



Jesus – ‘Our Wisest and Dearest Friend’: Aquinas and Moral Transformation

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Abstract

This article joins others in assessing the role of Christ in the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas. It investigates one specific phrase in the *Summa Theologiae* in four stages. First, there are some foundational considerations of Aquinas’s overall framework. Second, I examine the evidence supporting Aquinas’s original description of Jesus as our ‘dearest friend’ and as further disclosed in the *Tertia Pars*, specifically in His Passion and in His role as Teacher. Third, this leads to a consideration of Jesus as ‘wisest’ as the Incarnate Word and Wisdom. Fourth, I probe this sapiential aspect further in terms of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, specifically, that of wisdom, and, in particular, as construed in recent work on the second person perspective and Joint Attention. By investigating this phrase of Aquinas, it emerges that its sapiential, soteriological and inter-personal character is illuminated further by its Christological and ecclesial dimensions.

Keywords

Christ, Gifts, Moral, Virtue, Wisdom

Recent discussion has tried to assess the role of Christ in the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas. For some, that role, as reflected in the *Summa Theologiae*, is ‘not inconsiderable’, especially in the *Tertia Pars* where Jesus is presented as both model and saviour.¹ Close analysis of the *Summa*, particularly of the relationship between the Christology (implicit and explicit) of the *Prima*, *Secunda* and *Tertia Pars* and their respective Prologues, helps to clarify Aquinas’s intentions. Brian Shanley observes that ‘Aquinas does not always signpost the deep connections as much as one would like, yet they are there

¹ Joseph Wawrykow, ‘Jesus in the Moral Theology of Thomas Aquinas’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42:1, Winter (2012), pp.13-33 at 13. See also Patricia M Clark, ‘The Case for an Exemplarist Approach to Virtue in Catholic Moral Theology’, *Journal of Moral Theology* 3:1 (2014), pp.54-82 at p. 61 and p. 54.

to an attentive reader. Perhaps, if Aquinas had lived to finish the *Summa*, he might have gone back to make the connections clearer.²

I would like to build on these discussions as guided by the title above, namely, Jesus as our ‘wisest and dearest friend.’ This phrase is found towards the end of the *Prima Secundae* where Aquinas treats of the New Law of the Holy Spirit. There is traceable thread between this discussion and that found in the *Tertia Pars* on Christ as a moral exemplar. Both have a firm Scriptural content. Both are revelatory of moral standards and of the relational framework of moral living. I will, first, offer some foundational considerations. Second, I examine the evidence supporting Aquinas’s original description of Jesus as our ‘dearest friend’ and as further disclosed in the *Tertia Pars*. This leads to an investigation of Jesus as ‘wisest’ as the Incarnate Word and Wisdom. I probe this sapiential aspect further in terms of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, specifically, that of wisdom, and, in particular, as construed in recent work on the second person perspective and Joint Attention.

Foundational Considerations

In the *Prima Secundae Prol.*, Aquinas surveys what he has done. He has discussed God (the ‘exemplar’), the exercise of divine power, and how the human person, created according to the divine ‘image’ (*ad imaginem Dei*), reflects the divine goodness through the capacity for reflection, self-direction and freedom. The Prologue’s wording concerning ‘exemplar’ and ‘image’ must be understood in the light of his earlier discussion of ‘image’ in relation to the procession of the Word. Whatever implies procession or origin in God belongs to persons, hence, image is a personal name when used of God.³ ‘Exemplar’ is a more ‘proper’ description of the Trinity in whose ‘image’ humans are made.⁴ Whereas the Son is the ‘perfect image

² Brian Shanley, ‘Aquinas’s Exemplar Ethics’, *The Thomist* 72:3 (2008), pp. 345-69 at p.368-9. Also D. Stephen Long, ‘The Way of Aquinas: Its Importance for Moral Theology.’ *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19:3 (2006), pp. 339-356.

³ *Summa Theologica*, 1.35.1 (Henceforth *ST*). For my referencing of the *Summa*, I have consulted the Latin/English (Blackfriars) version of the English Dominican Province (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963-1975) and the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, 2nd rev. ed. 1920, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province in the on-line version www.newadvent.org/summa/ and the new translation by Alfred J Freddoso, on-line version at <http://www.nd.edu/~afreddos/summa-translation/TOC.htm> accessed 20/11/2015. Translated passages from the *Summa* are from the English Dominican New Advent version unless otherwise indicated. Summaries or paraphrases are this author’s.

