

A Thomistic Model of Friendship with God as Deification

Raphael Joshua Christianson OP

Abstract

While friendship with God is an important theme for Thomas Aquinas, Aquinas never explicitly delineates what such friendship looks like. In this article, I present a systematic description of friendship with God according to Thomas Aquinas. I examine three dynamics (mutuality, benevolence, and communicatio) and two effects (mutual indwelling and union) which Aquinas attributes to human friendship, and I show how they can exist analogically in friendship with God. Such a presentation reveals that friendship with God effects the deification of the human person, and such a deified condition is the intended state of the human person, in which he or she can be most fully human. This conclusion allows me to propose a way to define a human person as a relation (using the term *deificatus*), analogous to Aquinas's definition of person for the Trinity. In turn, I show how this reality impacts a Thomistic understanding of genuine human friendship, whereby one friend loves the other *qua deificatus*.

Keywords

Aquinas, friendship, deification, charity, participation

“In order that man may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he needs the fellowship of friends,” writes St. Thomas Aquinas.¹ Throughout his works, Aquinas not only affirms the importance of friendship between human persons, but also between the human person and God. At the same time, Aquinas never wrote a treatise on friendship and never gave any detailed explanation of how friendship with God works. In this paper, I will provide a systematic exposition of

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I-II q.4 a.8 corp; hereafter, *ST*.

friendship with God, thereby arguing that there exists a robust Thomistic model of friendship with God analogical to human friendship.

Aquinas identifies three dynamics of friendship: benevolence, mutuality, and *communicatio*.² I will show how these dynamics are present within friendship with God. I will not examine mutuality in a dedicated way. Instead, the presumed necessity of mutuality drives much of the following arguments: if benevolence and *communicatio* are essential to friendship, they must be mutual. I will also describe how friendship with God includes effects analogous to human friendship, namely mutual indwelling and union. Following especially from discussion of the effects of friendship with God, I will show that such friendship constitutes deification. This model of deifying-friendship will allow me to propose a way to describe a human person as a relation, thereby providing a new lens with which to understand human friendship.

Throughout this paper, I use “human friendship” to describe the friendship between two human persons (whom I name Jordan and Diana), and “theological friendship” to describe the friendship between a human person (Catherine) and God.

Sources

While Aquinas’s primary source for describing friendship is Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle himself doubted the possibility of friendship with God.³ Yet Aquinas has scriptural commitments to its possibility, of first importance being Jesus’ Farewell Discourse in the Gospel of John: “You are my friends if you do what I command you . . . I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (Jn 15:14-15).⁴

² Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.23 a.1 corp. See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), pp. 46-48; Samuel Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing: Overcoming Isolation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 144-145.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962), VIII.7; hereafter, *NE*.

⁴ All scriptural citations come from *NRSV*.

Aquinas's most detailed description of friendship occurs in the *Secunda pars*, which he wrote during the same period in which he commented on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the Gospel of John.⁵ The Gospel of John allows Aquinas to take a major step beyond Aristotle in relating theological friendship to charity: "it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God."⁶ For Aquinas, nothing can be said univocally of both God and man, and it would be unhelpful to speak equivocally of friendship, as if Aristotelian and Johannine friendship were two completely different things. One should expect that Aquinas intends theological friendship to be analogical to human friendship, meaning the various dynamics and effects within human friendship should have analogues in theological friendship.

Benevolence

The first dynamic of human friendship is benevolence, which Aquinas defines as wishing or desiring good for someone.⁷ One could object to the possibility of mutual benevolence between a human person and God. For Aquinas, God is obviously benevolent toward Catherine: God liberally bestows graces upon Catherine for her good, whether asked for or not.⁸ What is less evident is how Catherine can be benevolent toward God. God is perfect and needs nothing, meaning there is no unpossessed good Catherine could wish for God.⁹

Aquinas can resolve this difficulty through identifying *amor amicitiae* as the kind of love found in benevolence.¹⁰ *Amor* is expressed either as desire for an unpossessed good or as delight in a possessed good.¹¹ In *amor amicitiae*, the lover desires some good primarily for the beloved, and not primarily for herself. Consequently, *amor*

⁵ Gilles Emery, "Brief Catalogue of the Works of Saint Thomas Aquinas," in Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, vol. 1 of *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 333, 339, 343. See Fergus Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas: Charity as Friendship," in *Ancient and Medieval Concepts of Friendship*, eds. Suzanne Stern-Gillet and Gary M. Gurtler (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), p. 263; Anthony W. Keaty, "Thomas's Authority for Identifying Charity as Friendship: Aristotle or John 15?" *The Thomist* 62, no. 4 (1998), p. 582.

