

Thomas Aquinas and the Potential Catholic Integration of a Dynamic Occasionalist Understanding of Grace

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Abstract

Starting out from John Barclay's Lutheran-inclined, actualist reading of the in-breaking quality of grace and the Spirit in Paul, this essay asks how a Catholic theology of grace – typically more focussed on identifying the relatively stable structures and effects of grace – might with integrity learn from the Barclayan-Lutheran-Pauline difference. By pursuing a close, four-step reading of Thomas Aquinas' theology of grace, as that appears in the *Summa Theologiae* and his lectures on the Pauline epistles, the essay demonstrates that just such a Catholic appropriation of a more dynamic graced actualism is indeed possible; one which leads, with dynamic integrity, to a deepened understanding, articulation, and practice of core Catholic instincts rather than to their reduction or distortion.

Introduction: a possible Catholic appropriation of a Lutheran-inflected Paul?

One of the shaping influences on John Barclay's particular reading of grace and retrieval of gift in Paul is Jon Louis Martyn's neo-apocalyptic reading which emphasises the disruptive, in-breaking quality of grace and the Spirit.¹ Quite apart from providing a useful hermeneutic for more deeply appreciating this dimension of Pauline teaching, this is also of some tangential significance for the thorny question as to the relevance of Lutheran sensibilities to the reading of Paul.

In the latter regard, the basic narrational arc goes something as follows. Despite Krister Stendahl's anticipatory 1963 essay,² the Lutheran reading of the Pauline corpus as centrally focussed on the believer's justification by faith apart from good works continued to dominate much Pauline interpretation even some years after E. P. Sanders' espousal of covenantal nomism in his breakthrough 1977 text, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.³ Whilst Sanders' work

¹ See John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 147-50 *et passim*; also Barclay, "'By the Grace of God I Am What I Am': Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul", in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole, eds., (London: T & T Clark, 2008), pp. 140-57 (pp. 153-6); also Barclay, 'The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther', in *Reformation Readings of Paul: Explorations in History and Exegesis*, Michael Allen and Jonathan A. Linebaugh, eds., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), pp. 49-69.

² See Krister Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 56 (1963), 199-215.

³ See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London/Philadelphia, PA: SCM/Fortress, 1977).

marked the effective start of the whole ‘New Perspectives’ industry,⁴ the continuing long shelf-life of Reformation-influenced interpretations of Paul is evidenced by the fact that as late as the mid-1980s, the standard commentaries still in use in UK undergraduate courses on Romans were those of C. K. Barrett and C. E. B. Cranfield.⁵ By contrast, since that point any anachronistic Reformation-framing of Pauline interpretation has been very definitely sidelined.

Against this backdrop, it is fascinating that, amongst its many other contributions, John Barclay’s highly acclaimed fresh reading of Paul on grace also very effectively serves to bring a Lutheran sensibility back into the conversation.⁶ Indeed, Barclay brings Luther back into the conversation not just as one amongst many significant voices in his inevitably selective history of Pauline reception but as the place in subsequent tradition with the strongest resonance with the disruptive, in-breaking, incongruous quality of grace which he retrieves in Paul.⁷ For sure, Barclay is not finding in Paul any direct forerunner of Luther’s rejection of Gabriel Biel’s nominalist-influenced distortion and reduction of medieval merit, and he also wants to distinguish his own reading of Paul in key ways from that of Luther.

First, where for Barclay the incongruity of grace in Paul is relative to established social patterns of honour, worth, and like-to-like association in accordance with such codes,⁸ in Luther’s reading this becomes transposed to the interiority of each believer, such that the incongruity of grace concerns the irrelevance of any spiritual or moral worth on the believer’s behalf, either prior or subsequent to the ever-renewed event of grace.⁹

Secondly, there is another, more qualified, contrast between Barclay’s Paul and Luther’s Paul, at least at the level of consistency of emphasis. Allowing that Luther was not a systematic thinker, his particular exposition of the incongruity of grace combined with the very strong emphasis he places on the utterly unconditioned reality of grace can suggest a divine ‘unilateralism’, or ‘non-circularity’, such that nothing appears to be required of the recipient of grace.¹⁰ As he states in the 1535 Lectures on Galatians: ‘By faith alone, not by

⁴ See Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

⁵ I speak from my experience as a Durham undergraduate during these years. It is possible, of course, that the enduring influence of Barrett and Cranfield was a peculiarly Durham honouring of their local emeriti. See Charles Kingsley Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: A & C Black, 1971 [1957]), subsequently republished in 1991 and 2011; and C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Vol’s 1 & 2* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975 & 1979), subsequently reprinted in 1982 and 1983 respectively.

⁶ See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 97-116 *et passim*.

⁷ E.g. see Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 571-2.

⁸ E.g. see Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 489, 511, 572; and Barclay, ‘Grace and the Countercultural Reckoning of Worth: Community Construction in Galatians 5-6’, in *Galatians and Christian Theology*, M. W. Elliott, S. J. Hafemann, N. T. Wright, and J. Frederick, eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 306-17; and Barclay, ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, pp. 63-4.

⁹ E.g. see ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, p. 55; also pp. 65-6.

¹⁰ For Barclay on ‘non-circularity’ as one of six ways grace can be ‘perfected’, see *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 74-5; and for his finding a version of this in Luther, pp. 113, 115. For ‘unilateral’, see p. 31.

faith formed by love, are we justified. ... This faith justifies without love and before love.’¹¹ The fear for Luther was that any responsive requirement would become a conditioning of grace. The problem, however, as Barclay recognises, is that this ‘created a dichotomy that made it difficult for many in the subsequent Lutheran tradition to integrate “faith” with “ethics” ... it runs the risk of making faith merely an interior, individual phenomenon.’¹² By contrast, Barclay consistently reads Paul as maintaining both the utterly incongruous character of the event of grace – its not being given on account of any worth in the recipient – and its nevertheless carrying a responsibility to live in accordance with its reality and so bear witness to that reality.¹³ Indeed, Barclay recognises that ‘Luther himself, responding to sharp criticism of his theology, worked extremely hard in the Galatians lectures to emphasize that works *will follow* faith, even if faith alone is significant for justification’.¹⁴ In support of this he cites Luther as saying: ‘It is true that faith alone justifies, without works; but I am speaking about genuine faith, which, after it has justified, will not go to sleep but is active through love’.¹⁵ With some Lutheran-style inflexion, Barclay holds this together by emphasising, with Paul, that this fitting ‘newness’ of Christian life (Rom 6:4) is itself an aspect of the event of grace, the ‘Christ-gift’.¹⁶ Along with the influence of Martyn’s apocalyptic reading of Paul, there is also some resonance here with the fresh reading of Luther which Tuomo Mannermaa and the associated Finnish school of interpretation have propounded. For Mannermaa and colleagues a key principle is that for Luther ‘Christ is [really] present in faith itself’.¹⁷ Full understanding includes recognition that Luther speaks of justification not simply as a being embraced in forgiveness but as actually being taken into Christ and transformed, as fire transforms iron.¹⁸

These distinctions between Barclay’s Paul and Luther’s Paul acknowledged, it is nevertheless the case that in retrieving the dynamic, interruptive reality of grace in Pauline understanding, Barclay also gives fresh space and force to the lasting claim that the more

¹¹ The full text runs: ‘By faith alone, not by faith formed by love, are we justified. We must not attribute the power of justifying to a “form” that makes a man pleasing to God; we must attribute it to faith, which takes hold of Christ the Savior Himself and possesses Him in the heart. This faith justifies without love and before love.’ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535 Chapters 1-4. Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., Walter A. Hansen, ass. ed., (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963), p. 137, henceforth in the form *LW* 26:136. Barclay alludes to this in ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, p. 50. See also *LW* 12:368, *LW* 25:365, *LW* 26:5.

¹² Barclay, ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, p. 64.

¹³ E.g., *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 467, 498, 518; also ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, pp. 53, 64.

¹⁴ Barclay, ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, p. 64, n.36.

¹⁵ *LW* 27:30, in Barclay, ‘The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther’, p. 64, n.36; also in n.10 see *LW* 26:255; relevant too is *LW* 26:137 which Barclay alludes to in *Paul and the Gift*, p. 114, n.87.

¹⁶ See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, pp. 517-18.

¹⁷ See *LW* 26:129; also *LW* 26:357.

¹⁸ See Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther’s View of Justification*, Kirsi Stjerna, trans., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005 [1979]); also Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). For Barclay drawing upon the precise Lutheran text central to Mannermaa’s analysis, see *Paul and the Gift*, p. 107. For an earlier Catholic anticipation of this line of analysis, see Erwin Iserloh, ‘Luther’s Christ-Mysticism’, in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, Jared Wicks, ed., (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), pp. 37-58.

actualist, occasionalist dimensions of Luther's writings should have within Christian tradition, helpfully emphasising conversion under grace as a continual, daily reality in Christian life.¹⁹

Writing as a Catholic systematician who explores matters of grace, pneumatology, and ecclesiology, the focussing question for this essay is what we are to make of this. Are we to read it as another Protestant claiming of a Pauline prioritising of grace, freedom, and the charismatic in contrast to a supposed Catholic default to a Petrine prioritising of law, obedience, and the institutional? Well, in one sense, whether or not it was intentionally written as such, I think it can be read in this way. With the exception of Augustine as common property across the Western Christian traditions, is it significant that of the remarkable range of figures in the reception of Paul with whom John Barclay engages, he does not engage a single specifically Catholic writer, and not at all with the single most significant figure within the Catholic tradition, Thomas Aquinas? If there is something in this notion of Barclay's Paul once again being a somewhat Lutheran-inflected Paul then what is a Catholic theologian to make of it?

