



FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

1986 | Vol. XII, No. 2

THOMISTIC EVALUATION OF LOVE AND CHARITY

Jordan Aumann, O.P.

We are pleased to offer to our readers this essay by Fr. Aumann which sets forth the penetrating insights of the Common Doctor on the nature of human love and that divine love which is charity. (The article originally appeared in the Angelicum, the journal of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome.) Since today there is a great deal of talk about love but very little understanding, we believe Fr. Aumann's clear insights to be very timely.



WE LEARN FROM BOTH SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY THAT LOVE IS THE VERY ESSENCE and core of Christian spirituality, but we know from both experience and observation that frequently there is a conflict or tension among the various levels of love. It seems, as Jean Guitton has remarked, “as if nature had both desired to summon man to love and, at the same time, allowed him to be prevented from loving.”¹ Long before Christianity expounded the notion of the radical conflict between the flesh and the spirit, the Greek philosopher Plotinus had described love’s warfare in terms of a team of horses pulling in opposite directions. St. Paul and St. Augustine readily come to mind as proponents of this same teaching which emphasizes the struggle among the various levels of love.

Unfortunately, the distinction was gradually proposed as a necessary separation and the struggle was explained in terms of an irreconcilable opposition. Once this was done, the Christian was placed in the frustrating position of choosing between two worlds—that of the spirit or that of the flesh—even when he was convinced, both by reason and by revelation, that somehow the world of matter and flesh did not have to be branded as evil and pitted against the world of the spirit.

“Perhaps it has not been sufficiently noted”, says Jean Guitton, “that there is in Christianity another current of thought which has not had the good fortune to find interpreters as popular as St. Paul When one deals with love from the point of view of the moralist one can hardly avoid the idea of safeguarding morality. From this angle it is well to insist on the conflicts; but that has the effect of infecting words with a contrary adverse significance. Thus, the word flesh will not readily recover from the sombre sense given it by St. Paul. St. John, however, did not follow St. Paul in this respect; for him, since the Word made his abode in it, the flesh was a neutral, not a damnable, element.”² The truth of the matter is that both in the Old and the New Testament we find a much more positive and unified anthropology of love. The Old Testament does not speak of the body and the soul as distinct elements. The body is always the human, the animated body.³ And in the New Testament we have the mandate of Christ to love God with our whole heart, our whole soul, and with all our mind and strength (Mk 10:30). Christ calls for a truly human love, a love that includes the emotions as well as the spiritual love of the human will. We are to love God with our whole being.

Nevertheless, in view of man’s complex nature, there is a tendency to equate love with only part of that nature—either the physical or the spiritual. This is readily evident, for example, in the case of the sensate person whose

experience of love is restricted to the physical order, the self-centered person whose love is strictly utilitarian, or the individual who denies the existence of the transcendental order of the spiritual and is therefore left with only the lowest level of love. It is likewise evident in those persons who, in the name of Christianity and out of an irrational fear, have repressed the somatic aspects of love. Yet the sacred writers frequently symbolized the holiest kind of love with descriptions of marital love and union, as we see in the prophet Hosea, the Song of Songs, and St. Paul's well-known comparison of Christ's love for the Church with a man's love for his wife.

A similar dichotomy has frequently been established between the love of God and the love of self and of neighbor. The moralist and many spiritual writers concentrate almost exclusively on the love of God as the basis of Christian living. Modern humanists and many psychologists urge a more authentic love and empathy for one's fellow-man. But Christ gave the mandate to love both God and neighbor and as a single experience of love (Mk 12: 28-31). Hence, "to love another, God or man, is a single operation based upon a single psychodynamic principle-seeing the other as worthy of love ... Love, whether of God or man, is a single therapeutic power; it has a single function."²⁴

In order to correct the exaggerated separation that has been postulated among the various levels of love and between the love of God and of neighbor, it is necessary to examine the psychic factors that are involved in the experience and practice of love. It is extremely important to understand the structure and modality of human love if one is to grasp the meaning of the love that is charity. Otherwise the exhortations to love God and one another will be meaningless and one type of love will be overemphasized while the other is ignored, if not condemned, directly or indirectly.

LOVE IN GENERAL

It is axiomatic in psychology that all our knowledge of external reality comes to us through the senses. This sense knowledge, in turn, normally stimulates the activity of our affections so that we experience an at-

traction for what pleases us and an aversion for what displeases us. If the experience is a pleasurable one, we react with a complacency or attraction to the stimulation object. The intensity of the experience will vary according to the object itself, the degree of sensate stimulation, or the habits, moods, temperament and tastes of the individual. Every person is naturally drawn to that which pleases him, and this attraction is given the name of love.

