

## PHILIA AND SOCIAL ETHICS

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**Abstract.** Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, treated the different characteristics of human love and their expression. The first section discusses *eros* and the second shows how *agape* provides the essential framework for Catholic charitable organisations. I will be arguing that by omitting any reflection on the role of *philia*, he missed a significant opportunity to retrieve an important part of the Tradition and expand our usual understanding of the elements of social ethics. Part I briefly gives the background of Benedict's non-use of *philia* in his encyclical and indicates the basis for the view that *philia* has no place in Christian social ethics. The favoured approach is that of *agape*. Part II presents Thomas Aquinas' view of friendship and how it might counter the shortcomings identified by the authors in Part I. Part III applies his view of friendship to the key principles in Catholic social teaching of solidarity and preferential option for the poor. Part IV concludes with some general summary remarks.

### I.

The tone of Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* caught many by surprise. He had been expected to speak about what he was *against*. Instead he spoke about what he was *for* – what the Gospel presents as a deeply attractive vision of human love and its intrinsic link to the Love of God. He has a strong insistence on the crucial importance of love in action and of the fundamental duty of witnessing together by those actions to the love of God in Christ.

In §3, Benedict gives the three Greek words which describe love under its different aspects: *eros*, *agape* and *philia*. This is an important series of distinctions, as one can only know what love is when all its elements are considered. Yet the heading for this text only mentions *eros* and *agape*. For him, it would seem, *philia* has no particular bearing on what he wants

to discuss, neither intimate relations, nor social relations, and the word is never repeated again. In §8 love is specifically reduced to the two dimensions of eros and agape.<sup>1</sup> In §3, he mentions the friendship<sup>2</sup> love of Jesus for his disciples, and says that seeing things from the perspective of Jesus will include seeing that „[h]is friend is my friend.” However, this is not explored further, and in §10 the love of God for Israel is presented just as eros and agape.

Benedict therefore neglects a constitutive element of love. This neglect is particularly notable in the light of the definition of solidarity in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. There it states (but without any development of the claim) „The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of ‘friendship’ or ‘social charity’ is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood.” Elsewhere we read that „Respect for the human person considers the other ‘another self’.”<sup>3</sup> I suggest that this omission by Benedict was a missed opportunity to retrieve an important part of the Tradition for developing an understanding of how *philia* might make a contribution to Catholic social teaching. Instead, agape is left to carry the burden alone. Here Benedict follows a broad strand of Christian reflection.

For Outka, agape is the normative form of Christian neighbour love,<sup>4</sup> with self-love and agape characterised as radically opposed<sup>5</sup>. Agape entails a basic equality between all persons and leads to ‘equal regard’<sup>6</sup> for every individual, ruling out any preference for who is to be loved. It is self-love, preference and lack of equal regard which undermine any possibility of *philia* having a place in neighbour love. Outka praises agape because it „is unalterable; to abandon it would never be appropriate. Alternately, friendship may fluctuate, it depends at least in part on mutual liking, and usually on

<sup>1</sup> „Love is a single reality, but with different dimensions ... when the two dimensions [of agape and eros] are totally cut off from one another...” (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, London: Catholic Truth Society, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> As Cooper demonstrates, translating *philia* simply as friendship is highly misleading. *Philia* is a wider concept than just the intimate relations with non-family members to which the modern concept of ‘friendship’ tends to be restricted. It also includes all sorts of family relationships; civic friendship; certain business relationships; common membership of religious and social clubs and political parties. John M. Cooper, „Aristotle on Friendship,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 301–2.

<sup>3</sup> Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), nn. 1939, 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (London: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

admiration and esteem as well.”<sup>7</sup> Agape, on the other hand, does not require mutuality, and does not look at the personal qualities and characteristics of the neighbour. He does not utterly disparage friendship. Nevertheless, there are deep ambiguities about the philia quality of love which can only be redeemed by the presence of agape. It is agape which will guard friendship-love from degenerating into elitism and exclusivity, as well as „the other moral dangers in special relations”.<sup>8</sup>

Other writers take a harsher line, arguing that it is impossible to see friendship as worthy of being considered a truly Christian form of love. Kierkegaard attacks it as being radically opposed to Christian love, since the praise of friendship „belong[s] to paganism”.<sup>9</sup> He marks out Christian love as different by crudely excluding from it those features which he ascribes to friendship, principally reciprocity and preference.

Because love is a ‘duty’<sup>10</sup> it is protected from any contamination of reciprocity. Love is unshakeable and unchangeable whatever the circumstances, and once it has „undergone the transformation of the eternal by becoming duty,” love „continues to love regardless of any return or lack of return.”<sup>11</sup> His insistence on the necessity of complete indifference is summed up in his claim that „the true lover regards the very requirement of reciprocity to be a contamination, a devaluation, and loving without the reward of reciprocated love to be the highest blessedness.”<sup>12</sup> A lack of reciprocity is not an invitation to retreat from the beloved, but rather an invitation to remain faithful, for we are duty bound to do so.<sup>13</sup>

As a duty it must exclude any form of preference which is the ineliminable weakness of friendship, a weakness which reveals that friendship is nothing more than an elaborate facade for self-love. For Kierkegaard, even the classic description of a friend as ‘another self’ only serves to demonstrate the depth of self-obsession found in friendship.<sup>14</sup> For him there is simply no place for friendship in Christian love.

The resemblance between Kierkegaard and Nygren is marked. He, too, sees agape as the centre and summit of Christianity. „Without it nothing

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 272-273.