Is the appropriate Catholic response to seek to counter by claiming that emphasising an actualist, interruptive, incongruous in-breaking cannot alone do justice to the full Pauline story of grace, and that we also need to attend to the ways in which Paul allows for a certain stability of effect, manifesting in graced transformation and holy conformity to Christ (e.g. Gal 5:6, 16, 22–26; Rom 6:4; Phil 2:12–14)? Well, whilst I consider these good and interesting questions to ask, that is not my approach here. Quite apart from the fact that, as we have seen, this would represent a misdirected response relative to Barclay's own sophisticated reading of Paul, I explicitly eschew the default to confessional defensiveness and correcting explanatory restatement which, no matter how delicately and politely it has been pursued, has shaped much modern ecumenical engagement.²⁰ Rather, the guiding orientation at work here is that of Receptive Ecumenism.²¹ In keeping with this way, my inclination is to ask what Catholic theology and practice might have to learn and receive from this more dynamic, interruptive understanding of grace and the Spirit.²² In turn, the current focus on what

¹⁹ As Barclay expresses it, 'What is characteristic of Luther is that this dialectical relation between law and gospel is played out not in a once-off transition to faith, but repeatedly, even daily, in the life of the believer.' Barclay, 'The Text of Galatians and the Theology of Luther', p. 54; also pp. 54-5 referencing Luther speaking of the Christian life as 'nothing else than a daily baptism', Luther, *Large Catechism*, 'Holy Baptism', 65 [see *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore G. Tappert, trans. & ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 357-461 (p. 445)]; also Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, p. 109.

²⁰ See Paul D. Murray, 'In Search of a Way', in *The Oxford Companion to Ecumenism*, Geoffrey Wainwright and Paul McPartlan, eds., (Oxford: OUP, 2017), available at: <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199600847.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199600847-e-45> (accessed 2 October 2019).

²¹ See Murray, 'Introducing Receptive Ecumenism', *The Ecumenist* 51 (2014), pp. 1-8; also Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda', in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Murray, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 5-25.

²² See Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That', *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010), 142-70 (pp. 162-70); also Murray, 'Charisma, Institution und Trinität im Werk Karl Rahners: Zur Sicherung einer notwendigen pneumatologische Basis für eine ganzheitliche Theologie des Dienstamts', in *Gerettet durch Begeisterung: Reform der katholischen Kirche durch pfingstlich-charismatische Religiosität?* Gunda Werner, Hg., (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2018), pp. 145–63.

Catholic theology of grace and pneumatology might have to learn from a Lutheran-inflected Pauline sensibility could be fruitfully extended by asking in complementary fashion as to what Catholic ecclesiology and ecclesial practice might have to learn from the related sustained Lutheran subordination of the church to the Word in the Spirit. But that last point must wait for another day.²³

Now let me be clear, in taking this approach I am *not* saying that there is not also something of lasting importance in the Catholic default toward emphasising the relative stability of the effects of grace in such things as the habits, virtues, and character, on the one hand, and church, ministry, and sacraments, on the other hand. On the contrary, I take it for granted that there *is* something of lasting significance in each of these regards. Indeed, I view them as part of the Catholic gift and genius in ways which do not, I think, appear as naturally within a Protestant sensibility.²⁴ But my concern here is not to defend these Catholic givens.

Rather my critical concern is to attend closely to the Protestant critique of these Catholic givens as being always in danger of becoming idolatrously viewed as things important in their own right, which can then come to be thought of as standing between ourselves and God, and in which we can mistakenly place our direct trust and confidence. With that, my constructive concern is to ask as to how these – in themselves good and necessary – Catholic givens can be saved from falling into their respective idolatrous shadows by really learning from what is, in turn, true and sound in the very different Lutheran default instinct for our moment-by-moment absolute dependence on the continually renewed yet utterly unowed and entirely gratuitous gift of God’s active, saving grace in Christ and the Spirit.

So my overall dual constructive concern in the broader project of which this essay is a part is to ask: a) how Catholic theology and practice of the relative stability of graced effect can be resituated, with ‘dynamic integrity’, within the kind of Lutheran-inflected, Pauline-inspired appreciation for interruptive graced actualism that we find in John Barclay’s work?²⁵ And b) how the default Catholic valuing of Christic ecclesial structure can similarly be resituated, again with dynamic integrity, within a Protestant-inspired appreciation for the primacy of charismatic endowment and the continual proper subordination of church to Word and Spirit? The present essay contributes to the first of these concerns.²⁶ In each case, I believe: i) that such Catholic expansion and resituating through receptive ecumenical learning

²³ For an initial exploration, see Murray ‘Receptive Ecumenism and the Quincentennial Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation’, *Centro Pro Unione: Semi-Annual Bulletin* 92 (Fall 2017), 8-17, available at: <https://www.prounione.it/bulletin/web-n92-fall2017/> (accessed 2 October 2019).

²⁴ See Reinhard Hütter, ‘Karl Barth’s “Dialectical Catholicity”’, in his *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 78-94.

²⁵ On ‘dynamic integrity’ relative to the potential expansion and reconfiguring of traditioned webs of doctrine and practice, see Murray, ‘Living Catholicity Differently: On Growing into the Plenitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God’, in *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers, eds., (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2018), pp. 109-58 (pp. 110-111, particularly n.7); also Murray, ‘Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal: Notes on Being Reasonable and Responsible in Receptive Ecumenical Learning’, in *Leaning into the Spirit: Ecumenical Perspectives on Discernment and Decision-making in the Church*, Virginia Miller, David Moxon, Stephen Pickard, eds., (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), *in press*.

²⁶ I am pursuing the second of these concerns and related in a more extended project entitled *Catholicism Transfigured: Conceiving Change in the Church*.

is possible; ii) that there are authentic resources already within Catholic tradition which can help to facilitate such Catholic receptive learning with dynamic integrity; and iii) that pursuing this approach will lead to a deepened understanding, articulation, and practice of core Catholic instincts rather than to their reduction or distortion.

With all of this in view as context for and backdrop to my attempted Catholic appropriation of John Barclay's reading of Paul, my specific concern in this essay is to ask what help might be found here in the work of Thomas Aquinas – in some respects the theologian par-excellence of the relative stability of the effects of grace? To what extent, when read correctly, can we find in Thomas a theology of grace and an associated practice of graced Christian existence with sufficient resonance with Barclay's reading of Paul as to open the way to a more explicit Catholic appropriation of and resituating within a Lutheran-inflected appreciation for our utter dependence on the ever-renewed, event-like actuality of grace? In response the body of the essay traces a four-step reading of Thomas.

First is a preliminary summary of the Augustinian-Thomistic synthesis, its basic orientation and intent, and its openness to misinterpretation. Second is a closer examination of the absolute primacy of grace and the permanent dependence of human freedom on the transcendent act of divine freedom in the Thomistic synthesis. Third, crucially, is an appreciation for Thomas' understanding of the continually renewed reality of the effective gift of grace and a disentangling of this from erroneous understandings of what he means by habitual grace. Fourth, the essay draws to a close by looking at the way in which the existential-spiritual roots for Thomas' highly conceptualised theology of graced Christian existence are in clearest evidence in his account of the role of constant prayerful dependence on the Spirit in the shaping of Christian life.

Taken together, the purpose of this four-step reading of Thomas is to indicate quite how substantial the resources are within Catholic tradition for justifying the kind of receptive learning with dynamic integrity here being called for in relation to the theology and practice of graced Christian existence. If nothing else, the essay might serve to suggest the kind of chapter on Thomas which Barclay could well include in any second edition of his great work.

Classical Catholic theology of grace: the Augustinian-Thomistic synthesis and its limitations

Thomas' most carefully delineated and mature treatment of grace is to be found in the *prima secundae pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, qq. 109-114, in the course of which he makes frequent reference to the Pauline corpus. Stemming from about the same period as Thomas was likely writing this part of the *Summa* are his Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, wherein, perhaps unsurprisingly, we find a substantively similar theology of grace being presented.²⁷ Teaching on the scriptures was, of course, Thomas' real bread and butter work as

²⁷ See Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume I, The Person and His Work*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 340. John F. Boyle proposes 'only partially in jest' that the *Summa* can be viewed as 'lab work' to the biblical commentary's 'field work', see Boyle, 'On the Relation of St. Thomas's Commentary on Romans to the *Summa theologiae*', in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, Matthew Levering and Michael Dauphinais, eds., (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2012), pp. 75-82 (p. 81); also 'The compressed, even terse, references to Scripture in the *Summa* are typically capsule summaries of what he has worked out at greater length in the biblical commentaries. In other words, we see in *longhand* in the biblical commentaries what often appears in *shorthand* in the *Summa*.' Daniel A. Keating, 'Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas', in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical*

a member of the ‘Order of Preachers’, employed as a *magister in sacra pagina*, or master of sacred scripture.²⁸ Recognising this centrality of scriptural reflection in Thomas’ life and work – rather than approaching him as some kind of dessicated philosopher of religion who bases everything on nature and human reason – is vital to understanding him correctly in his writings on the gracious, healing, transforming, saving action of God in Christ and the Spirit.²⁹ For all his sophisticated deployment of Aristotelian categories, in his theology of grace Thomas is throughout seeking to be responsive to and in service of both the scriptural witness to the drama of salvation and the lived character of Christian existence.³⁰ Or in John F. Boyle’s terms, the *Summa* gives us ‘categories and distinctions’ in service of more clearly understanding ‘the reality’ which St Paul ‘described in its living form’.³¹

It is also important to recognise that whilst Thomas develops beyond Augustine in some significant ways, it is nevertheless the case that throughout his exposition of grace in the *Summa* he carefully pursues the Augustinian trajectory. This is particularly the case in relation to how Augustine articulated his thought in his later anti-Pelagian writings, wherein he developed the distinction between operative and cooperative grace. As we shall see in a little closer detail in the next section of this essay, for Thomas as for Augustine the entirety of Christian life, from beginning to end and all between is throughout and at once grace-initiated, grace-situated, and grace-drawn; grace-held and grace-impelled, within the predestining providence of God.³² This includes the concurrent necessary process of self-

Introduction, Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel Keating, John Yocum, eds., (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 139-58 (p. 139).

²⁸ See Nicholas M. Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*, (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 1-7 (p. 2); in turn drawing on Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*; also Wilhelmus G. B. M. Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

²⁹ As Mark Jordan writes, ‘Far from being a timeless system true across all cultures, the *Summa* is a deliberately belated teaching that depends on community practices of Scripture and sacrament for its sense and (more importantly) its persuasion.’ Mark D. Jordan, *Teaching Bodies: Moral Formation in the Summa of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), p. 88; also Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), ix-x.

