New Blackfriars

DOI:10.1111/nbfr.12133

Baptism and Its Glorious Cortege

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> The grace which baptism confers is accompanied by the glorious cortege of all the virtues, which by a special gift of God penetrate the soul simultaneously with it.
>
> – The Catechism of the Council of Trent

The course of true virtue never did run smooth. We are given gifts. We make progress. We are given more gifts. We regress. We reject the gifts, we set them aside, we forget them. Next, we turn to the sacraments and again we are infused with the virtues. We are given gifts . . .

These moral processes are the subject of this brief thought experiment. Our starting over again and again means that the sacramental-moral life is marked by a series of beginnings and ends.[1] These ends and beginnings are interrelated and inextricable, for beginnings become ends and ends, beginnings.[2] The process of beginnings becoming ends

[1] Thomas Aquinas writes in the *Summa Theologiae*, *Tertia Pars* question 60 article 3:

> A sacrament properly speaking is that which is ordained to signify our sanctification. In which three things may be considered: the very cause of our sanctification, which is Christ's passion; the form of our sanctification, which is grace and the virtues; and the ultimate end of our sanctification, which is eternal life.

Hereafter *ST* 3a q60 a3. I focus on the "form of our sanctification," specified by Thomas' binding together of the virtues and sacraments. I treat baptism but other equally rich passages include *ST* 3a q73 on Eucharist and charity and 3a q85 in which penance is a virtue as well as a sacrament. This paper presumes the continuity of Thomas' thought between *ST* 2a and 3a and along similar lines Servais Pinckaers O.P., Romanus Cessario O.P., and Matthew Levering all identify a lacuna in scholarship concerning the connection between his moral thought and Christology in *Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) and *The Pinckaers Reader* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005); *Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); *Christ's Fulfillment of Torah and Temple* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002. Thomas P. Harmon begins to address that gap in "The Sacramental Consummation of the Moral Life According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *New Blackfriars* 91.1034: 465–480.

[2] Using Thomas' language, the sacrament of baptism entails (1) a new beginning and new end as orientation toward one's supernatural end and (2) a series of beginnings and ends as reorientation of one's finite ends toward their supernatural goal, thus our attaining or failing to attain these (newly oriented) natural ends.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12133 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and ends, beginnings is captured by two principles that describe this movement: "dynamism" and "unraveling."

Dynamism and unraveling are heuristic terms that bear out the particulars of the more general thesis regarding beginnings and ends.[3] They help capture something of the vagaries of life, whether unexpected, instantaneous, anticipated, or gradual. They stand in relationship to growth and deterioration, yet dynamism is not strictly equivalent to growth nor unraveling to deterioration. Dynamism and unraveling are principles relative to the fixed realities of the moral life, sacraments, sanctification, and sin. Dynamism is a movement that remains indeterminate to an end; unraveling is a mere undoing. They assume their determinative character by being taken up into the context that charity provides. These two heuristic terms of dynamism and unraveling are moments on the way of love marking its contours and defying its being characterized as one of straightforward, sequential progress. Beginnings, ends, dynamism, and unraveling are all commentary on the wayfarer's return to God by the *via caritatis,* sustained and made manifest in the sacraments.

I begin with Augustine's account of his own baptism, a modest one by any standards. It stands toward the end of Book IX of the *Confessions*. Despite its being at the end, baptism does not bring resolution. Rather baptism initiates a *new* set of struggles and a *new* set of inquiries. At the heart of the moral life is a *dynamism* that demands continual recourse to the healing power of the sacraments. Such an insight is not unfamiliar to readers of Augustine, but its relationship to the sacrament of baptism is particularly illuminating. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells his disciples of the baptism by which disciples shall take the virtue of the Holy Spirit coming from above and become Christ's witnesses.[4] Baptism becomes the entry into a community whose common property conferred to all its members is a special type of relationship and union with God.

