New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/nbfr.12087

Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar: A Dialogue on Love and Charity

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Abstract

In *Love Alone is Credible* (1963), Hans Urs von Balthasar discusses love in a way that "seeks to be faithful to the theological tradition of the great saints." Conspicuously missing from the set of "great saints" whom Balthasar praises is Thomas Aquinas. Does Balthasar imply a negative judgment about Thomas's thought on love? If so, what is the judgment? On what grounds is it made? How might Thomas answer? To address these questions, I construct a dialogue between the two, privileging *Love Alone* and the Questions on charity from the *Summa Theologiae*. The dialogue begins with a survey of ground common to Balthasar and Thomas. A second step shows how three salient aspects of Thomas's treatment of charity appear from Balthasar's perspective. A third section deepens the critique, showing that for Balthasar, both divine and human love must be conceived as utterly gratuitous in ways that Thomas downplays or denies. A fourth section asks how the account of love given by Balthasar appears from Thomas's viewpoint. A final section asks what to make of these partly overlapping, partly clashing perspectives, and suggests why both are necessary.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar, Love, Charity, Theology, Philosophy, Philosophical Theology, Medieval Theology

In his short book Love Alone is Credible (*Love Alone is Credible*), Hans Urs von Balthasar tries to get at what is most distinctive and most fundamental about Christianity. He aims to express the revelation of divine love—what the New Testament calls *agape*, and the Latin tradition knows as *caritas*. In such an undertaking, any aspiration to novelty for its own sake would be out of place. Rather than try for originality, the essay "seeks to be faithful to the theological tradition of the great saints: Augustine, Bernard, Anselm, Ignatius, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, Theresa of Liseux … The great

lovers are those who know most about God and must be listened to" (10).[1] Notably absent from the list of "great saints" who "must be listened to" is Thomas Aquinas.[2] This does not mean, of course, that Balthasar regards Thomas as having nothing pertinent to say about love. Indeed, the essay contains several cautiously approving references to Thomas.[3] Nonetheless, it is difficult to escape the sense that Balthasar implies a negative judgment about Thomas's thought on love. For some reason, not explicitly stated, Thomas does not merit inclusion in the small list of great lovers who know most about God. His theology of love is not what "must be listened to" in our time. Something like this is Balthasar's implied judgment about Thomas Aquinas in *Love Alone*.

In what follows, I will construct a dialogue between Balthasar and Thomas on love. Rather than bring to bear every potentially relevant text by our two authors—an impossible task that, if attempted, would make the conversation unmanageable—I shall privilege *Love Alone* and the Questions on *caritas* in the *Secunda Secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*.[4] As a preliminary to the dialogue, I survey some ground common to Balthasar and Thomas. Then I begin the dialogue by

[1] All parenthetical references following quotations from Balthasar are to Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). The original edition was published as *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1963).

[2] Near the end of *Love Alone*, Balthasar provides another list of the "great figures of Christian spirituality—Irenaeus, Origen, Erigena, Nicholas of Cusa, etc" (123). Thomas goes missing from this list as well. This seems to anticipate his exclusion from the "clerical styles" lovingly read and commended in *Herrlichkeit* 2/1, though Balthasar claims that Thomas "receives his due in volume 3/1 [volume 4 of the English translation]" (Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993], pp. 82–83). Not all serious readers have been convinced that he does. "Balthasar's external and peremptory treatment of Aquinas in the fourth volume is also disappointing, even if Balthasar compensates somewhat for this in his interesting confrontation of Aquinas and Heidegger at the end of the fifth volume" (Cyril O'Regan, "I am Not What I am Because of . . . ," in Rodney A. Howsare and Larry S. Chapp, ed., *How Balthasar Changed My Mind* [New York: Crossroad, 2008], p. 157).

[3] These appear at *Love Alone*, p. 35, p. 90, p. 118. The relative absence of Thomas from *Love Alone* is partly explained by Balthasar's distaste for the Thomism that he was taught. On Balthasar's early instruction in neo-scholasticism, see Peter Henrici, "A Sketch of von Balthasar's Life," in David L. Schindler, ed., *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p. 13. As Fergus Kerr notes, in 1985 he was still attacking "the rationalism of the neoscholastics" (*Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2007], 122n6, quoting the introduction of *Theo-Logic*, vol. 1, trans. Adrian J. Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000], p. 20).

[4] Why privilege *Love Alone*? Beyond its evident relevance to our theme, the text is a good way into Balthasar's thought as a whole. As David Moss notes, it is a text "which in many respects presents, in severe concentration, the ambition of his great theological triptych" ("The Saints," in Edward T. Oakes, S.J. and David Moss, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], p. 82).

https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

showing how three salient aspects of Thomas's mature treatment of *caritas* appear from Balthasar's critical perspective. A third section deepens the critique. Its aim is to show that for Balthasar, both divine and human love must be conceived as utterly gratuitous, in ways that Thomas downplays, if he does not deny them altogether. In a fourth section, I reverse the polarity. I ask how the account of love given by Balthasar looks from Thomas's viewpoint. If it is instructive to see Thomas through the lens of the Swiss theologian, it is no less revealing to ask how Balthasar appears from the perspective of the Angelic Doctor. A concluding section asks what to make of these partly overlapping, partly clashing perspectives. Here I attempt to say why we need both perspectives, and that neither can be reduced to the other.

1. Common ground between Balthasar and Thomas

Thomas and Balthasar share the conviction that divine revelation, as expressed in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, is fundamental for understanding God's love and the ways in which humans can respond (or fail to respond) to it. In line with his emphasis on the centrality of revelation, the chapters that contain Balthasar's positive view (chapters 3–10) contain over 170 citations to Scripture—an average of more than two per page. One might suppose that in Thomas's account, Aristotle bulks larger than Scripture. Is the supposition true? The Questions on *caritas* in the *Secunda Secundae* (hereafter *QdeC*) contain 150 references to Aristotle, whereas *Love Alone* does not cite Aristotle once. The number of references to Aristotle may seem high, until one considers that *QdeC* contain almost 160 references to the Old Testament alone, along with nearly 300 citations to the New Testament. That both Balthasar and Thomas give Scripture pride of place cannot be doubted, even if one were to object to the use of Scripture made by either.