³⁰ As William Crozier remarked in conversation, it is notable that Thomas’ entire treatment of grace in qq.109-14 of the prima secundae pars of the *Summa Theologiae* is pursued in the context of asking how we are sanctified and justified (q.113).

³¹ See Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

³² There is a frequently used form of liturgical prayer which well articulates this Augustinian-Thomistic theology of the totality of grace, e.g., within the Western Catholic Rite compare the Opening Prayer at Mass for the Thursday after Ash Wednesday: ‘Lord, may everything we do begin with your inspiration, continue with your help, and reach perfection under your guidance.’ There are similar Collects within Anglican tradition. For Augustine on our utter incapacity, on account of the effects of sin, to make any right move, even of the will, without grace, see ‘Sermon 13’, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Part III – Sermons*, vol. 1, Edmund Hill, trans., John E. Rotelle, ed., (New York: New City Press, 1990), pp. 308-15 (p. 310); also ‘Sermon 169. ... Against the Pelagians, 416’, *The Works of Saint Augustine. Part III – Sermons*, vol. 5, Hill, trans., Rotelle, ed., (New York: New City Press, 1992), pp. 222-37 (p. 229). For the same basic point in Thomas, albeit more prosaically expressed, see *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, F. R. Larcher, trans., J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón, eds., (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), §592, p. 199 [on Rom 7:25]; also §772, p.258 [on Rom 9:15]. I am grateful to William Crozier for assisting with chasing down pertinent references in this volume.

willed and self-involving Christian regeneration which they each understand Christian life to entail,³³ and which ‘is not the cause but the effect of grace.’³⁴ In Augustine’s words, ‘when God crowns our merits, he only crowns his own gifts’.³⁵ Again there is echo of this in *ST* 1a2æ.109.5: ‘By his will man does perform works meriting eternal life; but ... for this there is need that man’s will should be prepared by God through grace.’³⁶ Or as Thomas puts it in the context of commenting on Eph 2:10: ‘whatever good we possess is not from ourselves but from the action of God.’³⁷ Following which, picking up the final clause of Eph. 2:10, ‘that we should walk in them’, he muses:

Lest anyone imagine that good works are prepared for us by God in such a way that we do not cooperate in their realization through our free will, he annexes *that we should walk in them*. As though he said: thus has he prepared them for us, that we might perform them for ourselves through our free will.³⁸

Even our first step to God ‘derives from the assistance of God moving the soul towards the good.’³⁹

Regardless, then, of what might be suggested by some of his early writings on the subject, for the mature Thomas, following the anti-Pelagian Augustine, it is beyond question

³³ For Augustine on this, see “‘So if it is God who works in us, why does it say *Work out your own salvation*?’ Because he works in us in such a way that we too are enabled to work ourselves. ... “But it is my will that is good,” he says. I grant you it’s yours. But who was it who gave you even that, who stirred it up in you? Don’t just listen to me; ask the apostle: *For it is God*, he says, *who works in you both to will – works in you both to will – and to work with a good will* (Phil 2:13).’ ‘Sermon 13’, p. 309. For strong echo of this in Thomas, see ‘Man’s turning to God does indeed take place by his free decision; and in this sense man is enjoined to turn himself to God. But the free decision can only be turned to God when God turns it to himself’ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2æ, q.109, ad.6, vol. 30. *The Gospel of Grace*, Cornelius Ernst, ed., (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill Book Co, 1972), p. 91. All subsequent references in the form, *ST* 1a2æ.109.6 (vol. 30, p. 91); and also to be found there ‘Man can do nothing unless he is moved by God, according to the text of *John*, *Without me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5). And so, when man is said to do what is within him, this is said to be in his power in so far as he is moved by God.’ *ST* 1a2æ.109.6.

³⁴ *ST* 1a2æ.111.2 (vol. 30, p. 131).

³⁵ Augustine, ‘Letter 194’ (§19), *The Works of Saint Augustine. Part II – Letters*, vol. 3, Roland Teske, trans., Boniface Ramsey, ed., (New York: New City Press, 2004), pp. 287-308 (p. 296).

³⁶ *ST* 1a2æ.109.5 (vol. 30, p. 87); also, referencing Rom 11:35, ‘For man’s whole power to do good he has from God ... And so man can only merit something from God by his gift, as Paul strikingly puts it, *Who has first made a gift to him that he might be repaid?*’ *ST* 1a2æ.114.3, p. 207); compare ‘For man can give God only what he has received from God.’ *Commentary on Romans*, §941, p. 321 [on Rom 11:35]; also there §771, p. 258 [on Rom 9:15].

³⁷ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Larcher and M. L. Lamb, trans., Mortensen and Alarcón, eds., (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), §98, p. 225. The Larcher/Lamb translation of the text of Eph 2:10 that Thomas was using, closest to the Vulgate, is ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works, which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.’

³⁸ Aquinas, *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians*, §100, p. 226.

³⁹ *ST* 1a2æ.112.2 (vol. 30, p. 149); also there p.151; and *Commentary on Romans*, §302, p. 101 [on Rom 3:22]; also there §383, p. 130 [on Rom 5:2].

that there is no theology of ‘Do what you can and God will help’.⁴⁰ There is only a theology of concurrent graced human desiring, willing, and acting within the one act of God’s creative-regenerative self-gift in Christ and the Spirit, which comes to us both utterly un-owed and with transformative effect.⁴¹ Barclay identifies Calvin as focussing on and holding together the ‘perfections’ of ‘incongruity’ and ‘efficacy’.⁴² The same could be said of Thomas, along with the addition of ‘priority’.⁴³

All this recognised, it also needs to be acknowledged that this beautiful, elegant, and sophisticated synthesis, deploying Aristotelian metaphysical categories throughout, has not and does not always translate easily into Catholic practice. To state the obvious, Thomas’ systematic articulation of the primacy of grace and the situating of human action within it operates in a significantly cooler, apparently less existentially-driven climate than does Luther’s heartfelt insistence on our absolute, moment-by-moment dependence on the ever-renewed act of grace, allowing nothing to dilute or to confuse this sense.⁴⁴ For Luther, as for Augustine before him, the immediate focus is on our pressing spiritual-existential need for grace as remedial cure for sin and assurance of the utterly gratuitous embrace of God, who comes to us whilst we are helpless sinners. Nor is this a one-off beginning but the constant state of Christian existence.

By contrast, whilst Thomas assumes this remedial concern throughout, he resituates it, even subsumes it, within what for him is a more fundamental metaphysical issue concerning our absolute need for grace as supernatural ontological elevation – even regardless of sin – if our true God-willed telos of eternal beatitude is to be satisfied. Even without the profoundly complicating effects of sin, the realisation of this supernatural end lies utterly beyond the

⁴⁰ Indeed, Thomas explicitly rejects this principle in *ST* 1a2æ.109.6 (vol. 30, p. 89). By contrast, in his earliest writings on grace in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, where he emphasises our responsibility for our active involvement in our own regeneration, we can find something along these lines, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd edn., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1986]), pp. 100-109, where he refers to Aquinas, *In II Sent.* 26 q.1 a.6; and *In III Sent.* 22 q.1 a.1; also Stephen J. Duffy, *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 142 n.42 referring to Aquinas, *IV Sent.* 17 q.1 a.2 sol.1; *I Sent.* 17 q.1 a.3; and *II Sent.* 27 q.1 a.4 ad 4.

⁴¹ Perhaps the most appropriate spiritual correlate to this theology of graced concurrence is a constant prayer of ‘Lord Holy Spirit, love of God, move my desire that I might the more desire your moving of me; so attune my instincts, will, and acts that in all things I might accord with you.’ This is given profound succinct expression in the language of the Spirit as the ‘Power of our power’, for which see the final line of the third stanza of the popular Irish hymn, ‘Be Thou my Vision’: ‘Raise Thou me heav’nward, O Pow’r of my pow’r’ (Eleanor Hull, 1912 translation). For Thomas on grace as effecting transformation, see *Commentary on Romans*, §302, p. 101 [on Rom 3:22]; also there §506, p. 173 [on Rom 6:19].

⁴² See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, p. 129.

⁴³ For Thomas emphasising the ‘priority’ of grace, see: ‘To create anything is to produce it from nothing; hence, when anyone is justified without preceding merits, he can be said to have been created as though made from nothing. This creative action of justification occurs through the power of Christ communicating the Holy Spirit.’ *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians*, §99, p. 226 [on Eph 2:10].

⁴⁴ For a classic discussion of this contrast, see Otto Pesch, ‘Existential and Sapiential Theology: The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas’, in *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, Wicks, ed., pp. 61-81. For illustration of Luther’s actualist theology of grace: ‘grace is the continuous and perpetual operation or action through which we are grasped and moved by the Spirit of God’ *LW* 12:377-8 [on Ps 51:10].

capacities of our unaided human nature to achieve.⁴⁵ The presenting issue, then, for Thomas is with a metaphysics of grace rather than with a spiritual-existential theology of Christian existence. Whilst the latter is in fact present throughout it is less obviously visible.

This difference of form, voice, and context can be significant for the way in which Thomas is read, particularly so when he is read as articulating a purely conceptual account in abstraction from the daily routines of prayer and ascetic dependence which formed Thomas' own personal *sitz im leben*. The abstracted focus of concern can appear to be on identifying the stable structures of the operation and effects of grace in such things as the habits, the virtues, and the formation of character. In such circumstances the danger is that Thomas' recognition of the absolute primacy of God's gracious action will be read as a mere necessary first acknowledged principle in what can present, in effect, as a systematic account of our own need for responsible living before and towards God; yes, with the assurance that the grace required for this is indeed given to us but also with the seeming imperative that we must now just get on and use it.⁴⁶ In which case, the believer can experience her/himself as being thrown back on currently experienced resources as the limit of what is available.