⁴ *ST* 1.35.1 ad 1. and notes Augustine’s comment about the Trinity as the ‘image’ to which man was made.

of the Father' so humans are made 'in the divine image' in having a certain tendency to perfection, namely, realizing the image by sharing the life of the Son.⁵ This is the final causality aspect implied in exemplar causality reflected in the three stage movement of the human as 'image' by nature, grace (virtue) and glory.⁶ The formal causality is implied in that humans are created to know and love and, through knowing and loving God, we share in God's own life. We are both beatified and deified. As Shanley sums it up: it is 'entering into the very knowing and loving that is the Trinitarian life of God.'⁷

Again, Aquinas explains that the exemplar principle is appropriated to the Son by reason of wisdom and in relation to creation.⁸ Creation can only be understood through a right knowledge of divine persons, namely, that it emerges not by necessity but from the Word prompted by the Love in God. Only on this basis can we 'think rightly concerning the salvation of the human race accomplished by the Incarnate Son, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.'⁹

This is anticipated at the start of the *Prima Pars* where Aquinas looks ahead to Christ who, in his humanity, is the way along which we journey to God (*tendendi in deum*).¹⁰ With the *Tertia Pars Prol.*, Aquinas is now in a position to explore how Jesus Christ not only redeemed us from our sins, but 'showed us in his own person (*in seipso demonstravit*) the way of truth, whereby we may attain the blessings of eternal life by rising again.'¹¹ This is expanded when Aquinas offers reasons for the Incarnation being for our good: firstly, 'for the sake of right action, in that he has given us an example in his own life' and, secondly, 'for the sake of a full participation in divinity, in which lies our beatitude and the end of human life, and this is bestowed on us through the humanity of Christ.'¹²

The wording here is instructive. The Incarnate Word, as embodying God's goodness in his humanity, is our saviour and teacher. In his own person we find the exemplar of the way to live and develop 'in the image' of Jesus whose life we share through baptism. Clark notes that the call made in Christ to participate in the divine life 'is made possible only by the mystery of the Incarnation: by the words and

⁵ *ST* 1.35.2.

⁶ *ST* 1. 93. 4.

⁷ Shanley, 'Aquinas's Exemplar Ethics', p. 350.

⁸ '...the exemplar principle is appropriated to the Son by reason of wisdom and in relation to creation. . . in order that, as it is said (Psalm 103:24), "Thou hast made all things in wisdom," it may be understood that God made all things in the beginning—that is, in the Son; according to the word of the Apostle (Colossians 1:16), "In Him"—viz. the Son—"were created all things.'" *ST* 1.46.3 resp.

⁹ *ST* 1.32.1 ad 3.

¹⁰ *ST* 1. 2 prol.

¹¹ *ST* 3. prol.

¹² *ST* 3. 1. 2. Rendition as in Shanley, 'Aquinas's Exemplar Ethics', p. 354.

deeds of Jesus as they occurred in human history.’¹³ This sentence captures the main content of the *Tertia Pars*. Responding to Jesus as exemplar is not so much through ‘imitation’ understood in relation to some external standard or model. As we shall see, *imitatio* is best captured by the word ‘identification.’

In the *Tertia Pars*, the prominent role played by the person of Jesus in his teaching and actions as narrated in the Gospels is indicative of Aquinas’s purpose. It is not simply to expound the meaning of the Christ Event, especially of his Passion and death. Aquinas aims to arouse his ‘audience’ or readers to a personal engagement with, and commitment to, the person of Jesus and, hence, to accompany Him on his Way. The latter section of the *Prima Secundae* with its treatment of the New Law is picked up again in the *Tertia Pars prol.* noted above and in the articles concerning Jesus’s life, teaching, passion and death. From here we see that Jesus, in his person, is not only a paradigm of the moral life but is also an ‘exemplar’ in the metaphysical sense of the word. For Aquinas, faith entails identifying with Jesus as the exemplar, namely, the human person is made to be ‘ad imaginem’, participating in the divine life through Christ, the Incarnate Word. This movement involves a call to respond to a personal relationship which takes the form of friendship. We trace this thread in Aquinas’s use of the Gospels in relation to two articles in the *Prima Secundae*.

Jesus as our ‘Dearest Friend’

The foundation of the New Law, which is primarily ‘inscribed in our hearts’, is ‘specifically and dominantly’ found in the grace of the Holy Spirit given to those who believe in Christ. Such grace comes to us through the Incarnate Word.¹⁴ For Aquinas, the written or external aspects of the Law, as found in the Gospels, for instance, are secondary (though not superfluous). They help dispose the intellect through faith (concerning truth) and the affections (through the ordering of affections) to be fit to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. From this emerges behaviour (effects of ‘spiritual grace’) or the works of virtue as exhorted to in diverse ways in the New Testament.¹⁵

Again, Aquinas says, citing Augustine, that the Sermon on the Mount contains ‘the whole process of forming the life of a Christian’ in that Christ, in his teaching on true happiness, orders our interior movements concerning oneself and one’s neighbour in relation to beatitude.’ Resultant action requires volition (the ordering of desires

¹³ Clark, ‘The Case for an Exemplarist Approach’, p. 79.

¹⁴ *ST* 1.2.106.1.

