

Article

Aquinas, Suicide, and Communities of Faith

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Abstract: In this paper, I will argue that Aquinas provides a framework for why and how religious communities, specifically Christian religious communities, can minister to those who struggle with suicide. Aquinas thinks that charity makes us friends of God, and to be God's friend is to love one's neighbor and care for his needs. After examining what Aquinas has to say about suicide, I consider in some detail what he has to say about charity. In light of recent psychological research, I use what Aquinas has to say about charity to suggest ways in which the church should help those struggling with suicidal ideation.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas; suicide; suicidal ideation; church communities; charity; justice

1. Introduction

Concerns about mental health are on the rise, and faith communities are also confronted with how to care for those struggling with mental health¹. Kate Finley argues that, Notably, those in the US with mental health concerns are more likely to seek help from spiritual or religious leaders than from psychologists or psychiatrists combined (Heseltine-Carp and Hoskins 2020; Oppenheimer et al. 2004)—thus resulting in spiritual and religious leaders often acting as 'frontline' mental health care workers and 'gatekeepers' to mental health treatment and services. (Finley 2023b, p. 236)

Finley's research also suggests that those in the church who have mental health disorders are currently attempting to create meaning from their suffering within the context of their faith (Finley 2023a, 2023b). Thus, the church should consider what role it can play in helping those struggling with suicidal ideation. In this paper, I will use the thought of Thomas Aquinas to suggest some ways that the church can help those struggling with suicidal ideation or thoughts of suicide (Van Orden et al. 2010, p. 576). My conversation about mental health will focus on how those in Christian faith communities can help those who are a part of the church who struggle with suicidal ideation. At first glance, Aquinas seems a strange starting point for this conversation. While Aquinas is an authoritative voice in the Christian tradition, he argues that suicide is wrong. However, I will argue that when we incorporate what Aquinas has to say about friendship, especially as it concerns the virtue of charity, we can find some insight for thinking about how to help people struggling with suicidal ideation.

My contention is that Aquinas's views on charity can be helpful to religious communities as they seek to understand why and how to minister to those struggling with suicidal ideation. Because Aquinas is a Christian thinker, it seems appropriate to limit my suggestions using his voice to the Christian community. Thus, my paper will concern what Aquinas has to say about how churches, which are Christian religious communities, can especially help other believers who are struggling with suicidal ideation. Aquinas can provide the framework, and hence motivation, for why the church should help those struggling with suicidal ideation. This may address concerns church-goers have about what role the church should play in addition to medical interventions in helping those



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who struggle with suicidal ideation. After providing that motivation, I will suggest a few specific ways that the church can help those struggling with suicidal ideation.²

2. Aquinas on the Wrongness of Suicide

In the *Summa Theologiae* (ST), Aquinas argues that suicide is wrong, and it is wrong for three reasons.³ First, suicide is a sin against oneself. According to Aquinas,

because everything naturally loves itself, the result being that everything naturally keeps itself in being, and resists corruptions so far as it can. Wherefore suicide is contrary to the inclination of nature, and to charity whereby every man should love himself. Hence suicide is always a mortal sin, as being contrary to the natural law and to charity. (ST II-II. q64. a5)

From nature, we learn that whatever exists seeks to preserve its own life and well-being. The person who commits suicide, however, acts contrary to that natural desire to keep existing and flourishing (Novak 1975, pp. 44–54; Leget 2002, esp pp. 289–93). Aquinas also says that suicide undercuts the charity that a person ought to have for themselves. Charity is a gift from God (ST II-II. q23. a1; see also Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* I. 17 (Lectura Romana). q1 a.1).⁴ One way to define mortal sin is as the rupturing or destroying of the bond of charity between God and a human person (see ST I-II. q88).⁵ Because suicide is a rejection of charity, “Suicide, then, becomes not only a rejection of man’s love for himself but of God’s love for man” (Novak 1975, p. 53).⁶

Suicide is also a sin against one’s community. Aquinas says, “every part, as such, belongs to the whole. Now every man is part of the community, and so, as such, he belongs to the community. Hence by killing himself he injures the community, as the Philosopher declares (Ethic. v, 11)” (ST II-II. q64. a5). Suicide injures a community because the community is now missing something that belonged to it. The community is no longer what it once was⁷ (see also Stump 2003, pp. 331–32).

Aquinas further considers suicide a sin against God because it usurps a power that belongs to God alone. Aquinas writes that,

life is God’s gift to man, and is subject to His power, Who kills and makes to live. Hence whoever takes his own life, sins against God, even as he who kills another’s slave, sins against that slave’s master, and as he who usurps to himself judgment of a matter not entrusted to him. For it belongs to God alone to pronounce sentence of death and life, according to Dt. 32:39, “I will kill and I will make to live.” (ST II-II. q64. a5)

Our birth date and death dates are under God’s providence, not our own power, and to take one’s own life is, according to Aquinas, to try to take what belongs to God (Novak 1975, pp. 70–71; see also Stump 2003, pp. 331–32).

Aquinas then sees suicide as a violation of three relationships:⁸ our relationship with ourselves, our relationship with our community, and our relationship with God (see Leget 2002, pp. 289–92). Because my purpose in this paper is to discuss how faith communities, churches in particular, can help those struggling with suicidal ideation, I am going to narrow the focus of this discussion to what Aquinas has to say about suicide in relationship to one’s community. Suicide violates the justice that should exist between a community and an individual. In a reply to an objection raised about whether one can be unjust to oneself, Aquinas says that “In relation to the community and to God, it is sinful, by reason also of its opposition to justice” (ST II-II. q64. a5. Reply to objection 1). In the next section, I am going to investigate what Aquinas has to say about justice and discuss how suicide is a violation of justice between an individual and a community.

3. Aquinas on Justice

Aquinas’s discussion of justice is extensive (see Stump 2003, p. 313), but for the purposes of our investigation of Aquinas on suicide, I will limit my discussion to two aspects of his discussion of justice.⁹ The first aspect I will survey is what he has to say about

general justice, and the second aspect I will survey is what he has to say about the distinction between distributive and commutative justice. These two items will structure our investigation of Aquinas on justice.

For Aquinas, justice is a virtue having to do with our relationships with others (see [Leget 2002](#)). When Aquinas defines justice in the *Summa Theologiae*, he says that “justice is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will” (ST II-II. q58 a1). In other words, one has a disposition to honor the rights of others in the communities in which they live (ST II-II q58 a1; see also [Stump 2003](#), chap. 10).

