

Theoria versus Praxis: A View Based on the Final End of  
Humanity According to Aquinas

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## Abstract

Which of praxis or theoria should be primary? Traditionally, theoria, the contemplative gaining of knowledge and love of God, came first. Liberation theologians have insisted instead that theology must be rooted in praxis in order to achieve social change that is an irruption of the Kingdom of God into history. To them, understanding of neighbor and of God follows from reflection on political and social action. This essay explores the question of which alternative is primary based on the mature theology of St Thomas Aquinas as found in the *Summa Theologica*. For Aquinas, the final end of humanity is happiness that is found in unity with the Triune God. But increasing conformity of the *imago Dei* within one necessitates that growing wisdom and love (charity) break out as action in the world, just as the Word and Spirit were sent into the world to make this final end possible for fallen humanity. Charity is not limited to almsgiving but is rather a mode of life involving gaining a thorough knowledge of the true needs of one's neighbor and acting on this knowledge with wisdom to build a just peace among all in society. Even the spheres of business and economics are places of training in the practice of seeing that one's neighbors have their needs met through just means. The justice required by charity can demand the re-ordering of economic affairs. The Christian life is a mode of life (1) oriented toward knowledge and union with God (theoria) but that very orientation requires that one have (2) knowledge and union with neighbor, which (3) necessarily involves praxis with the poor. For Aquinas, theoria is logically primary. However, motion toward unity with God means increasing unity of theoria and praxis.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Which of praxis or theoria should be primary in theology, or equivalently, in the Christian life that is being reflected upon? Here, by praxis I mean actions that are aimed at some good.<sup>1</sup> By theoria I mean both an apprehension of the truth by the intellect and knowledge that comes through experience of love, in Latin “contemplatio”. (I will use “theoria” and “praxis” rather than the English words “theory” and “practice” to avoid confusion with the tension that is present in almost all fields of endeavor between (1) academic teaching and theorizing and (2) the practices of day-to-day work.) The use of “theoria” in this combined sense in the Christian tradition dates back to Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>2</sup> From the fourth century through to the twentieth the primacy of theoria appeared to be the orthodox position. That is, right belief meant the intellectual assent to right positions primarily regarding God, that portion of theoria more easily reducible to formulas.

The idea that praxis should be prior to theoria in philosophy owes much to Karl Marx:

The question of whether human thinking can reach objective truth—is not a question of theory but a *practical* question. ... The coincidence of change of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can only be comprehended and rationally understood as *revolutionary practice*. ... All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice. ... The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world. The point is to change it.<sup>3</sup>

The term “praxis” came into use as describing a necessary connection between theology and politics with the political theology of the German Johann Baptist Metz in the 1960’s.<sup>4</sup> Metz’s work was a response to the challenges to the churches of the

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Parry, “Episteme and Techne”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Available at:

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”, in Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (eds. and trans.), *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 400-402. Italics in the original.

<sup>4</sup> Hugo Assman, *Teología desde la Praxis de la Liberación*, (Salamanca: Edición Sígueme, 1973), p. 16.

Holocaust and the rapid secularization of society in the *Bundesrepublik*.<sup>5</sup> To Metz, praxis in theology meant ensuring that theology is grounded in history—in events and social situations of past, present, and future—to ensure that it is not captive to the present, greedy interests of the upper and middle classes and the resulting pressure toward individualism. Part of this grounding is Marxist in nature, namely an awareness of the structures of power and interest that influence what is held to be knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Metz proposed to reflect along the *theoria-praxis* axis in new terms.<sup>7</sup> “Such a political theology desacralizes not only nature, but also the institutions of the *status quo*.”<sup>8</sup> “Metz emphasized that God in the Bible is the ultimate reference of the sense of human experience at the socio-political level, and not at the level of private interiorization.”<sup>9</sup>

The idea that praxis should be primary in Christian theology was introduced, at least to the English-speaking world, by Gustavo Gutiérrez’s classic *Theology of Liberation*.<sup>10</sup> Here, I summarize Hugo Assman’s more extensive presentation from his book devoted to the topic, *Teología desde la Praxis de la Liberación*. Assman writes that theology needs new language because the traditional theological languages have become empty. That is, it seeks to establish the truth within itself, without an intrinsic connection to praxis. Existing theological language has as its ultimate concern eternity, God, and the salvation of the soul and its relation to the world is tangential. “The concept of *theoria* is precisely that which must be revised.”

<sup>11</sup> It encourages perspectives that are private, circumscribed by the tiny personal and interpersonal world. We must either abandon that concept or abandon Matthew 25 and 1 John.<sup>12</sup> Praxis defines truth: “The truth is the name given by the historical community to those historical acts that were, are, and shall be effective for the liberation of humanity.”<sup>13</sup> Theological reflection on praxis is primarily to be done

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<sup>5</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), pp. 20-1.

<sup>6</sup> Assman, p. 17. Chopp, pp. 66-71.

<sup>7</sup> Assman, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Assman, p. 19. Translations from Spanish not attributed otherwise are those of this essay’s author.

<sup>9</sup> Assman, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), pp. 6-12.

<sup>11</sup> Assman, pp. 62-63.

<sup>12</sup> Assman, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Assman, p. 65.

through a recovery of the theology of the cross, “focalizing centrally on the radical praxis expressed in the death of Christ, which shall constitute a permanence of criticism indispensable to the liberation struggle,”<sup>14</sup> to be a “theology of revolution”.<sup>15</sup>

Liberation theology adopts the concept of praxis within a hermeneutical cycle as its methodological keystone. The praxis is to be directly involved in the lives of the poor, participating with them in their struggle for liberation. Marxist social theory is then applied to analyze the structural causes of their poverty, reflecting on these structures in the light of scripture and sacred tradition, yielding insights leading to new theology and to decisions concerning actions to take toward a restructuring of society.<sup>16</sup> Observing the results in the lives of the poor allows the hermeneutic cycle to be repeated.<sup>17</sup> Note that here perceptions of the social situation obtained through praxis comes before Biblical exegesis or consultation of the theological tradition to obtain knowledge of God or man (theoria). To liberation theologians, scriptural hermeneutic can not be founded on scripture (in a non-vicious cycle) or sacred tradition. Rather scripture must be interpreted in the light of the present plight of the powerless.

John Milbank argues that Liberation Theology’s acceptance and promotion of the secular social philosophies of Marxism,<sup>18</sup> including the primacy of praxis, “naturalizes the supernatural”<sup>19</sup> in order that the holy approach re-integration with the secular on the terms of Enlightenment reason.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, for Milbank, these secular political philosophies are themselves distorted developments from Christian theology and Biblical hermeneutics,<sup>21</sup> in turn rooted in the late Medieval acceptance that God “exists” in the same sense that creatures exist.<sup>22</sup> The power of the modern

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<sup>14</sup> Assman, p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> Assman, p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> Gutierrez, p. 6-12.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas L. Schubeck, *Liberation Ethics: Models, Sources, Norms*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), pp. 136-140.

<sup>18</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004), p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 207, 234-237.

<sup>20</sup> Milbank, p. 207.

<sup>21</sup> Milbank, pp. 12-23.

<sup>22</sup> Milbank, p. 302.

state, its violence, and its role as the promoter and protector of globalized capitalism is supported by these same distorted theological developments. Milbank teaches that this situation can only be countered by a return to theology as the one social science, where the Christian meta-narrative defines “reason” and the church becomes the definer, practitioner, and teacher of social harmony without reference to the state.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Milbank argues that the primacy of *theoria* over *praxis* results in a truer and less violence-promoting social theory than that of liberation theology.

For Daniel Bell, the efforts of Liberation Theology to integrate Christianity with liberation from the capitalist social order fail because Liberation Theology provides a road from Christian exhortations to love to the world beyond where real action takes place.<sup>24</sup> To correct the perversions of desire which capitalism both depends upon and fosters<sup>25</sup> there must instead be an ecclesiology where the fellowship of the saints is the primary political community, one where the private values and desires fostered by global capitalism are challenged by the Church as it engages in concrete acts of charity and sharing that transgress the boundaries established by state and city.<sup>26</sup> Rather than to pursue liberation through political and revolutionary action, Bell asks the poor to “refuse to cease suffering”: to continue to suffer oppression, pain, and death, showing forgiveness and relying on the God who ultimately will restore a just state of affairs.<sup>27</sup>

Liberation Theologians and their supporters in the North American academy have provided a number of counter-critiques of the Radical Orthodox sensitivity promoted by Milbank and Bell. Doak argues that Milbank’s vision of theology, as the mother of all social science and its practices as being the pattern of society, is an unacceptable limitation on human freedom and diversity.<sup>28</sup> For Doak, to achieve Milbank’s vision (which she criticizes as itself being an Utopian program) would ultimately require the state to use coercive measures to ensure that social functions could be carried out by the church in accordance with the Christian meta-narrative.

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<sup>23</sup> Milbank, ch. 12.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Bell, *Liberation Theology after the End of History*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 70-73.

<sup>25</sup> Bell, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Bell, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Bell, pp. 193-195.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Doak, “The Politics of Radical Orthodoxy: A Catholic Critique”, *Theological Studies*, vol. 68, no. 2, June 2007, pp. 368-393.



The result would not be the abjuration of violence foreseen by Milbank but rather a uniformity of belief, religious practice, and personal and community behavior enforced by a hybridized church and state. (Similarly but more precisely, Scott observes that Milbank requires that those who would participate in the life of the *polis* accept the orthodox Christian narrative.<sup>29</sup>) Doak answers Bell by asserting that far from being communities that demonstrate a life of sharing and that are active in identifying and opposing abuses of capitalism and state power, “many of our churches have been colonized by capitalist values”.<sup>30</sup>

The idea that the Radical Orthodox critique of Liberation Theology fails in its response to colonialism lies at the heart of the defense of Liberation Theology of Maldonado-Torres.<sup>31</sup> He sees Radical Orthodoxy as an attempted re-imposition not merely of theological orthodoxy but also of “border thinking”: the re-building of boundaries between white and brown and black, colonizer and colonized, male and female, oppressor and oppressed. This re-imposition and re-building follows the pattern of the colonizers of Latin America who created political boundaries and introduced African slaves, racial preference for whites, and European-Native American-*mestizo*-African racial tension to the Americas. Maldonado-Torres posits that what is needed is not Radical Orthodoxy but a “Radical Diversity”<sup>32</sup> fully incorporating theology done from a multitude of post-colonial points of view, including mujerist and black theologies of liberation.

Ivan Petrella offers two defenses of Liberation Theology to the Radical Orthodox critique.<sup>33</sup> First, he says that the Radical Orthodox criticism reduces to the critique of idolatry. For Petrella, this critique fails because the critics cannot devise an alternative to the idol that still relieves the suffering of the poor.<sup>34</sup> Second, he writes

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Scott, “‘Global Capitalism’ vs. ‘End of Socialism’: Crux Theologicae? Engaging Liberation Theology and Theological Postliberalism”, *Political Theology*, vol. 2, no. 4, May 2001, pp. 36-54.

<sup>30</sup>Doak, p. 383.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Liberation Theology and the Search for the Lost Paradigm” in Ivan Petrella (ed.), *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), pp. 39-61.

<sup>32</sup> Maldonado-Torres, p. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto*, (London: SCM, 2006), pp. 24-40.

<sup>34</sup> Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, p. 32.

that the critics “forget that life is prior to peace”,<sup>35</sup> that is, that those who are impoverished to the point of death cannot participate in the church envisioned by Bell or the ecclesial society or state envisioned by Milbank. Without life there is no theology. Without liberation the poor are dead. Action is required to preserve life in the face of oppression. The Radical Orthodox critics do not offer meaningful action.

Graham Ward has a response to such counter-critiques of Radical Orthodoxy from Liberation Theology.<sup>36</sup> The requirement for immediate outcomes, which would include immediate liberation, partakes in the modern desire to forget death.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the church should act to stop slavery in its current forms and prevent new forms from arising.<sup>38</sup> But such a Christian act is different from the action of a revolutionary. The Christian act and that of the revolutionary differ in agency. Christian action is done as an agent of Christ, “to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid” — who knows all things and futures — rather than in a delusion of self-sufficiency.<sup>39</sup> The Christian act is done in imitation of Christ and can be parsed through an understanding of the life of Jesus,<sup>40</sup> especially that life’s kenotic beginning and ending. Humans cannot penetrate the complexity of the interrelationships between all actions and effects in the world. But Christian action, because Christian action “participates in the actions of God”<sup>41</sup> will be retained and not undone come the *eschaton*.<sup>42</sup>

This conversation between those of the Radical Orthodoxy tendency and those of Liberation Theology is made from presuppositions that differ largely on the question of the primacy of *theoria* or *praxis*. Milbank gives priority to the Christian meta-narrative (*theoria*) and finds the primacy of *praxis* analyzed through social theory to be the source of the extreme violence of late modernity. Bell places *theoria* rooted in ecclesiology and the Christian understanding of kenosis and the suffering of the poor ahead of revolutionary *praxis*. Maldonado-Torres, Doak, Scott, and Petrella reply

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<sup>35</sup> Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology*, p. 128.