The second moment in this episode is ironic, as baptism becomes the very mechanism by which Augustine is formed to recognize that he is not formed in the virtues. It constitutes a kind of *unraveling.* Baptism endows a new identity, unmasking – indeed identifying – illusion. After

[3] Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the sacraments themselves with respect to dynamism: "the Blessed Sacrament contains a dynamism, which has the goal of transforming mankind and the world into the New Heaven and New Earth, into the unity of the risen body," (87) and "think of the great saints of history, from whom streams of faith, hope, and love really came forth, we can understand these words and thus understand something of the dynamism of Baptism, of the promise and vocation it contains" (223); moreover he speaks of the "dynamism of the liturgy as a whole" (122) in *Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco, CA: St. Ignatius Press, 2000). This paper's invocation of the same principle of dynamism would be well complemented by engaging and drawing out Cardinal Ratzinger's treatment to offer a broader treatment of the Christian life.

[4] Vulgate: "Accipietis virtutem supervenientis Spiritus Sancti in vos et eritis mihi testes . . . "

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his baptism Augustine continues in the confessional mode. His manner of proceeding post-baptism is telling.

To read Thomas along these same lines requires these same two principles: dynamism and unraveling. By the time I get there, I invert the order of these two principles so that I identify in Thomas first unraveling and then dynamism. I look to his work in the *Secunda Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, question 47 where he treats baptism in the context of infused prudence. Specifically with respect to baptism, Thomas provides the reader the resources to resist naming the reader's own incompletion as something more than it is. For perfection is often only partial and always only relative. Progress is punctuated by sin. *Unraveling* – what it is and what it looks like – depends on the kind of sin to which one is tempted. Yet all must become unraveled before God.

In a *dynamic* move, Thomas opens the reader up to the multiple ways in which we have yet to be perfected by the virtues in all the virtues' various kinds. He brings to light the various ways in which God's work perfects the human all the way down, leaving no part of His creature unredeemed. This sanctifying work happens through the creature's final recourse to the sacraments.

These cumulative insights highlight the paradox at the heart of any saint's account of the moral life: saints know best and most of all they are sinners. Their recourse is the sacraments, which genuinely infuse the virtues. This display of the integral relationship between sacraments and virtues in Augustine and Thomas is brief and necessitates certain theses regarding the relationship between acquired vice and infused virtue.[5] Setting these out in bare outline is the first aim for this thought experiment. The second is my intimation that our reading Augustine on baptism and the virtues in the *Confessions* makes us better readers of Thomas and the virtues in the *Summa Theologiae,* though the intimation is only suggestive. The significance of this experiment is modest, however, it may serve as an initial contribution to a desperately needed systematic and constructive reading of the relationship between virtues and sacraments especially in the *Secunda Pars* and the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae.*

Augustine

In Book IX of his *Confessions*, Augustine writes:

> And so we were baptized, and all our dread about our earlier lives dropped away from us. During the days that followed I could not get enough of the wonderful sweetness that filled me as I meditated on your deep design for the salvation of the human race. How copiously I wept at your hymns and canticles, how intensely was I moved by the lovely harmonies of your singing Church! Those voices flooded my ears, and the truth was

[5] My conclusions fit well with the work of Romanus Cessario, O.P. cited in Footnote 1.

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> distilled into my heart until it overflowed in loving devotion; my tears ran down, and I was the better for them.[6]

This is Augustine's entire narration of his own baptism. It is curious given Augustine's characteristic preoccupation with initiation into the Christian life. This understated account hardly serves as the kind of literary climax that a reader expects. The reader of the *Confessions* is trained to see what a crucial event this must necessarily be in the life of any Christian. Moreover, the reader ascertains how momentous an undertaking this must necessarily be for this particular sinner who has for so long gratified his habits of resistance. The reader rightly waits for baptism to assume spotlight and center stage. Instead the reader receives this mild and modest report. Having stated these curiosities, I hope to render them incurious by giving attention to Augustine's theology of baptism and ongoing conversion.

