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Friends of God: Thomas Aquinas, Prayer, and the Intercession of the Holy Spirit of Love

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Abstract

This article aims to consider the theology of Thomas Aquinas in relation to the prayer passages found in Romans chapter 8, in particular those pertaining to the intercessory function of the Holy Spirit in the prayer act. In so doing, it becomes clear that Thomas's theology mirrors a pattern for thinking about prayer found in those very biblical texts. This pattern divides into three basic concerns: i) the necessity of prayer, ii) the problematic nature of prayer and iii) the significance of the intercession of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Comments on the intercessory work of the Spirit form the climax of the project, at which point it is argued that prayer amounts to a prototypical moment of the Spirit – who is himself the divine principle of love – forming a bond of friendship between creatures and God. This central articulation sheds constructive light on the creature who prays and how that creature ought to pray, allowing us to think after Thomas in terms of the application of his principle of prayer for more creaturely and practical concerns.

Introduction

In broad terms, this study seeks to address the relationship between the creaturely act of prayer and the intercessory operation of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul's comments in Romans 8:26-27 serve as our point of departure: 'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God' (*Revised Standard Version*). This passage presents three basic points for thinking about prayer, upon which much of this work will be based. First, prayer is something Paul assumes we *ought* to carry out, even if it is far from a straightforward undertaking. Prayer is basic to the ethical life and, as far as Thomas understands it, compulsory. Indeed, it is a *necessity*. But while it is a necessity, it is also problematic. Thus the second basic point for thinking about prayer: we ought to do it, but we do not know how to do it 'as we ought.' Or, as Thomas writes in the Romans 8 commentary, 'the Apostle says there are two things we do not know, namely, what we should ask for in prayer and the manner in which we ought to ask.'[1] Finally, having established the necessity of prayer and the problem of prayer, we must consider the operation of the Spirit, who 'intercedes for the saints.' Paul declares that, despite Christian weakness in prayer, the Spirit *helps*. The Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints to the effect that those who once could not pray as they ought are transformed into those who can.

[1] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans: Chapter 8,' *Aquinas Study Bible*, Web, accessed 03 May, 2016, https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/romans/st-thomas-aquinas-on-romans/chapter-1/chapter-2/chapter-3/chapter-4/chapter-5/chapter-6/chapter-7/chapter-8, para. 691.

We might at this point make two preliminary assertions. The first relates to the methodological concerns of this study, which are summed up in the conviction that the task of Christian theology must bear the weight of prayer's basic importance: the *necessity* of prayer applies not just to the individual who prays but also to theological reflection. This is a methodological point indebted to Thomas himself.[2] In his *Principium Rigans montes*,[3] Thomas commends to his hearers Psalm 104:13: 'You water the hills from your upper rooms, the earth is sated with the fruit of your works.' The water, originating in God himself, is understood to be wisdom or 'spiritual doctrine,'[4] and is imparted in succession first to teachers ('the hills') and then to those who sit under them ('the earth'). At no point in the distillation of wisdom can a party claim it as its own: the listeners participate in the wisdom of the teachers, who draw wisdom from God himself, who alone waters the hills. In this respect, the theological task broadly is one of ministering – theology ought never to communicate something exclusively of itself, but pass on and down that which has been imparted from above. Indeed, Thomas argues that 'no one by himself, of himself, is sufficient for such a ministry.' The teacher must rather 'ask it from God.'[5] The sufficiency of the teacher who ministers wisdom is expressed in the words of the apostle James, who offers great comfort for the theological task: 'But if any of you is wanting in wisdom, let him ask it of God, who gives abundantly to all men, and does not reproach; and it will be given to him.'[6] Thomas cites this verse as he then ends with a prayer that God would grant such wisdom to him and his hearers. It is in this spirit that the modest aims of this study hope to be realised.

[2] And, of course, notable others – Augustine's *Confessions* and Anselm's *Proslogion* are prototypical works in this respect; indeed, one suspects that one of the reasons we do not have huge treatises on prayer from the Fathers is because they regarded theology to itself be a mode of prayer.
[3] 'Watering the Hills,' *Inaugaral Lectures: Commendation and Division of Sacred Scripture*, trans. Ralph McInerny in 'Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings,' (Penguin, 1998), revised and html-edited by Joseph Kenny, O.P., Web, accessed 30 April, 2016, http://dhspriory.org/thomas/Principium.htm#2.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

Second, that the Holy Spirit helps Christians in prayer, not someone or something else, is significant. There has in recent years been something of a resurgence in literature devoted to the theology and practice of prayer. Outside the academy books on prayer published within the last decade are numerous and, under the broad rubric of 'Christian living,' tend to concern the need for easily understood steps and techniques for praying more effectively, often with little space devoted to the Spirit. Much of what this project seeks to communicate is that without recourse to the Holy Spirit prayer remains unproblematic; a kind of facility is conveyed by the presumption that creatures can master certain skills in order to pray better. For Paul, and for Thomas, the very point of the problem of prayer is that humans are incapable, regardless of whether something like 'technique' is employed. Taking this example further, the notion of technique is not antithetical to prayer: there are certain forms of prayer that emerge from a biblical reading on the topic, and even the Lord's Prayer could be understood in such terms. But a pneumatologically rich theology of prayer demands that technique always be indexed to human weakness. An acknowledgement of the Spirit's work wrought, in a sense, outside of us, is utterly necessary.

In more detailed terms, then, this study seeks to carefully examine the acknowledgement made by Paul that the Spirit does indeed help the saints in prayer. In so doing, it will argue for the centrality of a pneumatology of love. That is to say, the particular mode of the Spirit's intercession is one of incitement to charity, which brings forth in creatures what Thomas calls 'right desires.'[7] According to Thomas the Spirit himself is called love, and his procession from the Father and the Son forms the principle for his intercessory work in creatures. Moreover, the Spirit's intercession brings about creaturely participation in God. As such, this project will also argue for *friendship* as the most appropriate way of naming the bond of love that the Spirit brings creatures into with God through prayer; for it is friendship, above any other theme in

[7] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 694.

Thomas's theology of prayer, which consistently provides the connection between the Spirit's love and the charity enabled in creatures that they might pray according to the will of God.

This has some significant implications for thinking about the creature who prays. With prayer as friendship with God comes fascinating insight into the human being who enters into that friendship, in terms both of human agency and the way prayer transforms the pray-er. In particular this project will examine the way in which participation in the divine life brought about by the intercession of the Spirit, rather than swallowing up any sense of human agency, actually lends the creature agential dignity; and especially so in light of some tendencies in theology to over-mechanise the relationship between the pray-er and God. Furthermore, it will be necessary to situate prayer in the transformational journey of the creature, her *reditus* to God. This will be accomplished by an explication of Thomas's understanding of the influence of the procession of the Spirit on this movement of creatures back to God. As well as this, transformation will be discussed in terms of what we might call prayer's complementary virtues, such as charity, faith and humility.

The final section of the article will attempt to do justice to Thomas's theology of prayer in its relation to more practical comments made in the *Summa*. The task in this respect will be to bring doctrinal conclusions to bear on the practicalities and every-day experiences of prayer, forming connections between prayer as friendship with God and the significance of this for, say, whether we ought to pray for our enemies. This will entail a degree of 'thinking after' Thomas. The question on prayer in the *Summa* has seventeen articles, but each is relatively sparse, especially when it comes to the pneumatology of love and other related themes. Nevertheless, there are interesting gestures made by Thomas towards his wider thinking on prayer that allow for some constructive insights.

I. The Necessity of Prayer

For Thomas, the Christian must pray. This necessity can be articulated under three categories. The first of these – petition – allows us to describe Thomas's thinking when it comes to the primary meaning of prayer. In the process, petition helps us to arrive at the necessity of prayer, insofar as asking requires an acknowledgment of neediness on the part of the pray-er. As well as petition, a discussion of the doctrine of providence invites reflection on the causality of prayer and as such its necessity as a function of the out-working of the divine will in the world. We will find that for Thomas it is as necessary to pray as it is to breathe and to walk. Finally, we will examine Thomas's understanding of grace and merit, and assert the necessity of prayer as one of those acts that makes up a virtuous life offered in response to divine grace.

Reasoned Petition

Thomas's claim that we *must* pray can be indexed to a prior commitment to define prayer as reasoned petition. This exact term is not used by Thomas, but it emerges clearly from the more definitional articles on prayer found in *ST* 2a2ae, where prayer is understood definitively as petition and just so an act of reason. Understanding prayer as reasoned petition illumines prayer's necessity as the only appropriate expression for creaturely needs and desires, and as a consequent means by which the creature is reminded of her lowliness in the face of God.

Petition was not always the principal definition of prayer for Thomas. It has been noted that he offers a rather confused account of prayer in his *Commentary on the Sentences*; there, it seems, parts and forms of prayer are discussed indecisively and without recourse to a clear definition.[8] However, by the time of the *Summa theologiae*, written some years later, Thomas holds to a

[8] Brian Davies, *Aquinas*, (London: Continuum, 2003), 211.

more definite view. Prayer is no longer an agglomeration of various elements but is understood singularly as petition. With the support of Augustine and St John of Damascus, Thomas declares petition to be 'the primary meaning of prayer,'[9] and it is under this rubric that he proceeds through all seventeen articles of that question relating to prayer.[10]

In the first article on prayer in *ST* 2a2ae, Thomas asks whether prayer is 'an act of the cognitive or appetitive powers?'[11] In mind here is a distinction common to Thomas between the intellect and the will.[12] Prayer, as speech, holds a predominantly cognitive dimension. More particularly, prayer is an act of practical reason; it is not merely a speculative undertaking, by which its object is simply apprehended, but entails the active causation of its object, so that 'one thing [prayer] can be the cause of another.' The causality of human prayer is restricted, however, on the basis of its character as a creaturely address to the divine. For example, it cannot take the form of a command because the creature is in no position to impose necessity upon God. Indeed, what Thomas calls 'perfect' causation is attributed to God alone, in so far as under his decree 'the effect is totally subject to the power of the cause and the effect is necessarily produced.' Where the practical spoken reason of the divine life can be understood in terms of command, its creaturely counterpart is moderated to the status of petition as the appropriate mode of address to 'either an equal or superior.' Petition is thus the 'primary meaning of prayer' understood in terms of an inferior addressing a superior. Furthermore, by causing something – or, in an idiom more particular to prayer, 'proposing that something be

[9] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 61 vols. (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1964-81) (hereafter *ST*), 2a2ae. 83. 1.
[10] It is important to note here that we are making a distinction between what has been described as petitionary prayer and contemplation. For the purposes of this work, contemplation is understood as a distinct enough discourse in Thomas to merit its own (albeit strongly related) discussion.
[11] Ibid.
[12] As one commentator explains in discussing the natural appetite: 'Just as animals have the ability to receive and process information from the external world, through the sense, so animals have the ability to desire and enjoy features of the environment. Moreover, just as human beings have a special cognitive capacity, the intellect, so we have a special appetitive capacity, the will.' Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae 1a 75-89*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 201.

done by someone else –' petitionary prayer implies 'a certain ordering' or *intelligence*, and to that extent is an act of reason.

