

## ABSTRACT

### Reclaiming Community: The Practice of Christian Friendship

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This thesis will draw from a Classical philosophical background describing the importance of friendship and then add an essential Christocentric element. By integrating philosophical, theological, and biblical sources, a richer understanding of friendship will be reached and resources for reclaiming a deeper sense of Christian friendship will be given. Finally, by drawing upon these resources and the practices and liturgies of the Church an example of how to practice genuine Christian friendship will be shown.

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RECLAIMING COMMUNITY: THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP

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By

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## PREFACE

What does it mean to be a friend, to have a friend? We believe that true, good, and virtuous friendship is a subject worthy of our most thoughtful consideration, perhaps because wise figures have considered it so. But although we hear a lot about "friends" in contemporary life, the current practice of friendship seems narrow, flattened, and even deformed. Because of the myriad technological means at our disposal, we may see and know the intimate details of the lives of our acquaintances, and this knowledge we may interpret as being true intimacy and evidence of genuine friendship. If, for example, I know what a person has had for breakfast a given morning, and what is the most important item in her wardrobe, and that she struggles with weight gain, and that her aunt died from cancer last week, I must be her friend—yes? Actually, no. In fact, I am merely a "friend" on Facebook. I have been given access to her electronic autobiography, and I am free to trespass on her mental landscape. Because of my glib request to "friend" her, she replied, "yes."

It is not only in the virtual world that the notion of friendship has been degraded. Even without technological methods, what passes for "community" and "intimacy" in our current society is clearly neither of the two. This is seen on college campuses where the need for human connection is recognized and embraced by students, but is sadly evidenced in the notion of "friends with benefits." No longer are the goods of the intimacy enabled by sexual contact exclusively reserved for romantic relationships; rather, a more free and "inclusive" approach to friendship is being cultivated, where

consent is the highest virtue.<sup>1</sup> These sorts of encounters dissolve the problematic “friend zone”—that place in relationships that people want to avoid because it means that instead of the sought after romantic relationship, one has to “settle” for friendship. However, there is a false assumption now that one can have both. This type of “no strings attached” sexual relationship can be seen in non-physical encounters as well. People are no longer expected to maintain the same relationships for years—the sense of loyalty that used to accompany friendship has diminished. If both parties are not receiving what they want from the friendship the bonds are easily dissolved and new friendships made, making the friendship and the friend disposable.

This general account of friendship is common in our culture. I would like to argue that such an understanding of friendship lacks depth and meaning. Indeed, the contemporary take on friendship denies what C.S. Lewis called “the happiest and most fully human of the loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue.”<sup>2</sup> Nor does it seem plausible that many people today would agree with Aristotle that “no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods.”<sup>3</sup> And finally, it would be difficult to imagine all 686 of my Facebook friends being willing to lay down their lives

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<sup>1</sup> The giving of “consent” is taken to be the only standard of moral license in many university party scene and anything is permissible as long as consent is given by both parties. Indeed some universities are employing new cell phone applications which track consent for sexual interactions in order to protect their students from sexual assault charges and allow them to have social sex “responsibly.” For an example see: <http://we-consent.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C.S., *The Inspirational Writings of C.S. Lewis*. (Edison, New Jersey: Inspirational Press, 1987), 87.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Roger Crisp. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 2000), 143.

for me, as it says in John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>4</sup> What has been lost? Can it be restored?

It seems that three broad problematics might be employed to characterize the narrow and flattened conception of friendship I have described thus far:

1) A self-centered orientation that views friendship as a means of obtaining pleasure or profit.

2) A misconception of friendship that sees it as something easily begun and ended.

3) The view that Christian friendship can either be: a) independent of a life with God, or b) independent of a life with others.

What follows is a recovery project, an exploration of what friendship is and why it is essential to a flourishing life. By recovering a richer conception of friendship, specifically friendship between Christians, it will be possible to understand why Cicero would urge one to “put friendship ahead of all other human concerns, for there is nothing so suited to man’s nature, nothing that can mean so much to him, whether in good times or in bad.”<sup>5</sup> As Augustine writes:

In this world two things are essential: life and friendship. Both should be highly prized and we must not undervalue them. Life and friendship are nature’s gifts. God created us that we might exist and live: this is life. But if we are not to remain solitary, there must be friendship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All biblical citations in this thesis will be from: *English Standard Version*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *On Old Age and Friendship*, trans. Frank Copley. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1971) 86.

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermon Denis*, 16, 1.

I will begin in chapter 1 by looking to the wisdom of the pre-Christians, thus presenting a philosophical grounding for the practice of friendship. A reflection on the writings of the ancient philosophers Aristotle and Cicero will establish a working definition for the type of relationship we call “friendship.”

In chapter 2, I will transition to a Christian definition which is made possible through God’s incarnation, passion, and resurrection. This will introduce the notion of being friends with God, a relationship which we are ultimately called to. Aelred of Rievaulx will be the primary guide into this new Christ filled relationship. As his writings on spiritual friendship build directly from Cicero, Aelred will serve as the transition from a pre-Christian understanding of friendship to a Christian one.

Because Christian friendship depends upon an exemplar, the model of Christ will be explored in chapter 3. All Christians have the vocation of Christlikeness, conforming their *Imagio Dei* to He who is God. The most perfect example of friendship is found with Christ, and through Him one is granted the grace to be friends with God. This chapter will be primarily concerned with an extended exegesis of John 15 where Jesus calls on friends to lay down their lives for their neighbors.

After a more fulsome account of friendship has been presented, the practicalities of practicing this rich relationship—Christian friendship—will be explored in chapter 4, particularly how our newfound philosophical, theological, and biblical resources might be used to solve the three problematics of contemporary friendship. Following James K.A. Smith’s thesis that we are formed and shaped more by our daily habits and practices than by knowledge, I will show that Christian friendship can be shaped by the practices of the



Church. I will employ the liturgy of Holy Communion as an especially powerful example of friendship and as a practice for forming Christian friendship.

By arguing that the practice of friendship in our contemporary culture is lacking, and that accordingly something vital to human flourishing is lost, one will come to the conclusion that an account of genuine friendship needs to be reclaimed. Once a better understanding of friendship has been reached, I will argue that the resources needed to practice friendship well are found in the liturgies of worship. With Christ to guide and the Church to nurture, there is great hope for true friendship, true communion, which finds its beginning and end in Christ.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### A Philosophical Account of Friendship

Reclaiming friendship, and ultimately reclaiming Christian friendship, rightly begins with the Greek and Roman philosophical tradition, to which we owe much of our Christian tradition of thought regarding friendship. This chapter will suggest why, as C.S. Lewis writes, “to the Ancients, friendship seemed the happiest and most fully human of the loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue,”<sup>7</sup> and why Aristotle says “no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods.”<sup>8</sup> Though pre-Christian examples of friendship abound, I will focus on the philosophical writings of Aristotle and Cicero. I will use Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero’s *De Amicitia* to develop a foundational understanding of the attributes, practices, and ends of friendship that will help us understand why our culture would do well to reclaim an understanding of friendship that would be in harmony with the ideas of these philosophers.

Aristotle’s influence has been both broad and deep. Indeed, he so impressed Thomas Aquinas that Aquinas referred to him, not by his name, but simply as “the philosopher.” Born in 384 BCE, Aristotle was influential in his day and in the ages to follow. In books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides a rich account of friendship that sees friendship as essential for the moral and virtuous life. In

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<sup>7</sup>Lewis, C.S., *The Inspirational Writings of C.S. Lewis*. (Edison, New Jersey: Inspirational Press, 1987), 87.

<sup>8</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Roger Crisp. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 2000), 143.

these books Aristotle describes three types of friendship, the motivations for practicing them, and the specific attributes, characteristics, and goods of each.

Why would no one choose to live without friendship, even if he had all other goods in life? In order to understand why Aristotle would hold such a view, we first must understand how Aristotle defines friendship. To Aristotle, essential to all friendships are: mutual affection, reciprocated goodwill, and wishing well to each other. These three attributes are united by the virtue of love. A precise definition that clearly delineates the essential attributes of “friendship” will protect against its overuse and ensure that its meaning does not become diluted by being overly broad and inclusive.

Mutual affection requires that there be something pleasing and lovable about both parties in the friendship—a feeling of benevolence between the two. Because friendships require mutual affection, friendships with inanimate objects are impossible, and one-sided affection, for example the infatuation for a celebrity whom you do not know personally, cannot rightfully be called friendship. One-sided affection does occur, and is sometimes felt towards soulless things, but mutual affection in friendship is a state of mind because it requires a mutual, rational choice.

Goodwill is a fundamental attitude of friendship. We must have benevolence for our friends; we must be of goodwill toward them. Friends desire what is best for one another. Aristotle says that goodwill is the first principle of friendship because people cannot be friends if they have not already developed goodwill for each other. He describes goodwill as “latent friendship, which becomes friendship as intimacy develops over time.”<sup>1</sup>

Wishing well is goodwill that is manifested in activity, in beneficence—transferring the mental state of affection to tangible action. For example, cooking your friend a meal, helping them paint their house, or offering them comfort when they are in distress. Thus beneficence can be thought of as the verb form of benevolence. Aristotle writes that in order to move beyond mere goodwill to friendship you must live in each other's company, in order that the love of friendship might be realized in action.<sup>9</sup>

Friendship involves loving, and Aristotle argues there are only three things worthy of love: the pleasurable, the useful, and the good. Thus, he defines three types of friendship as those of pleasure, utility, and virtue. Though the three types of friendship that Aristotle defines will look very different from one another in practice, he assures the reader that in each “there is a corresponding mutual affection that does not go unrecognized.”<sup>10</sup> This is because each friendship also involves the three essentials already discussed: mutual affection, reciprocated goodwill, and wishing well. However, though Aristotle names all three of these relationships as friendship, the first two types--those of pleasure and utility—Aristotle sees as lesser than friendships of virtue, which he considers the rarest and most praiseworthy. Nonetheless, virtue friendships bear resemblance to those of pleasure and utility because good people are both pleasing and useful to each other.