<sup>9</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (London: Collins, 1962), p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., e.g. p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

that is Christian would be Christian. Agape is Christianity's own original basic conception."<sup>15</sup> Agape is „universal in its scope”, whilst other loves are „exclusive and particularistic.” They set boundaries, but „Christian love ... overleaps all such limits; it is universal and all-embracing.”<sup>16</sup> It is not synonymous with universal altruism<sup>17</sup> because „the Christian ethic is from first to last a religious ethic ... inasmuch as the actual content of the ethical life is wholly determined by the religious relationship, by fellowship with God.”<sup>18</sup> However, this relationship is not to be identified as one of friendship, which is excluded by the sovereignty of Divine love.<sup>19</sup> As for Thomas's attempt to show that love towards God is friendship: „It need hardly be said that this attempt was doomed to failure.”<sup>20</sup>

Through our ‘fellowship with God’ we learn to love as God loves, and God loves with agape. Indeed: „God and Agape are one.”<sup>21</sup> Agape is spontaneous, ‘unmotivated’ and ‘groundless’. The only ground for it is to be found in God himself.<sup>22</sup> It is also „indifferent to value”. Neither our sinfulness nor our righteousness weigh with God: „It is only when all thought of the worthiness of the object is abandoned that we can understand what Agape is. God's love allows no limits to be set for it by the character or conduct of man.”<sup>23</sup> Our love for our neighbour should mirror these qualities if it is to be worthy of our relationship with God. „Nothing but that which bears the impress of Agape has a right to be called Christian love.”<sup>24</sup> There is no place for reciprocity, nor any assessment of the beloved's worth.<sup>25</sup> As for any attempt to bring in *amor amicitiae*, that would merely be a reversion to „the fundamental perversion in the Catholic doctrine of love” as that form of love still incorporates selfishness.<sup>26</sup>

However, Nygren's determination to break any linkage between the quality of God's love and the quality of the objects of that love results in saying that God loves us irrespective of who we are, without any conside-

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<sup>15</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 645.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 715.

ration of what makes the person uniquely who he or she is. In God's eyes, therefore, each person becomes utterly inter-changeable; it is a love directed at an abstraction. As Wadell points out:

It is one thing to say God loves us regardless of *what we do*, but it is another thing to say God loves us regardless of *who we are*. The first underscores how the divine love persists despite our sinfulness, but the second suggests God can love us without ever taking us into account.<sup>27</sup>

One is therefore left wondering who it is that God thinks fellowship is being established with and who we, in our turn, are loving when we love our neighbour. If agape, as defined by Nygren and Kierkegaard is the model of how we are to love our neighbour, then we too will be obliged to ignore their individuality, all those things which make them who they are. There is no awareness in his account that God's love „affirms the good we are, resists the evil in us, and fosters the good we can become.”<sup>28</sup> That surely holds too, *mutatis mutandis*, for human love for the neighbour.

Meilaender's stance towards friendship is ambivalent. He sees friendships as 'schools of love': „Life is a journey, a pilgrimage toward that community [the Kingdom] in which friends love one another in God. ... Along the way, friendship is a school, training us in the meaning and enactment of love.”<sup>29</sup> There is a „glad receptivity of friendship”<sup>30</sup> and a significant place for friendship as a counterweight to the contemporary over-evaluation of work.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, he argues that friendship is a concession to our status after the Fall. It is not an evil; „rather it is simply one of the goods which must be sacrificed by those who have been grasped by Christ and called to follow him.”<sup>32</sup> He suggests that friendship is not a Christian form of love: „A natural love like friendship, though not the same as specifically Christian love ...”;<sup>33</sup> and „Christian love, though not entirely incompatible with friendship ...”.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), p. 89, emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Edward Collins Vacek, „Love for God – is It Obligatory?” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1996): p. 207.

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-103.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Perhaps this perspective explains why he has problems with the concept of friendship. It is not clear on what grounds friendship is not Christian, other than the circular reasoning of his claim that only agape can count. He seems to believe that unless something is in some sense 'new' and unheard of before Christ, it does not count. He remarks that friendship is an essential part of our created nature.<sup>35</sup> This suggests that he thinks it is an unredeemed element, in that, although it is essential to us, it cannot be Christian. As Vacek has pointed out, however, *philia* is essential for a Christian. Love for strangers and sinners and enemies is part of, but not the whole of Christian life.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Adam argues that „a uniquely Christian form of love *should* be capable of including a very intimate and genuine friendship with our fellow human beings.”<sup>37</sup>

Meilaender's main grounds for unease are reciprocity and preference. For him, love should not be preferential but universal. We are to leave friendship behind as we learn agape, which friendship has trained us to live. „A love like that of the Samaritan can, without denigrating the natural love of friendship given us by the Creator, move us to try to live even now as if the process by which the partial, preferential loves are transformed into nonpreferential neighbour-love were completed.”<sup>38</sup> He sees no place at all for *philia* in neighbour-love: „I must confess, however, that I have never been able to understand how such neighbour-love could incorporate into its commitment any elements of *philia*.”<sup>39</sup>

This failure to comprehend the notion may explain his reading of Thomas' account of friendship-love. Meilaender's reading of Thomas ignores its context of friendship with God, from which other relationships then flow – he presents it as if Thomas is talking about any old friendship. This enables him to side-step Thomas' rooting of the argument in John 15:15 ('I do not call you servants any more, but my friends.') – an uncongenial context for his project of claiming that friendship is not a Christian love. It is noteworthy that when he does discuss John 15, after his discussion of Thomas, he quotes verses 12 and 13, ending with the concept of laying down one's life for one's friends.<sup>40</sup> He seeks to show that Thomas' account of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 40ff.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine: The Heart of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1994), p. 284.