⁶ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.23 a.1 corp.

⁷ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.23 a.1 corp.

⁸ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.83 a.2 ad 3.

⁹ See Marko Fuchs, "*Philia* and *Caritas*: Some Aspects of Aquinas's Reception of Aristotle's Theory of Friendship," in *Aquinas and the Nicomachean Ethics*, eds. Tobias Hoffmann, Jorn Muller, and Matthias Perkams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 214.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.25 a.3 corp.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, and Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Hanover House, 1955), III.26; hereafter, *SCG*. Aquinas,

amicitiae, identified as benevolence, can involve Jordan desiring some good for Diana that she does not yet possess, or delighting in the good that Diana does already possess. Catherine cannot desire some unpossessed good for God, since God already possesses the fullness of all good. But she can delight in the good that God already possesses, thereby allowing her to be benevolent toward God.

Because friendship is a human and therefore rational activity, Aquinas can identify the delight Catherine experiences through benevolence toward God as joy, which is the rational version of delight.¹² Catherine's benevolence comprises joy because of God's goodness, regardless of what is happening to her. Furthermore, because goodness and beauty are different aspects of the same reality, Catherine's benevolence toward God constitutes contemplation, in which "through loving God we are aflame to gaze on his beauty."¹³ The more profoundly Catherine is a friend to God, the more she experiences contemplation and its joy. Such joy perdures as long as she maintains that friendship with God, even amidst suffering in life. And so Christ can say, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11).

Additionally, Aquinas even provides a way for Catherine to desire an unpossessed good for God, albeit indirectly. A consequence of love in friendship is that one loves not just one's friend but also those belonging to one's friend.¹⁴ God loves all human persons with divine friendship and charity so that all persons belong to his love. Consequently, if Catherine loves God, she must also love all other human persons. Catherine can desire the good for God in desiring the good for God's loved ones, in virtue of God's love for them. Accordingly, in Aquinas's system, mutual benevolence between God and a human person is possible.

Communicatio

The second dynamic of friendship is *communicatio*, which generally means the sharing of goods or of life.¹⁵ Such sharing includes living in proximity, pursuing similar goods, equality, and concord. I will consider each of these aspects individually.

ST I q.20 a.1 corp. See Christopher Malloy, "Thomas on the Order of Love and Desire: A Development of Doctrine," *The Thomist* 71, no. 1 (2007), p. 66.

¹² Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.31 a.3 corp.

¹³ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.180 a.1 corp. See *ST I* q.5 a.4 ad 1.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.23 a.1 ad 2.

¹⁵ Torrell, *Christ and Spirituality*, p. 48; Joseph Bobik, "Aquinas on *Communicatio*, the Foundation of Friendship and *Caritas*," *The Modern Schoolman* LXIV (November 1986), pp. 13-14; Guy Mansini, "*Similitudo*, *Communicatio*, and the Friendship of Charity in Aquinas," in *Thomistica*, ed. E. Manning (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), p. 5.

Living in Proximity

First, following Aristotle, Aquinas indicates that friends must live in proximity.¹⁶ If they do not live near each other, there would be no meaningful way to share something. An objector could argue that God's transcendence prevents Catherine from living near God.

For Aquinas, individuals can live together in two ways: externally/physically and internally/spiritually.¹⁷ In human friendship, Jordan and Diana interact externally: they are physically close and engage in vocal or written conversation. Aquinas states that such external interaction is not possible with God, although internal or spiritual interaction is, which suffices for friendship with God.¹⁸ Furthermore, Aquinas says that God is in all things by essence, because he is the cause of all being; by presence, because he is able to inspect all things; and by power, because he can act upon all things.¹⁹ God's presence in these ways is sufficient to provide for the potential of Catherine interacting with him on a spiritual level, meaning there are ways they can live "near" each other.