The Bible is not the only *auctoritas* common to both writers. Outside Scripture, no writer is more important for either Thomas than Augustine. In the *QdeC* Thomas cites 29 different works by Augustine, privileging *On Christian Doctrine*, the *City of God*, and *On the Trinity.* Balthasar does not cite nearly so many of Augustine's works by name. But his deep influence pervades *Love Alone*, whose preface numbers him as one of the "great saints" who must be listened to. Accordingly, Balthasar privileges Augustine as one of the five "clerical styles" that he treats in *Herrlichkeit* 2/1.[5] Unlike Thomas, Balthasar finds other patristic authors no less (and perhaps more)

[5] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic*, Vol. 2: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh

https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

important than Augustine. It is, after all, not Augustine but Origen whom Balthasar regards as "the most sovereign spirit of the first centuries" and "who has set his mark for good or ill on the totality of Christian theology."[6] Balthasar produced anthologies and translations of both Origen and Augustine. But in *Love Alone*, Augustine is the more prominent interlocutor, and the more evident link to Thomas. As we shall see, both Thomas and Balthasar take pains to position their thinking about love in relation to Augustine.

Another authority common to Thomas and Balthasar is Dionysius. Near the beginning of the *Summa,* in the Prologue of Question 3 of the *prima pars*, Thomas makes the Dionysian claim that we know more what God is not than what God is. This is not, however, a condition that prevents us from loving God. Although we cannot know God perfectly, Thomas says, we can love God perfectly, even in this life.[7] Does Balthasar share this conviction? *Love Alone* quotes the formulation of the Dionysian/Thomist view found in Vatican I: God is "incomprehensible, essentially different from the world, in and of himself most blessed and unspeakably exalted above everything else which can be thought of" (48).[8] If stated merely as an alleged fact, abstracted from the revelation of divine love, the thought "becomes so empty of meaning that it is ever in danger of drifting into atheism or agnosticism or into a philosophy (or mysticism of identity)" (48). But any "negative theology" must be interpreted in terms of God's love, so that "the totally-other, the ever-greater *appears* and seizes hold of us *in* the very act of overwhelming us through the ultimately incomprehensible character of that love" (48). One might take the occurrence of "totally other" to signify that Balthasar's true inspiration here is not Dionysius or Thomas but Karl Barth. While *Love Alone*'s frequent use of "totally other" undeniably points to its kinship with Barth,[9] the phrase does not of itself signify any intention to break from Thomas, as evidenced by Balthasar's willingness in *Herrlichkeit* 3/1 to couple Barth's formulation with Thomist language: "Thus in a new and much more radical way God is placed

and Brian McNeil C.R.V. and ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), pp. 95–143. Balthasar published *Herrlichkeit* 2/1 in 1962, just before *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe*.

[6] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 11.

[7] See *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae 27.2 ad 2; 2a2ae 23.6 and 27.4.

[8] First Vatican Council, s.3, c.1. Compare the passages quoted by Balthasar at *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2003), pp. 99–102.

[9] Late in life, Balthasar commented that Barth "perhaps never noticed how much a little book like *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (*Love Alone*) sought to be fair to him and represents perhaps the closest approach to his position from the Catholic side" (*My Work: In Retrospect*, 90). In his later work, Barth himself says that if terms such as "wholly other" are not thoroughly clarified, they "might just as well fit a dead idol" (Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1960], p. 72).

https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

over and above all cosmic being, above everything that can be calculated or attained within the structures, real or ideal, of the cosmos: he is indeed 'the Wholly Other.' We can know that God is, but not what he is," Balthasar says in an intentional echo of Thomas.[10] For both Balthasar and Thomas, as for their common exemplar Dionysius, the more rigorous the negative theology, the more resounding the corresponding affirmation of divine love.

The centrality of revelation, along with an attitude of reverence toward both Augustine and Dionysius, point to ground shared by Thomas and Balthasar. One more significant affinity between the two should be mentioned. Both authors write for their time, consciously and deliberately. They wish to say things that are perennially true, but accommodating them to the needs of their particular audience. This is to say, each takes seriously the pedagogical dimension of authorship. In the case of Thomas, the Prologue of the *Summa* is a sufficient reminder. In Balthasar, the point appears with particular clarity in both the prologue and the conclusion of *Love Alone.* Stating what distinguishes his approach from the cosmological and the anthropological, he concludes: "If *this* approach does not move our age then there is not much chance that Christianity in a pure form will be discovered at all" (10). The essay's conclusion ends in a similar fashion. If his voice is to be heard, he must exclude peripheral questions and stick with "truths derived from the centre," expressing them "with the greatest degree of clarity at a level that is convincing" (125). However different the means selected for the task, both authors aim to persuade. To understand either in abstraction from the pedagogical impulse is to understand them poorly.[11]

2. Aspects of Thomas, seen through a Balthasarian lens

Thomas begins the *QdeC* with a consideration of "charity itself, according to its own nature."[12] In Question 23, Thomas isolates three defining characteristics of charity. Charity is (i) a friendship;

[10] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 4, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Brian McNeil C.R.V., Andrew Louth, John Saward, Rowan Williams and Oliver Davies and ed. John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), pp. 393–94.

[11] For insight into Balthasar's pedagogical impulse and its inseparability from love, see Francesca Murphy, "Truth Grounded in Love," in *How Balthasar Changed My Mind*, pp. 129.

[12] All translations of Thomas Aquinas into English are my own. Translations are of the Latin text as it appears in *Summa Theologiae*, Ottawa Institute of Medieval Studies Edition, 5 vols. (Ottawa: Dominican College of Ottawa, 1941–45). All parenthetical references following quotations of Thomas are to the *Secunda Secundae*, indicating Question, Article, and division within the Article. A complete translation of the Questions on charity in the 2a2ae is forthcoming in Yale University Press's "Rethinking the Western Tradition" series:

https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(ii) a particular virtue, indeed the greatest of the virtues; (iii) the form of the virtues. Does Balthasar agree that charity has these three characteristics? Are they the traits that merit emphasis? To address these questions, let us begin with Thomas's notion of charity as friendship. What makes charity "a certain friendship of man with God" is God's utterly free decision to share (*communicare*) his own blessedness (*beatitudo*) with us. Because (and only because) of this sharing, the divine-human relation merits description as a friendship. It is an *amicitia* containing "mutual love" and "goodwill," two marks of friendship as such. The Scriptural clue that we should understand the *communicatio* of blessedness as a basis for friendship, as something upon which a friendship is "founded" (*fundatur*), is given in the argument *sed contra*, which cites John 15: "Now I will not call you servants, but my friends" (23.1 sc).