<sup>36</sup> Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship*, (London: SCM, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Ward, p. 214.

<sup>38</sup> Ward, p. 220.

<sup>39</sup> Ward, p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, p. 186.

<sup>41</sup> Ward, p. 193.

<sup>42</sup> Ward, p. 193.

that the Radical Orthodox positions are not acceptable because they do not in practice result in liberation of the poor, women, persons of color, and other oppressed groups. Ward's response to the liberation theologians is that the theoria of participation in Christ renders actions more perfect and eternal than those rooted in the political praxis seeking immediate results.

Recently, Ivan Petrella noted that the nearly forty years of Liberation Theology have had little practical effect. Its writers have broken into Latin American, *Mujer-ist*, African American, Feminist, African American Feminist and other sub-, and sub-sub-groups. They have been successful in moving into the academy, but have had little influence on affairs beyond. Liberation Theology has failed its own test of praxis: liberating the oppressed.<sup>43</sup> Petrella suggests that the problem is that Liberation Theology is still entangled with theology. He suggests that theologians of liberation work solely in fields of praxis. They may wish to leave the academy and re-train as social workers, nurses, or community organizers.<sup>44</sup> It would seem that the practical result of giving praxis priority over theoria is that both theoria and also theology disappear.

In this essay I propose to take a telic perspective based on the theology of Thomas Aquinas from which to view the question of the primacy of theoria or praxis, that is, to start from the telos (that is, the final end, last end, or purpose) of human beings. Why Aquinas? The assertion that praxis should be primary is a statement about the source of truth, namely that it is found in action with and for the poor. The general Christian approach concerning access to truth has been that it is to be found in scripture and sacred tradition and understood and applied to particular questions and circumstances through reason. Aquinas stands at the historical center of the development of that approach. He used or responded to the work of a vast array of previous Christian and pagan thinkers from both the Greek and Latin traditions. Thomas's systematic theology is so wide-ranging and coherent that much Christian thought since may be considered either a development of or a response to his work.

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<sup>43</sup> Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic*, (London: SCM Press, 2008), pp. 1-147.

<sup>44</sup> Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, pp. 148-150.

Furthermore, time and time again Aquinas's theology has been of use when circumstances have asked theology entirely new questions that he could not have anticipated. I will give two examples from among many. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century a pressing theological ethical question was: What are the rights of the natives of the New World? In the Valladolid Debates on this question both sides extensively used the *Summa*. These debates were one of the key starting points for the development of the modern notion of human rights.<sup>45</sup> In twentieth century, Aquinas was also of some importance in developing theological responses to the rise of secular democracies where it could no longer be assumed that nearly all those participating in the public square were (at least nominally) members of the church, requiring cooperation with non-Christians in governing the state.<sup>46</sup>

A final reason to consult Thomas in this research is that his body of thought is sufficiently broad that it provides sufficient scope to relate aspects of political and economic praxis to theoria.

Speaking of the telos is better terminology for this exercise than that of eschatology because it follows an organizing principle of much of Thomas's writings, where he worked from the purposes of things in creation toward theological and ethical insights. The ultimate realization of such purposes is often only possible in the eschaton. But speaking of purposes or final ends makes it clear that partial realization and motion toward the full realization is possible over these things entire span of existence.

In order to take a telic perspective on the praxis versus theoria question, it is necessary to ask what is the telos of humanity. Exploring the answer to that question in Aquinas's mature theology in the *Summa Theologica* is the purpose of the next chapter. There, I will argue that for Thomas the purpose of human life is to find happiness in God through a process of increasing conformity, that is of

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<sup>45</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. by Robert R. Barr, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 199. Daniel R. Brunstetter and Dana Zartner, "Just War against Barbarians: Revisiting the Valladolid Debates between Sepúlveda and Las Casas", in *Political Studies*, vol. 59, no. 3, pp. 733–752, at pp.739, 749-50

<sup>46</sup> Clifford G. Kossel, "Thomistic Moral Philosophy in the Twentieth Century" in Stephen J. Pope (ed.), *The Ethics of Aquinas*, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2002), pp. 385-411 at pp. 388-396.

sanctification, with the triune God in this life. This would appear to make *theoria* primary. However, Aquinas is emphatic that growth in charity is a necessary part of sanctification. Chapter 3 considers the question of what charity means to Thomas. Charity turns out not to be mere almsgiving but to be a mode of life involving gaining a thorough knowledge of the true needs of one's neighbor and acting on this knowledge with wisdom to build peace among all in society. Such action in extreme situations may involve acts indistinguishable from revolutionary praxis: overthrowing the tyrant and redistributing wealth to satisfy the needs of the poor, for example. Nevertheless, several liberation theologians have claimed that Aquinas's acceptance of private property inevitably makes him an ally of the status quo of global capitalism. Chapter 4 examines Thomas's ethics of behavior in the economic sphere in the light of his teachings on charity. I will argue that this combination of teachings not only is capable of condemning a social order with grinding poverty and wide disparities of wealth, but also that it provides a vision of marketplace behavior that would work both toward filling the needs of all while teaching wisdom and charity to marketplace participants, acting as an exercise toward sanctification. In the final chapter I will conclude that for Aquinas reflectively examined individual or community Christian life is a mode of life (1) oriented toward knowledge and union with God (*theoria*) but which (2) necessarily involves praxis with the poor. Thus *theoria* may be primary in some formal sense, but increasing unity with God entails increasing unity of *theoria* and praxis. I conclude with a brief discussion of the novel contributions of this essay and of some possible topics for future research.

## Chapter 2: The Telos of Humanity

As discussed in Chapter 1, it is necessary to begin with a consideration of the question of what for Thomas Aquinas, is the telos, or purpose, or final end of humanity.

William J. Hoye identifies the telos of human life in Aquinas with eternal life. Hoye attacks what he calls the “praxis prejudice” in contemporary culture and argues that the Christian doctrine of eternal life is incompatible with the primacy of praxis.<sup>47</sup> For Hoye, the telos of humanity is eternal life. He identifies eternal life and the vision of God, relying in part on his etymology (not supported by citations) of “theoria” as the joining of “theos” and “horaō” (I see, behold, perceive).<sup>48</sup> This seeing can only be complete after this life. Since actions can only be performed in the here and now, the primacy of praxis requires a realized eschatology. This praxis prejudice renders the seeking of eternal life immoral: this seeking diverts attention from changing reality, it engenders ethical behaviors that are in fact self-serving, it encourages the denial of the reality of suffering and injustice and an ecclesiology where the church becomes solely a social service agency. God becomes merely a background object who grants authority to the church to engage in projects of social change.

Hoyle writes that the primacy of praxis is appealing to contemporary culture because culture is absorbed with a “technical mind set” where the attitude toward all things is that of a craftsperson toward the tools and products of the trade. This mind set makes humans the subject and reality the object. As God is real, this is also objectification of God, rendering encounter with God impossible.

The difference between the technical and the eternal mind-sets is seen in two alternate exegeses of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the praxis-oriented exegesis, the Samaritan becomes a neighbor to, comes to love, the injured man, through his acts of help. Hoye argues that a careful reading of the Greek text does not support this exegesis. Rather, the Samaritan is moved by compassion,

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<sup>47</sup> William J. Hoye, *The Emergence of Eternal Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 50-66.

experiencing a change of heart, becoming the injured man's neighbor, then acts. The Samaritan permits himself to be acted upon. He allows himself to be object not subject. He becomes a neighbor to the injured man by taking the opposite stance of that required by the technical mindset. The Samaritan does not collect facts regarding the fallen man. Rather, "he has the ability to perceive reality affectively",<sup>49</sup> a personal experience of seeing with the heart that engenders the unity with the other that is love. Out of that love, he acts.

For Hoye, then, *theoria* is primary over *praxis* because to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself requires an orientation toward the eternal life of seeing God. One perceives God (however partially) affectively, then self, then neighbor. From this seeing of God loving action arises. Hoye points out that for Aquinas, all *praxis* has as its end "intellectual speculation", the full perception of God by the human mind. Thus, the *praxis* of loving action has as its end the seeing of God by the actor, the acted upon, and those who see and understand the activity and its rootedness in God and reality.

Ralph McInerny writes that the subject of the second part of the *Summa* is human action.<sup>50</sup> The telos of humanity is what Aquinas says it is: happiness that is to be found "in loving union with God in the Beatific Vision".<sup>51</sup> However, the ability of humans to perceive God in contemplation is partial, temporary, and constantly interrupted by the need to satisfy necessities of life. Not everyone is able to or desires to engage in contemplation. Thus, Aquinas's discussion of the telos of humanity serves to provide a formal substitute for the notion of the good life in the ethics of Aristotle, which Aquinas accepts as more or less those ethics that are naturally knowable. That is, the theology of the first part of the *Summa Theologica* and the treatise on happiness and humanity's final end of *Summa Theologica* (ST) I-II.1-5 can be treated in isolation from Thomas's teachings on morality and law.<sup>52</sup> The rational activity in which all engage begins not at the level of contemplation (*theoria*)

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<sup>49</sup> Hoye, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Ralph McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1982), p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> McInerny, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> McInerny, p. 117-126.

but at that of action (praxis).<sup>53</sup> It would seem that for McInerny, *theoria* has priority over *praxis* in theory—in the formal structure of the *Summa*—but not in practice, not when attempting to act in accordance with its moral theology.

According to A. N. Williams, Aquinas holds the view that the telos of human life is to become God.<sup>54</sup> Thomas’s theology is meant to be a guide toward deification. The spirit is not only oriented and raised up toward spiritual truth by theology, but through it begins the process of deification. In the Fathers, nouns that seem to Westerners to be purely technical (e.g. adoption, union, participation), ethical (e.g. grace, virtue, and knowledge), or mystical (light, contemplation, glory, and vision) indicate respectively the process of deification, the growth of deformity, and the consummation of sanctification. These terms mark a path of life that, entirely owing to God’s grace, leads toward unity with God.

Williams argues that Aquinas holds to this view of deification throughout the *Summa Theologica*. For example, intellect will become deiform but those who practice charity have greater participation in “the light of glory”.<sup>55</sup> Charity is the most important of the virtues that direct us to God, greater even than another, the knowledge of the God that we are to love.<sup>56</sup> The purpose of theology is growth in the knowledge of God and in charity, where these form a virtuous cycle increasing the believer’s deformity.

Aquinas’s theology of the Trinity provides analogies that bring these points into clearer focus. Thomas’s descriptions of the characteristics of the divine persons extend the relations between the persons to include humanity. For example, “the perfect idea of paternity and filiation is to be found in God the Father, and in God the Son”.<sup>57</sup> Yet all creatures possess a likeness of the Son’s filiation in that they are sons or daughters and possess a likeness of the Father’s paternity in that they have potency

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<sup>53</sup> McInerny, p. 30-33.

<sup>54</sup> A. N. Williams, “Deification in the *Summa Theologiae*: A Structural Interpretation of the *Prima Pars*” in *The Thomist*, vol. 61, 1997, pp. 219-255.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, Thomas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benziger Brothers 1948, repr. Notre Dame: Christian Classics Press, 1981), I.12.6. Unless otherwise noted, other citations to the *Summa* in this essay refer to this edition. Citations below to the *Summa* are abbreviated “ST”.

<sup>56</sup> ST I-II.62.4

<sup>57</sup> ST I.33.3



for creation. Rational creatures are called in Romans “sons and heirs of God” who have “the hope of glory”, that is, of deification. There is an analogy between the Son’s sonship and our adoptive sonship that holds in the present life and, in the life to come, promises a unity with the Father likewise analogous to that of the Son.

According to Williams, the indwelling in the rational creature of all three Persons, the missions of the Son and the Spirit, and the gift to humanity of the Spirit all have a single purpose. That purpose is that the “rational creature is perfected . . . so as to enjoy the divine person himself”,<sup>58</sup> that is, enjoy unity with God. But the gift of the Spirit that makes this unity possible is a gift of the charity of God.<sup>59</sup> So to grow in conformity with the Spirit is to grow in charity. The Word has an intellectual mission. Yet this mission is not a delivery of perfect propositional knowledge: “Thus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love.”<sup>60</sup> So for Williams, Aquinas’s theology gives assurance of the hope of deification and its contemplation aids in this intellectual illumination, whereby, through grace, love (and hence deiformity) may increase.

Williams does not deal explicitly with the *theoria-praxis* question but, as the above discussion shows, it lies behind much of what she says. It appears that for Williams the *theoria* of contemplation leads to deification and love. Presumably loving action follows, as a result of growing conformity with the Father who sent Son and Spirit to a suffering world. Hence, if Thomas’s idea of the *telos* of humanity is deification of the sort described by A. N. Williams, then *theoria* is prior to *praxis*.

