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“I Will Give Them One Heart and One Way”: Self-Love and Love for Others

Within Christian thought we encounter something of a dichotomy between the call to lay down our lives for others and the necessity of self-love as a valued part of God’s creation. As St. Thomas Aquinas points out, man cannot hate himself and his own life, and yet there are times when it is permissible or even required for a man to lay down his life¹. Looking more closely at Aquinas provides us with a clear understanding of the reconciliation between the two; this reconciliation is primarily based in Thomas’ presentation on the primacy of the common good. After Aquinas, if we look to the school of personalism, we can glimpse some practical implications of this question. In particular, Charles De Koninck and Jacques Maritain’s dispute surrounding the primacy of the common good illustrates some pressing implications of self-love, love of others, and love of God. Establishing this background, I wish to look at the issue of proper relationships in light of the monastic tradition. Specifically, I will rely on Aelred of Rievaulx and his understanding of both the person and of community. Love of our neighbor constitutes a major component of Christian doctrine, a topic that still must be addressed today. Aelred will center both love of neighbor and love of self on Christ and our relationship with Him.

1. St. Thomas Aquinas on the Order of Love

Throughout the history of Christianity we encounter exhortations to endeavor for a love that “a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). The greatest act of love is one of self-sacrifice. Of course, the crowning example of such a love comes from our Lord Himself in His passion and death. Self-sacrificial love maintains a vital role within the Christian moral tradition. Here

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¹ STh I-II, q. 29, a. 4.

it behooves us now to look more closely at the theology behind this notion, specifically at what Thomas Aquinas has to say on the matter.

In seeking to understand how man loves, Aquinas finds it helpful to look at how the angels love. In particular, Aquinas appeals to a distinction between parts and wholes; his method of organization provides the clarification necessary to understand the proper ordering of loves. Aquinas responds to the question of whether angels naturally love themselves more or God more². Since angels love themselves in the presence of God, this love of self becomes more intense; thus it seems possible that angels can love themselves more than God. Thomas' answer, that angels do not love themselves more than God, illuminates the consistent thought behind sacrificial love.

In considering the natural order of things, Thomas finds that the natural movement would argue for angels loving God more than themselves. Ezra Sullivan provides a summary of Aquinas' argument in three steps, "A part is more principally and strongly inclined to a whole to which it belongs than to itself"³. The part does not exist without the whole, thus there is an inclination to the whole on which it depends. "God is to a created will as a whole is to a part"⁴. Aquinas emphasizes that God is the whole to which we, all those possessing created wills, are parts. This naturally includes the angelic beings who, in utilizing their will, recognize God as the whole. "Therefore, a creature with a rational will inclines to God more than to itself"⁵. Thus Thomas provides a logical defense of angels loving God more than themselves.

The implications of this regarding our own human love become especially clear when we look at the notion of sacrifice. The recognition of the relationship of parts to a whole helps to explain the path whereby a part may choose the whole over itself. In order to sacrifice ourselves for another, we must have a stronger inclination to the other; this is why a father will sacrifice himself for the sake of his family or a soldier for his country. However, this inclination must also benefit the man. "Man finds himself by subordinating himself to the group"⁶. The sacrifice of self serves the good of the whole and the one; there is a logical consistency in sacrifice of one's self and true good.

2. St. Thomas Aquinas on the Common Good

Another aspect of Aquinas' thought that can help shed light on the consistency of sacrificial love is the notion of the common good. The idea of the

² STh I, q. 60, a. 5.

³ E. Sullivan, *Self-Transcending Love According to Thomas*, "Nova et Vetera" 12(2014), no 3, 918, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277077389_Natural_Self-Transcending_Love_According_to_Thomas_Aquinas (access: 12.01.2020).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J. Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 39.

common good goes hand-in-hand with the part whole relationship Aquinas introduces. Recall that Aquinas, like Aristotle, argues that the good is what is desired. A good for the whole can only be considered a common good when it benefits all the parts of the whole. Likewise, “while a part, as such, belongs to a whole, so that whatever is the good of a part can be directed to the good of the whole”⁷. This common good is not diminished for each individual part that shares in it, rather, each part can lay full claim to the common good. A common good can be pursued and enjoyed by many. This lack of diminishment crucially distinguishes a common good from a private good.