¹⁵ *ST* 1.2.106 ad 1.

and choice concerning what ought to be done or avoided) and also intention concerning the 'end', namely, the proper goal and the guiding or overarching motivation to reach it.¹⁶ This suggests another aspect to the intentionality of the act of faith construed as the virtue of 'the first intention' (*virtus primae intentionis*) concerning the ultimate end whose force 'perdures and of itself informs every desire of the believer and every decision of his.'¹⁷

The twelve articles on the Law (Old and New) in the *Prima Secundae* are, understandably, anchored in the Scriptures. In these two representative articles above, Aquinas adumbrates key elements of the moral life that he develops more comprehensively in the *Prima* and *Secunda Secundae*. These involve the centrality of integral knowledge (wisdom) and ordered affections (love) that guide action. There is, then, an inter-play of the cognitive, affective and behavioural in the moral life embodied, as we shall see, in the virtues. More significantly, it is inherently inter-personal, which is our next consideration.

For Aquinas, friendship is the best model to express our relationship with God. As Wadell notes, 'we only truly love God when we have learned to be God's friend, and to be God's friend our relationship with God must be marked by the qualities integral to friendship.'¹⁸ The first quality is Benevolence in which one wishes what is good or best for a friend, Secondly, friendship entails mutual and reciprocal love. This means that love changes us. In loving God, we become more like God. Friendship's third mark is that, through this bond of love, each becomes for the other another self. 'We can see ourselves in them because we know we too have been formed, shaped, defined by the same love.'¹⁹

When discussing the commandments and counsels of the New Law, Aquinas encapsulates his discussion by observing that Christ is 'our wisest and dearest friend' (*Sed Christus maxime est sapiens et amicus*) and explains it further.²⁰ In this regard, Melina points out that action is regulated in the context of the New Law principally through Christ guiding us by his counsel, as one would do with a friend rather than by precepts as one would do with servants (See

¹⁶ *ST* 1.2.108.3.

¹⁷ Livio Melina, *Sharing in Christ's Virtues: For A Renewal of Moral Theology in the light of Veritatis Splendor* (Trans. William E May), Washington DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2001), p. 111 citing *ST* 1.2.1 6.ad 3.

¹⁸ Paul J Wadell, C.P., *Friendship and the Moral Life*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 130-141. Wadell presents an extensive treatment of Aquinas on friendship as the basic model of the Christian moral life.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 137.

²⁰ 'We must therefore understand the commandments of the New Law to have been given about matters that are necessary to gain the end of eternal bliss, to which end the New Law brings us forthwith: but that the counsels are about matters that render the gaining of this end more assured and expeditious' *ST* 1.2.108, 4.

John 15:15). ‘In the dynamism of friendship, the beloved becomes the rule of the lover. Through affective union, what our friend wants will begin to appear fitting and connatural to us.’²¹ Friendship with Jesus, then, both *informs* and *forms* us. It also entails growth in virtue – a matter that requires a brief comment.

For Aquinas, virtue in the full sense is only found in the infused virtues (theological and moral). Aristotelian dispositions are virtues only in the restricted sense. Aquinas introduces the category of virtue by using Augustine’s definition of virtue from Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*. ‘Virtue is a good quality of mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.’²²

Aquinas explains that ‘God working virtue ‘in us without us’ does not mean that God works virtue in us without our consent. What is essential to the notion of virtue is that it is infused by God. Virtues that order a person to good (to human flourishing) as defined by divine law (i.e., beatitude), cannot be caused in us by habituation.’²³ On that basis, for Aquinas, ‘without the infused virtues, there are no virtues.’²⁴ Virtues, in the fullest sense, direct to happiness with God.

This brings us to the key questions: how does Aquinas draw on Jesus’ life and his presence in the Church and the sacraments in the *Tertia Pars* to instruct our minds and foster our desire to walk the Way with ‘our wisest and dearest friend’? Further, in Aquinas’s treatment, how is God at ‘work in us, without us’? Our focus will be on Jesus in his Passion and as Teacher.

Jesus in his Passion

Amongst the reasons offered for the fittingness of Jesus’s Passion for our salvation, the first is that the Passion reveals the depth and scope of God’s love and that we are ‘thereby *stirred* to love Him in return and herein lies the perfection of human salvation’²⁵ (*italics added*). The centrality of divine love is a persistent theme in Aquinas’s discussion of Jesus’s Passion, sufferings and death. We read that Jesus underwent the Passion from love for his Father and neighbour.²⁶ To ensure a ‘living faith’ or charity, Jesus’s Passion is applied both to

²¹ Livio Melina, *The Epiphany of Love: Towards a Theological Understanding of Christian Action* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; UK, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 17. We will pursue the aspect of ‘connaturality’ later in this article.

²² *ST* 1.2.55.4 as in Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective in Aquinas’ ethics: Virtues and gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 13.

²³ *ST* 1.2.63.2.

²⁴ Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 13.

²⁵ *ST* 3.46.3.