As reasoned petition, prayer reminds the pray-er that her needs and desires must be met not in herself but in the form of divine help. There exists in prayer an ordering of human needs and desires towards another – and in the case of God another who is superior – so that the creature is compelled in the act of invocation to acknowledge an intrinsic neediness. Hence, Thomas argues that 'we must pray, not in order to inform God of our needs and desires, but in order to remind ourselves that in these matters we need divine assistance.'[13]

That prayer is petition, expressed as a function of reason, alerts us to the fact that it necessarily involves asking God for help. It is a rational act whereby God is invoked, in one sense, simply because he must be invoked – the creaturely status of inferiority and deficiency demands the cry for assistance from the one to whom alone is given the power to command. The words of Simon Peter from the Gospel of John come to mind: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'

Providence

Prayer means asking for things from God. It is a reflective and intelligent exercise; the one who prays recognises her need and seeks to fulfil that need by the employment of reason. As such, it is a properly creaturely act. Prayer is also *effective*. The prayers of the saints are profitable and accepted by God because they are prayed in accordance with the divine will. On this basis prayer also refers to divine providence – often in terms of the apparent deadlock between, on the one hand, petitionary prayer, and on the other God's omniscience, goodness, immutability

[13] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 2.

etc. Origen eloquently states the question: 'God knows all things before they come into being and there is nothing that becomes known to him from the fact of its beginning for the first time when it begins, as though it were not previously known. What need then is there to send up prayer to him who knows what we need even before we pray?'[14] Thomas frames the answer to this question in relation to prayer's right motive. We must pray, because that is how we 'obtain that which God has decreed will be obtained in prayer.'[15] Prayer is necessary because it is can accord with the providential ordering of God. It is understood as a fundamental means by which God carries out the tasks of his will. Rooted in the divine decree, it is therefore a human calling of the highest order, being lent what Thomas calls the 'dignity of causality.'[16]

If the impasse between divine providence and prayer's causality is indeed 'imaginary,'[17] how is this so? Providence, for Thomas, certainly means the causality of God extended to all being, so that 'all things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God towards some end.'[18] Furthermore, the motive of prayer is not to 'inform God of our needs and desires,' nor is it to 'change the divine decree.' There is a real sense in which God's mind is 'unchangeable and inflexible.'[19] Yet in Thomas's view God does actively share the working of providence with creatures. He does not, for example, wish to argue that God's absolute power demands exclusive divine action, so that lower beings lose any capacity for agency. Indeed, the absolute and sovereign divine power of God presents for us a nuance in Thomas's thinking. As one commentator has pointed out, God's 'absolute power' means exactly that it can 'cause something to be and to act by its own power.'[20] In other words, God, in his providence, is not

[14] Origen, *Treatise on Prayer*, trans. E. J. Day (London, 1954), 94.
[15] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 2.
[16] *ST* 1a. 23. 8
[17] Francesca Aran Murphy, 'The Trinity and Prayer,' *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, ed. Matthew Levering and Gilles Emery, O.P., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 513.
[18] *ST* 1a. 22. 2.
[19] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 2.
[20] Rudi Velde, 'Thomas Aquinas's Understanding of Prayer in the Light of the Doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo,' *Modern Theology*, 29.2 (2013), 53.

intolerant of and in fact invites creaturely action as part of his own working in the world. We might call this an 'inclusive' account of providence.

As an instance of this inclusivity, Thomas contends that the operations of nature can be attributed equally to both God and natural agents, insofar as the first agent (God) and lower agents do not act independently of each other but rather the 'whole natural effect' is produced by both: 'the same effect is from God and from the natural agent.'[21] Thomas illustrates the point by likening God to a craftsman, who 'applies the instrument to its proper effect, although sometimes he does not give the instrument the form whereby it acts, nor preserves that form, but merely puts it into motion.'[22] Accordingly, the lower agent is granted a 'proper power'[23] within the scope of God's encompassing providential action. In the same way, Thomas can speak about prayer – a rational effect – as having the 'dignity of causality.' Prayer's origin and power is found in the higher agent, but the creature who prays nevertheless acts of itself in immediacy. Prayer is a genuine and causal act within the scope of God's providence.

Prayer is of the order of secondary causes, and God wills to work out providence by sharing its effects with the operation of these causes. The impasse between prayer and providence is thus imaginary, and Thomas's resolution in fact uncontroversial: prayer is causal just as any natural process is. As Thomas states, 'to claim that we should not pray in order to obtain anything from God, on the ground that the ordering of providence is immutable, is like saying that we should not walk in order to arrive at some place and that we should not eat in order to be fed, all of which is patently absurd.'[24]

[21] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4 bks. (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne LTD., 1923-29) (hereafter *SCG*), 3. 70.
[22] *SCG* 3. 70.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 96.

Grace and Merit

As a presupposition of the working of divine providence, prayer emerges as a vital aspect of the Christian life, for by it we involve ourselves in the action of God for us and for the world. That prayer has this dignity is by no means arbitrary. The inclusivity of divine providence – God's willingness to produce effects by other causes – is a result not of an insufficiency of power but the 'immensity of his goodness, wherefore it was his will to communicate his likeness to things not only in the point of their being but also in the point of their being causes of other things.'[25] As the inclusivity of providence is referred to the divine goodness, so we are introduced to the grammar of grace. The language of God's grace in relation to prayer will gain greater specificity as we continue in our study to examine the particular role of the Holy Spirit, who, interceding for us, helps us in our weakness. For now it is enough to establish that for Thomas the Christian life in general is not something for which we have an aptitude. It does not come easily to us because it is in reality beyond us.[26] The Christian stands in need of grace as the power by which she can live the Christian life because without grace all efforts at virtue are futile. For Thomas, it is by grace that human beings can act *well*: preceded by healing, the consequent performance of good 'proper to supernatural capacity' is enabled only by divine assistance.[27] In Aristotelian terms, human beings may be masters of their acts, but there must be a point at which the enactment of free human decision is enabled by an exterior (and superior) power – thus 'the mind even of a healthy man is not so much the master of its acts as not to need to be moved by God.'[28] Human beings whose capacity for the good is inhibited by sin are therefore all the more in need of an exterior power for the doing of good. Human nature

[25] Ibid., 70.
[26] *ST* 1a2ae. 85. 1.
[27] *ST*, 1a2ae. 109. 2.
[28] Ibid.

is spoiled by sin and as such fails to desire what is good; 'grace' is what names for Thomas the enabling of that which we cannot do on our own.

With the establishment of grace it is incumbent on the human being to act. Thomas understands those who claim God's grace without any feeling of obligation towards gaining merit to be sinning by presumption, and therefore sinning against the Holy Spirit who administers the gift of grace.[29] As Healy puts it, for Thomas, 'merit cannot be separated from grace without greatly distorting our understanding of the Christian life.'[30] The true Christian life entails the gaining of salvation by merit on the basis of grace. On the one hand, to speak of merit without grace invites the Pelagian heresy, risking a form of salvation attainable without God's action in the life of the sinner. On the other, to speak of grace without merit is to allow room for the sin of presumption. The latter works in opposition to the kind of genuine action that enables creatures to realise what was beyond them. Thomas's understanding forges a middle-ground, whereby creaturely action is meritorious only insofar as it is enabled to be so by divine grace.

Prayer, as an action pertaining to the Christian life, represents a proper response to divine grace. Prayer is only achievable as an act which goes beyond our nature when it is endowed with grace. It represents part of the task of actualising infused grace through good works; and it is something that the Christian *must* do in response to that grace – for, 'grace and truth were the work of Christ through the Gifts of the Holy Ghost he gave to men,' and, 'to refuse to obey belongs to obstinacy.'[31]

[29] *ST*, 2a2ae. 14. 3.
[30] Nicholas M. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 108.
[31] *ST*, 2a2ae. 14. 3.

II. The Problem of Prayer

At the point of solving the problem of whether or not we must pray we are presented with another problem. The knowledge that we *must* pray easily leads to a feeling of anxiety about the fact that, in truth, we cannot pray. This is not to say that we cannot practicably carry out the task of prayer, but that prayer is somehow seriously compromised by human ignorance. On an experiential level, the requirement of prayer as a basic ethical act haunts the Christian who attempts to pray. There is an inadequacy at the point of prayer that echoes the plea of the disciple: 'Lord, teach us to pray.' Romans 8:26-27 also bespeaks the weakness involved in prayer, as it opens up the dimension of the Spirit's help in our inadequacy. There, according to Thomas, our not knowing how to pray as we ought manifests in a two-fold failure: we know neither what to ask for nor in what manner we should ask. Before examining Thomas's comments on weakness in prayer in the Romans commentary, however, deeper lying problems must be brought to the surface. Underneath the ignorance of the pray-er in Romans 8 lies the basic limitation of human virtue, which must contend both with the common restrictions of creatureliness as well as human sinfulness.

The Limits of Creaturely Knowledge

Human prayer emanates from God himself. Prayer is a response to a divine address of grace, and is therefore only enabled from without (an enabling which, considered 'on the ground' of human action, comes to fruition in the intercession of the Spirit). This means that it entails some kind of knowledge of God. It is a creaturely act, but it is also a divine act because God himself prays so that we might pray. The communication of grace beckons the human being to

respond in meritorious acts, of which prayer is one. As such, the creature is invited to know God.

For Thomas, however, we cannot know God in his essence. We can know *about* God. Thomas does not want to assert that the unknowability of God precludes any knowledge of truths concerning him.[32] What he does want to assert however is that knowledge of God considered as a science, in the form of demonstrative knowledge, or *scire*, is impossible.[33] Or more precisely, the only form in which we know in the sense of demonstrative knowledge in relation to God is an apophatic one. Thomas states, 'it is to be known with certainty therefore that one thing about God is entirely unknown to the human being in this life, namely what God is.'[34] In other words, we can know with certainty that we do not know God. Even faith, which joins human beings to God, does not imply that God is any more known. God is known only through himself, and so faith comes not 'from the vision of the believer but from the vision of the One who is believed. Thus as far as faith falls short of vision, it falls short of the determination which belongs to science.'[35] Moreover, because God is simple and without parts,[36] the fact that his essence is unknowable also means that his will is unknowable, so that assertions made about the unknowability of God's essence apply also to God's will. As Rogers puts it, 'to know with *scientia* what God wills is to know God's mind, which is inseparable from his essence.'[37] Just as creatures cannot 'class' God as they can a genus or a species, so they cannot comprehend his will as that which belongs to his essence.

[32] G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach, *Three Philosophers*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 117.
[33] As Rogers notes, Thomas distinguishes between this sort of knowledge (*scire*) and 'acquaintance with something, without necessarily knowing what it is – *cognoscere* or *cognitio*.' Eugene F. Rogers, *Aquinas and the Supreme Court: Race, Gender and Failure of Natural Law in Thomas's Biblical Commentaries*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 28.
[34] Ibid.
[35] *ST* 1a. 12. 13.
[36] *ST* 1a. 3. 7.
[37] Rogers, *Aquinas and the Supreme Court*, 29.

We cannot know God, either in his essence or his will. In a similar way, because they issue from God, we cannot know things. For Thomas, as a principal of the doctrine of the truth of things, a 'thing' finds its place 'between two intellects –'[38] namely, between the divine and human, the *intellectus divinus* and the *intellectus humanus*. According to Pieper, 'the first denotes the creative fashioning of things by God; the second their intrinsic knowability for the human mind.'[39] Pieper goes on to remark that 'the expression "things are true" means in the first place that they are creatively thought by God; and in the second, that they can be approached and grasped in human knowledge. Between these two concepts of truth there exists a relation of *prioritas naturae*, an ontological precedence.'[40] One reason this ontological precedence is so significant is that it marks for us the createdness of things. That is, the truth of things cannot be fully grasped by the human intellect because things are *creatura*, brought into existence by the knowledge of God himself. Things emanate from the divine intellect and therefore 'we cannot get to the bottom of them.'[41] 'We cannot seize the core'[42] of the truth of things because 'we cannot possess, constrain, or enclose them;'[43] in short, because we cannot create them.

