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GEMENTES ET FLENTES IN HAC LACRIMARUM VALLE:
THE GIFT OF TEARS IN THE DOMINICAN TRADITION

by

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Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in Theology

At

Providence College

2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I offer thanks and praise to God for the gift of my Dominican vocation. Thank you to Mother Ann Marie, O.P., Mother Anna Grace, O.P., and my congregation, the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia, for the privilege and opportunity to study, as well as to the Dominican Friars of the Province of Saint Joseph, for their fraternal friendship and scholarly support. I am grateful to Dr. Paul Gondreau, Dr. Daria Spezzano, and Fr. Bruno Shah, O.P., for their prompt, thorough, insightful, and positive guidance which made writing this thesis a true joy. Special thanks is extended to Father Andrew Hofer, O.P., Father John Martin Ruiz, O.P., and the innumerable Dominican sisters who have served as research assistants over the years, sharing the mention of tears in many Dominican texts. I also offer thanks to God for the life and ministry of the priests known to me who no longer serve in active ministry. Their sorrow was the inspiration for this study, and the seed that grew into a uniquely Dominican hope for the day when every tear will be wiped away.

INTRODUCTION

“Truth cannot be separated from tears.”¹ Although referring to totalitarian states of the nineteenth century, this bold statement by a contemporary commentator cannot help but attract the attention of an Order whose motto is *veritas*, truth. The Order of Preachers, founded by Saint Dominic in the thirteenth century, is a religious family oriented chiefly to the salvation of souls through the preaching of truth. It is an Order marked by a history of Marian devotion, sacred study, and dedication to the Eucharistic liturgy. The Dominicans are also known for their joy, both in modern works² and in traditional anecdotes.³ Can an Order deeply committed to both truth and joy stand by such a statement on tears? For the Dominican, can truth be accompanied by tears? Further, can it be said that the gift of tears is a fitting expression of the Dominican charism? In order to prepare to answer these questions, it will be helpful to consider a brief sketch of the role of tears in the broader Christian tradition, from its roots in Scripture to its expression throughout Church history.

¹ Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020), 212.

² See for example, Paul Murray, O.P., *The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness*. (London: Burns & Oates, 2006).

³ See for example the tales of Blessed Jordan of Saxony allowing novices to laugh in *Lives of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers, 1206-1259*, ed. Gérard de Frachet and Bede Jarrett, trans. John Placid Conway, (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1924), 127-128.

Tears in Scripture

It does not take long to find references to tears in the Old Testament. A quick online search reveals thirty-seven instances of the term, with an additional eighty-two references when one adds the word “weep.” The highest concentrations of these words are located in the Psalms, Jeremiah, and Lamentations, where the context is often within the form of a prayer of lament. Take for example the following poetic verses from Psalm 6, which are recited as part of the Liturgy of the Hours: “I am wearied with sighing; all night long I drench my bed with tears; I soak my couch with weeping. My eyes are dimmed with sorrow, worn out because of all my foes. Away from me, all who do evil! The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.”⁴ A concise overview of the contributions of the Lutheran Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann offers a fitting introduction to tearful lament as understood in the Scriptures, especially the Psalms.

For Westermann, understanding lament is inseparable from its relationship to God’s salvific acts.⁵ The lament of affliction addressed to God is by its nature relational. It implies both distress on the part of the supplicant and the confidence that God is able to act in order to save from this distress. Westermann considers this lament/praise dichotomy key to understanding the Old Testament, for “just as it is a part of human nature that man can pour out his heart in lamentation, so it is a part of divine nature that God is concerned about his cry of distress.”⁶ For Westermann, the interplay between man’s lament, God’s intervention, and man’s praise is vital to the spiritual life. Prayer cannot stop at lamentation; lament is intended to move into petition, and subsequently praise.

⁴ Psalm 6:7-9 (NABRE).

⁵ Claus Westermann, “The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (January 1974): 21.

⁶ Westermann, 24. While Westermann uses the phrase “part of divine nature,” the phrase “proper to the divine nature” is preferable to clarify that while God’s concern for His creation flows from His nature, this concern is not essential to the divine nature.

Westermann makes a further distinction in the prayer of lament: lament of the nation and lament of the individual. The laments of the nation came to serve a liturgical purpose, and interestingly, “in post-exilic times the recitation of the lament was changed into a service of repentance.”⁷ In contrast, the individual lament primarily serves the purpose of expressing suffering, “to lay out one's own inner sufferings before the one who alleviates suffering, heals wounds and dries tears.”⁸ Both the individual and national laments convey a powerful truth for theological anthropology, providing “an understanding of man in which the existence of an individual without participation in a community (a social dimension) and without a relationship with God (a theological dimension) is totally inconceivable.”⁹ Man is made for communion, and his tears, expressed often in the Psalms, reflect both personal and communal need.

Proceeding to the New Testament, there is the supreme example of Jesus Christ, who Himself wept over the city of Jerusalem¹⁰ and at the death of Lazarus,¹¹ and “with his tears, Jesus was revealing his humanity---the fullness, the concreteness, the reality of his human nature.”¹² To invoke the celebrated soteriological principle, in the Incarnation, Jesus assumed a full human nature, including the body, in order to redeem it. If Jesus Christ assumed a full human nature and thought it not beneath His dignity to cry, then neither is it unfitting for Christians to cry over what is truly sorrowful. Besides the example of Jesus Himself, two eminent examples of tearful repentance stand out in the New Testament: Peter and Mary Magdalene. Recognizing his denial

⁷ Westermann, 29-30.

⁸ Westermann, 32.

⁹ Westermann, 28.

¹⁰ Luke 19:41 (NABRE).

¹¹ John 11:35 (NABRE).

¹² Kevin Raedy, “The Tears of Jesus,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 31, no. 1 (January 2018): 17.

of Jesus on the night of His arrest, Peter “broke down and wept,”¹³ and a pious legend holds that the tears were so deep that they caused permanent furrows.¹⁴ Mary Magdalene, likewise, has come to be portrayed down the ages as a woman weeping. This association with tears comes both from the Resurrection appearance of Jesus to the weeping Magdalene¹⁵ and from a broader tradition, albeit debated by modern scholarship, that consolidates Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, and the nameless sinful woman who wept at Jesus’ feet.¹⁶ The figure of Mary Magdalene thus becomes known for her tears of love and contrition, a “sign and symbol of the sacramentality of the body reborn through the redemptive love of Jesus as the Christ.”¹⁷ It is also noteworthy for this study that Mary Magdalene is one of the principal patrons of the Dominican Order. Finally, a survey of the New Testament texts on tears would be incomplete without at least a brief reference to the beatitude of tears: “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”¹⁸ Rooted in this verse and built on the experience of the saints, a fruitful tradition of Christian sorrow for sin developed.

Christian Tradition of Tears

The Christian tradition includes a rich history of the gift of tears, which has enjoyed a rediscovery in contemporary scholarship. Building on Scriptural foundations, the desert fathers

¹³ Mark 14:72 (NABRE).

¹⁴ See Chapter 8 of Timothy Michael Dolan, *To Whom Shall We Go? Lessons from the Apostle Peter*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008).

