

Grace and Charity. Participation in the Divine Nature and Union with God: The Surpassing Contemporary Significance of Thomas Aquinas's Doctrine of Divinization

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Caritas non est virtus hominis in quantum est homo, sed in quantum per participationem gratiae fit Deus et filius Dei, secundum illud I Ioan. III.1: *Videte qualem caritatem dedit nobis Pater, ut filii Dei nominemur et simus.*
THOMAS AQUINAS, *De caritate*, q. I., a. 2, ad 15¹

I. Introduction: Modernity's Anthropocentric Turn, Immanent Transcendence, and the Loss of the Supernatural

In the early decades of the twenty-first century an observant spectator might perceive the striking ambiguity that haunts the self-image of late modern humanity in the Western Hemisphere. The rapidly accelerating progress of the scientific penetration of the natural world and the ensuing technological domination of the whole planet seem to have advanced humanity into a quasi-divine position, into a collective Demiurge. Sovereignty, once upon a time an exclusive attribute of divinity, seems now to fall to humanity collectively, and in rather far reaching specific ways to each individual human subject.

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¹ “Charity is not a virtue of human beings *qua human beings*, but insofar as, by sharing in grace, they become gods and the children of God, in keeping with 1 John 3:1, ‘You see what charity the Father has bestowed on us, so that we are called, and have become, the children of God’” (TH. AQUINAS, *On Charity*, in *ibidem*, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 121).

In the affluent parts of the Western Hemisphere, subjective sovereignty is exercised by way of the unfettered rule of one's will over ideally everything exterior to one's will. This rule extends from myriads of consumer goods to varyingly branded identities, and last but not least ideological and religious affiliations. However, the interpretation of reality that the natural sciences advance presents a jarringly different picture—a picture that puts into question the very possibility, let alone reality, of subjective sovereignty. According to a broad naturalist if not materialist consensus among contemporary neuroscientists and philosophers of mind, the human mind is an epiphenomenon of the brain's bio-chemical processes and human choices determined by the “interests” of the “selfish gene” and hence statistically predictable.

Thus the late modern subject vacillates between two competing self-images, between, on the one side, what might be called the *gnostic angelism* of the sovereign self that may submit to its will an absolutely malleable and fluid exteriority and, on the other side, the *materialist animalism* of a super-primate allegedly determined by its genetic make-up and its particular ecological niche. The utopian existentialist self-image of the sovereign subject and the competing dystopian naturalist self-image of the superprimate constantly destabilize each other precisely because they are nothing but the two contradictory effects brought about by the modern anthropocentric turn.² This turn, prepared in the Italian Renaissance, ushered in by Cartesian rationalism and Humean empiricism, and solidified by Kant's critical idealism, raised the specter of the irreconcilable bifurcation between a gnostic angelism and a materialist animalism. Both self-images of the age are false and hence ultimately uninhabitable by human beings. The flight from the unbearably reductive self-image characteristic of the materialist animalism of the superprimate ends up in the equally erroneous self-image of the gnostic angelism of the sovereign self. Since the latter self-image, though attractive, is impossible to sustain consistently over extended time, the resulting frustration leads to the predictable resignation to the self-

² In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant advances a profound analysis of this distinctly modern problematic and—tacitly presupposing the ontological and epistemological entailments of the anthropocentric turn—elevates the problematic to the dignity of one of the four antinomies of pure reason, the antinomy between causality according to the laws of nature and spontaneity, in short the antinomy between determination and freedom. (I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Transzendente Elementarlehre, 2. Hauptstück: Die Antinomie der reinen Vernunft, A 444/B472-A 452/B 480).

image of the superprimate which again turns out to be unbearable. Hence the ceaseless vacillation. But *nota bene*, both poles of this vacillation share the anthropocentric condition of immanentism and its specific subject-produced transcendence.

The utopian angelist version of immanent transcendence arises from the endless surplus of desires for finite goods that is fueled by the subject's will to sovereignty. Since the fulfillment of each of these desires is transitory, each fulfillment is transcended by a renewed desire for a finite good and its, at best, transitory fulfillment. The interminable vacillation between desire, transitory fulfillment, and the return of desire issues into the immanent transcendence of the bad infinity of an endless extension of finite goods. The dystopian animalist version of immanent transcendence is characterized by the replacement of finite desires with instinctual drives. Freed from the illusions of conscience and responsible agency the superprimate's activity arises from the conflagration of variegated constellations of drives and instincts. The immanent transcendence of materialist animalism arises from the complete dependency of human existence upon a complex and contingent matrix of bio-chemical processes. If commitments, convictions, customs, and preferences are indeed mere epiphenomena of such a matrix of neurological and bio-chemical processes that issue into distinct drives, urges, and instincts, what is the case today might not be the case tomorrow. "Identity" denotes nothing but a transitory state, an event, and the event-horizon of continuous contingent change constitutes the unique transcendence of this dystopian self-image.

Needless to say, the strictly immanent transcendence to which both self-images of the late modern age give rise force the spiritual soul into the proverbial Procrustean bed that cuts it off from the true transcendence whose encounter and contemplation grants the only lasting happiness to the human person.³ Precisely in this regard Thomas Aquinas turns out to be of continuing relevance for contemporary philosophy and theology "after the anthropocentric turn." This relevance consists in his uncompromising commitment to the participated wisdom characteristic of a consistent philosophical and theological theocentrism. The participated wisdom

³ The Thomist thinker who had a deep grasp of the late modern problematic of immanent transcendence and advanced a powerful Thomist response to it was the German philosopher JOSEF PIEPER. See especially his *Leisure, The Basis of Culture* and *Happiness and Contemplation*.

he pursues and displays is most accentuated in his consistent theological supernaturalism that is rooted in divine revelation and supported by a metaphysics of being that opens up from finite being to the absolute and objective transcendence of Uncreated Being Itself, that is, the universal cause of all being. Arguably, Aquinas offers the philosophical and theological resources necessary for a thorough undoing of the anthropocentric turn and for recovering a genuine theocentrism in the natural as well as the supernatural order. At the very center of this recovery stands the metaphysical and theological notion of participation.

Cornelio Fabro and others have shown convincingly that the concept of participation plays a central role in Aquinas's metaphysics.⁴ Unfolded along the lines of the ontological participation of effects in their causes, *participatio* terminates in a rich and nuanced philosophy of being. When consistently developed along the lines of the participation of finite being in Uncreated Being, such an inquiry into the principles of being issues into a metaphysics of creation. The metaphysics of creation rests on the fundamental principle "creare est dare esse," to create is to grant participation in the *actus essendi*. This principle marks the crucial onto-theological difference between the transcendent source of all being, *ipsum esse subsistens*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the participating *actus essendi*, terminating instantaneously in the participating "datum," the gift of the contingent existence of discrete beings.