²⁶ *ST* 3. 47. 2 ad 1.

our minds and hearts and that Christ's Passion 'excites' our charity as a cause for the forgiveness of sins.' The correlative of divine love in Jesus's Passion is the conquest of sin and evil.²⁷

Again, this pattern of love is evident during Jesus's ministry. For instance, the Transfiguration stems from Jesus's 'loving foresight' (*pia provisione*) that the disciples not only know the Way and its goal but that, through their brief taste of eternal joy, would still be drawn to it by desire, despite the hardship and suffering it involved.²⁸ Earlier, in his temptations, Jesus wants to strengthen us, offer an example but, importantly, to be in solidarity with us, as the compassionate high priest in order to fill us with confidence in his mercy.²⁹

Finally, and relevant to our purposes here, Christ's suffering on the cross is an example of virtue, citing Augustine 'God's Wisdom became man to give us an example in righteousness of living.'³⁰ This reflects Aquinas' earlier comment: 'in his Passion Christ offers himself to us as the perfect model of all the virtues.'³¹

How is this emphasis on the Passion and divine love to be understood? Being 'in Christ' and adopting Christ as exemplar of the moral life is not simply a matter of being like Him in our actions. Through our participation in the divine nature in Christ,³² we identify with Christ, 'putting on his mind' such that, as Clark notes, 'Christ *himself* becomes the principle of one's agency.' Further, Jesus in the paschal mystery indicates the 'manner in which certain acts may *reveal* rather than merely conform to standards of human goodness and moral perfection.'³³ The Passion is revelatory of the core quality of what is true and good, namely, Christ's gift of himself, of love realised in the form of redemptive suffering. Through discipleship, and especially, though the sacraments, we 'are united and conformed to the person of Christ himself.'³⁴ We are called to share in the self-giving love of our 'dearest friend.' In the Eucharist, we share in the very action of Jesus on the cross and, through freely consenting to his Eucharistic action, we allow ourselves 'to be permeated and informed by it.'³⁵ Our moral life is directed and animated by friendship with Jesus where 'the beloved becomes the rule of the lover.' With Him, we are called to the 'no greater love' of laying down one's life for one's friends.

For Aquinas, then, God befriends humanity in the person of Christ, principally through His reconciling and atoning work and through

²⁷ ST 3. 49. 1.

²⁸ ST 3. 45. 1.

²⁹ ST 3. 41. 1.

³⁰ ST 3. 46. 4.

³¹ ST 1.2. 46.3.

³² ST 1.2.62.1.

³³ Clark, 'The Case for an Exemplarist Approach', p. 61 and p. 54.

³⁴ Clark, 'The Case for an Exemplarist Approach', p. 62.

³⁵ Melina, *The Epiphany of Love*, p. 36.

his continuing presence in the Church, specifically in the sacraments. Friendship means that one person can ‘atone’ for another. This applies to Christ and the Church since ‘the head and members are as one mystic person (*una persona mystica*).’³⁶ It is in the Church, especially in the sacraments and, most importantly, in the Eucharist, that Christ’s formative presence is at work. For Aquinas, Christ is present in the Eucharist in the manner of his Passion since it was his Passion that restored humanity to friendship with God. The Eucharist is the sacrament of charity and the proof of friendship.³⁷

Jesus as Teacher

The role of Teacher is another feature of Christ as exemplar. The pedagogical dimension is implied above in Jesus’s role as counsellor and guide as too in the exemplary role of his Passion as a ‘model of virtue.’ Again, the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Jesus, speaks from within as a teacher (*Magister interior*) but is also working in the Church and its sacramental life. As Aquinas points out, Jesus has received the fullness of the Spirit but it is given to us only in ‘moderation’, hence, we need external instruction.³⁸ Our focus is on one particular facet of Jesus as Teacher.

Aquinas says that Jesus’s choice of the teaching /listening/response pattern was most suited for his ‘doctrine’ to be ‘imprinted on the hearts of his hearers’ as one having power.³⁹ The link between teaching and friendship with Jesus is captured in Aquinas’s comment that ‘the true sign of friendship is that a friend reveals the secrets of his heart to his friends.’⁴⁰ That means that we must listen and learn. Earlier, Aquinas reminds us that Jesus is an example to all through faith and that ‘faith comes from hearing.’⁴¹ Anthony Kelly notes that Aquinas ‘insists on the biblical priority of hearing, for, in all revelatory experiences, hearing precedes the seeing—even in the original experiences of seeing related to the risen Jesus.’⁴² While, at times, hearing the Word of God is superseded by a seeing and a touching

³⁶ *ST* 3. 48. 2 ad 1.

³⁷ *ST* 3. 73. 1.

³⁸ Melina, *Sharing in Christ’s Virtues*, p. 186 citing St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ep. ad Romanos*, Ch 12, Lect 1, no. 971.

³⁹ *ST* 3. 42. 1.

⁴⁰ St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on St John*, 15, lect. 4. N. 2016 cited in Paul Morrissey, ‘The Sapiential Dimension of Theology according to St. Thomas’, *New Blackfriars* 93:1045 (May 2012), pp. 309-323, at p. 315.

⁴¹ *ST* 3. 42. 2 ad 1.