But human life comprises three different levels—the vegetative, the sensate, and the rational, which is distinctively human. Consequently, the human person is able to experience the complacency or movement of love on any one of these levels, thus giving rise to the threefold classification of love by the psychologists. But it should be noted immediately that although there are three kinds of love and at a given moment an individual may experience one to the exclusion of the others, the experience will always be colored by the fact that the human person is a composite of body and soul, of flesh and spirit. For that reason the activity and enjoyment of love on the vegetative or sensate levels are not experienced by a human being in exactly the same way that they are experienced by an animal. Nevertheless, in analyzing and explaining

love, it is necessary to divide and explain it in its threefold classification, bearing in mind that we divide only to unite.

Physical love. St. Thomas does not hesitate to give the name of love to every attraction that draws one being to another, even on the strictly physical or biological level. His reasoning is as follows:

Natural things desire what is in conformity to their nature Now, in every appetite or desire, love is the principle of the movement that tends toward the end which is loved. In *natural appetite* the principle of such movement is the connaturality that exists between the one who desires and the end to

which he tends. We might call it natural love.⁵

Natural love is nothing more than the fundamental inclination which is stamped upon every being by the Author of nature.⁶



Aquinas

It follows from the foregoing that natural love is not only the inclination of a being toward its end or good, but it is the principle of every movement toward the end. Moreover, everything in nature-including rational being-manifests this tendency toward the end or goal in which it achieves its perfection, and both the tendency and the goal have been posited by the Creator. The psychologist identifies this natural love or appetite with the instinctual urge that prompts living things to seek their well-being as individuals (as in the case of nutrition) and as members of a species (as in the case of reproduction). For the theologian, however, although the natural appetite loves and finds pleasure in the satisfaction of instinctual needs, by its nature it extends beyond them to the ultimate end and good. As St. Thomas has stated: "In the love of every good it is the Sovereign Good that is loved."⁸ Jean Mouroux comments on this statement:

Every created good is at the same time both a likeness of God and a definite fulfillment for our desire; to desire it is to desire simultaneously the perfection it possesses and the divine likeness; to possess it is simultaneously to fulfill our own being and our likeness to God. Simultaneously; but an ontological priority has to be observed. Every perfection acquired supposes a principle of perfection, namely, the good; every good attracts only in virtue of, and in the measure of, its likeness to God. We must therefore say: it is because we love God that we love all else It is indeed the love of God that stirs up men to action, and if they love and seek their ends it is because first they love and desire, with a natural movement of desire, the God who created them and recalls them to himself.⁹

Unfortunately, because of the wounds inflicted on human nature by original sin, the inner integrity of the human person is not easily maintained. Rather, the same forces that effect the well-being and preservation of the individual can upset the inner order to the point of destruction of the equilibrium of the person. The reason for this, as St. Thomas points out, is that the instinctual forces for self-preservation pertain to the very essence of man.¹⁰ Consequently, they must be controlled and properly directed by the special virtue of temperance, and this means that the individual should satisfy his body needs without concentrating too exclusively and too selfishly on the satisfaction and pleasure of those needs. In this regard, Joseph Pieper offers some valuable insights:

For since the first sin man has been not only capable of loving himself more than he loves God his Creator but, contrary to his own nature, inclined to do so. The discipline of temperance defends him against all selfish perversion of the inner order, through which alone the moral person exists and lives effectively

The natural urge toward sensual enjoyment, manifested in delight in food and drink and sexual pleasure, is the echo and mirror of man's strongest natural forces of self-preservation. The basic forms of enjoyment correspond to these most primordial forces of being But for the very reason that these forces are closely allied to the deepest human urge toward being, they exceed all other powers of mankind in their destructive violence once they degenerate into selfishness.¹¹



Emotional love. When defining and describing the emotions, psychologists usually emphasize two aspects of emotional experience: sensate knowledge of an object evaluated as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, beneficial or harmful to the percipient; and a reaction in the psychosomatic structure as a result of this evaluation. Involving as they do both sensate knowledge and an organic reaction, the emotions are common to both human beings and animals, but with this difference: the emotional reaction in a human being normally involves some degree of participation by the intellect and the will-antecedently, concomitantly or consequently.

The emotion of love (also called affection, need-love, sensate love, selfish love) is a movement of complacency toward an object evaluated as good and pleasing to the percipient. On the emotional level the good is always loved and desired in terms of the individual self because the emotions are by their very nature self-centered. It is only when the intellect and will intervene that emotional love can be directed or sublimated to a higher level or to something other than the self.

