JUSTIFICATION IN AQUINAS: PAULINE FOUNDATIONS, ARISTOTELIAN

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ECUMENICAL PROMISE

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ABSTRACT

JUSTIFICATION IN AQUINAS: PAULINE FOUNDATIONS, ARISTOTELIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND ECUMENICAL PROMISE

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My thesis will examine Aquinas’ doctrine of justification in three chapters corresponding to three lines of inquiry. First, I examine Aquinas’ biblical interpretation of the Pauline language of justification in the epistle of Romans where the most extended and important biblical text of the doctrine is found. Second, I survey his overall anthropological understanding as illuminated by his doctrine of charity. This affords the interpreter of Aquinas with an understanding of how he conceives the core of human nature in the interdependent dynamic found between the will/appetite on the one hand and the intellect/reason on the other. Given the comprehensive scope and role of love in human nature, understanding charity in Aquinas, which is natural love transformed by grace, will also help clarify in what sense Aquinas understands grace to perfect and fulfill human nature.

Third, I provide a summary and interpretive expansion on his doctrine of justification as found in the Summa, starting with Aquinas’ explicit treatment of the
doctrine but drawing from other articles to clarify terms and set the doctrine in a larger context with respect to his understanding of human and divine causality. This helps establish the systemic difference between Aquinas’ doctrine of justification and the variety of forensic definitions found in post-Reformation theologies, as well as a more ecumenically promising commonality in how the dynamic between grace and free will is understood in justification. The three chapters relate to each other as progressive waves of interpretive insight. The close examination of his Pauline interpretation sets the basic contours and boundaries within which he works out his theology of justification. Aristotelian foundations in the second chapter enable a more penetrating analysis of Aquinas’ teaching on the doctrine of justification found in the *Summa*. The third chapter takes all that we understand about Aquinas’ biblical interpretation and anthropology and brings it to bear in the interpretation of his most systematic teaching on justification. My conclusion reflects on the significance of Aquinas’ thought for ecumenical theology and dialogue between Protestants and Catholics.
Dedicated to my wife Emily Marie Cochran, my son Roman Xavier Cochran, and my friend and mentor in Thomistic studies, Matthew Levering.
My special thanks first and foremost to my wife Emily Marie Cochran for her bravery in giving an all natural child birth to our healthy baby boy, Roman Xavier Cochran, during the writing of this thesis, my parents without whom I would never have been able to afford the luxury of careful study in those crucial early years in my academic development, my friends who never tired of discussing theologically complex questions in search for answers or exploring and entertaining differences and reasons for them. I would also like to express deep gratitude for those special breed of friends known at one point in time or another as mentors who invested time with me during the crucial years of my personal development without whom my study of theology would not have been as intense or important to me, such as (but not limited to): Warren Whitaker, Randy Spencer, Eric Marsden, Will Honeycutt, Gaylen Leverett, Todd Robertson, Kevin and BJ Hendrix, Gregg and Nora Allison, John H. Armstrong, Samkon Gado, Eric L. Johnson, Ramon Luzarraga, William Portier and Matthew Levering.

An especial thanks also to William Portier for believing “I have the disease” (which I still have and will never find a cure), Matthew Levering for his respectful engagement with Protestant evangelicals in the burgeoning of our new ecumenical era and his advise on my academic work and aspirations, Fr. Silviu Nicolae Bunta who also has become a personal friend and academic mentor for his great hospitality in inviting me to his home during my self-guided study to entertain all my questions about Eastern
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INTRODUCTION

For a long time it has been my conviction that Protestants in my own faith Tradition mostly understand Thomas Aquinas through a narrow lens of polemical historiography in which he is a go-to example of what went wrong with Medieval theology prior to the Reformation. In sum, this popular narrative runs roughly like this: Aquinas exploited the notion of justification as “make righteous” instead of “declare righteous” because he studied theology during a period when the true gospel recovered by the Reformers was mostly eclipsed, and this unfortunately ensured that semi-Pelagianism and human merit would forever be enshrined in the Catholic Tradition.¹ Although some Protestants heavily influenced by this narrative have found ways of re-evaluating Aquinas in more positive terms, this is ordinarily circumscribed to either his ethical teaching or his apologetical arguments or “proofs” for the existence of God. Aquinas’ biblical commentaries or his teachings on justification and grace are simply too “Catholic” for many Protestants to stomach—especially those in the conservative evangelical tradition with a “literal” interpretation of the Bible or a Calvinistic view of grace. Aquinas can be appreciated to some degree, but this appreciation does not easily extend to his theology where it really counts. The simple fact that he had a theology of

¹ The term “Semi-pelagian” is used loosely in Protestant theology to refer to any Roman Catholic teaching perceived to threaten a Protestant notion of grace. On the meanings and polemical origins of the term, see Irena Backus and Aza Goudriaan, “‘Semipelagianism’: The Origins of the Term and its Passage into the History of Heresy,” Journal of Ecclesiastical History 65, no. 1 (2014): 25-46.
human merit is enough for most Calvinistic Protestants to not take his grace theology seriously as a positive source for theological reflection. Actually adopting it would be almost unthinkable apart from a narrative of conversion to Roman Catholicism.

This sentiment can be corroborated more by the lack of rigorous study of Aquinas on grace amongst Calvinistic Protestants than by what is explicitly said by way of polemical historiography. The great dearth of Thomistic studies on grace in evangelical Protestant seminaries speaks louder than anything in writing ever could. Mediated through selective secondary sources that tell their readers what to expect from Aquinas on grace, very little of the distinctions that are important in Aquinas’ grace theology are known, much less appreciated, in the evangelical academic environments that shaped the development of my own Protestant spirituality and intellectual life. In less than ten minutes I could eagerly find a quotation in the *Summa* that seemed to support or confirm the polemical suspicions handed down to me in this popular polemical narrative.

Recent unprecedented ecumenical achievements between Protestants and Catholics have challenged the default polemical attitudes that have perpetuated polemical traditions in both Catholic and Protestant theology and largely taken hold by a critical reflection on these traditions. Those who might have initially dismissed these ecumenical endeavors as little more than a hopeless project to superficially fuse two theological traditions that are systematically at odds and irreconcilable, as it turns out, underestimated the degree to which this movement sought to ground itself in careful study of the respective traditions of its participants. With the publication of the *Joint Declaration*, the fruit of these new self-critical approaches have proven their value. The study of Thomas Aquinas by a limited group of ecumenically interested Protestants has also proven to be
fruitful as one of the sources for this reapproachment. Protestant scholars and theologians who have learned to interpret Aquinas on his own terms are no longer persuaded by the interpretive moves made in traditional Polemical treatments of Aquinas’ teaching on grace and justification in which he is often used as a foil for the Reformation doctrines of grace. There is a growing chasm between those Protestants who are well read in Thomistic studies and those who are only superficially acquainted by a narrow apologetical aim to defend traditional Protestant theology.

Such a history of polemical reactions in both the Catholic and Reformation traditions’ use of Aquinas’ teaching on grace make it all the more imperative that best interpretive practices be observed as a methodological safeguard against confirmation bias and confessional prejudice. I believe my thesis is a step in right direction for Protestants who wish to read Aquinas with a critical, yet open mind. Aquinas’ basic principles on grace and free will, as I hope will be evident by the end of this thesis, can be compatible with the deepest Reformation concerns that shaped the identity of Protestant tradition, and has a yet unrealized potential to work as an aid in overcoming prejudice tendencies in the interpretation of Catholic theology and identity more broadly. Catholics who have been used to thinking of Aquinas as their own may not appreciate the possibilities my research could open up, for there is a strong disagreement among Catholics about how Aquinas’ grace theology is to be understood—especially in relation to Protestant concerns about free will and merit. The value of this study for those in the Protestant tradition goes beyond getting the facts of historical interpretation correct, however, but (I hope) will help Protestants learn to appreciate the virtues of Aquinas’ intellectual accomplishments in sorting out competing demands within the construction
of a Systematic Theology that attempts to do justice to biblical sources and various streams of the Christian theological tradition. Aquinas’ strategy for dealing with the kind of problematic questions that have always become the dividing points in grace theology within both Catholic and Protestant traditions—and there were many controversies over how grace and predestination relate to human nature and free will long before the Reformation—is too ingenious and useful to ignore once properly understood.

Due to the inherent challenges of interpreting Aquinas’ theology among Catholics, and the challenges of overcoming polemical Protestant bias, one must take an adventure through a forest of misunderstanding to begin locating the trees of substantive difference between Aquinas’ grace theology and the range of possibilities for Protestant theologies that remain true to Reformation concerns. The anthropological insights in Aquinas have also opened up my eyes to a blind spot in Protestant Calvinistic theology: the failure to recognize how anthropology, much like philosophy in general, if not systematically established, will be uncritically assumed and adopted piecemeal for the purposes of interpretive or doctrinal convenience. To put it another way, without a systematic anthropology one’s theology remains ambiguous at best, and empty of real substance at worst: How can one talk about grace apart from what grace actually does to the human person? How can one have a substantive theology of the permutation caused by grace if she has no rigorous anthropology as the starting point? To describe the phenomenon of the human mind, heart, will, free-will, choice, free-choice, desire, love, destiny, happiness, intellect, etc., is to set the stage for how all these aspects of human personhood are understood to be deeply affected by grace. Two theologians assuming different anthropologies may use the same language to describe surprisingly different
conceptions of reality, as such anthropological terms are notoriously chameleonic, taking on the larger assumptions of the theological paradigm in which they are employed.

I have come to see the basic contours of Aquinas’ theology of justification as more plausible than any other alternative I have learned within my own faith tradition. Although dangers always abound with labels, since they are inevitable I would prefer to be considered an Ecumenical Protestant and for the category to be understood in such a broad way as to allow for Protestants who have adopted what used to be considered exclusively Catholic positions. For example, Aquinas’ doctrine of predestination avoids the problematic aspects of the so-called “double predestination” view of Calvin but (in my view) captures what is of ultimate importance to Calvinists in this doctrine through using a more effective linguistic strategy for defining terms and integrating philosophical and theological modes of taxonomy. Whether this makes me a Protestant Theological Thomist—as opposed to an ethical Thomist that adapts Thomistic ethical teaching or an apologetic Thomist that adapts Thomistic “proofs” for the existence of God—I will leave for Thomist scholars and other historical theologians to decide.

**Structure and Rational of Inquiry**

My thesis will examine Aquinas’ doctrine of justification in three chapters corresponding to Aquinas’ biblical interpretation of the Pauline language of justification, his overall anthropological understanding as illuminated by his doctrine of charity, and the centrality of grace in his doctrine of justification as found in the *Summa Theologica*. Although each chapter could potentially stand on its own, the combination of each inquiry constitutes a threefold progression leading to a more balanced look at Aquinas’
doctrine of justification. The first chapter examines Aquinas’ biblical foundations with a special focus on how he grounds characteristically Catholic teachings on justification in Pauline interpretation. Leaving aside the question of whether Aquinas interprets Paul correctly allows us to look more carefully at how the Pauline text influences his basic assumptions about justification that will come to bear upon the *Summa* and that makes plausible the contention that Aquinas’ doctrine of justification is first and foremost an attempt to reckon with this key Pauline source.

The second part of my thesis will focus on Aquinas’ doctrine of charity. Aquinas’ justification theology already brings with it so many assumptions Aquinas has labored to establish in his teaching about human nature that set the stage for how he will handle scholastic questions related to the doctrine. Since faith is so fundamentally connected to charity as “the mother of all virtues” in Aquinas, charity turns out to play a central role in Aquinas’ understanding of justification. Being made righteous in Aquinas can ultimately be understood directly in relation to loving God and others for God’s sake: submitting one’s mind (faith) and will (love) and therefore one’s whole self to God freely and willingly by divine grace. Appreciating Aquinas’ anthropological and philosophical framework by looking at his doctrine of love and charity will keep us informed on how justifying faith relates to the other theological virtues, and gives us clues for why Aquinas understands justification to be by faith and by charity in different ways made more explicit in his teaching on justification in the *Summa*.

The third and final chapter examines Aquinas’ most systematic and substantial teaching on justification in the *Summa* where he stakes out positions on key questions that were important in scholastic theology. My inquiry will explore the developments of
Aquinas’ doctrine of justification in the larger context of Aquinas’ teaching on grace, free will, and predestination in order to underscore Aquinas’ fidelity to the centrality of grace in justification. Having explored Aquinas’ Pauline biblical interpretation in the first chapter of my thesis and given an introduction to his anthropological insights that shape his doctrine of charity, the positions he takes in the *Summa* are more intelligible. Particular attention will be given to Aquinas’ language of “remission of sins” [*remissio peccatorum*] in the process of justification [*processus iustificationis*], the relationship between grace and free will in his doctrine of predestination, and some implications for ecumenical endeavors. I will end by correcting some popular distortions of Aquinas’ theology by Protestants and explain why his doctrine of justification is remarkably promising for ecumenical discussions between Protestants and Catholics once properly contextualized.
CHAPTER 1

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: PAULINE FOUNDATIONS

Although compared with Reformation theology, Medieval theology devoted “marginal” space to treating the doctrine of justification. Aquinas treats justification (and related questions) in its own right in a “treatise” on grace in his most mature work: *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas has also complemented this treatment in his mature and

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2 There has been a selective revival of Thomistic studies among Protestants in recent years that have led to a rediscovery of Aquinas’ thought. This rediscovery has inspired some Protestants to defend Thomas against a long history of Protestant caricatures, concluding that Aquinas’ theology relies upon grace just as much as his Protestant critics. Timothy Renick, “Second Chance for Thomas,” *Christian Century* 122, no. 17 (2005), 22, 24. David C. Steinmetz, “What Luther Got Wrong,” *Christian Century* 122, no. 17 (2005): 23, 25-26. Luther and Calvin’s denunciations of Thomistic theology have long been understood to be largely rooted in distortions of Thomas’s thought by subsequent Thomistic theologians. John L. Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988). This has given some the impression that if Aquinas’ theology of grace had been faithfully followed, the Protestant schism would not have had the kind of theological soil it needed to take root and grow. For example, Charles Raith II argues persuasively that John Calvin’s critique of the concept of merit—which was “the” central concern of Calvin’s theology of justification—does not even apply to Aquinas who himself critiqued the very concepts of merit which are the target of Calvin’s polemic. Calvin did not actually know what Aquinas taught, but was critiquing French theologians who misrepresented Aquinas. Charles Raith II, “Calvin’s Critique of Merit, and Why Aquinas (Mostly) Agrees,” Pro Ecclesia 20, no. 2 (2011): 135-166. Similar insights are expanded in his latest book *Aquinas and Calvin on Romans: God’s Justification and Our Participation* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014),


4 All quotations from the *Summa* are taken from the English Translation, *Summa Theologica*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols., *rev. ed.* (1948; repr., Notre Dame, Indiana:
extensive reflections on justification in his Lectures on the Letter to the Romans,\(^6\) though this work has in the past been less studied and is less systematic.\(^7\) In this commentary, the doctor angelicus has left behind a considerable contribution that sheds light on the positions he takes in the Summa. It would be tenable to say that Aquinas’ reflections in the Summa on grace and justification were—first and foremost—his attempts to address more extensive theological and philosophical questions in light of his biblical interpretation (i.e., his attempts to answer extrabiblical questions in a way that was faithful to the teaching of sacra pagina). This chapter is an attempt to explore aspects of Aquinas’ teaching on justification in light of his commentary on Romans. Although the Summa is more extensive in its scope of inquiry on justification, this study will show that the basic contours of Aquinas’ doctrine of justification can be seen in his Pauline interpretations from the book of Romans.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) Aquinas’ commentary on Romans is considered one of his particularly “mature” Scripture commentaries, perhaps even put in its final form during his last years in Naples (1272-1273). Eleonore Stump, “Biblical Commentary and Philosophy,” in The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Sump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 254.


\(^7\) Torrell laments: “The great systematic works have monopolized attention. But ‘to read’ Scripture was the first task for the master in theology, and therefore also for Thomas. … Though long overlooked in favor of the Sentences or the Summa, this kind of biblical teaching was nevertheless Thomas’s ordinary labor.” Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 1: The Person and His Work, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 55.

\(^8\) I hope this chapter will not be an “exercise in post-Reformation polemic,” but it is hard to deny that “confessional disputes shape the evaluation of Thomas.” Michael Root, “Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology After the Joint Declaration of Justification,” Modern Theology 20, no. 1 (2004): 6. Therefore, rather than deny my bias and pretend that this study is purely a neutral exercise of disinterested objective analysis, I would rather overtly acknowledge my interests and motivations for this study: I am a Reformed Protestant who believes that most Protestants do not appreciate the degree of biblical support in the Catholic tradition for their doctrine of justification, nor the level of sophistication in Aquinas’ integrative theology that greatly influenced subsequent Catholic thought. Although it is not my desire in this paper to decide whether Aquinas’ doctrine of justification is “Protestant” or “Catholic,” my conviction
Aquinas’ Expectations for Justification as a Remedy

Several aspects of Paul’s discourse in Romans prior to his most extensive teaching on justification are decisive for the shaping of Aquinas’ expectations for what Paul’s language of justification is intended to accomplish. Before Romans 3:21 where Paul offers his most explicit teaching on justification, Aquinas believes Paul has already largely set the stage for this teaching in his previous discourse about of the nature and power of sin, the nature of faith, and particularly in his depiction of eschatological judgment. Therefore, in this section, we will mostly explore these aspects of Aquinas’ hermeneutical navigation through the Pauline discourse prior to Romans 3:21.

Saving/Justifying Faith9 as Involving Charity and Fulfilling the Law

Aquinas’ first extended reflection duly arises at the verse he recognized (as do many modern exegetes)10 as containing the main theme of Paul’s letter in Romans 1:16-

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9 Hereafter, I will use justifying faith and saving faith interchangeably, since they basically refer to the same phenomenon in Aquinas’ commentary on Romans.

17. Here Aquinas explains his understanding of the range of meaning of Paul’s term “salvation,” as well as how this salvation is conferred to sinners. Salvation has a threefold referent in connection to the gospel: 1) the forgiveness of sins, 2) sanctifying grace, and 3) eternal life. The Gospel confers this threefold salvation “by faith,” which comes about through things like preaching, confessing the faith, the use of Scripture, etc. Aquinas allows two possible meanings for the genitive construction δικαιοσύνη θεού \[the righteousness/justice of God\]: the righteousness that is revealed in the gospel. It could refer to God’s faithfulness to his promises, in which case ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν \[from faith to faith\] means from the faithfulness of God (to fulfill his promises) to the faith of the one who believes in the fulfillment of God’s promise in Christ. \[Ibid., §102.\] \[Ibid.\] \[Cf. \textit{ST} I-II.113.1: “Justice is so-called inasmuch as it implies a certain rectitude of order in the interior disposition of a man” and “Aristotle calls this metaphorical justice.” The reason it is called justification rather than faithification or lovification is because whereas faith and charity “imply a special directing of the human mind to God by the intellect and will,” justification implies a more general “rectitude of order” not limited to either the intellect or the will only. \textit{ST} I-II.113.1.\textit{ad}.2.\]

In explanation of Paul’s thematic refrain, “the just one will live by faith,” Aquinas

\[\text{Aquinas has already loosely defined “grace” in his commentary in two ways: 1) as a gift “we receive through Christ” and “by which we are restored” and 2) as “the first among God’s gifts, because by it the sinner is made holy.” Aquinas, \textit{Lectures on the Letter to the Romans}, §60, §70.}\]

\[\text{“The second consideration is how the Gospel confers salvation, namely, through faith, which is indicated when he says, to everyone who believes.” Ibid., §100.}\]

\[\text{Aquinas, \textit{Lectures on the Letter to the Romans}, §102.}\]
takes the opportunity to define faith. Since Aquinas believes that justification is “by faith,” his understanding of what this faith entails decisively shapes his understanding of what justification brings about. He here defines faith as “willed assent, with certitude, to that which is not seen.” Faith involves the human will because, unlike scientific knowledge that “assents by the necessity of reason,” faith has equal certainty but is beyond reason. If reason does not compel the intellect to assent, something else must be compelling it, namely, the will. Paul’s language of “live by faith” indicates for Aquinas that faith is more than just intellectual assent but a disposition of the will “moving the intellect to assent.” But this cannot happen without love for God—which love Aquinas calls charity. Saving faith, then, requires a change or movement of the will (which Aquinas assumes must be changed or moved by the working of grace). He concludes, then, that saving faith must include a habitus (Aquinas’ Aristotelian word for “a stable disposition”) that is “formed by charity”—all of which requires the indwelling of God in the heart. These “virtues” of faith and charity are evidence of God’s life within the human soul, for “the soul lives the life of grace through God” who “dwells in the soul by faith.”

Although saving faith requires assent to something God has said “for the reason that it was said by God,” he also understands saving faith to involve more than believing that, but also a “believing unto God,” i.e. “to go to God by believing, which charity does.” Saving faith involves a movement of the heart toward God, which movement requires love for God. In other words, since faith is something one lives by (“the just shall live by faith”), and one’s actions are determined by their inner dispositions, Aquinas understands faith to entail a fundamental change that takes place in the human heart.
through grace—a change that moves the heart toward God through love. For Aquinas, faith was necessary for salvation even under the Old Law, and although faith is granted apart from both the Law and apart from any merit or any works, “works are [also] required in the New Law.” The “law of faith is the law inwardly written, through which are directed not only external works but even the very motions of the heart, among which the act of faith is the first” which Paul later calls “the law of the spirit” (Rom 8:2). He understands this to be Paul’s point when he says “Do we therefore overthrow the law by faith? On the contrary, we establish the law” (Rom 3:31). This for Aquinas means “by faith we complete and fulfill the Law.” This understanding of faith—which he gets from Paul’s letter to the Romans—shapes how he understands the meaning of Paul’s language of justification by faith. Though faith is a movement of the mind or intellect to assent, yet it somehow involves the heart.

**Sin as Ontological Corruption**

By the time Aquinas arrives at his reflection on Romans 3:21 where Paul writes about justification by faith more explicitly, he is already predisposed to understand this justification as Paul’s solution to the wickedness described in the previous chapters, which concludes with Paul’s charge that both Jews and Gentiles are φίλαξ αμαρτών εἶναι

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17 Ibid., §316.

18 νόμον σων καταργοῦμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως; μὴ γένοιτο ἀλλὰ νόμον ἱστάνομεν

[under the power of sin] (Rom 3:9). In Aquinas’ interpretation, Paul is emphasizing the need for justification by faith by emphasizing the ontological corruption of mankind.\(^\text{20}\)

Since this power of sin is described in ontological terms, Aquinas therefore expects Paul’s solution (justification by faith) to also address this state of corruption in the soul as a remedy.

When God gives people over to a “debase mind” (Rom 1:28) Aquinas takes this in an “interior sense” rather than “man’s external sense.”\(^\text{21}\) In Aquinas’ words, Paul describes “the sins by which a person deteriorates within himself” and becomes “misaligned in his desire for external things.”\(^\text{22}\) God’s punishment is to give them over to their sins—“not of course, by impelling them to evil but by abandoning them, to dishonorable passions, i.e. sins against nature.”\(^\text{23}\)

Aquinas understands this ontological corruption largely in terms a lack of love, drawing out how many of the sins Paul mentions are simply the opposite of, and destructive of, neighborly love. “Haters of God” are those who “attack something God loves in men, namely, mutual love.”\(^\text{24}\) When Paul describes the sinners who are “filled” with wickedness, Aquinas already sees this as the negative parallel to the believer: “For just as every virtue, inasmuch as it carries out a precept of the Law qualifies as

\(^{20}\) I am using “ontological” here to refer to the immaterial state of spiritual corruption in the soul that Aquinas calls “disorder” in distinction from any forensic status or bodily acts related to it. Ontology refers here to what is real and actual in the existence of the person’s inner state (e.g. soul, will, mind, heart, dispositions, affections, etc.) in distinction to either what legally “counts” or to any particular bodily movements.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., §154.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., §157-158.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., §147.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., §162.
righteousness, so every sin, inasmuch as it is at variance with the rule of the divine law, qualifies as wickedness.”

Aquinas is disinclined to understand Paul’s charge that “no one is just, not even one” as a Pauline exaggeration. Rather, he understands it to mean that all are unrighteous in and of themselves (i.e. apart from the grace of God) or that “no one is just in every way but has some sin.” Aquinas also does not understand the “works of the law” (by which “no flesh will be justified”) as referring only to the ceremonial laws since Paul adds, “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). It includes also the moral precepts of the law. The Law—both ceremonial and moral “is not enough to make one just; another remedy is needed to suppress concupiscence.”

The logic of Paul’s transition from ontological corruption to justification by faith is explained: “After showing that Jews and gentiles are equal as far as the state of previous guilt is concerned, the Apostle now shows that they are also equal as far as the state of subsequent grace is concerned.” It is worth noting that “guilt” here appears to be used by Aquinas to refer not merely to legal guilt or guilty actions but a guilt chiefly consisting in moral/ontological corruption. Again, this shapes his expectations as he

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25 Ibid., §156.
26 Ibid., §277.
27 He reiterates this interpretation later when he says: “Not only without the ceremonial works, which did not confer grace but only signified it, but also without the works of the moral precepts, as stated in Titus 3(:5), ‘Not because of deeds done by us in righteousness.’” Ibid., §317.
28 Ibid., §298. Concupiscence in Aquinas is a general cause of sin, a craving for something that appears “delightful to the senses,” and “is the craving for pleasurable good.” ST I-II.30.1.ad.3; I-II.30.3.
29 Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §299.
30 Aquinas here appears to understand culpability in the same basic terms as Augustine: culpability is rooted in essential interior corruption. Gerald Hiestand, “Augustine and the Justification Debates:
moves on to Paul’s discussion of justification by faith, looking for more than just
goodness or absolution, but for an ontological remedy for the interior corruption caused
by being ὄφει ἄμαρτίαν: under [the power] of sin (Rom 3:9). It is not a legal record, but
a power that must be overcome by Paul’s proposed remedy.

Paul’s Reasons for Depicting the Eschatological Judgment

Paul’s presentation of the dilemma of sinful humanity (both Jew and Gentile31) also includes the coming of eschatological judgment κατὰ τὰ ἐργα: according to works
(Rom 2:6-16). Aquinas’ understanding of this eschatological judgment decisively shapes
his expectations for Paul’s language of justification as the needed solution. According to
Aquinas’ interpretation, Paul contrasts the circumcised Jews who transgress the Law and
the praiseworthy uncircumcised Gentiles who do not have possession of the Law. As
Aquinas interprets it, the point of this comparison is to show that faith (a gift from God)
is what causes obedience and not mere possession or knowledge of the law. Gentile
believers keep the Law “instinctively” in a way that shows the Law to be “written in their
hearts” by the Spirit (not by the letter) on the day of eschatological judgment (Romans
2:14-16, 25-29). Aquinas understands Paul to be showing the Jew that “the Jewish Law
heard or accepted” is “not enough for salvation,”32 yet he shows this by comparing
Gentiles without the law who are obedient because of faith (the law written in their


31 “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have
sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before
God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. … But if you bear the name ‘Jew’ and rely upon the Law
and boast in God …” (Romans 2:12-13).

hearts) with Jews who have possession of the law but are disobedient because they lack faith (they lack the law written on the heart). Aquinas understands the key difference in terms of God’s grace that changes the heart through faith: “Gentiles converted to the faith … began to obey the moral precepts of the Law by the help of Christ’s grace.”

If Gentiles by faith obey the law instinctively while Jews disobey the law in spite of their possession of it, then the law does not cause divine righteousness; grace-wrought faith does.

**Merit in the Eschatological Judgment**

Aquinas’ teaching on merit arises in the context of Paul’s depiction of eschatological judgment. Because Aquinas understands Paul to be warning the Jews of their need for God’s gift of faith (the law written on the heart) in light of the impending eschatological judgment κατὰ τὰ ἔργα [according to works], the eschatological judgment Paul depicts is no mere hypothetical for Aquinas, as though Paul were going to relieve the dilemma later by teaching that the judgment will not be based on works after all. For Aquinas, the reason why Paul brings up the eschatological judgment in the first place is to warn the Jews that if God’s judgment is impartial and κατὰ τὰ ἔργα, only obedient works (not the mere possession of the law) will help them on the day of judgment. Mere possession of the law is useless without faith; one cannot truly obey the

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33 Ibid., §216.

34 Paul’s expression is hardly ambiguous here: ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὀργῆς καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως δικαιοκρίσιας τοῦ θεοῦ δὲ ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἐργα αὐτοῦ· τοῖς μὲν καθ’ ὑπομονὴν ἔργου ἀγαθοῦ δόξαν καὶ τιμήν καὶ ἀφθορίαν ζητοῦσιν ζωὴν αἰώνιον, τοὺς δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας καὶ ἀπειθεῖσιν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πειθομένοις δὲ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ ὀργῇ καὶ θυμῷ, θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαιν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακὸν, Ἰουδαίου τε πρῶτον καὶ ἸΙΩΛΗΝΟΣ· δόξα δὲ καὶ τιμή καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τῷ ἄγαθῳ, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ ἸΣΙΩΛΗΝΙ—οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ. (Rom 2:5b-11).
law until God’s grace has circumcised the heart.

Believing Gentiles, then, are incorporated into Paul’s argument for the sake of illustrating the sufficiency of God’s gift of faith in the heart for producing the obedience necessary for a favorable judgment in the eschaton. The sufficiency of faith for obedience and eternal reward is contrasted with the insufficiency of mere possession of the law without faith. In other words, Aquinas understands the rhetorical function of Paul’s depiction of eschatological judgment “according to works” to forcefully underscore the need for faith because faith is what produces true obedience in the heart that leads to the kind of works that will be rewarded with eternal life in the eschaton. This hermeneutical framework decisively shapes Aquinas’ understanding of why the justification of the ungodly that produces obedience is by the gift of faith, and since faith is a gift from God, cannot be attained by possession of, or graceless obedience to, law (or any works whatsoever).