Things are in this way only known to us by their effects; we cannot know them *in esse* because they belong properly to God and not to us. What of this for the problem of prayer? The basic question of how to pray when we do not know what to ask for is cast into sharp relief by the unknowability of God and divinely created things. It seems that for Thomas we do not know what to ask for because we do not know how God intends things to be used. We do not stand in the place of God, and therefore we do not know the ends of things as if they are created by

[38] Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St.Thomas: Three Essays*, trans. Daniel O'Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 60.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Rogers, *Aquinas and the Supreme Court*, 33.
[42] Pieper, *The Silence of St.Thomas*, 60.
[43] Rogers, *Aquinas and the Supreme Court*, 32.

us. Our knowledge of things is not intimate like God's.[44] The fact of our ignorance of course legitimises the exercise of prayer in the first place. But it also causes great difficulty for the pray-er. To know neither God nor things in their essence causes the motive and function of human prayer to be tinged with doubt and haunted by ineffectiveness. How do we know what to pray for when we do not know what God has ordained for things? To know things only by their effects – which is our only possible knowledge of things – appears to mean that we cannot pray. There is a stage pertaining to foreknowledge and the direction of things that is barred to us by our very creatureliness. As creatures, restricted from knowledge of the essence of God and things, we are in a very real sense unable to pray.

Sin and Disordered Desire

Also looming large in the landscape of prayer is human sinfulness. In the Romans 8 commentary Thomas employs the language of disordered desire to signify our failure to pray. It is a 'defect of the present life'[45] that our desires are wrong and misdirected, and hence we need the Holy Spirit to cause right desires in us. At this point, it will be helpful to situate the notion of disordered desire in the wider picture of human sin, in order to elaborate on the rather passing assertions made by Thomas in the Romans commentary.

The language of 'defects of the present life' used in the Romans 8 commentary shows that Thomas is referring primarily to sin in its original, rather than actual, form. He does not speak of failure to pray first as a particular instance of sin (though it surely is this) but rather as a condition of what it means to be a human who lives under the status of the present life. We might illumine the relation of original sin to the disordering of desires with reference to

[44] Indeed, Rogers argues that for Thomas God 'comes closer to a thing than it comes to itself.' Ibid., 33.
[45] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 693.

Thomas's thinking on concupiscence. In the *Summa*, addressing the question of whether original sin is concupiscence, Thomas argues that 'the whole order of original justice consists in man's will being subject to God: which subjection, first and chiefly, was in the will, whose function it is to move all the other parts to the end, as stated above, so that the will being turned away from God, all the other powers of the soul become inordinate.'[46] Original sin, then, is a corruption of original justice, and because original justice concerns the subjection of the human will to God, it also consists in the privation of that will. As Thomas goes on to write, 'accordingly the privation of original justice, whereby the will was made subject to God, is the formal element in original sin.' Where the formal element of original sin describes the corruption of the will, the material element describes the turning of the will to what Thomas calls the 'mutable good.'[47] In this case, the powers of the soul are not subjected chiefly to God, but rather seek inordinately after fleeting goods and transitory activities. Hence Thomas settles on the term concupiscence; the human being under original sin is inclined to long for fleshly and passing goods rather than the ultimate and immutable good which is God.

Thomas's telling of original sin accounts for the failure of human beings in prayer because, within the wider picture hinted at by the 'defects of the present life,' the will becomes inordinate and human desires brought to the crucible of prayer are left misdirected. The formal element – the sinful condition – leads derivatively to the material element, whereby our longings are directed towards mutable good. It is unsurprising then that Thomas quotes Matthew 26:41 in reference to our weakness in prayer: 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'[48] Our desires need to be changed: we do not know what to ask for because our longings are misplaced, seeking the mutable rather than the immutable.

[46] *ST* 1a2ae. 82. 3.
[47] Ibid.
[48] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 688.

General and Particular Knowledge

We know neither what to ask for nor in what manner we should ask. This is, according to Thomas, the problem presented to us by Paul in Romans 8. This constitutes our *weakness*. Further to this, the two-fold problem identified by Thomas in the Romans 8 commentary raises a set of questions pertaining to the experience of prayer in relation to the guidance and instruction of scripture. For instance, in that Jesus taught what should be asked for by way of the Lord's Prayer, how can we be ignorant of what we should ask for? And in terms of the manner in which we should pray, there is surely no excuse for ignorance, considering the apostle James exhorts us to ask in faith without doubting.[49] In answering such questions Thomas opts to refer the reader to a distinction between general and particular knowledge. We do indeed know in general what to ask for in prayer and in what manner we should ask because these things are taught plainly in scripture. The problem occurs, however, when it comes to the conditions of particular circumstances. Thomas elaborates by way of example. Under the first aspect (ignorance of what to ask for), when we want to undertake a virtuous act congruent with the petition 'your will be done,' it may be that such an act does not befit us, as Gregory's example: 'the quiet of contemplation is not expedient for a person who can press onward usefully in action.' Or, in seeking temporal blessing ('our daily bread') we may actually lead ourselves into ruin, 'for many have perished because of riches.'[50] In addition, a desire for freedom from earthly trials, presumably consistent with the final two petitions of the Lord's Prayer, may fall outside the will of God, who sometimes wishes us to suffer in order that humility be maintained (hence Paul's 'thorn in the flesh.') Under the second aspect (ignorance of the manner in which we should pray), Thomas argues in a similar way that although we may

[49] Ibid., para. 691.
[50] Ibid., para. 690.

know in general how we ought to pray, we cannot properly discern our motives at the point of praying. Thus, in a more particular discourse, we can never be sure whether our prayers derive 'from anger or from a zeal for justice.'[51]

Thomas's exposition of human ignorance in the place of prayer seems to reflect both strands of the creaturely hindrance. For though constituent of a basic and sinful weakness at the point of prayer, such experiential problems also afflict prayer from the standpoint of our creaturely limitation. For instance, on one side, our petitions for temporal blessings may lead us to sin by way of our exercising misplaced desires; on the other side, we are hindered by an ignorance of the divine will that leads us to pray without assurance about freedom from suffering and trials. In this way, the backdrop to the briefer, material problems raised in the Romans 8 commentary has been established. Weakness, ignorance, and an inability to pray when it comes to the particulars of human experience can all be indexed to Thomas's convictions about the limits of creaturely knowledge – whereby we cannot know *in esse* God or things – and human sinfulness which, under the rubric of the material element of original sin, causes our desires to be disordered.

III. The Spirit's Intercession

Creatures are faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem at the point of prayer, for, according to Thomas, we must pray, but we cannot pray. Indeed, this impasse speaks into a familiar Christian anxiety concerning the experience of prayer. There is a sense when the Christian comes to pray of overwhelming inadequacy, as well as unease in the face of prayer's necessity. This sense perhaps mirrors the apostle Paul's own insecurity over his actions – Paul

[51] Ibid., para. 691.

can 'will what is right,' he *wants* to do right, but he cannot do it. 'Evil lies close at hand' (Rom.7). The necessity of prayer coupled with the problem of prayer lead us in a more direct manner to a close consideration of Romans 8, in particular verses 26 and 27. There, the fact that we 'do not know how to pray as we ought' is met by Paul with a strong affirmation of the Spirit's intervention and assistance: 'but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.' The problem described is thus in fact surmountable. Paul concedes the problem of prayer (and elsewhere, of course, the necessity of prayer) but also makes a positive statement towards a solution: we are weak, but the Spirit *helps*.

This is an acknowledgement made by Paul in Romans 8:26-27 and taken up by Thomas in his commentary on those verses. Under consideration for the purposes of this study will be the details of the acknowledgment made by Paul that the Spirit intercedes on behalf of the saints in prayer. What exactly does the Spirit do in interceding for us? And what is the nature of our prayer when it is assisted in this way? Such a consideration will entail a close reading of the Romans commentary. The commentary will also serve as a point of departure for wider exploration, mainly in the *Summa theologiae*, as themes related to prayer and the Holy Spirit require filling out. In this respect we will consider specifically the themes of love/charity, hope, and the efficacy of prayer.

Intercession

First, however, it is necessary to grasp what Thomas means by the term intercession. There is a certain understanding that posits the Spirit's intercession as an act of petition of the Father and Son on behalf of the pray-er. Abraham Kuyper, for instance, opts for intercession as an act

wholly distinct from the pray-er's own efforts, so that, rather than enabling them to pray, the Spirit prays *for* believers: 'But being unable of ourselves to kindle the incense, the Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, and from our hearts prays to God in our behalf. We are not conscious of it; He prays for us and in us with groans that cannot be uttered; which does not mean that He makes *us* utter groans for which we cannot account, but that He groans in us.'[52] Thomas is swift to reject such an interpretation of 'intercedes' on the grounds that it tends towards the inferiority of the Spirit compared to the Father and the Son.[53] For him, the thought of the Spirit petitioning the other persons of the godhead is uncomfortable because it puts into question the very deity of the Spirit who, as co-equal with the other persons, cannot be imagined in terms of an inferior praying to a superior. In fact, to promote a petitioning sense when it comes to the Spirit's intercession is to align with Arius and Macedonius, 'who held that the Holy Spirit is a creature and lower than the Father and Son. For intercession is the role of a lesser person.'[54] What is required then, if not a reading of intercession that entails subordinationism, is to interpret Paul as locating the address of the Holy Spirit in the human being rather than the other persons of the godhead. The communicative aspect of intercession is directed not to the other divine persons but to the creature who is praying. The Spirit asks for us in the sense not that he intercedes with God (as if God were somehow superior to the Holy Spirit) but in that he 'makes us ask.'[55] The intercession of the Spirit is defined: the Spirit's work in prayer is one of 'directing and inciting'[56] the human being rather than making supplication to God on her behalf. On this account we can set forth the exact mode in which Thomas understands the Spirit's intercession:

[52] Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1975), 639.

[53] Augustine and Calvin take issue with Kuyper's sort of interpretation on similar grounds. See Augustine, *Letter 130 (A.D. 412)*, Web, accessed 26 August, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102130.htm and John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Epistle to the Romans*, (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1844), 224.
[54] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 692.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., 693

the Spirit compels us to ask 'inasmuch as he causes right desires in us, because to ask is to make desires known.'[57]

The foundation for an understanding of the Spirit's intercession is thus laid. The Spirit helps the creature who must pray but cannot pray by way of incitement. Insofar as prayer is primarily petition – the making known of desires – the Spirit assists the pray-er to pray with *right* desires. The human desires contaminated by sin and expressed under the limitations of creatureliness are somehow redeemed by the Spirit's intercession. In him we can truly pray because it is him who 'makes us ask.' Furthermore, even at this early stage we can gesture again towards Thomas's affirmation of creaturely agency in prayer. One of the clear dangers of an interpretation of intercession tending towards a purely advocatory role for the Spirit – such as Kuyper's – is that the human no longer truly prays. There is of course a strong advocatory sense in Thomas's notion of the Spirit 'making' us pray; but the pray-er, though incited, remains the pray-er. That is, under the rubric of Thomas's understanding of intercession, the creature does not recede into the background of prayer – as if the Spirit, so to speak, 'takes over –' but is rather transformed by the Spirit to become itself the genuine pray-er; the one who in fact *can* pray where before prayer was difficult or perhaps even impossible.