Friendships of pleasure exist between people seeking experiences of amusement and enjoyment. The foundation and motivation for these friendships is pleasure. These friendships are often short lived because they are built on transient and fleeting feelings

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 149

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 145.

and dependent on external circumstances; the moment the friendship ceases to bring either party enjoyment it is readily dissolved. The friend is not loved primarily for who he is but because he brings pleasure to the other. Friendships of pleasure can arise between those who share the same pastimes, humor, or drinking habits, but when the pleasures disappear so do the friendships. For example, friends with whom one may love to dance may be terrible conversation partners, and the moment one loses their love of dancing one may realize that one no longer desires the companionship of the friend.

Friendships of utility exist when there is work to do, a task to complete. These friendships arise when circumstances unite friends in a common goal. Like friendships of pleasure the friend is not loved solely because of their intrinsic nature but rather for an external happenstance, an incidental—for the sake of utility. Because what is useful differs according to circumstance, friendships of utility are also easily terminated. Classic examples of these friendships would be business partners or classmates. Whenever the circumstance changes, the friendship will no longer be necessary; unless it is built on something greater than the project the two people are engaging in, it will not continue.

The most complete and lasting friendship is “virtue friendship.” Virtue friendship can be differentiated from the other types of friendship in that it exists between two good people who form each other morally through the practice of the virtues. This friendship is most complete because the friends wish well to each other for the friends’ sake and the sake of virtue. The basis of the friendship is virtue alone—nothing else. The friendship is whole, complete, and its good is contained entirely within itself. Virtue friendships are grounded in goodness. That is, the friend is loved and the friendship itself is seen as an expression of virtue—a good to be desired and pursued. These friendships are naturally

long lasting because virtue endures. As Aristotle maintains, “The friendships last as long as they are good, and virtue is an enduring thing.”<sup>11</sup>

With these general definitions in mind, some specific attributes of virtue friendship will be defined. Most essential to virtue friendship is moral formation, but the following are also necessary to its practice and the practice of virtue: concord, equality, and self-love. These three additional traits draw out some important elements of virtue friendship and demonstrate how these rare and beautiful friendships might be recognized.

Most persons are formed morally through spending time with good and virtuous people and being inspired and encouraged to virtue by them. Aristotle writes: “the friendship of good people is good, and increases through their association. They seem to become even better through their activity and their improving each other, because each takes impressions from the other of what meets with his approval.”<sup>12</sup> Friendship has a synergistic effect on the two friends, both becoming more virtuous because of the action, one upon the other, of their friendship.

Moral formation occurs through repetitive action, through habits and practices. Friends require those tangible and consistent actions. Friends make us selfless, open, and generous—by the formative process of giving our time and talents for the sake of the other. For example, let us take the virtue of selflessness. Selflessness requires a certain “giving up” of ourselves for our friends, and an attitude of concern for their wellbeing before our own. The actions of selflessness can be seen when we drive our friends to work when their car is broken, when we invite them to have coffee with us because they

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 180.

are distressed and need a comforting word, or when we do any number of things for their sake when we would rather do something else for ourselves.

Many other virtues are formed through friendship; the following are but a few examples. Friendships require patience and perseverance in times of trial. Friendships demand courage when one must defend a friend or when one must confront them. Friendships require honesty and humility—allowing the other to know one deeply, to know one’s faults deeply, so that they can help one to virtue. Friendships involve prudence, to know when to offer comfort or criticism, when to listen and when to speak. Friendship is a moral training ground and the friend is simultaneously a coach, teammate, and cheerleader. The virtues are formed through practice, the two friends sharpening, shaping, and encouraging one another toward goodness.

Concord is another characteristic of virtue friendships. Aristotle defines concord as “when people agree about what is beneficial, rationally choose the same things, and carry out common resolutions.”<sup>13</sup> Concord involves a harmony between friends in their ideals and actions and thus a shared, or common, life. In order to grow in virtue the friends must acknowledge the same virtues and have similar methods for achieving them. Concord is thus essential to virtue friendship because without it the friends will not have a shared conception of the good and thus will be striving toward different ends.

Another important aspect of friendship is that those capable of loving another person in friendship must be able to love themselves. Aristotle writes: “the good person should be a self-lover, since he will help himself as well as benefit others by doing noble

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 172



acts.”<sup>14</sup> The origin of all the relations we have with others and the characteristics of those interactions begin in our relations to ourselves. Furthermore, Aristotle says that we should love ourselves because this is a sign of a good person--wicked people cannot love themselves because they are in internal conflict due to contradictory and conflicting actions. Therefore, self-love is necessary for virtue friendship. This self-love is not selfishness, a turning inward, but a preparation of the soul to turn outward and love generously because the self-lover desires what is best for his soul and takes great pains to act nobly and to strive for the good. Aristotle also has a powerful notion of the friend being a “second self,” in that man feels towards his friend as he feels toward himself. Thus, to love our friends we must love ourselves.

Friendship requires reciprocity in affection and equality in both the actions and parties of the friendship. Therefore, friendships are most likely to occur between those of similar social status. However when friendships arise between a socially superior and inferior party, as in the case of a father and son or a teacher and student, equality still must be established. For example, equality, and therefore reciprocity, can be established by the lesser party offering more love to the more meritorious party: “the better, that is to say, must be loved more than he loves (...) when the affection is in accordance with merit, then a kind of equality results, which of course is thought to be a mark of friendship.”<sup>15</sup>

With Aristotle’s definition of friendship before us, we begin to understand why no one would choose to live without friends. For Aristotle, the *telos* of human life is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 176

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 152.

happiness (which the Greeks termed *eudaimonia*). Aristotle believes that the Good is “that at which everything aims,”<sup>16</sup> and happiness is the Good that is most complete and self sufficient. It is always sought for its own sake. Happiness, “the best and noblest thing,”<sup>17</sup> is attained through activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. Friendship is both a virtue in itself and involves the practice of virtue. Without the encouragement and example given by friends, the path to virtue would be impossible. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine what it would mean to strive for happiness without the help of our friends, without friendship.

Second, Aristotle states that it is friendship, more than justice, laws, and the enforcement of laws, that holds cities together.<sup>18</sup> His argument is that friendship, if well practiced, informs the entire *polis*, not just particular individuals. Friendships are found in community and the extent to which they can flourish depends on the strength of that community. Community, and thus friendships, require that people spend time together and share things in common. “The extent of their community is the extent of their friendship,”<sup>19</sup> for the degree to which possessions and principles are shared in common will be reflected in the depth of the friendship.

Friendships are necessary and to be praised in all circumstances. Some might think that friendships are only necessary in bad times for comfort and support. However, Aristotle notes that: “friendship is in fact more necessary in ill fortune, and so it is useful

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 154.

to have friends that are called for in that instance. But it is nobler in good fortune, so we also seek good people for friends, since it is more worthy of choice to confer benefits on such people and to spend time with them.”<sup>20</sup> Again, friendships are necessary for the practice of virtue, and praiseworthy because they require that practice of virtue, which itself is praiseworthy.

In summary, Aristotle’s portrayal of friendship offers rich insights into the nature of friendship and why one should practice it. This depiction of friendship offers a philosophical grounding for the practice of friendship in both Aristotle’s time and in our own moment.

Tullius Cicero also wrote a discourse on friendship, and through his work, another voice will be added to our pre-Christian discussion of friendship. Cicero was a Roman born in the year 106 BCE. His philosophical writings, including *De Amicitia*, “On Friendship,” were patterned after the works of Plato and Aristotle. *De Amicitia* is, very fittingly, written in the form of a dialogue; instead of treating friendship abstractly in a lecture or a speech, Cicero presents it the form of a discussion between friends.

Like Aristotle, Cicero sees friendship as a primary good to be sought after “for all the gifts the gods have given us, this is our best source of goodness and happiness.”<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, however, Cicero claims that he does not in fact offer a philosophical treatise for the pursuit of friendship:

if you want a philosophical disquisition on friendship, I suggest that you ask those who make a profession of such things. All I can do is to urge you to put friendship ahead of all other human

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>21</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *On Old Age and Friendship*, trans. Frank Copley. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1971) xiii. 47.

concerns, for there is nothing so suited to man's nature, nothing that can mean so much to him, whether in good times or in bad.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Cicero states that friendship is not merely an abstract ideal but something that arises freely from our very nature. To illustrate this, I will compare and contrast the works of Aristotle and Cicero with one another, first giving Cicero's definition for friendship and then highlighting similarities and contrasts between the attributes of friendship identified by these two figures.

While Cicero's discussion of friendship shares many similarities with Aristotle's, he adds a few new ideas to the conversation. First, Cicero asserts a more exclusive definition of friendship. Second, he claims the need for virtue in a different way than Aristotle. Third, he emphasizes the morally corrective nature of friendship. Fourth, he maintains that friendship is somehow intrinsic to man's nature. Finally, he does not see equality as necessary in the same way that Aristotle does. These enumerated points reveal new dimensions to friendship that were not developed by Aristotle, thus enriching the conversation about friendship and deepening an understanding of its practice. Each of these emphases will now be discussed and developed in turn.

Cicero defines friendship as "complete sympathy in all matters of importance, plus goodwill and affection."<sup>23</sup> Here we see the goodwill and affection inherent in Aristotle's understanding of friendship reiterated by Cicero, with an added emphasis on the importance of shared belief among friends. Indeed, Cicero writes that there is "one element indispensable to friendship, a complete agreement in aims, ambitions, and attitudes." Friendships of this kind are rare because, for Cicero, friendship can only exist

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., v.18

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., vi.20.

between good men.<sup>24</sup> “Matters of importance” thus includes the virtues. However, before man despairs that he cannot have friendship until he is perfect, Cicero assures us that his “task is to look at conditions that actually exist in human life, not those that men dream about or pray about.”<sup>25</sup>

Cicero agrees that friendship is a relationship that requires virtue, for it is from the word for love (*amor*) that we get the word for friendship (*amicitia*) and there is nothing more worthy of love than virtue.<sup>26</sup> Following from this definition, Cicero believes that friendship cannot exist without virtue, and that one must first have virtue if he is to experience friendship. “Without virtue we cannot gain possession either of friendship or of anything else desirable.”<sup>27</sup> Instead of emphasizing friendship as a virtue, Cicero writes that friendships require virtue, and therefore stresses the prudence required to choose friends.