Aquinas expounds on Paul’s language about the good works that “merit” reward. First, he argues that “according to works” does not mean “according to equality of works because the reward exceeds the merit.” Second, he gives three characteristics of the deeds Paul depicts as being rewarded with eternal life. Each of

35 I put “merit” in quotations because much of the Protestant antipathy towards Aquinas’ teaching on merit is caused and perpetuated by a failure to understand Aquinas’ own definition for “merit.” Aquinas defines: “Merit and reward refer to the same [thing], for a reward means something given anyone in return for work or toil as a price for it.” ST I-II.114.1. If God gives rewards, they are given for some reason. This reason is what Aquinas refers to as “merit.” Merit is simply the reason of reward. If we take Aquinas’ definition of “merit,” then, we would have to say that anywhere the Bible teaches about reward, some idea of merit is presupposed. As we will see in my conclusion, even Martin Luther admitted to such a thing as “merit” in a biblical sense, a merit that is by grace alone. Unfortunately, he was so opposed to abuses of the term “merit” that he had no place for fully developing a doctrine of “merit” in a biblical sense. Such has been the state of the Protestant tradition to this very day: “merit” is understood to involve something that is fundamentally repugnant to a grace-centered soteriology—while at the same time, the notion of divine reward in the eschaton is accepted without any suspicion.

36 Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §194.
these arises from Paul’s wording “[God will give] to those who by perseverance in doing
good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life” (Rom 2:7). 37 The first is
patience (καθ’ ὁπομονήν) which Aquinas understands in terms of “tolerating adversity” and
perseverance. The second feature is “the goodness of a work” (εργου ἀγαθοῦ) or its
conformity to God’s law (and human reason). The third feature is “right intention, i.e. to
seek eternal life” rather than mere temporal goods (δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ζητοῦσιν). 38 Aquinas holds fast to this Pauline depiction of the final judgment and thus
understands the final meriting of eternal life to be κατὰ τὰ ἔργα. This final meriting of
eternal life should not be confused with justification in Aquinas’ thought, for one is by
faith and the other by works.

**Justification by Faith**

To summarize my account up to this point, several factors have shaped Aquinas’
extpectations for Paul’s subsequent language of justification by faith: 1) Paul’s statement
that “the just shall live by faith,” causes Aquinas to infer that πίστος [faith] in Paul’s
epistle is no mere intellectual assent, but a “living faith” that fulfills the law. 39 Aquinas
understands faith as a virtue inasmuch as it is a habitus (a steady disposition of the will)
formed by God’s indwelling, which happens only through charity. Only this kind of faith
moves the will to assent to the revealed truth about Christ. Thus for Aquinas, whatever

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37 But this poses a problem for Aquinas’ understanding. If only those whom God gives the grace
of justification can keep the law (and therefore find favor in the eschatological judgment), how can Paul
say God is no respecter of persons? Aquinas answers that justice is concerned with debts, “but God calls
sinners to repentance not from debt but as a favor.” Ibid., §206. In other words, God gives justice to some,
grace to others, and neither distributive justice nor gratuitous grace is an injustice to the sinner.

38 Ibid., §196.

39 This is how Aquinas summarizes his previous discussion about faith as a habitus. Ibid., §303.
justification means, it must include a change of the core inner person. 2) Paul’s
depictions of the human condition in terms of ontological corruption naturally dispose
Aquinas to expect Paul’s language of justification do the work of ontological remedy, and
this fits nicely with his understanding of the nature of justifying faith as a change of the
heart—the interior ontological core of a person. 3) Aquinas’ interpretation of Paul’s
warnings to Jews of eschatological judgment “according to works” is understood by
Aquinas to include the argument that uncircumcised Gentiles with faith now instinctively
keep the law (showing it is “written on their hearts” by the Spirit). 4) Paul’s descriptions
of the good works that receive the reward of eternal life are understood by Aquinas to
show that perseverance in good works “merit” eternal life and cause one to prevail at the
eschatological judgment.

Therefore, when Paul argues that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ [the justice of God] has been
manifested χωρίς νόμου [apart from the law], Aquinas takes him simply to mean
“without the Law causing righteousness,” for he understands Paul to have already
described exactly how this righteousness has been manifested in Gentile Christians who
instinctively keep the Law apart from the Law through faith-wrought obedience. 40 That
one is justified apart from the works of the law means without pre-existing merits that
prompt God to justify: “without works prior to becoming just, but not without works
following it.” 41 Aquinas understands faith as the key principle of righteousness given by
God as a gift that works obedience in the lives of the Gentile Christians.

40 Ibid., §300. “This justice of God, I say, has been manifested now, i.e. in the time of grace … inasmuch as it is evident that many have been divinely made just. And this apart from the Law, i.e., without the Law causing righteousness.” Italics added.

41 Ibid., §317. Italics added. This way of qualifying the relationship of works to justification shows that Aquinas thought of justification as an event rather than a process.
God’s justice is said to exist through faith in Jesus Christ, not as though by faith we merit being justified, as if faith exists from ourselves and through it we merit God’s justice, as the Pelagians assert; but because in the very justification, by which we are made just by God, the first motion of the mind toward God is through faith: “Whoever would draw near to God must believe” (Heb 11:6). Hence faith, as the first part of justice, is given to us by God: “By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing; for it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

Aquinas gives a succinct summary of his previous explanations of why faith is the key principle of righteousness, and why its presence in the just necessarily involves charity and the divine indwelling.

But this faith, out of which justice exists, is not the unformed faith about which James 2:26 says, “Faith without works is dead,” but it is faith formed by charity, about which Gal 5:6 says, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith [working through love],” through which Christ dwells in us; “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17), which does not happen without charity: “He who abides in love abides in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). This is the faith about which Acts 15:9 says, “He cleansed their hearts by faith,” a cleansing that does not occur without charity: “Love covers all offenses” (Pr 10:12).

... it transcends human power and merit: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us” (2 Cor 3:5).

... Furthermore, man should not ascribe this glory to himself: “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory” (Ps 115:1); “Give glory to God” (Ps 66:2).

Consequently, because all have sinned and cannot of themselves be justified, they need some other cause to make them just.

From this last line we can see that Aquinas’ understanding of Paul’s terminology of “justification” as a being “made righteous” (as opposed to merely declared righteous) is shaped by his previous interpretations of Paul’s description of how faith has changed the Gentile Christians into law keepers by a law that is “written on their hearts” within his

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42 It is simply erroneous to hold that Aquinas only thought of faith as a virtue and not as a “justifying principle.” Contra David S. Schaff and Robert Reymond: Robert Reymond, “Dr. John Gerstner on Thomas Aquinas as a Protestant,” 114. For Aquinas, this would mean that faith does not cause righteousness, which undermines the most basic contours of his doctrine of justification.

43 Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §302-306.
warnings of eschatological judgment. Faith is that “out of which justice exists” and from which good works come “instinctively.” The gratuitous nature of the grace of justification (“being justified freely”) consists in the fact that faith is given as a gift “without the merit of previous works.”\textsuperscript{44} God does not give faith as a recompense for works; it is freely given.

Paul’s discussion of Abraham’s faith being “reckoned to him as righteousness” does not mean (for Aquinas) that Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to him externally. Rather, presumably because the antecedent of “it” (in “it was reckoned to him as righteousness”\textsuperscript{45}) is Abraham’s act of faith, he takes for granted that it is Abraham’s faith (not Christ’s active and passive obedience) that is “reckoned as righteousness.”\textsuperscript{46} Paul’s uses of the word λογίζω [count, reckon, take into account] are understood by Aquinas to highlight that God does not merely look at a person’s outward works (which other persons can see), but reckons a person righteous based on that which God alone can see—“the inward faith of the heart.”\textsuperscript{48} Λογίζω functions to distinguish righteousness in eyes of man from righteousness in the sight of God (iustitia quae est apud Deum). Just

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., §306.

\textsuperscript{45} ἔλογιζόμην αὐτῷ ἐὰν δικαιοσύνην (Rom 4:3).


\textsuperscript{47} “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. … his faith is credited as righteousness. … Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness. … the righteousness of faith which [Abraham] had … not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. … Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. … it was credited to him. … but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him,” etc. (Romans 4:3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 22, 23, 24).

\textsuperscript{48} Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §327.
as wickedness is described in ontological terms (“lust of the heart,” “degrading passions,” “desire,” “a depraved mind”: Rom 1:24, 26-28), so true righteousness, as Aquinas perceives it, is considered by God to consist chiefly in the ontological righteousness of the heart.

When Paul says “we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand,” (Rom 5:2) Aquinas worries that this could be taken to mean that a person first believes and then God gives grace. In keeping with all he has said about faith being a divine gift (an infused habitus), he argues rather that faith “is the first effect of grace in us.” Through faith we subsequently “stand” in grace. Aquinas calls this “the state of grace.” Once a person is justified by faith, they are in this state.

Justification, then, in Aquinas’ commentary on Romans, is “to make righteous” by the Spirit’s writing of the law on the human heart. Whereas the law written on tablets command us above all else to love God and love our neighbor, and so requires charity, the law written on the human heart goes beyond commanding and actually moves us to this love and charity. It is “to make righteous” by the divine indwelling through the gift

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49 Ibid., §383. Aquinas’ Summa teaches that the act of faith is the first manifestation of grace. ST I-II.110.3.ad.1.

50 Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §383.


52 In the Summa Aquinas explains more extensively why he thinks justification is said to be “by faith” rather than “by the gift of love.” The reason it is called justification rather than faithification or
of faith which involves a fundamental change of the human will.\[53\] In other words, God makes the sinner righteous, apart from the written Law and apart from any previous merit (it is a divine gift), by granting to the sinner a new inner disposition (“faith”) that works as a new principle of righteousness that requires charity, the love of God “poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5).\[54\] This principle reorients the heart to the Law of God so that it obeys “instinctively” (Rom 2:14). This is justification, the freely given righteousness of God. Only this righteousness, although not merited in any way, is subsequently sufficient for the meriting of the divine reward of eternal life as Paul describes it. In the Thomistic soteriological scenario, then, the righteousness of the justified person is nothing less than the righteousness of God—the Holy Spirit himself particularly—dwelling in the human person via the person of the Holy Spirit. Faith and good works are simply the effects of this divine indwelling.

lovification is because whereas faith and charity “imply a special directing of the human mind to God by the intellect and will,” justification implies a more general “rectitude of order” not limited to either the intellect or the will only. ST I-II.113.1.ad.2.

\[53\] Desiring to keep the spirit of Augustine, who taught that justification was greater than God’s work of creation (since the heavens and earth will pass away, but the justification of the ungodly will endure), Aquinas also believes that in terms of what is made in justification, “the justification of the ungodly, which terminates at the eternal good of a share in the Godhead, is greater than the creation of the heaven and earth.” The gift of glory is greater, however, in terms of absolute quantity. ST I-II.113.9. He also believed that justification was miraculous in the sense that it can only be caused by a divine power and therefore its cause is hidden. It is also miraculous in the sense that it sometimes can involve something beyond the ordinary order of cause and effect. ST I-II.113.10. Although Aquinas distinguishes between God’s preparation of a sinner for justification (which might be a successive process) and the act of justification per se, he sees any instantaneous preparation or disposal also as miraculous. ST I-II113.10.

\[54\] Aquinas understands charity to be another divinely infused habitus—the most important of all—that “reaches to the perfecting of all the moral habits and acts of the soul.” Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §392. For Aquinas, this gift is described in Rom 5:5: “And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”
Christ’s Death and Resurrection as Causes of Justification

Aquinas assigns two more causes to justification: Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ died as a necessary part of making satisfaction for us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8). This means “he was not moved to do this by our merits.” "No other person could satisfy for the sin of the entire human race except Christ alone, who was immune from all sin.” God put forward Christ as an “expiation” for sin and “Christ’s satisfaction was efficacious for justifying and redeeming” since sinners “had no way of making satisfaction unless God himself gave them a redeemer and satisfier.” Aquinas understands the sacrifice of Christ that accomplished “satisfaction” as “the penalty of death” that Christ suffered “for us, a penalty man had incurred by sin.”

55 I say “necessary part” because Aquinas believes the whole of Christ’s life—not just his death—is what brought about satisfaction.

56 Ibid., §399.

57 Ibid., §307.

58 Ibid., §308.

59 Ibid., §309. Although here it sounds like Aquinas is locating satisfaction in the appeasement of God’s wrath as in a penal substitutionary model, later in his commentary (in his discussion of how the resurrection of Jesus justifies us), Aquinas explains “the penalty of death” not in terms of a wrathful God who pours out his wrath upon Christ at the cross, but simply as the organic outcome of joining the human race, which race had already accrued the penalty for sin: mortality. Thus, Aquinas understands the entire life of Christ to accomplish the “satisfaction” needed for redemption. As for why the Scripture so often speaks specifically of the death of Christ as achieving satisfaction for sin, Aquinas sees the whole life of Christ as being symbolically encapsulated in Paul’s language of Christ death (i.e. in the manner of a synecdoche: Pars pro toto). “For since Christ’s human nature was somehow the organ of his divinity, as Damascene says, all the acts and sufferings of his human nature were salutary for us, considering that they flowed from the power of his divinity. But because an effect has to some extent a similarity to its cause, the Apostle says that Christ’s death, by which mortal life was extinguished in him, is the cause of extinguishing our sins” (italics added). Ibid., §380. When discussing how Christ died for the ungodly, Aquinas puts it this way: “The very death of Christ shows God’s love for us, because he gave his own son that he should die in making satisfaction for us” (italics added, §399). Rik Van Nieuwenhove’s analysis of Aquinas as a theologian who can “accommodate modern concerns” has considered this aspect of Aquinas’ notion of the sacrifice of Christ. Nieuwenhove appropriates Aquinas as an alternative to views of satisfaction that involve the appeasement of a wrathful God, which, by modern concerns is seen to involve a problematic doctrine of God. Rik Van Nieuwenhove, “Bearing the Marks of Christ’s Passion,” in The Theology of Thomas Aquinas, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 278.
Law could not “remit,”\textsuperscript{60} sins, so Christ suffered the penalty “for us” and this too demonstrates God’s justice for passing over “former sins before the passion of Christ.”\textsuperscript{61} However, this redemption “reaches us” only through faith in Christ\textsuperscript{62} because “the power of Christ’s blood works through man’s faith.”\textsuperscript{63} The resurrection of Christ also causes justification, but Aquinas does not here explain exactly how.\textsuperscript{64} The merits of Christ are accessed and applied by mankind through the justification of the ungodly.

\textsuperscript{60} Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §310. In the Summa Aquinas often defines justification as “remission of sins” and teaches that they are the very same in substance. \textit{ST I-II.113.6.ad.2.} However, interpreters of Aquinas have often misunderstood his use of the term “remission.” For Aquinas, remission refers to the actual removal of ontological sin or corruption. Objection 3 in 113.2 clearly demonstrates the linguistic range of the term, for the objection assumes that “remission of sins” refers to the taking away of an actual sin, not just guilt. \textit{ST I-II.113.2.ad.3.} This point is even more clear when Aquinas argues that the removal of any sin could (technically) be called justification, since “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” [i.e. ontological justice]. \textit{ST I-II.113.1.ad.1.} For a recent misunderstanding of this issue, see McGrath, \textit{Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64. Although McGrath argues that others have misunderstood Aquinas on this point, his own analysis still assumes a forensic understanding of “remission” in Aquinas’ discourse. Once Aquinas’ usage of “remission” is understood correctly, it is easier to see why Aquinas, after defining justification as a transmutation from ontological injustice to ontological justice, would also define the very substance of justification as “remission of sins.” This is also why Aquinas can believe that in the very same act of the infusion of grace, sin is remitted \textit{and} guilt is taken away. \textit{ST I-II.113.6.ad.2.} As we have already seen, Aquinas understands guilt (as does Augustine) to be rooted in ontological corruption. If ontological corruption is taken away, so is the basis for any more guilt. I am not aware of any study attempting to demonstrate the confusion brought about by the forensic categories of the Reformers in their usage of the term “remission,” but it seems likely that Protestant theologians such as McGrath are erroneously reading such exclusively forensic usages back into Aquinas.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., §311.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., §309.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., §310. Aquinas concludes after his discussion of Christ’s propitiation: “And so it is clear how there is justification through faith in Jesus Christ, as has been stated above.” §309. Aquinas sometimes speaks of grace as “Christ’s grace.” §216. Also, in his discussion of how circumcision was a shadow of Christ, he mentions that “by bodily circumcision is signified the spiritual circumcision to be accomplished by Christ: first in the soul, inasmuch as it is through him that concupiscence and the effects \textit{[reatus]} of sin are removed by Christ.” §348. It is also in his discussion of circumcision that he teaches that “through faith in Christ, which circumcision was a sign, [circumcision] removed original sin and conferred the help of grace to righteously.” §349.

\textsuperscript{64} He simply quotes Rom 6:4: “So that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Then, after comparing this with what Christ’s life and death accomplishes, he concludes again: “But his resurrection, by which he returns to a new life of glory, he calls the cause of our justification, by which we return to the new life of righteousness.” Ibid., §380.
The Insufficiency of Human Works for Justification

Aquinas goes into a deeper explanation of why human works cannot cause divine righteousness. He rejects the idea that a sufficient inward habitus can be generated by “becoming accustomed to outward works” because the habit necessary for the kind of “good works” Paul describes in his depiction of eschatological judgment requires that one do such works with the right intention—namely, to obtain eternal life (as we have seen). This kind of habit requires something “which exceeds human ability, as is stated in 1 Cor 2(9), ‘It has not arisen in the heart of man what God has prepared for those who live him.’”\(^{65}\) In other words, good works ordained to eternal life require faith in something beyond the temporal sphere of life. This kind of faith does not come naturally to the sinner. “Consequently … a man’s heart needs first to be justified inwardly by God, so that he can perform works proportioned to divine glory.”\(^{66}\)

Paul’s distinction in Romans 4:4-5 between one who works and receives his “wage” as a debt and the other who does not work but has his faith counted as righteousness causes some trouble for Aquinas.\(^{67}\) He favors an interpretation that would see Paul as ruling out the possibility altogether of anyone being given her reward as a “debt,” and in which case the “working” Paul deplores is a working “so as to be justified

\(^{65}\) Ibid., §325.

\(^{66}\) Ibid.

\(^{67}\) He entertains the possibly of taking both to refer to persons who receive eschatological reward by the working of grace, one by debt and the other by gift. Therefore, if such is the interpretation, the person’s reward is considered “debt” only inasmuch as her “works” are considered “according to their source, namely insofar as they are performed under God’s impulse in accord with the intention of God who predestines. And in this respect the aforesaid reward is due them by debt.” Ibid., §329. Also, if this is the interpretation, the one who “does not work” Aquinas would take to refer to the person who dies before she has time to do any good works but who believes before her death—specifically “one who dies immediately after baptism.” Ibid., §330. However, Aquinas does not favor this interpretation, and suggests an alternative.
by his works.” In this line of interpretation, Aquinas understands Paul to be ruling out works as a ground for justification, but (in keeping with Paul’s depiction of eschatological judgment) not for the meriting of eternal life. Thus, Paul’s point is simply this: faith is not attained as a recompense for works, it is given as a free gift, yet it is only those who have this gift that are considered truly righteous before God and will prevail at the judgment “according to works.”

In his discussion of Abraham’s faith, Aquinas is keen to explain that the reason why righteousness must depend upon faith and not upon the law. He gives several reasons, but the most important one is this: “the Law commands and does not confer the grace to fulfill, according to 2 Cor (3:6): ‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,’ namely, because ‘the Spirit helps us inwardly in our weakness’ (Rom 8:26).” If righteousness comes by faith—which is a gift and enables one to fulfill the law—the promise does not depend on “man” but upon justifying grace, which Aquinas here calls “infallible.” He comments further on Romans 8:4:

… the intention of the lawgiver is to make citizens good. Human law does this by merely indicating what ought to be done; but the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the intellect but also inclines the affection to act right.

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68 Ibid., §331. Italics added. To illumine how the nuances of Aquinas’ interpretation affect his reading of this text, I offer a Thomistic interpolation of Romans 4:4-5: “Now to the one who works [thinking that by his works he shall be made righteous], his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due, [yet God is debtor to no man]. But to the one who does not work [to be made righteous by his works], but [by the infusion of grace] believes in Him who makes the ungodly righteous, his faith is righteous in God’s eyes [because he truly understands that true righteousness is God’s gift].”

69 Ibid., §357.

70 Ibid., §360. Cf. ST I-II.112.3. “God’s intention cannot fail. … Hence if God intends, while moving, that the one whose heart He moves should attain to grace, he will infallibly attain to it.” For Aquinas, the infusion of grace and the acceptance of grace are simultaneous in time (except for infants). ST I-II.113.3.

71 Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §602.
Justification as an Event Rather than a Process

It can be observed by now that Aquinas understands justification as an event rather than a process.\(^{72}\) The overwhelming force of Aquinas’ analysis in Romans presupposes that a sinner is first made just before any good works follow. As we have seen, Aquinas emphasizes that “apart from the works of the law” means “without works prior to becoming just,” but entails good works after becoming just.\(^{73}\) Furthermore, although Aquinas prefers to speak about the change faith brings about in the will, he also views this as a justification of the sinners “heart”: “a man’s heart needs first to be justified inwardly by God.”\(^{74}\) Good works done with the intention of the eternal good “signify” that the grace of justification has already been conferred.\(^{75}\) This implies a temporal scheme in which there is a before and after of justification without any time lapse in between.\(^{76}\) Before justification a person is ungodly. After justification a person

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\(^{72}\) In the *Summa*, this conviction of Aquinas’ is even more apparent, for he explicitly argues that justification takes places in an instant and that God “needs no disposition of the creature, but provides the sufficient disposition.” *ST* I-II.113.7. Although Aquinas lists a number of things that take place in justification and argues for ordering them a certain way, his *Ordo Iustificationis* is not one of temporal order, but one of logical (what he calls “natural”) order. This aspect of Aquinas’ doctrine of justification and the Catholic doctrine that followed the basic Augustinian paradigm for justification has been misrepresented in Protestant textbook overviews of historical theology. E.g. Alan F. Johnson, Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical & Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 307. John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 169. Cf. also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 535-40, par 1987-2005.


\(^{74}\) Ibid., §325. Italics added.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., §317.

\(^{76}\) Aquinas’ distinction between temporal order and the order of nature is especially helpful for understanding why he could speak of aspects of justification happening in a certain “order,” even though they are simultaneous in time. *ST* I-II.113.8. Although simultaneous in time, they take place logically in the following order: 1) the infusion of grace [the motion of the divine mover], 2) the movement of the free-
is righteous and begins to obey the law of God instinctively. Previous to justification a person does not have good works and therefore cannot merit God’s gift. After justification a person does good works and is capable of meriting eternal life. As we have noted, based on Aquinas’ interpretation of the ontological corruption of mankind in the Pauline discourse, Aquinas considers a person to be helplessly under the power of sin previous to justification (the state of sin) and after justification a person, by faith, stands in grace (the state of grace).

Conclusion

It is possible to see the foundational convictions of Aquinas’ doctrine of justification in his interpretation of Romans. His perspective on justification was not

will towards God by faith [the movement of the moved], 3) the movement of the free-will against sin [also the movement of the moved], and 4) the remission of sins [the attainment of the end]. ST I-II.113.6. Logically/naturally, the motion of the mover (1) precedes the motion of the moved (2-3), while the end attained is naturally last (4). ST I-II.113.8. Thomas’s Ordo Iustificationis is not one of temporal order, but one of logical (what he calls “natural”) order.

As we have noted, Aquinas considers a person incapable in and of themselves (i.e. apart from justifying grace) of doing anything that might make them righteous. Ibid., §277. Francis Schaeffer’s claim that Aquinas denied human depravity and made perfection possible apart from grace is simply untenable, as is Carl F.H. Henry’s claim that Aquinas did not take serious the scriptural claims about the effects of sin. Geisler, Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal, 12-13.

In viewing justification as an event, Aquinas is following St. Augustine. Gerald Hiestand, Augustine and Justification Debates: Did Calvin Step Too Far in the Right Direction? (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Enterprises, 2003), 78-80. In support Heistand also cites Louis Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1937). For an alternative interpretive argument that sees Augustine as having taught that justification encompasses a process, see McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 43.

I hope my analysis in this paper further corroborates Joseph P. Wawrykow’s case against Karlfried Froehlich and Alister McGrath who suggest that “medieval theologians were misled in their speculation by the Latin rendering of the biblical Greek and Hebrew for “righteousness.”” Joseph P. Wawrykow, God’s Grace and Human Action: ‘Merit’ in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 265-66. To attribute over a thousand years of exegetical that took Paul’s “justification” in the sense of “made righteous” to a careless linguistic mishap by one Latin theologian (Augustine) is an oversimplification that only obfuscates the hermeneutical and contextual
due to a neglect of Pauline studies, but just the opposite. It was a balancing act between different aspects of Pauline ideas (or at least Aquinas’ interpretation of Pauline passages). In conclusion, I will explain only four: 1) justifying faith, 2) the insufficiency of works or the law for justification, 3) the inheritance of eternal life according to works, and 4) merit.

First, Aquinas’ understanding of justifying faith comes from Paul. In his commentary on Romans, Aquinas does not hesitate to affirm over and over—without linguistic qualifiers—that “faith justifies.” He understands Paul to give a lengthy contrast between the ontological corruption caused by sin and the righteousness that comes through faith. Paul describes faith as something a righteous person “lives by,” (Rom 1:17) as “obedience” (Rom 1:5) that “establishes the law” (Rom 3:31) and circumcises the “heart,” (Rom 2:29), as the way to gain access to a certain “standing” in grace (Rom 5:1-2), and as that which fulfills the requirement of the law in us (in nobis,

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82 Wawrykow helpfully points out Aquinas’ indebtedness to his principle sources (e.g. the Bible and St. Augustine) in his chapter: “Concluding Observations: Thomas and His Authorities,” in God’s Grace and Human Action, 260-84.

83 Seeing how Aquinas’ theology is rooted in biblical interpretation helps expose that evangelical distortions are typically specious. Aquinas held to a grace-centered soteriology based on biblical interpretation, and his doctrine of merit was not a pagan syncretism from Aristotelian philosophy, but a result of his interpretation of the depictions of the final eschatological judgment in Scripture. Furthermore, while it cannot be denied that Aquinas’ theology thoroughly utilizes Aristotelian distinctions and predications, if our study of Aquinas’ doctrine of justification is representative of his theological methodology, it is equally true that such distinctions and predications are more like the branches on his theological tree than the roots and trunk of his theological convictions. Christians today who use philosophy to defend or explain Christian convictions are utilizing a similar methodology.

84 Aquinas, Lectures on the Letter to the Romans, §194.
Therefore, Aquinas understands the significance of justifying faith in terms of a change or movement of the heart from sin to God that leads to a “state of grace,” causes true obedience, and ultimately fulfills the demands of the law (even if not perfectly). To be “made righteous” simply means to be made obedient from the heart to the law of God. This is how he understands justification by faith as an internal rectitude that orders the heart aright so that it comes to obey the law instinctively (even if not perfectly). Obedience from the heart to the law commands charity above all else—love for God and neighbor. This is also why he believes justifying faith, as well as charity (Rom 5:5), are infused by God at the same time. This is also why true faith necessarily requires charity.

Second, Aquinas’ tenacious denial that justification can be earned or merited by any human work is due to Pauline language about justification. Because Paul’s depiction of justification by faith is contrasted with justification by works of the law, Aquinas concludes that true righteousness comes about, not as the result of works or possession of the law, but by the instantaneous infusion of grace when God gives the sinner a new heart.

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86 Since Aquinas nowhere detects Paul distinguishing which aspects of faith justify and which do not, he takes for granted that when Paul says justification if “by faith,” this includes faith in its entirety. When asking the question, “Why does faith justify?,” Aquinas does not quarantine the heavily emphasized dynamics of obedience in Paul’s depictions of faith. For Aquinas, faith justifies because it produces true obedience within. For Calvin, on the other hand, “faith is said to justify because it receives and embraces the righteousness offered in the Gospel.” John Calvin, Institutes, III.11.17.

87 One of the reasons Calvin believed that faith itself could never justify but was only a “vessel” that received Jesus’ righteousness is this: faith does not fulfill the requirement of the law perfectly. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), III.2.1; III.11.7. This raises the further exegetical question of whether the apostle Paul himself, by his expression that “[by faith] we establish the law,” intended absolute perfection. Aquinas does not take the apostle in this way.
that causes them to love God and neighbor: namely, the gift of faith. Since faith is what causes true obedience to the law—not the law itself or human works—Aquinas considers faith as the true gift of righteousness from God apart from the works of the law. All actions and deeds are dictated by the internal order of a person’s soul. Faith is what causes a person to be righteous internally. This results in a changed life—both internally and externally, but from the inside out, and by the indwelling of God. Also, as we have seen, Aquinas does not separate justification from the divine indwelling. Faith is the result of God’s infusion of grace. The righteousness that comes from this indwelling and this grace is therefore an alien righteousness because it originates from outside of us

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88 Given Aquinas’ understanding of the meaning of justification (to make the ungodly righteous) for anyone to expect the ungodly to somehow merit his own justification approaches absurdity. Here it is helpful to keep in mind the relationship between being and doing. Humans do what they do because they are what they are. Ontology determines action. Being, then, is logically prior to doing. Therefore, just as a bad tree cannot bear good fruit in order to become a good tree, so for Aquinas, the ungodly cannot bear righteous fruit and so become righteous—this is logically backwards and impossible. Rather, just as a bad tree must first become a good tree before it can bear good fruit, so an ungodly person must first become righteous [by God’s instantaneous, unmerited, and transforming grace before they would be able to do the good works in obedience to the law.