<sup>37</sup> Don Adam, „Loving God and one's neighbour: Thomistic charity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (April 1994): p. 209, emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup> Meilaender, pp. 34-35.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 109, note 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

love of enemies is inadequate by arguing that: „If we eliminate union of the affections, we have little reason to desire that the enemy become a friend.”<sup>41</sup> Leaving to one side his reading of how Thomas deals with union of the affections, such an assessment ignores the profoundly Christian narrative within which the question is located. For Thomas, love of the enemy is not dependent upon our desire, but on the command of the Lord.

There have been more favourable accounts recently, notably those of Wadell and Vacek. However, neither of them extend their reflection beyond personal friendships into social ethics. For this we need to turn to Thomas' account.

## II.

It is not my intention to present a comprehensive analysis of Thomas' account of charity. Instead I will highlight those features which have a more direct bearing on my argument for the use of philia in social ethics. Following some general remarks, this section will be structured around responses to the sorts of objections raised by the authors discussed in Part I.

Many writers underestimate the effect of the innovative way in which Thomas transposed Greek thought into Latin<sup>42</sup> and shifted it from a theory of friendship into one of love. Neither, with their exclusive focus on an Aristotelian framework, do they give sufficient weight to the scriptural underpinning of the whole *Summa*. Thomas' ethics are located in a narrative which is steeped in Christian understanding and rooted in scripture. In the very first question of the *Summa*, Thomas states that the canonical Scriptures function as the primary authority for sacred doctrine.<sup>43</sup> Whilst Aristotle provided the categories for identifying the essential features of any friendship, Thomas, working within a Scriptural framework generally and John 15:15 in particular, transformed the content of Aristotle's account into something quite different. Charity, as presented by Thomas, both affirms the particulars of Aristotelian ethics and denies their limits so that the new

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>42</sup> For a perceptive discussion of the ways in which Thomas took the threefold distinction of Aristotle and overlaid it with the (linguistically necessary) two-fold distinction of his own, see James McEvoy, „The Other as Oneself: Friendship and Love in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas,” *Maynooth University Record* (1996): pp. 27-48.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927), I q.1.a.8. Future references to the *Summa* will be in-text.



form of friendship he articulates subverts Aristotelian friendship. His is an ethic which points towards a transcendent love, one in which there is an imitation of divine love, a reciprocation of God's action towards us. This is the reciprocity which constitutes friendship.

For Thomas charity is the greatest of the three theological virtues because although, like the other two, it directs one to God as the supernatural fulfilment of human life (I-II q.62.a.1,3), it goes further by directing one to friendship with God (II-II q.23.a.1). For Wadell,<sup>44</sup> despite his high evaluation of it, friendship ultimately seems only to have instrumental value. Like the virtues, its purpose is to fit us for union with God. For Thomas, however, union with God *is* friendship and friendship is the very nature of charity. This friendship is union with God not simply as the source of all created good, the author of revelation and our future blessedness. This is union with God as God is in Godself (I-II q.62.a.3; II-II q.23.a.6).

The primary precept is the first great commandment, to love God above all things. Because charity transforms the whole personality – attitudes and affectivity, as well as the kinds of actions it requires – it becomes the supreme organising principle of the person, directing all their desires and impulses to God (II-II q.23.a.3,7). Therefore all one's actions should be referred to God in some way (II q.100.a.10.ad.2). The second great commandment, to love one's neighbour, charges us to love each person for the sake of God. Thomas is deeply committed to the Augustinian view of charity as love of God *and* love of neighbour. The command to love each person for the sake of God (*propter Deum*) is because each person is called to fellowship with God and one wishes the realisation of that same call for others as one wishes it for oneself (II-II q.25.a.1; q.27.a.8; q.44.a.2,7). Love of neighbour is not a different act from loving God. Because the divine essence is identical with charity, the charity with which we formally love our neighbour must be a participation in the divine charity (II-II q.23.a.2 ad 1). „It is specifically the same act whereby we love God and whereby we love our neighbour. Consequently the habit of charity extends not only to the love of God, but also to the love of our neighbour” (II-II q.25.a.1).<sup>45</sup> This is not a parochial understanding of charity; we are to love every rational being, including the angels, because we share with them „in the life of glory.”<sup>46</sup>

Charity is extended to all because all are, in fact, capable of salvation (II-II q.26.a.6). This extension of charity includes the obligations of charity.

<sup>44</sup> Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*.

<sup>45</sup> See also Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity (De Caritate)*, trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1971), a.4 *sed contra*. Hereafter *DC*.

<sup>46</sup> *DC* a.7 ad 9.



Among these obligations is that of promoting the well-being of others through material aid and spiritual counsel (II-II q.27-33, 44). Thomas goes so far as to say that although one human being cannot be the final end of another in charity, one can act „ministerially under God” to help bring about God’s love for another (II-II q.25.a1 ad3).