There are several problems with this approach based on deification as the *telos* of humanity. The first problem is that by making understanding of God through theology central to deification, it privileges those with the inclination, gifts, and resources to pursue theological study.<sup>61</sup> The second problem is pastoral. Most people today have themselves as idols: they need no convincing that they are divine and will

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<sup>58</sup> ST I.43.3

<sup>59</sup> ST I.43.3, quoting Romans 5:5

<sup>60</sup> ST I.43.5

<sup>61</sup> Karen Kilby, “Aquinas, the Trinity, and the Limits of Understanding”, in *Int. J. Systematic Theology*, vol. 7, no. 4, Oct. 2005, pp. 414-427.

not be called to grow in faith or behaviour by a doctrine of deification. It also poses a problem of apologetics and evangelization, at least in areas of high Mormon population density: How does one make a distinction, easily understood by those with no theological training, between a Christian doctrine of deification and that of Mormonism? I believe that it is desirable to avoid that potential confusion altogether. There is one significant advantage of Williams's concept of the telos of humanity: it ties together the first and second parts of the *Summa*. The knowledge and vision of God that is taught in the first part is what is to be attained by action as taught in the second part.

Russell Pannier develops a set of criteria that a telos of humanity should meet.<sup>62</sup> The telos should be instantly accessible to all humans during times of consciousness. It should be fulfilling, in that given that certain (unspecified) conditions hold nothing else is desired. It binds human time together, its actualization in any moment bringing the desire and expectation that it continue at a deeper level in the next moment, even beyond death. Pannier observes that Aquinas's specification of the telos of humanity as "union with God"<sup>63</sup> meets his criteria. Union with God is instantly accessible to some degree whenever a human chooses. It is fulfilling provided that the condition holds that the human agent has had certain basic needs met: safety, sleep, food, and so on. But what of goods that are not completely and immediately necessary for physical life, for example play and aesthetic experience? Pannier suggests that these goods are more fulfilling when the human agent chooses to experience them as being also in the presence of God.

Pannier does not go on to develop an ethics or consider the praxis-theoria question. However, others have noted that Pannier is teaching that that portion of the human telos that is accessible in the present life is a mode of being requiring a practice<sup>64</sup> and is not merely an emotion.<sup>65</sup> If that were the case, then taking Pannier's conception of the telos of humanity would lead to acceptance of the primacy of praxis. However,

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<sup>62</sup> Russell Pannier, "Aquinas on the Ultimate End of Human Existence" in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 4, Fall 2000, pp. 169-194.

<sup>63</sup> ST I-II.3.8

<sup>64</sup> Amanda Russell Beattie, *Justice and Morality: Human Suffering, Natural Law, and International Politics*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 93-94.

<sup>65</sup> Amanda Russell Beattie, *Obligations of Love: International Political Thought and the Tradition of Natural Law*, PhD thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2008, p. 214.

what Pannier describes may be a mode of being, but it is one that is *theoria*. It is experienced directly solely by the one human agent. It may change that one agent, but not reality directly, without actions by that agent. It is speculation, in the sense that is a form of seeing God.<sup>66</sup>

There is one problem, at least with regard to the purposes of this essay, with Pannier's concept of the *telos* of humanity as union with God. Pannier does not explicitly specify which god one is to make oneself conscious of. There is nothing in his argument that would not hold for other concepts of God, for example that of late eighteenth century deism.

The reader will recall that the purpose of the above review of concepts of the *telos* of humanity in the Thomist literature was to select such a concept that can be used in answering the *theoria-praxis* question. I propose a concept that borrows elements from those of Pannier and A. N. Williams. The *telos* of humanity is, as Pannier writes, union with God. That union is actualized in the present life through an awareness of God's presence whether engaging in activity or in prayer, liturgy, or quiet contemplation. This awareness requires the choice of the person, is repeated, and becomes habitual. As such, it constitutes a sort of spiritual exercise.

Furthermore, the god which one makes oneself consciously in the presence of is the Christian triune God. In the context of the Thomist tradition, that means that the god with whom humans are to be united is the God described in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologica*. Keeping oneself ever mindful of being in the presence of that God is asking oneself to grow in conformity to that God.

This concept of the *telos* of humanity meets Pannier's criteria for such a *telos* because it specifies more completely the identity and nature of the God who is the object of human awareness. This specification does not invalidate any of Pannier's reasoning that demonstrates that this sort of union with God in this life satisfies his criteria. Nevertheless, Karen Kilby has critiqued other authors, such as Giles Emery<sup>67</sup> and A. N. Williams, who have argued that Aquinas's Trinitarian theology can be

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<sup>66</sup> Hoye, p. 64.

<sup>67</sup> Giles Emory, "Trinitarian Theology as Spiritual Exercise in Augustine and Aquinas", trans. by John Baptist Ku, in Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, Matthew Levering (eds.), *Aquinas the Augustinian*, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 2-40.

read as an exercise toward conformity with the triune God.<sup>68</sup> For her, Aquinas's difficult technical language and logical inconsistency serve rather as lengthy demonstrations that God, and especially the Trinity are essentially unknowable, that they can never make sense to humans. In Pannier's terminology, a telos of union with the triune God is not accessible to anyone.

For example, in Thomas's discussion of divine procession and as an intellectual procession, Thomas explains that in God we cannot differentiate between God as the source of procession and the God that processes: "[i]n God we precisely *cannot* think of difference between that which proceeds and that from which it proceeds."<sup>69</sup> To think otherwise is to deny God's simplicity. But then has the word "procession" been emptied of meaning? To Kilby, Thomas has denied every notion of intellectual procession that might be graspable.

Kilby finds a second example in Aquinas's description of the Trinity as subsistent relations. For her this notion yields a vicious cycle. A Person is a subsisting relation, and that relation is a relation to another subsisting relation that is God. She claims that this cycle does not give the mind any purchase on the nature of the Trinity. Rather it confuses the idea of "relation" so that may be used to say something of God. Thomas does not ever explain what his modified notion of "relation" means. So the phrase "subsisting relation" does not say anything positive about the Trinity.

For Kilby, these examples illustrate a pervasive problem in Thomas's treatment of the Trinity considered as an exercise toward being ever mindful of the presence of God and increasing in conformity with God. This is, when the contradictions are boiled away Aquinas's Trinitarian theology provides no positive understanding of the nature of God. Without such an understanding, from what does contemplation result and to where can it ascend? Furthermore, if such contemplation were possible, it would privilege the theologian, or at least the seeker with sufficient leisure and intellectual inclination to study Trinitarian theology deeply, over other believers. This contradicts her presumption that the theologian should have no significant spiritual advantages over others.

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<sup>68</sup> Kilby, pp. 414-427.

<sup>69</sup> Kilby, p. 420.

But what then of Pannier's assertion that being mindful of God's presence is accessible to all? Does adding the idea that this God be the Trinity of Aquinas's *Prima Pars* result in a telos that is accessible to anyone or to no one? I believe that the latter is the case. Recall that Pannier gives preconditions for accessibility: that the person has their safety, food and water, and shelter needs met, for example. For access to the telos of union with the triune God other preconditions are needed in addition. One is participation in liturgical prayer that ingrains in the participant Trinitarian language. Another is the reception of catechesis that gives that language meaning. These last two are (or at least, should be, where the Church is doing its work) available to all who seek to live a Christian life.

It is possible to say more about how adding to the notion of the telos of humanity that it be union specifically with the triune God through an examination of Aquinas's discussion of how God is known by the blessed.<sup>70</sup> Although formally this question deals with knowledge of God that is fully available in the life to come, Thomas repeatedly describes the partial knowledge that is available in this life.

In either life, the essence of God cannot be known by the bodily eye, but only by the intellect.<sup>71</sup> This knowledge is not closed to humans: it is available to the created intellect, for the blessed see the essence of God in the life to come.<sup>72</sup> Children are born without any knowledge whatsoever, of God or of anything else.<sup>73</sup> Knowledge of God can increase in this life, "as our soul is abstracted from corporeal things and is capable of receiving abstract intelligible things".<sup>74</sup> This abstraction can never be complete in this life, as this life is material: we cannot see the essence of God in this life. The purpose of spiritual exercise, then, is to aid in this process of abstraction. The improvement of the knowledge of God and the illumination it gives to the believer has a linear component, directed over time from the complete ignorance of the newborn to seeing the essence of God in the life to come. This improvement must also have a component of repetition, of circularity, because only the blessed can see all of the essence of God at the same time, but we cannot understand many

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<sup>70</sup> ST I.12

<sup>71</sup> ST I.12.1

<sup>72</sup> ST I.12.1

<sup>73</sup> ST I.101.1

<sup>74</sup> ST I.12.11

things at the same time. We must understand successively in time.<sup>75</sup> So we must work continually to keep mindful of the presence of God. But as we become more capable of receiving abstract intelligible things<sup>76</sup> and the intellect strengthened over time by light received by grace,<sup>77</sup> the same exercise brings a clearer knowledge of God.

Our intellect cannot see God's essence unless God unites Godself to our intellect.<sup>78</sup> So the strengthening of the intellect in order to see God is a form of increasing conformity with God: "The faculty of seeing God ... does not belong to the created intellect naturally but is given to it by the light of glory which establishes a kind of deiformity."<sup>79</sup>

Now even though God can be seen only through the intellect,<sup>80</sup> this strengthening deiformity changes the person in a manner beyond the strictly intellectual. That manner is strengthening charity in the person. For not all see the essence of God to the same level of perfection. Those that have more charity have a fuller participation in glory, that is, are more deiform.<sup>81</sup> This would appear to involve a contradiction, as intellect and love are not at all the same thing and are indeed frequently considered opposites often in conflict. But in ascending to God the two must become one.

The resolution of this apparent contradiction and the connection to Thomas's Trinitarian theology is found in his treatment of the *imago dei* (ST I.93).<sup>82</sup> In humans this is an image of God that is a likeness copied from God, but not of equality with God.<sup>83</sup> Humans have this image in three ways:

1. An aptitude for knowing God shared by all,
2. Actively knowing and loving God, however imperfectly, and

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<sup>75</sup> ST I.12.10

<sup>76</sup> ST I.12.11

<sup>77</sup> ST I.12.13, ST I.12.5

<sup>78</sup> ST I.12.4

<sup>79</sup> ST I.12.6

<sup>80</sup> ST I.12.4

<sup>81</sup> ST I.12.6. See also Matthew Levering, "Friendship and Trinitarian Theology: Response to Karen Kilby", in *Int. J. Systematic Theology*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 2007, pp. 39-54, at p. 52.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, Section V.

<sup>83</sup> ST I.93.1

3. A likeness of glory to the extent that the knowledge of God is perfected.<sup>84</sup>

The first of these is by creation (nature), the second through re-creation through grace during the human life, and the third is available in the life to come. The image is to be perfected through life, growing better to imitate the God that fully understands and loves God's self.

This image of God is both an image of the divine nature and an image of the Trinity of divine persons; otherwise it is not a representation of the divine nature.<sup>85</sup> Aquinas agrees, citing his question on the divine persons and relations (in particular ST I.40.2) that only relations of origin distinguish the persons. But the origin of the *imago dei* is God. Thus the same relations are to be found in the image.

These relations necessarily give rise to real distinctions. The Trinity is distinguished by “the Word from the Speaker, and of Love from both of these”<sup>86</sup>. Likewise, when there is found in humans “a procession of the word from the intellect and a procession of love in the will, there exists an image of the uncreated Trinity.”<sup>87</sup> The Biblical texts that Thomas gives as support both concern human spiritual renewal: “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind...” (Eph. 4:23-24) and “... [the person] who is renewed into the knowledge of God, according to the image of the God who created [that person]” (Col. 3:10). This renewal is a step in the movement toward perfection of the imperfect image of God in a human.<sup>88</sup> Thus, this movement toward perfection of the trinity in the *imago dei* is the unity of the word from the intellect and love from the will, and this is spiritual renewal. It is also the knowledge and love of God that is in the just,<sup>89</sup> in those undergoing deification.

But this knowledge and love of God is not passive and solely internal. It is active and affects the external. In humans, a word cannot be without the occurrence of thought. Knowledge of God leads through our thought to a word (i.e., an intellection) from

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<sup>84</sup> ST I.93.4

<sup>85</sup> ST I.93.5

<sup>86</sup> ST I.93.6

<sup>87</sup> ST I.93.6

<sup>88</sup> ST I.35.2

<sup>89</sup> ST I.93.4

which love comes out from us.<sup>90</sup> If procession in God is perfect intellectual activity and perfect love united, then understanding them and their unity and distinction is on a path to perfecting these things in oneself. But as a person is moving toward such perfection, love necessarily breaks out of the person into the world. This, then, is the spiritual exercise of Aquinas's Trinitarian theology: the perfection of the *imago dei* through the understanding of God that breaks out in love.

