The Virtue of Gratitude According to St Thomas Aquinas

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ABSTRACT

The tendency today is to conceive of Aquinas’ virtue theory in individualistic terms, as though the practice of virtue is a personal matter for each one of us in isolation from the communio of the Church. This individualistic reading of virtue has led to some confusion about, and criticism of, Aquinas’ notion of person and his ecclesiology. Indeed, Aquinas has often been accused, in following the Boethian formula of person, of robbing the person of its essential relationality, in contrast (it is claimed) to the accounts provided by Richard of St Victor and Bonaventure.

This confusion, however, has largely arisen from an interpretation of Aquinas’ virtue theory inherited not from Aquinas himself, but from his later commentators. In fact, there is no such thing as virtue properly speaking detached from the ecclesial communio in Aquinas, for whom all virtue, both acquired and infused, finds its expression within the context of interpersonal relations. The form of the infused virtues is friendship with God, with whom a relationship is not simply unmediated, but mediated through the Church in Christ.

In his hierarchy of the “virtues of indebtedness”, Aquinas places gratitude last, following upon religion, piety and observance. Gratitude is last, not because it is of least significance, but because it represents the turning point in the exitus et reditus of God’s creative plan. It is only when one recognises the debitum imposed by grace, which is a debt of love, that one is able to respond to that gift and make grateful return in love and friendship. Given that an infinite gulf exists between God and the creature, the return of gratitude to God is only possible through participating in the gratitude of Christ. Consequently, gratitude properly speaking has a liturgical and sacramental character. All other acts of gratitude between creatures are grateful only by analogy. It is for this reason that Aquinas’ preferred term for gratitude towards God throughout his corpus is “gratiarum actio”: a term which has a distinctive liturgical character, and descriptive of praise and worship. In the exchange of gift and gratitude, free agents are bound in a mutual exchange of love. For Aquinas, this paradigm is most perfectly exemplified in the totally gratuitous self-offering of Christ to the Father, and the participation of the rational creature in that offering.

While a number of philosophical and theological treatments of the notion of gift have emerged in recent years, there has been very little attention given to the corresponding notion of gratitude. And, similarly, while the notion of gift in Aquinas has been the subject of considerable contemporary study, the necessary corresponding notion of gratitude in Aquinas has not. Where gratitude has emerged as a topic of study, it has largely been from a political and psychological point of view. More often than not in these studies, gratitude is treated of as an emotion or affective state. For Aquinas, gratitude is not an emotion, but a habitual openness to the process of theosis.
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THE VIRTUE OF GRATITUDE ACCORDING TO ST THOMAS AQUINAS

INTRODUCTION

A study of the virtue of gratitude and thanksgiving in the writings of St Thomas Aquinas reveals much about his understanding of the notions of virtue and person. It also reveals by extension an insight into his notion of Church. Gratitude for Aquinas is not simply an emotion or affection of the heart for perceived gifts, but it is, rather, the first and essential step in establishing friendship with God. This is because establishing friendship with God is not simply a subjective move, but is primarily a liturgical one in which God, in the first instance, extends friendship to the human person. According to Aquinas, there can be no friendship with God without this expression of gratitude which he considers primarily to be an act of praise and worship. Hence, it is not surprising to find that Thomas refers to friendship repeatedly throughout his treatment of the virtue of religion, and in his unfinished treatise on the sacraments.

The praise and worship of God, moreover, is not simply achieved on the part of the individual in isolation from the communio. Given the infinite gap between God and the creature, creaturely praise and worship is bound to fall short of bridging this gap. Rather, it is Christ who bridges this gap, and so is, consequently, Christ who provides us with the means of gratitude, of due praise and worship to God, as required by the virtue of religion. Christ is the normative means of satisfying the dictates of the virtue of religion, inasmuch as he provides us with the sacramental means of efficaciously honouring God. Hence gratitude to God has a liturgical character, and it is the ecclesial communio which makes this possible. In short, gratitude to God—which is the paradigm of all gratuitous action—is not simply a private expression of thanks, but the act of the individual who finds perfection by participation in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

There has been very little systematic study to date done on the notion of gratitude and thanksgiving in the writings of Aquinas. This is surprising, given the importance Aquinas
places on thanksgiving, and the way in which it ultimately determines praise and worship of God which are the normative means of establishing the divine life. Recently, there have been signs of an emerging interest in the concept of gift, both as treated by Aquinas and from a psychological and historical perspective in general. Yet for Aquinas, the notion of gift includes gratitude by necessity. This study is not interested in gratitude so much from a historical or political perspective, but from a theological and ecclesiological perspective according to Aquinas.

The method of this dissertation relies on a close reading of the primary texts of Aquinas himself, given that there has been, to now, very little treatment of gratitude in Aquinas from other scholars. Also, as Angela McKay rightly notes, commentaries on Aquinas give disparate accounts of the virtue and person in Aquinas and so it is necessary to allow the texts explicate themselves the notion of virtue and person, of gift and gratitude. Among these primary texts is the specific treatment of gratitude that Aquinas gives in questions one hundred and six and one hundred and seven of the secundae secunda partis of the Summa. While these two questions are the most obvious treatments of gratitude in the Summa and perhaps all of Aquinas’ writings, they cannot be read in isolation from his treatise on virtue in general, nor especially in isolation from what I refer to as the “virtues of indebtedness”, which include religion, piety and observance, along with gratitude itself. These in turn need to be examined in the context of the treatise on justice; within that treatise, questions eighty one through one hundred—which deal with the virtue of religion—need to be read in conjunction with the treatise on the sacraments in the tertia pars.

2 I am in particular grateful to Joseph Vnuk, O.P, for sharing with me his own research and dissertation, Full of grace and truth: the sacramental economy according to Thomas Aquinas (July, 2013). I am also indebted to Angela McKay, whose dissertation The infused and acquired virtues in Aquinas’ moral theory (April 2004) has been instrumental in my own reading of virtue in Aquinas.

3 The most common texts used include the following with the translation edition: the Benziger Brothers edition of 1947 and the Fathers of the English Province of the Dominicans of 1920 for the Summa; for the English texts of the De Veritate I have used the translation of Robert Mulligan, S.J (1952); the translations of Anton Pegis, James Anderson and Vernon J. Burke of 1955-1957 for the Summa Contra Gentiles; the translation of Ralph McInerny for the De Virtutibus (1999); and the translations of Fabian Larcher, O.P, Matthew Lamb, O.C.S.O, Michael Duffy, O.P., and Ralph McInerny for the various Commentaries on the Pauline Epistles. I have also included the original Latin texts of these works when cited, for the purpose of comparison, and also to highlight those instances where I have chosen different translations, in order to provide continuity for the cited texts.
In addition to the rich material found in the *Summa*, Aquinas has much to say about gratitude and thanksgiving in his various commentaries on the Pauline epistles, where the notion of gratitude as a liturgical and ecclesiological concern most clearly emerges. There is also much relevant material in the *De Veritate, De Virtutibus, De Malo* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, sermons and various other opuscula. Relevant background information is also extracted from the various commentaries on Boethius (*De Trinitate*) and Aristotle (most notably, the *Ethics*). In general, I read these texts through the lens of Aquinas’ Dionysian theology, relying on both the original works by Dionysius, and most significantly on the landmark study done by Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (2005).

In chapter two of this study, “What is Gratitude?” I focus on the notion of gratitude in general, and attempt to place it in a philosophical, theological and historical context, starting with Cicero and Seneca (who provide a starting point for Aquinas), Epicurus and the early Christian liturgical notion of the *gratiarum actio* (thanksgiving).

Recent studies of gratitude in general tend to treat of gratitude as either a psychological state or a routine of social cohesion. At the time of writing this dissertation, a recent publication by Peter Leithart has come onto the market. Gratitude: An Intellectual History (2014) promises to make a significant impact on the study of the political and social history of gratitude through the ages. Before this study, Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough released an influential study called *Psychology of Gratitude* (2004). As the name of this important work suggests, it examines gratitude from a psychological point of view. Emmons is perhaps one of the foremost scholars today working on the notion of gratitude from the point of view of psychology. While this text provides limited insight into gratitude as a theological subject, it makes an important contribution for the way in which it demonstrates how gratitude is generally understood in affective terms today, and so provides a very useful starting point for recovering gratitude as a theological and philosophical subject. A psychology of gratitude can also assist in

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identifying certain material features of gratitude and so provides an insight into the anthropological expression of the virtue. As Nicholas Lombardo has shown in an important study on the notion of emotion and desire in Aquinas (The Logic of Desire, 2011), the affections and emotions are not irrelevant to Aquinas’ understanding of virtue and gratitude. But at the same time, gratitude cannot be reduced to, or defined by, an affective state.

The starting point for chapter two is the inherited notion of gratitude we must work from today. That inherited notion is largely derived from post-Enlightenment studies in economics and anthropology and so I attempt to extract Aquinas’ notion from this milieu. Looming large in the foreground of that milieu is the critique of the notion of gift and gratitude put forward by a number of 18th and 19th century American and British pragmatists, as well as Adam Smith in The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759) and Marcel Mauss in The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange (1967) in particular. While this study does not engage in an exhaustive treatment of these contributions, I thought it important to place the notion of gift and gratitude in Aquinas within the context of this starting point, since these modern concerns highlight the way in which the ‘ontology of the gift’ has undergone a radical sea-change from Aquinas to the present day, and especially following Derrida’s critique of the “impossible gift”.

In chapter three, ‘Virtues & the Virtues of Indebtedness’, the dissertation aims to place Aquinas’ understanding of gratitude within the broader context of virtue in general. It is not possible to extract any virtue, much less gratitude, in Aquinas from his treatment of virtue in general, since for him, all the virtues are connected in terms of their form—which is love (caritas)—and their end—which is friendship (amicitia). While we may possess different virtues in varying degrees, it is not possible to be devoid of certain virtues while living out others. This is especially true of the virtues of religion and gratitude, which are intimately linked in Aquinas’ ecclesiology. I have rooted much of this discussion in my interpretation of the work of Rudi te Velde who, in his Participation and substantiality in Thomas Aquinas (1995) and Aquinas on God: the ‘divine science’ of the Summa Theologiae (2006) in particular, provides what is, in my view, one of the most coherent accounts of grace and the analogia entis in Aquinas, both of which figure prominently in this discussion.
Also in chapter three is a discussion of the important distinction between the acquired and infused virtues. The distinction between these has not always been clear in treatments of virtue according to Aquinas. But the distinction impinges significantly on the difference between gratitude as a political or sociological concern and gratitude as an infused virtue and the means of establishing friendship with God.

In chapter four, “The Grateful Person” I examine what the concept of person is for Aquinas in general, and a grateful person by extension. Aquinas has often been criticised, along with Augustine and Boethius, for his ‘static’ notion of person in contrast, it is suggested, to a more relational account of person found in the likes of Richard of St Victor and Bonaventure. Adopting Norris W. Clarke’s method of ‘creative retrieval’ and his work on recovering the notion of person in Aquinas, I challenge the assumption of Balthasar, et al, who have this view of Aquinas, and show instead, along with Clarke, that Aquinas does indeed provide a rich relational account of the notion of person, and that such an account of the person hinges on the relationship between gift and gratitude. Clarke argues that ‘being’ is best understood in Aquinas in terms of person, and the notion of the ‘grateful person’ certainly supports this view, for it is in the context of gratitude that Aquinas’ notion of person takes on its full force.

Furthermore, the ‘person’ in Aquinas is best understood in the context of Dionysian participation, and so this chapter will also consider the notion of person in the context of this debate. Here again, I will adopt the work of te Velde in positioning myself on this question, along with that of Jean-Pierre Torrell O.P., who also provides a rich personalist account of the human person in relation with God through Jesus Christ. Torrell’s work has the added dimension of not losing sight of the mystical dimension of Aquinas’ notion of person as a sacramental being; likewise with Michael Sherwin O.P whose important work, By Knowledge & Love (2005) contributes to a recovery of the person as relational in Aquinas. The specific character of this relational dimension of the human person is not only exemplified in the virtue

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5 Angela McKay (see note 2) gives what is perhaps the most systematic study of the difference between the acquired and infused virtues that was available at the time of my writing this study.
of gratitude, but it is, in effect, produced by gratitude as a participation in the gratuitous gift of God. Gratitude is the virtue by which God’s invitation to friendship is realised.

I am also indebted in this chapter to Martin Rhonheimer, whose work on recovering the concept of natural law in Aquinas—which is at the root of the virtues, and the virtues of indebtedness in particular—has helped me shape this discussion and orient the notion of person as being naturally inclined to friendship and love. For Aquinas, the natural law is at the root of the virtues, inasmuch as the function of virtue is to render the precepts of the natural law habitual. But these precepts do not constitute an interior lexicon of action, but are rather the principles of action rooted in the general precept of justice: namely, to do good and avoid evil.

Natural law must be, says Aquinas, informed and educated. That education is derived from the divine law, which also gives us the Church and the precepts of religion. Obedience to these is itself a precept of natural law and forms the basis of Aquinas’ ecclesial vision. Many of the well-known controversies surrounding discussions of the natural law stem from thinking of natural law from the perspective of the subject in isolation from the communio. Both the essentialist and consequentialist varieties of natural law theory, for example, frequently fall into this trap. Natural law, to be sure, is the participation of the individual in the eternal law; but what constitutes a participation in the eternal law is not determined by the individual, but by the ecclesial community in Christ. The person, fully alive, fully perfected, is not simply a relational person but an ecclesial person for Aquinas.

6 The on-going (and even sometimes polemic in tone) debate between Jean Porter and Martin Rhonheimer has been well-publicised in recent months and years. Rhonheimer, for example, has charged Porter with failing to address the inherently rational nature of natural law, and to treat natural law in the essentialist manner. Rhonheimer rejects what he understands to be revisionist Catholic moral theology of the post-conciliar generation, among whom he includes Jean Porter in a critique of her influential book, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Eardmans Co., 2005). Rhonheimer argues that Porter is in fact far from a genuinely Thomistic view, and that she in fact “obscures Thomas’ ‘core [Thomistic] doctrine’ of the natural law as the capacity of our natural reason to attain moral truth...because it thereby neglects a central implication of the doctrine of man as the image of God....” See William F. Murphy’s introduction to Rhonheimer, Martin. The Perspective of the Acting Person Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy. Washington, D.C.: Catholic U of America, 2008, p.xxxvii. It is not my intention here to address this ongoing debate between Rhonheimer and Porter, given the complexity and scope of the discussion. I have, however, chosen to follow Rhonheimer on the natural law in this thesis, as I find his explication of the Thomistic theory of natural law as he sees it, coheres with my own understand of virtue in Aquinas.
In chapter five, “Aquinas’ Ecclesiology”, I aim to bring the notion of gratitude, virtue and person together in the unifying ecclesiology as understood by Aquinas. It should be noted that along with the critiques of Aquinas’ notion of person, there is also a trend to critique Aquinas for his lack of any De ecclesia treatise. This was certainly a concern of Congar who argued that Aquinas’ ecclesiology is in fact contained in his treatment of the human person in the secunda pars of the Summa: his ecclesiology is, in other words, personalist and relational. The primary focus of chapter five then is an effort to support this contention through a recovery of the notion of Church in Aquinas as relational, and which emerges clearly in Aquinas’ Pauline commentaries; in conjunction with the treatise on religion and the sacraments, the Commentaries form a rich source for recovering Aquinas’ ecclesiology and sacramentology.

It is within his treatment of the Church as communio, as opposed to simply a polis, that Aquinas’ doctrine of gratitude as praise and worship comes into full force. There is in fact no concept of a ‘virtuous person’, much less a grateful person in Aquinas that is independent of the salvific work of Christ through the Church and the sacraments. Gratitude and gift represent two complimentary and essential dimensions of friendship; and these are expressed in terms of salvation and worship in terms of friendship with God. Salvation is offered as a free gift: the response to that gift is gratiarum actio, or thanksgiving, in the liturgical setting of praise and worship.
CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

2.1 Gift & Gratitude

Despite the emphasis on the notion of gift today in contemporary theology and philosophy, very little attention has been given to the corresponding notion of gratitude from a theological, much less a Thomistic, point of view. While there are several treatments of the notion of gift in Aquinas, there are no systematic treatments of gratitude in Aquinas as of today. Many excellent contributions in recent years have explored the significance and central role of the notion of gift in theology. The notion of gift, however, is—at least according to Aquinas—fundamentally incomplete without the corresponding notion of gratitude. As I explore in greater depth in the chapter on the notion of person, gratitude is not simply the virtue by which we receive gifts. It is also the virtue by which we repay gifts; in other words, it is the virtue by which we become like our benefactor, and the virtue by which we are transformed from passive recipients to active agents of love, in the image of our benefactor. Gratitude to God therefore is foundational in the process of divinisation.

For Aquinas, the very understanding of a gift requires an intuition of the intention of the donor (ST II-II, q.106, a.5). Such intuition of the donor’s intention provides both the

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7 Communio: International Catholic Review for example, has an excellent on-going series of articles dealing with the notion of gift in theology over the years. See for example, Grygiel, Stanislaw. “Existence Precedes Essence”: Fear of the Gift (Summer 1999); Healey, Nicholas. The World as Gift (Fall 2005) and also by Healy, Caritas in Veritate and Economic Theory (Winter 2010); Schindler, David L., America's Technological Ontology and the Gift of the Given: Benedict XVI on the Cultural Significance of the Quarrere Deum (Summer 2011); and Henri De Lubac’s Duplex Hominis Beatitudo (Winter 2008).

8 I should make note here of the discussion in contemporary philosophy centring on the distinction between “intention” and “motivation”. In question 106, Aquinas himself uses—when speaking of the “intention of the donor”—secundum voluntatem beneficantis (see for example ST II-II, q.106, a.6). His use of the noun voluntas is suggestive of a disposition or inclination towards the recipient. It also connotes desire and favour. As James Keenan notes, the distinction in philosophy today between intention and motivation is a relatively new discussion in philosophy: one can have a right motivation but wrong intention, or a right intention lacking prudence and thereby make a wrong choice (Keenan, p.14). That is not to say that there is no such distinction in Aquinas; but given that there is no real distinction in Aquinas between God’s essence and attributes, there is no distinction to be made between God’s goodness and rightness, nor between God’s intending and reason for intending. Intention does, however, correlate closely in Aquinas to the whole notion of choice, and he dedicates a significant treatise in the Summa to the very question of choice, action and intention (see ST I-II, q.6-19, for example). While this treatise in the Summa focusses on human action, there is a sense here of the
grounding for our understanding of gift and, at the same time, constitutes the grounding of
gratitude. By focussing on the intention of the donor rather than simply the gift, Aquinas has
already begun to conceive of gift and gratitude as an inter-personal dynamic. Aquinas dedicates
a whole question in the *Summa* to the notion of intention (ST I-II, q.12). In article one, he
identifies intention with an act of the will. The very word “intention” signifies, he says, an
inclination towards something *chosen*. Such is the nature of love, which is likewise constituted
by acts of the will and is the first of the concupiscible passions (ST I-II, q.25, a.2). It is for this
reason that it is necessary to understand the intention of the donor of a gift, so that one can
determine what is being *chosen* by the donor through the medium of the gift. Given that all acts
of genuine beneficence are acts of love as expressions of friendship (ST II-II, q.31, a.1), it is
clear that Aquinas understands the genuine intention of the donor to be in general an offering of
love and friendship. This is certainly true on the part of God, who loves all things and who
extends his love to all things (ST I, q.20, a.2). Thus, in saying that gratitude must consider the
intention of the donor, Aquinas is essentially saying that gratitude is the recognition of the
gratuitous extension of love and friendship. Nor is the recognition of the intention of the donor
simply an intellectual assent. In recognising the intention of the donor, one is obliged,
according to the moral debt, to return the gift in kind (ST II-II, 106).

Aquinas gives us three conditions required for the observance of gratitude: the first is to
recognise the intention behind the gift; the second to give thanks for it; and the third is to repay
the gift in kind (ST II-II, q.107, a.2). The most egregious act of ingratitude is to fail to
recognise a gift in the first place because the awareness of gift and corresponding acts of
gratitude stand and fall together and it is on this awareness and reciprocation that friendships are
built. Given that the intention of the donor is love, ingratitude amounts to a repudiation of that
love. There is, in other words, a single grounding for both gift and gratitude, and the one is
incomplete without the other: there can be no genuine recognition of a gift without there being

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participatory nature of human nature in the divine will, worthy of further study in reference to the
question of gift and gratitude. For the purpose of this study in the meantime, I have chosen to render
‘voluntas’ as ‘intention’, following the 1920 translation of the Summa by the Fathers of the English
Dominican Province.
the impetus towards acts proper to the virtue of gratitude *at the same time*. Gift and gratitude are thus essentially complementary in Aquinas and they form the foundation of friendship itself. It is for this reason he gives the word *gratia* three related meanings: love, gift and thanks.⁹

Gratitude then is not *simply* the virtue of responding to perceived gifts; it is, for Aquinas, the virtue by which we both *recognise* and *respond to* the gifts as signs of friendship within a fluid movement that leads us ultimately to God, through Jesus Christ. The grateful response—which is the act of thanksgiving, or *gratiarum actio*—is equivalent to the giving of praise and worship: it is an act of praise culminating in acts of worship, consummately so within the liturgy and Eucharist. It is instructive to observe that Aquinas places his treatment of gratitude following, and contingent upon, his extensive treatment of the virtue of religion, which he calls “chief among the moral virtues” (*religio est praecipua inter virtutes morales*; ST II-II, q.81, a.6) and under which he includes gratitude, following the related virtues of piety and observance. Indeed, the virtue of religion says Aquinas, commands and governs *all* the virtues inasmuch as it directs all virtuous action to the praise and honour of God (ST II-II, q.81, a.1, ad.1). Consequently, the virtues following religion, namely piety, observance and gratitude, must be considered together and in the context of the virtue of religion, as can be seen with the example of piety:

> The greater includes the lesser: wherefore the worship due to God [according to the virtue of religion] includes the worship due to our parents [according to piety] as a particular. Hence it is written: “If I be a father, where is my honour?” Consequently the term piety extends also to the divine worship.¹⁰

Unfortunately today, gratitude is almost invariably associated with an affective or episodic emotional state; a *feeling* of thankfulness for a perceived gift. One even finds this notion of gratitude in theological treatments of the *gift*. In part, this is due to the disintegration of gift economies and their replacement, at least in the West, with consumer economies. It is

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⁹ ST I-II, q.110, a.1. I shall return to this significant relation in the Conclusion of this study.

¹⁰ ST II-II, q101, a1, ad.1: *in maiori includitur minus. Et ideo cultus qui Deo debetur includit in se, sicut aliquid particulare, cultum qui debetur parentibus. Unde dicitur Malach. I, si ego pater, ubi honor meus? Et ideo nomen pietatis etiam ad divinum cultum refertur.*
also due in part to the shift in emphasis in philosophy from the perceived constraint on human freedom imposed by obedience, in deference to an individualist notion of liberty; it was an ideal that came to the fore in the 18th century, for example in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Prior to the decline of Scholastic metaphysics, and by extension mysticism with it, reason was conceived of as being commanded by the will, which in turn was to be informed by natural law under the guidance of the divine law. With this in mind, one can see why Aquinas places his treatment of gratitude immediately following his treatment of obedience and why, furthermore, the notion of law plays such a prominent role in his treatment of religion. With the liberation of natural reason from authority, one finds a gradual shift towards the identification of reason with affection, especially in British and Scottish philosophical circles, as discussed below.

Gratitude, however, is ultimately incoherent when characterised in affective terms. Rather, for Aquinas, gratitude—whether oriented to God or human persons—is a virtue and, like all virtues, is thus a habit or disposition of the will toward a certain way of acting. Habits place the virtuous person in potency towards specific acts; when actualised, virtuous habits are manifested in specific actions which not only actualise the habits, but the whole person. Gratitude is the orientation to grateful acts; the work of gratitude—gratiarum actio—are the actualisation of the habit in the person.11 Grateful acts make for a grateful person; and that person is one to whom everything is understood as being given within the plan of Providence.

Gratitude is a species of action and specifically a species of action which has as its object acts of praise and worship within a communion of persons. Ultimately, when gratitude has praise of God as its object, it falls under the virtue of religion which in turn disposes the virtuous person towards participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Not only can the virtues in general be detached from an orientation to God within the context of the communion of saints, neither can they be understood in terms of the individual alone, isolated from the salvific mission of Christ through the Church. This is no less true of the virtue of gratitude.

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11 See Agamben, Giorgio, & Adam Kotsko, trans. Opus Dei: an archaeology of duty. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2013. Karol Wojtyla’s Acting Person also makes this point: the actualisation of our habits is not simply an actualisation of something external to the person, but the actualisation of the person as moral agent.
which—as a virtue falling under justice—cannot be understood independently of our obligation to the community of persons in Christ. In short, all of the virtues are part of Aquinas’ ecclesiological theology; and gratitude in particular is a key way in which we respond to the redemptive gifts wrought in the world by Jesus Christ through the Church.

In article two of question fifty five in his Treatise on Human Acts, Aquinas insists that each virtue is not only a habit, but is a certain kind of habit: an operative habit (*habitus operativus*). In other words he says, citing Aristotle (Ethics II.6), “virtue of a thing is that which makes its work good.” Therefore, in understanding the virtues, we must look to a particular work that is specified by the habit of each virtue. Gratitude will likewise be identified with a specific work. It is the works of virtue which give human persons their character and identity as being either good or evil, meritorious or not.

Although not explicitly stated in his treatment of gratitude in question one hundred and six of the *secunda secundae partis*, gratitude is a virtue which is ultimately oriented towards the work of praise and honour, and ultimately—in reference to God, to whom the highest praise and worship is owing—liturgy and sacrifice. It is only when one reads the treatise on gratitude within the larger framework of the treatise on religion, piety and observance that one sees Aquinas’ intention is to assign gratitude and the related virtues to a class of acts which have an ecclesial character.

Employing what Norris W. Clarke has called the “creative retrieval” of Thomistic texts, I wish to show that not only is gratitude for Aquinas oriented to praise and worship, it is more specifically oriented to, and finds its fulfilment in, the sacramental life of the Church as the source of perfection for the virtuous life. It is fully realised, furthermore, in an understanding of virtue itself which is likewise often overlooked today: namely, that for Aquinas, there can be no true virtuous life without the sacraments. The very notion of personhood requires this holistic view of the perfection of the individual through the ecclesial community in Jesus Christ, mediated through the sacramental life of the Church. It is in this context, that of a sacramental ecclesiology, that one must read the virtues, and particularly the virtue of gratitude, according to Aquinas.
2.2 The Moral Object of Giving Thanks

The inspiration for this thesis on gratitude came to me following a walk one December morning a few days before Christmas along a river on the outskirts of Banff in the Canadian Rockies. Just beyond the town, a trail winds its way through the trees and along a creek towards Vermilion Lakes. In a clearing by the first lake—which was solidly frozen that time of year—I came upon a park bench which had been positioned for visitors to sit and admire the stunning view across the lake towards Mount Bourgeau towering in the distance, and covered in snow and reflected on the ice as it was that year. It was too cold to sit on the bench, and so I stood behind it, admiring the view. While standing there, I noticed that on the back of the wooden bench, some visitor before me had written with a black marker in large, bold letters, “Thank you Mother Earth!” in praise of the spectacular surroundings and incredible view. As I looked closer, I then noticed that a second previous visitor, in reply to the first, had written with a lesser pen underneath this hymn of praise, the fainter, smaller words, “Thank you Father, God Creator!”

It seemed clear to me why the second passer-by had written what he or she had. It was an apparent indignant corrective to the inadequacy of expressing gratitude to some entity such as ‘nature’ which lacked any intention in giving. The corrective was aimed to show that gratitude could only be an expression between two communicating parties. One could not, the objector was suggesting, praise “Mother Earth”, if by that term we are to understand nothing more than nature itself, as without an intention in giving, there could be coherent notion of gift for which we can give thanks. It was a very Thomistic correction.

The exchange on the bench reminded me of those debates one occasionally comes across on blogs and forums—namely, whether or not atheists and materialists are able to give thanks for creation, or whether they can only stare blankly with wonder at creation without having anyone to thank for it. The materialist will often reject this suggestion that there can be no gratitude for creation on the part of the materialist or atheist, and will insist that he or she can
indeed feel gratitude for the universe and creation. It is common to find the materialist equating gratitude for creation to unrequited love: they have the emotion or feeling of gratitude, but that there is simply no one to receive it. But the feeling of gratitude, they may say, is there nonetheless. Indeed, if gratitude were nothing more than a subjective feeling or emotion, then this claim would be difficult to counter.

Nor is it a new argument. Epicurus provides one of the earliest philosophical treatments of gratitude.12 For Epicurus, there is no need for gratitude to the gods, and they have no need of, or interest in, our gratitude. There is, however, a place for gratitude to Nature: “Gratitude must be vouchsafed to blesseèd Nature because she has made the essential things easy to procure and those things that are hard to procure non-essentials.”13 One can and should be grateful to nature because it benefits us, and gratitude is all about acknowledging benefits received, the Epicureans held.

Yet the Epicurean notion of gratitude is wanting. As DeWitt notes, Epicurus’ treatment of “Nature” already entails a personification of at least some kind of benevolent deity or intelligence, especially since he endows this “Nature” with the attribute of Wisdom—one of her principal gifts which is safeguarded by the philosophers. Even the notion of “unrequited gratitude” presupposes and personifies some missing or lacking response that must at least be possible or intelligible for a response to be unrequited. But already we find in the Epicurean notion of gratitude a petition to higher powers for guidance and succour: gratitude is, even in Epicurus’ somewhat whimsical treatment, oriented towards recognising the intention of a beneficiary through both petition for further favours and honour for favours received.

The petitionary notion of gratitude is not, DeWitt’s research shows, exclusive to Epicurus in the ancient world. Epicurus lays down a principal ingredient of gratitude common

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13 DeWitt p. 321.
among the ancient commentators: that of offering for benefits received.\textsuperscript{14} We find similar treatments of gratitude for example, in the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius (99BC-55BC) who treats of gratitude as something requiring offering and in doing so, his understanding of thanksgiving “leans more towards veneration than gratitude.”\textsuperscript{15} And we must not forget the extensive treatments of religion, piety, observance and gratitude found in Seneca and Cicero, who, along with Macrobius, Aquinas cites as authorities on the subject.

2.3 Overview of Gratitude in Aquinas

Aquinas treats of gratitude systematically in just two questions in the \textit{secunda secondae partis} of the \textit{Summa}: question one hundred and six, which deals with gratitude in general, and question one hundred and seven, which deals with the opposing vice of ingratitude. There are, however, extensive treatments of thanksgiving throughout his works, and especially in his Commentaries on the Pauline epistles.

Taken together, the two questions in the \textit{Summa} offer what might seem at first glance an unremarkable and straightforward description of gratitude: we should be grateful to benefactors, and avoid ingratitude.\textsuperscript{16} In article one, Aquinas establishes that gratitude is a distinct virtue in its own right, although it is annexed to justice; in article two, he establishes that the penitent is more bound to give thanks than the innocent, since there is a greater debt in someone who is forgiven more than someone who needed to be forgiven little; in article three, he declares that we are always obliged to be grateful for favours, as much as circumstances allow, and given that the favour itself is objectively good; in article four he considers the time element in repaying a favour: if we repay a favour too quickly, we run the risk of giving the impression that the gift was a burden; if we take too long in repaying, we may seem ungrateful; in article five, Aquinas asks if gratitude should be made according to the nature of the gift, or according to the intention

\textsuperscript{14} DeWitt p. 322, ff. The Epicurean community, DeWitt explains, were required to make offerings or contributions to the Philosophers who taught their disciples, since Wisdom, which the teachers bestowed, is the highest of all Nature’s gifts.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{ST II-II}, 106 & 107.
of the giver—to which he answers repayment should be made according to the mind or intention of the giver; finally, he asks in article six, whether or not we should repay more than we have been given. Again, he answers in the affirmative: we should strive to outdo the kindness of benefactors as much as our circumstances allow, since in this way friendship is forged and grows and doesn’t resemble commutative justice.

Aquinas’ treatment of gratitude places it last in a sequence of related virtues, following religion, piety and observance. Together with gratitude, these virtues comprise a sub-section in the Treatise on Justice in the *Summa* dealing with what I will refer to as “virtues of indebtedness”.

Why am I calling just these four virtues “virtues of indebtedness” and not all of the virtues annexed to justice, such as retribution (*vindicatio*) and truth (*veritas*), which follow in the Treatise on Justice? Primarily this is so because Aquinas himself relates these four virtues to each other himself, showing how they are linked in a hierarchy of participation. That hierarchy is a hierarchy of debt and based on the hierarchy of causes giving rise to the various modes of indebtedness (ST II-II, q.106, a.1). Thus, our chief debt is to God and repayment of this debt pertains to the virtue of religion. Secondly, we owe a debt to our parents, who are the proximate cause of our existence, and the repayment of this debt pertains to piety. Thirdly, we owe a debt of obedience and reverence to our superiors, who represent God for us, and the repayment of this debt pertains to observance. Finally, we owe a debt of thanks to our benefactors who, in giving us gifts and benefits, represent and participate in Providence; and the repayment of this debt belongs to gratitude.

On further reflection we also find that not all of the virtues listed by Aquinas towards the end of the Treatise deal with the same matter. *Retribution*, for example, is not concerned with the same kind of debt as the virtues of indebtedness; retribution is concerned with seeking

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17 *Vindicatio* is most commonly translated as ‘vengeance’ in various editions of the *Summa*. I have chosen to use ‘retribution’ here, since the word ‘vengeance’ does not carry the same connotation for modern minds as it did for Aquians and his contemporaries. For Aquinas, there is a difference between retribution or vengeance as an act of retaliation, versus retribution rooted in the restoration of justice through the punishment of sin and crime.

18 Aquinas lists obedience as belonging to the virtue of observance since observance is primarily concerned with authority. ST II-II, q.80, a.1, ad.3.
satisfaction for a different kind of debt than that with which the virtues of indebtedness are concerned: namely, the debt of punishment (reatus poenae), while the virtues of indebtedness are concerned with a specific kind of moral debt (debitum morale; ST II-II, q.108, a.2, ad.1).

Truth similarly is a general virtue which applies to what one person communicates to another. Given its universal scope, truth is common to all virtues (ST II-II, q.109, a.2, ad.3). In other words, the obligation to tell the truth exceeds the object of a virtue of indebtedness, which deals specifically with acts of praise and worship. One should, he says, be truthful in praise, but the virtue of truth is not limited to praise, but extends to everything which a person utters when a truth claim is being made and so applies to all virtues. The same point can be made of liberality (which deals with money) and epikeia (the “spirit of the law”). Each of these have a character which either exceeds the scope of the virtues of indebtedness or, as in the case of liberality, have an even more limited scope. All of the virtues Aquinas discusses from question eighty to one hundred and twenty have something in common, inasmuch as they are potential parts of justice, falling under the more perfect notion of justice; but the virtues of indebtedness have a unique reference point insofar as they are each concerned with the notion of gift.\(^\text{19}\)

In establishing the kind of virtue that gratitude is, Thomas sets out to establish first, that gratitude is both connected to justice but not simply identical with it; and secondly, that gratitude is part of a fourfold hierarchy of the virtues of indebtedness (religion, piety, observance and gratitude). I am calling these virtues ‘virtues of indebtedness’ furthermore because, in the first place, they are also intimately linked with one another in a hierarchy of indebtedness to a benefactor—the archetype of whom is God.

Man becomes a debtor to other men in various ways, according to their various excellences and the various benefits received from them. On both counts God holds first place, for He is supremely excellent, and is for us the first principle of being and government.\(^\text{20}\)

Secondly, Thomas describes and delimits each of these virtues within the context of a theology of debt which he works out in a discussion of these virtues in particular and which will

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\(^{19}\) One final virtue in Aquinas’ list following the virtues of indebtedness remains to be examined: that of friendliness (amicitia) which does have a unique relationship to the virtues of indebtedness and which will be treated of later in the discussion.

\(^{20}\) ST II-II, q.101, a.1.
be explored in greater depth in the next chapter. But in what sense are these virtues potential parts of justice and thus indicative of indebtedness? Thomas describes the virtues of indebtedness as being virtues annexed to justice though not properly identified with special justice or justice properly speaking. Given that Thomas identifies at least different species of justice, such as distributive and commutative, the first thing which needs to be clarified is whether or not the virtues of indebtedness are annexed to either species, both or some other species.21

In fact, it is clear that for Thomas the link between justice and the virtues of indebtedness exists on account of the obligation placed upon the recipient, and not on account of any contract which exists on the part of the donor of a gift. “Voluntary commutations are when a man voluntarily transfers his chattel to another person. And if he transfer it simply so that the recipient incurs no debt, as in the case of gifts, it is not an act of justice but of liberality.”22 So gratitude does not correspond to commutative justice. Nor, as it turns out, does it correspond to distributive justice, which is concerned with the sharing out of goods common to all. Gift-giving is not an act of distributive justice, which is concerned with giving each person his due (ST I, q.21. a.1). Gifts are not due to anyone.

The principal reason why the virtues of indebtedness are distinct from justice properly speaking is that special or proper justice is defined by a kind of binding commutation by analogy: “the matter of justice is external operation, in so far as an operation or the thing used in that operation is duly proportionate to another person, wherefore the mean of justice consists in a certain proportion of equality between the external thing and the external person.”23 But there cannot be this kind of equality of binding commutation with the virtues of indebtedness strictly speaking; rather, the virtues of indebtedness involve a kind of metaphorical commutation of the

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21 ST II-II, q.61, a.1
22 ST II-II, q.61, a.3. It may seem curious that Thomas implies here that there is no debt for the recipient of a gift, which extends from the donor on account of liberality rather than obligation, since Thomas is at pains elsewhere to identify the virtues of indebtedness with objects of debt. This apparent contradiction will be dealt with in the section on debts and is made clear from the fact that Aquinas uses the term of debt analogously, one in reference to the legal debt, and again in reference to a moral debt, or the “commutation of the heart”.
23 ST II-II, q.58, a.10
heart: they represent an exchange of love, which cannot be quantified externally in the way that the things of justice are weighed up and measured. “Gratitude,” says Aquinas, “depends chiefly on the heart” (*recompensatio magis in affectu consistit*). This commutation of the heart is the essence of friendship, and the function of gratitude:

Since true friendship is based on virtue, whatever there is contrary to virtue in a friend is an obstacle to friendship, and whatever in him is virtuous is an incentive to friendship. In this way friendship is preserved by repayment of favours, although repayment of favours belongs specially to the virtue of gratitude.24

Each of the virtues of indebtedness share the common feature of a certain kind of obligation, or indebtedness, to another. This particular kind of obligation is to be distinguished from other kinds of obligation which Aquinas deals with in the Treatise on Justice. The kind of debt which the virtues of indebtedness deal with is not a legal debt (*debitum legale*) but rather a moral debt (*debitum morale*). This distinction is key for Aquinas, although it has not been widely explored in studies of Aquinas’ treatment of Justice in general. The virtues of indebtedness thus involve an indebtedness of a moral kind as opposed to a legal kind; in other words, it is a moral indebtedness of love. Each of the virtues of indebtedness—religion, piety, observance and gratitude—thus have this essential feature in common; the form of each is constituted in what could be termed a voluntary commutation of the heart, or of love and friendship. They also share in common the payment of honour or worship, which is the special feature of gratitude. Thus gratitude is linked to all four virtues of indebtedness as it is the virtue whose specific matter deals with the repayment of moral debts (*recompensatio debiti moralis*; ST II-II, q.108, a.2, ad.1).

### 2.3.1 Aquinas’ Logic of Gratitude

Throughout the ancient world, taking us all the way up to Aquinas, we find that gratitude is understood to be intrinsically linked with the notion of the debt of praise, worship and offering. In a liturgical setting within Judaism and Christianity, this notion of offering is

24 ST II-II, q.106, a.1, ad.3:
further refined into the notion of sacrifice. Aquinas’ preferred term for gratitude to God is, in fact, the closely linked term *thanksgiving* (*gratiarum actio*) which suggests *liturgical* action. In this, he draws heavily on Dionysius, for whom thanksgiving and praise are intimately linked; specifically, he draws on the Dionysian understanding of ‘action’, which can refer to either *act* in terms of the ‘form’ of a thing, or *act* in terms of ‘doing’. The verb *agere* includes both meanings; and Aquinas applies both to the concept of gratitude; since through one’s virtuous actions one ‘becomes’ divinised; and what one is, in form, likewise determines the motivation for and character of one’s actions. In this way, the *gratiarum actio* implies more than simply *doing*, but also includes *being* in a specific way.

Aquinas uses *gratia*, *gratitudo* and *gratiarum actio* to identify gratitude and its related acts throughout his treatment of the virtue in question one hundred and six in the *secunda secundae partis*. He also uses, with considerable frequency, the transitive verb *recompenso* in conjunction with *gratia* (to return a favour or thanks) to describe the effect of gratitude, so that the virtue clearly implies the necessity of return or repayment: gratitude is not simply a passive state of reception. Both *gratitudo* and *gratiarum actio* are used to describe habits, since all virtues belong to the genus of habits. Aquinas does not explicitly state what the distinction is between the works of gratitude and thanksgiving (*gratiarum actio*) in question one hundred and six explicitly, although the distinction becomes clearer from an analysis of the primary texts, and would have been readily understood by his contemporary reader as is suggested by the historical context in which Aquinas is writing. His preferred term throughout his works which treat or touch upon the notion of gratitude or thanksgiving is *gratiarum actio*, especially when the concept of gratitude is applied to the works of religious practice and the worship of God. In fact, he does not generally use *gratitudo* at all in reference to the thanks we owe to God: gratitude is generally, though not exclusively, reserved for thanks to our human benefactors, which is only a participation in the ultimate gratitude to God. In speaking of gratitude to God, he will also often use *gratia*, which simultaneously connotes *grace* and *gift* by way of correspondence. Aquinas treats of gratitude to God under the acts of religion. The term *gratiarum actio* is more commonly used to describe works of gratitude to God and is linked to
the notion of praise and prayer, so that we find in his treatise on the Eucharist the expression, “oratio gratiarum actionis” to denote parts of the liturgy in which prayers of thanksgiving are offered.

Gratitudo describes the virtue of gratitude properly speaking; that disposition whereby one is habitually inclined to giving thanks for benefits received and the commensurate acts that such thanksgiving demands. Gratitudo is mostly reserved by Aquinas for describing our indebtedness to friends and benefactors. It follows the virtues of observance, by which we honour persons of dignity, which in turn follows piety, by which we honour our parents and homeland. Piety in turn is further subordinated to the virtue of religion, by which we honour God. These four virtues (gratitude, observance, piety and religion) which share the character of indebtedness, are linked together and follow a hierarchical scheme of participation.

…the nature of the debt to be paid must vary according to the various causes giving rise to the debt, so that the greater debt always includes the lesser. Now the cause of debt is found primarily and chiefly in God, in that He is the first principle of all our goods: secondarily it is found in our father, because he is the proximate principle of our begetting and upbringing; thirdly it is found in the person that excels in dignity, from whom general favours proceed; fourthly it is found in a benefactor, from whom we have received particular and private favours, on account of which we are under particular obligation to him.25

One cannot separate the virtues of indebtedness out from one another; there is, in other words, no genuine virtue of religion without the prerequisite virtue of gratitude or piety. One could not, for example, serve and worship God in acts of religion authentically while at the same time hating one’s parents. Aquinas understands Christ’s command in Luke 14:26 (“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”) in this context. He understands the pericope to be referring to the proper ordering of love of God in the context of the hierarchy of

25 ST II-II, q.106, a.1: ...secundum diversas causas ex quibus aliquid debetur, necesse est diversificari debiti reddendi rationem, ita tamen quod semper in maior illud quod minus est continentur. In Deo autem primo et principaliter invenitur causa debiti, eo quod ipse est primum principium omnium bonorum nostrorum. Secundario autem, in patre, quod est proximum nostrae generationis et disciplinae principium. Tertio autem, in persona quae dignitate praecellit, ex qua communia beneficia procedunt. Quarto autem, in aliquo benefactore a quo aliqua particularia et privata beneficia percepimus, pro quibus particulariter ei obligamur.
the virtues of indebtedness: God comes first; and on account of the diffusive love of God, which
is reflected in Creation, one ought on that account to show filial piety and respect to our elders.
But our love of parents and country is related to God as cause is to effect, and so our first
obligation is to God which in turn puts all other obligations into context. Where there is a
tendency to love of country, elders or kin over and against love of God, we ought on that
account to hate (odiēre) our parents (ST II-II, q.26, a.2) since such a love is already distorted and
not true love: “we are commanded to hate in our relatives, not their kinship, but only the fact of
their being an obstacle between us and God.”

There is then, among the virtues of indebtedness, a trajectory of thankfulness from benefactors to parents which ultimately leads us
to God. It is for this reason that Aquinas places gratitude last in the list of virtues of
indebtedness; in keeping with his understanding of the acquisition of truth those things which
are first principles, while better known in themselves, are more removed from us, and thus the
last things we come to know; our knowledge is first rooted in what sense presents to us, and
from there we ascend to first principles: “therefore it must be that, according to the progress of
its natural manner of cognition, the reason advances from the things that are posterior to those
that are prior, and from creatures to God.”

What distinguishes each of the four virtues of indebtedness is an objective measure: it is
the intention of the benefactor to whom the debt is owed and not, as some would have it, to any
subjective value placed on a gift by the beneficiary (ST II-II, q.106, a.5). It is for this reason
that gratitude to benefactors is subordinate—but ultimately contingent upon—thankfulness to
God in this hierarchical scheme.

Accordingly, since what we owe God, or our father, or a person
excelling in dignity, is not the same as what we owe a benefactor from
whom we have received some particular favour, it follows that after
religion, whereby we pay God due worship, and piety, whereby we
worship our parents, and observance, whereby we worship persons
excelling in dignity, there is thankfulness or gratitude, whereby we

26 II-II, q.26, a.7, ad.1: in propinquis nostris non praecipimus odire quod propinqui nostri sunt; sed hoc solum quod impediant nos a Deo. Furthermore, in II-II, q.34, Aquinas explains that hatred of God is
brought about through an inordinate or distorted love of creatures. Hatred of things which prevent us
from reaching God is thus an act of genuine love.

27 De Trinitate, Proemium (Recensio Vulgata): Unde oportet ut secundum naturalis cognitionis
progressum ratio a posterioribus in priora deveniat et a creaturis in Deum.
give thanks to our benefactors. And it is distinct from the foregoing virtues, just as each of these is distinct from the one that precedes, as falling short thereof.\footnote{Quia ergo non quidquid debemus Deo vel patri vel personae dignitate praecellenti, debemus alicui benefactorum a quo aliquod particulare beneficium recepimus; inde est quod post religionem, qua debitum cultum Deo impendimus; et pietatem, qua colimus parentes; et observantiam, qua colimus personas dignitate praecellentes; est gratia sive gratitudo, quae beneficiobus gratiam recompensat. Et distinguitur a praemissis virtutibus, sicut quaelibet posteriorum distinguitor a priori, quasi ab eo deficiens.}

Aquinas’ placement of gratitude last in the order of virtues of indebtedness needs to be understood in the context of this Dionysian hierarchy and metaphysical chain of knowing: gratitude is that virtue by which we first recognise gifts from human benefactors. This is in fact our first contact with God; the daily reception of gifts and acts of generosity directed towards us are the normative entry points into the ultimate appreciation of God as the First Cause of all our goods. Benefactors play their role within the context of Providence; through the hand of the benefactor closest to us, the ultimate benefaction of God is intimated and revealed: “The principle and chief cause of all our goods is found in God.”\footnote{ST II-II, q.106, a.1: In Deo autem primo et principaliter invenitur causa debiti, eo quod ipse est primum principium omnium bonorum nostrorum.}

But at the same time, it would be incorrect to think of gratitude’s subordination to observance, piety and religion as being a subordination of value or importance; indeed, as Jean Porter shows, there could be no higher virtues of observance and religion without the grounding of these virtues in their principle, which is gratitude.\footnote{See Porter, Jean. The recovery of virtue: the relevance of Aquinas for christian ethics. Louisville: J. Knox Press, 1990, p.138ff. Porter has further argued that moral reasoning for Aquinas is rooted in a dialectical process rather than a deductive one. This theory has the advantage of accounting for the unity of all the virtues, and helps explain the way in which gratitude and piety, for example, can remain distinct virtues in their own right, while at the same time being part of a wider experience of life in which the agent draws upon the full panoply of reason’s insights and judgements in order to make sense of what our moral obligations are. Porter, Jean. Moral action and Christian ethics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.} Thus, gratitude is not the last in a hierarchy of descent, but rather the first virtue in the hierarchy of ascent. Observance, piety and religion are grounded in gratitude, which is the foundation upon which we begin to make the climb to God. Catherine Pickstock has argued that all philosophy broadly considered,
culminates in what she calls “doxological language”, or liturgy. John Baldovin SJ summarises Pickstock’s project: “all thought, all language has praise as its true goal. One is reminded of Alexander’ Schmemann’s understanding of the human being as fundamentally Homo Adorans—the creature whose main goal is to adore…”31 I find this characterisation of philosophy to be in keeping with Aquinas’ own understanding of the way in which a study of virtue points us to the practice of religion, “chief among the virtues” and culminating in the praise of God. Therefore, the “subordination” of gratitude to observance, piety and religion needs be understood in the context of gratitude’s participation in the superlative gratiarum actio, which is the matter of religion.

2.3.2 “Gratiarum Actio”

The gratiarum actio associated with gratitude to God is, historically, an expression tied to both pagan, Jewish and Christian liturgy and ritual. In the Imperial Roman court, it was used as panegyric praise in deference to the Emperor. The Roman gratiarum actio was an act of praise of the Emperor for benefits received; such orations typically spell out, in superlative language, the beneficence of the Emperor and praise him for his generosity, wisdom and protection.

Perhaps one of the best known examples of such a panegyric is that of Ausonius (ca.310 – ca.395), whose prosaic work, Gratiarum actio dicta domino Gratiano Augusto, is a conventional panegyric oration in praise of and thanks to Gratian for making Ausonius a consul.32 It likely received a reading at Trier in 379, and would have been delivered in a ritualistic style typical of such panegyrics. The reading has a remarkably liturgical flavour to it; the opening line of Ausonius’ work—“Ago tibi gratias, imperator Auguste”—is suggestive of

the Christian liturgical formula, “Gratias tibi ago, Domine, sancte Pater,” as are many other pseudo-liturgical elements of Ausonius’ text which praise Gratian for his beneficence. The document is infused throughout with the language of praise and glory which parallel the essence of the Christian liturgical rites from the earliest times. Ausonius’ text is, in many respects, an extended type of *Gloria*, with clear echoes of the oration “tibi laus, tibi gloria, tibi gratiarum actio” directed to the Emperor.³³

Liturgical reference in the New Testament, such as Paul’s instructions regarding the celebration of the Lord’s Supper typically use *eucharisteo* for thanksgiving (for example, in those places in First and Second Letters to the Corinthians and the Letter to Ephesians which treat of the prayer and thanksgiving): “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18-20). Aquinas’ always translates *eucharisteo* as *gratiarum actio* in his commentaries on the Pauline Epistles.³⁴

The third effect [of the Holy Spirit] is thanksgiving because, when someone is influenced in these ways toward God, he recognizes that everything he has is from God. For the more a person is affected by his relation to God and knows him, the more does he see God as greater while he himself becomes smaller, indeed almost nothing, in comparison with God…. So he declares giving thanks always for all things, for all his gifts, whether of prosperity or adversity. “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall be always in my mouth” (Ps. 33:1).³⁵

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³³ Certainly, the notion of liturgy (from the Greek, *leitourgia*), predates the Christian use of the term, and means simply the public service to the polis or state, or—as in the Imperial court—the worship of the gods. Both the concept and formula of liturgy as public service was readily adopted and adapted by the Christian Church on account of the various benefits it provided, not least of which was the structuring of acts of praise. See Fortescue, Adrian. "Liturgy." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910. 16 Mar. 2014 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09306a.htm>.

³⁴ This rendering is not an innovation of Aquinas and his rendering of *eucharisteo* as *gratiarum actio* has been the common practice of translators throughout antiquity, even prior to Jerome’s translation. It has been the standard use from the very earliest of times in both East and West. Any of a great number of examples suffice, but we have a good example of this in the close contemporary Latin translations of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s (ca. 350-428) commentaries on the Pauline epistles. See Greer, Rowan A. Theodore of Mopsuestia: The commentaries on the minor Epistles of Paul. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010, introductory notes on the translations.

³⁵ Commentary on Ephesians, 5-7: *Tertius effectus est gratiarum actio: quia ex hoc quod aliquis sic affectus est ad Deum, recognoscit se omnia habere a Deo. Quanto enim aliquis magis afficitur ad Deum,*
It is well known that the Eucharist has always been identified intimately in Christian theology with an act of thanksgiving; indeed, it represents the superlative thanksgiving possible to the human race through the sacrifice of Christ. The liturgical action, which finds its roots in the Jewish Passover, is identified with the action of praise and thanks to God the Creator through Jesus Christ.  Simply put, the notion of thanksgiving (gratiarum actio) is intrinsically linked to the action of the liturgy: the “actio eucharistica” is identified with the “gratiarum actio” in Christian theology and certainly in Aquinas.

In Patristic theology, gratitude to God is also typically understood in terms of praise, worship and liturgical sacrifice. A few brief examples help illustrate the point. Among the Church Fathers we find, for example, the identification of gratitude with the redemptive mission of the Church in Christ in St Athanasius.

St Irenaeus of Lyons likewise clearly understands gratitude in the liturgical framework of sacrifice and oblation:

The oblation of the Church, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him; not that He stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted…. We are bound, therefore, to offer to God the first-fruits of His creation, as Moses also says, “You shall not appear in the presence of the Lord your God empty;” so that man, being accounted as grateful, by those things in

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36 It is not my intention to provide an exhaustive treatment of the relationship between thanksgiving and the Eucharist here, as this has been treated of extensively by historians of the liturgy. A number of studies have explored and detailed the relationship between the Eucharistic and the notion of thanksgiving; see for example, Bouyer, Louis. Eucharist: theology and spirituality of the Eucharistic prayer. London: Notre Dame Press, 1968; and Vagaggini, Cipriano. Theological dimensions of the liturgy: a general treatise on the theology of the liturgy. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1976, both of which treat of the Jewish notion of thanksgiving in the context of sacrificial atonement, and the inclusion of the awareness of the connection between thanksgiving and praise in the Christian liturgy. See also Dix, Gregory. The shape of the liturgy. [New ed]. London: Continuum, 2005. Dix traces out the notion of thanksgiving (gratiarum actio) through the early centuries of the Church.


which he has shown his gratitude, may receive that honour which flows from Him. 39

In Book VIII of the Confessions, we find Augustine extolling gratitude in liturgical tones: “O my God, let me remember with gratitude and confess to you your mercies toward me. Let my bones be bathed in your love, and let them say: ‘Lord, who is like you? You have broken my bonds; therefore I will offer you the sacrifice of thanksgiving.’”40 This notion of offering thanks by way of sacrifice is a recurring theme in Augustine; M. Clement Eagan notes that Augustine’s use of gratiarum actio typically carries with it allusions to the Eucharist.41

Anselm of Canterbury also understands gratitude in terms of the redemptive mission of Christ. Gratitude, he argues in Book V of Cur Deus Homo is elicited in us by the awareness that Christ’s atoning sacrifice was not accomplished out of necessity on God’s part, but as a totally gratuitous gift. Had it been out of necessity, gratitude would be compelled by necessity and therefore hollow. But the work of atonement is totally gratuitous, deserving of greater thanks than had it been of necessity. This totally gratuitous gift of redemption is therefore identified as a sacrifice in Book XVI; and so the human person’s participation in this sacrifice is nothing less than an act of gratitude for this work of salvation through Christ.

Aquinas does not cite many of these sources in his own treatment of the gratiarum actio, but his own treatment of it is certainly in keeping with this tradition and presupposes it. What Aquinas gives us furthermore is perhaps the most detailed and sustained treatment of gratitude as both a liturgical formula and a key element of his Dionysian doctrine of participation. He does also refer to Aristotle’s ethics in a number of places, where we find that Aristotle likewise links the notion of thanks to praise: “Gratitude is felt towards him who gives, and praise also is bestowed on him” (Ethics, IV.1).

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39 Against Heresies, Book IV.18: Concerning sacrifices and oblations, and those who truly offer them.
41 See the footnote on page 313 in her translation of Augustine’s “The Excellence of Widowhood” found in Treatises on Various Subjects by St Augustine (Vol 16), Catholic University of America Press, 1952.
2.5 Gratitude in Contemporary Discourse

By way of a preliminary observation, and in order to contrast this original historical understanding of gratitude leading at least up to Aquinas, I wish to sketch out the contemporary understanding of gratitude which tends to obfuscate this original theological meaning of gratitude as a virtue, and may help explain why even among theologians and philosophers of religion today there is scant attention to the rich concept of gratitude as a virtue in Christian theology and particularly in Aquinas (who, while innovative in his treatment of gratitude is by no means working in isolation of both his own historical context and the patrimony of the theology of gratitude in both pagan and Christian antiquity). This brief sketch will help clarify some key elements of Aquinas’ understanding of gratitude by way of contrast.

It is instructive to trace the decline of gratitude since the high Scholasticism of Aquinas and the rise of gratitude as a purely psychological or affective state in its place following the 18th century “liberation from authority”. In doing so, I hope that in so contrasting the modern devolution of gratitude I can set the stage for Aquinas’ understanding of gratitude that is obscured by the modern conceptions. For Aquinas, virtues—including gratitude—are habitual dispositions of the will to certain species of human acts. The acts of indebtedness furthermore have a specific character: they are the acts associated with praise and worship under two species: both latria (to God) and dulia (to persons of dignity).