The claim that friendship is a model of the love between God and human beings pervades the remainder of *QdeC*. Thomas takes "charity is a certain friendship with man and God" as a starting point, one whose full meaning must unfold gradually. So, for example, while it is appropriate to begin with the idea that charity is a certain friendship based on "the noble" (*honestum*)—and so corresponds to one of Aristotle's three forms of friendship—the friendship's basis is not merely an datum of human experience. It is based on no limited goodness, such as what might exist between two human beings, but on "eternal blessedness" (*beatitudo aeterna*) (23.5). In the next Question, we learn that the sharing of eternal beatitude is not constrained by natural goods, but occurs "according to gifts freely given," ensuring that those who have charity do so "only by an infusion of the Holy Spirit" (24.2). This implies that charity, as a communication of blessedness, is also a participation in the love that occurs fully in the love between the Father and the Son—the complete love which *is* the Holy Spirit. In this way, Thomas moves from an easily accessible starting point (charity as friendship) to a more metaphysical or theological formulation (charity as human participation in Trinitarian love). The Questions progressively qualify and enrich the starting point, without negating it.

How does charity as friendship appear from Balthasar's perspective? The notion that charity is friendship, or can even be compared to friendship, does not make a single appearance in *Love Alone*. It is not too much to infer that Balthasar rejects Thomas's starting point. But why? What makes the principle "charity is a certain friendship" so unpalatable to Balthasar, so apparently foreign to his pedagogy? Balthasar agrees that the love between God and human beings has two important features in common with the highest

Thomas Aquinas: Questions on Love and Charity, trans. Robert Miner, with interpretive essays by Mark Jordan, Dominic Doyle, Sheryl Overmyer and Jeffrey Bernstein.

https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12087 Published online by Cambridge University Press

friendships—namely, intimacy and reciprocity. Though wholly other, the "majesty of absolute love" is such that "in revealing itself [it] comes to meet man, brings him back, invites him in and raises him to an inconceivable intimacy" (48). Such intimacy seems to imply reciprocity. As Balthasar notices, the Gospel of John "emphasizes the reciprocal character almost to the point of exclusion (John 13:34–35; 15:12–13,17)—in contradistinction to the synoptics, who seem to stress love of one's enemies, a love squandered where there is no response" (95). But this reciprocity does not impel Balthasar to consider charity as a kind of friendship. Why not?

To describe charity as friendship seems to imply its basic continuity with other loves. For Balthasar, what must be emphasized is the radical discontinuity. To describe divine love according to the familiar phenomenon of friendship risks obscuring the "total otherness of the appearance of the love of God" (46). Balthasar wants to ensure that we do not confuse divine love with any other love, "however absolute and personal" (46–47). In beginning the treatment of charity with the principle that charity is a certain friendship, Thomas starts with what is familiar, perhaps to secure the plausibility of divine love. Balthasar rejects any strategy of this type.

> "The plausibility of divine love is not illumined by reducing it to and comparing it with what man has always recognized as love. Its plausibility comes only from the form of the revelation itself. This form is so majestic that, without expressly demanding it, its perception exacts from the beholder the attitude of adoration"(47).

It is not that Thomas fails to notice the discontinuity. At 23.5 ad 3 he acknowledges that "human friendship, of which the Philosopher is speaking, has a different end and a different sharing" from the *caritas* that is *amicitia divina*. But for Balthasar this would not emphasize the matter sufficiently. He fears, in a way that Thomas does not, that to describe charity as friendship is to lower divine love to the human plane. This would be to deny "the majesty of absolute love—the central phenomenon of revelation" (47).

If charity is not appropriately described in terms of friendship, can it nonetheless be called a virtue? In Question 23 Thomas moves from the proposal that charity is a friendship to the position that charity is a virtue (Article 3) and even a particular virtue, a *virtus specialis* (Article 4). He is aware that this claim is problematic, as we can see from the argument advanced by the second objector at 23.4: "What extends to the works of all the virtues cannot be a special virtue. But charity extends to the works of all the virtues, according to 1 Corinthians 13: 'Charity is patient, charity is kind' etc" (23.4 arg 2). But he does not see any conflict between charity's universality of extension and its status as a particular virtue. Instead, he argues from the distinctiveness of charity's object—the divine good, God

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himself—to the distinctiveness of the virtue. We must speak of charity as a *virtus specialis*, not because its object is particular, but because its object is like no other. To say that *caritas* is a "special virtue" does not, then, mean that it is one virtue among others. On the contrary, it is the virtue on which all other virtues somehow depend (see 23.4 ad 1).

That charity's object is like no other, Balthasar would not dispute. *Love Alone* teems with assertions about the stark otherness of the appearance of divine love. What Balthasar wants to resist is the move from the distinctiveness of charity's object to its status as a particular virtue. This resistance is evident in a passage that speaks not of the virtue of love, but of the "'virtue' of love" (90). The scare quotes, appearing in this passage and one other (see 104), signal that talk about charity as a particular virtue should be regarded with suspicion. In the passage quoted above, Thomas notes language from the New Testament suggesting that charity is not a particular virtue. But what Thomas wants to neutralize, Balthasar seeks to emphasize. "That is the language of the New Testament: love is not just *one* of the divine attributes, any more than man's answering love is *one* of the Virtues" (49). Scripture points away from the supposition that charity is a particular virtue, one among others. To speak of charity as *a* virtue seems to imply that it is something that a person can either possess or not possess. According to Balthasar, it is better to say that charity possesses a person, rather than a person possesses charity. To suppose the latter is already to take a step toward the conclusion that man is the "organizing controlling centre" from which other principles are derived. On the contrary, if "God remains the centre and man is related to something outside himself," then man "only 'has' this love in so far as it 'possesses' him, that is to say he does not have it as a possession over which he has control, or which he can point to as one of his powers" (108).[13]