In Augustine's account of his own baptism, he intersperses his personal conversion narrative with the stories of the conversions and deaths of others – of Verecundus and Nebridius. In Augustine's baptism, he is joined by others – his friend Alypius and his son Adeodatus. Following the brief record of their baptisms – of Alypius, Adeodatus, and Augustine – Augustine meditates on the use of hymns in the liturgy and the discovery of the bodies of two saints. His reflections testify to his praise for the fullness of the presence of God to us. The arc of the story moves from "once I had gasped for you" to "now at last I breathed your fragrance, insofar as your wind can blow through our house of straw."[7]

The method of conveying the message is, in part, the message. Augustine's mode of interspersing and shifting says something of the character of conversion. Conversion itself is an interspersing and a shifting. Augustine moves from telling of his struggle to maintain his individuality to the universal story, from the story of Augustine to the story of one becoming a part of the people of God. We find this characterization echoed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which reads, "the person baptized *belongs no longer to himself*, but to him who died and rose for us. From now on, he is called to be subject to others, to serve them in the communion of the Church, and to 'obey and submit' to the Church's leaders."[8] The public character of baptism is affirmed in Book IX and explored in the previous book in Victorinus' the profession of faith. Despite the priests' offers, Victorinus refuses to privatize the act of baptism.[9]

[6] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Random House, Inc.,1998), IX.6.14.

[7] Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.7.16.

[8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶ 1269.

[9] David Aers notes Augustine's concern with baptism being especially a public act, involving neighbors and self, inseparably collective and individual, offered to Christ (*Salvation and Sin,* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 6–7). Oliver O'Donovan adds

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In this shift of Augustine's from 'the story of Augustine' to 'the story of the people of God', he includes the narratives of other individuals – of Verecundus and Nebridius, of Alypius and Adeodatus – subordinating all to the larger story of which they have now become a part. In Book IX alone Augustine weaves together five deaths and five baptisms to highlight themes of our rebirth and God's work in us as God's works are wrought through us. Significant action becomes something that happens to us, not something we do.

Baptism's effects include "salvation, higher spiritual knowledge, and stability of soul," according to one persuasive interpretation of Augustine.[10] What contemplation of divine things there is, since after all Augustine is quite interested in it as a catalyst in his narrative, is grounded in the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist, confession. Contemplation at best provides moments of transcendence, however, such moments are not sustainable and are perhaps not fundamentally what the Christian life is about. The Christian life is about growing in love.

Now I come to another point that I take to be telling. Just as with baptism, so too with the virtues. Again, reader expectation is not fulfilled in Augustine's display of the virtues consequent to baptism. A reader may have thought that, in the pattern of the pre-conversion narrative, the post-baptismal narrative would involve Augustine's re-narration of Augustine's own worldly activities, now giving God's credit for the virtues. One expects to hear about how much his life changes or at the very least begins to change as he is shaped by a whole litany of Christian practices.

Rather than focusing on this new life into which he has been called, Augustine focuses on his mother as exemplar. He turns to her virtues and to her death. Now the reader sees a display of the virtues in the example of Monica. He writes, "I will speak not of her gifts, but of the gifts with which you endowed her," writing of her wisdom, gentleness, mercy, devotion, patience, peace-making, and loyalty.[11] These virtues that Augustine is now able to individuate gives good indication of the kind of narrative in which Augustine has been adopted. The new narrative and the new individual virtues are inseparable from one another. Only now that Augustine is Christian can he see that the gifts with which God endowed her are called wisdom, gentleness, mercy, devotion, and so on.

to the discussion by noting that man's life as social goes beyond the philosophers, Augustine stressing the "distinctive" capacity of Christian thought to "break free of an individualist notion of the good" and develop "a social one" ("The Political Thought of the *City of God*, 19," in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics Past and Present* ed. O'Donovan et al (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004): 48–72, 51–2).

[10] John Peter Kenney, *Mysticism of St. Augustine: Rereading the Confessions* (New York: Routledge, 2005), esp. pages 11 and 76; 75.

[11] Augustine, *Confessions*, IX.8.17–22.