89 In some ways, Aquinas’ view of the extent to which justification is by grace surpasses the position of many Protestants. In Aquinas, justification cannot simply be, as Reymond states, “the inevitable divine response to the sinner’s faith in Jesus Christ” (as some Protestants teach) because this obscures the extent of grace in justification—God does not simply wait on the sinner to believe, but grants the very faith by which the sinner is justified. cf. Reymond, “Dr. John H. Gerstner on Thomas Aquinas as a Protestant,” 116. Aquinas’ notion of faith as a virtue should not be understood as anything less than a free gift of God. It is a “virtue” in virtue of the fact that faith orients the inner person toward God as ultimate end (virtues are inner dispositions toward certain goods). It is “infused” for at least three reasons: 1) it is not an exterior or physical reality of the person but rather an invisible internal reality, 2) it is the effect of God’s indwelling and thus originates outside of the person (extra nos), and 3) it is beyond the natural capacities of that person to acquire. Aquinas’ language of “infusion” is employed to keep these sorts of distinctions at the heart of the discussion of virtue. Therefore, it should be no surprise that Jonathan Edwards—a theologian keen on both grace and virtue—employed similar language for similar reasons (to distinguish himself from Arminians), even though his language has been obscured by Protestant translators. Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards on Justification: Closer to Luther or Aquinas?,” Reformation & Revival 14, no. 1 (2005): 119.

90 As Cavanaugh explains: “God can perform an act which is both mine and God’s at the same time. ‘To be moved voluntarily, is to be moved from within, that is, by an interior principle: yet this interior principle may be caused by an exterior principle; and so to be moved from within is not repugnant to being moved by another’ (I.105.4, ad 2).” William T. Cavanaugh, “A Joint Declaration?: Justification as Theosis in Aquinas and Luther,” 270. Thus, for example, the fruits of the Spirit are ours—we become
(extra nos) in God and not from inside human persons (in nobis). While originating extra nos, in justification God’s righteousness dwells within us (in nobis) and changes our ontology. This is how, for example, the fruits of the Holy Spirit become ours. To ask whether these fruits of righteousness belong to the human person or to God introduces—in this way of thought—a false dichotomy. So in justification, a person becomes righteous by the righteousness of God, for he becomes righteous by the divine indwelling.

Third, Aquinas’ view about the inheritance of eternal life κατὰ τὰ ξηρακα [according to works] comes also from Paul. He does not see the eschatological judgment as hypothetical, but understands Paul to be warning the Jews that the law is not sufficient for prevailing at the eschatological judgment, which is impartial and “according to works.” Therefore, Aquinas understands the need for justification by faith as a need for God to change the heart so that obedience to the law and the doing of good works comes instinctively—as he depicts taking place among the Gentiles who do not have the law. Since Paul’s depiction of the eschatological judgment involves giving the reward of eternal life “according to works,” Aquinas teaches that works are the grounds for inheriting eternal life at the eschatological judgment. This is very different from the grounds of justification. In the eschatological judgment one prevails by faith-wrought patient, gentle, peaceful, loving, etc., yet at the same time these are the fruits of the Spirit—they are God at work in us. It is a righteousness that is given to the sinner so that it becomes part of who they really are, yet it is nothing more than God in us. In this case, righteousness is not either God’s or ours, either alien or human, but must be both. Aquinas’ language of “participation” overcomes this false dichotomy.

91 Contra Robert Reymond, “Dr. John Gerstner on Thomas Aquinas as a Protestant,” 114. And even once it is “inside” human persons, in Aquinas’ thought, it is still just God inside us. To ask whether justifying righteousness is inherent to the sinner or an alien righteousness is a false dichotomy in Aquinas’ scheme of thought (see above footnote).
works that proceed naturally from the infusion of grace. The eschatological reward of eternal life is indeed a reward, and thus implies previous merit. Whereas justification is by grace-wrought faith given without any previous merit, the eschatological reward of eternal life is given as a gracious reward for good works—works done by the power of grace.

Fourth, the Pauline depiction of eschatological judgment is also where Aquinas gets his understanding of merit. For Aquinas, merit is simply a way of referring to divine reward. God has ordained that works proceeding from grace should receive a reward from Him; therefore they constitute “merit” or reason for reward. Since our work has the character of merit only “on the presupposition of the Divine ordination, it does not follow that God is made our debtor simply, but His own.” Aquinas’ questions in the Summa on merit demonstrably show that his main concern is to balance his conviction that all of salvation is by grace with his conviction that the eschatological judgment is based on merit. From this balancing act comes Aquinas’ subtle distinctions about how this merit does not involve justice and reward in the absolute and simple sense; rather, God condescends to our humanity in its current state at it were to graciously attach

92 As Wawrykow points out, Thomas does not ultimately depend on Aristotle, the Fathers, or any medieval theologian for his teaching on merit, but “claims that his teaching on merit is biblically rooted.” Wawrykow, God’s Grace and Human Action, 265. When pressed by Erasmus on the New Testament teaching on “reward,” even Luther himself capitulated to speaking of a biblical sense of merit: “As for merit, or the proposal of a reward, what is it but a kind of promise? But that promise does not prove that we can do anything; it proves only this, that if anyone does this or that, he shall then have a reward. … If ‘free-will’ cannot will good by itself alone, but wills good by grace alone (for we are speaking of ‘free-will’ apart from grace, and inquiring into the proper power of each), who does not see that the good will, and merit, and reward, are of grace alone?” Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1998), 181. Italics added.

93 ST I-II.114.1. “Merit and reward refer to the same [thing], for a reward means something given anyone in return for work or toil as a price for it.”

94 ST I-II.114.1.ad.3.
rewards to actions of imperfect wayfarers in such a way that He is never made our 
debtor.\textsuperscript{95} This is because Aquinas understands faith to be a free and unmerited gift from 
God sufficient for the righteousness that leads to eternal life. The eschatological 
judgment is based on works, but good works are brought about through the gift of faith 
(given to those who are predestined),\textsuperscript{96} which the sinner never earns or merits. 
Ultimately, then, merit itself and “eternal life [are] \textit{utter gift}.”\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{95} Furthermore, the works of the justified \textit{in and of themselves} are not worthy of the divine reward, 
even though Aquinas speaks of “condign merit.” Inasmuch as such works are considered as springing from 
the human person, they are unworthy of the divine reward and have no condignity. However, inasmuch as 
the works of the justified are considered as springing from the grace of the Holy Spirit living within that 
person, they constitute condign merit. In other words, merit is only “condign” because the works of the 
Holy Spirit in the justified are also the works of God himself. What theologian is willing to say that God’s 
works are not worthy of reward (i.e. the highest honors)? \textit{ST I-II.114.3}. Condign reward refers to reward 
that is given appropriately or “in accordance with a fair judgment.” \textit{ST I-II.114.3}.

\textsuperscript{96} Aquinas believes the gifts of faith and justification “signify the effects of predestination in 
time.” Harm Goris, “Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Human Freedom,” in \textit{The 
Theology of Thomas Aquinas}, eds. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Indiana: 
University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 102. “A person’s holiness follows on God’s predestining will. … 
Thus, in intending a human to eternal life, God also wills for that person the grace that will bring that 
person to this end. There is nothing in the person that could ‘earn’ either this end or this grace.” Joseph 
Wawrykow, “Grace,” in \textit{The Theology of Thomas Aquinas}, 203. This eternal predestination is not based on 
God’s foreknowledge of that person’s moral goodness: “Foreknowledge of merits is not the cause or reason 
of predestination.” \textit{ST I.23.5}.

\textsuperscript{97} Wawrykow, “Grace,” 203. Italics added.
CHAPTER 2

LOVE AND CHARITY: THE PERFECTION OF INTELLIGENT WILL

The strategy of this inquiry into Thomistic charity will be as follows. Since Charity is a species of love, examining Aquinas’ doctrine of love will immerse us into his Aristotelian anthropology and help set the stage to attain better clarity on his doctrine of charity. It only makes sense to understand the answer to the question “What is love?” before understanding “What kind of love is charity?” After looking at several ways Aquinas defines love, we will begin to penetrate a much larger picture of his overall anthropology that assigns an interdependent relationship between the intellect and will. Exploring the dynamics of love will underscore how central love is to human nature in Thomistic anthropology—it is in fact the very principle of human life and, in a certain sense, the very essence of the human soul. Next, when the role of reason in love is considered we will see that reasoned love is the basis of free will in Aquinas. Particular attention will be given to highlighting the tension between Aquinas’ apparent acceptance of certain kinds of natural necessities and human freedom.

Cashing in on these anthropological insights from the first section, I will illumine several corresponding aspects of Aquinas’ doctrine of charity. First, I will show that Aquinas’ maxim that grace perfects nature is exemplified vividly in his doctrine of charity, since in loving God our natural desire for happiness is fulfilled in such a way that happiness and God become the subjective and objective ways of defining our last end. Second, I will explain how charity is the mother of all virtues by being their efficient
cause. Third, I will argue that in spite of the fact that love is a passion, charity is
ultimately a participation in divine charity. When Aquinas argues that the *imago Dei*
consists chiefly in the acts of knowing *and* loving, he is following his anthropological
insight that the intellect and the will operate as one principle. Finally, just as love as the
proper act of the intelligent will is in a certain way the essence of the soul for Aquinas, so
in many ways we can see an priority given to the soul in charity.

**Love as the Proper Act of the Intellective Will**

**Defining Love and Distinguishing Its Effects**

It is difficult to aggregate together Aquinas’ insights about the nature of love in
one concise definition. Before attempting this, Aquinas’ different ways of describing the
reality of love should be explored individually. Vocabulary that is essential to
understanding key aspects of Aquinas’ doctrine of love (e.g. the good, the last end, the
means, passion, apprehension, etc.) will become progressively clear. For Aquinas love is
an all-pervasive phenomenon so mysterious and broad as to be the cause of everything a
person does, says, thinks, or feels.

First, Aquinas believes love is a *principle* of volitional movement and rest, thus
distinguishing it from *desire or delight*, which he considers its effects. When the object
of love is not possessed, this causes the will’s locomotion towards the object (or towards
union with the object) with the intent of obtaining the object (or being united with it).

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98 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the *Summa* are taken from the English translation,
*Summa Theologica*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols., rev. ed. (1948; repr.,
Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1981), 113-114 [henceforth cited in the standard manner *ST*
I.20.1.*resp.*]. To be as specific as possible, I have distinguished between Aquinas’ “On the Contrary” (the
*sed contra*, herein abbreviated as *sed*), his “I answer that” (the *respondeo*, herein abbreviated as *resp*), and
his answers to objections (the *adversus*, herein abbreviated as *ad*).
This he calls desire. The only reason for the will’s loving and therefore desiring some object is if the human intellect perceives it as “good.” Aquinas’ definition of “the good” is correlative with desire: “For since the good is what all seek, the notion of good is that which calms the desire. … good means that which simply pleases the appetite.”

When the object of love is possessed, the will (which Aquinas defines as an appetite) is at rest and reposes in the good, and this he calls joy or delight.

Although when the younger Aquinas wrote the Scriptum, he tended to define love as delight, the mature Aquinas does not want to reduce love to either desire or delight, but maintains that love is a preceding principle that causes both, depending on whether the lover is or is not united with the object loved. Although he allows for a certain linguistic flexibility in speech, allowing for desire or delight to still be called “love,” they are only love considered under a particular circumstance: love in pursuit of its object is desire (love pursuing) and love at rest in its object is delight (love resting). These terms (desire and delight) are therefore still understood as signifying love by capturing love’s acts or effects. But when it comes to proper definitions, he defines love as “the first movement of the will and of every appetitive faculty” regarding good apprehended...

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99 ST I-II.27.1.ad.3. Aquinas also considers “the beautiful” as another way of talking about “the good.” “The notion of the beautiful is that which calms the desire, by being seen or known.”

100 Christopher J. Malloy, “Thomas on the Order of Love and Desire: A Development of Doctrine,” The Thomist 71 no. 1 (2007): 65-87. Malloy attributes this weakness to Aquinas’ interpretation of Augustine whom he interpreted as saying “Love is of what is already possessed.” Ibid. 65. Malloy points out that this exact quote cannot be found in Augustine, and that defining love this way changes love and desire’s order of generation, making desire the cause of love rather than vice versa. He further argues that Aquinas’ mature doctrine of love is nevertheless anticipated in the Scriptum.

101 For example, he allows for Augustine to define love as “movement towards the object loved,” which Aquinas technically considers desire. ST I-II.27.4.resp.
universally by the intellect, whether this good is considered as possessed or not.\footnote{102}{ST I.20.1.\ resp. Italics added.}

Aquinas allows that evil can in some sense be an object of the will, but it can only be so indirectly as a consequence of the will’s appetite for the good.

Love 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. For nobody desires anything nor rejoices in anything, except as a good that is loved: nor is anything an object of hate except as opposed to the object of love. Similarly, it is clear that sorrow, and other things like to it, must be referred to love as to their first principle.\footnote{103}{ST I.20.1.\ resp.}

Any negative stance the will takes toward something (e.g. sorrowing or hating) thus depends on the will’s first act of love for the good. While evil is the object of the will only in this indirect sense, the good is “essentially and especially the object of the will and the appetite,” and the two chief effects of love are circumstantial and necessarily presuppose love as their principle: joy or delight which apprehend good under the special condition of being present or possessed, and desire or hope which apprehend good as being absent or not possessed.\footnote{104}{ST I.20.1.\ resp. These categories (apprehension, love, desire, delight, etc.) are fundamental to Aquinas’ entire theology, and they will correspond to the theological virtues. The basic ontology at work in the phenomenon of love (often called Thomas’s “psychology of love”) is what gets transformed by grace in justification.}

Second, as appears from Aquinas’ way of defining love, apprehension of any particular good or goods as good depends logically upon a universal notion or apprehension of the good in a similar way that all truth depends logically upon the law of non-contradiction. Although the human has the habit of theoretical reasoning about
propositions as true or false which Aquinas calls the speculative intellect, the part of the intellect that apprehends good as good Aquinas calls the practical intellect, and the habitus of the intellect whereby it apprehends the good as good is called synderesis. Although one’s judgment can often be mistaken, one only needs to apprehend something as a good in some way for it to become an object of love. “In order that the will tend to anything, it is requisite not that this be good in very truth, but that it be apprehended as good.” Apprehension of the intellect thus logically precedes love.

Third, love is a complacency (complacentia) or “pleasing assent” in “the good” and is therefore also a passion because it consists in a certain change in the human appetite brought about by love’s object. Complacency in the good should not be confused with the calming of desire (joy or delight), however, for it is rather the cause of both desire and delight.

The first change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object is called love, and is nothing else than complacency in that object and from this complacency results a movement towards that same object, and this movement is desire; and lastly, there is rest which is joy. Since, therefore, love consists in a change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object, it is evident that love is a passion.

In this sense, the human will is passive in love (and love is therefore a passion) inasmuch

105 ST I-II.57.2.resp.
106 ST I.79.12.resp.
107 ST I-II.8.1.resp.
108 Michael Sherwin, O.P., By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 78. The phrase “pleasant affective affinity” is also used by Sherwin (46). Sherwin traces the development of Aquinas’ way of explaining the reality of love. At first he defined it as a “transformation” of affection when it receives the “form” of its object. Over time, however, Aquinas’ way of explaining this became more and more sophisticated, transcending the limitations of his earlier ways of defining love in his Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard (the Scriptum).
as the proper objects of the will in a certain way act upon and cause a change in the human appetite known as the will. The change (called “love”) brought about by the appetible object is here called complacency and is applied both to the sensitive appetite and the intellectual appetite in human nature: “The aptitude of the sensitive appetite or of the will to some good, that is to say, its very complacency in good, is called sensitive love, or intellectual or rational love.”

It is important to understand how the word “passion” is used by Aquinas to refer to movements of the irrational appetite as well as movements of the rational appetite. The term “passive” can be applied where something is received in a material sense, while something else material is taken away—as when a body is healed from sickness through a change or “transmutation.” In physical healing, bodily health is gained and bodily sickness is lost. To avoid attributing contradiction to Aquinas, we must bear in mind that this type of passion is reserved for the most “proper” meaning of the word. But the term can also be applied in an immaterial sense as well to anything in potentiality, whether corporeal or not, as when the human soul gains joy or understanding and thereby looses sorrow or misunderstanding. What is more, these two senses of the word “passion” are not merely analogous, for the immaterial soul’s passion is (or at least can be) accompanied by a material transmutation in the body. In this case there is a sense in which “the irascible and concupiscible powers are in the soul before it is united to the body (as long as we understand priority of nature, and not of time).”

Because the human nature is a composite of both body and soul, in such cases the material passion is

\[110\] \textit{ST I-II.26.2.} \textit{resp.}

\[111\] \textit{ST I.82.5.} \textit{ad.2.}
an aspect of or shares in the immaterial passion, although the material and immaterial aspects are still distinguishable.\textsuperscript{112} The formal aspect is the immaterial movement of the soul in response to an object, and the material aspect is the bodily effect that accompanies the immaterial movement.\textsuperscript{113} The sensitive appetite in this way can share in the intellectual or rational appetite. As Aquinas puts it, “even the lower appetitive powers are called rational, insofar as they partake of reason in some sort.”\textsuperscript{114} “In so far as the lower parts follow the movement of the higher” in the human person, Aquinas concludes “the more perfect a virtue is, the more does it cause passion” in the proper sense.\textsuperscript{115}

Different types of love can be distinguished according to different appetites—natural appetite, sensitive appetite, or intellectual appetite, but “in each of these appetites, the name love is given to the principle of movement towards the end loved.”\textsuperscript{116} In human nature the sensitive appetite is integrated with reason and “has a certain share of liberty, in so far as it obeys reason.”\textsuperscript{117} We find Aquinas’ use of the word “passion” to have a broad range of meaning beyond the material, but this “wider sense” in which Aquinas uses the term allows the immaterial human soul’s love to fall within the scope of “passion” even when it’s applied to the human will guided by reason.\textsuperscript{118} When dilection

\textsuperscript{112} ST I-II.22.1. The physical sense so of “passion” is only included in the soul’s passions “by accident” of the human composite.

\textsuperscript{113} ST I-II.41.1.\textit{resp.}

\textsuperscript{114} ST I-II.24.1.\textit{ad.2.}

\textsuperscript{115} ST I-II.59.5.\textit{resp.}

\textsuperscript{116} ST I-II.26.1.\textit{resp.}

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} “Since, therefore, love consists in a change wrought in the appetite by the appetible object, it is evident that love is a passion: properly so called, according as it is in the concupiscible faculty; in a wider
is added to the notion of love, it does not take away the notion of love as a passion, but adds to it something more—reasoned choice.¹¹⁹ Not all love is dilection, but all dilection is love. Love is the broader category and reasoned love is still yet a further specification. Love and choice are both “expressed by way of act or passion.”¹²⁰ Aquinas argues that love is more God-like than dilection because man can be drawn to God passively more than by reason.¹²¹

The modern reader should notice that Aquinas does not reserve the word passion only for peculiarly intense movements of the soul, but any movement whatsoever brought about when a power’s “object” becomes its “active principle” by being the reason or cause of its movement.¹²² In the case of human love, the power in consideration is the human will, which is an appetite vulnerable to being moved by an object that the intellect apprehends through reason as able to satisfy the will’s appetite.¹²³ This is why Aquinas elsewhere defines love as “a certain adapting of the appetitive power to some good” that

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¹¹⁹ ST I-II.26.3 resp., ad 4.

¹²⁰ ST I-II.3 resp.

¹²¹ ST I-II.3 ad 4.

¹²² ST I-II.41.1 resp. Aquinas divides all movements into two categories: 1) action and 2) passion. He gives the example of a heating. The “act” of heating is to cause heat, but the “passion” of heating is a movement towards heat. Aquinas admits that one and the same thing (such as heating) can be considered both an action and a passion, seen in different ways. “And either way, human acts, whether they be considered as actions, or as passions, receive their species from the end. For human acts can be considered in both ways, since man moves himself, and is moved by himself.” ST I-II.3 resp. Here Aquinas appears to explain this difference as one between moving and being moved. Love generally and reasoned love or choice (“dilection”) are “expressed by way of act or passion.” ST I-II.26.3 resp.

¹²³ Since objects also act upon the human understanding, “both to feel and to understand are passions.” ST I-II.41.1 resp.
is “suitable to it.”

Fourth, since the will is the principle of movement for all other human powers, love as the proper act of the will can be seen as the cause of all interior and exterior human acts. Aquinas distinguished between interior acts and exterior acts as between cause and effect, with the exception of internal bodily acts such as the beating of the heart that pumps blood throughout the body, which he considered wholly involuntary. Apart from certain interior acts of the bodily organs, however, all human acts (both interior and exterior) are in some way voluntary—that is, they are moved or commanded by the human will. Concerning human actions that rise above the level of mere instinct, “exterior action is the object of the will, inasmuch as [the action] is proposed to the will by the reason, as a good apprehended” and the act’s execution “is an effect of the will.” Inasmuch as potential actions (or courses of action) are proposed to the will by the reason, they can themselves be objects of the will. The will must first desire the act’s

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124 ST I-II.28.5.resp.

125 Thomas Aquinas, On Evil, trans. Richard Regan, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 257 [henceforth cited in the standard manner: De malo 6.1]. cf. Thomas Aquinas, On Love and Charity: Readings from the “Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard,” trans. Peter A. Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin, O.S.B., and Joseph Bolin (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 143 [henceforth cited in the standard manner with page numbers in brackets: In II Sent., 27.1.4.ad.12 [143]]. cf. ST I-II.9.3.resp. Even though Aquinas believes that humans can act out of instinctive love, he focuses on actions that are uniquely human. “Of actions done by man those alone are properly called human, which are proper to man as man. … Now man is the master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as the faculty and will of reason. Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will. And if any other actions are found in man, they can be called actions of a man, but not properly human actions.” ST I-II.1.1.resp.

126 ST I-II.17.9.resp.

127 This distinction can be seen very clearly at work in his answer of the question of whether sin consists chiefly in the acts of the will. He concludes “if we should understand the sinful acts as regards carrying out the deeds, then moral wrong is primarily and fundamentally in the will.” De Malo 2.4.resp.

128 ST I-II.20.1.ad.1.
execution before it is executed, which presupposes love as the principle of all action.

In this sense, when Aquinas says the human will is the “efficient cause” of all exterior acts, this is only because exterior actions are an object of love in some way. When Aquinas takes for granted that the will is the mover and the human body is the thing moved, he understands the movement as presupposing the proper act of the will—namely, love. In other words, all human action is motivated by the will in some way that presupposes a desired goal, object or end (even if it is as trite as getting out of bed, or as weighty as getting married). In the moment of decision (where a human settles on a course of action) this object (the action) is perceived as a good not yet attained, which moves the will to command action. But the actions themselves are not the ultimate goal. Human actions are always a means to or for the sake of some end. But within such a teleological framework, first the object (in this case, action) acts upon the will causing complacency; second the will desires the object as a good not obtained; and third the will moves the human to action as a means for obtaining the end.

129 They are never proposed to the will as “naked” or mechanical actions, but are always proposed to the will as taking their meaning from how they are understood by the agent as related to some end. In this sense, actions are proposed to the will as already interpreted as to their meaning, and hence as to their value or worth.

130 ST I-II.20.1.ad.3.
131 ST I-II.17.4.ad.1.
132 This is why harmony (or “unity”) exists between an exterior act and the will, its interior cause. ST I-II.4
133 In this sense, we can still see all human actions as being caused ultimately by the end, which acts upon the will (which is why the will’s proper act is a passion). This is why Aquinas defends the thesis that “the end is the principle in human operations, as the Philosopher states (Phys. ii. 9). Therefore it belongs to man to do everything for an end.” ST I.1.1.sed.
134 “Now it is clear that whatever actions proceed from a power, are caused by that power in accordance with the nature of its object. But the object of the will is the end and the good. Therefore all human actions must be for an end.” ST I-II.1.resp.
Once we understand this chain of causation in human action, we can make sense of Aquinas’ often repeated temporal distinction—“the end [is] last in the order of execution, yet it is first in the order of the agent’s intention. And it is in this way that it is a cause” of human action.\(^{135}\) In other words, intention is temporally first while union is temporally last. First we desire the object, then we are moved to obtain the object, last we obtain the object (union) and we cease from desiring it. In this way, the desired object that acts upon the will and causes human action is first \textit{intended} to be obtained before it is obtained. Intention precedes and causes union just as desire precedes and causes possession. Intention (caused by apprehension of a good) and desire both “move” the agent to seek the loved object, and so can be considered \textit{motive}.\(^{136}\) Motive specifies the nature of an act and determines its species. “We call moral acts generically good or evil by reason of their object. … And because an end is the first object of the will, the internal act acquires its species from its end.” In other words: \textit{Motive defines action by causing it}. Without intention, there can be no \textit{motive} for the \textit{motions} of soul and body and no direction towards which they move. Aquinas’ ubiquitous claim that all agents act for the sake of some end simply makes human action intelligible.

Love not only causes all exterior action, but also all interior acts (excluding the acts of certain bodily organs that are involuntary). The will “moves the intellect, and all the powers of the soul.”\(^{137}\) But the will’s proper act is love, so “there is no other passion

\(^{135}\text{ST I-II.1.1.ad.1.}\)

\(^{136}\text{De malo 7.4.}\)

\(^{137}\text{ST I.82.4.resp.}\)
of the soul that does not presuppose love of some kind."\(^\text{138}\)

The reason [all passions presuppose love] is that every other passion of the soul implies either movement towards something, or rest in something. … It is not possible for any other passion of the soul to be universally the cause of every love.\(^\text{139}\)

[Even] when a man loves a thing for the pleasure it affords, his love is indeed caused by pleasure; but that very pleasure is caused, in its turn, by another preceding love; for none takes pleasure save in that which is loved in some way.\(^\text{140}\)

Desire, sadness and pleasure, and consequently all the other passions of the soul, result from love. Wherefore every act that proceeds from any passion, proceeds also from love as from a first cause.\(^\text{141}\)

All the passions of the soul arise from one source, viz., love, wherein they are connected with one another.\(^\text{142}\)

Love causes all the deepest inner dynamics of a human being—desire, hope, fear, hatred, jealousy, zeal, sadness or joy.\(^\text{143}\) Love “is the root and cause of every emotion,”\(^\text{144}\) for each emotion is generated only in its relation to some good apprehended by the intellect.\(^\text{145}\)

\(^\text{138}\) \textit{ST I-II.27.4.resp.}  
\(^\text{139}\) \textit{ST I-II.27.4.resp.}  
\(^\text{140}\) \textit{ST I-II.27.4.ad.1.}  
\(^\text{141}\) \textit{ST I-II.28.6.ad.2.}  
\(^\text{142}\) \textit{ST I-II.41.1.ad.1.}  
\(^\text{143}\) \textit{ST I-II.25.3; ST I-II.28.4.resp.}  
\(^\text{144}\) \textit{ST I-II.62.2.ad.3.}  
It might seem counterintuitive that hatred would be caused by love, its contrary. To understand how Aquinas explains this we must first recall that a loved object acts upon the will. A prerequisite for an object’s ability to act upon the will in this way is for the object to have (or appear to have) a certain “kinship or aptness to that thing.” The loved object must be perceived not just as a good, but also a good “fitting” (conveniens) to the lover in particular (fitting to her nature as a human, fitting to her character, fitting to her circumstances, etc.). One’s reason for hating something is the same as one’s seeing that something as “unfitting,” or in some way in “disagreement” with what one loves. To say it yet another way “it amounts to the same that one love a certain thing, or that one hate its contrary,” and what is hated is only hated by reason of what is loved.

“Consequently love must needs precede hatred; and nothing is hated, save through being contrary to a suitable thing which is loved.” In terms of the will’s motion, its turning away from one term is caused by reason of its turning toward some other term.

A similar explanation is used to describe all the other movements of the soul. They all presuppose love as their cause. The intellect apprehends according to love


146 ST I-II.27.4.resp.
147 Sherwin, By Knowledge and By Love, 73.
148 ST I-II.29.2.ad.2.
149 ST I-II.29.2.resp.
150 ST I-II.29.2.ad.3.
151 Aquinas’ taxonomy of the passions is neatly summarized in ST I-II.25.3.resp.
and is directed to its acts by the will’s love (we will examine this aspect of love more deeply in the next section). Hope arises from love of a possible future good; fear arises from love of a good when its attainment or possession is threatened in some way; anger arises from love of justice when it is violated, etc.\textsuperscript{152} Since the interior acts of the soul are the cause of exterior human action, Aquinas concedes that love is the cause of all the lover does, as “Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv.) … all things, whatever they do they do for the love of good.”\textsuperscript{153} This point can also be seen from Aquinas’ ubiquitous maxim that “every agent, of necessity, acts for an end,” since acting for the sake of an end is the same as acting for the sake of an object of love.\textsuperscript{154} Acting for the sake of end implies desire for that end, which presupposes love. If love were taken as a passion only in the material sense—\textit{exclusively in the sensitive appetite}—these claims about love’s ubiquity in human life would not be possible, but Aquinas continues to clarify: “here we are speaking of love in a general sense, inasmuch as it includes intellectual, rational, animal, and natural love.”\textsuperscript{155} It is clear that when Aquinas denies that moral virtue is a passion, he takes the term passion in the narrower sense to refer only to the sensitive appetite rather than in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{152} \textit{ST} I-II.41.1-2. Aquinas’ way of explaining the human phenomenon of emotions and passions demonstrates their ability to be evaluated morally—that is, their ability to be either praiseworthy or blameworthy. William Mattison, relying on Thomistic moral theology, uses his treatment of the emotion of anger to demonstrate how this aspect of emotion is so often overlooked to the detriment of moral theology. His article is an example of how focusing on this aspect of emotions can be constructive for the development of virtue inasmuch as one can cultivate the habituation of virtuous emotions. He argues, for example, that emotional propensity can be shaped by deliberate choices that shape how one will be aroused emotionally in the future, that virtuous emotions effect a certain promptness in virtuous actions (thereby making them easier to perform), and that without harnessing the great power of emotions for the sake of virtue we neglect to reckon with the way we are built as humans. William Mattison, “Virtuous Anger? From Questions of \textit{Vindicatio} to the Habitation of Emotion,” \textit{Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics} 24 no. 1 (2004): 159-179.
\item \textsuperscript{153} \textit{ST} I-II.28.6\textit{.sed}.
\item \textsuperscript{154} \textit{ST} I-II.1.2\textit{.resp}.
\item \textsuperscript{155} \textit{ST} I-II 28.6\textit{.ad.1}.
\end{itemize}
immaterial sense to refer to the affections of the soul. ¹⁵⁶

Fifth, the previous analysis shows that Aquinas’ understanding of love as the proper act of the will makes human life thoroughly teleological. All actions are intended to accomplish something. We cannot, however, stop our inquiry into the intelligibility of human acts merely at proximate ends, but must inquire about why a certain set of proximate ends are themselves desired. If a human is involved in a number of actions that have their own ends (e.g. going to school in order to get a degree, while raising children in order for them to be well mannered, while working in order to provide for his family, etc.), we must ask why this group of penultimate ends are desired (for what reason is the degree, well-mannered children, and consistent provision for the family desired?). If this group of penultimate goals (as opposed to some other group) has no overarching purpose or order, the goals would be arbitrary and ultimately unintelligible, since there is no reason for them. Whatever reason someone has for their particular set of goals in life, it will indirectly reveal their apprehension of the point of their life.