The natural *participatio* of all finite beings in the *actus essendi* allows sacred theology *ad mentem Sancti Thomae* to consider analogically the surpassing supernatural *participatio* of the rational creature in the divine nature. This supernatural *participatio* rests on sanctifying grace as its quasi-ontological foundation and on the acts of the supernatural *habitus* of charity as the inchoative union with God.

⁴ C. FABRO, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo San Tommaso d'Aquino; ibidem*, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation", 449-491; L.-B. GEIGER, *La participation dans la philosophie de s. Thomas d'Aquin*; R. A. TE VELDE, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*; J. F. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, 94-131. For the surpassing theological importance of the concept of participation for Aquinas's doctrine of grace, see M. SÁNCHEZ SORONDO, *La gracia como participación de la naturaleza divina según Santo Tomás de Aquino*.

II. Participation as Perfective—Natural and Supernatural

According to the ontological constitution and teleological dynamism of finite being, each being is first and foremost directed to its own perfection, to the full actualization of its specific nature. Simultaneously, by way of the self-same actualization of its specific nature, every being is directed to the twofold good of the universe: the order among the parts and the ordering of the whole universe to God.⁵ Nothing short of the universe's perfection is the fitting manifestation of God's wisdom and goodness. Toward that end, Aquinas argues, God created an abundance of diverse beings with a plethora of different perfections in order that the universe as a whole may more perfectly manifest and participate God's goodness. Creatures do precisely that, not simply by participating the *actus essendi*, but to a much greater degree by imitating God through acting and thereby causing—in accord with their specific natures—distinct states of being. For this very reason, Aquinas argues, God created all things in a state of potency to their specific type of act which is the full realization of their specific nature. By realizing their specific nature through these acts, all creatures contribute to the perfection of the universe. All beings achieve their secondary perfection by acting in accord with the particular mode of their participation in the *actus essendi* which is their primary perfection, their substantial form. These secondary perfections are the way each being participates in the eternal law, the *ratio* by way of which God governs the universe.⁶ God's *ratio*, the eternal law, has imprinted upon all beings natural inclinations to their specific natural ends. Precisely by following their natural inclinations all beings pursue their own perfection and contribute to the perfection of the whole universe.

Yet God's wisdom ordains that the perfection of the universe transcends the finality proportionate to finite created natures, that it transcends the perfection that arises from the participation of all beings in the *actus essendi*. The only possible participation that transcends the participation of finite beings in the *actus essendi* must be an utterly unique and surpassingly mysterious participation in the transcendent Uncreated Being itself,

⁵ See esp. TH. AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* I, 29; III, 23-32. On this topic, now available in English, see the important essay by C. DE KONINCK, "The Primacy of the Common Good against the Personalists", vol. 2, 63-108.

⁶ For a lucid discussion of this complex topic, see J. RZIHA, *Perfecting Human Actions: St. Thomas Aquinas on Human Participation in Eternal Law*.

the *ipsum esse subsistens*, in short, nothing but a kind of participation in the divine nature itself. For this surpassing end God has created rational creatures (angels and human beings), as dynamic images of the divine triune exemplar. (*Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 93, aa. 1&3) Their perfect realization as images consists in nothing less than their union with the divine exemplar, a participation in the divine nature itself that surpasses infinitely the rational creatures' existence, their participation in the *actus essendi*. As the deposit of the faith—conveyed by Scripture, transmitted by tradition, and affirmed by dogma—teaches, God is a trinity of subsistent relations, persons in the fullest ontological sense. (ST I, q. 29, a. 4) Hence, participation of the created image in the divine exemplar occurs by way of a conformation to the image of the Trinity. This conformation, flowing from the divine nature, is realized by way of the activities of intellect and will. Aquinas explains:

God is in all things by His essence, power, and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature, but also to dwell therein as in His own temple. (ST I, q. 43, a. 3)⁷

The will is formed by the theological virtue of charity; the intellect by the theological virtue of faith and then more perfectly even, as faith formed by charity, by the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom. Through charity and wisdom, the elect human beings are made participators "of the divine Word and of the Love proceeding, so as freely to know God truly and to love God rightly" (ST I, q. 38, a. 1). Elected by God to this surpassing final end, the blessed qua creatures participate not only in the *actus essendi*, but rather qua deified persons also in the beatitude of the Triune God. Aquinas points to this divine *ordinatio* of humanity's final supernatural

⁷ All citations from the *Summa Theologiae* are taken from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948; repr. Christian Classics, 1981). Alterations are indicated by brackets.

end in the very first article of the *Summa theologiae*: “[The human being] is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason.” Then Aquinas quotes the *Vulgate* rendition of a crucial passage he returns to whenever he discusses the supernatural final end to which humanity is ordained. It is Isaiah 64:4, a passage that the Apostle Paul quotes in 1. Corinthians 2:9: “The eye has not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee” (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 1c). In order to carry out this *ordinatio* of his wisdom, God “who moves all things to their due ends” (*ST II-II*, q. 23, a. 2) and thereby orders all things sweetly, adds supernatural forms to the natural powers of the rational beings. The first of these supernatural forms, poured into the very essence of the soul, sanctifying grace, is the ontological principle and root of all the other supernatural forms or *habitus*, the theological virtues, the infused moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁸ Among these supernatural, infused *habitus*, charity is of surpassing eminence, first because charity is a certain participation of the Holy Spirit wherefore all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are rooted in charity. Secondly and even more importantly, charity is of surpassing eminence because already in this life of the *viator*, charity affords an inchoative union with God. Because union, which is due to charity, presupposes conversion, which is due to actual grace, and the elevation of human nature, which is due to sanctifying grace, I shall treat first of grace and then of charity.

III. Grace

Gratia in Aquinas’s use is an analogical notion with many nuances. In its widest sense, *gratia* denotes a freely given quality that renders the recipient pleasing. In a more restricted sense, *gratia* denotes the *auxilium* of the First Mover, whether due to nature or above nature, that is, natural (every motion proportionate to the nature of a being), preternatural (extraordinary strengthening, extension, or protection of natural capacities), or supernatural (for example, miracles in the strictest sense). Finally, in its most proper sense—the sense exclusively used in the following—, *gratia* denotes a strictly supernatural gift of God to the rational creature for the purpose of salvation, divinization, and eventual union of the rational creature with

⁸ “Sanctifying grace disposes the soul to possess the divine person” (*ST I*, q. 43, a. 3, ad 1).

God. This is *gratia gratum faciens*, sanctifying grace. This supernatural gift is either actual or habitual. As actual grace, *gratia gratum faciens* is a quality that is supernatural and transient; as habitual grace, it is a quality that is supernatural and permanent (albeit forfeitable), inhering in the very essence of the recipient's spiritual soul. Regarding the effect of sanctifying grace, Aquinas distinguishes between operating and cooperating grace; both are different effects of the same grace, the effect of operating grace being that God moves while the human being is moved, and the effect of cooperating grace being that God moves the human being and the human being moves him- or herself (again by virtue of God's movement).