When Aquinas begins to specify the types of justice, he claims that what makes the virtue of general justice unique is that it directs our actions toward the common good ([Farrell 2018](#); see also ST II-II. q 58. a6; [Bernstein 2016](#), p. 346). Thus, Aquinas says in the *Summa Theologiae*,

Justice, as stated above (a2) directs man in his relations with other men. Now this may happen in two ways: first as regards his relation with individuals, secondly as regards his relations with others in general, in so far as a man who serves a community, serves all those who are included in that community. Accordingly justice in its proper acceptation can be directed to another in both these senses. Now it is evident that all who are included in a community, stand in relation to that community as parts to a whole; while a part, as such, belongs to a whole, so that whatever is the good of a part can be directed to the good of the whole. It follows therefore that the good of any virtue, whether such virtue direct man in relation to himself, or in relation to certain other individual persons, is referable to the common good, to which justice directs: so that all acts of virtue can pertain to justice, in so far as it directs man to the common good. It is in this sense that justice is called a general virtue. (II-II. q58 a5)

Because justice in this sense directs us to the common good, justice, as Aquinas has described things here, may also be termed “legal justice”. Aquinas continues in the same section of the *Summa Theologiae* that

And since it belongs to the law to direct to the common good, as stated above (I. q90. a2.), it follows that the justice which is in this way styled general, is called “legal justice,” because thereby man is in harmony with the law which directs the acts of all the virtues to the common good. (II-II. q58 a5; see also ST II-II. q58. a6; see also [Leget 2002](#))

Now legal justice is not directed toward particular individuals, meaning that it does not govern what particular good is due to some particular person. Thus, Aquinas says that

besides legal justice which directs man immediately to the common good, there is a need for other virtues to direct him immediately in matters relating to particular goods: and these virtues may be relative to himself or to another individual person. Accordingly, just as in addition to legal justice there is a need for particular virtues to direct man in relation to himself, such as temperance and fortitude, so too besides legal justice there is need for particular justice to direct man in his relations to other individuals. (ST II-II. q58. a7)

And he also continues in this same section by arguing that

The common good of the realm and the particular good of the individual differ not only in respect of the “many” and the “few”, but also under a formal aspect. For the aspect of the “common” good differs from the aspect of the “individual” good, even as the aspect of “whole” differs from that of “part”. (ST II-II. q58. a7. Reply to Objection 2)

Thus, Aquinas argues that we need a different division of justice for those items that pertain to the rights of the individual: particular justice. Farrell notes that

Since justice is the virtue that disposes us to treat others correctly, there has to be a form of justice that disposes us to respect the good of the other qua single person.

Unlike general justice, this form of justice is not an all-encompassing general virtue, but covers a limited area of human action. It can be called particular justice. (Farrell 2018)

Legal justice, then, is acting for the sake of the common good. This does not mean simply following the law because we are commanded to by authorities but rather that one is “following the law so as to perform virtuous acts for the sake of the common good” (Farrell 2018).

Another way to understand the notion of justice, involved here for Aquinas, is via the differences between distributive and commutative justice. Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s distinction between distributive and commutative justice found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1999, see esp Book V). Aquinas argues that

particular justice is directed to the private individual, who is compared to the community as a part to the whole. Now a twofold order may be considered in relation to a part. In the first place there is the order of one part to another, to which corresponds the order of one private individual to another. This order is directed by commutative justice, which is concerned about the mutual dealings between two persons. In the second place there is the order of the whole towards the parts, to which corresponds the order of that which belongs to the community in relation to each single person. This order is directed by distributive justice, which distributes common goods proportionately. Hence there are two species of justice, distributive and commutative. (ST II-II. q61. a1)

Both distributive justice and commutative justice concern the proper distribution of goods (ST II-II q61 a1, Replies to Objections), but distributive and commutative justice distribute goods in different ways. Of distributive justice, Aquinas says that

in distributive justice something is given to a private individual, in so far as what belongs to the whole is due to the part, and in a quantity that is proportionate to the importance of the position of that part in respect of the whole. Consequently in distributive justice a person receives all the more of the common goods, according as he holds a more prominent position in the community. This prominence in an aristocratic community is gauged according to virtue, in an oligarchy according to wealth, in a democracy according to liberty, and in various ways according to various forms of community. Hence in distributive justice the mean is observed, not according to equality between thing and thing, but according to proportion between things and persons: in such a way that even as one person surpasses another, so that which is given to one person surpasses that which is allotted to another. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 3,4) that the mean in the latter case follows “geometrical proportion”, wherein equality depends not on quantity but on proportion. (ST II-II q61 a2)

An example of this kind of proportional justice would be wages paid for work performed. So, for example, if Matthew works a 12 h shift, but Cassondra works a 6 h shift, distributive justice dictates that Matthew be paid more because he has worked the longer shift. In other words, in distributive justice, desert matters for how much of the common good one receives. Stump comments that,

Any society has certain common goods to distribute. . .and certain burdens to impose. . .Just distribution is thus proportional to desert but what counts as desert varies from society to society. In aristocracies, it is virtue, Aquinas says; in oligarchies, wealth or nobility of birth. In democracy, it is being a free citizen, so that the goods of society are equally distributed to all. (Stump 2003, p. 317)

But of commutative justice, Aquinas says that,

in commutations something is paid to an individual on account of something of his that has been received, as may be seen chiefly in selling and buying, where the notion of commutation is found primarily. Hence it is necessary to equalize

thing with thing, so that the one person should pay back to the other just so much as he has become richer out of that which belonged to the other. The result of this will be equality according to the “arithmetical mean” which is gauged according to equal excess in quantity. (ST II-II q61 a2)

An example of this kind of justice would be economic trade between individuals in a society. If Jerry buys a car that is worth \$5000 from Sophia, then he should pay Sophia the value of the car, \$5000. In this way, both Jerry and Sophia come away from the transaction with something that is worth \$5000, and commutative justice, which demands equality of “thing with thing”, is upheld.¹⁰

Aquinas offers at least three ways of understanding how justice operates within society. In the next section, I will consider how each of these three kinds of justice diagnoses the injustice of suicide.