For Aquinas, the best common good is God. God is infinite perfection and goodness who shares His goodness with the things He makes. “While every creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness. Therefore the divine goodness is the end of all things”⁸. The ability to share divine goodness as our final end and common good makes sense as Aquinas uses “common” as meaning, “common, not by the community of genus or species, but the community of final cause”⁹. Ultimately we are all called to share in His fullness, and yet we know that we do not receive any less than our neighbor who also shares in the beatific vision. In fact, sharing God with our neighbors increases our own enjoyment with regards to God. Another helpful example is to think of the health of a body as good for its members. If a body is alive and well then each limb, organ or other part can thrive as well; the Body of Christ is no different.

Aquinas will also maintain that common goods are better than private goods. Following Aristotle, Aquinas emphasizes that we ourselves are ordered to the common good, not the other way around¹⁰. We desire God for His own sake, He is good solely by himself. In a similar fashion, we value the virtues like justice or charity for their own sake. These common goods are inherently honorable and to be sought after. Further, the common good does not find its superiority in some sort of arithmetic of goodness. Although the common good is good for each person involved, it is not this sum of goodness that grants it the highest position; the common good is not, “the simple sum of the particular goods of each subject of a social entity”¹¹. We cannot arrive at the common good simply by adding up all the goods each person possesses. The common good is entirely separate from this class of private and particular goods.

⁷ STh II-II, q. 58, a. 5.

⁸ STh I, q. 44. a. 4.

⁹ STh I-II, q. 90, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. I. Litzinger, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co, 1964), 1094b.

¹¹ The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, para 164, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html#Meaning%20and%20primary%20implications (access: 12.01.2020).

At this point we must place the common good into its proper context, that is, as the end of a community. “A society that wishes and intends to remain at the service of every human being at every level is a society that has the common good...as its primary goal”¹². Thus the common good is the goal of every community. Keep in mind that, “The human person cannot find fulfillment in himself, that is, apart from the fact that he exists ‘with’ others and ‘for’ others”¹³. For this reason, Aquinas will follow Aristotle in positing that man’s nature compels him to be a political animal, drawn to forming societal relationships.

Not only do these relationships allow man to flourish materially, but, more importantly, community orders man to a life of virtue. Ultimately Aquinas will agree with Aristotle that the city is the perfect society, insofar as it enables this pursuit of virtue. “For it is the nature of the city that in it should be found everything sufficient for human life...but from its existence it comes about that men not only live but that they live well insofar as by the laws of the city human life is ordered to the virtues”¹⁴. Thus, it is only communally that we can attain the life of virtue we are each called to. The city provides a place where we can “establish friendship between man and man”¹⁵, a community that at once challenges and fosters a love for God and for neighbor.

In recognizing the primacy of the common good, we can see the good in our suffering and sacrifice for it. Even so, a true gift of self can only originate from a place of self-love; we are not called to love our neighbor yet treat our own self with stoic indifference. Indeed, St. Thomas notes, “‘Person’ signifies what is most perfect in all nature”¹⁶. For this reason we can even apply the term “person” to God, for he is the most perfect individual of a rational nature. “St. Thomas teaches that whoever loves God must love himself for the sake of God, must love his own soul and body with a love of charity”¹⁷. Thus we find no room for disordered detachment or indifference to self, rather a sober exhortation to recognize the dignity of our own selves. Self-love, then, marks a necessary starting point before we can most fully give ourselves.

Recall that man possesses a natural inclination to fulfillment, a fulfillment that ultimately rests in God. This inclination goes hand-in-hand with love, for this reason, it is important to emphasize Aquinas’ distinction between love of friendship and love of concupiscence. Love tends towards two things, “namely, toward some good which one wills for someone, either for one’s self or for another; and toward that for which one wills this good. Thus one loves the

¹² Ibid, 165.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*, trans. E. L. Fortin, P. D. O’Neil, I, lect, 1, n. 23, <https://dhsprory.org/thomas/Politics.htm> (access: 12.01.2020).

¹⁵ STh I-II, q. 99, a. 2.

¹⁶ STh I, q. 29, a. 3.

¹⁷ J. Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 429.

good that is willed for the other with love of concupiscence, and that for which the good is willed with a love of friendship”¹⁸. The love of friendship describes our love of another person and willing their good; love of concupiscence describes willing some specific good for that person. Although these are two distinct types, both are present in one act of love. “We do not love a person without wanting that the person should have what is good for him, nor do we love what is not a person except as good for a person”¹⁹. So both loves are good and both are present simultaneously in one act of love, while maintaining an orientation toward the person.