Outka’s insistence that the normative content of neighbour-love is equal regard is contradicted by Thomas. He denies that charity as neighbour love requires us to love all our neighbours equally (II-II q.26 a.6). We are to love God above all else (II-II q.26.a.2,3), then oneself more than the neighbour (II-II a.26.a.4) and some neighbours more than others (II-II q.26.a.4), with careful gradations (II-II q.26.a.7-12). Porter sets out the surface moral and theological rationale for this<sup>47</sup> but does not find these explanations fully persuasive. Instead she argues cogently that: „Once we see that for Thomas, charity necessarily transforms the whole personality, including the affections, his remarks on the order of charity become more intelligible.”<sup>48</sup> Different persons should generate different degrees of emotional response in us and this is only natural and right. „Because charity essentially includes felt responses as well as exterior actions, a difference in the degree of felt love *is* a difference in the degree of charity itself.”<sup>49</sup> Because charity requires actions as well as affective responses and we cannot, as creatures, be ceaselessly active, this activity needs careful delimitation. This Thomas achieves through his order of charity which (roughly) determines the concrete circumstances in which positive promotion of another’s good is obligatory rather than supererogatory.<sup>50</sup> As these special relations are themselves defined within the demands of justice and do not depend on the inclinations of those involved, neighbour-love as charity is for Thomas as stable and permanent as agape is for its proponents.

There is another aspect of equality signalled by Thomas’ choice of John 15:15 as the *sed contra* at the head of his treatise on charity. Whilst Thomas was writing the *secunda pars* he was also lecturing on John’s gospel. His commentary helps us to understand his use of John 15:15 and provides the key to answering objections about equality between God and humans.<sup>51</sup> The equality between Jesus and the disciples is made possible by God’s activity. „*I have called* you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have

<sup>47</sup> Jean Porter, „*De ordine caritatis*: charity, friendship, and justice in Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, *Thomist* 53 (1989): pp. 200–202.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205, emphasis in the original.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Nygren, note 19.

made known to you” (John 15:15). It is the activity of *Christ* which both initiates and enables the friendship. In his lectures Thomas stresses this initiative: „Note that keeping the commandments is not the cause of divine friendship, but the sign, the sign that both God loves us and that we love God.”<sup>52</sup> Thus friendship does not spring out of our actions, nor of our choice of God: „You did not choose me, I chose you”, a text on which Thomas comments „... nothing can be the cause of and precede the divine choice, because all our goods are from God.”<sup>53</sup> Charity, as friendship, begins unilaterally with God’s elective call which makes possible a derivative equality between God and humans. It is this primary action which establishes the framework within which the friendship begins and then grows, through divine communication leading to our participation in the divine life (cf. I-II q.65.a.5). „It is not they [the disciples] who first loved God, but God makes them lovers by loving them.”<sup>54</sup> I suggest that this derivative equality between God and humans also grounds the degree of equality between humans which friendship requires.

Given our common usage of the term ‘friendship’ and its required elements, questions arise: what do I need to have in common if there is to be a friendship? What is it about the person that I am to love, if the love is to be personal enough to qualify as friendship? All friendship is based on some shared interest, ‘association’ or ‘fellowship’ (*communicatio*). The shared interest which provides the necessary basis of charity is the mere capacity to attain the same end, that is, union with God, „the fellowship of everlasting happiness” (for example, II-II q.23.a.5; q.25 a.3). Indeed, when it is a question of *communicatio gratiae*, the basis may well be stronger than other ‘natural’ relationships: „...respecting the fellowship of grace ... in this matter, a man ought to provide for his spiritual children, whom he has begotten spiritually, more than for the sons of his body...” (II-II q.26.a.8 ad 2).

What we ought to love in our neighbour „is that he be in God” and share in everlasting happiness. This clearly involves a deep concern for the neighbour, but that he or she has a rational nature might seem a bit thin, and therefore a weak foundation for the use of the word ‘love’. On the contrary, this is a very valuable basis. If someone is loved with charity on the grounds that he or she has a rational nature, this effectively makes charity ‘unconditional’, thus providing at least a partial response to those who argue that only agape has this quality.

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John: Part II*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1998), lecture 3, v. 14, para. 2012.

<sup>53</sup> *Commentary*, lecture 3, v. 16, para. 2021.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, lecture 3, v. 14, para. 2011.

But if we love our neighbour only „for God’s sake” (*propter Deum*) then is charity a genuine form of friendship between us? If someone were to say they loved me and when asked „Why?” replied „Because I was told to”, I think few people would consider that an adequate basis. Yet the universal, ‘indifferent to value’ model of agape love comes perilously close to that. There is to be nothing about *me* that should be the basis of that love, so that everything that matters most to me about my own life is, in effect, treated as irrelevant or worthless. I am to be loved simply, and *only*, because God has said so. It might be objected that loving someone „for God’s sake” is no different from that form of love. Furthermore, any genuine friendship must have mutual (and mutually recognised) goodwill towards the other for the other person’s sake, not for one’s own.<sup>55</sup> The aspect of mutuality will be dealt with in Part III. Here I will only look at the aspect ‘for the other person’s sake’.

Adam seeks to show how it is possible for us to love our neighbour ‘for God’s sake’ and ‘for the sake of the other’. Following a detailed analysis of the many possible interpretations of these terms, he argues that for Thomas there is a ‘similitude’ between humans and God<sup>56</sup> and therefore a similitude between the person and his or her neighbour. „The likeness we have to God precedes and causes the likeness we have to our neighbour because from the very fact that we share along with our neighbour in something received from God, we become like our neighbour.” (II-II q.26.a.2 ad 2). In consequence, as Adam points out: „The fact that the basis of our friendship, i.e. our similarity, consists in the respects in which we are both similar to God makes our friendship *amor caritas* and not merely *amor amicitiae*.”<sup>57</sup> We are similar to God in our rationality, our activities of knowing and willing. But these aspects are not merely external features bolted on. They are part of who we essentially are as human beings. Thus he is able to conclude that a human person can be a formal cause of charity and so can be loved ‘for God’s sake’ and ‘for the sake of the other’.