¹⁵ John 20:11-18 (NABRE).

¹⁶ See Luke 7:36-50 (NABRE).

¹⁷ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, “‘Pray with Tears and Your Request Will Find a Hearing’: On the Iconology of the Magdalene’s Tears,” in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, ed. Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 207.

¹⁸ Matthew 5:4 (NABRE).

saw weeping as an integral element of conversion. Tears were a sign of vulnerability and death to self, “a crucial piece in that process of learning how to die”¹⁹ and so to live in Christ. With these desert fathers, particularly in the East, originated the connection between tears and compunction, that is, personal sorrow for sin (*compunctio* in Latin and *penthos* in Greek).²⁰ John Climacus, Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, and Augustine are all notable figures of the early Church who contributed to a theology of tears. The names of John Cassian and Augustine will sound a particular note to the Dominican ear, as Saint Dominic was known to often read Cassian’s *Conferences* and he chose the *Rule of Saint Augustine* as the guiding rule for his Order.

Tears can be deeper than a mere emotional expression of sorrow, for “both Eastern and Western thinkers have commonly linked holy tears to the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit.”²¹ As an indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit, these tears were “neither a purely spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions nor some kind of mechanical process that could be (or should be) turned on or off at will. Instead holy tears were a *religious practice combining intentionality with spontaneity*.”²² This joining of intentional human acts of repentance with spontaneous movements of the Spirit marks holy tears as an experience of prayer. The motives for prayerful tears were also beautifully multifaceted: “sorrow over one’s sins, sorrow over the

¹⁹ Jessie Gutsell, “The Gift of Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination of Western Medieval Christianity,” *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2015): 241.

²⁰ Michael J. McClymond, “Holy Tears: A Neglected Aspect of Early Christian Spirituality in Contemporary Context,” in *The Spirit, the Affections, and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter, and Amos Young. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 92.

²¹ McClymond, “Holy Tears,” 88.

²² McClymond, “Holy Tears,” 89. Emphasis in original.

sins of others, gratitude for grace received, nostalgic longing for a lost paradise, an eschatological pining for the coming kingdom, or solidarity and compassion for the suffering.”²³

The tradition of holy tears continued well into the Middle Ages. As Jessie Gutsell points out, “The growth in the practice of holy crying was fitting for the medieval period because of the simultaneous rise in the popularity of embodied piety.”²⁴ As devotion to the Sacred Humanity of Christ flourished, so too did an emphasis on bodily prayer, which included weeping. Many contemporary scholars see this period as the height of holy tears, yet modern texts on tears often include regret that holy crying has been subsequently neglected: “The medieval period did indeed capture a unique moment in the history of weeping in the religious imagination, but while the rituals, people, and culture may have changed, the universal, ineffable, complex paralanguage of tears remains.”²⁵

Towards Dominican Tears

With the gift of holy tears situated in its wider Christian context, one can now focus on tears within the specifically Dominican tradition. In order to consider the role of sorrow in the Dominican charism, this study will examine the lives and writings of three prominent saints of the Order: Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Catherine of Siena. In pondering sorrow with these three great preachers, a portrait of the Dominican gift of tears begins to emerge. Through Saint Dominic, one encounters the founder of an Order who recognized the

²³ McClymond, “Holy Tears,” 98.

²⁴ Gutsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 242.

²⁵ Gutsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 253. For further reflections on the neglect of Christian tears, see also Apostolos-Cappadona, “Pray with Tears and Your Request Will Find a Hearing,” 201; McClymond, “Holy Tears,” 87; Kimberley-Joy Knight, “Si puose calcina a’ propi occhi: The Importance of the Gift of Tears for Thirteenth-Century Religious Women and their Hagiographers,” in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 137-139.

goodness of the body, including the passions. With Saint Thomas Aquinas, a consideration of the moral value of sorrow offers support for tears as an expression of charity. And in Saint Catherine of Siena this charity is conveyed through tears streaming out in zeal for Holy Mother Church.

The lives of these three Dominican saints reveal that holy tears as an expression of compunction and compassion, while certainly not exclusive to the Dominican Order, is indeed a fitting expression of the Dominican charism of preaching for the salvation of souls.

CHAPTER I: SAINT DOMINIC

In considering the elements of the charism of an Order, it is fitting to begin with its founder. Saint Dominic left few written works, but the living witness of his example leaves much for Dominicans to ponder. Dominic's paternal relationship to his spiritual children is unique in that Dominic himself generally recedes into the background. His leadership of the Order of Preachers was not so much intended to create an imitation of himself, but rather a model of governance and community life that enable the Gospel to be preached in all times and circumstances. As Father Simon Tugwell, O.P., notes, "Once the Order was established, he [Dominic] deliberately refused to retain any right to impose his views on its self-definition and legislation. He wanted simply to be a member of his own Order, bound, like everybody else, by the democratic procedures which were written into its constitutions."²⁶ Dominic thus becomes the first brother among brethren.

That being said, there can be no doubt that Dominic is still the *first* brother, gifted by God with the grace of a founding charism. As such, the example of his own spiritual life and the aims of the Order he founded must both be considered before one can turn to the lives of later Dominicans. While tears or weeping are not commonly named as a characteristic of Dominican spirituality, a closer examination finds them occupying a central role in the life of Dominic.

Personal Witness

Saint Dominic was born in Caleruega, Spain in 1170. He studied under the tutelage of a priest uncle and served as a canon regular at Osma. After accompanying his bishop, Diego, on a

²⁶ Simon Tugwell, O.P., introduction to *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, Blessed Jordan of Saxony (Chicago: Parable, 1982), x.

diplomatic mission, he became acquainted with the Albigensian heresy. The Albigensians, “(also known as Cathars), [were] a heretical, gnostic/Manichean sect with dualistic beliefs.”²⁷

Emphasizing the witness of evangelical poverty and the study of sacred truth, Dominic founded the Order of Friars Preachers to combat this and other heresies by the itinerant preaching of truth. Dominic recognized the importance of an apostolate supported by prayer, first founding the nuns in 1206 to prayerfully support the work of the preaching brethren. By 1216, the Order had been canonically established and Dominic sent his brothers to the cities of major universities. By his death in 1221, the Order had expanded across Europe and would grow over time to include friars, nuns, sisters, and lay tertiaries, all engaged in the apostolate of preaching.

“What is to become of sinners?”

Dominic’s preaching apostolate was driven by his great zeal for the salvation of souls. Testimonies from his canonization process attest to this fact: “He was filled with compassion for his neighbors and most ardently desired their salvation.”²⁸ The zeal of Dominic shone forth in two complementary aspects, both his active preaching and deep contemplation. Dominic gave his days to men and his nights to God, as the adage goes, but by charity he gave both to both. Again, canonization witnesses speak: “Throughout his lifetime, he passed the greater part, and frequently the whole, of the night in prayer. ‘We often found him in church weeping and

²⁷ Angelo Stagnaro, *How to Pray the Dominican Way: Ten Postures, Prayers, and Practices That Lead Us to God* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2012), 9.