Pursue Similar Good and Possess Shared Form

Second, for Aquinas, even before becoming friends, individuals must pursue some similar good, which means they must each have some likeness or similar form directing them to that good.²⁰ Guy Mansini calls this likeness the "disposing material cause" for friendship.²¹ Jordan identifies something similar between himself and Diana, and that similarity provides the ground for friendship. For Aquinas, the disposing likeness comes from a metaphysical actuality or form, which could also be described as an organizing principle or configuration.²² For two individuals to share one form means those two individuals have some common organizing principle directing them to perceive certain ends or activities as good and so to engage in those activities.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.25 a.3 corp; Aristotle, *NE* VIII.5. The Classical and Medieval perspective obviously do not account for modern forms of instant communication from a distance. It is possible to expand "near" to include the reach of electronic communications.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.23 a.1 ad 1.

¹⁸ There could be extraordinary mystical experiences that count as external interactions. However, theological friendship is available to all persons, not just extraordinary mystics. Consequently, such mystical experiences do not sufficiently respond to the objection.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *ST* I q.8 a.3.

²⁰ Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.27 a.3 corp. See Aristotle, *NE* VIII.8.

²¹ Mansini, "*Similitudo*," p. 7.

²² Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.27 a.3 corp; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 36.

Prior to friendship, they each possess some similar form or organizing principle leading them to delight in certain activities. When they enter into friendship, that organizing principle and the delight they receive in those activities can be reinforced. For this reason, Mansini says that this likeness not only provides the material for friendship but also serves to reinforce that similarity and even draw the friends into greater similarity through their pursuit of a common end.²³

Because God is the supreme good, the only good he can “pursue” is himself. Consequently, for friendship between God and Catherine to be possible, Catherine must also pursue God as her end, meaning she must have some form directing her to perceive God as her end. An objector could notice a problem for Aquinas: in order to delight in God’s goodness and beauty, Catherine must have some knowledge of that goodness and beauty, since the intellect directs the will.²⁴ For Aquinas, the human intellect obtains knowledge only through sensible objects; God does not exist in sensible objects, so it is not possible for a human person naturally to know God in an intimate way.²⁵ Relatedly, the human will is directed toward the good through sensible objects, meaning Catherine cannot fully love God through her natural capacities. Human nature cannot of itself acquire such capacity, since, as Samuel Kimbriel explains, “the soul cannot give itself that which it lacks.”²⁶ Catherine is not naturally able to possess a form conducive to theological friendship.

This reality means friendship with God is impossible unless some assistance comes to Catherine from God. Aquinas explains that God freely provides “forms and powers [*virtutes*]” so that the human person may have the capacity to act in certain ways.²⁷ God “superadds” [*superaddit*] a form to the human person, augmenting her natural capacity such that she can come to know and love God.²⁸ This superadded form is the theological virtue of charity. That God must be the one to infuse this charity satisfies Christ’s words: “You did not choose me but I chose you” (Jn 15:16). Aquinas comments on this verse, paraphrasing Christ: “Whoever has been called to this sublime friendship should not attribute the cause of this friendship to himself, but to me [i.e. Christ], who chose him or her as a friend.”²⁹ Catherine is not able to come to friendship with God, yet Christ desires friendship with her, and so he infuses the virtue of charity as a superadded

²³ Mansini, “*Similitudo*,” p. 7.

²⁴ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.24 a.1 corp.

²⁵ Aquinas, *ST I* q.12 a.4 corp; *ST II-II* q.24 a.2 ad 2.

²⁶ Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*, p. 140.

²⁷ Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.110 a.2 corp.

²⁸ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.23 a.2 corp.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. James A. Weisheipl and Fabian R. Larcher (Albany: Magi Books, Inc., 1998), 15.2019; hereafter, *John*.

habitual form in order to give her the capacity for such friendship.³⁰ In virtue of infused charity, Catherine and God do pursue a common good and have some kind of similarity.

Equality

Third, even if individuals have a similar form and pursue the same end, there must also be some equality between them. For Aristotle, friendship between unequal people is only possible if the friend with the greater quality “should receive more affection than he gives” so that a kind of equality comes about.³¹ However, Aristotle says there is a limit to how different friends can be. The greatest extreme, he says, are the gods, who excel human beings in every respect. The difference between a human being and a god is so great that no kind of equality can exist. Consequently, for Aristotle, friendship with God is impossible.

For Aquinas, there is a sense in which a kind of equality, from a limited perspective, is established between God and Catherine in order to allow for friendship, while also preserving their radical difference. Aquinas shows how this limited kind of equality comes about through the infusion of charity and participation.