While all men have some sort of relationship with one another, the significance of the relationship varies according to circumstance, intention, and character; the only relationships that qualify as friendships are those between men “without blemish” who share with one another all their sorrows, plans, and ideals.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Cicero reminds us that while men who do not practice virtue might think that they have friendships, they will always discover their error eventually. Cicero writes: “If men pass virtue by, they

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., v.18.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., v.18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., viii.27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., xxii.84.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., xvii.61.

may think they have friends, but in the end they discover their error: some serious misfortune will compel them to put those supposed friends to the test.”<sup>29</sup> This shows us that a misunderstanding of the nature of friendship is common to all times and places and clarifies the fact that without serious thought on the matter, friendship might be an elusive or even unrealized part of life. It is also important to note that Aristotle’s friendships of pleasure would not qualify as friendships for Cicero, unless they were accompanied by the practice of virtue.

Because friendships require virtue, moral formation and moral correction are necessary for friendship. Cicero chooses to dwell upon the morally corrective nature of friendship. Moral correction involves exhorting our friends to virtue by giving advice boldly and freely. This requires honesty and vulnerability which leads to a litmus test of authenticity, Cicero writes:

For in friendship unless, as we say, you see the naked heart and let your own be seen, there is nothing that you cannot deem trustworthy or reliable, not even the mere fact of loving and being loved, since you cannot know how genuine the sentiment is.<sup>30</sup>

Moral correction must be mutual, each person giving and accepting admonition graciously. Cicero writes that this correction is a great favor that our friends bestow upon us and warns us of the great dangers of flattery. It follows that if honesty and moral correction are goods of friendship then hypocrisy and flattery must be dangers of friendship “for by failing to call wrongdoing to account, it lets a friend fall to its ruin.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., xxii. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., xxv1.97.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., xxiv. 89.

For Cicero, the good of friendship seems to rest in its “naturalness,” writing that there is “nothing so suited to man’s nature.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, while Cicero thinks that the finest thing about friendship is that it sends “a ray of good hope into the future, and keeps our hearts from faltering,”<sup>33</sup> he also assures us that friendship springs, not from external necessity, but an inclination of heart and affection which is part of our very nature. Therefore, everyone is able to recognize the value and beauty of friendship without needing to be taught. Cicero states that the kind of love and affection seen in friendship is even reflected in an animal’s love for its young, indeed this is only one of a plethora of examples because even “nature abhors solitude.”<sup>34</sup> To Cicero, friendship is something to be sought because it is what we are made for.

While Aristotle stresses reciprocity and equality in friendships Cicero does not see this as being necessary in the same way and considers the exacting view of friendship characterized by Aristotle to be too narrow and even petty—a view towards friendship too concerned with details of rank and parity. Cicero thinks that true friendship is too rich to be overly concerned with the ledger of favors given and received. Furthermore, when a relationship includes a superior and inferior party, the superior should avoid unpleasant divisions and the inferior should rise above themselves and be careful not to take offense that they are surpassed by the superior. For example, in a friendship between a rich and a poor person, or an older and a younger person, or a teacher and a student, Cicero thinks that the “superior” person should humbly make light of their more advanced position and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., v.18.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., vii.23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., xxiii.888.

that the “inferior” person should not let embarrassment or pride get in the way of their friendship. Instead of making sure to level the playing field, as Aristotle would have it, Cicero prefers an approach that overlooks distinctions.

While Aristotle and Cicero hold many similar views about friendship, two main points of agreement are salient: true friendships are enduring, and they ought to be pursued in every circumstance, good or bad. Many men seem to love their friends in a way that anticipates that they will one day lose their friendship or even grow to dislike their friend. That is, they do not enter the friendship expecting it to endure the test of time and hardship. Instead, the kind of friendship bestowed is temporary, uninvested, and one friend is unwilling to suffer on their friend’s behalf. Cicero insists that it is impossible to have the kind of trust and vulnerability necessary for friendship if one thinks that a friend may one day become an enemy. This requires a certain foresight and prudence in choosing friends, thus requiring that friendship be made slowly and with acute attention to one another’s moral character.

Just as friendship is meant to endure time, so too is it meant to endure through hardship, Cicero writes: “friendship does not follow upon advantage, but advantage upon friendship.”<sup>35</sup> Friendship is a virtue in fair and ill fortune, and a good when it accompanies joy or sorrow. Cicero continues: “For when fortune smiles on us, friendship adds luster to that smile; and when she frowns, friendship absorbs her part and share of that frown, and thus makes it easier to bear.”<sup>36</sup> This sort of loyalty is a gift to the friend in need and an exercise in virtue for the friend giving comfort.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., xiv.51.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., vii.23.



In summary, both Aristotle and Cicero lay important groundwork for understanding the essential and exemplary role of friendship in one's life, from a pre-Christian perspective. By reading these ancients one gains a deeper understanding of what friendship is and its implications for the moral life. One sees that friendship is essential to human happiness, and that love, goodwill, and virtue are inexorably linked to the practice of friendship.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A Theological Account of Friendship

Because of Christ, and subsequently the growth of Christendom, what it meant to partake in friendship changed. Descriptions of friendship became more than a careful account of what occurs in the observable, material world of friendly relations; the addition of Christ, and of the Christian element, acted as a pre-condition by which the conditions of friendship became altered. Aristotle and Cicero's pre-Christian accounts of friendship were, therefore, insufficient for followers of Christ. This chapter will examine how Christian writers approach the subject of friendship *post Christum natum*.

Furthermore, it is not only friendship with our fellow man that undergoes change. With Christ arises the astonishing possibility that we might become friends with God Himself.

By comparing and contrasting the works of Cicero and Aelred of Rievaulx we will transition from a pre-Christian to a Christian understanding of friendship, and a new definition and Christ-informed reasons for the practice of friendship will be formed. Aelred, a twelfth-century Cistercian abbot, is a helpful guide into Christian friendship. His treatise *De Spirituali Amicitia* was inspired by Cicero's *De Amicitia*, and follows its format of a dialogue between friends. Aelred was greatly impressed by Cicero but realized that *De Amicitia* lacked an essential element, Christ. Therefore, he wrote his own treatise, suggesting that friendship always includes God.

Aelred explains the need for an account of Christian friendship when writing about Cicero's *De Amicitia*:

That treatise is not altogether unknown to me. In fact at one time I took great delight in it. But since I began to taste some of the

sweetness from the honey comb of Holy Scripture, and since the sweet name of Christ claimed my affection for itself, whatever I henceforth read or hear, though it be treated ever so subtly or eloquently, will have no relish or enlightenment for me, if it lacks the salt of the heavenly books and the flavoring of that most sweet name.<sup>37</sup>

The metaphor of food is both consequential and illuminating. For Aelred, the addition of Christ to the dish of life is not just adding another ingredient such as, say, tomatoes, to a soup. Christ does not merely add to what is already there. Christ is not just one more thing added to a group of things. Christ changes the flavor and the impact of everything else, just as salt or honey in a dish would.

The differences between Cicero and Aelred's conceptions of friendship are simultaneously subtle and profound: subtle in that the pre-Christian definition is filled with many similarities, in the attributes and practice of friendship, and has much "Egyptian gold" to offer<sup>38</sup>--yet profound in that the introduction of Christ presents a new species of friendship, one that holds Christ as essential. Christ becomes the underlying foundation for, and cement of, friendship. Furthermore, with this new species of friendship comes a new *telos*, a new aim, to the friendship.

The *telos* of the Christian life and Christian friendship can be understood by examining Aelred's desire that friendship would "Begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and be perfected in Christ."<sup>39</sup> To be perfected in Christ means to have our end in Christ. The

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<sup>37</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.7.

<sup>38</sup> "Egyptian gold" is the term that Saint Augustine uses in his treatise, *On Christian Doctrine*, to illustrate that all truth is God's truth. Therefore, wherever truth is revealed, even if from pagans, that truth belongs to God and can be used by the Christians.

<sup>39</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.9.

*telos* of the Christian is still happiness, but it is happiness that is realized in beatitude—a reimagined account of the pre-Christian moral life. The Christian’s life is begun and continued with the goal of beatitude in mind—union with Christ and communion with His “cloud of witnesses.”<sup>40</sup>

Attainment of this *telos* is two-fold. First, our *telos* is union with Christ Himself, because Christ is the center to which all things aim. Our fundamental purpose is to be in communion with Him in Heaven.<sup>41</sup> This is what it means to be perfected in Christ. Second, our *telos* is sought through interactions with our fellow Image-bearers,<sup>42</sup> by acting as Christ would to them, conforming the Image of God in us to our actions that we might be like Christ.<sup>43</sup> This is what it means to “continue in Christ.” Christ is the Alpha and Omega, our perfection. Furthermore, He does not abandon us along the way to friendship and union with Him because He is an active participant in our progression. The journey to our *telos* is “continued” through Christ’s friendship with us and our friendships with other Christians.

With the attainment of this Christocentric *telos* in mind we will turn to Aelred’s description of friendship. Aelred delineates three types of friendship, maintaining that

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<sup>40</sup> Hebrews 12:1

<sup>41</sup> This second *telos* is explained by Saint Augustine thus: “Man is made to live in communion with God in whom he finds happiness: When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete.”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” All humankind is made in the Image of God.

<sup>43</sup> “God was made man, that man might be made God.” St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54:3, PG 25:192B

only one of them is true, but acknowledging that they can all be considered friendship in some way because each has a reflection of truth in it:

Let us allow that, because of some similarity in feelings, those friendships which are not true, be, nevertheless, called friendships, provided, however, they are judiciously distinguished from that friendship which is spiritual and therefore true.<sup>44</sup>

The truest friendship is the one that leads us most directly to our *telos*; this is the friendship Aelred calls “spiritual friendship.” The other two types of friendship are “carnal” friendships and “worldly” friendships. Let me begin by describing these two lesser kinds of friendships.