Love/Charity

We come to the language of love/charity because Thomas himself locates the character of the Spirit's intercession there. In the Romans commentary, he states that the right desires of sanctified petitionary prayer 'arise from the ardour of love, which he [the Spirit] produces in us.'[58] Thomas cites Romans 5:5: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

Spirit which has been given to us.' He therefore names the Spirit's intercession by reference to love. This naming is grounded in his claim that the Spirit himself is properly referred to as love. By virtue of this ascription, the one who is love encourages love in creatures that they might pray with right desires.

'Love' is a term used to describe the divine life *in esse*, not just the Spirit. As Loyer states, 'in reference to the relation of the lover to the object loved, "love" and "to love" are said of the essence, which is to say that love is used essentially. Theologically speaking, in this sense love denotes the divine essence common to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'[59] Thomas readily concedes this point, and employs Augustine as a warning against its neglect: 'Hence Augustine says: "Who dares to say that the Father loves neither Himself, nor the Son, nor the Holy Ghost, except by the Holy Ghost?"'[60] On the other hand, 'love' as a notional term, or as a production of the essential love existing between members of the godhead, is most appropriately ascribed to the Holy Spirit.[61] That is, in Thomas's words, 'when the term Love is taken in a notional sense it means nothing else but "to spirate love."'[62] This is a difficult concept illustrated by Thomas with reference to a flower: just as a tree flowers by virtue of the flower it produces, so the Father and the Son love each other by the Spirit who proceeds therefrom. The Spirit is the particular form of love produced notionally out of the essential love that exists in the divine life. Loyer offers a helpful summary: 'God's goodness serves as the principle of God's love for himself (essential love in God), which gives rise to the imprint of love in God's will and the corresponding immanent procession of the Holy Spirit whom the Father and the Son breathe forth (notional love in God) as love in person.'[63]

[59] Kenneth Loyer, *God's Love Through the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Thomas Aquinas and John Wesley*, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 93.
[60] *ST* 1a. 37. 2.
[61] Indeed, Thomas himself argues that the term 'love' can be suitably used of divinity 'both essentially and personally.' *ST* 1. 37. 1.
[62] *ST* 1a. 37. 2.
[63] Loyer, *God's Love Through the Spirit*, 98.

We can further understand the particular ascription of love to the Holy Spirit by examining Thomas's explication of the divine processions. Thomas draws on the relation between procession by way of the intellect and procession by way of the will in order to designate the Holy Spirit as love. The explication begins at the point of the Son's procession from the Father. The Son proceeds from the Father as an object of knowledge, inasmuch as 'an intellectual conception comes forth in the knower, i.e. a word.' By the same principle, when the knower loves the object of his knowledge (as a function of the will), 'a kind of imprint, so to speak, of the reality loved comes forth in the lover's will.'[64] For Thomas, this 'relationship of the Love to the reality loved,' this imprint, finds expression in the Holy Spirit, who is 'the bond between the Father and the Son in that he is Love.'[65] The Spirit is thus the love of the Father for the Son, marked by the procession of the Father's will.[66] The Holy Spirit is also, however, the love of the Son for the Father, for there is a unitive love in the divine life which implies 'co-relationship between Father and Son as between lover and beloved.' In this respect, the Holy Spirit 'necessarily proceeds from both.'[67] The imprint originates in the Father's willing the Son in love, but exists also in the beloved's (the Son) love for the lover (the Father). The Holy Spirit, by virtue of the nature of its generation as one proceeding forth as a function of the divine will, is thus properly termed 'love.'

Important for our considerations of the Spirit's intercession, creatures too are entailed in this movement of knowledge and love. Thomas contends that the Father knows himself by his Word, as in a reflexive relation between divine persons, but that such knowledge also extends

[64] *ST* 1a. 37. 1.
[65] Ibid.
[66] *SCG*, 4, 24.
[67] *ST* 1a. 37. 1. Hence Thomas upholds *filioque*. For a fuller discussion of the Holy Spirit as love in relation to the *filioque* controversy see Anselm K. Min*, Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter Between Aquinas and Recent Theologies*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 203-4. See also Matthew Levering, *Scripture and Metaphysics: Aquinas and the Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 194.

to creatures, so that the Father 'finds his creatures in knowing the Son.'[68] Equally, and by virtue of the double procession established in the mutuality of Father and Son, God loves his creatures by the Holy Spirit. Thomas writes, 'even as the Father utters himself and every creature by the Word he begets, inasmuch as the Word begotten completely expresses the Father and every creature, so also he loves himself and every creature by the Holy Spirit.'[69] Because the Father speaks not only himself but every creature – that is, 'the Word "begotten" adequately represents the Father and every creature –'[70] creatures are loved by the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Father loves himself (and the Son) by the Holy Spirit.

On this basis, we find a close relation between the love imparted by the Holy Spirit and the charity produced therefrom in creatures, so that to be loved by the Holy Spirit means in particular that he produces in human beings the Christian virtue of charity. It is worth quoting Thomas at reasonable length: 'The divine essence itself is charity even as it is wisdom and goodness. Now we are said to be good with the goodness which is God, and wise with the wisdom which is God, because the very qualities which make us formally so are participations in the divine goodness and wisdom.'[71] For Thomas, the relation in question – between the Holy Spirit as love and the charity of creatures – is best articulated with regard to the notion of participation; human charity means sharing in God's nature.

In order to detail this assertion, the concept of friendship can be brought into view, for charity is decisively a matter of friendship for Thomas.[72] In the *Summa*, the first question in the treatise on charity asks 'is charity a friendship?' Thomas answers that charity is 'above all' friendship, a 'friendship of man and God.'[73] How is this so? Thomas refers to Aristotle, who taught that

[68] Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 206.
[69] *ST* 1a. 37. 2.
[70] Ibid.
[71] *ST* 2a2ae 23. 2. 1.
[72] The common translation for Thomas's 'friendship' is *amicitia*, which itself suggests, more than just companionship, a 'serious love and bonding.' Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 289.
[73] *ST* 2a2ae. 23. 1.

friendship has to do with loving another for their own sake, not one's own, and on the basis of a consequent 'reciprocal good will,' working towards a common goal.[74] Friendship is the mode by which human beings, more than simply being loved, are invited to share in God's love and join him in attaining to a common goal. This common goal in which creatures partake can be expressed in connection with the co-relationship of love between the Father and the Son. The mutual love of Father and Son, established in the bond of the Holy Spirit, is a love offered freely as part of God's will for himself, and is in no way derived from a need in God. As Thomas notes in the *Summa*, 'To that extent is love called a joining force, even in God, though without implying composition, for the good he wills himself is nothing other than himself, who is good of his essence.'[75] In the same way, as far as friendship is charity, it is offered without imposition and only for the sake of the other (hence Thomas cites Augustine's definition: 'Charity I call a movement of the soul towards enjoying God for his own sake.'[76]) Charity means sharing in God's nature because it allows for friendship with God, which in turn signifies an invitation into the mutual and free relation of love between Father and Son. Again, charity is produced in creatures by the Holy Spirit. Returning to the Romans commentary, Thomas refers back to Rom. 5:5 as a proof for the way the Spirit incites us to love: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.'[77] It is by the Holy Spirit who is love that human beings can experience charity; and it is charity, as friendship, that allows human beings to share in God's life.

It is worth asking in more detail after the character of this work of the Spirit. It is true, for example, that the language of grace is at least remote in Romans 8, and, perhaps consequently,

[74] Ibid. Loving another for our *own* good is still love, but without the element of friendship. Such a love, 'for wine or a horse or the like,' is rather a love that has to do with desire. The use of desire here by Thomas should not, however, be confused with that relating to petitions in Romans 8, for there it is chiefly an expression of sanctified wants, but here refers to Aristotle's (self) 'interested love' *amor concupiscentiae*. *ST* 2a2ae. 23. 1. n.
[75] *ST* 1a. 20. 1.
[76] *ST* 2a2ae. 23. 2.
[77] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 693.

absent in Thomas's commentary on verses 26 and 27. Eugene Rogers attributes this to a distinction in Thomas between grace and the New Law, whereby the rule of the Spirit is such that 'the language of grace falls away' and the human being is assumed, or incorporated, into the intratrinitarian relation of Father and Son. On this account there is 'no need for the condescension of grace.'[78] However, despite the absence of the term itself in the context of Romans 8, there is little to suggest a marked distinction between grace and the New Law in Thomas's thinking.[79] Indeed, against the backdrop of our discussion of charity, Thomas not only locates the pre-eminence of the New Law in the 'spiritual grace implanted in men's hearts,'[80] but also depicts those Old Testament saints belonging to the New Law as 'having charity and the grace of the Holy Spirit.'[81] Thus Thomas can also assert that charity, which is 'our friendship for God,' is founded not upon 'natural powers' but 'gifts of grace:' 'we have it neither by nature, nor as acquired, but as infused by the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son.'[82]

What does all this mean for the intercession of the Spirit at the point of prayer? It becomes clear that the Spirit works in prayer to regulate our petitions according to the charity that he graciously extends to us: 'Now right desires arise from the ardour of love, which he produces in us.'[83] By the same token, in prayer human beings experience charity in the manner of friendship with God, and are in this way granted participation in the divine nature. It is therefore true not only that 'the divine charity of the Holy Spirit is the deep motive and reason of

[78] Eugene Rogers, 'The Eclipse of the Spirit in Thomas Aquinas,' *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain, (London: SCM Press, 2013), 149.
[79] This is perhaps where Rogers fails. It is fair to say though that his formulation does not preclude outright an account of divine grace; it is simply that he places emphasis on an incorporative event *at which* he believes grace fades into the background, not that grace is totally uninvolved.
[80] *ST* 1ae2ae. 107. 1. 2.
[81] Ibid.
[82] *ST* 2a2ae. 24. 2.
[83] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 693.

prayer,'[84] but also that prayer represents a foremost occasion of creaturely participation in God by virtue of its motive and reason being charity, a gift given by the Holy Spirit who is himself love.

Hope

The objects of the pious desires incited by the Holy Spirit are not immediately accessible to the one who prays. 'Sighs,' consistent with the Spirit's work of intercession, are caused in us 'inasmuch as he inspires us to desire heavenly things which are postponed for the soul.'[85] They are 'indescribable' either because they pertain to the ineffability of heavenly glory or because they originate in the Holy Spirit, whose wisdom remains mysterious to creatures.[86] We are thus introduced by Thomas to the theme of hope. Hope, in this respect, can be construed as a subsidiary of the charity already discussed, because it is the desires incited and regulated by charity that pertain to at present unattainable things.

That hope issues from charity is clear for Thomas. There is a sense in which hope precedes charity,[87] but this is overshadowed by the primacy of charity in what Thomas calls 'the sequence of excellence:' 'with the advent of charity hope is rendered more perfect.'[88] Again, the regulatory function of charity comes into view, for just as our prayers are regulated according to the character of charity, so, in a more detailed sense, the pious desires expressed in prayer result from a hope sanctified by charity. So Jean-Pierre Torrell can state that 'confidence in prayer arises from the virtue of hope, but charity regulates the order of our hope

[84] Gilles Emery, O.P., 'The Holy Spirit in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans,' *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 158.
[85] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 693.
[86] Ibid.
[87] This Thomas attributes to 'the sequence of generation.' What he has in mind here is the possibility that hope can precede charity in the sense that it generates love and observance of God's law. We note however that this is a hope unaffected by charity, and therefore charity takes first place in the 'sequence of excellence.'
[88] *ST* 2a2ae. 17. 8.

and petitions.'[89] Charity remains operative above all in the Spirit's intercession because it is the Spirit's love that leads human beings to pray for the unattainable, and thus to hope in light of charity.