Since emotional love is of its nature self-centered, the moralist may be tempted to brand it as "mere selfishness" and therefore something to be avoided or sup-

pressed. “We must be cautious”, says C.S. Lewis, “about calling need-love (the emotion of love) ‘mere selfishness’. Mere is always a dangerous word. No doubt, need-love, like all our impulses, can be selfishly indulged Where need-love is felt, there may be reasons for denying or totally mortifying it; but not to feel it is in general the mark of the cold egoist. Since we do in reality need one another. ...,the failure of this need to appear as need-love in consciousness . . . is a bad spiritual symptom.”¹²

The truth of the matter is that emotional love is both natural and morally good when rightly used or enjoyed. Considered in itself, emotional love, like all the emotions, is morally indifferent and it is therefore erroneous and misleading to make a moral judgment on emotional love considered in the abstract. Whether they are aware of it or not, when persons experience truly human love there is always a movement of both the emotion of love and volitional love. This is so because the person always reacts as a whole human being, a composite of body and soul. It is the single self that loves, and therefore even our love for God, experienced as it is in our human personhood, should also encompass emotional love. As we have already noted, Christ appealed not only to the mind and will, but to the heart and feelings. C.W. Baars explains why purely spiritual or volitional love without any resonance in the emotion of love is not a truly human love:

Our love of God and man has to be truly a love of our whole being, including our sensitive being. This means that our sense appetite has to be stimulated also by the object of our love. If our feeling is not moved by the object and only our will is directed in love to this object, our love is incomplete, imperfect and falls short of the manner in which God wants us to love him and our fellow human beings Compared with the volitional love, our emotion of love is only secondary, accidental; it does not determine the essence of our being, our spirituality. But this does not mean that emotional love is something unnecessary, something we can do equally well without. On the contrary, even though emotional love belongs to another order, it is as much a part of a human being as is the will. Love without emotional love is incomplete, defective. Emotional love belongs to the perfection of man’s nature.¹³

The psychological explanation of the necessity of the emotion of love lies in the fact that the human being

can only establish contact with the good or object that is loved through the medium of the external and internal senses. But volitional love as such cannot be perceived by these senses directly; it must be manifested in a way that can be sensed. Here it should be noted once again that in view of our nature, wounded by original sin and therefore basically self-centered, emotional love all too easily becomes totally selfish and therefore threatens to be destructive of the personality. The control by reason is always necessary, as St. Thomas states in the dictum: “*Appetitus sensitivus in nobis natus est obedire rationi.*”¹⁴

However, extremes must be avoided. The controlling action by reason should never go so far as to become repression, for that is the path to neurosis. On the other hand, one must adjust the experience and expression of emotional love to the circumstances, and that is the function of the virtue of *prudence*.

From what has been stated, it follows that the well-regulated emotion of love is the foundation and source for love on the higher level of the will. This may at first seem a contradiction, since all emotions are by definition self-centered. Nevertheless, in answering the query whether love can be divided into love-of-friendship and love-of-desire, St. Thomas does not hesitate to state that when the movement of love is to the good thing that is desired, the love is called love-of-desire (*amor amicitiae*). But in using the term “*amor amicitiae*”, St. Thomas is not referring to friendship as such nor to the mutual benevolent love between friends; he is simply applying the principle that faculties and their operations are specified by their objects, and then stating that the things or objects we love are loved with a concupiscible love or love-of-desire, while loving a thing for a person (whether for oneself or another) is a friendship type of love.¹⁵

As regards the modality or movement of love, St. Thomas states that whatever is loved with the love-of-friendship (*amor amicitiae*) is loved *simpliciter et per se*, but the movement of *amor amicitiae* may be directed to oneself or to another person. The object that is loved as a good for someone is loved not *simpliciter et secundum se*, but only *secundum quid*.¹⁶ This is in accord with the principle enunciated by Aristotle: *amare est velle alicui bonum*¹⁷ and it seems to resolve the apparent contradiction between emotional love and the love-of-friendship. Since love-of-friendship (*amor amicitiae*) loves the good for a person (either oneself or another), the emotional love by which an individual loves a good for himself is in that

respect love-of-friendship (*amor amicitiae*).¹⁸ This is another reason, then, why one must beware of branding all emotional love as purely selfish in a pejorative sense, or as unworthy of the human person.

Subjectively, however, it is possible to distort the proper order of love, either by loving things as values in themselves and thus terminating love's movement in them, or by loving the person (self or another) as a "thing" and thus allowing *amor concupiscentiae* to usurp the place of *amor amicitiae*. St. Thomas was well aware of this possible distortion of love, for he states that in friendships based on pleasure or utility, a man does indeed wish some good to his friend and in this respect preserves the character of friendship, but since he then refers this good to his own pleasure or utility, the friendship, to the extent that it consists in love-of-desire (*amor concupiscentiae*), falls short of true friendship.¹⁹

Later, when speaking of the ecstasy or transport of love, St. Thomas makes a similar distinction between love-of-desire and love-of-friendship:

As for the appetitive faculties, a person is said to experience ecstasy when the appetite is carried toward something else, going out of itself, so to speak The ecstasy is caused directly by love; by love-of-friendship *simpliciter* and by love-of-desire *secundum quid*. For in love-of-desire the lover is carried out of himself in a certain sense, insofar as not being content with enjoying what is already in his possession, he desires to enjoy something outside himself. But since he seeks to have this extrinsic good for himself, he is not carried outside himself *simpliciter*, but this movement terminates finally within himself. In love-of-friendship, however, a man's affection goes out from itself *simpliciter*, for he wishes some good for his friend and works for it by caring and providing for him for his friend's sake.²⁰

We can summarize the Thomistic teaching on the emotion of love in the following statements: As a sensitive power, the emotion of love is passive; it must be actuated by its proper object, presented by the external and internal senses. When stimulated, the emotion of love, as an appetite, tends toward its object in an ecstatic movement. So far as the love moves toward the object perceived as a good, the movement is one of desire (*amor concupiscentiae*); and since the ecstatic movement of the emotion of love terminates in the lover, assimilating to himself the

object he loves, the emotion of love is by its nature ego-centric and for that reason called a concupiscible appetite (*appetitus concupiscibilis*). Nevertheless, since it is a person for whom the good is loved, albeit the lover himself, the emotion of love can partake somewhat of the character of love-of-friendship.

Fortunately, the emotion of love is only one aspect of human love, and however much the human person, wounded by original sin, may be inclined to purely egoistic love, in the measure that one subordinates this love to the rule of reason he can attain to the perfection of human love which is the love of friendship.

Volitional love. It is only when we rise to the level of man's spiritual faculties - intellect and will - that we discover the love that is properly human: volitional love. It is true, of course, that volitional love can be just as self-centered as natural love or emotional love and, indeed, some things should be loved precisely in that way, but in its perfection, volitional love is a non-possessive, generous, gift-love and is an essential ingredient for friendship.²¹ Even emotional love is elevated to a new level, so to speak, by the intervention of volitional love.

Although some of the sensitive powers are common to us and to brute animals, in us they have a certain excellence through being united to reason; thus, we surpass animals in the sensitive part by possessing the cogitative power and reminiscence, as stated in the First Part (q. 78, a. 4).

In the same way our sensitive appetite surpasses that of the brute animals by reason of a certain excellence which consists in its natural aptitude to obey reason, and in this respect it can be the principle of a voluntary action.²²

The sensitive appetite is also subject to the will: in execution, which is accomplished by the motive power. For in other animals movement follows at once the concupiscible and irascible appetites On the contrary, man is not moved at once by the concupiscible and irascible appetites, but he awaits the command of the will, which is the superior appetite.²³

As regards the person who is loved, volitional love makes it possible for the lover to relate with the other person, not as a thing (with *amor concupiscentiae*), but as a person worthy of love for what he is, which is *amor*

amicitiae. Because volitional love makes it possible to love another person, not primarily for our own fulfillment or pleasure, but for what he is in his unique personhood, “we are forced to recognize that love is not a mere feeling or emotion; nor does it ‘evolve’ from the sex instincts It is only with full consciousness of the spiritual aspects of love that we can understand it as a complex human attitude in which the emotions of affection, attraction and passion are molded into enduring patterns.”²⁴

As regards the one who loves, volitional love enables the lover to go forth in a generous movement of benevolence toward the one who is loved. There is, of course, always the danger of a calculated giving that anticipates the response of the beloved, and this would place volitional love in the category of self-centered love, but the perfection of volitional love is to give love freely - as a gift - without expecting any return. “The loftiest act of love is therefore not in receiving but in giving. There, moreover, lies the difference between love and passion The second stage of love consists in the return of the beloved to the lover. It is the essence of love to be reciprocal.”²⁵

We are born with a need to give and receive love and although we begin chronologically with an emphasis on the need or self aspect of love, as we mature we should develop a love that is outgoing and generous. This means that we should eventually arrive at a love which is true friendship, the mutual benevolent love that is based on the communication or sharing of some good.²⁶ C.S. Lewis makes the following observations on love and friendship:

Those who cannot conceive friendship as a substantive love but only as a disguise or elaboration of Eros betray the fact that they never had a friend. The rest of us know that though we can have erotic love and friendship for the same person, yet in some ways nothing is less like a friendship than a love affair. Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever about their friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest. Above all, Eros (while it lasts is necessarily between two only. But two, far from being the necessary num-

ber for friendship, is not even the best ... Hence true friendship is the least jealous of loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third, and three by a fourth, if only the newcomer is qualified to become a real friend. They can then say, as the blessed souls say in Dante, “Here comes one who will augment our loves.” For in this love, “to divide is not to take away.”²⁷

On the human level, then, the perfection of love is mutual gift-love, a sharing which constitutes authentic friendship. This friendship-love is primarily spiritual and it derives from the fact that man, as a spiritually constituted being, has an orientation to the universal and transcendent good.²⁸ Compared with friendship-love, emotional love is only secondary, accidental, but this does not mean that emotional love is unnecessary or something to be repressed. Rather, though it belongs to a lower level



C. S. Lewis

of love, emotional love is as much a part of human experience as is volitional love. As we have stated, human love without emotional resonance is imperfect, incomplete. We can only establish contact with other persons by what we perceive of the other through the senses, and the natural affective response on the sense level is the emotion of love. It is true that the emotional response may be such

that one person is attracted to and desires another for purely selfish reasons, thus subordinating the other to oneself. But in loving with a generous and benevolent love, the other person is loved for himself and the lover is drawn to him. It is in this sense that one can say that we become what we love.” And to love another person as “other” is the function of the intellectual appetite of volitional love.