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Now that Augustine focuses on his mother and her virtues, the reader also sees a display of the virtues in the authorship of Augustine. His writing is an attempt to be truthful. In loving devotion, he recounts Monica's virtues and describes his own struggle to love her appropriately. He resists despair. He confesses sin. He intercedes for her. His account is instructive insofar as Augustine directs his focus on an exemplar rather than on himself. Turning his gaze to the virtues of another, Augustine himself displays the virtues that he is now enabled to see.[12] His rhetoric and narrative images the theology it depicts.

In sum, Augustine's provoking account of his own baptism unfolds along the lines of least two significant elements: again what I call 'dynamism' and 'unraveling.' These two elements are characteristic of Augustine's story only insofar as they are a part of this particular narrative concerning growth in virtue. This narrative determines what growth looks like and therefore what dynamism and unraveling are. By the principal element of dynamism, baptism itself does not provide any solution to Augustine's search but becomes the means by which he is confirmed in a new stage of the soul's journey. He now has full access to the Eucharist and penance as his succor during his struggles to lead the life to which he is called. Baptism involves him in ritualistic tracing of his steps back to the Eucharistic altar. With the gracious assistance of the sacraments, the virtues are open to perfection over the course of a lifetime.

There is also an unraveling, which itself is in part the explanation for his recourse to the sacraments. Augustine now has formalized his confession of being a sinner before God. Baptism confirms previous failures in virtue. It becomes the means by which Augustine sees that any of his own attempts at virtue will damn him to the same fate. Rather than baptism eliminating the need for Augustine's confession, baptism does quite the opposite as it underscores confessions' continued need.

Thomas

Thomas adopts these insights of Augustine regarding the virtues and sacraments, and I focus on his doing so in the *Second Part of the Second Part* of the *Summa, Question 47* (*ST* 2a2ae, q47). Here Aquinas treats prudence and in article 14, he asks whether prudence is in all who have grace. He agrees with Gregory that all having grace also have

[12] The several strands of rhetoric surrounding Augustine's depiction of tears and grief could be another illustration of my point here. One might compare them, pre-baptism and post. His tears over Monica's death are among the most complex. See Paul Griffiths, "Tears and Weeping: An Augustinian View," *Faith & Philosophy* 28.1 (2011): 19–28.

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prudence.[13] Even the young may have a form of prudence, according to the objection and reply to objection 3. Nestled in this reply, Thomas brings baptism into his discussion of the virtues to explain the unusual character of the "prudence of grace":

> Acquired prudence comes from practice, and so, as remarked in the *Ethics*, time and experience are required to produce it. Accordingly the young possess it neither as a settled quality nor as an activity. The prudence of grace, however, is caused by God's imparting, and consequently baptized children who have not yet come to the use of reason have prudence as a settled endowment, though not as an activity . . . Whereas in those who have the use of reason it is also present as an activity concerning the things necessary for salvation. Then by exercising it they merit an increase till at length it grows complete, as with the other virtues. The Apostle tells us that *strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern both good and evil*.[14]

Thomas introduces baptism to explain how even the young may be prudent. The baptized enjoy this "settled endowment" simply by virtue of their entrance into a community, the body of Christ, the Church, which is given prudence as gift. In such cases, the Church is given the knowledge and friendship with God that makes salvation possible.

Children who become members of the Church are given what the Church has. They receive this habit, "though not [yet] as an activity." When things go rightly, children learn to properly use this endowment finally actualizing this habit. When things go wrongly, children may grow to reject their endowment though they never lose their baptismal character. At worst, such children become prodigal sons. They never lose their identity. They always retain access to what is not rightfully theirs in the first place.

Thomas is careful to distinguish this prudence of baptized children from its complete forms. Its complete forms entail the activity of prudence, which in turn merits its increase. Therefore baptism may mark the infusion of a form of virtues not available to the creature apart from it, but baptism is only a start. The creature must act through the virtues endowed by the sacraments for the virtues' perfection. Thomas mentions baptism to mark the important difference that it introduces to the moral life and to furthermore signal that the virtues it confers must be made complete through their exercise.

