

**The Forgotten Virtue of Friendship:
Thomistic Friendship and Contemporary Christian Ethics
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63rd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society
San Francisco, CA
November 17, 2011**

In our contemporary culture, friendship has become more of an expression of social networks than a true, intimate relationship between individuals. This new understanding of friendship has diluted the robust meaning of friendship that has historically been a part of ethical thought since the time of the Greek philosophers. Online applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, measure friendship by the number of followers or people in your circle. However, in most of these applications, there is no measure of intimacy or characteristics found within the historical understanding of friendship that shed any light on whether or not a true relationship actually exists.

Within the Christian tradition, friendship has been an important part of ethics as Thomas Aquinas developed one of the most substantial discourses on the virtue of friendship. While some have dismissed Aquinas' ideas on friendship as outdated, much of his writing on friendship can be helpful for ethical discussion within the contemporary evangelical context. Specifically, his ideas relate to the relationship between ethics and community, ethics and worship, and the unity of the church. This paper will explore the development of Aquinas' understanding of friendship and make application to contemporary evangelical ethics in order to recover the forgotten virtue of friendship. Through this, we will see that a Thomistic understanding of friendship provides a much needed, robust understanding of friendship whereby community, worship, and the church can be incorporated into contemporary Christian ethics.

Characteristics of Friendship

Using the Aristotelian philosophical concept of friendship and Augustinian theological foundations, Aquinas builds his concept of friendship as a part of his theological and philosophical system. In doing so, he turns to the greatest of virtues—charity—to accomplish his purpose.¹ Thus, his clearest treatment of friendship comes in the midst of his discussions of love and charity.² He succinctly states, “It is written (Jo. xv. 15): *I will not now call you servants . . . but My friends*. Now this was said to them by reason of nothing else than charity. Therefore charity is friendship.”³ Within these discussions, Aquinas addresses both the characteristics and the objects of friendship.

Aquinas develops four major characteristics of true friendship in his discussion of charity: well-wishing, mutuality, communion, and communication. These four characteristics lay the groundwork for discussing the objects of friendship. First, Aquinas addresses the characteristic of well-wishing as he writes, “According to the Philosopher (*Ethic.* viii. 2, 3), not every love has the character of friendship, but that love which is together with benevolence, when, to wit, we love someone so as to wish good to him.”⁴ This well-wishing stands in opposition to man’s natural desire to seek his own good because the man is directed outward

¹ In relation to charity being the chief of the virtues, Aquinas writes that “in the order of perfection, charity precedes faith and hope: because both faith and hope are quickened by charity, and receive from charity their full complement as virtues. For thus charity is the mother and the root of all the virtues, inasmuch as it is the form of them all. . . .” Aquinas, *ST*, I–II.62.4. See also *ST*, II–II.23.8 and Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity (De Caritate)* (trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1960), 3.

² In general, love and charity in Aquinas’ writings can be considered as the same. Aquinas does make some distinction between the two, but it is mostly for the sake of addressing action versus habit, and in general, actions lead to habits. Aquinas notes, “We find four words referring in a way to the same thing: viz., love, dilection, charity and friendship. They differ, however, in this, that *friendship*, according to the Philosopher (*Ethic.* viii. 5), *is like a habit*, whereas *love* and *dilection* are expressed by way of act or passion; and *charity* can be taken either way. Moreover these three express act in different ways. For love has a wider signification than the others, since every dilection or charity is love, but not vice versa. Because dilection implies, in addition to love, a choice (*electionem*) made beforehand, as the very word denotes: and therefore dilection is not in the concupiscible power, but only in the will, and only in the rational nature.—Charity denotes, in addition to love, a certain perfection of love, in so far as that which is loved is held to be of great price, as the word itself implies.” See Aquinas, *ST*, I–II.26.3.

³ Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.23.1.

⁴ *Ibid.*

from his own selfishness to seek the good of someone other than himself. Aquinas draws out the contrast by stating that “love of friendship seeks the friend’s good. In this respect, a man is said to be zealous on behalf of his friend when he makes a point of repelling whatever may be said or done against the friend’s good.”⁵ This characteristic is part of true friendship. In the other types of friendship, one may wish his friend well, but it is most likely for one’s own pleasure or utility.⁶ This well-wishing can only be properly expressed in the context of love of friendship. Bauerschmidt asserts, “Although we may say that we ‘love’ a particular food, that food does not thereby become our friend, in part because we do not desire that the food be good—in other words, we do not have ‘benevolence’ toward it.”⁷ Thus, love of friendship, or charity, involves well-wishing toward a person rather than toward an inanimate object.

While well-wishing provides a good start for the nature of friendship, it is insufficient in itself to provide an adequate description of true friendship in charity. Aquinas declares, “Yet neither does well-wishing suffice for friendship, for a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend.”⁸ Thomas derives this point from Aristotle’s description of friendship in the *Eth. nic.* In his *Commentary on the Eth. nic.*, Aquinas notes, “He [Aristotle] explains that when people wish good to someone for his sake we call them benevolent but not friends if the wish is not reciprocated so that the loved one wishes good to, and for the sake of, the one loving. The reason is that we say friendship is benevolence with corresponding requital

⁵ Ibid., I-II.28.4. Aquinas prefaces these comments with a discussion on the two types of love—love of concupiscence and love of friendship. He writes, “As the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii. 4), *to love is to wish good to someone*. Hence the movement to love has a twofold tendency: towards the good which a man wishes to someone,—to himself or to another, and towards that to which he wishes some good. Accordingly, man has love of concupiscence towards the good that he wishes to another, and love of friendship, towards him to whom he wishes good.” See Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.26.4.

⁶ Aquinas notes, “When friendship is based on usefulness or pleasure, a man does indeed wish his friend some good: and in this respect the character of friendship is preserved. But since he refers this good to his own pleasure or use, the result is that friendship of the useful or pleasant, in so far as it is concerned with love of concupiscence, loses the character of true friendship.” See Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.26.4.

⁷ Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 153, fn. 6.

⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II.23.1.

inasmuch as the one loving is loved in return, for friendship has a kind of exchange of love after the manner of communicative justice.”⁹ In addition, the mutual exchange of love must be recognized. Aristotle notes, “To be friends, then, they must be mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other.”¹⁰ Without mutuality, one’s love does not develop into the true friendship that Aquinas is commending. This indicates another reason why people cannot be friends with inanimate objects—the object cannot consider the person its friend in return.¹¹ Only persons can befriend each other. Augustine also supports this characteristic of friendship. He writes, “This is what we love in friends. We love to the point that the human conscience feels guilty if we do not love the person who is loving us, and if that love is not returned—without demanding any physical response other than the marks of affectionate goodwill.”¹² This mutuality serves as a baseline standard for all types of friendship, whether they are from pleasure, utility, or virtue.¹³

The third characteristic of true friendship addressed by Aquinas is communion. Aquinas draws his concept of communion from the Latin term *communicatio*. This term has a dual meaning, one of which includes sharing something in common.¹⁴ Monagle explains, “In the dynamic sense it indicates mutual activity and sharing. In this sense it is affective, intentional, and tendential, admitting of intensity and connoting affective union of friends in knowing,

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* (trans. C. I. Litzinger; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), VIII.ii.1559.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Eth. nic.*, VIII.2.1156a3–4. Cicero maintains a similar view on mutuality in friendship. He states, “Now friendship may be thus defined: *a complete accord on all subjects human and divine, joined with mutual goodwill and affection.*” Cicero, *Amic.*, 6.

¹¹ Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 154, fn. 7.

¹² Augustine, *Conf.*, IV.9.

¹³ Bauerschmidt observes, “Beyond well-wishing, friendship also involves mutuality: you cannot be friends with someone who does not consider herself your friend.” Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 154, fn. 7. See also Wadell, *Primacy of Love*, 68–69; Meilaender, *Friendship*, 36–52.

¹⁴ Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 154, fn. 8.

willing, and doing harmoniously.”¹⁵ This communion works in coordination with well-wishing to the point that a man considers his friend to be his other self. Aquinas states, “When a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself; wherefore, he apprehends him as his other self, in so far, to wit, as he wills good to him as to himself. Hence a friend is called a man’s *other self* (*Ethic.* ix. 4), and Augustine says (*Confess.* iv. 6), *Well did one say to his friend: Thou half of my soul.*”¹⁶ An example of this communion is the estate of man and woman in the Garden of Eden as recorded in Gen 2. While the relationship in Genesis specifically refers to marriage, one can see the overall concept of communion expressed in this description of the first couple. Upon seeing the woman, Adam declared, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). The communion in marriage is similar to the communion of friendship in that two individuals are drawn into a relationship of considering the friend to be another self.

This characteristic of communion seems to reveal an interesting dynamic in Aquinas’ overall understanding of friendship within his ethical system. Earlier in the *ST*, Aquinas declared, “If there were but one soul enjoying God, it would be happy, though having no neighbor to love. But supposing one neighbor to be there, love of him results from perfect love of God. Consequently, friendship is, as it were, concomitant with perfect Happiness.”¹⁷ Thus, a dynamic tension exists in his understanding of communion. On one hand, he is advocating that communion with God is sufficient. On the other hand, he suggests that friendship with other humans is a vital part of communion. Is communion with other humans necessary for friendship

¹⁵ Monagle, “Friendship in Aristotle and Aquinas,” 58.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.28.1. C. S. Lewis considers this characteristic to be companionship, out of which friendships arise. However, he notes that it is incomplete and not total friendship. See C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960), 96.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.4.8. Kerr declares, “To my mind at least, when he argues that the companionship of other human beings is not *de necessitate* in heaven ... he would have done better to think a little harder about what Aristotle is saying in the text that he cites.” See Kerr, “Charity as Friendship,” 19–20.

and happiness?¹⁸ For Aquinas, the fellowship of other humans is essential not because happiness cannot be attained in God, but that humans need someone else for whom to do good. Thomas writes that “the happy man needs friends . . . for the purpose of a good operation, viz., that he may do good to them; that he may delight in seeing them do good; and again that he may be helped by them in his good work. For in order that man may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he needs the fellowship of friends.”¹⁹ Thus, happiness for an individual in perfect communion with God can occur apart from human communion or friendships. However, human communion is required for the actions inspired by well-wishing and mutuality. The pattern set forth in creation by God is that humans are social creatures and a proper expression of God-honoring worship is to do good to one another and rejoice in the good of each other.²⁰ Therefore, Aquinas does not create an inconsistency or contradiction at this point; rather, he draws out a greater development of his overall ethic.²¹

Aquinas’ concept of communion in friendship is consistent with Aristotle’s idea, but it should not be confused with the Platonic ideal of communion in friendship. Plato described people as wandering the earth searching for their other half in order that they may be made complete.²² For Aristotle, the common feature shared was equality of virtue and status rather

¹⁸ In Gen 2:18, the Lord says, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” Thus, there is some aspect of goodness involved for humans to have communion with other humans. In the case of Gen 2, God created Eve, not specifically for companionship with Adam, but to accomplish the purpose of filling the earth and subduing it. Mark Liederbach explains, “Clearly, then, God remedied Adam’s aloneness not so much because he was ‘lonely’ but because remaining ‘alone’ would make it impossible to complete the task God meant for both Adam and Eve to accomplish: The filling and subduing the earth.” Mark D. Liederbach, “Ethics as Worship: A Meta-Ethical Discussion of the Foundations for Biblical Ethics” (paper presented at annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Valley Forge, PA, 16 November 2005), 10.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.4.8.

²⁰ 1 Cor 12:26.

²¹ The greater scheme of Aquinas’ ethic revolves around the idea of *exitus et reditus*. This is the flow from and return to God of all things in the universe.

²² Plato writes, “Each of us, then, is a ‘matching half’ of a human whole, because each was sliced like a flatfish, two out of one, and each of us is always seeking the half that matches him.” See Plato, *Symp.*, 191.

than a completion of self.²³ Aquinas generally accepts this characteristic among humans, but he departs from his philosophical foundation and considers friendship with God to be possible even though man is not God's equal.

The ability for such friendship with God comes from the final characteristic of friendship: communication. This characteristic plays on the other meaning of *communicatio*—that there is actual communication that takes place between the parties. Bauerschmidt notes, “To say that friendship depends on *communicatio* covers two points that Aristotle makes about friendship: it must be based on something shared in common . . . , and the parties must actually be in communication with each other.”²⁴ On the human level, communication is easy to understand in that two individuals will share communication through both verbal and nonverbal channels. In relation to friendship with God, communication becomes a more complex idea. Aquinas acknowledges the existence of communication in the relationship between God and man by saying, “Accordingly, since there is a communication [*communicatio*] between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor. i. 9): *God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son*. The love which is based on this communication, is charity: Wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.”²⁵ Eberhard Schockenhoff offers further explanation as he writes:

²³ Hauerwas insightfully writes that “it would be unjust to Aristotle’s account to fasten on the contention that friendship is present insofar as people are sharing something in common, in the interest of defending him from a far too narrow treatment of friendship. It makes all the difference what it is they share in common.” See Hauerwas, “Happiness,” 38–39.