THE LOVE THAT IS CHARITY

However much a part of human nature and however noble the love of friendship, it falls short of the perfection of charity to which all Christians are called.³⁰ Nevertheless, for St. Thomas Aquinas, the most noble form of human love - friendship - serves as a stepping-stone to the understanding of the love that is charity. In fact, the first question he asks in his tract on the theological virtue of charity is whether charity is friendship, and he answers as follows:

According to Aristotle (*Ethics* VIII, 4) not all love has the character of friendship, but only that love which goes with wishing well, namely when we so love another as to will what is good for him. For if we do not will what is good to the things we love but rather, we will their good for ourselves, as we are said to love wine, a horse or the like, then that is not love of friendship but a love of desire. For it would be foolish to say that someone has friendship with wine or a horse.

But benevolence alone does not suffice to constitute friendship; it also requires a certain mutual loving, because a friend is friendly to his friend. But such mutual benevolence is based on something shared in common.³¹

Therefore, since there is a certain sharing of something between man and God, so far as he shares his happiness with us, it is fitting that a friendship be based on this sharing. Concerning this sharing, 1 Corinthians states: “God is faithful, and it was he who called you to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”³² But the love that is based on this fellowship is charity. Therefore it is clear that charity is friendship between man and God.³³

In a sense, the love that is charity rises above all distinctions such as love of desire (concupiscence) and love of benevolence, but at the same time it embraces both altruistic love and self-centered love. It is not a question of loving God for ourselves primarily nor is it a question of loving God for Himself exclusively. Charity is friendship; it is a friendship based on the sharing of a good between God and man; and that good is divine happiness. As Thomas Gilby states it: “Charity is more than the loving of the good-for-you, and more than loving the good for another; it is a loving shared by you and another of such sort that the terms ‘egoism’ and ‘altruism’ are irrelevant.”³⁴ Likewise irrelevant are many of the particular questions raised concerning the exercise of charity when one has grasped the significance of a friendship between God and man, based on a mutual sharing of divine happiness. To understand human love, we start with man, but to understand the love that is charity, we must start with God.

God is love. “herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us. “(1 Jn 4:10) We must not begin with mysticism, with the creature’s love for

God, or with the wonderful foretastes of the fruition of God vouchsafed to some in their earthly life. We begin at the real beginning, with love as the divine energy. This primal love is gift-love. In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled, only plenteousness that desires to give. The doctrine that God was under no necessity to create is not a piece of dry scholastic speculation. It is essential.³⁵

Theology of Charity. The length and scope of this article do not call for us to investigate the Scriptural sources of charity. Many excellent studies are readily available³⁶ and therefore we choose rather to emphasize two important conclusions that follow from the New Testament teaching. First, charity is a gift from God and not simply the natural perfection of human love.³⁷ Secondly, charity is a participation in the self-same divine love that God has for Himself and for us, otherwise it would not fulfill the sharing of a common bond that is required for friendship. As St. Therese of Lisieux stated: “In order to love you as you loved me, I need to borrow your very own love.”



As a gift from God, charity is rightly described as an infused, supernatural virtue which is given with sanctifying grace. And although it is possible to merit an increase of grace and charity, the increase is to be seen as St. Augustine describes it: “O Lord, you give me the grace to love you, and when I love you, you give me the grace to love you more.”

As a participation in divine love, charity has God as its proper object, but it also enables the Christian to love God and self and neighbor the way God does. In this respect also, charity utterly transcends purely human love.

But here a difficulty arises: how is it possible for God to love anything outside Himself? St. Thomas provides the answer: “When God wills things distinct from himself for the sake of his own goodness, it follows that it is his goodness alone that moves his will. Hence, just as he understands things distinct from himself by gazing at his own essence, so also he wills things distinct from

himself by willing his own goodness.”³⁸ Actually, God could not love creatures in and for themselves because he cannot subordinate his infinite goodness to a partial good; becoming thus dependent on a good outside himself, he would no longer be God. Hence it follows that God does not love things because they are good (and thus moving the divine will to love), but things are good because God loves them, for his love is the cause and not the effect of goodness.³⁹

Does this mean that charity is so totally different from human love that they are opposed to each other? Not necessarily; although there may be conflicts between the various types of love, human love, on all its levels, is fundamentally good and it will be good likewise in its operation as long as it is subjected to the control of reason.⁴⁰ The problem arises in regard to self-centered love or need love, called the love-of-desire (*amor concupiscentiae*). How can that love in any sense be compatible with the love that is charity? The answer has already been given above: “the movement of love has a twofold tendency: toward the good that a man wishes to someone (to himself or another), and toward that to which he wishes some good.”⁴¹ Love directed to the person for whom some good is desired is love-of-friendship, even when the good is directed to oneself, since the essence of love-of-friendship is that it is wishing some good for a person. Consequently friendship-love toward oneself is not incompatible with charity.

