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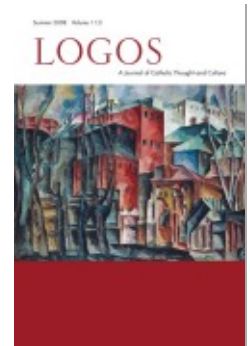
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Predestination, Freedom, and the Logic of Love

THE CHRISTIAN AFFIRMATION of predestination is one of the more difficult challenges to the credibility of the Christian faith. The topic is most often avoided entirely in presentations of the Christian faith on a popular level, especially in Catholic circles. This is likely because the very idea that the ultimate destiny of the human person is foreordained makes contemporary Christians instinctively uncomfortable; it seems to call into question both human freedom and the justice of God, two notions that are cherished by contemporary believers. Yet a doctrine of predestination is an undeniable part of the biblical, traditional, and magisterial heritage of the Church. Is this traditional doctrine comprehensible from the perspective of contemporary belief?

The notion of predestination has its roots in Scripture, but it has received much of its development from Augustine, who is the common foundation of later thought on predestination in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions. The Catholic tradition receives its Augustinian heritage on this question through Thomas Aquinas; it is Thomas's expression of the doctrine that will be explored here. (For the sake of simplicity, consideration will be limited to his sig-

nificant treatment of the issue in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*). In focusing on Thomas, the aim is to explore his view not for its own sake, but as an example of the classical Christian theistic approach to predestination in the Catholic philosophical and theological tradition.

The purpose of this exploration is to show that along with some valuable insights there are certain significant deficiencies in this classical approach. However, these deficiencies might be helpfully addressed not by challenging Thomas's entire approach but by expanding upon it, especially by reflecting more deeply on the nature of God's love and how it is operative in God's providential relationship to humanity. This more personalist approach creates a context for understanding predestination that may render the doctrine more intelligible to contemporary faith.

For Thomas, predestination is the destiny of the human person as it exists eternally in the mind of God; put another way, it refers to the direction divine providence gives to human creatures toward their final or ultimate end.¹ Beyond the ends or goals attainable through natural human abilities, we have inscribed in us an end that surpasses our ability to achieve it—eternal life, union with God, the beatific vision. If a thing cannot attain its end by its own powers, it must be directed by another, Thomas says; as the archer must direct the arrow to its target, so human persons must be directed toward their supernatural end (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 1). Predestination thus involves not only divine foreknowledge of the destinies of persons but also divine causation; God does not just see this end but in some sense effects it.

Now, this perspective immediately raises questions: Is the human person merely a passive instrument, like the arrow? How can one justly be rewarded with eternal union with God or punished by its absence if God is the ultimate cause directing the whole movement of one's life? The analogy of the archer and the arrow brings us up against the contemporary discomfort with the idea of predestination.

Thomas responds to these questions by developing a sophisticated vision of the coexistence of divine and human causality

that is an important corrective to the commonsense view (and even some philosophical and theological views) of God's operation within the created world. For Thomas, all events and agents fall under the power of divine providence or governance, but each does so according to its nature. Some things in the universe are necessary and some are contingent, but both of these are modes of being and God is the universal cause behind all being (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 4, ad 3). Thus God provides an order to the universe that includes both necessary and contingent causes. God's universal causality does not imply that all things occur necessarily; there are events or actions which God eternally foresees will happen contingently, according to the nature of their proximate cause (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 4). God can therefore choose to exercise his immediate providence over all things through intermediate causes. The dignity of causality is thus imparted to creatures (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 3). The greatest dignity among created things belongs to human creatures, who possess a unique degree of freedom and can act as free, secondary causes. They can participate in God's causal activity in a unique way.

God's providence allows for the operation within it of free creatures, especially human beings; they act not out of necessity but with genuine freedom, for such is the nature of being human. Furthermore, they are free not in spite of or in competition with God's universal causality but because of it.² God does not act *on* free agents, as though God were a separate and rival agent within the universe. God is the cause of their freedom by making them what they are and sustaining them in that nature.³ We consider human actions to be free if they are independent of any coercion or force by any other agent. But as Herbert McCabe puts it, human freedom does not mean, and could not mean, being independent of God, for apart from God's creative and sustaining action nothing exists.⁴ God's primary or universal causal activity is properly understood as empowering of human action, not coercive of it. It is the basis of human freedom rather than a restriction upon it.