Balthasar is expressively silent on the relation of charity to friendship. He directly contests the description of charity as "a virtue." What of the third salient characteristic of *caritas*—that charity is the "form of the virtues"? Here Balthasar and Thomas seem to overlap. "Both Thomist and Augustinian," Balthasar says, "agree that '*caritas forma virtutum*' is the fundamental principle of Christian ethics" (90). Where does Balthasar stand in relation to "Thomist" and "Augustinian"? In light of his divergence from Thomas, as we have seen it so far, we might expect Balthasar to understand the

[13] What would Thomas make of Balthasar's claim that to speak of charity as "a" virtue implies our ability to "possess" charity, and so stand above it? He is aware of the problem; he even builds it into the very dialectic by which he establishes that charity is a virtue. Though charity is an "accidental habit," it is nonetheless "worthier than the soul, so far as it is a certain participation in the Holy Spirit" (23.3 ad 3).

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principle in an "Augustinian" fashion. Perhaps surprisingly, Balthasar violates this expectation. The relation between the natural virtues and charity, he proposes, may be "taken in a more negative sense, as by St. Augustine in the *Civitas Dei* (where love is the only necessary form)." Alternatively, it can be "given a more positive sense (as the fulfillment of preceding forms)" (106). The latter appears to be the "Thomist" option, as *QdeC* 23.8 readily confirms. Charity can be "called" (*dicitur*) the form of the virtues, Thomas argues, but only after one has excluded other possible senses that "form" might take (exemplary form, essential form, material cause). Charity is not so much a "form" in any standard sense as it is a formative power. It "gives" form to the other virtues by ordering their acts and ends to the *finis ultimus,* the "enjoyment of God" (*Dei fruitio*). This conception appears to harmonize with Balthasar, who declines to follow Augustinian redescriptions of the natural virtues as splendid vices.[14] Rather, he urges his readers not to "overlook the virtues which can be derived from natural religion and *pietas* towards God," e.g. the four "cardinal virtues." About these virtues, Balthasar declares: "Christianity leaves them of course unquestioned, and the Christian is simply called upon to fulfill them beyond measure" (107). The invitation to leave these virtues "of course unquestioned" is difficult to reconcile with an Augustinian suspicion that beneath the glittering appearance of natural virtues lurks self-aggrandizing *cupiditas*. If Balthasar prefers the Thomist option over the Augustinian, as he seems to in this case, he is careful to emphasize that the end to which the natural virtues are reordered is infinitely beyond anything the natural virtues can themselves imagine. They will culminate, he writes

> in a standard of judgment which of themselves these virtues could never achieve or grasp, and which therefore appears pure 'foolishness'; the profound sense of this standard must at first seem senseless, in order that its higher sense may be perceived, not through philosophy, but only in faith (107).[15]

Both Balthasar and Thomas stress that the natural virtues are incomplete as long as they remain without an ordering to a supernatural good, which they cannot of themselves grasp. Though Balthasar is not a neo-Thomist,[16] he makes clear that he does not want to be

[14] Augustine himself did not use the phrase "splendid vices," but the phrase has become a *topos* for self-described Augustinians.

[15] Though Balthasar here contrasts philosophy and faith sharply, he contests attempts to construe "faith" and "knowledge" as opposites (*Love Alone*, pp. 114–15). "An attitude of faith is immanent in the attitude of knowledge" (*Theo-Logic*, vol. 1, trans. Adrian J. Walker [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000], p. 260).

[16] Thus Peter Henrici: "He does not understand himself as a 'Thomist' nor does he want to back up his own thought at all costs by means of quotations from Thomas" ("The Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar," 162). See also the insightful article by James

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confused with the confident Augustinian who would establish himself as a judge of natural goodness, as though he has already attained the cardinal virtues and so stands at some height above them.

To return to the opening query of this section: How does Thomas's conception of charity, as elaborated in the *QdeC*, look from Balthasar's perspective? Balthasar implicitly contests the starting point of Thomas's pedagogy—the description of charity as "a certain friendship of man with God." He explicitly opposes the idea that charity is appropriately described as a particular virtue. But he assents to the principle that "charity is the form of the virtues," interpreting it in a manner compatible with Thomas's view that charity brings the acts and ends of the natural virtues to their completion. Our initial perception of the differences separating Thomas and Balthasar seems to have given way to a new perception, one that registers a substantive and significant affinity. But have the differences been adequately canvassed? To address this question, let us consider in more detail the problem, as Balthasar formulates it, of the relation between God's love and the love that human beings experience as "natural."

3. Deepening the critique: absolute love vs. natural love

As we have seen, Balthasar rejects friendship as an appropriate starting point for a discourse on *caritas* that aspires to contemporary relevance. In contrast to Thomas, he begins with the stark otherness of God's love—something whose otherness appears most sharply against the background of a critique of the love that we already know by nature. Natural love does exist. We can readily spot its instances, e.g. "the unpremeditated play of eros; the animal's dedication to its young; the individual's renunciation for the sake of the whole" (51). "Cynical" theories that would simply deny any such thing, reducing every putative instance of natural love to bare egoism, need not be taken seriously—but nor should attempts to make natural love into an absolute, as Balthasar credits Nietzsche with having seen. Natural love, however formidable a power, is but one force among others. As we see in the domains of friendship, erotic love, and the family, it cannot help being countered by "other strong or stronger forces at work, which limit or paralyze the movement of love" (52). Rather than make natural love into an absolute, it is safer to conclude that "the ordinary level of human existence, where man meets man, is a sort of middle one where love and self-interest, love and the absence of love temper one another" (53).

Buckley, "Balthasar's Use of the Theology of Aquinas," *The Thomist* 59 (1995), pp. 517–545. This passage notwithstanding, Buckley argues that Henrici generally "underplays the oppositions between the two" (p. 524).

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Beyond its inherent vulnerability to other forces, natural love has another defect. Though it can be genuinely other-regarding, since it is not universally egoistic in any crude sense, natural love is nonetheless tainted by an ineradicable desire for self-fulfillment. Balthasar calls this deep tendency its "abysmal egoism." "It is when we look on Christ crucified that we realize the abysmal egoism of what we call love" (55). Never purely gratuitous, our natural love is inevitably bound up with our need. We see this with particular clarity, if we measure our natural love against the love displayed by Christ crucified. When we examine ourselves, comparing our love to that of Christ, we cannot escape our "consciousness of failure." "Deep within his heart man knows that he is crippled, corrupt and numbed, that he cannot satisfy any code of love, however vaguely defined" (56).

