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Love in Thomas Aquinas' Biblical Commentaries: A Sketch

The Question of Love

What is love? Thomas Aquinas discerns early in his career that there are both passive and active aspects of love. On one level, love is something we undergo. It is a change occurring in our appetites in response to some object (a person or a thing) that we perceive as good. This is the passive aspect of love. Aquinas portrays this passive aspect as existing both in the passions properly so called and in the will.¹ The objects of our love change us. In his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Thomas describes this change primarily as a *transformatio*, while in the *Summa theologiae* he principally portrays it as a *complacentia*.² This passive element of love becomes the principle or source of love's active element. Love causes desire, or an act of the will.³ Love leads us to action. Thomas further holds that love in the will has a special character. It entails a choice. This is why the proper Latin term for the will's love is "*dilectio*," a word that implies choice (*electio*).⁴ Moreover, while love in the passions produces desire, love in the will produces something more than mere desire. Specifically, the will's desire for a good presupposes a certain spiritual affirmation of the beloved for whom we desire that good. Spiritual love thus has a twofold character. There is love for the beloved and for the good we desire for the beloved.⁵

¹ *In III Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 3; *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 2.

² *In III Sent.* d. 27, q.1, a. 1: "amor nihil aliud est quam quaedam transformatio affectus in rem amatam." *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 2: "Prima ergo immutatio appetitus ab appetibili vocatur amor, qui nihil est aliud quam complacentia appetibilis."

³ *In III Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1; *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 2.

⁴ *In III Sent.* d. 27, q. 2, a. 1; *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 3.

⁵ *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3; *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4.

This at least is how Thomas Aquinas portrays love in his great systematic works of theology. It is already present embryonically in his *Commentary on the Sentences* and reappears more fully developed in his *Summa theologiae*. To what extent is this conception of love present in his biblical commentaries? This question guides the brief analysis that follows. The study contains two parts. It begins by considering love as an affective principle of action, and then studies love as an act proper to the will.

Love As an Affective Principle of Action

Perhaps the most striking feature of St. Thomas' portrayal of love as a principle of action in his biblical commentaries is that Thomas nowhere employs the technical terminology he develops in his systematic works. The word "*transformatio*" appears not at all in his biblical commentaries, while *complacentia*, although present, nowhere refers to love. Even without the technical terminology, however, Thomas does portray love as a principle of movement. In both his early and later commentaries he underlines love's emotional power to move and unite. He refers to charity's zeal and to its fervor.⁶ He speaks of love as "*incentivus*," as setting the tone or as inciting to action.⁷ When the Scriptures refer to fire, he explains, this often is a reference to charity that enflames us to advance upward.⁸ Thus, Hosea rightly refers to the cords of charity (*vinculis caritatis*) that draw the people Israel to God.⁹ Charity also

⁶ *In Is.*, ch 9, lectio 1: "Ultimo ponit motivum ad dandum: zelus, idest amor dei patris. Joan. 3: sic deus dilexit mundum ut filium suum unigenitum daret." *In Ioh.*, ch. 2, lectio 2 [392]: "Ubi sciendum, quod zelus proprie dicit quamdam intensionem amoris, qua intense diligens, nihil sustinet quod amori suo repugnet." *In Ioh.*, ch. 4, lectio 2 [614]: "deus autem tales quaerit qui scilicet eum adorent in spiritu et veritate, et in fervore caritatis, et veritate fidei." *In Ioh.*, ch. 6, lectio 5 [946]: "verbum autem dei patris est spirans amorem: qui ergo capit illud cum fervore amoris, discit."

⁷ *In Is.*, ch 28: "incentivo amoris: Cant. 4: comedite amici, et inebriamini."

⁸ *In Job*, ch 18, lectio 1: "per ignem enim ardor amoris significari solet, secundum illud Cant. VIII 6 lampades eius, lampades ignis atque flammaram." *Super Evangelium Johannis*, ch. 5, lectio 6 [812]: "Nam ignis duo habet: scilicet quod ardet et splendet. Ardor autem ignis significat dilectionem propter tria. Primo quidem, quia ignis inter omnia corpora est magis activus: sic et ardor caritatis, intantum quod nihil eius impetum ferre potest, secundum illud II Cor. V, V. 14: caritas christi urget nos. Secundo, quia sicut ignis per hoc quod est maxime sensitivus, facit multum aestuare, ita et caritas aestum causat quousque homo consequatur intentum; Cant. Ult., 6: lampades eius lampades ignis atque flammaram. Tertio sicut ignis est sursum ductivus, ita et caritas, intantum quod coniungit nos deo; I Io. IV, 16: qui manet in caritate, in deo manet, et deus in eo."