With the twofold characterization of love of friendship and love of concupiscence we can now more readily understand the natural inclination to self-love. As everything seeks to procure its own good, it follows that a desire for beatitude in man arises naturally. St. Thomas says, “This is to love self. Hence angel and man naturally love self, insofar as by natural appetite each desires what is good for self”²⁰. In this way, natural self-love provides a foundation for other loves, for the common good, for others, for supernatural charity. From this first natural act of love we come to all other loves. It is from our union with ourselves and love of ourselves that we can extend our charity to others; Aquinas agrees with Aristotle’s *Ethics* that relations with others begin with relations to ourselves. “For if we have friendship with others, it is because we do unto them as we do unto ourselves”²¹. As far as love of neighbor is concerned, charity really does originate at home. That is, if we cannot love ourselves we will find it impossible to love others.

Now this is not to say we ought to love ourselves unduly and with abandon. Rather, St. Thomas provides three ways in which self-love relates to charity: contrary to, included in or distinct from²². When a man places love of his own end as his highest order of self-love he does so contrary to proper charity. If self-love is the highest good, man will not be able to love God or others as he ought. The second and third modes, however, are both rightly ordered and therefore not mutually exclusive. In the second mode the man seeks his own private good included in the good of others, “We can say that this is the proper self-love of one who is dedicated to a common good”²³. This mode implies a sense of desire for the common good, man wants that both for himself and for his friends. Still, the emphasis here rests on the individual and his desire to contribute to the common good, even though that ultimately includes loving the good of the other.

¹⁸ STh I-II, q. 26, a. 4.

¹⁹ D. M. Gallagher, *Thomas Aquinas on Self-Love as the Basis for Love of Others*, “Acta Philosophica” 8(1999), 23-44, 27.

²⁰ STh I, q. 60, a. 3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² STh II-II, q. 19, a. 6.

²³ D. M. Gallagher, *Thomas Aquinas on Self Love as the Basis for Love of Others*, 41.

Focusing now on the third mode specifically, where self-love is totally in terms of ordination to God, to divine goodness, “His love of himself is an extension of his love for the whole; because he loves the whole he loves all that belongs to the whole including himself”²⁴. This third mode, then, places even more emphasis on both the common good and our existence as parts of a whole. We must, moreover, understand this self-love as explicitly taking pleasure from the good of others. Aquinas describes, “Thirdly, from the fact that another’s actions, if they be good, are reckoned as one’s own good, by reason of the power of love, which makes a man to regard his friend as one with himself”²⁵. Through the power of love, that is friendship, we can identify another as ourselves. We do not merely identify ourselves as part of a whole, rather, we find that the whole is composed of numerous *alter ipse*, other selves.

Indeed, the crucial point remains that we identify the beloved as *ourselves*. This is why we must take pains to emphasize the right-ordered nature of self-love. This provides clear implications for the common good; we love the goods for another as though they were our own, thus loving them with a love of concupiscence. “Since a person naturally loves his own good with a love of concupiscence, he will also love the good of another person with concupiscence if he somehow takes that other person to be one with himself”²⁶. In this way, Aquinas maintains self-love as the basis for all subsequent love of others and as our means for interacting with the common good. For, whatever thing is loved must be loved for someone. This applies even to the notion of the common good which we might love with the love of concupiscence. “The common good would not be loved for its own sake, but for the sake of those who share in it”²⁷. We love the common good because we love those who compose it. Taken to its fullest extent, we ought to love all people, all those who partake of the common good, with the love of friendship. This does not necessarily mean we will be friends with everyone, rather we are aware of the inherent worth of each person. “The love of friendship toward another means, fundamentally, to know another’s intrinsic goodness and to will him good for his own sake”²⁸. In this way our love finds its perfection in extending to all people as a means of their perfection and our own. None of this is possible, however, without a proper recognition of each person’s worth.

With all this in mind, we can see that sacrificing oneself for the common good does not provide any contradiction with love of self. “And when the person sacrifices to the common good of the city... suffers torture and gives his life for the city, in these very acts because it wills what is good and acts in ac-

²⁴ Ibid, 42.

²⁵ STh I-II, q. 32, a. 5.

²⁶ D. M. Gallagher, *Thomas Aquinas on Self Love as the Basis for Love of Others*, 31.

²⁷ E. Sullivan, *Self-Transcending Love According to Thomas*, 936.