First I shall focus on actual grace, and especially on operating actual grace, for two reasons: first, in human persons who have reached the age of reason—hence in every adult convert to the faith—actual grace is an indispensable preparation for the reception of sanctifying grace. Second, since the intellectual appetite, the will, stands at the center of the inchoative act of union in the life of the *viator*, it is crucial to understand how God moves the will toward this union. Fundamentally, Aquinas conceives of the movement of the will to God as a conversion to God.⁹ This conversion is threefold: the first conversion occurs in the *initium fidei*, the beginning of faith, which is the disposition necessary to receive the *habitus* of sanctifying grace. Based on the received *habitus* of sanctifying grace, the second conversion occurs—the continuous turning to God by acts of charity, acts that merit beatitude. This continuous turning to God through growth in charity creates the disposition necessary for the third conversion. This final conversion turns the *viator* into a *comprehensor* who has full possession of God in the beatific vision, a possession that issues into the perfect love of God and the perfect beatitude of the *comprehensor*.

⁹ Aquinas ranks the threefold conversion according to the order of perfection, not according to the chronological order, as I will do in the following discussion: “The first is by the perfect love of God; this belongs to the creature enjoying the possession of God; and for such conversion, consummate grace is required. The next turning to God is that which merits beatitude; and for this there is required habitual grace, which is the principle of merit. The third conversion is that whereby a [human being] disposes himself so that he may have grace; for this no habitual grace is required; but the operation of God, Who draws the soul towards Himself, according to Lament. V. 21: *Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted*” (*ST I*, q. 62, a. 2, ad 3).

III.1. Actual Grace and the *Initium Fidei*

The *initium fidei* denotes the special divine motion—operating actual grace—by which God efficaciously orders the human will to God as its final end and simultaneously signifies the absolutely crucial and indispensable, but albeit ultimately limited place of justification in the order of salvation and divinization. This “turning of the will,” its rectification or effective justification, issues in the will’s desire for God as the overarching specific good.¹⁰ Because the will is the efficient cause of all human acts and because it moves all the other powers of the soul to their acts, the will is the first principle of sin. (*ST* I-II, q. 74, a. 1) And consequently, of all the powers of the soul, the will has been most fundamentally infected by original sin. (*ST* I-II, q. 83, a. 3; *De malo*, q. 4, a. 2c) For that reason, it is necessary first and foremost that the will be justified, that is, the rectitude of the will be restored effectively from evil to good. In the *initium fidei* therefore actual grace is first of all operating.¹¹ Aquinas states: “An external cause alters free choice, as when God by grace changes the will of a human being from evil to good, as Prov. 21:1 says: ‘The heart of the king is in God’s hands, and God will turn it whithersoever he willed.’”¹² This changing of the will from evil does not violate or contradict the will’s proper operation. For “the will advanced to its first movement in virtue of the instigation [*instinctus*] of some exterior mover [*exterior movens*]” (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 4c), who is God himself. (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6c) Thanks to the divine *instinctus*,¹³ the appetitive inclination of the will tends now to God himself as the overarching specific good.

¹⁰ Aquinas distinguishes the special motion of operating actual grace very clearly from the will’s universal motion to the *bonum universale*: “God moves man’s will, as the Universal Mover, to the universal object of the will, which is good. And without this universal motion, man cannot will anything. But man determines himself by his reason to will this or that, which is true or apparent good. Nevertheless, sometimes God moves some specially [*specialiter*] to the willing of something determinate, which is good; as in the case of those whom He moves by grace” (*ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3).

¹¹ “God acts directly on the radical orientation of the will” (B. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom*, 128.) Lonergan’s insight does not contradict the fact that every free act of the will is informed by the intellect. (*ST* I-II, q. 77, a. 2)

¹² *De malo*, q. 16, a. 5c; TH. AQUINAS, *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, 877.

¹³ At this point I can only stress the pivotal role the term “instinctus” plays in the development of Aquinas’s thoroughly anti-Semipelagian theology of grace. For a full account, see M. SECKLER, *Instinkt und Glaubenswille nach Thomas von Aquin* and more recently and accessibly, M. S. SHERWIN, *By Knowledge & By Love*, 139-44.

Aquinas uses the notion of an external cause to refer to God's alteration of free choice and thus treats of operating actual grace as an instantiation of external transcendent causality. "External" is here distinguished from "internal," where the latter is the proximate cause in the order of secondary causality. God as external cause is in no way extrinsic to the creature's nature or existence but external only to the creature's proximate secondary causality. Lonergan puts the matter succinctly: "God as external principle moves the will to the end, and in special cases he moves it by grace to a special end. Conspicuous among the latter is conversion, which is expressed entirely in terms of willing the end."¹⁴ It is precisely the metaphysics of participation, of the *actus essendi* in its ontological differentiation from and correlation to the *ens commune* on the one hand, and on the other hand to the *ipsum esse subsistens* that prevents this "externality" from being understood in the modern sense of a "first cause," issued by a "highest" or "perfect" being—that is, infinitely superior to all other causes and beings but still on an ontic continuum and hence in a competitive relationship with them because a "first" cause thus conceived cannot transcend the ontological level of secondary causality. God's external causality remains transcendent causality all the way down and hence is not competitive with the internal proximate causality of the will—whose first universal mover, of course, is the self-same transcendent universal cause, God.¹⁵

¹⁴ B. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom*, 125.

¹⁵ Lonergan, in his interpretation of Aquinas's theology of operating grace, overcomes this noxious modern misunderstanding thanks to the "theorem of divine transcendence," which he sees at work in Aquinas: "The Thomist higher synthesis was to place God above and beyond the created orders of necessity and contingency: because God is universal cause, his providence must be certain; but because he is a transcendent cause, there can be no incompatibility between terrestrial contingency and the causal certitude of providence" (B. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom*, 81-82). It would be a mistake, however, to create a competitive relationship between what Lonergan describes as a theorem and Aquinas's metaphysics of being. Lonergan characterizes a theorem as "something known by understanding the data already apprehended and not something known by adding a new datum to the apprehension, something like the principle of work and not something like another lever, something like the discovery of gravitation and not something like the discovery of America" (*Ibidem*, 147). David Burrell rightly points out that "[w]e must speak here of *theorems* and of their *corollaries*, ... because we cannot determine anything in the creature which indicates that it is an instrument. ... That is, we know that the hammer did not build the house, yet that the carpenters who did are themselves instruments as well—that we cannot see. Yet we must assert it, although we can only assert it as a theorem" (D. B. BURRELL, "Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan on Divine and Human Freedom", 165, emphasis original). The theorem is