⁹ *In Ier.*, ch. 13, lectio 1: "Lumbare, quod lumbis adhaeret, in quibus concupiscentia amoris: sic est populus in amorem divinum assumptus. Oseae 11: in funiculis Adam traham eos, in vin-

functions as a cord by uniting the virtues together and uniting them to their end.¹⁰ Charity is the root and beginning of all the virtues. Charity plays this role, Aquinas explains, by uniting us to God in our affections: "Charity is called the root of all the virtues because it unites one to God, who is the ultimate end. Hence, just as the end is the principle of every action, so too charity is the principle of every virtue."¹¹ The love of charity, therefore, is the source from which all right desire flows.¹²

These themes remain present throughout St. Thomas' Biblical commentaries. In his last work, the unfinished *Commentary on the Psalms*, Thomas speaks of love as "a spur and a fire" (*stimulus et ignis*), paraphrasing Paul by asserting that "the Charity of God compels us" (2 Co 5.14).¹³ The Psalmist, we learn, not only refers to love as a fire, but as wings that make us soar the heights of contemplation.¹⁴ Aquinas also employs Augustine's analogy of weight: divine love is like a weight that "moves the whole man unwaveringly to God."¹⁵ Aquinas further explains, in his *Commentary*

culis caritatis. Lineum, quod rude de terra tollitur, sed cultu humano decoratur: sic ille populus cultu divino" *In Ier.*, ch. 31, lectio 1: "Et ostendens revocantis affectum: in caritate perpetua dilexi te, quasi dicat: non ad tempus, sed in perpetuum tibi bona largitus est, attraxit, ad locum tuum, miserans, misericordiam exterius beneficio complens. Oseae 11: in funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis caritatis. Supra 2: recordatus sum tui, miserans adolescentiam tuam, et caritatem deponationis tuae."

¹⁰ *In Col.*, ch. 3, lectio 3 [163]: "Secundum Glossam per omnes virtutes homo perficitur, sed caritas connectit eas ad invicem, et facit eas perseverantes, et ideo dicitur vinculum. Vel ex natura sua est vinculum, quia est amor, qui est uniens amatum amanti. Os. C. XI, 4: in funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis caritatis, etc." *In Ioh.*, ch. 6, lectio 5 [935]: "Sed quia non solum revelatio exterior, vel obiectum, virtutem attrahendi habet, sed etiam interior instinctus impellens et movens ad credendum, ideo trahit multos pater ad filium per instinctum divinae operationis moventis interius cor hominis ad credendum; Phil. II, 13: deus est qui operatur in nobis velle et perficere; Oseae XI, 4: in funiculis Adam traham eos in vinculis caritatis."

¹¹ *In II Cor.*, ch. 12, lectio 3 [472]: "caritas enim ideo dicitur radix omnium virtutum, quia coniungit Deo, qui est ultimus finis. Unde sicut finis est principium omnium operabilium, ita caritas est principium omnium virtutum."

¹² *Ad Rom.*, ch. 8, lectio 5 [693]: "Desideria autem recta ex amore caritatis proveniunt, quam in nobis scilicet facit. Supra V, 5: caritas dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per spiritum sanctum, qui datus est nobis."

¹³ *In Psalmos*, pars 25, n. 7: "Secundo sollicitat, cum sit sicut stimulus et ignis, amor: Cant. 8: lampades ejus lampades ignis: 2 Cor. 9: caritas dei urget nos."

¹⁴ *In Psalmos*, pars 54, n. 5: "Alia penna est caritas, quae maxime facit volare in contemplationem." *In Psalmos*, pars 16, n. 3: "sic et deus suis alis, quae sunt caritas et misericordia, justos defendit a rapacitate Daemonum. Matth. 23: quoties volui congregare vos, quemadmodum gallina congregat pullos sub alas, et noluitis? his ergo alis deus nos elevat ad superna: Ps. 88: misericordia et veritas praecedent faciem tuam, beatus populus etc.. Hier. 31: in caritate perpetua dilexi te, ideo attraxi te miserans."

¹⁵ *In Psalmos*, pars 25, n. 7: "divinus amor facit totum hominem in deum tendere sine vacillatione."

on *Job*, that whether the love be good or bad, love is the principle of all our affections.¹⁶ Returning to the Psalms, Aquinas says the same thing about the will: “The first movement in things that pertain to the will is the movement of love.”¹⁷ This movement is nothing other than a change occurred in the will that orients it toward the beloved. Stated another way, “every inclination of the appetitive power is located in love,” which is why the love of God is both the first commandment and the fulfillment of the law.¹⁸ In his *Commentary on Galatians*, when explaining charity’s place among the fruits of the Spirit, Aquinas offers an analogy with natural inclinations.

As with natural motions, where the first is the inclination of natural appetite toward its end, since the first interior motion is the inclination to the good, which is called love, so too the first fruit [of the Spirit] is charity—which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rm 5.5)—and from charity these others are perfected: thus the Apostle says, ‘above all these have charity which is the bond of perfection’ (Col. 3.14).¹⁹

Inclination here signifies the appetitive equivalent of an inclined plane, whose slant orients the rolling of all spheres placed upon it.²⁰ The will’s subsequent actions roll toward the beloved according to its initial appetitive slope. This conception of love as an inclination encourages Aquinas to describe charity as drawing us out of ourselves in ecstasy and as impelling us to serve God freely.²¹ When, however, the will loves from charity, what exactly is the will’s act?

¹⁶ *In Job*, ch. 1, lectio 2: “nam et amor terrenus ab amore dei deficit, et per consequens omnis affectio, nam cuiuslibet affectionis est amor principium.”

¹⁷ *In Psalmos*, pars 32, n. 5: “Primus motus in rebus quae sunt per voluntatem est motus amoris.”