²⁸ Ibid, 937.

cordance with justice, it still loves its own soul”²⁹. This sacrifice answers to the order of charity, allowing a person to love their own soul whilst suffering for a good not privately their own.

Indeed, the need for sacrifice is particularly present and urgent within communities, “social life should impose numerous restraints and sacrifices upon his life as a person, considered as part of the whole”³⁰. In living with others we necessarily must forego some pleasures and impulses if we are to exist harmoniously. This is perhaps even more readily apparent within the context of the family where mother and father both make sacrifices for the good of their children and the family as a whole. Nevertheless, these sacrifices can serve to help us become better people. “But in the measure that these sacrifices and restraints are required and accepted in the name of justice and amity, they raise higher the spiritual level of the person”³¹. Consistent with longstanding Christian tradition, it is worth reiterating that suffering does not have to be in vain. Suffering offers a testing ground for virtue and confirms our own growth; the love found in community both enables and demands our perseverance. The just man renders to each his own, and he also truly delights in doing so, even at the cost of his own pleasure³².

3. Personalism and Individualism

Looking now at personalism, we must keep in mind that, “Thomistic personalism stresses the metaphysical distinction between individuality and personality”³³. We can hardly speak of personalism without referencing the person himself and his own personality. Individuality, however, runs counter to this proper understanding of person and the term denotes a sort of isolationism; the individual cannot and does not want to be part of a community. “But the person is only growing insofar as he is continually purifying himself from the individual within him. He cannot do this by force of self-attention, but on the contrary by making himself available and thereby more transparent to both himself and others”³⁴. It is this fight against individualism that will prove particularly important; it is impossible to form a functioning “community” of individuals, much less one that pursues the common good. Oftentimes our obviously unique personalities obscure the fact that we belong to a whole and steers or evens drives us toward individuality. This being the case, it is not difficult to

²⁹ J. Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. J. J. Fitzgerald, “The Review Of Politics” 8(October, 1946), no. 4, 444, <http://www.sfu.ca/classics/pdf/person.pdf> (access: 12.01.2020).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² STh I-II, q. 59, a. 5.

³³ J. Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 420.

³⁴ E. Mounier, *Personalism*, trans. P. Mairet (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), 19.

bring to mind examples of the modern insistence that we more readily find personal progress through isolation. This, of course, is to mistake individuality with personality. The only way we truly advance is through communion with the other, “other persons do not limit it [the person], they enable it to be and to grow. The person only exists thus toward others, it only knows itself in knowing others, only finds itself in being known by them”³⁵. The radical stance offered by Thomistic personalism, emphasizes both the uniqueness of each person and the equal dignity inherent in all persons which calls us to community with one another.

Personalism recognizes that community enables the growth in love necessary for any union with God or others. “The communion of love, in liberating him who responds to it, also liberates and reassures him who offers it. Love is the surest certainty that man knows; the one irrefutable, existential *cogito*: I love, therefore I am”³⁶. In fully giving ourselves over to another through love, we confirm our own existence. We find ourselves drawn to unity precisely because union with others informs us who we are as distinct persons. Mounier clarifies even further when he describes reflection as a necessary step in the personal life, “for reflection is not simply a turning of the power of consciousness back upon the self and its imaginations; it is also an intention, a projection of the self”³⁷. A robust interior self-love need gives rise to an outward display of love for others, both our fellow man and our Creator.

4. De Koninck and Maritain: Personalism and the Common Good

This relationship between self-love and love of others ultimately proves less controversial than the alluded relationship between the individual and the common good. Attempts at explaining this relationship have often opened personalists up to attacks from those emphasizing the common good. Perhaps one of the most notable came from Charles De Koninck in his book *On the Primacy of the Common Good: Against the Personalists*. De Koninck will go so far as to draw a comparison between the speculative folly of the personalists and the sin of the fallen angels, “The sin of the angels was practically a personalist error: they preferred the dignity of their own person to the dignity which they would receive through their subordination to a good which was superior, but common in its very superiority”³⁸. De Koninck wanted recognition of the primacy of the common good, with regards to both society and the individual, as the greatest good for each singular person who participates in it as common.

³⁵ Ibid, 20.

³⁶ Ibid, 23.

³⁷ Ibid, 37.

³⁸ C. De Koninck, *On the Primacy of the Common Good: Against the Personalists and the Principle of New Order*, trans. S. Collins, “The Aquinas Review” 4(1997), 16.