²⁴ Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 154, fn. 8.

²⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.23.1. Eberhard Schockenhoff writes, “Human love for God proceeds from a communication that cannot be compared with any human compact. In this communication, the infinite God in the fullness of His Triune life is opened up to human beings and so calls them to friendship with Himself.” See Eberhard Schockenhoff, “The Theological Virtue of Charity (IIa IIae, qq.23–46)” (trans. Grant Kaplan and Frederick G. Lawrence), in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 247.

Thomas's intellectual achievement consists in his interpretation of the concept of *communicatio* against the background of the Christian understanding of God. According to Aristotle, lack of equality excludes friendship between gods and human beings. Thomas's God is neither the unmoved mover nor the highest thought who sees only his own essence in the finite spirit. He is the God of love, who yearns for intimate community with human beings and seeks companionship and exchange with them. Thomas does not shy away from using the vocabulary of "society" (*societas*), "to live together" (*convivere*), and "conversation" (*conversatio*), which are all taken from the realm of intimate human communication. The Triune God establishes the foundation upon which the friendship of human beings for God can emerge by bending down to him in God's becoming human, and becoming equal to human beings in the descent of love.²⁶

Thus, the complex idea of communication between God and man is made possible through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. While noted as two separate characteristics of friendship, communication cannot exist apart from communion. Therefore, the *communicatio* of friendship is a twofold characteristic that functions as a single unit. With these characteristics of friendship, Aquinas is able to develop a more complete understanding of the concept than Aristotle could accomplish without a fully developed theology. These four characteristics give a description of friendship that can be supported through the actions of God as revealed in Scripture in how he relates to his people. As a result, Aquinas' view allows for his concept to be directed toward more than just one object.

Objects of Friendship

According to Aquinas, friendship must be directed toward specific objects. David M. Gallagher notes that "for Thomas the moral life is essentially a matter of relationships among persons."²⁷ These persons are the objects of friendship for Aquinas and lead to a practical outworking of his ethic. As a result, Aquinas does not allow for friendship with irrational objects. He states, "The love of charity extends to none but God and neighbor. But the word neighbor cannot be extended

²⁶ Schockenhoff, "Theological Virtue of Charity," 247–48.

²⁷ David M. Gallagher, "The Will and Its Acts (Ia IIae, qq. 6–17)," in *The Ethics of Aquinas* (ed. Stephen J. Pope; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 84.

to irrational creatures, since they have no fellowship with man in the rational life. Therefore charity does not extend to irrational creatures.”²⁸ Aquinas’ rationale for this is threefold. First, one can only have friendship with one to whom he wishes good things, and one cannot wish good things to an irrational creature because it does not possess good. Second, friendship is based on fellowship in life, and irrational creatures cannot have fellowship with man because fellowship requires reason. Third, friendship is based upon everlasting happiness, and irrational creatures cannot attain everlasting happiness. However, Aquinas does allow for man to love irrational creatures out of charity. He writes, “Nevertheless we can love irrational creatures out of charity, if we regard them as the good things that we desire for others, in so far, to wit, as we wish for their preservation, to God’s honor and man’s use; thus too does God love them out of charity.”²⁹ The four rational objects with whom Aquinas believes man can be friends are God, self, neighbors, and bodies. He discusses these within the context of hierarchy that places a priority on God and then works in decreasing priority toward self, neighbors, and bodies. Within his discussion of neighbors, he creates a second level of priority which moves in concentric circles from the closest to the self and outward to enemies.

Friendship with God

Friendship with God serves as the basis for all friendship just as God serves as the ground of all being and perfect goodness in the theology of Aquinas. This serves as the greatest departure from Aristotle in Aquinas’ development of friendship. In Aristotle’s understanding of friendship, a human would have no possibility of friendship with God because God is too far removed from the estate of men to share any communion. However, Aquinas allows for the possibility of friendship with God based on communion with man established through the incarnation. In this

²⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.25.3.

²⁹ *Ibid.* See also, Aquinas, *De Caritate*, 7; and Aquinas, *In Sent.*, III.28.2.

one can see the theological innovations of Aquinas as he adapts Augustinian theology to integrate and improve upon Aristotelian philosophy. Aquinas writes:

[W]hat belongs to the essence of goodness befits God. But it belongs to the essence of goodness to communicate itself to others, as is plain from Dionysius (*Div. Nom.* iv). Hence it belongs to the essence of the highest good to communicate itself in the highest manner to the creature, and this is brought about chiefly by *His so joining created nature to Himself that one Person is made up of these three—the Word, a soul, and flesh*, as Augustine says (*De Trin.* xiii). Hence it is manifest that it was fitting that God should become incarnate.³⁰

Therefore, God has communicated to his creation as the highest good.

Since God is the chief good and it is befitting of goodness to communicate itself, then God has established communion between himself and mankind through the incarnation—the ultimate form of communication.³¹ Eberhard Schockenhoff writes, “The Triune God establishes the foundation upon which the friendship of human beings for God can emerge by bending down to him in God’s becoming human, and becoming equal to human beings in the descent of love.”³² On this basis of divine communication with mankind, friendship is possible between God and man.

In addition, friendship with God is constitutive of happiness, according to Aquinas. He says, “Now the friendship of charity is based on the fellowship of happiness, which consists essentially in God, as the First Principle, whence it flows to all who are capable of happiness.”³³

All who are capable of happiness, which would include all of mankind, find true happiness in

³⁰Aquinas, *ST*, III.1.1.

³¹As a note of interest, Jonathan Edwards also considers God’s communication to his creation as part of the emanation of his fullness to creation. Edwards suggests some particular emanations as divine knowledge, virtue, holiness, and happiness. Edwards summarizes, “And if we attend to the nature and circumstances of this eternal emanation of divine good, it will more clearly show how, in making this his end, God testifies a supreme respect to himself, and makes himself his end.” Jonathan Edwards, *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (vol. 1; Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005), 1.3.

³²Schockenhoff, “Theological Virtue of Charity,” 248. Contra Steven Edwards who believes that divine fatherhood was Aquinas’ key to bridging the gap between man and God. However, Edwards does not offer a text from Aquinas to support his claim. See Steven Anthony Edwards, “Structure and Change in Aquinas’s Religious Ethics,” *JAAR* 54 (1986): 294.

