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Mindfulness and the Discernment of Passions: Insights from Thomas Aquinas

THOMAS J. BUSHLACK

The general concept of mindfulness is an essential—if sometimes overlooked—aspect of Christian spirituality and morality. In a recent article, Aloysius Pieris, S.J., helps to rectify this by drawing attention to a rich biblical tradition of mindfulness understood as “recollected and recognition.” In this biblical paradigm, believers mindfully recall the acts of mercy that God has enacted on behalf of God’s people and recognize God’s continuing presence and promise of loving care, especially for the poor, now and into the future.1 In his defense of this biblical tradition, he suggests that the scholastic tradition is of little use for appreciating the role of mindfulness in Christian spirituality. In particular, he claims that “Thomism is deafeningly silent about the ancient practice of discernment, with its emphasis more on the virtue of prudence.”2 I want to suggest, however, that Thomas Aquinas’s richly descriptive account of the relationship between the passions and prudence implies a certain kind of awareness and capacity for mature discernment of one’s desires. Although Aquinas does not use the language of mindfulness in the way it is understood in contemporary spiritual practices, he should not be overlooked for the potential resources his approach to theology can provide for cultivating mindfulness.

It is fair to claim that certain manifestations of scholasticism, in particular the neo-scholasticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fixated on abstract analysis divorced from practical experience. One of the great insights, however, of more recent scholarship on Aquinas is that these scholars have highlighted the ways in which Aquinas was steeped in biblical theology, informed by the theology of the monastic and early church theologians, and concerned to address the practical and spiritual needs of his medieval context.3 Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., one of the preeminent living historians of Aquinas, writes the following:

It may be surprising to see [Aquinas] presented as a spiritual master. . . . The figure who at times seems to be known only for his philosophy is also first and foremost a theologian, a commentator on Sacred Scripture, an attentive student of the Fathers of the Church, and a man concerned about the spiritual and pastoral repercussions of his teaching.4
Discussions of the passions among the monastic writers in the Greek-speaking East such as Evagrius Pontus are more well-known. Awareness of the importance of the passions can also be found in the Latin-speaking West, especially through the writings of John Cassian and Gregory the Great. Aquinas’s familiarity with this tradition is attested to by the following three pieces of biographical information. First, he spent between nine or ten years as an oblate of the Benedictines at Monte Cassino prior to becoming a Dominican friar. Second, he kept a copy of Cassian’s *Collationes* throughout his life. And third, his moral and spiritual theology in the *Summa Theologicae* makes frequent references to Gregory.5 Torrell concludes by claiming that “there is no need to add to his theology, because it already leads to piety. We only need to pursue the full extent of what the theology itself requires of us.”6 Thus, my goal in this essay is to pursue an exploration of the kind of mindfulness that Aquinas’s discussion of the passions and the virtue of prudence implies and its ongoing significance for Christian spirituality and morality.

In light of recent popular interest in the role of mindfulness in Christian spirituality and Pieris’ critiques of Thomism, it is worthwhile to consider the implications of what Aquinas has to say regarding awareness of the passions in his Christian anthropology.7 Aquinas distinguishes between two types of basic human desires—passions and affections. The passions are the embodied movements of attraction or aversion that one experiences in response to internal or external stimuli. He describes passions as desires that are passively undergone by the person and which cause a “corporeal transmutation.”8 Affections, on the other hand, are spiritual movements (that is, non-embodied) experienced in the will, or the intellectual appetite, over which the person has more direct control. In order to highlight the embodied component of desire and because passions have received less attention in the secondary literature, I will focus more squarely on the passions in this essay and the will only as indirectly related to the passions.

My defense of Aquinas as a reliable resource in cultivating a Christian spirituality of mindfulness and mind-body awareness proceeds in three parts. In the first section I present a philosophical account of the role of the passions in the process of prudence or practical reasoning in Aquinas’s work.9 An analysis of the interaction between passions and practical reasoning reveals that prudence entails a capacity for the wise discernment of one’s embodied states that is often described as mindfulness. In other words, mindfulness is one aspect or modality of the broader process of practical reasoning, but one that is essential to its proper functioning. Two potential objections may arise, however, from the outset. First, since Aquinas does not use the language of mindfulness, and since attention to mindfulness in Christian spirituality is relatively new,10 it may be anachronistic at best to speak of mindfulness in relation to Aquinas’s
account of passions and prudence. Second, mindfulness typically has “an eastern flavor.” That is, it has received more sustained attention in Eastern traditions, especially Buddhism and yoga, and has only recently captured the attention of Christian thinkers. Therefore, one may object that the current study is both anachronistic and imposes an idiosyncratically contemporary hermeneutical lens upon Aquinas’s texts.

Therefore, I begin by explaining how I am using the term mindfulness and why I find it fitting to apply the term to describe one essential modality of Aquinas’s discussion of the prudential discernment of the passions. I find Jon Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness to provide a concise and helpful starting point. He defines mindfulness as “the intentional cultivation of nonjudgmental moment-to-moment awareness.” However, as the founder of the University of Massachusetts’ Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society, he has drawn primarily upon Buddhist notions of mindfulness in developing his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program. Christian Mindfulness, however, is tethered to distinctively Christian notions of contemplation—that is, total attention to the present moment and to God’s loving presence within each moment. According to Eugene Larkin, such contemplative mindfulness puts us “in communion with the real and the Real.” Therefore, Christian mindfulness takes us beyond the simple non-judgmental attention to the moment that is typically captured in Buddhist thought and deeper into the experience of the ultimate Reality who is God. In other words, Christian mindfulness is not an end in itself, but is at the service of a deeper perception of the presence of God in each moment. Although Aquinas does not use the language of mindfulness, his moral and spiritual theology is properly understood as leading the human person toward contemplation, to being open to God’s presence and the gifts of grace, and to responding wisely and virtuously in our thoughts and actions. What I find most helpful in drawing upon Kabat-Zinn’s definition is his appreciation for the ways in which the initial suspension of judgment in response to one’s passions enables a wiser engagement with and discernment of one’s passionate desires. When such wise engagement is cultivated, mindfulness in the Christian tradition can give way to deeper moments of contemplation of the Triune God. Given the tendency in the Christian tradition to interpret the body’s inclinations as likely to incite us to sin, Kabat-Zinn’s emphasis upon the initial suspension of judgment is particularly salient for cultivating more healthy engagement with the body and its passions. Therefore, if undertaken with careful hermeneutical attention to the differing language and context between us and Aquinas, reading Thomas through the lens of mindfulness—one that is admittedly formed in a contemporary dialogue between East and West—will prove to be neither anachronistic nor hermeneutically inappropriate.
In the second section I explore the ways in which mindfulness functions within a distinctively Christian spirituality, understood as a faithful response to God’s gift of grace. Christian spirituality implies a twofold mindfulness: first, an awareness of the passionate energies that must be wisely directed into prudential reasoning; and second, awareness of God’s grace and a capacity to respond to it. In the final section I conclude by noting three implications of a Thomistic account of mindfulness for contemporary spiritual practices. First, I claim that the technical scholastic language that Aquinas employs can be a barrier for those who might otherwise be interested in the significance of his theology as a resource for understanding Christian mindfulness. Thus, I translate the insights gained in the previous sections into a language that is more easily appreciated today, but which retains the careful distinctions that his analysis makes possible. Second, I note that a Thomistic analysis of mindfulness may be helpful for Christians engaged in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue regarding spiritual practices precisely because he provides a philosophical description of wise discernment that remains normative for any person engaged in practical reason. At the same time, however, he highlights the distinctive manner in which such discernment is practiced within Christian spirituality, particularly in response to grace. Finally, I note that in the Christian tradition the body itself has become a highly ambiguous modality of God’s grace. One commentator goes so far as to describe a “rout of the body” in the development of early Christian thought. Although there is a tendency in the Christian tradition to focus—even to obsess—on the ways in which the body’s passions are a constant temptation to sin, Aquinas’s account of the passions provides helpful suggestions for ways in which a more subtle awareness of the embodied natural inclinations can become a more trustworthy guide in the spiritual life.