This understanding cannot be divorced entirely from Aquinas' theoretical treatment of the Trinity.<sup>91</sup> In order to see that the *imago dei* is a trinity<sup>92</sup> understanding of the theoretical development of processions and relations is required.<sup>93</sup> The treatment of classes of names<sup>94</sup> is a spiritual exercise in the limits of our understanding,<sup>95</sup> following Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names*.<sup>96</sup> But this treatment also underpins the understanding to what is meant when the persons of the Trinity are called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is through the technical discussion of the naming of the Son as the Word that we can see the analogy between the Word and the human intellect.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, through the technical discussion of the names of the Holy Spirit we find the analogy between Love and Gift in God and in humans.<sup>98</sup> Finally, these analogies of Word, Love, and Gift allow the exploration of how the Son and Word work in humans, in Thomas's discussion of the mission of the Divine Persons.<sup>99</sup>

That mission is a mission out from God to humanity: the Son and Holy Spirit are sent *out*.<sup>100</sup> If it is the case that what is being contemplated in the Trinity is both God and the *imago dei*, then there should be a corresponding sending out of both intellect and love from the contemplative silence of unknowing. And indeed Aquinas teaches this within the question on the mission of the Divine Persons.<sup>101</sup> The invisible

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<sup>90</sup> ST I.93.7

<sup>91</sup> ST I.27-43

<sup>92</sup> ST I.93.5

<sup>93</sup> ST I.27-28

<sup>94</sup> ST I.13

<sup>95</sup> ST I.13.3-8

<sup>96</sup> Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1992, repr. 2010), pp. 47, 51.

<sup>97</sup> ST I.34.2

<sup>98</sup> ST I.36-37

<sup>99</sup> ST I.43

<sup>100</sup> ST I.43.1

<sup>101</sup> ST I.43.6



mission of the persons is sanctification, and that sanctification involves perfection in both knowledge and charity. Those whom grace is sanctifying are improving as in the performance of certain acts, including “the fervor of charity leading ... to the danger of martyrdom, or to renounce ... possessions, or undertake any dangerous work.”<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, those who participate more in the vision of God have greater charity because charity makes for greater desire for the vision of God, which in turn makes those with more charity better able to receive the vision.<sup>103</sup>

But what does Thomas mean by “charity”? After all, what is translated into Latin as “caritas” is often translated into English as “love”, as for example in Paul’s description of the theological virtues “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”<sup>104</sup> In common English usage, “love” may refer to a large range of emotion, ranging from recognition of filial duty to altruism to lust. Furthermore, may the object of love be God or self? Does Thomas’s concept of charity include doing justice with, for, and to the poor? If it does, then *theoria* is primary over *praxis*. To answer that question, it is necessary to consider Aquinas’s definition and discussion of charity in his treatise on the theological virtues in the second part of the second part of the *Summa*. That will be the topic of the next chapter.

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<sup>102</sup> ST I.43.6

<sup>103</sup> ST I.12.6

<sup>104</sup> 1 Cor 13:13, NRSV, Anglicized

## Chapter 3: Charity as a Mode of Life

In the previous chapter, I argued that for Aquinas the final end of humanity and of the individual human is unity with the triune God. Movement toward that unity is the process of sanctification that inherently requires growth in charity. But what does “charity” mean to Aquinas? Is it, as the common modern usage of the word would have it, merely giving small amounts from our surplus to the so-called “deserving poor” or others whom we pity?

No. Thomas taught that charity is much more complex than that. He devotes twenty-three questions (in one English translation, two volumes) of the second part of the second part of the *Summa Theologica* to the concept. For Aquinas, the word “charity” has a vastly larger semantic range than it has today: it entirely encompasses love of God and love of neighbor.<sup>105</sup> Or, relating it to humanity’s final end, charity is “our union of friendship with God.”<sup>106</sup> The *Summa*’s treatment of charity concludes his discussion of the theological virtues (faith, hope, charity). But charity, being according to St Paul the greatest,<sup>107</sup> receives the longest and most detailed treatment of the three.

Over the last few decades, several authors have investigated the relationships between Aquinas’s concepts of charity, of good and of right (what Thomas would call “fitting”) actions, and of justice, including social justice. All virtues, theological or acquired, are things through which humanity moves toward our final end of unity with God.<sup>108</sup> However, James Keenan has pointed out that, out of all the virtues, only charity is not a “complement of prudence”.<sup>109</sup> That is, someone can live an ordered life through exercise of prudence and the other virtues excepting charity. As Keenan reads Thomas, right action results from the other virtues alone. Only charity leads to perfection, which Aquinas equates with the unchangeable goodness of God. Even the

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<sup>105</sup> ST II.II.27

<sup>106</sup> Thomas R. Heath, “Glossary”, in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, trans. by Thomas R. Heath, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, repr. 2006), vol. 35, p. 204.

<sup>107</sup> 1 Cor 13:13, ST II.II.23-46

<sup>108</sup> ST I-II.1.prologue

<sup>109</sup> James F. Keenan, “Distinguishing Charity as Goodness and Prudence as Rightness: A Key to Thomas’s *Segunda Pars*”, in *The Thomist*, vol. 56, no. 3, July 1992, pp. 407-426, at p. 410.

other two theological virtues imply a distance from this goodness. Faith is required because we know God's goodness only in part. Likewise we need hope because we have only received a portion of God's promises. Charity, however, unites a person immediately with God.<sup>110</sup> Acts may be right (well-ordered) yet not good (tending toward unity with God). Charity provokes all morally good acts. To view this point the other way around, union with God already exists when one performs a morally good act. Charity is more present in the agent when that act must be strived for.<sup>111</sup> Charity is a virtue without a mean: it seeks rootedness and perfection within God, which cannot be over-achieved. Keenan holds that for Thomas charity has two functions. The first is to make us completely right and fitting, moving us toward the perfection we need to gain the final end. The second is that it allows us not merely to act rightly, but to act for the good, directing our actions toward the final end.

Jean Porter begins her discussion of the relationships among charity, friendship, and justice in Aquinas by noting Gene Otka's assertion that the most common property attributed to agape today is the equal regard for others entailed by love of neighbor.<sup>112</sup> In determining how to treat others, what is of greatest importance is that we identify what we have in common with them. Such commonality must exist: at a minimum, there is our common humanity. That commonality we share with everyone makes us all equal before God and so we should have equal agape for all. It is startling to Porter, then, that Aquinas writes in his discussion of charity<sup>113</sup> that instead that we are "not required to love our neighbors equally."<sup>114</sup> Instead there is a priority ordering among various objects of charity. We are to love God most of all. Next, one is to love oneself and one's own body. Next, we are to love family: parents, spouse, brothers and sisters, and others to the degree of consanguinity. Then, we are to love others not related to us, in order of their holiness. Porter writes that Aquinas takes this position for two reasons. Firstly, it is natural that we love and have duties for those closer to us. Secondly, and more overtly theologically, Thomas holds that God does not love all people equally: he loves more those more receptive

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<sup>110</sup> Keenan, p. 419.

<sup>111</sup> Keenan, p. 420.

<sup>112</sup> Jean Porter, "De Ordine Caritatis: Charity, Friendship, and Justice in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*" in *The Thomist*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1989, pp. 197-213.

<sup>113</sup> ST II-II.26

<sup>114</sup> Porter, p. 199.

to charity. As in charity we are emulating and uniting with God, we also are to love unequally on the same basis.<sup>115</sup> This reasoning does not persuade Porter. She believes that Aquinas should focus on the infinite neediness before God that we share rather than on the infinitesimal differences in the amount of grace bestowed on individuals. However, she then goes on to say that Aquinas's rejection of equality of regard for all in charity is required by his equating charity with Aristotle's notion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aquinas means literally that God's love for a person and that person's response of love for God is friendship between God and human. One's love for neighbor is based upon, formed, and informed by that person's friendship with God. But according to Aristotle, friendship is possible between any two people, but the extent of friendship limited by many circumstances including distance in social position. In particular, for Aristotle friendship between a person and a god is impossible. Aquinas has to hold that for God and a person to have friendship God has to take the initiative. That initiative is God's offer of friendship through Jesus Christ. A person responds to that offer by exercising charity. That charity transforms the person to be more good like God is good, to be more holy. To Porter, differentially loving based on holiness is no different than loving God more than self or neighbor.

Porter writes that Aquinas teaches that charity requires acts. The chief act from charity is love. But that love as an "affective response" is merely "sham sentiment"<sup>116</sup> unless there is further action: acts of mercy including almsgiving and fraternal correction of those whose course toward the final end is drifting.

Almsgiving is here much more than small donations to beggars. We must provide for the needs of others, following the same scheme of priorities for the amount of charity one is to have for neighbor. According to Porter, almsgiving requires giving to the needy what they require to survive. Circumstances can overturn the scheme of priorities. One is to aid someone who will die without food or other assistance rather

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<sup>115</sup> Porter, p. 201.

<sup>116</sup> Porter, p. 205.

than one's own father (one's closest relative in Aquinas's thinking), as long as one's father's situation is not equally dire.<sup>117</sup>

Porter's final topic is the relation between charity and justice in Aquinas. She is troubled by the fact that though Aquinas says that charity is required for justice, justice requires equal regard for all even though charity does not.<sup>118</sup> Justice requires that all receive the basics of life and equal protection from harm. The protection from harm extends even to the criminal: only the state, never an individual, may inflict harm on a person as punishment for crime. In matters of justice, individuals are always equal. However, Aquinas holds it to be injustice when a person does not receive the physical or financial support that is due from another because of the nearness of relationship discussed in Aquinas's scheme of prioritization of charity.<sup>119</sup>

Stephen J. Pope also offers an interpretation of the relations between charity and justice in Aquinas.<sup>120</sup> He begins by pointing out that modern discussions of the requirement to aid the poor use "justice" to mean duties to aid others that are binding on all and "charity" to mean purely voluntary giving of marginal significance both morally and in terms of practical and economic value. However, for Aquinas the Latin "*caritas*" (for which I have been writing "charity") when meant as love for the poor had a vastly more inclusive meaning. Aquinas moves from a general definition of *caritas* as someone's love for another person graciously enabled, inspired, and enriched by God through the first person's love for God. *Caritas* for a poor person requires action, which Aquinas calls almsgiving, to meet their need. What is to be given includes material goods, but also the love that is friendship. "Love for the poor involves not simply the giving of goods but also and more importantly the love of friendship, the giving of self that involves affective union and communication as well and benevolence."<sup>121</sup> It is in this manner that "if I bestow all my goods on the poor ... but have not love, it benefits me nothing."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Porter, p. 206.

<sup>118</sup> Porter, p. 208.

<sup>119</sup> Porter, p. 209.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen J. Pope, "Aquinas on Almsgiving, Justice, and Charity: An Interpretation and Reassessment" in *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 32, 1991, pp. 167-191.

<sup>121</sup> Pope, p. 168.

<sup>122</sup> 1 Cor 13:4

Pope writes that for Aquinas *caritas* is related to justice. Thomas, following Aristotle, considered justice largely as distributive: that each should receive what he or she is due. Mercy for the poor can create a moral debt, where acts are owed to the other because of the friendship that is love of neighbor. One is not in normal circumstances obligated to give so much to the poor that it lowers one's social status. However the fact that failing to feed the poor can result in damnation (Matthew 25) means that God commands that one must give out of one's surplus. To Aquinas, this is a moral debt because it affects the soul's growth in unity or separation from God. However this debt is not in normal circumstances a matter for a human court of law. (There are special circumstances where courts or the State can order that one give to the poor.<sup>123</sup>) Thomas takes a middle, and situational, path between two extremes: that one should sell all that one has and give the proceeds to the poor, and that of modern neo-liberalism, where one is totally free to do whatever one likes with one's property.<sup>124</sup>

However, Pope admits that Aquinas's view is, by late-twentieth century standards, paternalistic and hierarchical. Aquinas accepts that persons are divinely placed into roles that are "qualitatively distinct".<sup>125</sup> People are placed into classes where they practice the virtues appropriate to their class: the rich practice stewardship while the poor practice patience. Nevertheless, society is to be infused with love of neighbor, where all humble themselves for each other's sake.<sup>126</sup> Pope also agrees with modern critics of Thomas that he does not provide a concept of social change. However, Pope ascribes this to Aquinas's belief that the capabilities of the State are terribly limited when compared to those of the Kingdom of God. Aquinas's theory of charity is as an individual virtue, not a function of society. It is about changing one's affections and actions rather than policies. Nevertheless, in his treatise on justice Aquinas enumerates a long list of sins which are injustices by which the poor are subjected, especially by what we would now call businesses: fraud, unnecessarily inflated prices, legal processes which unjustly favor the richer party, and usury. These injustices could and should be treated by the State as criminal. Thus, in at least

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<sup>123</sup> Pope, p. 172, citing ST I-II.118.4 ad 2

<sup>124</sup> Pope, p. 179.

<sup>125</sup> Pope, p. 180.