For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, humans do not have the privilege of choosing their ultimate end any more than they have the privilege of choosing their nature—their ultimate end is given to them by God. This ultimate end is happiness. Although all people seek happiness as a part of their human nature, different people seek to obtain it through different means. In this teleological schema, no human acts are intelligible apart from an understanding of their ultimate intention, which is found in the will’s proper act, which is love.

Sixth, love is also defined as a certain “aptitude or proportion” to an end. Recall

¹⁵⁶ ST I-II.59.1 resp.
that Aquinas used this language of “aptness” in his explanation of why hatred is caused by its opposite, love. But Aquinas also uses this language to define love itself by arguing that love implies a certain fittingness or proportion between the lover and the object loved.

In the order of execution, the first place belongs to that which takes place first in the thing that tends to the end. Now it is evident that whatever tends to an end, has, in the first place, an aptitude or proportion to that end, for nothing tends to a disproportionate end; secondly, it is moved to that end; thirdly, it rests in the end, after having attained it. And this very aptitude or proportion of the appetite to good is love, which is complacency in good.157

This leads nicely into the seventh point, which is Aquinas’ definition of love as a unitive principle. Aquinas adapts Dionysius’s maxim that love is a “uniting and binding force,” but distinguishes between the sort of union implied once the loved object is possessed (joy) and the sort of union that precedes possession.158 The former he calls real union which is implied in joy or delight, the latter he calls affective union, and consists in “an aptitude or proportion” to the end that causes desire. But as we have seen, this aptitude or proportion is love. Sherwin calls this “affective proportion.”159 Before the object is desired, the agent apprehends it as belonging to her well-being, which is a kind of “apprehension of the oneness of the thing loved with the lover.”160 The lover thereby “partakes” of the loved object by receiving its form in the apprehension and finding complacency in it. The object thus indwells the lover’s affections. This seems to imply that the very apprehension of the loved object causes pleasure in the one who apprehends

157 ST I-II.25.2. resp. Italics added.
158 ST I-II.28. resp.
159 Sherwin, By Knowledge and By Love, 71.
160 ST I-II.28.1. resp.
before it is possessed or desired, but Aquinas will not call it pleasure since he argues that “desire precedes pleasure.” Nevertheless, this complacency (although we cannot call it pleasure) is also called affective union (“according to a bond of affection”) and is “essentially love.” This affective bond, if not the indwelling itself, causes the indwelling of a loved object through the affections.

As the appetitive power, the object loved is said to be in the lover, inasmuch as it is in his affections, by a kind of complacency; causing him either to take pleasure in it, or in its good, when present; or, in the absence of the object loved, by his longing … Complacency in the beloved is rooted in the lover’s heart. For this reason we speak of love as being intimate; and of the bowels of charity.

Therefore, affective union (which Aquinas calls love) and the will’s complacency in the good (which is also love), in addition to causing desire, also causes the object of affection to dwell in the person via apprehension. In summary: love is the compatibility between an agent’s appetite and the object of that appetite; this could also be called “affective union” which causes the indwelling of the loved object in the lover; this complacency precedes and causes desire which moves the agent toward possession of the object loved; it is therefore a unitive principle. Once the object is possessed, the desire calms, the will reposes, and the soul delights—and this is the perfection of love.

Love as the Principle of Human Life and Essence of the Soul

This summary of Aquinas’ doctrine of love demonstrates Aquinas’ Aristotelian

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161 ST I-II.25.2.resp.

162 ST I-II.28.1.ad.2.

163 ST I-II.28.2.resp.

164 ST I-II.28.2.resp. Italics added. Whenever two agents have each other indwelling in their affections, this is called friendship. “Mutual indwelling in the love of friendship can be understood in regard to reciprocal love.”
anthropology: he thinks of human nature largely in terms of a dialectic between the intellect and the will. If a person’s will can only have as its proper object something it apprehends with the intellect as a good, it would seem that the human will is structurally dependent upon the intellect’s apprehension. Likewise it would seem that if love—which is the proper act of the human will—is the principle of all uniquely human acts—whether these acts be considered as interior acts or exterior acts—then even the acts of the intellect (reflection, deliberation, speculation, focus, contemplation) must necessarily be executed only at the command of the will (what to reflect upon on, what to deliberate about, what is worth speculating about, what to turn its attention to as a focus, which objects to contemplate and for how long and for what reason, etc.). This might be considered as an anthropological irreducible complexity. By this I mean no more than that the will and the intellect are mutually dependent and do not operate autonomously, but rely on one another for their proper acts; one does not make sense without the other.

Michael Sherwin has referred to this irreducible complexity in terms of priority: the intellect has a structural priority over the will but the will has priority over the intellect in terms of how it is exercised.\(^{165}\) As Sherwin notes, “the first innovation that St. Thomas introduces into his [mature] account is to describe intellect and will as a single principle of action.”\(^{166}\) It must be admitted, however, that Aquinas gleans this insight

\(^{165}\) Sherwin, By Knowledge and By Love, 46. The point of Sherwin’s book is to defend the Augustinian insight in Aquinas that one cannot love what one does not know against Josef Fuchs and James Keenan who have developed the Rahnerian doctrine of transcendental freedom in a way that views the will’s motion in transcendental freedom as antecedent to, or independent of, practical reasoning and objects of choice. They interpreted the mature Aquinas in a way that lends support to this doctrine. Sherwin argues that although there was indeed development in Aquinas’ mature thought, nevertheless there remained in Aquinas a basic continuity on the point in question: knowledge always has a structural priority over the will. See also Jean Porter, “Recent Studies in Aquinas’ Virtue Ethic: A Review Essay,” The Journal of Religious Ethics 26, no. 1 (1998): 197-202.
from Aristotle. Following Aristotle’s maxim that “the will is in the reason,” the mature Aquinas defends the irreducible complexity of human nature against those who would want to separate (rather than merely distinguish) the acts of will and intellect:

… they mutually include each other: intellect knows the will, and the will has appetite for or loves what pertains to intellect.\(^{168}\)

… they are distinct powers; … But as both are rooted in the same substance of the soul, and since one is in a certain way the principle of the other, consequently what is in the will is, in a certain way, also in the intellect.\(^ {169}\)

… the objects of the will fall under the intellect, and those of the intellect can fall under the will.\(^ {170}\)

The affections of the soul are in the intellect… as the thing caused is in its principle.\(^ {171}\)

It is by virtue of the will that all action has intentionality, or to put it Aquinas’ way, all actions have an end (or goal) in view. By the nature of the case, however, with any action we can ask why the will is inclined to a particular goal such as taking a walk, graduating from college, becoming a husband, or striving to be healthy. Whatever that goal is, we might likewise ask why the will desires this goal as a goal, and so on indefinitely. Here Aquinas borrows again from Aristotle, who argued that this chain of intentionality stops at happiness because once we arrive at happiness as the end, it does

\(^{166}\) Sherwin, By Knowledge and By Love, 39.

\(^{167}\) In response to an objection that cites Aristotle where he seems to make the human intellect higher than love, Aquinas disputes the interpretation: “… for the Philosopher the term ‘intellect’ embraces both intellect and the will corresponding to it, as also the term ‘reason’ at times embraces both reason and will.” In II Sent. 27.1.4.ad.1 [141].

\(^{168}\) In II Sent. 27.1.4 [140].

\(^{169}\) ST I.87.4.ad.1.

\(^{170}\) ST I.87.4.ad.2.

\(^{171}\) ST I.87.4.ad.3.
not make sense to expect an answer for why we desire to be happy, as if happiness were chosen for the sake of something else.\textsuperscript{172} So strongly does Aquinas believe this, he calls it a “natural necessity” that the will should adhere to happiness, which he then calls “the last end” after Aristotle.\textsuperscript{173}

If the intellect’s act is caused by the will, but the will could only execute such an act with the intention of obtaining an apprehended good, we have the circularity problem of the chicken and the egg: \textit{which comes first logically?} Aquinas will not allow for circularity here, insisting instead (as did Aristotle) between the acts of the intellect and the intellect’s “first act,” which is caused by human nature itself. He makes the same distinction with the human will’s “first act” which is owing to the “instigation of nature,” which, as Sherwin notes, is ultimately a way of viewing God as the “higher cause” and creator of human nature.\textsuperscript{174}

Now that we have established that the will and the intellect are two faculties acting as a single principle of action, we might ask whether Aquinas thinks that the human soul is the same as this principle, since he says these are “rooted in the same substance of the soul.” Aquinas refused to separate the human soul from corporeality, viewing the latter instead as the “mode” of the former by which it exists (he gets this too from Aristotle). Aquinas’ account of creation culminates in his treatment of the human as a \textit{composite}, for he starts by considering the creation of spiritual and corporeal realities (e.g. the angelic realm and the cosmos), concluding that man is a microcosm of all

\textsuperscript{172} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., trans. by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), I.7.4-8 (1097a31-1097b21).

\textsuperscript{173} \textit{ST} I.82.1.\textit{resp.}

\textsuperscript{174} Sherwin, \textit{By Knowledge and By Love}, 57-58.
creation containing both realities (spiritual and corporeal) in one composite.

A standard praise of Aquinas’ anthropology regards his viewing the human person as a composite of the spiritual and the corporeal (rather than “essentially” a soul or “essentially” a body). Aquinas’ view avoids two extremes: thinking of the human body as merely accidental to the soul (the Cartesian error of Dualism) or reducing the human to mere physical processes (the materialist error known as Physicalism). This point should not obscure the fact, however, that Aquinas did not thereby refrain from critically distinguishing these two aspects of the human person. On the contrary, they are related in Aquinas as cause and effect. Furthermore, Aquinas is not actually interested in an account of human nature generically, but as Pasnau points out, “the nature of human beings with reference to the soul.” Aquinas’ account of human nature is unintelligible apart from a crucial distinction between the body and soul. Not only this, but Aquinas gives primacy to the human soul in his account of human nature, going as far as to say that although human beings are a composite, they are primarily soul.

Given the complexity of our human nature and the limitations of human knowing,

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175 I choose the word “essentially” here because although Aquinas believes the human person is not essentially body or essentially soul, he does believe (as we will see) the human person is primarily soul and not primarily body.


178 *ST* II-II.26.5. ad.1.
however, Aquinas hesitates to reduce the human soul to intellect and will. He thinks we cannot fully know the essence of a human soul (or essences in general for that matter). The best we can do is take note of its capacities. We frequently make use of something’s “leading capacities” as our best shot at understanding its “essence.” ¹⁷⁹ The unique capacity of the human is reason, and reason and will have a certain functional dependence upon one another, as we have seen. However, thinking of the human soul as this principle is the closest we can come to grasping the essence of the human soul.

Although Aquinas will not equate the human intellective will with the human soul, we should take note of just how close Aquinas comes to doing this, for he considers all souls as principles of movement and, life as the principle of self-movement. Speaking of life, Aquinas says:

The name [life] is given from a certain external appearance, namely, self-movement, yet not precisely to signify this, but rather a substance to which self-movement and the application of itself to any kind of operation, belong naturally. To live, accordingly, is nothing else than to exist in this or that nature; and life signifies this, though in the abstract, just as the word running denotes to run in the abstract. ¹⁸⁰

To live, then, means to exist in this or that nature so as to have self-movement “so far as it operates of itself and not as moved by another.” ¹⁸¹ Now movement can result from natural instinct, which is found in both animals and humans, or from reason, which is unique to humans. In either case, however, love is the cause of all actions. In the case of instinct, we are moved by our nature in the first act of the intellect and will—which naturally desires to be happy and naturally tends toward objects as apprehended under

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¹⁸⁰ *ST I.18.2. resp.*

¹⁸¹ *ST I.18.3. resp.*
the notion of the good—and this is caused by the creator of our nature, namely, God. In the case of uniquely human movement that results from reason, however, our actions flow not from the first acts of intellect and will, but from the irreducible dialectic between these two faculties. In this sense we might speak of an instinctive love pre-wired in humans on the one hand, and a reasoned love that results from the dialectic between the faculties of intellect and will. Therefore, we are not far off to say that for Aquinas, in being the principle of human self-movement love is the principle of life, and in being the proper act of the intellective will (which term fuses the human soul’s two leading capacities) love is the closest thing to the essence of the human soul.

**Reasoned Love as the Basis of Human Liberum Arbitrium**

If our foregoing analysis is sound, it can be said further that Aquinas’ reasoned love provides the basis for his argument that humans possess liberum arbitrium (free will). Although love in its most generic sense is so inclusive as to be the cause of all human acts and emotions, Aquinas’ liberum arbitrium (free will) is only inclusive of all human motions or acts that flow from reason. As Eleonore Stump recognizes, liberum arbitrium in Aquinas cannot be reduced to the property of the will only, but is an exercise of will and reason, putting them together with Aristotle’s term “intellective appetite.”

We have free-will with respect to what we will not of necessity, nor by natural instinct. For our will to be happy does not appertain to free-will, but to natural

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182 Aquinas still would consider instinctive self-movement as signifying life, but to a lesser degree. “Since a thing is said to live in so far as it operates of itself and not as moved by another, the more perfectly this power is found in anything, the more perfect is the life of that thing.” *ST* I.18.3.*resp.* Thus instinctive movement of humans is less perfect life, and movement resulting from reason is more perfect life or life “in a higher degree.” Both however, signify life.

instinct. Hence other animals, that are moved to act by natural instinct, are not said to be moved by free-will.\(^{184}\)

Some things act without judgment; as a stone moves downwards; and in like manner all things which lack knowledge. And some act from judgment, but not a free judgment; as brute animals. … But man acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive power he judges that something should be avoided or sought. But because this judgment, in the case of some particular act is not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and retains the power of being inclined to various things. … And forasmuch as man is rational is it necessary that man have a free will.\(^{185}\)

Human nature has been predetermined to desire happiness instinctively, and inasmuch as this desire is caused by the intellects apprehension it presupposes love as the principle of movement; yet it is also part of the very fabric of uniquely human nature to have the capacity to judge for itself (before choosing) the merits of two opposite courses of action based on how they fit more or less fully with the universal concept of “the good.” In this paradoxical way, human beings are predetermined to be *self*-determined by their very nature. Ironically, they have no choice but to be free.

But this raises the problem of interior determinism.\(^{186}\) Since the will is naturally inclined toward the good, does it not seem that “when reason presents a good the will would seem constrained to will it?”\(^{187}\) Aquinas grants that the will necessarily wills certain things, and calls this “the necessity of natural inclination” owing to nature, distinguishing this from the “necessity of force” owing to external constraints that cause

\(^{184}\) ST I.19.10. *resp.*

\(^{185}\) ST I.83.1. *resp.*

\(^{186}\) Here I borrow liberally from Michael Sherwin’s helpful account of Aquinas’ responses to this objection in *By Knowledge and By Love*, 24-53.

something to act contrary to its natural inclination.\textsuperscript{188} This admission does not amount to a concession that all people choose whatever they choose of necessity, for this necessary inclination is for two things only: the last end (happiness) and all that is perceived as a necessary means to that end. Happiness can be called the ultimate end, and all other ends are proximate. These two necessary inclinations, however, are only the foundations of human free choice, and of themselves do not necessitate any choice of a \textit{particular} good whatsoever; they simply spell out the necessary preconditions of any particular choice given human nature.

“The will always naturally wills good in general, but not necessarily this or that particular good.”\textsuperscript{189} Choice does not regard the last end, which is good absolutely and willed by natural necessity, but the means, which can always be considered under the aspect of both good and evil and are therefore not apprehended as good \textit{absolutely} (i.e. potentially not good in some respect). In other words, with respect to any particular good—which is a means to the absolute and perfect good of happiness—it is possible to \textit{not will} or \textit{not choose} this good by considering some way in which it is not \textit{absolutely} good, for only “the perfect good, which is Happiness” cannot be apprehended by the reason as evil, or as lacking in any way.”\textsuperscript{190} Unlike the conclusions of deductive reasoning which follow of necessity so long as the premises are sound, because choice regards objects which can potentially be considered good in some respect but also bad in some other respect, they do not follow of absolute necessity. Even objects that are

\textsuperscript{188} Sherwin, \textit{By Knowledge & By Love}, 27.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{190} \textit{ST} I-II.13.6.

\textit{resp}.
necessary means to the end (e.g. to be and to know) can potentially not be seen or apprehended as such.\textsuperscript{191}

Thomas still entertains one last objection to his understanding of freedom. If whatever appears to the intellect as holding “first place” between competing goods in such a way that the intellect cannot find any reason for considering the others as better, it would appear “impossible to choose any of the others,” in which case it would seem that all such choices are necessary and not free.\textsuperscript{192} Aquinas virtually grants this objection by stating that it is only a \textit{conditional} necessity and not an absolute necessity. Here Aquinas is building on his many distinctions of necessity in which a conditional necessity is only necessary by adding some supposition from which a certain conclusions follows logically, such as “a grain of millet would [necessarily] be everywhere, \textit{supposing that no other body existed.}”\textsuperscript{193} Admitting to this kind of necessity does not bother Thomas. It works something like this: supposing that a man trying to visit his next-door neighbor two blocks to the west is given two choices—1) find the nearest airport to the east with the longest possible flight eastward where he can then catch another plane east again (and so on) until he arrives at the closest airport to his neighbor’s house (having gone virtually all the way around the world) where he can rent a car and drive to his neighbor’s house or 2) walk west two blocks. Aquinas would have no difficulty in conceding that, given the nature of the human intellect (and no other practically relevant suppositions being allowed), it would be impossible for the human who has weighed these two options and

\textsuperscript{191} ST I-II.13.6.\textit{ad}.1.

\textsuperscript{192} ST I-II.13.6.\textit{ad}.3.

\textsuperscript{193} ST I.8.4.\textit{resp}. Italics added. This humorous example may suggest that Aquinas would find the “conditional necessity” objection to human freedom as a laughable mistake of logic.
perceives the latter as more advantageous to his goal to then choose otherwise. Such a concession does not establish that humans are not free, but that humans are human.\textsuperscript{194} This is important for understanding how Aquinas can believe that once we possess the beatific vision of God, we cannot \textit{not} habitually love him above all else.\textsuperscript{195} God is “irresistibly attractive,” yet we choose him freely out of reasoned love.\textsuperscript{196} This conception of human freedom leads Aquinas to give a complex account of the interplay between the intellect and the will that is anything but mechanical.\textsuperscript{197} First, he locates free will in human choice (\textit{electio}), which refers to an act of the will “ordered to reason.”\textsuperscript{198} The will’s choice is always based on reason’s role of discerning which is the greater good among goods, which depends logically upon which good is apprehended as more useful to the last end. Second, “the will has a role in shaping the judgment of reason.”\textsuperscript{199} The intellect naturally apprehends the universal good but its act of identifying

\textsuperscript{194} As Stump points out, this is different from libertarian notions of human freedom that require that “the agent could have performed a different act of will in exactly the same set of circumstances with exactly the same set of beliefs and desires. … On this way of thinking about free will, to be free, the will needs to be unconstrained not only by causal influences outside the agent; it needs to be unconstrained even by the agents intellect. On Aquinas’ view, however, it isn’t possible for the will to be unconstrained by the intellect.” Stump, “Aquinas’ Account of Freedom,” 290-291. It seems Aquinas’ account of human freedom is the fruit if his careful analysis of human nature that takes into account the very boundaries of human capacities.


\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{197} Sherwin notes: “In Aquinas’ view, human action has more the character of a free artistic expression than of a necessary scientific deduction.” Sherwin, \textit{By Knowledge & By Love}, 61. He gives an extensive account of how Aquinas’ mature thought distinguishes between the priority of the intellect as a formal cause (a priority of specification) and the will as an efficient cause (a priority of exercise). Ibid., 40ff.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
any particular good as good Sherwin calls the act of “specification.” Also crucial to understanding this last point is the reflexive ability belonging to reason. Reason can reflect on itself and judge about its own judgments. Likewise, because reason is in the will, it is important to also remember that for Aquinas the will can also perceive its own willing through the intellect’s apprehension. Thus the intelligent will can scrutinize itself and specify its own improvement an object of love—in other words, the reason can present the will’s act as itself a good (e.g. “It is a greater good that I should will x than y” or “It is a greater good that my reason should always take divine things into account in such and such a way before making a decision”).

The will is not deterministically mechanical, then, passively following the intellect’s first apprehension or reason’s first judgment, but has the ability to direct reason’s consideration further in unpredictable directions before finally committing to some particular good. This is an incredible influence the will has over reason’s final judgment. Aquinas even goes so far as to say that while happiness cannot not be willed as an end, at a particular time the will can so direct the intellect’s considerations as to cease from considering happiness. Aquinas attributes three causes that determine whether the intellect perceives a particular good as good in its act of specification: 1) the objective goodness of the object itself, 2) the reason’s fixation on one particular aspect over another owing to the will’s ability to direct the intellect’s consideration, and 3) a person’s character (as shaped by their dispositions to habitually perceive something in

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200 Ibid., 40.
201 Ibid., 45.
one way rather than another). The will functions to its highest capacity when it capitalizes on its ability to move the intellect to “consider all the relevant features” of some good; this is the will’s ability to act “according to right reason.”

From this it is easy to see how a perverse will might decisively control how one apprehends and judges among particular goods. The tendencies of reason’s considerations can decisively effect which good is chosen, but these tendencies are established by the will’s execution. This is why Aquinas does not locate the liberum arbitrium in reason, but in the will. Nevertheless, it is precisely the participation of the will in reason that makes human will free to choose between contraries. Without abandoning his understanding of reason being “in the will” and the two operating as one principle, he continues to distinguish between their roles. Only when the will commands the reason to cease from its consideration and settle on a particular good does the person arrive at some choice. This ceasing from deliberation is itself a judgment that a particular action “has nothing further of practical importance.” He defines choice as “the final acceptance of something to be carried out,” which goes beyond the human conscience (that knows right and wrong) and applies all relevant apprehended knowledge to the

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202 Ibid., 47-49.

203 Ibid., 49. Italics added. The third reason given is captured in Aquinas’ often quoted authority Aristotle, who said: “such as a man is, so does the end appear to him.” ST II-II.24.11.resp.

204 Seven J. Jensen, “The Error of the Passions,” The Thomist 73, no. 3 (2009): 369. Jensen gives a decisive critique of Donald Davidson’s criticism of Aquinas which argues that his understanding of human choice as dominated by reason silences the passions from joining the inner dialectic so that “the passions have nothing to say worth listening to; only the dictates of reason have any worth” (351). As Jensen shows, this criticism of Aquinas does not do justice to Aquinas’ moral psychology and, in addition to its logical gaps, is based on a misunderstanding of Aquinas. In particular, Jensen argues that the error of the passions in Aquinas lies not in the major premises such as “Adultery is to be avoided” (reason) and “Pleasure is to be pursued” (passions), but in the minor premise such as “Adultery is pleasurable and practically nothing else” which makes the major premise false if considered in this way by stifling the intellect’s consideration of all things relevant.
command of the human’s peculiar affections.\textsuperscript{205}

Aquinas affirms that humans have the ability to make free choices, but still believes in certain kinds of necessity given human nature, and the compatibility between these kinds of necessity, free choice, and human culpability. Eleonore Stump argues that Aquinas does not believe \textit{liberum arbitrium} to be identical or even essential to human freedom, for he still holds morally responsible agents who are “unable to do otherwise” on a given occasion because of some passion that prevents a person from the conscious deliberation of \textit{electio}.\textsuperscript{206} Furthermore, the intellect by its very nature always chooses whatever it apprehends as a superior good with respect to all other options. Thus, on the supposition that the intellect sees no alternative capable of competing with the superior good (whether this be a course of action or an object of contemplation), the person will always choose whatever is apprehended as the superior good \textit{and cannot do otherwise}. The point, as Stump shows, is not that Aquinas wants us to see that we are not ultimately free; the point is that our freedom is compatible with this sort of necessity, a position Aquinas has received from St. Augustine. Such necessity touches at the very heart of freedom itself—our decisions are not determined from some exterior cause as in coercion, but have their determination within, which is to be self-determinative. In this way, determination and human freedom are compatible. Whether someone can do otherwise is not the point for Aquinas, but merely an “associated accident” or non-

\textsuperscript{205} Sherwin, \textit{By Knowledge & By Love}, 34, 37. As Sherwin puts it, “Aquinas’ description in the \textit{De veritate} implies that unlike the judgment of conscience, the judgment of choice is shaped by one’s affections.”

essential property that often accompanies human freedom.\(^{207}\)

Stump’s conclusions about how to categorize Aquinas’ view of human freedom are stated with a degree of humble uncertainty. She admits her own difficulty in categorizing his views: “What exactly to call Aquinas’ position is not clear.”\(^{208}\) Nonetheless, since Aquinas did not believe in the compatibility between total causal determinism and human freedom, she concludes that he held an “incompatibilist theory of free will” which was “a species of libertarianism.”\(^{209}\) Yet if compatibilism in theology (as opposed to philosophy) has to do precisely with the happy compatibility between free will and God’s providence or sovereignty, this categorization may still obscure more than it reveals. Because God authored our human nature by his providence, Aquinas wants to show that the types of necessity that are determined by God (whether this be understood in purely natural terms or in view of God’s predestinating and efficacious grace) are compatible with human freedom. Stump’s hesitant categorization (even if correct) may help obscure Aquinas’ intention, which was primarily theological.\(^{210}\) His compatibilism is shaped most ultimately by his concern to keep human freedom and culpability in tact as compatible with certain forms of necessity or determination, especially considering the

\(^{207}\) Ibid., 289.

\(^{208}\) Ibid., 291.

\(^{209}\) Ibid.

\(^{210}\) As Jean-Pierre Torrell argues, this is a pervasive mistake of perspective in the history of the Summa’s reception: “It seems that the most common and damaging error was to have considered Thomas first of all as a philosopher and to have believed it possible to isolate certain parts of the Summa as ‘philosophical.’ This is a glaring error of perspective. The Summa is theological from beginning to end and its author is first and foremost a theologian who uses philosophical categories as he has need, but grants them a ‘foreign and only probably authority’ (Ia q. a 8 ad 2) in his synthesis.” Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., Aquinas’ Summa: Background, Structure, & Reception, trans. Benedict M. Guevin, O.S.B. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 133.
hopelessness of humanity apart from grace, the necessity of grace for salvation, and the infallibility and efficacy of grace for the predestined. In other words, the compatibility between divine and human causality is the end game for Aquinas’ version of libertarianism. Aquinas’ view of freedom is “compatible” with forms of natural necessity owing to God’s creation of our nature, but also with supernatural necessity owing to God’s new creation.

For those are led [by the Holy Spirit] are moved by a higher instinct. Hence we say that animals do not act but are led, because they are moved to perform their actions by nature and not from their own impulse. Similarly, the spiritual man is inclined to do something not as though by a movement of his own will chiefly, but by the prompting of the Holy Spirit … However, this does not mean that spiritual men do not act through will and free choice, because the Holy Spirit causes the very movement of the will and of free choice in them, as it says in Phil (2:13): “God is at work in you both to will and to work.”

Reasoned love is the basis of human freedom because all decisions are made between two or more options with respect to which is most useful to the end of happiness. Yet ultimately for Aquinas, even if a person’s love fails to participate fully in human reason (i.e. fails to deliberate over options in order to make a decision sufficiently informed by reason), human culpability is not thereby nullified. Humans have the ability to use their reason (whether they choose to or not), and thus make decisions freely rather

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211 Thomas Aquinas, *Lectures on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Fabian Larcher, ed. Jeremy Holmes (unpublished), §277. Aquinas considers a person incapable in and of themselves (i.e. apart from justifying grace) of doing anything that might make them righteous.

212 In certain places, we even find Aquinas happily denying human freedom, if by “freedom” he understands total escape from any kind of determinism. E.g. “Hence, to the extent that it is determined by a natural inclination implanted by God, in a way it does not have freedom, but is as it were, compelled by this natural inclination—as with respect to happiness, which no one is able not to will.” *In III Sent. 27.1.4.ad.12 [143]*. Italics added [except for the word “not”].

than acting on pure instinct.\textsuperscript{214} Furthermore, freedom of decision is also compatible with self-determination which involves a certain necessity owing to nature: by nature we always will to be happy as our last end and will always freely choose only what we apprehend as the greatest good at any particular time given the particular circumstances. 

_Nature is the context of freedom._ Underlying human freedom and human acts as the very principle of human life is the will’s proper act of love, which can be both instinctive and also reasoned, the latter decisively executing the direction of the intellect’s considerations of and among options as among means to an end. When a human is moved by love to make a free decision, it is the result of human judgment made in “the comparison of reason.”\textsuperscript{215} As can be seen with Aquinas’ psychology of human love, human movement is in fact determined, sometimes from human nature alone (natural love) but more characteristically from interior principles unique to the human (reasoned love), but never ultimately from mere coercion or compulsion (even if one’s options are severely limited by external constraint).

**Charity as a Kind of Love**

**Charity as Grace Perfecting Nature**

So far we have only been considering Aquinas’ anthropology, which carefully considers human nature apart from grace. When we make the shift to understanding his teaching of charity, we do not leave his anthropology behind; we “elevate” it. Inasmuch

\textsuperscript{214} Reason can be more or less reflective, and in situations where one has not time to be reflective (e.g. jumping out of the way of a moving bus), she relies on her reflexes. However, the will even has the ability to refine and reshape our reflexive actions (e.g. standing still and resisting the natural instinct to jump away from a moving bus via the will’s desire to commit suicide).