²⁸ William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality: Principles and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 14.

praying,' testified Ventura of Verona. 'Even while traveling,' said Paul of Venice, 'he was devoted and constant in prayer.'"²⁹

Dominic's devotion to intercessory prayer for sinners was the driving force behind his days of preaching. The well-known tale of Dominic's nocturnal debate with the heretical innkeeper is only one noteworthy example of the lengths to which Dominic was willing to go in pursuit of the Lord's lost sheep. In his night watches of love, Dominic brought the needs of God's children before their Heavenly Father, while his daily labors sought to alleviate these needs, primarily the spiritual ones. An abbot who knew Dominic from Toulouse commented that "he had never seen anyone pray or weep so much. Dominic's prayer was so intense that it forced him to pray aloud: 'O Lord, have mercy on Thy people...what is to become of sinners?'"³⁰ This seems to be the question which propelled Dominic's prayer and motivated many of his tears.

That Dominic's prayer burst forth in physical expression drew the attention of his early followers. Blessed Jordan of Saxony, the Order's second master general, testified that

God gave him the singular grace of weeping for sinners, the unfortunate, and the afflicted. He carried their miseries in the sanctuary of his compassionate heart and poured forth his burning love in floods of tears. Spending the whole night in prayer, he was accustomed to pray to his Father over and over again in secret. His frequent and special prayer to God was for the gift of true charity...³¹

In this manner, Dominic sought to be conformed to the Sacred, Merciful Heart of Jesus. As a priest sharing in the priesthood of Christ, Dominic considered the possibility of souls separated from Christ to be the greatest evil, an evil worthy of weeping. Dominic's charity and compassion for sinners was manifested not only in silent, contemplative prayer, but in prayer that involved his whole person, body and soul.

²⁹ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 85.

³⁰ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 39.

³¹ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 14.

Tears of Devotion

Dominic was not only caught weeping in the silent, secret prayer of night, but also in the public celebration of the Mass. At a time when daily Mass was not necessarily celebrated by all priests, especially when traveling, Dominic's devotion to the Holy Sacrifice is noteworthy. As Father William Hinnebusch, O.P., notes,

The founder had a profound devotion to the Mass, celebrating it every day; when possible, singing it. Invariably he was so moved by the sacred mystery taking place before him, that the tears flowed down his cheeks. Little wonder that he made the Order of Preachers a liturgical order.³²

During his celebration of the Mass, Dominic was often seen to weep. Here again, we see him conformed to Christ the High Priest and the Lamb who was slain. Dominic's celebration of the Mass with tears manifests his inner mysticism, as noted again by W. Hinnebusch and a contemporary of Dominic:

The Mass was his life. He was so moved during the sacred mysteries that he wept when reciting the Canon of the Mass and the *Pater Noster*. This weeping reveals the mystic who almost sees beyond the veil of the Sacrament. Mystically, Dominic sees Christ present on the altar, the Lamb slain and still bearing His wounds. The testimony of Stephen of Spain describes the devotion of Dominic at Mass: "The witness very frequently saw him celebrate Mass and always noticed that his eyes and cheeks were wet with tears during the Canon. It was quite easy for those present to perceive his devotion, his great fervor during Mass, and the way he said the *Pater Noster*. The witness never remembers having seen him say Mass with dry eyes."³³

The Dominican Order has inherited this deep devotion to the Mass from its founder. While Dominican friars may not weep at each celebration of the Mass, they are called to imitate their spiritual father in striving for this same mystical encounter with the Eucharistic Lord at each Holy Sacrifice.

³² Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 30.

³³ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 82-83.

More than Mere Emotions

Some might contend that Dominic's tears were the mere manifestation of an overly sensitive personality. After all, it seems hardly commendable to be constantly crying. But Dominic's tears were drawn forth by charity. "Dominic was, at times, moved to the point of tears by the sufferings of others. Such keen sensitivity reveals his beautiful goodness of heart."³⁴ As Father Fabio Giardini, O.P., points out, the early documents of the Order insist on Dominic's compassion as much as on his firmness of will. The descriptions of Dominic which have been passed down reveal a balanced, peaceful man, whose emotional life was governed by a strong will. "Undoubtedly, Jordan wished to avoid giving his reader the impression that Dominic's overflowing sensitivity indicated that he was a rather weak person, perhaps even a bit effeminate. Quite the contrary, Dominic's emphatic behavior was rooted in and nourished by virtuous and virile strength of character."³⁵

Moreover, Dominic's tears were not only motivated by sorrow. Dominic was known to be a man of great joy, and his Order has been stamped with this spiritual gladness. When weeping at Mass or during the Divine Office, Dominic's tears were a sign of his great devotion to God. Giardini considers this another sign of Dominic's integration as a virtuous man.

It is true that when Dominic prayed he was often deeply moved. Yet this happened not only when he meditated on the evils affecting his fellow men, but also when he contemplated God's immense merciful love towards them. He shed tears of sorrow over human miseries. But he also wept for sheer joy in pondering the merciful love God revealed through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.³⁶

Able to feel and express both sorrow and joy in a rightly ordered manner, Dominic's prayer life reconciled the great misery of sin with the profound mercy of God.

³⁴ Fabio Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic* (Summit, NJ: Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary, 2012), 17.

³⁵ Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic*, 24.

³⁶ Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic*, 114.

Even further, Dominic's weeping for sinners was a sign of his conformity to Christ. In his nightly vigils, replete with sighs, groanings, and tears, Dominic mirrored the Great High Priest, who "offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."³⁷ Reflecting on Dominic's central devotion to Christ the Savior, Giardini notes, "This makes us surmise that the abundant tears Dominic shed with 'sighs, groanings and cries during his secret prayers' were not the signs of an 'over-heated' devotional life, but were expressions of his intense and intimate participation in the divine drama of salvation."³⁸ As an active participant in bringing the salutary truth of salvation to sinners, Dominic prayed and preached with his whole person, body and soul.

Preaching Against Albigensianism

Saint Dominic's prayer served as the foundation for his apostolic labors. As noted above, the Order of Friars Preachers was founded initially to address the Albigensian heresy which was then infiltrating southern France. Recall that the Albigensians were a gnostic, dualistic sect which emphasized the spirit over the body. The material world was considered evil, and the soul was meant to break free from material corruption and imprisonment. Members were encouraged to practice strict mortifications, reject sexual intercourse and bodily food, and even commit suicide. With such beliefs and practices, it becomes clear the great danger that Albigensianism posed to the Christian faithful.³⁹

³⁷ Hebrews 5:7 (NABRE).

³⁸ Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic*, 105.

³⁹ Information above summarized from several sources, including Phyllis Zagano and Thomas C. McGonigle, *The Dominican Tradition*. Spirituality in History Series. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2006), xiii-xiv.

In the context of such an adamant rejection of the body, Dominic's strikingly *bodily* prayer takes on a whole new importance. It is commonly noted that Dominic and his bishop, Diego, countered the Albigensians by their witness of evangelical poverty. Yet Dominic's profoundly bodily prayer also offers a counter-witness to the Albigensian rejection of the body. By engaging his whole person in prayer, Dominic speaks to the inherent goodness of the body, and the consequential goodness of the emotions.