For sure, fully theorised acknowledgement is made of the priority of grace. But it is also emphasised that the role of the believer is to act in responsible cooperation with the movement of regeneration that this grace, already given, is understood to support. It is difficult to hold the balance here. If the latter is disproportionately emphasised then the actual experience of this life supposedly lived under and within grace can easily slip to becoming little different to a striving on the basis of one's currently available inadequate resources. Consequently, whilst the theory might well avoid all hint of Pelagian or semi-Pelagian self-perfecting at a conceptual level, it can nevertheless be in danger of too easily supporting, or at least floating somewhat detached from, a lived practice shot through with such implicit assumptions.

This danger would be exacerbated all the more were the theory itself to slip away from the subtle integration of human initiative within divine initiative that we find in the Augustinian-Thomistic synthesis, and to devolve into a sense of differing agencies, human and divine, working alongside, together, or over against each other. This is what tended to occur under the later medieval nominalist and voluntarist reduction of the Augustinian-Thomistic account of concurrence and its effective separating out of divine and human action.⁴⁷ Also significant here is the strong penitentiary emphasis which has commonly characterised Catholic spirituality, emphasising the believer's responsibility to cooperate actively in her/his own transformation. Taken together, this has frequently resulted both in demanding forms of practical Pelagianism within Catholic spirituality, on the one hand, and in

⁴⁵ See *ST* 1a2æ.109.2 (vol. 30, p. 75).

⁴⁶ In what follows I draw upon my argument in Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That', p. 152.

⁴⁷ John Duns Scotus' claim that we can take the first step towards love of God on the basis of unaided natural human reason might be viewed as a significant step in this direction, see Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, suppl., dist. 27, a.3 'Does Nature Suffice to Love God Above All?', in *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality*, Allan B. Wolter, ed. & trans., (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997 [1986]), pp. 279-82, in particular: 'natural reason dictates that the infinite good be loved above all. Consequently, the will can do this by its purely natural endowments, for the intellect could not rightly dictate something to the will that the natural will could not tend towards or carry out naturally.' p. 281.

commodified, seemingly more attainable ways of thinking about how the believer might otherwise obtain access to God's forgiving acceptance, through forms of attempted purchase, on the other hand. These recurrent tendencies towards forms of practical Pelagianism and the commodification of soteriological concern represent instances of what I have elsewhere referred to as 'pragmatic incoherence' within the Catholic system.⁴⁸ Regardless of whether they are rooted in distortions and misunderstandings of Catholic theology properly understood, their recurrent nature points to there being significant weaknesses in the Catholic system which require reparative attention.

How, then, might a return to Thomas help us here? More specifically, how might a return to Thomas which also attends closely to the actualist strain in Lutheran theology help us here? And even more specifically still, how might a return to Thomas' reading of Paul in a manner alert also to Barclay's particular reading of Paul help us here? How might it help refresh and renew an authentic Catholic sensibility of committed graced existence? How might it resituate and reframe the default Catholic focus on what it means to live in accordance with the stable structures of grace by bringing that, in itself sound, default into lively affective relationship with a keener sense of our moment-by-moment dependence on the gracious, forgiving-transforming embrace of God, without which we can do nothing? Towards answering such questions, let us first look more closely at the absolute primacy accorded to grace in the Thomistic synthesis, which is really an absolute primacy accorded to the action of the Spirit.

The absolute primacy of grace (the Spirit) in the Thomistic synthesis

Although he does not often spell it out explicitly in the *Summa*, for Thomas grace in its many and various forms is a way of talking of the various dimensions of the Spirit's sanctifying and divinizing activity in the believer.⁴⁹ This becomes much more clearly evident in the Pauline lectures.⁵⁰ Reflecting this, Thomas is quite clear that in relation to God's own gracious act in

⁴⁸ See Murray, 'Discerning the Call of the Spirit to Theological-Ecclesial Renewal', also Murray, 'Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice: On the Transformative Task of Systematic Ecclesiology', *Modern Theology* 30 (2014), 251-81.

⁴⁹ E.g., see 'the Holy Spirit dwells in us through grace', *ST* 1a2æ.109.1 (vol. 30, p. 69); also *ST* 1a2æ.109.9, p. 101, citing 1 Cor 3:16; also *ST* 1a2æ.114.3, p. 209; and *ST* 1a.27.1 (vol. 6, p. 5), using 1 Cor 6:19. Also see *ST* 1a2æ.106.1-3 (vol. 30, pp. 5, 7, 11) for multiple references to 'the grace of the Holy Spirit'. And Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa contra Gentiles. Book Four: Salvation*, Charles J. O'Neil (trans.), (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), IV.21.3 (p. 122), subsequently *ScG* bk.ch.para (p. x). For treatment of the claim that Thomas has an insufficiently developed emphasis on grace as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the *Summa* and can consequently be misread as tending towards an instrumentalist assistive, thing-like understanding of grace in that work, see A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 81. For a further defence of the true centrality of this point for Thomas, see Keating, 'Justification, Sanctification and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas', pp. 148-51.

⁵⁰ E.g. 'For the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and of the Son, to be given to us is our being brought to participate in the love who is the Holy Spirit, and by this participation we are made lovers of God.' *Commentary on Romans*, §392, p. 132 [on Rom 5:5]; and '... because this was not from himself alone but from the instinct and help of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he says: *yet not I alone acting but the grace of God with me ...*' *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, Larcher, Mortensen, and Keating, trans., Mortensen and Alarcón, eds., (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), §909, p. 344 [on

the Spirit we must think not merely in terms of a sequential priority but of an absolute transcendent priority. This comes out most clearly in his discussion of the concurrence of real human desiring, willing, and acting within the transcendentally prior act of God who, in Thomas' understanding, is the one most fundamentally moving.

In this understanding, God does not move things as one external efficient cause alongside and in competition with other external efficient causes. As transcendent and interior act of being on which all particular beings depend for their continually being held in existence,⁵¹ God cannot be thought of as standing in a line alongside any created things.⁵² Rather, God moves things from within by bringing them into being and holding them in being as things which move themselves in time within God's one eternal act of being.⁵³ As William Cavanaugh writes, with reference to *ST* 1a.8.1, ad 3:

1 Cor 15:10]; also there §309, p. 116 [on 1 Cor 6:19]. Related to this, Thomas also clarifies that when Paul refers to the 'law of the spirit' (Rom 8:2) he 'means the law which is the Spirit', *Commentary on Romans*, §602, p. 203; also there §557, p. 190 [on Rom 7:14, also referencing Rom 8:2]. Thomas also refers to this 'law of the spirit' as the 'New Law', see *Commentary on Romans*, §603, p. 204 [on Rom 8:2]; also *ST* 1a2æ.106-108 (vol. 30, pp. 3-65); and in q.184 Thomas identifies the perfection of the New Law with *caritas* (i.e., as we have seen in his comment on Rom 5:5, with the love that *is* the Spirit), see *ST* 2æ2æ.184.1 (vol. 47, pp. 19-23); also *Commentary on Corinthians*, §90, p. 437 [on 2 Cor 3:6]. For further on the Spirit as *caritas*/love, see *ST* 1a.37.1-2 (vol. 7, pp. 79-89); and *ST* 1a.38.2, pp. 95-7.

⁵¹ E.g., 'Now since it is God's nature to exist, he it must be who properly causes existence in creatures ... And God is causing this effect in things not just when they begin to exist, but all the time they are maintained in existence ... Now existence is more intimately and profoundly interior to things than anything else, for everything as we said is potential when compared to existence. So God must exist and exist intimately in everything.' *ST* 1a.8.1 (vol. 2, p. 113). For Augustine's classic expression of this: 'But you were more inward than my most inward part and higher than the highest element within me.' Augustine, *Confessions*, III.vi (11), Henry Chadwick, trans., (Oxford: OUP, 1991), p. 43. For Julian of Norwich's reworking of this: 'God is nearer to us than our own soul, for God is the ground in which it stands ... Our soul reposes in God its true rest, and stands in God, its true strength, and is fundamentally rooted in God, its eternal love.' Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Clifton Wolters, trans., (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1966), §56, p. 161, adapted to gender neutral. And for modern devotional expression of the same, see the second line of the third verse of W. Chalmers Smith's hymn, 'Immortal, Invisible': 'in all life thou livest, the true life of all'.

⁵² E.g., 'God is more distant from any creature than any two creatures are from each other. Now there are some creatures so different that nothing can be said univocally of them ... Much less, therefore, could there be anything said univocally of creatures and God.' *ST* 1a.13.5 (vol. 3, p. 63). The fact of there being an absolute qualitative difference between God and creaturely reality is, of course, a point trenchantly maintained by Karl Barth. Less frequently noted, however, is Barth's recognition – mediated to him by the work of the 17th cent. Lutheran scholastic, Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617-88) – that this can properly be attributed to Thomas, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Volume II: The Doctrine of God, Part I*, T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire, trans., G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, eds., (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957 [1940]), pp. 237-8, henceforth in the form CD II/1, pp. 237-8.

⁵³ See 'Now it is clear that just as all physical movements are derived from the movement of the heavenly body as primary physical mover, so all movements, both physical and spiritual, are derived from what is the primary mover simply speaking, which is God.' *ST* 1a2æ.109.1 (vol. 30, p. 71). For Thomas' classic treatment of this, see *ST* 1a.105.5, 'Whether God is active in every agent cause?' (vol. 14, pp. 75-9); also see *ST* 1a.105.4, 'Whether God can move the creature's will?' (vol. 14, pp. 71-5).

precisely because God is entirely transcendent to creaturely being, because God is not another being in competition with finite being, God is the only agent who acts immediately – that is, through no medium – in all things.⁵⁴

This gives both an absolute priority to God's action as primary cause and a genuine reality to our desiring, willing, and acting as secondary cause.