I can love you ‘because of God’ and also ‘because of yourself’; I can love God as *the* ultimate end and I can love you as *an* ultimate end. Your essential (rational) nature is something divine. With charity I see in you something divine, and so I love it because of itself; but that divine part of you is nothing other than your essential (rational) nature, and so I love you because of yourself.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (London: Penguin, 1976), Book VIII 1166a 1–4.

<sup>56</sup> *DC*, a.1 ad 8.

<sup>57</sup> Adam, „Loving God and one’s neighbour,” note 50, p. 223.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

Thomas' approach escapes the criticism that I only love another „Because I was told to” and preserves the necessary element of genuine friendship, that I love my friend for my friend's sake. At the same time, it meets Outka's objection to friendship which is based on the claim that what should determine how a person is treated are those qualities of the other that he or she has in common with everyone else, and not those which set him or her apart. However, Thomas' account also shows how things which are important to me in my own life can be a reason for being loved with charity-as-friendship, rather than being discounted in agape. Further aspects of this latter point will be discussed in Part III.

In contrast to seeing particular friendships and familial relationships as preferential and exclusive, Porter's account of the order of charity has shown that there is a necessary variation in the degrees of charity if we are to live within the limits of finitude. In addition, in Thomas' account we see these relationships reconceived as the secondary causality of God's providence and predestination. As already pointed out, we can act „ministerially under God” to help bring God's love for our neighbour. „In loving the neighbour in charity, one loves the good loved by one's divine friend. Thus, loving the neighbour in charity makes us the secondary cause of God's predestination of neighbours to the divine life . . . Our love for neighbours *propter Deum* is not outside God's providence: *through* our friendship, God's love for humans is enacted.”<sup>59</sup> This also meets Outka's requirement that neighbour-love conform to loving what God loves.<sup>60</sup> Thomas' account of loving one's enemies further counters the criticism of friendship.

Meilaender claims that when it comes to love of enemies, philia and agape stand in stark contrast.<sup>61</sup> Philia, because it includes the element of reciprocity, cannot extend to love of enemies. However, charity, as love of God, is only complete when it unfolds into love of all that God loves: „for a person who loves God must love his neighbour and things which belong to God.”<sup>62</sup> The fact that we are all created by God to find our eternal happiness in God is, in Thomas' view, a sufficient likeness between us to ground a kind of friendship. Here Thomas pushes past Aristotelian boundaries. Aristotle locates philia within the *polis* with those who were also of the same gender

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<sup>59</sup> William W. Young III, *The Politics of Praise: Naming God and Friendship in Aquinas and Derrida* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p. 121, emphasis in the original. For a detailed discussion of this point, see *ibid.*, pp. 101-109.

<sup>60</sup> Outka, p. 44.

<sup>61</sup> Meilaender, p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> *Commentary*, lecture 2, v. 12, para. 2007.

and age. Love of enemies, however, means that charity as friendship opens up to those beyond self-enclosed limits.

It might be argued, however, that John's Gospel only envisages such a form of friendship within the Christian community as John has no mention of loving enemies. Thomas, however, reads John in the light of Luke 6:32-35, where Jesus condemns loving only those who love you and commands us to love our enemies; it is this which shapes his reading of John 15. This enables his account of the order of charity to displace the emphasis on reciprocity and friendship within the community and extend it to include „even those who are not joined to us by any special bond, as for instance those who live in India or Ethiopia.”<sup>63</sup>

Thomas reshapes the responsibilities and obligations of the moral life to include friendship-love of enemies (II-II q.25.a8,9) because for him love of enemies is the perfection of charity since this is the nature of divine love.

Christ did not lay down his life for his enemies so that they would remain his enemies, but to make them his friends. Or, one could say, that he lay down his life for his friends, not in the sense that they were his friends who loved him, but rather were those whom he loved.<sup>64</sup>

This enables us to see that friendship with God is a friendship with one who loves us even when we are at enmity. To the extent that we share this friendship-love with Christ, and are therefore drawn into loving, in the manner of his love, the things which he loves, we too will love others who do not love us, who are at enmity with us, and we will do it with the love of friendship.

... inasmuch as friendship towards one [as opposed to many] 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.<sup>65</sup>

Proponents of agape insist that reciprocity must be present in friendship-love in such a way as to limit the range of possible objects of that love so as to exclude enemies. In Thomas' account, this is not the case.

This section has shown that charity-as-friendship is a long way from the accounts presented by its critics. Pope, referring to Meilaender but with wider applicability, has characterised their approach thus: „The point here

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<sup>63</sup> *DC* a. 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Commentary*, lecture 2, v. 13, para. 2009.

<sup>65</sup> *DC* a. 4 ad 11. See also *ST* II-II q. 25, a. 8.

is to note that *philia* has been rejected or displaced in favour of an individualistic, nonmutual and task-oriented love.”<sup>66</sup> I will now argue that *philia*, understood as charity-as-friendship, can have a beneficial role in social ethics which mitigates these features of *agape*.