<sup>126</sup> Pope, p. 181.

this admittedly limited way society as a whole does for Aquinas have some role in providing social justice.<sup>127</sup> Pope argues that the modern position that dramatic social change is required to improve the lot of the poor is based on the assumption that there is constant increase in the production of goods, and that in an unjust society that increase goes mostly to increase the disparity between rich and poor. However, the world in which Aquinas lived was more static: there was a constant level of scarcity, interrupted by famine. In those circumstances, it was not clear what more individuals or the State could do for the poor other than provide for their basic needs, store food against famine, and enforce laws against unjust business practices.<sup>128</sup> Among Pope's conclusions is that although in the modern world we do need to "strive for appropriate transformation of social, political, and economic structures" — a task that Aquinas did not envisage — Aquinas's analysis of *caritas* and justice "wisely balances moral universalism with the natural priorities of special friendships" and the limits of human capabilities.<sup>129</sup>

A recent paper by Meghan J. Clark is in considerable part a reply to Pope.<sup>130</sup> She describes Aquinas's concept of charity from two main perspectives. First, she characterizes what Aquinas means by charity, and then asks what it is to live in charity. Clark begins by pointing out that for Aquinas charity is something that God infuses in the human soul. While nature and reason point us toward God, these are not sufficient for us to reach our final end of happiness in God. It is God's infusion of charity in us that makes this final end a possibility. All other virtues have the form of charity. At the same time, charity is love and friendship with God, which results in love and friendship with neighbor. This love of neighbor is a participation in the love that God is. Thus, charity unites us with God.<sup>131</sup> Although the other virtues point toward the final end, they cannot bring union with God unless they take the form of charity. So charity is literally supernatural: "it transcends nature"<sup>132</sup> in that it unites and brings communion one with God, which nothing in nature can do. As such, it

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<sup>127</sup> Pope, p. 182.

<sup>128</sup> Pope, p. 183-184.

<sup>129</sup> Pope, p. 187.

<sup>130</sup> Meghan J. Clark, "Love of God and Neighbor: Living Charity in Aquinas' Ethics" in *New Blackfriars*, vol. 92, no. 1040, July 2011, pp. 415-430.

<sup>131</sup> Clark, p. 416.

<sup>132</sup> Clark, p. 417.

must be the work of God through the Holy Spirit. Charity can only increase or cease in a person, never decrease. Increase is further work of the Spirit as one's acts of charity dispose one to further such acts. Charity can cease due to God's withdrawal of friendship in response to one's withdrawal of friendship from God as a result of committing a mortal sin.<sup>133</sup> If charity is love of God, then why does it entail love of neighbor, that is, love of all other people? The neighbor is to be loved because the neighbor is has the potential of being united with God. That is, as God is in the neighbor, it is literally true that we cannot love God without loving the neighbor. We are to love neighbor for God's sake: hence we are to love God more. So, there is a differentiation in the amount of love that we owe God and various neighbors. We are to love God most of all, ourselves next, then those close to us through ties of blood and friendship, then others, even if the others are better than our family.<sup>134</sup> This prioritization of charity provides the structure that Aquinas uses to teach how to act out of charity with self and others.

The second half of Clark's paper asks what it is to live in charity according to Thomas. She answers that living in charity involves both one's internal and external life. But in both cases living in charity is about acts. The primary act of charity is to love, not to be loved. Charity's internal effect is mercy directed toward one's neighbor. "Mercy signifies grief for another's distress."<sup>135</sup> As such it is a passion, an emotion. It is an emotion that, guided by reason, leads us to works for the benefit of the distressed neighbor that are similar to the works of God. However, one way in which our beneficent acts fall short of God's is that ours are limited by our finiteness. It is impossible for any one of us to do good to everyone. Yet at any moment someone may cross our path for whom we may be able to do good, even someone who requires our aid for survival. We must continually be open and ready to act when that occurs. To be ready, we must prepare for such moments by removing obstacles to action, be they psychological, spiritual, practical, or in the ordering of our life.<sup>137</sup> In other words, for Aquinas charity is not only love and

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<sup>133</sup> Clark, p. 418.

<sup>134</sup> Clark, p. 420.

<sup>135</sup> ST II-II.30.3, quoted by Clark, p. 422.

<sup>137</sup> Clark, pp. 423-424.



friendship for God and neighbor and a virtue. It is also a mode of life that must be lived in order to have charity.

Clark's concluding section is an evaluation of whether such living in charity, as Thomas conceives it, is adequate for today. She answers in the negative, and this is where she deviates significantly from Pope's assessment. She identifies two parts to this inadequacy. The first is that Thomas identifies no role for social critique or social change in his concept of charity and that this makes it "problematic for addressing contemporary situations" where power structures must be challenged.<sup>138</sup> The second is that the priority ordering of charity is innately paternalistic, being modeled on God the father. Both inadequacies combine to render Aquinas's theory of charity insufficient for examining communal sins built into the structures of society on national and global scales. However, she does not propose an alternative model. Instead, she states that "living in charity in the twenty-first century must begin with the mandate [to live in charity] found in Aquinas" along with further integration of justice, including analyses of structural injustices, with charity.

More can be said, however, based on an examination of portions of the *Summa Theologica's* treatise on charity that the prior research described above does not consider. Thomas's treatment of each of the theological virtues follows a similar structure:

- He develops a theory concerning the virtue, then
- Uses the theory to discuss the acts done by one who has and grows in that virtue, and the vices that arise from lack of the virtue,
- Gives an assessment of the place of that virtue in natural law and in the Decalogue, and
- Concludes with a discussion of the gift of the Holy Spirit corresponding to the virtue.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Clark, p. 427.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas R. Heath, "The Gift of Wisdom", in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, trans. by Thomas R. Heath, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, repr. 2006), vol. 35, p. 200-202.

The acts associated with charity include love, peace, kindness, mercy, and almsgiving. The vices resulting from lack of charity are hatred, apathy, war (this is the location of Aquinas's just war theory), envy, schism, sedition, and so on. The gift of the Spirit corresponding to charity is wisdom.

I intend to examine more of the topics from Aquinas's treatment of acts and vices associated with charity (1) to add some additional insights to the first answer given above concerning the role of charity in humanity's final end and (2) to show that there are in fact some elements that can lead to social critique implicit in Aquinas's treatment of charity. The particular acts and vices that I will consider are peace, sedition, and the gift of wisdom.

Aquinas writes that peace is an effect of charity.<sup>140</sup> It comprises two forms of union, an outward form and an inner form. The outward form includes concord, agreement between people. However, the outward form of peace is more than just concord. Concord occurs when people with different objectives and feelings are nevertheless able to come to agreements. In contrast, the outward form of peace involves the alignment of peoples' feelings, desires, and goals and their movements (changes over time). The inner form of peace includes a lack of desire for things that cannot all be had simultaneously. The person experiences instead an inner harmony or union. Peace is present when this inner harmony or union is experienced by one person or extends to a group, which then sharing a union of affect and objective (and changes of these), are necessarily in concord.<sup>141</sup> Such a state is a "union of charity",<sup>142</sup> where one's desires are united with the neighbor's, because each one loves the neighbor as oneself. Just as friends want good things for each other, we want to fulfill our neighbor's will, just as the neighbor wishes to fulfill our will.<sup>143</sup> In other words, peace is caused by charity, love of God and neighbor.<sup>144</sup> All people desire peace. But perfect peace can only be found in enjoying the good, which is to say, enjoying God. Since enjoyment, that is to say unity with, God is not fully

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<sup>140</sup> ST II-II.29.3

<sup>141</sup> ST II-II.29.1, see also the translation *Summa Theologiae*, trans. by R. J. Batten, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, repr. 2006), vol. 34.

<sup>142</sup> ST II-II.29.3

<sup>143</sup> ST II-II.29.3

<sup>144</sup> ST II-II.29.4

realizable in this world; perfect peace is only available in the life to come.<sup>145</sup> Peace that is experienced in this life is a participation in that unity. Inward peace occurs when an individual participates in unity with God. Peace experienced within a group when all are participating in unity with God and therefore unity with one another.

This characterization of outward peace is not limited to informal groups of people. It also includes the peace in the political sphere. In each article within his question on peace, he takes as his authority Augustine's concept of peace in *City of God*.<sup>146</sup> But Augustine's presentation is explicit about what is required in the earthly city (i.e. in governments) for it to participate in God's peace. It is necessary that people share in "safety and security" and "air to breathe, water to drink, the things appropriate for the care and adornment of the body in the way of food and clothing."<sup>147</sup> This requires "earthly peace in the earthly city",<sup>148</sup> a society which "provides whatever is necessary for the protection and maintenance of such peace."<sup>149</sup>

For Aquinas, due to ignorance and foolishness people misunderstand where peace lies and use incorrect means, including violence, to attempt to bring it about.<sup>150</sup> In particular, an appearance of peace and concord that is obtained by means of fear is not peace at all.<sup>151</sup> So-called "peace" obtained through fear and force, that is to say oppression, is false.

Finally, on earth injustice is an obstacle to peace. No one can align their desires with others while being treated unjustly. That person desires justice, while others desire things that are resulting in the injustice. Justice is required to remove those obstacles.<sup>152</sup> What Aquinas calls justice, which includes justice in economic affairs,<sup>153</sup> is required to achieve peace and live in charity, which are in turn necessary

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<sup>145</sup> ST II-II.29.2

<sup>146</sup> ST II-II.29.4

<sup>147</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, trans. by J. W. C. Wand, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), book XIX, section 13.

<sup>148</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, book XIX, section 14.

<sup>149</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, book XIX, section 13.

<sup>150</sup> ST II-II.29.3

<sup>151</sup> ST II-II.29.1

<sup>152</sup> ST II-II.29.3 ad 3

<sup>153</sup> ST I-II.77-78

to grow toward humanity's final end. This is a point I will consider further in the next chapter.

Another reason to believe that by peace Aquinas includes peace in the civic realm is that he considers sedition to be a form of discord,<sup>154</sup> and discord prevents peace and hence charity.<sup>155</sup> Sedition is when part of the people of a State prepares for or engages in fighting against the State. It includes encouraging others to participate. It is an interference of the unity and well-being of the people of the State. It disrupts the State's organs of justice and prevents people from acting rightly to each other. Its characteristic is that the fomenters of sedition place something else above the common good.<sup>156</sup> This means that the leaders of a government can commit sedition. They do so when they place their good above the common good and foment discord among the population to ensure their own power. To act in what would otherwise be a seditious manner, including preparing for and engaging in violence,<sup>157</sup> against such a tyrannical government is not sedition<sup>158</sup> but rather an attempt to return the government to one that benefits the people.<sup>159</sup> The evil done must be less than that of the tyranny, which imposes limits on when such revolution is permitted and the means used to engage in it.<sup>160</sup> Note that the criteria for such "just sedition" are similar to those for just war,<sup>161</sup> except that there is no sovereign authority for deciding upon just sedition.

Just sedition is not the only response to tyrannical injustice that Thomas offers. There is also martyrdom, witnessing to truth and justice<sup>162</sup> in a manner that inevitably leads to death at the hands of persecutors.<sup>163</sup> Citing the example of John the Baptizer, Aquinas writes that the reason for a martyr's execution may be solely that of reproofing a ruler's behavior.<sup>164</sup> Martyrdom occurs because the divine good

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<sup>154</sup> ST II-II.42.1 ad 3

<sup>155</sup> ST II-II.37.1

<sup>156</sup> ST II-II.42.2

<sup>157</sup> ST II-II.42.1

<sup>158</sup> ST II-II.42.2 ad 3

<sup>159</sup> ST II-II.42.2 ad 1

<sup>160</sup> ST II-II.42.2 ad 1

<sup>161</sup> ST II-II.40.1

<sup>162</sup> ST II-II.124.1

<sup>163</sup> ST II-II.124.2, II-II.124.5

<sup>164</sup> ST II-II.124.5

exceeds the good of the State. “[A]ny human good in so far as it is referred to God, may be the cause of martyrdom.”<sup>165</sup> That is, any injustice that separates people from God may lead the Christian to act in a way that lead a martyr’s death.

But who decides when the government is tyrannical? Who decides whether to engage in speaking faith and truth in a manner that leads to martyrdom and what are the allowed means to overthrow the tyranny? Those who are wise, to the various extents of their wisdom.

Aquinas writes that wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>166</sup> that is a result of charity.<sup>167</sup> Wisdom is the ability to judge things rightly, knowing the most fundamental cause of things.<sup>168</sup> That cause is God. For Aquinas, knowledge comes in two stages that repeat and form a virtuous cycle. First we come to have some knowledge of an object. Secondly, we come to love it. That love intensifies our ability to understand and therefore to know, bringing us back to the first stage but at a deeper level. In the case of knowing God, the first stage is faith, the love is charity, and the deeper understanding and knowledge of the second stage is wisdom.<sup>169</sup> The cycle of gaining wisdom is bound up with the mode of life that is charity. As charity increases, so does the gift of wisdom. Wisdom is both practical and contemplative.<sup>170</sup> That is, it is *theoria* as far as it considers the things of God. But “it judges of human acts by Divine things, and directs human acts according to Divine rules.” As wisdom judges and directs acts, it is practical.<sup>171</sup> Wisdom, the “right judgment attained by some, whether in the contemplation of Divine things or in directing human affairs according to Divine rules” is an aspect of sanctification, with union with God.<sup>172</sup>

The contemplative and practical effect of wisdom is peace making.<sup>173</sup> That is, wisdom brings internal peace to one who has it. The wise act so as to set their things in order. Aquinas does not exclude from these things their role in civic affairs. Recall

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<sup>165</sup> ST II-II.124.5 ad 3

<sup>166</sup> ST II-II.45.1

<sup>167</sup> ST II-II.45.prologue (Heath translation)

<sup>168</sup> ST II-II.45.1

<sup>169</sup> Heath, “The Gift of Wisdom”.