Once more a connection can be detailed with reference to the notion of friendship. The question of what it looks like to hope in the light of charity leads Thomas to discuss friendship in terms of a distinction between perfect and imperfect love. Charity is a reflection of perfect love because, as we have previously noted, it loves another for his or her own sake, in the same fashion that one loves a friend. On the other hand, hope (untouched by charity) is an instance of imperfect love because it loves things for their 'pure utilitarian value.' For example, 'one loves what he covets.'[90] When hope is sanctified by charity, however, the association with imperfect love ends, and hope is brought into line with the principle of perfect love by virtue of the fact that now, consistent with charity, it 'expects something of God as from a friend.'[91] That hope presupposes charity entails a work of the Spirit in transforming creatures in prayer, for the Spirit's charity (which is the principle of its intercession) animates what was before an imperfect and covetous hope. In so doing, the hope of the creature takes on the character of friendship, and in harmony with perfect love desires God simply for himself.

This gestures at the question of what Thomas means by the 'heavenly things which are postponed for the soul.' What exactly are we hoping for in prayer when the Spirit of charity and friendship intercedes for us? In an earlier question on hope in the *Summa*, Thomas contends that our hope should be for 'limitless good.' Beginning from the equation of cause and effect, he writes,

[89] Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2: Spiritual Master*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 333.
[90] *ST* 2a2ae. 17. 8.
[91] Ibid.

> Now an effect should match its cause, and so the good we should rightly and chiefly hope for from God is an unlimited one, matching the power of God who helps us. For it belongs to his limitless power to bring us to limitless good. Such a good life is eternal, consisting in the joyful possession of God himself. This is simply to say that we should hope for nothing less from God than his very self; his goodness, by which he confers good upon creaturely things, is nothing less than his own being. And so the proper and principal object of hope is indeed eternal blessedness.[92]

We have encountered this sort of language already in connection with the nature of charity. Thomas locates the proper object of hope in eternal beatitude, taken to be a state of 'limitless good,' which is even God in his 'own being.' Indeed, he states explicitly in the same question that 'we should pray to God for no other favours apart from their subordination to eternal happiness.' Congruently, there are objects of prayer that are secondary (and presumably diverse) that always form around the chief principle of eternal beatitude.[93] Thomas is well aware that knowledge of beatitude in this life is at best imperfect, with its precise features hidden or at least vague to human understanding (he cites Hebrews 6:19: a hope that 'enters in, even behind the veil'). Yet he concedes that in this concept of the limitless good 'some vague idea of it [eternal beatitude] is possible.'[94] Perhaps in mind here are the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12.[95] Our awareness of beatitude is presently obscured, but through prayer, in which hope is animated by the charity of the Holy Spirit, we begin to *see*. Albeit it a dim vision, it is a vision pertaining to God himself and to a future clarity and fullness not yet attained.

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[92] *ST* 2a2ae. 17. 2.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.'

The Efficacy of Prayer

Our final point in this regard concerns the efficacy of prayer in light of what has gone before, namely, the intercession of the Spirit as the one who produces in us charity, and precisely thus furnishes us with hope and friendship with God. God is the one who searches the hearts of human beings. Thomas understands this in terms not of discovery but examination, in that God already 'knows clearly the things of the heart.'[96] In finding hearts that are incited towards pious desires by the Holy Spirit, God lends his approval to the intercessory work of the Spirit, and consequently lends his approval to the prayers uttered under the direction of that intercession. This Thomas reads from Paul's assertion that God 'knows what the Spirit desires,' i.e. God *approves* 'what he [the Spirit] makes us desire.'[97] God approves what the Spirit incites in human beings in prayer because the Spirit intercedes 'according to God.' It is only for things which are pleasing to God that the Spirit 'makes us ask.' Paradigmatic of this claim is Jesus's obedience to the Father in the anguish of Gethsemane: 'Not as I will, but as thou wilt' (Mt 26:39).[98]

Prayer can thus be effective. As we have already discussed, genuine causality is bestowed upon human prayer; God's providence is in nature such that he involves lower agents in the task of carrying out his will. Importantly, for Thomas, the principle that forms the connection between the human act of prayer and prayer's efficacy as a secondary cause is the Holy Spirit. We note this fact in reference to the notion of goodness and, again, friendship. In the *Summa contra Gentiles* Thomas asks directly after the value of prayer in light of the 'immutability of divine

[96] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 694.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

providence.'[99] As an effective secondary cause, it seems that prayer is fulfilled by God 'in accord with His goodness,' for as such God 'brings to a fitting conclusion the proper desires that are expressed by our prayers.'[100] This is very much the language of the Spirit's intercession in Romans 8, and so we can assuredly highlight Thomas's want to describe the Holy Spirit, in reference to the 'resources of God's causal power,' as itself 'goodness.'[101] This is so because goodness is the motive and object of love, and love is the principal identifier of the Holy Spirit. In the same chapter of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas speaks of friendship as another means of construing the movement from human prayer to its efficacy in the outworking of divine providence. We have already described how the friendship issuing from charity is characterised by loving the other for its own sake; and so in the relationship between lover and beloved which is the friendship of God and human beings, it is natural that God would wish the good of his creatures and therefore the fulfilment of their desires.[102] Framed in this way, we understand the Holy Spirit to be active in making human prayers effective by way of his bonding human beings in friendship with God. For Thomas, only from the status upheld in the Holy Spirit of 'friend of God' can human prayer be effective as a secondary cause.

The final clause of Romans 8:27 concerns the Spirit's interceding for the saints according to the will of God. Here we encounter the decision of God to accept the prayers of the saints on the basis of the Spirit's intercession. Our examination of the causality of prayer thus finds completion: 'the desires which the Holy Spirit causes in the saints are accepted by God.'[103] It is the fulfilment of God's approval of the mind of the Spirit, who incites us to ask in accordance with charity and hope, that God in turn approves human prayers. Thomas's example of what it is to pray according to God's will – the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane – demonstrates the

[99] *SCG*, 3, 95.
[100] Ibid.
[101] *ST* 1a. 39. 8.
[102] *SCG*, 3, 95.
[103] 'St. Thomas Aquinas on Romans,' para. 694.

dignity of prayer as a way in which creatures can 'imitate Christ in relationship to his Father.'[104] Indeed, Thomas's very definition of imitation of God is that creatures imitate 'God's understanding and loving of *himself*.'[105] This concurs with the general tenor of Thomas on Romans 8. Prayer is a moment of participation in the divine love because it imitates the reciprocal love of the Father and Son, where the other is loved simply for itself. That the Holy Spirit incites this love in creatures as charity is typical of the very same Spirit who forms the bond of love between Father and Son.

IV. The Creature Who Prays

Moving from the intercession of the Spirit to the effect therefrom on the creature who prays, we find two themes worthy of particular regard. The first requires that we address more fully the question of who it is that prays when the Spirit acts in prayer, and to what degree human beings *actually* pray when the Spirit works in this manner. The second concerns the transformative power of prayer when incited by the Spirit. How does prayer change us? In what way does prayer in the Spirit sanctify the pray-er? Under this heading, we will consider the implications for the creature's *reditus* (return) to God illuminated by the influence of the Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son, as well as the virtues complementary to prayer that are situated amongst those acts congruent with the Christian walk.

[104] Emery, O.P., 'The Holy Spirit in Aquinas's Commentary on Romans,' 158.
[105] *ST* 1a. 93. 4.

Human Agency

Does participation in the divine life inhibit the sense of human agency so encouraged by Thomas's definition of intercession? We have noted that that the Holy Spirit 'makes us ask' with right desires rather than simply asking himself on our behalf. But Thomas's strong account of participation in prayer, generated by the centrality of love (and in a particular mode, friendship) suggests a degree of participation that could easily lead to unhappy distortions. Images of the pray-er as a puppet of the Spirit, praying in the mode of auto-petition, are easily conjured by surface-level readings of prayer's participation.

One way of addressing this question is to refer, as Ashley Cocksworth has done in his monograph *Karl Barth on Prayer*, to the familiar criticisms levelled at so-called classical doctrines of God (usually those of the likes of Augustine, Thomas and Calvin) by those invested in the open-theism project.[106] The 'classical' doctrines in question are caricatured into hyper-Hellenistic, highly deterministic doctrines of God that apparently leave little room for the flexible, emotionally involved God of the Bible. A surface reading of Thomas on providence allows for easy proof texts – as we have seen, he is not reticent to employ the language of divine unchangeability. Indeed, under the conditions of open-theism, the claim is made that, rather, 'people can argue with God and win.'[107] God becomes uncomplicatedly accessible in prayer, and is understood to answer the requests of the pray-er in the same way that human beings respond to each other's demands. What results is, according to Cocksworth,

[106] See the movement's most prominent book, Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
[107] John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine providence*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2007), 64.

an 'unhelpfully competitive logic that needs naming and rejecting,' in that 'divine agency and human agency are competing here to occupy the same agential space, eventuating in a zero-sum standoff: either God is sovereign or the human agent free but not both.'[108]

Thomas's theology of prayer provides a helpful counter to open theism's questionable formulation. First, the objection that a 'classical' account of providence disallows a relational God is discredited by Thomas's strong account of human participation in the divine life. For instance, where open-theism seeks a relational God, it actually constructs a mechanistic one. On this account, in prayer the divine-human relationship is characterised by, as McDowell puts it, '*sequentiality* or *successiveness*.' McDowell goes further in his criticism: '"God" begins where the praying creature leaves off, and vice versa – prayer moves from the creature to the God who is purely hearer, and thus something of a passive spectator; God *then* acts in response to the *now waiting* one who had prayed … the image of the relay race is most appropriately applicable.'[109] According to this scheme, the creature who prays does so in what we might call a 'digital' manner. Prayer is something undertaken at the point of request, and when no request is in view, or when that request is awaiting an answer, prayer is 'switched off.' Prayer is either off or on, at zero or one. In this way, prayer is constituted both by periods of action as well as periods of inactivity and impassivity. The human is agent, but only insofar as it seems to be able to bridge the chasm between God and humanity when prayer is 'switched on.'

The real danger here is not so much a strange construal of prayer and what it means for humans to be agential in prayer, but rather and simply an insufficient pneumatology. Faced with the achievable task of momentarily bridging the gap between the divine and the human, the creature who prays is lulled into thinking that prayer can be achieved without the Spirit, and

[108] Ashley Cocksworth, *Karl Barth on Prayer*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 143.
[109] John C. McDowell, '"Openness to the World": Karl Barth's Evangelical Theology of Christ as the Pray-er,' *Modern Theology*, 25.2 (2009), 265.

thus that prayer is something that it can do as it ought. Contrary to this, implicit in Thomas's thinking on prayer is in fact a *more* relational understanding than that proposed by open-theism, as well as an acknowledgement of the problem of prayer and the need for the Spirit's help. As we have noted, Thomas opts for a participatory account of prayer whereby the Spirit of love bonds the human being in friendship with God. Prayer, on the basis of the divine goodness, represents a participation in the movement of divine love between Father and Son, enabled by the Spirit. Because the characteristic of this participation is friendship, there exists the working towards a common goal. The manner of true friendship, generated by charity, is that the human and divine work together to carry out the tasks of God's will (a situation that we have noted is possible due to Thomas's inclusive account of providence). This aspect to prayer's participation in the divine life bespeaks a genuine human agency and dignity – crucially, in tandem with a thoroughgoing description of both human failure in prayer and the Spirit's intercession. Where open-theism posits a non-participatory prayer, allowing for mechanical, unproblematic and only skittishly agential petitions, the participation proposed by Thomas supports the notion of prayer as at once a fully human and fully divine act. There is no point at which the creature does not pray – no point at which in this sense she is impassive in prayer – and neither is there a waiting on God's part for the requests of the creature. Where open-theism presents a 'digital' prayer, Thomas allows for prayer in analogue, whereby it need not be switched on or off. Here then, prayer, rather than being just the backwards and forwards of request and response, entails a fully human participation in the divine life and the working of the divine will.