In Aquinas’s system, Catherine receives charity through participation: “charity can be in us neither naturally, nor through acquisition by the natural powers, but by the infusion of the Holy Ghost [*per infusionem Spiritus Sancti*], Who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of Whom in us is created charity.”³² Charity cannot be in Catherine naturally nor acquired naturally, since it surpasses her faculties; the Holy Spirit must infuse charity. Through the Holy Spirit’s infusion, Catherine comes to participate the Holy Spirit.

For Aquinas, the way in which Catherine participates the Holy Spirit is as an effect participates its cause.³³ A simple example of

³⁰ See Aquinas, *ST* III q.8 a.1; Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), p. 269.

³¹ Aristotle, *NE* VIII.7.

³² Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.24 a.2 corp. In the phrase *per infusionem Spiritus Sancti*, *Spiritus Sancti* should be understood as a subjective genitive, i.e. the Holy Spirit does the infusing of created charity, rather than the objective genitive, in which it would be the Holy Spirit who is infused. This is clear from other passages, such as when Aquinas speaks of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as being infused through the work of the Spirit; see Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.68 a.4 ad 1.

³³ See Thomas Aquinas, *Exposition of Boethius’s “Hebdomads,”* trans. Peter King, 2004, http://individual.utoronto.ca/pking/translations/AQUINAS.Exposition_of_Hebdomads.pdf (accessed June 15, 2018), n. 24.

such participation is the way sunlight illuminates air: the air can be said to participate the sun's light.³⁴ Another example is that a child bears similarities to a parent.³⁵ The cause itself does not inhere in the effect, but the effect has something in common with its cause. In these examples, the effect has some univocal participation in the cause. Aquinas is clear that univocity cannot apply to God.³⁶ To preserve divine simplicity and transcendence, there cannot literally be something of the Divine Essence in the human person, nor can there be something identical between God and man. Aquinas adds analogy to participation in order to preserve the essential radical distinction between human and Divine in theological friendship.

Describing God's anger can illustrate Aquinas's use of analogy in this situation. Say Jordan experiences the human passion of anger. Diana does not know that Jordan is experiencing anger until Jordan outwardly expresses it by smashing a cup against a wall. Because of Jordan's outward expression, Diana rightly judges that Jordan is angry. There are occasions in which God's outward actions indicate something like what Diana would call anger. God rains down sulfur and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying them (Gen 19:24). This outward action looks like anger, so Diana attributes anger to God. However, the attribution is analogical. God does not experience passions, so what is going on "internal" to God is different from what goes on internal to Jordan.

Similarly, Aquinas can attribute charity-friendship both to God and to Catherine. God's outward actions are indicative of someone expressing friendship, as are Catherine's. Internally, there must be something different within each of them. The charity Catherine receives is given in virtue of God's charity, so that God's charity stands as the cause and her charity as the effect. Because of her limited and composite mode of being, Catherine cannot receive the fullness of God's charity, and so she receives a limited and restricted version of it.³⁷ Her version is radically different from God's because of their radically different modes of being, meaning Catherine's charity can only be compared to God's analogically and not univocally. Catherine's charity relates by participation to God's charity, because there is some similarity between them, yet the similarity is only analogical.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus expositio*, trans. Harry Clarke Marsh, Jr., in Harry Clarke Marsh, Jr., "Cosmic Structure and Knowledge of God: Thomas Aquinas' 'In librum beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus expositio'," PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1994, IV.20.

³⁵ Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), p. 100.

³⁶ Aquinas, *ST I*. q.13 a.5 corp. See te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, p. 96.

³⁷ See te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, p. 37; Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015), p. 364.

This version of Catherine's participation in God preserves God's simplicity and the radical difference between him and Catherine. Such participation brings about a kind of likeness and a kind of limited and restricted equality, through which both God and Catherine are able to love with divine charity.

Concord

Fourth, commenting on Aristotle, Aquinas writes, "concord and conversation with friends seem especially to be the works of friendship and its cause."³⁸ Individuals must actively pursue some good end cooperatively in order to enter into friendship. There must be some communication and resulting concord on what good to pursue and how. Aquinas defines concord as a "union of appetites among various persons" in which "the wills of various hearts agree together in consenting to the same thing."³⁹ Friends' wills are united or in agreement on their object.