To know what love is, in its revelation on the Cross, we must experience the infinite chasm separating our love from "absolute love," as Balthasar calls it throughout *Love Alone*.[17] The revelation of absolute love shows a person that "in the light of this love one has never loved" and convinces him that he must "start from the beginning to re-learn what love really is" (51). Rather than construe charity "as a certain friendship of man with God," Balthasar starts with the claim that absolute love is the action of a God who is "totally other." For the person disposed to receive God's love—that is, by renouncing the attempt to imagine God as "some more perfect or complete fulfillment of the cosmos or of man," Balthasar says that "God's action upon him can only appear as the action of a totally-other wisdom and truth" (59). It will strike him as a "shock," a *scandalum* that cannot be assimilated to our notions of love. A person must first be scandalized; he must first experience a "pitfall" that God has prepared for the rational creature. Only then can he possibly see that he lacks real any foothold, any center in his own being.

> Stumbling into the pit, he learns two things: that the love offered him is quite unlike anything he knows as love; and that the scandal exists in order to make him see the uniqueness of this new love—and by its light to reveal and lay bare to him his own love for what it is, lack of love (60).

Our love, however hard it strives to treat other people as ends in themselves, never quite escapes its "abysmal egoism." By the standard of God's love, it is a "lack of love." If our love were to be more

[17] In *Theodramatik* 4, Balthasar takes brief note of Anders Nygren's opposition of *eros* and *agape*, without fundamentally challenging it; instead, he speculates that "the only part of earthly love to survive will be the heavenly love that has become incarnate in it." This is a love "that has become selfless and that loves solely in God" (*Theo-Drama*, Volume 5: *The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998], p. 505).

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than this, it would have to be united to the Cross, becoming entirely self-emptying. For Balthasar, the absolute kenotic love displayed on the Cross provides the standard by which anything else that claims to be love must be measured. To the extent that human love is egoistic or self-interested, it is not love at all. If any doubt remains that *Love Alone* understands genuine love in terms of a radical opposition to egoism, self-love, self-interest, or the satisfaction of a need, one may consider the evidence of multiple passages from the text (in addition to the ones already quoted):

> Neither love in the freedom of its gratuitousness, nor beauty, since it is disinterested, are "products"—least of all of some person's need (45).
>
> In the love of God which man meets in Christ he experiences not only what true love is but also at the same time, and unanswerably, that he, sinner and egoist that he is, has no true love (51).
>
> An egoist must have some notion of love if he is to understand the unselfish love of someone who loves him (61).
>
> The whole purpose of Jesus' teaching, whether direct or indirect, is this self-sacrifice ... the aim of a life spent in self-effacing service to all men (69).
>
> [Prayer] is an act of perfect harmony with love, an act of worship and glorification in which the person loved attempts to make a complete and selfless answer, in order to show that he has understood the divine message (89).
>
> The desire of one and all [of the saints] is only to point away from themselves, and toward love (97).

We are now in a better position to see why *Love Alone* maintains a position of near-silence about Thomas and the *QdeC*. From Balthasar's perspective, Thomas does not pay nearly enough attention to the defining feature of love: its self-effacing, kenotic character. The *QdeC* do not contain a single reference to the Cross. While the passions of human beings are mentioned occasionally, Thomas says nothing in the *QdeC* about the Passion of Christ. There is at least the appearance that "charity in itself," along with its act and effects, and opposed vices, can be understood without any significant attention to the place where Balthasar considers the "*inner* majesty of God's love" to appear. As the unique revelation of absolute love, the Cross is inseparable from the mystery of love—and "the mystery of love must be the centre round which the conceptual apparatus revolves" (86n1). It is not difficult to suppose that in the *QdeC,* Thomas constructs a conceptual apparatus that revolves around a very different

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center. This may explain why Balthasar respects Thomas as a master of concepts, without revering him as one of the "great lovers."[18]

What is the center around which the conceptual apparatus of the *QdeC* revolves? An answer to this question is suggested by 24.8 and 24.9. At 24.8, Thomas distinguishes between three ways in which charity in this life is "completed" (*perfecta*).

1. *Caritas patriae*: charity of the homeland, attained in union with God, and so not possible in this life.
2. A special perfection of *caritas*, possible for a person in this life who devotes himself entirely "to emptying himself for God and divine things, putting everything else aside except as far as the necessity of the present life requires."
3. The perfection common to all who have *caritas*. This occurs when a person "habitually places his whole heart in God, so that he thinks of or wills nothing that is contrary to divine love."

Though (2) may describe some, the few who fully share Paul's "desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ," Thomas supposes that most practicing Christians, so far as they have charity, will fall into (3). Those within (3), he says in the next Article, are either "beginners" or "in progress." *Incipientes* are most concerned to avoid sins; *proficientes* are more solicitous about progressing in the virtues. In addressing the *Summa* as a whole to *incipientes*, Thomas finds himself attending to what he considers the primary need of the beginner. This is "to keep away from sin and to resist his concupiscence, which move him away from charity. And this belongs to beginners, in whom charity should be nourished and fostered, lest it be corrupted" (24.9 co). The entry level, as it were, consists in the vigilant avoidance of mortal sin, a single instance of which—Thomas holds—suffices to destroy charity. It belongs to the *ratio* of charity that a person "wills to subject himself to God, and to follow the rule of his precepts in everything. For whatever is contrary to his precepts is manifestly contrary to charity" (24.12 co). A mortal sin, one directly opposed to charity, has the power to "shut out" (*excludere*) charity. In voluntarily preferring "sin over divine friendship," a person erects an "obstacle" (*obstaculum*) to the "inflowing of charity from God into the soul" (24.12 co) and thus finds himself separated from God's love.