¹⁸ *In Matt.*, ch. 22, lectio 4: “omnis inclinatio appetitivae virtutis est in amore: ideo habemus mandatum quod colamus deum in dilectione; ad Rom. XIII, 10: plenitudo legis dilectio est; ad Eph. III, 17: in caritate radicati et fundati.”

¹⁹ *In Gal.*, ch. 5, lectio 6 [330]: “Nam sicut inter motus naturales primus est inclinatio appetitus naturae ad finem suum, ita primus motuum interiorum est inclinatio ad bonum, qui dicitur amor, et ideo primus fructus est caritas, Rom. V, 5: *caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris*, et cetera. Et ex caritate perficiuntur aliae, et ideo dicit apostolus, Col. III, v. 14: *super omnia charitatem habentes*.”

²⁰ The description of “*inclinatio*” as the appetitive equivalent of an inclined plane is not explicitly in Aquinas, but was suggested by Lawrence Dewan, o.p. in conversation with the author during a meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association.

²¹ *In II Cor.*, ch. 5, lectio 3; *ibid.* ch. 7, lectio 3.

The Will's Twofold Act of Love

When the young Thomas Aquinas as a bachelor began his cursory exposition of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, one of the first things he did was confront the apparently conflicting views in Isaiah concerning God's attitude toward sacrifice. St. Thomas affirms that "from the point of view of the thing sacrificed, our sacrifices please God in themselves (*per se*), but the sacrifices of the ancients did not."²² Aquinas justifies this assertion by offering the following distinction with regard to love.

Something is said to be pleasing or loved in itself (*per se*) when it has within its very self (*in se ipso*) what causes it to be loved, such as a noble good; when, however, something is loved only in relation to something else, we do not say that it is loved for itself (*per se*), such as when we describe cutting or burning as loved, because of their relation to the goal of health.²³

Aquinas then explains that God loves our sacrifices for themselves because they contain the noble good of sanctifying grace, while he loved the sacrifices of the Old Law only as signs of this future grace. Thus, he did not love them for themselves, but only in relation to what would come later.²⁴ In the context of his psychology of love, this distinction is significant because it marks the first time that the young Aquinas distinguishes between loving something for itself (*per se*) and loving something in relation to another (either oneself or someone else). Although he does not explicitly state what "to love" means, his description of God's loving acceptance of our sacrifices implies that to love something *per se* is to accept, to affirm or to be pleased with it.

This is how things stand until Thomas undertakes his first systematic study of theology in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter*. In his treatment of charity, although he still retains the distinction between loving something for itself and loving something in relation to another, he now introduces a distinction that enables him to express more clearly the will's twofold act of love. It is the distinction between the love of concupiscence and the love of benevolence or friendship — which perhaps

²² *In Is.*, ch. 1, lectio 3: "Ex parte rei oblatae, sacrificia nostra placent deo per se, non autem antiquorum sacrificia."

²³ *In Is.*, ch. 1, lectio 3: "placitum sive amatum dicitur per se quod in se ipso habet unde amatur, sicut bonum honestum; quod autem amatur tantum per relationem illius tantum ad alterum, non dicitur per se amatum, sicut dicitur secari vel uri amatum, secundum quod est ad finem sanitatis relatum."

²⁴ *In Is.*, ch. 1, lectio 3: "Nostra autem sacrificia in seipsis continent gratiam sanctificationis, secundum quam sunt deo accepta; sed illa antiquorum sacramenta vel sacrificia erant tantum signa istorum; et ideo non erant per se amata."

we can better translate as the love proper to friendship.²⁵ Aquinas affirms that if we consider the matter with care, we see that this distinction corresponds to two acts of the will: namely, to desire (*appetere*) which we have toward absent goods, and to love (*amare*), which we have for things that are somehow present.²⁶ In the love of concupiscence we desire a good not for itself, but in relation to something else. Aquinas offers the example of wine: which we love not for itself, but for the enjoyment it causes when we drink it.²⁷ In the love proper to friendship, however, we love the other as one with whom we share a likeness and for whom we will good. Already in the *Sentences*, Aquinas affirms that the love proper to friendship (*amor amicitiae*) wills the other's good (*volens bonum ejus*).²⁸ Specifically, it is a love that rests in the beloved, "either being pleased with the good he has or wishing for him the good he lacks."²⁹ Aquinas does not yet affirm explicitly that "to love is to will the good of another," but he is moving in that direction. The phrase is from Aristotle, and comes from Aristotle's definition of the act proper to friendship love (*philein*).³⁰ Aquinas seems to have discovered this definition sometime in the late 1260s, and only explicitly attributes

²⁵ *In II Sent.* d. 3, q. 4; *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3; *In IV Sent.* d. 49, q. 1, a. 2, qa. 1, ad 3; *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4.

²⁶ *In II Sent.* d. 3, q. 4, a. 1: "Quidam enim distinguunt dilectionem concupiscentiae et amicitiae: quae duo si diligenter consideremus, differunt secundum duos actus voluntatis, scilicet appetere, quod est rei non habitae, et amare, quod est rei habitae."