St. Thomas repeatedly stresses the basic principle that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it and, indeed, works through it.⁴² Therefore, human love and charity are materially the same but formally distinct, and the distinction arises from its cause (it is infused by God together with sanctifying grace), its object (the love of God and of self and neighbor on account of God), and good that is shared as the basis of divine friendship (divine happiness).⁴³

“*Quidquid recipitur, secundum modum recipientis recipitur.*” Human love, therefore, acts as the instrument or vehicle of the supernatural love of charity, but it is with good reason that St. Thomas insists that charity is localized in the will and not in the lower faculties.⁴⁴ The sense-appetite can be stimulated only by the individual good, since it relies on senseknowledge, which is restricted to the level of the material and the individual. But the object of charity is the divine good, which transcends the level of the senses and the material and, therefore, can

be attained only by the spiritual faculty of the will. The lower loves of the sensate order need not be suppressed, however, for it is not a question of either-or, but of both-and. In fact, wherever there is an intense movement of love, whether of the human love of friendship or the love which is charity, we would expect a reverberation in the emotion of love, accompanied as well by a reaction in the psychosomatic structure. It is a matter of priority rather than division.⁴⁵

Some theologians have been reluctant to allow for any degree of love-of-desire in the exercise of charity and some have gone so far as to question whether it is lawful for a person to desire eternal happiness for himself. St. Thomas, however, does not hesitate to justify love of self as an aspect of charity and, indeed, states the priority of charity in terms of God, self and neighbor.⁴⁶

Our next question deals with love of neighbor. It is not uncommon for persons to ask whether charity as love of neighbor is destructive of human friendship. Friendship requires a benevolent love that goes out to the person as a value in himself, but love of neighbor as imperated by charity seems to “use” the person as a means or instrument for loving God. Is not this in reality loving a person as a good ordained for someone else, and is it not therefore a love-of-desire (*amor concupiscentiae*) rather than a love-of-friendship (*amor amicitiae*)?

To answer this question it is necessary to recall that the love that is charity is one that transcends the love of human friendship; first, because it is a supernatural love infused into the soul with sanctifying grace, and secondly, because the bond of union (*communicatio*) is likewise supernatural - divine happiness. In human friendship the mutual benevolent love prompts each person to give himself to the other, to love the other as a good, but at the same time to love the other as a source of personal perfection and enrichment. All this is achieved through the *communicatio* or sharing of a common good. The same thing can be said of charity as friendship, whether seen as love of one person for another or as one’s love of God. But however enriching it may be, human friendship is constrained by the limitations of the individual persons in their carnal condition and therefore their *communicatio* or sharing is likewise limited. That is why one must rise from the psychological level to the metaphysical in order to understand the love of neighbor which is charity.

For St. Thomas, the metaphysical foundations of

love are the concept of unity and the relation of the part to the whole. As regards unity, it is at once the cause and the effect of love, but under different aspects. The unity of similarity gives rise to two types of love: actual similarity causes love-offriendship or love of benevolence, because being identical in possessing certain qualities, “the affections of the one are bent upon the other as being one with himself, and he wishes well to the other as to himself.”⁴⁷ When the similarity is only potential, it gives rise to the love-of-desire on the part of the person lacking the qualities possessed by another, “or to friendship based on convenience or pleasure.”⁴⁸ (St. Thomas remarks also that “a person’s love for himself is greater than his love of any other person, for he is one with himself in actual substance, whereas he is one with another person only through similarity of some form.”⁴⁹ Again, when speaking of love of oneself in charity, he states that “strictly speaking, we do not have friendship for ourselves, but something more, because friendship implies a union of some kind, . . . whereas with regard to himself, man possesses unity, which is something more than union. Accordingly, . . . our love for ourselves is the model and root of friendship.”⁵⁰)

As an effect of love, unity can again be considered under two aspects: unity of physical presence and unity of affection. Love is the efficient cause of the union of physical presence and it is the formal cause of the affective union, since love consists essentially in such a union.⁵¹

Applying these distinctions to the love of charity for one’s neighbor, we note first of all that all those who live the divine life of sanctifying grace already possess God; indeed, St. Thomas describes grace as “*quaedam inchoatio gloriae in nobis*.”⁵² Consequently, such persons enjoy a unity of actual similarity, from which springs the love-of-friendship, and this, in turn, is the formal cause of affective union in spiritual love. And since the good that is shared (*communicatio*) between two graced persons is the same good that each one shares with God, it follows that the charity with which they love God and love each other is of the same species of love.