³³Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.26.2.

fellowship, or friendship, with God. This points back to Aquinas' theological foundation of happiness in the beatific vision. Certainly, it must be acknowledged that Aquinas has previously admitted to the inability to achieve perfect happiness on earth, but the friendship of man with God serves as a reflection of the happiness that will be experienced in eternal communion with God. Thus, Aquinas exhorts, "God ought to be loved chiefly and before all out of charity: for He is loved as the cause of happiness."³⁴

In light of Aquinas' use of John 15 as his Scriptural basis for friendship with God, one should not take Aquinas' emphasis on man pursuing friendship with God as a work of the human will alone. In John 15:14, Jesus states, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." On the surface, it may appear to be man's duty to become friends with God through obedience to God's commands. However, it is God who bestows friendship upon men apart from the works of men. Bauerschmidt clarifies, "Here it should be underscored that the charity Aquinas is speaking of is a theological virtue, which means that it is instilled in us by God. As 1 John 4:19 says, 'We love because he first loved us.' The initiative is always on God's part. Nothing we do wins God's friendship; it is a gift freely bestowed."³⁵ Jesus implied this point in John 15:16 immediately after he called his disciples his friends: "You did not choose me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit." Thomas drives this point home in his commentary on the Gospel of John where he writes that "keeping the commandments is not the cause of divine

³⁴ Ibid. Gallagher writes, "If a person loves God with the love of friendship (*caritas*) then the good of God becomes his own good and his beatitude consists in possessing (by the *visio beatifica*) this good (IIa IIae, q. 180, a. 1)." See Gallagher, "The Will and Its Acts," 85.

³⁵ Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 154, f n. 10. See also Schockenhoff, "The Theological Virtue of Charity," 247; Diana Fritz Cates, "Compassion for Friends in Friendship with God: Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the Ethics of Shared Selfhood" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1990), 119–20; and Guy Mansini, "Charity and the Form of Friendship," in *Ethics and Theological Disclosures: The Thought of Robert Sokolowski* (eds. Guy Mansini and James G. Hart; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 35–36.

friendship but the sign, the sign both that God loves us and that we love God.”³⁶ This reminds one of the doctrine of election in salvation and the story of Abraham in Gen 12 where God chooses him to be the father of a great nation. From this friendship with God, man is able to extend his friendship outward to others. The life of a friend of God pursues God’s will above his own. Wadell declares, “Friends of God are those whose whole project is to will what God wills as God wills it, to make God’s good their own. Thus, charity is a life given to seeking and promoting what God wants, and seeing this as the singlemost meaning of one’s life.”³⁷

The shortcoming in Aquinas’ discussion of friendship with God comes in man’s expression of friendship and charity back toward God. In spite of noting the four characteristics of friendship—well-wishing, mutuality, communion, and communication—it is difficult to imagine how a finite individual expresses his friendship for an infinite God. Clearly, Aquinas believes that charity is infused in humans by God; thus, the very act of friendship with God is a divine act rather than a human one. However, consideration should be made for how someone expresses that friendship toward God. Throughout his writing on friendship, man’s expression of friendship with God appears to come from his relation with the rest of creation, not necessarily with God himself. Clearly, friendship with others is a means of loving God as will be seen in the discussion on friendship with neighbors. However, a direct expression of friendship with God apart from others is more difficult to see. The one insight Aquinas gives to this subject is when

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John: Part II: Chapters 8–21*, (trans. Fabian R. Larcher; Albany: Magi, 1998), XV.3.2012. Cited 4 August 2009. Online: <http://www.op-stjoseph.org/Students/study/thomas/SSJohn.htm>.

³⁷ Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 132. Scripture provides a clear explanation of how one attains this friendship with God. Recognizing the sinful state of all humans (Rom 3:23) and the consequences of this sin as eternal separation from God (Rom 6:23), no individual is capable of establishing this relationship on his own. All are dependent upon God to provide the means by which a relationship is established. Out of his abundant mercy and grace, God has provided salvation as a free gift through his Son, Jesus Christ (Eph 2:4–9). Through the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the consequences of human sinfulness were paid (Rom 5:8–10) so that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved (Rom 10:8–15). Thus, friendship with God is established by his provision of salvation through his Son that is given to individuals by grace through faith.

he states that “love of friendship seeks the friend’s good. In this respect, a man is said to be zealous on behalf of his friend when he makes a point of repelling whatever may be said or done against the friend’s good. In this way, too, a man is said to be zealous on God’s behalf when he endeavors, to the best of his means, to repel whatever is contrary to the honor or will of God.”³⁸ While appearing to offer some concrete expression of friendship for God, Aquinas still leaves his readers without a way to express friendship directly to God. Perhaps this was the difficulty Aristotle encountered and the reason why he did not allow for friendship between humans and gods.³⁹

Taking into account that friendship with God is the expression of charity with the one who embodies charity, there may be two areas of insight to apply to the concrete expression of friendship with God. First, as noted above, being zealous on God’s behalf is an expression of friendship. Such zeal includes concrete expressions as proclamation of the gospel message to the world (Matt 28:18–20), defense of God and his Word before unbelievers (1 Pet 3:13–16), and the correction of unorthodox theology within the church (2 Tim 4:1–5). Another area where expression of friendship with God is exhibited is through a worshipful life that encompasses all matters of life, obedience, and behavior. In 1 Cor 10:31, Paul writes, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” In this short admonition from Paul, believers see the all-encompassing nature of a worshipful life. There is no area untouched by worship in the life of the believer; therefore, the friend of God is constantly expressing that friendship in his actions, thoughts, and beliefs. Thus, a life of worship is a concrete expression of friendship with God that serves as a living testimony to a watching world of what it means to be in an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe.

³⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, I–II.28.4

³⁹ Aristotle states that “for much can be taken away and friendship remain, but when one party is removed to a great distance, as God is, the possibility of friendship ceases.” Aristotle, *Eth. nic.*, VIII.7.1159a4–5.