For example, commenting on Romans 9:16, 'So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy',⁵⁵ Thomas first notes that 'an action is attributed more to the principal agent than to the secondary' and provides the example, 'as when we say that the hammer does not make the box but the carpenter by using the hammer'.⁵⁶ Second, on the basis of Rom 8: 14, 'all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God', he similarly argues that given that 'man's will is moved to good by God ... therefore, an inward action of man is not to be attributed principally to man but to God.'⁵⁷ In support of this he cites Phil 2:13, 'it is God who of his good pleasure works in you both the will and the performance'. Then anticipating the objection that:

if willing does not depend on the man willing or exertion on the man exerting himself, but on God moving man to this, it seems that man is not master of his own action, which pertains to freedom of will.⁵⁸

Thomas responds:

the answer is that God moves all things, but in diverse ways, inasmuch as each is moved in a manner befitting its nature. And so man is moved by God to will and to perform outwardly in a manner consistent with free will. Therefore, willing and performing depends on man as freely acting; but on God and not on man, as initial mover.⁵⁹

We find a similar line of argument recurring elsewhere throughout the Romans lectures. For example, commenting on Rom 8:2, 'the law of the spirit of life', in a manner which more clearly draws out the pneumatological depths to this, he states: 'the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the

⁵⁴ William T. Cavanaugh, 'A Joint Declaration? Justification as Theosis in Aquinas and Luther', *The Heythrop Journal*, 41/3 (2000), 265-80 (p. 270).

⁵⁵ As translated following the Vulgate, see *Commentary on Romans*, p. 256; compare there iii.

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §777, p. 260; also §790, p. 266 [on Rom 9:20].

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §777, p. 260; also §325, p. 111 [on Rom 4:2]. For similar in the *Summa*, see 'that good movement of free choice itself, by which a man prepares to receive the gift of grace, is the action of a free choice moved by God ... The principal agent is God moving the free choice ...' *ST 1a2æ.112.2* (vol. 30, p. 149), then citing Prov. 8:35 and Ps 36:23.

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §778, p. 260.

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §778, p. 260; compare *ST 1a2æ.109.2* (vol. 30, p. 75) and *ST 1a2æ.111.2* (vol. 30, p. 129), again citing Rom 9:16 in each case; also 'what is produced in me by God is also produced in me by myself, that is, by my free choice.' *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 9-21*, Larcher, trans., (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), §1900, p. 245 [on Jn 14:12 and appealing to 1 Cor 15:10]; also here p.239.

intellect but also inclines the affection to act aright.’⁶⁰ And in his direct comment on Rom 8:14 – which we have already seen him later allude to in the context of his comment on Rom 9:16 – we find ‘the spiritual man is inclined to do something not as though by a movement of his own will chiefly, but by the prompting of the Holy Spirit’.⁶¹ Immediately following this he again emphasises ‘However, this does not mean that spiritual men do not act through will and free choice, because the Holy Spirit causes the very movement of the will and of free choice in them’, supporting this with the same appeal to Phil 2:13.⁶² In *ST* 1a2æ.110.2 Thomas speaks in terms of ‘the movements by which they are moved by God’ becoming ‘connatural and easy to them’ and, with reference to Wisdom 7:1, ‘*She orders all things sweetly*’, he glosses this as a being ‘moved by him sweetly and promptly towards obtaining the eternal good.’⁶³ Throughout Thomas is concerned to hold together genuine human freedom and absolute dependence on God’s initiating, sustaining, and perfecting action in the Spirit. As Gilles Emery emphasises:

Saint Thomas takes care to note that this motive instinct does not diminish human freedom, because the Spirit acts at the depth of our free will: the Holy Spirit gives us the free mode of our acts and the very movement of the free will. In this manner, the action accomplished under the motive instinct of the Holy Spirit remains a fully free action.⁶⁴

In turn, it is this principle which Rahner assumes when he famously refers to freedom and dependence upon God being related in direct rather than indirect proportion.⁶⁵ Contrary, then, to the frequent assumption in much post-Enlightenment thinking of a zero-sum competitive dynamic pertaining between divine and human freedom – such that if one increases, the other must decrease – in the Augustinian-Thomistic synthesis true human freedom increases the more one is properly dependent on the transcendent act of divine freedom. Here it is not a case of *either* divine action *or* human action; nor a matter of the multiplication of comparable and potentially competitive agencies alongside each other: divine action *plus* human action. Rather it is a matter of the situating and energising of human

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §602, p. 204; also ‘the grace of the Holy Spirit is a kind of interior disposition infused into us which inclines us to act rightly’ *ST* 1a2æ.108.1 (vol. 30, p. 45).

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §635, p. 215; also *ScG* IV.22.4-6 (pp. 126-7), directly referring to this passage.

⁶² Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, §635, p. 215. Matching this, in Thomas’ Philippians commentary on this verse and with reference to Is. 26:12, we find: ‘he moves the will from within to act well’, *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Larcher, trans., Mortensen and Alarcón, eds., (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), §77, p. 32.

⁶³ *ST* 1a2æ.110.2 (vol. 30, p. 115).

⁶⁴ Gilles Emery, ‘The Holy Spirit in Aquinas’s Commentary on Romans’, in *Reading Romans with St. Thomas Aquinas*, Levering and Dauphinais, eds., pp. 127-62 (pp. 147-8); also ‘Here, St. Thomas shows that the full recognition of human freedom does not undermine the absolute priority of God (the Holy Spirit) who acts as first and transcendent cause, and who is precisely the cause of the free mode of the holy actions accomplished by the children of God.’ p.148.

⁶⁵ See Rahner, ‘Current Problems in Christology’ (1954), *Theological Investigations* I, Cornelius Ernst, trans., (London: DLT, 1961), pp. 149-220 (pp. 162-3).

action within divine action through the right ordering of desire and will. Again it is significant to note that, learned through Kathryn Tanner, a related non-competitive account of the relationship between divine and human agency runs through Barclay's work, which he imaginatively refers to as 'energism'.⁶⁶

With this clearer appreciation for the absolute, non-negotiable primacy of grace in Thomas's synthesis in view, let us now turn to explore the way in which Thomas is properly to be read as maintaining this not simply as a necessary conceptual first-step in a systematic account of responsible human achievement but as a continually renewed reality. The claim here is that this presents us with a potential point of contact between core Catholic theology and practice of graced spiritual existence, on the one hand, and the Lutheran-inflected Pauline concern for the dynamic occasionalism of grace, on the other hand; a point of contact which lends weight to the central claim of this essay: that this too easily occluded aspect of Catholic understanding and practice can be fruitfully strengthened by attending closely to what might be appropriately learned from Lutheran tradition and sensibility in this regard.

The continual renewal of the effective gift of grace

Thomas famously talks of habitual grace. This can mislead people into thinking that a state of grace is something we cooperate in working towards and arriving at by developing good habits which render us able to receive grace. But, to speak for a moment in the manner of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, this is a misunderstanding so profound it serves to render the precise opposite of what Thomas actually intends. By habitual grace he refers, in the first instance, not to something to which we attain by good habit but to an operative grace which is given entirely without merit or action on our behalf and which alters our otherwise natural and corrupt state of being by disposing us and healing us in readiness for the life of grace. As he writes in *ST 1a2æ.111.2*, 'habitual grace, inasmuch as it heals or justifies the soul, or makes it pleasing to God, is called operative'⁶⁷ and in *ST 1a2æ.112.2*:

grace is spoken of in two ways, sometimes as God's gift in the form of a habit, sometimes as the assistance of God moving the soul towards the good. In the first sense, some preparation for grace is demanded in advance, since no form can subsist except in matter disposed for it.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ See 'Paul's language requires us to banish "zero-sum" calculations of agency (the more God, the less the human), it seems better to speak of a pattern of "energism" in Pauline agency.' Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, p. 442. For Barclay's acknowledgment of the influence of Kathryn Tanner's *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), see Barclay, "By the Grace of God I Am What I Am": Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul', pp. 153 & 156; also 'Introduction', in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul*, Barclay and Gathercole, eds. *Divine and Human Agency in Paul*, pp. 1-8 (p. 7). For Tanner's developing her non-competitive account of the God-world relationship specifically in relation to grace, see Tanner, *Economy of Grace* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), pp. 22-8 & 105-29.

⁶⁷ *ST 1a2æ.111.2* (vol. 30, p. 131); also 'man needs the assistance of God in two ways in order to live rightly. Firstly, as regards a certain habitual gift, by which spoiled human nature is healed, and once healed is raised up to perform works which merit eternal life, beyond the scope proportionate to nature.' *ST 1a2æ.109.9* (vol. 30, p. 101).

⁶⁸ *ST 1a2æ.112.2* (vol. 30, p. 149).

It is habitual, then, not because we have developed it by habit but because it gives us the habit of and potential for Godward orientation; and it is an operative grace because God alone can bring about this habitual disposition which lies utterly beyond our own natural powers.⁶⁹ As Joseph Wawrykow puts it:

A habit is a potency, a steady disposition to act in a certain way. Habitual grace thus is a power added to the soul which makes the person capable of, and inclined to, supernatural action.⁷⁰

But if that rules out the mistaken problem of habitual grace being a state at which we arrive through our virtuous acts, perhaps it opens up a different, more subtle, problem? This more subtle problem is that this notion of habitual grace – as our supernatural orientation to the life of grace – might in turn suggest the idea of grace having been *so given over to us* as a stable habit that it can no longer have the dynamically-active, transformative-*more* quality which we seek when we seek grace and which lies at the heart of both Lutheran and Pauline concerns in this regard.

Alternatively stated, the more subtle potential problem is that the notion of an already God-given habit of grace might ironically serve to leave us feeling condemned to the limits of what inadequate resources we already have available to us, with the implication being – as earlier indicated – that we should just get on and put these resources to good use.⁷¹ The logic at work here is that if habitual grace has already been given us, does this not suggest that there can be no effective graced *more* beyond what we already have? After all, we appear to be being told that we have already been given this grace and that such grace is all there is. If so, then the lived existential-spiritual problem – as Luther was profoundly aware – is that if the supposedly already given gift of habitual grace is all there is then such grace makes no actual effective difference to us in our continuing state of need.⁷²

Thankfully, this more subtle potential problem with Thomas' theology of habitual grace is also based on misunderstanding; and unravelling this misunderstanding opens the way to a true appreciation for the authentically dynamic and, as it were, “*ever-more*” character of effective grace in Thomas. This, in turn, serves to bring him into much closer proximity to the otherwise apparently alien sensibilities of Luther and John Barclay's Paul.