²⁷ *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3: "cum objectum amoris sit bonum, dupliciter aliquis tendere potest in bonum alicujus rei. Uno modo ita quod bonum illius rei ad alterum referat, sicut quod bonum unius rei optet alteri, si non habet; vel complaceat sibi, si habet: sicut amat quis vinum, in quantum dulcedinem vini peroptat, et in hoc gaudet quod ea fruitur, non quod vinum ipsam habet; et hic amor vocatur a quibusdam amor concupiscentiae. Amor autem iste non terminatur ad rem quae dicitur amari, sed reflectitur ad rem illam cui optatur bonum illius rei. Alio modo amor fertur in bonum alicujus rei ita quod ad rem ipsam terminatur, in quantum bonum quod habet, complaceat quod habeat, et bonum quod non habet optatur ei; et hic est amor benevolentiae, qui est principium amicitiae, ut dicit philosophus."

²⁸ *In II Sent.* d. 3, q. 4, a. 1: "Dilectio autem amicitiae est qua aliquis aliquid, vel similitudinem ejus quod in se habet, amat in altero volens bonum ejus ad quem similitudinem habet: et propter hoc philosophus dicit quod est similis a simili amari, sicut unus virtuosus alium diligit; in quibus tamen est vera amicitia."

²⁹ *In III Sent.* d. 29, a. 3: "ad rem ipsam terminatur, in quantum bonum quod habet, complaceat quod habeat, et bonum quod non habet optatur ei."

³⁰ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.4 (1380b35-1381a1): "To love (filein) signifies to will to another all that you hold to be good, and to do so for the other and not for yourself." The Medieval Latin version that was in circulation at the time renders this as follows: "Sit itaque amare velle alicui que putat bona, illius gratia, sed non sui" (*Aristoteles latinus: Rhetorica. Translatio Anonyma sive Vetus et Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeke*, edited by Bernhard Schneider [Leiden: Brill, 1978], vol. 31.1-2, p. 228).

it to Aristotle in his treatment of love in the *Summa theologiae*, written in 1271.³¹ To see how these insights influence Aquinas' analysis of love in the Scriptures, we shall consider his treatment of several biblical passages that consider the love of God, of neighbor, and of self, as well as God's love for us.

In his *Commentary on Galatians*, Thomas interprets the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Ga 5.14) as primarily commanding that one's love of neighbor be true. He explains what he means by true love (*veritas dilectionis*) by appealing to Aristotle's definition of love's act. His analysis of the components of Aristotle's definition enables Thomas to explain that the call to love our neighbor as ourselves means that we should love him for his own good and not for our own utility or pleasure.

Since 'to love is to will good to someone,' we are said to love both the one to whom we will a good and the good we will to him, but not in the same way. For when I will a good to myself, I love myself absolutely for myself, but the good which I will to myself, I do not love for itself but for myself. Accordingly, I love my neighbor as myself (in other words, in the same way that I love myself), when I will him a good for his sake, and not because it is useful or pleasurable to me.³²

The challenge that this biblical love commandment poses stems principally from the difficulty of interpreting the meaning of the "as" in the phrase "as yourself." St. Thomas interprets it primarily to mean "in the same way" that one loves oneself. Just as we desire certain goods for ourselves, we should desire these goods for our neighbor and do so for his own good. To understand the innovation concerning self-love that Thomas introduces here, it suffices to compare it with the one advanced by Augustine, who in the *De Trinitate* affirms: "what is it to love oneself, but to will to be present to oneself, in order to enjoy oneself?"³³ Augustine's definition of self-love renders the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself virtually incomprehensible. It would seem to imply that the love commandment is either enjoining us to

³¹ *ST I-II*, q. 26. a. 4: "sicut philosophus dicit in II Rhetoric., amare est velle alicui bonum." St. Thomas adds, however, that charity has a further feature: charity wills the good of the other from a union of affection: *ST I-II*, q. 27, a. 2: "benevolentia est simplex actus voluntatis quo volumus alicui bonum, etiam non praesupposita praedicta unione affectus ad ipsum. Sic igitur in dilectione, secundum quod est actus caritatis, includitur quidem benevolentia, sed dilectio sive amor addit unionem affectus."

³² *In Gal.*, ch. 5, lectio 3 [305]: "Amare enim est velle bonum alicui. Et ideo dicimur amare aliquem cui volumus bonum, et etiam bonum illud amamus, quod ei volumus; sed diversimode, quia cum volo bonum mihi, me diligo simpliciter propter me, bonum autem illud quod mihi volo, diligo non propter se, sed propter me. Tunc ergo diligo proximum sicut meipsum, id est eodem modo quo meipsum, quando volo ei bonum propter se, non quia est mihi utilis, vel delectabilis."

³³ *De trinitate* 9.2.2: "Quid est autem amare se, nisi praesto sibi esse velle ad fruendum se?"

enjoy our neighbor, or to promote our neighbor's enjoyment of himself. Aristotle's definition offers Aquinas the tools for a more satisfying interpretation of this biblical injunction. We love our neighbor as ourselves when we will our neighbor's good for his sake and not for our utility or enjoyment.