\textsuperscript{215} _ST_ I.83.1._resp._
as charity *elevates* human love, it goes beyond man’s natural capacities apart from grace. Inasmuch as charity elevates *human* love, charity remains a species of human love. One of the great maxims of Aquinas’ theology is that “Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it,” and when it comes to Aquinas’ doctrine of charity, grace fulfills, heals, elevates, and perfects human love. For this reason we have already come a long way in understanding Aquinas’ doctrine of charity, since charity is a species of human love. Grace elevates that principle from which all a person’s interior and exterior acts flow; that proper act of the will that results (at least in this life) in desire inasmuch as the object of love is absent, and in delight inasmuch as the object of love is present.

To be more specific, Aquinas’ doctrine of love helps clarify how human nature is “fitted” to God in its natural instinct to be happy, for “nothing natural can be vain: everything natural is made to attain its end.” As we have already noted, Aquinas believes that all people desire happiness by nature as their end. But this desire for happiness is insufficient for the actual attainment thereof, as Aquinas explains:

> Consequently, to desire happiness is nothing else than to desire that one’s will be satisfied. And this everyone desires. Secondly we may speak of Happiness according to its specific notion, as to that in which it consists. And thus all do not know Happiness; because they know not in what thing the general notion of happiness is found. And consequently, in this respect, not all desire it.

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216 *ST* I.1.8. ad 2. Aquinas utilizes Aristotelian anthropology to “provide a frame of reference” and “expose the groundwork of this surpassing virtue” of charity. “Grace enters into nature, and charity, as the following pages will show, goes to the depths of our innate capacity for loving … This continuity between grace and nature is essential to the notion of Christian theology, or *sacra doctrina*, as he conceives it.” Thomas Gilby O.P., “Introduction,” in R. J. Batten, O.P., *Summa Theologiae: Latin Text and English Translation, Introductions, Notes, Appendices and Glossaries*, vol. 34 (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1974), xvi.


218 *ST* I-II.5.8. *resp.*
Although man by nature seeks happiness, human nature unaided by grace will never attain to the perfect good in which human happiness consists. Cajetan’s maxim that desire for God as end “is only natural to the supernaturalized man” forces us to see that humanity only desires God implicitly in the natural desire for happiness: explicit desire for God as last end (understood in Christian terms as the beatific vision of the Trinity) is not natural, but requires the gift of grace that reveals the divine essence. Yet neither is it opposed to nature; rather, it is “supernatural.” Thus, for the attainment of the end man needs the supernatural grace of charity—love for God as last end. Because God contains all goodness within himself (including all created goodness), he is the supreme appetible object once acutely apprehended through a breakthrough of illumination.

It must be argued that if the grace of charity (seeking God as last end) causes humans to no longer seek happiness as their last end, it would appear to follow that grace does indeed destroy human nature rather than fulfilling it. But it should be clear from Aquinas’ words above that this is not the case; these are not two ends, but one.

*Our end is twofold.* First, there is the thing itself which we desire to attain: thus for the miser, the end is money. Secondly there is the attainment or possession, the use or enjoyment of the thing desired; thus we may say that the end of the miser is the possession of money; and the end of the intemperate man is to enjoy something pleasurable. In the first sense, then, man’s last end is the uncreated good, namely God, Who alone by His infinite goodness can perfectly satisfy man’s will. But in the second way, man’s last end is something created, existing in him, and this is nothing else than the attainment or enjoyment of the last end. Now the last end is called happiness. If, therefore, we consider man’s happiness in its cause or object, then it is something uncreated; but if we consider it as to the very essence of happiness, then it is created.\(^{220}\)

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\(^{219}\) Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 2: Spiritual Master*, 345. This is why Torrell argues against those who understand grace as simply being a “pure non-repugnance to the supernatural,” since “man’s nature unconsciously aspires to it, such that, when through revelation his Good will be known to him by its true name, this necessary desire of nature will be accompanied with a free desire, comforted by grace that will finally allow him to attain his end.” Ibid., 346.

Seeking happiness as one’s last end is only truly fulfilled when one seeks that in which happiness consists perfectly, which is God. This is why Torrell is so bold as to claim “Thomas proposes a life program under the aegis of self-fulfillment, since the creature finds itself in finding its end.”\textsuperscript{221} The fact that in the fervor of charity this \textit{self-fulfilling, nature-fulfilling, and happiness-completing} love ultimately leads a person “to expose himself to the danger of martyrdom, or to renounce his possessions, or to undertake any arduous work,” should not at all surprise us; nor should we seek to lessen its self-fulfilling nature in order to emphasize its self-sacrificing other-oriented nature.\textsuperscript{222} If one can find her own ultimate happiness and self-fulfillment only by being \textit{other}-oriented and \textit{self}-sacrificing, these two need not oppose each other, for they are just as complementary as nature and grace.\textsuperscript{223}

Many have argued (and continue to argue) that this Augustinian view of love that Aquinas develops and refines ultimately makes God and love of neighbor a means to our own happiness, and seems to thereby make charity self-serving as if it makes God simply a means to our selfish desire for happiness.\textsuperscript{224} While it is possible to misunderstand


\textsuperscript{222} \textit{ST} I.6.ad.2.

\textsuperscript{223} Although not immediately inspired by Aristotle or Aquinas, this strand of theological anthropology—that dignifies the human longing for happiness as God-given and only fulfilled in God as the ultimate object that satisfies the human soul—has been popularly vivified in recent Protestant theology by the seminal work of John Piper, \textit{Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist} (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2003) whose work was more inspired through the writings of St. Augustine, C.S. Lewis, and especially Jonathan Edwards. The impact of this book in North American conservative evangelicalism is not easily exaggerated.

Augustine in this way since he was not as exceptionally perspicuous as Aquinas, the *Doctor Angelicus* escapes this criticism in crucial ways. Most important for the accusation to stick, Aquinas would have to view happiness and God as two distinct ends, God as the *penultimate* end and happiness as the *ultimate* end. Aquinas’ position does not fit this criterion, since he unites these two—*happiness and God*—as both our last and ultimate end only seen from two different angels. For Aquinas our one last end is nevertheless *twofold*; seen from the subjective angle it is something created (i.e. human happiness) and seen from the objective angle it is something uncreated (i.e. God). Additionally, due attention to Aquinas’ understanding of friendship and his definition of “the good” demonstrates that one’s happiness in friendship becomes contingent on the happiness of the other. Every love (not just charity) involves an *extasis* in which a love as desire. The rise of new monastic orders created a new influx of ideas about love borrowed from “the ways of secular love” also expressed by the court troubadours. Before Paris dominated the scholastic scene, the city of Laon was the immanent center for theological rigor. Sherwin tells the story: “At the very moment that this literature was blossoming, an anonymous scholastic writer penned a treatise (entitled *De caritate*) that attacked the very thing these literary traditions shared in common … the view that charity entails desire” (182-83). This is what provoked the theological “crisis” concerning whether the love of charity was a self-interested love that reduced God to a means to our own happiness (183). Sherwin understands the controversy as to some extent a matter of interpreting Augustine and thinks Aquinas’ theology provides the solution to the crisis by categorizing desire as more properly belonging the theological virtue of hope.


226 “Subjective” and “objective” are Aquinas’ words borrowed from Aristotle. *ST* I.26.3.ad.2.

227 For this reason Gilby says that charity is “the whole-hearted love of God, but is no more self-denying at the deepest level than the object in the union of knowledge and love spells diminishment for the subject. Thomas Gilby O.P., “Introduction,” in *Summa Theologiae*, xviii.

228 We must recall here that Aquinas defines the good as that which pacifies the will or calms desire. “An act of love always tends toward two things; to the good that one wills, and to the person from
person goes outside of herself (as it were) toward the object of love.\textsuperscript{229}

**Charity as the Efficient Cause of All Virtues**

If human love is a unitive principle,\textsuperscript{230} it is easy to see why Aquinas would argue that charity is the chief virtue, mother of all virtues, “included in the definition of every virtue,” and the “form” of all virtues.\textsuperscript{231} Virtues already presuppose some end because they are concerned with attaining an end through means, but only desire (caused by love) moves the human person through means toward some end not already possessed. Desire is the effect of love. Therefore, love of the last end is the cause of all human virtues even apart from grace when happiness is the ambiguous last end. In charity, love of God as last end causes all virtues to be commanded by charity as the best means to attaining God as last end. The whole intention of all virtue becomes to do charity’s bidding. Sherwin argues that “charity is the form of the virtues by being the efficient cause.”\textsuperscript{232} This is why all true virtue (as distinguished from imperfect virtue that does not have God as end) presupposes charity as their mother virtue and why “no strictly true virtue is possible


\textsuperscript{230} Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen argues persuasively that a union-based soteriology is the most ecumenically promising. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{231} ST II-II.23.4.ad.1. ST II-II.23.8.resp.

\textsuperscript{232} Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 184.
without charity.”²³³ “Although virtues have their own elicited acts, they only generate acts when commanded by charity” and “only exist as commanded by charity.”²³⁴ Aquinas’ theological virtues are simply love and love’s effects when God is loved as last end. Since love is of a good apprehended by the intellect, faith is the theological virtue that apprehends the object of charity (God) with the human intellect and in this way has a structural priority over love. Faith gives birth to desire for God, which is the theological virtue of hope.

**Charity as a Participation in God**

Charity elevates love, love is a passion, but God is impassible (i.e. has no passions), so how can one opine of a charity (love of God as last end that perfectly fulfills human desire for happiness) that is in any way an imitation of God or a participation in God? It seems here that a number of Aquinas’ admirers (especially Protestant admirers)²³⁵ take issue with Aquinas and reject the doctrine of impassibility. How can charity, which supposedly makes a person godly and gives rise to all manner of godliness at the same time not exist in God? This is a mistake, however, for Aquinas does in fact hold that love exists in God, he only claims that since God fully possesses all goodness in himself, he lacks no goodness to desire. There is no object of love outside of God that is able to act upon his will and effect desire. “Will in us belongs to the appetitive part,

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²³³ *ST* I-II.23.7. *resp.*

²³⁴ Sherwin, *By Knoweldge and By Love*, 184.

which, although named from appetite, has not for its only act the seeking what it does not possess; but also the loving and delighting in what it does possess. In this respect will is said to be in God.\textsuperscript{236} Here is a beautiful example of Aquinas’ analogical approach to theology: he argues that if God knows he has an intellect; if he has intellect he must also have will (remember these two are irreducibly complex); but love is the proper act of the will—\textit{therefore love exists in God}.\textsuperscript{237}

If charity exists in God yet by his essence he already has perfect possession of infinite goodness, beatitude belongs to God especially and “to the highest degree.”\textsuperscript{238} For Aquinas God possess all goodness by his very essence, whereas any goodness possessed by a creature is possessed accidentally (in the Aristotelian sense) and by a certain participation of God’s goodness.\textsuperscript{239} Whatever charity or happiness belongs to a creature, then, belongs to the creature only by participation in God’s own charity and happiness. Since the intellect’s apprehension of goodness precedes and causes happiness and God is immaterial, apprehension of God and his supreme goodness depend on divine

\textsuperscript{236} \textit{ST} I.19.1.\textsuperscript{ad.2}.

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{ST} I.19.1.\textsuperscript{resp}. Recall that Aquinas distinguishes between the formal element of a passion and the material element (or bodily change) that accompanies these passions. He allows the formal element of passions to be attributed to God so long as they imply no imperfection. “Those that do not imply imperfection, such as love and joy, can be properly predicated of God.” \textit{ST} I.20.1.\textsuperscript{ad.2}. “Love, therefore, and joy and delight … in so far as they denote acts of the intellectual appetite [the will], they are not passions. It is in this latter sense that they are in God. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. vii): \textit{God rejoices by an operation that is one and simple, and for the same reason He loves without passion.” \textit{ST} I.20.1.\textsuperscript{ad.1}. In a certain sense, then, Aquinas allows for passions that do not imply imperfection to be attributed to God so long as we do not forget that God has no body, and therefore no bodily change accompanies these perfect passions. For a recent defense of the classical doctrine of impassibility see Michael J. Dodds, O.P., \textit{The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 2008), especially his qualifying remarks in chapter 3, “The Motion of the Motionless God,” 161-203.

\textsuperscript{238} \textit{ST} I.26.1.\textsuperscript{resp}.

\textsuperscript{239} \textit{ST} I.3.4.\textsuperscript{resp}. 
illumination by grace. God causes his goodness to dwell in the affections through the intellects apprehension of his goodness. “Now this increase of the intellectual powers is called the illumination of the intellect … By this light the blessed are made deiform—that is like to God.”

“To St. Thomas the communication of and sharing in God’s own happiness is the very foundation of charity.”

The foundation of friendship with God (one of Aquinas’ Aristotelian categories that he thinks captures the dynamics of the mutual love between God and humans in charity) is a certain communication of goodness (communicatio) that causes a certain likeness (similitude) in the one who has charity and participates in divine charity.

This also explains why happiness is “obtained only through imitation” of God “in whose likeness we are made,” for seeking happiness and God as our singular and ultimate last end is nothing less than an imitation of God whose own goodness is his own end and whose happiness is most complete. The more complete our own happiness, the more godlike we become and the more we “participate” in God. Seen from this angle, the restoration of the imago Dei is in direct proportion to our participation in the divine nature and in particular the divine happiness.

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240 *ST* I.12.5.resp.


244 For Aquinas, the imago Dei consists most specifically in human understanding and love, since the image of the Trinity concerns a Word and Love proceeding, corresponding to human understanding and love. But we must remember here that in God, love never takes the form of desire but only joy and delight since the object loved is always perfectly possessed. *ST* I.93.6. It is worth noting then, that the more man
the same time a “morality of divinization” that Aquinas appropriates from the Fathers of the East. Furthermore, the divine indwelling is explained in Aquinas (as we have already shown) as a phenomenon that occurs when the object loved “dwells” in the apprehensive power in the same way that objects of love dwell in the apprehensive power in general. However, we have already seen that the intellect that apprehends and the will that takes delight operate as one principle. Aquinas therefore argues that “because the Holy Ghost is Love, the soul is assimilated to the Holy Ghost by the gift of charity” not “according to every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love.” The names given by Aquinas to this knowledge according to which the human is made Godlike are therefore designed to underscore its affective component—experiential knowledge, wisdom, or better yet: “sweet knowledge [sapida scientia].”

Understanding Aquinas’ anthropology, specifically his emphasis on the interplay between the intellect and will in love, also helps us to see why Aquinas argues on the one hand that eternal life (which he equates with both happiness and knowing God) possesses that in which happiness consists (i.e. God) the more he imitates the divine happiness and reflects the imago Dei. ST I.93.4.


246 ST I.43.4.ad.2.

247 ST I.43.4.ad.2. Torrell argues against those who attempted to locate the imago Dei chiefly in the human intellect in distinction to human emotion. “We certainly cannot eliminate intellectual knowing, properly speaking, from this experience, but it is impossible for the experience not to have simultaneously a no less firm affective dimension.” Torrell, Saint Thomas Aquinas, vol. 2: Spiritual Master, 95. Taking it a step further than Torrell, when Aquinas distinguishes between knowledge and love per se, he always argues that love is greater than knowing. For a delightful read on wisdom as love see Etienne Gilson, Wisdom and Love in Saint Thomas Aquinas (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1951).

consists in an act of the intellect, and on the other that it consists in “the repose and perfect pacification of the intelligence and the will.”

The essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect: but the delight that results from happiness pertains to the will. In this sense Augustine says (Conf. x. 23) that happiness is *joy in truth*, because, to wit, joy itself is the consummation of happiness.

The Priority of the Soul in Charity

Charity unites us with God, but charity is a kind of love that must be distinguished from the human body in Aquinas. Love is an act of the soul that causes all other acts of the soul (interior acts) and the body (exterior acts). Although Aquinas works hard to fully integrate the human body and the human soul since they are inseparable to human nature, at certain places he leaves no question about the importance of the soul in comparison to the importance of the human body. I will mention but a few examples. First, charity is defined as a movement of the soul, as Augustine taught “*By charity I mean the movement of the soul towards the enjoyment of God for His own sake.*” Therefore, Aquinas will often speak of “the affection of charity” and distinguish it from its exterior “effects.” Secondly, as a good not yet obtained we “get nigh to God …not by steps of the body but by the affections of the soul” generated by charity. Third, Aquinas also defines charity as a “participation of the infinite charity which is the Holy

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249 Ibid., 346.

250 ST I-II.4.resp. See also In II Sent. 27.1.4.ad.1 [141].

251 ST II-II.23.2.sed.

252 ST II-II.6-7.

253 ST II-II.24.4.resp.
Ghost,” an immaterial reality with no body.\textsuperscript{254} Fourth, human bodies are “unable to enjoy God by knowing and loving Him,” but are a means to attaining this knowing and loving.\textsuperscript{255}

Fifth, the prioritization of charity’s objects relativizes the importance of the corporeal.\textsuperscript{256} Recall that for Aquinas humans are \textit{primarily} soul.\textsuperscript{257} In his examination of charity, Aquinas considers in what senses a person can love themselves and their neighbor. This triggers him (when pressed by objections) to define the “self” and the “neighbor.” His answers are incredibly revealing about the role of the human soul in his anthropology. He argues that although in substance man is both body and soul, in another sense “the rational soul is the predominant part of man, while the sensitive and corporeal nature takes the second place.”\textsuperscript{258} He even distinguishes between the “good man” and “the wicked man” as between the one who understands himself to be primarily soul versus the one who understands himself to be primarily corporeal.\textsuperscript{259} Furthermore, Aquinas adopts Augustine’s order of charity in which the self and the body have different priorities as objects of love, which seems to imply again that the “self” here is distinct

\textsuperscript{254} \textit{ST} II-II.24.7.\textit{resp.}

\textsuperscript{255} \textit{ST} II-II.25.5.\textit{ad.2}.

\textsuperscript{256} As Selner-Wright points out, divine happiness and participation in divine happiness is the standard that objectively prioritizes charity’s objects. “That which has eternal beatitude through its own essence, God, is primary. That which may have it through participation, myself and all other created rational beings, comes next. And finally, there is that which may have beatitude ‘only through an overflow of glory from the soul to the body.’” Susan C. Selner-Wright, “The Order of Charity in Thomas Aquinas,” \textit{Philosophy and Theology} 9 no. 1-2 (1995): 15.

\textsuperscript{257} \textit{ST} II-II.26.5.

\textsuperscript{258} \textit{ST} II-II.25.7.\textit{resp}. Translation taken from R. J. Batten, \textit{Summa Theologicae}, 117.

\textsuperscript{259} \textit{ST} II-II.25.7.\textit{resp}. 

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from the human body and is more important than the human body.\textsuperscript{260} We are supposed to love “ourselves” more than our neighbor, but our neighbor more than our own body.\textsuperscript{261} We are supposed to love “ourselves” more than our neighbor, but our neighbor more than our own body.\textsuperscript{262} Although these remarks in Aquinas appear \textit{prima facie} to betray his view of the human as a composite, when he explicitly entertains this objection he argues that a view of the human being as a composite does not rule out this distinction when the human is considered “according to preeminence \textit{[principalitatem]}.”\textsuperscript{263} In this way, Aquinas makes a clear distinction between the self’s body and the self without necessarily advocating a dualistic separation. The body is an aspect of the self, not the whole self, and is less important as an object of love than another, more preeminent aspect of the self: the human soul.

Finally, the \textit{imago Dei} consists primarily in human understanding breaking forth into love in the human soul, and secondarily in other acts of the soul.\textsuperscript{264}

First and chiefly, the image of the Trinity is to be found in the acts of the soul, that is, inasmuch as from the knowledge which we possess, by actual thought we form an internal word; and thence break forth into love. But, since the principles of acts are the habits and powers, and everything exists virtually in its principle, therefore, secondarily and consequently, the image of the Trinity may be considered as

\textsuperscript{260} \textit{ST} II-II.25.12\textit{sed.}

\textsuperscript{261} \textit{ST} II-II.26.6.

\textsuperscript{262} \textit{ST} II-II.26.6.

\textsuperscript{263} Selner-Wright, “The Order of Charity in Thomas Aquinas,” 20.

\textsuperscript{264} “Aquinas’ reading of Augustine helps him to see that the image of God in human expresses their dynamic orientation toward knowing and love in God, an orientation only perfected in the vision of God in the next life. … The comparison of the processions of the intellect and will in the human creature to the eternal processions within the Godhead does not relegate Trinitarian theology to abstraction. Instead, Aquinas elaborates the human relation to God in terms of the characteristically human activity of knowing and loving.” Michael A. Dauphinais, “Loving the Lord Your God: The \textit{Imago Dei} in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” \textit{The Thomist} 63, no. 2 (1999): 267.
existing in the powers, and still more in the habits, forasmuch as the acts virtually exist therein.\textsuperscript{265}

God is one in nature and three in persons.\textsuperscript{266} The \textit{imago Dei} in humans represents both aspects of God in a way corresponding to Aquinas’ distinction between nature and grace. The divine nature consists in intellect and will.\textsuperscript{267} In this sense, the \textit{imago Dei} is in all humans because they possess an aptitude to know and love God by virtue of the intellective will.\textsuperscript{268} The divine Trinity consist in the three persons which are only distinguished in terms of relationships of origin—from the Father proceeds understanding in the Word and mutual Love proceeds from both, which is the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{269} That which approaches most near to the representation of the divine Trinity is the actual knowledge and love of God; the more perfect this knowledge and love, the more perfect representation of the \textit{imago Dei} shines forth.\textsuperscript{270} It is clear that Aquinas does not say the image consists in love only, but in knowledge and love, because he is staying consistent with his understanding of charity as love—that is, he is keeping in harmony the two aspects of the human soul that operate in an irreducible complexity, the intellect and the will, which operate as one principle.\textsuperscript{271} Yet the most perfect representation of the \textit{imago Dei} is found only when the soul attains to the perfect vision of God and the will is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{265} \textit{ST} I.93.7.\textit{resp}.
  \item \textsuperscript{266} \textit{ST} I.93.5.\textit{resp}.
  \item \textsuperscript{267} \textit{ST} I.19.4.\textit{ad}.2.
  \item \textsuperscript{268} \textit{ST} I.93.4.\textit{resp}.
  \item \textsuperscript{269} \textit{ST} I.37.1.\textit{resp}.
  \item \textsuperscript{269} \textit{ST} I.93.4.\textit{resp}.
  \item \textsuperscript{270} \textit{ST} I.93.4.\textit{resp}.
  \item \textsuperscript{271} \textit{In II Sent.} 27.1.4.\textit{ad}.1 [141].
\end{itemize}
thereby perfectly satisfied. This is glorification and deification at its apex: beatitude; happiness; charity made perfect by the soul’s cleaving to God perfectly. In these ways and more, we see how the soul is central to Aquinas’ understanding of charity, godliness, virtue, goodness, and therefore his overall anthropology and theology.

Conclusion

We have come full circle in Aquinas’ thought from love as being the proper act of the human will that nevertheless presumes the apprehension of the intellect of some good, to the perfect pacification of both human faculties in our finite attainment of God’s infinite goodness through grace infused charity. There is a certain symmetry in Aquinas’ anthropology and theology here, since it only makes sense that if the will and the intellect which operate as one principle are the essence of the human soul (in which human nature

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272 Ibid. After one understands just how entangled the acts of the intellect and the will are in Aquinas’ doctrine of God and also his anthropology, the standard reading of Aquinas’ imago Dei as something merely consisting in intelligence (as if he did not also have in mind emotions, passions, or affections such as love, joy, and happiness) can only be seen as distortion by oversimplification. Anthony Hoekema (who has written a classic textbook used in Reformed Protestant circles on the imago Dei) criticizes Aquinas for placing the imago Dei “solely in man’s intellectual nature” and replies: “The Bible says that God is love; nowhere does it say that God is intellect.” Anthony A. Hoekema, Created in God’s Image (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans’ Publishing Company, 1994), 39. This criticism betrays a lack of familiarity with Aquinas’ larger theological anthropology and in particular his doctrine of charity and view of the human soul. Similar caricatures of Aquinas can be found in the most popular contemporary Protestant systematic textbooks used in seminaries. E.g. Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 521-522; Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002), 443. Furthermore, this is why when Paul J. Wadell, C.P. published The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1994) arguing that Aquinas’ real moral theology is mostly obscured and by being “presented as … overly rationalistic” and that virtues in Aquinas are best considered “not as acts of reason, but as strategies of love,” reviewers did not dispute the accuracy of his portrayal of Aquinas’ theology but welcomed it as a needed corrective. The criticism of Wadell’s book was simply that it was incomplete in some way (e.g. that his treatment of the virtues was weak, that he failed to talk about Aquinas’ teaching about moral law, that he does not consider adequately questions of objective norms, etc.). Steven J. Pope, Review of The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas, by Paul J. Wadell, Theological Studies 54, no. 1 (1993): 202. James P. Hanigan, Review of The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas, by Paul J. Wadell, Horizons 20, no. 1 (1993): 178-179.

273 Another fascinating and pregnant ontological claim Aquinas makes is that the body should not be thought of as containing the soul; on the contrary, “the soul contains the body,” for “spiritual things contain those thing in which they are.” ST I.8.1. ad.2.
consists primarily), the human end would somehow consist in the perfection of the intellective appetite by obtaining the object that most satisfies it as an appetite. It is also most appropriate to Aquinas’ anthropology that as creatures made in the imago Dei humans imitate God most fully in that immaterial part of their nature (the human soul), since participation in the divine nature is participation in something immaterial.

Furthermore, we must consider that for Aquinas love is the greatest commandment and all virtue and obedience consist in charity. Pursuit of happiness is often mistaken as something fundamentally selfish and wholly distinct from obedience. But in Aquinas’ doctrine of charity, it only makes sense that humans most imitate God by imitating his intelligent love, yet Aquinas considers God’s own happiness as love delighting. Therefore, imitating and participating in the divine happiness of eternal joy and delight is what human love does when it is perfected. This is why charity cannot be understood apart from happiness, for perfect happiness, delight, and joy are Aquinas’ words for perfected charity in humans, a finite participation in God’s perfect charity.
CHAPTER 3

PROCESSUS IUSTIFICATIONIS IN AQUINAS:
EXPLORING THE NEXUS OF REMISSION,
FREE WILL, AND PREDESTINATION

We have explored Aquinas’ biblical interpretation of the Pauline doctrine of justification, parsed Aquinas’ anthropology by bringing his understanding of human love into focus, and explored how grace fulfills human nature and elevates love in supernatural charity—all partially in order to place ourselves in a better position to have a better informed interpretation of his doctrine of justification as found in the Summa. The chief aim of this chapter will be to appreciate how Aquinas’ doctrine of justification is thoroughly rooted in grace. More precisely, I will conclude that it meets Reformed criterion of sola gratia, although this aspect of Aquinas is often eclipsed by the hermeneutical tradition in Protestantism that is driven by a concern for his teaching on free will and merit. I will first briefly summarize his presentation in the Summa, using this to take note of two important implications for a more delicate interpretation. First, Aquinas’ forensic language is penultimate; he ultimately interprets his own forensic language in non-forensic categories. Second, because predestination has been central to sola gratia in Calvinism, a very brief overview of the relation between free will and predestination in Aquinas will demonstrate how his theology leaves no room for human merit in any sense that threatens the principle of sola gratia. Finally, I will end by correcting some popular distortions of Aquinas’ theology by Protestants and explain why
his doctrine of grace is remarkably promising for ecumenical discussions between Protestants and Catholics once properly contextualized. This will illuminate the ambiguity and corresponding elasticity of biblical and theological language and underscore its purpose.

**Processus Iustificationis in Aquinas’ Summa**

It is widely recognized that Aquinas changed his position on many questions throughout the course of his intellectual development, but the *Summa* of Aquinas is credited with expressing his most mature theology.\(^{274}\) Here Aquinas is not merely interpreting the authors of scripture or defending Catholic theology, but using both the philosophy of Aristotle and other philosophical sources already borrowed from the Christian Tradition as the glue to selectively construct, synthesize, clarify and defend various strands of Catholic theology into a sophisticated, inclusively coherent system.\(^{275}\) As with any one doctrine in Aquinas, his section on justification must be understood within Thomas’ overall reasoned schema,\(^{276}\) yet his anthropology is what provides an


\(^{275}\) Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the *Summa* are taken from the English translation, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols., rev. ed. (1948; repr., Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1981). To be as specific as possible, I have distinguished between Aquinas’ “On the Contrary” (the *sed contra*, herein abbreviated as *sed*), his “I answer that” (the *respondeo*, herein abbreviated as *resp*.), and his answers to objections (the *adversus*, herein abbreviated as *ad*).

\(^{276}\) For example, because grace is a temporal effect of divine charity, Aquinas’ doctrine of God in the *Prima Pars* shapes his understanding of forensic language of justification in the *Prima Secundae*, as we will see. His understanding of the theological virtues and the sacraments treated in the *Secunda Secundae* are already shaping his doctrine of justification in the *Prima Secundae*. It is not necessary, however, to
intelligible means to launch from the language of Scripture we surveyed in chapter one into an exploration of how grace is received by human nature—one that has been mortally wounded by sin, internally decomposed by its infection beyond any natural cure.

Aquinas asks and answers ten questions in his treatment of justification in the *Summa*.

Replacing the questions with his responses, his articles can be summarized as follows:\textsuperscript{277}

(1) The justification of the ungodly is the remission of sins. Although God gifted the first human with original justice, and although this justice does not necessarily imply a movement from one contrary to another, the Pauline sense of justification addresses those deprived of this original justice and therefore implies a movement from one contrary (*sin*) to another (*justice*), taking its name from the term or end of its movement (*justice*) rather than its genesis (*sin*).

(2) The infusion of grace is required for the remission of guilt. Offense can only be removed when the person who has offended is at peace with the person who offended. This peace in justification consists in the love whereby God loves us, but this is eternal and unchanging in and of itself, yet its effect in time cancels out the sin whereby this divine love is interrupted. This effect of divine love is grace. Hence we cannot conceive of the remission of guilt apart from the infusion of grace.