Carnal friendship “springs from mutual harmony in vice.”<sup>45</sup> Aelred expresses how carnal people enjoy “beautiful bodies and voluptuous objects,”<sup>46</sup> but that they enjoy them even more with an accomplice or an associate. These people believe in a “community of like and dislike”<sup>47</sup> and find that their “likes” are sweetened in friendship. These friendships are not governed by reason or uprightness and are as transient as the passions they are built upon. An example of carnal friendship could be two people who enjoy eating ice cream together. If their companionship in no way serves their journey to God, or worse, if they begin placing pleasure above God and fall into the sin of gluttony, leading them away from God, this friendship is false. However, the companionship of the two people over ice cream could someday blossom into true friendship, if they begin to help each other toward spiritual goodness.

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<sup>44</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., I.37.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., I.39.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., I.40.

Worldly friendships are “enkindled by the hope of gain.”<sup>48</sup> These people build their friendship on a desire for temporal profit or possessions. These friendships are also quick to be dissolved, for as soon as the hope of profit disappears, so too will the friendship disappear. An example of worldly friendship could be two people who start a business together. Perhaps, on their own, neither one of them would have been able to open their shop, yet together they can realize their goal of making an income. As long as their interactions are only about external profit instead of one another’s good, this relationship is a false friendship. However, just as carnal friendships can point to spiritual friendship, so too can worldly friendships transform into something greater.

Just as Cicero believed that only one relationship, that between two good people, can be rightly be called friendship, Aelred acknowledges that both carnal and worldly friendships are only properly named friendships if they lead to true friendship, which includes the essential elements of growing in love for one another and God. However, Aelred’s understanding that not all carnal and worldly friendships are doomed reveals the redemptive nature of friendship, which is exhibited when he gives the following example:

And yet, the beginning of this vicious friendship leads many individuals to a certain degree of true friendship: those, namely, who at first enter into a compact of friendship in the hope of common profit (...) in so far as human affairs are concerned, reach an acme of pleasing mutual agreement.<sup>49</sup>

However, if these friendships are only friendships “in so far as human affairs are concerned,” they cannot be called true if they continue to be preserved for the sake of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., I.37.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., I.44.

temporal profit alone.<sup>50</sup> That is, these “friendships” can only be true friendships if they lead to spiritual friendship and do not remain carnal or worldly—they can only begin that way. For example, if a carnal friendship were to remain carnal, and actually lead the “friends” to sin more, Aelred would not bestow upon them the name of friendship. As he explains, “Falsely do they claim the illustrious name of friends among whom there exists a harmony of vices (...) Thus it follows that they glory only in the name of friendship and are deceived by a distorted image and are not supported by truth.”<sup>51</sup>

Conversely, true friendship, what Aelred calls spiritual friendship, is “cemented by similarity of life, morals, and pursuits among the just.”<sup>52</sup> These friendships look beyond “human affairs” towards the *telos* of the Christian life. Aelred thinks that spiritual friendships are “true” because they are desired for no purpose other than the friendship itself. The rest of the chapter will be a description of what Aelred considers spiritual friendship.

Aelred describes spiritual friendship as: “mutual conformity in affairs human and divine coupled with benevolence and charity.”<sup>53</sup> When contrasting this summation with that of Cicero, who writes that friendship is: “complete sympathy in all matters of importance, plus goodwill and affection,”<sup>54</sup> we notice that Aelred’s description of friendship includes an orientation to the divine. This orientation of spiritual friendship to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., I.44.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., I.35.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., I.35.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., I.11.

<sup>54</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *On Old Age and Friendship*. vii. 23.

the divine takes the relationship from the realm of the material and places friendship squarely within the eternal. It is impossible to overstate the magnitude of the contrast between a friendship limited by the material and a friendship that connects to the divine and eternal. These are the “matters of importance” to Christians, matters of faith and Christian spirituality.

The conformity and harmony to which Aelred refers means believing in the same divinity—Christ—and sharing a life that reflects a “similarity in life, morals, and pursuits.”<sup>55</sup> This makes spiritual friendship exclusive, something that can only be pursued fully among fellow Christians. It is only when our friend holds the same faith as we do that we can truly share everything with him, including our belief in the life to come.

Friendship being “coupled with benevolence and charity”<sup>56</sup> means that we feel affection for our friends and act virtuously toward them. Aelred’s benevolence is “the feeling to love which is pleasantly aroused interiorly.”<sup>57</sup> This feeling is more sincere, agreeable, and sacred, the more the two friends agree in likes and dislikes. Aelred explains that before the Fall, which corrupted the morals of men, there was no distinction between charity and friendship because all men were virtuous. After the fall, we understand charity as a “love that ought to be extended to the hostile and perverse” while friendship requires a union of will.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, because “no union of will can exist

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<sup>55</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.45.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., I.47.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., I.47.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., I.49.



between the good and the wicked,” friendship can only be between good men.<sup>59</sup> Aelred writes that charity is “named in the sense that friendship excludes every vice.”<sup>60</sup> Friendship can only exclude every vice if charity is mutual. Therefore, in order for charity to be considered friendship, it must be mutual.

When we move from Cicero’s description of friendship to that of Aelred, we also see a clear change in the attributes and practices of friendship. Each attribute is similar, looking almost exactly the same at first glance, but with a key difference: the introduction of Christ. Thus that which was limited by the material and the temporal is no longer limited, but becomes supernatural and eternal: moral virtue becomes Christian virtue, life-long friendship becomes eternal friendship, and our human nature becomes a striving toward our created Image of God.

Aelred finds Cicero’s understanding of virtue incomplete, saying: “Tulius [Cicero] was unacquainted with the virtue of true friendship, since he was completely unaware of its beginning and end, Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, while both Cicero and Aelred think that friendships require virtue, they understand virtue differently. True friendship for Cicero is friendship between two good men, while true friendship for Aelred is spiritual friendship.<sup>62</sup> Aelred writes: “Friendship, therefore, is that virtue by which spirits

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., I.59.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., I.47.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., I.8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., I.45.

are bound by the ties of love and sweetness (...) ranked not with things casual or transitory but with the virtues which are eternal.”<sup>63</sup>

The enduring nature of friendship is intensified in Christian friendship, in which “eternity blossoms.”<sup>1</sup> It is important to understand that "eternity" is not synonymous with "all the time." Eternity happens after death, which is outside of time, as we understand time on earth. So "eternity" does not merely mean a consistency in friendship, but points to the *telos* of friendship. On the other hand, for the fulfillment of the promise of eternity constancy in friendship is, indeed necessary, for, “he that is a friend loves at all times.”<sup>1</sup> Friends love each other through times of trial, injury, and injustice, because true friends can trust in one another’s goodness, their benevolence and charity, even when they make mistakes. Furthermore, Christian friendships are eternal in nature because Christian friends can hope in the promise of life everlasting together. The eternality of friendship is also made evident in that Christian friendship reflects the eternality of Heaven. Aelred notes that “for the angels too divine Wisdom created not one but many (...) the bond of charity among them increased their mutual happiness.”<sup>64</sup> Christian friendships on earth point to a heavenly reality.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.,I.19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.,I.20.

<sup>65</sup> So too, C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* stresses the companionship of the angels in heaven:

“friendship exhibits a glorious ‘nearness by resemblance’ to Heaven itself where the multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has of God. For every soul seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest” (62).

The honesty called for in Christian friendship reflects the morally corrective nature of friendship cited by Cicero. In friendship, Aelred says, “truth shines forth,”<sup>66</sup> and he calls friends “guardians of love.” Christian friendships must be based in truthfulness, not flattery. One is not a good “guardian” if one believes that the consequence for sin is death but does nothing to correct the dangerous habits or moral failings of one’s friend. The morally corrective nature of Christian friendship acknowledges the eternal realities of Heaven and Hell. Christian friendship requires the fearless love of friends who prepare each other to meet our God, who is a “consuming fire.”<sup>67</sup> Moral correction is not focused solely on the rewards of the afterlife, however. Rather, like Cicero, Aelred also concentrates on the cultivation of virtue in this life, saying that in spiritual friendship: “prudence directs, justice rules, fortitude guards, and temperance moderates.”<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, moral correction and truth-telling requires, for Aelred, that friends “cure and endure.” The curative element of moral correction shows that friendship is healing in nature. Friends help cure each other from the ills of sin and vice. Moral correction as “cure” reminds us that exhorting our friends to virtue does not mean criticizing them harshly. If we are truly to heal our friends, we should correct them with gentleness and humility. The reminder that friends “endure” tells us that we should not give up on our friends the moment they do something wrong. Though Aelred believes that friendships exist between good men, who are strong in Christian virtue, he

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<sup>66</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.68.

<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 12:29.

<sup>68</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.49.

recognizes that all men are fallen and sin. Moral correction requires neither injury though judgmentalism, nor abandonment.

Cicero maintains that friendship is something that springs from our very nature, something innate to what we are as humans. Aelred agrees by reminding us that “when God created man, in order to commend more highly the good of society, he said: ‘it is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a helper like unto himself.’”<sup>69</sup> It is in our nature to be social, to live in companionship with others, because God created us this way. Furthermore, our nature contains something of the supernatural, because as Christians we believe that we are made in the Image of God.

To gloss the notion of “image” will be helpful here. The word “image” usually calls to mind something static—a noun as opposed to a verb. But to understand the “Image of God” properly, we have to account for the relationality of the Trinity. God is a God of action, and the action is (primarily) love. To define the Trinity in any way that leaves out the active loving between the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is to not define the Trinity at all. God who “is love”<sup>70</sup> exists in an eternal friendly relationship through the Trinity—and we can reflect that love and relationality in our friendships with others.

Two additional aspects arise with spiritual friendship: that there are always three in a friendship, and that prayer moves people from friendship with one another to friendship with Christ.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., I.57.

<sup>70</sup> 1 John 4:16.

The introduction of this new Christian model of friendship means that friendship among fellow believers can never be between merely two people, because Christ is always present in the relationship. Indeed, Aelred begins his treatise by saying “Here we are, you and I and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.”<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the number of friends can never be just two but is always at least three. This expands the view of friendship and shifts its focus. Instead of being about just the two people, it is centered around Christ, because He is always present in and foundational to Christian friendship.