As previously noted, habitual grace is a disposition, a potency, a Godward orientation. But a disposition, a potency, an orientation is not the same as a realised actuality. Here Thomas is influenced both by the Aristotelian belief that potency cannot itself issue in

⁶⁹ See *ST* 1a2æ.109 (vol. 30, p. 87-91).

⁷⁰ Joseph Wawrykow, 'Grace', in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, Rik van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow, eds., (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 192-221 (p. 194).

⁷¹ I raise a similar question in relation to Rahner's understanding of grace as a 'supernatural existential' in Murray, 'St. Paul and Ecumenism: Justification and All That', pp.165-6, particularly n.48; also in Murray, 'Charisma, Institution und Trinität im Werk Karl Rahners'; and Murray, 'The Lasting Significance of Karl Rahner for Roman Catholic Theology', in *The Courage to Risk Everything... Essays Marking the Centenary of Karl Rahner's Birth*, E. Conway, ed., (Leuven: KUL, 2004), pp. 8-27 (p. 15).

⁷² Simeon Zahl's analysis of what lies at the heart of Luther's concerns is of relevance here, see Zahl, 'Non-competitive Agency and Luther's Experiential Argument against Virtue', *Modern Theology*, 35/2 (2019), 199-222.

actuality without a distinct actualising act by something already in act⁷³ – Thomas refers to this as ‘auxilium’⁷⁴ – and by a good Augustinian recognition that our desiring and willing and, hence, our acting is frustrated by sin.⁷⁵ As consequence, Thomas, again following Augustine, is quite clear that if our God-given habitual orientation to the life of grace is to issue in the desired, willed, actualised living of the life of grace then in each and every instance of this – and this for the entirety of our lives, regardless of any moral and spiritual maturity⁷⁶ – we always require an effective auxiliary action of grace in two modes: both operatively, to initiate such actualisation without any prior or concurrent desiring, willing, or acting on our behalf; and cooperatively, to draw, direct, and sustain our own real desired, willed, and active concurrent participation in this actualisation of grace.⁷⁷ Again with Wawrykow:

for as long as the person is in this world, the person will need more grace, to reduce the person endowed with habitual grace to correct moral and supernatural action. This further grace is *auxilium*, God’s direct contribution to the moral and supernatural behaviour required of the person to attain to God as end.⁷⁸

For the distinction in relation between the language of operative and cooperative grace, in *ST* 1a2æ.111.2, drawing on Augustine’s ‘On Grace and the Freedom of the Will’, we find:

Augustine says, *By his cooperation God perfects in us what he initiates by his operation; since by his operation he initiates our willing who, by his cooperation with*

⁷³ See *ST* 1a2æ.109.1 (vol. 30, p. 71); and *ST* 1a2æ.112.1 (vol. 30, p. 145).

⁷⁴ See *ST* 1a2æ.109.1 (vol. 30, p. 68, pp. 70 & 72); also *ST* 1a2æ.109.6 (vol. 30, pp. 88 & 90); and *ST* 1a2æ.109.9 (vol. 30, pp. 100 & 102); and *ST* 1a2æ.109.10 (vol. 30, p. 104).

⁷⁵ See n.32 earlier; compare *ST* 1a2æ.109.2 (vol. 30, p. 75), where Aquinas quotes Augustine: ‘*Without grace, men do no good whatsoever, either by thinking, or by willing and loving, or by acting.*’ Augustine, *De Corrept. et Gratia*, §2 (PL 44, 917).

⁷⁶ See *ST* 1a2æ.109.9-10 (vol. 30, pp. 101-107), in particular: ‘The gift of habitual grace is not given to us in order that through it we should no longer need divine assistance; for every creature needs to be conserved by God in the goodness which it has received from him.’ *ST* 1a2æ.109.9 (vol. 30, p. 103); and ‘even when he is established in grace, man needs to be given perseverance by God.’ *ST* 1a2æ.109.10 (vol. 30, p. 105). Similarly in the context of treating of the gifts of the Spirit in q. 68, Thomas earlier states that we stand in continual need of being ‘moved by a superior prompting of the Holy Spirit’, *ST* 1a2æ.68.2 ad2 (vol. 24, p. 15); and in the *Commentary on Romans*, §902, p. 310 [on Rom 11:21].

⁷⁷ See ‘I will promote them from virtue to virtue, for this progress is impossible without grace: *by the grace of God I am what I am* (1 Cor 15:10). For just as operating grace makes us to be something in the being of justice, so cooperating grace makes us progress in that being.’ *Commentary on Corinthians*, §240, p. 503 [on 2 Cor 6.16]. Similarly, ‘For God not only infuses but he also moves us to use the graces infused well, and this is called cooperating grace.’ *Commentary on Corinthians*, §909, p. 344 [on 1 Cor 15:10]. Here ‘cooperation’ is primarily to be understood in the strictest, formal sense of simultaneity of act, i.e. ‘both acting at once’. In as much as the more colloquial sense of ‘assistance rendered’ applies, it properly applies only to the Holy Spirit’s cooperation with human action, in the sense of the Spirit’s enabling such action to occur at all, and should not properly be taken as implying that human action renders any substantive assistance to the action of the Holy Spirit as such. See ‘And since for this act too God helps us, both by confirming the will within so that it might achieve its act and by providing the means of action without, grace is called cooperative in respect of this act.’ *ST* 1a2æ.111.2 (vol. 30, p. 131); also here p. 129.

⁷⁸ Wawrykow, ‘Grace’, p. 195; also ‘Thus, those moved into the state of grace must rely on God’s continued contribution to their progress, through the operative *auxilium* that works perseverance.’ p. 205; and pp. 198-9.

*us who will, perfects us. ... Augustine goes on, It is by his operation that we will; but once we will, it is by his cooperation with us that we bring our action to completion.*⁷⁹

In tune with this, commenting on the Vulgate's Rom 8:14, 'For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God', Thomas develops the notion of the 'instinct' of the Holy Spirit and writes of the Holy Spirit enlightening 'us inwardly about what we ought to do'.⁸⁰ Or as he puts it in *ST* 1a2æ.106.1, 'It is in this sense that the New Law is inward to man; it not only points out to him what he should do, but assists him actually to do it.'⁸¹ To think otherwise is the sin of presumption against the Holy Spirit.⁸²

So, for all his concern to trace the relatively stable structures and effects of grace, Thomas' theology really does allow for – indeed has centrally embedded within it – this recognition of the need for what I have referred to as an “ever-more” quality to effective grace, or the dynamism of the Spirit in the life of the believer. As Simon Gaine puts it:

According to Aquinas, our need here is not only for some kind of stable 'gift' (*donum*) from God by which we are healed and elevated, but also for God himself to move us to act in relation to this gift.⁸³

That said, is it still not the case that this is all presented in a far cooler, less existentially-charged register than we find in either Luther or Paul? This is undoubtedly so.

Perhaps something of this is simply due to temperamental difference. Without making value judgments either way, it would be fair to say that Thomas presents as being of a somewhat less troubled disposition than either Luther or Paul. In turn, perhaps lying behind this apparent temperamental difference between Luther and Thomas is, in part at least, a wider spiritual-cultural difference? Where Luther's late medieval religious context promoted in him an insatiable, anxiety-ridden need to improve and achieve in a manner which left him feeling hopelessly imprisoned, perhaps Thomas' context had more successfully communicated to him that the true purpose of asceticism is precisely about promoting a lively, constant sense of the believer's absolute poverty before and utter dependence on the merciful love of God as source, sustainer, and promised consummation of all?⁸⁴ That is, perhaps a lively, constant sense of absolute dependence on the merciful love and graceful initiative of God was so routine a feature of Thomas' formative and lived religious-cultural context that it

⁷⁹ *ST* 1a2æ.111.2 (vol. 30, pp. 129-131), citing Augustine, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* §17 (PL 44, 901).

⁸⁰ See *Commentary on Romans*, §635, p. 214.

⁸¹ *ST* 1a2æ.106.1 (vol. 30, p. 7); also *ST* 1a2æ.106.1-3, pp. 3-13; and *Commentary on Romans*, §316, p. 106 [on Rom 3:27]. Linking this with Thomas' theology of the situatedness and concurrence of human action within divine action (see here nn. 41 & 55-60 and surrounding), we might say that whereas much post-Enlightenment thinking is caught in a competitive binary of autonomy and heteronomy, assertion and subjection, the new law of life in the Spirit represents a life-giving third way which transcends this bind and which we might refer to as 'neonomy'.

⁸² See *ST* 2a2æ.14.2 (vol. 32, p. 125).

⁸³ Simon Francis Gaine, 'Aristotle's Philosophy in Aquinas's Theology of Grace', in *Aristotle in Aquinas's Theology*, Emery and Levering, eds., (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 94-120 (p. 101).

⁸⁴ If suffering can force on us the realisation that we must 'rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead' (2 Cor 1:9), so asceticism well-performed can be an intentional daily schooling in this lesson.

never presents as *the* critical question requiring affirmative resolution and constant reinforcement in the way that it pervasively does for Luther?⁸⁵

Whatever the potential value in such speculative lines of enquiry and whatever the reasons might be, it remains that there is a significant difference of voice, register, and apparent spiritual-existential concern between Thomas and Barclay's Lutheran-inflected Paul in relation to God's gracious self-gift in Christ and the Spirit. By comparison, as earlier noted, it can too easily appear as though Thomas' account of grace is simply a beautifully reasoned and systematised affair. We can too easily miss the living, experiential roots from which it springs and into which it seeks to speak. Consequently, in order to seek to get some greater glimpse of these true living roots and the live context for his highly systematised theology of grace, it will be helpful for us now to engage briefly Thomas' understanding of the role of prayer and of constant prayerful dependence on the Spirit in the shaping of Christian life. Most specifically, it will be helpful for us to engage the role which Thomas accords to prayer in what he refers to as 'the interpretation of desire', by which he means the purification and transformation of desire.