Second, Thomas allows for the simultaneous freedom of the human agent and the sovereignty of God by virtue of an inclusive account of providence. The caricature of classical doctrines of God propounded by those such as Thomas is shown to be just that by virtue of Thomas's nuanced explanation of the human agent in light of a conventional understanding of the divine

ordering. The imaginary quandary of divine sovereignty and human agency is generated by a lack of attention to the nature of God's absolute power, which tolerates the inclusion of secondary causes as a means by which it implements the divine will. Thomas's inclusive providence emerges from participation in the divine life, of which prayer represents a principal moment. To pray according to the will of God is to participate in the divine life, for in this way the pray-er is drawn into a relationship of love by the Spirit (the grounds of intercession) and is enabled to imitate God in echoing the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane ('not as I will, but as you will'). The prayer of the creature is effective, but also God sovereign. Again, this is due to the participatory function of prayer. As a 'digital' exercise, prayer cannot be effective whilst retaining divine sovereignty, for God is approached as a human would another human, and his mind can be changed. Furthermore, God becomes too easily accessible for the creature, portrayed as overly mechanistic and at the disposal of the creature purely for the fulfilment of certain requests. In Thomas's understanding, though, the participation of prayer at once secures God's eternal sovereign power and allows for the causality of prayer within that power. The praying creature is thus a genuine agent engaged in the work of God, and therefore an agent of much greater dignity than that suggested by open-theism.

We must draw attention to another aspect related to the friendship between God and humans undertaken in prayer. The Spirit enlivens friendship between God and creatures by way of his inciting creatures to pray with desires springing from love. The dignity of the human in prayer, whom we have established as a genuine agent, is confirmed in the fact that for Thomas the friendship generated by charity is one where the other is loved *for his or her own sake*. Along with Augustine, Thomas names charity as a loving of God for his own sake. That is to say, real charity loves God not in respect to what it can extract from God but simply for who God is. This true charity is rooted in the reciprocal love of the Father and the Son, who love non-competitively as a reflection of the knower loving the one who is known (as a kind of 'imprint').

Resultant of true charity is true friendship, the bond of love whereby mutual love is expressed for the sake of the other and not for the self. As we have already established, the divine loving of another for its own sake is extended also to creatures: 'so also he loves himself and every creature by the Holy Spirit.'[110] Creatures are invited into the bond of love between Father and Son in that they are loved by the Holy Spirit. The creature who prays is thus loved for its own sake, just as the principal aim of prayer from the side of the creature ought to be love of God for his own sake.

Prayer is a very certain type of friendship for Thomas, one dictated by the principle of love. It is not, for example, a relationship in which, in relation to the other, we 'wish its good for ourselves.'[111] This would be a friendship of concupiscence, and indeed a friendship of absurdity – for it would suggest friendship with animals or wine. Nor is this friendship to be understood in terms simply of rather distant, one-directional 'well-wishing.' Rather, it is a decisively dynamic communicative loving act exactly because it is friendship. As Thomas states, 'a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication.'[112]

Transformation

Talk of the transformation of the creature who prays, in light of our concentration on the work of the Spirit, points towards Thomas's formulation of the movement of the creature and the structure of that movement in salvation history. Transformation is but a way of naming the *reditus* of creatures which succeeds their *exitus*, and entails the movement of creatures back to God enabled by the trinitarian processions. Thomas states: 'Just as the procession of persons is

[110] *ST* 1a. 37. 2.
[111] *ST* 2a2ae. 23. 1.
[112] Ibid.

the reason of the production of creatures by the first principle, so too this same procession is the reason for the return of creatures to their end; since, just as we have been created by the Son and the Holy Spirit, so too it is by them that we are united to our ultimate end.'[113] The transformation of the creature is the process of return to God by way of the causality of God himself. Gilles Emery elaborates when he suggests that Thomas observes a 'certain "circular movement" of creatures (*circulation*, *regiratio*), of which the trinitarian processions are a dynamic pivot; the *exitus* and the *reditus* are accomplished by the same trinitarian processions (*per eadem*), who exercise their influence in a varied way.'[114] We are of course considering the exercise influenced by the Holy Spirit in this process; and we find that prayer holds a particular significance for the function of the Spirit as that transformative 'dynamic pivot.'

It has been established that for Thomas the procession of the Spirit means also that he imprints on creatures that property which is particular to him, i.e. charity. This is the Spirit's special gift in the same way that wisdom is the Son's.[115] This charity, communicated by the Spirit and expressed in the form of the bond of friendship between creatures and God, allows creatures to participate in God; the Spirit draws creatures into the personal relationship between the Father and the Son, which is one of mutual love and self-giving, or friendship. Creatures, by virtue of the procession of the Spirit, attain God himself – God lives in creatures 'as that which is known is in the person who knows and that which is loved is in the person who loves.'[116] Prayer is a prototypical occasion for participation in God because it is there in particular that the Spirit draws creatures into friendship with God by way of the incitement to charity. Prayer, it seems, is one of the principal crucibles in the Christian life where participation in God is 'worked out.'

[113] I *Sent*. d.14. q2. A2.
[114] Gilles Emery, O.P., 'Trinity and Creation,' *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 67.
[115] *ST* 1a. 34.
[116] *ST* 1a. 43. 3

In prayer, then, we have a foremost example of the Spirit 'imprinting a likeness' of his 'respective personal property' (that is, charity) onto creatures. In so doing, the Spirit inscribes on us the '*dynamic ardour for returning to our end*.'[117] The incitement to love gifted by the Holy Spirit acts to transform the creature as it takes up the call to return to God. The Holy Spirit's work in prayer makes up one of the various ways in which the divine processions act to exercise their influence on the movement of creatures back to God. It is fitting, then, that the Spirit is said to lead us to what is also prayer's ultimate end: God in himself, or eternal beatitude.

In this connection, prayer leads the creature to the 'ultimate and principal good of man,' which is the enjoyment of God. Thomas quotes Psalm 72:28: 'It is good for me to adhere to God.'[118] Prayer is a foremost instance of adhering to God in this way. As an act of participation in the divine charity between Father and Son, enabled by the Spirit, prayer transforms the creature into one who *loves*. The Spirit incites the pray-er to pray – that is, to make known her desires – according to the principle of divine charity, and in this way the desires of the heart (not strictly limited to the arena of prayer) are changed from those arising from the weakness of human sinfulness and limitation to those attaining to God himself. In short, insofar as the Spirit 'makes us ask,' he makes us love. The *telos* of the creature in general is also the *telos* of prayer – but more than this, prayer is ingredient in the transformation of the creature as it is granted participation in God by virtue of the origin and example of charity which lies in the Spirit, who is the principal divine actor in prayer.

[117] Gilles Emery, 'Trinity and Creation,' *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* p.68
[118] *ST* 2a2ae. 23. 7.

In addition to this, when it comes to the transformation of the creature prayer can be related to those things Thomas understands to be necessary for the one who prays. There is, as he puts it, a 'concurrence of other virtues requisite for the goodness of prayer'[119] that must be practiced for prayer to be practiced well, and indeed are practiced in the very act of prayer. Principal among these complementary virtues are charity, faith and humility.[120] The practice of prayer requires such virtues, but also encourages them by way of their complementary relationship to prayer.

For instance, the habit of love helped along by prayer does not stop at attaining to God himself but is extended to one's neighbour. This fact presents a helpful reminder that prayer for others is in itself an act of charity. The Spirit makes us love others when he makes us ask according to the principle of charity. Thomas makes this connection by reference to the formal aspect of love, which is God himself. Love of neighbour falls under the aspect of God because 'it is specifically the same act that tends to an aspect of the object, and that tends to the object under that aspect.' And thus, for example: 'it is specifically the same visual act whereby we see the light, and whereby we see the colour under the aspect of light.'[121] Through prayer the Christian community, as well as the individual, is transformed by way of the reciprocal love of believers in interceding for each other. Charity 'requires us to pray for others'[122] and so charity is practiced when we do so. Interestingly, in this way Thomas proposes a broader motive for prayer. Prayer for others does not have to be understood in terms first of necessity, or efficacy, but simply as an act of loving one's neighbour. Prayer for others is often haunted by the pressure of potentially endless intercession and the anxiety of prayers promised but seemingly

[119] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 15.
[120] It should be noted that hope is also a theological virtue (*ST* 2a2ae. 17. 5.) It is not however in this instance linked explicitly to prayer; furthermore, we have discussed already how hope is animated in prayer by the charity of the Holy Spirit.
[121] *ST* 2a2ae. 25. 1.
[122] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 7.

unanswered. The transformation of pray-ers into those who do so first from a position of love helps to draw intercessory prayer away from seeking results and towards an act of love committed simply for the sake of the other, and, as we have discussed, by virtue of this, to God himself.

Under the guiding principal of charity, prayer also encourages faith and humility. As a subsidiary of charity, we understand the claim that faith is necessary in prayer because 'we need to believe that we can obtain from Him what we seek'[123] to fall under an acknowledgement that prayer principally concerns love for God and one's neighbour rather than a face-value divine response. Nevertheless, Thomas does call for a real sense of expectation when it comes to the requests of the pray-er. Faith is thus encouraged in the pray-er because prayer entails the communication of desires to one who can be relied upon. To return to the principal theme of a friendship generated by charity, faith relies on the faithfulness of its object; and under the rubric of friendship with God, prayer is addressed not to a distant or capricious divine being but to the God who chooses friendship with his people by virtue of the bond of the Holy Spirit. Through the exercise of prayer properly understood, then, the creature is led to bring her desires to a friend, and therefore one whom she is confident will grant what is sought. Something similar can be said of humility. Humility is a necessary ingredient of prayer because prayer is inherently problematic: the limitations of creatureliness and original sin cause the pray-er to acknowledge a neediness and inadequacy at the point of prayer. Prayer is necessary, but we fail to carry it out well. Humility is thus required. As Thomas states, 'humility is necessary on the part of the person praying, because he recognises his neediness.'[124] There is no point at which, under Thomas's formulation, the pray-er can come to God in any posture but on her knees, given the fact that she *can* pray.

[123] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 15.
[124] Ibid.

V. The Prayers of the Creature

We have noted how prayer, enabled by the Spirit, allows for the transformation of the one who prays. We have also investigated human agency in prayer. As such, we have examined the creature who prays. At this juncture, we move from the creature who prays to the prayers of the creature: having devoted space to the agent, we now move to the prayers themselves, i.e. how they should be wrought and other such related questions. Thomas has much to say about the prayers creatures offer to God, and in answering related questions allows for a more practical tone than has perhaps gone before. The task of this section will be to take various questions posed by Thomas in the *Summa* and examine his answers in light of the wider picture that has been depicted so far. Given the constraints of space, we focus here on a few selected questions from the *Summa* that bear specific relation to what has gone before in the project.

'Whether we ought to ask for something definite when we pray?'

The first objection posed by Thomas in answer to this question covers by now well-trodden ground. Thomas relates a sequence of realisations that could easily lead to the conclusion that nothing definite can be prayed for. It is useless to ask for definite things from God because to pray 'amiss' is the reason why we 'ask and receive not;' and, one might object, who cannot but ask amiss? Thomas cites a familiar verse from Romans: 'we know not what we should pray for as we ought.'[125] As we have already concluded, exactly such a realisation is necessary to foreground the fact of the Spirit's intercession when it comes to the prayers of the saints.