AQUINAS ON PASSIONS AND PRUDENCE

One possible reason that Aquinas’s account of the passions has been overlooked in the secondary literature until fairly recently may be that most interpreters focus narrowly on Aquinas’s assertion that human action originates in the will, and that reason is the measure and rule of human action. It may appear, therefore, that reason and will are the only aspects of human action that demand mindful attention. In this perspective the body and its passions, if essential at all, are only of secondary importance. However, a closer look at what Aquinas has to say about the congruence of the appetites with the intellect demonstrates that spiritual and moral freedom requires awareness of the embodied passions involved in human motivation. The passions play a significant role in the manner in which human beings, understood as embodied rational creatures made in the image of God, are able to discern, judge, and act in ways congruent with God’s will and our deepest human longings.
Noting the tendency to interpret Aquinas as if he placed sole emphasis on the intellect and the will, Daniel Westberg writes, “[t]he relation between intellect and passion is often set up as one of inherent opposition, with the will as arbiter. This is not the model used by St. Thomas.” Rather, the goal for Aquinas is to order the passions to work in harmony with intellect and will in order that the person may act freely in pursuit of goods that will lead to true human flourishing—in this life and in the next. Aquinas refers to such goods that are apprehended in the intellect and desired via the appetites as “appetible goods” (in Latin, *boni appetabili*). Authentic human freedom flows from aligning the *boni appetabili* with the pursuit of “true” or “virtuous goods” (in Latin, *bonum honestum*), in order that one may self-consciously direct the appetites toward virtuous goods and ends. When functioning well, the passions are the human person’s embodied sensations of attraction toward goods that will contribute to his or her well-being and the well-being of others, and the correlative aversion to objects or circumstances that will harm such well-being.

I begin by drawing attention to the two contexts in which Aquinas discusses the effects of the passions on practical reason in the *Summa Theologiae*: I–II q. 24 a. 3, *ad* 1, and I–II q. 61 a. 2. His goal is to provide an account of the ways in which the passions are brought into harmony with reason, or under what Aristotle refers to as the “political rule” of reason. Aquinas first highlights the ways in which passions can thwart or disrupt the proper functioning of reason, and he indicates that passions can do this in two ways:

First, by the passions inciting to something against reason; and then the passions need a curb, which we call temperance. Second, by the passions diverting us from following the dictate of reason, through fear of danger or hard work for example, and then a person needs to be strengthened for that which reason dictates, lest he turn back; and to this end there is fortitude.

Aquinas is drawing upon a distinction between what he calls the intellectual and sensible appetites. The former are experienced as affections in the will and the latter are experienced as passions in the body. He further divides the sensitive appetites into what he calls the concupiscible and irascible appetites. The concupiscible appetite entails the love of pleasure derived from external goods (such as food, drink, sex, money, etc.), and is brought into harmony with reason by the virtue temperance. The irascible appetite generates fear and is harmonized with reason through the virtue fortitude or courage. Thus, there are two basic kinds of passion for Aquinas. The first are the *passions of attraction* for external goods that he calls the concupiscible appetite, and the second are the *passions of aversion* to fearful or difficult situations that he calls the irascible appetite. In other words, passions are the basic drivers of attraction and aversion that undergird the embodied component of human motivation.
and action. They are then brought into harmony with reason and will through the proper exercise of the virtues temperance and courage.

In *ST* I–II q.24 a. 3, Thomas further specifies the ways in which passions may interact with reason or intellect. He indicates that immoderate attachment to external goods may interfere *antecedently* to practical reason by misdirecting the intellect toward an improper object from the beginning. Fear or avoidance may interfere *consequently* to the process of discernment by keeping the person from acting upon the end process of prudential reasoning that issues the command to execute a particular act. In both instances passions can interfere with prudence—either by disrupting the earlier process of discernment and judgment of the most fitting means to the end sought, or by stopping the full application of prudence to action by interfering with the command of the will to execute a particular act.\(^{28}\)

While it is true that passions can frequently disrupt practical reason, it is also true that well-ordered passions positively support the will and contribute to the process of practical reasoning. In Aquinas’s account of the passions, they do this *consequently*, either by automatically following the lead of the higher parts of the soul (such as intellect and will) or insofar as a person may choose “to be affected by a passion in order to work more promptly with the cooperation of the sensitive appetite.”\(^{29}\) In either case, the presence of passion that accompanies a good act indicates a greater possession of virtue. The more one has developed a capacity for discernment of the passions the more she will be able to bring those natural inclinations of attachment or aversion into harmony with reason and will. This is a skill that can be gradually perfected through the use of practices such as non-judgmental awareness of one’s passionate appetites—that is, mindful observation of oneself. In an ideal situation well-ordered passions dispose one to the proper exercise of practical reason and its perfection through prudence.\(^{30}\)