What we find in the 19th century especially, at which time gratitude is a popular concept in both philosophy of mind and natural theology, is the separation of the concept of virtue from habits of the will and a move towards thinking of virtues as being psychological and subjective states. This voluntaristic trend has continued into modern treatments of gratitude, which frequently place it in the category of affective and psychological states. I do not intend here to go into all the multifarious reasons for this shift of emphasis, but simply to show at least some

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42 For a detailed study of the 18th-20th century effort to liberate the individual from authority, both religious and political, see Luxon, Nancy. Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
of the reasons indicating that such a shift has occurred and the impact this shift has had on the popular perception of gratitude which persists to this day.

There is in fact a notable trajectory from Aquinas to our present day in which the decline of gratitude, from the status of virtue as understood since Aristotle to that of an emotion or passion, can be seen. Nor is it simply polemical to call this trajectory a “decline”. The reduction of ‘virtue’ to affective states poses all kinds of theological and philosophical problems, not least of which is the elevation of the sensitive appetites above the will.

One can find the full force of this shift in emphasis from virtue to a state of mind by picking up a copy of Emmons’ and McCullough’s *The Psychology of Gratitude*, a work which is considered to be influential in resurrecting the “neglected emotion” from a scientific point of view.43 One can also trace the effects of this decline of the notion of gratitude as virtue in recently published essays by philosophers trying to get a handle on gratitude in the aftermath of this sea change, as well as in recent popular literature on the topic—a great deal of which reinforces the notion of gratitude as an episodic, emotional state or psychological attitude. Patrick Fitzgerald, for example, insists that “Gratitude is an emotion or a set of feelings. One feels grateful…. One cannot be grateful without feeling grateful.” There are many other such characterisations of gratitude in recent philosophical literature.44 But when conceived of from this affective and psychological point of view, gratitude appears as something paradoxical, as Margaret Visser for example discovers in her survey of cultural attitudes to gratitude around the

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44 Fitzgerald, Patrick. ”Gratitude & Justice.” Ethics 109.1 (1998), p.120. Fitzgerald, like Visser, recognises that the affective treatment of gratitude is problematic: “The emotional component of gratitude poses a difficulty that philosophers commonly recognize” because emotions are subjective and difficult to fit into any coherent taxonomy. It is rather remarkable therefore that he continues to insist on the affective characterisation of gratitude, without taking this recurring problem as an indication that something is perhaps wrong with the modern definition of gratitude in these affective terms. Part of Fitzgerald’s difficulty lies in his inability to see gratitude as being a virtue: while he does acknowledge that gratitude is not “merely an emotion” it remains that the “emotional component of gratitude is what differentiates it from the virtue of reciprocity.” The claim that gratitude is a virtue is, for Fitzgerald, “controversial.” The reason it seems controversial is that it is nigh impossible to classify a set of emotions as being virtuous. Once gratitude is labelled affective, any resemblance it has to a coherent definition of virtue quickly dissipates since the object becomes confused with the matter and subject.
The recurring difficulty for sociologists, psychologists and philosophers who count gratitude as an affective, purely subjective mental state is that one cannot place affections into any meaningful taxonomic framework: emotions shift, change, vary in degree; they are spontaneous, irregular and inconsistent. Expressions of gratitude change furthermore from time to time and from place to place, from culture to culture, and valuations of gift-giving likewise change and are fluid and resistant to ready classification.

2.5.1 Gratitude as Affective

For Aquinas, gratitude is not an emotion or feeling. Contra Fitzgerald, Aquinas would hold that one can indeed be grateful without feeling grateful. In fact, we have an obligation to give thanks even in the absence of any concomitant emotion. Gratitude for Aquinas is not simply an affective or psychological state, as it has widely come to be understood today. Gratitude is a virtue, and as such is a habit of the will oriented to some sort of specific action rooted in justice and charity, neither of which is affective:

Thus, there are two virtues in will as in a subject, namely, charity and justice. A sign of this is that these virtues, although they pertain to appetite, are not about emotions, as temperance and courage are, and thus, it is clear that they are not in sense appetite in which the emotions are found, but in rational appetite, that is, will, in which there are no emotions.

To say that for Aquinas gratitude is not an emotion is not to say that he dismisses the role of the passions in the exercise of virtue. His account of the virtues and of gratitude in particular is based on an anthropology rooted in love and friendship. Nicholas Lombardo

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45 See, Visser, Margaret. Gift of Thanks: The Roots, Persistence and Paradoxical Meanings of a Social Ritual. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. Print. Visser’s, like other contemporary commentaries on gratitude which suffer from the psychologism I here intend to explore, struggles to provide any coherent account of the virtue since the concept of the finality of the moral object has been eroded.

46 De Virtutibus, q.1, a.5: *Sic ergo duae virtutes sunt in voluntate sicut in subjecto; scilicet caritas et iustitia. Cuius signum est, quod istae virtutes quamvis ad appetitivam pertineant, tamen non circa passiones consistunt, sicut temperantia et fortitudo: unde patet quod non sunt in sensibili appetitu, in quo sunt passiones, sed in appetitu rationali, qui est voluntas, in quo passiones non sunt.*

provides a thoroughgoing account of the way in which the passions are at the root of the virtues for Aquinas and shows how his account of justice, of which gratitude is a part, is infused with this rich anthropology which accords the passions a foundational role in the motivation of the human person.

Lombardo shows that Aquinas’ treatment of the passions, which centre on his account of desire for the supernatural, is central not only to the *Summa* (being the longest sustained treatise on the emotions ever written by its time) but to Aquinas’ overarching theology of creation throughout his entire works.

Lombardo argues that the passions are naturally inclined towards reason, and, when properly ordered to reason, compliment it and “fill out”, so to speak, the human person. Rightly ordered passions of the soul, such as delight, joy and love, complement the virtuous life and help orient it. The passions, so ordered, are therefore not simply accidental to the human person in the sense that they are dispensable or irrelevant to the exercise of virtue.

For Aquinas, ethics involves more than the analysis of discrete choices: it is concerned with persons more than their actions. The virtuous life is about the cultivation of a fully human personality...virtue is the expansion of the self to its fullest potential for greatness, happiness and creativity. The parameters of virtue are determined by the teleology of human nature not by rules or conventions.

The passions are rather essential to the perfection of the human person, for it is through our passions that we not only know what is good, but also desire the good. Mercy and compassion, for example, would be hollow and mechanical if it weren’t for the role of desire in moving the heart to pity and sorrow. Similarly, joy and hope are infused with the language of desire in the *Summa*. Lombardo notes that Aquinas’ treatise on justice is similarly infused with the language of affection, so that it is not simply a legalistic treatment of rights and wrongs measured mechanistically, but rather is informed by a humane and sensitive understanding of the human person:

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49 ST I, q.20. Aquinas does not treat of love, properly speaking, as being a “passion” simply speaking. Charity is a theological virtue; but love is often treated of in various and often analogical ways which include not only the exercise of charity but concomitant emotions which often accompany the exercise of such virtues, as Lombardo shows.
50 Lombardo, p.242.
Throughout the questions on justice, Aquinas’s primary interests are the nature of just human relationships and the affective dimensions of various virtues and vices, not the resolution of complex cases of conscience. In fact, in the questions on justice, Aquinas uses the terms “affection” and “interior passions” with some frequency. It seems plausible that his sustained reflection on justice generated a deeper sensitivity to the category of *affectus*, since the virtue of justice involves, in Aquinas’s account, precisely those appetitive movements that are not passions and yet are still constitutive of character and personality.\(^51\)

We find similar references to the affections identified by Lombardo in the treatise on Justice specifically in the treatment of gratitude as well. Aquinas, in fact, identifies affection (*affectus*) as being the *chief motivation* for wanting to repay a favour.\(^52\) And in question one hundred and six, he says that a gift should be repaid “in the heart” before anything else.

Gratitude or thankfulness can certainly be *expressed* affectively. We could even go so far as to say gratitude is enlivened and perfected by the orientation of the heart. This affectivity, however, does not *constitute* gratitude, but rather points to it or accompanies it and may indeed “fill it out”. But strictly speaking, such affectivity is accidental to the nature of gratitude itself, and so cannot be our starting point in trying to get a handle on the nature of gratitude. In fact, when one does reduce gratitude to the affective, it becomes very difficult to define it at all. Aquinas certainly understood this: one cannot derive definitions of things from their accidental properties alone. This explains why a number of commentators seem to be so perplexed about gratitude and how to get a handle on it. But one cannot define a thing through its *accidental* properties.

The contrast between Aquinas’ notion of gratitude as a virtue as a habit of the will oriented towards particular species of human acts and the emergence of the psychological “virtues”, on the other hand, which describes a wholly subjective state, is clearly seen in various works of the British and Scottish empiricists following the Enlightenment, and in the American pragmatists. We find such an interest in gratitude on both sides of the Atlantic in 19th century philosophical circles owing to the liberal exchange of ideas and mutual appreciation between the American, British and Scottish schools of philosophy. The period witnessed a surge of

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\(^{51}\) Lombardo, p.174.
\(^{52}\) ST II-II, a.106, a.3, ad.6: ...*recompensatio beneficii praecipue pendet ex affectu.*
interest in the notion of gift and gratitude, largely due to the study of gift economies in anthropology following the West’s discoveries in the Pacific and elsewhere of “primitive peoples and practices,” and also because of the emergence of the philosophy of mind as a precursor to contemporary psychology.

2.5.2 19th Century Notions of Gratitude

The Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation by the Pennsylvanian minister James Barr Walker (1805-1887), for example, went through several editions in England where it was both popular and influential. Gratitude is a constant theme in this anthropological survey of primitive religions which he suggests are precursors to Christian worship. Despite the book’s pretentions at being a philosophy, the work is pietistic and appeals to emotion rather than any real, worked out philosophical methodology, and to “Revelation”, which is often a synonym for speculations in natural theology. Walker’s Plan of Salvation does have important features; it recognises, for instance, that the human creature “becomes assimilated into the moral character of the object which he worships.” Aquinas would say similarly that “it is evident that to render anyone his due has the aspect of the good, since by rendering a person his due [including God in worship], one becomes suitably proportioned to him.” Consequently, through the works of thanksgiving to God, we become “divinised”. Gratitude is thus a means by which we become united to our benefactors. Walker even approaches something of a metaphysic in this, understanding that this principle “operates with the certainty of cause and effect.” But, unlike Aquinas, Walker’s metaphysical insight reveals that it is rooted in an appeal to subjective emotional states: the quality of worship, for Walker, is rooted in the quality of desire in the individual and his enthusiasm for ritual. For Walker, distraction in prayer is thus the dilution of the efficacy of prayer, whereas for Aquinas, the occasional distraction in prayer does not

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54 ST II-II, q.81, a.2: Et ideo necesse est dicere omnem actum bonum ad virtutem pertinere. Manifestum est autem quod reddere debitum alicui habet rationem boni, quia per hoc quod aliquis alteri debitum reddit, etiam constituitur in proportione convenienti respectu ipsius, quasi convenienter ordinatus ad ipsum.
necessarily undermine the efficacious nature of prayer, since prayer has, for Aquinas, an objective value of praise (ST II-II, q.83, a.13). For Walker, praise is a subjective emotion.

The cause and effect Walker has in mind is the cause and effect of emotional states of the individual. True worship of God, for Walker, requires “sympathy”, right “affections of the soul”, properly oriented “affectionate obedience”. Chapter five of the Plan treats of passion and affection as being the foundation of gratitude and worship. In fact, Walker subordinates the will to affection as a motivation: “the affections, although not governed by the will, do themselves greatly influence the will.”55 Virtue, for Walker—and in this, he is emblematic of this period of philosophy—arises, not from a perfection of the will which governs and orders the emotions, but from emotional states which inspire love, conceived of in purely affective terms. Virtue is, by extension, conceived of in purely axiological terms. The result is that gratitude, for Walker, focusses on the perception and affection of the beneficiary rather than the intention of the donor: “Keeping in mind the fact that the more we need a benefactor and feel that need, the stronger will be our feelings of gratitude and love the being interposes on our behalf…”56 For Aquinas, gratitude involves an evaluation of the intention of the donor and not the value of the beneficiary (ST II-II, q.106, a.5: gratitude is measured according to the disposition of the giver, rather than the effect, namely the disposition or intention of the beneficiary). Walker’s conception of gratitude is consequently of an idealist strain. Much of Walker’s very interesting treatment of idolatry in primitive worship, which idolatry could only be overcome through the Incarnation, ironically leaves one with a purely subjective view of gratitude, worship and virtue in general. Walker’s placement of the passions and affections in the category of motive causes for virtue furthermore sits in stark contrast to Aquinas, who maintains that the passions and emotions cannot directly move the will, but only indirectly in the person who is inattentive and confused (ST I, q.77, a.1).

Like Walker, the Scottish moral philosopher and political economist Adam Smith (1723-1790) places a lot of emphasis on the value of gratitude. Smith places gratitude, much in

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55 Walker, p.77
56 Walker, p.81. Emphasis in the original.
the same way that Marcel Mauss will do in *The Gift* of 1925, as a social construct within a framework of gift exchange and reciprocity. Smith’s celebrated *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (first published in 1759) dedicates much to the concept of gratitude within this framework. Several elements of Smith’s treatment echo elements of Aquinas’ treatment of gratitude. For example, Smith understands gratitude as a being motivated by *indebtedness*. But unlike Smith, Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of indebtedness: the legal debt (*debitum legale*) and the moral debt (*debitum morale*). The legal debt is a requirement of commutative justice, namely, that I repay what I have been given or loaned equitably and in a timely fashion. The moral debt, however, is only a debt by analogy; the *debitum morale*, of which species the debt of gratitude falls under, is the insatiable debt of love and friendship. For Smith, no such distinction between a legal debt and moral debt of this kind is made; Smith’s understanding of the debt of gratitude parallels Aquinas’ notion of legal debt, an obligation of an economic kind which functions as a commutative exchange for the benefit of society. For Aquinas, to treat a gift with the obligation of legal due is to be *ungrateful* (ST II-II, q.107, a.1, ad.3).

Like Walker, Smith sees the motive cause of gratitude as being rooted in sentiment and emotion, and particularly in sympathy. Smith also understands that gratitude often accompanies love. But at the same time, Smith draws a distinction between love and gratitude. Love, Smith argues, is concerned with seeking the happiness of the object of our love. We seek in love, in other words, a change in the other. Gratitude, on the other hand, has no such object;

57 “If the person to whom we owe many obligations, is made happy without our assistance, though it pleases our love, it does not content our gratitude. Till we have recompensed him, till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting his happiness, we feel ourselves still loaded with that debt which his past services have laid upon us.” See Smith, Adam. *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. A. Millar: London. 1761.

58 I will treat of this important distinction between the kinds of debt further on. It suffices for the time being to note that among the 19th century moral theologians and philosophers, the debt of gratitude is a legal debt occurring within the context of economic gift exchange.

59 Cf. Smith, particularly chapter one, “On Sympathy” and chapter five, “Of the Amiable and Respectable Virtues” for example. This identification of gratitude with psychological states such as sympathy (and, by extension, guilt and shame) continues to persist to this day. See for example, McNamara, Patrick. *Where God and science meet: how brain and evolutionary studies alter our understanding of religion*. Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2007, p. 15: “By experiencing gratitude, a person is motivated to carry out prosocial behaviours, energized to sustain moral behaviors, and inhibited from committing destructive interpersonal behaviors. Because of its specialized functions in the moral domain, [McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson] likened gratitude to empathy, sympathy, guilt and shame…. [Gratitude] operates typically when people acknowledge they are the recipients of prosocial behaviour.”
its aim, rather, is the satisfaction of a legal due according to social norms, and can be executed in the absence of love. Gratitude is about shedding one’s own personal sense of obligation.

Our love, however, is fully satisfied, though his good fortune should be brought about without our assistance. All that this passion desires is to see him happy, without regarding who was the author of his prosperity. But gratitude is not to be satisfied in this manner. If the person to whom we owe many obligations, is made happy without our assistance, though it pleases our love, it does not content our gratitude. Till we have recompensed him, till we ourselves have been instrumental in promoting his happiness, we feel ourselves still loaded with that debt which his past services have laid upon us.60

For Aquinas, the form of all the virtues is love (ST II-II, q.23, a.8) and gratitude is incoherent as a concept both as a legal due and as independent of love and friendship (q.23, a.1). Smith’s notion of indebtedness is a burden which must be shed through the repayment of a due. For Aquinas, this understanding of indebtedness in fact equates to ingratitude (ST II-II, q.106, a.4). One should repay, Aquinas says, the debt of gratitude (debitum morale) quickly according to “the affection of the heart”; but while a legal debt (debitum legale) should be repaid at once (q.106, a.4, ad.1), the moral debt needs to be repaid “according to the demand of the rectitude of the virtue” (secundum quod exigit rectitudo virtutis). This rectitude of the virtue is not for Aquinas, as it is for Smith, determined according to the emotions of the recipient, or on account of a sense of legal obligation, but rather according to the nature of the gift and the intentions of the benefactor. The “rectitude of the virtue” requires praise and worship in the form of ritual.

Along with Walker and Smith, the Scottish physician and philosopher John Abercrombie (1780-1844) sits at a pivotal juncture in this transitional phase and exemplifies the slide into psychologism also disguised as natural theology in his treatment of gratitude. In one respect, Abercrombie is emblematic of the Enlightenment project in Scotland which aimed to reform metaphysics, and the influence of his predecessors is clearly seen in his attitude towards virtue and gratitude in particular. Abercrombie seems to be aware of the consequences of the unravelling of metaphysics in contemporary philosophy, and he struggles to give the virtues and gratitude any coherent meaning, although he is not, along with Walker, able to see why and therefore not in a position to properly address the decline.

60 Smith, p.111-112.
Not much has been written on the work of Abercrombie; partly because, from a philosophical point of view, his insights contribute little to the study of philosophy or metaphysics and his misreading of Scholasticism is evident from reading his works. From a scientific point of view, he belongs to the long-since discredited discipline of phrenology. Despite the fact that he has contributed little to philosophy or science however, Abercrombie remains of interest for at least one other significant reason. One can see in his writing that he is something of a melting pot of British and Scottish empiricism. He is strongly influenced by both Locke and Hume. At the same time, he appeals to the American pragmatist movement and natural theology typified by Walker, and the emerging science and philosophy of mind. For Abercrombie virtue is not a habit of the will but rather a reasoned judgement—indeed independent of any authority—which must also be made independently of the affections or emotions which influence, often unduly, the exercise of sovereign reason. There is no distinction in Abercrombie’s system between speculative reasoning and practical reasoning; he conflates prudence and justice. Truth only has value insofar as it has practical applications for right conduct: “it appears then, that the exercise of reason is precisely the same, and is guided by the same laws, whether it be applied to the investigation of truth, or to the regulation of conduct.”

While Abercrombie does not share Walker’s emphasis on the role of affections in motivating a subjective notion of virtue, he shares with Walker the separation of the will from his understanding of virtue. The same difficulty, however, arises for him in this move. Just as affections do not lend themselves to a description of action, neither do reasoned judgements which evaluate gifts in terms of their subjective value, rather than the intention behind the giving of them. Human reason, for Abercrombie, must overcome the will, which he tends to conflate with wilfulness. “In every exercise of judgement, it is of essential importance, that the mind shall be entirely unbiased by any personal feeling or emotion which might restrain or influence

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its decisions. Hence the difficulty we feel in deciding on a subject in which we are deeply interested….”

Thus, also, we may say to a man of strict integrity and virtue, that he has not the power to commit murder or robbery, or any act of gross injustice or oppression. He may reply, that he has the power to do it if he willed: and this is granted, for this is free agency; but it is not the question in dispute. We do not say that he has not the power to do any or all of these acts, if he willed, but that he has not the power to will such deeds.

Practical reason must set aside will and affection in order to establish a rational foundation for moral action. Gratitude is therefore annexed to prudence rather than justice in Abercrombie’s system. The reason the moral agent does not have the “power to will” is because his will has been subordinated to reason. Such a view is borne out of Abercrombie’s mistrust of Scholastic metaphysics, and an objective notion of the “good” as something ontological in its own right. For Aquinas, the object of the will is the good, while the object of reason and intellect is the true (ST I, q.16, a.1ff). For Walker, Smith and Abercrombie, the notion of the good is established either as an affective state (Walker), a social construct (Smith) or a prudential judgement (Abercrombie). All three attitudes share a subjective and voluntaristic view of gratitude which in effect radically alter the nature of the virtue of gratitude as a response to the instigation of friendship, according to the Aristotelian-Thomistic definition.

More contemporaries of Walker, Smith and Abercrombie could be added to the list: Francis Hutcheson (1694 –1746) and Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) also have treatments of gratitude which mirror much of what their contemporaries understood gratitude to be: in short, emotive states or rational or appetitive constructs which reduce gratitude to the subjective, psychological arenas. Virtue thus becomes the domain of either sociology, as in the case of Smith, or of the philosophy of mind (the precursor to psychology) for Abercrombie and Chalmers. We can give the final word to Chalmers, who encapsulates this theme running throughout the period:

Mental science makes still larger contributions to the Philosophy of Morals; and the latter is still more dependent on the former, for the

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62 Abercrombie, p.181
63 Ibid p.199.
solution of certain of its questions…. It is thus that the virtuousness of a right belief the virtuousness of certain of the emotions, as of gratitude for example, require for the demonstration that we should advert to the constitution of the mind, and evince therefrom the dependence of an intellectual state in the one case; and of a state of emotion in the other, on certain antecedent volitions which had given them birth.\textsuperscript{64}

I am conscious that this is a brief survey of 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} century treatments of gratitude, one which focusses on one particular and localised period in philosophy. But at the same time, it is accurate to say that it is broadly representative of the attitude toward gratitude in philosophy in the West at the time which persists today; furthermore, the period represents a radical departure from the way in which virtue and in particular the virtue of gratitude has been understood at least up until Aquinas.\textsuperscript{65} What all of these treatments have in common is this displacement of the individual from the context of the community. For Aquinas, gratitude can only be properly understood within this context of community, which itself is not simply accidental to the human person, but constitutive of human nature.

\textbf{2.5.3 Modern Philosophical Developments}

Following the reduction of gratitude to subjective, physiological and affective states gratitude has since then fallen victim to the ‘deconstruction of the gift’ most famously associated with Jacques Derrida (1930 - 2004).

For Derrida the notion of gift and gratitude present us with a paradox. Derrida’s famous maxim that the gift is annulled by the very notion of gift, it turns out, highlights the problem with the modern, affective, understanding of gratitude. In many respects, Derrida’s critique is a vindication of Aquinas’ understanding of gratitude, against the modern attempts to place the virtue within the boundaries of subjective, affective states. The rejection of gratitude by Derrida

\textsuperscript{64} Chalmers, Thomas. \textit{Moral and Mental Philosophy: Their Connection with Each Other; and Their Bearings on Doctrinal and Practical Christianity.} Robert Carter, New York. 1847. 47-48

\textsuperscript{65} Anecdotally, I continue to find ample evidence of this state of affairs today in my own students who invariably define gratitude (and love for that matter) as an affective state or emotion when asked for a definition.
is a rejection of the psychological treatment of gratitude developed in the two centuries leading up to the present day.

Contemporary psychology aims to avoid the perceived paradox of the gift by distancing the notion of gift from the affective experience of thankfulness. It thus often forces a dichotomy between gratitude and gift so that the notion of gift disappears altogether. What it leaves us with is perhaps a useful description of an emotion—but it is one detached from an origin in intention which gives it meaning and that preserves it from falling into voluntarism. This trend is already evident in Marcel Mauss, who, in his influential essay on *The Gift* (1923), barely mentions gratitude in his ethnographic survey of gift-giving. For Mauss, the gift is reduced to a sociological symbol of binding communities together. There is no place for authentic gratitude in such a functionalist and obligatory account of the gift. Neither Mauss nor Derrida find an intrinsic relationship between gift and gratitude, because both understand the gift as being a symbol of indebtedness. As Derrida puts it, “this simple recognition [of gift as gift] suffices to annul the gift. Why? Because it gives back, in the place, let us say, of the thing itself, a symbolic equivalent.”

Aquinas’ treatment of might be criticised for the way in which gratitude is subordinated to obligations demanded by justice in general and the related virtues of indebtedness making genuine gratitude impossible. Where one would expect to find further developments of gratitude or thankfulness (such as in the tertia pars where the Eucharist is treated of), there is no explicit treatment at all. Why is there no reference to gratitude in the treatment of a sacrament whose very etymology implies thankfulness? Yet in contrast to this perceived limitation of the treatment of gratitude, Aquinas’ treatment and reference to the *gift* is ubiquitous throughout his works in general and the *Summa* specifically, spanning all three parts. And yet we do not find an explicit treatment linking the notion of gift and gratitude generally speaking in his work. ‘Gift’ in his theological landscape is applied primarily as a Divine Name for the Holy Spirit (ST I, q.38) and is not, generally speaking, mapped out alongside any systematic treatment of

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gratitude. Rather, the notion of gift subsides when the virtues of indebtedness are discussed by Aquinas, and in the place of ‘gift’ we find a preponderance of language relating to debt and obligation.

Is this evidence then in suspecting in this that there is indeed an inevitable dichotomy between gift and gratitude? Is the relationship between gift and gratitude an irresolvable dialectic? Derrida declares, “The simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it.”67 Indeed, there are moments in reading the Summa where one begins to suspect that Derrida has a case to be answered. Aquinas seems on the surface to have some difficulty in balancing gift and gratitude against justice and obligation, to the extent that he has been accused of obligating gratitude with such force within deontological language so as to rob gratitude of any sincerity or meaning.

Many of these difficulties arise, not so much from Aquinas’ treatment of gratitude itself, but rather from the later, inherited notion of gift and gratitude derived largely from the 19th century commentators which does not correspond to Aquinas’ understanding. We see this difficulty in the narrative of the gift and gratitude taken up by Derrida.

Derrida held that there is no such thing as a gift freely given or freely received and that consequently the very notion of gift is destroyed in a kind of violence: the very act of giving at the same time involves coercing the recipient and placing an expectation of return on the part of the donor. Mauss, whom Derrida both draws on and critiques in his own work on gift-giving, sums up the apparent paradox of the nature of the gift in the introduction to his celebrated essay:

> We intend in this book to isolate one important set of phenomena: namely, prestation which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behaviour is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest.68

When Derrida takes up this narrative, he adds that as soon as gift giving is transacted, the donor places a burden on the recipient, drawing him back into this economic circle, the

“symbolic circle”, of giving and receiving. In this circle, the recipient of a gift is “on trial” so to speak, in which he is under an obligation to repay in some way; until he has repaid, he is a debtor.

[Recipients] are summoned to pay and to acquit themselves. They must restitute and enter again into the symbolic circle. They are on trial, they appear before the donee's court as before the law. With the result that in the final accounting, at the end of this trial, it will be a question of their own gratitude with regard to whoever accepts their damage payment ....69

This is not to say that we may not have the intention of giving a gift, but time itself, or the temporal context in which the giving and receiving occurs, eventually destroys any possibility of the genuine gift.

The temporalization of time...always sets in motion the process of a destruction of the gift: through keeping, restitution, reproduction, the anticipatory expectation or apprehension that grasps or comprehends in advance. In all these cases, the gift can certainly keep its phenomenality or, if one prefers, its appearance as gift. But its very appearance, the simple phenomenon of the gift annuls it as a gift, transforming the apparition into a phantom and the operation into a simulacrum.70

Interestingly, Derrida touches on an aspect of gift giving and gratitude that Aquinas himself tackled: the concept of the gift and gratitude in time. For Aquinas, the role of memory is central to the relationship between gift-giving and gratitude. Aquinas would not share Derrida’s concern that the temporalisation of the gift destroys the gift, and rather insists, in opposition to Derrida, that it is rather forgetfulness that destroys the gift: temporality and forgetfulness are not synonymous for Aquinas. The only true gift for Derrida would be one where neither the donor had any expectation of return or where the recipient felt no obligation to make such a return. But this would require a forgetfulness or lack of awareness of the exchange on part of both giver and receiver, which itself negates the possibility of the gift since gift necessarily involves recognition of value. Thus, genuine gift giving becomes an impossibility, annulled in the very temporal exchange between donor and recipient.

70 Ibid.
Given that no genuine gift is possible, it follows that neither is there any possibility of any genuine gratitude. For Derrida, gratitude is not simply the recognition of a gift but a kind of enslavement; as soon as one is aware of there being a gift, there is an obligation, and the very nature of the gift is thereby annulled, making genuine gratitude likewise dissolve.\footnote{Derrida, p13-14.}

Derrida’s critique of the gift and gratitude certainly poses a challenge to anyone wanting to retrieve gratitude from the work of Aquinas. The impossibility of a free gift, outside of the economic circle of “trial” and repayment, may seem to be confirmed by a certain reading of Aquinas’ understanding of gratitude. At times, Aquinas may seem to fall prey to Derrida’s critique, for example, when he says that a gift or favour “should be repaid in due time according as the rectitude of virtue demands” (ST II-II, q106, a4, ad1); and that since “the benefactor of his own free-will gave something he was not bound to give, so on the other hand the beneficiary repays something over and above what he has received” (ST II-II, q.106, a.6, ad.3); and all this is because “repayment of favours belongs specially to the virtue of gratitude.” The language of economic exchange is difficult to miss in question one hundred and six. It is a language of debt (debitum), owing (debere) and repayment (reddere)—and such language runs through every article. The challenge, however, turns out to be a challenge to the modern notion of gratitude, and not to the theological notion held by Aquinas. Rather, overcoming the modern conception of gratitude as an affective state—as Derrida wanted to do—is the first step in recovering an authentic notion of gratitude as understood by Aquinas.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the notion of gift and gratitude as understood by Aquinas, in distinction to the way in which it is understood by Derrida is that for Aquinas, an act of genuine gratitude—and the subsequent return of the gift—is not simply a symbolic gesture. Gratitude for Aquinas is not simply a symbolic gesture of friendship mediated through a reciprocation of gift-giving. Gratitude is already, in itself, the initiation of, and participation in, friendship. The gift itself is less important than the intention or will of the donor (ST II-II, q.106, a.6), which is an invitation to the donee to enter into friendship. The gift is a sign of friendship, and the act of gratitude is an acceptance of that offer. As such, the
donee, in Aquinas’ system, does not simply attempt to match the gift with a symbolic equivalent, but understands the gift as a gesture of reciprocal friendship.

John Milbank has shown however that this notion of reciprocity is present in Mauss, and is what distinguishes his treatment of the gift from that of Derrida whom Milbank criticises for misreading Mauss and being “unable to assimilate the more truly critical lesson of Mauss.”

Mauss understands that in the process of gift giving, there is a reciprocity of not just things, but of persons, who are mediated through the things that they give: “the thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place.” Furthermore, Mauss understands that the reciprocity of the gift exchange is not something merely economic, but a gesture which is primarily spiritual and transcendent of any simple economic value placed on the thing given. Gifts are, according to Mauss’ survey, not simply given for any value inherent in the gift itself, but rather they are given for what they represent. The gift, in other words, is enlivened by the reciprocal process of gift giving to the extent that a gift derives its meaning from the return-in-kind which it aims to generate. The gift is therefore part of a discourse of bonding so to speak, and would have no meaning if considered simply as an object in itself. That bonding is not simply economic, but embraces the legal, moral, cultural and religious strands of the donee’s self-identification.

In this reading of primitive gift-giving cultures, Mauss is perhaps more in tune with Aquinas’ own understanding of the function of the gift-exchange than is Derrida, who is perhaps more focussed on the way in which Western societies have monetised the gift as a thing-in-itself. For Aquinas, the notion of reciprocity is central to the notion of friendship, or self-donation:

In yet a third way, mutual indwelling in the love of friendship can be understood in regard to reciprocal love: inasmuch as friends return love for love, and both desire and do good things for one another.

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74 Ibid, pp. 11, 47 & 81.
75 ST I-II, q.28, a.2: Potest autem et terto modo mutua inhaesio intelligi in amore amicitiae, secundum viam redamationis, inquantum mutuo se amant amici, et sibi invicem bona volunt et operantur.
Mauss is perhaps correct in noting that gift-giving is never free in that it necessitates a reciprocation, just as a gesture of friendship is not free without a reciprocal gesture. To refuse to reciprocate a gesture of friendship is equivalent to a rejection of that friendship. The very essence of friendship is reciprocity; and the very essence of reciprocity is gratitude and hence friends “return love for love.”

Milbank has spent much of his career attempting to recover a notion of gift and gratitude within a theology of grace. This understanding of gratitude within the context of reciprocity has largely been lost in modernity. The failure of modernity, or what Milbank frequently describes as ‘liberalism’ is, in essence, the failure to understand the notion of gift and givenness—the failure to understand the “politics of the soul” in human governance and society, and consequently, to force a subordination of the givenness of the human person and interpersonal relationships (which are integral to the very givenness of the person) to economies which are fundamentally inhuman.

Thus liberalism declares, as we have seen, that all is natural and yet all is artificial, because it cannot admit that we are "supposed to be cultural," that nature most fully reveals herself in the human experience of love for nature, for other humans and for the divine. This duality further plays itself out in the contradictory demand that all sacrifice their liberty to the needs of growth, and yet that the "rights" of all to assert their negative liberty and material comfort against this need are equally absolute; in the view that we must submit to inexorable economic necessities, and yet that economic processes are the ultimate expression of human freedom; in the demand that we work all the time, and yet equally relax and consume all the time; in the view that all our significant actions impinge on the freedom of others and so must mostly be criminalised and exposed to public ridicule in the name of “transparency,” while equally we enjoy a right of absolute privacy to do what we like so long as it is (supposedly) done "only to ourselves." This despite the fact that any damage we did truly to ourselves and our own soul would render us the most dangerous of citizens. Whoever loses his own soul, cannot in fact gain even the world, because thereby he has helped to destroy the human world also.\textsuperscript{76}

Milbank recognises that in recent times, there has been both an awareness of this subordination of the givenness of the person to sterile economies and an attempt to rethink a theology of grace in its aftermath by Catholic and Anglican theologians. Such a rethinking has

taken the shape of a resurgence of interest in the notion of person (about which much has been written in recent decades by numerous theologians and philosophers). There is, as a result, a great deal of consensus among these that the human person is only properly understood ‘dyadically’ or in terms of reciprocal giving against the cynicism of the liberal view of the human person.

In the course of the nineteenth century, various socialisms, co-operative movements and finally Catholic and much Anglican social teaching started to realise these more egalitarian implications of Christianity, not in the name of the liberal left, but precisely in criticism of its egoistic pessimism. Indeed, they appealed, as Michea argues, to what George Orwell called “common human decency,” which Michea equates with the practice of gift-exchange or of reciprocity.77

While not confined in his study to Aquinas, Milbank’s underscores at least two key elements of Aquinas’ own understanding of gift and gratitude.

First, that the ‘gift’ is not simply something ontological or static; the gift, by its very nature, is the initiation of a relationship of mutual self-giving and it is through this process that the person is fully realised. In theological terms, the human person is a gift in essence; but even material gifts between two parties are a sign, or what Milbank calls a “point of intersection between the real and signifying.”78 Similarly, we find in Aquinas the recognition that, between friends, there is often an identification of choice for the same things, which accounts for the reason why friends like and dislike the same things.79 The things in themselves signify the unification of the will between friends, just as gifts signify, in a sense, a self-donation mediated through some vehicle.80 The gift, in other words, is an extension of the self—a sign of love extended through some medium—and the act of gratitude is in turn a reciprocation of that love so as to bring about a unification of the donor and donee in love. The gift of the creation of the human person contains within it from the outset a sharing in the divine life through this very act

79 ST II-II, q.29, a.3
80 ST I, q.38, a.1
of giving. The person who recognises this gift of creation becomes vivified, or fully alive, in gratitude that constitutes a full and proper understanding of self as given.

Secondly, that reconciliation of the human person with God is a primary means through which the exchange of gift and gratitude takes place. Given that the human person is by definition a gift of divine love, and given that human nature is in need of redemption, reconciliation with God becomes the second most important “point of intersection” between donor and donee for without reconciliation, the gift of self is itself lost. The person who experiences divine forgiveness by God re-enters the mystery of deification, or theosis through the invitation of divine forgiveness, enabled by the Incarnation. To know that one is forgiven, and to accept that forgiveness, is in that very act an act of gratitude. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that Aquinas, in question one hundred and six dealing with gratitude, turns almost immediately in article two to the question of the gratitude owed by the penitent. It is through the gratitude of the penitent—that is, through the experience of forgiveness—that the originary gift of self-discovery is redeemed and renewed.

For Milbank, the gift reveals itself only as a coherent concept when understood in terms of such reciprocal giving; first, in the act of creation, the reciprocation of self-donation in gratitude establishes the bonds of love and friendship; secondly, given that human nature is fallen, the acceptance of forgiveness and response to reconciliation renews and strengthens these bonds. I will return to these key themes in more detail throughout this study, following the placement of Aquinas in his historical context.

2.6 Historical Context for Aquinas’ Treatment of Gratitude

Not only do Abercrombie and Walker, et al, turn Scholastic moral theory on its head, but in doing so, they also lose sight of the historical understanding of gratitude up to their day. Indeed, one often finds in their writing a treatment of gratitude and gift-exchange in medieval and “primitive cultures” as little more than anthropological curiosities.

82 Ibid, p.66 ff.
While innovative and unique in his sustained treatment of the virtues of indebtedness, Aquinas’ is not writing in a historical vacuum. Not only is his thinking rooted in the ancient texts of Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, St Paul, Augustine and Dionysius, but it is also borne out of his lived experience in 13th century Europe which willingly inherited the Greco-Roman emphasis on gratitude as the means of social cohesion. As Catherine Dunn has shown, gratitude was not only understood as being a virtue, but in Europe at his time it provided the very framework for social cohesion, based on varieties of the Teutonic notion of *comitatus* between the king and his subjects, and the corresponding loyalty that subjects owed to the king, the state and duly appointed representatives of these. Ingratitude was thus not simply an unpleasant thing, but could in fact constitute *treason*.83 “In the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” Dunn writes, “the evil [of ingratitude] assumed overwhelming proportions and was regarded with horror scarcely explicable to the modern mind.”84 Ingratitude was considered a gross violation of the natural law, and for Aquinas at least, also a violation of the Divine Law.

Aquinas’ treatment of gratitude is somewhat heterogeneous and so we cannot speak simply of gratitude in his philosophy as though there is only one concept here. First of all, Aquinas treats of gratitude in both a perfect and imperfect sense. In other words, he has in mind gratitude as it pertains to our temporal relationships to benefactors in general and more perfectly as it pertains to our relationship with God. These distinctions run throughout his treatment of gratitude and the virtues of indebtedness in general. In other words, he treats of gratitude as an acquired virtue and gratitude as an infused virtue (although it must be noted that his distinction between these is not always immediately clear or explicit in his treatment of the virtues of indebtedness).

In the former treatment, gratitude as an acquired virtue, one needs to keep in mind the medieval gift economy in which we can place Aquinas’ thinking. In this respect, gratitude reflects an element of the feudal and manorial system in Medieval Europe which put

84 Ibid, p.xi.
considerable stock in reciprocal gift-giving, as well as that fealty owed to the head of state.\textsuperscript{85} One’s place in society in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century was determined by social status which in turn was determined by role, which extended for example from peasant to nobleman, including the various clerical offices. Hence, much of Aquinas’ discussion of gratitude treats of it as a social norm and here it has more of the character of commutative justice (the \textit{debitum legale} to which we will return later) and the obligation one has to people according to their social standing. Such justice is relative according to one’s state in life.\textsuperscript{86} We have a right to expect certain things from one another and each must honour this responsibility that comes with living in a human society. In this respect, gratitude is an obligation to honour a debt or a benefaction as a means of both encouraging liberality (no one wants to give to the ungrateful) and loyalty (one is bound to one’s benefactor). This sort of gratitude qualifies as an acquired virtue and falls short of a more perfect form of gratitude. One finds that gratitude is occasionally a mechanical enterprise in these kinds of situations, and so Aquinas’ language often slips into a more general discussion of justice in these instances. But the acquired, social virtue, always remains a participation of our obligation to God, the first cause of all our goods.

Aquinas moves fluidly, and without explicit distinction, between discussions of imperfect and acquired gratitude to gratitude as an infused virtue. The difference between the acquired virtues and the infused virtues is that the former correspond to our earthly happiness and the functioning of a well-ordered society. These virtues can be acquired through regular practice and discipline (for example, one can teach oneself to overcome a fear of dogs through repeated practice). Hence acquired gratitude is also essential for social harmony and temporal


\textsuperscript{86} Aquinas gives a good example of this hierarchy and the relative nature of acquired virtue in his response in I-II, q.47, a.4 where he says, “I answer that, as stated above unmerited contempt more than anything else is a provocative of anger. Consequently deficiency or littleness in the person with whom we are angry, tends to increase our anger, in so far as it adds to the unmeritedness of being despised. For just as the higher a man’s position is, the more undeservedly he is despised; so the lower it is, the less reason he has for despising. Thus a nobleman is angry if he be insulted by a peasant; a wise man, if by a fool; a master, if by a servant.”
happiness but does not guarantee total Beatitud that supersedes human nature in its present state.

Infused virtues on the other hand correspond to our eternal destiny and our life in God and have God as their effective principle. While acquired virtue does not go beyond the limitations of natural human efficacy in respect to the powers of the soul, the infused virtues exceed the capacity of human nature. The infused virtues have life in God and our eternal destiny as their proper end.

The infused virtues ultimately have eternal life and friendship with God as their object. But this supernatural end is not something private to the individual; the infused virtue of gratitude to God is not something exclusively lived out in the quiet and secret of one’s heart, detached from the communio of God’s people. This ecclesial notion of gratitude will be explored in a subsequent chapter, but for now it is worth noting that for Aquinas, the highest form of treason with its “horror of overwhelming proportions” is that treason against the Church itself in the form of heresy. Quoting Gregory VII’s decree at the 5th Roman Council, Aquinas writes, “Holding to the institutions of our holy predecessors, we, by our apostolic authority, absolve from their oath those who through loyalty or through the sacred bond of an oath owe allegiance to excommunicated persons: and we absolutely forbid them to continue their allegiance to such persons, until these shall have made amends” (ST II-II, q.12, a.2). Heresy is disobedience to the Church, and by extension, disobedience to God. It is, for Aquinas, the ultimate ingratitude.

The class structure or hierarchy that existed in society between peasants all the way up to the king is the subject, for Aquinas, of the acquired virtues. But this same class structure provides an anagogical image of the hierarchical participation of creatures in God which is the subject of the infused virtues. The earthly city is a representation of the heavenly: “To him that despises earthly things, heavenly things are promised” (ST II-II, q.161, a.5, ad.3).

87 ST I-II, q.63, a.3
2.7 The Placement of Gratitude in Aquinas

Aquinas treats of gratitude (gratitudo) and thanksgiving (gratiarum actio) primarily in question one hundred and six of the secunda secundae partis of the Summa. Ingratitude is treated of in question one hundred and seven. There are also several other treatments of gratitude and thanksgiving throughout the Summa and elsewhere, and these are almost invariably used in connection to the precepts of religious practice and ritual.

For example, gratitude and thanksgiving is linked to prayer (ST II-II, q.83, a.17 and the Commentary on First Thessalonians 1.1, where thanksgiving is treated of as the essence of “continuous prayer”); to petitionary prayer (Commentary on Philemon, 1); to praise (ST II-II, q.3, a.1, ad.1) and blessing (Commentary on Job, 1:4); to penance (ST III, q.88, a.4 where the focus is on ingratitude); to the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law (ST I-II, q.103, a.3); and to devotion (Commentary on First Corinthians, 1:12). Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find, outside of question one hundred and six, any reference in the entire works of Thomas that treat of gratitude or thanksgiving in any context other than one which is intrinsically connected to the practice of the requirements of the virtue of religion. A brief sketch of the treatise on justice is helpful to put it into textual context.

The Treatise on Justice spans sixty-five questions in the secunda secundae partis from question fifty seven through one hundred and twenty two. Justice is a general virtue in that it is concerned with relationships between at least two people. It is divided between commutative and distributive justice, and annexes the entire class of virtues of indebtedness—religion, piety, observance and gratitude, which also deal with inter-personal relationships where a specific kind of debt (debitum morale) is owed.

From question eighty of the treatise, he deals with the potential parts of justice, or those virtues annexed to justice. His treatment of the virtue of religion, which he calls the “most important” or “chief part” of justice (potissima pars iustitiae; ST II-II, q.122, a.1), falls within the overarching treatise on the virtue of justice in the secunda secundae partis from question

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88 It is instructive to read both questions 106 and 107 together, since they are complimentary articles and each contain elements which impact on the other. In effect, they should be read as a single article.
fifty seven through one hundred and twenty two. Aquinas’ treatise on gratitude falls within this broader treatment of justice, of which gratitude is “a special part” (specialem iustitiae partem; ST 11-11, q.106. a1) and classified under the virtues of observance. Within the treatment on justice, Aquinas groups together a number of connected virtues with a shared character of indebtedness towards persons of excellence. These virtues are observance itself (question 102), which is the umbrella virtue in this grouping and which deals with paying “worship and honour to those in positions of dignity”; this is followed by honour (dulia), which “denotes witnessing to a person’s excellence” including honour to the saints in prayer (question 103); obedience (obedientia), by which virtue “inferiors are bound to obey their superiors” (question 104) and disobedience (question 105); gratitude (gratitudine) by which virtue we repay our debts (question 106) and its opposite vice, ingratitude (question 107); retribution (vindicatione) by which justice is restored through the punishment of sins and crimes; (question 108); truth (veritas) which is the virtue of being habitually honest (question 109); and finally friendship (amicitia, philia) which is the virtue of friendliness or affability (ST I-II, q.65) and the vices opposed to it.89

All of these virtues, annexed to the more general virtue of justice, need to be read in context together. All of them furthermore contain elements of one another and Aquinas frequently has an on-going explication of one in the treatment of another. Before proceeding to make sense of his overall plan in the treatise, we should take note that some elements of the treatise appear quite heterogeneous at times, which perhaps is not surprising, given its scope and range. The final three articles of the treatise appear to be appended somewhat incongruously with the overall plan of the treatise. Question one hundred and twenty deals with the virtue of epikeia or equity and is the virtue which considers the “spirit of the law” as opposed to the “letter of the law”, allowing for prudential judgement and even mercy in legal matters. In question eighty of the treatise, Aquinas acknowledges that this virtue is not found in the schema.

89 Aquinas counts friendliness, or affability, as a virtue. However, he distinguishes in this question two kinds of friendship. In a more general sense, the friendship of love is not a virtue properly speaking, but is the reason why all the other virtues exist (ST II-II, q.114, a.1, ad.1). Some confusion arises in that he uses amicitia in describing both kinds of friendship. However, in article 5 of question 60, he again identifies this virtue with the Greek form of friendship philia, based on Aristotle’s Ethics (II.7).
provided by Cicero which he generally follows (ST II-II, q.80, a.1, ad.5) and his inclusion of it where it is does not seem to contribute directly to the development of religion, piety, observance and gratitude which precede it.

It remains to figure out why Aquinas has chosen to group these particular virtues in this particular manner and order. On one level, the grouping seems to be an attempt to accommodate Cicero’s classification found in the *De Inventione* (II:22 & 53) and which classification Aquinas defends in question eighty of the Treatise on Justice. It also contains a concession to Aristotle, with the inclusion of *epikeia* in question one hundred and twenty. On another level, the classification of these virtues seems heterogeneous and somewhat arbitrary. Why, for example, does Aquinas prefer Cicero’s classification rather than Macrobius’ (whom Aquinas cites as an authority for other things) grouping found in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, which is raised in an objection and which Aquinas glosses over? Macrobius himself uses Cicero as an authority for his own list and although Aquinas does not explicitly say so, the list of Macrobius loses some of the coherence Cicero tried to give his own list. The reason Aquinas adopts—and adapts—Cicero’s list becomes clearer when one considers the Dionysian pattern of *exitus et reditus* employed in the classification of the virtues of indebtedness.

Cicero’s list includes six principle virtues annexed to justice: religion, piety, gratitude, vindication, observance and truth (*religio, pietas, gratia, vindicatio, observantia, veritas*). While Aquinas adopts these six, he rearranges the order so that his own list runs: religion, piety, observance, obedience, gratitude, vindication and truth. Cicero’s treatment at times conflates, or at least combines, a treatment of observance (to persons of dignity) and obedience.

While he moves observance immediately behind piety, Aquinas retains the link between observance and obedience (ST II-II, q.80, a.1, ad.3): respect of persons of dignity or those in positions of authority over us, involves, necessarily, obedience since such persons are deserving of respect precisely on account of their authority: “Insofar as [obedience] proceeds from reverence for a superior, it is contained, in a manner, under the virtue of observance; insofar as it follows upon the reverence owed to one’s parents, it is contained under piety; and insofar as it
proceeds from reverence to God, it falls under religion and relates to devotion, which is the principle act of religion.”

It is interesting to note here that Aquinas provides a similar reasoning for placing gratitude after religion and piety as he does for observance: “Just as religion is superexcelling piety, so also is it excelling thanks or gratitude (gratitudo); so giving thanks (gratiarum actio) to God is counted among those things pertaining to religion.” Here we now find that observance and obedience is omitted from the comparison, but they still retain their relevance in the list when one considers them in sequence: first, there is our duty to praise and worship God in religion; then, the most proximate likeness to God is our parents, who begot us and so are deserving of worship and honour in second place; then, we owe honour and obedience to our superiors which extends beyond the family and kin to the king and state and religious superiors; finally, there is honour due to anyone at all who meets the criteria of a benefactor, and who participates in this hierarchy of benefaction.

In this explanation of the relatedness of obedience to observance (primarily), and then to piety and religion (by way of participation), Aquinas does not provide any immediately obvious link between obedience and gratitude, which falls after obedience in Aquinas’ re-organising of Cicero’s list. Nor does he provide any direct link in either question one hundred and two (dealing with observance) and one hundred and six (dealing with gratitude) between observance and gratitude. So while observance and obedience are always considered within a hierarchy of participation to piety and religion, and while gratitude is likewise considered in the hierarchy of piety and religion, observance and gratitude are not so compared to each other. Perhaps it is easy to make too much of this omission, but I am inclined to think that it is at least an indication of the overall relationship between the virtues of indebtedness as Aquinas sees

90 ST II-II, q.104, a.3, ad.1: Inquantum ergo procedit ex reverentia praelatorum, continetur quodammodo sub observantia. Inquantum vero procedit ex reverentia parentum, sub pietate. Inquantum vero procedit ex reverentia Dei, sub religione, et pertinet ad devotionem, quae est principalis actus religionis.
91 ST II-II, q.106, a.1, ad.1: sicut religio est quaedam superexcellens pietas, ita est etiam quaedam excellens gratia seu gratitudo. Unde et gratiarum actio ad Deum supra posita est inter ea quae ad religionem pertinent.
them and which is borne out throughout his treatment of these virtues and not simply an immaterial omission.

In fact, the reason becomes clearer on further analysis of the questions dealing with observance and gratitude. Both these virtues have an idiosyncratic element not present in piety and religion. Not everyone, for example, stands in the same relationship to others in society. Observance is concerned with persons of dignity; but it is clear that in any given society, some persons have greater dignity than others: as for example the king over and against his subjects. Likewise with gratitude, some are in a better position to give and receive than are others. But while observance and gratitude retain this variable element, every human person has a duty to parents, regardless of their station in life; and every human person has a duty to God in acts of religion, again, regardless of one’s state in life. Piety and religion are thus universal virtues of indebtedness.

With this in mind, it is worthwhile noting that the tendency has frequently been, by some commentators of Aquinas, to assume that Aquinas’ reversal of observance and gratitude is to place gratitude as a virtue annexed to observance as though gratitude were a part of observance itself. We see this in one of the only sustained treatments of the virtue of observance in Aquinas by Benedict Joseph O.P. for example.92 Joseph follows the classification in the table of contents given by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province in their 1920 edition of the *Summa*, which also lists gratitude as being annexed to observance.

This assumption—that Aquinas intends us to think of gratitude as being a part of observance—is, I believe, mistaken and there does not appear to be any justification for it from examining the texts themselves. First of all, Aquinas himself is clear that both observance and gratitude are distinct virtues, each with a distinct object: both are special virtues in their own right (cf. II-II, q.102, a1 and II-II, q.106, a.1). Secondly, as noted above, they are distinct by virtue of their subjective order in the hierarchy of the mystical ascent to God, which moves through distinct stages in increasing degrees of perfection. It does not make sense to simply

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think of gratitude as being a part of observance. Both gratitude and observance find their fulfilment in their placement within the hierarchy of participation in reference to piety and religion. Furthermore, the eliciting virtue that observance commands is obedience, while the eliciting virtue gratitude commands is religion more perfectly. Both gratitude and observance represent different, albeit related, stages on the ascent to God. Gratitude is the beginning point; observance is a part of the journey begun in gratitude, because the human person—having recognised that he is given in relation in this first instance—then discovers that he is, by nature, oriented to communion with others. This communion is represented in three stages: that of communion among friends and equals; that of communion among those in positions of authority or dignity over us; and that communion of family and relatives, which is the most perfect of the three stages since it more perfectly represents our eternal destiny in the familial relationship of the Trinity. All three of these stages find their fullest expression in the virtue of religion.

There is a third factor, to which I will return in the next chapter, and that involves a distinction which needs to be made between infused and acquired virtues. Aquinas does not make this distinction explicit in the Treatise on Justice, so it is not clear which virtues he considers to be infused and which are not, or where the line of demarcation lies in distinguishing these. The answer to this problem is found, not in the Treatise itself, but rather in the treatment of virtue in general spread throughout his corpus. But it is a significant consideration; for while gratitude “sits at the bottom” of the hierarchy, the virtue of gratitude does not preclude gratitude to God, which culminates in the top virtue in the hierarchy: that of religion. Gratitude is carried all the way through the virtues of indebtedness, so to speak. It is this third consideration which gives us a clue to the reason behind Aquinas’ inclusion of, then reordering of Cicero’s list.

Cicero’s own reasoning behind listing religion, piety, gratitude, observance, vindication and truth is that each of these virtues represents something innate in us; they are virtues which are not derived from custom but from natural law or innate, instinctive principles in human nature itself. One passage in the De Inventione in particular is of significance:
Justice is a habit of the mind which gives every man his dignity and preserves the common good. Its first principles proceed from nature; then it is established by custom, from a consideration of their usefulness; afterwards, the fear of the laws and religion govern actions which originated in nature, and had been approved of by custom.\textsuperscript{93}

Cicero gives us here his rationale for including the virtues of indebtedness within the embrace of justice: they are virtues which are in us by nature, as innate principles, and which are confirmed and recognised in both law and custom through the exercise of reason. They provide, essentially, the rational framework for the proper and effective ordering of society according to natural law. While Aquinas does not cite this particular text directly, it seems to me to provide something of a blueprint—with key modifications—for his own schema of the virtues of indebtedness.

This is indeed what Aquinas has in mind in his consideration of these virtues of indebtedness: “Now all the virtues, both intellectual and moral, that are acquired by our actions, \textit{arise from certain natural principles pre-existing in us.}”\textsuperscript{94} He treats of this process in some detail in question fifty-one of the first of the second part where he explains that virtues arise in us according to both an inner, and an exterior principle. It is a theme he returns to often. Virtues are thus not purely innate; nor are they purely imposed on us from without, but are grounded in a stable inner disposition towards acts with exterior motivations.

In a number of places, Aquinas refers to these innate or inchoate principles which are the foundation of the virtues as “seeds of virtue” (\textit{seminaria virtutum}).\textsuperscript{95} These seeds of virtue can lead to both natural and infused virtue.\textsuperscript{96} The moral and intellectual virtues activate, so to

\textsuperscript{93} De Inventione, II, 53:6: \textit{Justitia est habitus animi, communi utilitate conservata, suum cuique tribuens dignitatem. Eius initium est ab natura profectum; deinde quaedam in consuetudinem ex utilitatis ratione venerunt: postea res et ab natura prefectas et ab consuetudine probatas legum metus et religio sanxit.}

\textsuperscript{94} ST I-II, q.63, a.3: \textit{Omnes autem virtutes tam intellectuales quam morales, quae ex nostris actibus acquiruntur, procedunt ex quibusdam naturalibus principiis in nobis praexistentibus.}

\textsuperscript{95} Angela McKay, to whom I am here indebted, provides an excellent study of these “seeds of virtue”: see McKay, Angela. The Infused & Acquired Virtues in Aquinas’ Moral Philosophy. University of Notre Dame. Indiana. April 2004. Online copy: http://etd.nd.edu/etd_data/theses/available/etd-04152004-125337/unrestricted/McKayAM052004.pdf.

\textsuperscript{96} For example, in his \textit{Commentary on Job}, Aquinas gives us an indication of such infused “seeds”: “Certain seeds of virtue are divinely infused together with the rational soul into man, some common to all and others special to the individual. For this reason, some men are naturally disposed to one virtue; others to another.” (Commentary on Job 10:1): \textit{quaedam seminaria virtutum, aliqua quidem...}
speak, these natural inclinations in us and bring the acquired virtues to life in the form of virtuous action. God also infuses in us certain habits or dispositions which give rise to the infused, theological virtues. This natural inclination to virtue is nothing less than natural law, which operates as the principle for all good, moral action.