4. What Kind of Injustice Is Suicide?

Carlo Leget comments that “Suicide was studied under the heading of the cardinal virtue of justice, covering all actions in which one gives everyone his or her due” (Leget 2002, p. 281). Aquinas notes that suicide is an injustice against the community in which one lives. But how should we understand this: as a violation of general justice, of commutative justice, or of distributive justice? And more importantly, how is this distinction relevant for our purposes here?

Aquinas does argue that suicide is a violation of general or legal justice. Following Aristotle’s discussion of suicide in *Nicomachean Ethics* V. 11, Aquinas argues that suicide is a violation of legal justice. Aquinas argues in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Aquinas 1964) that

the things that are just according to any virtue are ordered by law. Hence what is not ordered at all by law does not seem to be just in terms of any virtue and hence is unjust. In no case does the law command a man to take his own life. But those acts that the law does not command as just, it forbids as unjust. This is not to be understood as if no mean exists between the command and the prohibition of the law, since there are many acts that are neither commanded nor forbidden by the law but are left to man’s will, for example, buying or not buying a particular thing. But this is to be understood in the sense that it is only those things which are forbidden as unjust in themselves that the law in no case commands. So it seems that to take one’s own life is of itself unjust, since the law never commands it. (CNE V. Lecture XVII. 1092)

When thinking in terms of legal justice, Aquinas thinks that when someone commits suicide, the wrong committed is committed against the state. He argues that “the man who commits suicide does some injustice. But we must consider against whom he acts unjustly. Certainly he does an injustice to the state, which he deprives of a citizen, even if he does no injustice to himself” (CNE V. Lecture XVII. 1094). For Aquinas, one motivation for thinking that suicide violates legal justice is the punishments and dishonors that the State imposes on those who commit suicide (ibid., V. Lecture XVII. 1096).¹¹

It seems that suicide as a violation of commutative justice is not quite right when it comes to understanding the injustice of suicide (see Stump 2003, chap. 10). If it is true that commutative justice concerns transactions between persons within a society, it is not clear how suicide violates commutative justice. There is not one person whom suicide affects such that those effects fall on just that one person (see Mitchell et al. 2009; Cerel et al. 2018; Wagner et al. 2021; Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2024). Once this action affects multiple persons, we seem to find ourselves again in territory where suicide affects communities. And injustices committed towards communities regards distributive justice.

But in other passages, we might be able to read Aquinas as saying that suicide is a violation of distributive justice. According to Eleonore Stump, there are two ways to read how suicide is a distributive injustice to the community. The first reason that suicide violates distributive justice is that it takes something away from the community that rightfully

belongs to it. When writing about whether it is ever appropriate to maim someone, Aquinas writes that, when a person is injured wrongfully, the whole community suffers because the injury “would involve an injury to the community, to whom the man and all his parts belong” (*ST II-II. q65 a1*). Aquinas also states that “since one man is a part of the community, each man in all that he is and has, belongs to the community; just as a part, in all that it is, belongs to the whole” (*ST I-II q96 a4*). The idea seems to be that when I take something that is “my own” away from the community, I am also in a very real sense taking something integral from my community and injuring it in the process (see also [Stump 2003](#), p. 331).

Another reason that suicide falls under a failure of distributive justice concerns Aquinas’s view that God is the true owner of all things (see *ST II-II. q.66 a1*; see also [Novak 1975](#), esp pp. 70–71; [Leget 2002](#)). God’s purposes for his creation are for their flourishing, and persons, as co-stewards with God of the resources of the earth, are to use their possessions to further the common good. Stump comments, “Insofar as everything really belongs to God, God plays a role analogous to the role of society in more usual explanations of distributive justice. Furthermore in holding or disposing of property any human being is in effect acting as God’s agent, helping to effect the distribution of property within a society” ([Stump 2003](#), p. 325). The idea here is that, as stewards of God’s creation, in any transaction of goods in society, whether they look like they are between individuals or between a community and an individual, those transactions always implicate our relationship to God’s created order, and thus to God. The ultimate aim of transactions with others or with the community as a whole is “a distribution of what belongs to God in accordance with God’s purposes” ([Stump 2003](#), p. 326). Suicide is wrong in this way of reading Aquinas because, in taking one’s life, one is using what God has given to them to use for the benefit of the whole community in a way that violates God’s ultimate purposes of good for the flourishing of that very community ([Stump 2003](#), p. 332). Aquinas affirms that human beings are given free will over the affairs of their lives that “pertain to this life” and come under their choice (*ST II-II. q64. a2*). But one’s own life falls under God’s power, not their own (*ST II-II. q64. a2*; see also [Stump 2003](#), pp. 331–32).

The kinds of justice that seem to fare best for diagnosing the injustice of suicide are general justice and distributive justice. But it is outside of the bounds of this project to adjudicate which of these is the right diagnosis. What is pertinent to our purposes is to note that both general justice and distributive justice identify the wrongness of suicide as against a community. As will be pointed out in the following sections, communities imply relationships, and it is in this notion of relationships that Christian religious communities can find the means to help those struggling with suicidal ideation.

5. What Are Faith Communities to Do?

In the previous section, I pointed out that community plays a strong role in understanding the wrongness of suicide, and it is in communities that this sin can be avoided.¹² Thus, I now turn my attention to the Christian religious communities that include members who struggle with suicidal ideation. And that attention will be given in the form of how they can be of help to their struggling members.

I would like to investigate two items before laying out what I think faith communities are to do for those struggling in their midst. It will be helpful to begin by briefly surveying some psychological literature on the causes of suicidal ideation. This literature will help to understand some of the sources of suicidal ideation and can be suggestive of ways that Christian religious communities can begin to imagine ways to help those who struggle with suicidal ideation. The next task will be to investigate what Aquinas has to say about the nature of charity. Faith communities are importantly different from political communities, and as such, justice cannot be the only virtue that governs the operations within a faith community. I would suggest that charity, in addition to justice, is a virtue that should shape the relationships between individuals who partake in faith communities. I do not mean to suggest that Aquinas’s discussion of the injustice of suicide is misplaced, but rather I think

Aquinas's discussion of charity is a fruitful place to glean the reasons why integrating those with suicidal ideation into the life of a religious community is important.