Aelred emphasizes the importance of prayer in spiritual friendship, a concept foreign to Cicero’s friendship of the good. For Aelred, prayer helps us to fulfill our “two fold *telos*,” of communion with others in Christ-likeness and of union with Christ. By praying for our friends we enter a deeper communion with them and help them to draw nearer to Christ. Aelred writes that the prayers of a friend for a friend are more efficacious because they are lovingly sent to God with much feeling and supplication.<sup>72</sup> These prayers lead us beyond communion with earthly friends, bringing us nearer to a union with the divinity of Christ:

Thus a friend praying to Christ on behalf of his friend (...) directs his attention with love and longing to Christ; then it sometimes happens that quickly and imperceptibly the one love passes over into the other, and coming, as it were, into close contact with the sweetness of Christ himself.<sup>73</sup>

Notably, it is here, dwelling on prayer in friendship, that Aelred’s account of spiritual friendship ends. Aelred leaves us with just a taste of the “sweetness of Christ,”

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<sup>71</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, I.1.

<sup>72</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, III.133.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., III.134.

instead of delving deeply into what Christian friendship as “friendship with God” would mean,<sup>74</sup> because Aelred is most concerned with that aspect of spiritual friendship, which though it always includes God, also always includes communion with other persons. We remember that Aelred begins his treatise by saying, “Here we are, you and I and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst,”<sup>75</sup> and it is with this emphasis on community that the treatise ends—helping us to understand that we must be friends with other people in order to be friends with God.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> This is a much different emphasis than many other Christian writers will take, many choosing to dwell on the aspect of Christian friendship that is a sort of “personal relationship” with God. This idea of friendship with God as distinct from friendships with other people that include God can be clearly seen in the writings of Aquinas, for example: *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 65, 5 and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., I.1.

<sup>76</sup> “If anyone says, ‘I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen’ (1 John 4:20).

## CHAPTER THREE

### A Biblical Account of Friendship

All Christians have the vocation of Christlikeness, conforming their *Imago Dei* to God.<sup>77</sup> The Incarnation makes this possible, for in it all virtues are made tangible as they are embodied in Christ. The essence of the friendship of the three persons of the Trinity becomes corporeal in the Incarnation of Christ. So that this discussion of the practice of Christian friendship does not become too abstract, I will take Christ as the model for perfect Christian friendship—Christ who makes God visible and gives flesh and blood reality to the practice of friendship. The living Word, Christ in the Scriptures, will be used to gain a deeper understanding of Christian friendship with one another and with God, and will allow the discussion of friendship to move from a theological account to a biblical one.

Furthermore, this scriptural account adds some distinctions to Christian friendship that have not yet been seen in the philosophical and theological accounts explored in chapters 1 and 2. Three important developments stand out to me and will be emphasized in this chapter:

- 1) That friendship is connected to obedience to God;
- 2) That Christian friendship contains a profound notion of selflessness—a

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<sup>77</sup> Made in God's Image we are most truly ourselves when we most clearly reflect God. By reading the Word and studying God's perfect Image, the nature and likeness of Christ, we are able aspire to our true nature. Paradoxically, because our truest nature is Christlikeness, we are simply being called to fulfill our own nature when we attempt to become like Christ.

willingness to give up one's life for one's friends;

3) That Christian friends should "bear fruit" for Christ's kingdom.

This chapter will consist in an extended exegesis of John 15:9-17, aided by the biblical commentaries of Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Bonaventure.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, I will appeal to other passages to clarify the notion of friendship articulated by Jesus in John 15.

The setting and context of John 15 are important to our topic. John 15:9-17 comes after the Last Supper and Christ washing the feet of the disciples, when Jesus is comforting His disciples with the hope of Heaven, teaching them with parables, and exhorting them to love. John 15 begins with the parable of the vine, taken to describe the relationship of Christ to the Church and to the Father. This parable emphasizes the fruitfulness of the branches and that the branches will only be fruitful if they are joined to the main stock. Aquinas writes that each branch of the vine is a believer.<sup>79</sup> This is a reminder of the communal nature of Christian friendship. The believers are always connected to both the broader community of faith in the Church (the other branches), and to Christ (the stock of the vine). Additionally, a healthy vine will have many branches, and the branches can only produce fruit if they are attached to the stock.

This is the context in which one may begin to think about friendship as described in John 15. Allow me now to treat the passage verse by verse with the aid of several biblical commentaries.

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<sup>78</sup> All biblical citations in this thesis will be from: *English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. F. Larcher & J. Weisheipl (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 1983.



*15:9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*

Christ models the love of His Father for us. Christ tells of the supernatural love his Father has for him, a deep and strong love which human persons can somewhat comprehend, due to our earthly understanding of parental love (even though we realize that this other very singular Father-Son attachment, being supernatural and of God, must be infinitely greater) and assures us that there is a corresponding love in his heart for us. It is through this model that we are able to understand what it means to be loved, but only because we have been loved first. This love has been created by God and is a gift, existing before any knowledge or action on our part. Thus, we are only able to love—and actively give ourselves to another—because we have been loved first by God. Bonaventure, commenting on this passage, tells his reader to remember 1 John 4:19: “Let us, therefore, love God, because God first loved us.” We are only asked to love God after He has first shown His love to us.

Bonaventure also notes that the love the Father has for Christ is purely gratuitous,<sup>80</sup> which it must be, because God, fully complete and needing nothing, can only give freely; He cannot do otherwise. The Father gives to the Son and demands nothing in return. Christ loves us with the same gratuitous love, exacting nothing in return for the friendship He shows us. This is how we should love one another, giving without requiring any sort of repayment.

Aquinas writes that the comparative “as,” in this passage, indicates a likeness in grace and love. Christ did not love the disciples so that they would become gods by their

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<sup>80</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure: Commentary on the Gospel of John Volume XI*, trans. Robert Karris (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2007), 769.

nature, nor so that they would be so united with God that they would form one person with Him. But Christ did love them to the extent that they would be gods by their *participation* in grace and be united with God in affection.<sup>81</sup> Aquinas is reminding us that Christ did not love us in exactly the same way that the Father loved Him, but in a way befitting our fallen state.

To “abide in love” means to persevere in a state of love.<sup>82</sup> Persevering in a state, abiding in love, is a commitment continually kept and continually renewed—not just being in God’s love at one moment in time, but staying there, residing in His love. Abiding in love is similar to enduring in friendship, as Aelred emphasized. An example of abiding in God’s friendship is being present to God throughout one’s day by recognizing His friendship and offering it back to him. Abiding in friendship is similar to the idea of praying without ceasing.<sup>83</sup> “To abide” can be thought of as “to inhabit” or “to live within”—friendship with God is something that encloses and animates our whole lives.

Aquinas explains that Christ is in effect saying “Abide in my love because I love you, that is, abide in my grace so you will not be excluded from the good things I have prepared for you.”<sup>84</sup> By abiding in grace, we abide in love and will not be excluded from the good things that the Lord has prepared for us. By abiding in the grace of God we open

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<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1999.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 2000.

<sup>83</sup> “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

<sup>84</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2000

ourselves up to the effects of love. 1 John 4:16 says: “He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

We can love God only in response to the love He has shown for us--love that He showed us, initially, when He created us, and then when He died on the Cross for our sins. Thus, the love that God models for us is a gift love. Though we love God responsively, we should try to love our neighbors with the same gratuitous love that God has for us. Finally, although God is our model, we do not become gods by following His example. We are only participants in His grace.

*15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*

We show our love to God in our obedience to Him, obedience that is only possible because of His great love for us. Just as we are granted the ability to love by being loved first, so too we are only asked to do things that Christ has already done first. Christ acts as our exemplar in His relationship with Father—and by keeping His Father’s commandments, He shows us that it is possible for us to keep them as well. Aquinas writes: “For just as the love which the Father has for him is the model or standard of Christ’s love for us, so Christ wants his obedience to be the model for our obedience.”<sup>85</sup> Additionally, Aquinas says, God not only tells us to keep all of His commandments, but He gives us the means to do so: “For from the fact that God loves us, he influences us and helps us to fulfill his commandments, which we could not do without grace.”<sup>86</sup>

Love and obedience are deeply interconnected. As John 14:31 says: “That the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2003.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 2002.

world may know that I love my Father and that I do as the Father commanded me.” There are many other biblical examples of love being linked with obedience to God’s commandments. This love is often exemplified as “walking with” God: 1 John 2:6<sup>87</sup> and Deuteronomy 10:12-13.<sup>88</sup> This image of “walking with” helps us to remember that God is always with us in the process of our friendship with Him, that love is an action, and that friendship is a life-long journey—twisting and turning, with many hills and valleys, but a path continually taken.

*15:11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Love of God and neighbor in friendship is a cause and reason for joy. Aquinas writes, “Now love is the cause of joy, for everyone takes joy in what he loves.”<sup>89</sup> This joy that Christ speaks is full joy, whole joy, what Aquinas says is the joy of truth. This joy cannot be found in shallow or false friendships, but only in those grounded in truth. This joy is an effect of abiding in God.<sup>90</sup> Aquinas comments additionally that the phrase “*that my joy be in you*” “means, in effect, that you might have eternal life.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, to have joy in God, through love of God, is to have the possibility of eternal life. God, in the person

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<sup>87</sup> “The person who says that he abides in him must also walk just as he walked.”

<sup>88</sup> “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but that you fear the Lord your God and walk in his ways and love him and serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and keep the commandments of the Lord and his ceremonies which I command you today, so that it may be well with you?”

<sup>89</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2004.

<sup>90</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, 763.

<sup>91</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2004.

of Jesus, takes on our joy in His own humanity, in order that we may have full joy when we reach Heaven, because the goods in which we now rejoice are either imperfect or imperfectly possessed, and thus our joy can only be partial, not full, in this life.<sup>92</sup>

*15:12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*

God not only exhorts us, but commands us, to love one another. This verse binds our friendship with our neighbor to obedience to God and reminds us that we have been given the apotheosis of love to emulate. In order to be obedient to God's command, we must love our neighbor.