This classical vision of God's universal or primary causality and the human person's secondary causality or freedom presents a much more intimate relationship between God's action and human freedom than is often supposed. McCabe suggests that the most commonly held contemporary view of that relationship is that God has granted human persons independence so that they might freely and responsibly choose whether to love and serve God. He sums up this view thusly: "God could not make man free, independent, and loving without allowing him the possibility of not loving and of sin; but it is a greater thing to have free people, even if they sometimes sin, than to have automata totally dependent on God."⁵ McCabe's evaluation of it is equally succinct: "This whole position involves a false and idolatrous picture of God."⁶ This view turns God into what Karl Rahner calls "a member of the larger household of reality"—simply another agent or being among others, albeit the most powerful one.⁷ God becomes a resident of the universe and thus in some sense subject to its laws and possibilities. But God, says McCabe, ought not be conceived as a fellow inhabitant of the creaturely universe, but rather as the mystery of love that lies behind the being of all that is.⁸

This is a very significant and often forgotten insight in the realms of both philosophy and spirituality. Philosophically, the error is to be captive to the image of God as a mover or agent like other movers or agents. The disproportion in speaking of God by means of this analogy is overlooked, which obscures how God can act uniquely along with created agents. Spiritually or religiously, even the most sincere believer can find ways to reduce God, to make the infinite God of mystery more manageable, or to relegate God to only a segment of human living and experience. This is possible only if God is conceived as a fellow resident of the universe, capable of intermittent interaction with human persons. Such a construct is not really God in any meaningful, Christian sense. This reduction is, as McCabe rightly names it, a contemporary version of idolatry. (In a parallel way, "heaven" is often popularly imagined as the larger household in which both God and the faithfully departed dwell,

rather than as a way of talking about the character of the divine/human relationship after death). Thomas's perspective here is a valuable corrective to this perpetual temptation, and that value is by no means limited to philosophical and theological discussions. For the present purpose, this understanding of the nature of God's relationship to human creatures helps considerably in recognizing how an affirmation of human freedom might be maintained along with a belief in divine providence or governance in general.

Predestination, however, is a very specific instance of providence; it concerns not any human actions whatsoever but actions that ultimately lead to salvation or damnation. This raises the stakes considerably since what is being examined are not simply human acts or free human acts but the ultimate destiny of the human person. Many questions arise, including the question of evil: does God empower even evil actions through divine, universal causality? This poses a substantial dilemma for the classical approach. It seems contrary to the nature of a deity of infinite goodness to be the first cause of evil. Yet the alternative seems to be that some human actions are indeed independent of God's causation. Neither option seems adequate to the claims of Christian theism.

In dealing with such questions specifically within the context of predestination, Thomas reiterates that there is no contradiction between human freedom and divine governance. These represent two distinct levels or modes of causation that are not and cannot be in competition. He holds that because human free choice is genuine, rational creatures are subject to providence in a special manner. Unlike nonrational creatures, merit or fault can be imputed or credited to rational creatures according to how they act (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 5). Simply put, freedom necessarily implies responsibility and so it is just that merits be rewarded and faults be punished. Human agents are not "independent" of God's universal causality, yet they act freely and so are accountable for their deeds.

Thomas makes an intriguing distinction here. God extends divine providence differently over the just and the wicked; God's

providence is extended over the just in a “certain more excellent way,” preventing anything that would impede their final salvation. (This more excellent exercise of divine governance is precisely what Thomas means by predestination.) By contrast, God does not restrain the wicked from evil; in this sense, God abandons them (which Thomas calls reprobation.) This abandonment, however, is not absolute since God continues to sustain the wicked in existence (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 4).

This last distinction is quite significant; he is distinguishing here between God’s creative and sustaining activity on the one hand and the activity that would lead to union with God on the other. In this context, Thomas does not dwell on the matter, but this distinction will be crucial in evaluating the classical approach to predestination. But before reaching that evaluation, it is worth noting that this approach to God’s actions toward the predestined and the reprobated raises some interesting issues that Thomas does consider and that can help to unfold the rationale behind his notion of predestination.