⁴² Anthony J Kelly, ‘Faith as Sight? Toward a Phenomenology of Revelation’, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 19:3, December (2012), pp. 180-194, at p. 185 citing *ST* 3.55.3 ad 1.

(as in 1 John 1:1-3), Kelly makes a comment that is pertinent to our discussion of the inter-personal nature of moral life in Jesus:

It remains, however, that the experience of hearing is still basic in the economy of faith since, while sight and touch play their parts, they are less able to register either the excess of God's self-giving or to underline the essential self-surrendering receptivity of faith. *To hear the word of God places the hearer in a profoundly interpersonal context of relationships which occur in time, as a call and response.*⁴³

The summons to a shared self-surrender with Jesus entails, as with true friendship, a response to an invitation rather than a command. Yet it is central in the call/response dynamic. While, as Melina suggests above, 'our dearest friend' 'principally' counsels and advises rather than 'commands', it is still true that 'the beloved becomes the rule of the lover.' For Aquinas, friendship can generate imperatives if it is to endure and grow.⁴⁴ Further, this personal relationship as a form of self-surrender within friendship with Jesus, involves, as noted earlier, a participation in 'God's Wisdom [who] became man to give us an example in righteousness of living.'⁴⁵ This brings us to Jesus as our 'wisest' friend.

Jesus as Our 'Wisest' Friend

Martin Rhonheimer, in his analysis of Aquinas on the law of practical reason, explains that human reason as 'constituting the natural law, is a conscious, intelligent, free responsible partaking in the power and wisdom of the divine reason, and thereby also a 'sharing' as well in the divine providence and governance of the universe.'⁴⁶ Again, for Aquinas, created wisdom shares in uncreated Wisdom.⁴⁷

Aquinas sees discipleship with Jesus as grounded in our participation in the Incarnation, but with a specific focus, namely, in relation to our human share in divine wisdom and, specifically, in the Word as Wisdom.⁴⁸ This is explained by Aquinas.

Now the Person of the Son, Who is the Word of God, has a certain common agreement with all creatures, because the word of the

⁴³ Kelly, 'Faith as Sight', p. 185. Italics added.

⁴⁴ See n. 20 above.

⁴⁵ *ST* 3. 46. 4.

⁴⁶ Martin Rhonheimer, (Trans from the German by Gerald Malbary), *Natural Law and Practical Reason: a Thomist View of Moral Autonomy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 11-12. See *ST* 1.2.90.1; 1.2.91.2; 94.2.1; 1.103. 6 and 8.

⁴⁷ *ST* 1. 43. 3 and 4.

⁴⁸ *ST* 3. 52. 2. Also, there are three levels of wisdom for Aquinas: philosophical (human), theological and supernatural (gift). This is explored by Morrissey, 'The Sapiential Dimension', pp. 311-318. See *ST* 1.1.1; and 2.2.45.

craftsman, i.e. his concept, is an exemplar likeness of whatever is made by him. Hence the Word of God, Who is His eternal concept, is the exemplar likeness of all creatures. And therefore as creatures are established in their proper species, though movably, by the participation of this likeness, so by the non-participated and personal union of the Word with a creature, it was fitting that the creature should be restored in order to its eternal and unchangeable perfection; for the craftsman by the intelligible form of his art, whereby he fashioned his handiwork, restores it when it has fallen into ruin. Moreover, He has a particular agreement with human nature, since the Word is a concept of the eternal Wisdom, from Whom all man's wisdom is derived. And hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God, as the disciple is instructed by receiving the word of his master.⁴⁹

As noted earlier, through creation, human beings as 'image' participate in God (the metaphysical exemplar) through knowledge, love and freedom expressed in self-directed action.⁵⁰ Again, they share in divine wisdom and providence (through prudence). But, as the above text indicates, the Incarnation involves another level of participation, namely, the possibility of direct union with the person of the Word. Christ's humanity mediates grace as the 'instrument of the Godhead.' As Word, He is Wisdom itself. Now, as the Word made flesh, He makes wisdom accessible and achievable for us.⁵¹ Further, Christ 'is the means by which creation is drawn into full participation in the life of the Triune God.'⁵² As Shanley explains, 'the New Law of Christ 'is a deeper entering into divine providence, indeed a sharing in it precisely as Trinitarian: returning to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.'⁵³

Our concern here is not so much on participation in the Incarnation but on Jesus as divine Wisdom. As the final sentence of the text above indicates, this has clear implications for hearing the teaching, heeding the counsel and being guided by the 'rule of the lover' – by Jesus, our 'wisest friend.' This applies also to virtue as God working in us 'without us.' On these matters, we are helped by recent studies on Joint Attention and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁹ *ST* 3. 3. 8.

⁵⁰ *ST* 1. 2 prolog.

⁵¹ A paraphrase of a comment of Michael Sherwin, OP, "Christ the Teacher in St. Thomas's Commentary on the Gospel of John," in Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, eds., *Reading John with St. Thomas* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2005), p. 175 cited in Morrissey, 'The Sapiential Dimension', p. 316.