Under the category of God as external transcendent cause, operating grace is identical with the very act of the will willing God as supernatural end. The distinction between *operating* and *cooperating* actual grace denotes the different effects of God's actual grace in the *initium fidei*. When Aquinas responds to the question whether human beings can prepare themselves for grace without the external aid of grace, he states the following: "To prepare oneself for grace is, as it were, to be turned to God."¹⁶ To prepare oneself

consequent upon the cosmic emanation scheme operative in Aquinas's metaphysics so that the former presupposes the latter: "[F]or an instrument is a lower cause moved by a higher so as to produce an effect within the category proportionate to the higher; but in the cosmic hierarchy all causes are moved except the highest, and every effect is at least in the category of being; therefore, all causes except the highest are instruments" (B. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom*, 83). Burrell brings Lonergan's insistence upon God's universal transcendent causality (that is, transcending necessity as well as contingency) succinctly to the point when he states: "So what freely comes forth from God in its very being can be brought to act freely by that same One who keeps it in existence. The how escapes us in both cases, of course, but using the language of 'theorems' links us expressly to the originating activity, and so reminds us that just as the "how" of creation escapes us (it is not a motion), so does the manner in which God causes agents to cause by 'applying causes to effects'" (D. B. BURRELL, "Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan on Divine and Human Freedom", 166).

¹⁶ "*Hoc autem est praeparare se ad gratiam, quasi ad Deum converti*" (ST I-II, q. 109, a. 6c). Here is the important passage in full length: "Now in order that man prepare himself to receive this gift, it is not necessary to presuppose any further habitual gift in the soul, otherwise we should go on to infinity. But we must presuppose a gratuitous gift of God, Who moves the soul inwardly or inspires the good wish. For in these two ways do we need the Divine assistance as stated above (AA. 2, 3). Now that we need the help of God to move us, is manifest. For since every agent acts for an end, every cause must direct its effect to its end, and hence since the order of ends is according to the order of agents or movers, man must be directed to the last end by the motion of the first mover, and to the proximate end by the motion of any of the subordinate movers; ... And thus since God is the first Mover simply, it is by His motion that everything seeks Him under the common notion of good, whereby everything seeks to be likened to God in its own way. Hence Dionysius says (Div. Nom. Iv) that *God turns all to Himself*. But He directs righteous men to Himself as to a special end [*ad specialem finem*], which they seek, and to which they wish to cling, according to Ps. Lxxii. 28, *it is good for Me to adhere to my God*. And that they are *turned* to God can only spring from God's having *turned* them. Now to prepare oneself for grace is, as it were, to be turned to God; just as, whoever has his eyes turned away from the light of the sun, prepares himself to receive the sun's light, by turning his eyes towards the sun. Hence it is clear that man cannot prepare himself to receive the light of grace except by the gratuitous help of God moving him inwardly. (ST I-II, q. 109, a. 6c). "Sic igitur, cum Deus sit primum movens simpliciter, ex eius motione est quod omnia in ipsum convertantur secundum communem intentionem boni, per quam unumquodque intendit assimilari Deo secundum suum modum. Unde et Dionysius, in libro *de Divinis Nominibus* [c. 4 §10], dicit quod Deus *convertit omnia ad seipsum*. Sed

for the gift of habitual grace *is* to be turned to God. As transcendent First Cause, God moves interiorly as a cause genuinely external to the order of secondary causality. In other words, one's own act of preparation is caused by God without that act's losing its integrity as the will's proper operation, being drawn toward its end—but now being the special end of adhering to God. There is no ontological difference between operating and cooperating grace; rather, they are the two distinct effects of God's self-same actual grace.¹⁷ These two distinct effects pertain each to one specific aspect of the voluntary action. For, as Aquinas states,

in a voluntary action, there is a twofold action, viz., the interior action of the will, and the external action: and each of these actions has its object. The end is properly the object of the interior act of the will: while the object of the external action, is that on which the action is brought to bear. (*ST I-II*, q. 18, a. 6c)

The interior action is concerned solely with the end itself; the external action pertains to the means that lead to the end, means that can entail proper proximate ends of their own, which are respectively objects of interior actions of the will. The first effect of actual grace pertains to the interior action of the will. Regarding this action, the will is moved and God is the sole mover.¹⁸ The operating actual grace of conversion *is* the very action of the will willing God as the overarching special good to be desired, that is,

homines iustos convertit ad seipsum sicut ad specialem finem, quem intendunt, et cui cupiunt adhaerere sicut bono proprio; secundum illud *Psalmi* 72 [28]: *Mihi adhaerere Deo bonum est*. Et ideo quod homo convertatur ad Deum, hoc non potest esse nisi Deo ipsum convertente. Hoc autem est praeparare se ad gratiam, quasi ad Deum converti: sicut ille qui habet oculum aversum a lumine solis, per hoc se praeparat ad recipiendum lumen solis, quod oculos suos convertit versus solem. Unde patet quod homo non potest se praeparare ad lumen gratiae suscipiendum, nisi per auxilium gratuitum Dei interius moventis” (*ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 6c).

¹⁷ “Operating and co-operating grace are the same grace; but are distinguished by their different effects” (*ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2, ad 4).

¹⁸ “Now there is a double act in us. First, there is the interior act of the will, and with regard to this act the will is a thing moved, and God is the mover [*istum actum, voluntas se habet ut mota, Deus autem ut movens*]; and especially when the will, which hitherto willed evil, begins to will good. And hence, inasmuch as God moves the human mind to this act, we speak of operating grace” (*ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2c).

as willing God as the supernatural end.¹⁹ The second effect of actual grace pertains to the exterior action. Aquinas states:

[S]ince [the exterior act] is commanded by the will, ... the operation of this act is attributed to the will. And because God assists us in this act, both by strengthening our will interiorly so as to attain to the act, and by granting outwardly the capability of operating, it is with respect to this that we speak of cooperating grace. (*ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2c)

Consequently, as Aquinas emphasizes, “God does not justify us without ourselves, because whilst we are being justified we consent to God’s justification (*justitiae*) by a movement of our free-will. Nevertheless this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect; hence the whole operation pertains to grace.”²⁰ Already acts of prayer asking for God’s help are the effect of cooperating actual grace—but only *secundum quid*, only in a broader, analogical sense.

Let me explain: While this kind of cooperating actual grace is a virtually unavoidable entailment of Aquinas’s doctrine of actual grace in the process of conversion before and leading up to the *initium fidei*, the qualification “*secundum quid*” seems nevertheless to be apposite. Here is the reason: The distinction between actual operating and cooperating grace makes it possible to explain the difference between pre-justificatory motions of grace in which God moves us and we are moved, on the one hand, and on the other hand, our actions in which we act moved by God—but not as yet justified. However, *nota bene*: The pre-justificatory actual grace we cooperate with in view of justification is not cooperating grace in the strict sense,

¹⁹ Lonergan explains: “The *voluntas mota et non movens* is the reception of divine action in the creature antecedent to any operation on the creature’s part. So far from being a free act, it lies entirely outside the creature’s power. But though not a free act in itself, it is the first principle of free acts, even internal free acts such as faith, fear, hope, sorrow, and repentance” (B. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom*, 424). Accordingly, the internal act of faith, arising from the new principle, is a free act, an act of *liberum arbitrium*: “Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God, so that it is subject to the free-will [*liberum arbitrium*] in relation to God; and consequently the act of faith can be meritorious” (*ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 9c).