This does not mean, however, that the virtues themselves are in us by nature. Aquinas is quite explicit about this in his discussion of the cause of virtue (ST I-II, q.63). What is natural to the human person however are the principles of knowledge and action which give rise to the virtues, and in this sense they are in us inchoately: “in man’s reason are found the naturally known principles of knowledge and action which are instilled by nature, and which are the nurseries of the intellectual and moral virtues, and insofar as there is in the will a natural appetite towards the good in conformity with reason.”⁹⁷ Thus we have, by nature, a natural aptitude for the virtues but this aptitude is only enlivened by the exercise of virtues which are rooted in these principles—in other words, in natural law, to which I shall return shortly.

2.7.1 Gratitude in Time & Memory: “Propinquitas”

One of the recurring features of Seneca’s treatment of gratitude in De Beneficiis is the role of memory as the vehicle for gratitude. “Even the ungrateful remember us by our gifts,” Seneca writes, “when [these gifts] are always in their sight and do not allow themselves to be forgotten, but constantly stamp upon the mind the memory of the giver. As we never ought to remind men of what we have given them, we ought all the more to choose presents that will be permanent; for the things themselves will prevent the remembrance of the giver from fading away” (De Beneficiis, I:12); for as the memory of benefaction fades away, so too does gratitude, and hence friendship with it.

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⁹⁷ ST I-II, q.63, a.1: Secundum quidem naturam speciei, inquantum in ratione homini insunt naturaliter quaedam principia naturaliter cognita tam scibilium quam agendorum, quae sunt quaedam seminalia intellectualium virtutum et moralium; et inquantum in voluntate inest quidam naturalis appetitus boni quod est secundum rationem.
Taking a cue from Seneca, Aquinas places significant emphasis on the role of memory in eliciting acts of the virtues of observance, and of gratitude in particular. Memory (memoria), says Aquinas, is the holding of the past in the present, or the measuring of the past according in reference to the here and now. Memory looks to the past with reference to the present. Yet memory is more than simply the recalling of past experiences. Certainly, memory can reach into habitual knowledge and make it active, like recalling the way through a maze of streets once travelled many years ago. Or one may recall with fondness a dinner with friends in years past, or a holiday destination one might like to visit again. But the active contemplation of past contingent events is not the whole story about the dignity of memory, which, for Aquinas, finds its greater function in leading the human person into a stable friendship with God, most clearly seen in the Eucharist, which he often refers to as the ‘memorial’ of Christ’s Passion.

Aquinas lists memory as the first quasi-integral part of prudence and its quest for the truth. Quoting Aristotle’s ethics, he notes that “intellectual virtue is stimulated and fostered by experience and time.” Thus memory is ultimately ordered towards the perfection of virtue since memory of the past is essential for prudential judgement about the good which should be done in the future. For this reason, memory needs to be cultivated, so that those things which are proper to virtue are recalled with greater ease and become more habitually entrenched within us. Without memory, we would not be able to orient our actions to specific ends.

Primary among the functions of memory is that of establishing relationship. In the second treatise of De Sensu et Sensato on memory and reminiscence, Aquinas notes that memory helps us establish at least three kinds of relationship: that of likeness (similitudo), for example when one is reminded of the wisdom of Plato when thinking of the wisdom of Socrates; or that of contrast (contrarietas) when one thinks of Achilles when thinking of Hector;

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98 De Veritate, q.10, a.11. See also, ST, II-II, q.49, a.1.
99 ST II-II, q.49, a.1: virtus intellectualis habet generationem et augmentum ex experimento et tempore.
The whole question of the role of memory was a going concern for medieval philosophers and theologians and Aquinas’ emphasis on the relationship between memory and virtue is not unique but is rather indicative of the elevated role that memory plays in the religious quest for union with God. One is reminded, for example, of Duns Scotus and Peter John Olivi and their emphasis on the role of memory in reference to the Son of God as the ‘Verbum’ of the Father.
100 See for example, Commentary on Metaphysics, Book 1, L.1.
or that of closeness or connectedness (*propinquitas*) such as being reminded of the son when recalling the father.\(^\text{101}\) It is this third action of memory—*propinquity*—which lies at the heart of gratitude and the virtues of indebtedness.

The vision of God is not simply known through the first kind of memory of similitude.\(^\text{102}\) The knowledge of God, when it is attained through a vision, such as St Paul’s on the road to Damascus, or the perfect vision of God in beatitude, is not a vision derived from this first kind of likeness, but rather it is the vision of God in his essence. The apprehension of things by similitude is an act of the imagination.\(^\text{103}\) Like opinion, though distinct from it, the imagination can be true or false but is, of itself, unable to distinguish between the true and the false.\(^\text{104}\) There is a certain subjectivity in the act of the imagination which finds corollaries between things. There is, in other words, any number of conceptual relationships we may dream up between things and such relationships do not necessarily describe any actual relation of things in reality. This is why, in receiving gifts, Aquinas says we must consider the intention of the giver, and not simply the gift itself, which is subject to personal valuation and the vagaries of imagination. We derive an understanding of value, not from the perception of things, but from understanding why they have been given, and for what purpose.

As for the second kind of relationship brought about through contrast, this is a key feature of the virtue of hope. For hope consists in longing for that which is currently not present.\(^\text{105}\) But unlike hope itself, memory will not pass away in the attainment of perfect beatitude, for memory and knowledge have one act: knowledge, in other words, is one habit corresponding to memory and understanding.

In a passage in his commentary on *De Caelo*, Aquinas notes that the more lasting something is, the greater the time required to notice it change. Thus, we might not notice much

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\(^{101}\) *Sentencia De sensu*, tr. 2, l. 5, n. 6.

\(^{102}\) See ST I, q.12, a.9.

\(^{103}\) ST I-II, q.15, a.1.

\(^{104}\) De Anima, III, c.2, l.4, ff.

\(^{105}\) Hope, unlike memory, is in the will as its subject, thus we could not say that hope is in the memory (ST II-II, q.18. a.1), but memory nonetheless plays an integral role. See also for example, De Sensu, t.2, l1; Commentary on Metaphysics, Book XII, L.8. Furthermore, in the Commentary on Job, l.3, c.1, Aquinas notes that things hoped for or recalled become clearer in their contrast.
of a physical change over the span of a year or two in an adult human, but will see more of a
change in an animal, such as a dog, over the same time period since dogs have a shorter life
span than humans and age more rapidly. On the other hand, human memory is not sufficient to
notice a change in the heavenly bodies, such as the moon, since these are subject to a longevity
that exceeds the lifespan of not just one but a great many generations of peoples.\textsuperscript{106} All the
more, then, the case that in the unchanging God, there will be nothing subject to memory, since
there will be no change to be observed as the subject of memory. But it does not follow that
there is no role for memory in friendship with God which will culminate in beatitude; for, in the
first place, memory maintains the contrast between the vision of God and the awareness of self.
The self is not lost, so to speak, in beatitude as though something subsumed to the point where
individual identity is overcome. Secondly, the virtues are not dispensed with after this life, but
rather perfected.\textsuperscript{107} There will, for example, be prudence and justice. Not that there will be
decisions to make about the good to be done and evil avoided, since there will be no such threat
to human integrity. But the human person—with intellect, memory and will—will be perfected
in the beatific vision. In other words, says Aquinas, the virtues remain—not in their material
element, but in their formal element. The material element governs the virtues in respect to the
active life, and this indeed will cease in beatitude. But the formal element of all the virtues,
which is love, remains since the very essence of beatitude is love and the vision of the Source of
all love. And there will be, by the same token, a persistence of the virtue of gratitude more
specifically, since the sharing in the divine life is a sharing framed in gratitude for the gift of
existence and for the gift of grace.

The third—and most relevant to virtue and gratitude—kind of relationship established
through memory is that based on \emph{propinquitas}. Propinquity describes a real relation and not
simply a conceptual relationship as is the case with an act of memory based on similitude or the
awareness of something absent established through the memory of contrast. This propinquity
has an affective element in the sense that we are bound to others that are nearest to us. Thus,

\textsuperscript{106} De Caelo et Mundo, l.7.
\textsuperscript{107} ST I-II, q.67.
every natural agent “pours forth its activity first and most of all on the things which are nearest
to it”. The bestowal of gifts is an act of charity towards others who are closest to us; and the
return of such beneficence in gratitude serves to strengthen and perpetuate this bond between
persons. Hence, the “memory of gifts” is essentially a memory of relationships for the properly
grateful person. The economy of gift and gratitude is thus preserved through memory which
preserves the propinquity, or sense of closeness, to the giver of gifts.

But at the same time, memory alone is not sufficient on its own to establish lasting
propinquity between persons. The old adage “absence makes the heart grow fonder” does not
seem to hold water for Aquinas. Time alone does not strengthen love; as long as the cause of
love, like anger, is in the memory alone, it is gradually lessened by time, and not increased by
time. Time is home to both generation and corruption—generation at the beginning,
corruption at the end. For this reason, our anger and love burns hottest when the cause of this
anger and love is closest to us in time. A hurt feeling or first kiss will move us more the closer
in time to us it is. But as time passes, the memory of hurt or love fades. Thus, by extension,
Aquinas reasons, simply enduring through time is not the chief purpose of the experiences of
the rational creature. If that were the case, nature would be destroyed by time, not perfected
in it. Memory must be attended by some action through time which keeps that which is
remembered alive. Again, this is why gratitude does not consist in considering gifts, but rather
the will, or love of the giver; the propinquity of love is itself an act of love. And time cannot
destroy true love or charity. True gratitude therefore will be, in some way, an act of reciprocal
love. It is for this reason, Aquinas says, that Christ left us the ‘memorial’ of his Passion in the
Eucharist—so that the propinquity of Christ is not lessened in time.

It is not the effort of human reason, thinking grateful thoughts with all its might, which
keeps the memory of the gift alive. In the first place, Aquinas is at pains to refute the Pelagian
heresy, which we would be committed to if we were to maintain that gratitude were something

108 ST II-II, q.31, a.3.
109 ST I-II, q.48, a.2, ad.2: “Time, of necessity, weakens all things, the causes of which are impaired by
time.”
110 ST I, q.98, a.1.
temporally subsequent to the gift of grace or something supervening on some action lost in the past. It is the on-going presence of the gift itself which renews our gratitude and keeps it alive through the passage of time. But imagining that we can perpetuate gratitude for the gifts of grace through time with equal intensity on our own also reduces the notion of the gift of grace to something static, locked in time. Such a notion of gift and gratitude reduces friendship to a historical artefact.

Grace is both given to us in time, and yet transcends the temporal limits of the human creature. In his treatise on grace, Aquinas says that the work of the Holy Spirit in infusing grace into the soul happens “in an instant, and without succession.”\(^{111}\) Time may be required to prepare the soul for this instantaneous infusion, but the infusion itself simultaneously removes sin and moves the free-will towards friendship with God. But it is precisely this work of grace—that it establishes the human person in friendship with God—that also persists in, and transcends time. The instantaneous act of grace is to make eternal friendship with God possible. It does so by making the ungodly person virtuous by turning the freewill towards the offer of friendship in an act of continuous gratitude.

When we understand gratitude as a continuous—or habitual, as the virtue requires—act of thanksgiving, Aquinas’ intention in his reply to the objections given in article three of question one hundred and six become clearer. There, in the sed contra, he quotes 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “In all things give thanks” \((\text{in omnibus gratias agite})\). Taken at face value, and along with the objections themselves, one would be excused for thinking that Aquinas simply means here that we should give thanks every time something is given to us, so that thanksgiving is something continual rather than something continuous. But Aquinas means that gratitude should be continuous, \((\text{continuatum})\), which indicates an uninterrupted practice.

Immediately following the quote from 1 Thessalonians in the sed contra, Aquinas turns immediately in the respondeo to Dionysius, and quotes the Divine Names where the Areopagite says, “God turns all things to Himself because He is the cause of all.” As the effect of the Cause of all, Aquinas continues, the beneficiary must always be directed to the Benefactor.

\(^{111}\) ST I-II, q.113, a.7; De Veritate q.28, ad.18.
And what the beneficiary always owes to God is nothing less than honour and reverence (*honor et reverentia*) or, in other words, constant praise and prayer. Indeed, Aquinas says in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, prayer which is not constant is not efficacious (SCG III:2, c.96).
CHAPTER TWO: VIRTUE, AND THE VIRTUES OF INDEBTEDNESS

3.1 Virtue and Gratitude as Analogous Terms

Aquinas’ account of gratitude, as it falls within the context of the virtues of indebtedness, hinges on his understanding of virtue in general. In this chapter, I wish to unpack his notion of virtue in general in order to see how the notion applies specifically to the virtues of indebtedness: religion, piety, observance and to gratitude in particular.

‘Virtue’ in Aquinas’ philosophy and theology is an analogous term. This important consideration is often overlooked in many treatments of his virtue theory, but it is necessary to keep this fact in front of us as we come to terms with his notion of ‘gratitude’. Gratitude, like all virtues, can be either acquired or infused. It can be directed to human persons, or to God. The kind of gratitude we offer to friends is not the same kind of gratitude we should offer to God, though the former kind is a participation in the archetype.

Gratitude—and the virtues of indebtedness—in turn include the notion of debt. There is therefore a threefold use of analogous terminology in reference to gratitude which must be outlined in order to get a handle on the function of gratitude in Aquinas’ thinking.

Certainly, to claim that virtue is an analogous term requires immediately certain qualifications on account of the on-going debate about Aquinas’ use of analogous terms and his application of the so-called ‘analogia entis’.

112 There was in medieval thinking a detailed philosophy of relation: relations were considered merely according to speech (relationes secundum dici) and also according to nature or being (relationes secundum esse). Much of the debate today centres on which of these relations Aquinas has in mind in his use of analogy: is

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112 My reading of analogy in Aquinas here will follow te Velde’s and Wippel’s accounts in order to set the stage. In particular, I agree with te Velde’s assessment that, It cannot be denied that analogy is, in whatever way, essential to Aquinas’ philosophical account of reality. Analogy intends to express the unity of being, as a unity which includes its differences.” This will become highly evident when I address the notion of ‘predestination’ in Aquinas’ theology and its impact on our understanding of infused virtue. See Rudi te Velde, Aquinas Colloquium ‘Participation and Analogy’. Blackfriars, Oxford, 3d March 2012.
analogy a purely linguistic tool, or does it have reference to something ontological? The term is not unique to Aquinas; however his development of the term and use of it is.  

‘Analogy’ for Aquinas is a wide-ranging term. It is perhaps worth recalling that his use of the term is, like all of his metaphysical terminology, subject to a certain flexibility. This hermeneutic of flexibility should not be pushed to the point where the meaning in the word itself and the texts it supervenes on begin to dissipate, but it does need to be extended far enough so as not to be trapped in the sort of rigid account of analogy that preoccupied Cajetan. Aquinas does not frequently engage in any systematic discussion of analogy. Rather, the concept exists as a sub-text and, mostly in reference to treatments on the Divine Names. That sub-text is heavily intertwined with Dionysian themes, and in particular the triplex via which becomes a hermeneutic for reading Aquinas, and in particular for his theology of grace and sacramental theology and ecclesiology, which are at the root of his virtue theory.

The analogia entis is not simply (as it is often characterised) merely an analytic or linguistic term. Citing Roger Duncan, te Velde notes that the analogia entis needs to be understood as “a broad philosophical current in which it is held, against excessive metaphysical timidity, that being is the inescapable theme of the philosophic quest, because it is our most inclusive notion – there is no stopping short of it as there is no going beyond it.” In other words, the analogia entis is both a limited term which at the same time affects and informs Aquinas’ entire philosophical and theological system and an ontological reality which cannot be reduced to the field of language.

Aquinas repeatedly affirms that something of God can be known through Creation; that the world of created phenomena reveals something of the ‘originary world of invisible being’.

113 Wipel 2007, p.10: “This, too, should be recognized as another important non-Aristotelian element of his [Aquinas’] metaphysics, and one which has been traced back to Dionysius and also to the Liber De Causis and to Proclus as likely influences. Nonetheless, Aquinas’s own understanding of this notion is original.”
114 See O’Rourke 2005, p.143 ff, and te Velde 2006, p.86.
115 See McInerny 1996. Norris Clarke also reads analogy as a ‘flexible term’ which covers a wide range of concepts, much like—to use te Velde’s analogy—a blanket. At the same time, te Velde is wary of the term ‘concept of being’—a term which Aquinas himself never uses.
At the same time, this ontological connectedness does not eliminate the ontological difference which stands between the cause and effect. It is necessary to keep this in mind in order to understand Aquinas’ use of the term virtue and especially justice and gratitude.

Iis necessary to clarify the way in which the term ‘analogy’ applies to the virtues, and by extension, gratitude. Given that an analogical terms are those which signify and unite both the ratio perfecta and the ratio imperfecta, it is useful to identify which is which in the case of virtue. As Gregory Rocca has shown, analogical terms for Aquinas are predicated per prius et posterius in such a way that there is one governing ratio (the ratio perfecta) while other uses of the term possess the ratio imperfecta.117

There is no univocal predication of virtue between God and the human person because there is no accidents in God, as there are in creatures (ST I, q.3, a.6). Aquinas goes on to explain that some virtues can only be predicated of God metaphorically, and some analogically (ST I, q.21, a.1, ad.1). For example, fortitude and daring are virtues which govern the passions; but since there are no passions in God, these virtues are only referred to God by way of metaphor. However, those virtues concerning the will—which include justice and prudence—can be predicated of God, although our reference for such a predication is our own experience of the ratio imperfecta. Since gratitude falls under the virtue of justice, it is the case that gratitude can be predicated of God as its exemplar, or ratio perfecta.

But in what sense can gratitude be said to be found in God? Wouldn’t this suggest that we can give to God something which he is lacking? Aquinas’ answer is quite simple: the return to God through the exchange of gift, gratitude and return-in-kind, consists in the creatures’ participation in divine love. God’s gift emanates from his infinite love; in returning love to God we are returning what we have been given, and thereby we enter more perfectly into the source of the love which initiated the cycle of giving and return. In reality, we can give nothing to God as though to augment his being; even our worship and praise, which is directed at God, does not accrue to God as though it adds something to his majesty; rather, our praise and worship (which

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is the essence of gratitude) accrues to ourselves, by uniting us more perfectly to the source of our being (ST I-II, q.114, a.1, ad.1). Thus to speak of virtue analogically is to speak of the way in which virtue unites us to God, the source of being (ST I-II, q.68, a.4, ad.4).

The first question which may confront us is, given this ontological difference, how ‘being’ can be applied to both God and Creation with meaning. This issue has been raised and treated so many times and by such a vast array of commentators that it would be virtually impossible to cover them all here, or even to attempt a synthesis of the complementary and competing views on the subject. But it is necessary that one start with a particular reading of the question in order to move on to the broader question of its application to virtue. Thus, what I will sketch out here is not an overview or summary of the debate, but rather my own starting point in the context of the on-going debate.

In the first place, we must rule out any formal complementarity between God and his creation; nor is there any complementarity of species or genus; and yet, the notion of ‘ens’ applies to both God and creature, said analogically. It is this qualification, ‘analogically’, that is a term designating both something real and at the same time doing so in an apophatic way. The essential difference here is one of participation on the part of the creature so that ‘ens’ applies to God properly, and to the creature in a secondary sense:

Likeness of creatures to God is not affirmed on account of agreement in form according to the formality of the same genus or species, but solely according to analogy, inasmuch as God is essential being, whereas other things are beings by participation.118

Relying on the Dionysian concept of participation, Aquinas maintains that such a participation flows from God to creature and not vice versa. Thus we must understand the *analogia entis* to be a term describing both a unity and a difference; *ens commune*, in other words, expresses both unity and an ineffable diversity.

Although it may be admitted that creatures are in some sort like God, it must in no way be admitted that God is like creatures; because, as Dionysius says “A mutual likeness may be found between things of the same order, but not between a cause and that which is caused.”

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118 ST I, q.4, a.3, ad.3: *non dicitur esse similitudo creaturae ad Deum propter communicantiam in forma secundum eandem rationem generis et speciei, sed secundum analogiam tantum; prout scilicet Deus est ens per essentiam, et alia per participationem.*
For, we say that a statue is like a man, but not conversely; so also a creature can be spoken of as in some sort like God; but not that God is like a creature.  

While being careful not to reduce *analogia entis* to a linguistic term, te Velde notes that the term ‘being’ is, *ens dicitur*, said of things: something is said to be something else: *Black Beauty* is a horse; *Lewis* is a man; *gratitude* is a virtue. Being thus describes, or rather includes, an essence or a nature. Yet there is no such thing as ‘pure being’ if this is ever understood to be somehow detachable from a substance: there is no ‘concept of being’ in Aquinas apart from this *ens acta*. The rational creature cannot have a concept of being, per se, apart from the idea of something. Thus being always designates something ontological—something existing, even if the nature of this existence remains unknown to us; te Velde calls this ‘transgeneric predication’.

That is to say, analogous terms signify, from within the limitation of a genus, something which is outside that genus. Thus ‘analogy’ is a semantic reference to something really transcending the genus from which the predication is formed.

How do we move from within a genus to this ‘transgeneric’ predication in order to make sense of things like virtue? Not, te Velde notes, according to a Plotinean notion of hierarchy of being or emanationism. According to such a view, being is a sort of ladder (as in Plato’s ‘great chain of being’) according to which one ascends through degrees of being to ever-perfect instances of being until we arrive at God. Aquinas’ theory of participation excludes

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119 ST I, q.4., a.3, ad.4: *licet aliquo modo concedatur quod creatura sit similis Deo, nullo tamen modo concedendum est quod Deus sit similis creaturae, quia, ut dicit Dionysius cap. IX de Div. Nom., in his quae unius ordinis sunt, recipitur mutua similitudo, non autem in causa et causato, dicimus enim quod imago sit similis homini, et non e converso. Et similiter dicit potest aliquo modo quod creatura sit similis Deo, non tamen quod Deus sit similis creaturae.*

120 Aquinas explains in his treatise *De Ente et Essentia*: “Whence we say that man is a rational animal, and not that man is made up of animal and rational as we say that man is made up of soul and body. Man is said to be composed of soul and body as some third thing constituted of two other things, and which is neither of them. For man is neither soul nor body. But if man may be said in some way to be composed of animal and rational, it will not be as a third thing out of two other things, but as a third concept out of two other concepts. For the concept “animal” is without the determination of the form of the species, and it expresses the nature of a thing from that which is material in relation to the ultimate perfection. But the concept of the difference “rational” consists in the determination of the form of the species. And from these two concepts the concept of the species or of the definition is constituted. And thus just as the constituents of a real thing are not predicated of that real thing, so too the concepts which are constituents of another concept are not predicated of that concept; for we do not say that the definition is the genus or the difference.” (De Ente et Essentia, 37).

121 McKay, page 9
such a notion of hierarchy in this sense. God is not part of the ‘chain of being’; if such a chain exists (and there is no reason why such a notion can’t be employed analogically in a sense limited to created being), God is not part of it: God is not simply a more perfect, or the most perfect, member of the class of being, *ens commune*. God’s substance is his own existence; the substance of created being is derived from the genus in which that substance finds its principle.

The word *substance* signifies not only what exists of itself—for existence cannot of itself be a genus; but, it also signifies an essence that has the property of existing in this way—namely, of existing of itself; this existence, however, is not its essence. Thus it is clear that God is not in the genus of substance.\(^{122}\)

All being (*ens commune*) tends towards its source and origin. The movement towards this source is a threefold action or what is known as the *triplex via*, a concept Aquinas borrows from Dionysius.\(^{123}\) The three elements of the *triplex via* are first, that God is the actual cause of all his effects (causality); secondly, that God is not to be identified with those effects (remotion); finally, that God is the source of perfection of those effects (eminence).

As applied to virtue in general, the triplex via is manifest in a threefold operation of grace itself. In the first place, God prepares the soul for the gifts of grace in a prevenient operation which moves and disposes the soul towards the good; secondly, there is nothing the rational creature can do to merit grace—it is the work of God, something totally other than what human nature can effect; but at the same time this totally transcendent work of God does not eliminate the freedom of the creature, whose agency is not on the account of grace simply overridden by God; grace changes nature but does not destroy it; and finally, the grace moves the soul to perfection, by placing within it a habitual disposition to the good in general, and ultimately that Good which is God. One of the clearest formulations of this doctrine in Aquinas is seen in the following response to question one hundred and twelve of the *prima secundae partis*:

\(^{122}\) ST I, q.3, a.5, ad.1: *dicendum quod substantiae nomen non significat hoc solum quod est per se esse, quia hoc quod est esse, non potest per se esse genus, ut ostensum est. Sed significat essentiam cui competit sic esse, ideo per se esse, quod tamen esse non est ipsa eius essentia. Et sic patet quod Deus non est in genere substantiae.*

\(^{123}\) See O'Rourke, Fran. Page 33.
Grace is taken in two ways: first, as a habitual gift of God. Secondly, as a help from God, Who moves the soul to good. Now taking grace in the first sense, a certain preparation of grace is required for it, since a form can only be in disposed matter. But if we speak of grace as it signifies a help from God to move us to good, no preparation is required on man's part, that, as it were, anticipates the Divine help, but rather, every preparation in man must be by the help of God moving the soul to good. And thus even the good movement of the free-will, whereby anyone is prepared for receiving the gift of grace is an act of the free-will moved by God. And thus man is said to prepare himself, according to Proverbs 16:1: “It is the part of man to prepare the soul”; yet it is principally from God, Who moves the free-will. Hence it is said that man's will is prepared by God, and that man's steps are guided by God.\

When applied to the virtues of indebtedness, the *triplex via* takes on an added ecclesial and sacramental dimension. First, God is the cause of the indebtedness leading to gratitude in us; indeed, this is true of each of the virtues of indebtedness: “the cause of debt is found primarily and chiefly in God, in that he is the first principle of all our goods” (ST II-II, q.106, a.1).

Secondly, the very nature of debt carries with it a certain antithesis to the cause of that debt, which in a sense transcends the limits of human justice: it is impossible for the creature to repay God for his gifts and the human person stands before God as before a gulf—as a beneficiary before a Benefactor, in which relationship between God and humans there is no equity. For in a purely legal exchange, one is bound to return no more than what has been given; justice does not demand anything more than equality of commutation. But since gratitude itself is an expression of the *moral* debt which is love, it is without limit (ST II-II, q.106, a.6, ad.2). The way in which the debt of gratitude to God is paid is therefore not on account of acts of human justice, but through Christ: “Christ freed us from the slavery of sin.

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124 ST I-II, q.112, a.2: *gratia dupliciter dicitur, quandoque quidem ipsum habituale donum Dei; quandoque autem ipsum auxilium Dei moventis animam ad bonum. Primo igitur modo accipiendo gratiam, praexigitur ad gratiam aliqua gratiae praeparatio, quia nulla forma potest esse nisi in materia disposita. Sed si loquamur de gratia secundum quod significat auxilium Dei moventis ad bonum, sic nulla praeparatio requiritur ex parte hominis quasi praeveniens divinum auxilium, sed potius quaeccumque praeparatio in homine esse potest, est ex auxilio Dei moventis animam ad bonum. Et secundum hoc, ipse bonus motus liberi arbitrii quo quis praeparatur ad donum gratiae susciendum, est actus liberi arbitrii moti a Deo, et quantum ad hoc, dicitur homo se praeparare, secundum illud Prov. XVI, hominis est praeparare animum. Et est principaliter a Deo moventer liberum arbitrium, et secundum hoc, dicitur a Deo voluntas hominis praeparari, et a domino gressus hominis dirigir.*
For if a creditor holds a man captive on account of a debt that he owes, it is not enough merely to pay the debt; the person himself must also be freed. This is what Christ did.”

Finally, Aquinas understands the perfection, or eminence, of the person perfected by the virtues of indebtedness and virtues in general in sacramental and ecclesial terms:

In a body the members are joined in two ways. One way is by contact, as the hand is joined to the wrist, and the wrist to the forearm, and so on. The other way is by a connection, as being joined by nerves. And so Paul refers to joints and ligaments. So also in the Church, its members are joined by faith and understanding: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism”. But this is incomplete without the ligaments of charity and the sacraments.

This ecclesial and sacramental dimension of virtue and the virtues of indebtedness is explored at length in the chapter on Ecclesiology, but for the time being it is important to note that for Aquinas, there is no true notion of a ‘virtuous person’ or, by extension, a ‘grateful person’ outside of the context of the ecclesial and sacramental vision. First, it is necessary to unpack Aquinas’ notion of virtue in general, in order to recover a sense of the gratitude and the virtues of indebtedness, in the context of Aquinas’ Dionysian scheme.

3.2 Virtues in General

As Lee Yearley has noted, Aquinas’ treatment of the virtues “is astonishingly complex and lengthy, covering over a million words and 170 separate questions in the Summa alone.”

We could add to this impressive corpus Aquinas’ Disputed Questions on the Virtues, and the innumerable other places where he treats, directly and indirectly, of both acquired and infused virtue.

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Given this sweeping and diverse coverage of virtue in the works of Aquinas, it is hardly surprising to find different approaches to the question of virtue in his thinking and, not too infrequently, disagreements in commentaries on these. Many of these disagreements stem from a confusion of the critical distinction between acquired and infused virtues (and, indeed, Aquinas’ own treatment of this distinction is not always clear or straightforward). There is also a related tendency to confuse the object and subject of the virtues and it is this latter distinction I hope to clarify here by recalling three key elements of Aquinas’ virtue theory:

1. The acquired virtues are not virtues in the true sense of the term; they can be present in a subject who is in a state of sin and lack the fundamental character of virtue properly speaking, which is charity;

2. It is the infused virtues which are virtue properly speaking, and these infused virtues cannot exist without sanctifying grace and Aquinas’ treatment of the virtues properly speaking presupposes his theology of grace (charity, which is presupposed by grace, is the form of all the virtues);

3. There is a unity and interconnection of the virtues in Aquinas’ treatment that has close parallels with Plato’s and Augustine’s treatment of virtue; this unity does not simply refer to the unity of the ultimate end, to which all the virtues are disposed, but to the unity of the form and motive principle of all the virtues, which is love and friendship respectively.

3.2.1 Acquired & Infused Virtue

Aquinas’ virtue theory is so closely aligned to his doctrine of grace that one cannot possibly arrive at a proper reading of his virtue theory without due reference to this theology of grace according to which the infused virtues, which are virtues properly speaking, presuppose a nature elevated by grace.

Some authors have maintained that the four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance—are acquired, while the three theological virtues—faith, hope and
charity—are infused. According to Aquinas, this in fact is only part of the story. The picture of the virtues that Aquinas gives us is that for every virtue—theological, moral and intellectual—there are two kinds: acquired and infused. This is because the acquired moral virtues are not sufficient counterparts to the infused theological virtues: “Some moral and intellectual virtues can indeed be caused in us by our actions: but such are not proportionate to the theological virtues. Therefore it was necessary for us to receive, from God immediately, others that are proportionate to these virtues” (ST I-II, q. 63, a. 3, ad.1).

Consequently, the acquired moral virtues are not sufficient grounding for the infused virtues as many have claimed; nor, as Yearley and others contend, do the infused virtues presuppose the presence of the acquired virtues. In short, the infused virtues, which are virtues properly speaking, are on account of friendship with God—and which God initiates in the first instance.128

By way of example, we might consider the virtue of temperance, by which we control and moderate the passions, such as concupiscence. Materially speaking, an act of acquired temperance and an act of infused temperance may, to an outside observer, appear to be the same act—for example, abstaining from meat on Friday or fasting from alcohol during Lent. Considered from the point of view of the observer, Aquinas would say that both acts—namely abstaining from meat as an act of acquired habit and abstaining from meat an act of infused habit—share the same natural species. But formally speaking, or according to the moral species, the same material act may be differentiated according to differing moral objects, describing acquired and infused varieties of the action.

But insofar as an act of temperance or courage is commanded by charity ordering it to the ultimate end, the acts formally are specified and formally speaking become acts of charity, but it does not follow that it is from this that temperance and courage are specified. Therefore, infused temperance and courage do not differ specifically from the acquired virtue in this, that their acts are commanded by charity, but rather because their acts are constituted in a mean orderable to the ultimate end which is the object of charity.129

128 See for example ST I-II, q.65, a.5 and Disputed Questions on Virtue, q.1, a.5, ad.5. This question also plays a prominent role in Aquinas’ Commentary on Job.

129 Disputed Questions on Virtue, q.1, a.10, ad.10: Ex hoc ergo quod actus temperantiae vel fortitudinis imperantur a caritate ordinante eos in ultimum finem; ipsi quidem actus formaliter speciem sortiuntur:
What differentiates the moral object of the acquired virtue from the infused virtues is

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th e kind of charity

to which each is ultimately ordered; in other words, infused virtues are of the
order of Divine Charity, and not simply other kinds of love, such as human love. To speak of
acquired virtue is thus not simply to speak of a virtue without love as such, but a virtue which
does not, at God’s instigation, participate in the friendship of Divine Love. Thus, it is possible
says Aquinas, to acquire imperfect or natural virtue through habitual works, but so long as these
are not constituted in the love of God, or infused by God, they are oriented to a natural end, and
not to a supernatural end which is constituted in friendship with God.

It is possible by means of human works to acquire moral virtues, in so
far as they produce good works that are directed to an end not
surpassing the natural power of man: and when they are acquired thus,
they can be without charity, even as they were in many of the
Gentiles. But in so far as they produce good works in proportion to a
supernatural last end, thus they have the character of virtue, truly and
perfectly; and cannot be acquired by human acts, but are infused by
God.¹³⁰

Divine Charity is thus the form of all the infused virtues, while prudence is the form of all the
acquired virtues (ST I-II q.61, a.2, ad1).¹³¹ Prudence, since it governs choices directed by
reason (prudence is the use of right reason about things to be done), governs all the virtues.
Indeed, Aquinas says, “there can be no moral virtue without prudence” (ST I-II, q.58, a.4).
This is clear from considering the nature of every virtue, including gratitude, since every virtue is
about the good to be done (ST I-II, q.60, a.1). So the first significant distinction between

¹³⁰ ST I-II, q.65, a.2: virtutes morales prout sunt operativa bóni in ordine ad finem qui non excedit
facultatem naturalem hominis, possunt per opera humana acquiri. Et sic acquisitae sine caritate esse
possunt, sicut fuerunt in multitibus gentilibus. Secundum autem quod sunt operativa bóni in ordine ad
ultimum finem supernaturalem, sic perfecte et vere habent rationem virtutis; et non possunt humanis
actibus acquiri, sed infunduntur a Deo.

¹³¹ The prudence which Aquinas speaks about in reference to the acquired virtues is not to be
understood as infused virtue, one of the four infused cardinal virtues; if such were the case, Aquinas
would be forced to conclude the form of the acquired virtues is the infused virtues, which would make
no sense. The habitual prudence which Aquinas speaks about in reference to the acquired virtues is
what we might call natural prudence, or synderesis.
acquired and infused virtues is their species, differentiated in their form as to their moral objects.

Even the theological virtues have an acquired counterpart: faith can be infused or acquired, just as temperance and the other moral virtues can be acquired or infused. Anything resembling an acquired kind of faith is not a theological virtue (which by definition is an infused virtue), but will retain some resemblance to the perfect virtue. What is the difference between acquired and infused faith? Human reason, Aquinas tells us, is naturally inclined towards the truth. As such, reason seeks of necessity that which is true, including, as far as it is able, the First Truth. Any such truth which compels the mind as the result of natural reason is acquired knowledge. If such truths cannot be demonstrated conclusively through a syllogism but which is held to be true nonetheless, or which is believed on account of a command of the will, it is acquired or imperfect faith. But when this belief is infused with charity and thereby becomes a rule of life so to speak—not simply an act of the intellect but also a directive for life borne out of love for God, it is infused faith (ST II-II.4.5). Thus even the demons are compelled to believe in God on account of the evidence, though clearly this faith is unformed, without love (In Sent III, q.3, a.3). Similarly, in regards to charity, Aquinas discusses the difference between acquired or natural love, and infused love, or charity—concluding that the former is insufficient to merit the title ‘virtue’ properly speaking. And we could divide each and every virtue thus: into an acquired and infused counterpart but always in such a way where the definition properly speaking belongs only to the infused virtue. Hence, in article two of question one in the Quaestiones Disputate de Virtutibus, Aquinas is able to speak of the “moral, intellectual and theological virtues, regardless of whether the virtues are acquired or infused.”

Of both kinds of virtue, only the infused virtues go by the name ‘virtue’ properly speaking. This is because the acquired virtues, which man comes into possession through human effort and repetition, fit us for a more ordered existence only within the natural order, as determined by divine providence. On the other hand, the infused virtues, given directly and

132 DQV 1.2.co: Haec autem omnia convieniunt tam virtuti morali quam intellectuali, quam theologicae, quam acquisitae, quam infusae.
predestined by God, lead man to supernatural union with God. As such, the infused virtues perfect human nature in respect to beatitude.

But it is manifest that the virtues acquired by human acts of which we spoke above are dispositions, whereby a man is fittingly disposed with reference to the nature whereby he is a man; whereas infused virtues dispose man in a higher manner and towards a higher end, and consequently in relation to some higher nature, i.e. in relation to a participation of the Divine Nature, according to 2 Peter 1:4: “He has given us most great and most precious promises; that by these you may be made partakers of the Divine Nature.” And it is in respect of receiving this nature that we are said to be born again sons of God.\(^{133}\)

The acquired virtues are those which we can achieve by our own effort and through habit or repeated action and are “caused through the principles of the soul’s [natural] powers” (DQV 1.3). These acquired virtues—which might mirror acts of the infused virtues outwardly, though not formally—equip us for temporal happiness and help us to act as good citizens in the earthly state. Thus acquired virtues are worked in us through the exercise of diligence and hard work; while the infused virtues on the other hand are those which “God works in us, without us” (ST I-II, q.55).

Lastly, God is the efficient cause of infused virtue, to which this definition applies; and this is expressed in the words “which God works in us without us.” If we omit this phrase, the remainder of the definition will apply to all virtues in general, whether acquired or infused.\(^{134}\)

Thus the second significant distinction between the acquired and infused virtues is that the human agent is the efficient cause of the acquired virtues, while God is the direct efficient cause of the infused virtues.

Perhaps one of the most striking and subsequently telling differences between the acquired and infused virtues is that the former can persist in a subject in the state of mortal sin,

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\(^{133}\) ST I-II.110.3: Manifestum est autem quod virtutes acquisitae per actus humanos, de quibus supra dictum est, sunt dispositiones quibus homo convenienter disponitur in ordine ad naturam qua homo est. Virtutes autem infusae disponunt hominem altiori modo, et ad altiorum naturam, unde etiam oportet quod in ordine ad aliquam altiorum naturam. Hoc autem est in ordine ad naturam divinam participatam; secundum quod dicitur II Petr. I, maxima et pretiosa nobis promissa donavit, ut per haec efficiamini divinae consortes naturae. Et secundum conceptionem huius naturae, dicimur regenerari in filios Dei.

\(^{134}\) ST I-II.55.4: Causa autem efficiens virtutis infusae, de qua definitio datur, Deus est. Propter quod dicitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur. Quae quidem particula si auferatur, reliquum definitionis erit commune omnibus virtutibus, et acquisitis et infusis. I explore the relationship between Divine Providence and Predestination more fully in the next chapter.
while the latter cannot. This is because acquired virtues derive their habitude from temporal practice and exercise of the will and not, as do the acquired virtues, from supernatural grace.

Mortal sin is incompatible with divinely infused virtue, especially if this be considered in its perfect state. But actual sin, even mortal, is compatible with humanly acquired virtue; because the use of a habit in us is subject to our will, as stated above; and one sinful act does not destroy a habit of acquired virtue, since it is not an act but a habit, that is directly contrary to a habit. Wherefore, though man cannot avoid mortal sin without grace, so as never to sin mortally, yet he is not hindered from acquiring a habit of virtue, whereby he may abstain from evil in the majority of cases, and chiefly in matters most opposed to reason. There are also certain mortal sins which man can nowise avoid without grace, those, namely, which are directly opposed to the theological virtues, which are in us through the gift of grace.\(^{135}\)

The implications of this passage require a certain amount of reflection, for they are far-reaching and help settle the question on the clear distinction between acquired and infused virtues. First of all, the passage makes us wonder: if infused virtue can be lost so readily through mortal sin, in what way can it be meaningfully termed a ‘habit’? This question brings us to a significant element of Aquinas’ treatment of the virtues, one frequently overlooked in discussions of his virtue theory. Up to now we have considered the distinction between acquired and infused habits, but not how this distinction plays out in the reality of the lived experience. That discussion flows from an understanding of the way in which ‘habit’ applies to both acquired and infused virtues.

### 3.2.2 Virtues as Habits

\(^{135}\) ST I-II.63.2.ad2: *Ad secundum dicendum quod virtus divinitus infusa, maxime si in sua perfectione consideretur, non compatitur secum aliquod peccatum mortale. Sed virtus humanitatis acquisita potest secum compati aliquem actum peccati, etiam mortalis, quia usus habitus in nobis est nostrae voluntati subjectus, ut supra dictum est; non autem per unum actum peccati corrumpitur habitus virtutis acquisita; habitui enim non contrariatur directe actus, sed habitus. Et ideo, licet sine gratia homo non possit peccatum mortale vitare, ita quod nunquam pecet mortaliter; non tamen impeditur quin possit habitum virtutis acquirere, per quam a malis operibus abstineat ut in pluribus, et praecepue ab his quae sunt valde rationi contraria. Sunt etiam quaedam peccata mortalia quae homo sine gratia nullo modo potest vitare, quae scient directe opponuntur virtutibus theologicis, quae ex dono gratiae sunt in nobis.*
Aquinas, following Aristotle, rejects the notion that virtues are a kind of knowledge and places them instead among habits (habitus), the first species of quality. Virtues—both acquired and infused—are operative habits, although this designation applies to the infused virtues in a different sense than it does to the acquired virtues. But despite the difference between acquired and infused habits, Aquinas insists that they are very difficult to tell apart. This remarkable insight suggests something about the relationship between acquired and infused virtues which is often overlooked in treatments of them.

There is a temptation to think of habits as being something irrational: in English we often use the word ‘habit’ to describe some trained, ingrained or reflexive way of behaving that bypasses the need for much thought. In some respects, habits might seem even to be opposed to reason. But this is not the way that either Aristotle or Aquinas use the term in reference to what virtues are. In question forty-nine of the treatise on human acts, Aquinas describes habits and dispositions as being qualities which are difficult to change.

Habits in fact facilitate reason and in no way dispense with it. Habits are similar to nature in that they produce in man an operation in keeping with his powers and faculties. Consider for example the skill of an expert snooker player. His handling and alignment of the

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136 Anthony Kenny has chosen to translate Aquinas’ use of the word ‘habitus’ in English as ‘disposition’ rather than ‘habit’ (see, Kenny, Anthony. Summa Theologiae: Dispositions for Human Acts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; footnote b on page 5; and appendix 3 on page 115). While Kenny makes a good case for this translation, which is a departure from the accepted translation of ‘habit’ but gaining ground among a number of scholars, I believe it runs the risk of being confusing, especially when it comes to contrasting habitus with dispositio, which in turn Kenny translates as ‘state’. Hence he renders “omnis habitus est dispositio” as “all dispositions are states.” In opposition to this translation, and hence adding to the confusion, we find a number of scholars who translate Aristotle’s hexis (ἕξις)—which is Aquinas’ ‘habitus’—as state (for example, see the Bibliographical essay on page 164 in Devettere, Raymond J., Introduction to virtue ethics: insights of the ancient Greeks. Washington D.C. Georgetown University Press, 2002). I have chosen to render ‘habitus’ as ‘habit’ to avoid this confusion and because I believe that the use of the generic word ‘state’ to translate ‘dispositio’ is not rigorous enough to account for Aquinas’ critical descriptions of how the differing classes of dispositions differ from habits. I will, in this section, be referring to good habits each time I refer to acquired and infused habits, unless otherwise stated.

137 Bernard Lonergan suggests that for Aquinas habits are distinguished from dispositions in that the latter are not as deeply rooted as the former. Consequently, habit, and not disposition, refers more properly to virtue. I accept this distinction which seems to better fit with Aquinas’ own distinction (See Lonergan, Bernard J. F.. Grace and freedom: operative grace in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Toronto: Published for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, Toronto, by University of Toronto Press, 2000; page 52).

138 See Commentary on Metaphysics: I.1.28; and II.5.332. This point is integral to understanding why acquired virtues are habits properly speaking and therefore virtue only imperfectly.
cue does not distance him as an agent from the game, but rather increases his involvement in it by perfecting his operation as a snooker player. Certain operations to him become mechanical, such as the correct handling of the cue. But this does not make his playing less rational; it in fact his playing becomes more rational through his skill.

In a similar way, virtues do not remove us as rational agents in life, but increase our engagement in, and ultimately enjoyment of, life itself. What (good) habits do is remove from reason hesitancy and confusion that often precede judgments and actions; in other words, good habits eliminate those things that cloud the effective operation of reason. But habits do not remove the need for deliberation, but perfect the deliberative operation—otherwise, there would be no justification for considering prudence a virtue. But such is the task of prudence which is the form of all the acquired virtues: as a habit, it does not diminish reason but rather perfects the ability of practical reason in respect to choice. The person with prudence does not act without thinking or judging; on the contrary: the person with prudence thinks and judges between goods with an augmented view of circumstances and choices available to him and does so with relative ease. There may be certain elements of the deliberative process that become ‘mechanical’ such as the automatic processing of information into a valid syllogism; but as with our snooker player, the mechanising of processes enhances the work of reason by making it freer.

Because the faculties of intellect and will can be directed to a multitude, indeed a potential infinitude, of possible actions (good and evil) they are non-specific until they are proportioned to a specific object. It is for this reason that Aquinas tells us that the unity of a habit is determined by its object. As such, he characterises habits as being the medium between potency, or the power to act and act itself—or, put another way, that which specifies acts according to a particular moral species.

Therefore, habits stand between the power of the soul—which the habit specifies—and the act, which in turn specifies the habit. In this way, we could say (as Aquinas does) that habits take the place of nature in that they dispose us towards acting according to our natural powers and faculties. And like nature they place us in relation to the world around and are the point of
unity between possibility and reality in respect to human agency. Habits form a relationship with a certain way of behaving in the world.

Human nature is naturally disposed to the acquisition of habits. They are acquired through repetition and “customary activity.” Memory plays an integral part of the acquisition of habit too since it holds intelligible forms in the mind even when they are not being immediately apprehended. This is what makes gratitude possible: that the memory of the gift is habitually held in the mind, and orients the grateful person to a way of living and acting.

With this in mind, we can see why a habit, properly speaking, is the cause of acquired virtues but not of infused virtues and why the term habit cannot apply univocally to both acquired and infused virtues.

*Acquired and infused habits are not to be classed together; for the habit of knowledge is acquired by the relation of the human mind to phantasms; hence, another habit of the same kind cannot be again acquired. But the habit of infused knowledge is of a different nature, as coming down to the soul from on high, and not from phantasms. And hence there is no parity between these habits.*

According to Aquinas’ doctrine of grace and salvation, the human person is not capable, in his present state, of that original union with God he was destined for prior to the Fall. Human nature as it is now equips him for a temporal existence and even a measure of temporal happiness. But none of this natural condition carries over beyond the grave as all natural habits are corruptible (ST I-II 69.3.ad6). It is impossible therefore for fallen nature to enter into Beatitude by its own efforts or merits. Hence no natural habit, which includes habits of human acquisition, can lead to eternal beatitude.

...there are some habits by which man is disposed to an end which exceeds the proportion of human nature, namely, the ultimate and perfect happiness of man, as stated above. And since habits need to be in proportion with that to which man is disposed by them, therefore it is necessary that those habits, which dispose to this end, exceed the proportion of human nature. Wherefore such habits can never be in

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139 ST III, q.9, a.4, ad.3. This passage also explains how an acquired habit and an infused habit can coexist in the same individual: *Ad tertium dicendum quod alia ratio est de habitu acquisito, et de habitu infuso. Nam habitus scientiae acquiritur per comparationem humanae mentis ad phantasmata, unde secundum eandem rationem non potest alius habitus iterato acquiri. Sed habitus scientiae infusae est alterius rationis, utpote a superiori descendens in animam, non secundum proportionem phantasmatum. Et ideo non est eadem ratio de utroque habitu.*
man except by Divine infusion, as is the case with all gratuitous virtues.\textsuperscript{140}

Clearly then, a different kind of habit will be required to fit us for beatitude since this exceeds the proportion of human nature as it is.

Habits perfect powers in two senses: in reference to being and in reference to act. In this regards, the habits of acquired virtue are habits more properly speaking, because they are habits both of being (that is, a quality of an operative habit of the soul) which inclines the agent towards a particular kind of activity (ST I-II.55.2; & In I Sent. d.17, q.2, a.3). So the acting person is the efficient cause of his own acquired moral activity. For this reason, the acquired virtue rather seems to fit the designation ‘habit’ more properly. And as paradoxical as it may seem initially, it is precisely because habits of the acquired virtues are habits more properly that they are virtues less perfectly.

The term ‘habit’, as it applies to the acquired virtues, does not apply univocally to the infused virtues. As such, the infused virtues are virtuous more perfectly. In contrast then to the acquired virtues, for which man himself is the direct efficient cause, God is the direct efficient cause of the infused virtues.\textsuperscript{141} Aquinas tells us that the infused virtues produce the effects of habits within us, and so it is only in a manner of speaking that we refer to the cause of these infused virtues ‘habits’.

Infused virtue is caused in us by God without any action on our part, but not without our consent. This is the sense of the words, “which God works in us without us.” As to those things which are done by us, God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part, for He works in every will and in every nature.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{140} ST I-II, q.51, a.4: (Prima ratio est) quia aliqui habitus sunt quibus homo bene disponitur ad finem excedentem facultatem humanae naturae, qui est ultima et perfecta hominis beatitudo, ut supra dictum est. Et quia habitus oportet esse proportionatos ei ad quod homo disponitur secundum ipsos, ideo necesse est quod etiam habitus ad huiusmodi finem disponentes, excedant facultatem humanae naturae. Unde tales habitus nunquam possunt homini inesse nisi ex infusione divina, sicut est de omnibus gratuitis virtutibus.

\textsuperscript{141} Causa autem efficientis virtutis infusae, de qua definitio datur, Deus est. (ST I-II.55.4) God remains the indirect cause through nature even of the acquired virtues, since God alone is the source of all being and the good.

\textsuperscript{142} ...virtus infusa causatur in nobis a Deo sine nobis agentibus, non tamen sine nobis consentientibus. Et sic est intelligendum quod dicitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur. Quae vero per nos aguntur, Deus in nobis causat non sine nobis agentibus, ipse enim operatur in omni voluntate et natura. (ST I-II.55.4ad6)
This distinction explains why one retains control of the acquired virtues while in a state of mortal sin, but why, at the same time, one loses the infused virtues in a similar state of sin. For, in breaking friendship with God, one does not sever the tie to the habit—which is the efficient cause of virtuous action—in the acquired virtues, for this efficient cause is the human subject himself. But since God is the direct efficient cause of the infused virtues, to sever friendship with God is to sever the cause of those virtues too.

Without grace a man cannot have a work equal to a work proceeding from grace, since the more perfect the principle, the more perfect the action.¹⁴³

It is evident from the foregoing that Aquinas uses the term ‘habit’ in reference to infused virtues analogically. This is because any human habit properly speaking is of necessity a habit of fallen nature and therefore incapable of raising the human person to the supernatural state. This suggests furthermore that Aquinas’ description of the infused virtues is so closely aligned with his theology of grace that it is only within the context of grace that his discussion of infused virtues and infused habits make sense and comes alive: “And thus, even as the natural light of reason is something besides the acquired virtues, which are ordained to this natural light, so also the light of grace which is a participation of the Divine Nature is something besides the infused virtues which are derived from and are ordained to this light.”¹⁴⁴

3.2.3: Infused Habits & the Analogical Agent

In question thirteen of the prima pars of the Summa, Aquinas introduces the term, ‘analogical agent’ (agens analogicum). Aquinas arrives at the concept of the analogical agent through a relatively simple logical exercise. He says, in essence, that God—as the cause of all causes—cannot be a cause like other causes because this would produce a reductio ad absurdum for it would mean that God would be in the same species of every other cause which

¹⁴³ Ad secundum dicendum quod homo sine gratia non potest habere aequale opus operi quod ex gratia procedit, quia quanto est perfectius principium actionis, tanto est perfectior actio. Sequetur autem ratio, supposita aequalitate operationis utrobique. (ST I-II.14.2.2)
¹⁴⁴ ST I-II.110.3: Sicut igitur lumen naturale rationis est aliquid praeter virtutes acquisitas, quae dicuntur in ordine ad ipsum lumen naturale; ita etiam ipsum lumen gratiae, quod est participatio divinae naturae, est aliquid praeter virtutes infusas, quae a lumine illo derivantur, et ad illud lumen ordinantur.
would result in our need to seek another cause for that set of causes. So while all equivocal causes can be reduced to the notion of cause univocally, there must remain another cause for all univocal causes but which itself is not univocal along with them (ST I, q.13 a.5, ad.1). It is in this sense that we should understand ‘habit’ in relation to the infused virtues. Infused habits are causes, analogically, of their corresponding virtues.

To speak of God as being the direct cause of an infused habit in the human person is to speak of habit analogically, “as coming down to the soul from on high” (ST III, q.9 a.4, ad.3). Thus acquired habits and infused habits are not habits univocally. And that is why “acquired and infused habits are not to be classed together” (ST III.9.4.ad3). God’s assistance through grace, as we shall see, does not necessarily make natural human endeavour easier.

Furthermore, I do not want to suggest that an infused habit is a temporary state of affairs until we “get the hang of it” and are able to perform virtuous acts well and on our own, without further assistance from God. This is certainly not what Aquinas has in mind: we can never perform meritorious acts of the supernatural kind without on-going, moment-by-moment guidance from above. There is no sense consequently in Aquinas of grace “setting us up” to allow us to work virtuously on our own merits once we’ve been ‘trained’ (ST I-II.109.9).

Rather, for an infused habit to remain in a person, they must be in a state of grace or a state of friendship with God. Infused habits are present in us moment by moment: “Therefore, just as light in the air immediately ceases if some obstacle is placed in the way, so does the habit of

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146 I am reminded here of the description Hans Urs von Balthasar gives of Jesus’ relationship to the Father during his earthly ministry. Balthasar writes, “Now it is [Jesus’] receptivity to everything that comes to him from the Father that is the basis of time and temporality as these terms apply to the Son in his creaturely form of existence. This receptivity is the very constitution of his being, by which it is perpetually open to receive his mission from the Father.” (Balthasar, Urs von, Hans. A theology of history. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994. Pages 33-34). In a related way, infused habits open up the human person to reality and the possibility of virtuous acts moment by moment. They are not, as with the acquired virtues, drawn from a store within a person, but unite a person to God in a living friendship (ST-I.20.1.ad3).
charity immediately cease in the soul when the soul turns itself away from God through sin.”

Thus the infused habit is identical to being in a state of grace, and the infused virtue of gratitude by extension refers to being in a state of grace through a certain kind of grateful activity: the activity of praise, worship and liturgy.

Aquinas thus speaks of a dual action that the infused habit performs; for it is not sufficient that we be disposed to acting virtuously according to the infused habit; but we also must be provided with the ability to carry out acts according to that disposition. Just as a person needs, not only a healthy set of eyes to see by, but also the light—so too do we need both the infused habit (grace) by which to act rightly, but also the divine light of God’s justice by which to see what must be done.

...in order to live righteously a man needs a twofold help of God: first, a habitual gift whereby corrupted human nature is healed, and after being healed is lifted up so as to work deeds meritoriously of everlasting life, which exceed the capability of nature. Secondly, man needs the help of grace in order to be moved by God to act. Now with regard to the first kind of help, man does not need a further help of grace, that is, a further infused habit. Yet he needs the help of grace in another way, i.e. in order to be moved by God to act righteously, and this for two reasons: first, for the general reason that no created thing can put forth any act, unless by virtue of the Divine motion. Secondly, for this special reason—the condition of the state of human nature. For although healed by grace as to the mind, yet it remains corrupted and poisoned in the flesh, whereby it serves “the law of sin....” [Emphasis added]

Throughout the Summa, an indeed in those works dealing with the nature and distinction of acquired and infused habits, Aquinas frequently uses the language of grace interchangeably with descriptions of infused habit, as in the passage just cited.

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147 DQV 1.13: Et ideo, sicut statim cessaret lumen in aere, si interponeretur aliquod obstaculum; ita statim cessat habitus caritatis in anima, quando anima se avertit a Deo per peccatum.

148 ST I-II.109.9: ...homo ad recte vivendum dupliciter auxilio Dei indiget. Uno quidem modo, quantum ad aliquod habituale donum, per quod natura humana corrupita sanetur; et etiam sanata elevetur ad operandum opera meritoria vitae aeternae, quae exceedunt proportionem naturae. Alio modo indiget homo auxilio gratiae ut a Deo moveatur ad recte agendum. Quantum igitur ad primum auxilii modum, homo in gratia existens non indiget aliquid aliuxilia quosque aliqo alio habitu infusos. Indiget tamen auxilio gratiae secundum alium modum, ut scilicet a Deo moveatur ad recte agendum. Et hoc propter duo. Primo quidem, ratione generali, propter hoc quod, sicut supra dictum est, nulla res creata potest in quicumque actum prodire nisi virtute motionis divinae. Secundo, ratione speciali, propter conditionem status humanae naturae. Quae quidem licet per gratiam sanetur quantum ad mentem, remanet tamen in ea corruptio et infectio quantum ad carnem, per quam servit legi peccati....
With this in mind, we can see that infused and acquired habits are of a different species, and Aquinas stresses this repeatedly. But recalling those earlier texts of his, which state that the acquired and infused virtues are of differing acts (unde non habent eundem actum), we need to ask: in what way do the moral objects of acquired habits and infused habits differ? For “infused and acquired virtue differ not only in relation to the ultimate end, but also in relation to their proper objects.”