Yet it is still the neighbor that is loved through charity, and he can be loved with all the warmth and affection that accompanies all intense love. Thus, St. Thomas states that “the love of charity encloses within itself all human affections, except those which are based on sin Every legitimate and proper affection, no matter what its

source, can be ordered to charity. Thus charity can direct the acts of the other forms of love in such a way that what we love more by one of these other loves, we also love more by the charity which directs it.”⁵³

The differential note in love of neighbor through charity is that the bond of communication is not a created good nor is it a purely human friendship. “In loving our neighbor,” says St. Thomas, “charity has God for its formal object and not merely as its ultimate end. Thus, when we say that charity loves our neighbor for God, the word for expresses not only the final cause, but also, in some way, the formal cause.”⁵⁴

The second metaphysical principle - the relation of the part to the whole - has been offered by P. Rousselot as the basic Thomistic principle for solving the problems related to love.” St. Thomas applies the principle in question when discussing whether a man can, by his natural powers and without grace, love God above all things:

Loving God above all things is something con-natural to man, and even to any creature, rational and non-rational, and even non-living, in accordance with the kind of love that may befit any creature. The reason for this is that it is natural to each thing to desire and love something, in accordance with the mode of being proper to it by nature Now it is clear that the good of the part is for the sake of the good of the whole. Hence even by natural desire or love every particular thing loves its own proper good for the sake of the common good of the whole universe; and this is God.⁵⁶

Later, St. Thomas raises the question of whether charity requires that a man love God more than himself. This question is of special importance for those who may feel that the teaching of Aquinas on charity tends to overemphasize the role of love of self (*amor concupiscentiae*) and thus reduces all love to concupiscence. He responds by invoking once more the relation of the part to the whole:

Two good things we get from God: the good of nature and the good of grace. Now God, by giving us natural goods, provides the basis for that natural love by which man, when he is whole and unspoiled, loves God above all things including himself. This holds not only for man but for each and every creature in its own way The reason for this is that a part naturally loves the common

good of the whole more than its own particular good. The way things behave is evidence of this, for every part displays a dominant inclination for some action conducive to the good of the whole . . . How much more then is this realized in the friendship of charity, which is based on a common sharing of the gifts of grace. Accordingly, man is bound in charity to love God, who is the common good of all things, more than himself; for eternal happiness is to be found in God as in the common principle and source of all things which are capable of sharing such happiness.⁵⁷

The love that is charity, therefore, springs from a source that far transcends human love and enables us to participate even now in that divine good which is our All. Such a love, coming from God, who is Love, enables us to return to him in an ecstasy of self-forgetfulness and to embrace our fellow man in that same love, without becoming possessive or possessed by any human love. Achieving this, we fulfill Christ's supreme mandate of charity: "Love one another as I loved you."



NOTES

1J. Guitton, *Essay on Human Love*, London, 1951, p. 3.

2Ibid., p. 11.

3Cf. J. Garcia Trapiello, "Valoración bíblica de las cosas terrenas," *Angelicum* 54, 1977, p. 8.

4E.M. Stern, B.G. Marino, *Psychotheology*, New York/Toronto, 1970, p. 56.

5*Summa theologiae*, I-II, 26, 1.

6Ibid., I, 60, 1, ad 3.

7Op. cit., 1-11, 26, 1, ad 3.

8*De caritate*, 12; cf. *Summa theol.*, 1, 44, 4, ad 3.

9J. Mouroux, *The Meaning of Man*, New York, 1961, p. 184.

10*Summa theol.*, II-II, 141, 2, ad 2.

11J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, Univ. of Notre Dame, 1966, p. 150.

12C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, New York, 1960, p. 12.

13C. W. Baars, *Sex, Love and the Life of the Spirit* (ed. A. Rock), Chicago, 1966, pp. 18-19.

14*Summa theol.*, 1-11, 74, 3, ad 1.

15"Love is divided, not into friendship and desire, but into love-of-friendship and love-of-desire. For a person is properly called a friend for whom we wish some good; whereas we are said to desire something that we want for ourselves" (*Summa theol.* I-II, 26, 4, ad 1). Cf. also L.M. Hughes, "Charity as Friendship in the Theology of St. Thomas", *Angelicum* 52, 1975, pp. 164-178.

16Cf. *Summa theol.*, I-II, 26, 4.

17*Rhetoric* II, 4.

18Cf. *Summa theol.*, I-II, 26, 1, ad 1 and 3; II-II, 25, 4, where St. Thomas states that "our love for our selves is the model and root of friendship, for our friendship for others consists precisely in the fact that our attitude to them is the same as to ourselves."