²⁰ “Deus non sine nobis nos iustificat, quia per motum liberi arbitrii, dum iustificamur, Dei iustitiae consentimus. Ille tamen motus non est causa gratiae, sed effectus. Unde tota operatio pertinet ad gratiam” (*ST I-II*, q. 111, a. 2, ad 2).

since cooperating grace *simpliciter* is reserved to habitual grace that alone allows for the stable habitual cooperation. This notion of cooperating grace in its strict sense seems to be implied in Aquinas's preface at the beginning of *ST* I-II, q. 113: "We have now to consider the effect of grace: (1) the justification of the ungodly, which is the effect of operating grace; and (2) merit, which is the effect of cooperating grace." Hence, pre-justificatory actual grace with which we cooperate must be qualified as "secundum quid," as being a quasi-cooperative actual grace, a grace that disposes us toward justification but remains pre-justificatory.

To summarize: The difference between *voluntas mota et non movens* and *voluntas mota et movens* is the difference between willing the end and willing the means leading to this end.²¹ The gift of grace comes first as a transitory *auxilium*, as actual grace, with two distinct effects, operating grace, moving the human being interiorly, and cooperating grace *secundum quid*, the human being moving him- or herself to act, as moved by cooperating grace. *Nota bene*, the *auxilium* of actual operating grace remains absolutely indispensable from the *initium fidei* right up until the grace of final perseverance, which is according to Aquinas—following Augustine's position advanced in *De dono perseverantiae*—nothing but a motion of operating actual grace. Furthermore, since the infused *habitus* of sanctifying grace

²¹ *Voluntas mota et movens* simply renders the actualization of acquired freedom in the efficacious choice of means, as the will's proximate causality is now directed to its special end, God himself. In his commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans Aquinas applies this actualization of the acquired freedom to the reality of the spiritual person, that is, the person who is moved by the higher prompting [*superiori instinctu*] of the Holy Spirit: "[H]omo spiritualis non quasi ex motu propriae voluntatis principaliter, sed ex instinctu Spiritus Sancti inclinatur ad aliquid agendum... Non tamen per hoc excluditur quin viri spirituales, per voluntatem et liberum arbitrium operentur, quia ipsum motum voluntatis et liberi arbitrii Spiritus Sanctus in eis causat, secundum illud Phil. II: *Deus est qui operatur in nobis velle et perficere*" (*Super romanos* 8.3; *S. Thomae Aquinitatis Doctoris Angelici in Omnes S. Pauli Apostoli Epistolas Commentarii*, Vol. 1, 111). Thus, cooperating grace is nothing but the grace of conversion, the willing of the supernatural end, but now as moving the will to will the means leading to this end. Lonergan rightly stresses that "in both cases the same theory of instrumentality and of freedom is in evidence: the will has its strip of autonomy, yet beyond this there is the ground from which free acts spring; and that ground God holds and moves as a fencer moves his whole rapier by grasping only the hilt. When the will is *mota et non movens*, *solus autem Deus movens, dicitur gratia operans*. On the other hand, when the will is *et mota et movens*, *dicitur gratia cooperans*. ... [I]n actual grace divine operation effects the will of the end to become cooperation when this will of the end leads to an efficacious choice of means" (B. LONERGAN, *Grace and Freedom*, 147).

cannot reduce itself to act, the actual divine *auxilium* of a first motion is also required for such acts of sanctifying grace.

The central function of actual grace in the first conversion, the *initium fidei*, is the creation of the disposition that allows the reception of sanctifying grace. For as all appropriate matter must be rightly prepared in order to become disposed for the reception of a specific form, so analogously the human will must be rightly disposed in order to receive the *habitus* of sanctifying grace. With the first conversion completed and the will justified such that it desires God as the surpassing specific good, the human being at the age of reason is properly disposed to receive the *habitus* of sanctifying grace.

III.2. Sanctifying Grace²²

Aquinas introduces the ontologically surpassing reality of sanctifying grace from the perspective of the mystery of God's creative love *ad extra* which is the source of all participation, whether natural or supernatural. God's *dilectio communis* grants to all beings—by way of their participation in the *actus essendi*—their *esse naturale*. Yet by his *dilectio specialis*, God draws the elect rational creature *supra conditionem naturae* to a *participatio divini boni*. It is by this love that “God wishes the eternal good, which is Himself, for the creature” (*ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 1). Then Aquinas concludes: “Accordingly, when someone is said to have the grace of God, *significatur quiddam supernaturale in homine a Deo proveniens*” (*ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 1). “To have the grace of God,” points to an infused *habitus*, something that comes forth directly from God beyond the *actus essendi*—but nevertheless always by way of it—, a unique supernatural participation in the divine goodness.²³ But lest the soul be mistaken for a divine substance, this *habitus*

²² In the following part of the essay I am greatly indebted to two important recent studies on the topic of deification in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas: B. BLANKENHORN, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* and D. SPEZZANO, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas*. See also the magisterial and by now classic account offered by M. SÁNCHEZ SORONDO, *La gracia como participación de la naturaleza divina según Santo Tomás de Aquino* and *ibidem*, “La grazia come partecipazione della natura divina: implicazioni antropologiche dei misteri della fede Cristiana”. In *Doctor Communis*, 83-93.

²³ Matthias Joseph Scheeben is one of the most congenial 19th century interpreters of Aquinas's theology of sanctification and deification. Already in his first major work,

must be thought of as inhering in the soul like an accidental quality exists by way of the substantial form in which it inheres. Hence, while not divine, the soul “becomes godlike in its condition.”²⁴ Consider Aquinas’s nuanced argument:

Because grace is above human nature, it cannot be a substance or a substantial form, but is an accidental form of the soul. Now what is substantially in God, becomes accidental in the soul participating the Divine goodness, as is clear in the case of knowledge. And thus because the soul participates in the Divine goodness imperfectly, the participation of the Divine goodness, which is grace, has its being in the soul in a less perfect way than the soul subsists in itself. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is the expression or participation of the Divine goodness, it is nobler than the nature of the soul, though not in its mode of being. (*ST I-II*, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2)

The *habitus* of sanctifying grace is essentially nothing but a certain participation of the divine nature. While not a substance, but an accidental form, an infused quality, this unique participation—in Matthias Joseph Scheeben’s apt rendition—“shares with substance the function of being a single common substratum of the various supernatural faculties and acts.”²⁵ For this reason Aquinas rejects an all too easy solution advanced by Peter Lombard, namely the identification of this infused quality with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Aquinas takes the theological virtues as starting points for his own argument: The difference between sanctifying grace and the theological virtues is the real, not just conceptual

Nature and Grace (1861), he demonstrated a deep understanding of Aquinas’s doctrine of sanctifying grace: “The supernatural principle is not really a new substance, but inheres in a substance, is linked with the essential, basic faculties belonging to this substance, and makes them capable of a higher domain of activity. It is present in the natural substance and faculties as a form determining them to a new existence, power, and activity. Therefore it is called a [*habitus*], whereby the soul exists in a definite way, especially with regard to a certain end and to acts of life” (M. J. SCHEEBEN, *Nature and Grace*, 152-153).