⁵² Clark, 'The Case for an Exemplarist Approach', p. 70 and *ST* 3. 1. 2.

⁵³ Shanley, 'Aquinas's Exemplar Ethics', p. 368.

Second Personal Perspective, Joint Attention and the Gift of Wisdom

I will briefly outline the ‘traditional’ presentation of the gifts, with specific focus on the gift of wisdom, and then explore the relevance of studies in Joint Attention to our topic.⁵⁴

Pinsent proposes that, for Aquinas, moral perfection grounded in God ‘working virtue in us without us’ gives an essential role to the gifts (and the beatitudes and fruits of the Spirit). The gifts are perfections disposing a person to be attuned to, and to follow, the divine impulse or instinct of the Holy Spirit. These dispositions surpass all the Aristotelian or divinely infused moral virtues. With the theological virtues as their ultimate foundation, the gifts are not secondary but essential to salvation and, hence, to the moral life in Aquinas.⁵⁵ The gifts accompany grace in Baptism and are not for the ‘more advanced’ in virtue.

Again, it is true that in Christ, just as there are found all the virtues⁵⁶ so too are found the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to ‘a pre-eminent degree.’⁵⁷ But, as noted earlier, our capacity is such that the Spirit is given ‘in moderation.’ Given our creaturely status, the effects of sin and our resistances, our share in the divine life is, understandably, imperfect and fragile. The gifts are meant to remedy these influences that can impede our growing into the divine likeness.⁵⁸

When Aquinas speaks of the cognitive gifts, namely, those allied to the intellect (wisdom, counsel, understanding and knowledge), he is referring to intellect in terms of practical reason (*ratio practica* or *ratio affectiva*).⁵⁹ Their specific objects (truth under the aspect of good or value to be pursued) involve evaluation and appreciative knowledge. Aquinas’s account of the four cognitive gifts suggests two aspects to their kind of ‘knowing.’ Through understanding, we are enabled to grasp as true something proposed to us and ‘withdraw’ from is opposite. In order to ‘grasp or ‘withdraw’ we must be enabled to make the appropriate judgement and that depends on the matter

⁵⁴ Relevant sources here are Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, and Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010). For an extensive discussion and evaluation see Tom Ryan, ‘Second Person Perspective, Virtues and the Gifts in Aquinas’s Ethics’, *Australian eJournal of Theology* 21:1: (April 2014), pp. 49-62.

⁵⁵ *ST* 1.2.68.2.

⁵⁶ *ST* 3. 7. 2.

⁵⁷ *ST* 3. 7. 5.

⁵⁸ Shanley, ‘Aquinas’s Exemplar Ethics’, p. 361.

⁵⁹ The other three appetitive or affective gifts are fear, piety and courage.

under consideration: for created things, it is the gift of knowledge; for divine things, it is wisdom; for individual actions, it is counsel.⁶⁰

As Anthony Kelly notes, Aquinas presents ‘the gift of grace as saturating every aspect of the cognitive and conative life of faith. The seven gifts are given to enable the graced subject to respond to the movement of the Spirit and to act in a manner that is beyond the human measure.’⁶¹ He goes on to say that

... intelligence must be receptive, waiting, as it were, on the gift from above, in order to know and to act in a way that respects the irruptive and transformative character of the Spirit’s action. Each gift is an aspect of transforming grace of the Spirit. Each gift specifies a particular receptivity within Christian consciousness to the Spirit’s “suprarational” action. Consequently, the notion of these gifts of the Spirit leads to a healthy deconstruction of a one-dimensional rational or calculative mode of thinking, while suggesting other domains of spiritual perception.⁶²

Aquinas is consistent in the different texts where he explains what is specific about the gifts. The gifts dispose a person to be ‘amenable’ or readily moveable (*disponitur ut efficiatur prompte mobilis*) by divine inspiration or *instinctus*.⁶³ The objects of both the gifts and the virtues are co-extensive. The difference lies in the manner of operation. With the virtues, a person is moved promptly and easily by her own reason. It is a person-object process, captured in the blend of final and formal causality noted earlier (self-movement in knowing and loving). With the gifts, alternatively, the person is moved by God (the Holy Spirit) with regard to the object of one’s attention. As Pinsent sums it up: in the gifts ‘Aquinas is describing a triadic person-God-object scenario in which one’s stance to the object is “moved” by God, in some sense yet to be understood’⁶⁴ (a phrase to be considered later).

Again, unlike the parallel virtues, in none of the gifts do we know or arrive at truth through the process of deliberation. For example, when Aquinas describes the gift of knowledge, he contrasts it with the ‘demonstrative reasoning’ of the intellectual virtue of knowledge to arrive at sure judgment about the truth. Aquinas proposes that in God ‘there is a sure judgment of truth, without any discourse, by simple intuition.’ The gift of knowledge is a participated likeness of God’s knowledge. Through this gift, one is moved by God to a knowing that is a share in the divine knowledge that is ‘absolute and simple.’⁶⁵ Again, we find here the triadic person-God-object pattern

⁶⁰ ST 2 2.8.6. Also Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 39.