One can see this principle at work in Aquinas’ distinction between those acts proper to acquired habits, and those proper to infused habits. For example, in the Quaestiones Disputate de Virtutibus, Aquinas notes that “through the acquired virtues we do not attain the happiness of heaven, but a kind of happiness that we are naturally apt to acquire through our natural endowments in this life. [We gain this sort of happiness] through the activity of complete virtue, which Aristotle discusses in Ethics X.” From this, and many other passages like it, we see that the acts proper to the acquired virtues and those acts proper to the infused virtues—which here we see also are ‘complete’ virtues properly speaking—have acts with different ends: acquired habits perfect us in our operation as citizens of the earthly city; whereas virtue properly speaking, orients us to, and fits us for, heaven and beatitude. Indeed, all our good acts produced by acquired habits perfect us in reference to this social existence; hence, all of the acquired virtues are, in this sense, social.

Again, since man by his nature is a social animal, the [acquired] virtues, in so far as they are in him according to the condition of his nature, are called “social” virtues; since it is by reason of them that man behaves himself well in the conduct of human affairs.

Since we are destined, however, for something greater than just a social existence here on earth, “there are some habits by which man is disposed to an end which exceeds the

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149 ST I-II.63.4.ad1: ...virtus infusa et acquisita non solum differunt secundum ordinem ad ultimum finem; sed etiam secundum ordinem ad propria objecta....
150 DQV, 1.9.ad6: Ad sextum dicendum, quod per virtutes acquisitas non pervenitur ad felicitatem caelestem, sed ad quamdam felicitatem quam homo natus est acquirere per propria naturalia in hac vita secundum actum perfectae virtutis, de qua Aristoteles tractat in X Metaph.
151 ST I-II.61.5: Et quia homo secundum suam naturam est animal politicum, virtutes huiusmodi, prout in homine existunt secundum conditionem suae naturae, politicae vocantur, prout scilicet homo secundum has virtutes recte se habet in rebus humanis gerendis.
proportion of human nature, namely, the ultimate and perfect happiness of man, as stated above” as we have seen.152

3.3 The Distinction Between Acquired & Infused Virtue

An important clarification is needed here, for at least two potential dangers loom on the horizon: firstly, how are we to tell the acquired virtues and the infused virtues apart? Secondly, what justification does Aquinas have for making this distinction between acquired and infused virtues?

One might be excused in thinking that telling the infused virtues apart from the acquired is simply a question of ‘feeling’. But there is no sense in Aquinas of one feeling one’s way into the distinction. Feelings are accidental to, not the subject of, habits and so are ordered by, and put in check by habits. Feelings as such are not a reliable indicator of a habit because one cannot derive definitions of substances from accidents. Feelings are essentially non-rational, despite our modern tendency to think of at least some virtues—like gratitude—as being principally emotional movements.

For Aquinas, feelings, in a sense, are antithetical to habit, as they are evoked by the vicissitudes of life and hence cannot be the subject of permanent dispositions. For this reason, gratitude cannot be merely a feeling. This is not to say that feelings are of no use in indicating certain dispositions to us; but the nature of feelings is such that they are difficult to define and measure, as Reginald of Piperno remarks in the Supplement to the Summa (ST Supp q.3, ad.4), picking up where Aquinas left off.

Alternatively, we may seek a different understanding of virtues, one based not on an evaluation of feelings associated with habits but on the acts produced by those habits themselves. Aquinas himself has said that habits, like powers, can only be known through their

152 ST I-II, q.51, a.4.
acts and so this would seem to be a more useful approach to the question of the distinction between acquired and infused habits.\textsuperscript{153}

But on reflection we can see a further difficulty here. It is possible to imagine, for example, two people performing what seems to be exactly the same act from the point of view of the observer—but which in fact constitutes two different acts. A person could repay a gift, motivated only by the prospect of more favours in return, while another person could repay the same gift, genuinely motivated by love. We might be inclined, on observation, to ascribe virtuous acts in both situations. And while we might be inclined to ascribe the adjectives, “grateful” and “thoughtful” to both, we would not do so if we knew the real motivations of both.

The philosophical principle of Scholastic thought, that we do not gain knowledge of things from their potency or matter but rather from their act or form (Meta. IV.12.681) holds good for habits and virtues, too (ST I-II, q.1 a.3). Hence, our distinction between the kind of acts performed by others and ourselves cannot be based on an observation of the activity in its material exposition, but rather on an insight into the form of the act, which is difficult to know with certainty—even for the acting person.

Indeed, Aquinas notes that it is very difficult to observe a difference between the form of an act ensuing from an acquired habit and one ensuing from an infused habit.

A habit can never be known except through its acts, and the acts of the infused supernatural virtues greatly resemble the acts of the acquired natural virtues. Consequently, it is not easy to be certain that acts of this kind have their source in grace, unless, by a special privilege, a person is made certain of it through a revelation.\textsuperscript{154}

This is a significant observation by Aquinas and one which opens up a totally different way of thinking about acquired and infused virtues. For most of us, I suspect, are accustomed to thinking of infused habits as being something self-evidently different to acquired habits: the latter come to us through hard work and repetition, through trial and error; while the former, those God-given graces “coming down to the soul from on high”, are somehow mysteriously

\textsuperscript{153} ST I, q.87, a.2
\textsuperscript{154} DQT, 6.5.ad3: Habitus enim nunquam possunt cognosci nisi per actus. Actus autem virtutum gratuitarum habent maximam similitudinem cum actibus virtutum acquisitarum, ut non possit de facili per huiusmodi actus certitudo de gratia haberi, nisi forte per revelationem inde certificetur aliquis ex speciali privilegio.
planted in us without the need for any work on our part at all, and hence which flow from us like a mysterious second-nature that comes to us with a certain facility, though how, we can’t really say. And this is why some have thought that the infused virtues presuppose the acquired virtues—because they seem to be ‘superadded’ onto the acquired.\footnote{With this in mind, it is clear why Lee Yearley’s contention that the infused virtues presuppose the acquired virtues is mistaken. First of all, God’s will does not presuppose human will, but vice versa and so similarly, an infused habit—which is of divine origin—would not presuppose the acquired habit. More importantly, the ‘presupposition’ model seems to be based on the ‘superadded’ notion of infused virtues. But there would in fact be no need for an acquired virtue when one already has the infused virtue which includes, so to speak, the same natural species of object as presented by the acquired virtue. As we have seen, an acquired act of bravery is no different, materially speaking, from an infused act of bravery. The distinction between the two acts is not material, but formal, and so no presupposition is necessary to explain the infused variety.}

But Aquinas is a realist when it comes to human nature. Experience tells us that the temptation to think of infused habits and graces as giving us virtue without any need for effort on our part does not in fact cohere either with experience or with a further, systematic reflection on the matter. The remarkable conclusion is, therefore, that infused habits do not bypass human effort but rather transform its object. It is for this reason that it is difficult to tell acquired and infused virtues apart; because materially, they may look identical. Just as we couldn’t see a difference in merit by simply comparing external actions, so too would it be wrong to think that the difference between an acquired an infused virtue can in some way be observed. It is not as though an acquired virtue, such as gratitude, means giving thanks to a local benefactor, while the infused virtue means giving thanks to God. Both acts could be either the result of an acquired or an infused habit. And both acquired gratitude and infused gratitude will become habitual in a person after effort and practice. The difference between the two cannot be observed in the outward act. Hence even the fact that God may be the object of an act in no way guarantees that such an act is the result of infused virtue. Aquinas is conscious that such a view would commit us to Pelagianism. The foregoing then suggests that the proper way of thinking about acquired and infused virtues is as follows:

(1) Acquired virtues are those which are acquired by man, following effort and practice, flowing from his natural abilities as man, according to providence.
Infused virtues are those which are acquired by man, following effort and practice, flowing from the grace of God, according to predestination.

One can see that italicised parts of those definitions are beyond human scrutiny: the acquired and infused habits differ formally not on account of their material aspect, but on account of their object, which determines reason and action to a particular end. In the case of the infused virtues, that end is friendship with God. This is borne out in Aquinas’ distinction between acquired and infused virtues in ST I-II, q.55 a.4, ad.6, where the only difference he gives between the acquired and infused virtues is the addition, in the case of the latter, of the phrase, “...which God works in us, without us.” This distinction is beyond the reach of any observation of acts.

This explains the difficulty Aquinas has in distinguishing acts of acquired habits from acts of infused habits; for the distinction between the two is not simply a question of identifying habits we get on our own from hard work, from those that we simply wake up with in the morning, mysteriously acquired and present in consciousness with no apparent effort on our part. ‘Grace does not eliminate human nature, but perfects it’ is a well-known axiom of Aquinas—but we mustn’t forget that “grace perfects nature according to the manner of nature” (ST I, q.62, a.5). Human nature proceeds in time, through toil and effort, through trial and error, through an apprenticeship in front of reality. Grace does not eliminate this industriousness in us or this need to work at cooperating with grace. Hence, neither do the infused virtues do away with the need for sweat and tears. This is even true of the infused, theological virtue of faith which must produce, of necessity if it is to be meritorious, the outward act of confession. Aquinas makes this point even more explicitly in his Commentary on First Thessalonians: “It is not sufficient [simply to believe in God]” he writes, “unless a person practices good works of faith and makes an effort”; and further on in the same passage he writes, “[St Paul] uses the words ‘work’ and ‘labour’, implying that he is mindful of their active and struggling faith.”

Nor should this be taken to mean that one can “increase grace” through the exercise of the

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156 ST II-II, q.3, a.1 & 2.
157 Commentary on 1 Thessalonians, 1:1: Haec autem non est sufficient, nisi habeat operationem et laborem.... Ideo dicit operis et laboris. Quasi dicit: memores fidei vestrae operantis et laborantis.
infused virtues. One does not multiply the infused virtue in respect to its origin in the grace of 
God through repeated acts. Rather, the repeated acts of infused virtue serve to open the virtuous 
person up to greater merit granted by God, and to orienting the person more and more to the 
love of God so that “through giving thanks for benefits received we merit to receive yet greater 
benefits.”158

It is clear that charity and the other infused virtues are not actively 
increased by acts, but only as disposing and meriting; they are actively 
increased by the action of God who perfects and conserves the charity 
that he first infused.159

Along with his treatments in the Summa and those from question one of the 
Quaestiones Disputate de Virtutibus two more significant texts highlight Aquinas’ on-going 
concern regarding the difficulty of distinguishing the works of acquired virtue from infused 
virtue.

First, we find him setting out this difficulty at greater length in the Scriptum super 
Sententiae, suggesting, as do later works, that the issue was very much on his mind anytime he 
thought about the nature of virtue in general. Here, he sets out the question, “Whether anyone 
can know with certainty that he has charity?”—and it turns out to be a question which he 
answers in the negative.160 He states,

The Philosopher says that a sign of habit is when pleasure is taken in 
the carrying out of some work. Yet it cannot be discerned, by the 
mere fact of someone’s having such a manner in his work, whether it 
comes from the habit of infused charity or from an acquired habit. 
Finally, love’s proper effect, insofar as it comes from charity, comes 
in the power of meriting. But knowing we have merited does not in 
any way fall into our knowledge, unless it is specially revealed to us 
by God. Therefore no one can know with certainty that he has charity, 
though he may make some conjecture from probable signs.161

158 ST II-II, q.83, a.17: Ratio vero impetrandi ex parte petentis est gratiarum actio, quia de acceptis 
beneficiis gratias agentes, meremur accipere potiora.
159 De Virtutibus q.1, a.2, ad.18.
160 In the parallel text in the Lectura Romnana, Aquinas notes, within the body of the reply, that while 
the intellect has a certain recursive quality, and as such is able to reflect on its own reflecting, it is not 
readily able to reflect on the principles or causes of its own acts with the same kind of clarity, since 
these sources of action are not always clear—especially when they are considered as being from a 
“configuration to the Holy Spirit.” One can guess that they may be acting out of infused love—and 
certainly, hope that they are; but this motivation is not something that can be phenomenologically held 
up to scrutiny.
161 In I Sent. d.17;1.4: Modus autem quem ponit habitus in opere est facilitas et delectatio, ut dicit 
philosophus, quod signum habitus oportet accipere fientem in opere delectationem. Per istum autem
The reason why we cannot know whether or not our actions proceed from infused charity is explained by the Aristotelian principle found in *Metaphysics II* which Aquinas makes reference to earlier in the question: things which are more intelligible in themselves are less knowable to us; since that which is more intelligible is not in matter. Now infused charity, since it is of God, is more perfectly known to God, but less so to us: we are not privy to the inner workings of grace, which proceed from the mind of God. But in the case of distinguishing virtue, the phenomena of acquired and infused virtues often appears identical; thus we can only properly know acquired virtue and guess—or rather hope—that we have infused virtue. Nor is it enough simply to try and establish the presence of grace by appealing to the presence of love: even love has acquired and infused varieties: “the act of love which we perceive in ourselves, in so far as it is perceptible, is not an adequate indication of charity because of the similarity between natural love and infused love.”

This reading is confirmed more generally speaking by considering Aquinas’ project in question one of the *Quaestiones Disputate de Virtutibus*. Here, beginning with article one, he immediately sets to work distinguishing acquired from infused virtues. With this distinction established and now taken for granted in articles one through eight, Aquinas then proceeds to ask in article nine, and citing Dionysius as an authority, whether or not we acquire virtues through repetition of acts—a question which he answers in the affirmative. Again, he distinguishes acquired from infused virtues—as we would expect—saying that we do not acquire virtue properly speaking (i.e., the infused virtues) through our own acts, since a supernatural end exceeds the ability of our natural endowments. But, he goes on to say, and in fact repeats this throughout the entire question more than fifty times, that virtues, both acquired and infused, function as *perfecting* the will through habitually good acts. So while infused

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162 De Veritate, q.10, a.10, ad.1: *quia actus ille dilectionis quem in nobis percipimus secundum id quod de eo est perceptibile, non est sufficiens signum caritatis, propter similitudinem dilectionis naturalis ad gratuitam.*
virtues are not directly or exclusively caused by repetition of action, the repeated actions produced by them are perfected through grace. What is of interest here is that these perfecting acts can be considered to be simultaneous with their habits, and particularly the habit of charity, from which they flow (ST III.85.6).

No amount of introspection therefore will reveal to us whether or not our actions proceed from acquired or infused principles because they are directly infused by the will of God—which causal chain we can in no way sense. Without a direct revelation from God therefore, we cannot know for certain whether or not we are performing acts which flow from an infused habit. We can make a reasoned and hopeful guess based on “probable signs”; but such guesswork is precisely that, and fails to provide any knowledge as such.

3.4 Merit

An important distinction to keep in mind at the same time is that this inability to know whether or not our actions are of infused virtue is not because we cannot know what is good. We can indeed know what actions are good (if we couldn’t, no virtuous action of either kind would be possible because we wouldn’t know what acts we should be engaging in); we just can’t know if a particular good action we perform is worthy of merit. Ultimately then, what distinguishes acquired and infused virtues is their meritorious efficacy which is imperceptible to the senses. So Aquinas is not so concerned with a distinction between which acts are good and which are not; this in fact can be known through reason and application of the natural law, or by appealing to the Divine Law. But what we cannot possibly know is which of our acts are meritorious. As it turns out for Aquinas, it is only virtue which is worthy of merit, and vice which is worthy of demerit: “For God loves a cheerful giver, he gives the reason, which is this:

163 This is due in part to the fact that intelligence arises from memory (ST I.79.7.ad3) and there can be no memory of what is infused.
everyone who rewards gives a reward for things worthy of a reward; but only acts of the virtues
are such.”

Aquinas’ teaching that we cannot know with certainty whether or not we possess
infused virtue is a strong indication that for him virtues are not simply subjective acts, but have
an objective value, a worthiness which comes to them from without. Virtues are not simply the
result of personal effort. While they include personal effort, they also have a counterpart in
keeping with the notion of friendship, for which they exist. Every friendship exists between one
loving and one loved. Since this is the essence of virtue, we must look for something in
addition to the individual in order to understand what virtues are. They are personal habits to be
sure; but they are personal habits oriented towards friendship. This is why Aquinas is so
insistent that virtues, like gratitude, cannot be reduced to the level of subjective affectivity.
Gratitude is not a feeling; gratitude is a response to an invitation to friendship. For this reason
furthermore, gratitude cannot be conceived of independently of the gift which elicits it. In short,
virtues and the virtue of gratitude in particular, are by their very nature relational because the
human agent is by nature relational.

In concluding these reflections on the lack of certitude in reference to infused virtue, we
should note that just because we cannot know with certainty whether or not we have infused,
meritorious, virtue we can however know with certainty what is required to dispose ourselves to
friendship with God, in the hope that he will bless our hope and desire with his grace. First of
all, we have the certainty of faith, which tells us that the Holy Spirit is working through the
Church, in which God is revealed. Thus we know what things we ought to be doing at least,
given this certainty of faith.

Among the things that faith points us to, is the practice of religion, which in turn
disposes us to the sacraments of the Church. Indeed, the virtue of faith—and theological virtues
in general—are the cause of the virtue of religion. It is the virtue of religion furthermore

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164 Commentary on 2nd Corinthians, 332: omnis remunerator remunerat ea quae sunt remuneratione digna. Haec autem sunt solum actus virtutum.
165 De Rationibus Fidei, c.9; ST II-II, q.1, a.4 & 5.
166 ST II-II, q.81, a.5, ad.1.
which directs us to the acts of praise and thanksgiving to God. For it is in the act of thanking God that not only do we dispose ourselves to his grace, but we demonstrate the confidence that comes with faith in the reality of his grace given through the Church.\footnote{Commentary on 1\textsuperscript{st} Thessalonians, 1.1.}

### 3.4.1 The \textit{actus humanus} as an act of merit & reward

In the very first question and article of the first of the second part of the \textit{Summa Theologiae}, Aquinas draws a distinction between those human acts which are \textit{not} the result of deliberation or choice (\textit{actus hominis}) and those acts which are the result of a rational activity (\textit{actus humanus}). This distinction is not unique to Aquinas; it traces its origins to the ancient world and was, in medieval times, a common feature of Scholastic thinking.\footnote{Nor is the distinction anything novel for Thomists, for whom the distinction is rather straightforward—although, in recent years, the distinction has been at the centre of discussions about what Aquinas means precisely by his reference to the moral object. Martin Rhonheimer in particular has developed the notion of the \textit{actus humanus} to show how such acts are synonymous with free and therefore moral actions which constitute personhood itself, which I address in the section on Natural Law.} However, there is another dimension of the \textit{actus humanus} in Aquinas—one that is not often the subject of discussion, but which is, however, central to Aquinas’ virtue theory, and that is the notion of the \textit{actus humanus} not simply as an act of the will, but as an act of the will which is simultaneously an \textit{act worthy of merit or demerit} on account of the gifts of God. Without such merit, any deliberate action would lack any value and indeed any coherence at all. Every \textit{actus humanus} is, therefore, an act of merit or demerit essentially speaking. Indeed, Aquinas declares that it is the task of the theologian to consider human actions as actions of merit and demerit, because this is requisite for a voluntary action.\footnote{Tertio, quia theologus considerat actus humanos secundum quod sunt meritorii vel demeritorii, quod convenit actibus humanis; ad quod requiritur quod sint voluntarii. Actus autem humanus iudicatur voluntarius vel involuntarius, secundum cognitionem vel ignorantiam circumstantiarum, ut dictum est. Et ideo consideratio circumstantiarum pertinet ad theologum. (ST I-II.7.2)} For Aquinas, merit and demerit constitute the very finality of human action: “Merit belongs to a subject which is moving towards its end” he says (ST I, q.62, a.9, ad.1), and all chosen acts of the will move towards some end.\footnote{In what follows, I shall, to avoid confusion, refer to human acts properly speaking (actus humanus) as \textit{acts of the person} in contrast to \textit{acts of the creature} (actus hominis), simply as animal, without this}
It is necessary to keep in mind that in Aquinas’ thinking, there is no such thing as a morally neutral act of a person, as a morally free agent. Every such act, because it consists in an act of the will, by nature and necessity, tends towards an end as specified as good (ST I, q.82, a.1). In fact, the will never tends towards being as such, but always and only towards the “good apprehended” (bonum apprehensum; ST I-II, q.8, a.1). Every act of the person, which is an act of will, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem, is a moral action and therefore an act of merit or demerit because every deliberately chosen action tends towards the good so apprehended, since “without free choice, there can be neither merit or demerit.”

If it is true that no action of the will is morally neutral, it would imply that seemingly insignificant actions like tying one’s shoelace are moral acts of a person—or acts worthy of merit. But on examination, it is evident that this is in fact the case. For central to Aquinas’ argument is the observation that every freely chosen act, no matter how small, aims at some rational differentiation. Some commentators, such as John Trigilio Jr., in his essay, Thomistic Renaissance: The Natural Moral Law, suggest that the actus hominis is peculiar to the human species in general, but this cannot be right. For any action that is from the human species as differentiated from other animals is therefore rational and, consequently, moral. Trigilio suggests the act of laughing or speaking is an example of the actus hominis. However, speaking is in fact a rational activity and therefore an act of a person (actus humanus), not simply of man as animal. As for laughing, Aquinas explains that this is an accident of a rational nature which emanates from man as rational, and is therefore also not an actus hominis but an actus humanus: “But the accidents that follow from the form are properly passions of the genus or species, and so they are found in all things participating in the nature of the genus or species, as risibility in man follows from the form, for laughter comes from a certain kind of understanding in the soul of man.” (De Ente et Essentia, c.6)...

Rational differentiation. Some commentators, such as John Trigilio Jr., in his essay, Thomistic Renaissance: The Natural Moral Law, suggest that the actus hominis is peculiar to the human species in general, but this cannot be right. For any action that is from the human species as differentiated from other animals is therefore rational and, consequently, moral. Trigilio suggests the act of laughing or speaking is an example of the actus hominis. However, speaking is in fact a rational activity and therefore an act of a person (actus humanus), not simply of man as animal. As for laughing, Aquinas explains that this is an accident of a rational nature which emanates from man as rational, and is therefore also not an actus hominis but an actus humanus: “But the accidents that follow from the form are properly passions of the genus or species, and so they are found in all things participating in the nature of the genus or species, as risibility in man follows from the form, for laughter comes from a certain kind of understanding in the soul of man.” (De Ente et Essentia, c.6)...

...unde inveniuntur in omnibus participantibus naturam generis vel speciei, sicut risibile consequitur in homine formam, quia risus contingit ex aliqua apprehensione animae hominis. In evidence of this, one can see that one would be culpable for laughing inappropriately—hence, laughing carries with it attachment to merit and demerit along with our other properly personal actions. Furthermore, Aquinas is clear that all acts of the person are, by nature, rational while any act of man as man (actus hominis) is never rational as such: “Such like actions are not properly human actions; since they do not proceed from deliberation of the reason, which is the proper principle of human actions. Therefore they have indeed an imaginary end, but not one that is determined by the use of reason.” (ST I-II, 1.1.ad3) Ad tertium dicendum quod huiusmodi actiones non sunt proprie humanae, quia non procedunt ex deliberatione rationis, quae est proprium principium humanorum actuum. Et ideo habent quidem finem imaginatum, non autem per rationem praestitutum. Aquinas lays out his clearest exposition of the difference between acts of the person and acts of man as animal in the Disputed Questions on Virtues, q.1, a.4, where he explains: “It is not just any activity found in man or engaged in by a man that is called human, since there are many activities shared by plants, animals, and men, but only that which is proper to him. Unlike these other things, it is proper to man that he have dominion over his acts. Any act over which a man has dominion is properly called a human act, but not those over which he does not have dominion, even though they occur in him, e.g., digesting and growing and the like.” Actus autem humanus dicitur qui non quocumque modo in homine vel per hominem exercetur; cum in quibusdam etiam plantae, bruta et homines conveniant; sed qui hominis proprius est. Inter cetera vero hoc habet homo proprium in suo actu, quod sui actu est dominus.

171 De Veritate, q.24, a.1: sine libero arbitrio non possess esse meritum vel demeritum.
good, and is on this account ‘moral’. Such acts furthermore occur within a certain orbit of human action: acts of the person are never isolated from an overarching project aimed at the good. Giving money to the poor for example, is never an act in isolation from other acts. Stealing in order to give to the poor alters the nature of the act. The end of the action, helping the poor, thus falls within a wider orbit of action aimed at some greater good. Aquinas calls this orbit of action the ‘circumstances’ of a moral act of the person.

These circumstances are the accidents of a given freely chosen action, and they feature prominently in Aquinas’ account of the virtues of indebtedness. For example, in considering the mean of religion and piety, the circumstances consider the how, when and to whom worship and honour should be given; in the virtue of obedience, the circumstances include what and who is obeyed; in the virtue of gratitude, the circumstances include one’s ability and means to repay the moral debt. As far as gratitude to God is concerned, the human person lacks any requisite means of repaying God, and so must look to another set of circumstances in which this can be effected, namely through the properly instituted sacraments of Christ, present in the Church.172

While we may not be totally conscious of every detail of every part of this overarching action, just as we may not be aware of the far-reaching consequences of our giving money to a poor man, nonetheless, our actions in the context of the circumstances and particular end to which they are aimed together constitute a deliberate project aimed at some reasoned end and so are included in the act of the person. Aquinas explains this principle at work in the example of a builder who, while having the general project of the house in mind, may not necessarily have every detail of the building materials in mind: “a builder thinks out the definite measurements of a house, and also the definite number of rooms which he wishes to make in the house; and definite measurements of the walls and roof; he does not, however, select a definite number of

172 Aquinas repeatedly makes this point in his various Commentaries on the Letters of Paul which deal with the nature of the Church and the sacraments, such as the Commentaries on 1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Galatians, etc. This theme is explored in greater depth in the chapter on Ecclesiology.
stones, but accepts and uses just so many as are sufficient for the required measurements of the wall”. 173

Similarly, the act of giving money to the poor occurs within a context of circumstances, and is aimed at a particular end, such as the alleviation of suffering or poverty. To neutralise, so to speak, these subsidiary acts involves divorcing them from a reasoned project occurring within a temporal framework. To do so would be to fragment the natural contiguity of human action extended through place and time, in which context the life of the person is an unfolding of meaning which is either good or bad. It is for this reason that gratitude, for example, cannot simply be construed as an effective ‘giving thanks’ in the heart. Any such reduction of gratitude or any virtue contingent on love (as they all are) eliminates the relevance of the very real circumstances in which the human agent lives and expresses himself. The expression of the body in the context of the material world is a real circumstance in which our actions take place; the virtuous person takes full advantage of everything that is placed at his disposal for the production of virtuous acts. The circumstance of my life is not irrelevant to the way in which I am called to express myself as a virtuous person in the world around me. Human life consists in action (ST II-II, q.51, a.1).

There is perhaps a certain tendency to forget the relationship between the lived experience and the virtuous life. The virtues don’t simply respond to situations as they arise, as though they were simply passive responses to external forces. The truly virtuous person makes use of the circumstances in which he finds himself, in order to perfect himself and the world around him: “A virtuous act may be considered in another way, in comparison with its first motive cause, which is the love of charity, and it is in this respect that an act comes to belong to the perfection of life.” Virtuous acts not only do make use of circumstances; they must make use of the due circumstances in which human activity can only take place (ST I-II, q.18, a.3). In looking to the works of gratitude therefore, we must look at the circumstances of human

173 ST I, q.23, a.7: Sicut aedificator excogitat determinatam mensuram domus, et etiam determinatum numerum mansionum quas vult facere in domo, et determinatum numerum mensurarum parietis vel tecti, non autem eligit determinatum numerum lapidum, sed accipit tot, quot sufficiunt ad explendam tantam mensuram parietis.
existence. These circumstances include, in the case of natural human powers, the total inability of the human creature to repay God by the natural powers alone: the genuinely grateful person must look to some other circumstances not of his own making in which to show gratitude to God.

Any set of reasoned actions which are part of a continuous motion towards fulfilment of a particular moral object share in the merit or demerit of the acts of the person. Each set of circumstances chosen for some end provides the means for the accomplishment an act that seems to be, in the mind of the agent, for some overarching good or end. It is in the context of these circumstances, those accidents of moral action, that we find ourselves operating from day to day in an effort to build a life that is either good or bad.

I answer that, it sometimes happens that an action is indifferent in its species, but considered in the individual it is good or evil. And the reason of this is because a moral action, as stated above, derives its goodness not only from its object, whence it takes its species; but also from the circumstances, which are its accidents, as it were; just as something belongs to a man by reason of his individual accidents, which does not belong to him by reason of his species. And every individual action needs to have some circumstance that makes it good or bad, at least in respect of the intention of the end. For since it belongs to the reason to direct; if an action that proceeds from deliberate reason be not directed to the due end, it is, by that fact alone, repugnant to reason, and has the character of evil. But if it be directed to a due end, it is in accord with reason; wherefore it has the character of good. Now it must needs be either directed or not directed to a due end. Consequently every human action that proceeds from deliberate reason, if it be considered in the individual, must be good or bad.\[174\]

‘Voluntary’ action is therefore synonymous with ‘moral’ action. We should not, with that in mind, simply assume however that voluntary action is somehow worthy of merit or
demerit, but ask why this is the case, if indeed it must be. What is it that constitutes acts of the will as acts of merit and demerit?

We need to clarify here what Aquinas himself means by the word ‘merit’, for he uses the word in at least two significant senses: merit of the natural order and merit of the supernatural order. The first corresponds to the acquired virtues, while the latter corresponds to the infused virtues.

Each kind of merit—natural and supernatural—relate to providence and predestination. Merit of the natural order pertains to those things that the human agent can and does do according to created nature, or those things which are produced by the acquired virtues. As such, they include things that fall within the direction of Divine Providence (ST I-II, q.114, a.2). Merit of the supernatural order on the other hand pertains to those acts of the person which are directed towards eternal life and beatitude—including those acts produced by the infused virtues.

...predestination differs from providence in two respects. Providence means a general ordering to an end. Consequently, it extends to all things, rational or irrational, good or bad, that have been ordained by God to an end. Predestination, however, is concerned only with that end which is possible for a rational creature, namely, his eternal glory. Consequently, it concerns only men, and only with reference to those things that are related to salvation. Moreover, predestination differs from providence in a second respect. In any ordering to an end, two things must be considered: the ordering itself, and the outcome or result of the ordering, for not everything that is ordered to an end reaches that end. Providence, therefore, is concerned only with the ordering to the end. Consequently, by God’s providence, all men are ordained to beatitude. But predestination is also concerned with the outcome or result of this ordering, and, therefore, it is related only to those who will attain heavenly glory. Hence, providence, is related to the initial establishment of an order, and predestination is related to its outcome or result; for the fact that some attain the end that is eternal glory is not due primarily to their own power but to the help of grace given by God.  

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175 DQT, 6.1: ...praedestinatio quantum ad duo a providentia differt: providentia enim dicit universaliter ordinationem in finem, et ideo se extendit ad omnia quae a Deo in finem aliquem ordinantur, sive rationalia sive irrationalia, sive bona sive mala; sed praedestinatio respicit tantum illum finem qui est possibilis rationali creaturae, utpote gloriam; et ideo praedestinatio non est nisi hominum, et respectu horum quae pertinent ad salutem. Differt etiam alio modo. In qualibet enim ordinatione ad finem est duo considerare: scilicet ipsum ordinem, et exitum vel eventum ordinis: non enim omnia quae ad finem ordinantur, finem consequuntur. Providentia ergo, ordinem in finem respicit tantum, unde per Dei providentiam homines omnes ad beatitudinem ordinantur. Sed praedestinatio respicit etiam exitum vel eventum ordinis, unde non est nisi eorum qui gloriam consequentur. Sicut igitur se habet providentia ad
Providence orders all things, rational and non-rational, towards the good in general and the created goods which constitute life here on earth. Predestination, which pertains only to rational creatures, ordains some towards a specific supernatural end, beatitude. With this in mind, Aquinas explains how merit flowing from providence is of a temporal kind; while God himself is the cause of merit of the supernatural kind. This is the basis for Aquinas’ distinction between two kinds of merit:

We are said to merit by something in two ways. First, according to merit itself, just as we are said to run by running; and thus we merit by acts. Secondly, we are said to merit by something as by the principle whereby we merit, as we are said to run by the motive power; and thus are we said to merit by virtues and habits.176

In other words, merit is derived either naturally, according to the order of providence and secondly, according to some higher principle, namely God, which comes to us through the exercise of the infused virtues.

Within the order of providential goods, the common good is the highest, since no part is greater than the whole. Thus the good of the nation is more godlike than the good of a particular individual (SCG 3.17.6). This does not mean however that the individual exists for the common good, but vice versa. The common good, when it is realised, elevates each citizen to be able to reach his full potential in respect to his nature.177 Thus merit, when considered in the context of the natural order, as directed by Providence, is for the good of society and the individual as a member of that society. The merits—or benefits—of a healthy society are shared by all, so that the fruits of virtue from any one individual contribute to the common good overall (ST I.96.4).

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impositionem ordinis, ita se habet praeestinatio ad ordinis exitum vel eventum: quod enim aliqui finem gloriae consequantur, non est principaliter ex propriis viribus, sed ex auxilio gratiae divinitus dato.

176 ST I-II.55.1.ad3: ...aliquo dicimus mereri dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut ipso merito, eo modo quo dicimus currere cursu, et hoc modo meremur actibus. Allo modo dicimus mereri aliquo sicut principio merendi, sicut dicimus currere potentia motiva, et sic dicimus mereri virtutibus et habitibus.

177 ST I-II.21.3. This relationship between the individual and the common good is the topic of Pope John XXIII’s 1963 Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which draws upon this teaching of Aquinas: “It must, moreover, be observed that every individual member of a society is, in a fashion, a part and member of the whole society. Wherefore, any good or evil, done to the member of a society, redounds on the whole society...”
It is key to remember here that these goods associated with the acquired habits of the individual in no way contribute, on their own, to eternal beatitude but only to temporal and corruptible happiness. The term ‘merit’ when used to describe merit of the natural order can in no way be said to meritorious in the supernatural sense. Gaining earthly merit contributes nothing, on its own, to eternal beatitude. To suggest otherwise would be to suggest that the human agent can achieve salvation through his own efforts.

A habit together with a power is enough for the act of that habit. But the act of the natural habit called synderesis is to warn against evil and to incline to good. Therefore, men are naturally capable of this act. However, it does not follow from this that a man with purely natural gifts can perform a meritorious act. To impute this to natural capability alone is the Pelagian impiety.\^\textsuperscript{178}

This does not mean that acts of the person cannot be good (\textit{bonum honestum}). But Aquinas draws a distinction between \textit{good} acts and \textit{meritorious} acts. They are not the same for Aquinas. To impute merit to goodness simply speaking would mean that every act of the person flowing from acquired habits would of \textit{necessity} be meritorious; merit then would be something intrinsic to human nature and would rob grace of its gratuitous character. This is in essence what Pelagianism is: the belief in self-meriting action. For Aquinas however, grace alone is the cause of merit, and human action in no way can cause grace (De Veritate, 6.2).

Aquinas unequivocally rejects the Pelagian view, and reminds us that it is Providence which orders all things towards good, and why we seek the good by nature. But given that our acting according to Providence is a natural condition and therefore, not requiring of sanctifying grace, is not meritorious in itself. “By his free choice man is capable of a good which is natural to him,” Aquinas says in the \textit{De Veritate}; “But a meritorious good is above his nature” (\textit{De Veritate} 24.14.ad4). And in the \textit{De Trinitate} he adds,

\footnote{DQT, 16.1.ad12: \textit{Ad duodecimum dicendum, quod habitus cum potentia sufficit ad actum qui est illius habitus. Actus autem huius habitus naturalis, quem synderesis nominat, est remurmurare malo, et inclinare ad bonum: et ideo ad hunc actum homo naturaliter potest. Non autem ex hoc sequitur quod in opus meritorium peragendum homo ex puris naturalibus possit. Haec enim naturali facultati solummodo deputare, Pelagianae impietatis est.}

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The will never can will the good without divine incitement; nevertheless it can will the good without infusion of grace, though not meritoriously.\textsuperscript{179}

This providentially-directed natural goodness can even help us avoid sin. But, in opposition to Pelagius, Aquinas maintains that sin-avoidance cannot in any way suggest anything approaching supernatural merit. Avoiding sin is a question of choosing rightly according to a good habit (ST I-II.78.2) and so, just as an infused habit help us avoid sin, so too can an acquired one.

By performing an act that is good generically man avoids sin, though he does not merit a reward. Consequently, even though man can avoid a particular sin by his free choice, it still does not follow that he is capable of any meritorious good by his free choice alone.\textsuperscript{180}

Sin-avoidance thus helps us live well in this temporal state, but does not, on its own, equip us for beatitude. For this reason, Aquinas maintains that a certain participation in Happiness can be had in this life; but this participatory happiness falls short of beatitude.\textsuperscript{181}

Since then we are unable to know if our actions are meritorious or not, we need some kind of surety that our actions are at all useful, otherwise we might be tempted to despair or inaction. Hope is that virtue by which we anticipate that certain of our acts are in fact meritorious (ST I-II.62.4ad2). There would be no need for hope if we had certainty that our faith and good works were meritorious: “if [the natural light of] reason could lead to a proving of those things which are of faith, it would deprive man of the merit of faith.”\textsuperscript{182} It is not surprising therefore to find that Aquinas’ exposition of the virtue of hope is bound up in his awareness that we cannot know whether or not we possess infused virtue: “a man may, of himself, know something, and with certainty; and in this way no one can know that he has grace.”\textsuperscript{183} Belief that our good actions are meritorious is thus the object of hope. And along

\textsuperscript{179} De Trinitate, 1.1.ad7: ...voluntas numquam potest bene velle sine divino instinctu, potest autem bene velle sine gratiae infusione, sed non meritorie.
\textsuperscript{180} DQT 24.14.ad3:
\textsuperscript{181} ST I-II, q.5, a.3.
\textsuperscript{182} De Trinitate 2.1.ad5:
\textsuperscript{183} ST I-II, q.112, a.5: Alio modo homo cognoscit aliquid per seipsum, et hoc certitudinaliter. Et sic nullus potest scire se habere gratiam.
with faith and charity, it is this hope which causes the virtue of religion, through which gratitude to God rests (ST II-II, q.81, a.5, ad.1).

3.5 Free Will & Predestination

If man can merit nothing on his own—that is, nothing of supernatural order merit on his own—then how can his freely chosen actions, flowing from infused virtue, be meaningful? In other words, how does Aquinas safeguard the efficacy of free will of the human person in the face of our inability to merit anything for ourselves independently of grace and infused virtue? For it seems on the one hand that while to ascribe supernatural merit to the human agent falls prey to ‘the Pelagian impiety’, to ascribe it solely to God on the other hand forces us into a Calvinist account of salvation in which free will plays little or no part at all. For Aquinas is explicit in his claim that predestination causes merit, and not the other way around (ST I-II.101.1).

Aquinas addresses this problem, and attempts to provide a solution in several key passages. Two in particular I will focus on here: chapter seventy three of book three of the Summa Contra Gentiles; and question twenty two of the Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate. Both texts are emblematic of Aquinas’ wide ranging coverage of the issue of free will found in a great many of his works, not least of all, the Summa. Neither of these two texts, singly or together, deal with the question exhaustively, but I focus on these two texts here simply because there is a complimentary discussion in them which highlights in a helpful way the relationship of free will to merit.

In the latter text, Aquinas distinguishes between man’s natural tendency towards the good and his freely choosing the good; while in the former text he explains how that choice is always participatory in the Divine Essence. Together, both texts help bridge the gap between human freedom and Divine guidance, or human autonomy within the efficacious scope of grace. Putting gratitude into this context, we can say that moral debt represents a natural response
towards the good of God’s gifts, while the second indicates the sacramental framework as to how that debt is satisfied.

In article seven of question twenty two in the De Veritate, Aquinas notes that the will cannot but help chose the good in general (bonum universale) and therefore, in respect to this general good, the will cannot be considered to be acting freely. This is because the will, by its very nature, seeks the good. Nothing moves the will of necessity in regards to its exercise, but only in regards to its specification towards the good in general. All acts of the person are aimed at happiness without qualification and this happiness, which is the end of all deliberate action, does not fall within the remit of free will.

What human freedom is inclined to are the proximate ends (ratio finis) which are a matter of choice and therefore what constitute actions as being worth of merit or demerit (ST I-II, q.10, a.2). In other words, the human person is free in the choice of this or that particular good, in reference to the moral object which he freely apprehends and chooses under the aspect of the good (sub ratione boni). Thus, in being inclined to good in general, there is neither merit nor demerit as this is the natural disposition of the rational creature; but it is in making a choice for a specific good that a particular action may be meritorious.  

What the passage illustrates is how, within the context of a nature directed of necessity towards the good (bonum apprehensum), the will can exercise autonomy relative to that nature. But now the task for Aquinas is to show how these freely chosen acts within that context can be meaningful (i.e., meritorious). Therefore, it will be necessary to show that freely chosen acts of this contingent kind can be meritorious—since without merit, either of the natural or supernatural kind, acts have no meaning.

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184 De Veritate, q.22, a.7: Patet igitur quod volendo id quod quis naturaliter vult, secundum se non est neque meritorium neque demeritorium; sed secundum quod specificatur ad hoc vel ad illud, potest esse vel meritorium vel demeritorium. Et hoc modo sancti merentur appetendo Deum et vitam aeternam.
Aquinas seems to be aware of this challenge and so sets about to demonstrate that not only do the infused virtues make room for free will, they are in fact constituted by it. “Without the will, there is no merit” he declares. Why should this be so? It is not that the will earns or necessitates merit; the will is not the cause of merit as we have seen because only grace is the cause of merit (De Veritate 6.2). How then does Aquinas reconcile grace and free will in respect to virtue? The key is in his conception of predestination and how that facilitates human freedom. One often finds commentators on Aquinas’ doctrine of free will trying to ‘make room’ for freedom in the imposing shadow of a predestined end. But free will is not collateral damage in Aquinas’ doctrine of predestination. At least, Aquinas is at pains to show that freedom is not only left intact alongside predestination, but that true freedom can only exist within the context of predestination.

3.5.1 Participation in the Divine Life through Virtue

Through a life of virtue, the human person participates in the Divine life of God. In respect to the virtues, Aquinas speaks of two kinds of participation: one which might be called analogical, and the other, anagogical. The infused virtues participate in the Divine life analogically while the acquired virtues participate in the Divine life anagogically. While Aquinas does not use these particular terms to describe the difference between acquired and infused virtue, they provide an apt explanation as to why, if the acquired virtues are not virtues properly speaking, they should be called virtues at all. The analogical predication of the infused virtues thus posits some real relation to eternal beatitude, while anagogical predication—which Aquinas speaks of in reference to a trope in Scriptural interpretation—posits a virtue which is such by way of being a temporal sign in the “earthly city” of the eternal “city of God”. Thus those virtues of indebtedness which pertain to our earthly existence, point more perfectly to that

185 DQV 1.7.ad5: Ad quintum dicendum, quod per actum scientiae, aut alicuius talis habitus, potest homo mereri, secundum quod imperatur a voluntate, sine qua nullum est meritum.
which is to come. Piety, for example, by which we honour our homeland and parents, is a sign of our heavenly city which awaits.

It is commonly laid upon men's souls that they hear with delight the praises of their homeland and of their parents. The praises of their homeland, that they may hasten to return to her; the praises of their parents, that they, by imitating them, may not become degenerate. But what is our homeland? That homeland for which we strive is a heavenly homeland. Wherefore, the Apostle state at Hebrews 13:14, “For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.”

Analogical participation, by way of the infused virtues, is that participation by which the creature becomes formed in the image of God (imago Dei). Such a likeness of the creature to God is not, to be sure, a univocal likeness, but rather “by the analogy of some kind of imitation” (secundum analogiam alicuius imitationis; ST I, q.44, a.3).

Although creatures do not acquire a natural likeness to God according to similitude of species, as a man begotten is like to the man begetting, they do however attain a likeness to Him, inasmuch as they represent the divine idea, as a material house is like the idea of the house in the architect’s mind.

Given that the analogia entis refers in Aquinas’ system to something both linguistic and ontological or real, the divine similitude attained by the infused virtues is a real, albeit analogical, likeness to God. The virtuous person properly speaking—the person, for example, who possesses the virtues of indebtedness and gratitude of the infused kind—truly does share in the Divine Life. The acquired virtues, however, while perfecting the human person for life in the “earthly city”, do not perfect him for the “City of God”.

A man’s nature does not suffice for him to be a participant of this [heavenly] city; he must be elevated by the grace of God. For it is manifest that the virtues that are man’s as a participant in this city cannot be acquired by him through his natural powers; hence they are not caused by our acts but are infused in us as a divine gift. But the virtues of a man as man, insofar as he is a citizen of the earthly city,

186 From the introduction to Aquinas’ sermon, “Beata Gens”, given for the Feast of All Saints: *inditum est communiter animis hominum, ut delectabiliter audiant laudes patriae suae et parentum suorum. laudes patriae, ut ad eam redire festinent: laudes parentum, ut eos imitando non sint degeneres. Sed quae est patria nostra? patria ad quam tendimus est coelestis patria. unde apostolus heb. xiii, 14: non habemus hic manentem civitatem, sed futuram inquirimus.”

187 ST I, q.44, a.3, ad.1: *licet creaturae non pertingant ad hoc quod sint similes Deo secundum suam naturam, similitudine speciei, ut homo genitus homini generanti; attingunt tamen ad eius similitudinem secundum repraesentationem rationis intellectae a Deo, ut domus quae est in materia, domui quae est in mente artificis.*
do not exceed the capacity of human nature; hence, a man can acquire
them through his natural capacities, by his own acts, which is
evident.\textsuperscript{188}

The earthly city, and its perfection through the acquired virtues, stands as a sign—
anagogically, in other words—of the heavenly city of God.\textsuperscript{189} The acquired virtues are thus
anagological; inasmuch as they do not—cannot—lead to friendship with God, they do serve as
both concrete reminders of our deep yearning for God, and as signs of the soul’s natural
orientation towards the good in general, which flows from God: “the virtue of man as a good
man is not the same as the virtue of man as good citizen. But man is not only a citizen of the
earthly city, but is also a participant in the heavenly city of Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{190}

With this in mind, we can start drawing a distinction between kinds of gratitude and
virtues of indebtedness: there are those which, while anagogically pointing to the city of God,
perfect the human person in reference to the earthly city only. On the other hand, infused
gratitude is an expression of gratitude to God and consists of praise, worship and sacrifice found
in the practice of religion. This is why, gratitude, as an acquired virtue “falling short” (\textit{ab eo
deficiens}) of the virtue of religion is perfected in the virtue of religion which is the virtue by
which we show thanksgiving (\textit{gratiarum actio}) to God. Article seventeen of question eighty
three, identifies \textit{prayer} as being the principal way through which we show gratitude to God, and
thereby make an ascent towards him.

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Ad hoc autem quod homo huius civitatis sit particeps, non sufficit sua natura, sed ad hoc elevatur per
gratiam Dei. Nam manifestum est quod virtutes illae quae sunt hominis in quantum est huius civitatis
particeps, non possunt ab eo acquiri per sua naturalia; unde non causantur ab actibus nostris, sed ex
divino munere nobis infunduntur. Virtutes autem quae sunt hominis in eo quod est homo, vel in eo quod
est terrenae civitatis particeps, non excedunt facultatem humanae naturae; unde eas per sua naturalia
homo potest acquirere, ex actibus propriis: quod sic patet.}

\textsuperscript{189} It is possible, by way of conjecturing, that Aquinas based this idea of the anagogical function of virtue
in the works of Gregory of Nyssa for whom “anagogical participation” through the virtues is a sign of the
soul’s orientation to God through Christ; Aquinas is clearly familiar with Gregory’s work, and cites him
several times in his discussion of the virtues of indebtedness although he never directly cites him for this
reason. Yet a certain parity of ideas can be found here. For a discussion of anagogical participation in
Gregory, see Boersma, Hans. \textit{Embodiment and virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: an anagogical approach.}

\textsuperscript{190} \textit{De Virtutibus, q.1, a.9: non est eadem virtus hominis in quantum est bonus et hominis in quantum est
bonus civis. Homo autem non solum est civis terrenae civitatis, sed est particeps civitatis caelestis
Ierusalem.}
Hence we can speak of two modes of gratitude: gratitude to earthly benefactors (*gratitudo*) and thanksgiving to God (*gratias agentes Deo*). The latter falls under the virtue of religion, and forms the basis of Aquinas’ ecclesiological understanding of virtue, as explored in chapter five.

For now, it is helpful to keep in mind that for Aquinas, perfect, infused gratitude is directed to God. In his Commentary on 1st Thessalonians, Aquinas spells out the *triplex via* or manner in which we should show perfect gratitude: first, by acknowledging that God is the source of all our gifts (even if they should come via the hand of other creatures, since Providence directs the hearts of man to acts of generosity); secondly, our gratitude should be unceasing, since prayer and praise itself should be unceasing, as St Paul instructs us; and thirdly, perfect gratitude is universal: it recognises that everything is *gift*, and so gives thanks for everyone and everything: gratitude makes use of all the circumstances in which the virtue is exercised.\(^{191}\)

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\(^{191}\) Commentary on 1st Thessalonians, 1.1: “In treating the first point, Paul mentions three things that ought to be present in thanksgiving. First, thanksgiving should be directed to God: we give thanks to God: ‘He bestows favour and honour’ (Ps. 84:11). ‘Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights’ (Jas. 1: 17). Thanksgiving should also be unceasing or as St Paul says, always. It should also be universal, which is why Paul says, ‘for you all’; and later he adds, ‘give thanks in all circumstances.’” *Quantum ergo ad primum dicit tria, quae debent esse in gratiarum actione. Primo quod sit ordinata, scilicet ad Deum. Ideo dicit gratias agimus Deo. Ps. LXXXIII, 12: gratiam et gloriam dabit dominus. Iac. I, 17: omne datum optimum et omne donum perfectum de sursum est descendens a patre luminum. Item assidua, quia semper. Item universalis, ibi pro omnibus vobis. Infra V, 18: in omnibus gratias agite.*
CHAPTER THREE: THE GRATEFUL PERSON

4.1 The Person as Virtuous

What constitutes the notion of a grateful person for Aquinas is bound up with his notion of person in general. Gratitude is essentially the impetus towards friendship—as indeed are all the virtues in various, and specific ways. The perfection of the human person for Aquinas is realised in terms of friendship, for which purpose all of the virtues exist (ST II-II, q.106, a.1, ad.3), and in terms of divine love, which is at the same time the form of all the (infused) virtues (ST II-II, q.23, a.8). The person so perfected is necessarily a ‘grateful person’, just as he must be an ‘honest’ or ‘generous’ person at the same time. The person as grateful, however, represents the person as incipient in a specific way.

The perfection of personhood requires the virtues; there is no perfection of personhood or realisation of one’s true destiny in God without considering the person as being a person of the virtues, among which gratitude holds a distinctive and essential place. Gratitude is, for Aquinas, not simply an element of friendship which constitutes the person: gratitude or thanksgiving is, in a manner of speaking, the very beginning of friendship. It is through being grateful persons that we first orient ourselves towards the recognition that my very person is a gift, an act of love. Gratitude is that first moment when we recognise that we have been created for friendship with God, and for God through others.

The very notion of gift and gratitude is bound up for Aquinas in his understanding of what it means to be a person. The virtues of indebtedness in particular give us a picture of the human person which is both gift and invitation to communion. This picture emerges most clearly when one places Aquinas’ understanding of person within the context of his Dionysian schematic of exitus et redivitum: a going out from God and return to God. Citing Dionysius, Aquinas notes that “God turns all things to Himself because He is the cause of all”.

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192 ST II-II, q.106, a.3.
a description of the intimate relation, rooted in love, which exists between God’s ‘going out’ or diffusiveness, and the impetus of the creature to return to this source of Goodness, to which all things tend.

For Aquinas, the human person is, by nature ‘gift’. Aquinas speaks of both the gifts of nature and the gifts of grace, and the latter perfect the former. In the gift of grace, the human person is ‘divinised’ and made like God and exists in union with him: “By receiving this gratuitous gift therefore, the human person is made pleasing to God and is brought so far by the love of charity that he becomes one spirit with God so that he is in God, and God is in him.”\textsuperscript{193}

The ‘going out’ of God, the communication of himself with his creatures, is the essence of gift: the gifts of nature and the gifts of grace which bring the gifts of nature to perfection. The journey of return, the response, to this gift originates in the virtue of gratitude, and culminates in the virtue of religion through stages of participation understood by Aquinas in both a mystical and analogical way.\textsuperscript{194}

\section*{4.2 Notion of Person in General}

It perhaps goes without saying that Aquinas’ concept of person has been the subject of significant criticism in recent times for what is perceived to be his alienation of the essential character of rationality from personhood, largely stemming from his adoption of the Boethian formula of person as an ‘individual substance of a rational nature.’ At the same time, it is widely accepted today among philosophers and theologians that the notion of person is only fully realised when considered in relation to another (or, as some commentators have it, dyadically).\textsuperscript{195} Aquinas, it should be noted, has been criticised by a number of scholars for

\textsuperscript{193} Compendium Theologiae, lib. 1:214 \textit{Ille igitur per acceptum donum gratuitum efficitur Deo gratus qui usque ad hoc perducitur quod per caritatis amorem unus spiritus fiat cum Deo, quad ipse in Deo sit, et Deus in eo.}
\textsuperscript{194} It is worth noting, in support of this reading, that in all his discussions of the nature of gift and gratitude, such as the question on gratitude (q.106) and beneficence (q.33), Aquinas appeals to Dionysius as his principal source of authority.
\textsuperscript{195} Among the key proponents of this reading of the notion of person are Ratzinger, Moltmann, Buber, Barth, Balthazar and Clarke. I will be following here work done by Clarke in particular who maintains,
failing to provide a properly “dyadic account” of the human person—a common contention being that personhood in Aquinas is expressed in an exclusively Trinitarian formula, “closed off” from the creaturely experience of personhood: God is, as it were, relational within himself but it is assumed that Aquinas’ concept of Trinitarian relation does not extend outward to creatures because of his emphasis on God’s self-subistence and on the notion of substance in general.

Among these critics is Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who gave one of the more blunt indictments of the perceived shortcomings of both Aquinas, and Augustine—from whom, along with Boethius, Aquinas drew much of his inspiration—saying of them both that they were responsible for the diminishing of the person to the extent that “the whole dimension of the ‘we’ lost its place in theology”.196

Hallman and Whitehead, along with other process theologians furthermore contend that Aquinas provides a somewhat deficient notion of person so as to end with a conception of God as little more than the ‘actus purus’ and thereby as nothing more than an inert and “self-enclosed substance” without the possibility of potentiality which, Hallman contends, is required for the movement of love.197 One significant passage in particular is cited as being the consequence of this closed notion of person: in ST I-II, q.4, a.8, Aquinas seems to be claiming that the fellowship of friends is not necessary for happiness and that one can find total fulfilment in the interior contemplation of God alone. We will have no need of friends other than God in heaven.

despite the criticisms outlined below, that this view is shared by Aquinas following a “creative retrieval” of this doctrine in primary texts, particularly the Summa Theologiae.

196 Cf. Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology. Communio. Fall 1990. P. 454. The quote is taken from a lecture the Cardinal gave in 1973; in a footnote on the page to this 1990 article he attenuates his view by adding that “Today, of course, I would not judge as harshly as I did in the lecture above”, but still leaves Aquinas with a case to be answered in defending the notion of God as one person at the expense of relationality extending to the creature. The Cardinal was equally critical of Boethius, from whom Aquinas derives his definition of the person: cf. Marenbon, John, ed. The Cambridge Companion to Boethius. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. P.121, note 44. I think Ratzinger puts a case to be answered, but would suggest that the loss of “we” in Thomistic thought is largely due to his later commentators and not to Aquinas himself.

Given these criticisms, it is necessary to recover a genuine reading of the notion of person in Aquinas, since ultimately his ecclesiology and virtue theory rests on his understanding of ‘person’. If Aquinas’ notion of person is deficient in respect to the essential notion of person as relational, so too will be his ecclesiology. I will aim to show in this chapter that Aquinas’ understanding of the person, notwithstanding some difficulties in the texts, is in fact deeply relational, paving the way for a coherent ecclesiology in which gratitude and the virtues of indebtedness play a key role. I also wish to show why Aquinas begins with the Boethian definition of person, and then moves beyond it into the realm of persons as being in relation.

I wish to begin by drawing a comparison between Aquinas’ notion of person and that of Richard of St Victor (d.1173) and Bonaventure (d.1274), which are often held up in apparent opposition to Boethius’ and Aquinas’ perceived static and self-enclosed notion of person. The definition of person by Boethius, which Aquinas adopts, is “a person is an individual substance of a rational nature” (persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia). Compare this with Bonaventure’s description of the human person as being nothing less than the self-communication of God so that ‘person’ does not simply designate a ‘form’ or ‘substance’ but rather the vivifying image of God, concretised in a lived experience. As Hans Urs von Balthasar puts it, Bonaventure seeks to distinguish between individuum and persona—a distinction Boethius’ definition is not able to account for. The individuum is static and self-enclosed while the persona is, by definition, relational. Both Richard and Bonaventure use the metaphor of marriage to describe the essence of union in personhood. Aquinas’ notion of person, however, is not at odds with that of Richard or Bonaventure, and in many respects Aquinas’ notion goes further than either of these.

Richard and Bonaventure are not infrequently held up as providing better insights into the nature of person, both as the term applies to God and the human being by participation. This is because, it is maintained, both Richard and Bonaventure remove the emphasis from God’s

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self-subsistence to God’s self-communication and the self-diffusive nature of the Good and the Beautiful. This self-diffusive account of Being provides an account of the person as existentia: “a spiritual subject that earns the name person only by going out beyond itself (ex)—in God, as something relative.”