²⁴ M. J. SCHEEBEN, *Nature and Grace*, 154.

²⁵ M. J. SCHEEBEN, *Nature and Grace*, 154: “The supernatural principle of life, or supernature, does not have quite the same relation to its acts as the nature of things has to its acts, as though it were a substance; it is not a substance. Yet if we consider it minutely, we can say with St. Thomas that it shares with substance the function of being a single, common substratum of the various supernatural faculties and acts. It is not one of these faculties or all of them taken together; it is their common substructure.”

distinction between the supernatural principle and cause and the supernatural effect. (*ST* I-II, q. 110, a. 3) His argument unfolds in three steps. First, virtue is a disposition of what is perfect and perfect is what is disposed according to its nature. Second, the infused virtues dispose the human being in a surpassing manner to a surpassingly supernatural end, deification, union with God. Third and consequently, these virtues must dispose the human being in relation to some higher nature, a nature in which the human being must somehow participate: “*Hoc autem est in ordine ad naturam divinam participatam.*” Aquinas tops off this conclusion with 2. Pet. 1:4, a crucial biblical text that he usually cites when he points to the divine *ordinatio* of the human being’s supernatural end: to become partakers of the divine nature, “*divinae consortes naturae.*” The infused virtues are derived from and ordered to this, “*ipsum lumen gratiae, quod est participatio divinae naturae.*” It is because of the reception (*acceptatio*) of this divine nature that human beings are regarded as regenerated or reborn as sons of God. And precisely because sanctifying grace, the supernatural principle, shares the characteristic of a substance, it serves as the “principle and root” (ad 3) of all the infused virtues, first and foremost of the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity.²⁶

To summarize: While the second conversion is initiated by way of operating actual grace in the *initium fidei*, it is completed by way of the infusion of sanctifying grace. This grace is a supernatural, albeit created *habitus*, an

²⁶ The metaphysical underpinnings of Aquinas’s doctrine of sanctifying grace do not only have decidedly anti-Pelagian but also and equally clear—although obviously *avant la lettre*—anti-Lubacian implications. If infused grace simply was the theological virtues, then grace would graft onto natural inclinations in the human being already sufficiently disposed so as to be inclined toward the supernatural object of faith, hope, and charity. But because human nature is absolutely disproportionate to the supernatural final end to which it is ordained in the extant order of providence, the natural inclinations are not sufficiently disposed to this supernatural final end. Consequently, a surpassing, infused “organism,” a quasi-nature or substratum of grace is needed to elevate the natural inclinations toward God. Only by way of such an infused quasi-nature, the *habitus* of sanctifying grace, can the theological virtues, the infused moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit be coordinated within an “organic” spiritually structured and informed life of sanctification and divinization. Evidence yet again that—*pace* Henri de Lubac—there is no natural tendency toward the supernatural, *formally* considered, in Aquinas’s mature theology. For a more extensive discussion of this matter, see chapters five and six of my *Dust Bound For Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* and, more recently, TH. J. WHITE, “Imperfect Happiness and the Final End of Man: Thomas Aquinas and the Paradigm of Nature-Grace Orthodoxy”.

infused form and hence an accidental quality informing the soul with divine light and thereby elevating the very essence of the soul. By way of sanctifying grace the rational creature participates inchoatively in the divine nature itself. In the order of sanctification or deification, sanctifying grace is the primary perfection, the quasi-ontological principle that elevates human nature in such a way that now the inclinations of the spiritual soul are well disposed to be inclined to the supernatural object of the theological virtues—God. The secondary perfection are the infused *habitus* of faith, hope, and charity and their specific actions. The theological virtues do not merely order the human person rightly to God through a submission of will and intellect—as does the infused virtue of *religio*. Rather, the actions specific to the theological virtues “arrive at” or “touch” (*atingant*) God (*ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 3c; q. 81, a. 5c) and therefore unite the human person to God. In order to understand this extraordinary claim and how Aquinas arrives at it we need to turn now to the theological virtue of charity, whose beginning characterizes the second conversion and whose perfection belongs to the third.

IV. Charity

Recall, the third conversion comes about by the perfect love of God which occurs irreversibly and everlastingly when the rational creature enjoys the possession of God in the beatific vision. Remember also, in order to acquire the right disposition for the reception of a specific form, appropriate matter needs to be specifically prepared. Analogously, for this third and final conversion to come about, a specific preparation of the human being endowed with sanctifying grace is called for. What disposition does the third conversion require and does the second conversion bring about?

Aquinas develops his answer along the lines of the overarching axiomatic principle that grace presupposes and perfects nature. Every creature realizes its secondary perfection by way of actions that contribute to the realization of the final end of its specific nature. The rational creature whose nature has been elevated by sanctifying grace realizes the secondary perfection by way of actions that contribute to the realization of the supernatural final end of its elevated nature. Realizing this supernatural secondary perfection of the human nature elevated by sanctifying grace prepares the proper disposition for the final perfect conversion, the reception of the gra-

ce of glory. But since the human being is created *toward* the image of the Trinity, that is, as a dynamic image ordered to be conformed to its divine exemplar, the actions that move human nature to its perfection must be operations of those very faculties through which the human image is conformed to the triune exemplar—intellect and will. And because sanctifying grace is the created effect of the indwelling Trinity, the conformation of the intellect and the will to the triune exemplar must be appropriated to the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the subsistent relation of love, the *vinculum caritatis*, between the Father and the Son. Therefore, “taken personally, love is the proper name of the Holy Spirit” (*ST I*, q. 37, a. 1). The temporal missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit terminate in the respective conformation of the intellect and the will—the infused *habitus* of divine faith conforms the intellect to the Son, the Word, Who is Truth Itself, and the infused *habitus* of charity conforms the will to the Holy Spirit, Who is Love itself. Charity is nothing less than a participation in the love of the Father and Son, who love each other principally and all creatures by the Holy Spirit. (*ST I*, q. 37, a. 2) As sanctifying grace, the principle of the theological virtues, is a participation in the divine nature, so is charity a participation in the Holy Spirit. (*ST II-II*, q. 23, a. 3, ad 3)