The passions, when mindfully acknowledged and properly ordered to the good in conformity with reason, aid and strengthen the will and thereby increase a person’s spiritual freedom and capacity to choose the good. In Aquinas’s account, the passions can distract reason from acting toward its true end or they can follow upon a properly executed act, but when properly ordered they also facilitate and support the process of practical reasoning. For example, Nicholas Lombardo writes, “[t]here is a circular, symbiotic relationship between prudence and affectivity in Aquinas’s account. Prudence both depends on virtuous appetite and guides appetite toward virtue.”\(^{31}\) The fact that one can mindfully guide her passions toward fitting acts is why Aquinas believes that one can be held morally responsible for her desires.\(^{32}\)

Prudence entails a three-stage process of discernment, judgment, and action, sometimes initiated in response to the arising of the natural inclinations
of the passions. Aquinas states that “it belongs to prudence . . . to apply right reason to action, and this is not done without a right appetite.” Mindfulness of the push and pull of one’s sensitive appetites (that is, passions or embodied desires) is therefore one essential component of practical reasoning. Since prudence is accounted as both an intellectual and a moral virtue, prudence plays a distinctive role in integrating the embodied or emotional aspects of discernment with the more abstract or rational aspects of human behavior. This first step of discernment requires that the person make use of the gift of reason to become as fully aware as possible of the various passions of attraction or aversion that influence one’s motivation. Because humans are rational beings and capable of self-directed action through the will, one cannot blindly follow these passionate inclinations (in the way animals do) but they must be brought into harmony with proper reasoning about the best possible choice of action. Prudence, aided by the practice of mindfulness, is an essential component of cultivating a healthy capacity for free moral choices and actions. Without this skill, one is often quite literally a slave of the passions.

The passions are the body’s natural inclinations, which order the virtues temperance and courage towards their proper ends. Aquinas indicates, however, that for the full attainment of the good of the human person, although the moral virtues such as temperance and courage are rooted in and ordered by these natural inclinations, “the inclination of nature . . . does not suffice for this purpose.” This is due to two reasons. First, although the natural inclinations of the passions order and direct the sensitive appetite toward true or virtuous goods, these must be further specified toward particular choices through prudential reasoning. Second, the disorder in the soul caused by human error and/or original sin further complicates this process of prudential discernment of one’s desires. It is the role of prudence to provide the mediating step of specifying which means will guide the natural inclinations into particular choices that will lead to the attainment of the “true” or “virtuous” ends (the bonum honestum) appointed by the moral virtues. In other words, while these natural inclinations orient the person’s appetites toward the attainment of the good and the aversion of evil, they do so rather inchoately. These natural inclinations can quickly dissipate into an endless labyrinth of desire, leaving the person ultimately unsatisfied and frustrated in the pursuit of happiness and the true good. Larkin describes this as a result of living mindlessly that leads to “divided and disordered selves.” Prudence therefore requires a recollection of the self that is facilitated by mindfulness of the passions so that they can be intentionally directed toward choices that will lead to the attainment of the person’s true good. Mindfulness creates a space within which prudential discernment of the passions may be undertaken.
Aquinas’s discussion of solicitude as a necessary component of prudence implies a correlative capacity for mindfulness as careful attention to the present moment. Solicitude (in Latin, *sollicitudo*) is a kind of careful watchfulness with regard to the context as to what is to be done, combined with a concern for the present situation that issues in a quick response. Quoting Augustine, Thomas writes that “prudence maintains careful watchfulness and diligent vigilance lest we be gradually deceived by bad advice.” On the one hand, solicitude implies a certain quickness of response that could be understood to advocate for a kind of rushed mindlessness and anxiety over the future. Indeed, Aquinas lists such solicitousness as a vice that falsely mimics prudence. If taken in this way, solicitude would work against the kind of mindfulness that is required for prudential discernment. On the other hand, Aquinas is careful to note that solicitude does not connote this kind of heedless action. Quoting from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV 3. 1124b), he notes that the magnanimous person is slow and leisurely in cultivating wise and generous action. He responds, however, that “the magnanimous person is said to be ‘slow and leisurely’ not because he is solicitous about nothing, but because he is not overly solicitous about many things.” Therefore, the magnanimous and prudent person who cultivates solicitude does not overlook the need to take careful counsel, but rather exhibits a quickness in responding to wise counsel once a judgment has been properly formed. If we tether mindfulness to solicitude, then such mindful solicitude enables a person to filter out unnecessary sensory information (such as distracting, disordered passions) and to focus on what is to be done in the moment. Although Aquinas does not state it in these terms, this kind of practical wisdom demands close attention to both the internal and external aspects of the present moment within which the wise person deliberates about what is to be done. The greater one has practiced and perfected prudence along with a correlative capacity for mindfulness, the more quickly, easily, and joyfully will she exhibit solicitousness in her execution of wise actions.

A necessary conclusion of Aquinas’s discussion is that solicitude therefore includes a capacity to mindfully notice and to quickly foresee the outcome of one’s response to the passions. These observations become the foundation for a sound judgment regarding what is to be done. In other words, careful attention to the present moment enables a person to pause and follow the inclination of a passion to its logical conclusion. This gives the intellect time to consider the end result of following a particular passion and to wisely discern whether or not to follow the impulse of a particular inclination. This skill entails a capacity to respond to one’s passions without allowing them to drive one’s behavior blindly. It is a skill that can be cultivated and strengthened through mindfulness and careful attention to the subtle contours of each moment. By using the practices of mindfulness and solicitousness to engage more directly with the
body’s natural inclinations and then to create what the Buddhist teacher and psychologist Tara Brach calls a “sacred pause” before following the inclination of a passion, one grows in self-knowledge of her embodied responses to various goods and circumstances and learns to wisely harness those energies toward true and virtuous goods. The initial suspension of judgment regarding one’s passions that is highlighted in Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness creates the cognitive space within which one may wisely discern and respond to the energies of the body. Temperance and courage moderate the immediate effect of the passions, and they do so in conjunction with prudence which uses reason and solicitude to quickly discern and choose which passions are worth acting upon, and which are to be avoided.