19Cf. *Summa theol.*, 1-11, 26, 4, ad 3.

20*Summa theol.*, I-II, 28, 3.

21Among the various names given to the expressions of love, we may note the following: eros, love as generative and creative, whether sexually or artistically, and usually characterized by some degree of ecstasy; storge, a tender love, as of a mother for her child; philia, brotherly love or the love that is content to be accepted by others and able to relax in their presence, as with one's own family; agape, esteem and unselfish love for others, interested primarily in their welfare without seeking a return, of which the exemplar is God's love for us.

22*Summa theol.*, I-II, 74, 3, ad 1.

23Ibid., I, 81, 3.

- 24C. Benda, *The Image of Love*, New York, 1961, pp. 24-27, passim.
- 25J. Guittou, op. cit., p. 80.
- 26Cf. *Summa theol.*, I-II, 65, 5; II II, 23, 1.
- 27c. s. Lewis, op. cit., p. 92.
- 28“Even by natural desire or love every particular thing loves its own particular good for the sake of the common good of the whole universe, and this is God” (*Summa theol.*, I-II, 109, 3).
- 29“Let us here recall Aristotle’s definition: velle alicui bonum. What is this bonum? It can be anything. But this good which I wish for my friend, can it be myself? Nothing prevents us from interpreting St. Thomas in this way. In fact, the development of his thought . . . leads us to adopt this interpretation. One of the applications of the definition of love will be then: velle alteri seipsum. But it must be understood rightly” (G. Gilleman, *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology*, Westminster, Maryland, 1961, pp. 113-114).
- 30Cf. *Summa theol.*, II-II, 23, 1; 25, 1.
- 31For further clarification of the meaning of “communicatio” in friendship, see L.B. Gillon, “A propos de la theorie thomiste de l’amitie”, *Angelicum* 25, pp. 3-17; L.M. Hughes, “Charity as Friendship in the Theology of Saint Thomas”, *Angelicum* 52, pp. 164-178.
- 321 Cor 1:9.
- 33*Summa theol.*, 11-11, 23, 1.
- 34Cf. R.J. Batten, *Charity* (vol. 34 of English translation of the *Summa theologiae*), Introduction by T. Gilby, London/New York, 1974, p. xvii.
- 35C.S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 175.
- 36Cf. C. Spicq, *Agape in the New Testament*, 3 vols., St. Louis/London, 1963; J. Barosse, *Christianity: Mystery of Love*, Notre Dame, 1964; J. Lebreton, *The Spiritual Teaching of the New Testament*, Westminster, Maryland, 1964; J. Grisipino (ed.), *Foundations of Biblical Spirituality*, New York, 1964.
- 37Cf. *Summa theol.*, II-II, 24, 2 and 3.
- 38Ibid., 1, 19, 2.
- 39Cf. *Summa theol.*, I, 20, 2.
- 40Cf. *Summa theol.*, I-II, 74, 3, ad 1; II-II, 141-142.
- 41Ibid., I-II, 26, 4.
- 42Cf. *Summa theol.*, I, 1, 8, ad 2.
- 43See *Summa theol.*, II-II, 24, 2 (cause of charity); 25, 1 (objects of charity); 23, 1 (charity as friendship).
- 44Cf. *Summa theol.*, II-II, 24, 1.
- 45Cf. C.V. Heris, *Spirituality of Love*, St. Louis, 1965, pp. 209-232.
- 46Cf. *Summa theol.*, II-II, 26, 1-4. A. Nygren rejects the Thomistic teaching on charity and emphasizes that God is love and man’s response must be by way of an exclusively disinterested love. This, for Nygren is authentic agape, while the concept of charity is a Scholastic invention that compromises between agape and eros. See his work, *Agape and Eros: A Study of the Christian Idea of Love*, trans. A.G. Herbert and P.S. Watson, London, 1939.
- 47*Summa theol.*, I-II, 27, 3.
- 48Loc. cit.
- 49Ibid., loc. cit.
- 50*Summa theol.*, II-II, 25, 4. “In the genus of human love, self-love is principal; hence it is on this love that all love for others must be measured” (*Quaest. quodlibetales*, 5, 6).
- 51*Summa theol.*, I-II, 28, 1.
- 52Ibid., II-II, 24, 3, ad 2.
- 53*De caritate*, 7 and 9.
- 54Ibid., 5, 2.
- 55Cf. P. Rousselot, *Pour l’histoire du probleme de l’amour au moyen-age*, Paris, 1933. For a different opinion, see L.B. Geiger, *Le probleme de l’amour chez Saint Thomas*, Montreal, 1952.
- 56*Summa theol.*, I-II, 109, 3. St. Thomas concludes, of course, that in the state of fallen nature man needs the help of grace to love God above all things.
- 57*Summa theol.*, II-II, 26, 3.