For the actions of the theological virtue of charity to be voluntary and hence meritorious, they must proceed from an intrinsic principle: “Given that the will is moved by the Holy Spirit to the act of love, it is necessary that the will also should be the efficient cause of that act” (*ST II-II*, q. 23, a. 2). Charity requires a supernatural but intrinsic form added to the natural power of the will, by means of which the Holy Spirit moves it. In opposition to Peter Lombard’s position, Aquinas insists that charity is “formal” in us; that is, as a proper, intrinsic, and therefore created *habitus*, which is genuinely the principle of the actions specific to the theological virtue of charity.²⁷

²⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 23, a. 2, ad 3: “Charity works formally. Now the efficacy of a form depends on the power of the agent, who instills the form. ... But because it produces an infinite effect, since, by justifying the soul, it unites it to God, this proves the infinity of the Divine power, which is the author of charity.” Not infrequently Orthodox theologians have voiced the following concern about Aquinas’s doctrine of “created charity,” that is, of charity as an infused *habitus*: it purportedly constitutes a buffer or even amounts to an opposition between the human person infused with charity and the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit. But this is not the case at all. Rather, the notion of *infused* charity avoids

As an infused *habitus*, charity enables the will to supernatural actions, first by directing the will to the divine good as its supernatural end, second, by commanding actions of the other virtues to this supernatural end, and third, by providing the foundation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifts that dispose one to be moved by the Holy Spirit. Fourth and finally, charity enables the will when acting with cooperating grace to produce Spirit-filled works proportionate to eternal life and thereby meriting beatitude by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit moving the person to eternal life. Far from being any problematic hold-over from early fifth century Semi-pelagianism (as it was called only much later in the wake of the Protestant Reformation), merit is for Aquinas the principle of genuine human cooperation with actual and habitual grace. When considered under the aspect of the Holy Spirit's agency—charity is after all a participation in the Holy Spirit—the merit of actions specific of charity is condign, that is, a strict merit, because the Holy Spirit as the divine agent alone can merit in the proper sense. When considered under the aspect of the proximate secondary causality of human cooperating agency, the merit of actions specific of charity is only congruous and acknowledged by God's merciful *ordinatio* as

a theology of the activity of the Holy Spirit as merely extrinsic and non-transformative and so is very close indeed to the deepest Orthodox theological commitments. After all, Aquinas's doctrine of infused charity is all about divinization. Furthermore, *teleologically*, this created form disposes us to immediate contact with the Holy Spirit living in us and, moreover, allows us, so to speak, to touch God's face, to love God as he is in himself, and so to be in contact with the uncreated life of God. In terms of *efficient* causation, this created form is the result of the Holy Spirit inhabiting us. Finally and most crucially, the notion of *created* charity affords the insight that, *formally*, charity in us is something created that does not affect immediately the essence of God. What difference does this make? Consider the following: Someone in the state of grace commits a mortal sin and thereby forfeits the *habitus* of charity and the friendship with God. The notion of created charity allows us to understand why this mortal sin is not simultaneously the sin against the Holy Spirit. If charity were the immediate uncreated effect of the indwelling Holy Spirit, it would be hard if not impossible to explain why a grave sin against charity would not be identical with the sin against the Holy Spirit, that is, identical with the implicit but nevertheless direct negation of the Holy Spirit himself. The notion of infused charity as created form avoids this problematic consequence. In sum, infused charity is not a buffer or opposition between us and the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit, but is rather the created effect of that immediate presence and a created condition for an ultimate and immediate communion in love with God in himself. I am indebted to Fr. Thomas Joseph White, O.P. for bringing to my attention Aquinas's implicit anticipation of this important concern of Orthodox theology and of Aquinas's implicit way of addressing the concern.

meritorious.²⁸ Actions specific of the theological virtue of charity merit an increase in the infusion of charity, that is, a greater conformity to the Holy Spirit, so that eventually—if not forfeited by an act of mortal sin—charity deifies the will and brings about already in the life of the *viator* an inchoative union with the triune God.

Aquinas conceives of this charity-produced union as the most perfect and profound interpersonal relationship with the Triune God: through the sacramental character of baptism the created dynamic image participates in Christ's death and resurrection, becomes thereby part of the mystical body whose head is Christ and from whom all graces flow qua headship, and receives interiorly sanctifying grace and with it the *habitus* of charity. Thus the created dynamic image becomes increasingly conformed to the divine triune exemplar and thereby rightly disposed for the reception of the grace of glory, the perfect participation in the divine nature which is nothing but the life and beatitude of the divine persons.

The very essence of the future perfection as well as its preparation for it by way of charity, is the participation of the divine triune beatitude. Charity is the *communicatio* of the divine beatitude already into the very life of the *viator*. Aquinas elucidates this *communicatio* of the divine beatitude, this inchoative union of the *viator* with God in two ways: first by way of mapping the friendship between Christ and his disciples onto the Aristotelian concept of perfect friendship, and secondly, by exploiting the structural analogy between the natural passion of love (*amor, dilectio*) and the supernatural love of charity (*caritas*)—for both transform the lover into the beloved object.

Let us first turn to friendship. Aquinas uses Aristotle's concept of perfect friendship from book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*²⁹ as the framework which allows him to unfold the full theological implications of the dominical words from John 15:5, "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends." Aquinas sees the theological implications as twofold: First, by virtue of the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit perfect friendship between God and a human person is possible precisely on the terms of Aristotle's account of perfect friendship. Second, Aristotle's struc-

²⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 114, aa. 1&2. For a noteworthy study of the development of Aquinas's doctrine of merit, see J. P. WAWRYKOW, *God's Grace and Human Action: "Merit" in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas*.

²⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156^b8-1157^a.

tural account of perfect friendship affords a deeper understanding of the unitive dynamic of charity.

Aquinas achieves both purposes by focusing upon two central features of Aristotle's account of perfect friendship, the *amor amicitiae* and the *communicatio* of the *bonum honestum*. (*ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 1). Friendships of pleasure and use are characterized by *amor concupiscentiae*, the *ratio* of which is to wish the good of the beloved object for oneself, for reasons of pleasure or use. Perfect friendship, on the contrary, is characterized by *amor amicitiae*, the *ratio* of which is benevolence: to love someone as to wish good to them. To qualify as perfect friendship this love must be mutual; and most importantly, this mutual well-wishing must be founded on some *communicatio*, the sharing of some genuine good. Because of the radical disproportion in natures, Aristotle holds that there can be no true *communicatio* between a god and a human being.³⁰ Yet Aquinas rightly points out that by way of their indwelling and the ensuing elevation of human nature the temporal missions of the Son and the Spirit overcome this impediment and thus make possible a genuine *communicatio* between the triune God and the rational creature. The substance of this *communicatio* is nothing but God's own beatitude. Aquinas states:

Since there is a communication between [the human being] and God, inasmuch as [God] communicates his [beatitude] to us, some kind of friendship must be based on this same communication. (*ST* II-II, q. 23, a. 1) Charity is a friendship of [the human being] for God, founded upon the [*communicatio*] of everlasting beatitude. (*ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 2)

Aquinas takes the *communicatio* of eternal beatitude as explanatory principle for every aspect of his treatment of charity: (1) Charity is one virtue with the divine goodness as its end; (2) charity is gratuitously infused; (3) charity is proper to rational creatures with a capacity for eternal life; (4) all things should be loved with respect to God as the first principle of beatitude. All these aspects are intimately connected with charity's foundation on God's *communicatio* of a share in his own beatitude as final end.