The place of prayerful dependence and of the 'interpretation of desire' in the life of grace

Thomas' best-known treatment of prayer is in q.83 of the *secunda secundae pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*. He treats there of such matters as the relationship between the immutability and omniscience of God and the practice of petitionary prayer: if God is unchanging and all-knowing and if petitionary prayer presupposes that God can change God's mind, as it appears to do at face-value, then what is the point of praying? As is treated of in innumerable undergraduate Theology and Philosophy 101 classes, the primary answer Thomas appears to give to such questions is that God not only wills what we receive but also the manner by which we receive it.⁸⁶ This includes God's willing that we should receive some things as a response to prayer.⁸⁷ The purpose behind this being so that we can thereby better learn to trust that God loves us personally by experiencing God as being responsive to our prayers.⁸⁸ So, whilst petitionary prayer takes the form of our asking God for something and whilst our experience can be that of God responding to this request, far from this implying that God changes God's mind in a manner which contradicts God's immutability, all has been foreseen and foreordained in the omniscient, immutable, and perfectly loving will of God.

At one level this might seem somewhat manipulative, or at least patronising. But at work here is a deeper and thoroughly Thomistic principle about God's willing that we each be

⁸⁵ In conversation, Nicholas Healy noted that another possible factor in the significant difference of register between Thomas' writings and those of Luther is that whereas Thomas was writing for teachers of theology, Luther was writing immediately for the attention of the Christian believer.

⁸⁶ See *ST* 2a2æ.83.2 (vol. 39, p. 53).

⁸⁷ See 'What is true of natural causes is true also of prayer, for we do not pray in order to change the decree of divine providence, rather we pray in order to impetrate those things which God has determined would be obtained only through our prayers. In other words, men pray that *by asking they might deserve to receive what Almighty God decreed to give them from all eternity*' *ST* 2a2æ.83.2 (vol. 39, p. 53), citing St Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* I.8 (PL 77, 188).

⁸⁸ See *ST* 2a2æ.83.2 ad.3 (vol. 39, p. 53); also *ST* 2a2æ.83.9 (vol. 39, p. 75).

directly and personally involved in the narrative of our growth into God's life so that it genuinely becomes our own story from within rather than something merely placed on top of us in a manner that never really connects with who we are.⁸⁹ When viewed in these terms, the real point of petitionary prayer is not simply that God has arbitrarily willed to bring things about in this way and thereby involve us in the process in order to teach us that we are personally loved. Rather, the real point is that petitionary prayer is the means by which our actual, confused state of desiring, both good and ill, can be brought before God so that we can have them 'interpreted' to us – by which Thomas means purified and transformed – and thereby, over time, we can become people who truly desire the particular goods which God wills to give us and draw out in us.⁹⁰

This is what Thomas means when, as we have seen (see n.87 here), he quotes St Gregory as saying 'men pray that *by asking they might deserve to receive what Almighty God decreed to give them from all eternity ...*' For Thomas 'deserve' here means 'be able'.⁹¹ Related to this, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, drawing on John of Damascus, Thomas describes prayer as the act of 'bringing the will's desire into relationship with him who is our superior'.⁹² Connecting this with Thomas' wider theological vision: as our source, sustainer, and consummation,⁹³ God is the true source, seat, and only possible fulfilment of our deepest desiring; which deepest desiring is always for our being drawn into the life of God's love in and through the lived circumstances of our lives.⁹⁴ As such, most fundamentally understood, prayer is about our being intentionally situated within and oriented upon the movement of

⁸⁹ This is the same principle which is at work in Thomas' theology of merit, e.g. see *ST* 1a2æ.114.1-2 (vol. 30, pp. 201-7). Also Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995).

⁹⁰ For the confused state of our desiring, see 'we can know in a general way what it is suitable to pray for, but we cannot know this in particular.' *Commentary on Romans*, §690, p. 228 [on Rom 8:26]. For prayer as placing 'our desires before God' and as expressing desire, see *ST* 2a2æ.83.9 (vol. 39, p. 71); and *ST* 2a2æ.83.14 (vol. 39, p. 87); also *ST* 3a.21.2-3 (vol. 50, p. 127). For prayer as 'the interpreter of desire', see *ST* 2a2æ.83.9 (vol. 39, p. 73); compare *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, §58, p. 263 [on 1 Tim 2:1].

⁹¹ On this also see 'the Holy Spirit given to me, *prays*, who inclines and moves me to pray. Nevertheless, I merit in that prayer, because the very fact that I am moved by the Holy Spirit is merit for me' *Commentary on Corinthians*, §838, p. 318 [on 1 Cor 14:14, also referring to Rom 8:26].

⁹² Aquinas, *IV Sent.* 15 q.4 a.1, drawing on St John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 68.I, as cited in Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 181.

⁹³ See *ST* 1a.1.7 (vol. 1, p. 27).

⁹⁴ See *ST* 2a2æ.83.9 (vol. 39, p. 71). Thomas refers to this as 'persisting in the "one thing needful."' *ST* 2a2æ.83.14 (vol. 39, p. 89). For Thomas viewing this as applying 'in all circumstances' (1 Thess 5:18), see *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, §131, p. 199 [on 1 Thess 5:18]. Of course, in our concupiscent state of divided hearts and confused desiring it can be very difficult for us to have freedom of orientation in relation to this our deepest desiring. It is endlessly difficult for us to trust ourselves to the promise of the Spirit's *neonomy* (see n.81 here). We are caught in fear of subjection to the alien will of another; fear that it will not accord with our own immediate felt desire, which if we could we would assert and fulfil. Where the promise of the love of God is alluring and reassuring, the call to live 'Thy *will* be done' is challenging. Here it can be helpful to reflect that in the simplicity of God there is no distinction whatsoever between the love of God and the will of God. They are one and the same. As such we might more easily – psychologically and spiritually 'more easily' – seek our deepest desire by instead praying in confident trust: 'Thy *love* be done in me, by me, to me and through me.'

God's love, the Spirit, who 'inclines and moves' us so our actual desiring can be shaped and reoriented upon this our deepest desire.⁹⁵ As Herbert McCabe put it:

My prayer is not me putting pressure on God, doing something to God, it is God doing something for me, raising me into the divine life or intensifying the divine life in me.⁹⁶

Or as J.-C Sagne beautifully expresses it, in a passage quoted at length in Yves Congar's *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*:

At this point, prayer appears as the mystery of God in us and an event of the Spirit, because it is the function of the Holy Spirit to be the desire of God in God himself and also the desire of God in us. The Spirit forms, deepens, expands and adjusts our desire to the desire of God by giving it the same object. The Spirit makes our desire live from the life of God himself, to the point where God himself comes to desire at the heart of our desire.⁹⁷

Understood in this way, prayer might be thought of as an 'exercise' in attunement; an exercise in our actual desiring being sounded and plumbed in the context of our acknowledged fundamental desiring so that the former can be moved from dissonance to resonance with the latter.⁹⁸ Like seed in good soil (Mk 4:8), our right desiring grows as if by itself (Mk 4:26-9) when situated in the right context and conditions of light and life, Word and breath, Son and Spirit. The implication is that we do not have to clean ourselves up by wilfully detaching from our mass of mixed desires before we come into prayer.⁹⁹ Rather, prayer itself is the means by which our desiring is reoriented, retuned, refined, deepened, heightened, and expanded (cf. Eph 3:14-21). As Denys Turner writes, 'prayer is the route down which grace traces us back to that place where what we really want lies dormant and all too often unrecognized.'¹⁰⁰ Our being honest before God brings the actual state of our desiring

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Commentary on Corinthians*, §838, p. 318 [on 1 Cor 14:14]. Also see again n.41 here and the appropriate invocation of 'Lord, Holy Spirit, move my desire that I might the more desire your moving of me.'

⁹⁶ Herbert McCabe, 'Prayer', in his collection *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), pp. 215-25 (p. 222).

⁹⁷ J.-C. Sagne, 'Du besoin à la demande, ou la conversation du désir dans la prière', *La Maison-Dieu* 109 (1972), 87-97 (p. 94), cited in Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit II: 'He is Lord and Giver of Life'*, David Smith (trans.), (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983 [1979]), p. 116.

⁹⁸ For Thomas using the language of 'spiritual exercises' (*spiritual exercitium*), see *ScG* III.132.14; also *ST* 2æ2æ.188.1 (vol. 47, p. 183); and *ST* 2æ2æ.189.1 (vol. 47, pp. 229 & 231); also *ST* 3a.69.3 (vol. 57, p. 131). For a useful discussion, see Matthew Kruger, 'Aquinas, Hadot, and Spiritual Exercises', *New Blackfriars*, 98 (2017), 414-26.

⁹⁹ See 'The prayer of petition is a matter of bringing ourselves, in the form of our wants and needs, into the presence of the Father. If we come before the Father not in our true selves but in a disguised respectable form, pretending to be highminded altruistic saints, then we will not make any contact at all.' McCabe, 'Prayer', pp. 223-4.

¹⁰⁰ Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 172; and with McCabe again: 'Prayer of petition is a form of self-exploration and at the same time self-realisation. If we are honest enough to admit to our shabby infantile desires then the grace of God will grow in us, it will slowly be revealed to us, precisely in the course of our prayer, that there are more important things that we truly do want.' McCabe, 'Prayer', p. 224.

and ‘sensuous impulses’ into the light.¹⁰¹ In this manner the Spirit moves in us and leads us through a process of ‘reasoned deliberation’ to focus our willed desiring on that which is in our best interest.¹⁰² It is in this way that prayer disposes us to receive properly what God has eternally willed to give us.