6. The Psychological Literature on Suicide and Suicidal Ideation

The purpose of this survey is to get a general sense of some of the factors that increase the risk of suicide and suicidal ideation. This survey is not meant to be comprehensive but rather suggestive of the different variables at play when considering the causes of suicidal ideation. As such, this literature will not prove that Aquinas offers the correct framework for thinking about how to show charity to those struggling with suicidal ideation. Rather it is meant to indicate whether what Aquinas has to say is in line with what can be learned from the data.

The causes of suicide can be complex and various and may include social, economic, and cultural influences (Lee et al. 2021; Az et al. 2023; Kim et al. 2020). Van Orden et al. note that "The literature indicates the most consistent and robust support for the following as risk factors for suicide: mental disorder, past suicide attempts, social isolation, family conflict, unemployment, and physical illness" (Van Orden et al. 2010, pp. 577–78). In a 2020 study conducted from the records of South Korean patients who had attempted suicide, researchers attempted to identify reasons why they had attempted suicide. The dominant reason for suicide varied by age group, but one dominant reason, especially in the young and middle-aged population, was some kind of relational conflict, especially with a romantic partner. Other significant reasons given for attempted suicide were financial, especially among the middle-aged population, and disease was a dominant reason among the older population (Kim et al. 2020).

In a 2021 study conducted on South Korean, Japanese, and American adult participants, researchers found that "factors such as stress resilience and religion act as protective elements against suicidal ideation" (Lee et al. 2021, p. 208). This same study also suggests that, in what the authors call a post-materialist society, where ideals such as self-actualization, "self-expression" and "quality of life" are prevalent, suicide may be viewed as a way of realizing these ideals, and as a result, suicide may be viewed as a right (Lee et al. 2021, p. 208).

A 2019 study examined how "thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, and hopelessness" influenced suicidal ideation or suicidal behavior for college-age students (Wolford-Clevenger et al. 2020, p. 251). Their study ultimately concluded that thwarted belongingness and hopelessness were major factors in the occurrence of suicidal ideation and that these results replicated other studies which found that "unmet interpersonal needs were a proximal correlate of suicidal ideation" (Ibid., p. 258). These authors suggest that "treatments that increase feelings of connectedness, hope, and contribution may decrease the risk for suicidal thoughts" for college students (Wolford-Clevenger et al. 2020, p. 259; see also Ahmadboukani et al. 2023; Tynes et al. 2024).¹³ They also suggest that for college students experiencing suicidal ideation, treatments that address unmet personal needs, by drawing in close friends and family, may also be helpful for treating suicidal ideation (Wolford-Clevenger et al. 2020, p. 260; See also Drum et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2018).

What these studies suggest is that one's relationship to others, and even to one's society, plays a role in one's risk for suicide. In fact, Van Orden et al. note that "social isolation is arguably the strongest and most reliable predictor of suicidal ideation, attempts and lethal suicidal behavior among samples varying in age, nationality, and clinical severity" (Van Orden et al. 2010, p. 579). Social isolation includes situations such as "loneliness, social withdrawal, living alone and having few social supports, living in nonintact families, losing a spouse through death or divorce, and residing in a single prison cell" (Van Orden et al. 2010, p. 579). Conversely, they note that the risk of lethal suicidal behavior is lower for those who have "marriage, children, and greater number of friends/family" (Van Orden et al. 2010, p. 579).¹⁴

These studies are helpful for seeing the significance of one's relationship to one's community when it comes to suicide risk. This literature suggests that strengthening or reconciling one's relationships with one's community may be key to treating suicidal ideation.

7. Aquinas on Charity: A Shift in Thinking About How to Love One Another

In this section, I will investigate what Aquinas has to say about charity. At this point, it might seem puzzling to understand why I have shifted from discussing suicide as a violation of justice to discussing how churches can love those who are struggling with suicidal ideation. How do justice and love square together? My reason for this shift is that churches are communities whose actions and relationships are to be motivated by love, and given what we have seen about the importance of relationships in warding off suicide or suicidal ideation, love seems the best place to start in learning how to be of help to the suffering.

It is possible to read Aquinas on the wrongness of suicide that is consistent both with justice and with the love found in relationships. Carlo Leget presents an interpretation of Aquinas on suicide which argues that we should not read Aquinas's prohibition on suicide in a purely legal fashion. He notes that if we read Aquinas on suicide in a purely legal way, we seem to have missed the subject of suicide entirely: "Framing suicide in terms of laws and rights, one is most likely to miss the tragic situation of the suicide. Whether one ends up by either assigning or denying the right to commit suicide, the person in distress is left alone" (Leget 2002, p. 290). He suggests that Aquinas can be read as understanding justice as a kind of balance. Leget writes that

Thomas does not consider justice to be the same as law and external obligation, but primarily, to be a virtue of the human will. And as a virtue, justice is essentially the art of balance. Now we enter a different realm of thinking: we enter the language of harmony, on the Stoic foundations of which Aquinas developed his theory of sin. Reading Sth II-II, q. 64 a. 5 co in this light, suicide appears as the ultimate act of disharmony or imbalance. (Leget 2002, p. 290)

As Leget reads Aquinas, because Aquinas sees the aim of the moral life to be human happiness, Aquinas thinks that the task of the human person is to improve oneself. This improvement involves finding a balance of the goods of human life, and the point of natural inclination is to point us in the direction of these goods. If committing suicide is against natural inclination, then, on Leget's view, suicide becomes a disruption of the "natural dynamism" of obtaining these human goods (Leget 2002, p. 291). Leget also argues that we can see the different ways in which suicide is wrong as different relationships: to oneself, to one's community, and to God, and these relationships, considered as goods, require a kind of receptivity. He says that,

The vital level, the social level, and the religious level are three dimensions that sustain life and that cannot be disposed of completely. All three of them are essential to the goods that are constitutive of the good life. To put it differently: all three of them ask for a specific attitude of accepting, and of being open to the goods that we cannot produce or make; goods that make life worth living. (Leget 2002, p. 291)

Now the badness of suicide can be seen in that it undercuts the flourishing of a human life. Leget writes that,

Losing the balance of these three relationships, human life becomes a life that is threatened in that which concerns the access to the good. A life that is lived without having access to oneself, cut off from social bonds and without any hope, is a dead end. Thus suicide appears as an act of objective disorder, running contrary to the three dimensions that sustain life and make it valuable. (Leget 2002, p. 292)

Leget points out that this "objective disorder" is where the wrongness and injustice of suicide truly lie (Ibid., p. 292).