In order to account for the union of charity Aquinas exploits the structural analogy between the natural passion of love (*amor, dilectio*) and the

³⁰ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1158^b35-1159^a13.

supernatural love of charity (*caritas*). (*ST* I-II, qq. 26-28) Here are his three operative principles: First, love (*amor*) is a *passio*; second, all love transforms the lover; third, with God as the beloved object, charity is the highest kind of love. As to the first principle: While *passio* applies first and properly to the concupiscible appetite, it can also, by extension, apply to the intellectual appetite, the will, in which the love of charity is a principle of movement. The fundamental principle applies to all kinds of love, including charity: “The appetible object gives to the appetite a certain adaptation to itself, which consists in a pleasing affinity (*complacentia*) with that object, and from this follows movement towards the appetible object” (*ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 2). As to the second principle: Love brings about union by virtue of the principle of affinity, *complacentia*: “The lover stands in relation to that which he loves, as though it were himself or part of himself” (*ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 2, ad 2). The effect of love is therefore a mutual indwelling. (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 2) Consequently, in application of the third principle, “the love of charity is of that which is already possessed, since the beloved is, in a manner, in the lover, and, again, the lover is drawn by desire to union with the beloved” (*ST* I-II, q. 66, a. 6).

But which form exactly does the *complacentia*, the loving affinity characteristic of all love take in the *amor amicitiae*, the love of true friendship? According to Aquinas, in the *amor amicitiae*, the principle of *complacentia* takes the following form: willing the good to the other as to oneself, one apprehends the friend as another self: *alter ipse* (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 1) which entails a mutual indwelling of sorts: “every love makes the beloved to be in the lover, and vice versa” (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 2). But there is one all important difference between natural loves and supernatural charity: In the case of natural loves, likeness, *similitudo*, “causes” love. Yet in the case of the theological virtue of charity, likeness “is the effect” of love, the consequence of a gift from God of a similitude between the created dynamic image and the divine exemplar. Hence the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (together with the Father and the Son) is the cause of the union of charity. Because of the *communicatio* of beatitude and the increasing conformation of the will to the Holy Spirit, charity affords nothing less than “connaturality with divine things” (*ST* II-II, q. 45, a. 2). By, so to speak, spiritually “touching” the very face of God—and nothing less than that the operations of infused charity do—the human person gains a knowledge of God *per connaturalitatem* that is as immediate and intimate as it is ineffable.

To summarize: In the elect rational creature the participation in the *actus essendi* finds its perfection not in acts proportionate to the participating nature. Rather, in the elect rational creature, by virtue of grace and charity, the participation in the *actus essendi* is surpassingly perfected by a quasi-ontological participation in the divine nature that already in the *viator* makes possible the act of inchoative union. Charity unites the *viator* inchoatively with the divine nature itself, whose essence is love, a love that subsists personally as the Holy Spirit.

V. Conclusion

The point has been reached where it is apposite to return to the beginning, to the irreconcilable contradiction interior to the anthropocentric turn. One of the overarching reasons for the anthropocentric turn was the attempt at achieving the full realization of human subjectivity and, indeed, sovereignty. Yet instead we are faced with two dominant but false self-images of the anthropocentric age, a gnostic angelism and a materialistic animalism, whose interminable *agon* destroys what the anthropocentric turn had set out to achieve. The familiar opening lines of Dante's *Divine Comedy* capture the situation well: *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita ci ritrovammo per una selva oscura, che la diritta via era smarrita.*³¹ Midway upon the journey of our life, having wandered from the straight and true and thus finding ourselves lost in the dark and hard wood of late-modern anthropocentrism, we may learn from Aquinas's philosophy and theology of participation and divinization this: The genuine realization of subjectivity comes about only in what is best called a self-forgetful self-realization. This self-forgetful self-realization is nothing but the twofold participation of the human being in the origin and end of all things: first qua rational creature through intellect and will in the First Truth and Sovereign Good and, secondly, qua created image

³¹ The opening stanza of the first Canto of Dante's poem reads thus:

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
che la diritta via era smarrita."

In his noted translation, Anthony Esolen renders this opening stanza thus:

"Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself in a dark wilderness,
for I had wandered from the straight and true."
(DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Inferno*, 2-3)

through the conformation to the divine exemplar in an everlasting union of vision and love with God. The first participation is the creaturely condition of the possibility for the latter participation, and the latter is the surpassing fulfillment of the former. The key to this self-forgetful self-realization is simultaneously the key to overcoming the destructive contradiction interior to the anthropocentric turn. The key is to become, through grace and charity, in the Christ-centered friendship with the triune God, already in this life as *viator* inchoatively an *alter ipse* of the divine friend. When the created image conforms to the divine exemplar, then and only then is the self perfectly realized, as *alter ipse* of the Triune God. It is the only authentic *self-realization*. And this self-realization can be achieved only in union with God because this union is the fullest realization of what is constitutive of a self—the unitive acts of intellect and will that through the grace of glory and the perfection of charity are now formally united with the First Truth and the Sovereign Good. This realization of the self is *self-forgetful* because the surpassing object of these unitive acts is not the self, *ipse*, but the *Alter Ipse*, the self's uncreated, transcendent origin. "Self-forgetful self-realization" is a contemporary way of identifying the eschatological *comprehensor*, the divinized soul in its perfection (as principle and substantial form of a resurrection body) participating in such a way in the divine nature—Subsistent Being Itself and Love Itself—that the created dynamic image finally becomes completely conformed to its divine exemplar such that as the divine exemplar is identically subsistent being and love so the created image now divinized is completely "being-love." Thus the Apostle John names what obtains inchoatively in the *viator* and perfectly in the *comprehensor*: "Deus caritas est: et qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet, et Deus in eo" (1 Jn 4:16). The objective beatitude of the *comprehensor* is the *Alter Ipse*, and the subjective beatitude of the *comprehensor* is the beatific vision. Divinization through friendship with God, the self-forgetful self-realization as the triune God's *alter ipse*, is the true end and resolution of the anthropocentric turn.³²

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