Thomas' allusion at the end of this passage – "The Apostle tells us that *strong meat belongs to them that are of full age, those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern both good and evil*" – gives the reader a sense of the progression Thomas intends for those who are

[13] *ST* 2a2ae q47 a14 s.c.

[14] *ST* 2a2ae q47 a14 ad3; see *ST* 3a q69 a6.

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to grow in virtue. Although children may receive prudence through a settled endowment, it is not yet enacted. Progress: the young begin to act on this endowment. More progress: those who act on this endowment are called to even further activity, hoping to "merit an increase till at length it grows complete."[15]

Yet Thomas would not overestimate our growth. The formation in these virtues carries along with it a sharpened capacity to recognize how we are not formed in the virtues in an 'unraveling.' Growth in virtue makes us constantly young again, and thus we must constantly take recourse to the sacraments.

Unraveling finds its home in several moments of Thomas' *Summa.* Take, for example, his account of acquired virtues in *ST* 1a2ae. Contrary to expectations for virtues that are ours according to "nature," acquired virtues are surprisingly "theological." For Thomas clarifies that acquired virtues are "not of course without God's help" and "not without God."[16] They are movements of love that express our relationship with a gratuitous and loving Creator.[17] Moreover this profound account of agency results from Thomas' brilliant combination of an ostensible metaphysical ordering with his careful attention to the moral and spiritual formation of his readers.[18] As agents ourselves, we readers may infer that progress we attempt to make *on our own* may make us more sinful rather than less![19]

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *ST* 1a2ae q62 a1 co. et q109 a2; *De veritate* 24 a14 co.

[17] See Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God*: *the 'divine science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006): c.152.

[18] A dual emphasis on the metaphysical ordering of the *Summa* with Thomas' concerns for the formation of his reader is my attempt to synthesize the insights of Jean-Pierre Torrell, Joseph Boyle, and Mark Jordan. (As uneasy as a synthesis this may be with such disparate authors!) Substantiating this claim would bolster exactly the relationship between the *Confessions* and *Summa* that I posit here. See Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol I: The Person and His Work*. Trans. Robert Royal. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1996). Boyle, *Aquinas's* Summa Theologiae: *Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006): 1–24. Jordan, "The *Summa's* Reform of Moral Teaching – and Its Failures" in *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. Fergus Kerr (London: SCM, 2003): 41–54; "Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* as Pedagogy" in *Medieval Education*, eds. Ronald Begley and Joseph W. Koterski (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005): 133–142.

For a sampling of different orderings attributed to the *Summa Theologiae*, see Brian Johnstone, "The Debate on the Structure of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas: from Chenu (1939) to Metz (1998)" in *Aquinas as Authority,* ed. Paul Van Geest, Harm Goris, and Carlo Leget (Leuven: Peeters, 2002): 187–200.

[19] This rhetoric is best tempered with qualification, but qualification renders the claim more grave rather than less since it has specifically to do with mortal sin. Thomas writes: "Mortal sin is incompatible with the infused virtues, but it is consistent with acquired virtue: while venial sin is compatible with virtues, whether infused or acquired" (*ST* 1a2ae q71 a4; see too *ST* 1a2ae q63 a2 ad2). Although the difference between infused and acquired virtue has several explanations, here Thomas concentrates the character of acquired virtue as neither generated nor destroyed in a single action. Moreover I do not think the point for Thomas is

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So much for Thomas' unraveling; now, his dynamism. For both Thomas and Augustine, charity always has room to grow. The moral life is constantly in flux, moving from potency to act. Christians either grow through participation in the sacraments and in the life of God open to them by charity, or they vitiate and even relinquish their gifts through sin. Baptism plays a crucial role in this movement toward or away from God. Thomas' invocation of it shows simultaneously its power and its limitation with respect to the agents who receive them. Its power is to confer the infused virtues, which in turn perfect the acquired. Baptism's limitation is that it may not effect our full perfection. Yet its limitation is essentially our limitation, as limited creatures wounded by sin. To the extent that sin compromises the virtues conferred by baptism, the sacrament is received while we stifle "the glorious cortege of all the virtues."[20] We are limited, incomplete, when we receive the sacraments without also receiving their fruits.