Bonaventure writes that Christ commands us to this love of our neighbor in three ways: obedience (verse 12), divine friendship (verse 14), and eternal remuneration (verse 16).<sup>93</sup> Bonaventure also emphasizes that Christ tells us to love one another "as I have loved you" and cites 1 John 3:18, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." This introduces the next verse where the deed and action of love are exemplified in Christ's death on the Cross.<sup>94</sup> Christ's love is not merely the love of good will, wanting the good of the other without doing anything to secure it. His love for us is a love of action, expressed through tangible deeds. This is the way Christ wills us to love our friends, not only showing our love by what we think and say, but by what we do.

*15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*

The love that is friendship is sacrificial, because it requires an intentional giving. In the economy of love, nothing is without cost, and so the greatest love must be the

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2004.

<sup>93</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, 770.

<sup>94</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, 770.

willingness to give up all—even life—for the sake of the friends. This love is the greatest love we can have. Christ gives us this great love when He is crucified for us, showing us the sacrificial and self-giving nature of friendship. Not only are we called to share our lives with our friends, but we are called to give up our lives for our friends—to die to ourselves for their sake. However, this giving up may not always be as extreme as physically dying for them. Instead, laying down one’s life can be practiced daily by giving up our agendas, time, and resources, for the sake of our friends. For example, “laying down one’s life” could be practiced daily for a friend who suddenly contracted an illness that requires they have help washing, feeding, and caring for themselves. Helping one’s friend by doing these actions requires giving up some of one’s own desires, activities, and autonomy—this is what laying down one’s life for friends can look like.

When Bonaventure comments on this passage he writes that there is nothing more precious to give to a friend than one’s life: “The greatest love is that of the soul for the body. But Christ’s love for us exceeded that love.”<sup>95</sup> Jeremiah 12:7 says “I have forsaken my house; I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies.” This love that “is as strong as death,”<sup>96</sup> is the love that we should have for our friends, and this is the model of love that Christ gives us.

Christ tells us that there is no greater love than to die for our friends. Yet, Aquinas writes, someone could object by saying that it requires greater love to die for one’s enemies, as Christ did for us: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet

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<sup>95</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, 771.

<sup>96</sup> Song of Songs 8:6

sinner Christ died for us.”<sup>97</sup> Aquinas responds to this objection by saying that Christ did not die for His enemies expecting that they would remain His enemies. Instead, Christ laid down His life so that we might become His friends.<sup>98</sup> The love Christ has for us is transformative. Our love for our friends should be transformative as well, helping to shape them into better Christians. We do not love our friends out of pity, as we might our enemies, but with the merciful love of Christ. This is an example of the principle of Aelred’s “cure and endure,” a patient and redemptive friendship.

*15: 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.*

Friendship is structured; it involves covenants and agreements, unspoken or otherwise. Christ’s disciples show that they have friendship with God by following His commandments. In Mark 3:34-35 we read: “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” However, God still offers us His friendship when we imperfectly follow His commands. As Aquinas writes, keeping the commandments is the sign, not the cause, of the friendship.<sup>99</sup> Instead, we are friends with God for two reasons: because He loves us and because we love Him. Following God’s commands is way for us to demonstrate our love for Him, but if we fail, God’s love for us keeps us His friends.<sup>100</sup>

Bonaventure qualifies the exhortation to friendship under the perspective of divine friendship—that we are being called not only to friendship with our neighbor, but

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<sup>97</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2009.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 2011.

to friendship with God himself.<sup>101</sup> The “if” also reminds us that friendship is proven in deeds, thus, we are Christ’s friends “if” we do what He commands, just as He obeys the commands of His Father. Friendship does require certain attitudes and actions and it can only truly be called friendship “if” those attitudes and actions are met.

*15:15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

This verse reminds one that servitude is opposed to friendship. Though one is called to obey the commandments of God, He calls us out of friendship and love, and not as a master exacting power over his servants. According to Aquinas, through the statement “*no longer do I call you servants*,” Christ is reminding His disciples that though they were once servants under the law, they are now under the free rule of grace.<sup>102</sup> Aquinas makes a further distinction between servitude and friendship, saying that a tool shares in the work of its master, but does not do the work out of the master’s will, not its own. Furthermore, the tool knows the work of the master but not the reason for the work: the tool is like a servant. Conversely, the disciples were moved to serve God by their own will and the inclinations of love. God, in an act of friendship, revealed His reasons to them, transforming the relationship from mastery and servitude to friendship.<sup>103</sup> By knowing what the master is doing, the Christian is able to partake more deeply in God’s divine plan.

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<sup>101</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, 771.

<sup>102</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2014.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 2015.



Friendship requires trust and a shared life. St. John Chrysostom writes that one way to share life, to show love, is through disclosing secrets.<sup>104</sup> This is exactly what Christ does, when He makes known to us what He has heard from the Father.

Friendships involve the vulnerability of allowing another person into your life by sharing information with them. Even God shares with His people. However, in the context of friendship with God, Chrysostom makes it clear that the disciples did not know everything that Christ did, for that would be unseemly as it would place us on the same spiritual level as Christ. Rather, by “all” Christ meant “all that you ought to hear.”<sup>105</sup> This is a gesture of intimacy, but it does not place man on the same level as God--reminding us that “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”<sup>106</sup>

*15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

This verse reminds one that the beginning of all friendship is God. Aquinas writes that, in effect, the Lord is saying: “Whoever has been called to this sublime friendship should not attribute the cause of the friendship to himself, but to me, who chose him or her as a friend.”<sup>107</sup> Thus one learns that friendship is the gratuitous choice

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<sup>104</sup> John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist: Homilies 48-88*, trans. Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin (New York: The Fathers of the Church, INC., 1959), 327.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>106</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12

<sup>107</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2019.

of God. In this verse Christ also confers what we have been chosen for: to “go and bear fruit.” This fruit can be understood either as the fruit of the conversion to the faith: “In order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles,”<sup>108</sup> or as an interior spiritual fruit: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace.”<sup>109</sup>

Bonaventure writes that by “you did not choose me” we are meant to understand friendship with God from the perspective of the eternal reward, that is, the reward of Heaven to which we were invited when God chose us through eternal predestination. Just as we cannot “choose” our way into Heaven, we cannot choose to be friends with God. We can only be friends with Him because He chose us first.<sup>110</sup>

The exhortation to friendship with Christ includes a greater responsibility and mission to bear fruit by sharing the message of Christ with others, bringing them into the promise of Christian friendship. Our call to friendship with God is not punctiliar—rather, it requires constant commitment to bear external and internal fruit for Him.

*15:17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

Aquinas writes that Christ says this to remind us that “everything I said to you was to lead you to love your neighbor: ‘the aim of our charge is love’ (1 Timothy 1:5).”<sup>111</sup> We remember that:

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<sup>108</sup> Romans 1:13

<sup>109</sup> Galatians 5:22; Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2027.

<sup>110</sup> St. Bonaventure, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, 773.

<sup>111</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2029.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>112</sup>

All of God’s laws are grounded in and sustained by love. This love is reflected in the friendship of the Trinity, reflected in Christ and reflected in us when we show each other friendship.

I will now return to the three distinctions given at the beginning of the chapter to highlight their presence and explicate their significance to Christian friendship.

First, friendship is connected to obedience to God. We see this reflected in two ways: 1) God commands Christians to love one another, and 2) God tells Christians that they are His friends if they do what He commands of them.

The moment that Christ commands Christians to love one another, friendship transforms from something that is ancillary to the virtuous or spiritual life into something profoundly essential to the Christian’s salvation. Therefore, it is not a trivial choice whether or not a Christian should love and befriend others, but a choice that has grave and eternal consequence. By failing to love others, one disobeys a command of God.

When Christ tells His followers that they are His friends if they do what He commands them, He puts a qualifying “if” on friendship with Him. Christians “qualify for” and demonstrate their friendship with God by keeping His commandments. This truth of friendship with God was not so explicit in Aelred, because he chose to focus on spiritual friendship with other Christians. However, this notion adds to one’s understanding of Christian friendship by reminding one that all friendships require accountability in deeds—even friendship with God. One is only a friend if one performs

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<sup>112</sup> Matthew 22:37-40

desires and performs acts of friendship.

Second, the understanding of the selflessness required for Christian friendship is intensified in this scriptural account as we are called to give up our very selves, our lives, for our friends. This is the ultimate sacrifice, which Christ modeled for us when He gave up His own life for ours on the cross. Though notions of selflessness were certainly present in the philosophical and theological accounts given in chapters 1 and 2, they were not so intense and profoundly simple. Christ sheds a brilliant and terrible light on what true self-sacrifice means, by demonstrating to the Christian that selflessness can be the absolute act of substitutionary death.

The third development is the emphasis on Christian friends bearing fruit for God. Friendship is prolific—not a static or sterile relationship, but one that gives life and purpose to life. Friendships that bear fruit have consequence in the world because they are not self-contained but creative and influential. Friendship in and of itself has been recognized as a great good and something that leads one toward the greatest good. However, by placing emphasis on friendship bearing fruit, one becomes more acutely aware that friendship brings good to others as well. That friendship is commanded reminds one that its practice is essential to one's own salvation. That friendship bears fruit reminds one that its practice can bring salvation to others.

The scriptural account in this chapter aids in one's understanding of Christian friendship through the words and example of Christ. Furthermore, this scriptural account adds new dimensions to the understanding of friendship already philosophically and theologically established. The rich relationship of friendship becomes even more profound through the living Word of Christ and the words of scripture.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Synthesis and Practice

The notion of friendship in the preface is “thin,” almost unrecognizable, when compared to the relationships described in chapters 1-3. In this final chapter, I will discuss a synthesis of these philosophical, theological, and biblical resources, exploring how they might answer the three main problematics identified in the preface. The first problematic is the utilitarian use of friendship for pleasure or profit: the “what’s in it for me?” objective. The second problematic concerns friendships that are too easily begun and too easily ended: the disposable friend. The third problematic is a compartmentalization of that which should be integrated: friendship seen as independent of either God or others.