Thomas considers why God would act differently or unequally toward different persons, which would seem, on the face of things, to contradict the ordinary sense of the justice of God. One possible response that Thomas entertains is that God predestines some for salvation because he foresees their merits and in light of this gives them grace, knowing that they will freely make good use of that grace. Thomas illustrates this view with the analogy of a king giving a horse to a soldier who he knows will make good use of it (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5). So, according to this view, the reason for predestination is ultimately the foreseen merits of the human person earned through his or her free action.

This is an attractive suggestion, since it seems to place responsibility for salvation within human freedom, which accords with our expectations of what constitutes a fitting basis for just reward and punishment. Thomas rejects this approach, however, since it seems to detach human freedom from grace, from God’s activity,

again as though these were competing or rival forces. He says that meritorious actions are free, but their primary cause is grace; and grace, by definition, is an effect of predestination (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5). Merits come from grace, which comes from predestination; merits are thus an effect, rather than a cause, of predestination. Here, Thomas is holding fast to the Augustinian position forged in the conflicts with Pelagianism. Salvation and human merit must have their source in God alone. Predestination is not just a matter of God's foreseeing what will happen but of God's willing what will happen. The grounding of predestination in foreseen merits is ultimately rejected by Thomas because it would essentially separate God's knowledge from God's will. It contradicts both Thomas's understanding of grace and his notion of divine simplicity.

Having ruled out foreknowledge of merits or faults as the basis for the difference in God's exercise of providence over the predestined and the reprobated, Thomas must find another explanation. He grounds it in another scriptural notion, that of election: God's sovereign choice of those who will be saved. He says that predestination presupposes election, which in turn presupposes love. God's love differs somewhat from ours; we choose to love in response to a good that we perceive, whether a person or thing. But God's love is the cause of good things, not a response to them (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5). God's love creates where human love merely affirms an already existing goodness. So God's love is the ground of election not through perceiving an existing (or foreseen) good but by bringing that good into being out of God's will. Love precedes election, which in turn precedes predestination.

Thomas does not dwell at length on the nature of God's love as it can be understood in the context of predestination. Here again, an opportunity is missed, an opportunity to which we must return later. But Thomas's notion of election bears further examination, for he has thus far not explained why God would choose some but not others for salvation. Why would God will some creatures into being only to abandon or condemn them?

Thomas approaches this difficult question from several different avenues, none wholly satisfactory. One of these approaches is to understand the destiny of particular creatures in terms of the good of creation as a whole. In governing the universe, God rightly allows some defects to occur in view of the good of the whole, Thomas argues. A defect in one thing may yield to the good of another thing or to the universal good. If all evil were to be prevented, much good would be absent from the world. He cites the example of persecution, which makes possible the witness of martyrdom (*ST I*, q. 22, a. 2, ad 2). Underlying this position is the recognition that only God can see the whole picture, the infinitely complex web of causes and effects that makes up the order of the universe. What may legitimately be perceived as evil or inexplicable from a limited, human perspective is allowed to occur if this leads to a greater good. That greater good may not be perceptible to natural reason. For Thomas, it is part of God's providence to allow some to fall away from their supernatural end.

Again, this reprobation or abandonment involves more than God's foreknowledge; as predestination includes the will to confer grace and glory, so reprobation includes the will to permit a person to fall into sin and to impose the just punishment of damnation for that sin (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 3). Any suggestion as to why or how this might contribute to the good of the whole of creation is conspicuously absent—a lacuna that one can imagine the condemned dwelling upon for eternity. It also raises the specter of a God who treats some human persons in a purely instrumental way, as though they were nothing more than means toward a greater end (or at least allows them to become such within his providential order). The inherent value of the human person given by God in creation seems to be at risk within Thomas's vision.