Friendship with Self

Following the teaching of Augustine and the admonition of Scripture, Aquinas holds that man can love himself and thus exhibit the friendship of charity with himself.⁴⁰ Aquinas opens his answer to the question regarding whether man ought to love himself by stating, “It is written (Levit. xix. 18): *Thou shalt love thy friend as thyself*. Now we love our friends out of charity. Therefore we should love ourselves too out of charity.”⁴¹ Aquinas develops a two-part nature of friendship to make application to being friends with oneself. The first part of friendship is union. Although man’s union with himself is different from union with other friends, the union with self serves as the foundation for union with others. Aquinas notes, “[P]roperly speaking, a man is not a friend to himself, but something more than a friend. . . . Hence, just as unity is the principle of union, so the love with which a man loves himself is the form and root of friendship. For if we have friendship with others it is because we do unto them as we do unto ourselves, hence we read in *Ethic.* ix. 4, 8, that *the origin of friendly relations with others lies in our relations to ourselves*.”⁴² While Aquinas is not entirely clear what he means by union with oneself, he believes that there is a special union with the self that allows for charity to exist for oneself. Schockenhoff describes it this way:

For Thomas, the primacy of self-love over love of neighbor on this level is not a statement of normative ethics. He simply describes the natural weight of the human will, which is inscribed in it as an ontologically fundamental direction. In a specific way, the human will also stands under the fundamental law of all creaturely being according to which *being-one* is prior to *becoming-one* (*unitas est potior unione*). The natural assertion of one’s own good precedes the free love that is supposed to reach the neighbor, just as it already includes the self of the one loving.⁴³

⁴⁰ See Augustine, *Doctr. chr.*, I.23.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II.25.4.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Schockenhoff, “Theological Virtue of Charity,” 253.

Thus, the will of a person provides the ontological basis from which to love oneself because it is united with the individual naturally. In addition this special union with the will serves as the basis from which one loves oneself in priority over loving others.

The second part of friendship that leads Aquinas to call for being friends with oneself is the extension of friendship to those related to one's friends. In this case, a man is friends with God; therefore, he ought also to be friends with himself because his existence is contingent upon God. This friendship with self should be examined carefully so as not to degenerate into one's being a lover of oneself as warned in 2 Tim 3:1–2.⁴⁴ In order to avoid this possibility, Aquinas suggests that true love of self relates only to one's rational nature, and the lovers of self in 2 Tim 3:2 are those who love their sensitive nature, not their rational nature.⁴⁵

Aquinas places love of self firmly within the hierarchy of charity between love of God and love of neighbor. Man is “to love God, Who is the common good of all, more than himself: since happiness is in God as in the universal and fountain principle of all who are able to have a share of that happiness.”⁴⁶ This initial placement of love for self behind love for God seems easy to accept; however, the next step appears more difficult. Aquinas believes that man is to love himself more than he loves his neighbor. While this seems to fly in the face of Paul's statement in 1 Cor 13:5 that love “does not seek its own,” Aquinas justifies the placement through analogy. He notes, “It is written, (Lev. xix. 18, Matth. xxii. 39): *Thou shalt love thy neighbor (Lev. loc. cit.,—friend) as thyself*. Whence it seems to follow that man's love for himself is the model of his love for another. But the model exceeds the copy. Therefore, out of charity, a man ought to

⁴⁴ Aquinas offers this objection in *ST*, II–II.25.4 as he writes, “Further, anything related to charity cannot be blameworthy, since charity *dealeth not perversely* (1 Cor. xiii. 4). Now a man deserves to be blamed for loving himself, since it is written (2 Tim. iii. 1, 2): *In the last days shall come dangerous times, men shall be lovers of themselves.*”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II–II.26.3.

love himself more than his neighbor.”⁴⁷ He continues by drawing a distinction between love for one’s spiritual self rather than love for one’s corporeal self. Love for one’s corporeal self is sinful when it surpasses the love of neighbor.⁴⁸

Friendship with Neighbors

In the Thomistic synthesis of friendship, the natural extension of friendship with God is friendship with one’s neighbors. The simplest aspect of friendship with neighbors is that charity is directed toward those someone would consider close. Aquinas writes, “Friendship extends to a person in two ways: first in respect of himself, and in this way friendship never extends but to one’s friends.”⁴⁹ Much has already been said concerning the characteristics of friendship, and these are easily applied to the ones who would already be considered neighbors. Well-wishing, mutuality, communion, and communication are the very nature of friendship and easily apply to close relationships.

As already noted, Aquinas creates a priority of friendship and charity within close relationships that places God at the top and descends through family and neighbors.⁵⁰ Within this system, Aquinas considers God to be the object of the most love because he is the highest good. Next, Aquinas states that man ought to love himself. Then Aquinas inserts a broad category of others as the third greatest object of love. Within this third category, Aquinas applies a second priority list of loving those in close proximity more than those who are not closely associated, much like concentric circles. Under that heading, individuals related by blood are to be loved

⁴⁷ Ibid., II–II.26.4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., II–II.25.7. While Aquinas’ distinction is noted, it still appears difficult to accept his priority of loving self more than neighbors. His only scriptural justification comes from passages that seem to teach that man should love neighbors (which does not come “naturally” to sinful man) in the same way that man loves himself (which does come “naturally” to sinful man). Thus, Aquinas’ placement of friendship with self at this place in the hierarchy may be somewhat forced; however, it does not negate the importance of friendship with self in the greater context of Aquinas’ ethic of friendship.

⁴⁹ Ibid., II–II, 23.1. The second way will be discussed in reference to loving one’s enemies.

⁵⁰ Ibid., II–II.26.3–12.

more than those not related. Then one's father and mother are to be loved more than children, and the father more than the mother. One's father and mother are also to be loved more than one's wife. Finally, one should love those he benefits more than his benefactor. At the outermost circle is love for one's benefactors.⁵¹

Even though Aquinas establishes this hierarchy, these types of people are all considered part of one's closer association of friends, and he believes that all of these types of people should be loved. Bauerschmidt describes this friendship within a close community as he states, "For Thomas, . . . the common life of Christians is not that of some earthly city-state, with its attendant limitation; it is rather the common life of the heavenly Jerusalem, in which all those who are chosen for salvation share without regard to status. Thus friendship is possible across boundaries that seemed unbreachable in the ancient world—ultimately even across the boundary that separates the divine and human."⁵² Thus, friendship within close relationships and the church are a simple extension of friendship with God.

The difficulty comes in extending friendship beyond the confines of close relationships because it infringes upon the characteristic of mutuality. Aquinas proposes this objection to loving one's enemies and seeks to answer it through his theological understanding of charity and friendship. He states in the objection, "Further, there is no friendship without return of love (*Ethic.* viii. 2). But charity extends even to one's enemies, according to Matth. v. 44: *Love your enemies*. Therefore charity is not friendship."⁵³ In his response to the objection, Thomas expresses the second way that friendship extends to a person

⁵¹ Ibid. See also Thomas Aquinas, *De Caritate*, 9. Cicero also offers a similar hierarchy as he states, "Now this truth seems clear to me, that nature has so formed us that a certain tie unites us all, but that this tie becomes stronger from proximity. So it is that fellow-citizens are preferred in our affections to foreigners, relations to strangers; for in their case Nature herself has caused a kind of friendship to exist, though it is one which lacks some of the elements of permanence." See Cicero, *Amic.*, 5.