<sup>170</sup> ST II-II.45.3

<sup>171</sup> ST II-II.45.3

<sup>172</sup> ST II-II.45.5

<sup>173</sup> ST II-II.45.6

that peace requires also the peace within the State, which in turn depends on the presence of justice. Thus, the gift of wisdom includes the ability to judge rightly and from the perspective of unity with God the things of social and government affairs and to act rightly with regard to them.

Through the gift of wisdom, humans “participate in the likeness of the only-begotten and natural Son of God, according to Romans 8:29”.<sup>174</sup> That is, wisdom makes a person a living analogy of the Word of God. But as was discussed in the previous chapter, to be the Word of God is to be sent out into the world with a mission to increase understanding and love, uniting humans closer to God, sanctifying them.

Now it is possible to answer to the question of this chapter. For Aquinas, charity is a vastly more encompassing concept than the term commonly used implies today. It means to possess a love of God that unites one to God. As the neighbor is also uniting with God (or at least has the potential to do so), one must love the neighbor also. That love must show itself in actions that help the neighbor in need. If that need is dire, one cannot put one’s interests above that of the neighbor. Those who have an abundance of worldly goods, but deceive themselves and think that misfortune cannot find them, cannot gain the unity of emotions that is peace and so have no pity for the poor.<sup>175</sup> Instead, charity requires that one be willing to act for the common good, and this may require one to give up one’s own property.<sup>176</sup> One must be ready to give at any time, as God may give at any time, and that readiness is a mode of life.

For Thomas, the need of one’s neighbor includes but goes beyond physical needs. Need is to lack something required to sustain either human physical life or the growth of virtue toward attending the final end of happiness in union with God.<sup>177</sup>

But charity goes beyond giving. It means to be at peace with others, to have one’s deepest, most heartfelt desires aligned with those of others. Such alignment of desires means to see and know, and therefore grow in love for one’s neighbor. That requires seeing people and situations as they really are, doing the right (just) things

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<sup>174</sup> ST II-II.45.6

<sup>175</sup> ST II-II.30.2

<sup>176</sup> ST II-II.26.3

<sup>177</sup> ST I-II.4.7

for and to them so that all involved in the situation may grow in peace and charity. In other words, growing unity of friendship with God is inextricably linked to growing unity of friendship with neighbor. Friendship requires direct personal involvement, not mere support of a third party who sees and helps the friend. Thus, growth in charity requires not loving the abstract assistance of the poor but particular individuals. Support of institutions and governmental and non-governmental organizations that help the poor is necessary but not sufficient.

From this point of view, a wide range of praxes ranging from conversation and engagement with a homeless person or prisoner to the base communities of liberation theology to faith-based community organizing are seen to be spiritual exercises with the purpose of building up charity among all who are involved. That is, the purpose is that they may live more fully into the mode of life of charity, which is what Aquinas means by increasing in charity, which is a necessary component of sanctification, the mission of the divine persons. To live that mode of life is being ready to be for others the Jesus Christ who gave food and drink to the hungry and healed the sick. Hence such living is participating (in the scholastic sense of sharing fundamentally in the form yet for now incompletely) in the love among the divine Persons and in their giving to humanity. This participation is a building up of the *imago dei*. This mode of life is one that requires praxis, yet at the same time is a spiritual practice that achieves the goal of contemplation: to be drawn closer to the final end of humanity, the vision of and unity with God's essence.

Thus, for Aquinas *theoria* and *praxis* are a unity. In order to increase perfection in one it is necessary to increase in perfection in the other. Their apparent separation is an artifact of human temporal and cognitive limitedness and the fallen-ness of the world. I will go further with these conclusions in the final chapter.

If the conclusions of the previous two paragraphs hold, does that mean that Aquinas teaches mute acceptance of the political and economic status quo? We have seen that his teachings on peace, sedition, and wisdom make provision not only for critique but also for revolutionary change in political settlements. Thomas's concept of charity allows a critique of social arrangements that do not rise to the level of tyranny. As charity requires a union of friendship with neighbor, social arrangements

and governmental policies that inhibit their development subvert charity and peace. Today, such social arrangements and policies would cover a broad range, including:

- Land use and zoning (e.g., encouraging or discouraging segregation according to wealth),
- Transport (e.g., requiring all productive adults to drive an automobile, which is isolating, vs. encouraging public transport and other alternatives), and
- Education (e.g., tying assignments of pupils to schools to post codes or other *de facto* markers of wealth, race, or social standing, which results in or is a response to great disparities in school quality).

The liberation theologians recognized, correctly in my view, that the dominant powers in the world today are at least as economic as they are political. If the politics of sanctification that includes praxis described in the previous paragraphs is to have an adequate concept of praxis, then it must:

- Be able to critique our economic arrangements,
- Allow the evaluation of alternatives, and
- Permit working to change from our current economic arrangements toward the better alternatives.

Whether or not Thomas's theology provides these is the subject of the next chapter.



## Chapter 4: Thomas's Ethics of Economic Behavior

Economics – the study of wealth, poverty, the flow of money and the production of goods and services – is a key concern of liberation theology and the focus of much of the praxis from which its theological reasoning is done. For liberation theology, the Kingdom of God is an economic order where the present dichotomy between rich and poor has been eliminated because all have equal access to the riches of the Earth. In the present world, the existence of poverty is maintained through the sinful acceptance of private property and the idolization of wealth. The forces of capital in the rich countries, in order to maximize profit, extract resources from the poor countries at unfairly low prices and sell manufactured goods at unethically high prices. The populaces of the poor countries in debt peonage, a state of *de facto* enslavement by the rich and influential of their own nations. These rich are maintained in power by the governments of the rich countries which act as agents of capital. It is this enslavement from which the poor require liberation. In order to achieve this liberation, a new social order must be constructed, based on the teachings of Jesus, where the satisfaction of the basic needs of all is the priority. The system of private property is not required in order to achieve this goal.<sup>178</sup> In particular, Aquinas's acceptance of private property is a provision for a sinful world. But it is possible to construct a society where that provision becomes less necessary over time. That is, according to one analysis, Aquinas

suggests that private property may be the best way in practice to maintain economic production and social order. However, for Aquinas this situation is the result of human selfishness arising from original sin. In consequence liberation theologians argue that this sinful selfishness will be overcome as the 'new land' is approached. For instance, natural resources such as land and water are considered by economists as essentially public goods, and constitute the first step in the recovery of common ownership...<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> "Attempts to bring about change in the existing order have proven futile. Only a radical break from the status quo, that is, a profound transformation of the private property system, access to the power for the exploited class, and a social revolution would allow for the change to a new society, a socialist society." Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, pp. 26-27. "[P]overty is the consequence of the sin of exclusive possession." Valpy Fitzgerald, "The Economics of Liberation Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 248-264, at p. 249.

<sup>179</sup> Fitzgerald, p. 252.

Both capitalism and socialism are human constructs and hence sinful. But of the two, Liberation Theology holds the economics of socialism to be closer to that of the Kingdom to come.<sup>180</sup> Aquinas's theological ethics of behavior in the economic sphere is fatally enmeshed with capitalism and the interests of the wealthy (i.e., is a constituent of what liberation theologians calls the "civilization of wealth") and opposed to the interests of the poor (the "civilization of poverty"). The civilization of wealth, including Aquinas's theological ethics, will be swept away in the eschatological struggle between these civilizations.<sup>181</sup> The primacy of praxis over *theoria* in theology is required in order to re-orient the activity of the church and of Christians toward creating the socialist society that is to be the actualization in history of the civilization of poverty.<sup>182</sup>

It would be a strong counter-argument against the work of the previous two chapters were it the case that Aquinas's theological ethics must be discarded based on this line of reasoning that requires the primacy of praxis. The liberation theologians are correct in noting that the post-Columbian history of Latin America has largely been one of exploitation of the many by the few. The objective of the Spanish colonial government was to extract as much silver and gold as possible without regard for the lives of those not born on the Iberian Peninsula. After independence, the new governments continued (and in many nations, continue) to prioritize crippling interest payments on loans from European and North American banks over the health and welfare of their own people.<sup>183</sup> So, in order to refute such a counter-argument, I must show that Thomas's economic ethics would also condemn this history and this present state of exploitation and gross inequity. In this chapter I argue that:

- Rather than accepting sin, Aquinas provides an ethics of economic behaviour that would condemn today's global economic practices and institutions that lead to grinding, deadly poverty,

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<sup>180</sup> Fitzgerald, pp. 248-251.

<sup>181</sup> Fitzgerald, p. 252.

<sup>182</sup> See the discussion of Assman's *Theologia desde la Praxis de Liberación* above in Chapter 1.

<sup>183</sup> Tulio Halperin Donghi, *Historia Contemporánea de América Latina*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2013), pp. 20-39, 623-624.

- In particular, although Thomas by no means demands equality of wealth, there is a limit to the inequity that he would accept, and that the current disparity of wealth in the world is beyond that limit,
- This ethics of economic behaviour is an application of Aquinas's concept of sanctification as discussed in the previous two chapters, and
- Therefore it is not necessary to take praxis as primary even when considering (as we must) the plight of the poor.

Much of Aquinas's mature teaching concerning economic behaviour is found in his discussion of justice in the *Summa*, as part of his consideration of the topics of property and theft, commerce and cheating, and lending and usury. (In this essay, "usury" will carry Aquinas's meaning, namely charging any amount of interest on a loan and not the current common meaning of charging excessive interest.<sup>184</sup>)

Aquinas begins his discussion of property by noting God has granted humanity dominion over many physical, created things. God has given us this power because humanity needs to make use of these things in order to survive.<sup>185</sup> It is necessary to human life that individuals can possess property privately for two reasons. First, because anyone is a better steward of what they own than what is owned in common. Second, if everything were owned in common there would be endless quarrelling about how to use everything. Peace would be impossible in the resulting disorder. Therefore, many things have been assigned to the stewardship and fitting and proper use of particular people, that is, many things have owners. Private property is not a matter of natural law, that is, it is not a necessary consequence of the nature of God's creation. It is rather an outcome of human reason seeking the proper stewardship and use of things, consequently encoded in human, positive law. The only just reason for disparity of wealth, that is, that some have stewardship of more than others, is that some are more capable stewards. Although Aquinas quotes St. Basil the Great: "Why are you rich while another is poor, unless it be that you may have the merit of

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<sup>184</sup> Joseph Persky, "From Usury to Interest" in *Economic Perspectives*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2007, pp. 227-236.

<sup>185</sup> ST II-II.66.1

a good stewardship...?”<sup>186</sup> Aquinas provides no additional support for this point, believing that the reader will accept it as a matter of reason. Assuming such a just distribution of goods, then taking what is under the stewardship of another by threat or violence (robbery) or by cheating or stealth (theft) are sins.<sup>187</sup>

However, not only is it neither robbery nor theft to take what is truly needed,<sup>188</sup> it is lawful. “In case of need all things are common property. ... That which [someone] takes for the support of his life becomes his own property by reason of that need.”<sup>189</sup> Human, positive law cannot trump natural and divine law. According to the creation stories of Genesis, the purpose (nature) of the goods of the Earth is to be the means of human life. Human laws defining who owns what things do not change the natural law that human life depends on these same things. When some possess a surplus of goods, it is only because they are to steward them for the purpose of providing for the needs of the poor.<sup>190</sup> To refuse to give the poor what they need is itself theft. The poor are due what they need, and “To keep back what is due to another, inflicts the same kind of injury as taking a thing unjustly: wherefore an unjust detention is included in an unjust taking.”<sup>191</sup> Governments may take from their citizens what is “due to them for safeguarding the common good”, even if violence is needed to overcome the resistance of the erstwhile owners.<sup>192</sup>

Possessions may be bought and sold, but transactions must be just. It must be possible to exchange things in order that people’s needs are satisfied. Trade in commodities necessary to support life is praiseworthy.<sup>193</sup> Providing for needs through buying and selling is more common and often more effective than outright giving, and therefore God and God’s law encourages many forms of trade.<sup>194</sup> The price for which something is sold may be more than what was paid for it. The

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<sup>186</sup> St. Basil the Great, “Homily on Luke 12:18” quoted at ST II-II.66.2. Basil is commenting the Parable of the Rich Fool who builds new storehouses for his wealth, only to die suddenly.