⁶¹ Citing *III Sent* d. 34, q. 1 a. 1; ST 1.2, 70, 4.

⁶² Kelly, ‘Faith as Sight’, p. 188.

⁶³ ST 1.2.68.1 and Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 32.

⁶⁴ Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ ST 2 2.9.1 ad 1. Also Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 39.

at work on a particular object that is the focus of one's attention. Further, this judgment is evaluative or appreciative in character that moves the will to a certain 'stance', or as Stump describes it, to 'a conative attitude prompted by the mind's understanding.'⁶⁶

Recent studies of second personal experiences and second personal relationship can illuminate Aquinas's approach to the moral life.⁶⁷ For Stump, the necessary condition for a minimal second-personal experience is a personal conscious interaction between two persons that is immediate, namely a mutual presence. There is the recognition by one person of the other as a 'you'.⁶⁸ Stump's necessary conditions reflect studies of those suffering from autism spectrum disorder which is characterised by diminished social interaction and communication. In other words, autism involves an impaired ability to form 'second person' (or I-you) relationships.⁶⁹

Further, within a mutually shared second-personal relationship there is a phenomenon called *triadic joint attention* whereby both individuals can simultaneously have his or her attention fixed on some third object, event or state of affairs. Each person's attitudes and responses to the third 'object' can be shared in a manner that is direct and intuitive. It is a 'sharing of minds.' Pinsent argues that this form of interactive relationship can offer an insight into the interaction and 'sharing of minds' between God and the person in the setting of a graced relationship and of God working 'in us without us.'

Research has shown that children with autism spectrum disorder are often unable to be 'moved' by the other person such that, from a basic form of affective response, the child can identify with the 'other' and so engage in 'joint attention' of another object or event. Pinsent (and Stump) suggests that such a condition can be seen analogically in terms of a person's 'spiritual autism' – the inability to be 'moved' affectively by the divine other and, hence, share a graced relationship with God.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Eleonore Stump, 'The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions', *Faith and Philosophy* 28:1 (2011), pp. 29-43, at p.41.

⁶⁷ These draw on advances in neuroscience (differences in left [analysis] and right brain [affective and metaphoric] activities) and, importantly, on research into social cognition with its relational and embodied context.

⁶⁸ Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, pp. 75–6.

⁶⁹ Given that those with autism 'do not easily identify with other persons or appropriate their psychological orientation', they have difficulty using the second- personal pronoun 'you', namely, 'in grasping the grammatical meaning of the second person.' See Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 128, n. 56. In the same work, Pinsent cites research that confirms the phenomenon of 'pronoun reversal', namely, that 'children with autism often refer to themselves as "you" and the person they are speaking with as "I" (p. 48).

⁷⁰ Pinsent relates his discussion of autism (a relational and affective deficit) to Aquinas's view that the infused virtues and gifts as dispositions can be present in children and in the intellectually impaired (*ST* 2.2.47.14 ad 3). See Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 131, n. 95.

On this basis, Pinsent probes texts in Aquinas where the infused non-Aristotelian virtues (theological and moral) and gifts heal and remove a person's spiritual autism. One is, thus, enabled to enter and pursue a relationship with God which is radically different in character and consequences from Aristotelian accounts of virtue. This is a disposition which 'God works in us without us.'

The virtues and the gifts are interrelated and complementary dispositions in Aquinas's moral theory. First-personal dispositions (such as the virtue of wisdom) do not require a shared stance or inter-personal relationship. Alternatively, second- personal dispositions involve the shared experience of embodied relationship, namely, a mutual presence of another and an acknowledged shared stance. The person so identifies with the other that they take on something of the other's psychological disposition, namely, their ways of perceiving and their dispositions to be moved and respond affectively.⁷¹

For Aquinas, then, with the virtue of wisdom, a judgment is made in relation to the benchmark of first-personal flourishing (growing *ad imaginem* through self-direction on freedom), albeit within the context of the gift of grace.⁷² Alternatively, since the gifts are a disposition to being 'moved', they entail an interaction with another personal agent resulting in a shared stance towards some object - an expression of inter-personal flourishing or, in Aquinas' terms, of friendship.

The gift of wisdom, then, is qualitatively different from the virtue of wisdom. It is a disposition, within friendship with God, seeking to be associated with God by a kind of 'union of the soul.' From the action of the Holy Spirit, the person is disposed to be 'amenable' or 'readily moveable' by divine inspiration.⁷³ Here, wisdom's judgment comes from a 'meeting of minds' in which there is a 'connaturality' for such judgments from love through union with God, a sharing of the divine instinct. In other words, the personal conviction grounded in love is such that we are moved to judge about right response and action where one's desire and choice are at one.⁷⁴

Pinsent's treatment of the gifts recognises their soteriological function. A reading that takes into account Aquinas's discussions elsewhere helps to throw light on their Christological and ecclesial nature. As noted earlier, for Aquinas, such aspects are central in our participation in the divine nature and moral growth with Christ as exemplar. The gift of wisdom, for instance, is a share in Christ's wisdom in Whom all the gifts are found to an 'exemplary degree.' By partaking

⁷¹ Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 62.