### III.

Loving as God loves leads to a *prima facie* possibility that *philia* in the form of charity-as-friendship has a place in social ethics. Given, however, that the *Catechism* already mentions friendship in connection with solidarity, what difference would there be if *philia* were seen as more overtly foundational than Benedict XVI’s treatment suggests?

One of the problems with the *Catechism*’s use of the term ‘friendship’ is that it ignores the importance at the pastoral level of the *language* of friendship. It can be empty rhetoric or slip easily into a non-theological understanding. As Vogt rightly insists, we need to move away from an over-reliance solely on principles in Catholic social teaching (hereafter CST) to a greater emphasis on virtue.<sup>67</sup> For Thomas there are many virtues which even the non-believer may have (*virtutes humanas*). Charity, however, *must* be rooted in the love of God. Moving the focus of our attention to this fact would help us to re-balance the various emphases within the Catholic moral tradition.

The overwhelming majority of the Church’s moral teaching flows from reflection on the ‘second table’ of the Decalogue, that is, commandments four to ten. The tendency is to look at discrete acts or types of act, which can quickly reduce the moral life to quandary ethics: specific actions viewed from the minimalist perspective of being right or wrong. Vision, moral imagination, virtue, goals and many other aspects of the moral life do not easily find a home in such an approach. Such aspects become subordinated to an understanding of morality based primarily on a legal model. It reduces Christianity to moral precepts.

If, however, morality were to be more clearly rooted in the first block, above all in the first commandment, it would move attention from specific actions to the ground of those actions. This takes account of Thomas’ observation that keeping the commandments is the sign that both God loves

<sup>66</sup> Stephen Pope, ‘The Moral Centrality of Natural Priorities’, cited in Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, p. 283.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher P. Vogt, ‘Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics,’ *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): pp. 394–417.

us and that we love God. Charity-as-friendship, seen as participation in God, means that one identifies with God because that is where one's focus is fixed. Life then becomes a continual interaction with God, fed by God. Once this union is seen as friendship, one can see the threadbare nature of considering the first commandment solely under the heading of 'duty' as the *Catechism* does. Thomas' treatment of the inner unity between the love of God, self and neighbour has the constant meaning of the creative love of God for human beings, the responsive love of human beings for God, and included in that love, the love of human beings for one another. Many today would wish to add here that it includes the love of human beings for the whole of God's creation. The moral life is seen in terms of the person's multiple relationships with God, self, neighbour and the world.

Here we see the beginnings of how charity-as-friendship can provide a basis for our social ethics. It provides motivating reasons, as well as justificatory ones. The source and ground of moral values is not social convention, human creativity or personal preference. The source and ground of value is God. The demands of discipleship are based on the uniqueness of God before whom everything else disappears. Everything is an application of the first commandment, made possible by the friendship-love of God.

Thomas' understanding of the basis of our relationship with God as friendship liberates us from the modern myth that we are really solitary beings, each pursuing his or her own private good in fierce competition. The deepest truth of our human nature is not, as the market and many modern intellectual trends insist, that we are atomistic, selfish and greedy individuals. Rather, the deepest truth is that we hunger and thirst for God and in God we find each other, for we meet others at the depth at which we allow ourselves to be met by God. His approach supports a wider understanding of friendship than just intimate relations because it is based on how I relate to myself, how I love myself. If I relate to myself and love myself as a friend of God, then I am able to see others as my friends in God, as 'another self', irrespective of their proximity.

Friendship, in the proper sense, has to be shown not only in words but also in deed. For Thomas it is in the acts of charity, the works of the body, that we most fully relate to God and participate in charity. An obvious place for friendship in social ethics is through love of enemies – our 'enemies' may include, but are not limited to, those opposing us in war. Just War reflection might be improved by including being friends in the Thomistic sense. But there are 'enemies' in the economic and social sense wherever there is competition for apparently scarce resources.



There are also the scapegoat groups and those who are ‘in’ a society but not ‘of’ it. It is a commonplace that in a globalised world, human beings are unavoidably in relationship with one another, that we are interdependent. The problem with an emphasis on the globalisation aspect is that it can lead us to think that solidarity is usually only required for people somewhere else. Yet in a fragmenting society such as contemporary Britain, an awareness of interdependence close at hand is needed. As Hanvey argues, the alchemy of fear and political opportunism (features not restricted to Britain) have colonised and mutated the ‘spaces’ for hospitality and acceptance of difference into an arena of suspicion.<sup>68</sup> A recovery of the language of friendship, rather than the stranger, of friendship based on the Christian understanding that every person is *imago Dei*, with a shared call to participation in the divine life, would ground a resistance to the depersonalisation of the public space and the slow erosion of our ability to care for one another. Thomas’ account has implications for how we construe hospitality and justice for the marginalised and unpopular and is a way of making explicit the social reconciliation which is an essential part of the Church’s mission.

The opposite of love is not hate, but the indifference which elicits no sense of social duty or care. Indifference takes many forms, but what links them is a sense that the very existence of some other, with needs, wants, concerns and desires, is dismissed as utterly unimportant to me. By loving we grow in our very ability to love (II-II q.24.a.7): to ignore someone, or some others, or some social group, shows that my world is not big enough to include them. The present context of the upsurge of the ideology of liberal individualism in conjunction with market imperatives makes this indifference increasingly likely.