<sup>187</sup> ST II-II.66.3-6

<sup>188</sup> ST II-II.66.6 ad 1

<sup>189</sup> ST II-II.66.7

<sup>190</sup> ST II-II.66.7

<sup>191</sup> ST II-II.66.3 ad 2

<sup>192</sup> ST II-II.66.8

<sup>193</sup> ST II-II.77.4

<sup>194</sup> ST I-II.105.2 ad 4. See also Juan Antonio Widow, “La Ética Económica y la Usura” in *Anales de la Fundación Francisco Elías de Tejada*, no. 10, 2004, pp. 15-45.

purpose of the resulting moderate profit is to compensate the seller for his or her time and risk in acquiring, transporting, and preparing the goods for sale, support the seller's family, and assist the poor or perform some other public good. On the other hand, trading of money for money or any commodity with solely the objective of large profits serves no just end.<sup>195</sup>

The price paid for something should not be dramatically different from its worth, often referred to in the Thomistic literature as the "just price". The purpose of money is to measure the quality and usefulness to humans of things sold. So when anything is sold for too much or too little compared to its just price, money is being misused in a way that is unjust. That is, a price that is too high is an injustice to the buyer; a price that is too low is an injustice to the seller. Suppose there is more than one potential buyer in need of some thing, in the sense that they will suffer<sup>196</sup> without it. The price may then be higher than otherwise, but not more than it is worth to the seller (presumably including the modest profit described above). That some thing is of greater advantage or usefulness to the buyer than to the seller is also no reason to charge an excessive price. The advantage is due to the circumstances of the buyer, not the seller, so the seller should not benefit abnormally.<sup>197</sup> Before closing a transaction a seller must give to the buyer all information possessed concerning non-obvious defects in anything being sold.<sup>198</sup>

Governments may regulate buying and selling in order to ensure that too much wealth does not concentrate in too few hands. Evening out over-concentration of wealth is a matter of the survival of the state, even of social order. Too much inequality of wealth will lead to the depopulation of a nation. Thomas does not describe the mechanism of the decline in population.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> ST II-II.77.4

<sup>196</sup> ST II-II.77.1. Recall that Aquinas defines a need to be anything required to sustain physical life or the growth of virtue toward the final end of happiness in unity with God (ST I-II.4.7). In the present context, he considers the lack of any such need to be suffering because it inhibits motion toward the final end of happiness. When writing of the Passion of Christ, however, Aquinas writes of suffering as if it is any sort of physical or emotional pain (ST III.46.5). Thus, the *Summa* contains two ideas of what is suffering, and these are not identical.

<sup>197</sup> ST II-II.77.1

<sup>198</sup> ST II-II.77.2 and 77.3

<sup>199</sup> ST I-II.105 ad 3

Thomas is even harder on the world of finance, the marketplace for money, than he is on the marketplace for goods. As an Italian aristocrat of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he was probably familiar with nascent forms of modern banking. Minute books survive from 1154 documenting the operations of a Genoese firm doing credit for traders and governments, foreign exchange, and merchant banking. Interest rates for loans from Italian sources in the 12<sup>th</sup> century could be as high as 20% or even 100% per annum.<sup>200</sup>

He condemns as sin all usury, any charging of interest on loans.<sup>201</sup> According to Thomas, neither money nor anything fungible with money may be given to a lender as a condition, explicit or implicit, of a loan being made. Suppose, however, that money is lent to tradesman or merchant as an investment in a business. This is making an association for a common purpose, namely better to satisfy the needs of a community and receive a just profit. In this case, the lender may receive a share of the profit.<sup>202</sup>

The first reason Aquinas gives for the prohibition of usury is that it is a form of oppression of the poor. The reason is biblical: “It is written (Exodus 22:25): ‘If thou lend money to any of thy people that is poor, that dwelleth with thee, thou shalt not be hard upon them as an extortioner, nor oppress them with usuries.’”<sup>203</sup> Lending and charging interest leads to inequality at a level that reaches that of injustice. It disturbs the natural equality that all humans share.<sup>204</sup> Aquinas interprets interest as being a charge for the use of the money lent. The purpose of money is to be spent to obtain that which is needed to support life. To use it is to spend it. When money is alienated from a buyer in exchange for some good, he no longer retains its form (in Aristotle’s sense of the word), the value it represents.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, when both interest is charged and a loan must be repaid, the borrower is both fully returning what was lent

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<sup>200</sup> Robert S. Lopez, “The Dawn of Medieval Banking”, in *The Dawn of Modern Banking*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10.

<sup>201</sup> ST II-II.78.1

<sup>202</sup> ST II-II.78.2

<sup>203</sup> ST II-II.78.1

<sup>204</sup> ST II-II.104.5

<sup>205</sup> John T. Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 56.

and also paying for its use, in effect paying for the money lent in two different ways.<sup>206</sup>

Why then should anyone ever lend? Aquinas writes that we should lend due to benevolence and love.<sup>207</sup> He quotes Luke 6:35: “Lend, hoping for nothing thereby.” Lending should not be done in hope of profit but be an act of hope in God, reaching out to the borrower that his needs will be fulfilled.<sup>208</sup>

Much secondary literature does not accept that Aquinas’s economic ethics is as characterized by liberation theology (i.e., as an acceptance of sin and the culture of wealth). Aquinas is dismissed by many researchers in the fields of economic and business ethics and the history of economics as being fundamentally hostile to the worlds of the marketplace and finance.<sup>209</sup> One ethics primer states that, like Jesus and St Paul, Aquinas “made wholesale attack on business practices”.<sup>210</sup> Some authors, even while writing approvingly of parts of Aquinas’s economic ethics soundly condemn other portions. For example, in an article arguing for positive reconsideration by economists of Aquinas’s notion of a just price, David D. Friedman writes that the notion of just price became tainted by association with Aquinas’s condemnation of usury.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, Friedman writes that Aquinas’s classification of usury as a sin is “notorious” and “prevented transactions from occurring” (the failure of a transaction to be completed being to Friedman and his intended audience a great evil).<sup>212</sup> Others see the economic ethics of Aquinas and other Scholastics as a strategy by the Christian religious leadership to slow or stop the emergence of economic competition to the dominant political and commercial interests with which the Church was enmeshed.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> ST II-II.78.1

<sup>207</sup> ST II-II.78.2

<sup>208</sup> ST II-II.78.1 ad 4

<sup>209</sup> Adrian Walsh, “The Morality of the Market and the Medieval Schoolmen”, in *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics*, vol. 3, 2004, pp. 241-259.

<sup>210</sup> Robert C. Solomon, “Business Ethics and Virtue”, in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. by Peter Singer, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), p. 31-38, at p. 35.

<sup>211</sup> David D. Friedman, “In Defense of Thomas Aquinas and the Just Price” in *History of Political Economy*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1980, pp. 234-242, at p. 235.

<sup>212</sup> Friedman, p. 240.

<sup>213</sup> Mark Koyama, “Evading the ‘Taint of Usury’: The Usury Prohibition As a Barrier to Entry” in *Explorations in Economic History*, vol. 47, 2010, pp. 420–442.

According to Mews and Abraham, the Scholastic condemnation of usury was a response to “crippling interest rates being charged in urban centers”. Both Franciscan and Dominican preachers working prior to Aquinas taught that usury was wrong as a matter of law. Aquinas’s contribution was to alter the grounds of discussion of usury by arguing that relationships between the parties involved in lending for interest are unequal in a manner contrary to natural justice.<sup>214</sup>

Two recent journal papers each go part way toward providing links between Aquinas’s economics and his notion of sanctification. In the first, Luke Bretherton provides new insights into the nature of the inequality that arises from usury. Bretherton writes that the scriptural treatment of usury teaches that it is not solely an economic act: usury is political. It demarcates who is within and who is without the community.<sup>215</sup> In the Torah, lending is encouraged yet lending for interest to and permanent debt slavery (in the event of default on a loan) of fellow Jews and those residing with them are prohibited. Among other places, this prohibition is found in Exodus 22:25: the text noted above as having been quoted by Aquinas as a notable scriptural basis for the prohibition of usury. These laws work together to ensure that while robust economic relationships flourish, a rough sort of equality within the community and before God is periodically re-established. However, both lending for interest and debt slavery are permitted when the borrower is a foreigner. There is to be a level of mutuality within Israel’s economic life. However, opportunities to exercise economic power over members of neighboring nations may be taken. In the economic sphere, co-religionists are to be treated as friends and those from other nations as real or latent enemies. The charging of interest and debt slavery are weapons that weaken the enemy. Bretherton quotes St Ambrose: “He fights without a weapon who demands usury; without a sword he revenges himself upon an enemy, who is an interest collector from his foe.”<sup>216</sup> Payment of interest weakens the enemy. When the enemy is weakest, the loan cannot be repaid and the enemy is further crippled by debt slavery or other penalties of default. However, Jesus taught that we

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<sup>214</sup> Constant J. Mews and Ibrahim Abraham, “Usury and Just Compensation: Religious and Financial Ethics in Historical Perspective” in *J. of Business Ethics*, vol. 72, 2007, pp. 1–15, at p. 4.

<sup>215</sup> Luke Bretherton, “‘Love Your Enemies’: Usury, Citizenship, and the Friend-Enemy Distinction”, in *Modern Theology*, vol. 27, no. 3, July 2011, pp. 366-392.

<sup>216</sup> Ambrose, *De Tobia*, quoted in Bretherton, p. 380.



are to love our enemies (Mth 5:44), witnessing to Christ's love that makes possible friendship among all humanity. But then usury, being a weapon wielded during peace or war at enemies outside the community, is prohibited. Christ universalizes the notions of nation, people, and community of friendship. But then the ban on usury is universalized also.<sup>217</sup>

Bretherton does not explicitly connect back to Aquinas's notion of deification as the final end of humanity. However, such a link is not difficult to make. As we have seen, Aquinas objected to usury on the grounds of the inequality it necessarily produces. If we accept the notion of usury as a weapon, then the inequality produced by lending to the needy for interest is like the inequality of an armed person exerting her or his will upon an unarmed person. It constitutes a differential of power that renders impossible the acting out of love of neighbor, building peace within and without, and growing in justice which is a necessary component of contemplation and therefore of growing unity with God.

Another recent paper on Aquinas's notion of the just price goes part way toward connecting Thomas's ethics of economic behavior with his notion of sanctification and envisioning how it could work in today's world.<sup>218</sup> Its authors, Daryl Koehn and Barry Wilbratte, propose that Aquinas's "just price" should be interpreted as the "just person price," the price that a just person would pay. This just person would take into account the "well being of all who are parties to a given transaction and the good of the larger community."<sup>219</sup> In the case that both the buyer and seller are just, the price they arrive at will consider that both must live, support their families, and that public life must also be supported. In this way, the just person price is a price that is good for all participants in a transaction and for society as a whole. To arrive at the just person price, both buyers and sellers are to be reflective, understanding the costs and benefits associated with the good being exchanged and the needs of the others involved in the exchange and of the community. The just person price may be

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<sup>217</sup> This point was made before Bretherton, for example in Widow, "La Ética Económica y la Usura".

<sup>218</sup> Daryl Koehn and Barry Wilbratte, "A Defense of a Thomistic Concept of the Just Price" in *Business Ethics Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3, July 2012, pp. 501-526.

<sup>219</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 502.

higher or lower than the price that would be assigned by the neo-classical market, where price is a function only of supply and demand.<sup>220</sup>

Those who engage in commerce in this manner, with reflection and concern with the needs of others, are practicing doing justice. Indeed, economic exchanges are such a frequent part of life that they would be for most people the most common and accessible form of such practice. A greedy person, whether buyer or seller, consults only her or his own appetite for gain and does not consider the needs of others. Such a person will happily take a gouging price, an excessively high or low price that is obtainable due to sudden fluctuations in supply or demand. But such a person is practicing doing injustice rather than justice. Not only are they depriving others of what they need in order to secure their gain; they are depriving themselves of the virtue of justice.<sup>221</sup> On the other hand, the just buyer or seller is, and grows, more focused on the needs of others and the community.<sup>222</sup>

What is learned in perceiving and reasoning about the needs of other individuals and the community is transferred to other situations where one must act justly. In other words, through being a just person in economic exchanges, one learns how to be just in other, weightier matters.<sup>223</sup> Aquinas allows reasonable profits to be made. However, the just person who profits from justly priced transactions—having grown in knowledge of the needs of others, in reflective reasoning regarding self and others, and in practical justice—will in part use those profits to help the neighbor.<sup>224</sup>

The just person price will not generally be the same as the price in the market as generally understood by economists and practiced by business firms. This market price is set in great part by demand from customers that include the foolish and supply from sellers that include the predatory. Perhaps more important is who does not have the opportunity to participate in the setting of prices by supply and demand: those who are too poor or otherwise excluded as marginalized members of society. Neither they nor their needs are accorded a role in price setting in the neo-classical

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<sup>220</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 502.

<sup>221</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 506.

<sup>222</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 507-8.

<sup>223</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 503-4.

<sup>224</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 509.

market.<sup>225</sup> That is, a supply-and-demand price serves the needs of those who can afford to participate in that market. It is incapable of serving the needs of the poor. A marketplace based on the just price includes even the poorest and most marginalized because it accounts for their needs and not solely their ability to pay. This inclusion of the poor and marginalized provides the sellers and other buyers with the opportunity to help them, to provide what is necessary for a full life, through the transactions that take place.<sup>226</sup> The notion of just price “unlike the exchange price of neo-classical economics, recognizes [the] duty to the poor and brings this duty so to speak into the market exchange itself”.<sup>227</sup>

Under supply-and-demand pricing, the goal of economic activity is to maximize the monetary volume of goods exchanged and efficiency leading to maximum profit. Under just person pricing, the goal of economic activity becomes the personal and social life of all persons.<sup>228</sup> For this reason, the considerations used in arriving at a just price for something must include the externalities of producing or using the thing, for example, environmental effects and social costs.<sup>229</sup> Things may exist that have no just price, because they inevitably cause harm.<sup>230</sup>

Koehn and Wilbratte do not attempt to relate their elucidation of Aquinas’s concept of just price to other elements of his ethics or theology. However, there are a number of similarities between the person who can set a just person price and the person, described in the previous chapter, who is infused with charity and wisdom, growing in a virtuous cycle toward conformity with God and bringing peace to self, others, and the community. Both are outwardly focused, able to perceive the true needs of the neighbor. Both act in such a way as to balance the neighbor’s needs, their own needs, and the needs of family or others for whom they are responsible. The person who is strong in charity sees people and situations as they really are, doing the right (just) things for them. The person who is able to determine a just price perceives not just the economics of a deal, but also the situations of the people involved in the

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<sup>225</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 505.