I find Leget's language of relationship here helpful for framing the ways in which the church can be helpful. The opposite of being cut off from social bonds is to belonging in one's community. If we are to make sense of how the church can be of help to those struggling with suicidal ideation, we should understand the nature of the relationship between the church and its members. If any relationships are governed by love and charity, it seems that one's relationship with their church and its members would be governed by love. Thus, we shall begin our discussion of how the church can love those struggling with suicide or suicidal ideations through love.

8. What Aquinas Has to Say About Charity

Church communities should be places of love for our neighbor, but for Aquinas, love of neighbor begins with love of God. And love of God is only possible when the soul receives charity.¹⁵ Aquinas holds that charity makes possible the union with God whereby human persons are able to love God and enjoy him.¹⁶ According to Aquinas, human beings, by their own intellectual powers, cannot attain this relationship with God. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG), Aquinas argues that,

whatever exceeds the limitations of a nature cannot accrue to it except through the action of another being. For instance, water does not tend upward unless it is moved by something else. Now, seeing God's substance transcends the limitations of every created nature; indeed, it is proper for each created intellectual nature to understand according to the manner of its own substance. But divine substance cannot be understood in this way, as we showed above. Therefore, the attainment by a created intellect to the vision of divine substance is not possible except through the action of God, Who transcends all creatures. Thus, it is said: "The grace of God is life everlasting" (Rom. 6:23). In fact, we have shown that man's happiness, which is called life everlasting, consists in this divine vision, and we are said to attain it by God's grace alone, because such a vision exceeds all the capacity of a creature and it is not possible to reach it without divine assistance. (SCG III. 52. vi–vii)¹⁷

This divine assistance comes in the form of charity, and this form results in the human person being made like God in such a way that they can enjoy him.¹⁸ Aquinas argues that

Indeed, it is not possible for what is the proper form of one thing to become the form of another unless the latter thing participates some likeness of the thing to which the form belongs. For instance, light can only become the act of a body if the body participates somewhat in the diaphanous. But the divine essence is the proper intelligible form for the divine intellect and is proportioned to it; in fact, these three are one in God: the intellect, that whereby understanding is accomplished, and the object which is understood. So, it is impossible for this essence to become the intelligible form of a created intellect unless by virtue of the fact that the created intellect participates in the divine likeness. Therefore, this participation in the divine likeness is necessary so that the substance of God may be seen. (SCG III. 53. ii)

What affects this participation in the divine likeness for Aquinas is the form of charity. According to Aquinas,

Furthermore, nothing can be elevated to a higher operation unless because its power is strengthened. But there are two possible ways in which a thing's power may be strengthened. One way is by a simple intensification of the power itself; thus, the active power of a hot thing is increased by an intensification of the heat, so that it is able to perform a stronger action of the same species. A second way is by the imposition of a new form; thus, the power of a diaphanous object is increased so that it can shine with light, by virtue of its becoming actually luminous, through the form of light received for the first time within it. And in fact, this latter kind of increase of power is needed for the acquisition of an

operation of another species. Now, the power of a created intellect is not sufficient to see the divine substance, as is clear from what we have said. So, its power must be increased in order that it may attain such a vision. But the increase through the intensification of a natural power does not suffice, since this vision is not of the same essential type as the vision proper to a natural created intellect. This is evident from the difference between the objects of these visions. Therefore, an increase of the intellectual power by means of the acquisition of a new disposition must be accomplished. (SCG III. 53. v)

In other words, Aquinas thinks that human persons need to be given the form of charity for them to be able to see and enjoy God. In his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Aquinas makes the point more succinctly that the form of charity is that,

by which man transcends all effects and every creature and directs his affection to God himself and loves the very goodness of God as our beatitude, so that we may have a certain fellowship with him; and this is altogether above nature and natural reason. Hence in order to love God in this way, a supernatural light is required, which elevates our affection to God himself, according as he is to be loved in and of himself. (I. 17 (*Lectura Romana*) q.1. a.1.)¹⁹

The point at which the believer receives the form of charity from God is the point at which she also begins to love the goodness which God is. According to Aquinas, when we are genuinely in a union of love, we also begin to desire what the beloved desires (*Commentary on the Sentences*, III. d.32 a. 1–2). As Aquinas sees things, God desires the goodness that he is, and if the believer loves God, she will also desire what God desires. Thus, to possess charity means that one is also shaped by the goodness that God is (see *ST* I.q2.a3; I.q3.a4; I.q6.a3; I.q3.a3; I-II.q26.a1; I-II.q27.a1).²⁰

The primary example that Aquinas uses to explain how charity places us in a relationship with God is friendship. Aquinas says that charity makes us friends of God:

since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor. 1:9): “God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son.” The love, which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God. (*ST* II-II. q23. a1)

Charity, for Aquinas, makes us God’s friends, but charity also extends to the love of others, including our enemies. Aquinas argues that,

Now the aspect under which our neighbor is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that he may be in God. Hence it is clear that it is specifically the same act whereby we love God, and whereby we love our neighbor. Consequently the habit of charity extends not only to the love of God, but also to the love of our neighbor. (*ST* II-II. q25. a1; see also *ST* II-II. q27. a8)

In fact, Aquinas says that, when one possesses charity, they love their neighbor “for God’s sake” (*ST* II-II. q25. a1. Reply to Objection 3). As Meghan Clark succinctly puts it, “God is to be loved above all else, and all other things are to be loved in relation to God” (Clark 2011, p. 419).

But what is the shape of this charity when it comes to loving others? For Aquinas, charity results in two desires toward the one being loved, whether it is God or neighbor being loved. Charity involves desiring good for the beloved, and the desire to be in union with what it loved, or one with them (see Stump 2010). Aquinas says that

As the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 4), “to love is to wish good to someone.” Hence the movement of love has a twofold tendency: towards the good which a man wishes to someone (to himself or to another) and towards that to which he wishes some good. Accordingly, man has love of concupiscence towards the good that

he wishes to another, and love of friendship towards him to whom he wishes good. (*ST II-II. q26. a4*)

Aquinas points out that, in friendship, we desire another person's good, not for the good itself, but rather for the sake of the friend.