Moreover, many of the essential practices of friendship described in chapters 1-3 can be found to have a direct correlation in the liturgies of Christian worship. By examining in detail an individual liturgical practice, I can then show the relationship between that liturgy and its manifestation in friendship. Invoking both Aristotle and James K.A. Smith, I will argue that people are deeply formed by what they practice, i.e., their daily habits and rituals. By practicing worship well, people are formed into being better friends, both with others and with God. The specific liturgy and component of worship that I will use as an example of Christian friendship is the liturgy of the Eucharist. Because worship, like friendship, draws us out of ourselves, by taking the practice of worship (its liturgies) seriously, one will learn how to be a better friend.

Let me begin by revisiting each of the three problematics of contemporary friendship and draw from the resources of chapters 1-3 to show that friendship need not be reinvented, only reclaimed.

The first problematic I mentioned is a false and self-centered notion of friendship that sees friends as a means of obtaining pleasure or profit. This egotistical view of friendship makes it self-centered instead of other-centered. Such friends do not seek the good of the other, but only the good for themselves. As a result of the self-centered attitude (unintentional as it may be), there is little respect for the friend. Furthermore, there is little respect for the friendship in and of itself; it is in fact only a means of getting pleasure or profit. What is called friendship in contemporary practice is often not really friendship at all. For example, after a college course is finished, "friends" who studied together, and afterward socialized together, friends who shared the intimacy of mutual stress and strife, then go their separate ways. The friendship is over. What can we possibly make of this, but come to the conclusion that there was no real friendship at all. The glue that held the friendship together was not a desire for a "good" which is beyond or above the material; the glue was a shared circumstance -- a circumstance, and nothing more.

The result of this kind of friendship is shallowness at best, and, more likely, the danger of hurt and exploitation impacting both members of the friendship. This type of friendship is unsustainable, as it is based on nothing more than transient feelings of pleasure or temporal gain. When these emotional states vanish, due to any number of life circumstances, the friendship ends. The resources in chapters 1-3 provide several ways of correcting this impoverished account. However, I believe that by recalling Aristotle's

understanding of *telos* as it impacts his three types of friendship, one can see how this contemporary notion of friendship is false. I also ask the reader to recall the biblical account of friendship, the call to lay down one's life for the sake of a friend that protects one from the sin of selfishness.

Aristotle defines three types of friendships: pleasure, utility, and virtue. Then he argues that the first two, friendships of pleasure and utility, are clearly lesser than what he considers true friendship--virtue friendship. In order to make his argument convincing, Aristotle relies on the concept of a "*telos*." This is the notion that there is a particular good, or goal, to which purposeful activity ought to be directed. The "good" for Aristotle is happiness, understood as living and doing well over a complete human life.

Furthermore, Aristotle believes that happiness can only be attained through the practice of virtue. Thus, because virtue friendships both are a virtue in and of themselves, and involve the practice of virtue, they lead people towards their final end. Aristotle understands that friendships based purely in pleasure or utility are lesser because they do not lead one towards one's highest good. The first problematic of contemporary friendship can be solved by applying the truths from Aristotle's philosophical tradition: that there is a clear *telos* to friendship and that this *telos* introduces a hierarchy to friendship, where some relationships are clearly better than others because they lead people more definitely towards true happiness.

This first problematic can also be resolved by recalling the biblical account of friendship given in chapter 3. Remembering that friends are willing to give up their lives for the sake of the other completely disqualifies self-centered relationships from being considered friendship. The idea that friendships could be merely about receiving

pleasure or profit is also refuted by the reality that friends must be willing to die. This idea is further stressed by the notion that dying to self is the greatest act of friendship.<sup>113</sup> Because this “greatest act” is neither pleasurable nor profitable, the primary aims and actions of friendship cannot be centered upon pleasure, profit, or the self.

The second problematic of contemporary friendship is that the friendships are too easily begun and ended. Contemporary culture often has an almost flippant understanding of friendship, not realizing friendship’s importance to the flourishing life and its impact on the eternal life. For example, those in our society often think that surface level acquaintances can be considered friends, or that friendships need no more sustenance than the connection that online networking provides. It is of little consequence whether the friendship comes or goes because friendship is not understood to be a serious endeavor, and because the coin of online friendships is cheap. It is an irony that the most ephemeral of mediums, the zeroes and ones of computer communication, lead people into an equally ephemeral type of “friendship.” This friendship can be and is literally turned on and off with a switch. To “unfriend” a person online is devilishly easy, and it is also telling that a former noun, “friend,” has been transformed into a verb “to friend,” which can only have significance as an action, not as a durable state of being.

Christians do not necessarily escape this trap either, because they are often unmindful of the spiritual and eternal significance of friendships and are just as susceptible as anyone else to our culture of transience. This careless attitude can be a

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<sup>113</sup> “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).



result of the first problematic, because friendships based in pleasure and profit will end the moment they no longer supply these transitory benefits. This short-term orientation is problematic because friends cannot help one another grow in virtue without an enduring commitment. Furthermore, the fruits of trust and support, which should be inherent to friendship, cannot be reaped if friends cannot rely on the friendship to abide in times of trouble.

I will divide the second problematic into two parts, first taking issue with friendships too easily begun and then with friendships too readily ended. First, in order to demonstrate a solution to the problem of friendships that are too easily or thoughtlessly begun, I will recall the resources given by Aristotle, Cicero, and Aelred, whose careful and almost reverent orientation to friendship sees it as a rare relationship, and is heedful of “friendship” as a term that should not be applied loosely. Second, I will show that Aelred’s notion that friendships are eternal and that friends should “cure and endure” helps to prevent friendships being too quickly dissolved.

Aristotle, Cicero, and Aelred are all extremely careful to only ascribe to very particular relationships the term “friendship” and even more careful to delineate very singular relationships as “true” friendships. All three of these men see the importance of precise and truthful speech when naming a relationship as a “friendship,” as opposed to some other thing. I think that they are so careful to restrict the term of friendship to very special relationships because they all have great admiration and respect for the covenant of friendship. Contrast this with the weak definition of “friend” today, where a mere acquaintance or Facebook contact is called a friend.

Though Aristotle and Cicero provide ample resources to solve the problem of friendships too easily begun, I think that Cicero's account of friendship is especially apt at resolving this flippancy and false speech. Recall Cicero's exclusive definition of friendship: "complete sympathy in all matters of importance, plus goodwill and affection,"<sup>114</sup> and his insistence that friendship can only exist between good men. Furthermore, because Cicero writes that virtue is a prerequisite to friendship, he emphasizes the great prudence required when choosing friends: embarking on this serious relationship takes time and discernment. Too hastily labeling a relationship as friendship runs the risk of misunderstanding the notion of friendship itself.

Aelred places great emphasis on friendships being eternal, and it is his account upon which I will rely to combat the misconception that friendships can be dissolved in haste: that they are disposable. By remembering Aelred's assertions that "Christian friendships on earth point to a heavenly reality," and that "in friendship eternity blossoms," one should acknowledge that there is something about friendship that is enduring, even enduring to eternity. It is not only Aelred's account that friendships are connected with the eternal that helps to dissolve the false notion that friendships can be easily ended and forgotten: Aelred's concept of "cure and endure" is also helpful to the reader here.

What does Aelred have in mind when he asserts that friends should "cure and endure"? He writes this within the context of the moral correction, which he sees as an essential component to true friendship. In order to "cure" a friend, one must recognize an ill (sin, fault, or unfortunate circumstance) with them and "endure" with them through the

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<sup>114</sup> Cicero, *On Old Age and Friendship*, VI.20.

healing process. One might be tempted to leave a friendship at the first sign of trouble, the first time one sees that the friendship might cause suffering; however, this is not the proper response in friendship. Who would we rely on if our friends abandoned us the moment the friendship was inconvenient or unpleasant to them? On a practical level, an example of this would be a person who left a friendship because the other person contracted cancer and was suddenly difficult to be around: this would be a friendship that was no longer enjoyable on the surface, but instead caused pain and required strength. On a spiritual level, an example of this would be dissolving a friendship because one's friend was struggling with a particular sin, such as alcoholism, that one is not willing to help the other overcome.

The third problematic is particular to a spiritual account of friendship. This problematic arises when one thinks that Christian friendship can either be 1) independent of a life with God, i.e., a relationship that doesn't recognize Christ's presence; or, 2) independent of a life with others. Stated succinctly, this is an issue of false compartmentalization. To think that one's spiritual life can be separate from one's social life (or any other part of life) is to misunderstand the wholistic nature of the human person.

I will cite Aelred to resolve the misconception that friendships can be independent from one's life with God. Aelred understands that spiritual friends should always recognize that Christ is present in their friendship, in their conversations and in their actions. Aelred also emphasizes that spiritual friendships are between at least three persons, because Christ is in their midst. Furthermore, by recalling that friendships begin, continue, and end in Christ, one realizes that there is no stage of friendship that

can be separated from Christ. It is notable that a response to false compartmentalization of friendship can even be seen in Aristotle, who believes that the moral life (his equivalent of the Christian life) cannot be had independent of friends, because friends enable one to practice the virtues and strive for *eudaimonia*.

The second misunderstanding, that friendship with God can be independent of friendship with others, would mistakenly place this form of Christian friendship in an exclusive relationship with God: interior, compartmentalized, and unconcerned with the outside world. Instead, one's friendship with God must influence and shape how one acts towards other human persons. What must be understood is that our relationship and friendship with God is so bound up with whatever we do that there is no possibility of separation or compartmentalization. Our love of God *is* our love of friends, and our love of friends *is* our love of God. This second error is also clarified by Aelred's theological account and by the scriptural account found in chapter 3. Aelred's explanation of friendship ends, significantly, with an emphasis on prayer, which could be understood as an exclusive friendship with God. However, that would be a misunderstanding. Instead, Aelred actually emphasizes the idea that spiritual friendship is never practiced with Christ alone but always with another. Furthermore, the same notion that helped to clarify the first false compartmentalization can be applied to the second false compartmentalization: "Here we are, you and I and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst."<sup>115</sup> There are always three in friendship.