An objector would argue that concord between Catherine and God is not possible. First, Catherine cannot perfectly know God's will so as to conform her will to it. Aquinas affirms this impossibility: "we know not what God wills in particular: and in this respect we are not bound to conform our will to the Divine will."⁴⁰ Furthermore, God's consequent will includes even Catherine's suffering.⁴¹ There are occasions when Catherine could will her own suffering: for example, Catherine can will the pain of the hypodermic needle penetrating her skin because she knows it is necessary to receive immunity from certain diseases. At other times, Catherine cannot see the purpose of her suffering, such as some illness or unexpected disaster. Concord with God implies Catherine must will any occasion of suffering, which could seem contrary to her innate inclination toward happiness.

Aquinas begins to resolve this issue through his analysis of Jn 15:14, in which Christ says, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Aquinas connects Christ's words with his own understanding of friendship: "It is proper to friendship to consent to a friend in what he wills. Of course, the will of God is set forth for us by His precepts. Therefore, it belongs to the love by which we love God that we fulfill His commandments."⁴² Catherine begins forming

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1964), VIII.VI.1607; hereafter, *Ethics*.

³⁹ Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.29 a.1 corp.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.19 a.10 ad 1.

⁴¹ See Aquinas, *ST* I q.19 a.6 ad 1.

⁴² Aquinas, *SCG* IV.22.4.

concord with God by conforming herself to God's commandments present in Sacred Scripture.

Even if Catherine is completely faithful to God's commandments, she will encounter situations in which commandments do not explicitly guide her actions, comparable to the experience of the rich young man in Mt 19:16-22. For example, in discerning between a vocation to marriage, to consecrated virginity, or to religious life, Catherine attempts to discern God's will for her and so conform herself to it. Each option is good, and Scripture does not provide an explicit commandment to guide her. It then seems there is a limit to how much Catherine can come into concord with God, meaning there is a limit to friendship with God.

Aquinas's solution involves the distinction between willing something materially versus formally.⁴³ Catherine may not know God's will regarding a particular decision. In that case, she cannot materially will what God wills. She can, however, formally will what God wills, directing her will toward God as her final end and keeping in mind his commandments. Aquinas explains, "in order that a man will some particular good with a right will, he must will that particular good materially, and the Divine and universal good, formally. Therefore the human will is bound to be conformed to the Divine will It is customary to say that a man's will, in this respect, is conformed to the Divine will, because it wills what God wishes him to will."⁴⁴ Catherine's will can be united to God's will in keeping God as the formal element of her will. Such union will lead Catherine to make particular choices that fall within God's will.

This distinction provides an approach for Catherine to conform her will to God's consequent will regarding her own suffering. Daniel Schwartz delineates three elements involved in directing an action: the end, which stands as the formal element; the means, which stand as the material element; and the relation of those means to that end.⁴⁵ The human person always knows her end—God—but the means may be unknown. She draws upon her love of God to direct her will according to his. Other times, she may know the means and the end but not the relation between them. Schwartz gives the example of a drought: a drought occurs, and an individual may know that God wills the drought for good but not know how the drought brings about good. If that individual has genuine friendship with God, she cannot help but trust that God is benevolent and beneficent, even if the individual cannot understand the situation. She can then somehow accept the drought through an act of trust or abandonment to her Good Friend. In doing so, she unites or conforms her will to God's,

⁴³ Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.8 a.3 corp.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.19 a.10 corp.

⁴⁵ Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 48-50.

at least formally, if not materially. In this way, Catherine can come to accept her suffering through trust in God, trusting that he will cause all things to work for her good (see Rom 8:28). This shows that concord of man with God is possible.

From these various aspects of *communicatio* as well as benevolence, it is evident that Aquinas's system does provide a way for the human person and God to enter into a genuine friendship with each other, analogically. One would then expect that the effects of friendship seen between human friends must have analogical correspondence in the friendship between the human person and God. Looking at these effects, it is evident that friendship with God provides for Catherine's deification and also provides a deeper understanding of her humanity.

Effects of Friendship

Two important effects of friendship for Aquinas are mutual indwelling and union. In theological friendship, this indwelling and union constitute deification. Aquinas indicates that mutual indwelling can occur within the intellect or the will.⁴⁶ From Jordan's perspective, Diana is within his intellect through some image or apprehension of her. His intellect dwells within her because, for Aquinas, it is the nature of friendship to move closer to union, so that one friend desires to know the other intimately and perfectly.