⁷² *ST* 1.2. Prologue.

⁷³ Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 32 citing *ST* 1.2. 68.1.

⁷⁴ 'In this way, therefore, wisdom that is a gift has its cause in the will, namely charity, but has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge rightly.' *ST* 2.2.45-2.

in the divine nature in Christ, we are called to put on ‘the mind of Christ.’ Hence, the gifts of the Spirit attune the believer’s mind and heart to existence in our ‘new creation’ in Christ and to ‘the divine milieu in which faith must now live.’⁷⁵ They enable one to be responsive to the divine gift and action of being ‘moved’ such that one’s identity, perceptions and dispositions are shaped and informed by those of Jesus.

With the gift of wisdom, in relation to a common object, event or state of affairs, a shared stance with God comes an intuitive judgment or ‘a sure estimation that something ought to be adhered to and its opposite withdrawn from’ that simulates the will. Citing Stump’s phrase, it is a shared ‘conative attitude prompted by the mind’s understanding.’⁷⁶ But this has an ecclesial dimension based on union with Christ whose formative and collaborative influence finds its fullest expression, for Aquinas, in the Eucharist - as we have seen earlier. We have noted how Aquinas sums up the relationship between Christ and the Church in these terms: ‘the head and members are as one mystic person (*una persona mystica*).’⁷⁷ This is the context of the mutual presence and joint attention expressed in the gift of wisdom. As Kelly explains, the gift of wisdom

‘... is at once a tasting and an attunement to the reality of the crucified and risen One mediated in the life of the Church. It amounts to a feeling for the totality of the divine economy centred in Christ.’⁷⁸

One is moved by the Spirit to taste with the divine taste. Because of our union with Incarnate Wisdom, that wisdom which is uppermost among the gifts brings a sharing in Christ’s ‘taste’ for divine things and in his judgment about divine realities.

Further, participation of the graced person in the Word of God Incarnate who is Wisdom together with amenability to be ‘moved’ by the Spirit has an inescapable Trinitarian dimension. As noted earlier, Shanley sums up the Christian moral life as a return ‘to the Father through the Son and in the Spirit’ and continues:

We enter most deeply into the life of the Trinity when charity is crowned with the gift of wisdom resulting in a deep affective affinity (*compassio sive connaturalitas*) for the things of God as our own, and the resultant ability to judge them aright on that basis (*recte iudicium propter connaturalitatem*).⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Kelly, ‘Faith as Sight’, p. 189.

⁷⁶ Pinsent, *The Second-person perspective*, p. 40. See Eleonore Stump, ‘The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas’s Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions’, *Faith and Philosophy* 28:1 (2011), pp. 29-43, at p. 41.

⁷⁷ See n 36 above.

⁷⁸ Kelly, ‘Faith as Sight’, p. 189 citing *ST* 2.2. 45.2.

⁷⁹ Shanley, ‘Aquinas’s Exemplar Ethics’, p. 368 citing *ST* 2.2.45.2.

In understanding, loving and judging as God does, one grows into the image of God (*imago Dei*), of the triune God, *Dei Trinitatis* and, one could rightly add, a person becomes *imago Christi*.

Finally, the gift of wisdom subverts and relativises our human understandings in that it is a participation in divine Wisdom whose paradigmatic, personal and supreme expression is the cross. It is God's 'wise foolishness' that conquers all 'human prudence' as Paul reminds us writing to the Corinthians and, as noted earlier, the cross gives us an example of virtue.⁸⁰ Aquinas sees the timing of the Passion as subject to the divine will but within the overarching direction of divine wisdom.⁸¹ Earlier, he draws on Gregory of Nyssa's comment that the shape of the cross extending to the four points of the compass is a metaphor of Christ as universal Saviour. The Word as divine Wisdom is expressed in 'the power and the providence diffused everywhere of Him who hung upon it.'⁸²

Conclusion

Hopefully, with these considerations, we can better 'signpost the connections' concerning the role of Christ in the moral theology of Aquinas. Central are the role of the Word as embodied Wisdom and the soteriological emphasis of Jesus as exemplar, especially in the redemptive love of his Passion and as Teacher. These help to illuminate both the unity of the *Summa Theologiae* and Aquinas's sapiential approach to moral transformation, particularly through the Gifts and, specifically, that of wisdom. Our investigation has also drawn attention to the Christological and ecclesial aspects of this process. When all this is viewed within the overall matrix of friendship, of the New Law as personalised in Jesus, and of the formative action of the Holy Spirit, then, Aquinas's dictum on Christ as our 'wisest and dearest friend' offers a distilled 'taste' of the moral life that is both rich and appealing.

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⁸⁰ Melina, *The Epiphany of Love*, p. 62.

⁸¹ *ST* 3. 46.9.

⁸² *ST* 3. 46. 4.