[18] That Balthasar genuinely respects Thomas is not in question. He knows of no better way to praise Karl Barth than to say that we would "have to go back to Thomas Aquinas to find a similar spirit, one free from the constraints of every tenseness and narrowness, combining superior gifts of understanding with goodness of heart." (*The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992], p. 26). But regarding love, Thomas does not count for Balthasar as one of the highest spirits.

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Avoidance of sin—growth in virtue—union with God. This sequence describes the trajectory of the human being *in via*, who can possess charity, lose it quickly by an act of mortal sin, and possess it again as soon as he repents. This conception of life, apparently presupposed by Thomas in his account of *caritas*, seems to veer close to what Balthasar calls "repose in the ethical domesticity of 'guilt and repentance'" (56). It conceives of divine love as something that we can easily possess and easily lose. The conception is illustrated by Thomas's claim that "Peter, acting against charity, lost charity, but he quickly recovered it" (24.12 ad 2). For Balthasar, this conception places far too much emphasis on our actions, and far too little emphasis on the power of the redemptive act already "accomplished in man by the grace of God" (63). It overlooks a universal truth that applies to any human being: "God has already seen in him the unloving sinner, the child he loves as his son, and it is in the light of his own love that God considers him and confers his dignity upon him" (84). Balthasar does not reject the idea that a person might decisively turn away from God, bound and determined not to love him. He recognizes the tragic possibility that a person might behold absolute love, as revealed on the Cross, and yet engage in "the refusal to recognize the dazzling evidence and to answer the call to self-surrender" (50). But this refusal is something more than having charity, losing it, and acquiring it again. For Balthasar, this aspect of Thomas's conception of charity may well belong to "the ethical domesticity of 'guilt and repentance.'" By inviting a Christian to judge whether or not his particular act has opposed the precepts in such a way that God will withdraw his love—"Since a person does something contrary to charity by sinning mortally, it is worthy that God withdraw charity from him," Thomas writes (24.10 co)—the conception replaces divine love with conformity to the law. In doing so, it risks dissociating *caritas* from the Cross. "For if the Cross is turned into a law which reason can grasp and administer, even an elastic sort of law governing the rhythm of life, then it is once again a *law*—in the Pauline sense—and absolute love is displaced and set aside by knowledge" (114).

Another difference between Thomas's conception of *caritas viae* and Balthasar's "absolute love" is the stance of each toward our natural tendency to love some neighbors over others. From multiple angles, Thomas argues in the middle of *QdeC* 26, we naturally love some of our neighbors—the ones to whom we have a closer connection—more than others. This preference is rooted in our nature, and it reflects a norm that ought to be observed in our acts of loving. The order of charity, as it proceeds from nature itself, is the same as the order observed *in patria*. "Grace and virtue imitate the order of nature, which is set up out of divine wisdom" (31.3 co). Balthasar would contest any such assimilation of the

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natural to what is above nature. Though anything rooted in nature may "display traits similar to the final Christian form, reflecting it in various degrees of clarity," it cannot be forgotten that "an even greater dissimilarity cuts right across that similarity and is shown to us in the acts of the living God, his death on the Cross and resurrection" (106). Thomas affirms this greater dissimilarity in the brief remarks about analogy that appear very early in the *Summa* (see 1a 4.3 and 13.5). But from Balthasar's perspective, he has forgotten the lesson by the time he writes the 2a2ae. His grasp of the relevant dissimilarities in the domain of loving is shaky at best.

Why is this? What causes Thomas to assimilate charity, even in the *patria*, to natural and human modes of loving? In part, Balthasar might say, the assimilation occurs because Thomas does not derive his conception of love from its exemplary cause in the Trinity. Instead, he fuses an Aristotelian concept of friendship with a Platonic notion of participation, without according primacy to the Trinity in his theology of *caritas*. It is not that the *QdeC* never mention the Trinity. There are occasional references. Perhaps the most striking occurs at 24.2, when Thomas holds that *caritas* comes into man "only by an infusion of the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son, whose participation in us is created charity itself." But no reader of the *QdeC* will confuse Thomas's procedure with one that *begins* from the insight that "the Trinity is the only doctrine to assert" love as an absolute (72).[19] From Balthasar's point of view, anything worth calling love is essentially kenotic, and so connected intrinsically to the Trinity.[20] "For it is precisely in the kenosis of Christ (and nowhere else) that the *inner* majesty of God's love appears, of God who 'is

[19] Of the "three central theological tractates," Balthasar claims, *De deo trino* (as he calls it) "gave Thomas an excellent formal training" but had "no further role to play in shaping the course of his *Summa*." What Balthasar takes to be "theology's *propria principia*"— the Trinity, Christ, and the Church—had, he claims, "little structuring impact in his theology" (*The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 263). Balthasar's assumption that the entrance of Christ is not crucial for the structure of the *Summa*, and therefore for Thomas's thinking as a whole, is highly questionable. Similarly problematic is the unqualified assertion that Thomas "emphasizes thinking from below up" and that he presents us with "a methodology that is predominantly philosophical, whose use in theology is quite limited" (*The Theology of Karl Barth*, pp. 263–64). One might also mention the questionability of describing sections of the *Summa* as "tractates."

[20] By the time he comes to write *Theodramatik* 3, Balthasar pushes kenosis as far back as possible within the life of the Trinity. "It is possible to say, with Bulgakov, that the Father's self-utterance in the generation of the Son is an initial 'kenosis' within the Godhead that underpins all subsequent kenosis. For the Father strips himself, without remainder, of his Godhead and hands it over to the Son; he 'imparts' to the Son all that is his" (*Theo-Drama*, vol. 4: *The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994], p. 323). For useful commentary on this aspect of Balthasar, see Wolfgang Treitler, "True Foundations of Authentic Theology," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and Work*, pp. 171–73; Rowan Williams, "Balthasar on the Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, pp. 38–42; Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 99–100 and 119.

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love' (1 John 4.8) and therefore a trinity" (71). Because Thomas fails to begin with the triune God, his thoughts about *caritas* will be only a weak expression of "absolute love." For this reason, he does not rank highly among the saints whose words on love "must be listened to."