[125] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 5.

Furthermore, Thomas reasserts that the Spirit 'makes us ask for what is right.'[126] It is the Holy Spirit that allows creatures to pray in a way that is *definite*, that is, in a way that entails the genuine communication of relationship enabled by the bonding of the Holy Spirit. Without the friendship dimension described throughout this project prayer would falter at the point of asking for definite things. Creatures would not know the things that were to be asked for without being bonded in friendship with God. The ardour of love arising from the intercession of the Spirit is the necessary ingredient for asking with right desires, which is the only form in which a creature can truly pray. Without this in place, the pray-er would be forced to pray only in vague terms, and with little comprehension of prayer's right direction. Creatures are left faltering in prayer without the Spirit's intercession, and as a result risk praying not from a posture of friendship with God but from a position of suspicion and mistrust, whereby nothing can be requested with definiteness because the there exists no guarantee of God's hearing our prayers.

Thomas thus invites us to pray with clarity and boldness appropriate to the relationship which the Spirit has brought us in to. Incoherent murmurings are as inappropriate to Thomas as the kind of 'digital' prayer that we have associated with open-theism, because neither reflects true friendship with God. Digital prayer throws out requests to an effectively unknown God, and while it does so with some confidence, it cannot truly be sure of an answer because its requests must traverse a wide and perilous gap between the creature and God. The murmuring of indefinite prayer is less proud but just as misguided. For while it takes seriously, according to Thomas, the claim that we cannot pray as we ought, it fails to do justice to the fact that we *can* pray. It is a denial of the real and active work of the Spirit in prayer to assume that we can pray with nothing but vague thoughts or murmurings. Indeed, to make this assumption would be to

[126] Ibid.

fall back on a kind of intercession that precludes human agency, where the Spirit, as it were, takes over and the creature is left unable to actually pray.

Furthermore, we are to pray for things that are definite because there are definite objects that are good for us. This counters what Thomas understands to be a vague asking of that which is good for us without claiming to know the details of what those things are. This he attributes to Socrates, who claimed that 'they [the gods] at any rate know what is good for each one whereas when we pray we frequently ask for what it had been better for us not to obtain.' Thomas concedes the truth of this 'to a certain extent,' because a feature of not knowing how to pray as we ought is an ignorance when it comes to the details of the ethical life (there are, for instance, those things that creatures may use 'ill or well,' such as riches). Nevertheless, there are those things which creatures 'cannot ill use' that should be prayed for without any feeling of doubt. Principal among those things is, of course, eternal beatitude, whose objects we can seek 'absolutely,' such as the Psalmist did – 'Show us thy face, and we shall be saved' (Ps. 79:4).[127] Does this leave room for prayer without need for the Spirit's intercession? If we can know without doubt what we should pray for in eternal beatitude (and here the caveat of particular circumstances does not apply) why is there any need for the Spirit to lead us to pray for what is right? It is true that Thomas speaks with a certain pragmatism here which might suggest there is an eternal beatitude longed for and prayed for regardless of the incitement of the Spirit. On the other hand, the theme of hope allows us to present something different. It should be remembered that only a hope inspired by charity can be called perfect, and in this way attain not to one's own desires but to God himself. Concurrent with Thomas's notion of eternal beatitude representing participation in God himself in immediacy, it becomes clear that only through the charity of the Holy Spirit can creatures long for eternal beatitude in the first place,

[127] Ibid.

and so the Holy Spirit is a necessary (though implied) figure in even this most pragmatic of points.

From the standpoint of friendship with God, it is thus apparent that praying for things that are definite is not just endorsed by Thomas but stands in line with his wider thinking on prayer. Indeed, it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can pray in a definite way – that is, with clarity and boldness and for concrete things. As a place of friendship with God, prayer is an arena of genuine request, where concrete desires are expressed and moderated by the ultimate desire for God himself, all through the Spirit.

'Whether man ought to ask God for temporal things when he prays?'

Relatedly, Thomas asks whether we ought to ask God for temporal things. Temporal things are those things which are definite; but Thomas's response to this question takes a subtly different form to the one before, for in this case he argues that the subordination of temporal things to eternal things – namely, beatitude – allows temporal things to be raised 'to a higher level'[128] than was before imaginable.

The instinct to favour spiritual things to the reduction of temporal things arises from the pre-eminence of seeking after the spiritual. Thomas cites Matthew 6:33 as an example: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his justice: and all these things shall be added unto you.' This verse suggests, on one interpretation, that to request that which is spiritual excuses any requirement to request that which is temporal, because these things will, on account of the first request, simply follow after. Thomas offers a different and less reductive interpretation. Along

[128] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 6.

with Augustine, he argues that we ought to seek after temporal things, but only insofar as these things tend towards beatitude. The practicality of this somewhat enigmatic assertion is borne out again in the words of Augustine. Temporal things are to be desired insofar as they equip creatures to physically carry out virtuous deeds. We should seek those things that 'are of service to us as instruments in performing acts of virtue.'[129] In this way, rather than holding to a crude spirit/nature dichotomy, Thomas affirms the temporal things ingredient in a comprehensive doctrine of creation whilst retaining their subordination to the spiritual life and goods.

As such, Thomas's doctrine of prayer, in its close attention to the desire for eternal beatitude, rather than relegating temporal things to either total insignificance or at best 'following after' a prayer for beatitude, actually allows for the esteeming of temporal things on the very basis of their being informed by a principal prayer for the spiritual. Thomas writes, 'When our mind is intent on temporal things in order that it may rest in them, it remains immersed therein; but when it is intent on them in relation to the acquisition of beatitude, it is not lowered by them, but raises them to a higher level.'[130] Crucial to this formulation is the location of the pray-er's *rest*. To rest in temporal things is to miss the point of prayer. The principal object of prayer – what we might call its hope – is, as we have seen, God in himself. But to rest in spiritual things and, informed by this rest, to seek after temporal things beneficial to the former heightens those temporal things so that they gain a new kind of dignity. They are no longer employed for their own sake, whether that be for pleasure or utility, but come into the service of eternal beatitude. As such, concurrent with Thomas's loyalty to the doctrine of love/charity, temporal things take on the flavour of love, insofar as they are now prayed for and used by creatures for the sake of the other and not for oneself.

[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

'Whether we ought to pray for others?'

Prayer for others is an act of what Thomas calls 'fraternal charity.' As we have discussed, prayer for others is freed from the shackles of necessity by its being informed by the principle of charity and thus friendship: 'fraternal charity urges us to pray for others: and the prayer that fraternal charity proffers is sweeter to God than that which is the outcome of necessity.'[131] Prayer for others is a natural outworking of the mode of prayer favoured by Thomas because it concurs with the strongly relational sense encouraged by the bond of friendship enabled by the Spirit. It is clear, then, that we ought to pray for others.

But there is another sense in which prayer for others is encouraged by Thomas. He asserts that 'We ought to pray even for sinners, that they may be converted, and for the just that they may persevere and advance in holiness.'[132] Here we arrive at the efficacy of prayer for others, having first established the requirement that we do so primarily out of love for one's neighbour. The topic of predestination comes into view here for Thomas because there may be those (the reprobate) whose hearts are not softened by the power of prayer. But to distinguish between the predestined and the reprobate is impossible 'here below,' and so 'no man should be denied the help of prayer.'[133]

What is there to be said about the efficacy of prayer on these terms? Thomas affirms a traditional formulation when it comes to predestination in the respect that it falls under the rubric of providence – 'it is fitting that God should predestine men. For all things are subject

[131] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 7.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.

to his providence.'[134] Providence, too, is construed in traditional terms by Thomas – as we have noted. But we have also noted that providence, whilst the divine prerogative, retains an inclusivity that means creatures are permitted to work *with* God towards what Thomas would call a 'common goal.' Is human prayer then operative in the salvation of creatures? This is a tricky question to address, and one which Thomas tackles explicitly in article 8 of question 23 on predestination. In asking 'whether predestination can be furthered by the prayers of the saints?'[135] Thomas offers two preliminary caveats. One is to maintain that prayer is not superfluous in the face of divine predestination. It would be easy to imagine that along with the claim of God's certain predestination should come the claim that works of human virtue are rendered futile and are thus not worth carrying out. Against this Thomas directs 'all the warnings of Holy Scripture, exhorting us to prayer and other good works.' On the other side, there are those who imagine that divine predestination can be *altered* by prayer (note the language of manipulation rather than cooperative involvement) like 'the Egyptians, who thought that the divine ordination, which they called fate, could be frustrated by certain sacrifices and prayers.' Thomas suggests that this understanding too is contradicted in the testimony of scripture. How then can the prayers of the saints further predestination? Crucial to answering this question is to grasp the distinction made by Thomas between the divine 'ordination' and its consequent effect. In regards God's ordination, predestination can in no way be affected or furthered by prayer. This is God's 'preordination,' that is, the eternal divine decision made without reference to or need for creaturely counsel. When it comes to the effect of God's eternal decree, however, 'predestination is said to be helped by the prayers of the saints.' Here we arrive at a practical instance of the power of prayer as a genuine secondary cause, and a parallel example to the one appealing to natural effects (cited earlier) is offered.

[134] *ST* 1a. 23. 1.
[135] *ST* 1a. 23. 8.

Thomas contends that just as the operations of nature can be attributed equally to God and the working of secondary causes, so when it comes to matters of salvation there is still room for the working out of the preordained decree *by means of* prayer. Thomas writes,

> predestination is said to be helped by the prayers of the saints, and by other good works; because providence, of which predestination is a part, does not do away with secondary causes but so provides effects, that the order of secondary causes falls also under providence. So, as natural effects are provided by God in such a way that natural causes are directed to bring about those natural effects, without which those effects would not happen; so the salvation of a person is predestined by God in such a way, that whatever helps that person towards salvation falls under the order of predestination.[136]

We ought to pray for others in terms of salvation exactly because prayer is designated a causal act. Furthermore, because predestination falls under providence, prayer as a causal act operates as a means by which salvation is attributed – not as a preordination, but as part of a providential ordering 'without which one would not attain to salvation.'[137]

'Whether we ought to pray for our enemies?'

The question of whether we ought to pray for our enemies is framed in terms of the basic rule of charity – that 'To pray for another is an act of charity, as stated above. Wherefore we are bound to pray for our enemies in the same manner as we are bound to love them.'[138] That we should pray for our enemies is thus clear from the fact that we should love our enemies, which Thomas asserts elsewhere (*ST* 2a2ae. 25. 8.). The rule concurrent with

[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 8.

praying for our enemies out of love is that we ought not to lessen or trivialise sin. One objection, for example, refers to the testimony of scripture when it comes to the enemies of God's people. Scripture in some places seems to suggest that we ought not just to refrain from praying for enemies but actively pray against them. The Psalms particularly seem to strike this chord: 'Let all my enemies be ashamed and be troubled, let them be ashamed and be troubled very speedily.' Furthermore, the book of Revelation seems to license vengeance upon the enemies of God, so that praying against enemies becomes a real possibility. To add another problem, there is the objection that prayers ought not to contradict deeds, and so the argument follows that if there are cases where it is lawful to attack one's enemy, there must also be licence for prayer against one's enemies.