Prudence thus perfects the practical intellect, harnesses and focuses the inchoate inclinations of the passions, and provides the thread that holds together the initial activation of the appetites, proper reasoning, and its direct application and execution in action. For this process to go well one must be able to mindfully discern the effect of the passions on the process of practical reason, and to have cultivated the capacity to direct them toward true goods under the direction of reason and will. The challenge in this process lies in the fact that there is such an immediacy and strength to the embodied nature of the passions that persons often respond to them quickly and mindlessly—that is, without solicitous reason. On the other hand, mindfulness, understood as “non-judgmental moment-to-moment awareness” (Kabat-Zinn) or as a “sacred pause” (Brach), creates a cognitive space where one can briefly suspend judgment in a relaxed state of mind in order to discern the likely outcome of a particular passion before responding. Taking this pause makes it more likely that a person can intelligently respond to the passions by discerning whether or not they are leading toward authentic well-being or toward actions that may ultimately be harmful to one’s self or to others. Thus, although Aquinas does not use terms such as mindfulness, awareness, or discernment in his account of the role of the passions in relation to prudence, his analysis implies that a certain kind of mindfulness of the passions is necessary in order for a person to execute good practical judgments and right actions.

GRACE AND THE MINDFUL DISCERNMENT OF PASSIONS

Thus far I have demonstrated how Aquinas’s analysis of the relationship between passions and prudence implies a certain degree of mindfulness. In doing so, I have provided a philosophical and normative account of Aquinas’s description of the relationship between passions and prudence that in theory applies to any person engaged in prudential reasoning. In the second part of this essay I focus on the ways in which mindfulness plays an essential role within a distinctively Christian spirituality. As Larkin notes, the distinguishing char-
Door Closed, Courtesy Leo van Rozendaa
acteristic of Christian mindfulness is not only awareness of self and context, but also a recognition that the “given moment is the only place one can meet God.” Likewise, Pieris notes that a person will “identify the object of mindfulness as God or God’s will,” and that the final result of this mindfulness of God results in “doing what God wills for me here and now.” Although the presence of God’s grace adds an additional dimension to the practice of mindfulness that must be accounted for, wise discernment of the passions remains an essential component of Christian mindfulness. Indeed, the help God offers via grace enables a deeper integration between passions, reason, and will, especially as the appetites are brought into harmony under the architectonic direction of the virtue charity.

The font from which the Christian life is lived is the freely offered gift of the grace of Jesus Christ that God infuses through the Holy Spirit into the soul at the moment of conversion. Aquinas refers to this grace as “habitual grace,” understood as a supernatural quality of the soul that accomplishes the transformation of the entire human person from the inside outward. Space does not allow a full explanation of Aquinas’s theology of grace. I do, however, want to focus on the implications of introducing the active agency of God’s grace into the analysis of the role of mindfulness in the relationship between passions and prudence. In other words, if the Christian life is understood as a response to God’s gift of grace, how does the infusion of grace affect the practice of mindfulness as the prudential discernment of passions in Christian spirituality?

Scripture attests to the existence of both the theological virtues faith, hope, and love or charity (see 1 Corinthians 13:13) and the moral or cardinal virtues prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude (see Wisdom 8:7). Following St. Paul, who asserts that “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13), Aquinas maintains that charity functions as the architectonic virtue of the will that orders and directs all other virtues toward the love of God and the good of one’s self and of others. In Aquinas’s terms, charity is the “form of the virtues,” insofar as it informs every motion of the appetites and the virtues by ordering them toward congruence with God’s will. While some have held that infused charity alone is sufficient to direct the cardinal virtues toward love of God and others, Aquinas maintains that the person also needs an infused form of the cardinal virtues in order to enable a person to faithfully respond to God’s call. Although the proper material (the physical “stuff”) and the proximate object (the immediate goal) of these infused virtues remains the same, they differ in species from the naturally acquired virtues. In other words, the nature of each infused cardinal virtue is distinguished from its acquired counterpart because each infused virtue acts with a different final end (that is, God) and according to a different rule and mean (that is, the Divine rule provided in Scripture rather than the rule of reason alone).
Unfortunately, Aquinas is not entirely clear about the status of the previously acquired cardinal virtues after the infused forms of the virtues have been given. Does a Christian therefore possess both the acquired and the infused forms of the cardinal virtues or only the infused forms? While scholars have disagreed for centuries about the implications of Aquinas’s theory of infused virtues, I follow the recent thesis supported by William Mattison and Angela McKay Knobel who claim that a person in a state of habitual grace must necessarily be in possession of only the infused forms of the cardinal virtues. In what follows I will assume that it is the infused forms of all the virtues that are active in the Christian life (assuming that one remains in a state of grace).

One example that Aquinas provides regarding the manner in which the infused virtues function is taken from acts of infused temperance. His choice provides an example of how the concupiscible passions that are moderated through infused temperance and directed toward virtuous means through infused prudence function in relation to grace and the theological virtues. Regarding infused temperance Aquinas writes the following:

In the consumption of food, the mean fixed by human reason is that food should not harm the health of the body, nor hinder the use of reason. On the other hand, according to the Divine rule, it is fitting for a person to “chastise the body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27), by abstinence in food, drink and the like. It is therefore evident that infused and acquired temperance differ in species, and the same applies to the other virtues.

Thus, both the acquired and the infused forms of temperance function with relation to the same material (that is, “food, drink and the like”) and the same set of concupiscible passions that respond to these appetible goods. In general, a temperate person will respond to the desire for food in ways consistent with reason and that support health and well-being. But a temperate person in a state of grace will respond not only according to the rule of reason but also with regard to what is revealed in Scripture. In this way, Scripture and charity inform the will in directing the concupiscible passions toward acts congruent with Scripture and the love of God. Thus, such a person will simultaneously direct those natural inclinations toward God and toward a choice that will support not only her physical health and well-being but also the well-being of her eternal soul and that of others. In relation to the practice of mindfulness, fidelity to God’s gift of grace requires an awareness not only of one’s passions but also of the effects of God’s grace as it elevates the human intellect and will to act with a higher goal that transcends but does not disregard the bodily needs of this earthly life.

If this were the whole story, then it would seem that God’s grace provides a magic bullet that makes possible perfect mindfulness of God’s presence and
the capacity to respond to God’s loving will with perfectly ordered passions. But of course one need not look far to recall examples from one’s life or others’ to indicate that no Christian—not even the saints—has ever achieved such perfection in this life. The challenge of the spiritual life arises from the fact that although the infused forms of the cardinal virtues remove the opposing vices, and thus make it possible to respond freely to God’s grace, there still remain the previously acquired dispositions of the soul. The dispositions may at times work against the grain of grace. Indeed, one of the primary ways that these contrary dispositions are experienced is through the passions, which remain imperfectly ordered as long as the person remains in the body on the journey toward God in this earthly life. Thus, mindfulness of the conflicting forces within the body and soul of a person in a state of habitual grace will be an essential tool for bringing those dispositions and inclinations into harmony with God’s will.