Even in encountering such strong resistance to the faith, Dominic's preaching remained motivated by charity. As Father Humbert Clérissac, O.P., notes, "In the person of St. Dominic, the apostolic intention appears clothed with an infinite tenderness...In a mere man, universality of affection excludes, as a general rule, such a degree of tenderness, but in St. Dominic the union of these two elements is a proof of his likeness to Our Lord."⁴⁰ The tender tears which Dominic shed for those enslaved in heresy flowed from the fountain of living water, and as such, bore fruit for the Kingdom of God in reclaiming these souls for Christ.

Nine Ways of Prayer

The accounts of Dominic's preaching and prayer life describe truly human prayer which incorporates both body and soul. It is not surprising, then, that one of the traditions of prayer handed down in the Order is the *Nine Ways of Prayer* of St. Dominic. One author describes the text which documents this tradition thus: "*The Nine Ways of Prayer* of St. Dominic was written anonymously sometime between 1260 and 1288 in Bologna, the city in which Dominic died. Sister Cecilia of the Monastery of St. Agnes at Bologna, who personally knew Dominic (he had

⁴⁰ Humbert Clérissac, O.P., *The Spirit of St. Dominic* (Tacoma, WA: Cluny Media, 2015), 35.

received her vows), was the source of this biographical information.”⁴¹ The text describes the many and various ways in which Dominic engaged in personal prayer, that is, in contrast to liturgical prayer following set rubrics. Though not written by Dominic himself, the text stands squarely in the Dominican tradition. “There seems no reason to doubt that, in the *Nine Ways*, we are in contact with the actual practice of prayer of Saint Dominic, and with the teaching that he gave to the brethren.”⁴² In *The Nine Ways of Prayer*, the reader is offered a window into both the prayer of Dominic himself, and the way in which this prayer tradition was handed down by the early Order of Preachers.

The tapestry which is woven from the *Nine Ways* depicts a prayer life that highlights man’s composite nature. “Above all else, this treatise is about how the soul is moved by the body and how the body responds in turn. To be specific, ecstatic prayer is not merely an experience for the soul. Rather, it affects both the soul and the body because the two are intimately connected.”⁴³ In each of the nine ways, Dominic is seen to pray in a manner which involves both soul and body, through genuflections, reading, prostrations, and the like. The text itself acknowledges the importance of the body in prayer, noting in the opening paragraphs that

We find the saints of the old and new testaments sometimes praying like this. This manner of praying stirs up devotion, the soul stirring the body, and the body in turn stirring the soul. Praying this way used to make Saint Dominic dissolve utterly into weeping, and it so kindled the fervor of his good will that he could not contain it: his devotion showed quite plainly in his bodily members.⁴⁴

The *Nine Ways of Prayer* thus offers a valuable glimpse into the tradition of bodily prayer inherited by the Dominicans. Based on previous testimony, it should be no surprise that tears

⁴¹ Stagnaro, *How to Pray the Dominican Way*, 17.

⁴² *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, ed. Simon Tugwell, O.P. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1978), 6.

⁴³ Stagnaro, *How to Pray the Dominican Way*, 18-19.

⁴⁴ *Nine Ways of Prayer*, 11.

appear here as a key element of Dominic's prayer. As Tugwell notes in his introduction to the text,

The teaching of the Nine Ways presupposes the medieval monastic tradition and emerges from it. Its insistence on tears, for instance, is wholly monastic and traditional, as is, more generally, the degree of emotional involvement in prayer that it envisages. But, as the author himself points out, there is a very special emphasis on bodily prayer, which may well derive from Dominic himself.⁴⁵

The emphasis on prayer being something embodied and emotional is thus both in keeping with the general monastic tradition and the specifically Dominican inheritance of prayer.

The Second Way of Prayer

In the second way of prayer, which depicts Dominic's prostrations, an emphasis is placed on compunction of heart, a virtue often associated with tears. Dominic is said to "weep and groan passionately"⁴⁶ in an expression of humility and reverence before God. It is important to note that Dominic not only engaged in this prayer himself, but also exhorted his brethren to do so, "saying, 'if you cannot weep for your own sins, because you have none, still there are many sinners to be directed to God's mercy and love...'"⁴⁷ As noted earlier, in examining the prayer of the saints, and especially of a founder, the question often arises as to what is to be admired and what is to be imitated. In Saint Dominic, this question assumes a unique challenge in that the man himself stands so much behind the Order he founded. Yet here is a clear example of Dominic's tears being recorded for Dominican posterity, not merely to be noted and admired, as are the prayers in some of the other nine ways, but to be emulated and carried out by the brethren after him.

⁴⁵ *Nine Ways of Prayer*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Nine Ways of Prayer*, 18.

⁴⁷ *Nine Ways of Prayer*, 18.

Other Ways of Prayer

One commentator also briefly notes Dominic's being moved to tears in the fourth way (contemplation of the crucifix), fifth way (standing before God), and eighth way (spiritual reading):

According to the *Nine Ways*, it was not uncommon in these intense periods of prayer for a person to be given to joyous tears and even a type of spiritual excitement...The saint would become so moved by this prayer form that he would come to tears and clap his hands over his eyes both in joy and in sorrow...He took special care and reverence when he read Christ's very words. When doing so, he would cover his head and hide his face with the hood of his habit. At times he was brought to tears of joy and repentance.⁴⁸

In each of these instances, Dominic's tears serve as a sign of the intensity of his prayer. They can express either repentance and sorrow for sins or joy and devotion at the sweetness of the Word of God. There can be no doubt that Dominic was a man who prayed deeply and intensely, in a manner both spiritual and bodily.

Behold, My Children, the Heritage I Leave You

Saint Dominic's tears have thus far been considered through his personal witness of prayer, the preaching apostolate for which the Order was founded, and the early traditions of the Order's prayer. It remains to be examined whether praying through tears was a particular grace of Dominic, or if it is meant to be handed down as part of the Dominican Order's charism. Speaking of renewal in the post-Vatican II age, W. Hinnebusch raises important questions for the contemporary Dominican and students of Saint Dominic's life to consider:

In presenting my materials, I not only faced the problems already described but came up against the further difficulty that I could not speak of Dominic's spirit without speaking also of the regional and temporal forms in which he expressed it. For example, in commenting on his prayer, I had to describe the medieval ways of prayer that he sometimes employed. I have no intention of holding up such forms for contemporary

⁴⁸ Stagnaro, *How to Pray the Dominican Way*, 63, 71, 102.

imitation. I don't use them myself. I had to probe my material constantly to separate the permanent from the ephemeral, the central meaning from the surface appearances of Dominic's spirit.⁴⁹

The question remains whether tears belong to the permanent or the ephemeral, to the central or the superficial in Dominican life.

Ephemeral and Superficial

One might first contend that Dominic's tears were simply that, *Dominic's*, and as such ought to be relegated only to the accounts of his own private prayer. However, as has been shown above, the tradition of the Dominican Order does not reflect this view. The author of *The Nine Ways of Prayer* exhorts his readers precisely to imitate this prayer of Dominic: "saying, 'if you cannot weep for your own sins, because you have none, still there are many sinners to be directed to God's mercy and love...'"⁵⁰ Likewise, the tears which Dominic shed during times of personal prayer were audible and visible, as brought forward by many witnesses at the canonization process. Further, Dominic also wept at times of public, liturgical prayer. Taken together, the evidence suggests that Dominic's weeping was not merely a private, hidden manner for Dominic alone, but part of the meaningful patrimony of the Dominican tradition of prayer.