4. Balthasar's conception of love, seen from Thomas's perspective

We have sought to explicate the critique of Thomas that *Love Alone* implies. It is impossible to say exactly what Thomas would make of this critique. But the *QdeC* does give ample indication about what Thomas thinks about Balthasar's evident preference for defining *caritas* in radical opposition to self-love. To reiterate a point in common: both Thomas and Balthasar accord Scripture the first rank among textual precedents. It is strange, therefore, to discover that *Love Alone* does not once quote—or even allude to—the Gospel passages that Thomas takes to be central for understanding the relations between love of God, love of self, and love of neighbor. These are Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31, and Luke 10:27. In the middle of the *QdeC*'s treatment of the "order of charity," Thomas quotes the passage from Matthew, as well as its antecedent in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If Thomas were able to read *Love Alone*, he would surely wonder at its failure to mention these loci.

In the order of charity, God comes first. Nothing can take precedence over the activity of loving God. To be sure, the "inclination of our affections to visible goods" makes this difficult for us, but it is nonetheless possible for someone in whom charity has been infused (24.2 ad 2). Any such love of God is necessarily accompanied by love of neighbor. "For we love our neighbor and God insofar as we love this—that we love God in our neighbor. This is to have charity" (25.2 ad 1). It is not that love of God can be identified with love of neighbor, even if both are indeed acts "of the same species" (25.1 co). This would presume that God and neighbor were equally objects of charity, a presumption that Thomas rejects. "God is the principal object of charity, whereas our neighbor is loved out of charity on account of God" (23.5 ad 1). To love God—to really love God, as distinct from merely professing a love of God—one must love one's neighbor, a category that embraces one's brothers, family, friends, and enemies (see 25.8).[21]

To love God, you must love your neighbor. Suppose that a precondition of loving your neighbor is loving yourself. If this supposition is granted, then it follows that to love God, you must love yourself. Would Thomas grant the supposition? He would not only grant it; he would insist upon it. We can see this from examining his use of

[21] Compare Karl Barth: "A love of God which does not involve also the required love of the neighbor is not the required love of God" (*Church Dogmatics* IV/2 §68, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance [Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1958], p. 732).

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a claim that Aristotle makes in Book 9 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "friendly sentiments for another arise from friendly sentiments for oneself" (*NE* 9.4 1166a1; 9.8 1168b5). Thomas deploys this maxim at *QdeC* 25.4, asking whether someone can love himself out of charity. The love that we bear ourselves is not merely the love that we bear toward a friend. The bond present in friendship-love is "union" (*unio*), which arises from a deeper bond with ourselves, "unity" (*unitas*). The unity with our own substance is self-love, in a sense deeper than union with another. Such unity seems to differ from charity, since charity is a friendship, and we do not have friendship with ourselves, in the strict sense. But self-love nonetheless falls under charity. We see this, Thomas argues, when we move from considering "the general aspect of friendship" to charity

> according to its own proper aspect, namely as the friendship of human beings with God principally, and consequently with the things that are of God. Among these things is man himself, who has charity. Thus among the other things that he loves out of charity, as belonging to God, he loves himself out of charity (25.4).

That one must love oneself in order to love one's neighbor, and to love God, Thomas takes to be clear. But this is not so much to solve a problem as to raise a question. Just what does it mean to "love oneself" in this particular sense? In *Love Alone*, Balthasar simply omits to ask the question. From Thomas's standpoint, any such omission is a failure. Since self-love is a prerequisite for love of God and neighbor, the question is not peripheral but of the first importance. Instead of facing the question, Balthasar merely stresses that in emptying himself on the Cross, Jesus gives himself completely in obedience to the Father, with no thought of what is good for himself—and that we should strive to imitate this "absolute love." He never asks whether there is a type of self-love, a care for one's own good, that is ultimately distinguishable from "egoism." Instead, he suggests that the Cross exposes our own love as egoism, and therefore "lack of love" (60). Thomas, by contrast, takes seriously the notion that we should look for a sense of "loving oneself" that is not merely compatible with loving God and neighbor, but actually *necessary* for doing so.

What does it mean to love oneself, in the proper sense? Thomas raises the question at *QdeC* 25.7, contrasting the love sinners bear themselves with another type of self-love. Everyone, sinner or not, loves "that which he deems (*aestimat*) himself to be." But "evil men esteem (*aestimant*) principally in themselves sensitive and bodily nature, namely the outer man." This self-estimation is an error, overlooking as it does what Paul calls the "inner man" (in 2 Corinthians 4). Thomas identifies the inner man with *mens rationalis*, "the primary thing in man." The substitution of the secondary for the

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primary, the outer for the inner, the sensitive for the rational, has a consequence for those who consent to it.

> Evil men esteem principally in themselves sensitive and bodily nature, namely the outer man. So that not rightly knowing themselves, they do not truly love themselves, but rather love that which they deem themselves to be. But good men, truly knowing themselves, truly love themselves (25.7 co).

Thomas construes the Pauline inner man/outer man distinction in a way that enables him to describe self-love in its true sense.[22] True self-love occurs when the lover regards the sentiments that a virtuous person has for his friend as a pattern for the friendly sentiments that he has for his inner man. Good human beings who love themselves do so with respect to the inner man in five ways, Thomas says, drawing from Book 9 of Aristotle's *Ethics* (1166a3–10). They (1) "wish him to be preserved in his wholeness"; (2) "wish good things for him, which are spiritual goods"; (3) "give themselves over to pursuing works"; (4) "return pleasurably to their own heart"; (5) derive pleasure from the harmony between "good thoughts in the present, the memory of good things in the past, and the hope for good things in the future." After listing these five ways in which good human beings love themselves, Thomas adds: "Likewise they do not suffer dissension of the will in themselves, since their whole soul tends toward one thing" (25.7 co).

In tending toward one thing, the inner man loves God above all else. This love of God enables him to love himself in the five ways mentioned. These in turn indicate the manner in which he loves his neighbor, bearing the same love for her that he bears the inner man. In other words, he loves his neighbor as he loves himself. This is what Thomas describes at *QdeC* 26 as the "order of charity" (*ordo caritatis*)—love of God, love of self, love of neighbor. In this *ordo*, there is no room for the opposition between "absolute love" and "love of self" rightly understood. Only a parody of self-love, the self-love that occurs "according to the corruption of the outer man," would introduce this tension. This is a counterfeit of genuine self-love, since it despises "the primary thing in man," the "rational mind." The *mens rationalis* is the privileged point at which the Holy Spirit meets man, so that he may participate in charity. This participation can overflow into the body, so that one also loves one's bodily nature out of charity, as Thomas argues (25.5 co; 25.12 ad 2). But if we are presented with the alternative of choosing between our bodily

[22] The inner man/outer man distinction of 2 Corinthians 4 is foundational for Luther's 1520 text *Christian Liberty*. Like Thomas, Luther links spiritual health to the resolute subordination of the outer man to the inner man. Unlike Thomas, he does not identify this subordination with an appropriate love of self.