The drama of the Christian journey is therefore that the wayfarer is in a peculiar spiritual struggle between the forces of good and evil within her very body and soul. On the one hand, even with habitual grace a person remains in the body and in possession of a free will as these have been affected by the consequences of both original sin (common to humankind) and actual sins (specific to individual persons). With respect to the influence of original sin, Aquinas writes that the natural inclination to good is not destroyed, but is rather “diminished by sin.”52 This diminishment is felt primarily in the will, but the disorder of the will also flows over into the passions. This disorder is healed but never fully perfected in this life by the gift of grace. Here Aquinas picks up the Augustinian insight that a person’s character is ultimately defined by what he or she loves as the highest good, and that this orientation will be reflected in the ways in which the appetites manifest and subsequently direct choice and behavior. With respect to actual sins Thomas speaks of the “difficulty in performing actions proper to . . . the infused moral virtues because of certain contrary dispositions surviving from previous acts.”53 The dispositions contrary to infused temperance and courage, which are experienced as embedded in the passions, thus remain to be struggled against in the spiritual life. In other words, there is a sort of embodied memory from past sinful acts that may continue to influence present and future choices, even once the will has been oriented toward the love of God and informed by charity.54

On the other hand, the positive dispositions remaining from previously acquired virtue and the infused forms of the virtues function as additional aids in this spiritual struggle “to work out [one’s] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 1:12). Thus, Vincent de Castro Novo, O.P., fills in Aquinas’s comments in the De Virtutibus when he writes that
Acquired virtue prevails in this, that the struggle is felt less, and this is due to how this type of virtue is caused, by which is repeated acts. For one loosens the custom of obeying such passions when one becomes accustomed to resisting them and that is why one is troubled by them less. But infused virtue prevails in this, that although such passions are felt, they in no way dominate. After the infusion of grace a person retains whatever positive dispositions that have been acquired, while grace and charity further strengthen such well-ordered passions just as grace also begins to heal disordered desires. Indeed, Aquinas even goes so far as to claim that the cultivation of acquired virtues may dispose one to receive the infused virtues in the first place. While Thomas never explains the full implications of this statement, it seems probable that one reason natural virtue may dispose one to receive grace is that the passions that have been well-ordered by temperance and courage are less likely to interfere in the process of the will’s assent to God’s freely offered gift of grace. If we add to this discussion the fact of God’s desire for every person to “be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), it seems that Aquinas desires to underscore God’s graciousness in providing help in coming to friendship with God in charity. The more mindful one is of God’s presence and help the more likely one is to positively assent to grace in the will and to order the passions more consistently in harmony with reason, the order of charity, and God’s loving will.

Habitual grace, gratuitous graces, charity, and the infused virtues temperance and courage function along with infused prudence to aid the person in ordering the passions toward the love of God, self, and neighbors. At the same time, the previously acquired negative dispositions remain that must be mindfully discerned in order to respond to them wisely to order them into greater harmony with charity. Mindfulness is therefore required in the Christian life in order to effectively discern the ongoing impact of the passionate dispositions that remain after conversion. Just as mindfulness was implied as a necessary component of natural virtue in the previous section, mindfulness is analogously a necessary tool for sustaining continued growth in the infused forms of the virtues. Such spiritual growth “should be understood in terms of the emergence of habits that were potentially there all along [after the infusion of grace], rather than as the acquisition of virtues that did not exist in the subject before.” Since grace and the infused virtues are unmerited gifts from God a person may in no way earn them. Grace therefore implies something entirely new within the soul. At the same time, however, the continued effects of previously acquired dispositions highlight the continuity of the personality of a person before and after conversion. Thus does Aquinas uphold both the total gratuity of God’s gift and the freedom and continuity of the human will and personality after conversion. Similarly, just as the mindful “sacred pause”
in response to the immediate inclination of the passions makes possible a wise direction of those passions into healthy choices and acts through the acquired form of the virtue prudence, so too does mindfulness enable one to prudently direct those passions into acts that are harmonized with and further ordered by God’s grace via the infused forms of the virtues.

Therefore, one can speak of a twofold mindfulness requisite for Christian spirituality: (1) awareness of the inclination and ordering of the passions as they lead toward or misdirect reason away from the love of God, self, and others, and (2) awareness of God’s abiding and loving presence experienced as the healing movements of grace in one’s body and soul. The addition of grace and the infused forms of the virtues adds a layer of complexity to the analysis of mindfulness as discernment of the passions via prudential reasoning. The Christian spiritual life requires mindfulness not only of one’s interior dispositions, and a capacity to prudently channel those dispositions into acts congruent with reason, Scripture, and God’s loving will, but also an embodied sensitivity to the promptings of God’s graces in everyday life. The theological virtues that function as the principle of the infused cardinal virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit create the capacity for such spiritual sensitivity to grace.58

I claimed in the introduction that Christian mindfulness leads toward contemplation, and that Aquinas’s discussion of the virtues is properly interpreted as oriented toward the final goal of contemplation as the intellect’s resting quietly and receptively in the presence of God. A tension therefore arises between the active effort of will involved in the discernment of passions and the passive receptivity of the intellect in contemplation. Larkin notes: “Practice in meditation and in mindfulness will develop the virtues needed and give me a handle on my desires [including the passions]. Perfect mindfulness will neutralize the warring factions within me and let me be absorbed by what I am doing.”59 Thomas Keating makes a similar distinction, rooted in the classic notions of kataphatic (or active) and the apophatic (more receptive) dimensions of contemplative prayer. Kataphatic contemplation is, in this understanding, “a preparation for contemplation” that involves “a disciplined use of reason, imagination, memory, and emotion.” Apophatic contemplation entails “resting in God beyond the exercise of particular acts.”60 Perfect mindfulness of the divine presence in each moment therefore leads one beyond the active discernment of passions into an experience of self-forgetfulness in the divine presence. In this state the active faculties are stilled and one is drawn into God’s essence as pure Act and pure Being, the “eternal now.”61 This apophatic contemplation is experienced without effort or strain on the part of the person. And yet, as St. John of the Cross’s discussion of the dark night of the soul gives witness, even for the most advanced practitioners of contemplation and the holiest of
saints, such moments of pure contemplation are pure gift, are relatively rare, and are interspersed by great effort and spiritual struggle. What this suggests is that there is a circular and synergistic pattern in spiritual life between disciplined moments of quiet restfulness and the demands of the active life in which virtue is perfected. Greater virtue disposes one to deeper receptivity to grace, while deeper receptivity to grace conforms the person to God’s presence in each moment. This in turn enables more consistency in the wise discernment and ordering of the passions into acts of virtue. Mindfulness as one modality of prudential reasoning is therefore heightened and strengthened by both the active (*kataphatic*) and receptive (*apophatic*) moments of contemplation.