Yet, were these tears solely an expression of prayer for the spirituality of the Middle Ages? There can be no doubt that tears held a prominent place in the medieval schema of prayer. Entire books, such as *Crying in the Middle Ages*, whose title itself is revelatory, have been

⁴⁹ William Hinnebusch, O.P., *Renewal in the Spirit of St. Dominic*, ed. Robert Leo Pelkington (Washington, D.C.: Dominicana, 1968), x-xi.

⁵⁰ *Nine Ways of Prayer*, 18.

written on the subject.⁵¹ The practice of praying with tears reflected an increased emphasis on bodily prayer for a largely illiterate laity: “The growth in the practice of holy crying was fitting for the medieval period because of the simultaneous rise in the popularity of embodied piety.”⁵² Tears may have achieved a prominence in medieval prayer; however, they were by no means isolated to this time period. “Medieval weeping developed from an already existing narrative within the Christian tradition; Christianity and weeping were connected in the Bible, where tears are frequently mentioned,”⁵³ and “the desert fathers and mothers elaborated on the practice of weeping.”⁵⁴ Weeping in prayer thus stands in continuity with the Church’s tradition, tracing from Scripture to the Patristic age up through the medieval period. There is no reason to believe that this tradition need cease there. “The medieval period did indeed capture a unique moment in the history of weeping in the religious imagination, but while the rituals, people, and culture may have changed, the universal, ineffable, complex paralanguage of tears remains.”⁵⁵

Permanent and Central

While Dominic must certainly be understood in the context of his time, nevertheless he is the recipient of the grace of a founding charism. As such, what is handed on concerning his own personal virtues, prayer life, and apostolic activity takes on a new dimension of importance. Particularly when modern man lacks wide historical record of a particular saint’s words or a

⁵¹ See Elina Gertsman, *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, Routledge Studies in Medieval Religion and Culture, 10. (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁵² Gutgsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 242.

⁵³ Gutgsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 240.

⁵⁴ Gutgsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 241.

⁵⁵ Gutgsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 253.

large corpus of his original texts, that which is passed down through tradition becomes significantly noteworthy. The mere fact that Dominic's tears are recalled throughout the early writings of the Dominican Order speaks to its importance. One can hardly pick up a book on Dominican spirituality without some reference to Dominic's tears. Yet, perhaps few authors have seen the significance of tears as clearly as Father Fabio Giardini, O.P.

A "Singular Grace"

Giardini's short work, *The Spirit of Saint Dominic* offers a splendid synthesis of the charism inherited from St. Dominic. Drawing together the seemingly diverse aspects of Dominican life and the inherent tension between contemplation and apostolate, Giardini notes that "the genius of Saint Dominic was able to infuse our life of prayer and study with a deep apostolic 'compassion' and thus bring contemplation and action into perfect unity."⁵⁶ It is this compassion, often manifested by Dominic's tears, which Giardini considers the crux of the Dominican charism. As noted above, Blessed Jordan considered Dominic's weeping for sinners to be a "singular grace," which might imply that it was exclusively for Dominic alone. Yet, Giardini contends that

The term *singularis gratia*, could be suitably translated as a 'specific charism.' It is, in fact, a special grace of compassion for 'sinners' (understood here in a very broad sense) that constitutes the essential core of Dominic's charism, as Preacher and Founder of the Order. We are dealing with a supernatural grace and not just with a natural response of a sensitive man to human misery. This was a grace infused into the depths of Dominic's heart... Thus, Blessed Jordan describes more than Dominic's external behavior, i.e., the tears profusely shed during his times of prayer... He gives instead a spiritual/theological interpretation of this fact, viewing it as the external sign of a specific divine grace preparing Dominic for an apostolic preaching mission.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic*, 6.

⁵⁷ Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic*, 127-128.

In Giardini's view, the tears of Dominic are one of the visible witnesses of the invisible grace of compassion at work in Dominic's heart. This singular grace of Dominic's compassion, then, manifested in the charism of preaching for the salvation of souls, becomes the seed of grace for the entire Dominican Order.

Whether It is Fitting...

A survey of texts on Dominican spirituality shows a remarkable consensus on the core elements of Dominican life. Frequently mentioned themes include: devotion to Christ's Sacred Humanity, deep reverence for the liturgy, a priestly character, the union of contemplation and apostolate, and preaching for the salvation of souls. These elements, which were so central in the life of Dominic, have been handed down as part of the tradition of the Order of Preachers. They are the elements which make the Order precisely *Dominican*. While tears may not be explicitly listed among these central tenets, they are a fitting expression of the spirituality of Saint Dominic, which he handed on to his Order.

Devotion to Christ and the Liturgy

Dominicans are noteworthy for their devotion to Christ's humanity.⁵⁸ "They manifested and helped develop the devotions which focused on the Sacred Passion, the Precious Blood, the Five Wounds, the Pierced Heart, and the Blessed Sacrament."⁵⁹ An inescapable part of Christ's

⁵⁸ One notes in particular the anti-Docetic language throughout the Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas. See Paul Gondreau, "Anti-Docetism in Aquinas' *Super Ioannem*: St. Thomas as Defender of the Full Humanity of Christ", in *Reading John with St. Thomas Aquinas. Theological Exegesis and Speculative Theology*, eds. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 254-76.

⁵⁹ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 8.

humanity is His affective life, including sorrow and tears. Because “Jesus wept”⁶⁰ the followers of Jesus, and especially Dominicans, join in a rightly ordered sorrow towards sin and compassion towards the sinner.

Likewise, Dominic instilled in his Order a liturgical and priestly character. His devotion to daily Mass is well documented, despite this practice being uncommon for his time. Recall that Dominic’s fervent tears at Mass have been tied to his sharing in the priesthood of Christ, who “lives forever to make intercession [for us] ...”⁶¹ Dominic, by this deep devotion to the Mass manifested in tears, sought to be conformed to the sacrifice of Christ, the High Priest. A beautiful trace of this devotion lives on in the liturgy of the Dominican Rite, which contains a set of prayers for a Mass for the gift of tears.⁶² The collect reads as follows:

Almighty and most merciful God, who for thy thirsting people didst draw a fountain of living water from the rock; draw from our hard hearts tears of sorrow, that we may be able to mourn over our sins, and so merit to receive the forgiveness of them from thy mercy.⁶³

Likewise, the post-Communion prayer specifically calls upon tears as a gift of the Holy Spirit:

Mercifully pour forth into our hearts, O Lord God, the grace of the Holy Ghost; which by sighs and tears may make us wash away the stains of our sins, and by thy bounty may enrich us with the pardon we have sought.⁶⁴

These exquisite prayers poetically weave together contrition, grace, and tears. Their inclusion in the Dominican Rite indicates the value the Order has placed on continuing this prayer of Dominic.

⁶⁰ John 11:35 (NABRE).

⁶¹ Hebrews 7:25b (NABRE).