With respect to the will, Jordan perceives Diana as dwelling within his will as he delights in or longs for her presence, and as he delights in or desires what is good for her. David Gallagher summarizes this indwelling by saying that Diana formally determines Jordan's will.⁴⁷ Through their friendship, Diana provides Jordan with a new form, so that she can be said to dwell within Jordan's will. Likewise, Jordan perceives himself dwelling within Diana as whatever good happens to Diana he perceives as happening to himself. Through the dynamics of mutual indwelling, Jordan's will goes outside of himself to dwell within Diana and remains with her, and vice versa, an effect Aquinas calls ecstasy.⁴⁸ These various aspects of mutual indwelling constitute a "dynamic reciprocity of ever-deepening acts

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.28 a.2 corp. See Bryan R. Cross, "St. Thomas Aquinas on Unity as an End of Love," in *Love and Friendship: Maritain and Tradition*, ed. Montague Brown (Washington D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2013), p. 174.

⁴⁷ David M. Gallagher, "Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (1996), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.28 a.3.

of self-donation and reception of the other” by which friends become more deeply formally united.⁴⁹

The interlocutor could object to this mutual indwelling between God and Catherine. As Aquinas himself says, the human intellect is not capable of receiving God like any other form. Consequently, God could not dwell in Catherine’s intellect nor will. However, Aquinas provides a scriptural citation affirming the possibility of mutual indwelling between a human person and God: “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” (1 Jn 4:16).⁵⁰ Aquinas’s understanding of grace and infused charity shows how mutual indwelling is possible.

When the Holy Spirit infuses charity-friendship into Catherine, Catherine gains new potential for knowing and loving God, mirroring how God knows and loves himself. Te Velde explains that an “effect, in seeking its perfection, turns to its cause and seeks to become as alike to it as possible.”⁵¹ God loves himself perfectly, both as subject and object of love.⁵² Once charity is infused into Catherine and she enters into friendship with God, she will want to enter more deeply into that friendship and seek to love God as object as perfectly as possible, and for her to do so perfectly as a subject. Catherine’s friendship with God leads her to make relating to God as God relates to himself her primary end. In doing this, Catherine becomes like God, in a certain respect. She no longer loves merely in the way other human persons do; she loves in the way God loves.

This conclusion is indicative of theological friendship effecting mutual indwelling. From Catherine’s perspective, God can be said to dwell within her intellect through the graced form he provides her in order to have supernatural knowledge of him. Catherine dwells within God intellectually as she strives and yearns for a deeper, more intimate knowledge of God. God dwells within Catherine as the graced form directing her will toward him, and Catherine’s will dwells within God as she experiences delight in God’s goodness regardless of what is happening to her.

Through indwelling and ecstasy within human friendship, Jordan’s and Diana’s wills, in some sense, become intermixed so that there becomes a sort of union between them that is beyond the good of either individual but focused upon the friendship itself. Aquinas compares this union to substantial union: union of affections leads to a feeling as if there were metaphysical union.⁵³ The two individuals

⁴⁹ Cross, “Aquinas on Unity,” p. 176.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.28 a.2 sc.

⁵¹ Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*, pp. 33-34. See Aquinas, *ST* I q.6 a.1 corp.

⁵² Aquinas, *ST* II-II q.24 a.8 corp.

⁵³ Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.28 a1 ad 2. See Gallagher, “Desire for Beatitude,” p. 26; James McEvoy, “The Other as Oneself: Friendship and Love in the Thought of St. Thomas

remain substantially different, yet share in some form generating a union approaching identity. It is as if some new organizing principle supervened upon them, as if they were the matter, love of friendship the form, and friendship itself the resultant meta-substance. Jordan relates to Diana as if she were a part of himself. Because of this union, Aquinas can say, “the true sign of friendship is that a friend reveals the secrets of his heart to his friend. Since friends have one mind and heart, it does not seem that what one friend reveals to another is placed outside his own heart.”⁵⁴ Through this union, a friend is seen as another self.⁵⁵ Jordan can confide in Diana and share what is intimate about himself with her because he perceives her as another self or an extension of himself.

An analogous version of this union occurs within Catherine’s friendship for God. Through the infusion of charity, some form comes from the Divine bearing resemblance to the Divine through participation, so that Catherine becomes configured in some way as God is configured and comes to love as God loves. In this sense, Catherine is deified and can be said analogically to become God *formally*, but not *materially*. Aquinas’s doctrine of deification could best be described with the word *deiform*.⁵⁶ In friendship with God, Catherine is deiform, and not “deimatter.” She remains herself and distinct from God, not becoming part of the Divine Essence. But there is some divinely-effected configuration within her and directing her, according to her mode of being.