Aquinas writes, for example, that “the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life dispositively. For the act of contemplation . . . is hindered both by the disruptiveness of the passions . . . and by outward disturbances.”62 Christian mindfulness is therefore always directed toward the end of receptive, *apophatic* contemplation. But the more active and intentional moments of discerning the passions to bring them into harmony with right reason and the love of God serve to remove the barriers to contemplation such as disordered passions and vices that divide the self and disrupt one’s relationship with God in the present moment. When mindfulness is practiced consistently as part of a regular prayer life, this circular and symbiotic relationship between active and passive moments of contemplation leads to a synergistic effect in which growth in moral virtue is coupled with greater awareness of and intimacy with God in all moments of daily life. For more advanced practitioners of Christian mindfulness awareness of one’s sinfulness and of the ongoing struggle with vices then becomes a call to return to quiet contemplation. Personal struggles with disordered passions foster mindfulness of one’s total dependency upon God in each moment, rather than encouraging moments of recoiling from God in shame. Such proclivity to shame is archetypically represented by Adam and Eve hiding from God in their nakedness in the garden (see Genesis 3:8). Rather, intimacy with God is fostered by the kind of non-judgmental attention to the present moment as the only space within which one may encounter God, whether in the mundane activities of daily life or the fleeting moments of infused contemplative prayer.

The technical and precise language of Aquinas’s analysis helps us to appreciate these essential components of the spiritual life that the great writers of the Christian tradition have noted. For example, Thomas Merton writes that “seeds of contemplation” are constantly drifting past human consciousness, and that “[m]ost of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, *because [persons] are not prepared to receive them:* for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of liberty and desire.”63 A Thomistic account of the role of mindfulness enables a deeper appreciation of the ways
in which one may work to cultivate such good soil of liberty and well-ordered desire where grace may take root in the whole person and enable her to grow into “maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

AQUINAS’S SIGNIFICANCE FOR CHRISTIAN MINDFULNESS

I conclude by noting three ways in which the implications of a Thomistic account of mindfulness may provide helpful directions for spiritual practices that seek to integrate mind-body awareness and mindfulness. First, it should be admitted that Aquinas’s scholastic language and use of Aristotelian philosophy is not the common idiom of those persons who are interested in a spirituality of mindfulness today. My goal has not so much been to suggest that everyone interested in such practices must spend the requisite time to understand Thomas’s technical language and systematic theology, but my goal has been to claim that his analysis of passions and prudence provides helpful insights for those interested in mindfulness practices. One would be hard-pressed to find individuals who speak of the concupiscible and irascible appetites, or of acquired and infused virtues, outside of a few academic departments where such terms retain their relevance. But anyone with even a small amount of experience in spiritual
practices will easily recognize the conflicting forces of aversion and attraction at work in one’s mind and body and the difficulty of sorting through these desires in making responsible and mature decisions. And in his own way Aquinas is aware of and provides a language for talking about the conflicting desires between continued growth in virtue and the constant temptations that serve as reminders of human sinfulness and the need for grace. Aquinas’s analyses of the help provided by grace and the dispositions that remain after conversion shed light on the struggle that the author of the first letter to Peter describes when he admonishes Christians to “live as free men and women, but do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil” (1 Peter 2:16). This kind of freedom for choosing the good is possible only with mature awareness of one’s passionate desires and a cultivated solicitude in directing them toward true goods through prudence.

Aquinas’s discussion of the passions as appetites of aversion and attraction, and his distinction between the naturally acquired and the infused virtues temperance, courage, and prudence retains a capacity to highlight some of the more nuanced aspects of the spiritual struggle to become more loving and compassionate human beings. In translating the Thomistic lexicon for a contemporary audience, one can understand the concupiscible appetite as the embodied attraction for external goods, which can lead to unhealthy attachment. The irascible appetite may be understood as the embodied aversion to or fear of dangerous or difficult situations that may prevent one from the bold actions required for spiritual growth. In addition, although not all Christians agree with Aquinas’s theory of infused virtues, his account highlights the reality that even as humans are capable of acquiring a certain amount of moral excellence of their own accord, spiritual growth entails a recognition of the need for help from a source that transcends human capacities. Aquinas’s discussion of grace, charity, and infused virtues provides one way of expressing the need for reliance on a transcendent source of strength in the spiritual struggle. Thus, a Thomistic account of mindfulness may provide a nuanced language for dealing with the conflicting desires that arise in the spiritual life, and for seeking a transcendent source of help in that struggle.

Second, I suggest that a Thomistic account of mindfulness provides a helpful tool in the efforts toward ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue that is a hallmark of the Roman Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1963–65). Indeed, this essay itself arises out of my own interest in the mind-body connection and mindfulness inspired by my encounters with texts and those who practice Buddhism and yoga, and with the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. The contribution of Thomism toward mindfulness practices that I have developed from his work remains a powerful tool for dialogue precisely because he offers insight into...
the similarities and differences between the universally experienced inclinations of the passions and the distinctive ways in which these are ordered in the Christian tradition. Aquinas’s theological analysis is able to account for the distinctive contributions that a biblically inspired theology of grace and infused virtues highlights in the Christian journey toward friendship with God. The fact that Aquinas consistently accounts for the analogies between human nature as such and the distinctive components of human persons transformed by grace enables those who study the Thomistic tradition to affirm the goodness in other traditions while also noting the unique insights into the spiritual life that are encountered in trying to live life as a response to God’s will, steeped in God’s Word in Scripture, and transformed into an image of God’s love for all beings and all of creation. Additionally, Aquinas’s thought on the passions may provide fertile ground for ongoing dialogue between Eastern and Western modalities of Christian spirituality, as Eastern Christianity has tended to sustain a more ongoing discussion of the importance of the passions than has been undertaken in the West.64