⁶² The Roman Missal also contains a Mass with similar themes, listed as “Mass for the Forgiveness of Sins,” option B.

⁶³ *The Dominican Missal*, (Oxford: Blackfriars Publications, 1948) 1581.

⁶⁴ *The Dominican Missal*, 1581-2.

An Apostolate of Compassion

The Order's prayer life has always been seen to flow out in works of the apostolate. Dominic's tears of devotion at Mass were mirrored by his tears of sorrow at the fate of sinners. "Dominic's contemplation made him apostolic. Jordan of Saxony speaking of the Founder's years at Osma, describes his singular gift of compassionating sinners, the wretched, and the afflicted."⁶⁵ Contemporary Dominicans are called to follow this compassion of their founder by the diligent preaching of truth. A true Dominican is nourished by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in order to offer his or her own life in sacrifice for sinners, compelled by charity in preaching and teaching to seek out the Father's lost sheep. The compassion exercised in the apostolate finds further strength in the mortification and austerities of the monastic life. The prayer and penances of Dominic, while not all imitable, provide the example for the Dominican who today brings into the world a message of truth "that has been shaped in the sanctuary, the choir, and the cloister."⁶⁶ The singular grace of Dominic's compassion is poetically expressed by Giardini thus: "Dominic was so deeply involved in carrying the brokenness of his spiritually needy neighbors that the inner shrine (*sacrarium*) of his compassionate heart was like a pot of water at the boiling point! The steam rising from it cooled and coalesced into drops of water flowing like tears from out of his eyes."⁶⁷ Whether in visible tears or not, it should be said of every Dominican that charity is the overflowing force behind every sermon preached, lecture prepared, or book published.

⁶⁵ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 57.

⁶⁶ Hinnebusch, O.P., *Dominican Spirituality*, 20. This phrase, taken from Pie-Raymond Régamey, O.P., is also cited in the Constitutions of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia.

⁶⁷ Giardini, O.P., *The Spirit of Saint Dominic*, 126-127.

Conclusion

Who could ever hope to imitate the virtues of this man? We can however admire them, and weigh up the slackness of our own generation against his example. To be able to do what he did requires more than human strength, it presupposes a particular grace...But still, brethren, let us follow in our father's footsteps to the best of our ability, and let us also give thanks to our Redeemer, who has granted to his servants such a remarkable man to lead us along the path we are walking...⁶⁸

These words of Blessed Jordan of Saxony express the challenge of following a saintly founder.

Dominic was certainly a man who received unique graces from God so as to exercise the mission entrusted to him in founding the Order of Preachers. Yet among these gifts, there exists in the charism of preaching for the salvation of souls a seed of grace for all those who follow after Dominic, the Preacher of Grace. While each and every Dominican may not be called to imitate exactly the model of Dominic, those who receive this spiritual patrimony are called to inherit the spirit which animated his life. Saint Dominic's singular grace of compassion acts as the binding force of the Dominican Order, holding in balance contemplation and action, silence and speaking, prayer and preaching. One manifestation of this compassion is holy tears. Dominic's weeping bespoke both a deep sense of the misery caused by sin, and an equally deep reverence for the mercy of God who redeems the sinner. This dynamic between misery and mercy, joy and sorrow, would be expounded upon in both life and writing by one of Dominic's greatest sons, Saint Thomas Aquinas.

⁶⁸ Jordan of Saxony, *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, 27, #109.

CHAPTER II: SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

Saint Thomas Aquinas may be the most well-known and most prolific saint of the Dominican Order. As renowned Thomistic scholar Father Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., notes, “For a person like Thomas—more than for many others—the life cannot be understood without the work. We cannot conceive of Saint Thomas without the *Summa theologiae!*”⁶⁹ Yet, Torrell wisely goes on to state in the preface to his two volume text on Thomas’ life and work, “We also hope to shed some new light on the man Thomas was; it has long been thought it was difficult, if not impossible, to discover his personality, which was said to be hidden behind his writings. This is less true than is usually thought, and though the undertaking is arduous, it is worth the attempt.”⁷⁰ Indeed, the life of Saint Thomas Aquinas serves as a beautiful illustration of the truths he sought to expound, particularly in regards to the centrality of charity in the moral life. The present examination of tears in the Dominican tradition will attempt to discover their significance in both the life *and* work of this foremost of Dominican scholars, Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Personal Witness

If Saint Dominic as a man risks fading behind his innovative order, Saint Thomas Aquinas the man risks fading behind his monumental written work. Before considering his corpus of words on sorrow, tears, and compassion, it is fitting first to consider the witness of these realities in the life and prayer of Aquinas.

⁶⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), xix.

⁷⁰ Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, xxi.

Aquinas at Prayer

Far from the stoic, placid intellectual sometimes imagined, the early biographers of Saint Thomas Aquinas portray a man of deep prayer, whose affective life was both nourished and expressed in conversation with God. In describing Thomas' capture by his family from the Dominicans, one early biographer compares his situation to that of the psalmist: "He cried copiously and his tears were his bread day and night."⁷¹ In the course of the imprisonment by his family, Thomas was tempted by a woman of ill repute. In the accounts of the scene, Thomas is depicted as a man earnestly desiring purity of heart and body. Having chased the woman from the room and burned a Cross into the wall, he "fell to the ground weeping and begging God to grant him the gift of a constant virginity."⁷² Here Thomas witnesses to a deep desire for virtue and sorrow at the mere thought of sin, a fervent revolt against anything which could separate him from God. Later, when the still youthful Thomas was given teaching responsibility, his response was one of tearful humility: "Humbly understanding the burden imposed on him, he went to the chapel where he prostrated himself upon the floor and tearfully besought God to mercifully instill into him the grace and the knowledge that were necessary to fulfill worthily the office of a Master."⁷³ Aquinas is thus portrayed as a man who sought to fulfill his vocation from a posture

⁷¹ Peter Calo, O.P., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Rev. A.C. Sheehan, O.P. (Collection of the Dominican Theological Library, Washington D.C., no publication date), 9. Peter Calo, O.P. was one of the three earliest biographers of St. Thomas Aquinas, with his account dating to the early fourteenth century. While at times his text affords more poetic language than that of William of Tocco or Bernard Gui, his account of Thomas' tears generally corroborates the others. As such, Calo will be taken as a roughly historically accurate account, even if at times he may be offering a touch of pious embellishment. For more on biographical sources of St. Thomas Aquinas see the "Preface" in Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, and the "Introduction" in *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, ed. Kenelm Foster, O.P., (London: Longmans, Green, 1959).

⁷² Foster, O.P., *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 30.

⁷³ Calo, O.P., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 18-19. See also Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 34, and Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, 51.

of humility before God, knowing full well his own limitations and the danger of sin, and indeed, weeping for them.

As Aquinas grew in intellectual status and responsibility, his work was sustained by wisdom gained more by prayer than by study. As Brother Reginald, Thomas' longtime secretary and companion recounted, "...for as often as he intended to study, teach, write, or dictate he would go first to a secret place of prayer. And there he prayed tearfully for divine assistance in investigating the secret truths."⁷⁴ Again, questioning Thomas about an articulate answer to a troubling theological question, Reginald received this reply: "My son, during these past days you have seen how I suffered because of that difficulty; with many tears I begged God for the answer to the question that I have just dictated to you."⁷⁵ These examples make clear that Saint Thomas often had recourse to God in prayer, and that these moments of prayer often included weeping. In his ardent and laborious search for truth, Aquinas' affective life was thoroughly involved.