But what are the goods we should will for our neighbor? Thomas discerns that the "as yourself" of the love commandment also refers to this, which Thomas portrays as the requirement that our love of neighbor be just. Thomas explains that we love ourselves rightly (justly) when we want for ourselves those goods that pertain to what is highest in us, namely our intellect and reason. Likewise, we rightly love our neighbor when we primarily will for him intellectual or rational goods.³⁴ St. Thomas develops this insight further in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, when he interprets the Lord's affirmation that "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn 12.25). Thomas once again appeals to Aristotle's definition of love to explain what it means to love oneself (or more specifically, to love one's own life): "to love someone is to will good to that person; so, to love one's own life is to will good to it."³⁵ Thomas notes, however, that there are two ways we can love our lives: absolutely (*simpliciter*) or partially and only in a certain sense (*secundum quid*). Thomas explains that the difference stems from the character of the good we will for our lives. We love ourselves without qualification when we will for ourselves the absolute good (*bonum simpliciter*), which is nothing other than the highest good (*summum bonum*), God himself. We love ourselves only in a qualified way if we love only lesser things.³⁶ Thus, "one who wills the divine and spiritual good for his life, loves it unqualifiedly; while one who wills for it earthly goods, such as riches, honors, pleasures, and the like, loves it in a qualified way."³⁷ Armed with these distinctions, St. Thomas can now offer a convincing interpretation of the Lord's words: "the passage means, therefore, that *he who loves his life*, in a qualified way, that is, in regard to temporal goods, *loses it*, unqualifiedly," while "*he*

³⁴ *In Gal.*, ch. 5, lectio 3 [305]: "Secundo modo, ut referatur ad iustitiam dilectionis. Unaqueque enim res est inclinata velle sibi illud, quod potissimum est in ea; potissimum autem in homine est intellectus, et ratio; ille ergo diligit se, qui vult sibi bonum intellectus et rationis. Tunc ergo diligit proximum sicut teipsum, quando vis ei bonum intellectus et rationis."

³⁵ *In Ioh.*, ch. 12, lectio 4 [1643]: "Amare enim aliquem est velle ei bonum; ille ergo animam suam amat, qui vult ei bonum."

³⁶ *In Ioh.*, ch. 12, lectio 4 [1643]: "Qui ergo vult animae suae id quod est bonum simpliciter, simpliciter amat eam; qui autem vult ei aliquod particulare bonum, amat eam secundum quid. Bona autem animae simpliciter sunt illa quibus anima fit bona, scilicet summum bonum, quod est Deus."

³⁷ *In Ioh.*, ch. 12, lectio 4 [1643]: "Qui ergo vult animae suae bonum divinum et spirituale, simpliciter amat eam; qui autem vult ei bona terrena, puta divitias et honores, voluptates et huiusmodi, amat eam secundum quid."

*who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*³⁸ Once again, this nuanced account of the Lord's words becomes possible because of the definition of love's act that Aquinas takes from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

In his *Commentary on Galatians*, St. Thomas discerns one further meaning in the biblical commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. In addition to signifying that our love for our neighbor should be true and just, the "as yourself" also conveys that we should order our love of neighbor to the proper end: "just as you love yourself for God, so you should love your neighbor for him, namely, that he attain God."³⁹ The importance of this last element becomes clear once we remember that Augustine influentially defines charity as "the spirit's motion toward enjoying God for himself, and enjoying oneself and one's neighbor for God."⁴⁰ The challenge for those reading Augustine was how to interpret the phrase "for God" (*propter Deum*). Aquinas helps the reader by interpreting it to mean "that he attain God." To love our neighbors "for God" is to love them in a way that helps them attain God. St. Thomas, therefore, interprets the "as yourself" of the love commandment to mean that our love of neighbor should be true, just and ordered to God. It is Thomas' discovery of Aristotle's definition of the love proper to friendship that enables him to offer this nuanced account.

Thomas further develops his understanding of charity's act when, in his *Commentary on Philippians*, he analyses St. Paul's affirmation that although he desires to "depart and be with Christ," it is more necessary for him to "remain in the flesh" for the sake of his ministry to the Church in Philippi (Phil 1.21-24). Thomas objects that St. Paul seems to choose the lesser good. The objection unfolds as follows: "The love of God rouses the first desire in us, while the love of neighbor the second. But the first is a greater and better desire. Therefore, [Paul has chosen the less perfect desire]."⁴¹ Thomas responds to this objection by first describing charity's love for God.

The love of God is twofold, namely, the love of concupiscence, by which a man wills to enjoy God and to delight in Him; and this is man's good. The other is the love of

³⁸ *In Ioh.*, ch. 12, lectio 4 [1644]: "Et ideo dicitur *qui amat animam suam*, secundum quid, scilicet ad bona temporalia, *perdet eam*, simpliciter scilicet. . . . *qui odit animam suam in hoc mundo*, in vitam aeternam custodit eam."

³⁹ *In Gal.*, ch. 5, lectio 3 [305]: "ut sicut te diligis propter Deum, ita et proximum propter ipsum diligas, scilicet ut ad Deum perveniat."

⁴⁰ *De Doctrina Christiana* 3.10 [16]: "caritatem voco motum animi ad fruendum deo propter ipsum et se atque proximo propter deum."