For Aquinas, Catherine’s deification constitutes a kind of formal union to God. Analogous to human friendship, Catherine takes on a new divine form, which unites her to God in an abiding way. In some sense, Catherine becomes experientially united to God, perceiving herself as God’s other self or an extension of himself. She can no longer conceive of herself as a completely separate entity, but only in relation to her formal union to God within the meta-substance of her theological friendship.

These analogous effects of friendship show that, through her friendship with God, Catherine is, in a certain respect, formally and experientially united to God, knowing and feeling his presence within her. Through developing friendship with God, then, Catherine attains deification, in which she becomes like God.

Aquinas,” in *Thomas Aquinas: Approaches to Truth: The Aquinas Lectures at Maynooth, 1996-2001*, eds. James McEvoy and Michael Dunne (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), p. 23.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *John* 15.2016.

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.28 a.1 corp. See Aristotle, *NE IX.4*; Cicero, *De amicitia XXI.80*; Sirach 6:11.

⁵⁶ See Aquinas, *ST I* q.12 a.6 corp.

Human Nature in light of Theological Friendship

An objector could be concerned that deifying friendship changes the human person too much so as no longer to be merely human, thereby somehow denigrating human nature. Aquinas could seem to affirm this, when he states, “insofar as men are made God-like [*deiformes*] by charity, they are indeed above mere men.”⁵⁷ However, not only does Aquinas deny that deifying friendship makes Catherine more than human; Aquinas’s position is that deifying friendship makes Catherine most fully human, so that the deified state of friendship with God is the intended state of the human person. Aquinas’s description of peace demonstrates this position.

Aquinas defines peace as the internal unity of an individual’s will so that it is not divided against itself, and he connects this peace to concord, whereby one person’s will is united to another’s.⁵⁸ There is an intrinsic connection between concord and peace, such that the presence of peace necessitates the presence of concord. Aquinas writes, “peace implies a twofold union The first is the result of one’s own appetites being directed to one object; while the other results from one’s appetite being united with the appetite of another.”⁵⁹ The first union mentioned is properly peace, and the second is properly concord. Such connection may not seem intuitively necessary; one might be tempted to say concord includes peace rather than peace including concord.

Aquinas elucidates this relation through his description of how one attains peace. Each of the two unions—peace and concord—is an effect of charity, “insofar as man loves God with his whole heart, by referring all things to him, so that all his desires tend to one object.”⁶⁰ God intends the individual’s will to be directed toward one object only: God. Fallen and sinful human nature leads one to direct her will partially toward God and partially toward lower goods as final ends.⁶¹ Nothing can be essentially bad or wholly directed

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *On Love and Charity: Readings from the Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, trans. Peter A. Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin, and Joseph Bolin (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), III d.27 q.2 a.1 ad 10. This book bases its translation and numbering off a provisional version of the Leonine text. The *Corpus Thomisticum*, which did not have access to the Leonine version, places this as ad 9 in the same article. See <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/snp3027.html#11069> (accessed June 15, 2018).

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.29 a.1 corp. See Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), p. 100. In the following section, I am indebted to various discussions with Eleonore Stump about the divided human will.

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.29 a.3 corp.

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.29 a.3 corp.

⁶¹ See Aquinas, *ST I-II* q.71 a.2 ad 3, a.6 corp.

toward evil, meaning one's will can never be wholly united away from God.⁶² Accordingly, one's will can be wholly united to itself only when directed wholly to God. Consequently, the state of internal union of will can occur only when one unites one's will to God's; that is, one attains peace only through attaining concord with God.

For Aquinas, this state of peace and concord is the intended mode of existence for human persons. Aquinas speaks of original justice as "man's will being subject to God," meaning the individual has concord with God, and consequently peace.⁶³ Such concord and peace occur within charity-friendship, meaning that the human person's intended state is to have friendship with God. Friendship with God implies deification, meaning the human person's intended state is to be deiform. When Catherine is deified through theological friendship, she does not become something more than human: rather, she becomes most fully human. She lost the capacity to be fully human because of sin, so God infuses graced forms into her to give her the capacity to reclaim her intended state.