Aquinas at Mass

This ardent affective life found further expression in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Like his spiritual father, Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas Aquinas had a deep devotion to the Mass and celebrated it daily whenever possible. An early biographer describes his devotion thus:

He was completely devoted to The Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. God granted him the privilege of not only writing very profoundly about this Sacrament, but also of celebrating it with an intense devotion. He celebrated Mass every day, unless he was ill...He was habitually so enraptured during Mass that he was literally bathed in tears, so absorbed was he in the mysteries of this great Sacrament and so revived was he by its gifts...And [on one occasion] he seemed to have witnessed Christ, as Man, suffering for

⁷⁴ Calo, O.P., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 33. See also Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 37.

⁷⁵ Calo, O.P., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 34. See also Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 38-39.

the sins of mankind. This was deduced from the fact that his absorption lasted a long time and that he was crying profusely.⁷⁶

Aquinas here exhibits the tears of devotion as shed earlier by Saint Dominic. As it was for his Order's sainted founder, Saint Thomas' celebration of the Mass was a mystical experience in which he encountered the suffering Christ. As a priest, who serves as an *alter Christus*, Saint Thomas Aquinas no doubt entered into a share in Christ's role as mediator. Here, sorrow for sin and compassion towards sinners are united in precisely the *sacrifice* of the Mass. Father Paul Murray, O.P., discussing Aquinas' reflections on the Letter to the Hebrews, draws out this theme of compassionate mediation: "And, as mediator, he [Christ] offers to the Father what St Thomas calls a 'spiritual sacrifice,' one that involves 'prayers and supplications.' 'The priesthood of Christ is ordained to that spiritual sacrifice...*that he might offer gifts and sacrifices for sins*. Two things are necessary in one who prays, namely fervent love along with pain and groaning...But Christ had these two.'" ⁷⁷ Sharing in the mediation of Christ conveyed through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Aquinas entered into these "groanings" in a literal way by his tears. Aquinas' weeping in prayer can be aptly summarized by the description offered by the canonization bull itself: "In these Masses as well as in his assiduous prayers, he revealed, in the shedding of tears, his sweetness of mind and his devotion to God, from whom nothing is hidden."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Calo, O.P., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 31. See also Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 37, 46, and Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, 288.

⁷⁷ Paul Murray, O.P., *Aquinas at Prayer: The Bible, Mysticism and Poetry*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 113-114. See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews*, ch. 5, lect 1, 255-256, trans. Aquinas Institute, Inc., accessed April 23, 2023, <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Heb.C5.L1.n255>.

⁷⁸ As quoted in Martin Grabmann, *The Interior Life of St. Thomas Aquinas: Presented from His Works and the Acts of His Canonization Process*, (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1951), 15.

Charity at the Center

As considered in the life of Saint Dominic, so for Saint Thomas, one must ask about the motive for these tears. Are they merely the effusions of a mind strained by regular and rigorous intellectual effort? It is interesting to note that, throughout the various accounts of Thomas' prayer as recorded by the canonization witnesses, phrases such as "with tears," are frequently conjoined to terms of devotion and reverence.⁷⁹ Tears thus seem almost to be highlighted as an intensifying factor to the prayer itself. It is as if the witnesses wish to emphasize the quality of Aquinas' prayer, that it was not merely an intellectual exercise. Nor were tears ancillary or even contrary to prayer, but rather part of its essential expression. As one later author states frankly, "He received the gift of tears. The man who wrote the *Summa Theologica* was suffused with tenderness before God."⁸⁰ In organizing his work on the virtues of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Father Martin Grabmann places his comments about Thomas' weeping within his chapter on charity. Alongside a consideration of contemplation as the source of joy, Grabmann states:

Thoughts on the suffering of Christ and on our own sins and sinfulness fill us simultaneously with a holy sorrow. The tears which are shed in true prayer to God do not flow merely from grief, but also from a certain tenderness of heart... Here the saint [Thomas Aquinas] can speak from his own experience since both the testimony of his canonization process and the bull of canonization tell us that he shed abundant tears during his prayers.⁸¹

Thomas' tears are thus understood as motivated not merely by sorrow for sin, but also a deep love for God and neighbor. In a mode of praying entirely in line with Saint Dominic himself, Thomas wept for sinners: "And although, because of his own innocence it was difficult for him to believe that man could sin, nonetheless whenever it was evident that anyone because of

⁷⁹ See Foster, O.P., *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 55, 85, 86, 87, 94.

⁸⁰ Thomas Deman, O.P., "Knowledge and Holiness and St. Thomas Aquinas," *Life of the Spirit* (1946-1964) 11, no. 129 (1957): 403. Note that *Life of the Spirit* was a journal predating the current *New Blackfriars* publication.

⁸¹ Grabmann, *The Interior Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 43.

weakness had sinned, he wept for the other person's sins, as though they were his own."⁸² As a true Dominican, Aquinas wept over the sins of the world and their impact on his fellow men.

As will be seen, Thomas himself places authentic, virtuous sorrow under these auspices of charity. This is entirely in line with the aims of the Dominican Order, which seeks to preach the truth out of that greatest charity for the salvation of souls. "For Thomas and Dominic—following Christ in Saint John's Gospel—know that only truth saves and sets free, and that in truth we find the culmination, salvation, and happiness of man. Through his theology and spirituality of the apostolic life, Thomas thus joins Dominic in a common passion for the salvation of others."⁸³ Aquinas the pray-er is Aquinas the preach-er, whose theological investigations are far from dry and abstract. Thomas' tears flowed from the same deep well of charity that underpinned his theological work: "Any deep intellectual life involves also an affective life...Theology is the work of charity...[and] how can one refuse to admit that the communicating of truth to men's minds is not also a work of love?"⁸⁴ In order to appreciate Aquinas' own understanding of tears as connected to charity, sorrow must be seen within the greater framework of the role of the passions in the moral life of man.

⁸² Calo, O.P., *The Life of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 37. Note that this comment falls under the section on Thomas' charity. See also Foster, *The Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Biographical Documents*, 52: "Yet Thomas always found it hard to believe in the sins of his fellow-men; seeing them like himself in nature, he thought them like him in innocence; and when it was brought home to him that anyone had fallen into sin through human frailty, he would grieve as if the sin were his own—like the Apostle whose charity caused him to feel the failings of others like a scorching fire."

⁸³ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2: Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 381.

⁸⁴ Deman, O.P., "Knowledge and Holiness and St. Thomas Aquinas," 388, 402, 404.

Passions in the Moral Life

The passions are movements of the sensitive appetite, part of the nature which man shares with irrational animals. Thus, the passions are in themselves morally neutral; however, once acted upon by reason and will, they assume a good or evil character. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, sorrow, like all the passions, must be ordered by reason to a proper end and perfected by the virtues. As such, sorrow (*tristitia*) is an essential component of a good human life, which involves the whole of man's human nature, including the sensitive appetite.