⁵² Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 155, fn. 12.

⁵³ Aquinas, *ST*, II-II.23.1.

as “it extends to someone in respect of another, as, when a man has friendship for a certain person, for his sake he loves all belonging to him, be they children, servant, or connected with him in any way.”⁵⁴ Thus, a man can love anyone who is connected to someone else with whom he already shares friendship. But how does this relate to friendship with enemies? Aquinas declares that “in this way, the friendship of charity extends even to our enemies, whom we love out of charity in relation to God, to Whom the friendship of charity is chiefly directed.”⁵⁵ The problem of mutuality is addressed through one’s friendship with God. Even though the enemy does not provide the necessary mutuality, God provides it through his relationship with both individuals. The believer, thus, receives the necessary mutuality of friendship from God for expressing charity to the enemy. As a result, the friendship expressed to enemies on the basis of one’s relationship with God meets the standard of mutuality for the friendship to be charity as Aquinas discusses.

This expression of friendship relates back to Aquinas’ understanding of God as the ground of all being. Since the existence of all people is contingent upon God creating them, they deserve the friendship of the believer out of his friendship with God. Bauerschmidt explains, “If we love someone, we love all those who are connected with them. But because all creatures exist only by virtue of their relatedness to God, in loving God we are called to love all creatures. This does not, however, lessen the paradox of having charity toward our enemies, such that our

⁵⁴ Ibid. Brian Davies describes the extension of friendship from God to what he has created as follows: “But there is yet another reason for saying that charity, in Aquinas’s view, is not entirely other worldly. And this lies in the fact that he thinks of charity as a sharing by us in time of the life that belongs to God. He maintains that the primary object of charity is God. In charity, it is God we love first. But he also holds that the good of everything derives from God and reflects him. So consistency would seem to demand that he should think that those with charity will love whatever is good as well as loving the source of goodness which is God himself.” See Davies, *Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 294.

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.23.1. See also Aquinas, *De Caritate*, 4, where he writes, “But inasmuch as friendship towards one becomes more perfect as regards that one, the more perfect the love we have toward one, the better able are we to love others. Thus charity, because it is the most perfect friendship, extends itself to God and to all who are able to know God; it includes not only those whom we know, but also our enemies.”

enemies are our friends.”⁵⁶ Aquinas offers further explanation in *De Caritate* in an attempt to show how one loves his enemies in God. He states that “it must be said that one’s enemy, considered as enemy, is not the object of love but is only insofar as he pertains to God. Therefore we ought to hate in our enemy the fact that he hates us, and to desire that he would love us.”⁵⁷ Aquinas also extends this argument to sinners in general in his response to another objection against friendship when he writes that “charity, which above all is friendship based on the virtuous, extends to sinners, whom, out of charity, we love for God’s sake.”⁵⁸ Thus, friendship with all people is strongly grounded in one’s friendship with God and all of creation’s contingent nature in him. Aquinas’ discussion does not entirely solve the paradox of loving one’s enemies who do not reciprocate the love of friendship, but the reciprocity of friendship from God replaces, at least in part, the mutuality lacking from enemies and sinners.⁵⁹

Friendship with One’s Body

The final object of friendship noted by Aquinas in his hierarchy of charity is friendship with one’s body. Based on Aquinas’ previous distinction regarding love for one’s spiritual self over one’s corporeal self, one can see his logic to address love for one’s body. He spends only two articles in his *ST* addressing this topic, and he addresses two main issues: the nature of the body and why one should love his neighbor more than his own body. Regarding the nature of one’s

⁵⁶ Bauerschmidt, *Holy Teaching*, 155, fn. 13.

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *De Caritate*, 8.

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.23.1. See also Aquinas, *In Sent.*, III.27.2.1

⁵⁹ The final part of loving one’s neighbor, which may appear to be somewhat unusual, is love for the angels. Aquinas proposes an objection against loving the angels as one’s neighbors because angels are not of a common species to man and do not share companionship with man. (Ibid., II–II.25.10) However, he suggests, “As stated above (Q. 23, A. 1), the friendship of charity is founded upon the fellowship of everlasting happiness, in which men share in common with the angels. For it is written (Matth. xxii. 30) that *in the resurrection . . . men shall be as the angels of God in heaven*. It is therefore evident that the friendship of charity extends also to the angels.” (Ibid., II–II.25.10) In this explanation, Aquinas extends friendship to the angels for the same reason that he denies it to irrational creatures—rationality. In contrast, Aquinas does not believe that we should extend the friendship of charity to demons. Even though they possess a rational mind like the angels, one cannot wish them well nor desire that their own good endure for they stand in opposition to the glory and honor of God. (Ibid., II–II.25.11)

body, Aquinas clearly rejects the Manichean understanding that the body is evil. Since one can use his body to serve God, the body ought to be loved, but one ought to desire the removal of the evil effects of sin.⁶⁰ Speaking of loving neighbors more than one's body, Aquinas says, "Out of charity we ought to love more that which has more fully the reason for being loved out of charity, as stated above (A. 2: Q. 25, A. 12). Now fellowship in the full participation of happiness which is the reason for loving one's neighbor, is a greater reason for loving, than the participation of happiness by way of overflow, which is the reason for loving one's own body. Therefore, as regards the welfare of the soul we ought to love our neighbor more than our own body."⁶¹

By dividing the importance of the soul from the importance of the body, Aquinas is able to make this distinction between loving self and loving the body.⁶² In this, he seems to be adopting a dualistic understanding where the soul can be separated from the body for the sake of love and friendship. In his *Comp. Theol.*, Aquinas rejects any form of Platonic dualism as he proclaims that the body is necessary for the eternal happiness of the soul. He states, "Since, therefore, the natural condition of the human soul is to be united to the body, . . . it has a natural desire for union with the body."⁶³ Regarding the nature of the soul Aquinas writes in the *ST*, "To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life in those things which live: for we call living things *animate*, and those things which have no life, *inanimate*. Now life is shown principally by two actions, knowledge and movement."⁶⁴ Thus, the soul is the source of life for all animate things. However, the soul is not a body nor is man

⁶⁰ Ibid., II-II.25.5.

⁶¹ Ibid., II-II.26.5.

⁶² See Aquinas, *In Sent.*, III.28.7.