Another way to navigate the relationship between the sacraments and the virtues comes by language Thomas offers elsewhere in the *Summa* of 'imperfect' and 'perfect.' To receive the sacraments in good faith but to fail to grow in virtue names an 'imperfect' participation in the perfection open to us creatures through the sacraments. (Of course we bring inherent limitation to the sacraments by the fact that we need them in the first place.) Beyond the limitations of nature are the limitations we choose ourselves. We choose limitation by sin, which comes to bear on our reception of them. As we choose sin, we choose our own imperfection.

Yet the power of the sacraments should not be underestimated, as when we receive them most fully.[21] This is the case of receiving the sacraments and growing in the virtues. When we participate 'perfectly,' the sacraments are the instruments by which we are enabled to overcome our limitation by sin. In such a case, the grace of the sacraments is truly "accompanied by the glorious cortege of all the virtues."[22] The sacraments therefore perfect all aspects of the human person, not only completing the virtues but by conferring upon them a graced unity in

that we are "sinful" without infused virtue, for in fact his emphasis lands somewhere else in *ST* 1a2ae q71 – that acquired habits enjoy a kind of stability in the face of sin. This is not to downplay the role of sin in alienating creatures from God but to acknowledge what Thomas appears to acknowledge: sin is expected. Although it is possible not to sin, we sin. Rather than dismissing the need for grace, further underscores the needfulness for the sacraments to help fix us against the onslaught of sin. Whereas sin disintegrates, the sacraments integrate. Thomas' turn first to sin and then to the sacraments means that sin need not have the last word.

[20] *Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

[21] I imply the dark side of this thesis: that our incomplete participation has gradations ranging from complete rejection to partial perfection, e.g., infused virtues alongside acquired vice.

[22] *Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

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participated likeness of the Divine Nature.[23] The most complete and perfect participation in the sacraments entails the perfection of both the acquired and infused virtues. Nothing remains untouched by charity. Describing our perfection, Thomas leaves no part of the human person behind because he understands that neither does God.

In this rendering, Thomas' relative lack of focus on sin means that sin does not determine salvation. Charity wins the day. Thomas' treatment of sin in fact shares a great deal in common with Augustine's account of the same. Augustine says the good life consists in the right regulation of loves. In *De Trinitate*, he writes:

> For the soul loving its own power, slips onwards from the whole which is common, to a part, which belongs especially to itself. And that apostatizing pride, which is called "the beginning of sin," whereas it might have been most excellently governed by the laws of God, if it had followed Him as its ruler in the universal creature, by seeking something more than the whole, and struggling to govern this by a law of its own, is thrust on, since nothing is more than the whole, into caring for a part; and thus by lusting after something more, is made less.[24]

Thomas iterates the Augustinian line on loves using language of false, imperfect, and perfect. Thomas' variants between false, imperfect, and perfect virtue lend themselves to naming how in the particulars one loves God either falsely, imperfectly, or perfectly. One can thereby also name how one loves the goods of the world either falsely, imperfectly, or perfectly. Sin is itself a false or imperfect love of the world, for it makes worldly goods out to be something they are not. In sin, the soul, "loving its own power, slips onwards from the whole which is common, to a part, which belongs especially to itself."[25] In contrast, the only true love is love for something for what it truly is.

Sin marks a stifling in growth and virtue. That is not all. Sin finally leads to growth in virtue, by God's grace. To recognize sin is an achievement that requires that one go back and relearn the things one has learned so far regarding the virtues. This real progression, rather than the simulacra that precedes it, finally leads to the fullness of life open to us in the sacraments. Creatures, rather than determining themselves, are finally are determined by God's love. The process of the *Confessions* shows readers of the *Summa* what narration and re-narration looks like. They show how growth in sin enjoys a complex relationship to growth in virtue.