The aspects of De Koninck’s work decrying modern individualism certainly seem agreeable to personalists; we ought not enter into common life with the sole intention of procuring our own private good. Rather, De Koninck seems to disagree with what he sees as undue emphasis placed on each man’s ultimate common good, that is, each person’s supernatural end in God. At first glance, and his subtitle certainly suggests as much, De Koninck views Jacques Maritain and other personalists as ultimately usurping the common good for the private. However, as we will see, Maritain is not guilty of nearly as many crimes as De Koninck would have us believe. Rather, examining the primary point of disagreement we see that the two thinkers are closer than they would admit.

Recall that, with the recognition of man’s inherent dignity, Thomistic personalism emphasizes man’s call to unity. This unity extends to each person’s distinct contact and subordination to God. Jacques Maritain will hold this up as the chief aim of Thomistic personalism, “Everything else— the whole universe and every social institution— must ultimately minister to this purpose; everything must foster and strengthen and protect the conversation of the soul, every soul, with God”³⁹. For Maritain, this is where the central concern of Thomism lies; with the addition of personalism we can see even more clearly our orientation to God.

This communion and love of God does displace the person from himself somewhat. “If...the person itself desires God as its good, it does so in loving God for Himself, more than itself, and in willing the good of God more than its own proper good”⁴⁰. As we have established, God is certainly not a private good, on the contrary, He is the greatest common good. Were it possible to love God and not our fellow man, this would be a markedly incomplete love and not at all what Maritain presents from the angelic doctor. Moreover, Maritain acknowledges Thomas’ view concerning the primacy of the common good. “No one more than St. Thomas has emphasized the primacy of the common good...At every opportunity, he repeats the maxim of Aristotle that the good of the whole is ‘more divine’ than the good of the parts”⁴¹. Thus it is clear that, on some level, Maritain reads St. Thomas’ emphasis on the common good in the same light as De Koninck. Ultimately both agree that Aquinas emphasizes the primacy of the common good.

With this in mind, we can look to how Maritain believes a distinct personalist philosophy could survive alongside the primacy of the common good. Maritain provides some potential answers, emphasizing that the person tends by nature to communion, culminating in the Church and the communion of saints⁴². However, we can appreciate De Koninck’s frustration when Maritain ultimately concludes that the community is for the person perhaps more

³⁹ J. Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 421.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 423 f.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 427-428.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 453.

than the person is for the community, “In this sense the city [of heaven] is for each stone. It is for each of God’s saints, St. Thomas writes, that it is spoken in Matthew: ‘He shall place him over all his goods’”⁴³. This somewhat confusing conclusion seems to undermine much of what he previously established, so we end up lacking a satisfying explanation that grants proper weight to both the person and the common good.

5. St. Aelred of Rievaulx’s Theology of Love

In order to answer this fairly modern debate, then, it is helpful to turn to a great monastic mind from the twelfth century, St. Aelred of Rievaulx. Born around 1110, Aelred entered the Cistercian monastery at Rievaulx after growing up amongst the court of King David of Scotland. Other than a few brief years as abbot at Revesby, he remained based at Rievaulx until death, becoming a renowned spiritual father and director of souls⁴⁴. His insights into living in community provide an intriguing guide as to how we might incorporate a personalist understanding into the common good.

Aelred’s understanding of community relies on his theology concerning love of God and love of neighbor, laid bare in *The Mirror of Charity*. We can fill out the picture even more with the addition of Aelred’s notion of friendship found in *Spiritual Friendship*, for him a necessary bond if there is any hope of true community.

To begin, we must look at Aelred’s use of the sabbath as a descriptor for spiritual progress. Aelred emphasizes heaven as the final sabbath and eternal rest, but alongside this he introduces two other sabbaths, love of self and love of neighbor. “The spiritual sabbath is the rest of the spirit, peace of heart and tranquility of mind. This sabbath is sometimes experienced in love of oneself, it is sometimes derived from the sweetness of brotherly love and, beyond all doubt, it is brought to perfection in the love of God”⁴⁵. Love of self, as noted earlier, tends to arise naturally and thus provides a standard from which to begin. Once we love ourselves in a rightly ordered fashion we can love others as our own selves. The proper ordination arises from man’s not loving “either himself or his neighbor except for God’s sake”⁴⁶. Love of God, then, must be the love taken above all others. It is from our love of God that we recognize how we ought to love ourselves and others. While each sabbath arises out of the love we offer, the sabbath is also where we draw our strength from. God’s

⁴³ Ibid, 454.