(3) A movement of the free will is required for justification. Although infants and mentally disabled adults who cannot exercise free will can still be justified, God only moves objects according to their nature and human nature considered as mature and apart from unnatural aberrations includes the exercise of a free will.

(4) A movement of faith is required for justification. It implies a movement towards God in the soul and the first turning to God is by faith, even though other virtues concur together with it that expel sin because charity, which includes the other virtues, must always be infused at the same time as justifying faith.

(5) A movement of the free will away from sin is required for justification.

\textsuperscript{277} ST II-I 113.1-10.
Justification implies a movement to justice from its contrary. Although charity is enough to take away sin, yet the same virtue can be responsible for seeking one thing and avoiding its contrary. Although seeking righteousness requires a detesting of one’s sins which take time to recall, the recollection of all sins is not required since contrition places the moved in a contrite frame of mind with regard to sin in general such that were the sins recalled they would be detested by reason of being against God.

(6) The remission of sins ought to be considered a requirement for justification. A movement takes its name from its term, but other things are required to reach this term. Although by the same act grace is infused and sin remitted (as when light dispels darkness), nevertheless on the part of the object these two differ, as one refers to the sin being taken away, and the other refers to a grace which is infused. Although it is by faith and contrition both that sin is forgiven, they should still be distinguished to fully clarify all requirements for the completion of justification and to determine whether one follows the other or vice versa. Furthermore, the only reason justification is defined as the remission of sins is because movements are categorized or named after their end or term. [Here Aquinas is implying that a definition is insufficient to determine the full scope of a movement.]

(7) Justification takes place in an instant because it occurs at the infusion of grace, which takes place in an instant since God’s power is infinite and can dispose anything whatsoever to its form instantly. The entirety of justification originates in grace and a form can be acquired and begin to operate in the same instant, as when fire is received and moves upwards in the same instant.

(8) The infusion of grace is naturally the first of things required for justification. Although all things required take place simultaneously in an instant, such grace is related to the other requirements for justification as cause is to effect, the free-will’s movement away from sin is caused by its movement toward God, and the remission of sins is naturally last as the transmutation’s end.

(9) Justification is God’s greatest work. From the perspective of mode of action creation is greater since the universe was created from nothing. In terms of absolute quantity glorification is greater since it perfects justification itself. Yet on the part of what is made justification is greater because it results in eternal good whereas creation results in a mutable good and in terms of proportionate quantity justification is greater because where glorification justifies the just, justification justifies the ungodly.

(10) Justification is not necessarily a miraculous work. Although the active power is divine and therefore the cause hidden, and although sometimes justification departs from the normal cause and effect relationship, yet the form introduced is not beyond the natural power of the matter since the soul is capable of it and fit for grace by virtue of the divine image. Furthermore, in justification the movement does not necessarily depart from the usual cause and effect relationship, though sometimes it does.

It should be noted that the first respondeo defines justification while all others—excluding the last two—address what Aquinas believes his definition naturally requires
using the standards of Aristotelian anthropology. By noting the logical relations between these components the natural order of each is determined. The remaining two articles address what can only be answered once the components and full scope of justification are appreciated: justification can be considered in some ways as God’s greatest work, but not necessarily a miraculous one.

**Remissio Peccatorum in the Processus Iustificationis**

Aquinas’ use of *remissio peccatorum* in his taxonomy of justification as the “remission of sins” has led some to conclude that ultimately he argues for a forensic understanding of justification. This conclusion, however, is problematic on several grounds. Correcting this common mistake provides a contextual analysis of an entire group of forensic terminology used in Aquinas: First, this reading does not reflect a familiarity with the historical context. Aquinas’ approach to the doctrine replicates the standard medieval subject matter, which focused on the *processus iustificationis*—the sequential ordering of all necessary components of the *infusion* of grace with the help of

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278 Following Aristotle, Aquinas argues that in any scenario (not just justification) where one thing is being moved by another, at least three things are required: 1) the motion of the mover (in justification, the infusion of grace), 2) the movement of the moved (a departure from the term *whence* and an approach to the term *whereto*), and 3) the consummation of the movement, or the attainment of the end (the remission of sins). *ST I-II*.113.6.*resp.*, cf. *ST I-II*.113.8.*resp*.

279 The “natural” or logical order is as follows: The infusion of grace is naturally first as the cause of justification in its entirety (i.e. it causes all other components considered as requirements). The movement away from sin is by reason of its being against God, making the movement towards God logically prior to a movement away from sin. The movement away from sin must be sufficient enough to cause sin’s remission, making remission logically the *terminus*, or last component in justification. *ST I-II*.113.8.*resp*.

280 McGrath rightly points out that a forensic interpretation of justification in Aquinas is “a serious misunderstanding.” McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 64. On the influence of Aristotelian physics within the Dominican school of theological speculation inherited by Aquinas in his doctrine of justification, see Ibid., 63-64. On this and other misguided reasons for taking Aquinas as a “proto-Protestant” see Francis Beckwith, “Doting Thomists: Evangelicals, Thomas Aquinas, and Justification,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 85 no. 3 (2013): 211-227.
an Aristotelian-styled taxonomy. The organizing principle is one of *infusion*. Virtually all medieval theologians took for granted that justifying grace was infused, whereas the controversies mostly surrounded the details of how best to logically divide and relate the various components of infused grace.\(^{281}\) *Remissio peccatorum* was a standard component of justifying grace in the scholastic schema, but was not interpreted primarily or purely as forensic, as we will confirm from Aquinas’ own use of the language.\(^{282}\)

Second, this view misses the sense given by Aquinas to *iustitia*. Although Aquinas lists legal justice as one use of *iustitia*, he forgoes this use entirely in favor of Aristotle’s metaphorical justice. None of the articles in this section on justification have as their focus or subject matter an extrinsic legal status that must be remedied or overlooked.\(^{283}\) Third, this reading dislodges the inward place or location given to *remissio peccatorum* in Aquinas’ *processus iustificationis*. *Remissio peccatorum* is the *terminus* of the human soul’s movement: the arrival of the soul to sin’s antipodal. This *terminus* of interior movement does not cause the remission of sins, but *is* the remission of sins by reason of interior justice being diametrical to interior sin. This interior exclusion of

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\(^{281}\) For an informed summary of the medieval theological context, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 55-207. It might be added, given McGrath’ summary, that if Aquinas held a forensic doctrine, so did most Medieval theologians, as Aquinas’ understanding of justification in terms of the remission of sins was apparently ubiquitous. Aquinas cannot be singled out in this regard as unique.

\(^{282}\) Bruce Marshall, “*Beatus Vir*: Aquinas, Romans 4, and the Role of ‘Reckoning’ in Justification” in *Reading Romans With St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Mathew Levering and Michael Dauphinais (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 219-231. As Marshall points out, language that has come to be seen by post-Reformation eyes as forensic Thomas (and others) had never understood as purely forensic, but actually interpreted these notions in transformational terms. For example, “for God to forgive our sins or not to impute them is for him to keep the damage they have caused from standing,” which damage is repaired by the infusion of grace. This way of reading biblical forensic language was well established by the medieval period. Ibid., 227.

\(^{283}\) We will consider later whether a purely forensic *element* can be found in Aquinas’ thought, however peripheral it is to his choice articles on justification in the *Summa*. 
justice’s opposite is the negative aspect of the metaphysical state within the human soul caused by the *iustitia infusa*, not a forensic result within the mind or reckoning of God, which is neither the focus of the articles nor included as one of the requirements for justification.

Fourth, this interpretation conflicts with the dynamic understanding and interpretation of *remissio peccatorum* in Aquinas that can be seen in his varied expression when reasoning. Aquinas varies his expression when discussing remission, pardon, the non-imputation of sin, and forgiveness as the taking away of sin, as the remission of guilt, and as the removal of offense within the human soul. The second article asks whether the infusion of grace is necessary for the remission of guilt, which is treated in the article as *the remission of* and *taking away of*, ontological sin. His *respondeo* and *adversus* in this question also illustrate how his reference point for the divine imputation, whereby God does not impute sin to the justified, is grounded ontologically. As Bruce D. Marshall has keenly argued, the reason divine imputation implies by its very meaning an inward reorientation of the soul is because divine imputation is never counterfactual, as in the reckoning of a guilty sinner as not guilty, but is a divine attribution of responsibility (praise or blame) to the guilty or praiseworthy agent, and thus implies a correlative merit of either reward or punishment. The interior

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284 For terminological clarity, see Marshall, “*Beatus vir,*” *Reading Romans,* 219 ff. I will be borrowing here from Marshall’s apt language which is the only source I know that captures Aquinas’ forgiveness and imputation language within a careful taxonomy of a nexus of kindred concepts such as guilt (*culpa*), stain (*macula*), sin (*peccatum*), evil (*malum*), reckoning (*imputare* or *repatare*), penalty (*poena*), etc. Marshall discusses, for example, how the kindred concepts such as “sin” and “guilt” by virtue of their interchangeability are practically equated in Aquinas, even though elsewhere he clarifies that each term covers a different aspect of a singular reality. He also shows how terms like “forgiveness” and “non-imputation” amount virtually to the infusion of grace as the repair of sin’s internal damage. My argument here is based on similar reasoning.
effect implied by non-imputation is the infusion of justifying grace, which is in turn explained as the temporal effect of God’s atemporal love:

When God does not impute sin to a man, there is implied a certain effect in him to whom the sin is not imputed; for it proceeds from the Divine love, that sin is not imputed to a man by God.285

Now the effect of the Divine love in us which is taken away by sin, is grace, whereby man is made worthy of eternal life, from which sin shuts him out. Hence we could not conceive the remission of guilt, without the infusion of grace.286

The influence of the Pauline discourse on sin in the opening of his epistle to the Romans (interpreted as the pretext for the apostle’s proposed solution in justification) and of St. Augustine’s theology of culpability can be seen in how Aquinas grounds guilt (culpa) in the ontology of sin (peccatum) rather than sin’s record.287 The debt sin incurs, for example, is a mixed bag, some of which disappears at the moment of justification by the infusion of grace, but some of which remains because not all sin disappears for the justified.

If man turns inordinately to a mutable good, without turning from God, as happens in venial sins, he incurs a debt, not of eternal but of temporal punishment. Consequently when guilt is pardoned through grace, the soul ceases to be turned away from God, through being untied to God by grace: so that at the same time, the debt of punishment is taken away, albeit a debt of some temporal punishment may yet remain.288

Mortal sin is said to be pardoned from the very fact that, by means of grace, the aversion of the mind from God is taken away together with the debt of punishment: and yet the material element remains,286

285 ST I-II.113.2.ad.2.

286 ST I-I.113.2. resp.

287 On Augustine’s doctrine of culpability, see Gerald Heistand, “Augustine and the Justification Debates: Appropriating Augustine’s Doctrine of Culpability,” Trinity Journal 28 no. 1 (2007): 115-139. In Aquinas, see for example how guilt is said to be capable of being “brought back to justice,” by which he means interior justice. ST III 86.4.resp. If by “guilt” he intended a record of sins and by justice he intended to refer to an exterior forensic justice, he would be arguing here that sin’s record can be converted to a just record, which would be intelligible. How a record of sin becomes a proper constitution of the soul, however, is so difficult to see that it demonstrates the absurdity that ensues when confusing Aquinas’ language of sin, guilt, and forgiveness as forensically oriented.

288 ST III 86.4.resp.
viz. the inordinate turning to a created good, for which a debt of temporal punishment is due.\textsuperscript{289}

Now it has been said above (A. 4) that the guilt of mortal sin \textit{is pardoned through grace removing the aversion of the mind from God}. Nevertheless when that which is on the part of the aversion has been \textit{taken away by grace}, that which is on the part of the inordinate turning to a mutable good can remain, since this may happen to be without the other, as stated above (A. 4). Consequently, there is no reason why, after the guilt has been forgiven, the dispositions caused by preceding acts should not remain, which are called the remnants of sin. Yet they remain weakened and diminished, so as not to domineer over man, and they are after the manner of dispositions rather than of habits, like the \textit{fomes} which remain after Baptism.\textsuperscript{290}

Forgiveness is not comprehensive in justification because the infusion of grace pardons or takes away the will’s habit of aversion from God (mortal sin), but not all sin arises from aversion (i.e. venial sin). Sin and guilt are bound up together in the ontology of the disordered soul; their remission, forgiveness, or non-imputation is bound up with their coextensive removal, not merely a removal of a legal record of sinful acts extrinsic to the justified.

Similar varied expressions and reasoning appear when Aquinas elsewhere explains \textit{remissio peccatorum} as the removal of offense by the infusion of grace, for the offense is understood to consist in a turned will. Aquinas’ discussion of penance’s ability to remit sin uses “taken away,” “blotted out,” “remission” and “pardon” interchangeably when arguing that sin can only be pardoned through the genuine repentance (i.e. the \textit{virtue} of penance) caused by the power of infused grace which is effected through Christ’s Passion.\textsuperscript{291} The divine pardon in Aquinas requires the soul of the offender be at peace with the offended in justification, but God’s peace with the offender is eternal and unchanging. When the latter is manifested in time \textit{as infused grace}, sin and guilt are removed instantly and simultaneously. Aquinas’ \textit{respondeo} in article two is worth

\textsuperscript{289} \textit{ST} III.86.4.\textit{ad}.1. Italics added.

\textsuperscript{290} \textit{ST} III.86.5.\textit{resp}. Italics added; Italicized “fomes” original. Here we can also see that justification does not take away all sin so as to perfect the justified, but only takes away sin’s dominance over the will, or what Aquinas calls “mortal sin.” The justice in justification therefore is pivotal but not comprehensive.

\textsuperscript{291} \textit{ST} III.86.1.\textit{resp}. 

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quoting at length, as it captures well the orientation in his language of forgiveness, pardon, and remission:

It is impossible for a mortal actual sin to be pardoned without penance, if we speak of penance as a virtue. For, as sin is an offense against God, *He pardons sin in the same way he pardons an offense committed against Him.* Now an offense is directly opposed to grace, since one man is said to be offended with another, because he excludes him from his grace. Now, as stated in the Second Part (I-II, Q. 110, A. 1), the difference between the grace of God and the grace of man, is that the latter does not cause but presupposes true or apparent goodness in him who is graced, whereas the grace of God causes goodness in the man who is graced, because the good-will of God, which is denoted by the word grace, is the cause of all created good. Hence it is possible for a man to pardon an offense, for which he is offended with someone, without any change in the latter’s will; but it is impossible that God pardon a man for an offense, without his will being changed. *Now the offense of mortal sin is due to man’s will being turned away from God, through being turned to some mutable good.* Consequently, for the pardon of this offense against God, it is necessary for man’s will to be so changed as to turn to God and to renounce having turned to something else in the aforesaid manner, together with a purpose of amendment; all of which belongs to the nature of penance.292

God is said to be offended by virtue of his excluding the offender from grace, thus the infusion of grace by definition removes the offense. In short, “sin is taken away by grace removing the offense against God.”293

But how does the discussion of pardon through penance relate to justification? Aquinas’ opening articles on Penance establish in different ways that “mortal sin cannot be forgiven without true Penance, *to which it belongs to renounce sin, by reason of its being against God, which is common to all mortal sins.*”294 Now as we have already seen, this renouncing is the same movement of the will caused by the infused grace of

292 *ST* III.86.2.*resp.* Italics added.

293 *ST* III.86.3.*resp.*

294 *ST* III.86.3.*resp.*
If the meanings of offense and sin are not identical (and my argument does not require this) their meaning is so difficult to disentangle that they appear as the same substantive act of justification viewed in different anthropomorphic imagery, all amounting to a vital ontological change within the sinner’s soul by the infusion of grace, which takes its power from Christ’s passion. The pregnant silences add weight to this interpretation while making a Protestant forensic interpretation problematic, such as the absence of any questions on: (1) God’s reckoning of punishment towards Christ as the basis of forgiveness, (2) why the guilt of all future sins are not removed by justification and (3) why one’s debt of future punishment must be forgiven more than once and (4) why Aquinas would allow the removal of any particular sin after justification to be classified under the rubric of a non-technical non-Pauline sense of justification used in a broader sense if justification is the forensic acquittal which would have already taken place for all sin in a forensic justification, etc.  

From Aquinas’ discussion above concerning Penance, we can add a fifth reason why a forensic interpretation of Aquinas’ doctrine of justification is problematic: It fails to fully incorporate Aquinas’ doctrine of God, which drives him to reinterpret all theological language as anthropologically accommodated and recognize aspects of the analogy that do not hold with God. The divine disposition never changes, which means

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295 In light of Aquinas’ interpretation of forensic language, although one might still say forensic elements exists in Aquinas’ soteriology in one sense, because they are interpreted ontologically as shown one could equally say forensic elements do not exist in the same. The sinner has a debt of punishment with respect to his future prior to justification, which Aquinas allows to be removed by justification. However, even in this case the debt of punishment is still interpreted ontologically and not legally, as Aquinas locates the debt in the ontological sin of the soul rather than on a legal record, so that when the ontological sin is removed no legal debt can possibly remain.

296 Aquinas inextricably attributes forgiveness of sins to the virtues of faith, penance, and charity. E.g. ST III.86.6.ad.1-3.
whatever takes place in time—including the sinner’s justification—does not cause any change in God, only in the human person. It is impossible for God to literally be of one disposition prior to a person’s faith, then of a contrary disposition instantaneously once that person becomes just by grace: all such language in Aquinas represents the change or effect of the relationship between the temporal finite and the eternal infinite.²⁹⁷ One might think Christ’s humanity could potentially offer wiggle room here, since his human nature is capable of dispositional change. The human act of forgiveness on the part of the one forgiving (in this case Jesus’ human nature) need not imply a change in the human will of the offender from sin to justice, but Aquinas explicitly rejects this possibility.²⁹⁸

Sixth, and perhaps most important in confirming the above interpretations, this view of Aquinas’ doctrine of justification fails to properly synthesize Aquinas’ other definition of justification. Although Aquinas formally borrows the Aristotelian strategy of definition, he more consistently defines justification in non-forensic terms as a movement from internal sin to internal justice with no intention to switch “senses” of the word *iustitia*, having already forgone legal justice as the apostolic sense given to justification by Paul. This makes viewing the latter definition as his interpretation of the former natural and fitting.²⁹⁹ Both definitions offer a *terminus: remissio peccatorum* in

²⁹⁷“Two things pertain to providence—namely, the reason of order, which is called providence and disposition; and the execution of order, which is termed government. Of these, the first is eternal, and the second is temporal.” ST I.22.1.ad.2.

²⁹⁸He quotes the authority of Gregory of Nyssa on Christ’s pardon of the adulterous woman to justify his position: “He drew inwardly by grace, i.e. by penance, her whom He received outwardly by His mercy.” ST III.86.2.resp.

²⁹⁹My point here goes beyond McGrath’s point that elsewhere Aquinas defines justification in non-forensic terms. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 64-65. My argument is that the forensic concept of *remissio peccatorum* in Aquinas is ultimately interpreted primarily in non-forensic terms in such a way that both definitions refer to the same substantive act.
the first and *iustitia infusa* in the second. Understanding these as different ends in justification would require a strained interpretation, but understanding them as different aspects of the same end of justifying grace is logically and contextually sensitive and unproblematic. The soul’s movement in justification, by virtue of being a movement to justice, is also a movement away from non-justice. The substance of this end remains the same in either description. Although this can be referred to as a dual movement, this should not obscure Aquinas’ understanding of the movement’s singularity: *the movement bears a dual relation to its respective objects because they are opposites*, resulting in a dual relation of the *terminus* of the same.\(^{300}\) In other words, the remission of sins in Aquinas should be seen much like a spiritual parallel to the remission of cancerous cells—it refers to the expulsion or termination of ontological sin and the guilt inherent therein. The definition of justification as the expulsion of sins rather than the infusion of justice in Aquinas can be seen as the result of Aquinas’ overall tendency to inherit his *loci communes* from the Christian Tradition while avoiding the redundancy of defining justification self-referentially by its root word—*justice*.

Finally, as McGrath points out, the *processus iustificationis* discussed by Medieval scholastic theologians was understood to refer to a distinct and irreducible package of grace in which the presence of any one of the elements logically entails the other elements and “therefore *expressly includes*” those correlated elements.\(^{301}\) The *remissio peccatorum* is only the final element in a logical schema used to parse an

\(^{300}\) McGrath’s labeling of this movement as a “dual motion” is not incorrect, as “motion” here is singular. However, referring to the motion as a singular motion with a dual relation better captures the type of duality involved. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 65.

\(^{301}\) McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 64.
instantaneous movement within the human soul. Thus, even if we were to mistake *remissio peccatorum* as merely God’s erasure of a sin record (an unperceptive reading as I have argued), any purely or primarily forensic reading of justification in Aquinas would still be a gross distortion of the substance of his doctrine, confused by lack of familiarity with the scholastic theological tradition that inspires the language of his formulations. The substance of the act of justification even upon this misreading of *remissio* cannot be reduced to its *terminus*, as this would exclude the middle term that logically comes between the *infusio gratiae* and this *terminus*.

There is a purely forensic notion that can be *reasoned from* Aquinas’ doctrine of justification, although Aquinas does not include it in any of his articles on justification for reasons we will note below. The gift of justifying grace logically presupposes an eternal and deliberate forbearance of the penalty of mortal sin in the providence of God. As Marshall so deftly captures this in his article on the role of reckoning in Aquinas, he is worth quoting at length here:

> Why does God cause this justice in the first place, the justice that actually heals the wound of sin, repairing sin’s interior damage and leaving nothing in us that merits the punishment of final separation from God? This doesn’t just happen, but is a deliberate divine action, and so presupposes a specific intention and disposition on God’s part. Essential to that disposition, it seems, is the non-imputation or non-reckoning of sins or faults. God forbears to count our sins against us, by imposing the penalty their guilt deserves, and instead restores the harmony and beauty of the creature by the utterly undeserved gift of sanctifying grace. The gift requires forbearance. God holds in check his right to punish the outrages we have committed against him, and instead treats us with patience and mercy.

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302 Perhaps this point might be better appreciated by Protestants through pointing out that likewise, inasmuch as being declared righteous *per se* could be on the basis of infused or forensic righteousness, if a declaration were considered the *terminus* apart from its logical relationship to something else (such as the reasons for the declaration), this too would be inadequate as a sufficient summary of the forensic doctrines of justification in Protestant theologies.

Marshall explores this aspect of grace under Aquinas’ rubric of “covering.” Its application is limited to the “stain” of specific acts of sin, not the sin disorder itself which causes the acts. As he further notes, the historical occurrence of such acts can no more be changed or erased than history itself can be altered or undone. It is important to note, in light of Marshall’s insight, that if the divine act of justifying regards a permutation, this act cannot be applied to facts about what happened in the past. However, the deliberate forbearance of God is related to this permutation in Aquinas as cause to effect.

Inasmuch as by the divine act whereby the guilty sinner is healed of her mortal sin wound and given the greatest good, Marshall argues that by this act God is effectively treating the unworthy sinner “as though [past acts of sin] had not been done.” The divine covering as presented by Marshall is certainly the closest Aquinas’ theology of grace ever comes to affirming anything comparable to the Reformation views of justification. Marshall even argues that Aquinas’ view of grace in the divine covering approximates the view of Martin Luther because Aquinas views God as treating what is the case, as though it were not the case, but Marshall’s reason for the comparison may be misleading. Technically this would be true only if we exclude the divine mercy from God’s ordering of providence, for the act of healing the cause of sinful acts presupposes them as a reason for the act: God is treating the acts of sin as though their cause needed to be expunged. Whether God punishes acts of sin in the executing of divine justice or heals their cause in the ordering of his mercy: in either case, God is not ignoring sinful


acts committed as though they had never happened. Rather, God is treating them under different aspects of the divine providence. Although history cannot be changed, the divine act of justification changes what can, and at least part of the reason for the divine act lays in the very acts of sin committed. The divine act of justification stands in relation to what can be changed as the mover to the moved. This same act relates to what cannot be changed (the acts of sin committed) as a reason of movement.306

Thus even when we scrutinize Aquinas’ notion of covering and come to the brink of our quest to find a purely forensic notion comparable to strictly forensic Reformation renderings of sola fide, counterfactual interpretations are, in the end, only illusory. The anthropological language of God hiding his face, forgetting our sins, or covering them, all refer anthropologically to God’s will to order the acts of sin under one aspect of providence rather than another.307 And what is more: the language of covering is wholly absent from Aquinas’ doctrine of justification proper in the Summa. It is neither one of the required elements nor a side discussion, as it belongs more properly to his doctrine of providence wherein he explores the eternal and unchanging divine wisdom in the mind of

306 “… the type of things ordered towards an end is, properly speaking, providence. For it is the chief part of prudence, to which two other parts are directed—namely, remembrance of the past, and understanding of the present; inasmuch as from the remembrance of what is past and the understanding of what is present, we gather how to provide for the future.” ST I.22.1. resp. Providence is eternal

307 Aquinas’ reply to the objector in adverses 4 of Tertia Pars’ 88th article, quoted by Marshall, is a shorthand reply restating what Aquinas has already argued in the main article: When an act of mortal sin incurs a debt of eternal punishment for one who previously enjoyed the benefits of grace, this does not mean former acts of sin and the debt incurred by them have simply “returned.” The newly committed sins and the corresponding debt they incur are distinct from the specific acts of sin and their corresponding debt previously committed, for the latter were already “overlooked” (i.e. ordered to the divine mercy) in the first showing of grace. This first showing of grace is a temporal and therefore historical effect of God’s eternal love in time and therefore cannot be undone anymore than history can be undone: “what grace has once done, endures for ever.” ST III.88.1.ad.4. Quoted by Marshall, “Beatus Vir,” 236. Now in this context what is “covering” the stain of past sins if not the past forbearance shown by God in the first showing of grace? The function of covering here reaffirms the main logic in Aquinas’ respondeo and closely resembles the function of pardon and forgiveness in every showing of grace that removes mortal sin.
God. As we have already noted, grace is the effect of divine charity in time.\textsuperscript{308}

Justification therefore cannot be located in the divine providence, but only in the execution of divine providence, which Aquinas calls the divine government.

Two things pertain to providence—namely, the reason of order, which is called providence and disposition; and the execution of order, which is termed government. Of these, the first is eternal, and the second is temporal.\textsuperscript{309}

Every aspect of history fits under God’s order of providence by which he directs all things to an end.\textsuperscript{310} Now predestination regards the ordering of some free agents to a particular end—namely, that of eternal life. Whereas humans are said to destine something by firmly planning it in the mind, so predestination “by reason of the antecedent nature it implies, can be attributed to a thing which does not actually exist” yet, and so has not only a future orientation but is firmly in the mind of God prior to the existence of anything outside of God.\textsuperscript{311} This is why justification places something in the justified, but predestination does not place anything in the predestined: infusion belongs rather to the execution of divine providence \textit{ex tempore} [in time], whereas the predestination of such infusion is in the mind of God \textit{ab aeterno} [before time].\textsuperscript{312}

\textsuperscript{308} The effect of eternal divine charity in time is nothing less than the effect of God’s essence on created objects, for “eternity is nothing less than God himself.” ST I.10.2.\textit{ad} 3.

\textsuperscript{309} ST I.22.1.\textit{ad} 2.

\textsuperscript{310} “The providence of God is nothing less than the type of the order of things towards an end.” ST I.22.2.\textit{resp}.

\textsuperscript{311} ST I.23.2.\textit{ad} 2.

\textsuperscript{312} Harm Goris, “Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Human Freedom,” in \textit{The Theology of Thomas Aquinas}, eds. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 101. Goris notes that while Augustine, Boethius, and Anselm denied foreknowledge and foresight in God on the basis that God is timeless, Aquinas did not believe God’s timelessness excluded the use of such language by temporally situated creatures from whom there is a past, present, and future. Ibid., 103.
Justification and Free Will

While a failure to demonstrate any unambiguous notions of a forensic justification in Aquinas seem bleak for ecumenical reapproachment, his doctrine of grace writ large—and especially the place of free will or human cooperation in justification—not only provides a more proper context for any final evaluation of his doctrine of justification, but also proves to be unparalleled in its ecumenical promise, as I hope to show.