Union belongs to love in so far as by reason of the complacency of the appetite, the lover stands in relation to that which he loves, as though it were himself or part of himself. Hence it is clear that love is not the very relation of union, but that union is a result of love. Hence, too, Dionysius says that "love is a unitive force" (*Div. Nom. iv*), and the Philosopher says (*Polit. ii, 1*) that union is the work of love. (*ST II-II. q26. a2. Reply to Objection 2*)

Furthermore, Aquinas writes in *ST I. q20. a1. Reply to objection 3*:

An act of love always tends towards two things; to the good that one wills, and to the person for whom one wills it: since to love a person is to wish that person good. Hence, inasmuch as we love ourselves, we wish ourselves good; and, so far as possible, union with that good. So love is called the unitive force, even in God, yet without implying composition; for the good that He wills for Himself, is no other than Himself, Who is good by His essence, as above shown [citation omitted]. And by the fact that anyone loves another, he wills good to that other. Thus he puts the other, as it were, in the place of himself; and regards the good done to him as done to himself. So far love is a binding force, since it aggregates another to ourselves, and refers his good to our own. And then again the divine love is a binding force, inasmuch as God wills good to others; yet it implies no composition in God.

Notice that Aquinas emphasizes that when we truly love someone, their flourishing matters to us as much as our own. Aquinas says that,

Whereas, in the love of friendship, the lover is in the beloved, inasmuch as he reckons what is good or evil to his friend, as being so to himself; and his friend's will as his own, so that it seems as though he felt the good or suffered the evil in the person of his friend. Hence it is proper to friends "to desire the same things, and to grieve and rejoice at the same", as the Philosopher says (*Ethic. ix, 3* and *Rhet. ii, 4*). Consequently in so far as he reckons what affects his friend as affecting himself, the lover seems to be in the beloved, as though he were become one with him: but in so far as, on the other hand, he wills and acts for his friend's sake as for his own sake, looking on his friend as identified with himself, thus the beloved is in the lover. (*ST I-II. q28. a2*)

Thus, for Aquinas, if we genuinely have charity toward another person, we cannot ignore their well-being. The other person becomes as dear to us as we are to ourselves. When I love another person, I desire on their behalf what is good for them. This seems obvious at first but notice that Aquinas also thinks that we care so much for the well-being of others that their good is as dear to us as our own well-being. Thus, love requires that we deeply care about the well-being of others. Love requires that the flourishing of others matter to us (see [Stump 2006; 2010](#), chaps. 5 and 6).²¹

According to Aquinas, when we love someone, not only do we wish them well, but we also desire to be in some kind of community or union with that other person. In fact, this desire for union with another person helps explain Aquinas's comment from the *Summa Theologiae* that we desire another's good as our own: We desire the good for the other person because we see ourselves as united, one with, that other person. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (*SCG*), Aquinas says that "charity unites affections and makes, as it were, one heart of two" (*SCG IV. 21. 5*). We certainly will not have the same kind of relationship with every person ([Stump 2006; 2010](#), chaps. 5 and 6), but for love to be real, for Aquinas, we should desire union with that person (see [Stump 2010](#), chap. 6; [2018](#), chap. 4).

Furthermore, love between friends is mutual for Aquinas. He says in the *Summa Theologiae* that "mutual indwelling in the love of friendship can be understood in regard

to reciprocal love: inasmuch as friends return love for love, and both desire and do good things for one another" (*ST I-II. q28. a2*). Love in its most robust expression is not one-sided: There is a sharing of one's life with another (see [Stump 2006; 2010](#), chaps. 5 and 6).

When writing about friendship with God, Aquinas continues his commentary on the unity and care involved in friendship. Aquinas writes that,

it is not only proper to love that one reveal his secrets to a friend by reason of their unity in affection, but the same unity requires that what he has he have in common with the friend. For, "since a man has a friend as another self," he must help the friend as he does himself, making his own possessions common with the friend, and so one takes this as the property of friendship "to will and to do the good for a friend". (*SCG IV. 21. 7*)

For Aquinas, friends are a source of comfort and joy. Aquinas writes that,

It is also a property of friendship that one take delight in a friend's presence, rejoice in his words and deeds, and find in him security against all anxieties; and so it is especially in our sorrows that we hasten to our friends for consolation. (*SCG IV. 22. 3*)

A feature of Aquinas's discussion of friendship that should stand out is this idea of a shared life. Aquinas emphasizes the unity and shared life between friends. Friends share the joys, the sorrows, and the goods of normal life.

But Aquinas thinks that charity is not just directed toward our friends. He also thinks that charity makes us love even our enemies, and we love them because of the charity that is primarily directed toward God. Aquinas argues that

Indeed so much do we love our friends, that for their sake we love all who belong to them, even if they hurt or hate us; so that, in this way, the friendship of charity extends even to our enemies, whom we love out of charity in relation to God, to Whom the friendship of charity is chiefly directed. (*ST II-II. q23. a1. Reply to Objection 2*)

In this same vein, Aquinas claims that we are to love the unvirtuous, again because of our love for God in charity:

The friendship that is based on the virtuous is directed to none but a virtuous man as the principal person, but for his sake we love those who belong to him, even though they be not virtuous: in this way charity, which above all is friendship based on the virtuous, extends to sinners, whom, out of charity, we love for God's sake. (*ST II-II. q23. a1. Reply to Objection 3*)

As Aquinas sees things, love of God means that we love neighbors, enemies, and those who are unvirtuous or the "sinner" ([Clark 2011](#), p. 416). For Aquinas, charity requires that we love all others within our community. In fact, this community is quite extensive. Clark notes that, "From the beginning, Aquinas is clear that charity extends to one's neighbors, by which he means the entire human community. It is clear that one is to love one's neighbor as part of charity" (*Ibid.*, p. 418).