⁴⁴ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. M. E. Laker (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1974), 4-10.

⁴⁵ Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, trans. E. Connor (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1990), III.2.3.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

sabbath in particular is at once, “the source of our rest and our peace and it is also our goal”⁴⁷.

Here it is important to note that we cannot separate these three sabbaths from the right ordered charity each requires. That is, the rest of God is equal to the love of God and so forth for each. “Charity alone is his changeless and eternal rest, his eternal and changeless tranquility, his eternal and changeless Sabbath”⁴⁸. God’s very existence consists of this eternal rest in His own charity, a charity freely offered that brings all things to completion. Aelred’s association between charity and rest provides some insight into how our love of others and our self-gift can serve to refresh both ourselves and those to whom we offer it.

Perfectly realized, the two sabbaths of love of self and love of neighbor temper whatever defects are present in our own souls and more properly dispose us to love of God. Although, “that a person may love himself, the love of God is formed in him; that one may love one’s neighbor, the capacity of one’s heart is enlarged...somehow, then, love of neighbor precedes love of God. Likewise love of self precedes love of neighbor”⁴⁹. Each love works with the others and each strengthens the others; these three loves cannot fully exist without the others, operating together and disposing our souls to the way of perfection.

Now for our purposes we should look specifically at the second sabbath, that is, love of neighbor. Once our own soul is set in the tranquility of self-love, we can enter into the second sabbath by opening out to others. “There he embraces and cherishes them all with tender attachment and makes them one heart and one soul with himself”⁵⁰. It is in the second sabbath that we realize that the very act of love increases our capacity for love. In the move to loving others we remove all tendencies toward self-centeredness and egoism, even as we identify others as our very own selves. This right ordering of both self-love and love of others sets the soul at peace, a peace that puts to rest any divisions within the soul. “This gives rise to a marvelous security, and from security to marvelous joy and from joy to a kind of jubilation”⁵¹. The realization of the sabbath for Aelred is the realization of things as they ought to be. No longer do we struggle to reconcile the actual with the ideal, any tension is replaced with a restful tranquility.

6. St. Aelred of Rievaulx’s Vision of Friendship

Looking at this second sabbath in a practical frame of mind we come to Aelred’s great work on friendship. For Aelred, community is synonymous with

⁴⁷ B. Callaghan, *Aelred of Rievaulx*, in: *Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Collected from “The Way”*, ed. L. Byrne (London: Continuum International Publishing, 1990), 379.

⁴⁸ Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, I.19.56.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, III.2.4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, III.4.7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III.3.6.

friendship; if there is no bond of charity the community ceases to exist. The community provides the answer to man's natural desire for unity, "Aelred's is a tacitly Trinitarian understanding of the universe, designed to join all God's creatures in peace and fellowship in a mirroring of God's own community and society"⁵². In God's declaration that it is not good for man to be alone, Aelred finds a directive to join himself to his fellow man in friendship. Thus it seems to Aelred that community is an integral part of creation, present from the beginning. Adam and Eve provide a first example, "How beautiful it is that the second human being was taken from the side of the first, so that nature might teach that human beings are equal and, as it were, collateral, and that there is in human affairs neither a superior nor an inferior, a characteristic of true friendship"⁵³. God ordained it so that we might look to one another as equals, that we might have helpers who can bear our load with us. The creation of Eve from Adam's very substance speaks also to the great intimacy of friendship. Friendship allows two people to share in a limited way the unity found in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This bond of unity does not necessarily remain between two or three people, rather, friendships of a few can grow to encompass multitudes. Aelred cites both the early church and the monastic community as examples of this growth and spread of charity. "Indeed, through faith in him they were prepared to die for one another – I do not say three of four, but I offer you thousands of pairs of friends"⁵⁴. Thus Aelred guides us to view our relation to larger bodies as we would our relation to our friends; a sort of paradox arises as our friendly intimacies create a broader community. Aelred does offer an important distinction to keep in mind although, "reiterating his view that community begins with people in twos or threes, intimately sharing their thoughts and so becoming one spirit and expanding into a larger body, Aelred also regularly shows friends stepping apart from the larger community for time together"⁵⁵. This provides us with wise practical guidance. On the one hand, we should let whatever real friendship is present spill over into the whole and thus better serve the whole by treating every member as our friend. On the other hand, in order to recharge and foster a right disposition it can be beneficial to spend time alone with our more familiar companions.