Differences in perspective over how divine causality and human freedom relate in salvation find their most forceful expression in clashes over the doctrine of justification. This is not simply the result Reformation controversies for at least two related reasons. First, this state of affairs existed prior to the Reformation and was part of what caused it. Second, the differences in perspective on grace and free will were arguably the deepest reason why justification and St. Augustine’s doctrine of grace were both so important to the Reformation tradition and why this tradition has continued to hold in such high esteem St. Augustine’s doctrine of grace in spite of his thoroughly Catholic view of justification. The reason is this: as the initium fidei, justification is “the first and fundamental act of salvation, … the beginning of faith” and so has continued to be viewed in the Reformation tradition as the most paradigmatic salvific act for determining

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the precise role of free will in salvation.\footnote{Reinhard Hütter, “‘Thomas the Augustinian’—Recovering a Surpassing Synthesis of Grace and Free Will,” in Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 249.} Contrary to often-exaggerated claims about the importance of \textit{sola fide} in the Reformation tradition, it is more perceptive of how the tradition’s overall history illustrates its deepest concerns to see \textit{sola gratia} rather than \textit{sola fide} as constituting “the hinge” on which the Reformed streams in Protestantism have actually turned.\footnote{For the maxim as originally expressed, see John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.11.1. I concur here with Michael Root that interpreting the popular maxims of Luther and Calvin about the so-called \textit{articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae} are both ambiguous and “cannot stand up to sustained analysis (or they mean something rather different than they appear to mean).” Michael Root, “Continuing the Conversation: Deeper Agreement on Justification as Criterion and on the Christian as \textit{simul iustus et peccator},” in The Gospel of Justification in Christ: Where Does the Church Stand Today?, ed. Wayne C. Stumme (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 50. Root’s deference to Karl Barth’s position on this question as more balanced is likewise commendable, for Barth’s maxim was this: “there is no part of dogmatics, no locus, where we can treat it lightly.” Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics}, trans. G. Bromiley et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956-75), IV/1: 520-21. The reason it cannot be treaded lightly, I would argue, is the same reason the focus of Reformation theology did not take long to shift its focus more to matters of “the divine decree of election and reprobation,” practically demoting justification a “low priority in the \textit{ordo salutis},” as McGrath points out. McGrath, \textit{Iustitia Dei}, 400. The reason is this: whatever locus is perceived as the live battle grounds for \textit{sola gratia}, there the Reformed stream of Protestantism will sound the battle cry and seek to establish its flag of identity. Because of the historical shift in the locus of concern relative to time and location, McGrath explains Barth’s position as more in keeping with Reformation Orthodoxy than Calvin himself, although even this is debatable given Calvin’s reasoning for his own acceptance of Augustine and the importance he places on sanctification. For a close look at this reasoning as something at odds with some forms of Protestant identity exemplified by but not limited to R.C. Sproul, see Heckel, “Is R.C. Sproul Wrong About Martin Luther?,” 89-120. The whole aim of the gospel for Calvin was piety: “The whole lives of Christians ought to be a kind of aspiration after piety.” \textit{Inst}. 3.19.2. Without regeneration alien righteousness is of no value: “[A]s long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.” \textit{Inst}. 1.3.1. More explicitly, Calvin asserts that nothing is more theologically important than the divine indwelling of Christ and mystical union: “[T]hat indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance…” \textit{Inst}. 3.11.10.} This is why difference over the nature of imputed righteousness, while not being overlooked, were placed on the back burner in the accomplishment of ECT and JDDJ.\footnote{When the priority of \textit{sola gratia} is overlooked, Evangelical assessments of and JDDJ will inevitably be unfavorable. For an excellent and thoughtful analysis of ecumenical discussions that regrettably concludes that no consensus in basic truths has been achieved by JDDJ based on the omission of imputation, see Anthony N.S. Lane, \textit{Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical} 103
Before broaching the subject of Aquinas’ doctrine of grace to consider the dynamic between grace and free will, we must take a step back to consider the very nature of divine causality in general as related to created causality in general.\footnote{318} We must understand the \textit{nexus mysteriorum} Aquinas aims to make intelligible and coherent, which is nothing less than God’s simple mode of existence and metaphysical transcendence over all creation.\footnote{319} The divine mode of causality is beyond human comprehension and the term causality itself is only used by analogy with human causation. All human causation is subordinate to and mediates—\textit{whether contingently or necessarily}—the divine causality, which is not to be conceived as on the same metaphysical plane as created causality so as to compete with it.\footnote{320} In an analogous way the divine omnipresence includes rather than excludes created physical and spiritual presence; so also divine omnicausality does not violate or threaten created causality, but establishes and includes the dignity of free choice and causality.\footnote{321}

Just as it is important to realize that Aquinas’ doctrine of grace underwent a

\footnote{318} Here I am borrowing from and building on Goris’ quality introduction to Aquinas’ type of compatibilism between the divine will and human freedom. Harm Goris, “Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Human Freedom,” 112-115. In his conclusion Goris indicates that he has only covered Aquinas’ “conceptual and linguistic framework within which the theologian has to think and speak,” but that a more concrete and detailed analysis requires a closer look at his anthropology, which we have done, and his theology of sin and grace, which I introduced in my first chapter and build on in this one.

\footnote{319} My point here is well argued by, and some of my language directly borrowed from, Goris, “Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Human Freedom,” 101; 112-115.

\footnote{320} “As each cause operates at a different level, the divine one on the transcendental level of being itself, and the created one on the level of its categorical determinations, there is no competition between the two, nor is there mutual exclusion.” Ibid., 114-115.

\footnote{321} God fills every place, but not like a body that “excludes the co-presence of another body,” but in a way that actually makes the presence of other things possible. \textit{ST I.8.2 resp.}
substantive change around the time he read Augustine’s anti-Pelagian works, so it is important to realize Aquinas’ way of dealing with the difficulties involved in the question over freedom and divine causality also developed.\textsuperscript{322} As Goris notes, the mature Aquinas was no longer satisfied with a basic adaptation of Aristotle’s categories. First, Aristotle’s notion of first cause used analogies from nature like the sun, but God’s causal activity is not owing to the necessity of nature, but results from the intentionally of the divine will, which is always free. Secondly,

\begin{quote}
[T]he efficacy of his causal activity exceeds that of any created cause: it not only causes the effect to be, but also causes the mode in which the effect exists, namely, contingently or necessarily. It does not destroy creaturely causality, but sustains it. God causes necessary created causes to bring forth necessary effects and contingent causes to produce contingent effects. Elsewhere, Aquinas states that God’s will is beyond the order of contingency and necessity, for it is the very cause of being as such and, hence, of the modal order. We may use different models, derived from our created reality, to illustrate the relation between divine and created causation: the Aristotelian models of first and secondary causes, remote and proximate causes, and principal and instrumental causes, or the Platonic idea of participation. But none of them captures adequately or express univocally the transcendence of the divine cause.\textsuperscript{323}
\end{quote}

God’s mode of causality, as Goris argues, is ultimately tied up in his mode of atermorality and simplicity in such a way that, in the end, eludes precise grasp. The mystery does not, however, exclude the intelligible light Aquinas needs to offer a coherent account of how the divine causality brings about the consequent will of God without doing violence to created human freedom.

Aquinas is exceptionally perspicuous in his systematically persistent exclusion of any role for human merit in the justification of the ungodly, the incapability of the

\textsuperscript{322} Goris traces the development concisely. Ibid., 112-115.

\textsuperscript{323} Ibid., 114.
ungodly to attain faith on their own, the nature of faith as altogether gift, the infallible and efficacious execution of grace in justification, and the passivity of the human will as regards the cause or execution of the movement of the will in justification that make all requirements on the part of the justified free gifts. Rather than demonstrate each point in succession, it will be more advantageous to aim at noting some key relationships between divine and human will and choice. Grasping this dynamic in Aquinas will lay the proper plot points for connecting the right dots which establish the following as true in Aquinas’ theology: when grace moves the will in the execution of divine providence to the justice of justification, it moves the will infallibly in such a way that the will desires God as last end of necessity, yet without violating the free will in such a way that the will adheres to or chooses anything against its inclination and without causing absolute necessity in human willing. Most fundamental to understanding Aquinas’ compatibilism between free will and infallible grace is a basic Thomistic taxonomy of types of necessity and types of divine and human willing. Once these distinctions are clear Aquinas’ view will be more easily demonstrated, for as Aquinas says: “the word necessity is employed in many ways.”

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324 I have avoided the use of the word “determinism” here because this is not Aquinas’ proper term when treating the subject matter, even though that is often the philosophical term for discussing various types of necessity, whether these types are properly distinguished or conflated. Those who believe Aquinas’ views of free will are compatible with determinism are known as “compatibilists” and those who don’t as “incompatibilists.” For a breakdown of interpreters on both sides see Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, et. al. *Aquinas’ Ethics: Metaphysical Foundations, Moral Theory, and Theological Context* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009) 123-124. The problem with these categories is their ambiguity: what type(s) of free will and what type(s) of necessity are compatible in Aquinas? Sticking to the terms Aquinas himself uses promises a better chance of clarity to these questions.

325 *ST I.82.1 resp.* Divine causality and free will in Aquinas have led to a multiplicity of Thomistic positions among theologians. See, for example, Mark K. Spencer’s treatment, in which he attempts to propose a “personalist thesis” in order to capture what he considers to be “central features” of most of the views, but qualifies his argument to side-step the question of whether his thesis is a faithful interpretation of Aquinas. Mark K. Spencer, “Divine Causality and Created Freedom: A Thomistic Personalist View,”
The conditions of *absolute* necessity require for God himself to have willed something of necessity such that he could not have willed otherwise. Since God contains all goodness in himself, only his own divine goodness is willed of absolute necessity, for the divine goodness is God’s own proper object.\textsuperscript{326} Aquinas’ doctrine of aseity rules out all of creation from absolute necessity, since God already possesses fully his own divine goodness and could have willed not to create anything in the first place.\textsuperscript{327} Hence, nothing that happens in time with regard to created things is of absolute necessity.\textsuperscript{328} The types of necessities that fall outside of absolute necessity are necessary on the condition (*suppositio*) that God has willed them to take place by his consequent will. The *simple* or *consequent* will of God regards that which is willed when all particular circumstances or contingencies are taken into account.\textsuperscript{329} Since God’s will always follows upon his

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\textit{Nova et Vetera}: forthcoming. Unsurprisingly, interpretations of Aquinas by historians (not to mention theologians) are often driven by political and philosophical (not to mention theological) agendas that distort Aquinas’ meaning. For a well argued historical example of this, see John Inglis, “Freiheit, Liberte, or Free choice: the Recovery of Aquinas after 1848 as Interpretation or Misinterpretation?” in Aquinas as Authority, eds. Paul Van Geest, Harm Goris, Carlo Leget (Stichting Thomasfonds, Utrecht: Peeters Leuven, 2002), 109-122.

\textsuperscript{326} \textit{ST} I.19.3.resp.

\textsuperscript{327} “Hence, since the goodness of God is perfect, and can exist without other things inasmuch as no perfection can accrue to Him from them, it follows that His willing things apart from Himself is not absolutely necessary. Yet it can be necessary by supposition, for supposing that He wills a thing, then He is unable not to will it, as His will cannot change.” \textit{ST} I.19.3.resp.

\textsuperscript{328} It is important for interpreting Aquinas to note that he will often deny that some act takes place “of necessity” (without qualification) but in his explanation still allow for a certain type of necessity in the act, indicating a shorthand use of “necessity" for absolute necessity where it appears without qualification. For example, he states that predestination “does not impose any necessity, so that, namely, its effect should take place from necessity,” but when responding to objections grants to the same the necessity of supposition on account of the immutability of the divine will. \textit{ST} I.23.6.resp; \textit{ST} I.23.ad.3.

\textsuperscript{329} \textit{ST} I.19.6.ad.1. It is “simple” because God considers things as they are in themselves under all their appropriate qualifications; it is “consequent” because it follows upon God’s omniscience whereby he takes all things into account. Here Aquinas is drawing on a well established tradition in Medieval Christian theology between “necessitas consequentis (a necessity which arises through the inherent nature of things) and necessitas consequentiae (a necessity which arises through the establishment of a contingent order of existence)” or between “absolute necessity and self-imposed conditional necessity” which, as McGrath
omniscience, anything else is referred to as God’s will only in a qualified manner, as that which God would will hypothetically if known circumstances differed. This Aquinas terms God’s antecedent will after Damascene, who used the category to explain the following propositions: (1) God’s will always comes to pass; (2) God wills salvation for all; (3) Not all are saved:

… In the same way God antecedently wills all men to be saved, but consequently wills some to be damned, as His justice exacts. Nor do we will simply, what we will antecedently, but rather we will it in a qualified manner; for the will is directed to things as they are in themselves, and in themselves they exist under particular qualifications. Hence we will a thing simply inasmuch as we will it when all particular circumstances are considered; and this is what is meant by willing consequently. Thus it may be said that a just judge wills simply the hanging of a murderer, but in a qualified manner he would will him to live, to wit, inasmuch as he is a man. Such a qualified will may be called a willingness rather than an absolute will. Thus it is clear that whatever God simply wills takes place; although what He wills antecedently may not take place.  

Since providence regards God’s direction of created things to some end along with the necessary means to that chosen end, the end chosen implies God’s willing of the end. Predestination is God’s providential will for certain persons to the end of eternal life; justification is a necessary means to the end of eternal life given the supposition that the one predestined has freely willed and chosen mortal sin and has a disordered will. Reprobation concerns God’s providential will for the rest of humanity under that same supposition of freely willed and chosen sin to be eternally damned as just punishment; dying in mortal sin is a necessary means to this end.  

Among other reasons, since God points out, “is of vital importance to a correct understanding of the medieval discussion of justification.” McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 151.

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330 *ST* I.19.6.ad.1. Italics added. Cf. also “God wills all men to be saved by His antecedent will, which is to will not simply but relatively; and not by His consequent will, which his to will simply.” *ST* I.23.4.ad.3. We must remember also that God’s atemporal love has temporal effects in time, and at any given time, God loves more whatever things are better at that time, for his love is the cause of all goodness whatsoever in time. *ST* I.20.4.ad.5.

331 *ST* I.23.3.
can choose for any person in mortal sin to be justified and glorified by grace or else abandoned and damnned by justice, his willing of either end for any such creature is not absolutely necessary but implies free choice in the divine will.\textsuperscript{332} Although considering the good in the reprobate’s end of just damnation, the reprobate might be considered “chosen” for this end, Aquinas avoids the use of this type of language and only uses language fitting to the end of eternal life, for in respect to this end some are chosen and some are passed over or “rejected.”\textsuperscript{333} The reprobated are not predestined to eternal damnation in Aquinas for the sufficient reason that predestination only regards one end—that of eternal life. Given Aquinas’ use of language, such an affirmation would be a contradiction of terms.

This should not lead us to conclude, however, that God does not will by his eternal providence the damnation of the reprobate, for this he explicitly defends against objections.\textsuperscript{334} God wills the reprobation of some and the predestination of others for the same reason he wills multiformity (i.e. diversity in grades of being) in the universe: for the sake of a fuller representation of his own goodness. While this might at first seem counter-intuitive, Aquinas argues that since God is one and simple, but creatures by nature are composite, this makes necessary limited refractions of the divine goodness perceivable under a diversity of aspects. These are incomplete revelations on account of

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\item \textsuperscript{332} \textit{ST I.23.4.\textit{resp.}} Aquinas here speaks of God’s willing the good of salvation for “some in preference to others.”
\item \textsuperscript{333} “It is the custom to inscribe, not those who are rejected, but those who are chosen. Whence there is no book of death corresponding to reprobation; as the book of life to predestination.” \textit{ST 24.1.ad.3.}
\item \textsuperscript{334} \textit{ST I.23.3.} To be sure, for Aquinas God does not “actively” will the sin that makes God’s punishment just for those who freely will to sin. God rather “permits” free creatures to sin, and so sin falls under God’s passive will.
\end{itemize}
a defect in the mode of the knower of what is in reality simple and one.

God wills to manifest His goodness in men; in respect to those He predestines, by means of His mercy, as sparing them; and in respect of others, whom he reprobates, by means of His justice, in punishing them. This is the reason why God elects some and rejects others.335

But this does not account for why God chooses this person rather than that person to be chosen for grace, or this person rather than that person to be chosen for just punishment. Now since nothing of providence or its execution, including predestination, reprobation, justification, or moral sin, falls under absolute necessity either in God or in rational creatures, and since God’s providential will is always his consequential will, every end willed providentially (including predestination and reprobation) is not only freely willed (ruling out absolute necessity), but is willed together with its mode of efficacy, which means divine causality can be mediated through circumstances and contingencies.336 Further, this would include the supposition of mortal sin freely chosen by those reprobated, the guilt of which renders the person deserving of just punishment. Whereas predestination brings about its effect entirely through undeserved grace (thereby reflecting the divine mercy), reprobation brings about its effect through the execution of deserved punishment. A further difference is this: in the grace of justification predestination takes effect by turning the human will, whereas reprobation takes its effect in leaving the human will turned to whatever finite object(s) it already desires and freely chooses in preference to the divine goodness. God also prevents any impediments to salvation for the predestined, but does not restrain the reprobate from wickedness.337

335 ST I.23.5.ad.3. It is more than coincidence that this fuller expansion on his respondeo in the third article be dealt with under the question concerning whether humans merit predestination.


337 ST I.22.2.ad.4.
Whereas effectual grace raises concerns about the relationship between divine and human freedom, Aquinas’ understanding of reprobation escapes the peculiarities of that problem on account of the differences in the mode willed in providence and its execution in the divine governance.

Reprobation differs in its causality from predestination. This latter is the cause both of what is expected in the future life by the predestined—namely, glory—and of what is received in this life—namely grace. Reprobation, however, is not the cause of what is in the present—namely sin; but it is the cause of abandonment by God. It is the cause, however, of what is assigned in the future—namely, eternal punishment. But guilt proceeds from the free-will of the person who is reprobated and deserted by grace. In this way the word of the prophet is true—namely, Destruction is thy own, O Israel.  

Given the circumstances willed by God as means to achieving the multiformity of divine representation—a sin-infected humanity all deserving of punishment by default on account of their freely chosen sin (which excludes persons incapable of rational choice)—“anyone reprobated by God cannot acquire grace” by a conditional necessity that encompasses free will, just as the predestined acquire grace necessarily on the condition that God wills their conversion to be effected through their free will. A less emphasized point, however, is that the same supposition that makes the damnation of the reprobate just applies equally to those predestined. Prior to receiving effectual grace, the predestined are supposed guilty in the same way as the reprobate. Debt of punishment is owed and deserved by both sections of humanity and Christ has made superabundant satisfaction for both sections of humanity for this very debt. But “Christ’s Passion

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338 ST I.23.3.ad.2.

339 ST I.23.3.ad.3. “[A]s predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory; so also reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin, and to impose the punishment of damnation on account of that sin. ST I.23.3.resp.

340 ST III.49.3.resp.
works its effect in them to whom it is applied, through faith and charity and the sacraments of faith."

Herein lies the reason for assigning some good on the part of the creature (such as a preparation for, meriting of, or cooperation with, grace) as the reason for God’s preference of some for eternal life and not others, for there seems to be no other way to account for God’s otherwise apparently arbitrary decision. In spite of the established pedigree of this position in patristic sources (and especially in Eastern Orthodoxy), Aquinas—in no uncertain terms—denies that God’s choosing in predestination is based on anything that flows from the only part of human nature capable of any personal responsibility, merit or demerit: namely, the free will.

For Aquinas, the issue is summarized this way: “Whether, as regards the effect, predestination has any cause; or what comes to the same thing, whether God pre-ordained that He would give the effect of predestination to anyone on account of any merits.”

Although within the chain of secondary causality, one created effect can have a created cause, such as when the human will is caused to move away from sin on account of its moving toward God, or good works being the effect of interior virtue, nevertheless because predestination encompasses the full scope of created causes leading to eternal salvation.  

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341 ST III.49.ad.1.

342 John Chrysostom is representative of the Eastern Tradition of Pauline interpretation that views the initial act of faith (man’s part) as being undetermined by grace (God’s part) on the grounds that if grace is the “all-sufficient cause” then “there is nothing to prevent the automatic salvation of all” since God desires most earnestly (with “the first will”) that all be saved. Wiles, The Divine Apostle, 108. Cf. Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, §1.1.5. This is why predestination in Eastern Pauline interpretation is based on God’s foreknowledge of those who will allow grace to save them by an act of free will. Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, §9.22-24. “But in saying, which He had afore prepared unto glory, he does not mean that all is God’s doing. Since if this were so, there were nothing to hinder all men from being saved. But he is setting forth again His foreknowledge, and doing away with the difference between the Jews and the Gentiles.” Cf. Ibid., §16.9.10. Still the “main part” [tov plevon] of justification issues from grace. Wiles, The Divine Apostle, 96.

343 ST I.23.5.resp.
life for the one predestined, including the application of the effects of Christ’s passion, created causes cannot be assigned as the reason for the first cause of God’s predestination. All such causal agency are the \textit{effect} of God’s providential predestination rather than its cause or reason. Free will is the key example:

[T]he Pelagians taught that the beginning of doing well came from us; and the consummation from God: so that it came about that the effect of predestination was granted to one, and not to another, because the one made a beginning by preparing, whereas the other did not. But against this we have the saying of the Apostle (2 Cor. Iii, 5), \textit{that we are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves}. Now no principle of action can be imagined previous to the act of thinking. Wherefore it cannot be said anything begun in us can be the reason of the effect of predestination. … [O]thers said that merits following the effect of predestination are the reason of predestination; giving us to understand that God gives grace to a person, and pre-ordains that He will give it, because He knows beforehand that He will make good use of that grace … But these seem to have drawn a distinction between that which flows from grace, and that which flows from free will, as if the same thing cannot come from both. It is, however, manifest that what is of grace is the effect of predestination; and this cannot be considered as the reason of predestination, since it is contained in the notion of predestination. Therefore, if anything else in us be the reason of predestination, it will be outside the effect of predestination. Now there is no distinction between what flows from the free will, and what is of predestination; as there is no distinction between what flows from a secondary cause and from a first cause. For the providence of God produces effects through the operation of secondary causes, as was shown above (Q. 22, A. 3). Wherefore, that which flows from free-will is also of predestination. … whatsoever is in man disposing him towards salvation, is all included under the effect of predestination; even the preparation for grace. For neither does this happen otherwise than by divine help, according to the prophet Jeremias (Lam. V. 21): \textit{Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted}.\footnote{344 \textit{ST} I.23.5.\textit{resp.}}

Here we see Aquinas excluding any use of the free will disposing one towards salvation that is either (1) the cause of God’s predestination of the predestined or (2) falls outside the scope of the causality of grace given as a means or divine “help” to the end of eternal life.\footnote{345 \textit{ST} I.24.2.\textit{resp.} This quotation is taken from Aquinas’ discussion of the book of life, and whether those names written therein are the names of only those predestined to glory. In the article just prior to this quotation, Aquinas concludes that “predestination and the book of life are different aspects of the same thing.” \textit{ST} I.25.1.\textit{ad}.4.}

Concerning the second point, this would include the grace of justification for the predestined, which is a necessary divine help given to those predestined of precisely the
kind Aquinas has in mind in this passage (i.e. conversion). This raises the question of whether the kind of grace given is not only necessary for the predestined to be properly disposed and converted, but entirely sufficient for predestination’s effect in the predestined, for then it would seem for those ordained to such an end by the immutable and eternal divine will, nothing in the order of proximate or secondary causes—including the free will of that person—could ever ultimately prevent it. Upon the supposition that God will this end for a person ab aeterno, it would come to pass necessarily ex tempore.\textsuperscript{346} Now we have already seen that God’s antecedent will does not necessarily always come to pass, so here we must consider whether God’s consequent will comes to pass by necessity \textit{in such a way that} not even the free will can resist its power.

In Aquinas’ account of the divine will concerning creation, “the will of God must needs always be fulfilled,” and “all things are subject to divine providence, not only in general, but even in their own individual selves” in such a way that “the effect follows upon the cause, not only as to the thing done, but also as to its manner of being done or of being” which includes the means to ordained ends.\textsuperscript{347} For this reason, without exception: “nothing resists the divine will.”\textsuperscript{348} Aquinas refers shorthand to this aspect of the irresistibility of the divine will with the use of such terms as “efficacious” and

\textsuperscript{346} This does not necessarily imply that God’s will is temporally prior. Although the language of God’s predestination uses temporal language, with God’s election taking place before the beginning of time, Aquinas’ view of God’s atermporality requires that God’s will not be seen as temporal.

\textsuperscript{347} First quotation from \textit{ST} I.19.6.resp; second from \textit{ST} I.22.2.resp.; third from \textit{ST} I.19.8.resp. “Since the divine will is perfectly efficacious, it follows not only that things are done, which God wills to be done, but also that they are done in the way that he wills.” \textit{ST} I.19.8.resp.

\textsuperscript{348} \textit{ST} I.19.8.ad.2.
“infallible.”

In short: “God’s [consequent] will is utterly efficacious.” Once God decides by his simple or consequent will that He will ordain created persons to a particular end, each created person will most certainly and freely reach both the end and the necessary means to that end. For Aquinas no reason can be given for why God predestines this person and reprobates that person:

...[T]he reason of predestination must be sought for in the same way as the reason of the will of God. Now it was shown above (Q. 19, A. 5), that we cannot assign any cause of the divine will on the part of the act of willing; but a reason can be found on the part of the things willed; inasmuch as God wills one thing on account of something else. Wherefore nobody has been so insane as to say that merit is the cause of the divine predestination as regards the act of the predestinator.

Yet why He chooses some for glory, and reprobates others, has no reason, except the divine will. Whence Augustine says (Tract. Xxvi. In Joan.): Why He draws one, and another He draws not, seek not to judge, if thou dost not wish to err.

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349 “It is better therefore to say that this happens on account of the efficacy of the divine will. For when a cause is efficacious to act, the effect follows upon the cause, not only as to the thing done, but also as to its manner of being done or of being.” ST I.19.8. resp. “Therefore whatsoever divine providence ordains to happen infallibly and of necessity happens infallibly and of necessity.” ST I.22.4. ad.1. “Predestination most certainly and infallibly takes effect.” ST I.23.6. resp. “God’s intention cannot fail. ... Hence if God intends, while moving, that the one whose heart He moves should attain to grace, he will infallibly attain to it.” ST I-II.112.3. resp. I have been careful here not to equate Aquinas’ use of “effectual,” “infallible,” and “resist” with uses in the Reformation tradition for practical rather than theoretical purposes; it should be indisputable, however, that Reformation theology employed much of Aquinas’ language when defending the five points of Calvinism, whether or not they carried over the philosophically sophisticated complexities within which they were employed by Aquinas.


351 In human acts the means are often willed in a separate act distinct from the willing of the end, but in God he wills both the end and means in the same act. For this reason He wills simply the ordering of the means on account of the end, but without the end and the means being willed in two separate acts as though one were the cause of the other. God’s will has neither a cause nor can it be its own cause. ST I.19.5. resp. cf. Jonathan Edwards borrowed this notion in his own theology of divine willing. See Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, The Theology of Jonathan Edwards (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6-7.

352 ST I.23.5. resp.

353 ST I.23.5. ad.3. Nowhere is Aquinas’ view closer to that of John Calvin’s double predestination than in this answer he gives for the divine ratio of predestination and reprobation, although as I argue, Aquinas does not hold the reprobate are “predestined” to damnation but only infallibly preordained thereto.
The execution of order in the divine providence in justification “is in a passive way in the predestined, but actively in God,” because any movement of the human will disposing it towards salvation is motus mobilis [movement of the moved], i.e. caused infallibly by the operation of grace as a means to God’s preordained end.\textsuperscript{354} Whereas in reprobation’s execution in time the sinner acts apart from God’s intervening gift of grace, leaving the will of the sinner to its own course (though never outside of the omnicausality), in justification God changes this course by infallibly directing the human soul (i.e. the intellective will) to a supernatural end through the gift of divine illumination. For justification, divine illumination would appear sufficient to cause this movement to take place necessarily precisely because the Divine Vision excludes any other possibility given the supreme fittingness of the divine to the human nature, by which I mean: (1) the will’s inability to avoid adhering to its first principle whereby it always desires the greater good perceived and (2) the direct effect of the Divine Vision on the intellect’s perception, which in Aquinas is a \textit{connatural union with or instinctive experiential knowledge of} the Divine essence that “melts in the affection of love.”\textsuperscript{355}

This fittingness is perhaps what Aquinas chiefly has in mind when he affirms the

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\textsuperscript{354} \textit{ST} I.23.2.\textit{resp}.  This qualifies all such movements as “gift” by the criterion used in popular Reformed Protestant theology: namely, that justification and salvation must be wholly gift—including any movement of the will. Justifying grace as \textit{gift} once given for those predestined cannot leave the human will ambiguous concerning whether to believe or not, for this would leave a major part of salvation (if not salvation itself) in some way in the power of the human will that chooses to accept or reject grace. Justification and salvation require a grace that surpasses nature’s power. But further still, the use of one’s free will apart from \textit{effectual} grace can never achieve the gift of justification because it is the will’s primary act that is necessarily effected by operative grace in justification. This means all movements of free will—including those that merit eternal life—are wholly “gift” even under Reformed criterion, even when the possession gift or action caused by the gift is truly attributed to the human person (faith, repentance, good works, etc.).

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Dominican maxim: *anima naturaliter est gratiae capax*: “the soul is naturally capable of grace,” by which maxim he denies that justification is *in all senses* miraculous.  

With respect to God’s will in Providence and Predestination, it should be clear that Aquinas’ mature Augustinian formulations intended to rule out any *ratio iustificationis ex parte creaturae* [reason of justification in the part of the creature] for any *ratio* that could be given on God’s part is already included in the effect of the divine preordination and so cannot be its cause. Even secondary causes (or proximate causes) such as prayer are explicitly excluded from the divine *ratio* and given a place only in the divine governance wherein secondary causes are God’s instrument for executing his will.  

There are at least six reasons Aquinas is comfortable affirming the irresistibility of the divine will in general or of predestinating grace in particular: (1) it is fitting with his metaphysics of divine transcendence in which created causality is never in competition with the divine causality, (2) divine grace is not an “equipoise with human freedom” because free will is a causality of the created or secondary order, (3) nothing of providence or its execution, including predestination, reprobation, mortal sin or

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356 *ST* I-II.113.10.*sed*. Here Aquinas expands on and follows Augustine’s maxim in the *sed contra*: “to be capable of having faith and to be capable of having charity belongs to man’s nature; but to have faith and charity belongs to the grace of the faithful.” Stated more succinctly by Aquinas: “the soul is naturally capable of grace.” *ST* I-II.113.10.*resp.*

357 McGrath points out that this exclusion is the characteristic standard by which a theologian is typically judged to be Augustinian per se. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 203. More precision is called for, however, since (as he argues) such an exclusion can be found in theologians such as Duns Scotus for entirely non-Augustinian reasons, or Bradwardine’s rejection of any such *ratio* on purely Aristotelian grounds. Ibid.

358 Concerning the divine preordination “in no possible way can predestination be furthered by the prayers of the saints. For it is not due to their prayers that anyone is predestined by God.” *ST* I.23.8.*resp.* Aquinas instead argues that prayers are rather God’s instruments in effecting predestination with the use of “intermediary causes.” *ST* I.23.8.*ad.2.*

justification, falls under *absolute* necessity either in God or in rational creatures.\(^\text{360}\) (4) so long as what takes place is not of absolute necessity it could have taken place otherwise, (5) the freedom of the human will remains always wholly intact even in the face of various types of necessities, (6) no injustice occurs in God’s preference for some to be predestined for undeserved grace and others to be justly damned. These last two points need to be considered more carefully before we reach our conclusion.