The scriptural account of friendship also provides evidence that a person's friendship with God must be reflected in that person's friendship with others: "This is my

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<sup>115</sup> Aelred, *Spiritual Friendship*, 30.

commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>116</sup>By recalling this verse and another, “You are my friends if you do what I command you,”<sup>117</sup>one sees that in order to be friends with God one must follow His commandments. He commands people to love one another and tells them that the result of following His commands is friendship with Him. Furthermore, because He commands us to love others, and tells us that we love Him by following His commands, we cannot love God without befriending the other. Thus we realize that friendship with others, and friendship with God, are inseparably and synergistically related—reliant upon, nourished, and inspired by the other.

A rich understanding of the philosophical, theological, and biblical traditions of friendship can be relied upon in reclaiming a deeper and more fruitful account of friendship, one that lives up to the claim that “no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all the other goods.”<sup>118</sup> However, in order for a true and lasting reclamation and recovery of Christian friendship to take place, these intellectual resources must be accompanied by embodied practices. Thus, the second half of this final chapter will be an argument for the necessity of practice and formation in friendship, and an example of a practice that powerfully manifests Christian friendship.

In several recent books, James K.A. Smith writes about the power of practice and habit.<sup>119</sup> His position follows the Augustinian notion that we are shaped and defined by what we love most. Smith says that we learn to love “not primarily by acquiring

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<sup>116</sup> John 15:2.

<sup>117</sup> John 15:14

<sup>118</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 143.

<sup>119</sup> Specifically: *Desiring the Kingdom* and *You Are What You Love*.

information about *what* we should love, but rather through practices that form the habits of *how* we love.”<sup>120</sup> Our lives are not so much shaped by abstract intellectual knowledge as they are by embodied practices, by doing what we love most. We do not become better friends merely through an understanding what good friendship is, but through practicing good friendship. Therefore, we need both knowledge of how Christian friendship should be practiced, and the habit of actualizing that knowledge. Aristotle writes: “Men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.”<sup>121</sup> In order to practice Christian friendship well, one must do just that: practice.

To more deeply understand James Smith’s thesis and the power of habit, I will give a brief overview of his preliminary argument as it appears in “You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit.”

Smith begins by claiming that the Christian life is more about “hungering and thirsting” (desiring and wanting) than it is about knowing and believing. However, most Christians mistakenly approach discipleship as a didactic endeavor. This didactic model Smith attributes to Rene Descartes, who sees human beings as primarily “res cogitans” or “thinking things.” Descartes places the emphasis of the human being on the mind, on knowledge, and not the body, which he sees as an extraneous vehicle for moving our minds around.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> James Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 21.

<sup>121</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b

<sup>122</sup> James Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3.

However, Smith poses the question: “Do you ever experience a gap between what you know and what you do?”<sup>123</sup> The answer for most of us would be a resounding, “Yes.” Smith claims that most often we do what we love rather than what we know. We are not primarily “thinking things” but “loving things.” What we do shapes and forms us into who we are, and thus, we are what we love. Furthermore, Smith says: “to be a human is to be a lover and to love something ultimate.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, it is not a question of “if” we love, but “what” we love as ultimate.

Smith next emphasizes that our loves act as a kind of subconscious desire—forming and shaping us, even when we do not realize it. Smith cites Paul who uses clothing as a metaphor for the Christian life: to “put on” Christ is to “put on” love and the other virtues of the Christian life.<sup>125</sup> Smith says that these virtues are simply good moral habits. These habits become second nature, so woven into the clothing of the Christian life that one need not deliberate about whether or not to act virtuously; one simply is, or is not, virtuous. Smith explains the connection between love and virtue thusly: “If you are what you love and if love is a virtue, then love is a habit. This means that our most fundamental orientation to the world—the longings and desires that orient us toward some version of the good life—is shaped by imitation and practice.”<sup>126</sup> Love is aimed and directed, just like anything else, through practice: love informs what we practice and our

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>125</sup> Romans 13:14.

<sup>126</sup> James Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 19.

practices form our loves. Thus our practices are of utmost importance to the people we are and will become.

The next move Smith makes in his argument is to say that we are what we worship. Smith writes: “the great Reformer Martin Luther once said, ‘whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God.’ We become what we worship because we worship what we love.”<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, Smith thinks that our idolatries (what we worship) are more liturgical than theological, that is, more shaped by practices than knowledge. Smith writes that we clothe ourselves in Christ’s love *by* letting His Word dwell in us, *by* teaching and exhorting one another in the virtuous life, *by* singing the psalms, *by* kneeling in prayer... The practices, actions, and liturgies of Christian worship train our love by habituating us into fitting citizens for the Kingdom of God.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, for the Christian, the practices and liturgies of church worship are especially formative, and especially powerful for forming our virtues, like friendship.<sup>129</sup> Sadly, even among Christians the importance of worship, and the liturgy thereof, is often neglected. But by making the sincere (and sometimes difficult) effort to be formed by the liturgies of worship, one will be formed into being a better Christian and a better friend. Certainly, liturgy is not the only way to form oneself in Christian friendship, but it can, and will, be employed as a helpful example.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>129</sup> Paul Wadell in his book *Becoming Friends*, writes: “Christian morality is not only inseparable from worship, it begins there” (11). This is the notion that the Christian life of virtue is fundamentally connected to the Christian life of worship.



The specific liturgy that I will engage as an example of Christian friendship is the liturgy of the Eucharist, specifically the rite of Holy Communion. For the purposes of precision, and brevity within this thesis, I will explain this practice from within my own tradition, Roman Catholicism. However, much of what I write can be applied to other liturgies of communion, or the Lord's Supper, found in other Christian traditions.

The Eucharistic liturgy is rich and complex; thus I will primarily focus on the reception of Holy Communion. Stated in a most basic and elementary fashion, Holy Communion is the sacrifice and reception of Christ's body and blood made actually present in consecrated bread and wine. The Eucharistic rite was instituted at the Last Supper,<sup>130</sup> when Christ gave his disciples bread and wine, telling them to take it and eat it and that it was His body and blood given up for them. Holy Communion in the church is practiced by the priest consecrating the bread and wine (mystically transforming them into the body and blood of Christ) and then offering them, along with the congregation, as Christ's un-bloody sacrifice and the sacrifice of their own selves to the Father. Through consuming Christ's holy body and blood, the faithful are given life and enter into intimate union with Him and intimate communion with the members of His body, the Church.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Matthew 26:25-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-23.

<sup>131</sup> "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (John 6:51).

The practice of the communal reception of Christ forms our friendship with others and with God. Specifically, I will argue that the practice of receiving Holy Communion strengthens us against the three problematics of Christian friendship.<sup>132</sup>

Before directing the reader's attention to the three problematics I will emphasize that in order for the Eucharist to be a good example of Christian friendship, it must be practiced so that by internalizing Holy Communion, one consciously internalizes Christ, and thus the practices and truths of Christian friendship. Specifically, true reception of Communion should inform how one lives. Like our relationship with God, our participation in Holy Communion cannot be compartmentalized; rather, its practice should animate all actions of the Christian faithful. Pope Benedict XVI reminds Christians: "A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."<sup>133</sup> He further chastens the Christian by saying: "the Christian faithful need a fuller understanding of the relationship between the Eucharist and their daily lives. Eucharistic spirituality is not just participation in Mass and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It embraces the whole of life."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> This treatment of Eucharistic liturgy will be given primarily with the aid of Pope Benedict XVI's *Sacramentum Caritatis* and John Paul II's *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, but is by no means exclusive to Catholic Christians.

<sup>133</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Vatican Web site, December 25, 2005, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html), sec. 14.

<sup>134</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Vatican Web site, February 22, 2007, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis.html), sec 22.

I will now direct the reader back to the three problematics of Christian friendship and show how the liturgy of Holy Communion gives a striking rejoinder to these weaknesses in friendship.

The friendship exhibited in Holy Communion is not self-centered. By receiving Christ, Christians are drawn into His act of self-sacrifice, and are called to their own sacrifice. The body and blood of Christ present in Holy Communion are tangible reminders of John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” By receiving the Eucharist, Christ’s selfless love becomes a daily reminder that true friendship is other-centered. Furthermore, the Eucharistic liturgy reminds the Christian of the true *telos* of Christian friendship, which is neither pleasure nor profit but Christ himself. Christ *is* our happiness; it is Christ for whom we were made, Christ without whom we are incomplete. When Christians receive the Holy Communion together, their aim is Christ—connecting in intimate union with Him when they eat His flesh and blood.

Friendships founded in and strengthened by the Holy Communion are not disposable, neither easily begun nor ended. The Eucharistic community unites the eternal with the temporal. John 6:51 says: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.” Christ says that whoever receives Him in Holy Communion “will live forever,” thus connecting the liturgy of the Eucharist to the life eternal, and reminding His disciples that their temporal actions have eternal consequence. Likewise, union and friendship with Christ and communion and friendship with other Christians are both temporally and eternally significant.

Finally, the Eucharistic liturgy reminds one that friendship with others and friendship with God are inseparable realities. Pope Benedict writes: “Communion always and inseparably has both a vertical and a horizontal sense: it is communion with God and communion with our brothers and sisters. Both dimensions mysteriously converge in the gift of the Eucharist.”<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, one reads in 1 Corinthians 10:17 “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Thus union with Christ is also union with all those to whom He gives himself.

The unifying power of the body of Christ, and the habits inculcated through a sincere practice of Holy Communion, give the Christian a clear example of how to practice Christian friendship with others and with God.

To conclude this thesis, I will ask the reader to recall the thinned and feeble understanding of friendship given in the preface, and then to dwell on the rich and powerful understanding of friendship as portrayed in this final chapter. The resources for the reclamation and revitalization of friendship were multidimensional, beginning with the philosophical tradition of the pre-Christians Aristotle and Cicero, then developing with the addition of Christ into the theological account given by Aelred, and finally reaching the perfect iteration as given by Christ in the scriptures. All of these resources build a rich and solid foundation for the practice of friendship. However, as we learn in this final chapter, knowledge is empty without action and practice, and if we want to be formed into better friends, we must look further. Therefore, I urge the reader to reach beyond the detached, albeit edifying, knowledge of Christian friendship to its actual

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<sup>135</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, sec, 76.

practice, remembering that the liturgies of the church hold truths of love and friendship that will form and nourish a life of Christian friendship, if they are only allowed to.

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