Seeing Catherine as most fully human when deified through friendship can shift Aquinas's definition of a human person to parallel the definition he gives of a Divine Person. In the article in which Aquinas discusses how *person* applies to God, Aquinas begins with the traditional definition of person as an *individual substance of rational nature*.⁶⁴ By the end of the article, Aquinas has developed a new definition that applies to the Divine Persons. Aquinas indicates that "*person* in any nature signifies what is distinct in that nature."⁶⁵ For Aquinas, *person* can signify what distinguishes one individual from another. Among human beings, *person* can signify a certain individual body: bones, flesh, etc. Looking at the Divine Persons, Aquinas determines that what distinguishes each of them is their relation to one another, so that *person* in the divine sense can be defined as a *subsistent relation*.

In examining friendship, I started by implicitly thinking of the human person as an individual substance of rational nature, employing intellect and will to engage with other individual substances of rational natures. If Catherine is deified and thus like God, one might expect her to be definable as a subsistent relation, in some limited and restricted analogical sense.

Through friendship with God, the human person becomes deified and, in some sense, formally united to God, who is pure form. Because of that formal union, there is a certain analogical sense in which God and Catherine are formally and experientially indistinguishable.

⁶² See Aquinas, *ST* I q. 49 a.3 corp.

⁶³ Aquinas, *ST* I-II q.82 a.3 corp.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *ST* I q.29 a.1.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *ST* I q.29 a.4 corp.

To distinguish between them, one could think of God as *deificator* and Catherine as *deificata* (or *deificabilis*). What makes them distinguishable is the relation they have to one another. This relation can become the definition of the human person. At the core of the human person, to really understand the human person, one must understand the human person as *amicus dei*, *deificatus*, or *deificabilis*, terms that focus on the human person as a relation. This conclusion reveals a deeper aspect of deification: not only does Catherine know and love as God; her mode of existence analogically reflects how the Persons of the Trinity relate to one another.

Understanding friendship with God as the intended state of human existence and *deificatus* as a potential way to describe the human person as a subsistent relation shifts the understanding of genuine human friendship. The perfect version of human friendship is founded upon virtue and seeking the ultimate good.⁶⁶ Any genuine virtue must be infused by God, the ultimate Good. Such infusion occurs through theological friendship. Consequently, the friendship between Jordan and Diana can only be genuine if each has friendship with God individually. Jordan does not love Diana just in virtue of who she is; he loves her in relation to God. Jordan loves Diana *qua deificata*. Their friendship is founded upon the shared likeness, which is in fact a participation in God. What unites Jordan and Diana together in friendship, which is the form of their friendship, is a participation in the Holy Spirit.

Friendship with God makes even greater demands. If Jordan has perfect human friendship with Diana, he will love everything she loves, including her friends. He might not love them with a genuine love of friendship, but Jordan will have some benevolence toward them. Such extension of friendship is true in theological friendship. Because Catherine is friends with God and united to God in friendship, she must love all those whom God loves. God loves everything that exists, and he loves all human beings with friendship. Catherine is then obliged to love God's friends with friendship. The more her heart is fully united to God, the more she will find she cannot help but love all those whom God loves. Catherine becomes formally united to those people in virtue of their mutual union to God. This includes the union of those who have actual friendship with God, but also God's potential friends, since he already loves all human beings as *deificabiles* and potential friends. Catherine is most fully human as a friend of God, which means she is also most fully human when formally united to all of humanity through theological friendship. It will be second nature to Catherine to attend to the physical and spiritual needs of others, since their suffering belongs to God and

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *ST II-II* q.23 a.5 corp; Aquinas, *Ethics VIII.III.1574*.

to Catherine. In this way, as Kimbriel states, “it is precisely in this movement towards deification that finite interactions themselves become properly ordered.”⁶⁷ Such union among humanity points toward the Eucharist as the Sacrament of unity and toward an ecclesiology of communion.

Conclusion

While Aquinas never detailed how friendship with God could work, and perhaps may not have considered it in depth himself, an analysis of his thought reveals a robust analogical version of such friendship. This version of friendship, founded upon an Aristotelian description of friendship and consistent with Jesus’ mention of friendship in John 15, includes the three dynamics of friendship (benevolence, mutuality, and *communicatio*), as well as some of the important effects of friendship (mutual indwelling and union). Through infused charity and participation, friendship with God effects the deification of the human person, which allows the human person to be most fully human and provides a way to define the human person as *deificatus*. This Thomistic model of friendship with God as deification encompasses the entire human person, including rational faculties and relations with other human persons, thereby offering a potential lens with which to consider other theological questions.

Raphael Joshua Christianson OP
rchristianson@svfparish.org

⁶⁷ Kimbriel, *Friendship as Sacred Knowing*, p. 138.