This is why Aelred refers to the early church as composed of "pairs of friends," and as the community that, "begins with personal friendships, among people who are able without anxiety to open their hearts freely to one another, friends in their total confidence and openness to one another"⁵⁶. This founda-

⁵² M. L. Dutton, *The Sacramentality of Community in Aelred*, in: *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx*, ed. M. L. Dutton (Boston: Brill Publishers, 2017), 250.

⁵³ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 1:57.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:28.

⁵⁵ M. L. Dutton, *The Sacramentality of Community in Aelred*, 255.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

tion provides grounds for the larger community and ensures its survival in mutual affection. Without these smaller unbroken links a larger chain never forms; without relationships between distinct persons no larger community arises.

When this community of friends takes shape, the result, while not universal friendship, can be universal charity. Aelred will go so far as to compare the monastic community with paradise, for what is paradise but living in perfect charity with God and neighbor. Although Aelred is quite clear that we cannot, in this present life, extend the secrets of friendship to every man, he maintains that living in community provides us with a foretaste of heaven. “In that multitude of brethren I found no one whom I did not love, and no one by whom, I felt sure, I was not loved. I was filled with such joy that it surpassed all the delights of this world”⁵⁷. This love constitutes to make many into one; the locus of this community is love between brothers and friends. If we follow Aelred and look to another example of friendship, Martha and Mary, we see realize that this bond of love is most perfectly realized in love Itself, Christ.

Martha and Mary, taken as models of the active and contemplative life, their friendship is notable in that it is Christ-centric, with Jesus providing the motivation for both modes of life. “Aelred emphasizes the tension between active service and contemplative seeking, the effort to achieve a balance between love of neighbor and love of God, between the ministry that members must offer Jesus in his human needs and their longing to immerse themselves entirely in his presence and teaching”⁵⁸. An authentic community must incorporate both of these aspects of charity, as both serve to strengthen the bond of friendship. This means that, far from disrupting community, differences in temperament and capabilities foster an interdependence that evinces God in our midst. “For Aelred the two great commandments are always one...because in loving and serving the neighbor one builds a community within which God lives”⁵⁹. Like Eve, we are each given as a helper to each other, serving some distinct purpose that manifests Christ in the world. As Aelred remarks at the beginning of *Spiritual Friendship*, “Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst”⁶⁰, two together with Christ as their bond.

Conclusion

If there is any wisdom to be gleaned with regards to answering the debate between the common good and the private good, it lies here. Maritain emphasizes friendship with God as the ultimate good and goal of man; similarly De Konnink offers Christ in the common good as man’s final *telos*. Aelred instead places Christ in the center of any relationship as a necessary first step

⁵⁷ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 3:82.

⁵⁸ M. L. Dutton, *The Sacramentality of Community in Aelred*, 252.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 262.

⁶⁰ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 1:1.

and the underlying gravity in any discussion surrounding the common good. “And all these take their beginning from Christ, advance through Christ, and are perfected in Christ”⁶¹, Locating Christ at the center of human relations is no mere reminder to act with charity; rather friendship with Christ allows us to see the world as it should be. Thus we are able to see with clear eyes the true common good that sin obscures. “But after the fall of the first man, when with the cooling of charity concupiscence made secret inroads and caused private goods to take precedence over the common weal, it corrupted the splendor of friendship and charity”⁶². For Aelred, friendship provides the answer to how we might repair man to God, and then ourselves to our fellow man. Aspiring to the kiss of Christ⁶³, that our breath might mingle with His, we look to conform our will to that of our Beloved’s⁶⁴. From this place of intimacy with Christ we can pursue the common good free from all fear and inhibitions.

* * *

Summary

Love of neighbor originates in a rightly ordered love of self; though it appears contradictory at first blush, this relationship of the two loves underlies the Christian understanding of love. In order to get a clearer picture, we must examine the notion of the common good. The common good holds a prominent place within the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas and illuminates the relationship of self-love and love of neighbor. Modern Catholic philosophy has often struggled with how the common good should be interpreted, with personalists in particular coming under fire. Looking at the monastic life described by St. Aelred of Rievaulx we can glean some insight into how we might embrace a personalist understanding of the common good.

Keywords: common good, sacrificial love, community, self-love, personalism.

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⁶¹ Ibid, 2:21.

⁶² Ibid, 1:57.

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⁶⁴ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, 2:22.

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