We can no longer rely on extensive social ties of civic friendship. Whether one uses Hollenbach’s ‘eclipse of the public’<sup>69</sup> or Cortina’s analysis of the growth of the ‘contract’ model against the ‘covenantal’ model<sup>70</sup> it seems clear that in many parts of Western society, there has been a dilution of the general public’s sense of responsibility towards one another. Christians cannot live unaffected by the cultural, political and economic assumptions of their societies, and the danger is that the Church’s understanding of the human person and society could remain merely aspirational. Precepts can

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<sup>68</sup> James Hanvey, „Other Than Stranger,” in *Values in Public Life: Aspects of Common Goods*, ed. Patrick Riordan (Berlin-London: Lit, 2007), pp. 123–4.

<sup>69</sup> David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 3–31.

<sup>70</sup> Adela Cortina, *Covenant and Contract: Politics, Ethics and Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).

remain at the level of slogans unless they penetrate the lives of people. Charity-as-friendship is, by definition, a counter to radical individualism. It insistently re-locates the person into a network of relationships. Bracket out philia and all you have left are abstract citizens as per the liberal conception.

It is specifically in the area of solidarity and preferential option for the poor that friendship can be articulated in a helpful way. Official CST and some CST rhetoric seem to demand an unbounded response to the call to solidarity: „we are *all* really responsible *for all*”<sup>71</sup>. This may be one of the reasons why many Catholics appear uneasy about responding to it. It seems designed for automatic failure. Universal beneficence is an impossibility. Universal solidarity is also an impossibility; being finite creatures we simply cannot do this.<sup>72</sup> But through the preferential option for (some of) the poor, we can have solidarity with some people. This inevitably means exercising choice which means that not everyone will be included. Preference and exclusion are required if my efforts to do anything are not to be spread so thin as to be useless, and psychologically unsustainable.

The question of reciprocity, rather than being a defect of philia, is a strength when considering solidarity. At the pastoral level there is a tendency to think that ‘we’ (in the rich, developed countries) should be in solidarity with ‘the poor’, i.e. it is a one-way street. Expressing solidarity in terms of non-mutual, unilateral agape reinforces the one-way street tendency. But true solidarity is a two-way relationship, not a patronising *noblesse oblige*. Solidarity needs re-description if it is to become what it claims to be. Friendship can help here because it challenges how we see the other. It is often difficult to keep clearly in mind that the other is truly other, is not myself, with my ideas, assumptions. I am to love my neighbour, not my idea of my neighbour. How I see the other, and discover that the other is not myself, is one of the challenges in overcoming our instinctive selfcentredness. Friends have to let one another *be*; allow each other to be free. It is only through the processes which necessarily comprise what friendship is that I will discover that the other is another centre of meaning, in whom I can delight.

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1987), n. 38, emphasis in the original.

<sup>72</sup> „...although we are bound by the precept of charity to love our neighbour, the precept does not extend to this that we should actually love each and every neighbour in particular or do well by each one in a particular way because no man is capable of having all men in mind in such a way that he would actually love each one in a particular way, nor is there any one capable of doing good or helping each and every one in a particular way.” *DC* a. 8.

This process of discovery makes us look differently at our world, draws us out of ourselves, pulls us beyond the security of our own narrow world. Because true solidarity is a two-way street, I cannot egoistically remain the centre and controller of the relationship. And this, of course, will make one vulnerable. As Vacek argues, writers „describe agape as doing what is good for the other without in any way being affected by the other.”<sup>73</sup> In friendship, however, we do allow ourselves to be affected. How the other lives, fares well or ill, achieves his or her appropriate desires and goals, *matters* to us. The things important to them in their lives become important to us. We love them for themselves.

Which points to a second problem with how solidarity is generally seen: reflection on it is hindered by a monolithic approach. There may be a variety of specific objectives, one might be in solidarity with differing groups, but in essence solidarity is seen as one ‘kind’ of thing. However, Riordan helpfully distinguishes between two distinct forms which solidarity can take: solidarity in suffering and solidarity in the good.<sup>74</sup> Generally speaking, CST has concentrated on the former, which is easily grounded in Thomas’ account of our common human nature. However, as Riordan argues, a richer, more intense solidarity can be achieved based on concern for the realisation by others of the same human good and is, in its fullest and most intense sense, friendship. Whilst the former sort of solidarity is given in the commonality of nature, the latter has to be willed; as friendship it has to be chosen.<sup>75</sup>

As a choice it cannot be extended to all. The *preferential* option for the poor is, by definition, selective. We are to have special regard for certain groups; to have a particular concern in distributive justice for poor and vulnerable persons; to help ensure their full participation in the common good and, therefore, their human flourishing. This is not impartiality. In the course of undertaking this special regard, one might well begin to feel deeply about the situation of a particular group, to take up their cause as one’s own, giving more weight to their cause than to others. Role reversal, listening to the other in a reciprocal relationship, commitment – these are all features of particular relations, and show partiality. Critics such as Meilaender dismiss partiality as axiomatically against Christian love. However, as Pope shows,<sup>76</sup> there are different forms which partiality can take and at

<sup>73</sup> Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, p. 160.

<sup>74</sup> Patrick Riordan, „Solidarity in Fulfilment: A Vision for Politics?” in *Values in Public Life: Aspects of Common Goods*, ed. Patrick Riordan (Berlin-London: Lit, 2007), pp. 35-51.

<sup>75</sup> Riordan, „Solidarity in Fulfilment,” pp. 49–50.

<sup>76</sup> Stephen J. Pope, „Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 242–71.

times must take, if morally relevant differences are to be attended to. In the case of the preferential option for the poor, partiality is both morally justified and, indeed, required.