[23] *ST* 1a2ae q110 a3 et 4; 3a q62 a2. Arguably I could strengthen this thesis by way of Thomas' identification of the sacramental character with the character of Christ in *ST* 3a q63.

[24] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Arthur West Haddan, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3., ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), Book XII, Chapter 9 (Paragraph 14). Thomas cites extensively Augustine's *De Trinitate* in his account of vice and sin, *ST* 1a2ae qq71–89, esp. Book XII in q74.

[25] *Ibid.*

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By this reading of the *Summa*, 'perfect' and 'imperfect' themselves become stages in a narrative that can only be told from one perspective. That is, the movement from imperfect to perfect participation is a narrative that can only be told from the perspective of more perfect participation. Those who are imperfectly participating will not have a sense of that imperfection. If they come to recognize it, they have already moved toward perfect participation.

This perspectival shift is yet another lesson that *Confessions* offers to readers of Thomas' *Summa.* Augustine helps readers see that one's progression in the moral life is not always seen by the self who embodies that narrative and if it is, it is often only glimpsed retrospectively. The very notion of beginning and ends are retrospective notions projected onto events. Augustine is sure of naming his beginnings because he is sure of the story by which he measures them. Once he is given something of a glimpse of the ultimate constant standpoint, as a *viator in via* he can begin to identify the fragmentariness of his activities.[26] As Augustine begins this retrospective narration and re-narration in the *Confessions*, he sees himself in no theoretical, general, or universal human terms, but in light of the Gospel. He defies characterizations of sin or virtue in nontheistic or even vaguely theistic terms because the only terms appropriate are Trinitarian. Likewise readers of Thomas might finally employ this perspectival shift as they read the initial work on the virtues from the ultimate standpoint of Christology and the sacraments. Again, all virtue has a theological character, even if it is not, technically, "theological virtue"!

As I draw this thought experiment to a close, I ought to subject my own conclusions to scrutiny. I offer two points of self-criticism. First, I use the word 'narrative' often throughout the paper, perhaps too much. This is especially evident with Augustine's narrative, which sits uneasily within the description 'narrative' as it is not ordered temporally or chronologically but rather iconically.[27] What Augustine appears to want from his own narrative and his narrativization of the narratives of others is the inscription of all those narratives into a tableau that can be looked at *in ictu oculi*. It appears then that narrative is a preliminary interpretive term. Therefore, I need to go to greater lengths to explain its being overcome to the extent possible. These additional efforts would likely thicken the reading of Augustine I offer here.

A second point of self-criticism is that I have valorized what I find Thomas' fruitful distinction between perfect and imperfect to a degree

[26] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Who Needs to Learn What from Whom? A partially autobiographical reflection on contemporary academic philosophy and one particular Thomist tradition" (February, 2005), 28.

[27] I am indebted to conversations with Paul Griffiths on this topic as well as his "The Limits of Narrative Theology," Chapter 12 in *Faith and Narrative*, ed. Keith Yandell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 217–236.

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that exceeds Thomas' own use. Such a concentration may turn the distinction between perfect and imperfect into an end itself, which is ultimately misguided. Instead, according to the principles of my proposed reading, I should relocate Thomas as standing with Augustine regarding sin and sanctity. What does this mean, ultimately, for Thomas' reading regarding baptism and the virtues?

Dynamism and unraveling are ways of naming the complexities of greater participation in that friendship with Charity Itself, God Himself. Such a movement does not end in ever greater specification of kinds of virtue, but in a Christological moment. The road to fullness in virtue *begins* with baptism, which again turns the gaze upon Christ and His work wrought on our behalf. Renewal in baptism is not our final beginning but we are made new again in the renewal of our baptismal vows and in the celebration of the Eucharist. Dynamism leads each new beginning ineluctably to its end; unraveling points to the penultimacy of every end and every beginning. Far from a linear progression, growth in virtue looks more like a loop back to the confessional, the font, and the altar as one returns to one's beginnings again.

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https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12133 Published online by Cambridge University Press