Whilst something of this is touched on in *ST* 2a2æ.83 and gives what we find there its real depth, as alluded to in earlier notes it receives its fullest treatment in the *Summa* in 3a.21, in the context of reflecting on Jesus’ prayer as our model. What emerges is that constant prayerful dependence – itself a work of grace – is the experiential, existential engine room of the life of continually renewed effective grace. As also earlier alluded to, this is again treated of at length in Thomas’ Lectures on Romans, particularly Rom 8.¹⁰³ For example, commenting on Rom 8:26, ‘*the Spirit himself asks for us with unspeakable groanings*’, he states ‘the Holy Spirit makes us ask, inasmuch as he causes right desires in us’¹⁰⁴ Moreover, such ‘right desires’ ‘arise from the ardour of love, which he [*the Spirit*] produces in us’, for ‘with the Holy Spirit directing and inciting our heart, our desires cannot but be profitable to us’.¹⁰⁵

All of this opens the way, I suggest, to a form of genuinely Thomistically-rooted, yet Lutheran and Barclayian-Pauline-resonant Catholicism which might helpfully promote a deeper sense of our need for a lively, effective, and affective continual dependence on the active movement of grace and of the place of prayer in the graced transformation of our desiring, willing, and acting. There is something fitting about us finding the locus in Thomas’ theology and practice of prayer for a possible spiritual-existential link between his carefully delineated analysis of the operations and effects of grace, on the one hand, and the Lutheran-Pauline understanding of our lived utter dependence on the in-breaking, “ever-more” quality of grace, on the other hand. At its simplest, prayer is a practice of our becoming attentively aware of our utter dependence, at every possible level, on God as inexhaustible life and mystery, as communicating Word, and as moving breath and Spirit. More than this, as sinners who know ourselves to have been ‘looked upon’ in mercy,¹⁰⁶ prayer is a practice of our becoming daily, moment-by-moment, aware of our utter dependence on the forgiving (justifying) embrace and transforming (sanctifying) touch of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. When understood in this way, prayer performs as the required daily baptism of which Luther spoke (see n.19 here).

¹⁰¹ For the language of ‘sensuous impulses’, see *ST* 3a.21.2 (vol. 50, pp. 125-7).

¹⁰² See *ST* 3a.21.4 (vol. 50, p. 133).

¹⁰³ For helpful discussion of Thomas on prayer in his Pauline commentaries, see Paul Murray, OP, ‘Prayer in Practice: Aquinas on St Paul’, in Murray, OP, *Aquinas at Prayer: The Bible, Mysticism and Poetry* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 95-122.

¹⁰⁴ See *Commentary on Romans*, §693, p. 229 [on Rom 8:26]; and §736, p. 246 [on Rom 9:1].

¹⁰⁵ *Commentary on Romans*, §693, p. 229 [on Rom 8:26, with reference to Isa 48:17].

¹⁰⁶ See Pope Francis’ response to Antonio Spadaro’s interview question as to who Joseph Bergoglio is. With reference to his motto from St Bede’s commentary on the calling of Matthew, which speaks about the Lord’s choosing in mercy, Pope Francis replied: ‘I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon ... a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze’. Antonio Spadaro, ‘Interview with Pope Francis’ (September 2013), at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html (accessed 2 October 2019).

In this regard, some pages on from his evocative lengthy quotation from Sagne, Congar returns to the movement of the Spirit in prayer as understood in Thomistic vein but this time articulated more explicitly in the register of justification, forgiveness, and grace, doubtless reflecting his lifetime of close engagement with Lutheran spirituality, theology, and practice. He writes powerfully there of the way in which we have, at once, a dual-sided experience of being able to be more honest about our sinfulness and our need of forgiveness in specific ways as we are *both* made aware of and judged by its seriousness *and* granted assurance of a loving acceptance which wants to cover-over and transform this sin. The result, he tells us, is that ‘our false excuses, our self-justifying mechanisms and the selfish structure of our lives break down’. The full passage runs:

The Holy Spirit acts within us or he penetrates into us like an anointing. He makes us, at a level that is deeper than that of mere regret for some fault, conscious of the sovereign attraction of the Absolute, the Pure and the True, and of a new life offered to us by the Lord, and he also gives us a clear consciousness of our own wretchedness and of the untruth and selfishness that fills our lives. We are conscious of being judged, but at the same time we are forestalled by forgiveness and grace, *with the result that our false excuses, our self-justifying mechanisms and the selfish structure of our lives break down.*¹⁰⁷

I suggest that this is where we would get to if we were really to pursue a Thomistic-inclined Catholic reception of a Lutheran-Pauline sensibility around grace at the level of the individual believer, particularly so one influenced by John Barclay’s strong retrieval of the actualist, in-breaking, and transgressively transformative, event-like character of Paul’s understanding of God’s self-gift in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸ It would still be a recognisably Catholic sensibility, with an authenticity and integrity within Catholic spiritual tradition, but it would be one expanded, deepened, refreshed, and renewed through a real learning from this Barclayan-Lutheran-Pauline sensibility. The result might be well described as a form of charismatic-contemplative Catholicism. It would retain the default Catholic concern to value the relatively stable structures and effects of grace but would resituate that concern within a much stronger appreciation for the unpredictable, interruptive dynamism of grace and the believer’s moment-by-moment dependence on its movements. It would represent a form of energised, graced docility and graced passivity which is neither a quietism nor a self-resourced activism.

For now, let us draw to close by opening a series of yet wider questions as to what it might mean for wider Catholic theology and practice to be recalibrated towards living in accordance with the kind of charismatic-contemplative orientation being indicated here? What broader implications might it hold for Catholic spirituality, theological anthropology, and theological ethics? How might it serve to reconfigure and to free individual Catholic habits of mind *from*, for example, any weighty sense of obligation to achieve, and *towards* a lightness of being loved and lifted, moment-by-moment?

¹⁰⁷ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit II*, p. 123, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ As noted earlier (n.23), as complement to this it is also necessary to treat of the implications of this Lutheran-Pauline resourced, charismatic-contemplative Catholicism for the more collective dimensions of ecclesial existence. But beyond the initial exploratory work there indicated, that must currently await another day.

Again, how might such a charismatic-contemplative understanding of Christian existence, as a life of true graced docility to the in-breaking, moment-by-moment initiative, support, and impulse of the Spirit, help to introduce a greater sense of spontaneity and fresh possibility rather than routine repetition into Catholic life and mission? What implications might this hold for the encountering of fresh challenges in this light, both personally and collectively? How might it alter the default sense of Catholic tradition so that it becomes lived as a process both of leaning into the energy and expressed Christic form of the in-breakings of the Spirit at the time of their occurrence and of continuing to lean into them as we live along their trajectory and ride-out their surf?¹⁰⁹ How might this help to promote both an attitude of patient attentiveness in times of calm and relative stability and of sure expectation that new, strong, surprising events of grace will continue to happen in addition to more routine, less dramatic yet nevertheless tangible modes of moment-by-moment support?

Again, how might it help to resituate Catholic moral theology, spiritual theology, and pastoral counsel from giving, at times, a somewhat notional acknowledgement of the priority of grace whilst encouraging a practical Pelagianism, and towards, instead, a truly lively, effective, and affective sense of dependence on the movement of grace and the place of prayer in the transformation of our habits and structures of desire? How might it promote a deeper sense that the moral life, the life of virtue, is always lived in the mode of response and of being conformed? And how might it promote a clearer recognition that growth in this life is not linear or neatly progressive ... that it always holds the reality of our frailty within it ... that things have their moment ... that occasions can arise which require a certain agility and spontaneity and not simply the repetition of established patterns?

By way of concluding comment

The focussing question for this essay has been on what Catholic theology is to make of John Barclay's Lutheran-inflected reading of the incongruous, transformative actuality of grace in Paul. The more specific concern has been to ask how this understanding configures with the Thomistic understanding of the operations and effects of grace. With this, in line with the receptive ecumenical commitment to learning across traditioned difference in ways that can help repair difficulties in one's own tradition, the dual concern has been: a) to ask what Catholic theology and practice of grace might fruitfully have to learn from Barclay's account; and b) to test whether this proposed receptive Catholic learning can be pursued with 'dynamic integrity', in a way which can be seen to cohere, albeit creatively and reparatively, with established Catholic tradition.

The cumulative argument of the essay has been that when read correctly we can find in Thomas a theology of grace and associated practice of graced Christian existence with sufficient resonance with Barclay's reading of Paul as to open the way to a more explicit Catholic appropriation of and resituating within a Lutheran-inflected appreciation for our utter

¹⁰⁹ For the language of 'leaning-in' as an image for life in the Spirit, see Murray, 'St Paul and Ecumenism', pp. 168-9; also Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism as a Leaning-in to the Spirit of Loving Transformation', in *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning, and Loving in the Way of Christ*, Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes, eds., (Adelaide: ATF, 2018), xv-xxiii (xii-xiii).

dependence on the ever-renewed, event-like actuality of grace.¹¹⁰ For all the difference of tone and conceptual frame, Thomas also maintains the need for our continual active dependence on grace as “ever-more”, the spiritual-existential roots of which are most clearly in view in his theology of prayer.

As regards, in turn, the potential role that Thomas might play in any revised version of John Barclay’s already monumental *Paul and the Gift*, for appropriate concluding comment it is suffice for now to appeal again to one of the greatest Dominican theologians since Thomas, Yves Congar, in turn quoting the greatest Protestant theologian since the Reformers, Karl Barth, on Thomas’ ecumenical significance:

An attentive reading of the works of the *Doctor Angelicus* permits one to verify in him certain lines of force which, even if they do not lead directly to the Reformation, do not tend, any the more, towards Jesuitical Romanism. Thus when one knows how to use intelligently this immense compendium of the previous tradition which constitutes the Summa, one remarks that its author is, on many issues, an evangelical theologian useful to know.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ I say ‘more explicit’ in order to acknowledge that since Vatican II something like this process of learning has been informally taking place in Catholicism, influenced, I suggest, by the widespread impact of the charismatic movement and a newfound Catholic appropriation of the gospel of grace. As flip-side to this, in a fascinating resonant analysis John Thiel argues that under the influence of Rahner’s theology of grace, and other factors, much post-conciliar Catholicism has moved from what he characterises as an anxious, striving, judgment-focussed ‘Matthean style of faith’, in which purgatory features large, to a grace-assured ‘Pauline’ style, in which the felt urgency of the need for a space of post-mortem purgation has typically diminished, see Thiel, *Icons of Hope: The “Last Things” in Catholic Imagination* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2013), pp. 93-105.

¹¹¹ Congar, ‘St Thomas Aquinas and the Spirit of Ecumenism’, *New Blackfriars*, 55 (1974), 196-209 (p. 200), citing Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. I, bk. 2, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes: Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatik* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1938), p. 686; cf. Barth, CD I/2, p. 614 for the standard alternative ET.