⁶³ Aquinas, *Comp. Theol.*, 151.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, I.75.1.

merely a soul.⁶⁵ Rather, man is composed of both body and soul with the body providing the material substance of humans. The soul and body are rightly unified in the way God created them. Aquinas asserts that the soul is more than just the motor of the body. It is the substantial form of the body. Thus, the body is human because of the existence of the soul.⁶⁶ The body also exists for the purpose of the soul as Aquinas notes, “Since the form is not for the matter, but rather the matter for the form, we must gather from the form the reason why the matter is such as it is; and not conversely.”⁶⁷ Thus, Aquinas is attempting to make a distinction between the soul and body, especially as it relates to the importance of friendship; however, he is not espousing a hard separation of the two. Moreland and Rae describe this distinction in Thomistic thought as “substance dualism,” which is consistent with “functional holism.”⁶⁸

With this in mind, Aquinas still offers his readers little practical application of how to love the soul of the neighbor less than oneself yet more than one’s body. His lone application falls short of offering any distinct division between oneself and one’s body. In response to Christ’s statement in John 15:13 concerning the love of a man laying down his life for his friend, Aquinas argues, “Every man is immediately concerned with the care of his own body, but not with his neighbor’s welfare, except perhaps in cases of urgency: wherefore charity does not necessarily require a man to imperil his own body for his neighbor’s welfare, except in a case where he is under obligation to do so and if a man of his own accord offer himself for that

⁶⁵ Ibid., I.75.1, I.75.4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., I.76.4. For a contemporary interpretation of the Thomistic view of body and soul see J. P. Moreland and Scott B. Rae, *Body & Soul: Human Nature & the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 199–228.

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, I.76.5.

⁶⁸ Moreland and Rae, *Body & Soul*, 21. They further clarify, “According to functional holism, while the soul (mind) is in the body, the body-soul complex is a deeply integrated unity with a vastly complicated, intricate array of mutual functional dependence and causal connection. But functional holism allows for the possibility that the soul (mind) may exist independent of the body with which it is currently functionally integrated or in a disembodied state altogether. It is a serious mistake to take substance dualism as being inconsistent with functional holism.”

purpose, this belongs to the perfection of charity.”⁶⁹ In this reply, Aquinas offers a supererogatory act as an example of love for one’s neighbor, but he does not obligate anyone to perform this act. He simply considers it to be the perfection of charity.

Aquinas used his understanding of friendship as one piece within the greater scheme of his ethic. It did not serve as the pivot point; rather, the existence of God and creation’s contingent nature played that role. Instead, he used friendship as the outworking of the greatest of the virtues—charity. He offers some practical applications of his doctrine of friendship but leaves the readers short of applicable actions relating to most areas of friendship. Scott MacDonald suggests a possible explanation for why Aquinas would not offer specifics. Since his system of ethics is dependent upon the use of practical wisdom, the reasoning behind practical wisdom does not deal with specifics. MacDonald notes, “Aquinas thinks of practical reasoning—which starts from our ends or goals and moves toward fully specified individual actions we think we can actually perform—as a process from what is general or universal to what is particular and fully specified. The starting points of our practical reasoning are often general in the sense that they lack the specificity required to elicit immediate action. That is why we must deliberate about how to attain them and continue our deliberation until we reach something we can actually do.”⁷⁰ If Aquinas’ goal is only to bring his readers to the point at which practical reason takes over, then he has accomplished his goal and leaves the rest of the work to his readers.

Implications of Thomistic Friendship

A study of the Thomistic understanding of friendship can be fruitful for personal edification, but it can also be of assistance through incorporation into contemporary ethics. Even though some

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, II–II.26.5.

⁷⁰ Scott MacDonald, “Practical Reasoning and Reasons-Explanations: Aquinas’s Account of Reason’s Role in Action,” in *Aquinas’s Moral Theory: Essays in Honor of Norman Kretzmann* (eds. Scott MacDonald and Eleonore Stump; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 152–53.

have dismissed Aquinas' ideas as outdated or solely Roman Catholic in nature, much of his writing on friendship can be helpful for ethical discussion in the contemporary context. Three initial ethical and theological implications are the relationship between ethics and community, ethics and worship, and the unity of the church.

Ethics and Community

Aquinas believed that the study of morals involves the consideration of human actions.⁷¹

However, human actions cannot be studied completely within the context of only one individual because human actions often affect more than one person. Thomas writes, "But the principal ends of human acts are God, man himself, and his neighbor: for whatever we do, it is on account of one of these that we do it."⁷² Since every human action has an end, and one of the possible ends is a neighbor, then human action must be considered with a connection to community.

Thus, Gallagher notes that "for Thomas the moral life is essentially a matter of relationships among persons."⁷³ For this reason, ethics is directly connected to community in the thought of Aquinas.

Although Aquinas considered the ultimate form of happiness to be union with God, he also believed that happiness on this earth involved relationships with other people. Specifically, he stated that the fellowship of friends was necessary for happiness in this life for the purpose of doing good to others and delighting in seeing them do good.⁷⁴ This idea of earthly happiness brings together the concepts of community and action. Aquinas recognized that moral action takes place in the context of relationships and community and that the love of friendship serves

⁷¹ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I-II.73.9.

⁷³ Gallagher, "The Will and Its Acts," 84.

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.4.8.

as a basis from which to perform moral actions.⁷⁵ Aquinas works out much of his thought on the role of community and relationships in ethics, specifically as it relates to charity and friendship, through the characteristics and order of charity that has already been discussed. Charity demonstrates the characteristics of well-wishing, mutuality, communion, and communication as essential elements for any relationship that can be described as friendship. As to objects, charity extends to one's neighbors based on the closeness of relationship (e.g., family first, then neighbors, and finally enemies). Thus, community can exist on many different levels in the ethics of Aquinas. In much the same way, contemporary ethicists view community within the contexts of blood ties, ideology, friendship, proximity, political association, or expediency.⁷⁶ The major difference for Aquinas, however, is that God stands as the ultimate end for all human action and serves as the ontological grounding by which humans develop other relationships. Since all persons are dependent upon God for their existence and even human relationships point back toward God, worship of God is the ultimate end for developing such communities. Therefore, even communities must find the reason for their existence in the nature of God. Kreeft states, "One reason why loving God is the first and greatest commandment and loving neighbors is second, is that true love of God will always spill over, so to speak, into love of neighbor, but not necessarily vice versa. God will always send you to your neighbor, but your neighbor will not always send you to God."⁷⁷ As a result, community and ethics are intricately related in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, but just as with other issues, union with God serves as the ultimate purpose for their existence and the goal for human action within the context of such relationships.

⁷⁵ See Gallagher, "The Will and Its Acts," 84.

⁷⁶ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 215–8; Dyke, *Rethinking Rights and Responsibilities*, 126.

⁷⁷ Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 391, fn. 87.