⁴¹ *In Phil.*, ch. 1, lectio 3 [36]: "Primum enim desiderium excitat in nobis dilectio Dei, secundum dilectio proximi: maius autem et melius est desiderium primum, igitur, et cetera."

friendship, by which a man prefers the honor of God, even over this delight with which he enjoys God; and this is perfect charity.⁴²

Thomas' goal is to show that St. Paul's love of neighbor is perfect, but he does so by first describing charity's perfect love for God. Drawing on the distinction between the love proper to concupiscence and the love proper to friendship, which, as we have seen, he had already introduced (using slightly different vocabulary) in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Thomas describes what he regards as two legitimate ways of loving God. We love God by desiring to enjoy him, and we love God by willing his honor. Only this latter love is perfect.

Once again a comparison with Augustine's most influential definition of charity illustrates the importance of Thomas' innovation. As we have seen, Augustine places enjoyment at the heart of his definition of charity: "I call charity the spirit's motion toward enjoying God for himself" etc.⁴³ This definition well describes St. Paul's own desire: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ" (Phil 1.23). Aquinas, however, although he sees this love as legitimate, regards it as imperfect. It is a love of concupiscence, which he will later describe, in the *Summa theologiae*, as the love proper to hope: "Hope presupposes love of that which a man hopes to obtain; and such love is love of concupiscence, whereby he who desires good, loves himself rather than something else. On the other hand, charity implies love of friendship, to which we are led by hope"⁴⁴ Hope is an imperfect love in two ways: it loves God as an absent good we desire to attain, and it is essentially a form of self-love: we love God as *our* fulfillment. Like an infant's desire for his mother's milk, hope's desire is legitimate, but transitory and in the service of a greater love: the friendship love that wills God's glory and honor. This is why, in Aquinas' view, Paul ultimately sees his continued service on earth as more necessary. To show that charity's friendship love for God was more powerfully active in Paul's life than his desire to enjoy God in heaven, Aquinas quotes Paul's affirmation that "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren" (Rm 9.3). Aquinas asserts that Paul's words show that "he possessed a more perfect charity, as though for the

⁴² *In Phil.*, ch. 1, lectio 3 [36]: "duplex est dilectio Dei, scilicet dilectio concupiscentiae, qua vult frui Deo et delectari in ipso, et hoc est bonum hominis. Item est dilectio amicitiae, qua homo praeponit honorem Dei etiam huic delectationi, qua fruitur Deo, et haec est perfecta caritas."

⁴³ *De Doctrina Christiana* 3.10 [16]: "caritatem voco motum animi ad fruendum deo propter ipsum et se atque proximo propter deum."

⁴⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 66, a. 6, ad 2: "spes praesupponit amorem eius quod quis adipisci se sperat, qui est amor concupiscentiae, quo quidem amore magis se amat qui concupiscit bonum, quam aliquid aliud. Caritas autem importat amorem amicitiae, ad quam pervenitur spe."

love of God and neighbor he was prepared to lose the delight of seeing God."⁴⁵ From this perspective, as has been argued elsewhere, Augustine's definition of charity is essentially a definition of Christian hope as animated by charity.⁴⁶

St. Thomas' fullest account in his biblical commentaries of the distinction between the love of concupiscence and the love of friendship occurs in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, when he analyses the ways in which the world loves its own. He first notes that "world" can signify both something positive and something negative. Positively, world signifies "those who lead a good life in the world," as when Paul says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2Co 5.19).⁴⁷ In this sense, world signifies "the Church of the good that has grown strong throughout the whole world."⁴⁸ Negatively, however, world signifies those who love the passing things of this world to the exclusion of God, as when the Scriptures affirm that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (1Jn 5.19).⁴⁹ It is this negative sense of world that the Lord employs when he says to the disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, since I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn 15.19). Thomas objects that the Lord appears to be in error here, because experience shows that the wicked do not appear to love each other, but instead are full of strife among themselves. In what way, therefore, does the world (taken in its negative sense) love its own?⁵⁰ To answer this question, Thomas turns once again to his twofold understanding of love.

I reply by saying that love is twofold, of friendship and of concupiscence, but they differ: since in the love of concupiscence we draw what is external to us toward ourselves, and we love these others insofar as they are useful or pleasurable to us. But in the love of friendship the opposite occurs, since we draw ourselves to what is external to

⁴⁵ *In Phil.*, ch. 1, lectio 3 [36]: "ut ostendat se esse perfectioris caritatis, quasi sit paratus propter amorem Dei et gloriam carere delectatione visionis Dei; et ideo hoc elegit, et bene, tamquam magis perfectum."

⁴⁶ See Michael Sherwin, "Augustine and Aquinas on Charity's Desire," in *Faith, Hope and Love: Thomas Aquinas on living by the theological virtues*, edited by Harm Goris, Lambert Hendriks and Henk Schoot (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 185-186.

⁴⁷ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2032]: "his qui bene vivunt in mundo; II Cor. V, 19: *Deus erat in Christo, mundum reconcilians sibi.*"

⁴⁸ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2032]: "Ecclesiam bonorum per totum mundum roboratam."