Here we find the influence of Dionysius reaching into Scholastic philosophy with the notion of person. Indeed, Richard (along with Hugo, the earlier Victorine) was largely responsible for bringing the Areopagite into mainstream philosophy and theology. The Dionysian scheme, however, is not absent in Aquinas and, as Fran O’Rourke has shown, Aquinas’ notion of person as gift and oriented to gratitude is fundamental to his doctrine of the person as gift.

For Richard of St Victor, drawing on Dionysius, the notion of person is bound up closely with the notion of friendship and love. For Dionysius, all things that exist participate in friendship—even rocks and snails—since all things derive their being from the one Life; it is this Life which gives “peace to all things”—that is to say, harmony. Thus, for Dionysius, friendship describes the state of being in harmony with, or having a proper alignment between a thing’s nature and the Source of that nature.

In Book Three of The Trinity, Richard identifies Divine Personhood with love and friendship, in which human personhood is reflected. Again, we find this theme explored and developed in chapter XVII of The Mystical Ark where Richard equates the notion of person with Dionysian harmony, the orienting of “outer person” to the “inner person”, and the orienting of the “inner person” to God. Richard is alluding here with this reference to the inner and outer person to 2nd Corinthians 4:16: “So we do not lose heart; though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.” This inner person is the locus of friendship because it is what participates in the beautiful. For Richard, participation in God means participation in the Beautiful, which is convertible with the Good, but which extends the notion of the Good from something appetitive to something relational.

202 Divine Names, 724A ff.
Now your soul is a spiritual nature. Indeed your soul is either beautiful or deformed by its will. A good will makes your soul beautiful; but it becomes deformed by a bad will. Its goodness makes it beautiful; its malevolence makes it deformed. From these assertions we may consider what the figure of a spiritual substance is. If the Lord grants it, the same form of perfection can undoubtedly form your soul and my soul.203

Norris W. Clarke especially maintains that such a dyadic account of the person is present though not explicitly expressed in Aquinas and therefore is one that must be creatively retrieved.204 What Clarke has in mind when he speaks of creative retrieval is a hermeneutic of the primary text that allows one to move beyond a merely compartmentalised reading of those texts. The nuanced language of Aquinas, typical of scholastic practice in general, is not simply a detached tool for framing concepts but is also expressive of a historical context—one which is concerned about a great many things, not least of all the pitfalls of heresy. Understanding Aquinas is not then simply a question of decoding the minutiae of technical language in reference to an abstract idea, but found in embracing the totality of Aquinas’ thought so as to retrieve a faithful reading of the entire content as it relates above all to his intentions.205 Indeed, an author’s intention is not always physically present in a text but which nonetheless supervenes upon that text. (This is not to say that Clarke is unaware of the risks involved in trying to separate the text from intention, but he is insistent that such a risk is necessary to bring Aquinas’ thought to life).

So while, on the surface, it seems that, in following Boethius’ account of the person as being an individual substance of a rational nature, Aquinas has committed himself to a static and inert notion of person, one which eliminates the ‘we’ from the notion of person and by

203 De Trinitate, VI.21
204 Such a retrieval should not be understood to be a revisionist “reading between the lines” of Aquinas or an exercise in wishful thinking. By “Creative retrieval” Clarke has a method in mind, one which involves trying to make explicit what is implicit in the texts. Any hypothesis derived in this way must then be subject to multiple cross-referencing in the texts to establish that it is part of the originary thinking of Aquinas. The litmus test of an insight so retrieved is that it will help us see a coherent pattern in Aquinas’ thinking.
extension theology, and so undermines the finality of the creature, Clarke is in fact confident that we can retrieve from Aquinas’ philosophy of person,

...a powerful notion of the person as self-possessing, master of one’s dominus sui, self-possessing and self-communicating and self-transcending, that notion of the person, and then the notion of an integrating vision of the whole universe as a vast community of beings, all participating from the source in God, the notion of the universe as a community where nobody can really be alienated because we are in a community, a kind of connatural friendship, as St. Aquinas says, with all beings.206

Balthasar’s preference for Richard’s and Bonaventure’s notion of person, and his handling of Aquinas’ notion is somewhat more critical than Clarke’s. Perhaps one of Balthasar’s more influential contributions is his interpretation of the notion of being in Aquinas, which he develops in the face of the perceived shortcomings of Aquinas’ treatment of the person.207 For Balthasar, being is dynamic in the very act of being given: gift is relational in and of itself. As such, the person is radically dependent on God; this radical dependence is inscribed in the very essence of the person who reaches out in turn to the source of that gift. This is what it means to be.208 But it is precisely because esse is gift that it is at once ‘total fullness and total nothingness’: total fullness because it flows from the abundant generosity of God and nothingness because it is of itself, apart from this source, nothing.209

To put it briefly, the question of the nature of person was, since antiquity, brought about by the emergence of Trinitarian theology. In what way are the Three Persons to be understood

207 Schindler, David. Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Dramatic Structure of Truth: A Philosophical Investigation. New York: Fordham University Press, 2004. P.29ff. It perhaps goes without saying that Thomas uses the term “being” in various senses; it is both an equivocal and analogical term as he explains in the De Ente et Essentia. Wippel identifies at least four classes of the use of the term “being” in the writings of Thomas (See Wippel, John F.. The metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas: from finite being to uncreated being. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000, p.197,ff). In the first and weakest sense of the term is the class of being which exists only in the order of thought as negations and privations, such as “blindness”. A second, related, class of being mixes the positive with negation and privation, such as generation and corruption. A third kind of being, while not mixed with negation, does not exist through itself (per se) but is found in another subject. This class includes the properties of secondary substance (“man”, “horse”), quality and quantity. Finally, Thomas speaks of “esse” properly speaking, “a firm and solid being” which exists per se and again is identified with substance, namely primary substance (“this man,” or “this horse”).
209 Healy, P.47

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as *persons*? How are we to understand this word person so as to make sense of the inner life of God and, by extension, the hypostasis of Christ and then finally the relationship of God with the created human person? Again, in general terms, it could be said that the medieval solutions to the question took two divergent paths: that of relationality and that of emanation.210

Tertullian’s phrase “we see in Jesus that two states are not confused but conjoined in one person, God and man” was a starting point for much of the later discussion about what it means to be a person. The statement was aimed at redressing the isolation of Christ from God posed by the Monarchians, and culminating in the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon (451AD) which defined that Christ was one person with two natures. The decrees of Chalcedon were also aimed at redressing the errors of Nestorius, so that we find that the early tracing out of the doctrine of the person was driven by a need to clarify a central theme in theology, the centrality of which is evidenced by so many distortions and heresies.

So the problem facing the Scholastic theologian was in navigating on the one hand between Sabellianism—in which the notion of the Three Persons is merely a modal distinction of convenience—and Arianism, according to which the Father is God but the Son and Spirit are not and so genuine relationality is destroyed. At the heart of these theological disputes was the very notion of person itself.

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210 We could consider Aquinas as a paradigm of relationality while the theme of emanation is recurrent and central to the theology of Bonaventure (a development which was also the topic of Pope Benedict XVI’s general audience on March 17, 2010). For a full discussion of these developments in medieval theology see Friedman, Russell L., ed. *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
4.3 Aquinas’ use of the Boethian Formula

It is with this backdrop in mind that, in his theological tractate Against Eutyches and Nestorius, Boethius arrives at his definition of the person which Aquinas will use as a starting point for his own thinking. Boethius works out his notion of person after several careful steps and recognises from the outset that defining person is no easy task (II.83) but at the very least begins with the assumption that the definition must include nature, since “person is a substrate of nature”. Next, Boethius classifies natures as being either substantial or accidental; and since a person—an integral whole—is not brought about among accidents but exists as a substance, the definition begins to take shape that the person is a substantial kind of nature.

But what kind of substance is the person? Boethius considers the many different kinds of substance there are: animate and inanimate; rational and irrational; universal and particular. It follows, Boethius maintains, that person cannot be predicated of a universal, but only of a particular. “Humanity”, for example, cannot bear the term “person” but only those individuals—Cicero, Plato—in whom human nature subsists (II.85).

There is an inconsistency here in Boethius which has led certain critics to dismiss his definition out of hand. The problem appears to be twofold: in the first instance, Boethius seems to put God in a genus of persons alongside human persons, since the definition of individual substance would have to apply to the three Persons of the Trinity too. Boethius does in fact attempt to avoid this problem by making an apophatic appeal to God’s “ultra substantiam”: “When we speak of God, we seem to denote a substance; but it is a substance that is supersubstantial. When we say of Him, “He is just,” we mention a quality, not an accidental quality—rather a substantial and, in fact, a supersubstantial quality. For God is not one thing because He is, and another thing because He is just; with Him to be just and to be God are one and the same. So when we say, “He is great or the greatest,” we seem to predicate quantity, but it is a quantity similar to this substance which we have declared to be supersubstantial; for with Him to be great and to be God are all one” (De Trinitate, 4:19).
In attempting to avoid this first difficulty, a second more serious one emerges, for Boethius must also now maintain that person is said of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a purely relational or modal and not in any substantial manner. This is because God cannot be three persons if person is to be understood as a substance since this would imply a form of tritheism: there cannot be three substances in God.\footnote{Bradshaw, David. The Opuscula sacra: Boethius & Theology in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Boethius}. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. P.118ff.} Again, Boethius relies on an equivocal and apophatic understanding of substance to circumvent this difficulty.

Despite these problematic conclusions with Boethius’ definition of person, Aquinas is at pains to defend the title in question twenty nine of the \textit{prima pars}—and one might reasonably wonder why. Balthasar notes that the definition will give Aquinas “all sorts of difficulties in applying it to the triune God”.\footnote{Balthasar, Hans Urs von. \textit{On the Concept of Person. Communio}. Spring 1986. P.22} Aquinas is clearly seen to be at work in article two cleaning up some of the confusion in terminology: Boethius at times conflates person, hypostasis and substance; he also shifts between the use of \textit{subsistence} and \textit{substance} leading to some confusion; and admits himself that his project seems bound to fail on account of some of the seemingly intractable difficulties his thinking leads him to.\footnote{For a succinct discussion of a number of these difficulties, cf. Arlig, Andrew. \textit{The Metaphysics of Individuals in the Opuscula sacra.} in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Boethius}. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.} But he has recognised a real need to provide some rational access to the revelation that God is three persons in one God.

But—so the charges go—while Aquinas may have cleared up at least some of Boethius’ difficulties by providing an internal coherence to the notion of person in God as being three subsisting relations, his insistence that relationality in God is incommunicable seems to lock God off within himself (ST I, q.29, a.3, ad.4). The persons of the Trinity are in relation with one another, but cut off from creation and the human race. So, it may seem that Balthasar’s criticism is not unfounded: there remain a great many difficulties with this account of \textit{relational person} as applied to God and analogically the creature. Question twenty nine does not seem to leave the reader with a totally satisfactory account of the person as relational by nature. In fact, in article four, Aquinas does indeed seem to deny that the created person (both human and
angelic) is relational by nature: “relation is contained in the signification of divine person, but not in that of an angelic or of a human person.”

Notwithstanding, Clarke notes that Aquinas does insist that “[positive] names applied to God signify His relationship towards creatures: thus in the words, ‘God is good,’ we mean, God is the cause of goodness in things” (ST I, q.13, a.2). The question remains, however, whether or not Aquinas goes far enough in establishing that the person is by nature only fully realised within the ‘we’ and not merely as an effect of a cause as the foregoing might suggest.

We should also not lose sight of the fact that for the medieval theologian there is a very real methodological concern involved in setting out the parameters of what it means to be a person or to be in a relationship. In fact, this methodological concern rests with defining things in general. For example, in Book VI of the Commentary on the Metaphysics, Aquinas explains what is at stake in the effort to know something in itself. In the first place, there is no science of accidentals (among which Aristotle places relation) but only of being itself. The definition of a thing must capture what it is as it persists through time and change. A dynamic relationship is not stable enough to count as the basis upon which something can be defined: a relationship is between substances. Accidents inhere in subsisting entities and so it is to the thing itself we must go (as the phenomenologists would say) in order to uncover the notion of person. It is therefore evident, in examining the way in which things are defined, that the definition of person must go beyond the accidental and singular: singulars cannot be the subject of definition, as the Scholastic maxim goes. This is precisely the objection Aquinas sets out to answer in his treatment of the person; the very first objection of question twenty nine notes that since nothing singular can be subject to definition, and since the word person denotes something singular, the word person cannot therefore be defined. In his reply, Aquinas concedes that indeed singulars cannot be defined; but general things he says pertaining to singulars can be defined. Thus it is clear from the very outset of his treatment of the notion of person, he is conscious of the fact that he is providing a general description of what pertains to all who can lay claim to the name,

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214 ST I, q.29, a.4, ad.4: licet in significatione personae divinae contineatur relatio, non autem in significatione angelicae personae vel humanae.
“person”. But there is a limit to this definition, and so it should not be understood as being the end of the matter: it certainly isn’t for Aquinas.

We must look for something more embracing than the individual, something which will account for the person being “what is most perfect in nature.” The person is being in a special and exalted sense among other notions of being. Hence in article three of question twenty nine, Aquinas picks out the feature of person as a “hypostasis [that is] distinct by reason of dignity”. The very definition of ‘human dignity’ is, for Aquinas, an indication of the relationality of the person. One has dignity in other words in reference to one’s proper end, which is friendship with God. It is on account of this destiny of friendship in God that the human creature lays claim to a certain inalienable and essential dignity (ST III, q.4, a.1). But recognising the person as being endowed with *dignity* does not interfere with the person’s *autonomy*. One is free to choose to enter into loving relationships. Dignity describes the potential each person has to enter into communion with another—and ultimately with God—without doing so at the expense of the person’s moral freedom. We do not lose our dignity when we refuse the offer of friendship, and that same dignity guarantees the possibility of a change of heart. But for Aquinas, the concept of relationship—of the moral kind, including love and friendship—is not something that can simply be defined into existence, or counted as a part of the essence of the created person.

Even so, Balthasar is not satisfied that this identification of person with dignity is sufficient to safeguard the notion of person from sliding into subjectivism. In fact, he holds High Scholasticism responsible for losing sight of the true theological meaning of person-in-relation and for setting in motion a subjectivist notion of person that would persist until at least the 19th century.

In this way the paradoxical had to come about—that after a personless idealism met its end in Hegel, the popular atheistic materialism of Feuerbach had to rediscover the elementary fact that there simply cannot be a single person, existing within himself, but that existence as a person comes about only in the relationship between the *I* and *Thou*. The atheistic materialist was the one who reached beyond
Augustine to the insight about what man is, in Christian terms, the personal imago Trinitatis.\textsuperscript{215}

\subsection*{4.3.1 Being as Self-Communication}

Despite the strong criticisms, Clarke is convinced that an equally strong answer can be made to them on Aquinas’ behalf. It is true, he notes, that “on a superficial reading” there are no explicit treatments by Aquinas of the person as being-in-relation beyond the accidental consideration; but, through a “creative retrieval” of all the relevant texts, Aquinas’ thinking does indeed provide us with a notion of real being that is “intrinsically active and self-communicating”.\textsuperscript{216}

In fact, Norris maintains, the very nature of being itself for Aquinas is self-communicating as can be seen in key passages in the Summa which illustrate the doctrine bonum diffusivum sui—that the good is, by its very nature, self-diffusive. One such passage Clarke appeals to is question five, article four of the prima pars in which Aquinas explains that since goodness is desired by all creatures by nature, and since the desire for goodness has the aspect of an end (\emph{ratio finis}), it follows that the cause of this desire is goodness itself. For any cause always brings about a likeness of itself in the thing caused. Appealing to Dionysius, Aquinas uses this principle of the likeness of an effect to its cause to maintain that all created things participate in the Goodness of God (ST I, q.93, a.2, ad.1). God’s goodness is thus not simply ‘inert’ but is a dynamic which draws all things back into itself. Being made in the ‘image of God’ is thus already, by the very nature of God’s dynamic goodness, the essence of a relationship which draws creatures back to God as the source of both their being and their desire for goodness.

Similarly, in the \textit{Summa Contra Gentiles}, Aquinas states that from the fact of the existence of a thing, it is active (SCG I.43) since all things are, in their very nature, ordered to an end—which for the created person is beatitude in God, much in the way as described in

\textsuperscript{215} Balthasar, note 12 ibid. P.24

\textsuperscript{216} Clarke, Norris. \textit{Person, Being & St Thomas}. Communio. Winter 1992. P.603
psalm 142: “I stretch out my arms to you, I stretch out my soul, like a land without water”.

Beings are naturally endowed, so to speak, for the pursuit of this end in the constitution of the dignity of their very nature: “Every substance exists for the sake of its operations” (ST Ia.105.5). Citing Etienne Gilson, Clarke notes, “Not: to be, then to act, but: to be is to act.”217

The operation of a substance is for the purpose of its end. As noted earlier, habits—including the habits of virtue—place the human person in potency towards a certain way of acting. The person is thus actualised in virtuous acts since all virtue is, by definition, oriented towards relationship and friendship. Since human dignity is only fully realised in the virtuous life, the fullness of personhood is thus relational. Gratitude and gift are thus not simply elements of what it means to human; they are essential. They constitute, together, the essence of relationship.

The theological virtues and virtues under justice, including gratitude, are all ordered towards another. Thus, the actualisation of the person consists in relations with others, and most perfectly in a relationship with God, who is the end of all virtuous action. The route Aquinas takes to this conclusion, that all the virtues direct us to activity in God, is through noting first of all that the form of all the virtues is love and are so directed to God thereby (ST II-II, q.23, a.8); and secondly, that the exemplar of the virtues, the theological virtues, all have their end in God and likewise direct us to him (ST I-II, q.62, a.1). One sees this principle at work clearly in the virtue of gratitude, in which the benefactor stands “in the relation of a principle” to the very being of a person who is endowed as given (ST II-II, q.106, a.3).

The meaning of being good is therefore derived, not only from the objective goodness of being itself, but from the goodness derived from the actualisation of being, which in the case of the human person is found in the virtuous life lived in communion with others. The good—which is convertible with, though more extensive than, being—is, by its very nature self-communicating; it possesses what Clarke calls “an innate fecundity and generosity” which is evidenced all around us in nature. So, for Aquinas, the perfection of any created thing is

realised through the actualisation of its *esse* which is, according to Gerald Phelan, “not a state, it is an act and not as a static definable object of conception.”

It follows that, for Aquinas, finite created being, pours over naturally into action for two reasons: (1) because it is poor, i.e., lacking the fullness of existence, and so it strives to enrich itself as much as its nature allows from the richness of those around it; but (2) even more profoundly because it is rich, endowed with its own richness of existence, however slight this may be, which it tends naturally to communicate and share with others.

It is on this last point that we find something of a convergence of Balthasar and Clarke: in the ‘total fullness and total nothingness’—or in Clarke’s words, the richness and poverty of created being. For both Balthasar and Clarke, being is by its nature self-communicating and as such has the character of *vocation*, or as Balthasar prefers to say, the character of a *mission*. This missiological and vocational character of the human person is best described in Aquinas’ thinking as having its impetus in *gratitude*; for it is the grateful person who engages in acts of thanksgiving to God and thereby enacts the *going-out* towards the source of being.

Much of the inspiration for Balthasar’s retrieval of the missiological concept of person is found in the work of Hegel. It was Hegel, he believed, who helped bring an end to the so-called *static notion* of the person. What Hegel represents, at least for Balthasar, is a return to the concept of being as *teleological*. Hegel’s concern with redeeming the teleological nature of being comes about through a dialogue with Kant who, while open to natural teleology for heuristic reasons, had been critical of the general application of teleology as a way of demonstrating the existence of God or even divine purposiveness in things. Hegel, however, argued that all living things have at least an internal purposiveness and argued that Kant’s limitation of knowledge of such purposiveness brought about the “end of relation.” Being for Hegel, according to Balthasar’s reading of him, is diffusive on account of its participation in its own purposiveness; this for Balthasar represents an end to the static and inward-facing notion of being brought about by the limitations of the Scholastic subjective treatment of person. For

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218 Clarke, p.605
219 Ibid.
220 cf. Note 16
Balthasar, the missiological notion of person allows him to go a step further beyond the limitations of Hegel’s logic and to unite being and the person to Love.

The challenge facing any discourse on God that attempts to go beyond the simple affirmation of his existence is to avoid either, on one side, ascribing to human logic the capacity to express adequately the divine logic—as Hegel tried to do—or, on the other, upholding an extreme apophatic theology, which, in striving to free God from the clumsy web of human concepts, ends up not in the Gregorian “radiant darkness,” but in the Plotinean opacity within which nothing can be said about the One because the One is not.222

Balthasar hoped to find a middle ground between logic and the extreme apophatic theology of Dionysius which he believed threatened to negate God altogether. He found it in both the fullness and nothingness of being, for it is here that love emerges (in the form of gift and gratitude—which is the meeting of fullness and nothingness); “the intrinsic self-diffusiveness of the Good turns into Love, self-communicating Love.”223 Thus, since God—the source of all being—is himself Love, that end to which the person is, and for which it exists, is love. Clarke, rightly in my view, recognises that the missiological and dynamic orientation of the human person to God is not absent in Aquinas for whom love is the very essence of human agency; as Aquinas himself writes, “love (amor) is naturally the first act of the will and appetite; for which reason all the other appetite movements presuppose love, as their root and origin.”224

In fact, much of what Balthasar thought was lacking in Aquinas in fact seems to emerge from an analysis of his understanding of the interplay between grace, gift and gratitude.

4.4 The Interplay of Grace & Nature

For Aquinas, the perfection of human nature is not the addition of something to human nature as such; but since human nature is essentially relational, the perfection of human nature is the perfection of it as relational. The human person is naturally capable of friendship, but not

223 cf. Note 17, P.606
224 ST 1, q.20, a.1: Unde amor naturaliter est primus actus voluntatis et appetitus. Et propter hoc, omnes alii motus appetitivi praesupponunt amorem, quasi primam radicem.
naturally capable of producing friendship with God, because friendship itself is a gift and not simply an endowment of nature. The possession of the virtue of charity, which is the cause of friendship, is thus the possession of a relationship, a dynamic moving towards God through participation, as Aquinas explains in *De Virtutibus.*

Charity is not a virtue of man considered in himself, but rather of man considered as becoming, through participation in grace, like to God and the Son of God, according to which it is written (*1 John* 3:1); Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God.\(^{225}\)

Metaphorically, we can see this dynamic at work even in human relationships: we are capable of friendship with others, but not capable of demanding or coercing genuine friendship from others according to our whims and desires. The friendship between God and the human person is a two-way relationship; it involves both the free act of God and the free act of man: “friendship consists in loving rather than in being loved. Now charity is a kind of friendship. Therefore it consists in loving rather than in being loved.”\(^{226}\) Friendship with God (not simply the friendship of God) is not simply the act of God at the expense of human freedom or conversely the act of a human at the expense of the freedom of God. The one loved must freely love in return in order for there to exist anything in the order of mutual friendship.\(^{227}\) There is, nonetheless, no parity between God’s love and human love; but such a parity is made possible through the creature’s participation in Divine Love, which God makes possible through the gift of his own initiating love.

\(^{225}\) *De Virtutibus,* ad.15: *caritas non est virtus hominis in quantum est homo, sed in quantum per participationem gratiae fit Deus et filius Dei, secundum illud Ioan. Ill, 1: videte qualem caritatem dedit nobis pater, ut filii Dei nominemur et simus.*

\(^{226}\) *ST II-II, q.27, a.1:* *magis existit amicitia in amare quam in amari. Sed caritas est amicitia quaedam. Ergo caritas magis consistit in amare quam in amari.*

\(^{227}\) Aquinas does consider the possibility of extending friendship even to our enemies (*ST II-II, q.23, a.1, ad.2*). Here, Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of friendships: that of mutual friendship, which exists between those who love each other; and the friendship of charity, which extends even to our enemies. The friendship which is extended to us by God in grace is of the first order, which opens us up to reciprocal friendship with God: “He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him [*1 John 4:16*]. Now charity is the love of God. Therefore, for the same reason, every love makes the beloved to be in the lover, and vice versa.” (*ST I-II, q.28, a.2*): *qui monet in caritate, in Deo monet, et Deus in eo. Caritas autem est amor Dei. Ergo, eadem ratione, quilibet amor facit amatum esse in amante, et e conversa.*
While the ability to realise a chosen course of action is not always in the power of the created agent says Aquinas, the *choice* of any course of action “is always in a man’s power.”\(^{228}\)

The love of man for God is not simply a passive openness to God, as though grace is some kind of ontological object transplanted into nature with or without the knowledge or choice of the recipient. In the *De Veritate* (q.28, a.3) Aquinas asks, “Does the justification of the sinner require free choice?” To which he answers in the affirmative; the work of grace requires a turning-toward (*conversio*) grace on the part of the creature. Grace does not eliminate free choice, but sets it free by removing the obstacles to it. This is not to say that the agent acts independently of God in the exercise of free will; grace itself makes this free choice possible; both operating and cooperating grace act with, and upon, free will so that neither God nor the creature is excluded from the mutual process of *theosis* (ST I-II, q.111, a.2). The very definition of the person therefore is centred on a participatory freedom.

This is why, I believe, Aquinas is reluctant to simply *define* the person as *relational* in the way that Richard and Bonaventure had, and in the way that Balthasar et al suppose he should have. In so doing—that is, defining the person as relational, and by nature in relationship with God—one would run a very real and perhaps inevitable risk of placing a necessity on God to honour such a nature. If true friendship with God were the very definition of the human person, such a friendship would have to be constituted by a debt of nature (*debitum naturae*). Any such friendship—that imposed by nature—would not, consequently, be a genuine friendship at all. A relationship must include choice if it is to be free and loving. Defining a person into such a relationship brings an end to the gratuity of such a friendship.

But friendship with God is both the work of free will and the work of God’s grace which does not and cannot fall under the debt owed to nature (*De Veritate*, q.23, a.6, ad.3) but rather under the debt of love (*debitum amicitiae*). If it were a debt of nature, everyone *by necessity* would be in a natural state of friendship with God and free will would be eliminated in

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\(^{228}\) *De Veritate*, q.24, a.1, ad.1: *in opere hominis duo est invenire: scilicet electionem operum, et haec semper in hominis potestate consistit; et operum gestionem sive executionem, et haec non semper in potestate hominis est, sed divina providentia gubernante, propositionem hominis ad finem quandoque perductur, quandoque vero non.*
both God and the human person. There is something genuinely contingent, in the sense of being free, in the notion of relationship. Part of what it means to be human—in a relationship with God—involves choice, and is not simply a matter of definition. Such choice closes the bridge between nature and grace. This is Aquinas’ concern; and why, I believe, he begins with the Boethian definition of person as *substance*, before going on to explore the notion of person as participating in relationships as a matter of friendship and choice.

There is at the same time a certain *natural* relationship between God and creatures, insofar as the human person has a *natural desire* for the good. Through the infused virtues, God adds to this natural desire, a supernatural desire for the things of God and for union with God himself. This elevated kind of relationship with God cannot simply be defined into reality; it remains a possibility for the human person without absolute necessity. What is necessary, is that the human person can only be truly satisfied in friendship with God, but that satisfaction is not an inevitability. Personhood stands at the threshold of possibility. And by extension, it is possible to damage our personhood if we make the wrong choices in life.

This can be clearly seen in Aquinas’ consideration of the possibility of extending friendship even to our enemies or those who do not love in return (ST II-II, q.23, a.1, ad.2) without reciprocation: the unrequited variety of love. Here, Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of friendships: that of mutual friendship, which exists between those who love each other; and the friendship of charity, which extends even to our enemies. The friendship which is extended to us by God in grace is of the first order, which opens us up to the possibility of reciprocal friendship with God: “He that abides in charity abides in God, and God in him [1 John 4:16]. Now charity is the love of God. Therefore, for the same reason, every love makes the beloved to be in the lover, and vice versa.”230 True reciprocal friendship is based on mutual love (*mutua amatio*) and not simply on well-wishing (*benevolentia*) which one could have for an enemy or an indifferent person; but true friendship requires some kind of mutual, reciprocal

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229 Commentary on 2nd Corinthians, 5-2:160.
230 ST I-II, q.28, a.2: *qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet, et Deus in eo. Caritas autem est amor Dei. Ergo, eadem ratione, quilibet amor facit amatum esse in amante, et e converso.*
Both kinds of love result in two very different kinds of relationship. God indeed loves everyone; but this does not automatically necessitate the relationship of love between creature and God, because human freedom remains a constant dynamic in the very notion of the person. While God initiates friendship with the creature by an act of grace, the creature must respond in an act of gratitude. Personhood, or at least its fulfilment and elevation, is thus not simply a metaphysical construct; it is a dynamic work of virtue: it is the complementarity of gift and gratitude. The work of grace is such that it can remove an obstacle (prohibens) to the mutual self-communication of friendship—that is, between God and the human person. Grace does not ‘create’ friendship as though it were some object; grace rather opens the way to friendship on the part of the human person and makes the soul worthy of such friendship.

4.4.1 Justification by Grace

Aquinas never wrote a treatise on nature and grace as such, in a way that might give us his explicit thoughts on how these two realities are in relation to each other. However, as Torrell notes, this does not mean that they can be considered, in reference to the human person at least, separately. While it is necessary to consider each as distinct realities, they are at the same time bound up in each other and we derive an understanding of the one in reference to the other. It is for this reason that Aquinas begins his treatment of grace in the prima secundae partis immediately following and in reference to questions relating to human acts and the human person’s last end.

The interplay of grace and nature thereafter become integral, in the secunda secundae partis, in the treatment of the virtues especially where he teaches that the human creature cannot

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231 ST II-II, q.23, a.1: Sed nec benevolentia sufficit ad rationem amicitiae, sed requiritur quaedam mutua amatio, quia amicus est amico amicus. Talis autem mutua benevolentia fundatur super aliqua communicatione.

232 ST II-II, q.26, a.3.

virtuously fulfil the precepts of the law without grace. Indeed, there is a progression in Aquinas’ thinking on the relationship between nature and grace and even a certain hesitancy in his Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard to commit to one of the various positions he considers, for the reasons given above. By the time he is writing the Summa Theologiae however, “Aquinas seeks to justify his position more amply by emphasising that creation in grace is required by a verse in Ecclesiastes (7:29), according to which ‘God made man upright.’”

In other words, God created man in a state of ‘original justice’ in which his lower powers were perfectly subject to reason. This state of original justice was conferred on Adam and Eve through the gift of grace. Subsequent to original sin, and the loss of original innocence, we need regain what has been lost of the state of original justice similarly through the restorative action of grace.

For Aquinas, the virtues are integral to the perfection of human nature. In other words, the acquired virtues are integral to and perfect the human person in his natural state, while the infused virtues perfect him according to his participation in the Divine Nature with God. This distinction in Aquinas corresponds to his use of the terms ‘effectus naturae’ and ‘effectus gratiae.’

The effectus naturae correspond to the acquired virtues while the effectus gratiae correspond to the infused virtues. It is evident therefore that understanding Aquinas’ use of nature must be the departure point for understanding his distinction between nature and participation in the Divine Nature, or between the acquired virtues and the infused virtues.

It is not possible to separate Aquinas’ notion of nature—and by extension the notion of grace—from the notion of ‘end’. End, or finality, in turn can likewise only be understood in

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234 ST I-II, q109, a..4.
235 Note 1, ibid. p165.
236 ST I-II, q81, a2.
237 ST I-II, q114.a7.
238 “In some places in his work Aquinas speaks of a distinction in God’s action between the effectus naturae and the effectus gratiae. There is a division between grace and nature, although both refer to God’s action with respect to creatures. The effectus naturae embraces the work of creation, by which creatures are established in their proper nature. The effectus gratiae is something additional, not in itself something part of nature. Grace is not in itself a gift of creation but a gift beyond the natural endowment of creatures, enabling the (human) creature to reach God beyond its natural power.” Velde, Rudi A. te.. Aquinas on God: the ‘divine science’ of the Summa Theologiae. Oxford: Ashgate, 2006. p148
239 This distinction can be clearly seen in ST I-II, q63, a2 for example.
terms of the Dionysian doctrine of participation, which Aquinas makes his own. The virtues (both acquired and infused) thus bring the human person into conformity with that end: the acquired virtues orient the person to the natural end of human nature, while the infused virtues, under the impetus of grace, orient the person to the participation in the Divine Nature.

4.5 Human Nature in Aquinas

To get an accurate idea of the notion of person in Aquinas, a person motivated by gratitude and love, it is necessary to first come to terms with this Dionysian concept of nature and participation, as Fran O’Rourke has shown. I begin by adopting Thomas White’s definition of nature as he understands it to be in Aquinas: “Let us take ‘nature’ to designate the essential determination of a created reality as it is constituted in existence such that it can normally accomplish certain actions by its own intrinsic powers that tend toward such actions, and such that it behaves according to certain stable, integral ways of being.” Aquinas frequently uses the term ‘determinatio’ to describe human actions which, if voluntary (i.e., the actus humanus) are always directed to this same end of human nature, either directly or indirectly.

The first among the actions or ‘determinations’ of human nature is somewhat paradoxical; for the end of human nature, properly speaking, is something which at the same time exceeds the natural faculty (or ability) of human nature: God himself. In his current state, man is not capable of attaining this supernatural end which alone properly fulfils and completes and gives meaning to who and what he is. But given that God is indeed the proper end of human nature, there must be some sense in which this end is intrinsic to human nature (otherwise, we would have no grounds for calling it ‘nature’ or even ‘supernature’). Aquinas

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240 For what is perhaps one of the most thorough studies of the relationship between Aquinas and Dionysius to date, see O’Rourke, Fran. Pseudo-Dionysius and the metaphysics of Aquinas. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005


242 ST I, q.23, a.1, ad.1.
affirms this intrinsic capacity that human nature has for God. Thus the human person is caught in a tension between the ability and the supernatural end, to which he is inclined.

The problem of attaining one’s end by one’s own ability gave rise to at least two problems which Aquinas responds to. The first was that of fatalism, which views human nature as totally powerless in the face of being’s flow. The second was that of Pelagianism, according to which the human person is fully equipped on his own to seek and attain his proper end. Aquinas’ response to both of these positions is what is often referred to as the doctrine of the exitus et reditus, the going-out-from, and returning-to, God. Theories of exitus et reditus are not a Christian innovation and have their roots in Platonist theories of emanation—a kind of emanationism which Aquinas clearly rejects. Emanationism (as for example in Plotinus’ Enneads, Book 5) sees the flow of being proceeding from the Source of all Being as a necessary condition of that Being. Creation according to this theory is thus not a free act, but a necessary condition of Being, or the One, just as giving off light is a necessary feature of the sun. Emanationism, furthermore, places God in a univocal hierarchy of being: a ladder of being so to speak, in which the bottom rung of the ladder leads to the top rung: but all are rungs of varying degrees. Aquinas is by no means an emanationist in the Plotinean sense. First of all, Creation is the work of God’s free choice, and in no way was God compelled to create anything due to the demands of his own nature. Nor does he compel creatures into friendship with him: created being is gift and therefore free and subject to the free response in gratitude. God has no

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243 See for example ST I, q.12, a.7 and I, q.23, a5, ad.3.
244 ST I, q116.
245 ST I-II, q100, a10.
247 Paradoxically, those who think Aquinas should have defined the person in a relational way as envisioned by Bonaventure, for example, often proposes ‘emanationist’ kinds of solutions, which impose a necessity of divine-creaturely relationship; and while Bonaventure has been held up as the ideal in terms of his prosopological theology, it is precisely this tendency to define the person into relationships with God that have led some to define Bonaventure’s prosopology as ‘emanationist.’ See for example, Ables, Travis E., Natura and the Christological Problem of the Exemplars in Hugh of St Victor and Bonaventure. Villanova, 2011: http://www.academia.edu/1043237/Natura_and_the_Christological_Problem_of_the_Exemplars_in_Hugh_of_St_Victor_and_Bonaventure.
248 See for example SCG 2:12, and especially SCG 2:23, “God does not act by necessity, but by will.”
absolute necessity for human companionship, or for creation to amuse or interest him. God’s creative love is thus essentially free and creation participates in Being on account of God’s free act.249 Secondly, God is not a being like other beings; he is beyond being and any notion of being that we might have.

This reality gives us the first piece of the puzzle in the answer to our question as to how to reconcile the apparent contradiction between nature’s end and nature’s ability: Creation is contingent, because it flows from a free act of God’s will. There is nothing necessary in creation. Thus, at its very core, creation—including human nature—is not able to satisfy the conditions for its own existence, its place in the universal order of cause and effect.250

In what does human nature consist? What are these conditions of existence which the human person is not able to satisfy on his own? The question can be accessed in a number of ways but at the very core human nature is relational—it consists in friendship: “the chief intention of the Divine Law is to establish man in friendship with God.”251 Hence the doctrine of exitus et reditus is perhaps best summed up in the famous line of Augustine found in the very beginning of the Confessions, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.” This restlessness is the yearning for union with God, the source of all creation. The yearning is, in essence, a cosmic dialogue of the communion of friendship, or love.

Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Corinthians 1:9): “God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son.” The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.252

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249 ST I, q.19.
250 ST I, q.103, a.8, ad.3.
251 ST I-II, q.99, a.2. The Divine Law, at the same time, is the first cause of human goodness and hence of human nature: “Now it is from the eternal law, which is the Divine Reason, that human reason is the rule of the human will, from which the human derives its goodness [of its being]”. ST I-II, q.19, a.4: Quod autem ratio humana sit regula voluntatis humanae, ex qua eius bonitas mensuretur, habet ex lege aeterna, quae est ratio divina.
252 ST II-II, q.23, a.1: Cum igitur sit aliqua communicatio hominis ad Deum secundum quod nobis suam beatitudinem communicat, super hac communicacione aportet aliquam amicitiam fundari. De qua quidem communicacione dicitur I ad Cor. I, fidelis Deus, per quem vocati estis in societatem filii eius.
4.5.1 The Dionysian Hierarchy

This doctrine of *exitus et reditus* finds its way into Aquinas via Dionysius. In the *Divine Names* (oft quoted by Aquinas), the Areopagite explains that the yearning for God is the very essence of human nature. Why, Dionysius asks is this the case (*Divine Names* 712C)? Why do we yearn for that which is Other? His answer, which will be picked up and developed by Aquinas, is that God is both Yearning and Yearned-for, both Love and Beloved. For every desire there is a counterpart; love is attractive by nature, and so God is attractive by nature. Although Dionysius does not equate these terms with gift and gratitude, they play out in the language of Aquinas in this way. God’s act of love for the human person is his gift; the response—the orientation to the beloved, the origin of that experience of, and orientation to, love—is realised in the virtues of indebtedness and gratitude. The gift of human existence already bears within it the imprint of this Divine Love, and so already bears within it an impetus to the source, “by the inward instinct of the Divine Invitation” (*interiori instinctu Dei invitantis*). The gift calls for a response in gratitude and for this reason, Aquinas identifies the act of prayer and praise, in which gratitude consists, with the movement of desire (ST II-II, q.83). Gratitude, expressed through acts of thanksgiving, simultaneously bears the character of desire. The gift of existence is not static; it is a movement towards its source.

Love, by its very nature, is diffusive, and self-communicating. But this self-diffusiveness of the Good (Aquinas speaks of the *bonum diffusivum sui*) is not simply a pouring out; God does not simply pour His Being out, says Dionysius, as water flowing out of a broken flask onto the floor. God’s love is not ‘wasted’ in other words; it is not a one-way communication. Rather, as it goes out, it returns again from whence it came, like the tide: God is “yearning on the move, simple, self-moving, self-acting, pre-existing in the Good, flowing out from the Good onto all that is and returning once again to the Good. In this divine yearning shows especially is unbeginning and unending nature, travelling in an endless circle through the

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*Amor autem super hac communicacione fundatus est caritas. Unde manifestum est quod caritas amicitia quaedam est hominis ad Deum.*

253 ST II-II, q.2, a.9, ad.3

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Good, from the Good, in the Good and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same centre, ever in the same direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself” (DN 712D-713A).

In referencing this theology in the *Divine Names*, Aquinas sums up this doxological account of the self-diffusive nature of the good by noting that not only does all Good pre-exist in the “Yearning” but, by necessity, this must include all perfections of the Good too. As far as humans are concerned, this means that the perfection, or end, of human nature, while it can only be found in God, the impetus towards that perfection is already integral to human nature: “the nature of the good comes from its being something appetible. This is the end, which also moves the agent to act.” And consequently, “all things, in desiring their own perfection, in fact desire God.”

Aquinas repeatedly asserts that every effect bears some trace of its cause. In the case of human nature, this trace is not simply inert or material, but the formal condition of humanity constituted in reason and love: human nature is a relation founded on the principle of *exitus et reditus*. Aquinas himself is thus explicit in espousing the Dionysian principle of the cyclic movement from and return to God—as Fran O’Rourke emphasises, pointing to a significant passage in Aquinas’ Commentary on the Sentences (*In I Sent.*, 14, 2, 2) to underscore the point:

> In the issue of creatures from the first principle there is observed a certain circulation, or gyration, in that all things are returned as to an end to that from which they proceed as from their origin.

4.6 The Relationship between Benefactor & Beneficiary

Throughout his treatment of gratitude in the *Summa*, and in the commentaries on the Pauline epistles, Aquinas frequently identifies God as our primary Benefactor (q.106, a.1). The

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255 ST I, q4, a2.
256 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 37:5
257 ST I, q.6, a.1, ad.2: *omnia, appetendo proprias perfectiones, appetunt ipsum Deum*.
very word ‘benefactor’ means ‘to make well’ (*bene facere*). To be the subject of benefaction is, in a certain sense, to be *made*. There are, in the order of gifts, various degrees of ‘being made’, but the most primary sense for Aquinas is the act of being brought into existence as a person; first, according to the natural order, but then more perfectly according to the order of grace (ST II-II, q.1, a.7, ad.3). In a secondary sense, we are ‘made’ by the gifts of earthly benefactors: we may be ‘made healthy’ by the gifts of medicine, or ‘made wealthy’ by the gifts of money. All these secondary gifts, from human benefactors, are both signs of the superlative benefaction of God, or else they fit within the order of providence which uses them for the perfection of the individual either in that natural or supernatural order.\(^{259}\)

Because of the order of beneficence and the varying kinds of gifts, our first act of gratitude must be to God. It is because of the participation of the second order of gifts in the higher order of God that we should also be grateful to human benefactors. Earthly gifts are only gifts in reference to the Gifts and providence of God.

Furthermore, giving is a greater sign of love than simply receiving.\(^{260}\) And so, for the sake of friendship—which is the reason genuine gifts are given in the first place—we must give to those who have given to us. This is the essence of gratitude: giving in return to one who has given to us. And not only should we give back to those who have given to us, but we should give *more* than what we were given in the first place (q.106, a.6). Otherwise, in giving back measure for measure, we would reduce the cycle of gift-giving to the level of commutative justice. Since the nature of gift includes something gratis, it must of necessity exceed what it aims to repay.

But if our first and greatest gratitude is owed to God, who is our greatest benefactor, how do we go about honouring the friendship by giving back more than we have received? How can we give more than our very selves, even if that were possible? God cannot be outdone in kindness and beneficence, so how then is any gratitude by way of return even possible?

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\(^{259}\) Aquinas often highlights this point by drawing analogy between the work of providence and the work of human government, which is both a means and sign of providence. See for example, *De Regno (ad regem Cypri)*: c.13:94.

\(^{260}\) See ST II-II, q.26, a.12.
Aquinas is aware of this difficulty, and provides two related solutions. First, he says that in cases where the obligation to repay a benefactor is limited by our ability to make such a repayment, we are not excused from ingratitude on that account (q.107, a.1, ad.2). What then are we to do? By way of example, Aquinas notes that a son can never repay his parents for the gift of his begetting. However, there is a different kind of repayment he can make: the repayment of the will (q.106, a.6, a.1). In other words, genuine love, and all that it might entail within the scope of one’s ability, is sufficient to honour the debt. Aquinas does not give, in questions one hundred and six and one hundred and seven, an indication of what this ‘repayment of the will’ might look like specifically. But in his treatment of the question of beneficence and related treatments of devotion and religion, he paints a fuller picture of what repayment of the will looks like in terms of being grateful to God.

His second, more detailed solution is found in the questions dealing with beneficence. Aquinas treats of charity and beneficence in questions twenty three and thirty one of the secunda secundae partis of the Summa. Here, he notes that, first of all, gift-giving is primarily an act of love and that secondly, while we are bound to love everyone, we have a special obligation to give most to those who are closest to us: our friends, family and above all, God. The act of receiving—even receiving gratefully—is not as loving as the act of giving. Benefaction participates more in the order of charity than does getting, because it involves more perfectly the donation of self than does simply receiving of a gift.261 Thus, in the requirement to repay a gift in gratitude, the grateful person is elevated from the level of simply being a ‘recipient’ to a giver too. Gratitude calls us to repay gifts we have been given, and so calls us to model the donor who initiates our begetting as persons of a certain kind. We model, in other words, the donor who ‘makes us’; and in so doing, we too become participants in this making, a production of love. “Anyone who renders a person what is due to him,” Aquinas says,

261 See also the question dealing with the order of charity, which complements this question: ST II-II, q.26, a.12. Here, Aquinas explains in more detail that giving is higher on the order of charity than simply receiving.
“becomes suitably proportioned to him, through being ordered to him in a becoming manner.”

Through the repayment of gifts, we share in the life of the donor; in repayment of God’s gifts, we therefore become ‘divinised’.

Thus genuine gratitude cannot simply be a question of ‘feeling grateful’ for having received a good gift. Gratitude is not a dead-end, one-way exchange from a benefactor whose gift lands without return in the recipient. Gratitude rather is a moment of awakening and begetting; we become “partakers” in the divine life. In fact, this is how Aquinas explains Christ’s action at the Last Supper: he makes us partakers in his own life through his body and blood. Gratitude calls us out of ourselves into a communion of the exchange of love in friendship. It is a dynamic virtue that gives birth to friendship because the first act of friendship is to give gifts; and so the first act of returning, or accepting, that friendship, must be gratitude.

Since we cannot give God anything which we have not already received, what we therefore return to God by way of gratitude is already given to us by God. Gratitude is itself a gift because not only do the gifts of God benefit the human recipient, but through them the recipient becomes pleasing to God. Indeed, “whatever is pleasing to God in man is caused by the Divine love.”

Gratitude calls us into the mystical life of our primary Benefactor, by making us worthy of friendship with God through grace. In particular, the interior and exterior acts of the virtue of religion provide the means by which we enter into the cycle of friendship, and the means by which we return thanksgiving (gratiarum actio) to God.

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262 ST II-II, q.81, a.2. *Manifestum est autem quod reddere debitum alicui habet rationem boni, quia per hoc quod aliquis alteri debitum reddit, etiam constituitur in proportione convenienti respectu ipsius, quasi convenienter ordinatus ad ipsum.*

263 ST III, q.81, a.1

264 ST II-II, q.31, a.1.

265 Compendium Theologiae, c.143.

266 ST I-II, q.110, a.1: *Nam illud quod est homini gratum in alio homine, praesupponitur eius dilectioni, causatur autem ex dilectione divina quod est in homine Deo gratum.*
4.7 Original Sin & Original Justice

In keeping with his general theory of evil, Aquinas routinely describes sin in terms of “privation”. Sin is not something ontological in itself but is rather descriptive of something lacking—namely, in the case of original sin, for example, as the absence of original justice. The nature of the privation furthermore is not simply a pure privation (privationem solam) but rather a privation in reference to a cause—namely, the final cause, whether this be the natural or supernatural beatitude of the human person.

A sin is an inordinate act. Accordingly, so far as it is an act, it can have a direct cause, even as any other act; but, so far as it is inordinate, it has a cause, in the same way as a negation or privation can have a cause.

Specifically, this privation is in the order of human acts, and hence “sin is not a pure privation, but and act deprived of its due order.” This privation of due order in reference to the human person’s natural and supernatural beatitude constitutes an obstacle (prohibens) to that final end—an obstacle which grace removes. Hence we find frequent references to the work of grace as cooperating with human freedom in removing the obstacles to man’s proper end as in, for example, the De Veritate: “Sin is an obstacle to grace especially from the point of view of turning away from God. To remove this obstacle there is accordingly required the turning of our free choice toward God.”

Just as sin is an obstacle to virtue, so too is virtue an obstacle to sin. Every sin, says Aquinas in the De Malo (q.3, a.7), involves a turning-to some inordinate desire (conversio) and turning-from some positive good (aversio). Virtues thus both militate against a turning-to some evil and a turning-from some good since both every sin involves both a turning-to some disordered good and a turning-from some objective good, namely love. At the same time, every

\[\text{ST I-II, q.82, a.1, ad.1}\]
\[\text{ST I-II, q.86, a.1, ad.3}\]
\[\text{ST I-II, q.75, a.1: peccatum est quidam actus inordinatus. Ex parte igitur actus, potest habere per se causam, sicut et quilibet alius actus. Ex parte autem inordinationis, habet causam eo modo quo negatio vel privatio potest habere causam.}\]
\[\text{ST I-II, q.72, a.1, ad.2: peccatum non est pura privatio, sed est actus debito ordine privatus.}\]
\[\text{De Veritate, q.28, a.4, ad.12: peccatum prohibit gratiam praecipue ratione aversionis; et ideo ad removendum hoc prohibens, requiritur conversio liberi arbitrii in Deum.}\]
A virtuous act refers to both a *turning-from* such disordered acts and a *turning-to* some positive good. In his response to an objection on the nature of ignorance, which, the objection suggests, seems to imply only a turning-from (the truth) and not a turning-to some perceived good (since ignorance is, by nature, non-reflective), Aquinas replies that even ignorance has as its cause a turning-to, since part of the work of sinful ‘conversio’ is the removal of *obstacles to sin*. Thus, sin is not only an obstacle to the good, but the good is likewise an obstacle to sin: “any good may hinder a man from sinning.”

Original sin is itself not simply a disorder in human nature, but a disorder on account of the loss of something positive: namely original justice: “a certain inclination to an inordinate act does follow from original sin, not directly, but indirectly, namely, by the removal of the obstacle—that is, original justice, which hindered inordinate movements: just as an inclination to inordinate bodily movements results indirectly from bodily sickness.”

Aquinas logic of the obstacle is instructive. Not only does he use it to describe the relationship between sin and virtue, but—by extension—to the working of grace: grace is that which removes the obstacles *set up* by sin, and which reinforce the obstacles *against* sin set up by virtue.

Just as the removal of a shadow implies not only the removal of darkness but also the removal of the obstructing body, in the same way the forgiveness of guilt implies not only the removal of the absence of grace but also the removal of the obstacle to grace, which arose from a preceding act of sin. This does not mean that that act must be made not to have been, for that is impossible, but it means that the entry of grace is not hindered by it.

In other words, human freedom places the person simultaneously before that which hinders grace and that which enables grace to operate; it places the human person at every stage

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272 ST II-II, q.105, a.2, ad.2: *...bonum potest homo a peccato impediri.*

273 ST I-II, q.82, a.1, ad.3: *obiectio illa procedit de habitu quo potentia inclinatur in actum, talis autem habitus non est peccatum originale. Quamvis etiam ex peccato originali sequatur aliqua inclinatio in actum inordinatum, non directe, sed indirecte, scilicet per remotionem prohibentis, idest originalis iustitiae, quae prohibebat inordinatos motus, sicut etiam ex aegritudine corporali indirecte sequitur inclinatio ad motus corporales inordinatos.*

274 De Veritate, q.28, a.6: *Sicut ergo ablatio umbrae importat non solum remotionem tenebrae, sed remotionem corporis impedientis; ita remissio culpae non solum importat ablationem absentiae gratiae, sed ablationem impedimenti gratiae, quod erat ex actu peccati praecedente; non ut actus ille non fuerit, quia hoc est impossibile; sed ut propter illum influens gratiae non impediatur.*
of existence in a dynamic state of movement, either towards or away from love. Gratitude constitutes a move towards love as gift, and ingratitude, the move away. The debt of gratitude flows from a debt of love (ex debito amoris); ingratitude is nothing less than a refusal to, or turning away from, love (ST II-II, 107, a.1, ad.3).

On his own, and according to his natural endowments, man cannot overcome this obstacle to grace and satisfy this natural yearning for God born in the moment of gratitude, which is the form of friendship with God and therefore the proper end of human nature.275 The cause of this failure of human nature to fulfil the inclination to God is original sin. In question eighty two of the prima secundae partis Aquinas asks, “In what way is original sin a habit?” He affirms that it is indeed a habit in a secondary sense of the term in contradistinction to habits of action (that is, science and virtue). In this secondary sense, original sin is a disposition of nature—in the way, he says, that sickness or health form in a sense a ‘second nature’ alongside primary nature. In the case of original sin, this ‘second nature’ is more like a sickness in which the “harmony of original justice” is lost.276

4.7.1 Person & Harmony

This characterisation of original sin as the loss of the harmony (concordia) of original justice is significant. Aquinas often uses the Dionysian concept of harmony, or concord, in reference to friendship (as in ST I, q.19, a.12, ad.4 and ST I-II, q.114, a.6 for example) and to sin as the cause of discord (ST II-II, q.37). Harmony is that state in which contraries or opposites are balanced—such as in the state of bodily health, when the complex of the body is harmony with itself.

One of Aquinas’ most thoroughgoing treatments of harmony can be found in his Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima (Book 1:IV). There, he rejects, along with Aristotle, the notion put forward by Democritus and Empedocles among others that the soul itself is best

275 ST I-II, q.109, a.4, ad.3
276 ST I-II, q.82, a.1: Est enim quaedam inordinata dispositio proveniens ex dissolutione illius harmoniae in qua consistebat ratio originalis iustitiae.
described as a ‘Harmony’. Given that harmony means ‘mixing contraries in due proportion’ there is no harmony in this sense in the soul which is the unified form of the person. Harmony better describes that which has contrary parts, such as the body when these parts work in unison or cooperate for some final good. In his *Commentary on Philippians*, Aquinas identifies perfect harmony as existing between the gift of God and the thanksgiving of his friends: between members of the Church and Christ, and this, he says, is the cause and reason for our joy and thanksgiving.\(^{277}\) Harmony, in other words, is the union of gift and gratitude.

Harmony is an apt description of justice and friendship, of gift and gratitude, because these represent unified contraries: the lover and the beloved. Thus in the *Divine Names*, we find the Areopagite speaking of the way in which the Good brings “friendship and peace to all beings, which is why all good things show friendship and inherent harmony” (724A). Original justice likewise describes the harmonious relationship between God and the human person which existed as a habit in the secondary sense, or a condition of nature.

Original justice therefore is equivalent to mutual friendship, and it is this which has been lost through original sin. Friendship is not itself a virtue, but the reason why the virtues exist.\(^{278}\) Later, Aquinas will go on to describe all the virtues as being rooted in friendship, and it is the virtues which help restore original justice. In particular, the virtues of indebtedness orient the rational creature to friendship and harmony by mapping out the trajectory of the return, as it were, to the source of being and friendship from which he came. Gratitude is essentially the recognition and cultivation of this friendship (ST II-II, q.106, a.1, ad.3). Indeed, Aquinas’ whole treatise on justice is concerned with the restoration of *original justice*. One of the aims of justice, he says, is to reconcile two contraries—sin and justice—and to thereby bring about harmony (ST I-II, q.113, a.1). All of the virtues of indebtedness therefore are oriented to leading the person, once alienated from God, back to divine friendship. Gratitude is the last rung in descent on the ladder of those virtues, because it is the first step on the ascent back to God. For this reason, in his prologue to his apology for religious orders (*Liber contra

\(^{277}\) *Commentary on Philippians*, 2-1.

\(^{278}\) *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, q.1, a.5, ad.5: *amicitia proprie non est virtus, sed consequens virtutem.*
impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem), Aquinas describes the birth of Christ as being the moment in which the possibility of this harmony through friendship with Christ becomes possible: “At the birth of Our Lord, an angel proclaimed this harmony (concordia) between God and man, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will.”

Original justice is the unrestricted motion of the exitus et reditus according to the nature of God and creation—the latter expressed in a hierarchy of being. It is the “perfect union” “within the transcendent cycle of divine love.” This union was never something simply imposed on the human person, but is constituted through the free consent of his will. Our modern notion of ‘justice’ often conjures up ideas of compulsion and demands. But original justice, for both in Dionysius and Aquinas, is better understood as the establishment of an original order or harmony which is founded on the impetus of Divine Love and the free response to that love, in love, of the human person. In other words, the loss of original justice is the distortion of free will.

4.7.2 Anticipation as the Foundation for Gratitude

Much has been written on the question of whether or not the human person has a wholly natural desire for the supernatural. It is not my intention here to go into, much less try to resolve, the well-known debate between the opponents and proponents of the nouvelle theologie (perhaps most notably, Henri de Lubac) on the question concerning the relationship between grace and nature. However, it is at the same time necessary to adopt a certain position in

279 O’Rourke, p.235.
280 ST I-II, q.82, a.3.
reference to the question of “pure nature” (*in puris naturalibus*) in the writings of Aquinas in order to set a foundation for understanding gratitude. Gratitude is, after all, a virtue; and there is no notion of virtue in Aquinas that is independent of the interplay between grace and nature, and more specifically between the natural and infused virtues. One passage in the *Summa* in particular can be identified as a flashpoint for the debate:

The nature or essence of a thing is completely comprised within it: whatever then extends to anything beyond it is not its essence. Hence we see in natural bodies that inclination to being does not come anything superadded to the essence, but from the matter which desires being before possessing it, and from the form which keeps it in such when once it exists. But the inclination towards something extrinsic comes from something superadded to the essence; as tendency to a place comes from gravity or lightness, while the inclination to make something like itself comes from the active qualities.