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good and our neighbor's spiritual good, charity demands that we opt unhesitatingly for the latter (26.5). To that extent, love is kenotic. We must at times sacrifice our own bodily good for that of our neighbor. But not even our neighbor's spiritual good can be pursued at the expense of our own spiritual good.

> Just as unity is superior to union, so the fact that a man himself participates in the divine good is a better reason for loving (*ratio diligendi*) than the fact that he is associated with another in this participation. And so a person should, out of charity, love himself more than his neighbor. A sign of this is that a person should not lower himself to some evil that belongs to sin—which is opposed to his participation in blessedness—so that he may free his neighbor from sin (26.4 co).

As the phrase *ratio diligendi* indicates, love for Thomas is never sheerly gratuitous, at least for created beings. There is always a reason for loving. This reason can be described only in reference to some good, connected to what fulfills or completes the lover and the beloved. From Thomas's perspective, later speech about the utter "whylessness" of love is difficult to understand. Balthasar, by contrast, is far more sympathetic to this discourse. "God is 'the Whyless,'" he writes, expounding Eckhart. "The only thing worthy of God and appropriate to Him is what takes place 'whylessly' as a free act of homage."[23] Balthasar's emphasis on love's spontaneity and gratuity, with no qualifications that might arise from meditation on Biblical commands to love your neighbor as yourself—or from reflection on Aristotle's remarks on the positive relations between self-love and love of another—indicates a profound difference between his approach and that of Thomas.

5. Thomas or Balthasar Alone?

In constructing a dialogue on love between Thomas Aquinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar, I have emphasized the divergences between the two. This is partly to heed Nietzsche's warning: "Those who want to mediate between two resolute thinkers show that they are mediocre; they lack eyes for seeing what is unique. Seeing things as similar and making things the same is the sign of weak eyes."[24]

[23] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age,* trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil C.R.V, John Saward and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p. 31. For suggestions aimed at bringing "whylessness" closer to an understanding shared by Thomas, see Adrian Walker, "Hans Urs von Balthasar as a Master of Theological Renewal," *Communio* 32 (2005), p. 534.

[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* §228, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 212.

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Accordingly, I have sought to discern the main points at which the perspectives of each thinker differ. To discern these points, however, and to acknowledge the impossibility of fully harmonizing the perspectives, does not imply that we must choose between them. Nor does it suggest that we must reject both in favor of some third perspective. On the contrary, we need to see what can be seen from each viewpoint. What we need to see depends on our particular condition and temptation.

If we are influenced by a particular strand of post-Reformation theology, we might harbor a deep prejudice against loving ourselves. We have heard that we should love spontaneously, without constraint.[25] Accordingly, we may suppose that any regard for our own needs is a constraint, if not *the* constraint, that prevents us from loving others. The best way to free ourselves from this constraint, we sometimes think, is not to love ourselves. But can any real love of God and neighbor take root in this soil? Carl Jung astutely asks:

> If anyone tells me that he loves me more than he loves himself and wants to sacrifice himself, I say: what does it cost?—what do you want afterwards? For afterwards a long account will be presented. Nature will present it because it is not unselfish; there is no such thing as unselfishness in that sense. But if you can love yourself, you will be on the way to unselfishness.[26]

We should be suspicious of a degraded "altruism," decking itself out in the robes of 1 Corinthians 13:5, that claims to love the neighbor and hate oneself. As Jung remarks, "it is a sort of neurotic late-Christian prejudice that you should not love yourself."[27] The perspective of Thomas Aquinas is still necessary, because it points to a radically different understanding of charity, one that declines the temptation to ground love of God and neighbor in self-hatred. It goes further, offering a positive conception of self-love, one whose deployment of the Pauline distinction between the outer man and the inner man suffices to distinguish it from calculating egoism. These advantages of Thomas's conception should not be understood as warrant for a Thomist triumphalism. On the contrary, Thomas's perspective is necessarily limited in ways that Balthasar helps us to see. Thomas's treatment of charity includes many things. Among them are some that tend to nourish "religion" at the expense of love. They stress

[25] See Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 22.

[26] C.G. Jung, *Nietzsche's* Zarathustra: *Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934–1939*, ed. James L. Jarrett, vol.1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 100.

[27] Jung, *Nietzsche's* Zarathustra, p. 102.

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what Barth trenchantly calls the "puppet sins with which we torment ourselves," as distinct from the sin of which Paul speaks.[28]

If we are susceptible to a legalistic approach to Christianity, all too prone to the "ethical domesticity of 'guilt and repentance,'" we need to see God's love from the perspective that Balthasar constructs—or one very much like it. In an age when many are beholden to a particular formula or style of worship, another approach is required.[29] Whatever is true of Thomas himself, Balthasar was correct to think that the multiple versions of Thomas, as handed down by the tradition, did not do nearly enough to diagnose and challenge our tendency to assimilate divine love to more familiar loves, human and natural. Against these assimilations, Balthasar felt himself obliged to assert the radical nature of absolute love as "an incomprehensible epitome of the totally-other God" (82), here taking Barth rather than Aquinas as his master.

To say that we need the perspectives of both Thomas and Balthasar is to doubt that the differences can be resolved in some third perspective that absorbs them both. Reflecting on the differences reminds us of a persistent difficulty. The Christian is obliged to speak of *both* self-emptying and self-fulfillment, of *kenosis* and *eudaimonia*. To speak of these in the same breath is necessary and impossible. The paradox is internal to Christian reflection. It can never finally be eliminated. In this respect, the theologian of the Word, no matter how subtle or how ingenious, never does get beyond the words of Christ: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).

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[28] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1978), p. 118.

[29] See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* §94 (London: CTS, 2013), p. 54.

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