While we should love the entire human community, Aquinas argues that we show charity, especially to those who are closest to us because of the kinds of relationships we have with them (see [Pope 1991; Clark 2011; Stump 2006, 2010](#)). In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas argues that one should love those who also possess charity with a greater affection: "Out of charity, we should wish a greater good to one who is nearer to God" (*ST II-II. q26 a7*). Aquinas also argues that we love more those with whom we have a connection beyond the friendship of the virtue of charity:

out of charity, we love more those who are more nearly connected with us, since we love them in more ways. For, towards those who are not connected with us we have no other friendship than charity, whereas for those who are connected with us, we have certain other friendships, according to the way in which they are connected. Now since the good on which every other friendship of the virtuous

is based, is directed, as to its end, to the good on which charity is based, it follows that charity commands each act of another friendship, even as the art which is about the end commands the art which is about the means. Consequently this very act of loving someone because he is akin or connected with us, or because he is a fellow-countryman or for any like reason that is referable to the end of charity, can be commanded by charity, so that, out of charity both eliciting and commanding, we love in more ways those who are more nearly connected with us. (*ST II-II. q26. a7*)

However, Aquinas's view that we should help those more closely connected to us is not a hard and fast rule: There are times when someone's need creates exceptions to helping those closest to us (see also [Clark 2011](#); [Pope 1991](#)). When commenting on whom we are to show beneficence, which is an act of charity (*ST II-II. q31. a1*; see also [Clark 2011](#), p. 423), Aquinas argues that

Now one man's connection with another may be measured in reference to the various matters in which men are engaged together; (thus the intercourse of kinsmen is in natural matters, that of fellow-citizens is in civic matters, that of the faithful is in spiritual matters, and so forth): and various benefits should be conferred in various ways according to these various connections, because we ought in preference to bestow on each one such benefits as pertain to the matter in which, speaking simply, he is most closely connected with us. And yet this may vary according to the various requirements of time, place, or matter in hand: because in certain cases one ought, for instance, to succor a stranger, in extreme necessity, rather than one's own father, if he is not in such urgent need. (*ST II-II. q31. a3*)

For Aquinas, then, love of God means love of neighbor, and our love should especially extend to (1) those closest to us and (2) those in need.²²

Within the context of Christian religious communities, it seems that believers who struggle with suicidal ideation are certainly in need. Furthermore, because they are part of our church communities, they are, by Aquinas' lights, among those closest to us. Therefore, our charity should extend to them also. With charity as the ground of the church's action, I will argue in the next section that Aquinas's notion of common life will help us illuminate how churches can help those struggling with suicidal ideation.

9. How the Church Can Help the Hurting

In this section, I want to show how Aquinas is helpful first in grounding the church's care for those struggling with suicidal ideation. And from that grounding, I would like to show how his reasoning can help the church care for those with suicidal ideation. What I am suggesting is not meant to replace professional treatments for those struggling with suicidal ideation. These suggestions are meant to supplement the care that those struggling with suicidal ideation should already be receiving.²³

One can find grounding for the church's care for those struggling with suicidal ideation in Aquinas's emphasis on the shared life of love between friends. Given Aquinas's emphasis on loving others in charity because of the love one has for God, love for those struggling with suicidal ideation is rooted in the love of God. Church communities are communities by love, and one cannot refuse to care about the suffering of those whom one claims to love, including those struggling with suicidal ideation. This point seems obvious, but its connection to another element of love highlights its significance. Aquinas does not just say to care about others in your community. He claims that in communities of love, their good is your own good. Their flourishing should matter to you as much as your own. This kind of love must be a deep, heartfelt concern for the lives of those struggling with suicidal ideation.

Aquinas's discussion of love also provides motivation for some more practical ways in which we can care for those struggling with suicidal ideation. As the psychological literature notes, one reason noted as a factor for suicidal ideation is a lack of feeling like

one belongs. Some of the studies referenced earlier indicate that belongingness can be increased by encouraging participation in those communities of which one is already a part. For example, the study by Wolford-Clevenger et al. indicates that the treatment for college students who are struggling with suicidal ideation should “increase feelings of connectedness, hope, and contribution,” and in more severe cases, family and friends should be brought into the treatment process to help individuals increase feelings of closeness (Wolford-Clevenger et al. 2020; Drum et al. 2009). Van Orden et al. (2010) note that social isolation is one of the biggest factors contributing to suicidal ideation. This suggests that one way to help those struggling with suicidal ideation is to incorporate them into the life of the church through active participation. One way to incorporate individuals into the life of the church community would be to help them find a place to serve. If feeling like one contributes could ward off suicidal ideation, then the church community can be helpful by using the structures it already has in place to find ways for those struggling to contribute.

Furthermore, the study conducted by Lee et al. (2021, p. 208) suggested that religious involvement can function as a buffer against suicidal ideation. By drawing those struggling with suicidal ideation deeper into the life of the church by encouraging their involvement in service, they are befriended by the church in the ways that Aquinas suggests. And in that friendship, they may find some help against their suicidal ideation.

10. Conclusions

Aquinas offers church communities a foundation for helping those struggling with suicidal ideation. Ultimately, Aquinas shows that it is through the church’s offer of friendship that positive peace will be present for those who struggle with suicidal ideation. Positive peace has to do with an understanding of justice in which the flourishing of individuals is paramount. Andrew Fiala (2023) explains that “The peace of a just and tranquil order points toward something like a condition of wholeness in which there is solidarity, mutual respect, and satisfaction of needs. In this vision of peace there is genuine community and human flourishing”. If there is to be positive peace with the church, then the flourishing of those in its community must be attended to. And Aquinas provides us with motivation for why we should bring about that positive peace.

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Notes

- ¹ I am indebted to two groups for this article. First, I am indebted to my Cultural Perspectives course (Spring 2023) at Hope College for prompting my interest in this question. Our discussions and work in that class on Dante’s Circle of the Suicides in *The Inferno* were helpful in shaping the structure, content, and trajectory of this paper. I am also indebted to Eleonore Stump and her lectures on Dante for inspiring this paper. Her way of questioning the symbolism of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (Alighieri 2003) was also helpful in raising the questions that are discussed here. I am indebted to three anonymous reviewers for their helpful insights in revising this paper.
- ² I am also indebted to Eleonore Stump and Carlo Leget for shaping how I crafted this paper. David Novak and Carl Leget were significant in shaping my discussion of justice throughout the paper, especially when it comes to understanding the notion of the common good. The styles of both Stump and Leget in handling the issues of both justice and suicide were helpful for thinking about how to narrow the scope of my own project at certain points.
- ³ Although outside the scope of this paper, Leget raises the objection of why we should think Aquinas is an authority on the wrongness of suicide. He points to the objections of both John Donne and David Hume to raise challenges to Aquinas’s argument against suicide. As Leget reads Donne, Donne argues that one cannot know whether suicide is wrong unless one looks at the intention of the action, and he appeals specifically to martyrdom to make his case. As Leget reads Hume, Hume raises an

objection to each of Aquinas’s arguments. To the first, Hume objects that suicide does not bring harm to the person in every instance. To the second argument, Hume objects that the obligations between members of society only hold if both sides “have profit of each other” (Leget 2002, p. 283). And to the third argument, Hume objects that because of God’s total providence over the world, one’s taking their own life could never be outside of that providence. These objections came from the new worldviews that each represents—the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Leget was helpful in pointing out the need to take into account an author’s context when analyzing an argument. While helpful, the constraints of space in this paper prevent me from examining these arguments in detail; (see Leget 2002, pp. 279–84; Donne 1983; Hume 1992).