We also need friendship within our particular Christian communities – only in that way will we be able to be ‘aware of the painful condition of the human family without being paralysed by that awareness’ ... ‘or angered by the experience of powerlessness.’ ... ‘without giving into a fatalistic resignation’ ... ‘without panicking.’<sup>77</sup> In other words, we need local solidarity built on friendship if our wider solidarity is not to be destructive in the ways suggested, or lead to burn-out. Solidarity is too demanding to be done unsupported.

#### IV.

The privatising of friendship in contemporary society is linked with the privatising of ethical life in general. There is a dichotomy between personal and social spheres which pervades popular ethical thinking. Thomas’ account presents a friendship which, because of its insistence that it be at least potentially open to those beyond one’s private sphere, breaks out of the circle of self-reference, the narcissism which is a prominent feature of contemporary society, and reaches others for their own sake to wish them well. Furthermore, because friendship is a gift, not a right, it can help redefine and expand a public discourse too tightly focussed on rights language. It is not just public discourse which is marked by this. As Pope points out in his discussion of agape: „Equal regard seems to reflect an ethic of rights rather than the good.”<sup>78</sup>

Philia contributes to CST not necessarily by adding something new, but by highlighting latent features and correcting others. There is a significant silence in *Deus Caritas Est*: the preferential option for the poor, characterised by John Paul II as being „a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian Charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness”<sup>79</sup> is not mentioned. In a document dealing precisely with the Christian response to suffering, its absence is startling.

<sup>77</sup> McNeill, Morrison and Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* quoted in Diana Fritz Cates, *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 216.

<sup>78</sup> Stephen J. Pope, „‘Equal Regard’ Versus ‘Special Relations’? Reaffirming the Inclusiveness of Agape,” *Journal of Religion* 77, no. 3 (July 1997): p. 374.

<sup>79</sup> John Paul II, *SRS*, n. 42.

Benedict explores how the love of God is expressed in the service of one's neighbour, specifically the poor and the needy. Yet the poor themselves are largely absent from the document; he speaks about them rather than to them. The spiritually needy are mentioned in §28; other forms of need and suffering are subsumed within the dominant scriptural image of the Good Samaritan (cited four times). With the use of this parable the victims of injustice and violence are presented as nameless, faceless and passive. Benedict fails to engage with the central insight of the preferential option for the poor that the poor themselves are also called to be active agents of change and instruments of God's redemption for others. The impression given by Benedict's treatment is that they are to revert to being seen as mere passive recipients of charity, objects of our concern, rather than protagonists, subjects of their own lives. The lack of reciprocity implied here suggests that the solidarity he commends is the one-way form: the rich are to be in solidarity with the poor, but the poor cannot presume to be in solidarity with the rich.

Benedict's overarching intention in writing the encyclical was to 'purify' the word 'love' and restore it to its original splendour. However, in at least some countries today the word 'charity' also needs to be purified. It is not only from the viewpoint of Marxism, to which Benedict draws our attention, that charity can be seen as demeaning and disempowering to those who receive it (§§26, 31). This perception has entered into popular thought, and slogans such as „We want justice, not charity” are but one manifestation of the image of charity as something potentially humiliating and merely a balm to ease the consciences of the middle-class. „As cold as charity” is a saying which catches well its fall from a rich, multi-dimensional term to something little more than a moralistic notion of kindness to the poor and afflicted, alms-giving and so on which, as Singer noted, is praiseworthy if done but not blameworthy if omitted.<sup>80</sup> Benedict intends to demonstrate that justice must always be complemented by charity. Indeed, as he rightly points out, in §29, even in a perfectly just world, charity would still be needed. However, by failing to engage with charity from the perspective of the poor themselves, Benedict runs the risk of being seen as setting charity against justice and perpetuating the negative connotations of charity as patronising, distant 'do-goodery'. A recovery of charity-as-friendship would help counteract these elements of the encyclical.

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<sup>80</sup> Peter Singer, „Famine, Affluence and Morality” reprinted in *Ethics in Practice*, 3rd edition, Hugh LaFollette (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 613-622, at 616.

Although the document gives an extensive treatment of love of God and love of others, there is no consideration of the notion of self-love. Christ exhorts us not only to a love of God and of neighbour, but to a proper love of 'self', 'love thy neighbour as thyself'. Thomas's order of charity would provide a way of opening up a difficult subject, as many believe that true discipleship means leaving self-love behind. Knowing that this is impossible, they may conclude either that something is wrong with the (presumed) teaching of the Church, or that they cannot be real disciples. Either way, their Christian vocation is undermined.

When considering neighbour-love, there is a wider Tradition to be weighed than that evoked by Benedict XVI. The sort of piety which can be engendered by some readings of agape, coupled with the increasingly atomistic individualism found in many societies, will not help us address the pressing needs of our time. In proposing philia as an important strand of social ethics, I am not dismissing its role in intimacy. Even in the extended form which I have proposed some of the elements of intimacy are retained, for example, I do care who you, my neighbour, are. However, I believe that retrieving an element of the Tradition which Benedict neglected will help us to see that friendship's richness goes well beyond the interpersonal, enabling a deeper and more dynamic engagement with social issues. I am not suggesting that philia will form the basis of all loves towards others. There is, and will continue to be, an important place for agape. But agape cannot cover all the ground on its own. The Christian tradition has praised the love of agape because it is held to imitate God's love. But if the point is to imitate God's love for us, and God's love is friendship-love, then agape cannot be the sum total of how we face the world in general.

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