Rather than wade headlong into the debate, I would like here to focus on a Dionysian element in Aquinas' thinking on human nature: what might be termed a primordial sense of anticipation or the “inward instinct of the Divine Invitation”, which manifests itself as emptiness or incompleteness, which gives rise in the human heart to a natural desire for something missing, something which one senses should or might be present, but which is not. This sense of incompleteness in turn gives rise to anticipation or longing for harmony. Aquinas has various terms for this primordial sense of anticipation. At times, he speaks of a certain passivity in the soul in need of healing (ST I-II, q.22, a.1), or the capacity for God (*capax Dei*) which is a unique feature of the rational creature (ST III, q.6, a.2); at other times he speaks of the tendency of the intellect to reach out to that which is outside it (ST I, q.59, a.2); or longing (ST II-II, q.180, a.1) and desire for God (ST II-II, q.28, a.3). His most common terminology to express this idea however is ‘debt’ (*debitum*). The notion of indebtedness is at the heart of his treatment of gratitude.

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283 ST I, q.59, a.2: *...natura vel essentia alicuius rei intra ipsum rem comprehenditur, quidquid ergo se extendit ad id quod est extra rem, non est rei essentia. Unde videmus in corporibus naturalibus, quod inclinatio quae est ad esse rei, non est per aliquid superadditum essentiae; sed per materiam, quae appetit esse antequam illud habeat, et per formam, quae tenet rem in esse postquam fuerit. Sed inclinatio ad aliquid extrinsecum, est per aliquid essentiae superadditum, sicut inclinatio ad locum est per gravitatem vel levitatem, inclinatio autem ad faciendum sibi simile est per qualitates activas.*
In question sixty three of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa*, Aquinas considers the claim that “virtue is in us by nature.” In his reply, he considers the two prevailing theories on the matter: the first is that of the Platonists, who held that the forms are in us by nature, and that science and the virtues pre-exist in us naturally and are “awakened” through study and practice. On the other hand he considers the position of the followers of Avicenna, who held that there is nothing in us by nature, and that all knowledge and virtue comes to us from without, as from external motivation. Aquinas’ answer in question sixty three suggests that it is a bit of both: the virtues are in us in one sense by nature as “seeds” or principles, and in another sense they are not, when considered as established habits: there is in us, he says, a certain *inchoate* capacity for the virtues, but that we do not possess the virtues as perfected habits by nature. In other words, there is a natural capacity for the virtues in the human creature—a capacity which requires actualisation in the individual through grace at the invitation of God.

In answering the question, Aquinas draws a distinction between what belongs to us according to our species, and that which belongs to us as individual persons (ST I, q.63, a.1). Here, it is important to make a distinction between two basic kinds of specification Aquinas has in mind. The first kind of specification, which applies to all natural corporeal things, is derived from the form of the thing itself. This also applies to the human creature, considered as a natural corporeal being like other corporeal beings. In this sense, every human creature is endowed with debts of nature and a moral debt of love. But in another way, the human agent is also considered from the point of view as an individual person, a responsible moral agent capable of a particular friendship, and acting for a particular end by responding to the debt of love. As Augustine puts it, “What we have received in order to be is one thing; what we received in order to be holy is another.”

Thus the definition of person on the one hand is subject to the first kind of specification; a definition according to the second kind, as discussed earlier, is not possible, since it is actualised in the moment of friendship and gratitude: in the response to the *debitum morale*, the kind of debt with which gratitude is primarily concerned.

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The debt of gratitude is also expressive of the anticipatory nature of the human person. We are not only grateful for what we have received; we are grateful for what we will receive. In his treatment on the nature of vows, Aquinas has this to say: “He who promises something gives it already in as far as he binds himself to give it: even as a thing is said to be made when its cause is made, because the effect is contained virtually in its cause. This is why we thank not only a giver, but also one who promises to give.”

In the anticipation of the gift, the virtue of hope is awakened and cultivated, along with faith—which hope itself presupposes. Gratitude is not simply an acknowledgement that God has given, but that he will give, according to the promise of his friendship. Indeed, such an expectation of the continuation of friendship could not be possible without the expectation of future gifts of love. Friendship by its very nature is anticipatory, just as it is mindful of the past and conscious of the present (ST II-II, q.25, a.7).

This anticipatory nature of friendship should not be thought of as being an entitlement; there is no entitlement to grace or God’s friendship. The very nature of grace is that it is “gratis”—free, and it is this freedom in giving which elicits gratitude in return (ST I-II, q.110, a.1). There is no sense of indebtedness on the part of God to satisfy our sense of anticipation. Rather, the fulfilment of anticipation creates a condition of debt on the recipient of the gift.

4.8 The grateful person as indebted

The question of what constitutes the ‘grateful person’ hinges on Aquinas’ use of the term ‘debt’ (debitum). In a narrow sense, Aquinas speaks of the debitum naturae, or the natural endowments of human nature, beyond which it can lay no ‘claim’ to anything further—such as divine beatitude.

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285 ST II-II, q.88, a.5, ad.2: Ad secundum dicendum quod ille qui promittit, inquantum se obligat ad dandum, iam quodammodo dat, sicut dicitur fieri aliquid cum fit causa eius, quia effectus virtute continetur in causa. Et inde est quod non solum danti, sed etiam promittenti gratiae aguntur.

286 See Velde, Rudi A., te.. Aquinas on God: the ‘divine science’ of the Summa Theologiae. Oxford: Ashgate, 2006., p.152: "There is apparently some limitation inherent to nature which allows the gift of grace to be an additional perfection lying outside the essential ingredients of human nature (debitum naturae). This limitation concerns the condition of created nature as such; not some defect of nature which is not intended by God’s creative will, or some deficiency on the part of divine power which has to
More specifically, Aquinas speaks of two kinds of indebtedness related to human nature: the debt which arises through legal obligation (debitum legale) and the debt which arises on account of some gift received, by which one becomes indebted to another (debitum morale).\textsuperscript{287} There is also the corresponding notion of the debt of punishment due to personal sin (reatus poenae), and the debt of human nature itself as a result of original sin (reatu naturae humanae). Broadly speaking, the various uses of the notion of debt are summarised under the unifying notion of the debitum naturae—the debt of human nature itself, including its natural impetus fulfilling the quasi-integral demands of justice: to avoid evil and do good. Of all these notions of indebtedness, for Aquinas the debitum morale is that through which human nature goes beyond itself and reaches out for the good in general and the divine more specifically through acts of gratitude and thanksgiving. He equates this kind of debt with the debitum amicitiae, or the debt of friendship.\textsuperscript{288}

While he uses these terms of debt in various senses, Aquinas employs them in a way which provides a unifying backdrop to his ecclesiology and treatment of the virtues in general. Ultimately, the term debt describes the human condition, both essentially and accidentally, in reference to itself and in its relations to others and ultimately to the Creator, and which enables us to speak of a moral debt of friendship. The human condition is complex and varied and so is its indebted nature. Simply put, the notion of debt provides us with a concept of the human person which has at once a nature due to it (debitum naturae); but which, at the same time appears to be incomplete on account of sin (reatu naturae humanae) and its own inherent limitations and so is incapable, without grace, of achieving union with God on account of the loss of original justice. And because God calls the human person to ultimate union with him, there is a debt of friendship owed—a response to this call (debitum morale, debitum

\textsuperscript{287} ST II-II, q.114, a.2.

\textsuperscript{288} ST II-II, q.78, a.2, ad 2: Alio modo tenetur aliquis ad recompensandum beneficium ex debito amicitiae, in quo magis consideratur affectus ex quo alicuiis beneficium contulit quam etiam quantitas eius quod fecit. Et tali debito non competit civilis obligatio, per quam inducitur quaedam necessitas, ut non spontanea recompensatio fiat.
amicitiae)—which is facilitated through the virtuous life and gratitude. Thus the notion of debt is thus a key term in Aquinas’ virtue theory and indeed, in his very concept of the person. We could say that the human person is, by nature, “indebted”.\textsuperscript{289} The human person’s indebtedness is not simply satisfied through his own independent personal action, but within the context of the Church which satisfies the debt of punishment through its ministry (Commentary on Colossians, 1.3) and through enabling the full exercise of the virtuous life. Indeed, Aquinas is insistent that it is through the Church, the mystical body, that the life of Christ flows to all its members.\textsuperscript{290}

At the heart of this question of the debt of human nature is the famous question of de Lubac on the relationship between nature and supernature. In what sense can we speak of human nature as being a “gift” in a way that necessitates a debt of gratitude? Can there be a “debt” of nature which calls us to supernature and yet at the same time provides us with a natural capacity to attain such an end? At stake is not simply a question of relationship between an individual and God, but, as Nicholas Healy notes, it is a question concerning “the relationship between the Church and the world, between theology and philosophy, the ecclesial and cosmological significance of the Eucharist, and the meaning of the universality of Christ’s saving mission.”\textsuperscript{291}

4.8.1 Gratitude and the ‘debitum morale’

Aquinas frequently mentions the link between debt (debitum) and justice (for example, ST II-II q.109, a.3) and consequently between debt and gratitude, since gratitude flows from the

\textsuperscript{289} Indebted, not in the sense of financial debt to a creditor; Aquinas is clear in his treatise on gratitude that the rush to repay a debt out of a sense of indebtedness (arising from the debitum legale for example) is in fact an act of ingratitude since it betrays any true sense of friendship “qui festinat reddere, non animum habet grati hominis, sed debitoris” (ST II-II, 106, a.4). I hope to show that for Aquinas, indebtedness in this sense is in fact equivalent to gratitude and that the indebtedness of human nature is a dependence on its participation in the Divine nature (ST II-II, q.2, a.3, ad.1).

\textsuperscript{290} See Commentary on Hebrews, Prologue. “For these three things are found in the body of the Church, just as they are found in the natural body, namely, the mystical body itself, its chief members, namely, prelates and rulers, and the head, namely, Christ, from Whom life flows to all the members.”

\textsuperscript{291} Healy, 2008; p.536.
precept of justice. Indeed, the very “essence of justice,” says Aquinas “requires debt.”292 At the same time, he notes that the kind of debt required of gratitude is not the same kind of debt required of justice—they both involve a different notion of justice.293

The kind of debt associated with the virtue of gratitude carries within it the sense of indebtedness to a benefactor—chief among whom is God, who is the benefactor par excellence: “Now the cause of debt is found primarily and chiefly in God, in that He is the first principle of all our goods.”294 Typically speaking however, gratitude is that virtue which pertains to the debt owed to a benefactor who has shown us special favours.

In equating gratitude with the obligation of debt (“a debt of gratitude is a moral debt required by virtue” ST II-II, q.107, a.1) Aquinas may make us somewhat uncomfortable! Shouldn’t gratitude be a spontaneous outpouring of free and loving thanks, if it is to have any meaning? Isn’t the idea of ‘debt’ coercive upon the agent, to the extent that it nullifies any sense of freedom in a genuine act of gratitude which is the seed of friendship? The coupling of gratitude with obligation not only seems to eliminate the possibility of genuine gratitude, but furthermore eliminates the very notion of ‘gift’ by extension. ‘Obligatory’ and ‘indebted’ gratitude seems to justify these concerns and trap us in an apparent paradox: we may have a clear and distinct notion of what a free, genuine gratitude should be; but any authentic expressions of it seem to evade the possibility of it in reality.

Our difficulty with the language of debt may arise from reading into the ‘debt of gratitude’ a legalistic notion of debt. It is, perhaps, a feature of post-modernity that we struggle to understand the distinction between moral and juridical indebtedness in general. Aquinas makes the distinction between a legal debt (debitum legale) and a moral debt (the debitum morale) explicit.295 It is the latter kind, the moral debt, which corresponds to the virtues of gratitude and friendship, while the virtue of justice more properly speaking pertains to the

292 De Veritate, q.23, a.6, ad.3: ratio iustitiae debitum requirit.
293 See ST II-II, q.106, a.5, ad.2
294 ST II-II, q.106, a.1
295 ST II-II, q.106, a.1, ad.2, and q.106, a.4, ad.1. A third kind of debt Aquinas speaks of is the “debt of Punishment”, which I explore further on in this chapter.
The moral debt of gratitude must not be confused with the notion of debt in the positive legal sense. The moral debt of friendship is nothing less than the rational agent’s awareness of what natural law requires, namely, that one ought to seek the good and avoid evil, and that one should honour one’s parents and repay kindness with gratitude. The highest good that one can seek and attain is the goodness of love itself. The debitum morale is the recognition of love as the highest good possible to the creature; it is a debt of participation in the eternal law and as such cannot be simply equated with positive law since its expression is primarily an expression of friendship.

As stated above, debt is twofold. One is legal debt, to pay which man is compelled by law; and thus man owes honour and worship to those persons in positions of dignity who are placed over him. The other is moral debt, which is due by reason of a certain honesty.

Debt, as Aquinas uses the term in this sense related to the execution of moral virtue, is not simply a question of a legal due but more completely of the right ordering of operations towards a proper or due end. It is the natural, originary anticipation of the good. The character of that end is the relationship of the human person with God. Debt is thus an object of inner reflection. It is an act of reason in conformity to the dictates of justice broadly speaking, and the requirements of friendship more specifically. Since all inter-personal relationships fall in some way under the notion of justice, all of them fall under the notion of debt.

Justice in this context is thus concerned with the execution of the debitum morale, the moral debt of friendship. There is also a sense in which natural justice pertains to the debitum legale in matters of positive law. Aquinas deals with this kind of debt specifically in a letter to James of Viterbo on ‘Credit Sales and Usury’ (De Emptione et Venditione ad Tempus), which he wrote in 1262. It is clear from this letter and what Aquinas says about debt in the Summa

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296 See ST II-II, q.106, a.5: “The repayment of a favour may belong to three virtues, namely, justice, gratitude and friendship. It belongs to justice when the repayment has the character of a legal debt, as in a loan and the like: and in such cases repayment must be made according to the quantity received. On the other hand, repayment of a favour belongs, though in different ways, to friendship and likewise to the virtue of gratitude when it has the character of a moral debt.”

297 ST II-II, q.102, a.2, ad.2: duplex est debitum. Unum quidem legale, ad quod reddendum homo lege compellitur. Et sic debit homo honorem et cultum his qui sunt in dignitate constitutri praelationem super ipsum habentes. Aliud autem est debitum morale, quod ex quadem honestate debetur.

298 ST I-II, q.60, a.3
and elsewhere, that he distinguishes the kind of debt demanded by positive law from the moral debt which pertains to those virtues which fall under the umbrella of justice and the requisites of the Divine and natural law (ST II-II, q.102, a.2, ad.2). Debt is thus an analogous term.

It is important to note too that the moral debt of friendship, as it refers to the virtue of justice and its parts, including gratitude, is not simply something that is imposed on the agent from without. The debitum is demanded by natural law which is properly speaking ordered by reason; the natural law is not simply as a ‘reading off’ the order of nature (ordo naturalis) as Rhonheimer has shown. The human agent has a natural inclination to the due act or the actus debitus; in other words, the human agent has a natural, rational, inclination to do what is a positive good: ‘ad debitum actum et finem’ (ST I-II, q.91, a.2). This natural inclination to what is due is nothing less than reason’s participation in the eternal law which inclines us to the good. Thus, on one significant level, the moral debt of friendship can be considered to be an inclination to those acts by which an agent participates in the eternal law, through the exercise of the natural law according to the order of reason.

Thus, the notion of debt as it is derived from the moral debt in no way eliminates or coerces the individual to act against freedom or against conscience; rather, the moral debt is precisely a free act in conformity with the agent’s conscience in pursuit of the good: “through the conscience we judge that something should be done or not done” (ST I, q.79, a.13). In other words, the notion of debt (debitum morale) simply refers to a natural inclination to the good.

Freedom is only called in question, and the moral debt becomes confused or conflated with the legal debt, as something coercive and imposed on reason in opposition to what the agent may otherwise wish, only when one conceives of the natural law itself as something imposed by nature, or ‘read off’ nature, rather than being the ordering of the natural reason (ordinatio rationis naturalis). The result will be to take the legal debt as being co-extensive with the moral debt of friendship, or the debt of nature, as some interpreters of Aquinas have done. Aquinas, following Seneca—whom he cites more than fifty times and mostly in

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reference to gratitude—clearly rejects any notion of the moral debt being something that might be considered part of an economic or legal exchange. One can see why Seneca’s *De Beneficiis* is an important source for Aquinas in this respect. Likewise for Seneca, the debt of gratitude is equivalent to a desire for the good—a desire for friendship. Seneca’s notion of debt in reference to friendship is equivalent to the natural dictate of friendship—through which we enter into an intimacy with another person: “Think for a long time whether or not you should admit a given person to your friendship,” the Stoic writes; “But when you have decided to do so, welcome him heart and soul, and speak as unreservedly with him as you would with yourself.”

Understanding the nature of the *debitum* is a strong indication that Rhoneheimer is on the right path in his understanding of the nature of the natural law: the natural law is not something superadded to reason; natural law is rather the right ordering of reason to the good which by nature it always seeks and desires. The *debitum morale* is a judgement of natural law pertaining to what response is necessitated according to the dictates of reason in accordance with justice. The natural law is the recognition of, and impetus toward satisfying, the moral debt.

It is especially difficult to reconcile the notion of freedom and love with gratitude if one interprets Aquinas’ use of the term ‘debt’ in a positivist or physicalist way according to the “methodic naturalism”. According to such a physicalist view, the *debitum morale* would be convertible with the *debitum legale*. We see this in treatments of gratitude which reduce it to the arena of the psychological, as discussed earlier. When it is understood as a reaction to external expectations (such as Mauss describes), or deterministically according to psychological or cultural conditioning, gratitude loses its character as a genuinely free and loving response to an invitation to friendship.

understand why some interpreters like Lee have taken this approach given that the matter of an acquired virtuous act may indeed be co-extensive with the matter of an infused virtuous act; however, there is no co-extension of form between an act of acquired virtue and an act of infused virtue.


301 Rhonheimer 2000, p.xvii
But Aquinas tells us that something exterior cannot lead another to virtue efficaciously. Only an external law can coerce another to act in way in which he might not otherwise choose. But the *debitum morale* would have *no efficacy* if it were imposed from without. It must, at some level, be a free act if it is to be efficacious and open to the infusion of grace. In this sense, we might say that the *debitum morale* is self-imposed or rather “self-expllicative”.

For Aquinas, to be coerced means to be compelled to do something in reference to one’s natural activities. The loss of freedom to enact the *debitum morale* however is equivalent to falling into sin through choosing; it is a choice, leading to the loss of freedom from sin and the loss of happiness (ST I, q.83, a.2, ad.3). There can be no genuine gratitude where there is an experience of coercion or obligation that contradicts conscience or the impetus of the heart. There can be no gratitude where the *debitum morale* is supplanted by a *debitum legale*.

Reason does not coerce us in spite of reason’s dictates; reason is, rather the free and proper expression of self—what Rhonheimer has in mind by the term self-explication. It is not possible to reconcile the notion of the *debitum morale* in Aquinas with any sense of a coerced positive or external rule. The inner moral debt is nothing other than a debt of friendship which is an understanding of self in relationship to the Divine. It flows from the free choice of love of one person for another—of the creature for God. For this reason, Aquinas equates the “debt of gratitude” with the “debt of love”: gratitude flows freely and naturally from the desire to love another. Thus, we should understand the moral debt as a kind of natural exigency by which the agent is moved by the desire for the good and, by extension, for God. The *debitum morale* is nothing else than the awareness that I am incomplete, and that this invitation to

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302 Cf. ST I-II, q.90, a.3, ad.2.
303 Rhonheimer 2000, p.277: “On the other hand, if one considers the natural law formally, as an ordinatio rations, as an ordering act of the practical reason, a law formulated and constituted through the practical reason, and if the practical reason in this sense is itself understood to be a legislator, then there would be no contradiction in finding an inner dynamic of self-explication in such a law, a dynamic characterised by a structure of inventive explication of particular principles implicitly contained in other principles.”
304 This is a theme which is taken up at considerable length in Pope John Paul II’s work, *The Acting Person*.
305 ST II-II, q.107, a.1, ad.3: ...*debitum gratitudinis ex debito amoris derivatur, a quo nullus debet velle absolvi. Unde quod aliquis invitus hoc debitum debeat, videtur provenire ex defectu amoris ad eum qui beneficium dedit.*
friendship awakens in me a longing for wholeness and harmony, and which bears within it the promise of the fulfilment of that desire.

In modern, popular use, the word ‘obligation’ often carries with it a sense of an “ought” in opposition to freedom, a corrective of the will and a constraint upon reason. This opposition is brought about by external pressure, either through positive law or external circumstances, often evoked by a sense of guilt. ‘Obligation’ in this sense is considered synonymous with ‘onus’, which means ‘load’ or ‘burden.’ But this contemporary use is not the sense in which Aquinas uses the term in reference to the debt of gratitude or virtue in general. Nor, furthermore, is it the sense in which the word was understood in medieval and renaissance moral philosophy in general. The obligation of debt, of the debitum morale, is an inner light of reason at the impetus of natural law. E. Catherine Dunn has shown that in medieval and renaissance Europe the obligation associated with gratitude was understood as an inner guiding principle of natural reason—an inclination to the good. The ungrateful man distorts his own nature, because he violates this “elementary obligation” which guides human relations constituted by reason. This obligatio gratitudinis was not seen as being an onus imposed from external sources, but from considering oneself in the context of inter-human relations. Ingratitude, simply stated, was understood to be the failure to love. 306

That this is certainly the case for Aquinas—that is, that the debitum morale is nothing less than the natural inclination to the good—can further be deduced from two essential premises that underscore his treatment of the virtues of justice and gratitude: firstly, that the principle of human action (actus humanus) is the free will and such acts are more perfect when they flow from charity (ST I-II, q.24, a.3, ad.1); secondly, that the debitum demanded of gratitude likewise flows from charity (“ex carite derivatur”: ST II-II q.106, a.6, ad 2). Thus, the form of the debitum morale is love, which is the subject of virtuous acts, freely chosen. It is in this context that the obligations motivating gratitude and acts of justice in general must be considered. We might say that the debitum morale is the awakening of charity in the human

heart. It provides an impetus for action, since the human person by nature desires—and can only desire—the good.

This will help explain why, in his references to the *actus debitum* or the act due according to virtue (i.e., an act following upon reason’s understanding of the *debitum morale*), Aquinas uses this particular noun phrase almost exclusively in reference to that which is omitted, the sin of negligence.\(^{307}\) He seems to be suggesting in these pairings of the *actus debitum* with sins of omission that the *debitum morale* is reason’s witness to what ought to be done according to charity’s dictate which has not yet been done, but which reason recognises as that which should be done for the sake of relationships. To ignore the *debitum morale* is to sin against charity—the failure to seek what is directed by the will and commanded by reason.\(^{308}\) The debt we are placed under through sin and the failure to love is the inverse of the debt which elicits a loving response to grace.

Someone who is in the clutches of sin has lost the sense of indebtedness which urges us on to moral perfection. There is, in the moral debt, a kind of natural anamnesis\(^{309}\), which inclines us towards the good, which relates to the end as its proper object. The moral ‘debt’ is thus on the one hand equated with a rejection of the sinful disposition and on the other, the invitation to “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

In commenting on these words of Christ exhorting us to perfection in the Gospel of Matthew, Aquinas draws the distinction between the acquired or “human virtues” and the

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\(^{307}\) See for example, ST II-II 54.1.ad3; De Malo 2.1.7; Super Sent., lib. 2 d. 42 q. 2 a. 2 qc. 3 ad 2, and Super Sent., lib. 2 d. 35 q. 1 a. 3 co.

\(^{308}\) ST I-II, q.77, a.1.

\(^{309}\) Aquinas notes—in a discussion on the ceremonial precepts of the Old Law (ST I-II, q.101, a.3)—that the ceremonial precepts were intended by God to recall his people from idolatry and the worship of idols to the worship of God. The law is a teacher; and through the law of ceremonial precepts, the Chosen People were taught to worship God, by calling to mind his Providence and saving work in history through occupying their time with worship according to law. Throughout his treatment of the virtues of indebtedness, we find repeated reference to the role of memory in recalling us to the propinquity of God through Jesus Christ. Memory continues to be elicited by both law and custom, which serve to provide the impetus for worship. For example, memory preserves within us the memory of the immense gift of Christ’s passion (De Rationibus Fidei, c.8) given to us in the Eucharist. Memory, furthermore, as we are told in the Commentary on Colossians, also serves to remind us of our sinfulness, which acts as a bond upon us, which Christ himself removes through the Church and the sacraments. See Commentary on Colossians, c.2, a.2. Indeed, Christ’s saving work was such that it abolished the memory of this bond.
“exemplar virtues” as they are derived from the eternal law. The path of perfection is thus the
transition from the human virtues towards “divine similitude” by way of what he calls
“perfecting virtues” (virtutes purgatoriae).\textsuperscript{310} These perfecting virtues, which bear the character
of the infused virtues, are the bridge by which we pass from potential to actual Divine
Similitude, for “everything is called good by reason of the Divine goodness belonging to it,
which formally is its own goodness” (ST I, q.6, a.4). It is this movement, this flow from
potency to actuality, from the absence of love to the reality of love, which is captured in the
richness of the word ‘debt’ as Aquinas uses it, borrowing the theme from Dionysius. The moral
debt is thus a dynamic relationship, a calling forth of the human agent from one inactive state to
the active, loving state.

Given this reading of the meaning of the moral debt in the \textit{Summa}, the objection could
be raised that, since we are called always and everywhere to love that it would seem to follow
that the \textit{debitum morale} can never be satiated. It would essentially be an endless debt, since
perfection can never be achieved in this life and love never surpasses its object: one can never
fully grasp the good, since “all things in desiring perfection, desire God himself.”\textsuperscript{311}

In fact, Aquinas suggests precisely this when he considers the nature of the \textit{debitum
morale} in reference to the gratitude elicited by friendship: “The debt of gratitude flows from
charity, which the more it is paid the more it is due, according to Romans 13:8, ‘Owe no man
anything, but to love one another.’ And so it is not unreasonable if the obligation of gratitude
has no limit.”\textsuperscript{312} In contrast, the \textit{debitum legale} is not—cannot be—\textit{limitless} as this would
contravene the very notion of commutative justice which, not only regulates the exchange of
gifts, also regulates the giving of punishments; such justice of its nature demands an equality or
balance of punishment and reward commensurate with demerits and merits.\textsuperscript{313} The limits of
legal justice can be seen, for example, in Aquinas’ defence of a ten day limit placed on a legal
appeal. Such a temporal limit on justice is necessary since without it, legal justice would

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{310} ST I-II, q.61, a.5
\item \textsuperscript{311} ST I, q.6, a.1
\item \textsuperscript{312} ST II-II, q.106, a.6, ad.2
\item \textsuperscript{313} See for example, ST I, q.65, a.2, ad.3
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
“forever be suspended” and thereby no justice would be done at all. On the other hand, there is no time limit on the moral debt of gratitude or friendship since to satisfy such a debt would be to bring an end to what is demanded by the debt—namely love in friendship.

4.8.2 Debt of Punishment

It should also be noted here that Aquinas also speaks of a third kind of debt—the debt of punishment (debitum poenae). The debitum poenae is the flipside, so to speak, of the debitum morale. Question eighty seven of the first of the second part contains eight articles dealing with the debt of punishment. Indeed, the term debitum poenae appears in many of his works in which he touches on the notion of debt. In the article he deals with the nature of punishment as it occurs naturally according to the order of reason and as it occurs according to positive justice. The former case arises from a “disturbance in the order of nature” in which situation, the “debt of punishment remains for as long as the disturbance remains” (ST I-II, q.87, a.3). The latter case arises from the just indictment of either the Divine Judge or a temporal judge by way of participation in the eternal law. In consideration of these two uses, two things should be noted about Aquinas’ treatment of the notion of debt in reference to justice.

First, it is clear from a comparison of the way in which the notion of debt is applied in these various passages that Aquinas considers the human person by nature to be in a state of indebtedness. The human person is oriented towards either fulfilment in friendship or damnation through rejection of friendship. Both states involve a kind of indebtedness, and so it is proper to say of the notion of person in general that it essentially includes indebtedness. There is a tension, so to speak, between the appetite for the good, and the inclination toward evil. Aquinas treats of this tension between being and nothingness in several places, for example in his treatment on the virtue of humility (ST II-II, q.161, a.1).

314 ST II-II, q.69, a.3, ad.3
315 See for example, Commentary on Hebrews, I.I.40; Commentary on Job, 20.2; and Commentary on Corinthians, 1.3.28.
In question eighty seven, Aquinas distinguishes between three kinds of debt associated with a corresponding due punishment: that punishment which is incurred by the agent himself, through the remonstrations of his own conscience and reason; that which is inflicted by someone in authority, such as a judge; and that which is inflicted by God, as Just Judge of all humanity (ST I-II, q.87, a.1).

Secondly, the rejection of friendship necessitates the debitum poenae. There is no middle ground: either we accept the friendship of God through responding to the debitum morale, or we subject ourselves to the consequences of failing to fulfil the debt. Aquinas’ preferred expression for the debt of punishment is reatus poenae. Reatus, unlike debitum, implies not simply guilt (for which he typically uses culpa), but more specifically a liability according to which repayment is due or owed as a result of sin or a crime (reatus culpae), and the necessity or just demand to undergo punishment as a result of such a sin or crime (reatus poenae). It is a penalty due according to the dictate of God’s eternal justice. Thus the reatus poenae is a debt of the order of the debitum legale, and not of the order of the debitum morale—the debt of friendship and love.

This shift in emphasis and shift in language in no way contradicts what has been said about the nature of the moral debt and its intrinsic link to the proper notion of love and friendship. By it, Aquinas expresses the reality that human actions and inclinations, including those urged by the moral debt, carry objective consequences to be meted out in the final judgement.

Given the reality of original sin, all of us find ourselves condemned by the loss of original justice. But God’s grace transforms the debitum poenae into the positive debitum morale. In this way, Aquinas is able to speak of the “debt of human nature” (reatu naturae humanae; see De Veritate q.29, a.7, ad.6) which alone is overcome by the grace of friendship with Christ. Thus the notion of debt thus seems to place the human agent at a junction between love and the absence of love—namely sin, or between the possibility of friendship with God through Christ, or friendlessness. As such, the moral debt is nothing less than the Divine Command to strive for the perfection that is constituted in friendship—and to turn away from
sin and to do good. This is what Aquinas means by the quasi-integral part of justice (which he outlines in question seventy nine in the treatise on justice) which is to avoid evil and to do good (declinare a malo et facere bonum). The debitum that virtue urges within us is at once inclined both to the avoidance of sin and the exigency of charity as it is directed by the will and commanded by reason. “Every sin, inasmuch as it implies the disorder of a mind not subject to God, may be called injustice, as being contrary to the aforesaid justice, according to 1 Jn. 3:4: ‘Whoever commits sin, also commits iniquity; and sin is iniquity.’ And thus the removal of any sin is called the justification of the ungodly” (ST I-II q.113, a.1, ad.1). The moral debt, when it is not answered, is the essence of sin; when its resolution is sought, it is the essence of friendship.

The moral debt is, in the true sense of the word, a moment of ‘crisis,’ a turning point. It is the moment in which the human person realises that he stands before life and death, between love and sin, between friendship with God and alienation from God. The human person stands on the edge of an abyss so to speak between everything and nothing; the possession of Christ is everything; the abandonment of Christ is to choose nothingness. There is no intermediary state, no neutral ground in this respect: “the whole human race is indebted by sin” says Aquinas; but it is precisely this ability to sin on the one hand, that makes the debt of friendship possible.316

In brief, we can say that Aquinas’ notion of the moral debt differs significantly from the notion of a legal debt in that the latter corresponds to a due which can be measured while the former kind, the moral debt, corresponds to gratitude: the awareness or an inner reflection on the potential for friendship which cannot be measured: “God is the cause of our loving God; the measure is to love Him without measure.”317 The debt, consequently, of which Aquinas speaks, is not simply something ‘owed’ to it on account of its own nature, but rather a capacity for love which is, in a certain sense, limitless. Thus, when speaking of the moral debt of friendship, and by extension the debt of nature, Aquinas is not simply speaking of something to which the created nature can lay claim or demand, but rather something which opens up the horizons of

316 See De Veritate, q.24, a.7: On Free Choice.
317 ST II-II, q.27, a.6. Here, Aquinas is quoting the De Diligendo Deo of St Bernard: quod causa diligendi Deum Deus est; modus, sine modo diligere.
human existence to the experience of divine love in the context of friendship. It is because
divine love is limitless that the debt of friendship is itself limitless. Unlike a legal debt, the
moral debt of friendship involves a certain “spontaneous gratuity”, just as love involves a
spontaneous movement of the lover towards the loved. Such is the nature of friendship and
thankfulness.\textsuperscript{318}

Finally, the \textit{debitum morale} is also the cause of true \textit{joy} in us—which cannot be said of
any other kind of debt. The person alive to the moral debt of love is a person enlivened by joy.
For this reason, Aquinas notes that “joy is the matter of the action of thanksgiving” (\textit{gaudium
est materia gratiarum actionis}).\textsuperscript{319} Not only does the \textit{debitum morale} associated with the virtues
of indebtedness and gratitude not place a burden of legal debt on us, it opens us up to the
fullness of nature, to joy and happiness. It is this joyfulness which awakens the debt of love in
us, and makes us want to satisfy it. For this reason, Aquinas says of Philemon that he is
indebted to Paul, “not of necessity, but of will.”\textsuperscript{320} And it is the characteristic of friendship that
friends will the same thing.\textsuperscript{321} The \textit{debitum morale} does not therefore override the desire of the
recipient of gifts, but fulfils it.

\textbf{4.8.3 The Debt of Love & Friendship}

Aquinas repeatedly insists that the very essence of love is friendship (for example in ST
I-II, q.65, a.5; and In III Sent, d.27, q.2, a.4). What this means ultimately is that the unity of all
the virtues is friendship properly speaking (he rejects any meaningful application of the word
‘friendship’ to relationships of mere pleasure and utility; neither of these could be ‘infused’ in
other words) which has love (\textit{caritas}) as its proper form. In this, he is developing a line of
thought inherited from Dionysius and Richard of St Victor which held a prominent and lively
place of discussion among the Scholastics, thanks mainly to the question posed by Peter

\textsuperscript{318} See ST I-II, q.69, a.3 and ST II-II, q.25, a.2
\textsuperscript{319} Commentary on Job, 1:4.
\textsuperscript{320} Commentary on Philemon, 1:1:2.
\textsuperscript{321} \textit{Contra Gentiles}, II:95.5.
Lombard, “What is charity?” According to Liz Carmichael, Aquinas in fact goes even further than this and equates friendship (amicitia) with caritas—a move which distances his view of friendship from that of Aristotle and goes beyond the claims of any other Scholastic, including Peter Abelard, Albert and Bonaventure.\textsuperscript{322}

Peter Abelard (d.1142), writing around the same time as the Master of the Sentences, was among the first to examine the intrinsic and causal relationship between love and friendship in his \textit{Theologia Scholarium}. Although Aquinas does not directly cite Abelard as an authority on the matter, he echoes much of what Abelard has to say on the topic. As was common among the Schoolmen, Aquinas included, Abelard is already relying heavily on Cicero for his starting point on this question (1.4) though in typical Scholastic fashion he understands the paradigm of friendship as being union with God and by extension with others for the sake of this friendship with God. This is right love (amor honestas) and it has as its object “a good will towards another for his own sake.”\textsuperscript{323} Thus friendship is a sign of the right-ordering of the will towards others and God. Abelard defines friendship (amicitia) not as a particular act of the will but rather the disposition to all those acts which can be considered ‘friendly’. Thus Abelard has already begun to understand friendship as both a something related to virtue but also as something which unifies and orders the virtues to their proper end, namely love of the other. With this Dionysian insight, Abelard sets what is to become a recurring theme in later Scholastic treatments of friendship.

Similarly, when we get to Aquinas, we find this same understanding that friendship is not a virtue in itself, but is in fact the consequence or the effect of virtue.\textsuperscript{324} In other words, virtue exists for the purpose of friendship; it is what enables the person to be a friend to another with that friendship which is based on love and concern for the other, and not simply with quasi friendships based on utility and pleasure. Only the virtuous person can be a friend in the true

\textsuperscript{324} ST II-II, q.23, a.3, ad.1. \textit{Unde amicitia virtuosa magis est aliquid consequens ad virtutes quam sit virtus. Nec est simile de caritate, quae non fundatur principaliter super virtute humana, sed super bonitate divina.}
sense of the word: the person with the acquired virtues can be a true friend to his fellow human beings in the world at large; and by extension, only the person with the infused virtues can enjoy that ultimate friendship: friendship with God. Both cases involve love.

Aquinas frequently expresses the notion of friendship in keeping with his doctrine of indebtedness; debt and the obligations of one friend to another arise from the debt of friendship (ex debito amicitiae). It is important to note here that for Aquinas friendship is both aligned to the cardinal virtue of justice and surpasses it. Formally speaking, acts of friendship bear a resemblance to justice, which is the repayment of a debt (debitum morale). There is at the same time a certain indebtedness which accompanies friendship, and in this respect, friendship is a kind of justice. But at the same time, Aquinas uses the term ‘debt of friendship’ as a response to “gratuitous favour”.

Thus a debt may be compelled by a binding rule established by law or contract; but it also describes the sense of obligation brought about by the inner promptings of conscience, desire or attraction. All of these senses of the word debt however are unified, along with justice itself, under the aspect of the right ordering of parts to their whole or acts to their ends.

In the word debt, therefore, is implied a certain exigency or necessity of the thing to which it is directed. Now a twofold order has to be considered in things: the one, whereby one created thing is directed to another, as the parts of the whole, accident to substance, and all things whatsoever to their end; the other, whereby all created things are ordered to God. Thus in the divine operations debt may be regarded in two ways, as due either to God, or to creatures, and in either way God pays what is due. It is due to God that there should be fulfilled in creatures what His will and wisdom require, and what manifests His goodness.

Thus it is not surprising to find that Aquinas uses the terms debt and debtor to describe incipient friendship, since it is a primary dictate of reason that one should return kindness to those who have shown kindness.

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325 See for example ST II-II, q.78, a.2, ad.2.
326 See ST II-II, q.23, a.3, ad.1 and ST II-II, q.78, a.2, ad.2.
327 ST I, q.21, a.1, ad.3
328 ST I-II, q.100, a.7, ad1: Inest autem primo dictamen rationis quod homo debitore est beneficii vel obsequii exhibendi illis a quibus beneficia accept, si nondum recompensavit.
4.9 Gratitude & Natural Law

While commutative justice typically concerns a legal debt, the virtues of indebtedness are concerned with the moral debt, which is rooted in natural law. Aquinas holds, along with Cicero from whom he derives his list of virtues of indebtedness, that these virtues are derived from certain innate principles and not simply from custom. Gratitude itself is a precept of the natural law.

Much of the contemporary debate about Aquinas’ natural law theory attempts to find the origin of natural law in the decision making process of the individual. On the one hand, referring to the experience of the individual can be a legitimate methodology as a means of confirming certain judgements, but individuals or singulars cannot be the subject of definition as we have seen. A problem arises then when natural law is considered in purely individualistic terms, isolated from what pertains to natural law in general, which includes those relational considerations required to understand the virtues. Natural law and the virtues are closely linked; natural law is not itself a habit, but the virtues render the precepts of the natural law habitual.329

The natural law, according to Aquinas, is properly basic to human reason; it should not be understood to mean that the human person is endowed by nature with a set of innate instructions that dictate the matter of each and every moral action, as though an individual can figure out what needs to be done in a given situation simply by reflecting on these innate principles within him. Aquinas is quite clear rather that the essence of law consists in a work of reason.330

Cicero and Seneca both hold gratitude to be a matter of natural law: one has a moral obligation to repay favours and gifts, according to the dictate of reason. When Aquinas picks up this theme, he will apply it to all the related virtues of indebtedness, along with gratitude.

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329 See ST I-II, q.94, a.2
330 ST I-II, q.90, a.1: Respondeo dicendum quod lex quaedam regula est et mensura actuum, secundum quam inductur alicuis ad agendum, vel ab agendo retrahitur, dicitur enim lex a ligando, quia obligat ad agendum. Regula autem et mensura humanorum actuum est ratio, quae est primum principium actuum humanorum, ut ex praedictis patet, rationis enim est ordinare ad finem, qui est primum principium in aggregis, secundum philosophum. In unoquoque autem genere id quod est principium, est mensura et regula illius generis, sicut unitas in genere numeri, et motus primus in genere matuum. Unde relinquitur quod lex sit aliquid pertinens ad rationem.
For example, the Commandment to ‘honour your father and mother’, which falls under the virtue of piety, is a prescript of the natural law (Commentary on Colossians, 3-4:174), as is offering thanksgiving by way of prayer and sacrifice under the virtue of religion (ST II-II, 85, a.1). Already there is, in Aquinas’ identification of the virtues of indebtedness with the natural law, a move towards placing the natural law within the context of inter-personal relationships.

Natural law, which governs our moral acts, is, by its very nature, ordered toward the good. It is the very nature of human reason to seek the good; all human inclinations are ordered towards the good and away from what is perceived to be evil. It is therefore the very nature of reason to fulfil the first precept of natural law: to seek the good and to avoid evil. Any sense of reason being “commanded”, therefore, cannot be understood as an extrinsic command imposing itself on the reason and will, from some principle or law outside of itself; this “command” of natural law is simply the exigency with which reason naturally operates by its own nature: “reason rules and commands the other powers [of the rational animal], so all the natural inclinations belonging to the other powers must needs be directed according to reason.”

Hence the “natural” aspect of natural law refers to the nature of human practical reason itself and its own inner life. Otherwise, it could not be the basis of virtue, since no external force or compulsion can bring about virtue in a person.

At the same time, this does not mean that practical reason is detached from, or “other” than, nature; such a view—that human reason looks at nature as if from a neutral standpoint (what Thomas Nagel famously called the “View from Nowhere”)—would simply return us to an individualistic understanding of natural law. Rather, human reason is part and parcel of the order of creation; the human person derives an understanding of self and other precisely because of his experience of nature from within nature and as a part of nature; to use an expression of Luigi Giussani, “Man is that level of nature where nature itself becomes conscious of itself, that level of reality where reality…begins to become reason.”

Whatever the dictates of gratitude are therefore, they have been planted in us by the Creator. Already, in the moment of creation,

331 ST I-II, q.94, a.4, ad.3
332 ST I-II, q.90, a.3, ad.2
the impetus towards friendship with God through gratitude is inchoate within us in the natural law.

The order of reason is not independent of the order of creation, because it seeks God through the mediated world of created goods and all of creation provides evidence of the reality of God.\textsuperscript{334} Or, according to Dionysius, “The human mind has a capacity to think, through which it looks on conceptual things, and a unity which transcends the nature of the mind, through which it is joined to things beyond itself.”\textsuperscript{335} That Aquinas held this understanding of the identity of the natural law with the work of practical reason seems clearly evinced in question ninety four and elsewhere in his work.

The first precept of the natural law—\textit{to do good and avoid evil}—is thus the first principle of practical reason itself: “whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man’s good belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.”\textsuperscript{336} This precept therefore is not something that reason discovers “out there” in the world; it is the intrinsic principle itself by which reason operates.

It is precisely the essence of law to direct action to a proper or due end; and therefore this is also the task of practical reason.\textsuperscript{337} This is the second basic precept of the natural law, namely that mutable goods (which is all created goods that are not identified with Dionysius’ \textit{One Good}) be not chosen as ends in themselves. The pursuit of mutable good entails such things as cultivating friends purely for the purpose of utility or pleasure.

Hence the work of natural law, through the exercise of practical reason, is to direct moral action towards a due end and to avoid the inordinate choosing of mutable goods. This is the basis for the precepts of the natural law and it is the end of all matters of practical reason:

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\item [334] This is the principle behind the so-called “cosmological argument” of Aquinas (ST I, q.2, a.3): The First Cause is known through its created effects. Furthermore, creation is order towards reason because the very principle of nature is rational by virtue of the fact that it pre-exists in the Divine mind.
\item [335] The Divine Names, 865D.
\item [336] ST I-II, q.94, a.2: \textit{omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana}.
\item [337] ST I-II, q.90, a.1
\end{itemize}
“this principle cannot be called into question, but must be presupposed in every [moral] enquiry.”

4.9.1 Consequentialist and essentialist readings of Natural Law

Without wishing to oversimplify the often complex arguments which are used to defend various interpretations of Aquinas’ natural law theory, for the sake of discussion, many of them can be summarised as attempts in their own way to evaluate moral action of an individual—that is, the moral object—from either the point of view of the third person observer (consequentialism), or from an analysis of nature itself, or from an analysis of psychological processes which may or may not be taking place in the mind of the individual acting agent (essentialism).

One often finds in many of these discussions about natural law and the debates between those arguing for consequentialist and essentialist concepts of natural law that a key challenge lies in trying to account for ways in which the specific objects of moral action (that is, intentional acts of the individual) can be measured against the general requirements of the natural law (whatever they may be understood to be). How should I act gratefully in this given situation and in this particular time and place? What does the natural law require of me in repaying this gift in these unique and nuanced set of circumstances? What form should my prayer of praise take, and what duration and in what place? One cannot answer these kinds of question simply by appealing to the natural law since the natural law itself is the principle that “good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided; all other precepts of the natural law are based upon this.” As a principle, the natural law does not tell us however what particular grateful act should be performed in a given circumstance; the natural law is not a list of proscribed and prescribed activities. Aquinas tells us that the natural law functions as a principle of action furthermore, and it does not provide a list, or determinate content of each and

338 ST I-II, q.14, a.2
339 ST I-II, q.94, a.2: Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum. Et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae....
every action of the agent: “the precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles.”

The natural law covers everyday practical actions, frequently subtle and complex ones: a beneficiary may wonder, for example, “What is the motivation for this gift? How should I repay it? When should I repay it?” All of these considerations fall under the virtue of justice, which is rooted in natural law. How then can natural law help me answer these kinds of questions?

Consequentialists may seem at first to be better equipped for answering these subtle kinds of questions than the essentialist, since the consequentialist can point to the effects of choices we make; they may even support such observations with statistical evidence. Essentialists, on the other hand, typically struggle to provide an answer to these kinds of question, because an analysis of human nature or metaphysical principles (such as the nature of ‘gifts’) will not really yield any clear directives that are not already somehow presupposing consequentialist methodology or circular reasoning. An analysis of the nature of gifts, in other words, will not provide a beneficiary with the best course of action in dealing with the repayment of gifts as the virtue requires. But the consequentialist view does not itself stand up to scrutiny for long either, since it ultimately forgets the first person experience in the process of evaluating moral actions from the third-person perspective.

Human agency can be incredibly complex, and often fraught with anxiety and limited intellectual visibility. The explication of natural law by some commentators often seems to overlook the fact that human existence is a struggle and moral decision making can be laborious and not very clear; Aquinas is aware of this, and much of his Pauline commentaries addresses

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340 ST I-II, q.94, a.2: praecepta legis naturae hoc modo se habent ad rationem practicam, sicut principia prima demonstrationum se habent ad rationem speculativam, utroque enim sunt quaedam principia per se nota.

341 For a useful and thorough critique of these positions, see Rhonheimer, Martin, and William F. Murphy, ed. The perspective of the acting person: essays in the renewal of Thomistic moral philosophy. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008
the very real challenge of the Christian’s struggles—the kind we see in this rather plaintive cry of Teilhard de Chardin,

If you knew the bitterness of giving in when one does not have the inner certitude that it is right to give in, and when one fears, in spite of everything, to be unfaithful to true courage and true renunciation.\(^{342}\)

One could imagine Aquinas empathising with this cry; we have seen how he recognises that we can have no certitude in laying claim to the possession of the infused, meritorious virtues. And while we are always inclined to the good as apprehended, we are not always clear on the choices that circumstance place before us.

Defenders of the essentialist view will argue that the precepts of the natural law are contained within the nature of things and circumstances themselves, so that the natural law can be “read off” nature, or discovered through an analysis of the ways things are. Such a view tends to undermine the whole concept of human freedom in respect to the law because moral actions are necessitated by what is thought to be an extrinsic or self-explicating law. Reason is thus reduced to the level of an interpreter of, rather than a participant in, the divine law.

That is not to say the alternative position holds us to the claim that we are free from objective standards, and free to make up ‘natural laws’ in our heads; rather that the natural law is the rectitude of reason; as such, it is also the origin of genuine freedom of agency because natural law enables us to evaluate an almost infinite number of possible actions, while at the same time remaining within the boundaries of rightly chosen proximate ends.\(^{343}\) But this ability to evaluate possible actions is limited precisely because the natural law is a principle of action and not a prescriber and proscriber of particular action; natural law only introduces us to true courses of action “to a certain extent” (ST I-II, q.93, a.1).

There is good reason why Aquinas does not try to provide a “list of natural laws”, because there is no such list and none is possible. Natural law—at least as far as Aquinas conceives of it—operates within the parameters of human freedom and choice-making. It provides “principles” of action, such as “obey your parents”, “worship God” and “repay

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\(^{343}\) See for example ST I-II, q.60, a.1, ad.3.
kindness shown to you.” How these principles are to be expressed in particular acts will not be clear from a simple appeal to the principles of natural law. For guidance on particular acts, we need a different kind of guide: one which will help us determine what specific acts should be done to fulfil the requirements of the natural law, and acts of gratitude and the virtues of indebtedness especially.

4.9.2 Natural Law & Divine Law

What guides the natural law in respect to the virtues of indebtedness is the divine law. Indeed, one of the very first precepts of the natural law is that we should obey the divine law. The reason for this is that the supernatural end of the human agent transcends what he can achieve or work out on his own; thus he needs a law in addition to the natural law to know how he should act. Thus the natural law only pertains to what belongs properly to human nature. It cannot direct the human person to act according to the infused virtues, because—as we have seen—these are beyond the natural powers of the human agent. And so when he says that natural law is at the root of virtue, Aquinas means that the natural law is at the root of virtue in a general sense, as in the case of the acquired virtues, inasmuch as all virtue is a question of the basic precept of justice to do good and avoid evil. But not all virtue is subject to the natural law, because some virtuous action requires what natural law could not reasonably work out on its own—for example, what action is consequent on the dictates of revelation, such as obtaining

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344 ST I-II, .91, a.4.
345 In fact, this seems to be exactly what Aquinas has in mind when he says that the natural law is at the root of all the virtues: that is the case when we understand virtue in general; but, he goes on to say, that it is not the case that the natural law is at the root of every virtue, because some virtuous acts (such as, we might suppose, those of the infused virtues) are beyond the prescription of natural law. ST I-II, q.94, a.3: “But if we speak of virtuous acts, considered in themselves, i.e. in their proper species, thus not all virtuous acts are prescribed by the natural law: for many things are done virtuously, to which nature does not incline at first; but which, through the inquiry of reason, have been found by men to be conducive to well-living.” Sed si loquamur de actibus virtuosis secundum seipsos, prout scilicet in propriis speciebus considerantur, sic non omnes actus virtuosi sunt de lege naturae. Multa enim secundum virtutem fiunt, ad quae natura non prima inclinat; sed per rationis inquisitionem ea homines adinvenerunt, quasi utilia ad bene vivendum.

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baptism, and other such works of the Church. For this reason, we need another law in addition to the natural law: the divine law.

Throughout his corpus, Aquinas returns to the principle that the human person does not simply access the truths of God—such as those derived from the eternal law and divine law—entirely on his own, but through the teaching authority of the Church and Scripture which contains the Decalogue, which help direct the human person toward the good. Natural law is not purely autonomous as though self-directing independently of some context; if it were, there would be no sense in calling obedience a virtue, and much less a virtue of the natural law.346

Rather, the natural law orders the rational creature not simply to act, but also to receive instruction in many circumstances as to how and when he should act. The individual “could not suffice for himself in the matter of this training” required to achieve perfection through virtue; rather, the individual “needs to receive this training from another in order to arrive at the perfection of virtue” (ST I-II, q.95, a.1). Simply being in possession of the natural law by virtue of nature is not sufficient to know what to do with it. Natural law directs us to seek assistance; it identifies its own limitations.

For the same reason says Aquinas, citing Cicero’s treatment of the virtues of indebtedness, we are bound by natural law to follow human law and due customs—including the customs of the Church. Thus what is prescribed for the human person by the natural law is that he obey the “dictates of reason, which is a starting point of virtue.”347 Given that virtue includes gratitude, obedience, observance, piety, and religion, it stands to reason that natural law directs us to these things so as to receive instruction from them. And each of those virtues requires a certain submission to authority to custom and law. In the case of gratitude, natural

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346 See for example, ST II-II, q.88, a.10, ad.2: a person is bound, by both natural and divine law, to obey his superiors in the execution of his vows. Natural law does not stand above obedience to authority, but inclines the human person to legitimate authority, which one should obey.
347 ST I-II, q.92, a.1, ad.2. Here is all of Aquinas’ reply, in context, to the second objection in the article that it cannot be an effect of the law to make people good, since nobody will choose to obey the law unless they are indeed already good, to which Aquinas answers: *Ad secundum dicendum quod non semper aliquis obedit legi ex bonitate perfecta virtutis, sed quandoque quidem ex timore poenae; quandoque autem ex solo dictamine rationis, quod est quoddam principium virtutis, ut supra habitum est. This is an important objection and reply, which I will revisit later in establishing the way in which we come to learn and perfect the natural law.*
law dictates that the repayment of gifts be directed to God. And it is the virtue of religion which provides us the means of doing this. Thus gratitude, as the initiation of friendship with God, directs us to the practice of religion.

It is for this reason that Aquinas considers the precepts of religion to be a matter of the natural law, and that in particular, the offering of sacrifices falls under the natural law (ST II-II, q.85, a.1). Consequently, all are bound to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, since all are bound by the precepts of the natural law (q. 85, a.4). The natural law, which is so “inscribed in human reason”, directs us to thanksgiving. Indeed, thanksgiving is one of the primary obligations of the natural law. Consequently, gratitude, as a dictate of natural law, falls within an ecclesiological framework for Aquinas. Natural law itself directs us to the worship of God through thanksgiving and praise; and this obligation only finds its fulfilment in the Church.
CHAPTER FOUR: AQUINAS’ ECCLESIOLOGY

5.1 The Virtuous Person in the Context of the Ecclesial ‘Communio’

We often tend to think of treatments of the virtues as being somehow concerned exclusively with the interests of the individual, disembodied from any overarching communio or ecclesiology. This is equally true for many commentaries on virtue in the writings of Aquinas, which frequently consider virtues as detached from his broader picture of life within the mystery of that Christian communio. Consequently, we may be inclined to think of gratitude as being nothing more than the individual’s personal response to a perceived personal gift, or the virtue of piety being nothing other than the personal obligation to one’s own parents. But Aquinas holds that the plenitude of divine goodness cannot be transmitted to individuals as such.

Since the divine goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, on account of the distance that separates each creature from God, it had to be represented by many creatures, so that what is lacking to one might be supplied by another.348

Of course, he goes on to say, not even an entire universe of creatures would be sufficient to perfectly represent the infinite divine goodness. But the diversity of creatures is not simply a question of representing the divine goodness, but equally it is a question of Providence, and the way in which the divine goodness is diffused throughout creation: we assist one another in climbing to God in the diversity of our existence. Such is the nature of virtue, that it not only perfects the virtuous person, but also perfects and helps others at the same time.

While we may acknowledge that the virtues—most notably charity and justice—do indeed govern our personal relationships with others, these relationships are all too often conceived of in an individualistic way that ultimately treats of the ‘other’ as an abstract entity, while the focus remains on the actions of the individual isolated from an embracing and unifying community and ecclesial theology. Aquinas’ treatise on the virtues however is only properly understood within a unifying ecclesiology and in particular a sacramental

348 Compendium Theologiae, 1:120: *Quia enim divinam bonitatem perfecte repraesentari impossibile fuit propter distantiam uniussciusque creaturae a Deo, necessarium fuit ut repraesentaretur per multa, ut quod deest ex uno, suppleretur ex alio.*
ecclesiology. The person cannot reach the perfection as an individual apart from perfection within the *communion of saints* or ecclesial community. This is especially true of the virtue of gratitude which Aquinas ties not only to an understanding of the general notion of *gift*, but to the very essence of the person. For Aquinas, the notion of person furthermore is only fully understood within the perfecting mission of Christianity itself, and more broadly, within an understanding of religion itself, which, Aquinas tells us, “is chief among the moral virtues.”

The virtuous individual is not virtuous on account of personal acts independent of the good of the community but precisely because of the Church community, which defines him and the very exercise of his virtue. The good of the person is the good of the community, and vice versa. Aquinas’ vision of the Church surfaces in most of his scriptural commentaries, such as the *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, where the vision of the Church clearly places the spiritual life of the individual within the context of the Church community. Being a member of the Church community brings with it an indebtedness to that community of faith, through the practice of all that the virtue of religion requires: “For one who professes a religion makes himself a debtor to all that pertains to the observances of that religion.”

In a nutshell then we could characterise Aquinas’ understanding of the virtues thus: there can be no real (infused) virtue without grace; and there can be no grace without Christ, who is manifested in the world through the mediation of the Church and the sacraments. The virtues of indebtedness in particular order the human person to this end. While Aquinas does not doubt God’s ability to directly infuse virtue or grace into anyone he chooses, the normative means by which we obtain the grace of infused virtue is through the Church and the “Divine gifts” of the sacraments.