We have shown that for rational creatures all movements of the will are by nature caused by love—a movement toward an end desired inasmuch as it is not possessed, and delighted in inasmuch as it is possessed. Therefore, for God to move the will against its inclination it would have to move the will apart from love, the cause of all movements of the will. Hence this would not merely commit the violence of compulsion, but is logically impossible given Aquinas’ *modus loquendi theologicus* [use of theological language].\(^\text{361}\) We will recall also that the last end of the human will is happiness, and the will adheres to this last end by natural necessity (i.e. by human nature). The human will *cannot not* will happiness as last end. Natural necessity is always compatible with human

\(^\text{360}\) Furthermore, since God could have chosen to ordain all guilty persons to eternal punishment who deserved punishment eternally by his justice and could have chosen persons other than whom he chose to predestine, His choice to reprobate or predestine anyone adds an extra layer of gratuity on top of what is already implied in his divine aseity, by reason of which the conditions of absolute necessity can never be met with regard to anything historical or temporal whatsoever. This (and many more like contingencies) remove the divine will all the more away from absolute necessity.

\(^\text{361}\) “For an act to e violent it is not enough that its principle be extrinsic, but we must add without the concurrence of him that suffers violence. This does not happen when the will is moved by an exterior principle: for it is the will that wills, though moved by another. But this movement would be violent, if it were counter to the movement of the will: *which in the present case is impossible; since then the will would will and not will the same thing.*” *ST* I-II 9.4.ad.2. Italics added. The Eastern Orthodox opinion that God foreknows without “predetermining” everything as attributed to Damascene is, for example, interpreted critically by Aquinas to be concerned with (1) a kind of predetermining that imposes something against the human nature—that is, *against the inclination of the free will so as to involve compulsion*—and (2) a denial that God directly causes evil. Based on this critical interpretation of the opinion attributed to Damascene, Aquinas concludes that his version of predestination “is not excluded by him.” *ST* I.23.1.ad.1.
nature and free will, for humans do not choose their nature. Desiring and choosing, however, must be distinguished.

The human capacity of choice only applies when there are two or more options for the reason to consider. Since nature determines the first discriminating criterion for this process of preference (i.e. natural desire for happiness as last end), humans by nature always aim in their choosing for the good perceived as a better means to the last end of happiness than the alternative it thereby passes over. Here, as we have seen, the will does not necessarily always choose the better good, however, because it is always capable of moving the intellect to fixate on the defects of a greater good and the good aspects of a lesser good: yet another reason why a given choice is never absolutely necessary. The intellect could be moved by the will to neglect due consideration of one’s best options. On the other hand, if the intellect perceives a good as necessary to the last end, the will adheres to it by a teleological necessity Aquinas calls “necessity of end or utility.”362 The will is dependent upon the intellect’s apprehension of its object, so the will does not assent of necessity to a necessary means unless or until it perceives a necessary connection between that means and the last end.

But there are some things which have a necessary connection with happiness, by means of which things man adheres to God, in Whom alone true happiness consists. Nevertheless, until through the certitude of the Divine Vision the necessity of such connection be shown, the will does not adhere to God of necessity, nor to those things which are of God. But the will of the man who sees God in His essence of

362 “We are masters of our own actions by reason of our being able to chose this or that. But choice regards not the end, but the means to the end, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. III. 9). Wherefore the desire of the ultimate end does not regard those actions of which we are masters.” ST I.82.1.ad.3. Aquinas compares this with the principles of reason, which adhere of necessity to its first principles and anything perceived to have a necessary connection to those first principles. The will likewise adheres to the last end as a first principle and of necessity desires whatever it perceives as necessary to that last end. ST I.82.2.resp.
necessity adheres to God, just as now we desire of necessity to be happy.\textsuperscript{363} This helps explain why justifying faith is formed by charity and how God, in the execution of his providence for those predestined to be justified, can execute his providence infallibly without violence against the human will and hold in place the logical priority of the intellect over the will in justification, which priority amounts to the structural priority of faith over charity in the infusion of grace.\textsuperscript{364} Grace moves the will to desire God as last end (charity) by illuminating the intellect to perceive God in “the Divine Vision” as last end (faith). Hence the infusion of faith and charity are necessarily infused together on account of human nature’s irreducible complexity, and justification is by faith rather than by charity on account of the logical priority of the intellect over the will in human nature. In substance, however, justification consists more in charity because the end thereof more properly concerns the good, which is most properly the object of the will. The movement of the intellect to faith depends on love, for love is the cause of virtually all movements in a rational creature, as we have demonstrated. Justification is primarily and formally by faith on account of the will’s dependency on the intellect’s perception of the desired object, but consists in charity more so than in faith on

\textsuperscript{363} ST I.82.2.resp. Italics added. For an overview of types of illumination in Aquinas that specify different causal mechanisms, see Matthew Cuddeback, “Thomas Aquinas on Divine Illumination,” Nova et Vertera 7, no. 3 (2009): 579-602. Aquinas’ explanation of the Divine Vision here is partly why the quiescent power of the will central to Eleonore Stump’s interpretation is a questionable interpretive move. Eleonore Stump, Aquinas (New York, New York: Routledge, 2003), 389-404. Stump’s interpretation only takes into account a certain power reserved for the will that does not apply in all cases—most relevantly it does not apply in the operation of infallible justifying grace which, as we have seen, Aquinas credits for any and all preparation of the will for receiving such grace—and takes pains to argue that nothing prevents this preparation from being infallibly caused instantaneously when justifying grace is infused. Failing to reject grace can be distinguished from accepting it, but the ceasing of rejection is part of what is removed by grace, not the condition upon which God infuses grace.

\textsuperscript{364} We can also see herein how Aquinas incorporates the strand illumination theology in the famous “three ways” of Dionysius and Bonaventure: purification, illumination and perfection of the soul. Aquinas prioritizes illumination by reason of human anthropology. McGrath, Iustitia Dei, 67.
account of the object desired, which is the good. In the deepest sense, because the intellect and will are irreducible in substance and virtually comprise the essence of the human soul, the conversion of the soul in justification is the permutation of one human faculty—the intellective will. So long as a Divine Vision prevails in the perception of the intellect, one cannot not habitually will God as last end.\(^{365}\)

On the one hand, humans are incapable of attaining the Divine Vision by nature and mortal sin cannot be overcome by the will without this very gift. The “incapability” of the reprobate to obtain grace is another necessity of supposition rather than an absolute necessity, and does not contradict the will’s ability to choose whatever the intellect perceives as the preferable good.\(^{366}\) On the other hand, the infusion of justifying grace causes a faith corresponding to the object seen in the Divine Vision. The will is moved necessarily to love of God as last end by an immediate illumination of God causing the intellect to instinctively perceive a necessary connection between God and happiness; the end of human happiness is everyone’s by nature, but for the one who has seen the Divine Vision, the end of human happiness is no longer distinct from God as last end. What could be perceived by the intellect as two ends prior the Divine Vision (God and happiness) are infallibly yoked as the effect of the Divine Vision unless or until the intellect no longer sees this necessary connection. This is why the beatific vision features prominently in Aquinas’ understanding of the spiritual life and must be sustained in the predestined.


\(^{366}\) *ST* 23.3.\(\text{ad.3.}\)
We have seen many times how Aquinas denies any role for human merit in the justification of the ungodly or in the election of God whereby he chooses to give grace sufficient for achieving the end of eternal life. This does not exclude the meriting of eternal life as a secondary cause but encompasses it as its effect in the providence of God (the divine government). “Thus we might say that God preordained to give glory on account of merit, and that He preordained to give grace to merit glory.”

Merit (or reward) is then a contingency that grace infallibly effects for the elect according to consequent and providential will in God.

Failing to grasp the secondary role of all created causation within the economy of salvation can easily lead to other errors. Without a proper distinction between Providence and governance on the one hand or justification and glorification (eternal life) on the other, Aquinas’ understanding of salvation as a whole or justification in particular are often mistaken by Reformed suspicions for being based on merit. These twin errors are sometimes hard to disentangle for Protestants attempting to evaluate his views on their own terms: by defining differently key terms of soteriology and short-circuiting the flow of genuine dialogue by failing to compare their own linguistic-conceptual framework with that of Aquinas, drawing conclusions about his views based on imposed definitions. Further, whatever secondary role God has graciously allowed the merit of

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367 ST I.23.5.resp.

368 Exemplary of this type of conflation are evangelical Protestants constructing theological or historiographical ἀπολογία for the Reformed tradition writing theological or historical overviews in broad strokes. As a recent example of this, see Gregg R. Allison, Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 2011), 504-509. Allison shifts focus from Aquinas’ notion of initial infusion in justification to the justified person’s subsequent cooperation with grace in general whereby the justified do good deeds and avoid bad ones (the effect of justifying grace in Aquinas), then interprets the latter as Aquinas’ version of the well known Medieval scholastic Semi-Pelagian maxim si homo facit quod in se est, Deus dat ei gratiam. This seamless transition away from
the already justified to play in the divine salvific economy, it most certainly has no place in the divine *ratio* for justifying the ungodly on Aquinas’ account. Justification, then, is caused by unmerited, operative and infallible grace; for those predestined, it is a necessary means to the end of eternal life and can never be ultimately lost, but must be sustained by the gift of the divine illumination.

CONCLUSION

EVER RECEGING DIFFERENCES

One of the chief ends of ecumenical theology on justification has been to demonstrate how “differences on this doctrine have always been fewer than has been popularly perceived,” and shifts in ecumenical posture “have served to narrow the difference yet further.” On the other hand, as Charles Morerod has persuasively argued, the new phase of the ecumenical movement must be marked by unearthing “the most deeply rooted differences which separate the various Christian confessions,” which are often operating philosophically at an unconscious level. In closing, I have limited myself to only two important implications: First, no unambiguously forensic notions can be found in Aquinas’ doctrine of justification that are not in some way explained using non-forensic concepts. In the way noted above, this can be seen in terms of Aquinas’ philosophically systematic integration of the divine transcendence, specifically God’s atemporality, omniscience, and immutability. Second, in spite of Aquinas’ Augustinian definition of justification as “make righteous” instead of “declare righteous,” his theology of grace has all the required features of ecumenical promise for the Reformed stream of Protestantism. His doctrine of justification refines rather than refutes a truly Augustinian

369 Lane, Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment, 228.

outlook that captures the spirit of *sola gratia*. As Matthew Levering summarizes, “Aquinas develops Augustine’s position in a systematic manner.”371 I have avoided the question of whether Aquinas’ views on providence and free will are praiseworthy, need correction, or somehow depict a deficiency in God’s love.372 These questions can only be properly discussed by both Catholics and Reformed Protestants once Aquinas’ doctrine of justification can be appreciated as void of all human merit, and once his doctrine of salvation *as a whole*—including the meriting of eternal life—can be seen to conform to the criterion of *sola gratia* in the deepest sense. I have selectively overviewed key aspects of his doctrine of providence and free will to demonstrate that Aquinas’ doctrine of merit poses no ultimate threat to *sola gratia* once placed in the context of his doctrine of providence and predestination. Because Aquinas’ idea of “merit” simply means an undeserved “reward” based on God’s self-imposed obligation to the same is based on and takes place within a gracious divine economy rather than outside of it,373 the threat it


372 Levering frames the discussion in terms of how each view on predestination meets the criterion of two paradoxical affirmations that must be held in equal tension for a biblically balanced view: (1) there is “no deficiency, limitation, or stinginess” in God’s eternal love for all humans (2) some are predestined to union with God while others he permits to rebel permanently. Ibid., 11, 34. Since Augustine’s doctrine of predestination is “one-sided” with regard to the biblical teaching about God Levering points especially to Catherine of Siena’s view as “salutary.” She insisted “that God causes our goodness and permits some to rebel permanently, and that from eternity God loves each and every rational creature without any deficiency in God’s love.” Ibid., 8-9. Levering does not believe the tension between the two principles he proposes can be neatly worked out or “plumbed by us,” but must contain the character of mystery “until the eschaton.” Ibid., 11, 35, 178. Levering’s two affirmations approach fits with the Christian Tradition’s early approach to controversial dogma and resembles, for example, how the Church affirmed two paradoxical Christological affirmations (that Jesus was both God and man) even when no philosophy was forthcoming to resolve the logical tensions resulting from these affirmations. This is because what drives theology is not philosophy, but doxology. So Levering concludes “the doctrine of predestination, understood through a twofold affirmation, is best appropriated doxologically.” Ibid.

373 The very foundation of merit that makes anything worthy of being graciously treated as merit is not the act of the human, but the human act is meritorious only “inasmuch as it proceeds from the grace of the Holy Ghost moving us to life everlasting.” ST I-II 114.3.*resp.* That our goodness or good works are to
poses for the Reformed tradition (in my judgment) is reduced to a mere linguistic difference: the word itself immediately offends Protestants sensibilities to *sola gratia*.

For those familiar with Aquinas studies in this area and related ecumenical discussions, the task to figure out exactly what differences remain requires conceptual straining.\(^{374}\)

Although the concept of merit in Aquinas does not contradict the ultimate concerns of Reformation theology, that is not to say that related philosophical differences do not exist or should not be further explored. They, in fact, are already being explored by Catholics such as Charles Morerod and Protestants such as Charles Raith III. Morerod argues the most fundamental difference concerns the metaphysical assumptions shaping Protestant and Catholic views of the relationship between God and man, another area besides anthropology Protestants have not done well to develop systematically. Morerod is spot on in his observation that Reformation ideology started off on a philosophically naïve venture in systematically attempting to exclude philosophy from theology and limit itself more strictly to biblical language or a functional-linguistic orientation. Keenly cautious and concerned about the power of philosophy to distort, complicate, and limit be attributed to grace ironically makes them all the more meritorious, for the more we view them as not our own works, to the same degree we view them as God’s own works in us; God’s works are always worthy and deserving of the highest honors.

\(^{374}\) Lutheran scholar Michael Root, for example, laments the lack of attention given to Aquinas’ doctrine of merit and illustrates how the conceptual difference has been virtually reduced to a linguistic one between referring to the same concept as either “reward” or “merit,” so Root attempts to “get at underlying issues” with the use of subtle distinctions that build off the insights of Otto H. Pesch. Michael Root, “Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology After the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” in *Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Jim Fodor and Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 1-18. Quotation from page 11. Root and Pesch raise the kind of sensitive questions (beyond the scope of this research) that lead ecumenical discussions forward because they arise only once this has been fully appreciated. Cf. Otto H. Pesch, “Existential and Sapiential Theology: The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas,” in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, ed. Jared Wicks (Chicago, Illinois: Loyola University Press, 1970), 182-93.
the reception of divine revelation, this over-reaction has created a blind spot that has plagued Protestant theology.

This influence [of philosophy] is more or less universally recognized on the theoretical level, with respect to the interchange between theology and contemporary philosophy. But is the Reformation the only historical exception? In ecumenical dialogue, the Reformation is treated as though it arose out of a simple reading of self-evident Scripture passages within a severely disturbed ecclesiastical and political context. But what about its philosophical presuppositions? That these presuppositions may have been unconscious only increases their impact, … The theologian depends most on philosophy when he is least thinking of it, because then he is philosophizing unawares.\textsuperscript{375}

Charles Raith II has argued that a philosophical assumption about how human and divine causalities relate heavily influenced the Reformation tradition, which he calls a “competitive-causal schema” between divine and human causality and accounts for a significant portion misunderstandings about the notion of “merit” in Aquinas.\textsuperscript{376} Calvin’s main critique of what he understood to be Aquinas’ position turns out to be inaccurate representations of Thomism by French theologians involved the judgment that when it comes to merit and grace, we are playing a zero-sum game. In other words, if the human is responsible for anything in the work of salvation, merit or otherwise, then it must be understood in distinction from grace as relatively autonomous or not wholly caused by grace (i.e. not caused by effectual/infallible grace). The Thomistic notion of human cooperation in salvation was understood by Calvin to imply that the grounds for justification came in parts—one part God plays and therefore the human person does not play, and the other part is played by the human person and therefore not by God. But as

\textsuperscript{375} Morerod, Ecumenism and Philosophy, xxiii. For more on this, see especially part II of his book “The Philosophical Presuppositions of the Reformation,” 47-171.

we have seen (and as Raith II also demonstrates), Aquinas views all salvific human acts to be already principally caused by grace in such a way that one and the same act—*whether seen as charity or faith*—flows from both a human principle inasmuch as it is performed by the human *and* always more fundamentally from a principle of grace inasmuch as it is gift. Grace moves, the human person is therefore moved. Furthermore, the infusion of justice in the justification of the ungodly is not owing to the human causality but is God’s act alone. Faith and charity result in the human person as the necessary effect upon the supposition that justifying grace is infused by God in that same person. With respect to a person’s salvation considered whole, the divine predestination is God’s act alone, and all chains of human causality leading to eternal life result for the predestined as the necessary effect upon the supposition that the person is predestined.

The language of cooperation and merit in the mature Aquinas always refer to a certain *grace caused movement of the moved* in the interior of the person, not something that falls outside of effectual and infallible grace. The notion of “merit” (which Aquinas defines as “reward”) is never considered “owed” by God to any human person on account of any role played by that human person, but is owed solely on account of God’s gracious promise within this gracious economy. Likewise, any “worth” of any salvific act of the human person (such as faith or charity or the acts caused by them) is derived exclusively on account of the Spirit’s act within the human as the principle cause, whereas the same act *considered merely under the aspect of human causality* (which is

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377 Mystery is still embedded in the very notion of God moving anything since “God has no movement, and is therefore outside of time,” and “cannot acquire anything new, nor extend Himself to anything whereunto He was not extended previously” and yet somehow God causes effects in time and even extends himself in some way in grace in a “special mode” of his existence within created humans causing a “union” between the divine and created which is beyond human comprehension. *ST* I.8.3. *ad*4; *ST* I.10.2.*ad*.3.
always the effect of this grace) is deemed incapable of merit owed by God by measure of just reward. The insights of Morerod and Raith II converge here: the philosophical notion of participation lends more naturally to Aquinas’ distinction between two causes of merit, with the finite human participating in a transcendent dignity that belongs fully to God alone (it’s a finite participation), whereas Calvin’s lack of this philosophical presupposition (combined with his own philosophical conditioning) causes him to view all such human acts with respect to merit only in terms of the human cause, which accounts for why they evaluate the appropriateness of merit language differently in spite of their thoroughly grace-based view of salvation, predestination, and justification.

Some of the most conservative theologians in Reformed theology hold views substantively compatible with Aquinas’ use of the term “cooperation.”. If repentance is 1) “our work,” (2) resulting from God’s monergistic work in regeneration and (3) therefore a gift, but is also (4) inseparable from and (5) included in saving faith, then justification by faith must necessarily be a faith that works through repentance, and human cooperation in Aquinas should be seen as compatible with the principle of sola gratia.378 In other words, just as in Aquinas faith cannot logically exist without charity as they are two sides of one coin (the human soul’s irreducible complexity of intellect and will), so in today’s Reformed Protestant theologians faith and repentance are two sides of

378 The classic evangelical work on this issue in recent times is John McArthur’s The Gospel According to Jesus, revised & expanded edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1994) where McArthur argues that “repentance is at the core of saving faith,” 38. This influence of the so called “Lordship Salvation” controversy can be seen in the most popular Systematic Theology textbook for Reformed evangelicalism by Grudem, Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, 709-21. Grudem argues (as did McArthur) that saving faith includes repentance. John Piper spins this truth in another direction even more compatible with Aquinas by integrating its significance once human nature is viewed as having happiness and God as dual aspects of man’s chief end—a doctrine he calls “Christian Hedonism,” and claims to get from Jonathan Edwards, but is in substance found more thoroughly integrated in Thomas Aquinas. John Piper, Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 53-74.
the same coin. Repentance, however, cannot be logically conceived apart from charity for the following reason: (1) Repentance is a turning from sin, (2) sin is understood in terms of God’s commandments, and (3) God’s command of charity encompasses all other commandments. If the Catholic view is justification by faith working through love is taken in a Thomistic sense, today’s popular Reformed conceptions of justification by faith working through repentance amount to virtually the same affirmation—albeit without the philosophical sophistication of Aristotelian anthropology or Platonic notions of participation.

Furthermore, when discussing ultimate concerns, Protestants inevitably resort to pastoral justifications when presenting a case against the kind of confessional unity found formally in JDDJ or informally in ECT. Chief among these is a concern over the possible anxiety one experiences when absolutely certainty is unattainable in the quest for assurance of salvation. This level of potential anxiety is mistakenly presumed to be relieved only by a doctrine of sola fide. As Cristopher J. Malloy points out, however, so long as faith is a requirement in salvation—even if it is a mere passive human response to the absolute sovereign and infallible grace of God imputing an external righteousness to those who believe—“the difficulty of anxiety cannot be avoided, no matter the route.”

The only way to purge Christian theology of all possibility of anxiety is to remove any

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379 Galatians 5:14; Matthew 22:40. Cf. Jonathan Edwards who said “Hence love appears to be the sum of all the virtue and duty that God requires of us, and therefore most undoubtedly be the most essential thing—the sum of all the virtue that is essential and distinguishing in real Christianity. … That true love is an ingredient in true and living faith, and is what is most essential and distinguishing in it. … [T]rue Spiritual consent of the heart cannot be distinguished from the love of the heart. … [A] justifying faith, as a most distinguishing mark of Christianity, is comprehended in the great command of loving God.” Jonathan Edwards, Charity and Its Fruits, reprint 1852 (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 14-15.

threat of punishment or exclusion from eternal bliss by embracing unconditional universal salvation, otherwise distinguishing marks between the damned and the saved will always be possible to discern or misapprehend. It is no accident that Jonathan Edwards devised an entire theology of the so-called “distinguishing marks” of true conversion within the Reformed tradition.\(^{381}\) Grounding justification in an external righteousness imputed to the believer cannot remove the grounds of anxiety for those seeking consolation that such external righteousness has most assuredly been imputed to this or that person, as such validation requires an interpretation of one’s inner life and “fruits” or works. The type of pastoral concerns motivating Reformed theologians to defend a certain version of *sola fide* as the only way to ensure assurance of salvation are therefore tragically misplaced. To put it more in the colloquial vernacular of evangelical religious expression: accepting Jesus into your heart as savior, if not followed by a clear change of heart and life, indicates a false conversion. Obtaining reliable grounds for assuring oneself of salvation, then, will not depend merely on what Jesus has already done in his incarnation, but what the human person has done to apply the benefits of Jesus’ righteousness or salvific act to one’s own self.

The terms “monergism” and “synergism” are no longer helpful to sort out the differences among Protestants, much less the differences between the Protestant Tradition and other Christian Traditions. To label Aquinas’ version of merit and human cooperation “synergism,” thereby lumping it together with Eastern Orthodox views that reserve a parallel role to free will as distinct from the role of grace in some way (which

Raith calls the “competitive-causal schema”) rather than viewing it as a version of the same type of synergism found in the Protestant Reformed tradition (although again, the term synergism, like that of merit, is often vehemently rejected) illustrates the problematic of language’s superfluity of ambiguity. Ecumenical theology requires careful philosophical distinctions that remain open to further refinements. Furthermore, since Aquinas defines justification as the kind of grace that instantly changes a person and imparts faith and repentance simultaneously and infallibly as a “gift,” and conceptually separates God’s singular operation from its efficacious result in the operation of the human intellect and will, the substance of his views are virtually an earlier Catholic and Aristotelian version of the popular Reformed doctrine of conversion found in today’s Calvinistic evangelicals most opposed to Protestant-Catholic unity. This is an irony worth contemplating, demonstrating, and further teasing out.

In spite of the strong opposition demonstrated in the controversy over ECT, Aquinas’ overall conception of justification is compatible with the substance of

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Reformed theology even if not under the rubric of justification. The terms “merit,” “cooperation,” and “synergism” can be affirmed in many thinkers who hold strikingly different views because they all borrow the language of the Christian tradition, but either define it differently or explain the definition in different conceptual frameworks crafted for different reasons and embedded with certain emphases that follow from different concerns. Surely not all Protestant and Catholic differences are a matter merely of different linguistic packaging (as Morerod demonstrates), but a true perception of the extent to which substantive differences do actually exist requires first a full appreciation of the substantive compatibilities that underlie contradictions in theological language.\(^{383}\)

Theological language is not generally aimed at accuracy and philosophical nuance for many reasons; its true and ultimate end is doxological. No matter how sloppy or philosophically problematic the conceptuality of theology, its popularity will always rest on its practical use for theology’s chief end.\(^{384}\) In theology, philosophy is arguably most employed by a minority of erudite Christians with access to many resources who see in them a practical opportunity to appropriate them as a means for strengthening their own

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\(^{384}\) This is part of the reason why the very structure of theology is sometimes constituted in dichotomies where the goal is not to spell out different senses of contradictory statements, but to enshrine faith over philosophy/reason/logic and to preserve mystery/tension. The tradition of Luther’s dichotomies of Law/Gospel, letter/spirit, human/divine, works/faith are still seen by some Lutherans today as definitive of true Christianity. As Michael Root points out, this dogmatization of method hinders ecumenical progress and is also historically problematic for Lutherans (e.g. Gerhard Forde and Gerhard Ebeling). Michael Root, “The Implications of the Joint Declaration on Justification and Its Wider Impact for Lutheran Participation in the Ecumenical Movement,” in *Justification and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. William G. Rusch (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2003), 50-52.
faith or the faith of others. Philosophy helps relieve the tensions one’s faith language has caused in one’s own mind or else in the mind of others. Revelation is more fundamental in theology; philosophy helps organize, clarify, or defend revelation. How language is used in this endeavor is often a matter of practical strategy; two theologians aiming to clarify and defend the same doctrine will often choose different language for the task that results in linguistic contradictions. The less familiar one is with the faith tradition of another and the language that tradition has adopted (and in what ways the language is fluid within the tradition), the less likely they will be to use the language of the other’s faith tradition in this task or appreciate the reasons for difference.

Aquinas’ theology of grace falls inside the Catholic Tradition. Levering’s reflections illustrate how they continue to influence ongoing discussions in the development of Catholic theology. At the same time, Aquinas’ views on grace can be rejected by Catholics because there is no singular position adopted by the Catholic Church, only a generous boundary in which to find an acceptable path of understanding the mystery. Hence anyone adopting Augustinian or Thomistic views on grace without revisions would adopt an acceptable—if not popular or officially endorsed—path for reconciling the mystery of God’s eternal divine providence and free will. Finally, as Michael Root has aptly stated, “We must not demand more consensus with others than we have achieved within our own traditions.”

385 Simply put: if eliminating any hint of human merit (with or without the use of the word) as the cause of the justification of the ungodly is the aim of Reformation polemics (and something like this must be admitted even if accompanied by plenty of caveats), the Thomistic paradigm offers a more

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promising doctrine of justification than a long list of Protestant versions of *sola fide*—most notably in the spectrum of Arminian theologies.

For the Reformed tradition this means that if Protestant Arminianism is within the bounds of Protestant Christianity, then whatever Catholic views prioritize the free will over the divine sovereignty in the divine *ratio* for predestination and justification cannot be viewed as heresy merely on the grounds of this prioritization. Arminianism views God’s predestination as based on the divine foreknowledge of free will, thereby prioritizing it as pivotal or decisive in some way in the *ratio* of the divine predilection.

The Thomist view unmodified and the neo-Thomist appropriation of Matthew Levering that seeks to correct or balance Aquinas’ insights with a corresponding paradoxical affirmation *without prioritizing one over the other*, are actually more compatible to the Reformation understanding of *sola gratia* than Protestant Arminianism. Aquinas’ concept of merit properly understood is in principle less offensive to Reformed Protestant sensibilities than the Arminian concept of predestination that makes predestination a merited grace—without necessarily using the language of “merit”—based on some good in the creature *that cannot be attributed to effectual or infallible grace*. The solution for Reformed Protestantism is not to lump Arminian Protestants and all Catholics into the same anathema based on *sola gratia* principles, but to humbly acknowledge the difficulty of the subject matter, broaden the scope of acceptable paths of understanding, and join the ongoing discussions made possible once a true appreciation of the Thomist version of *sola gratia* is seen in Aquinas and the Catholic Thomist tradition. The alternative is to so narrow the scope of authentic gospel faith that confessional/denominational identity is melted into a golden calf—a shiny (and man-made) idol in a haughty remnant posture.
incompatible with reason, history, and true piety.

Fruitful ecumenical discussion between individuals requires for not just one person or tradition to seek the self-understanding of the other; true progress comes when both do likewise. When appropriating Aquinas, there is something perhaps more enlightening and persuasive than any specific argument which could be made about his compatibility with this or that Protestant confessional tradition: one must learn to delight in the deft brilliance of Aquinas’ God-intoxicated theological vision, which gave generously to the language of others and sought to affirm whatever senses his interlocutors’ use of terms could bear—not by the expounding of a doctrine of charity, but by its practice within the theological method itself. Aquinas wielded Aristotelian elasticity to critically evaluate and affirm linguistic contradictions by giving each their proper and due sense, which is part of why Aquinas’ theology has endured throughout the centuries against the odds of the initial reactions against it by the Catholic Church. In Aquinas, this elasticity is driven by faith working through charity and aimed at dogmatic reconciliation. Both his views on grace and his linguistic generosity are especially exemplary and worthy of imitation—especially for ecumenical endeavors. Because sola gratia is the true hinge for Reformation Protestantism and not sola fide, Aquinas’ views are not only acceptable, but refine the foundational principle of sola gratia in ways unparalleled in the Reformed tradition. What is more: Aquinas’ theological method itself is infused with generous measures of charity, and thereby has the potential—if appropriated responsibly by Protestants—to elevate the aim of theology from the polemical designs of traditional anathemas to the humble task of critical affirmation, ecumenical reconciliation, intellectual empathy, and other much more worthy aims that
bear the marks of that very charity that most exemplifies the highest ideals of Christian piety. Making less of disagreements between Catholics and Protestants does not necessarily entail what critics of the practice often fear: relativizing of all truth, abandoning all Protestant distinctives, apathy for doctrine, etc. On the contrary, it can help put differences in proper critical and systematic perspective, enabling the practitioner to more clearly discern the ultimate concerns of their own theological approach. In this way, by making more of the gospel, ecumenists gladly relativize the importance of all else.
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