Finally, one may note that the Christian tradition has been dominated by an almost exclusive emphasis on the ways in which the disordered passions may incite one to sin. As noted in the introduction, this has led to a certain denigration and mistrust of the body in the Christian tradition. Since the primary effect of sin is disorder in the will, sin is more a result of misdirected use of the will in response to the passions (mindless, improper discernment, false solicitude) than any disorder within the passions themselves. Aquinas, following Augustine, focuses on the effects of sin as introducing disorder into the will, which is expressed correlative through a certain level of disorder into the natural inclinations of the passions.65 Aquinas himself is to be credited for rejecting the doctrine of the Stoic philosophers who maintained that all passions are necessarily evil and therefore must be resisted and overcome.66 His goal is rather to account for the ways in which the sometimes unruly passions may be brought into conformity with right reason and the love of God. But what Aquinas himself does not develop in any greater detail is the ways in which well-ordered passions are an aid to the process of practical reasoning and to the will, whether understood under the rubric of naturally acquired or infused prudence. Further study of this particular point would yield worthwhile results for appreciating the ways in which the God-given natural inclinations of the passions may be cultivated as a positive guide in the spiritual journey undertaken by human beings.

There is a sense in which the natural inclinations of the passions function as the seed of all moral goodness given by God to human persons as part of the beauty and order of creation reflected in the human body itself. As Christians in the West are more and more introduced to and even incorporate into
their spiritual practices forms of prayer and meditation that focus on mind-body awareness and mindfulness there is a healing awareness that comes from accessing the body’s natural goodness that has not always been highlighted in Western Christianity. Thus there are potential implications of the fact that Aquinas (and others) can be read with greater sensitivity to the importance of the body and the embodied experience of natural and supernatural energies (which, to be fair, Aquinas himself attended to but which generations of commentators have overlooked). When combined with the kind of mindfulness that is popular today, Aquinas’s corpus may provide additional insights into the nature of how one might learn to discern and to trust one’s embodied inclinations as a guide in the spiritual and the moral life. Although Aquinas is often understood as a master of the intellectual and philosophical life, his attention to the nature of human persons as embodied rational creatures made in God’s image, combined with his recognition of the incarnational nature of Christianity, might fruitfully continue to be explored for a greater appreciation of the connections between mind, body, and spirit in this peculiar human life.

NOTES

1. Aloysius Pieris, S.J., “Spirituality and Mindfulness: Biblical and Buddhist Perspectives,” *Spiritus* 10.1 (Spring 2010); 38–51, at 43. Pieris’ analysis is similar to that provided by Ernest E. Larkin, O. Carm., where he describes three aspects of Christian mindfulness: “recollection, the practice of the presence of God, and the sacrament of the present moment” (*Contemplative Prayer for Today: Christian Meditation* [Singapore: Medio Media, 2007], 130). Recognition would seem to include both of the latter two aspects of mindfulness noted by Larkin. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for noting the significance of Larkin’s work on the topic of Christian mindfulness.


3. I am referring especially to the “revisionist” and *ressourcement* schools of Thomism. James Keenan, S.J., refers to Odon Lottin (1880–1965) as “the first true revisionist” Thomist in *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 38. Lottin was succeeded by others in the French *ressourcement* movement such as M.-D. Chenu, O.P., Henri de Lubac, S.J., Yves Congar, O.P., Etienne Gilson, and Jean Danielou, S.J., among others.


7. There has been a recent interest in the place of the passions in Aquinas’s corpus, motivated in part by the fact that they had been overlooked in the neo-scholastic tradition of...

8. Thomas Aquinas, _Summa Theologiae_ I–II q. 22 a.3. Subsequent references will be indicated by _ST_. English translation can be found from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948), available in five volumes. I have made slight emendations in consultation with the critical Latin texts of Aquinas available at http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html.

9. I employ the terms prudence, practical reasoning, and moral reasoning as synonymous, using them to refer to the process of perceiving, discerning a choice, and executing that choice in action. I believe this accurately reflects Aquinas’s insight that prudence is “right reason in action” (Aquinas, _ST_ II–II q. 47 a. 2).

10. Larkin, _Contemplative Prayer_, 130.


13. For more information on this program, see http://www.umassmed.edu/Content.aspx?id=41252. Accessed April 7, 2014.


15. As Larkin states it, dialogue with other traditions that emphasize mindfulness practices “can tell us something we always knew” about the place of attention to the present moment in Christian spirituality ( _Contemplative Prayer_, 135).


17. Attention has tended to focus in particular on sexuality as the passion most in need of continent control. Brown writes, for example, that “Christian notions of sexuality had tended to prise the human person loose from the physical world. . . . [Early Christian thinkers] had protected human sacred space from the formless, purely biological, products of the body” so that by the time of early medieval Christianity “human flesh emerged as a quivering thing. Its vulnerability to temptation, to death, even to delight, was a painfully apposite concretization of the limping will of Adam” ( _Body and Society_, 432 and 434).

18. Aquinas, _ST_ I–II q. 9 a. 1; see also, I q. 82 a. 4.

19. Aquinas, _ST_ I–II q. 55 a. 4, ad 2; see also, q. 90 a. 1.


21. Aquinas, _ST_ I-II q. 9 a. 1; see also Aristotle, _De Anima_ III 10.

22. Aquinas, _ST_ I q. 5 a. 6.

23. These comments are further underscored in relation to sin in Aquinas, _ST_ I–II q. 77 a. 1.

24. Aquinas draws upon Aristotle’s distinction between despotic and political rule (Politics I 3) to claim that the passions do not follow a despotic rule in the same way that the movements of the corporeal body follow the command of the soul without any capacity for rebellion. Rather, since the passions are capable of disobeying reason—due either to sin
or ignorance—they must be brought under the political rule of reason. In the analogy the passions are free just as subjects that must be persuaded to follow the command of reason are free, rather than slaves that must be forced to follow reason without any autonomy their part (see Aquinas, ST I–II q. 58 a. 2).

25. Aquinas, ST I–II q. 61 a. 2.
26. For the purposes of this essay I am focusing on the passions, but the intellectual appetite or the will is brought into accord with right reason through the virtue justice, which orders the affections toward the social goods of equality and the common good.