Ethics and Worship

The entirety of Aquinas' theological content revolves around the concept of *exitus et reditus*, the flow from and return to God of all things in the universe. Kreeft explains, "Thus the overall scheme of the *Summa*, like that of the universe, is an *exitus-redditus*, an exit from and a return to God, Who is both Alpha and Omega. God is the ontological heart that pumps the blood of being through the arteries of creation into the body of the universe, which wears a human face, and receives it back through the veins of man's life of love and will."⁷⁸ The same holds true for Aquinas' concept of friendship, and this idea can be incorporated into contemporary evangelical ethics. True friendship flows down to man through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As a result, man is then capable of expressing true friendship to others and to God himself. Wadell observes, "When Thomas speaks of charity as our active participation in the Divine Friendship, he discloses what for him is the task and fullness of the Christian moral life. The purpose of the moral life is to make our way to God, to return to God through love."⁷⁹ The procession of friendship from the character of God—the essence of goodness communicating himself to mankind—provides the pattern for man to return his friendship back to God. Schockenhoff asserts, "In charity, God becomes the person's friend, and the person, separated by an infinite distance from God, becomes God's friend. The relationship of the person to his or her origin and end is conceived through a transformation of the cosmological procession-return motif, in accord with the model of relationships, as a mutual friendship."⁸⁰ Since God loves and desires friendship with mankind, man responds to this friendship with love and friendship toward all things related

⁷⁸ Kreeft, *Summa of the Summa*, 15.

⁷⁹ Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 127.

⁸⁰ Schockenhoff. "Theological Virtue of Charity," 246. Wadell writes, "To love God as a friend is to love a God who always loves us first. It is God's movement toward us in love that allows us to move toward God in love. Thomas says we return to God in love only because God has come to us, in grace, in Word, in Spirit." See Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 124.

to God. Thus, all things that are contingent upon God and are capable of participating in friendship (i.e., all humans) are the proper objects of friendship as an act of worship to God and returning to him what he has given man. Schockenhoff further notes, “In *caritas*, the neighbors are loved for God’s sake, or—if one may be permitted to combine the formulation of the *Summa theologiae* with the more precise elaborations of the parallel *Quaestio disputata*—because God is in the neighbors, and *so that* they can be in God and God can be in them. In this way, love does not just mean the love for one’s own good, or for the good of another, but a common movement toward God; because humans are united with God as their highest good, they also become worthy of each other’s love.”⁸¹ Therefore, friendship with both God and neighbor should be an appropriate expression of man’s relationship with God as evidenced through the Thomistic scheme of *exitus et reditus*.

Unity within the Church

In Eph 4, Paul calls the believers in Ephesus to a sense of unity through the power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. In vv. 1–3, he writes, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This call rests upon the fact that there is only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, and one God and Father (Eph 4:4–5). The unity within the body of Christ of which Paul speaks in Ephesians can be properly expressed through Aquinas’ understanding of friendship. As noted previously, Aquinas believes, “When a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself; wherefore, he apprehends him as his other self, in so far, to wit,

⁸¹ Schockenhoff. “Theological Virtue of Charity,” 252. For the reference to *Quaestio disputata*, see Aquinas, *De Caritate*, 4.

as he wills good to him as to himself. Hence a friend is called a man's *other self* (*Ethic.* ix. 4), and Augustine says (*Confess.* iv. 6), *Well did one say to his friend: Thou half of my soul.*⁸² What greater unity could the church express than when its members consider the others as part of themselves? The unity drawn from friendship within the church serves as a practical expression of the true nature of the body of Christ. Charles Pinches declares, "For the Christian is a Christian in the Church; in an important way he or she does not know what it means to be a Christian—indeed, *cannot* be a Christian—apart from the community of friends who together form one another into selves who reflect the image of their God."⁸³

This friendship among believers that produces unity within the body of Christ is the proper reflection of the church's role to worship and honor God. By expressing friendship among believers, the church expresses its friendship toward God because all true worship flows back toward God. However, this friendship among believers should not be misconstrued so as to supersede doctrinal integrity. As Aquinas has expressed, true friendship with others involves willing good to the neighbor just as one would will good to himself. Aquinas has also acknowledged that true goodness, or happiness, exists only in the beatific vision of God. Thus, wishing good to one's neighbor, especially within the church, involves drawing the friend closer to God's true nature.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Aquinas' consideration of friendship as a foundational piece to his ethical system provides a pre-modern look into how community and relationships play a part in ethics. Immanuel Kant wrote,

⁸² Aquinas, *ST*, I-II.28.1.

⁸³ Charles Pinches, "Friendship and Tragedy: The Fragilities of Goodness," *First Things* 3 (1990): 42–43. Italics original.

⁸⁴ In the *SCG*, Aquinas states that "the ultimate end of things is to become like God." See Thomas Aquinas, *SCG*, III.1. He also states "that perfect beatitude consists in the direct union of the spirit with God in knowledge and love." Aquinas, *Comp. Theol.*, II.9.

“Friendship is the hobby-horse of all rhetorical moralists; it is nectar and ambrosia to them.”⁸⁵ In a sense, his statement is true of Aquinas since the medieval theologian incorporated friendship into the greatest of his theological virtues and declared that charity is friendship with God. However, friendship can serve as more than simply “nectar and ambrosia.” Friendship can serve as a substantive foundation for incorporating community into contemporary ethics.

Even though friendship serves as a central element to Aquinas’ ethic, his development still suffers from a couple of weaknesses. First, he neglects to offer much practical application to friendship in how it should be worked out in real life. His intent may have just been to bring his readers to the place where their own practical reason takes over and they use right practical reason to deduce specific applications in their own lives. However, it seems that he could have offered some application to his ideas. Second, his hierarchy of the objects of charity reveals an apparent Neo-Platonic dualism in the separation of the body and soul. Aquinas attempts to rectify this problem by asserting that the soul is designed to be united with the body as a whole, but he still runs the risk of espousing a form of Platonism that he is attempting to avoid.

Despite these weaknesses, Aquinas’ development of friendship as a foundational piece to his ethic demonstrates both the historical and contemporary significance of Aquinas’ work for ethical discussion. Since Aquinas’ concept of friendship serves as the basis upon which humans interact within his ethical construct, one can see the connection to discussions of community in the contemporary context. Aquinas leads one to consider the implications of friendship on community, worship, and the unity of the church. As such, this chapter serves as a foundational piece to incorporating a Thomistic understanding of friendship into discussions of community and ethics.

⁸⁵ Immanuel Kant, “Lecture on Friendship,” in *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (ed. Michael Pakaluk; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 210.