He is not, however, utterly blind to the difficulty of seeing how a God of infinite love and goodness could will the reprobation of some of his creatures. This leads him to take another approach to the notion of election, saying that God loves or wills some good to

all creatures but does not will every good to each. Thus, while God can be said to love all human persons generally, insofar as he does not will the particular good of eternal life to certain persons, God can be said to hate or reprobate them (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 3, ad 1). This does not contradict the infinite goodness of God, which is manifested to some as mercy and to others as justice, according to their merits (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3).

Such a claim was likely not as jarring to the ears of Thomas's contemporaries as to ours. However, while the Christian conviction in God's universal salvific will was not as prominent in Thomas's day as today, he does have to grapple with the fact that Scripture makes reference to it (1 Tm 2:4). Is it possible that God's will is fallible or that it contradicts itself? (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1).⁹

Of course, Thomas will not entertain the notion that God's perfect will is fallible, changeable, or self-contradictory. He deals with this by distinguishing between what he calls God's antecedent and consequent will (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5). God wills generally or antecedently that all be saved, but that general will takes on a different character depending on the particular circumstances of the individual. He illustrates this with the analogy of a judge who wills antecedently that all persons should live, but wills consequently, in the particular circumstances of a case, that a murderer should be hanged (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1). So God can be said to will antecedently that all should be saved, but this is a qualified will; Thomas suggests that perhaps this should be called a "willingness." In his consequent will, God considers things not generally but as they exist in their particular qualities and circumstances; in doing so, God wills some to be damned in accordance with his justice. What God wills antecedently may not take place, but what God wills simply or consequently always takes place, infallibly (*ST I*, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1).

This distinction raises several questions. It does not seem truly to overcome the difficulty of introducing contradiction or complexity within the will of God—especially strange since Thomas is characteristically insistent on God's simplicity. Furthermore, the distinc-

tion fails to get to the heart of the matter. He holds that one effect of predestination may be the secondary reason or cause of another; so merits may be the cause of glory (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5). However, grace is the cause of the merit; so ultimately the chain of causality, while it allows for the operation of human free will within it, can be traced back to the choice of God to give or withhold grace. Thus the distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will does not adequately resolve the issue of why God would predestine some, providing them with the grace for salvation, while reprobating others.

In the end, Thomas seems to recognize this himself when he comes back to the notion of election mentioned earlier; he says there is no reason why God chooses some for salvation and not others beyond the will of God itself. The "reason" for the choice is simply unknowable from a human perspective. Thomas quotes Augustine who says, "Why he draws one and another he draws not, seek not to judge, if thou dost not wish to err" (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3). Underlying this is the presupposition, inherited through Augustine, that since all human beings are sinful, salvation is by definition completely unmerited, undeserved, and gratuitous; thus there is no injustice in the fact that it is given only to some, since it is owed to none. The effects of predestination are granted not as a debt but as a grace (*ST I*, q. 23, a. 5, ad 3).

In the end, then, Thomas comes to rest upon the unknowable will of God. This is not the most satisfying conclusion to the discussion. Without diminishing the incomprehensibility of God's will (and Augustine's warning notwithstanding), it seems that this is a mystery that calls out for further pondering, as well as an effort "to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pt 3:15). Mystery does not end our search for understanding but invites us to embark upon a deeper and richer exploration. To this end, Thomas has left several angles unexplored that might help us to understand more deeply the Christian notion of predestination. The limitations of his approach lie

not in his reasoning but in the overly narrow context in which he sets out to do it.

The difficulty of understanding the Christian notion of predestination in the present day is ultimately not so much a problem of grappling with human freedom but of grappling with God's freedom. It is there, however tentatively, that we must begin. God's will is not arbitrary; God is free, but not capricious. God's will perfectly reflects God's nature, which, while not knowable in itself, can be reflected upon in a limited and analogical way.¹⁰ For Thomas, God is pure act, the First Being, that reality that is truest, best, and noblest; the best analogy we have for this reality is love (I Jn 4:16). Thomas points to this himself in saying that election (and ultimately the whole of providence) is grounded in love; yet he fails to explore that love in the context of his discussion of predestination as fully as he might. By exploring more fully the human experience of love and how, by analogy, that may shed light on God's love, some of the more difficult elements of the classical Catholic vision of predestination may be explored more fruitfully.