The sacraments of the New Law produce a character, in so far as by them we are directed to the worship of God according to the rite of the

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349 ST II-II, q.81, a.6: *religio est praecipua inter virtutes morales*.
350 “For, since one man is a part of the community, each man in all that he is and has, belongs to the community; just as a part, in all that it is, belongs to the whole” (ST I-II, q.96, a.4). I will examine in the next chapter Aquinas’ notion of personhood and virtuous personhood which is in fact tied to his notion of community.
351 Commentary on Galatians 5:1 *Nam quicumque profitetur in aliqua religione, facit se debitorem omnium quae ad observantiam illius religionis pertinent*.
352 ST I-II, q.108, a.2.
Christian religion. For this reason Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. ii), after saying that God “by a kind of sign grants a share of Himself to those that approach Him,” adds “by making them Godlike and communicators of Divine gifts.” Now the worship of God consists either in receiving Divine gifts, or in bestowing them on others.353

For this reason, the superlative work of Divine Providence is to bring people into the Church, through which they can hope to attain perfection and the hope of eternal life: “Now, the citizens who are ruled most perfectly by divine providence form the society of the Church triumphant, which is also called the City of God in Scripture. Hence, the enrolment or representation of those who are to be admitted to that society is called the book of life.”354

Aquinas sets the stage for this communal vision of virtue in his Commentary on Hebrews, where he says that when we wish to define a virtue perfectly, we need to consider both its matter and its end—since good habits (or virtues) are known through their acts, and acts are known through their determinate ends. In illustration of the point, Aquinas considers the virtue of fortitude, which, he says, deals with fear and daring as its matter and the good of the republic as its end.355 It is through the perfection of the community in other words in which we find the proper definition of the virtue of fortitude which originates in the will of the individual but which act of the will is only properly realised in the perfection of the community. And so it is with all the virtues—both natural and infused: the end of each virtue is for both the good of the individual and of the community:

Now it is evident that all who are included in a community, stand in relation to that community as parts to a whole; while a part, as such, belongs to a whole, so that whatever is the good of a part can be directed to the good of the whole. It follows therefore that the good of any virtue, whether such virtue direct man in relation to himself, or in

353 ST III, q.63, a.2
354 De Veritate, q.7, a.1: Multitudo autem illa quae eminentissimo modo divina providentia gubernatur, est collegium Ecclesiae triumphantis, quae et civitas Dei nominatur in Scripturis; et ideo conscriptio eorum qui ad illam societatem sunt admittendi, sive repraesentatio, liber vitae dicitur.
355 Commentary on Hebrews, 11, 1: Unde sciendum est, quod volens perfecte diffinire virtutem aliquam, oportet quod tangat materiam eius propriam, circa quam est, et finem eius, quia habitus cognoscitur per actum et actus per obiectum. Et ideo oportet tangere actum et ordinem ad obiectum et finem. Sicut volens diffinire fortitudinem, oportet tangere propriam eius materiam circa quam est, scilicet timores et audacias, et finem, scilicet bonum reipublicae, ut dicatur quod fortitudo est virtus moderativa illorum, propter bonum reipublicae.
relation to certain other individual persons, is referred to the common good.\textsuperscript{356}

Similarly, the person possessed of the infused virtues (that is, virtues properly speaking) is not virtuous simply through an unmediated and purely individual relationship with the Divine, but on account of the grace of God mediated through the Church. It is only within such a context that both the notion of person, and by extension the treatise on virtues, finds coherence. This can be seen through an analysis of Aquinas’ understanding of the ecclesial communion.

\section*{5.2 Aquinas’ notion of the Church}

Part of the problem in identifying Aquinas’ ecclesiology to begin with, it has been well-noted, is that Aquinas does not provide any specific treatment of the Church as such and that there is no section in the \textit{Summa} which treats of the Church itself in a systematic way. Rather, his ecclesiology is “hidden and diffused throughout his corpus, and accessible to a large degree only by his Christology, pneumatology, and sacramentology.”\textsuperscript{357} Yet despite this apparent lack of any ostensive ecclesiology, Aquinas’ conception of the Church is integral to his understanding of the virtues and the role of grace in the justification of the human person. In fact, Aquinas’ ecclesiology is integral to his whole theological and philosophical enterprise.\textsuperscript{358} The whole structure of Aquinas’ enterprise in the \textit{Summa} for example, as Chenu famously noted, can be read as a framework of \textit{exitus-reditus}: a flowing of all being from God which in

\textsuperscript{356} ST II-II, q.58, a.5: \textit{Manifestum est autem quod omnes qui sub communitate aliqua continentur comparantur ad communitatem sicut partes ad totum. Pars autem id quod est totius est, unde et quodlibet bonum partis est ordinabile in bonum totius. Secundum hoc igitur bonum cuiuslibet virtutis, sive ordinantis aliquem hominem ad seipsum sive ordinantis ipsum ad aliquid alias personas singulares, est referibile ad bonum commune}.


\textsuperscript{358} Consider, for example, the way in which Aquinas relies on \textit{Metaphysics} V in his explication of 1 Corinthians where the notion of one is employed in his ecclesiology. Throughout Aquinas’ works, metaphysical insights, belonging properly to philosophy, are nevertheless only properly understood in reference to the divine.
The point of turnaround—or the point where the rational creature is able to return to God—is found exclusively in the person of Christ, who is the Head of the Church.  

Aquinas never separates the operation of the Church from the operation of Christ. Like Chenu, Yves Congar also understood this, and found the reason for it in Aquinas’ understanding of creaturely participation in the Divine, through the person of Jesus Christ sustained and effected in the virtuous life. Even the hierarchy of the Church is for this purpose—namely, the instruments by which the members of the Church have access to Christ.  

For this reason, Congar understood the lack of any discrete treatise on ecclesiology in the *Summa* as being indicative of the fact that Aquinas does not understand “the Church” to be a sub-divided topic among other topics (for example, as a topic distinct from sacramentology or soteriology) but is in fact the underlying foundation or medium through which the entire creature-Divine relationship is established.  

Aquinas’ treatment of the Church, therefore, is infused throughout the entire *Secunda Pars*, and so his notion of the Church is to be understood as the broad context in which he considers the economy of salvation itself. In his essay for the first edition of the Thomist, Congar wrote that “For St Thomas, the Church is the whole economy of the return towards God, *motus rationalis creaturae in Deum*, in short, the *Seconda Pars*.”  

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359 Chenu remarks, “Beyond the scientific world of Aristotle, Saint Thomas appeals to the Platonic theme of emanation and return. Since theology is the science of God, all things will be studied in their relation to God, whether in their production or in their final end, in their exitus et reditus.” Chenu, Marie-Dominique. Toward Understanding Saint Thomas. Chicago: Henry Regnery Press, 1964, p.304. Rudi te Velde rejects Chenu’s famous reading of the exitus-reditus scheme into the structure of the Summa. I will treat more of this controversy in the Chapter on Gratitude. See Velde, Rudi A. te. *Aquinas on God: the 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologicae*. Oxford: Ashgate, 2006, p11 ff.  
360 See for example, ST I, q.2, proemium: *Christo, qui, secundum quod homo, via est nobis tendendi in Deum*.  
361 Thomas O’Meara explains, “For Yves Congar, Aquinas’ ecclesiology is found in his lengthy treatment of the Christian life; Aquinas views the Church as a communio to nourish faith, hope, and love. Congar observes the influence of Platonism in this ecclesiology of grace…. All grace flows to the members of the Mystical Body from the caput, Christ. Citing Pseudo-Dionysius, the Commentary on the Sentences explains that episcopal power has for its goal the purification, illumination, and leading to perfection of the ranks of Church members below it.” See O’Meara O.P., Aquinas Franklin. *Philosophical Models in Ecclesiology*. Aquinas Institute of Theology. Dubuque. Online journal edition: http://www.ts.mu.edu/readers/content/pdf/39/39.1/39.1.1.pdf. P.7  
In short, the economy of salvation is summed up for Aquinas in the person of Jesus Christ who, as head of the Church, is the means by which we return to God, and through whom the exitus et reditus is completed.

5.2.1 Sacramental Theosis & the Twofold Operation of Christ

Christ acts upon the members of the Church in both an interior and exterior way: interiorly, through the grace given to each member through the infused virtues; externally through the manifestation of Christ’s continued presence in the world through the visible structure and governance of the Church and, as we shall see, in the action in the sacraments:

I answer that, the head influences the other members [of the body] in two ways. First, by a certain intrinsic influence, inasmuch as motive and sensitive force flow from the head to the other members; secondly, by a certain exterior guidance, inasmuch as by sight and the senses, which are rooted in the head, man is guided in his exterior acts. Now the interior influx of grace is from no one save Christ, Whose manhood, through its union with the Godhead, has the power of justifying; but the influence over the members of the Church, as regards their exterior guidance, can belong to others; and in this way others may be called heads of the Church....

Thus, Aquinas' ecclesiology is founded on a twofold configuration of the individual to Christ. In the first instance, this configuration is an internal configuration of the individual—a ‘configuration of the heart’—and in the second instance, there is an external configuration of both of the individual participating in the Church itself: “just as internal actions belong to the heart, so do external actions belong to the members of the flesh.”

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364 ST III, q.8, a.6: Respondeo dicendum quod caput in alia membra infiltur dupliciter. Uno modo, quodam intrinseco influxu, prout virtus motiva et sensitiva a capite derivatur ad cetera membra. Alio modo, secundum exteriorem quandam gubernationem, prout scilicet secundum visum et alios sensus, qui in capite radicantur, dirigitur homo in exterioribus actibus. Interior autem effluxus gratiae non est ab aliquo nisi a solo Christo, cuius humanitas, ex hoc quod est divinitati adiuncta, habet virtutem iustificandi. Sed influxus in membra Ecclesiae quantum ad exteriorem gubernationem, potest alis convenire. Et secundum hoc, aliqui alii possunt dici capita Ecclesiae....
365 ST II-II, q.81, a.7. I do not intend—as Aquinas does not intend—by the use of the distinction of terms ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to suggest that there is a twofold order of grace, one internal and one external; all grace acts upon the soul of the individual internally insofar as the human person participates in grace accidentally (ST I-II, q.112, a.4, ad.3); but whereas the grace of the sacraments is signified by external...
in keeping with Aquinas’ general description of the virtue of religion, which consists of both internal actions of the heart and external actions of worship (ST II-II, q.81, a.7).

The internal configuration of the heart to Christ corresponds to the possession and exercise of the virtues. And since what Christ offers us through the Church is totally gratuitous, the first virtue to respond is gratitude. There is an analogy then between gift and gratitude and the sacraments of grace and faith-filled reception of these.

Such a configuration is a perfection of the operation of the will and intellect, which are the principle of human actions, thus these powers of the soul are the subject of the virtues. But: the happiness of eternal beatitude, to which man is invited in Christ, surpasses the natural powers of the intellect and will, and so a second configuration in Christ is needed—something which opens up human nature to the fullness of beatitude. This secondary configuration takes place through the work of the visible Church, and primarily through the sacraments, which are superadded by Providence through the Church for the perfection of human nature in grace.

The grace of the virtues and gifts perfects the essence and powers of the soul sufficiently as regards ordinary conduct: but as regards certain special effects which are necessary in a Christian life, sacramental grace is needed.

Thus it makes no sense in Aquinas to speak of a person who possesses the perfect or infused virtues independently of sacramental grace outside the Church, and vice versa. Both are required for the perfection of the Christian life which is lived in the context of the communio. Consider, for example, Aquinas’ fourfold distinction of the virtues in question sixty one, article five, of the Prima Pars. Here, Aquinas adopts the division of Macrobius who, in his Super Somnium Scipionis (Commentary on the Dream of Scipio), classifies the virtues according to the social (or human), the perfecting, the perfect and the exemplary. All of the virtues can be considered as existing originally in God since all perfection flows from the divine mind. The
social virtues (which Aquinas variously refers to as human, acquired and natural) are those virtues which enable humans to live together productively in society; they make for a peaceful state, efficient and just government, honest commerce, and so on. These kinds of virtues, on their own, do not require sacramental grace, since they are purely natural and do not lay claim to the name of virtue properly speaking. The perfecting and perfect virtues however (which Aquinas also refers to as ‘infused’) have God directly as their efficient cause. In other words, they are ‘infused with grace’.

The perfecting virtues, as the gerund suggests, do not yet signify a perfection in the human person, but signify that someone is striving on the way to perfection—namely, that someone is developing a tendency towards ‘Divine similitude’—while those who possess virtue perfectly speaking (and such people, Aquinas tells us, are rare) are about to attain such perfection in this life. But when we consider Aquinas’ conception of the ‘perfected’ human creature, such a person has attained divine similitude on account of Christ, mediated through the sacramental life of the Church. There is no distinction therefore to be found in Aquinas between the perfectly virtuous person, and the person divinised through the instrumental power of the sacraments. While there is indeed a formal distinction (distinctio formalis: not to be understood in a Scotist sense) between the infused virtues and the sacraments, there is no distinction between the virtuous person and the person who is vivified by the grace of the sacraments and vice versa. This is the basis of Aquinas’ doctrine of theosis, or divinisation, and it explains the way in which the virtuous person attains divine similitude: the process of theosis, for Aquinas, is initiated sacramentally.

Hence, the internal configuration brought about by the infused virtues is disposed towards the external configuration brought about by the sacramental life of the Church in Christ, which again in turn presupposes the internal ordering to God through Christ. The two configurations to Christ—internal and external—are not separable, but form a unified

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368 ST I-II q.110, q.3
369 These virtues are not directly equated with grace; they are different from, but oriented to, grace: ST I-II q.110, a.3; but grace is at the same time the principle and root of the infused virtues: ST I-II, q.110, a.3, ad.3.
370 ST I-II, q.61, a.5
participation in the life of Christ. Both operations are united in the single operation of Providence, which governs both the temporal and eternal destiny of the human person.\textsuperscript{371}

What this points to is that the life of virtue properly speaking is not separable from the supplementary and consummating action of sacramental grace. The internal disposition of the human person towards the good in general—that is, according to the natural disposition of the creature—is more proper to human nature as such because it concerns things which are within the rational agent’s natural powers. However, this natural disposition on its own is not enough for the rational agent’s beatitude, since this lies totally beyond his natural powers.

Consequently, Aquinas is at pains to refute the Pelagian tendency to stress man’s ability to establish friendship with God on his own merits (see for example ST I-II, q.109, a.4). The human person is totally incapable of bridging the gap between the creature and God. Thus, Providence has provided something above and beyond the natural capacity of his human nature, namely the sacraments and gifts of the Holy Spirit through the treasury of the Church.\textsuperscript{372}

The virtues therefore fall within the scope of the human person’s natural powers, but this is not sufficient for salvation and sanctification. For this reason it falls within the scope of providence to provide those visible and external remedies in the form of the sacraments to aid the human person in establishing friendship with God. The reason that the sacramental life is established in the visible, external order is, Aquinas tells us, because sin has the tendency to cling unduly to the things of the physical world and so Providence provides us with something we readily identify with and have immediate contact with, while at the same time re-establishing the goodness of the created order as pointing to Christ.

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\textsuperscript{371} ST I, q.22, a.1. Strictly speaking, Aquinas holds that the sacraments are governed more perfectly by providence; the virtues do not fall in the same way under the direction of Providence since they are formalised by an act of the will. However, we can speak of a role of Providence that providence plays in providing the virtuous person with the circumstances and opportunities through which such acts of the will are enacted.

\textsuperscript{372} See for example, ST III, q.61, a.1: \textit{...the condition of human nature...is such that it has to be led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible. Now it belongs to Divine providence to provide for each one according as its condition requires. Divine wisdom, therefore, fittingly provides man with means of salvation, in the shape of corporeal and sensible signs that are called sacraments. ...ex conditione humanae naturae, cuius proprium est ut per corporalia et sensibilia in spiritualia et intelligibilia deductur. Pertinet autem ad divinam providentiam ut unicuique rei providet secundum modum suae conditionis. Et ideo convenienter divina sapientia homini auxilia salutis conferat sub quibusdam corporalibus et sensibilibus signis, quae sacraentia dicuntur.}
Thus it was fitting that through the visible things themselves the remedies of salvation be applied to men…. Nor is it unsuitable that by things visible and bodily a spiritual salvation is served. For visible things of this kind are the instruments, so to say, of a God who was made flesh and suffered. Now, an instrument does not operate by the power of its nature, but by the power of its principal agent who puts it into operation. Thus, also, then, do visible things of this kind work out a spiritual salvation—not by a property of their own nature, but by Christ’s institution, and from the latter they receive their instrumental power.  

Given this twofold order of grace—the internal established through virtue and the external established through the sacraments of the Church—it is not possible to separate them out in Aquinas and to treat of virtue simply as an unmediated participation in the Divine. The infused virtues, or virtues properly speaking, are only coherent concepts in Aquinas’ system in fuller context of his sacramental ecclesiology. This model of virtue as mediated participation is totally in keeping with Aquinas’ notion of the person which he explicates largely through the lens of Scripture (most notably in his exegesis of the Pauline Epistles) and the mysticism of Dionysius, for whom the interior motion of the soul is unified to its external source in Christ.  

Christ is the source of both the virtues and the sacraments. And in Christ, the interior life of virtue and the external gifts of the sacraments are unified; sacramental grace completes the virtuous life. There is one movement between the efficacy of the sacraments and the efficacy of the virtues through Christ, who is the cause and reason for the efficacy of both. This is why, as Aquinas explains, quoting the Venerable Bede, that the Devil will often attack Christ’s work of salvation, brought about through the work of the Church through the sacramental economy, through an attack on virtue: “often, when after falling into sin we strive to return to God [in the Church], we experience further and more grievous attacks from the old enemy. This he does…that he may inspire us with a distaste (odium) for virtue….”

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373 SCG IV, c.56, n.5 & n.7.
374 See for example The Divine Names, 705A.
375 See ST I-II, q.20, a.3 and ST III, q.62, a.2
376 The virtues are define as being that which God works in us, without us: ST I-II, q.55, a.4; and God alone is the source of the efficacy of the sacraments, as Reginald of Piperno adds in the Supplement (ST Supp. q.29, a.3) and this is consistent with what Aquinas says of the sacraments throughout his corpus.
377 ST III, q.44, a.1, ad.4: dum converti ad Deum post peccata conamur, maioribus novisque antiqui hostis pulsamur insidiis. Quod facit vel ut odium virtutis incutiat....
5.2.2 Complementarity of the Grace of Virtue and Grace of the Sacraments

In question sixty-two of the Treatise on the Sacraments (tertia pars), Aquinas specifically deals with the question whether or not sacramental grace confers anything in addition to the grace obtained through the virtues. The first objection notes that, since the grace of the infused virtues and gifts perfect the soul in both its essence and its powers, this seems to make the grace conferred by the sacraments superfluous. In his reply to the objection, Aquinas draws the distinction between what the grace required for “ordinary conduct” and the grace necessary for living a “Christian life.” At first glance, this short reply to the objection is troubling, because it seems to suggest that the infused virtues are only suitable for a life established in “pure nature” while beatitude requires something superadded to “pure nature” by way of the sacraments in order to elevate the subject to divine beatitude. Such a conclusion would be troubling furthermore, because it would seem to undermine what Aquinas has said about the efficacy of the infused virtues in the treatise on virtues in the prima secundae partis.

But it is precisely the wider context of the treatise on virtues (and what is said in the Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus) that, when read in conjunction with the treatise on the sacraments, this first-glance reading is not adequate, nor should it be taken as support for the “pure nature” thesis. Rather, a short-cut to Aquinas’ thinking on this issue is found in question one hundred and nine on the prima secundae partis on the necessity of grace: grace is needed both for the perfected and corrupt states; and not only for attaining eternal life, but the rational creature in both the perfected and fallen state requires grace simply to fulfil the commandments of the Divine Law. The perfected human creature can, Aquinas says, carry out the substance of the works required by the Divine Law. In other words, the perfected agent can, by his own natural powers, conduct virtuous acts of justice, temperance and fortitude, etc. But without grace, the rational creature is not capable—either in the corrupt or perfected states—of fulfilling the precepts of the Divine Law out of charity (ST I-II, q.109, a.4). To suggest otherwise would be, Aquinas insists, to commit the “Pelagian heresy”; for charity is the essence of friendship with God, and no one can simply establish friendship with God (or anyone for that matter) by...
his own efforts. Friendship with God cannot be attained without grace, either in a pre-fallen or post-fallen state.

Grace is, in its simplest conception for Aquinas, the friendship of God (ST II-II, q.26). Both the virtues and the sacraments make this friendship possible, for two distinct reasons. In the first place, the virtues make friendship possible with Christ by perfecting the powers of the soul and thereby making the possibility of Divine friendship a reality. The virtues are thus dispositive in that they orient the creature internally towards friendship with the Divine.\textsuperscript{378} The sacraments on the other hand actualise this friendship and make it an external reality. The sacraments are Christ’s initiative towards the human person, while the virtues are the creature’s openness to this Divine initiative. Aquinas in fact repeatedly appeals to the notion of friendship so actualised in his treatise on the sacraments. For example, in his discussion of the Eucharist, he says that it was out of love that Christ became incarnate and it is a special feature, furthermore, of his desire for friendship with us that he continues to make himself available, bodily-speaking and not just figuratively, among his friends.\textsuperscript{379}

5.3 Incarnational Ecclesiology

What Aquinas proposes is a genuinely incarnational ecclesiology in which the creature participates in both body and soul in friendship with Christ. Aquinas’ ecclesiology is not understood in terms of mental acts, but in terms of the whole person—body and soul—operating in a determinate time and place. Acts of worship, furthermore, require tangible signs in the physical order, and the proper use of these tangible signs, including sacramental signs, occurs in a specific place. The “communion of saints” is not simply a gathering of people with a common interest, but a gathering of a unified people in a time and place in which each individual is part of a whole which brings about his or her perfection.

\textsuperscript{378} ST II-II, q.180, a.2, ad.1: \textit{ad primum ergo dicendum quod, sicut dictum est, vita contemplativa habet motivum ex parte affectus, et secundum hoc dilectio Dei et proximi requiritur ad vitam contemplativam. Causae autem moventes non inrant essentiam rei, sed disponunt et perficiunt rem. Unde non sequitur quod virtutes morales essentialiter pertineant ad vitam contemplativam.}

\textsuperscript{379} ST III, q.75, a.1.
Grace is mediated through the created order, whether this mediation is through the signs of the sacraments or interiorly within the rational creature himself and outwardly through virtuous actions. Virtue is not simply a matter of internal reflection, but which is united to its proper objects, its acts exercised in the body. Hence, Aquinas is able to speak of “virtues of the body”—those virtues pertaining to playing and recreation and to the graceful and modest movement of the human body. There is a certain aesthetic quality to the virtues; spiritual beauty is manifest in physical beauty. Virtues are not simply about disembodied action, but involve a flourishing of the spirit in the body itself, as it moves through life in the created order in time and place. In this, Aquinas’ notion of flourishing goes beyond Aristotle’s use of eudaimonia; for Aristotle, the virtues are indeed about the good life in the world, life of individuals interacting among family members, among friends, among fellow citizens engaged in the political life, and among commercial enterprises aimed at and the acquisition of various kinds of legitimate wealth. This is not to say that Aristotle leaves no room for beauty in his ethical system; but Aquinas, while allowing for much of what Aristotle has in mind in his concept of human flourishing, delves deep into the transcendental notion of beauty and draws much from Dionysius’ on this topic. For Dionysius, the beauty of God is mediated through the beauty of the created order, and the recognition of beauty in that created order is the first step in the ascent towards the divine origin of all beauty. Human happiness is not a disembodied experience but a lived experience in the flesh in time and place. So too for Aquinas, the perfection of the human person is not simply a perfection of the soul, but also a perfection of the human body through spiritual perfection as its proper form. The beauty of the soul is complemented by the beauty of the human body.

In citing chapter four of Dionysius’ Divine Names, Aquinas remarks that beauty is a feature of every virtue, and in an especially evident way it is seen in the virtue of temperance. This is because, as Dionysius notes, beauty is the proper proportion of things—both in terms of internal and unifying coherence, and in proportion of a thing to its exemplar. In the virtue of

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380 ST II-II, q.168.
381 ST I-II, q.4, a.5
temperance in particular Aquinas notes we find occurring one such beautifying proportion between what is lowest in man—that is, his baser, animal appetites—and what is more excellent in him, namely his rational powers, his will and ability to love.\textsuperscript{382} The virtue of temperance provides a harmony between the powers and appetites of the human person, providing a unification of the body and soul—which relation has been otherwise destabilised through original sin.

The exercise of the virtues is not only manifested in the body; the body too exercises the virtues in time and place. In question eighty-four of the \textit{secunda secundae partis}, he treats of adoration (\textit{adoratione}) and the “exterior acts of latria” (\textit{exterioribus actibus latriae}). Article two specifies that adoration involves both a spiritual and a bodily worship:

\ldots since we are composed of a twofold nature, intellectual and sensible, we offer God a twofold adoration: namely, a spiritual adoration, consisting in the internal devotion of the mind; and a bodily adoration, which consists in an exterior humbling of the body.\textsuperscript{383}

Given that the body exists in a time and place, Aquinas then goes on to say—in article three—that the bodily signs of adoration “must of necessity be in some definite place and position” (\textit{corporalia signa necesse est quod in determinato loco et situ sint}). Aquinas’ ecclesiology understands the Church to be manifest both in the spiritual order (following what he identifies as the “spiritual truth of the Gospel”) and the tangible, physical order of creation through which God’s goodness is communicated to the creature.

Aquinas gives three reasons why God needs to be adored and worshiped in a determinate location (ST II-II, q.84, a.3, ad.2): firstly, because the Church is consecrated to God, which increases the devotion of the adorers and places them in a suitable frame-of-mind for worship in which to be heard by God; secondly, because the determinate location contains those sacred objects set aside for worship; and thirdly, on account of the “concourse of adoring crowds” (\textit{concursum multorum adorantium}) who come together to praise and worship God,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{382} See ST II-II, q.141, a.2, ad.3
\item \textsuperscript{383} ST II-II, q.84, a.2: \textit{quia ex duplici natura compositi sumus, intellectuali scilicet et sensibili, duplicem adorationem Deo offerimus, scilicet spiritualem, quae consistit in interiori mentis devotione; et corporalem, quae consistit in exteriori corporis humiliatione.}
\end{itemize}
according to the exhortation in Matthew 18:20, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

With this in mind, it becomes clear that for Aquinas, the “communion of the saints” is to be understood in two ways: as both embodying the community of believers and as being a determinate place in which the believers are drawn to God through *sacred signs*. As Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P explains,

…the Latin expression, *communio sanctorum* has two possible meanings. The word *sanctorum* can be the genitive plural of *sancti* (“saints,” that is to say, the faithful, as we find it used in St Paul), and thus it describes the communion among the faithful. It can also be the genitive plural of *sancta* (“holy things”) and thus designate a communion in holy things (in the sacraments, in grace, in God himself). The grammar of the expression does not allow us to sever these two meanings from each other, since they are both possible meanings of the Latin words. Neither does history allow for this, because both meanings are well attested in the most ancient preaching on the Apostle’s Creed. For faith and for theology, however, there is no doubt: the second meaning alone makes the first possible. It is because Christians commune in holy things, because they gather around the *sancta*, these goods that they hold in common, that they can together form the communion of saints gathered in the Holy Spirit.\(^{384}\)

It is clear that Aquinas has both these interpretations of ‘*sanctorum*’ in mind as Torrell describes them. Among the holy things are those sacred signs pertaining to the exercise of the sacraments, which are manifest in the visible and tangible order, add something to nature so as to elevate it beyond what is visible. Thus the worship of God is both of the internal and external order, an expression of Divine Participation exercised both bodily and spiritually.

Now the Divine worship is twofold: internal, and external. For since man is composed of soul and body, each of these should be applied to the worship of God; the soul by an interior worship; the body by an outward worship: hence it is written in Psalm 83, *‘My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.’* And as the body is ordained to God through the soul, so the outward worship is ordained to the internal worship. *Now interior worship consists in the soul being united to God by the intellect and affections.* Wherefore according to the various ways in which the intellect and affections of the man who worships God are rightly united to God, his external actions are applied in various ways to the Divine worship.\(^{385}\)

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\(^{385}\) ST I-II, q.101, a.2: *Est autem duplex cultus Dei, interior, et exterior. Cum enim homo sit compositus ex anima et corpore, utrumque debet applicari ad colendum Deum, ut scilicet anima colat interiori cultu, et corpus exteriori, unde dicitur in Psalmo LXXXIII, cor meum et caro mea exultaverunt in Deum vivum. Et*
This incarnational ecclesiology in which the members of the Church participate is itself a participation in the life of Christ. Christ is not simply head of our souls, but of our bodies too; virtuous actions are incarnate, as are the sacraments. Given that the soul is the form of the body, the perfection of the body in reference to its moral acts implies the perfecting of its formal principle and the perfecting of the soul through grace; and by extension, the intellect—which is the principle of the virtues—is perfected through the perfection of the soul.

5.4 Christ as the Source of Grace of the Virtues & Sacraments

In his treatise on the Person of Christ in the Tertia Pars of the Summa, Aquinas explains that neither the natural or perfected nature of the human agent is sufficient to establish friendship in God. This requires grace which perfects the very essence of the soul, while the virtues perfect the intellectual and bodily operations which flow from that essence. Christ, furthermore, is the paradigm of all the virtues, in whom the virtues find their perfection. Hence, it is from the grace of Christ that the virtues flow.

Hence it is necessary that as the powers of the soul flow from its essence, so do the virtues flow from grace. Now the more perfect a principle is, the more it impresses its effects. Hence, since the grace of Christ was most perfect, there flowed from it, in consequence, the virtues which perfect the several powers of the soul for all the soul’s acts; and thus Christ had all the virtues.
It is thus that the natural virtues need the infusion of grace to become rooted in Divine charity and thus efficacious for salvation.\textsuperscript{389} Aquinas goes on to explain in his response to the objections in the above passage that Christ does not need grace in the way that the creature does, but rather he is the “dispenser of grace.”\textsuperscript{390} Indeed, it is not simply the Church that dispenses the sacraments in isolation from Christ, but it does so through the reality of the presence of Christ in the Church: “Christ Himself perfects all the sacraments of the Church: it is He who baptizes; it is He who forgives sins; it is He, the true priest, who offered Himself on the altar of the cross, and by whose power His body is daily consecrated on the altar—nevertheless, because He was not going to be with all the faithful in bodily presence, He chose ministers to dispense the things just mentioned to the faithful.”\textsuperscript{391} Hence, the graces which come to us through virtue and the graces which come to us through the sacraments find their origin and source in the person of Christ.

The Church according to Aquinas is thus nothing less than the continuation of this work of Christ; for example, those who seek universal truth sincerely—even if they do not yet know Christ—are seeking nothing less than conformity to the doctrines of the Church.\textsuperscript{392} Thus Christ is mysteriously but concretely manifest in the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit through the creatures’ participation in the Divine, enacted in part by the virtues, completed by sacraments, intellectually nourished by the doctrines of the Church and directed ultimately toward eternal beatitude.

Aquinas frequently identifies this work of grace through Christ with the work of the Church.\textsuperscript{393} Characteristically, in his Commentary on the Colossians he states that “Christ and the Church are one mystical person, whose head is Christ.”\textsuperscript{394} It is fair to say that Aquinas

\textsuperscript{389} ST I-II, q.109, a.4
\textsuperscript{390} ST III, q.7, a.7, ad.2: \textit{Sic autem non competit sibi habere gratiam, sed potius esse gratiae largitorem.}
\textsuperscript{391} SCG IV, c.76, n.7: \textit{Manifestum est enim quod omnia ecclesiastica sacramenta ipse Christus perficit: ipse enim est qui baptizat; ipse qui peccata remittit; ipse est verus sacerdos, qui se obtulit in ara crucis, et cuius virtute corpus eius in altari quotidie consecratur: et tamen, quia corporaliter non cum omnibus fidelibus praeceptaliiter erat futurus, elegit ministros, per quos praedicta fidelibus dispensaret…}
\textsuperscript{392} ST II-II, q.11, a.2, ad.3
\textsuperscript{393} See for example SCG IV.50.9; ST II-II, q. 2, a.7:
\textsuperscript{394} Emphasis added. See Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Colossenses lectura, 1-6: \textit{Christus et Ecclesia est una persona mystica, cuius caput est Christus… I am conscious here of de Lubac’s (et al) insistence that there}
routinely treats the Church in purely Christological terms—and, vice versa, Christ in ecclesial
terms, since our knowledge of Christ is derived from the Church. Hence, “The Church’s
ordinances are Christ’s own ordinances.”

It would be going much too far to assert that Christ and the Church are univocal terms
for Aquinas; but the fact remains that for Aquinas, the Church is the means by which we come
to know Christ and encounter him.

Humans have no natural knowledge of Christ’s divinity says Aquinas, as there is for the
existence of God, which we can come to know—albeit with great difficulty and by nature in a
“general and confused way”—through the light of natural reason (ST I, a.2, q.1). But such
knowledge of Christ-as-divine is not possible. For to know simply the historical fact of the man
Jesus of Nazareth’s existence is not to know Christ, the Son of God; rather, to know Christ as
divine is to know the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ—namely, the Mysteria
Christi. These mysteries of Christ are not accessible to the light of natural reason, and require
the infusion of faith without which salvation is not possible (ST II-II, q.2). How then do we
come to know Christ in the mysteries of his person? The knowledge of Christ is not a natural
knowledge, or a knowledge of a particular kind of datum, but a kind of practical knowledge in
which the truth is experienced and lived as an encounter with Christ in God: “Thus the one who

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is a necessary distinction between Christ and the Church—a distinction which I believe Aquinas himself
maintains; however, it remains true that Christ is the necessary form of the very life of the Church:
“Christ is our life, because the whole principle of our life and activity is Christ” (Commentary on
Philippians, 1.3.18).

395 ST III, q.83, a.3: [Sed contra est quod] ea quae per Ecclesiam statuuntur, ab ipso Christo ordinantur.
396 ST II-II, q.2, a.7: Post tempus autem gratiae revelatae tam maiores quam minores tenentur habere
fidem explicitam de mysteriis Christi; praecepice quantum ad ea quae communione in Ecclesia
sollemnizantur et publice proponuntur, sicut sunt articuli incarnationis, de quibus supra dictum est. Alias
autem subtiles considerationes circa incarnationis articulos tenentur aliqvi magis vel minus explicitc
credere secundum quod convenit statui et officio uniusculaque.
lives in a holy way knows God’s will.” “Knowing Christ” is inextricably linked to virtuous living, the fullness of which requires sacramental grace from Christ as a condition for salvation (ST III, q.61). Christ is thus both the source and object of virtuous living—the mediatory point of the exitus et reditus; we are spiritually reborn in Christ in baptism (ST III, q.68, a.1) and return to the Father through him: the Incarnation is the means of the restoration of human nature (ST III, q.1, a.2: ad humanae naturae reparationem).

Because Christ himself is the source of our rebirth and return to God, the knowledge of Christ is not simply a one-way knowledge of the rational creature of Christ; in the first initiating movement, it is Christ’s knowledge of the rational creature: “Therefore, the soul of Christ knows all creatures not only according to their natural properties, as the angels also do, but even in so far as they are subject to divine providence and are ordered to the end of human salvation and the gifts of grace. Therefore, He knows all individual things and every single act of all things, even the secret thoughts of men’s hearts. This can be said of no other creature.”

The knowledge of Christ is relational; it consists, on the part of the human person in virtuous living; and on the part of Christ in the governance of Providence, which finds its perfection in the exercise of the ministry of the Church: “the citizens who are ruled most perfectly by divine providence form the society of the Church triumphant, which is also called the City of God in Scripture.”

This is in keeping with a key principle of Aquinas, namely that the work of divine providence is always, in reference to creatures, mediated through the created order. This work of Providence is achieved primarily through what we might say has the nature of fate (rationem fati) but in a more ordered and systematic way through the work of the Church. The

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397 Commentary on Colossians, 1.3.19: Ille ergo cognoscit voluntatem Dei, qui in sanctitate vivit.
398 De Veritate, q.20, a.7: Scit igitur anima Christi omnes creaturas, non solum quantum ad naturales proprietates, quod et Angeli habent, sed etiam secundum quod substant divinae providentiae ordinatae in finem salutis humanae et donorum gratiae: et ideo scit omnia singularia, et omnes singulares actus omnium, et etiam cordis abscondita; quod de nulla alia creatura dicere oportet.
399 De Veritate, q.7, a.1: Multitudo autem illa quae eminentissimo modo divina providentia gubernatur, est collegium Ecclesiae triumphantis, quae et civitas Dei nominatur in Scripturis.
400 ST I, q.116, a.2

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government of the Church has been disposed by Providence in Christ for the benefit of all the members.\textsuperscript{401}

5.5 The Nature of the Church as perfecting

Aquinas finds throughout the Pauline Epistles ample transcendental imagery of Unity, Oneness, Goodness, and Beauty as paradigms of the Church. By extension, the members of the Church, by the operation of the Church, are unified, made one, good and beautified through their association with the Church.

All of Aquinas’ commentaries on the Epistles can be read as a single exposition of his christology and ecclesiology derived from Paul, as each of them intertwines common themes and cross-references the other epistles. Continuing his exposition of Colossians, Aquinas gives us a useful starting point for understanding this ecclesiology and the unity of the virtues and sacraments within it.\textsuperscript{402}

In the prologue to the Colossians, Aquinas describes this present life as “a battle waged by soldiers who live in a camp.”\textsuperscript{403} The soldiers are the Christian faithful, while the camp represents the Church. Within the camp, the soldiers find succour and strength for the battle outside and they remain in the camp just so long as they resist sin and live as children of God: “therefore, it is necessary to act according to virtue.”\textsuperscript{404} It is through the exercise of virtue that the individual becomes “rich in power” of Christ which flows through the Church and which unites the members with the “camp of the Church” (\textit{castra Ecclesiae}).\textsuperscript{405} It is thus within the

\textsuperscript{401} SCG IV, c.76
\textsuperscript{402} The Commentary, which was perhaps penned by a student with notes transcribed from a lecture of Aquinas, and with Aquinas’ approval, was written roughly around the same time as the \textit{Summa Theologiae}, and so provides a useful gloss on Aquinas’ mature treatment of virtues and sacraments found in the Summa.
\textsuperscript{403} Commentary on Colossians, prologue: “\textit{huius vitae est in pugnatione militantium.”} The battle motif is a popular one with Aquinas; the life of the Church is akin to an army, and the sacraments and virtues are the weapons and armour by which we do combat. See also for example SCG IV.60.2 in which the sacrament of confirmation is likened to battle, and ST II-II, q.123, a.5 in which the virtue of fortitude is described as being pre-eminently suited to those engaged in warfare.
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid, 21
\textsuperscript{405} Commentary on Colossians, 22
context of this *communio* that the virtues reach their full and proper expression: one cannot be truly virtuous independently of the Church.

The virtues are not simply for the sanctification of the individual detached from the people of God. “It is clear,” Aquinas writes in his *De Regno*, “that the end of a multitude gathered together is to live virtuously.” Not that the *communio* is an end in itself; the *communio*—both secular and ecclesial—exists ultimately for the benefit of each individual, who is ordained to a higher end, namely union with God: “Yet through virtuous living man is further ordained to a higher end, which consists in the enjoyment of God, as we have said above. Consequently, since society must have the same end as the individual man, it is not the ultimate end of an assembled multitude to live virtuously, but through virtuous living to attain to the possession of God.”406 But the fact remains that individuals cannot achieve this union with God on their own; personal union with God is achieved through a relationship with others. The earthly state, as we have noted, is the locus in which one attains and exercises the acquired virtues; the *castra Ecclesiae* is the celestial state, through which one attains and exercises the infused virtues.

Within the Epistle itself, Paul speaks of putting on the “new self” through which we become divinised, or like the Creator (3:10ff). In his Commentary, Aquinas equates this “new self” with the possession and exercise of the virtues which, continuing the military motif, are the armour against all evil and the path to perfection: “Paul says: If you have put on the new self, you should put on the parts of the new self, that is, the virtues: ‘Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light’. We put these on when our exterior actions are made pleasing by the virtues.”407

The darkness which we are called upon by the Epistle to fight against is not simply an abstract darkness, but is concretised in the antithetical powers arrayed against the Church: “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers,  

406 *De Regno*, 15.106: *Videtur autem finis esse multitudinis congregatae vivere secundum virtutem*; and 15.107: *Non est ergo ultimus finis multituidinis congregatae vivere secundum virtutem, sed per virtuosam vitam pervenire ad fruitionem divinam.*
407 Commentary on Colossians, 158
against the rulers of this present darkness. And it is the principal duty of those in the clerical state to lead the war against these powers of darkness: by forgiving sins, by sound teaching which refutes heresy, and by the example of patience—in other words, through the dispensation of the sacraments, through the exposition of scripture, and through the example of personal holiness. All of these works of the Church are aimed at making the virtuous life both possible and fruitful. The Church exists, Aquinas tells us in the Commentary, for the perfection of the individual. Without this communio, it is not possible to achieve the perfection of the infused virtues because the communio—the castra Ecclesiae—provides us with the means of exercising charity and the sacraments.

The sacraments are more diverse in their matter and form than are the infused virtues, but the form of all the sacraments consists in what the sacrament accomplishes. This accomplishment is twofold: first, the sacraments bring about a “spiritual effect” of grace in the individual through grace—whether the remission of sins, the conferring of orders, and so on. Secondly, the sacraments (and in particular the Eucharist) bring about the unity of the mystical body—the Church.

This latter effect is central to Aquinas’ concept of salvation, which is not simply an event in the life of the individual, but one in which the individual is intimately bound up in a relationship with others. Here again, Dionysian theology forms the subplot of Aquinas’ ecclesiology.

408 Commentary on Colossians, prologue; (cf. also 258). Aquinas’ reference to the “works of darkness” and corresponding “armour of light” is taken from Ephesians 6:12. In fact, his selective use of other pertinent imagery found in Scripture gives us a further insight into Aquinas’ ecclesiology.

409 Ibid

410 ST III, q.78, a.2.

411 ST III, q.62, a.4, ad.1: Et hoc modo vis spiritualis est in sacramentis, inquantum ordinantur a Deo ad effectum spiritualem.

412 See for example, ST III, q.73, a.3: res sacramenti est unitas corporis mystici....
5.5.1 Aquinas’ Pauline & Dionysian Ecclesiology

In chapter three of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, Dionysius provides us with a sketch of the doctrine of *synaxis*, which is common to Eastern theology, and which is rendered *communio* in Latin.\(^{413}\) We find Aquinas invoking this Eastern concept of *synaxis* specifically just once in the *Summa Theologiae*, although his implicit references to it in reference to his treatment of the mystical body of Christ is suffused throughout his corpus. There, we find that his use of ‘*communio*’ (or ‘*gathering*’) in this ecclesial sense is consistent with what we find in the treatments of *synaxis* by Dionysius and John Damascene.\(^{414}\)

> For a start, let us reverently behold what is above all characteristic of this, though also of the other hierarchic sacraments, namely, that which is especially referred to as “Communion” and “gathering [*synaxis]*”. Every sacredly initiating operation draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like divinisation. It forges a divine unity out of the divisions within us. It grants us communion and union with the One.\(^{415}\)

Together, the virtues and sacraments are like the ligaments and joints of the Church, providing coherence for the individual, but through the binding of all the members together in a “*synaxis*” of the salvific work of Christ. The *communio* is the binding together not only the various members of the Church, but the binding of all the members of the Church into faith and baptism: that is, into a sacramental life.

> And so Paul refers to joints and ligaments. So also in the Church, its members are joined by faith and understanding: “One Lord, one faith,

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\(^{413}\) Dom Gregory Dix explains that the term ‘*synaxis*’, which was inherited directly from Judaism (and which forms the basis of the meaning of ‘synagogue’) and was, at first, considered separable from the term ‘Eucharist.’ In time, these two terms became to be understood by the Christian community as being inseparable: the gathering (*synaxis*) of the people was precisely identified with the celebration of the Eucharist; the one existed on account of the other: hence, the development of the term ‘*communio*’ in the Western tradition especially now represents both the ‘*communion*’ of the people and the ‘*communion*’ which is the Eucharist; one is born in the other, and there is no longer a distinction between the two. This is the inherited use of Aquinas throughout the Summa, and his use of the term ‘*communio*’ seems to be consistent with the development of the term from its original *synaxis* as Dix explains. See: Dix, Gregory. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. [New ed. London: Continuum, 2005, p.36, ff.

\(^{414}\) See ST III, q.73, a.4. Aquinas borrows the term from St John Damascene, along with the notion of ‘*metalepsis*’, by which we are understood to be “assumed” into the Godhead of the Son through the sacrament.

one baptism” (Eph 4:5). But this is incomplete without the ligaments of charity and the sacraments.  

St Paul’s ecclesiology plays an integral role in Aquinas’ own understanding of the synaxis or communio, which he finds echoed in the Church Fathers and which is even, albeit inchoately, present in some classical Roman thought. As Aquinas understands him, Paul always sees the Church in the context of its source—namely, Christ, the Incarnated God. Thus ‘Church’ is never simply a sociological entity, but always a synaxis understood in a unity with God through Christ, brought about in the sacramental communio. Each time he writes to the Romans, Galatians or Thessalonians, etc., Paul refers the concrete local Church to the universal Church in Christ. Hence the Church is not simply a “camp of the Church” in a given location but, the camp of the Church of God (castra Dei sunt haec) which at the same time transcends geography and time. Thus typically we find in his commentary on the First Letter to the Thessalonians that Aquinas remarks that “Paul greets the Church, which is the assembly of believers, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, in the faith of the Trinity and of the divinity and humanity of Christ, because our beatitude will consist in knowing them.”

The external unity is preserved through the interior unity or the “internal configuration to Christ” of each member in the first place. Such internal unity is brought about by the virtues, and sustained by the sacraments. Hence, in all of Aquinas’ Pauline commentaries, we find repeated reference to the role of the virtues in maintaining ecclesial unity: “This unity consists in the unity of the truth of faith and the rectitude of good action; and both must be


418 Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Thessalonicenses, 1.1. Salutat autem Ecclesiam, quae est congregatio fidelium. Et hoc in Deo patre et domino nostro Iesu Christo, id est, in fide Trinitatis, et divinitatis et humanitatis Christi, quia in horum cognitione erit nostra beatitudo.

419 See note 8, above. “One thing was immediately clear to Paul in his new situation: the fundamental, foundational value of Christ and of the “word” that he was proclaiming. Paul knew not only that one does not become Christian by coercion but also that in the internal configuration of the new community the institutional element was inevitably linked to the living “word”, to the proclamation of the living Christ through whom God opens himself to all peoples and unites them in one People of God.”
preserved."\textsuperscript{420} We could go so far as to say that the Unity of the Church, which has as its
principal God, is a participated unity through the virtuous life rooted in faith in Christ.

Now it is evident that unbelief is a sin committed against God Himself, according as He is Himself the First Truth, on which faith is
founded; whereas schism is opposed to ecclesiastical unity, which is a
participated good, and a lesser good than God Himself.\textsuperscript{421}

Aquinas never separates the virtues from this overarching participated ecclesial unity,
since such a participation is a participation of individuals and the individual is perfected in his
operation through virtue. Virtue is even required to receive the sacraments worthily, and so
virtue becomes the foundation of ecclesial communion.\textsuperscript{422} Indeed, the \textit{telos} of the Church,
which is beatitude, cannot be reached at all without the possession and practice of the virtues in
the first instance.\textsuperscript{423}

The \textit{communio}, or sacramental assembly of the Church is found principally in unity
with its source and summit, namely Jesus Christ, God incarnate—born, crucified and
resurrected in the flesh. The unity of the Church is a unity furthermore of its members in
fellowship with Christ whose \textit{telos} is located in ultimate beatitude with God. It is through this
unity that the \textit{telos} is achieved. This unity of the Church is not simply a functional unity, but an
ontological unity in which its members collectively participate in the Divine through both the
virtues and the sacraments—through the interior and exterior configuration to Christ. Christ
himself enacts this unity through his own crucified body which provides us both with the
paradigm of the virtuous life, and the fruits of the “sacraments of his passion.”\textsuperscript{424} The cross,
says Aquinas quoting and explicating a sermon of Gregory of Nyssa, is both the means and the
symbol of \textit{universal salvation} (“\textit{competit universali salvationi totius mundi}”): just as the cross

\textsuperscript{420} Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Philipenses, 3.3. \textit{Quae unitas Ecclesiae consistit in unitate veritatis fidei, et
rectitudinis bonae operationis. Et utraque servanda est.}
\textsuperscript{421} ST II-II, q.39, a.2
\textsuperscript{422} ST III, q.62, a.2.
\textsuperscript{423} SCG, IV.54.7. \textit{Similiter etiam manifestum est quod beatitudo virtutis est praemium. Oportet igitur ad
beatitudinem tendentes secundum virtutem disponi. Ad virtutem autem et verbis et exemplis
provocamur. Exempla autem alciuis et verba tanto efficacius ad virtutem inducunt, quanto de eo firrior
bonitatis habetur opinio. De nullo autem homine puro infallibilis opinio bonitatis haberi poterat: quia
etiam sanctissimi viri in aliquibus inveniuntur defecisse. Unde necessarium fuit homini, ad hoc quod in
virtute firmaretur, quod a Deo humanato doctrinam et exempla virtutis acciperet.}
\textsuperscript{424} ST III, q.46, a.4 & a.11.
extends symbolically in all four directions of the universe, so too does the Church reach out into all four corners of the earth with the salvific mission entrusted to her by Christ. The cross of Christ is at once, therefore, both the means of salvation, and the symbol of the Church in which all the virtues and the sacraments are united in Christ.

5.6 The Integral Relationship between the Virtues & Sacraments

What has been said about the inter-relatedness of the infused virtues and the sacrament raises an important question about the relationship between this so-called internal and external configuration to Christ. How does Aquinas understand the efficacy of the virtues and sacraments in their own right? Surely the sacraments do not require the virtues for their own efficacy; and surely one could be virtuous without the sacraments in at least some situations, as for example when the faithful of France were placed under Papal interdict in 1200, or the faithful in England between 1208 and 1213 and thus deprived of some or all of the sacraments for a time? In what meaningful sense can we consider the virtues and sacraments as constituting a unified foundation of Aquinas’ ecclesiology in light of the distinct nature of each?

Aquinas is not unaware of these difficulties. In question sixty two of the Tertia Pars, he insists that the sacraments differ essentially from the virtues and further, they do indeed confer something in addition to the graces conferred by the infused virtues. The sacraments and virtues are not simply convertible in terms of their efficacy, nor is the grace conferred by the sacraments superfluous to the grace obtained through the virtues—or vice versa. The difference, he explains in article two of this question, is that the virtues perfect the human person in reference to the soul’s natural powers. “Grace…perfects the essence of the soul,” he declares; and in the case of the virtues, grace operates so as to perfect the natural powers of the soul which flow from its essence, and by these natural powers of the soul are the actions of the human agent perfected through virtue. Thus the grace of the virtues “perfects the essence and
powers of the soul sufficiently as regards ordinary conduct.”

But the sanctification of “ordinary conduct” (ordinatio actuum)—of those actions flowing from the natural capacity of the human person—while a necessary condition for salvation, are not a sufficient condition for salvation. That sufficiency is supplied by the grace which flows from participation in the sacraments, which enable a new, higher level of participation in the Divine which would not otherwise be possible by the merits of the virtues on their own.

It is in this sense we can speak of an internal configuration—namely, a configuration of the human person according to his natural powers—and the external configuration, which completes the natural condition of humans by which they are elevated to supernatural life in Christ through the Church. The external configuration moreover is signified by the external signs which accompany the sacraments as their matter. The human person is configured to the world through the senses; sense perception is the way therefore we become configured through the tangible order to the merits of Christ’s passion.

So while the natural powers of the human person are not sufficient for divine beatitude, they are nonetheless necessary. Salvation does not override human agency, but perfects it; that human agency is still required for salvation; we must cooperate with Christ in his saving work. That saving work of Christ itself was instrumentally caused by the “power of the humanity of Christ.”

Human agency cooperates with the work of grace begun in Christ.

5.6.1 Certainty & Uncertainty in Reference to the Virtues and Sacraments

A further element of this distinction between the internal and external configuration can be found in the relationship of the virtues and sacraments to the natural law and the divine law.

Reginald of Piperno sums up explicitly what can be pieced together from various sources:

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ST III, q.62, a.2, ad.1: gratia virtutum et donorum sufficienter perficit essentiam et potentias animae quantum ad generalem ordinationem actuum.

SCG IV, c.56, n.5 & n.7.

Commentary on 1 Thessalonians, 4-2.

There has been, it is evident, much debate among scholars about Aquinas’ idea of the nature of the natural law and its relationship to the Divine law. Here, I follow the reading and interpretation of Martin.
sources in Aquinas himself: the virtues are part of the natural law, but the sacraments are not, but rather part of the Divine law directly. The natural law does indeed cooperate with the Divine law; but the natural law is the law of human reason which participates in the eternal law through its own natural powers.

In his treatise on law, in which he explores the different kinds of law (ST I-II, q.91, a.4), Aquinas notes that the natural law—to which the virtues are configured internally—is not, on its own, sufficient to direct the conduct of the creature in all things to God. Thus, a higher and external law—namely, the Divine law—is needed to complete the creature’s orientation towards God. There are, Aquinas tells us, four principal reasons for this.

First of all, the natural law orders human conduct to those ends which are proportionate to his natural faculties. Natural law, in other words, pertains to natural human conduct. But since the human person is ordained to an end which surpasses the powers of his natural faculties, i.e., eternal beatitude, a higher law is needed to illumine this path. Secondly, because human reason is frail on account of sin, it can and does err in its own judgement, especially in reference to contingent and particular things. Thirdly, the human person has competency in respect to laws which govern his external actions, but humans do not have competency with respect to the hidden things of creation, to those things which are not manifest or obvious. Finally, the natural law is not sufficient for removing all evil, nor can it forbid or punish all evil deeds. Humans are not always in a position, even when they recognise evil, to affect a desired change for the good, even in themselves. This is certainly true of our spiritual condition and the evil brought about by original sin. While natural reason may point out privations in creaturely


429 ST Supp. q.6, a.2. For Aquinas on this subject, we have for example, ST I-II, q.94, a.3: Sed contra est quod Damascenus dicit, in III libro, quod virtutes sunt naturales. Ergo et actus virtuosi subiacent legi naturae; and
existence, natural law on its own is not capable of remedying all that besets the human condition.

Natural law therefore, while participating in the eternal law, is clouded by uncertainty and for this reason in particular, the virtues on their own cannot be understood to be sufficient to guarantee salvation. Not that we should read into this claim that the natural law itself is uncertain, but it stands to reason that given that the human condition is fallen, that the exercise of natural reason can and does err in respect to its judgements about the natural law.\footnote{Aquinas explains in greater depth how human reason frequently errs in trying to attain universal judgements in his \textit{Commentary on Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics}, Book 1, Lecture 12 (74a4-b4). Primarily, such errors obtain from fact that human reason by nature is always contingent on limited experience. By extension, since we have no experience of the Divine apart from knowledge gained through sense experience in this life, our understanding of universal truth is always limited and incomplete.}

At work in Aquinas’ understanding of the interior prompting of the natural law and the exterior beckoning of the Divine law is his inspiration drawn from Dionysius. In chapter four of \textit{The Divine Names}, for example, the Areopagite teaches that the concept of the good can be spoken of in various ways—both perfect and imperfect as created being climbs ever higher towards its source, the Good itself. The human person is not simply an object among many on this ladder of perfection with a single, static degree of perfection, but within the individual human person there exists a participation in various ways in the Good, some more, some less, perfect than other modes of participation. When human reason participates in the divine truth, it participates more perfectly than when it participates in human philosophy or mere human activity. Human reason, Dionysius says furthermore in \textit{The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy}, begins with the internal fact of creaturely existence; but “divinisation requires a divine birth”, namely, the external “illumination of truths received from God”, which is the essence of the divine law.\footnote{See \textit{The Divine Names}, chapters III-IV; and \textit{The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy}, Chapter II.}

Aquinas incorporates this thinking of Dionysius into his understanding of the efficacy of the law in article one of question 98 of the \textit{prima secundae partis}. Drawing on chapter four of \textit{The Divine Names}, he further comments that, since the end of the divine law is everlasting happiness, participation in this law is the more perfect for the human person. But, on its own,
the internal natural law is not capable of directing the human person to this beatitude, and hence an outward or external law is required to assist the creature in his ascent to God. Therefore the virtues, since they are stem from the operation of natural law, are less perfect than the sacraments, which originate from the divine law.