28. Aquinas, ST I–II q. 57 a. 6, and II–II q. 47 a. 8.
29. Aquinas asserts this same possibility even more forcefully in De Veritate, where he writes the following: “When by a judgment of the reason the will chooses anything it does so more promptly and easily if in addition a passion is aroused in the lower part, since the lower appetitive power is closely connected with changes in the body . . . because when a person is virtuous with the virtue of courage the passion of anger following upon the choice of virtue makes for greater alacrity in the act” (Aquinas, De Veritate q. 26 a. 7).

30. Cates describes this phenomenon in the following manner: “If the acts of one’s sensory and rational appetite concur, the result can be a resounding act of the will that is indistinguishable experientially from a vibrant, intellectually informed emotion” (Aquinas on Emotion, 236).
31. Lombardo, Logic of Desire, 171. Miner also notes the supportive role of passions when he writes that “the passions must be positively cultivated. Without the genuine support . . . of the sensitive appetite, the will is feeble, unable to accomplish its own act without any kind of assurance” (Aquinas on the Passions, 297).
33. Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 4.
34. Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 7, ad 3. Jean Porter writes that the natural inclinations are “underdetermined,” and therefore in need of more direction and cultivation in order to lead to the kind of normative claims that shape moral decision-making (Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005], 126–7), and Paul Wadell states that human creatures are “underdeveloped” by our natural inclinations (The Primacy of Love [New York: Paulist Press, 1992], 106–24).
35. Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 6.
36. Larkin, Contemplative Prayer, 137.
37. “A person is said to be solicitous through being shrewd (solers) and alert (citus), insofar as a person through a certain shrewdness of mind is quick to do whatever is to be done” (Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 9).
38. Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 9; Augustine, De Morib. Eccl. XXIV.
40. Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 9, ad 3.
42. This last aspect of prudence bears special note, and is frequently overlooked in discussions of prudence. For Aquinas, “[t]he worth of prudence is not in thought merely, but in its application to action, which is the end of the practical reason” (Aquinas, ST II–II q. 47 a. 1, ad 3).
44. Pieris, “Spirituality as Mindfulness,” 45.
45. Pieris, “Spirituality as Mindfulness,” 44. Mindfulness is also recognized as a necessary component of two of the more popular forms of Christian contemplative prayer today, Lectio divina and centering prayer. See Michael Casey, Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1995), 70–76; and Thomas Keating, Intimacy with God (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 11.

46. Thomas refers to habitual grace in Aquinas, ST I–II q. 110 a. 2 and q. 111 a. 2. Aquinas also mentions not only habitual grace but also occasional “gratuitous graces” given as additional aid to respond lovingly to God’s offer of grace (see Aquinas, ST I–II q. 111 articles 1, 4–5).

47. Aquinas writes that “the principal of moral acts is the will, whose object and form, so to speak, are the end. Now the form of an act always follows from a form of the agent. Consequently, in morals, that which gives an act its order to the end, must needs give the act its form. Now it is evident . . . that it is charity which directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end, and which, consequently, also gives the form to all other acts of virtue: and it is precisely in this sense that charity is called the form of the virtues, for these are called virtues in relation to ‘informed’ acts” (Aquinas, ST II–II q. 23 a. 8).


49. He writes that “we need to receive from God other habits corresponding, in due proportion, to the theological virtues, which habits are to the theological virtues, what the moral and intellectual virtues are to the natural principles of virtue” (Aquinas, ST I–II q. 63 a. 4). He then discusses the different rule and mean of the infused cardinal virtues in q. 63 a. 4.


51. Aquinas, ST I–II q. 63 a. 4.

52. Aquinas, ST I–II q. 85 a. 1.

53. Aquinas, ST I–II q. 65 a. 3, ad 2; see also Aquinas’s Quaestiones Disputates de Virtutibus in Communis, q. 2, ad 2; subsequent references are indicated by Aquinas, De Virt. English translation available in “Disputed Questions on the Virtues in General,” in Disputed Questions on the Virtues, trans. by Ralph McInerny (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999).

54. Thomas discusses the importance of memory in relation to prudence in ST II–II q. 47 a. 16. He asks whether prudence can be lost through forgetfulness, and he answers in the negative: “Forgetfulness regards knowledge only. . . . But prudence consists not in knowledge, but also in an act of the appetite. . . . Hence prudence is not taken away directly by forgetfulness, but rather is corrupted by the [disordered] passions.”

55. This quotation can be found in Aquinas, De Virt., q. 2 ad 18; see also McInerniny, “Disputed Questions,” 16–17. In this question Aquinas proposed twenty-one objections, but only wrote responses to the first eight, and thus de Castro Novo completed the responses to the objections.
56. “Our actions dispose to the increase of charity and the infused virtues, in the way that charity is obtained from the outset. A person who does what it is in his power prepares himself so that he might receive charity from God. . . . But no one can merit charity at the outset, because without charity there can be no merit” (Aquinas, De Virt. in Comm., q. 11). Aquinas also claims, that the acquired virtues may become meritorious by the “mediation” of the infused virtues (Aquinas, De Virt., q. 10 ad 4), but as Knobel notes, “its cash value remains unclear” (“Relating Aquinas’s Infused and Acquired Virtues,” 430, footnote 46). Aquinas also notes that although the perfection of the moral virtues in regard to the sensitive appetites does not belong essentially to contemplation, it does belong dispositively to the contemplative life (Aquinas, ST I–II q. 180 a. 2). These claims are worthy of further study in their own right.


58. Thomas discusses the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he describes as “higher perfections [of the soul], whereby one is disposed to be moved by God,” in Aquinas, ST I–II q. 68.


61. Larkin, Contemplative Prayer, 139. Thomas discusses God as Being itself (esse ipsum) in Aquinas, ST I q. 3 aa. 3–4 and q. 4 a. 2, and God’s eternity in ST I q. 8.

62. Aquinas, ST II–II q. 180, a. 2.

63. Thomas Merton, OCSO, Seeds of Contemplation (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1949), 1; italics added.

64. Pieris also notes the attention to vigilance, analogous to Aquinas’s solicitude, as much more developed in the Eastern Churches (“Spirituality as Mindfulness,” 39).

65. Brown writes rather poetically that “In man’s fallen state, sexual desire invariably created eddies in the will that stood in the way of true concord” (Body and Society, 403).

66. Thomas writes that although “the Stoics held that all passions are evil,” he claims rather that the “passions are not called ‘diseases’ or ‘disturbances’ of the soul, save when they are not controlled by reason” (Aquinas, ST I–II q. 24 a. 2).