Thomas, following Aristotle, defines love as willing the good for the other. This is not the most common definition today but nonetheless is quite insightful in exploring the nature of human and divine love. Within the human experience of love we can discern two dimensions or ways of willing the good of the other. The first is to affirm the inherent goodness of the other, that it is good that he or she exists. As Joseph Pieper puts it, "What the lover gazing upon his beloved says and means is *not*: How good that you are *so* (so clever, useful, capable, skillful) but: It's good that you are; how wonderful that you exist."¹¹ The second dimension of willing the good of the other is to seek union with the other, to give oneself to one's beloved, which can be done in as many ways as there are loves—erotic love, friendship, familial love, and so on.¹²

In God, these two dimensions are manifest as, first, God's creative and sustaining love, which affirms the goodness of the beloved by bringing him or her into existence; and second, God's gift of

the divine self, a gift that invites human persons into interpersonal communion with God. Now, in his discussion of predestination, Thomas focuses almost exclusively on the first, creative dimension of God's love. The second, unitive dimension is alluded to in terms of humanity's supernatural end or final cause, but that more explicitly interpersonal love is not explored as part of the efficient causal chain that leads from God's love to that final glory. Thomas's focus has the unintended and unfortunate tendency to create a division within the love of God for humanity, conceived as two quite separate activities rather than as two integral dimensions of one simple love. Thus we find Thomas making some less than convincing distinctions between God willing some good for certain persons but not their ultimate good of salvation, or God willing one thing antecedently but not consequently, without any sense of how these acts are grounded in the nature of a God whose very being is love.

At least in part, the root of this problem lies in the division of the discussion on God into separate treatises on God as one and God as three in one. This division is not, of course, unique to Thomas, but has been normative in Catholic thought from the medieval period until very recently. It is essentially a pedagogical division, designed to delineate the line between natural reasoning and reasoning that makes use of divine revelation. But predestination as a Christian concept has its roots in Scripture, and so the division creates a less than adequate context for discussing this concept. The division between the two treatises creates habits of thought that are not helpful in discussions of many philosophical and theological issues—a contention shared by many of the most prominent contemporary Catholic theologians, such as Rahner, LaCugna, and Kasper and by Orthodox theologians such as John Zizioulas.

In treating God as one, the tendency is to deal with God on the level of substance.¹³ God is seen as the first cause, the ground and sustainer of being. This is true enough, but it is too restrictive, reflecting only the first, creative dimension of love. The classical treatise on God as one acknowledges the second, unitive dimension

of love as humanity's final, supernatural end, but this fuller, more personal, intersubjective sense of love is not allowed to inform the understanding of the whole dynamic of God's relationship to human persons.

But the being of God is always a personal mode of existence; there is not a primary reality of substance that is differentiated into the threeness of persons.¹⁴ Thomas himself acknowledges this in his treatise on God as three in one when he affirms that there is no real distinction between substance and persons in God (*STI*, q. 28, a. 2). The one God always subsists as a communion of persons—a communion of love that is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When this is acknowledged, love ceases to be understood as an emanation or property of the substance of God but is recognized as constitutive of God; love is God's mode of existing, not merely an attribute.¹⁵ In this light, love must be at the center of one's understanding of God, creation, and God's relation to humanity. Love becomes the context for ontology rather than the other way around, since love is "the supreme ontological predicate."¹⁶

This vision of God's interpersonal ontology and the unitive dimension of love that flows from it are bracketed off from the Thomistic discussion of predestination. Since predestination is about the ultimate destiny of persons, this is a crucial omission. When we reflect on the nature or logic of love in a deeper and more inclusive sense, it transforms the understanding of God's primary or universal causality in ways that cast the discussion of predestination in very different light. This does not necessitate entering here into a full consideration of Trinitarian theology, but it hardly seems avoidable in a discussion of issues around humanity's supernatural end as communion with God to reflect to some degree on the nature of that communion. If humanity's origin and end is personal, a communion of love, then that truth must affect how one understands that creative and sustaining force governing and interacting with creation and especially with free personal beings. Framing the question of predestination within this larger optic yields insights

that do not emerge as readily within a treatise restricted to considering God as one.