Consequently, just as under the state of the law of nature man was moved by inward instinct and without any outward law, to worship God, so also the sensible things to be employed in the worship of God were determined by inward instinct. But later on it became necessary for a law to be given from without: both because the Law of nature had become obscured by man’s sins; and in order to signify more expressly the grace of Christ, by which the human race is sanctified. And hence the need for those things to be determinate, of which men have to make use in the sacraments.\footnote{ST III, q.60, a.5, ad.3: Et ideo, sicut in statu legis naturae homines, nulla lege exterius data, solo interiori instinctu movebantur ad Deum colendum, ita etiam ex interiori instinctu determinabatur eis quibus rebus sensibilibus ad Dei cultum uterentur. Postmodum vero necesse fuit etiam exterius legem dari, tum propter obscurationem legis naturae ex peccatis hominum; tum etiam ad expressiorem significationem gratiae Christi, per quam humanum genus sanctificatur. Et ideo etiam necesse fuit res determinari quibus homines uterentur in sacramentis. Emphasis added.}

If the natural law, to which the action of the virtues is configured, is “obscured by man’s sins”, it would seem that, given the uncertainty of human reason in respect to natural law, one could never be totally sure that he is in possession of the infused virtues, as discussed in chapter three. How could any one of us say with certainty that our actions are infused with grace? Experience shows us time and time again that what we thought was a reasonable course of action in hindsight seems to have been something altogether lacking in prudence or even charity. We confuse, Aquinas tells us, a sense of justice with the balance of mercy; we often mistake indecision for caution, sloth for relaxation, a deficient course of action for the best course of action. But we have a hint as to the presence of the infused virtues “from probable signs” (ex aliquibus probabilibus signis). Of these probable signs Aquinas includes love, which we can see at work in spiritual works, including a worthy engagement in the sacraments.\footnote{De Veritate, q.10, a.10.}

This difficulty was of real concern for Aquinas and is an on-going concern throughout his corpus. On the one hand, he is, without doubt, totally committed to working out a coherent theory of the virtues which he considers to be of real efficacity in human perfection and indeed necessary for salvation. The virtues are in fact what make us truly human; they perfect not
simply exterior actions, but the very essence of the human person. It is through the virtues moreover that we become more like Christ, the exemplar of all the virtues, and hence divinised through him in grace. But at the same time Aquinas is convinced that human action on its own is not enough. Our actions need to be made into actions of friendship with God if they are to have true efficacy. This is not something we can do on our own; no effort on our part is sufficient to bridge the gap between human nature and eternal beatitude. Even with the infused virtues on their own, we are still at a disadvantage: firstly, because the virtues only perfect the natural operations of the human person and beatitude requires something above and beyond this; and secondly, because we could never know with clarity if we are in possession of them. Thus there is a risk, Aquinas notes, between presumption and despair: presumption, that we have obtained all the grace we need from God and have no cause for fear of his justice, and despair that we do not and so lose confidence in his eternal mercy.\footnote{Aquinas’ solution to the problem is his sacramental ecclesiology. Sacramental grace goes a long way in solving this dual problem of insufficiency and uncertainty. Indeed, in both Commentaries on Galatians and and Second Corinthians, Aquinas describes the Church as the place where we receive the spiritual consolation that we need.}

5.6.2 Consolation and Sufficiency of the Sacraments

Firstly, the insufficiency is overcome in the sacraments which perfect the human person in the practice of the Christian life: “the sacraments of the Church were instituted for a twofold purpose: namely, in order to perfect man in things pertaining to the worship of God according to the religion of Christian life, and to be a remedy against the defects caused by sin.”\footnote{Virtue can help avoid the likelihood of future sin, but it cannot remedy actual, past sin. For this we need baptism, penance and final unction. Additionally, the sacraments, because they were}

\footnote{ST II-II, q.21, a.1}

\footnote{ST III, q.65, a.1: sicut supra dictum est, ordinantur sacramenta Ecclesiae ad duo, scilicet, ad perficiendum hominem in his quae pertinent ad cultum Dei secundum religionem Christianae vitae; et etiam in remedium contra defectum peccati.}
instituted by Christ, bring about our sanctification: “the sacrament is completed where sanctification is completed.”

Secondly, the sacraments remove from us the doubt associated with the virtues. One of the reasons for this is that “the things which need to be used in the sacraments, are either in everyone's possession or can be had with little trouble.” In other words, the proper matter of the sacraments is easy to come by, while the matter of the virtues gives, as we have noted, no guarantee as to its efficacy. The efficacy of the sacraments is brought about through a formula given to the Church, guaranteed by Christ and exercised through his ministers. Hence, there is no such ambiguity about the efficacy of the sacraments as there is with the virtues, which can be assessed through consideration of their matter and form, unlike the virtues.

This is not to say that for Aquinas, the sacraments are nothing more than surety for epistemological uncertainty about the efficacy of the virtues. The uncertainty about the efficacy of the virtues is linked, not simply to a clouding of the intellect, but to a real limitation of the power of the infused virtues. We are uncertain about them because they are indeed uncertain in limit themselves. They carry no guarantee of salvation because they are incapable of giving or providing any such guarantee. As we have noted, they are necessary for salvation, but not sufficient. The virtues are only part of the story; the individual virtuous person is only fully vivified in the Church; his virtues are only brought to completion through the salvific work of sacramental grace.

5.7 “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus”

The foregoing suggests what is in fact held by Aquinas, that outside the Church, there is no salvation. Personal virtue is not sufficient for salvation; a necessary infusion of grace obtained through the sacraments of the Church is required: “The reality of the sacrament is the

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436 ST III, q.66, a.1: *ibi perficitur sacramentum ubi perficitur sanctificatio.*
437 ST III, q.60, a.5, ad.3: *...res quarum usus est necessarius in sacramentis, vel communiter habentur, vel parvo studio adhibito haberī possunt.*

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unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation, for there is no entering into salvation outside the Church.\textsuperscript{438}

Aquinas’ doctrine of salvation holds that both an interior and exterior configuration to Christ is required. This in effect means that what is required for salvation is a personal relationship with Christ through the virtues, and most notably through the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity which inform and enliven the virtues of indebtedness. This personal relationship is both signified by and consummated in a participation in the sacraments of the Church. We have already seen that this notion of the inner and outer person is present in the like of Richard of St Victor who, in commenting on 2nd Corinthians 4:16 writes in chapter XVII of the \textit{Mystical Ark}, “So we do not lose heart; though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day.” Aquinas’ language of the interior and exterior expression of the person finds its culmination in his understanding of the person being an individual subsistence (the radically unique individual) and constituted by a rational nature (oriented towards others).

It is precisely in this doctrine that Aquinas’ conception of the relationship and unity of the virtues and the sacraments can be more clearly seen. Not only are the sacraments—and most notably, baptism—required for salvation, but the virtues are required for the efficacious reception of the sacraments. This is not to suggest that the sacraments for Aquinas have a relative character, in that their efficacy is drawn exclusively from personal intent or personal orientation towards them; but, in keeping with his overall conception of the unity between virtues and the life in the Church through the sacraments, the one supports the other. \textit{Desire} plays a role in bringing the efficacy of the sacraments to life in the individual; we see this clearly in, for example, Aquinas’ treatment of both the sacrament and virtue of penance (or sorrow) which he treats of in questions eighty four and eighty five of the \textit{tertia pars} of the \textit{Summa} respectively. The sacrament has its own efficacy; but the desire of the penitent for forgiveness and sorrow for sins, which is elicited by the virtue, predispose the penitent to the

\textsuperscript{438} ST III, q.73, a.3: \textit{Dictum est autem quod res sacramenti est unitas corporis mystici, sine qua non potest esse salus, nulli enim patet aditus salutis extra Ecclesiam.}
sacrament while the sacrament elicits and infuses virtues. Similarly, in reference to baptism, Aquinas considers the case of Cornelius in the Acts of the Apostles who was so moved by the words of Peter that he desired baptism—and received its grace—even before he received the sacrament in reality. “But afterwards,” he goes on, “when [those who desire baptism receive it in fact], they receive yet a greater fullness of grace and virtues.”

Those who desire the sacraments, whether explicitly or implicitly, can be said to have obtained the graces given by the sacraments in a way that predisposes the recipient to the sacrament properly speaking. In this way, Aquinas does allow for those who do not yet know Christ concretely in the Church or in a manifest way to gain salvation, through an orientation to what the sacraments promise. Hence, Aquinas distinguishes prevenient grace from subsequent grace: the former disposing one to grace through a desire for the good or through actions which pave the way for sacramental reception or virtuous acts; the latter—subsequent—grace which brings to fruition that desire and strengthens the recipient in fact. Prevenient grace can be likened to being called by God, while subsequent grace can be likened to being glorified.

5.7.1 Predestination of the Church

The doctrine of extra Ecclesiam nulla salus brings us to the question of predestination of the Church since it appears that for Aquinas, salvation and membership in the Church are intimately linked and so predestination to glory would seem to be on account of that membership. For Aquinas, the predestination of the individual takes place within the context of the predestination of the Church itself. The notion of the predestination of the Church is an essential element in Aquinas’ ecclesiology. The doctrine furthermore puts his emphasis on the

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439 ST III, q.69, a.4, ad.2: Ita etiam ante Baptismum Cornelius et alii similes consequuntur gratiam et virtutes per fidem Christi et desiderium Baptismi, implicita vel explicite, postmodum tamen in Baptismo matura copiam gratiae et virtutum consequuntur.

440 ST I-II, q.111, a.3
virtue of religion into context, and why religion should be considered “chief among the virtues”.

One who is predestined is so on account of the Church, and not simply on account of any merit obtained as an individual independently of the Church. There is no such concept of “independent merit” divinely obtained in Aquinas, for all merit comes through Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. Aquinas explicitly rejects the view, held by some he says, that the gifts of grace are given because of a person’s individual merit (Commentary on Colossians 1-3:24); rather, all merit of salvation which we obtain come to us through the Passion of Christ (ST III, q.48, a.1) and that Christ, through the merits of his passion, leads creatures to salvation “inasmuch as He is the Head of the Church” (ST I-II, q.114, a.6).

Grace was bestowed upon Christ, not only as an individual, but inasmuch as He is the Head of the Church, so that it might overflow into His members; and therefore Christ’s works are referred to Himself and to His members in the same way as the works of any other man in a state of grace are referred to himself.

It is useful to sketch out here some further insights into Aquinas’ teaching on predestination as it pertains to his ecclesiology. According to Aquinas, we receive infused habits from God on account of the fact the he has predestined us to beatitude. All supernatural merit is earned on account of this predestination to beatitude. But predestination is in no way caused by any merit on our part.

Given that merit is won for us by Christ through the Church, it follows that Aquinas’ doctrine of predestination of the Church supervenes on his doctrine of the predestination of the individual. As Henri de Lubac has said, “Our predestination in Christ is the predestination of the Church.” Again, the tendency in debates about the doctrine of predestination has been to stress or focus on the predestination of the individual, detached from the communio. This

441 Aquinas’ attempt to answer the doctrine of predestination is modelled somewhat on Augustine’s, who Aquinas takes to be the major authority on the issue in his exegesis of the Pauline version of the doctrine found especially Romans 8:30: “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified”.
442 ST III, q.48, a.1: Christo data est gratia non solum sicut singulari personae, sed inquantum est caput Ecclesiae, ut scilicet ab ipso redundaret ad membra. Et ideo opera Christi hoc modo se habent tam ad se quam ad sua membra, sicut se habent opera alterius hominis in gratia constituti ad ipsum.
443 See for example De Veritate 6.2; & SCG III(2).163; & ST I, q.23, a.5.
failure to understand the link between the individual and the *communio* is the origin of confusion about what Aquinas intends to say about predestination in general. Like his virtue theory, Aquinas’ predestination theory is ecclesial.

As Peter J. Thuesen has catalogued, Aquinas’ doctrine of predestination has been both controversial and misrepresented; as a result, it has undergone numerous “facelifts” by some in an attempt to “rescue” it from a perceived Calvinist reading, especially since not a few commentators have indeed argued that there are significant parallels between Aquinas’ doctrine and Calvin’s doctrine of predestination.\(^{445}\) For example, Aquinas entertains along with Calvin, according to Louis Berkhof and James Smith, the notion of double predestination when he says, “God does reprobate some” (*Deus aliquos reprobate*) in his treatment of predestination (ST I, q.23, a.3).\(^{446}\) The double-predestinarian view was anathematized by both the Councils of Orange and Trent;\(^{447}\) thus, if Berkhof and Smith et al are correct in associating this doctrine with Aquinas, it would place the Angelic Doctor outside the tradition of the Church in this matter. This does not seem likely for several reasons, not least of which is that Aquinas was familiar with the decrees of Orange, and cites it in the *Summa*.\(^{448}\)

Rather, it seems as though Berkhof and Smith have attributed the doctrine of double-predestination to Aquinas incorrectly. Aquinas distinguishes predestination from reprobation and he uses both terms analogically, by virtue of the fact that we cannot speak univocally of the causal power or will of God.\(^{449}\) Aquinas remarks that the former term—predestination—only pertains to those who are destined to eternal beatitude. Reprobates however are “abandoned” by


\(^{447}\) Council of Orange (529 AD): “If any one says that it is not in man’s power to make his ways evil, but that the works that are evil God works well as those that are good, not permissively only, but properly, and of Himself, in such wise that the treason of Judas is no less His own proper work than the vocation of Paul; let him be anathema.” And the Council of Trent (Canon VI of the Decrees on Justification) declares that God predestines no one to go to hell.

\(^{448}\) See for example, ST III, q.80, a.9. It’s also worth noting that Aquinas was never criticized for a perceived teaching of double-predestination either in his life nor immediately after it; there is no condemnation of his work in this regard, as we might expect from the Paris Condemnations of 1270 and 1277 for example.

\(^{449}\) See ST I, q.13, a.5
God. But such language, it becomes clear, is metaphorical language for Aquinas, since causally speaking, God is only the cause of salvation and not of damnation; the cause of “abandonment by God” is in fact not God himself, but mortal sin on the part of the reprobate. Consequently, no one is predestined to evil by God, since this would necessitate God’s willing of evil. “Predestination and election impose no necessity,” he says, “by the same reasoning whereby we showed above that divine providence does not take away contingency from things.”

A number of other interpreters, in an effort to avoid the presumed fatalist view have read Aquinas’ doctrine through the language of libertarian versus compatibilist theories. Where should we place Aquinas on this spectrum? Kevin M. Staley has argued that Aquinas is neither purely a compatibilist nor a libertarian but rather somewhere in between. I think the whole framing of the discussion in these terms however is misconceived: on examination, the doctrine of predestination does not require us to try and “accommodate” freewill with predestination according to either a compatibilist or libertarian view. Freewill does not need to be thought of as an awkward afterthought in the doctrine of predestination that somehow needs to be shoe-horned in against the potentially freedom-nullifying action of predestination. The basic aim of all compatibilist or libertarian theories is to find a way to accommodate freewill with predestination because they seem to begin with definitions of freewill and predestination which cause tension between them from the outset. In fact, predestination for Aquinas

450 ST I, q.23, a.3, ad.2
451 There appears to be, among a number of these commentators, a confusion between good as the cause of evil and good as the will of evil.
452 SCG II, c.163, a.2: praedestinatio et electio necessitatem non inducunt, quibus et supra ostensum est quod divina providentia contingentiam a rebus non auferit. The confusion among a number of these commentators seems to stem from a failure to distinguish between Good as an accidental cause of evil, and Good as positively willing evil as its efficient cause. It is true that good accidentally causes evil because, while evil is a privation, a cause is in fact something, a being, which is by definition good (ST I, q.49, a.1); but this is an altogether different thing than saying God wills evil: God, says Aquinas, does not will evil (ST I, q.19, a.9).
453 According to Thuesen, drove certain Puritans to suicide in 17th century America; and which prompted Augustine, in De Dono Perseverantiae to warn preachers against teaching this doctrine too explicitly for fear of driving people to despair.
454 See Staley, Kevin M., Aquinas: Compatibilist or Libertarian?. St Anselm Journal. 2.2. 2005. Pages 73-79
455 This is not to make light of the apparent and significant difficulties with Aquinas’ own attempts to defend and explain the doctrine of predestination. The differences between the Calvinist view of predestination and Aquinas’ own view notwithstanding, Aquinas’ doctrine remains notoriously problematic, giving rise to the efforts of Ressourcement theology to attempt a recapitulation of the
necessitates the rectitude of reason and free will: “there is no distinction between what is from free will, and what is from predestination.”

5.7.2 Providence & Predestination in Aquinas

Aquinas deals with the question of predestination throughout his writings, and most directly in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (I, d.40-41), *Commentary on Romans* (c.8:30), *Commentary on Ephesians* (c.1), *De veritate*, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (III:163), and the *Summa Theologiae*—most notably in question twenty three of the first part; he also treats of the predestination of Christ in question twenty four of the third part (this question is an important element in his doctrine, because it adds the Christological element to the doctrine which is absent in his other treatments). In nearly all of these treatments the notion of predestination is placed within a broader treatment of the Church and Christ’s headship of it. The exception to this appears to be question twenty three of the *prima pars*, where neither the Church or Christ are explicitly discussed. However, the focus of question twenty three is salvation; and when the question is read in conjunction with question twenty four of the *tertia pars*, in which Aquinas resumes his discussion of predestination in the treatment of Christ’s predestination, we find that he says quite clearly that Christ’s predestination is the means of our own predestination, both in time and mode, because he is the means of our salvation (ST III, q.24, a.4).

Aquinas also regards predestination as the completion, in effect, of Providence; providence ordains all human beings to salvation in principle, but predestination confirms only some in that end in fact:

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doctrine in cosmic and Christological terms—a major project of Henri de Lubac and an important question for Vatican II theologians. As it stands, Aquinas’ doctrine appears to split hairs with the Calvinist notion of predestination; on the one hand, Aquinas denies that God predestines anyone to damnation; but God does reprobate some—that is, allow them to earn damnation on their own. But, as it turns out, such choosing is also on account that God withholds his grace: “reprobation includes [God’s] will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation on account of that sin.” ST I, q.23, a.3: *reprobatio includit voluntatem permettendi aliquem cadere in culpam, et inferendi damnationis poenam pro culpa*.  

456 ST I, q.23, a.5: *Non est autem distinctum quod est ex libero arbitrio, et ex praedestinatione.*
Providence, therefore, is concerned only with the ordering to the end. Consequently, by God’s providence, all men are ordained to beatitude. But predestination is also concerned with the outcome or result of this ordering, and, therefore, it is related only to those who will attain heavenly glory.\(^{457}\)

In this way, Aquinas attempts to reconcile the apparently opposing notions that Christ came to offer salvation to all (ST III, q.36, a.1, ad.3) and that God offers salvation gratuitously to whomever he please and without absolute necessity (ST I-II, q.98, a.4, ad.2). Aquinas understands this to be consistent both with the received tradition of the Church (he cites Augustine and John Damascene in support) and Scripture (most notably he finds the doctrine confirmed by the words of Christ himself in the Gospels, and by Paul in various epistles).

Aquinas not only defends the notion that human freewill is not overturned by God’s act of predestination but argues that an understanding of genuine freedom is not possible without a doctrine of predestination. Agents are indeed blameworthy and praiseworthy on account of their choices. At the same time, this freedom is limited; the human agent is only able to choose in accordance, inasmuch as it lies within the natural power of the person to do so, with the good.\(^{458}\) It is this natural orientation towards the good which is the root of Aquinas’ understanding of virtue, natural law and predestination: human intellect, by nature, is designed to be a good-seeking faculty.\(^{459}\) Freewill only seems to be an issue against predestination first of all when freewill is conceived of in terms of being totally arbitrary and non-oriented, as though it were not inclined to anything in particular, good or evil, and stands in front of moral decisions in a detached and totally neutral way. This is precisely the definition of freewill Aquinas argues against in ST I, q.83, a.1. The first objection in this question suggests an impossible model of freewill which sets the human agent adrift in an endless sea of choice without any orientation for such choices: “whoever has freewill does whatever he wills” (\textit{Quicumque enim est liberi arbitrii, facit quod vult}). But Aquinas rejects the idea that freedom is simply a matter of “doing whatever one wills.” Freedom, rather, consists in pursuit of the good (ST I, q.83, a.2), to which the person is oriented by nature.

\(^{457}\) De Veritate, q.6, a.1
\(^{458}\) ST I-II.13.6.
\(^{459}\) ST I-II, q.94, a.2
Aquinas also rejects the notion of freedom as “doing whatever one wills” since any moral action of the person (the actus humanus) always involves a relationship with God, for good or ill: we cannot, in other words, but help or harm our relationship with God through our freely chosen acts. As we have seen in this chapter, that relationship with God is mediated through the Church in Jesus Christ. It follows therefore that for Aquinas the predestination of each person is linked to membership and participation in that Church. This is clear from his understanding of the Church, whose very mission is to dispose the human person to salvation in Jesus Christ.

It seems clear then that the truly virtuous person then is so, not independently of the sacramental life of the Church, which Aquinas equates with the salvific work of Christ, but precisely because of the communio, in which such a person is predestined to eternal beatitude. In the scheme of virtues, gratitude represents that first step in the journey towards being restored in original justice through baptism and the Eucharist in particular. The grateful person is the one who both acknowledges the free gift of grace being offered by Christ; those gifts of grace come through the sacraments. As such, gift and gratitude bear the character of religious worship and the sacraments: the interior, and exterior, configuration to Christ. The interior configuration is the movement of free will, and embodied in virtue; the exterior configuration is totally the work of Christ. In both, friendship is established, as between two freely loving parties.

5.8 Harmony, Worship & Sacraments

In the chapter in this study on The Grateful Person, I argued that Aquinas built on the Dionysian concept of harmony (concordia) to describe the restoration of original justice in the mutual friendship between God and the human person. Aquinas again uses this same language of harmony and concord to describe the union of the members of the Church to Christ through worship and the sacraments: the virtuous person is harmonised with the sacramental person.
Harmony is in fact a common theme of Aquinas throughout his Pauline commentaries. For example, in the Commentary on Philippians, Aquinas quotes a line from Romans, in which St Paul says, “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in concord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:5). In his exegesis on this passage, Aquinas notes that this harmony requires that we “have the same love” for one another—that is, a shared faith, rooted in the same love of God in Christ. God uses this concord he says in a gloss on Psalm sixty seven, to “make people of one mind, to dwell in one house”, in other words, in the Church. And the effect of this shared love is, he goes on to say, “that together, you may glorify God with one voice.”

Aquinas goes on in the Commentary with what could be described as a near-frenetic pace, invoking passage after passage from the Psalms, Pauline epistles and Gospels to reinforce the notion that the Church itself consists in an act of praise and adoration of God, through Christ. One can see Aquinas’ own mystical passion emerge in these strings of citations which follow, one on top of another, in a stream of praise all of its own.

Then when he says, “[at the Name of Jesus let] every tongue confess [and every knee bow]”, he touches on the reverence shown by confessing with the mouth: Every tongue, namely, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. This does not refer to a confession of praise from those in hell, but to a confession compelled by recognising God: “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Is. 40:5); “Let them praise your great and terrible name! Holy is he!” (Ps. 99:3). And this confession will recognise that Jesus Christ is Lord [in] the glory of God the Father. He does not say in a similar glory, because it is the same glory: “That all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father” (John 5:23). It should be noted that earlier he had said that, he was in the form of God, but here he says in the glory, because it would come to pass that what He had from all eternity would be known by all: “Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made” (John. 17:5).
There are many such passages in the Commentary, and indeed all the Commentaries, in which Aquinas engages in his own ecstasy of praise, moving from the Commentary under discussion to cite passages that inspire him as he goes along. Indeed, each of his Pauline Commentaries are in fact in many respects collective commentaries on Scripture, in which he aims to show not only how the passages under comment speak of harmony, but of how they are harmonious in themselves, in directing the members of the Christ’s faithful to shared praise and adoration. “It profits one nothing to praise with the lips if one praise not with the heart”, he writes, “For the heart speaks God’s praises when it fervently recalls “the glorious things of His works.” Yet the outward praise of the lips serves to arouse the inward fervour of those who praise, and to incite others to praise God.”

The recurring theme in each of the commentaries on the Pauline epistles reinforces this triplex via: that love brings harmony, and that the expression of harmony is praise and worship. A favourite reference of Aquinas, from Paul’s letter to the Colossians (3:14), is “Above all put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Each time he returns to it, as in his commentaries on Colossians, Thessalonians and 2nd Corinthians for example, it is to lay out his ecclesial vision of Church as a body unified in love and praise. Indeed, in each of these instances, the harmony of love and praise are expressions of thanksgiving. And so he couples this passage with another from Colossians (2:6-7), “continue to live your lives in [Christ], rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

In the harmony of friendship between God and the human person, brought about through praise, Aquinas places the sacraments in special consideration. Praise on its own is not enough to bring about salvation, because salvation is not a human work, or a work of virtue. Salvation is the work of Christ. And so the sacraments provide a special nexus in the

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462 ST II-II, q.91, a.1, ad.2: laus oris inutilis est laudanti si sit sine laude cordis, quod loquitur Deo laudem dum magnalia eius operum recogitat cum affectu. Valet tamen exterior laus oris ad excitandum interiorem affectum laudantis, et ad provocandum olias ad Dei laudem.

honorificent filium, sicut honorificant patrem. Et notandum est, quod in principio dicit qui cum in forma, etc., hic dicit in gloria, quia futurum erat quod illud quod ab aeterno habuit, omnibus innosceret, ut lo. XVII, 5: clarifica me tu, pater, apud temetipsum claritate quam habui priusquam mundus fieret apud te.
relationship of God and the human person, in the exchange of gift and gratitude. Two things need to be considered, Aquinas says, in the gift of the sacraments: the first is the worship and praise of God. The second is the sanctification of the person (ST III, q.60, a.5). Thus, not only do the sacraments provide the means of sanctification, but also the means of our returning praise in thanksgiving for that gift.

In the Commentary on the Galatians, Aquinas again gives a threefold order found in the sacraments: first, they bring grace. This grace in return brings harmony between us and Christ. Thirdly, he says, we can give thanks (gratiarum actio) for these immeasurable goods. It is proper, therefore he says in his treatise on the Eucharist, that the celebration of the sacrament should end with thanksgiving, “for having received this mystery” (ST III, q.82, a.4). This mystery consists of the participation in the divine life of God, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit.

### 5.8.1 Holy Spirit as “Gift”& Source of Harmony

For Aquinas, the source of all harmony is the Holy Spirit, who guides and enlives the Church and gives it life. Indeed, the word ‘Gift’ is properly the Divine Name for the Holy Spirit (ST I, q.38). The reason the Holy Spirit is properly called ‘Gift’, is because he proceeds from the Father and Son in Love; in fact, the Holy Spirit is the first love because he is the First Gift, Procession by nature; and through him, all gifts are given. The nature of a gift is such that, before it is given, it belongs entirely to the giver. But when it is given, it belongs to the one to whom it is given (q.38, a.2, ad.3). The gift of God, therefore, is not simply some intermediary thing, something symbolising God’s love; God’s gift is the gift of himself. And in giving himself, he becomes one with the one to whom he is given.

This treatment in question thirty eight provides Aquinas’ most succinct formulas for the process of theosis, by which the human creature is ‘divinised’. That is not to say that we

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463 Commentary on Galatians, 1:1.
become essentially equal to God, but it is through a participated likeness that we become so divinised by God.\textsuperscript{464}

Two questions later in the \textit{Treatise on Grace}, in question one hundred and ten, Aquinas gives three related meanings for the word grace as an extension of the discussion on the Divine Name ‘Gift’ and the method of \textit{theosis} this Gift offers. Grace has three meanings, Aquinas says: first, it refers to \textit{love}; secondly, it refers to a \textit{gift} as something freely given; thirdly, it refers to \textit{gratitude}, which is the response to that which is freely given. All three meanings depend on each other he says; every true gift is a gift of love; every gift of love elicits the love of gratitude in return. Thus one word—\textit{grantia}—unifies a threefold operation of gift and gratitude: the gift is love; and the response is love. Grace is thus both the gift, and the means by which thanksgiving for the gift is rendered. This is pre-eminently the meaning of gratitude for Aquinas; all other forms and expressions of gratitude, acquired or natural, are a mere participation in this paradigm.

This love is not limited by time; the same Spirit has moved, Aquinas says, throughout human time; first, in the precepts of the Old Law, then according to the sacraments and the precepts of the New Law: “Hence the ancient Fathers, by observing the legal sacraments, were borne to Christ by the same faith and love whereby we also are borne to Him, and hence the ancient Fathers belong to the same Church as we.”\textsuperscript{465} The Holy Spirit works among us as a human family, as a Church, and not simply as individuals. The Holy Spirit furthermore does not come to us at our own behest, but through Jesus Christ; it is exclusively through Christ that God gives the gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{466} We are thus divinised by the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of the Church dispensed by Christ.

\textsuperscript{464} ST I-II, q.112, a.1.
\textsuperscript{465} ST III, q.8, a.3, ad.3: \textit{Et ideo antiqui patres, servando legalia sacramenta, ferebantur in Christum per fidem et dilectionem eandem qua et nos in ipsum ferimur. Et ita patres antiqui pertinebant ad idem corpus Ecclesiae ad quod nos pertinemus.}
\textsuperscript{466} Ibid., a.1.
5.8.2 Knowing the mind of God

In his treatment of gratitude in question one hundred and six, Aquinas says—more than once—that in considering the repayment of gift, we should consider the intention or will of the giver, and not simply what is given; we should not, in other words, consider a gift qua gift, but rather consider a gift as a sign of intention. To consider the gift apart from the intention of the donor is to cut the donor’s motive out of the act of giving, and to reduce the gift to something as valued in and of itself. In such circumstances, a gift could be interpreted as a right, or as an object whose value is simply one of utility. A gift is essentially a sign of the will of the donor and, in the case of God’s gifts, it is divine life itself.

But how are we to assess the intention of God in the giving of his gifts? How can the finite, rational creature scrutinise the inscrutable mind of God? Even in beatitude, when we shall get to see God in his essence, complete knowledge of God’s will and inner life will always be beyond the capacity of finite creatures. And yet, Aquinas insists that gratitude to God through praise and worship “is not to be dismissed as impossible.”467 Otherwise, if praise and worship of God was impossible, then the human person would seem to have been made in vain, in which case, “the desire of nature, whereby all men naturally desire to know something of the Divine perfections, would be fruitless.”468

On his own, the human person then cannot know how to praise God appropriately, because he does not have knowledge of God’s will. But what we do have, says Aquinas, is Revelation: God himself has revealed something of himself to us; and among the things he has revealed to us is the way in which we should worship him.469 Without Revelation, any supposed gratitude to God would be no gratitude at all; one cannot show gratitude to oneself (q.106, a.3, ad.1) and worship of the subjective idea of God would simply be tantamount to idolatry. As Robert Spaemann puts it, “To believe that God exists means to believe that he is not our idea, but that we are his idea. It implies precisely what Jesus demanded from us: a

467 Compendium Theologiae, c.8.
468 Ibid.
469 ST II-II, q.81
transformation of perspective. Conversion.” When gratitude is reduced to the subjective, psychological arena, the reality of another will engaged in self-communication to us is lost. Gratitude is not simply a gesture; but it is above all the awareness that something totally other has penetrated the horizon of my own existence. The gift of grace calls me out of my own limitations, and draws me into something deeper and beyond my understanding and control.

It is then, according to Aquinas, Revelation which introduces us to the very mind of God. Aquinas draws a clear connection between the impenetrability of the mind of God and the path the Christ lays out for us in his Commentary on First Corinthians where he says that while no one can judge the mind of God, the members of the Church “have the mind of Christ” in its place and as a guide for living and judging the things of God.470

By extension, possessing the mind of Christ is the reason for the propinquity through which the memory holds God’s gift present. The propinquity of God through the memory of gratitude is not simply the memory of the individual, but the memory of the Church. And this memory is kept alive through the Eucharist.

Since people are cleansed of sin through the suffering and death of Christ, in order to preserve constantly in us the memory of such an immense gift, when the time of his suffering was drawing near, the Son of God left his faithful a memorial of his suffering and death that would be constantly recalled, giving his disciples his own body and blood under the forms of bread and wine. The Church of Christ continues celebrating this memorial of his venerable suffering up to the present day all over the world.471

Aquinas refers to the Eucharist as the sacrificium laudis—the sacrament of praise in several places, such as in his Commentary on Hebrews, Commentary on the Psalms, and in the treatise on the Eucharist (ST III, q.83). The Eucharist is the pre-eminent form of praise and gratitude for Aquinas, for it is the living memory for us of Christ’s Passion, by which we are saved.

470 Commentary on First Corinthians, 2:3: 121.
471 De Rationibus Fidei, c.8: Quia ergo per passionem et mortem Christi homines a peccato purgantur, ut huius tam immensi beneficii in nobis iugi maneret memoria, filius Dei passione appropinquante, suae passionis et mortis memoriam fidelibus suis reliquit iugiter recolendam, suum corpus et sanguinem tradens discipulis sub speciebus panis et vini, quod usque nunc in memoriam illius venerandae passionis ubique terrarum Christi frequentat Ecclesia.
5.9 “Before all else, be thankful”

Because gratitude is the first act by which we respond to God’s gifts, and the Gift of the Holy Spirit and grace through Christ, the praise and honour due to God is the ‘first act’ of worship. The act of thanksgiving is the first act of gratitude, because it recognises God’s grace is the beginning of life. For this reason Aquinas says that, “Latria, which is the worship of God as the Beginning of all things, is the duty of man in this life. Hence religion, primarily and chiefly, signifies latria, which renders worship to God by the expression of the true Faith.” Nor is latria best understood as the praise of an individual; “prayers of the multitude are more easily heard” he says and that we individuals, as weak as we are, “become great” when united in one mind with the people of God in acts of praise. Thanksgiving is a collective work of the communio, and not simply an act in isolation.

God initiates the divine life, in an instant, through the work of grace in individuals, through the Church. The first response of the recipient of such grace is thanksgiving, before anything else. This is why, Aquinas notes, that in the Letter to Philemon, the very first thing Paul does after introducing himself is to give thanks and then admonishes Philemon, to likewise always present himself as being thankful. We are, before anything else “given” and therefore, before anything else, we must be thankful. The essence of this thankfulness at recognising being given, is to give praise: “Thanks, in a special way praise, is due to the giver of gifts.” In fact, Aquinas repeatedly associates the act of praise with acts of thanksgiving; they are essentially the same. For this reason, every praiseworthy act is deserving of gratitude.

In commenting on the Our Father, Aquinas again places praise and thanksgiving as being due to God above all else. The very first petition in the Our Father he notes, quoting

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472 Liber contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem, 1: Huius quidem fidei protestatio, latria est, quae cultum Deo exhibet, quasi recognoscens eum esse principium: unde religio primo et principaliter latriam significat, quae Deo cultum exhibet in verae fidei protestationem.
473 ST II-II, q.83, a.7, ad.3
474 Commentary on Philemon, 1.
475 Ethics IV, 1:662.
476 ST II-II, q.106, a.5, ad.1.
Chrysostom, is “hallowed be thy name.” Why does the Lord’s Prayer open with an expression of praise?

Because, as Chrysostom observes, ‘he who would offer a worthy prayer to God should ask for nothing before the Father’s glory, but should make everything come after the praise of Him.’ Therefore, praise, or thanksgiving, is the first step: we acknowledge God before asking for more blessings; thanks first of all, and only then petition.⁴⁷⁷

Why, we might ask, is praise identified with thanksgiving? What is it about the nature of gratitude that necessitates praise, rather than, say, fear, or humility, or joy? Certainly, there may be elements of all these, and other things, as elicited by gratitude. But Aquinas’ reason for linking praise with thanksgiving is based on his observation about the nature of communication.

The communication of love, through genuine gift-giving, is a communication of goodness and not excellence (ST II-II, q.81, a.4, ad.3). One does not, should not, seek praise in giving a gift; this would render the gift insincere, since the gift on that account would not be out of gratuitous love, but with the return of praise in mind: such a gift would be self-seeking. Excellence, however, is the acknowledgement of another’s goodness, or the recognition of honour due to a person on account of something of value seen in them. Just as gift and gratitude are counterparts, so too are goodness and excellence counterparts. We praise the giver of gifts, therefore, not because they seek such praise, but because we want to honour them for their goodness.

With this in mind, Aquinas notes that the praise elicited by the virtue of religion is not commanded by God as though by an act of commutative justice: we do not ‘exchange’ praise for gifts. God does not need our praise. Praise is, for Aquinas, a natural and totally free response to the gifts of grace, because the act of praise is equal to an act of recognising something of great value, something excellent, worthy of honour. In the Divine Names, Dionysius speaks of praise as being a profound expression of joy, where words alone are not sufficient to express the depths of the heart’s gratitude: “The Divine Goodness surpasses every name and every splendour, and every description of every sort.” We are totally incapable of

⁴⁷⁷ Compendium Theologiae, c.8: haec petitio primo ponitur, quia, sicut Chrysostomus dicit, digna est Deum deprecantis oratio nihil ante patris gloriam petere, sed omnia laudi eius postponere.
praising God as we should; and so God himself gives us the means by which we desire to praise him.

In this respect, even gratitude itself is a gift of God. We cannot elevate ourselves to the station of giving thanks to God; we do not possess the means by which to express the deepest longings of the human heart. Gratitude is thus given to us on account of God’s mercy, to enable us to give satisfying expression to our natural impetus to give thanks. And because it is given to us by God, it already bears within itself the hope that the greatest gift for which we give thanks, salvation, is in fact already a reality for us.
CONCLUSION

I have attempted to present in this thesis a systematic understanding of the virtue of gratitude as found in the works of St Thomas Aquinas, but with a wider view too, of the way in which this understanding of the virtue of gratitude has been lost in contemporary discourse. It is, as far as I am aware, the only systematic treatment of gratitude in Aquinas done to date. There has been much discussion about the concept of gift, in Aquinas and elsewhere. Certainly in recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in a theology of gift and grace. My aim has been to show that a study of the virtue of gratitude is necessary to complete this theology of gift and grace, since the gift—by definition—is intended to initiate a response.

Frequently today, and perhaps more often than not, gratitude is reduced to the realm of emotion. While the affective element of gratitude and love is an important consideration, an over-emphasis on the affective, or even reduction of the virtue to the affective state, has obscured the real value of gratitude. Gratitude is often considered little more than a point of etiquette whereas, in reality, it is bound up in the very notion of what it means to be a person.

Aquinas’ teaching on gratitude touches on the very meaning of human existence in its relation to the divine goodness. Existence itself is a gift, but the gift is only actualised, so to speak, in the expression of gratitude as a giving of self in return. The gift remains in a manner inert, without the actualising principle of freewill on the part of the recipient. The actualisation of the gift requires a “yes”; and this “yes” is not possible, until what is offered is understood as something not only profoundly attractive, but more importantly, as corresponding to the realisation and accomplishment of the self.

One can only discover oneself in the awareness that one is given, and that the givenness of self is not simply to be identified with bodily or earthly existence, but with the invitation to friendship with God and all that entails. The self as gift is not simply something, but is rather someone; a someone in whom the awareness of another breaks in upon the limited horizon of human experience and self-awareness. One begins, however to think of oneself as a something, when one does not or cannot see oneself as given—not simply as given in the present, but also
given in the fullness of time. The gift, which intrudes into the limitation of the self, corresponds to the very longing of the human heart. The person is already predisposed to the gift since it flows from the Divine Mind, and so it naturally refers back to its source. Original sin prevents it from seeing its true destiny; original sin, which allows the cacophony and distraction of the world to dominate, prevent the heart from realising that the gift is already anticipated in the person’s very act of existing. But unless the person finds restoration in original justice, and is given the eyes through grace to see it, the gift of self will remain elusive: seeing oneself as given is not a foregone conclusion simply in virtue of being born. For this reason, and in this context at least, I think it is proper to think of Aquinas’ notion of the person as having, as Kierkegaard and Sartre would say, though maybe for different reasons, an existence that precedes essence.

This understanding of gratitude—which I propose is in fact Aquinas’ own understanding—will seem very alien to modernity. It will certainly seem alien to the person who is overcome by the process of secularisation, or whose starting point is rooted in relativism, or un-rooted from the certainty that God exists, or the certainty that, even if he does exist, I am something significant in his mind and plan, something in fact given, something gratuitously willed for its own sake. God today is often thought of as an object, a datum to be examined, proven or disproven. The concept of God-as-relation, and the person, by analogy, as a being-in-relation, cannot have any real currency in this sort of ambivalence.

Aquinas’ understanding of gratitude seems to become even more complicated and further removed from modernity when it is placed, as Aquinas himself places it, in the context of a sacramental ecclesiology. While many of us are still on the first rung of the ladder of uncertainty, Aquinas paints a picture of gratitude which requires not only unwavering belief in God, but a commensurate belief in the sanctity of the Church, and the real efficacy of the sacraments. His concept of gratitude seems possible only for a small percentage of the population today—if any mortal at all! So perhaps for reasons other than what Derrida suggests, the gift seems impossible after all from the perspective of modernity: the standard of Aquinas’ gift is set too high.
But Aquinas has a solution, and it is simply this: gratitude is not the highest ladder on the rung; it is in fact the first step towards encounter with God; perhaps even before we know it is God we are seeking. We have by nature a desire for fulfilment, a capacity for being given even when we can’t identify what it is we want; “to know that someone is approaching,” he says, “is not the same as knowing that it is Peter who is approaching” (ST I, q.2, a.1, ad.1).

Everyone longs for happiness, for the satisfaction of the heart’s desire, even before we know where to look. We recognise beauty and joy before knowing who the giver of that beauty and joy is.

Gratitude is not the conclusion of understanding that we are given; it is in fact a primordial instinct and so a starting point in the quest for God, corresponding to the Socratic notion of aporia. It is one of the reasons why Aquinas places gratitude last in his virtues of indebtedness, because it is our first point of access to the notion of gift on the ladder of ascent, not our last point of access. Aquinas believes that the human person is naturally inclined to thankfulness, and he counts it as being part of the natural law which corresponds to a deep sense of givenness which comes with an analogous exigency; and this sense is born out in history and culture, time and time again. It is not part of human nature to have the faith, says Aquinas, but it is part of human nature to have the instinct of, or impetus towards, faith (ST II-II, q.10, a.1, ad.1). Unless concerted acts of unbelief thwart this instinct, it remains alive in anyone who is seeking, as does the impulse towards thanksgiving. The person who wrote, “Thank you Mother Earth!” on the park bench validates the point; not knowing who he or she wanted to thank—but the desire to thank was there all the same, born in that moment of awe and wonder at creation.

If what I have proposed about gratitude is correct, what does it suggest for the next steps in this area of study? There are a number of issues that still need to be resolved, and there is also room for practical, pastoral considerations as well.
Critique of Aquinas’ Doctrine of Grace & Sacrament

Further study is required in the area of Aquinas’ sacramental theology, for it is not without its challenges. Perhaps the most significant critique of Aquinas’ sacramental theology and related doctrine of grace—a critique levelled at Scholastic theology in general—is that it reduces God’s free and loving grace to “metaphysical categories”. The mysterious and transcendent love of God, which invites the human person into dynamic communion seems to be lost or threatened when the sacramental life is reduced to the language of cause and effect. This is indeed the contention of Louis-Marie Chauvet (perhaps one of the most influential theologians of sacramental theology in recent years and one who represents well many of the criticisms levelled at Thomistic ecclesiology examined above).

Chauvet has argued that Aquinas has failed to understand the sacraments as transcendent signs of “Presence,” and that he instead reduces the sacraments to an ‘onto-theology’ in which the sacraments are, according to Bernhard Blankenhorn’s reading of Chauvet, rendered little more than a “human model of mechanistic production” of grace, or causal instruments of grace.478

Blankenhorn recognises at least three major critiques which Chauvet directs at Aquinas’ theology of sacrament and grace, and two in particular which I wish to focus on here: the first is that this “model of mechanistic production” does not, and indeed cannot, properly account for God’s dynamic love present in the sacraments. Love is not a product, brought about mechanically through a ritual; nor is divine love something which can be understood independently of the relationship between the lover and the beloved and which flows freely within the context of such a relationship, which necessarily resists metaphysical categories of causation.479 Following upon this critique is Chauvet’s second observation; namely, that love,

479 Chauvet explains, “The initial question of the present study may be formulated as follows: How did it come about that, when attempting to comprehend theologically the sacramental relation with God expressed most fully under the term “grace,” the Scholastics (and here we will consider only Thomas Aquinas) singles out for privileged consideration the category of “cause”? Let us make explicit what underlies this question. On the one hand, grace can in no way be considered an object or a value..... On
like grace, is not a ‘thing’ or a ‘value’. Grace resists the metaphysical language of cause and effect, because love itself resists such categories. Chauvet identifies in this tendency of Scholastic theology to place values on grace and love a methodological problem at root: namely, the habit of conflating various kinds of “language games”—the poetic, the religious, the liturgical, the philosophical, and so on. According to Chauvet, the Scholastic method has the tendency to ignore the limitations of language which Wittgenstein has identified and instead to treat the objects of metaphysical language as constituting reality itself.

Nor is Chauvet satisfied with Thomistic appeals to Dionysian mystical theology as evidence of his recognition of the transcendence of grace. For although Dionysius and the neo-Platonic tradition of apophatic theology goes some way in overcoming this onto-theology enacted by metaphysical language, negative theology still attempts to constitute what can and cannot be known of God in terms of metaphysical language. To say that God is ‘super-abundant love’ for example is, for Chauvet, to categorise God according to what can and cannot be expressed in metaphysical language; the limitation of knowing God is nothing more than an admitted limitation of metaphysics. Dionysian onto-theology is thus no remedy for Aquinas’ own onto-theology. “Put another way,” says Chauvet, “negative theology, even in its most sublime moments where it transcends, through negation, the notion of being as cause, nonetheless remains viscerally connected to a type of language that is irredeemably causal and ontological.”

Chauvet proposes a solution in *Symbol and Sacrament* to this Scholastic and Thomistic ‘onto-theology’. His solution characterises the “sacraments as revealers” of an already-present and dynamic relationship:

> That the sacraments are revealers which make symbolically visible what identifies as Christian human existence anterior to them; that consequently they manifest the “already-there” of grace in the experience of faith; that they therefore have an expressive function of response to what God has done, and of gratitude for what God has done: not only we not deny all this, but we insist on it.

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480 Chauvet, p.42
481 Ibid, p.431.
Blankenhorn however notes that there is a shift in thinking in Aquinas’ writings which Chauvet misses. He argues that the early Aquinas of the Sentences favoured the Avicennian account of disposing causality as a tool to explain sacramental causality (according to which the sacrament itself disposes one to grace, while God remains the principle efficient agent which acts upon the form, or the soul, of the recipient).  

However, as his writings and thinking matures, Aquinas moves from a strict adherence to disposing sacramental causality—first to an occasional causality following Bonaventure (in which the sacraments provide the occasion for grace, but in which God choses to infuse grace freely), and then to an Aristotelian instrumental causality (which Blankenhorn finds as early as the De Veritate written just shortly after the Sentences in the 1250s). Crucially, according to Blankenhorn, Aquinas’ shift in thinking first notably found in the De Veritate (q.27, a.7) indicates that Aquinas is open to the notion that the perfecting instrumentality of the sacraments; that is, the sacraments do not simply dispose us to grace, but are the instrumental causes of grace. But Aquinas goes further, and his understanding of instrumental causality is not the culmination of his thinking on sacramental causality, but rather the beginning of a trend towards an innovative understanding of the relationship between the sacraments and grace.

That innovation understands instrumentality—the perfecting instrumental cause of the sacraments as a means of grace—not in a way which reifies grace, but in a way which understands ‘causality’ as an analogical term in which the sacraments are understood as ‘signs’—indeed, pace Chauvet—as signs of the presence of Christ. In question 60 of the Tertia pars of the Summa, Aquinas speaks repeatedly of sacraments as being ‘signs’. In article 3 of the question, he explains that a sacrament is that which is “ordered to signify our sanctification” (ordinatur ad significandum nostram sanctificationem). That signification encompasses three realities: first, the cause of our sanctification, which is the Person of Christ’s through his passion; secondly, the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; thirdly, the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal beatitude (vita aeterna).

482 Several of the Scholastics made use of the Avicennian notion of disposing causality, including Alexander of Hales, St. Albert the Great and St. Bonaventure.
It is not clear however that an appeal to something as subtle as the distinction between Avicennian disposing causality and Aristotelian instrumental causality is necessary to counter Chauvet’s charge that Aquinas reifies sacramental grace. Philip Reynolds for example argues that scholars who attempt to make such distinctions between disposing and instrumental causality in Aquinas are on “shaky ground”.\textsuperscript{483} If Aquinas’ virtue theory is intimately linked to his sacramentology, which all indications from the primary texts suggest it is, then understanding his sacramentology and its relationship to his virtue theory is a major area of necessary further study. But while much of the Thomistic scholarship has been dedicated to addressing Aquinas’ virtue theory and natural law theory, there has been relatively little commensurate study of his sacramental theology. Part of the reason for this is that there is a prevalent view among some scholars that Aquinas’ does not have a sound account of the human person, nor consequently does he have a well-worked out ecclesiology. W. Norris Clarke and Martin Rhonheimer, et al, have contributed much in attempting to recover this ‘prosopological’ dimension in Aquinas. The next step would seem to be seeing this theology of the person in the context of Aquinas’ sacramental ecclesiology.

**Pastoral & Catechetical Implications**

Aquinas’ notion of gratitude also raises some practical considerations—for pastors, homilists and teachers. There is a certain anxiety today about capitalist structures and financial markets; there is concern about the environment and the damage we are doing to it through our rapacious thirst for earth’s natural resources. There is, in short, a very real uneasiness today about the future of human societies and the fear of the subjugation of the human person to

\textsuperscript{483} “Scholars who see a positive development from merely dispositive to real or physical instrumental causality in Aquinas’s treatment of the sacraments and of Christ’s saving work are on shaky ground, for Aquinas himself abandons the distinction. Even in the Sentences, Aquinas uses the term ‘disposing’ and its cognates more broadly, to include modes of causality different from the merely preparatory one defined above.” See Reynolds, Philip Lydon. *Efficient Causality and Instrumentality in Thomas Aquinas’s Theology of the Sacraments* in Walter H., James R. Ginther, and Carl N. Still ed., *Essays in medieval philosophy and theology in memory of Walter H. Principe* (CSB: fortresses and launching pads. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2005) p75
technocratic advances. Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* spells out and addresses many of those concerns.

In such a setting as this in which we find ourselves today, the possibility of genuine gratitude seems to be supplanted by fear. It is difficult to see oneself as gift, or the earth as gift, in this context. And yet, the psychological benefits of gratitude are now well documented, as shown by the clinical tests of Emmons and McCullough (2003). Emmons’ latest book even goes so far as to make the claim that gratitude can increase one’s overall happiness by “as much as twenty-five percent”.

But apart from this pragmatic, quality-of-life benefit to gratitude, the virtue of gratitude presents a rich source of inspiration for homilists, teachers, pastors and parents. What the psychological studies do indicate, which is consistent with my reading of Aquinas on gratitude, is that the desire to be grateful, and the primordial sense of needing to be grateful, runs very deep in us: it is an innate orientation to the source of our being, an instinctive capacity to reach out to others in thankful joy and friendship.

Merely inculcating grateful attitudes seems to be sufficient to orient this perspective, that life is, in essence, something given. The nature of gratitude is such that one does not arrive at gratitude to God following catechesis and theological instruction. Given that gratitude is something akin to *aporia*, it is the natural starting point of friendship. One always initiates friendship before knowing what one is getting into; one does not, for example, examine and test potential friends before making reasoned judgement, *pace* Abercrombie, that one wants to be friends. Friendships tend to be spontaneous and unplanned; others constantly break into our horizon in much the same way that God does.

Gratitude then offers a potential method of catechesis. In celebrating the things we have cause to be grateful for, the natural object of this thankfulness will begin to emerge if it is coupled with further instruction that God is primarily a Giver of Gifts. Understanding God in

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484 How Emmons and McCullough are able to quantify and calculate happiness, I do not know, and I remain a little sceptical! But even from a purely anecdotal point of view, the research suggests that grateful people do seem, by and large, more at peace than those who are not. See Emmons, Robert A. *Thanks!: how the new science of gratitude can make you happier*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007.
this way should be the first moment of catechesis: all too often, it is not. I think that there is much to be gained from reflecting on the nature of the human person as a being-in-relation, grateful-in-response-to-gifts by nature. There is, then, a certain aesthetic quality to gratitude: it is attractive and the idea of gifts is deeply attractive to us.

From a personal perspective, as a secondary school teacher for many years, I’ve become aware that in all the schooling years a pupil endures, the notion of self as given does not occur as part of a formal curriculum even once. Gratitude has become, by and large, a mere point of etiquette; we’ve lost sight of it as being the method by which we realise ourselves as persons.

The late Stratford Caldecott understood well the connection between an appreciation for the virtue of gratitude and the recovery of an authentic liberal arts education, rooted in an awareness of the givenness and beauty of being, a project to which he dedicated much of his life and energy before his death this year. I had the good fortune of getting to know Stratford at a colloquium on the Gift in Oxford, and at a subsequent lunch we talked much about the importance of an education in gratitude, beginning in our secondary school curricula. Stratford understood the link between an appreciation for beauty as being at the heart of a liberal arts education, and the way in which cultivating gratitude was a necessary first step in helping students appreciate beauty and to recognise it in creation.

He also saw that the failure to recognise beauty at the origins of human desire and motivation gave way to a cannibalising consumerism and economy, not of gift, but of demand. John Milbank among others has also alerted us to this trend in contemporary society. Milbank recognises that modernity is losing the very ability to understand human interaction in terms of gift and gratitude.

Yet in the long run, if all human interaction is bypassed, we start to lose the skill for it. We trust only ourselves and no others, and certainly not the government. Neither does the government trust us: thus one gets the pursuit of private profits whose ease of gaining is to do with the fact that they merely transfer and do not grow real wealth; thus one also gets a number of posh criminals who calculate that they can flout the social contract and get away with it; thus again one gets
increasingly criminalized politicians who bleed the system for their own private interests. In my own work in secondary education, I have witnessed an increasing and inherited scepticism among young people towards politics, organised religion and science, and the authority figures representing these, who are often only understood by means of caricatures established in popular mass media. Underlying this scepticism is an ambivalence about the meaning of truth, the meaning of life and the reality of the divine. Worse yet, there is an ambivalence about the meaning of love, and there has entered into this vacuum an unprecedented increase in the use of pornography among young people in its place. Pornography, is in essence, a direct consequence of the failure to understand the self and other as given. This is clearly confirmed by the numerous studies showing the link between pornography addiction and the break down in the ability—of adolescents especially—of those with such addictions to form healthy bonds of authentic friendship and love, born in the experience of gratitude. A recovery of gratitude, not as something simply abstract, but as a lived and experience of self and others in friendship, is necessary to tackle this phenomenon. Young people are, in a sense, detached or even unhinged from the Christian patrimony of contemporary culture, so that this patrimony no longer is seen as something coherent or relevant to them. And yet it is precisely within this patrimony—including the contributions of philosophy and theology over the centuries—that a rich anthropology giving sense to the human person as gift is found. Milbank goes on,

For despite the many wars over truth—and are they not more noble than liberal wars over money and less terrible than the wars of power that have been instigated by nihilists who have taken liberal logic to its limits?—human culture could never have arisen without practices of trust: of gratuitous gift, counter-giving, and gratuitous giving again which anthropologists have long known form the main bond of all

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486 Conor Cunningham provides a rather convincing account of the influence of nihilism throughout the history of philosophy, and the way in which nihilistic thought has attempted to eliminate the notion of difference in philosophy, or to make nothing into something. Along with this trend has been the elimination of the difference between gift and gratitude; the human person is, in this nihilist view, simply there, a brute fact. This is perhaps, the dominant view in secular discourse today. See Cunningham, Conor. Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing & the Difference of Theology. London: Routledge, 2002.
human societies. In this sense, “society,” as socialists and anarchists argued against the liberals, is indeed more fundamental than either law or contract, either politics or economics.487

Stratford Caldecott attempted, before his death, to set up a committee to develop a new secondary school theology specification aimed at the recovery of this patrimony, and to overcome the reduction of the gift to economies of monetary exchange at the expense of a true humanity. I was invited to be a part of this committee, though I do not think it ever got off the ground given Stratford’s waning health. But it is something that needs to be revisited, and with some urgency. Key to this enterprise will be methods by which students can rediscover self as something given, and the gratuitous response to this gift. It is hard to imagine how such a recovery is possible without a rediscovery of the contribution of this Christian inheritance and what Milbank calls the “political soul”. This problem has recently been highlighted in a series of studies produced by a variety of philosophers and theologians in a landmark study published by Springer in 2006. In it, one of the contributors, Randall Zachman remarks,

Since the fall of Adam, human beings have been kept from properly beholding and enjoying [the benefits of life] by their own blindness and ingratitude. Human blindness keeps us from judging the works of God aright, so that we do not see in them the living image of the Creator, but are rather left to the worship of false gods devised by the human imagination. Human ingratitude means that even when we do enjoy the powers of God, we do not seek their source in God, and glorify God in our gratitude, but rather enjoy them without ever lifting our hearts and minds to their source in God…. [It] is significant to note that the self-disclosure of God in the Word is subordinate to the self-manifestation of God in the universe by making the proper contemplation of God in God’s works possible.488

It is with this in mind that we see that the recovery of gratitude is not simply a question of recovering a pleasant etiquette, but rather recovering the very concept of what it means to be a person. It’s hard to see how this might be accomplished within contemporary society, but certainly it is time for all interested parties to think a response through.

488 Zachman, Randall in Cherry, Mark J, Ed. The Death of Metaphysics, the Death of Culture: Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Morality. Dordrecht: Springer, 2006, p.79-80
Along with the realisation of Stratford Caldecott’s vision for a new curriculum, there is also a real challenge here to churches to revisit and clarify the theological concept of person, and to find ways to make this accessible to the public—both in and out of the pews. Currently, our pastoral approach to Christian anthropology appears as something piecemeal and lacking grounding in a unified starting point. The various crises in modernity—human life issues, social justice issues and the proclamation of the Gospel itself—are often tackled or presented to the world in piecemeal fashion, without any explicit prosopology forming the criteria for these. Christians often raise the banner of the poor and marginalised, or speak about the dignity of human life, without grounding these in a theology of grace explicating the reality of the person within the context of gift and gratitude.

Perhaps the task is not as daunting as it may seem at first. Because we are beings who are given, and that gratitude is the natural response to this gift, there is, naturally, something innate in us which responds enthusiastically to gift-exchange and gratitude. Everyone loves receiving gifts! And most of us enjoy giving them, too. The language of gift-exchange flows from our very being, and so there is a ready audience to receive this message and to find within it the bigger picture of salvation and theosis.
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