- 4 In his broader discussion of charity, Aquinas describes it as a form that makes human beings fit for union with God. This form is not also necessary for human beings to be able to see God, but once we are made fit for union with God, we are then able to enjoy him in this life and the next. Novak (1975) picks up on this notion of charity and how it relates to the wrongness of suicide in relationship to oneself and with God. Because of the focus in this paper on the relationship between the church community and individuals struggling with suicidal ideation, I have chosen to omit this discussion, but it is an important aspect of Aquinas’s thought on charity; see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.52 and 53; IV. 21 and 22. *ST II-II* 23.1, Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences* I. 17 (Lectura Romana) q1. a1 and a2; (see also Novak 1975, pp. 53–54; Stump 2018, chap. 7).
- 5 I am also indebted to correspondence with Eleonore Stump for this way of reading what mortal sin means.
- 6 Novak contains a wonderful discussion of how one’s love of self is connected to love of God and the virtue of charity. He sees natural inclination as connected to charity, as charity perfects human nature (including inclination, especially when it comes to the love of God) (Novak 1975, pp. 53–54); see also *ST II-II*. q23 a1. and *ST II-II*. q26. a4.
- 7 I am indebted to Aristotle’s discussion of the political community as understood in the *Nicomachean Ethics* for my own use of it here, (see also Stump 2003; Novak 1975). Later in the paper, I modify the notion of community from political to religious communities, but I think much of what is true of political community can translate to religious community, with some modification.
- 8 I am indebted to (Leget 2002, pp. 289–93) for putting Aquinas’s discussion of suicide in terms of relationships.
- 9 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer’s comments for the shape of these sections on justice.
- 10 I am indebted to (Stump 2003) for many of the citations of Aquinas. I am also indebted to her chapter on Justice in that text for the structure and examples found in this section. My examples were inspired by hers (Stump 2003, p. 317).
- 11 This way of understanding the wrongness of suicide might come off as offensive to the modern reader. While not pertinent to my discussion at this point in the text, Leget offers a helpful explanation for this initial reactions by pointing to a difference in worldviews, (see Leget 2002, pp. 279–85, 292–93).
- 12 Clark (2011) and Pope (1991) argue that almsgiving is an expression of charity for Aquinas. One way we might also understand such avoidance of sin is as an expression of spiritual almsgiving, which can involve the correction of a sinner, see *ST II-II*. q32. q2. I am also indebted to correspondence with Eleonore Stump for my understanding of almsgiving on this point.
- 13 See Tynes et al. for similar findings among Black young people who struggled with suicidal ideation post discrimination on online platforms.
- 14 For more on Van Orden’s study of the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide, (see Van Orden et al. 2008, 2012).
- 15 I should note that my discussion of charity will not include its relation to the gifts of the Holy Spirit or to the infused virtues. For more on this, see *ST I-II*. q68.a1-a2 and *ST I-II*. q62.a1. (See also Stump 2010, 2011, 2016, 2018) for more on the gifts and infused virtues. It should also be noted that the form of charity is received freely. This coming to will what God wills is not forced on the human person, but one that they themselves desire. See Stump 2010, 2018 for more on this point about justification, or coming to will what God wills.
- 16 There is some ambiguity among the commentators about whether, for Aquinas, charity is infused at baptism or in connection to the presence of faith. Eleonore Stump (2003, chap. 12; 2011, 2016, 2018, chap. 7), for example, argues that Aquinas thinks that the virtues are infused at the moment of justification, when one comes to faith in Christ. Brian Davies (1992, chaps. 16 and 17) emphasizes that, on Aquinas’s view it is Christ’s work on the cross that effects salvation, and we are united to that work via faith. Davies cites *ST III*. Q62. a5 to this effect (see also *ST III*. Q61, a1, reply to objection 3). The sacraments remain important as physical signs of the experience of salvation (Davies 1992, chap. 17), but there is some debate on what their importance for salvation is. Aquinas deals with baptism in the *ST III*. Q60–69 (see also Davies 1992, chap. 17). For more on this debate over what baptism accomplishes, (see Weed 2014, 2019; Kaczor and Sherman 2020; Kaczor 2020; Bauerschmidt 2013). I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to address this point about baptism.
- 17 All references to the *Summa Contra Gentiles* are from the following version: (Aquinas 1955–1957).
- 18 For a more technical explanation of how the form comes to be in the believer, (see Sherwin 2005, chap. 3).
- 19 I use selections from the Paris and Lectura Romana versions with equal authority. As I understand the two texts, both contain the same ideas, but in more direct expression in the Lectura Romana. Thus, I hold both versions to be equally representative of Aquinas’s views, see (Doyle 2016). All references to Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Sentences* are from the following edition: (Aquinas 2008).
- 20 For more on how God is goodness itself, and God’s relationship to that goodness and to himself, (see Stump 2010), “Theodicy in Another World” and “What We Care About: The Desires of the Heart”; as well as (Stump 2003), “Goodness”. For more on the

claim that sanctification involves growth in goodness, becoming more like God, (see Stump 2018, pp. 204–9, 290–99). Aquinas claims in the *ST* II-II. Q23 that part of charity or a person's friendship with God involves loving what that other person loves as well. If God is goodness, and what it means to love God is to love goodness, then sanctification means that we grow in love of goodness itself. All references to the *Summa Theologica* are from the following version: (Aquinas 1947).

- 21 My understanding of Aquinas on love in this section and what follows is heavily shaped by Stump (2006; 2010, chaps. 5 and 6).
 22 I am indebted especially to Pope (1991) and Clark (2011) for the shape of this section on charity and the citations used.
 23 In what follows I discuss flourishing. I am grateful for the correspondence with Dan Haybron for my use of flourishing in this paper.

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