So God's universal causality in creation is not just an impersonal, metaphysical agency divorced from God's personal being. Recognizing this has ramifications for how we conceive both God's freedom and human freedom. God's will is neither an arbitrary exercise nor is it subject to necessity; it is an expression of love, which is God's pure act of being. Human persons resemble God in being created as free, personal agents; expressed in biblical language, they are created in the image and likeness of God. Human freedom, unlike divine freedom, always exists in a struggle between light and darkness. But that human capacity actualizes itself fully or reaches its zenith in the self-transcending act of love. In that act, we do not just make a particular free choice, but we dispose of ourselves, we make a commitment of our whole selves to another. Unlike any other creature, we have an existential capacity to make of ourselves the kind of self we will be.

The love of God that draws human persons into communion presupposes this quality, that we are beings who are created for and are responsive to that love. Human freedom is perfected in that communion; the greater the union with God, the greater is human freedom.¹⁷ Human persons are created not just *out of* love, like a work of art, but *for* love. The call of God of each of us "by name" is the call to the ultimate exercise of self-transcendence and the fullest achievement of our humanity. If the creative dimension of God's love is the ground of the human ability to act freely in choosing to do this or that, the unitive dimension of God's love is what makes human persons capable of the fullest realization of their free natures.

This connection between love and human fulfillment can be observed on the natural level in the developmental flourishing of human persons. Children will thrive only through being loved. If they are not loved unconditionally, they will be unable to develop the capacity to give love unconditionally. As Pieper puts it: "Above all, the ability to love, in which our own existence achieves its highest

intensification, presupposes the experience of being loved by someone else.”¹⁸ Love transforms us at a very fundamental level: “[One’s] capacity for self-transcendence . . . becomes an actuality when one falls in love. Then one’s being becomes being-in-love. Such being-in-love has its antecedents, its causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it has blossomed forth and as long as it lasts, it takes over. It is the first principle. From it flow one’s desires and fears, one’s joys and sorrows, one’s discernment of values, one’s decisions and deeds.”¹⁹

But it is crucial to see that the experience of being loved is more than the mere *precondition* of human flourishing; it is the *effective cause* of our ability to fulfill our humanity. Love is not just a latent potency in the person that needs an object in order to be actualized by that person, as the power of sight needs light. The power of sight is within us. Light is necessary for its use, but light is not transformative of us. Love is of a rather different order, one that goes to the very heart of human personhood: “The paradox of human being as interpersonal is that what we need to live and to become self-actualized is something which I must receive as a freely bestowed gift from others. To be, and to be a self, is a gift, it is the fundamental *grace*. I cannot live and become myself unless there is an other who desires it and effectively communicates it to me.”²⁰

Only in having another subject freely enter into relation with us do we have the capacity for transcending ourselves in that encounter. This experience does not just *occasion*, but *creates* the possibility of our response; it empowers us to be able to love. Being in love is much more than the turning on of a switch; it is not just the actualization of human possibilities but the elevation and transformation of them.

This empowering or causal character of love is key when reflecting by analogy on the relationship between God and humanity. It is essential to be cognizant here of not falling into the illusory view (critiqued above by McCabe) in which God is thought to allow human persons to choose or reject him by somehow granting them independence, as though God could “step aside” momentarily. Love

makes freedom. In its creative dimension, God's love is the cause of the possibility of free choice, the human ability to choose this or that thing or this or that action. But in its unitive dimension, that love creates the deeper freedom to dispose of oneself, the free act of deciding what kind of person one will be, what one will commit oneself to or stake one's life upon.

McCabe describes human love in a way that evokes beautifully the unique causal properties of love. He says that we can describe loving someone in two ways:

We can say it is to give them themselves or we can say it is to give them nothing—the priceless gift of nothing, which means space in which to move freely, to grow and become themselves. Every gift we give to others (apart from the gift of ourselves) imposes something upon them—they have something of ours, even if it is only a new tie or a drink. But love, which is the gift of ourselves, does not *add* anything to them from the outside, it is the gift of space in which they can be themselves.²¹

McCabe unfolds this notion further, saying that, in love, we receive ourselves at each other's hands because we let each other be. Nature will not let us be—only another person can do so.²²

This “letting be” of the other should not be confused with indifference, abandonment, or absence. It is a letting be that is active and present in the unique mode of one subject to another. It involves creating relationship and letting the other be in relationship, which is the space in which they become themselves. Love is the creation of a certain space that is unique between any two people. McCabe illustrates this with the example of parents loving children.²³ Parenting well is the delicate skill of letting children be without letting them go awry.