<sup>226</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 507.

<sup>227</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 517.

<sup>228</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 520.

<sup>229</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 505.

<sup>230</sup> Koehn and Wilbratte, p. 520.

transaction. The just person, in their economic dealings, is treating others as friends, giving all involved the opportunity to increase the alignment of affections which grows peace.

In short, the person who works faithfully at setting just prices and participating in just transactions is a person being conformed to God through charity, acting in the economic sphere. The marketplace has a purpose: to be a means that supports the final end of humanity. It does this in two ways. The first is the overt one of providing the means of full human life. The second is to be an occasion for training the virtues of charity, wisdom, and justice in practical situations where the needs of the neighbor must be fully taken into account. Any

- individual price or transaction,
- type of transaction or financial instrument,
- means of joint ownership and management of assets and business activities, such as the modern corporation,
- human laws regulating economic activity, or
- system of interlocking economic and state power,

is to be judged by its suitability for providing these two means of humanity's final end of happiness in God.

Aquinas's analysis of usury can be viewed as the working out of such a judgment for the case of loan transactions. He judges that charging interest is incompatible with the learning of charity, peace, and justice on the part of the lender. Someone who needs money to satisfy her or his physical needs may obtain an interest-bearing loan because no one can grow in charity, peace, and justice when lacking food, shelter, and the like, and "it is lawful to make use of another's sin for a good end".<sup>231</sup>

Exactly the same process of judgment is applicable to both the current form of global capitalism and the historical economic practices in the countries of the liberation theologians. Neo-classical economics and neo-liberal politics of the powers and principalities of the global economy evaluate economic practices on the criteria of

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<sup>231</sup> ST II-II.78.4

maximization of economic growth and profits. In other words, a transaction is good as long as both parties agree to it and it does not result in a future decline of economic activity. The good of the other party to a transaction is not to be considered. Quite the opposite: a transaction, such as a high interest rate loan, that binds the other party to a lifetime of similar transactions is “good”, because it results in a high level of spending for life, at least on such transactions. But this is virtually the situation against which the liberation theologians were reacting. The primary difference was one of scale: whole Latin American nations were and are in debt peonage, not only individuals.<sup>232</sup> Were the ethics of the marketplace as envisioned by Aquinas, with all caring for each other, then the distribution of the goods of the earth would closely match what are the needs of each and the ability of each effectively to steward these goods. Extreme disparities of wealth would be impossible. No one can be millions of times a better steward than anyone else. All have the same basic needs for sustaining life and similar needs for making life full. Therefore, economic and governmental institutions that promote and protect a situation where some have millions of times more wealth than others are setting up stumbling blocks to humanity’s final end rather than participating in humanity’s sanctification. This is not at all what the liberation theologians accuse Aquinas of: a mute acceptance of a concept of private property where a few own nearly everything.

Now it would seem that the foregoing depends on marketplace participants being reasonable, just, perceptive, wise, and charitable. But it should be remembered that Aquinas classifies unjust marketplace behavior as cheating,<sup>233</sup> which, as it is done secretly is a form of theft.<sup>234</sup> Theft is a mortal sin: it is punishable by the civil authority according to the human positive law by any punishment including death, in order to teach others.<sup>235</sup> There are two reasons why a human government may happen to permit some unjust behavior. One is that it is not practical to legislate against all possible acts of vice. But theft is unjust enough that it must be against human law.<sup>236</sup> The other is that a government may be acting for the good of its

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<sup>232</sup> Donghi, pp. 623-624.

<sup>233</sup> ST II-II.77

<sup>234</sup> ST II-II.66.3

<sup>235</sup> ST II-II.66.6, ST I-II.95.1

<sup>236</sup> ST I-II.95.3

leaders and not its people. But, as was discussed in the previous chapter, this is tyranny and Aquinas teaches that tyrannies may be overthrown. Thus, governments are obligated to use the law to teach ethical marketplace behavior, up to some limit of practicality.

In the previous chapter, I described a cycle in which charity (a result and measure of deification, which is *theoria*) leads to acts of love for neighbor (*praxis*), which leads to peace and understanding of the neighbor (the fruit of *praxis*), which leads to an increase of charity. Both *theoria* and *praxis* are found in this cycle without either being prior to the other. As Aquinas's ethics of economic behavior is an application of his concept of deification and its growth through charity, it should inherit the same cyclic structure and lack of primacy of either *theoria* or *praxis*. This inherited structure is what Koehn and Wilbratte have found in their concept of the growing justice of the person engaging in the setting of just prices. To put it another way, as with Trinitarian theology and charity, for Aquinas the buying and selling are a form of spiritual practice.

Justice is another result and means of deification, as God is ultimately just. So justice is a form of *theoria*. Aquinas teaches that justice leads to economic transactions that benefit the neighbor, addressing their true needs, which is *praxis*. The peace and understanding of the people engaged in such a transaction is increased by the experience, which grows justice: *theoria* again.

This structure exactly parallels that of the cycle of charity, with the same roles for *theoria* and *praxis*. Neither is primary. Yet any one individual or community must join the cycle at some point. That point may appear to be primary to them, because that was the place through which the beginning of their path of sanctification passed.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

In Chapter 1, we saw that the liberation theologians argue that praxis must henceforth take precedence over theoria. They observe that the poor of the Earth are being oppressed and killed. They must be liberated. Primacy of theoria supports the status quo, the power of the oppressor, with whom the church and theology are enmeshed. The focus on the individual soul promoted by primacy of theoria leaves theology unable to act in the world against the Powers of individual and corporate wealth and political and social structures that protect it. Theology itself requires liberation from the Powers of this world before it can aid the poor. That liberation is the primacy of praxis. Liberation of theology is to be found in the re-definition of truth in terms of praxis rather than theoria: Truth is what is efficacious for liberating the poor. The resulting theology will be a theology of the cross, where the atoning sacrifice of the death of Jesus is the ultimate praxis. So, the cross is the viewpoint from which other praxis is reflected upon.

Given the explorations of the theology of Thomas Aquinas in Chapters 2 to 4, where does this argument for the necessity of the primacy of praxis break down? Where it breaks down is in its assumption that either theoria or praxis must be primary. If that assumption were correct, then the primacy of theoria in theology would lead to its fatal enmeshment with the Powers, and then praxis must be primary.

But for Aquinas, the middle is not excluded here. Neither theoria nor praxis need be primary. There is a purpose, a goal, to human life, namely happiness in unity with God, growing the *imago dei* in the human person. But that growth cannot occur without growth in love for God and neighbor (charity). Not only growth, but even having charity within one at all depends on praxis. The Christian life is a mode of life (1) oriented toward knowledge and union with God (theoria) but that very orientation requires that one have (2) knowledge and union with neighbor, which (3) necessarily involves praxis with the poor. Thus truly seeking union with God yields solidarity with and knowledge of the poor and their situation. Far from being abandoned, Matthew 25, 1 John, and so on are central to our uniting with God and our neighbor. For Aquinas, theoria is primary in some formal sense. However, theoria is impossible without charity. But when we ask how one would be a person

growing in charity, in Aquinas' sense but in today's world, we find that charity is in turn impossible without praxis.

Now recall that Aquinas is insistent upon the simplicity of God.<sup>237</sup> Even though God is simple, God created, creates, and sustains creation. Furthermore, the Word and the Spirit have missions in the world and irrupted into history. Thus, motion toward unity with God means increasing unity of self that includes increasing unity of *theoria* and *praxis*. Thus, in the limit (unattainable in this life) *theoria* and *praxis* are one.

Those truly seeking liberation for the poor from poverty and oppression learn charity (in Aquinas's sense as discussed in Chapter 3). Yet God is charity. Union with the poor leads to union with God. There is no primacy, but rather a virtuous cycle that can be entered through more than one path. But human cognition is limited to working in temporal sequence. So any one individual or community necessarily enters into this mode of life through either *theoria* or *praxis*. In their experience and reflection, that one seems to have priority.

In Chapter 3, we saw that Aquinas taught that in severe situations, the mode of life that is charity could require the violent overthrow of tyrants, that is, revolution. The justice required by charity can demand the re-ordering of economic affairs (Chapter 4). If a government makes realignment of economics toward justice impossible because its leaders are benefiting from the *status quo*, then it is tyrannical (Chapter 3). Thus, those engaged in the mode of life Aquinas describes are required to act in the world—using even the most unusual and extreme measures when the situation, justice, and charity so demand—against the Powers of individual and corporate wealth and the political and social structures that protect it. Thus, the argument of liberation theologians for the primacy of *praxis* fails in a second manner: Primacy of *praxis* is not necessary to act against the Powers.

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<sup>237</sup> ST I.3



Now this is not to say that praxis does not have an important role in the mode of life that Aquinas teaches. Praxis and reflection on praxis provide a corrective. Where the neighbor suffers either the Christian or the church do not act, there is a failure of perception, virtue, and or theology. Reflection is required to identify and address the failure. (Observe that reflection is an aspect of theoria and fixing a failure is an aspect of praxis. Once again we find that they are bound together.)

Finally, the mode of life that Aquinas teaches does depend on acts in history that are prior to it. But these acts are not those of humans but of God: the creation of history by the Father through the Son, the missions of the Son and the Spirit (Chapter 2), the foretastes of unity of God and neighbor that we receive in this life (including the sacraments), and the promise that that unity will be fulfilled.

I believe that this essay contains several novel contributions in addition to the above argument:

- The connection between the interpretation of Aquinas's Trinitarian theology as a spiritual exercise and the centrality of charity in that exercise (Chapter 2),
- The extension of recent research on the acts required by Aquinas's concept of charity to include the roles of peace, justice, and wisdom in charity, the conclusions made concerning political praxis based on this extension, and connecting that to the Aquinas's concept of sanctification (Chapter 3),
- Relating other scholars' work on Thomas's concept of just price and prohibition of usury as justice to his concept of sanctification (Chapter 4).

Finally, this essay leaves open some areas for possible future research. The most apparent one comes from noting that Aquinas was the inheritor and teacher of a distinctly Dominican spirituality that emphasized the role of happiness in one's spiritual life and practice.<sup>238</sup> The human telos of unity with God is to produce our ultimate happiness. An opportunity for extending the present research would be to examine the role of happiness in the mode of live envisioned by Aquinas,

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<sup>238</sup> Paul Murray, *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness*, (London: Burnes and Oats, 2006), pp. 1-44.

incorporating sources from the Dominican community of around Aquinas's time, such as Jordan of Saxony and Humbert of Romans. Such an extension might also be able to relate more clearly Thomas's (or the Dominican) concept of happiness, Aquinas's ethics, and the Beatitudes.

Another possible extension of the present work would be to examine its connections to Aquinas's sacramental theology, asking questions such as: What is the role of the sacraments in bringing about and supporting the mode of life envisioned by Aquinas, in particular growing charity, peace, wisdom, and justice?

A third extension would be to re-examine the life and work of the Bartolomé de las Casas in the light of the conclusions of this essay. In his biographical tome on las Casas, Gustavo Gutiérrez characterizes Bartolomé as a front-runner of Liberation Theology. Gutierrez writes that las Casas "abandoned his blindness",<sup>239</sup> including theological blindness, rooted in his position of privilege in order to preach to the impoverished and abused natives of Central America and advocate for them in the corridors of power of the Spanish empire and the Roman Catholic Church. The point of the re-examination would be to ask whether las Casas's life and writings necessarily reflect such an abandonment or whether they are an attempt to live into the mode of life of charity envisioned by Aquinas, whom as a Dominican of the 16<sup>th</sup> century las Casas would have studied extensively.

The question of the primacy of praxis came about due to the need for theology to respond to widespread poverty in the presence of exponentially growing wealth and global structures of power and finance in the modern world. However, much of this wealth is an effect of the practice of the mathematical, physical, and biological sciences and of the technologies and industrial revolutions based upon them. To me, the apparent lack of any *theoria* or ethics inherent in the practices of science and technology is the second great problem (after poverty) that the world presents to theology. This problem encompasses a number of challenges, for example those presented by:

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<sup>239</sup> Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, p. 48.

- Stewardship of the ecology,
- Response to the existence of weapons of mass destruction,
- The pervasive effects of inside the panopticon that our electronic devices provide, and
- The challenge to Christianity of scientism as a *de facto* religion.

It is possible that some responses to that lack of *theoria* and ethics could be developed from the conclusions of this essay, what we have learned about Thomas's view of the marketplace as a training ground for virtue, plus his writings about creation and about practical knowledge.

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