⁴⁹ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2032]. This reflection elicits from St. Thomas one of the rare occasions where he permits himself a play on words, affirming that armed with these two senses of world we can say that "the whole world hates the whole world" (Sic ergo totus mundus totum odit mundum: quia amatores mundi, qui sunt per totum mundum diffusi, odiunt mundum totum, idest Ecclesiam.).

⁵⁰ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036].

us, because those we love in this way we treat the same as ourselves, sharing ourselves with them in some way.⁵¹

Thomas once again observes that love of concupiscence is here a form of self-love.

The love of concupiscence is not a love for the thing desired but a love for the one desiring: for in this kind of love, one loves another because the other is useful, as was said. Therefore, in this kind of love, one is more loving himself than the other. For example, a person who loves wine because it gives him pleasure loves himself rather than the wine.⁵²

In contrast, “the love of friendship is concerned more with the thing loved than with the one loving, because here one loves another for the sake of the beloved, and not for the sake of the one loving.”⁵³

The distinction between these two loves only helps St Thomas understand how the world loves its own, when he considers these loves’ contrasting relationship to likeness. On one level, it seems obvious that the world loves its own, because as the Scriptures say, “Every creature loves its like” (Sir 13.15). Thomas can thus affirm that, “the world, that is, those who love the world, love those who love the world.”⁵⁴ Thomas notes, however, that this is only the case with regard to the love proper to friendship: “in the love of friendship, likeness is a cause of love, for we do not love someone in this way unless we are one with that person: and likeness is a certain type of oneness.”⁵⁵ In the love of concupiscence, however, a shared likeness is a cause of strife, because the similarity between the lovers hinders them in their pursuit of the useful or pleasurable goods they each desire. This is why “among the proud there is

⁵¹ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036]: “Responsio. Dicendum, quod duplex est amor: amicitiae scilicet et concupiscentiae, sed differunt: quia in amore concupiscentiae, quae sunt nobis extrinseca, ad nos ipsos trahimus, cum ipso amore diligamus alia, in quantum sunt nobis utilia vel delectabilia; sed in amore amicitiae est e converso, quia nosmetipsos trahimus ad ea quae sunt extra nos; quia ad eos quos isto amore diligimus, habemus nos sicut ad nosmetipsos, communicantes eis quodammodo nosmetipsos.”

⁵² *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036]: “amor concupiscentiae non est rei concupitae, sed concupiscentis: propter hoc enim quis hoc amore aliquem diligit, in quantum est sibi utilis, ut dictum est. Et ideo magis diligit in hoc se quam illum: sicut qui diligit vinum quia est sibi delectabile, se potius quam vinum diligit.”

⁵³ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036]: “amor amicitiae est potius rei amatae quam amantis, quia diligit aliquem propter ipsum dilectum, non propter ipsum diligentem.”

⁵⁴ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2034]: “mundus, idest amatores mundi diligunt mundi amatores.”

⁵⁵ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036]: “in amore amicitiae similitudo est causa amoris, non enim sic diligimus aliquem nisi in quantum sumus unum cum eo: similitudo autem est unitas quaedam.”

always strife" (Pr 13.10) and, as Aristotle notes, there are quarrels among those of the same trade, such as among potters.⁵⁶ Thomas explains this as follows: "so it is that the proud feud among themselves, for one takes for himself the glory that another loves and in which he takes pleasure. As for the potters, they quarrel because one takes for himself some profit which another wants for himself."⁵⁷ These fine grained reflections enable St. Thomas to demonstrate both the wisdom of the Lord's words and the truth underlying the objection to them. They enable him to explain how the world both loves and hates its own. Those who belong to the world, hate each other on the level of concupiscible love, since they hinder each other in their common pursuit of pleasure or utility. On the level of the love proper to friendship, however, the shared likeness of their corrupt characters provokes a certain mutual affection. The just have no fellowship with the wicked on this level, and thus the world hates them.⁵⁸

The sharp contrast that St. Thomas sketches here between these two loves tends to overshadow his earlier attempts to integrate them into a single dynamic. As we have seen, in his *Commentary on Galatians*, Thomas employs Aristotle's definition of love to assert love's twofold character. "Since 'to love is to will good to someone,' we are said to love both the one to whom we will a good and the good we will to him, but not in the same way."⁵⁹ In his systematic works, he indicates that this distinction corresponds to the distinction between love of concupiscence and love of friendship:

As the Philosopher says (*Rhetoric II*), 'to love is to wish good to someone.' Hence the movement of love has a twofold tendency: towards the good which a person wishes to someone (to himself or to another) and towards that to which he wishes some good. A person, therefore, has love of concupiscence towards the good that he wishes to another, and love of friendship towards him to whom he wishes good.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1 (1155a35). Aristotle is alluding to the proverb found in Hesiod: "Potter with potter contends, and joiner quarrels with joiner" (*Works and Days*, 25). See also Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.4 (1381b).

⁵⁷ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036]: "Et inde est quod superbi iurgantur adinvicem, in quantum unus usurpat sibi gloriam quam alius amat, et in qua delectatur; figuli etiam, in quantum unus trahit ad se lucrum, quod alius pro se volebat."