This vision of human love is a reflection of the Triune God in whose image the human person was created. The human experience of love as “letting be” parallels traditional ideas from Trinitar-

ian theology. It evokes Thomas's idea of the persons of the Trinity as "subsistent relations"—not entities who *have* relations, but persons who *are* relations, who are constituted by their mutual love. It also evokes the idea of *perichoresis* or *circumincessio*—the mutual interpenetration of the three divine persons. This interpenetration does not blur the distinction of persons but has connotations of "moving around" or of making room for the other within one's own personal being.

In applying this vision of love to the divine/human relationship, McCabe suggests we might imagine God as space—not impersonal space, but the enveloping love that creates, sustains, and invites human persons into communion.²⁴ This brings to mind the Pauline affirmation that God is the one in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Here Paul, speaking to the Athenians, is taking over a Stoic formula, which conceives of God in impersonal terms, as a principle of rationality within the universe. Yet in Paul's hands, and thereafter in the Christian tradition, the image is transformed into one of personal intimacy, but one that suggests life, freedom, and personal dynamism within the "divine space" in which we dwell.

This reflection on the deeper dimensions of love, with its intrinsic connections to divine and human nature, opens up possibilities beyond what Thomas has explored within the context of his treatise on predestination. Because Thomas (and the Catholic tradition after him) is dealing exclusively with God as one in regard to the issue of predestination, he fails to make use of the vision of God's being as interpersonal communion, which can radically expand and deepen our understanding of God's love and how it is transformative of humanity.

In this light, we can go back and reassess Thomas's understanding of the relation of love and election that grounds his account of predestination. In this context, Thomas restricts that love to its creative dimension. Thus he can find no rationale for God's election; it becomes a purely sovereign choice, beyond any human capacity

even to seek to understand. Such a rationale can only be grasped, however imperfectly, when it is grounded in God's being as personal, unitive love that is offered to humanity in the revelation and outpouring of God's life in history.

Within this broader understanding, God's love can be recognized as the universal, personal cause of the human person's disposing of him- or herself either for God or in rejecting God. That love is not a precondition that sets the stage for human persons to act independently of God, but the abiding causal force that empowers persons to be what they make of themselves. God's love gives the person the power to accept God or, paradoxically, to reject God, since the very logic of love demands that it let the person be. Love is the cause of the human capacity to choose to reject God, not because God has withheld grace from that individual but because that is in the very nature of the gift of grace itself. This is not a matter of God "standing aside," but of God being present in the empowering mode of one whose being is love.

That same logic is the reason that the love of God for human persons is not incompatible with allowing some, potentially, to choose to reject God and suffer because of that choice. Love does not entail protecting persons from pain or suffering at all costs. As C. S. Lewis puts it, God's love is not that of "senile benevolence" who likes to see the young people enjoying themselves.²⁵ To will the good of the other is not necessarily to wish them to be free of all burdens, at all costs. Pieper uses the analogy of those who loved the Christian martyrs. They would wish their beloved to be spared the suffering of a violent end, of course, but not at the cost of betraying who they are.²⁶

In light of this broader understanding of God's love, an alternative to Thomas's understanding of election and predestination can be suggested. Perhaps God wills the ultimate good for all human persons, electing and predestining them all to receive the grace necessary for salvation. As all fell in Adam, so all are called to new life in Christ, the second Adam (a Pauline insight that is notably de-

veloped and deepened in *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). There is a disproportion in our relationship to the two Adams. None of us has a choice about participating in original sin, but such is the nature of evil—it inhibits freedom. We do, by contrast, have a choice about participating in the overcoming of sin by grace, for such is the nature of love—it is liberating. The election of all in Christ is not “automatic” in a way that violates our integrity as free beings, for that would not be real love. It would not be worthy of the God who is love—it would contradict God’s very nature. Olivier Boulnois expresses this aptly:

The Father willed the salvation of the world, and of all humanity, in the Son and through the Son. He wills only the good, and desires that all human beings be saved. Even if he foresees finite freedom from the beginning, he is unable to resign himself to the loss of his creature, to evil, or to death. Providence is thus presented as a gift of self, in which the divine giver effaces himself before the freedom of the other: the Father effaces himself before human beings, he sends the gift of his Son (made man) and allows human beings to welcome him or reject him in their freedom.²⁷

This notion of the self-effacement of God in the Incarnation makes it clear that God makes possible that human freedom not by standing aside, but precisely by giving himself to humanity, intimately encountering and making room for the other.

Thomas would surely object that this affirmation of God’s universal salvific intention would make salvation a necessity since God’s will is infallible. This is an objection that must be taken seriously. God’s will *is* infallible, but it is infallible as love is, as that which unfailingly gives God’s beloved to themselves. This is not a limit on God’s power but a recognition of the character of that power. It is understood best not by an analogy of an instrumental force that moves inanimate objects but by the analogy of love that moves persons, that moves subjects in the unique and sublime way that only

love can. By limiting his consideration of God's love largely to its creative dimension in his discussion of predestination, Thomas fails to do justice to the intricacy of how God's unitive love empowers the human person, not through the inexorable motion of God's will but through the logic of love that, by its nature, creates freedom for either communion or rejection.

The inexplicable mystery at the heart of the doctrine of predestination is not that God chooses some and not others for reasons only God knows; the inexplicable mystery is why human beings might reject that love that is offered as universally as it is gratuitously. It is not God who is inexplicable, but ourselves. That is the enigma of sin.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that an exploration of God's being as love or of love as the "supreme ontological predicate" might have applications far beyond the issue of predestination. Attention to the unique causal properties of love could place the discussion of many issues in a broader and richer context. One of the most valuable gifts Christianity can give to the broader enterprise of human thought is to posit a vision of being that would open up a profound consideration of love not only within the realm of the ethical but firstly, and even more significantly, in the realm of the ontological.

Notes

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, q. 23, a. 2 (hereafter referred to in the text as *ST*).
2. Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 176.
3. *Ibid.*, 177.
4. Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1991), 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 11.
6. *ibid.*
7. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 63.
8. Quoted in Harri Pritchard Jones, "Communicating the God of Love," *Doctrine and Life* 51, no. 9 (2001): 541.

9. Interestingly, Thomas lists several options for interpreting this passage. He cites Augustine, who interprets it to refer exclusively to the predestined—that is, that God wills all to be saved who are in fact destined to be saved. Another interpretation alluded to by Thomas is that the passage applies to every class of human person (Jew and Gentile, male and female) but not to every individual of each class. He neither explicitly rejects nor develops either of these rather strained interpretations, but opts for a third alternative: the distinction between God’s antecedent and consequent will.
10. This was the major theological point that Benedict XVI sought to make in his speech of September 12, 2006, at the University of Regensburg that provoked so much controversy, for other reasons.
11. Joseph Pieper, *About Love*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 24.
12. *Ibid.*, 48.
13. John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 40–41.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 46. While Thomas acknowledges that God’s attributes are only logically distinct from God’s being (*ST I*, q. 3, a. 3), the framing of the discussion of predestination within the treatise of God as one may hinder the emergence of insights that arise more fruitfully when personal love is placed in the forefront of the discussion.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 61.
18. Pieper, *About Love*, 29. This insight may provide a basis for an interpersonal variant of the classical argument for God’s existence: if love exists in the world, we may infer the existence of a First Lover.
19. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 105.
20. John Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 36–37.
21. Herbert McCabe, “God,” *New Blackfriars* 82 (Oct. 2001): 420.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Centenary Press, 1943), 29.
26. Pieper, *About Love*, 42.
27. Olivier Boulnois, “The Concept of God After Theodicy,” *Communio* 29, no. 3 (2002): 464–65.