Thomas again addresses these questions while holding in mind charity as the foremost principal of prayer. In replying to the above objections, Thomas opts for a kind of unquestioning love when it comes to prayer which prays for the sinner and against the 'kingdom of sin.' Behind this lies the assertion that we must 'love them [our enemies] in their nature, not their sin.'[139] That is to say, a prayer indebted to the principle of charity prays indiscriminately and without recourse to the character or deeds of the other. Prayer is as much for the enemies of God's people as it is for the friends of God's people because love extends not just to those who have earned it but unquestioningly to anyone. This is the charity that we have come across already – that which is offered simply for the sake of the other, rather than based on anything that can be offered by the other.

Prayer in this sense is not, however, totally indiscriminate. There is an unquestioning spirit when it comes to the criteria for those who should be prayed for, but prayer for enemies takes on a different character than prayer for friends. For example, Thomas notes that 'It

[139] Ibid.

is lawful to attack one's enemies, that they may be restrained from sin: and this is for their own good and for the good of others. Consequently it is even lawful in praying to ask that temporal evils be inflicted on our enemies in order that they may mend their ways.'[140] The principle of goodness is introduced by Thomas as a moderator for those prayers that could be offered for vengeance and nothing more. The mending of our enemies' ways ought to direct our prayers, and restraint be shown when it comes to the temptation to pray simply for their punishment. In this case the problem of consistency between prayer and deed is also solved. The attack made on the enemies of God – which Thomas believes to be lawful – is rendered consistent with the lawful prayer that enemies may be defeated, provided – and this theme runs throughout Thomas' thinking on prayer for enemies – not only that prayer is offered in love, but also that *justice*, rather than vengeance, is sought. In this way prayer for enemies is furthered extracted from the arena of vengeance and placed in the hands of divine justice for God's people.

'Whether prayer should last a long time?'

In mind when Thomas asks this question seems to be the exhortation of Paul to 'pray without ceasing.'[141] How is this possible? Thomas attempts to uphold the possibility of continual prayer whilst at the same time holding to a practicable view of prayer. In doing so he distinguishes between two ways of speaking about prayer – one which considers prayer in itself and another which considers prayer according to its cause. According to its cause, which is charity, prayer 'ought to be in us continually.'[142] By this Thomas means that the *desire* for charity, which is the root of prayer, ought always to be in the one who prays because the *virtue* of charity ought

[140] Ibid.
[141] *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 14.
[142] Ibid.

always to be in the one who prays. Thomas cites Augustine: 'Faith, hope and charity are by themselves a prayer of continual longing.'[143] In this respect, the practice of the virtue of charity, and its consequent desire for that which pertains to God himself, is in itself a kind of prayer; the longing for those things incited by the Holy Spirit seems to undergird not just the prayer life of the creature but its life in more general terms, and this is, for Thomas, a kind of continual prayer.

On the other hand, prayer 'in itself' cannot be continual. Obviously, the practical and everyday act of prayer is impossible to undertake without ceasing simply because 'we have to be busy about other works.'[144] Less clear though is how we ought to judge the quantity of prayer. We might readily acknowledge that we cannot pray all of the time, but when we do pray, for how long ought we to do so? Thomas introduces a kind of rule by which to navigate this question, namely, that the 'quantity of a thing should be commensurate with its end.'[145] Thus, in the same way that a medical dosage should be commensurate with a patient's health, so the quantity of human prayer should accord with what Thomas calls the 'fervour of the interior desire.'[146] This is an interesting phrase because it hints at the kind of language employed of the Spirit's incitement in the place of prayer: there is a familiarity here with the 'ardour of love' incited by the Spirit. Prayer, for Thomas, should last long enough for this 'fervour' to arise and be maintained, but not so long that a seemingly appropriate level of fervour causes weariness; if this were the case, Thomas recommends that prayer be 'discontinued.'[147]

Is there a connection to be made between creaturely fervour in prayer – a kind of attainable yet unsustainable 'high point –' and the intercession of the Spirit? It is true that there is a consistency in language here that could suggest Thomas has the incitement of the Spirit in the

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.

background of his thinking. Indeed, the language of 'interior desire' clearly hints at the longings of the creature which are, by the Spirit, directed towards God and eternal beatitude by the principal of charity. It is evident that implicit in prayer's operation in arousing 'the fervour of the interior desire' is the work of the Spirit simply because he is the operative force in the prayer act. We have discussed at length the details of the Spirit's intercession. What Thomas also communicates here, though, is a sense of realism rooted in the fact that prayer remains a creaturely act. For all of the Spirit's prominence in the act of prayer, it is still undertaken by the creature, and as such 'weariness'[148] is a real possibility. In communicating this, Thomas reminds us that the problem of prayer, though in receipt of a solution in the form of the Spirit's intercession, nevertheless still lingers – the Spirit intercedes, but prayer is still problematic. In this case, our aptitude for it is exhaustible, we become weary and must cease.

Conclusion

On coming to the end of this project, we might reflect that Thomas's account of prayer and the intercession of the Spirit is not immune from criticism. The constraints of this study have not allowed for a comprehensive examination of all avenues in Thomas's thought related to the Spirit and prayer; but nevertheless, there are certain infelicities to be highlighted. For instance, it is appropriate to ask whether Thomas lends enough thought to what he understands to be the secondary objects of prayer. It is possible that such an emphasis on prayer's principal object – eternal beatitude – leaves little room for discussion of those earthly things that creatures ought to pray for. Thomas asserts that temporal goods can and should be asked for when the request is 'informed' by a hope that rests in God himself, and we have seen that there is an acknowledgement of prayer's significance in more practical terms. What we have not

[148] Ibid.

discovered, though, is any gesture – in regards to the hope of prayer and indeed more widely the pneumatology of love – towards the power of prayer to affect change in the world, whether that be in the guise of, for example, healing, or the struggle described by Paul against the 'powers and principalities.' There is almost an underlying fatalism entailed in prayer's conformity to eternal beatitude, which is surprising given its dignity as a properly causal act.

What's more, it remains unclear just how prominent a position Thomas lends to prayer in the ethical life of the creature. This study has attempted to secure the centrality of prayer in the relationship of the creature to God by means of the motif of friendship. It is evident that Thomas understands prayer to be a foremost ethical act when we consider the actuality of the Spirit in that particular arena. But there is no explicit mention in his thinking on the necessity of prayer of the fact that prayer brings the creature into participatory relationship with God. Just how distinctive is prayer in respect to relationship with God? There is no doubt Thomas holds prayer in high regard, but we are left to guess at whether prayer is *the* basic ethical act for Thomas or just *a* basic ethical act. The question of the sacraments could be relevant here: is the Mass more basic or paradigmatic for Thomas than prayer? And how might such a question allow us to form connections with liturgical prayer or the prayer of the priests and religious orders?

Despite this, over the course of this study we have found Thomas to be faithful to the basic principles for prayer offered by Paul in the Romans 8 passage. Thomas is, throughout his thinking on prayer, keen to assert i) the necessity of prayer, ii) the problem of prayer and iii) the intervention of the Spirit in the form of intercession. In considering prayer and the Holy Spirit in these terms we have been able to present Thomas's theology of prayer as one adhering to a particular pattern. That is, to understand the intercession of the Spirit it is first necessary to describe both the Christian obligation to pray and the obstacles that stop us from doing so as we ought. This we have done in reference to prayer as petition, the doctrine of providence,

Thomas's construal of grace and merit, and, of course, the obstacles of creaturely limitation and sin.

That the Spirit does in fact intercede for the saints brings us to the principal argument of this study. The Holy Spirit intercedes in the mode of the gift of charity, so that the creatures for whom he intercedes are granted love themselves, and thus participation in the divine life. It has been argued that friendship is the most appropriate way to name this relationship that the creature is brought into through prayer. For Thomas, the concept of friendship forms the link between the love of the Holy Spirit and the charity of creatures – creatures are able to participate with God in prayer by way of the Spirit's inviting them in to the existing bond of mutual love between Father and Son. It is into this relationship that the creature is invited when she comes to pray. Furthermore, the hope that we have associated with prayer takes on the character of friendship when it is animated by the charity of the Spirit. In this way, the hope of prayer is no longer covetous but attains to God in himself; and this in itself articulates the proper manner of friendship, which is exercised only for the sake of the other, as seen in the relationship between the Father and the Son. Providence, too, is flavoured with the notion of friendship. It has been discussed at length how the absolute power exercised in divine providence allows for the action of lower agents to be grafted in to its causality. But more than simply causality, our study of providence allowed us to assert that God and creatures work together towards a common goal, a shared task consistent with the friendship into which the creature is invited.

As such we found an affirmation of human agency. For Thomas, it is not the Spirit who prays but the creature. The Spirit incites the creature to pray where it cannot and so lends the creature a new dignity. This presents a critical nuance. As we have noted in comparison to some of the pit-falls of open theism, Thomas allows for a prominent pneumatology *and* anthropology when it comes to prayer, insofar as the Spirit operates to bridge the conceptual gap between creature

and God in prayer, and just so the creature is brought into friendship with God and invited to share in the out-working of the divine will. It thus has a dignity and position in prayer of much greater significance than the one suggested by open theism's 'digital prayer.'

This essay has only managed to sketch the significance of the divine processions – and in our case the procession of the Spirit – for the transformation of the creature who prays. We have established that the procession of the Spirit is a key influencing factor when it comes to the return of the creature to God. Further to this, it seems that prayer is one of the principal crucibles in which this influence is wrought, mainly in relation to the incitement of the Spirit to bring about charity in creatures. There is, however, scope for further research into the cooperative operation of prayer and the Holy Spirit in the transformation of human beings as they undertake their *reditus* to God. For instance, it would be profitable to ask in more detail after the transformative process of the creature in Thomas's theology and the other ways in which the Spirit and prayer might be casual in such a process. Additionally, this study has not been able to address the possible co-working of the Spirit *and* the Son in their respective intercessory functions. Jesus Christ is the one who is 'also interceding for us' (Rom. 8:34). How are we to understand *this* intercession and how might that understanding be different from the one gleaned from reading Paul and Thomas on the Holy Spirit?

The same can be said in terms of our discussion under the heading 'The Prayers of the Creature.' There, it became clear that a variety of Thomas's more practical remarks, often rooted in experiential questions related to prayer, invited connection with his formulation of prayer and a pneumatology of love. This was an exercise which allowed us to apply more properly theological discussion to some practical anxieties raised by Thomas himself. Yet, once more, there is much potential for further exploration. For example, other questions raised by

Thomas could be linked to his wider theological programme, such as those to do with prayer and the saints in heaven.[149]

Finally, the results of this inquiry would benefit from direct comparison with Thomas's thinking on contemplation, the other aspect to prayer which has, under current constraints, been left to one side. Much of what has been established in this study gestures towards Thomas's theology of contemplation. For example, where petitionary prayer accords with what Thomas calls the 'cognitive powers,' it seems contemplation is linked primarily to the appetitive powers – and, interestingly, finds its basis in charity:

> Although the contemplative life consists chiefly in an act of the intellect, it has its beginning in the appetite, since it is through charity that one is urged to the contemplation of God. And since the end corresponds to the beginning, it follows that the term also and the end of the contemplative life has its being in the appetite, since one delights in seeing the object loved, and the very delight in the object seen arouses a yet greater love. Wherefore Gregory says (Hom. xiv in Ezech.) that "when we see one whom we love, we are so aflame as to love him more." And this is the ultimate perfection of the contemplative life, namely that the Divine truth be not only seen but also loved.[150]

Indeed, this comment suggests that friendship, too, finds its way into the landscape of contemplative prayer, with the language of delight in and love of God betraying strong resonances with some of the central concerns of this particular study.

[149] See *ST* 2a2ae. 83. 4;11.
[150] *ST* 2a2ae. 180. 7.

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