⁵⁸ *In Ioh.*, ch. 15, lectio 4 [2036]: "Sic ergo, quia in amore amicitiae similitudo causa est amoris, dissimilitudo causa odii, inde est quod mundus odio habet quod suum non est et sibi dissimile, et diligit, idest dilectione amicitiae, quod suum est. Sed de dilectione concupiscentiae est e converso. Et ideo dicit *si de mundo fuissetis, mundus quod suum erat diligeret*, scilicet amore amicitiae.

⁵⁹ *In Gal.*, ch. 5, lectio 3 [305]: "Amare enim est velle bonum alicui. Et ideo dicimur amare aliquem cui volumus bonum, et etiam bonum illud amamus, quod ei volumus; sed diversimode."

⁶⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 26, a. 4: "sicut philosophus dicit in *II Rhetoric.*, amare est velle alicui bonum. Sic ergo motus amoris in duo tendit, scilicet in bonum quod quis vult alicui, vel sibi vel alii; et in

When, therefore, St. Thomas describes the love of concupiscence as a form of self-love, he is not rejecting his overall psychology of love that sees every act of friendship love as containing a movement of concupiscible love. Instead, he is being elliptic, describing the case where we ourselves are the object of our love of friendship, desiring our own good by means of the love of concupiscence. That this is Aquinas' view becomes clear once we consider the rest of the passage from his *Commentary on Galatians* cited above. Thomas illustrates love's twofold character precisely by offering the example of self-love: "for when I will a good to myself, I love myself absolutely for myself, but the good which I will to myself, I do not love for itself but for myself."⁶¹ In Aquinas' view, therefore, whether we are loving God, neighbor, or ourselves, the will's love is always the twofold act of willing a good for the beloved.

The foundational example of love's twofold dynamic is God's love for us. In his *Commentary on Romans*, St. Thomas portrays this on the level of grace, once again employing Aristotle's definition of love, in this case to explain Paul's insistence on the priority of God's action.

The primary source of grace is mentioned, namely, God's love. . . . For God's love is not called forth by any goodness in a creature, as human love is; rather, he causes the creature's goodness, because to love is to will good to the beloved. But God's love is the cause of things.⁶²

Thomas proclaims this even more fully in his analysis of the Lord's famous affirmation to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3.16). St. Thomas explains that this love is the source of all we have, both on the level of nature and of grace, and especially concerning the gift of eternal glory.

The cause of all our good is the Lord and divine love. For to love is, properly speaking, to will good to someone. Therefore, since the will of God is the cause of things, good comes to us because God loves us. Thus God's love is the cause of the good of nature: 'You love everything that exists' (Ws 11.25). It is also the cause of the good of

illud cui vult bonum. Ad illud ergo bonum quod quis vult alteri, habetur amor concupiscentiae, ad illud autem cui aliquis vult bonum, habetur amor amicitiae." See also the earlier formulation.

⁶¹ *In Gal.*, ch. 5, lectio 3 [305]: "quia cum volo bonum mihi, me diligo simpliciter propter me, bonum autem illud quod mihi volo, diligo non propter se, sed propter me."

⁶² *Ad Rom.*, ch. 1, lectio 4 [67]: "ponitur gratiae origo, quod est dei dilectio. . . . Dei enim dilectio non provocatur ex bono creaturae, sicut dilectio humana, sed magis ipsum bonum creaturae causat, quia diligere est bonum velle dilecto: voluntas autem dei est causa rerum."

grace: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love, and so I have drawn you,' namely, by grace (Jr 31.3). But that we also be given the good of glory flows from great charity.⁶³

St. Thomas then argues that in this famous verse (Jn 3.16), Jesus reveals how God's charity is not just great, but is the greatest (*maximam*): because it is God who loves us, loving us while we were yet sinners, giving us the greatest gift, his son, which bears the fruit of eternal life. Once again, it is by employing Aristotle's simple definition of love's act that Thomas can help the reader better understand the biblical account of divine love.

Conclusion

We began this sketch by asking to what extent does Thomas Aquinas employ in his biblical commentaries the psychology of love he develops in his systematic works of theology. Specifically, to what extent does he portray love as an affective principle of action, and to what degree does he portray the will's love as a twofold love, whereby we will good to another? The initial evidence offered in these pages demonstrates that he does both. Although he avoids some of the technical vocabulary he employs in the *Sentences* and the *Summa*, he nonetheless applies his understanding of love as passive principle and of love as act to help the reader better understand the biblical message concerning love, both human and divine. A full account of St. Thomas' theology of love in his biblical commentaries would study a wider selection of texts and address the thorny question of the relative dates of composition of these works. This essay offers only a sketch, but perhaps it will encourage scholars to finish the portrait.

⁶³ *In Ioh.*, ch. 3, lectio 3 [477]: "omnium bonorum nostrorum causa est dominus et divinus amor. Amare enim proprie est velle alicui bonum. Cum ergo voluntas Dei sit causa rerum, ex hoc provenit nobis bonum, quia Deus amat nos. Et quidem amor Dei est causa boni naturae; Sap. XI, 25: *diligis omnia quae sunt* et cetera. Item est causa boni gratiae; Ier. XXXI, 3: *in caritate perpetua dilexi te, ideo attraxi te*, scilicet per gratiam. Sed quod sit etiam dator boni gloriae, procedit ex magna caritate."