Aquinas proceeds in the *Summa Theologica* to outline the powers of the rational soul as interacting with the powers of the sensitive soul, in particular, the sensitive appetite and its movements, the passions, as part of the foundation for discussing the moral life. As Paul Gondreau points out, placing the examination of the passions in the section on the moral life “allows him [Aquinas] to drive home the point that the emotions play a necessary first step in our striving for happiness, in our attaining the end of seeing God.”⁸⁵ In delineating the powers of the soul, Aquinas distinguishes between the intellect, will, and sensitive appetite. The intellect is the power by which man apprehends what is true in the abstract and universal. The will is the power by which man desires the good which he has apprehended. The sensitive appetite, by which man is moved towards a sense or bodily good, can be divided into the concupiscible and irascible appetites. The concupiscible appetite is moved by the simple good or evil, while the irascible appetite is moved by the arduous good or evil. According to Aquinas, these powers of the soul work together to draw man towards his ultimate fulfillment: “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Paul Gondreau, “The Passions and the Moral Life: Appreciating the Originality of Aquinas,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 71, no. 3 (2007): 427.

⁸⁶ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *ST*), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948), I-II q. 3, a. 8, co.

The individual passions or emotions are operations of the concupiscible and irascible appetites.⁸⁷ Aquinas specifically associates the passions with the sensitive appetite, since it is evident that they are intimately connected to man's body, and not merely his soul.⁸⁸ This is a point not to be overlooked. "In his [Aquinas'] perspective, an emotion is a mode of tending on the part of an embodied soul. It is a motion of the soul that is mediated by certain changes in the body. Aquinas avoids reducing an emotion to a purely mental state, a brain state, a bodily state of some other kind, or a bodily feeling."⁸⁹ The passions are a unique bridge in man's composite nature, with both causes and effects in body and soul. As Gondreau makes clear, "it is paramount to see how man's hylemorphic (matter-form) makeup stands as the backdrop of all his moral action. Human affectivity provides an ideal case in point of this."⁹⁰ Gondreau goes on to describe how the passions are expressed through the body and effect physical changes. Additionally, the passions participate in reason and will to help lead man to his highest, and not just temporal, good, "making the emotions not merely 'animal-like' acts but genuine *human* acts."⁹¹ Thus, the dynamics between the intellect, will, and passions render all the powers of the soul essential components in the fulfillment of man's desires.

Thus, in order to live a good life, the passions not only can but must be ordered by reason. As Father Romanus Cessario, O.P., points out, "the concupiscible and irascible sense appetites, which, in themselves comprise the emotional life of the human person, possess the

⁸⁷ For the purposes of this study, the terms "passions" and "emotions" will be used interchangeably, reflecting a Thomistic psychology. See Nicholas E. Lombardo, O.P., *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010) and Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry*, (Georgetown University Press, 2009), 8-9.

⁸⁸ *ST I-II* q. 22, a. 3, co.

⁸⁹ Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, 10.

⁹⁰ Gondreau, "The Passions and the Moral Life," 423.

⁹¹ Gondreau, "The Passions and the Moral Life," 425 (emphasis in original).

capacity for true virtuous formation ordered to the authentic finalities of both nature and grace.”⁹² Under the guidance of the intellect and will, the passions move man toward the good. According to Cates, each passion “is a motion that occurs with respect to the appetitive dimension of an embodied soul. In other words, it is a motion that occurs through the exercise of one’s appetitive powers.”⁹³ As such, the passions lie at the unique intersection of body and soul, and furthermore, the intersection of nature and grace.⁹⁴

The passions are also related among themselves. Aquinas is clear that the two concupiscible and irascible appetites are distinct, although they are also intimately connected.

Now these two are not to be reduced to one principle: for sometimes the soul busies itself with unpleasant things, against the inclination of the concupiscible appetite, in order that, following the impulse of the irascible appetite, it may fight against obstacles. Wherefore also the passions of the irascible appetite counteract the passions of the concupiscible appetite... This is clear also from the fact that the irascible is, as it were, the champion and defender of the concupiscible when it rises up against what hinders the acquisition of the suitable things which the concupiscible desires, or against what inflicts harm, from which the concupiscible flies. And for this reason all the passions of the irascible appetite rise from the passions of the concupiscible appetite and terminate in them.⁹⁵

The concupiscible passions of love/hate, desire/aversion, and pleasure/sadness are ordered to the simple sensible good or evil. The correlating irascible passions of hope/despair, daring/fear, and anger are ordered to the arduous sensible good or evil. These pairings reflect how the passions work together based on the sense perception of the good or evil at hand, and whether or not the good is attainable. As several scholars have noted, the treatment of the passions in general, and

⁹² Romanus Cessario, O.P., “What Is a Moral Virtue?” in *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics, Second Edition*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 65, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpj74h4.8.

⁹³ Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions*, 62.

⁹⁴ As Father Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., further elaborates, “In the context that Thomas uses it, as we will have other opportunities to see, the reason is not that of a man left with only his human resources. For the theologian, we are always dealing with reason enlightened by the Word of God, informed by the divine law, strengthened by grace, and putting to work all the resources of virtue at its disposal.” Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 2: Spiritual Master*, 261.

⁹⁵ *ST I q. 81, a. 2, co.*

sorrow in particular, make up a proportionately significant amount of the *Summa Theologica*.⁹⁶

Not only that, Aquinas' overall treatment of the passions is decidedly and ardently positive:

The Dominican theologian has little time for what on one occasion he denounces as the "unreasonable" Stoic disdain for the passions (*hoc irrationabiliter dicitur*), or the "excessively inhuman" (*valde inhumanum*) Stoic view that sorrow never befalls the wise individual. From the start of his writing career, Thomas wages a relentless, if at times tempered, criticism of the Stoic view on the passions.⁹⁷

While quantity does not always indicate importance, the treatise on the passions does make up a large section of Aquinas' work in the *Summa*. There can be no doubt that Aquinas himself considered a proper and positive understanding of the passions essential to moral theology.

Sorrow in the Moral Life

With this foundational understanding of the place of the passions within the human person, one can now examine the particular passion of sorrow in more detail. Aquinas considers sorrow as "that pain alone which is caused by an interior apprehension"⁹⁸ of the presence of a sense evil, requiring both an aspect of evil and the perception of this evil.⁹⁹ The perceived evil can be apprehended as either physically or psychically sensed, and this helps orient sorrow as part of the sensitive appetite guided by reason. Properly speaking, pain is the response to an exterior evil, while sorrow senses interior evil which may or may not correspond to an attendant

⁹⁶ See Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 273. Cited in Gondreau, "The Passions and the Moral Life," 426, and Robert C. Miner, "Sorrow," in *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae, 1a2ae 22-48*, 188-211. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 189.

⁹⁷ Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2009), 282.

⁹⁸ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 2, co.

⁹⁹ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 1, co.

exterior evil.¹⁰⁰ Stated more poetically, “Behind pain there are nerve endings; ‘behind sorrow there is always a soul.’”¹⁰¹ Sorrow is contrary to joy and pleasure, insofar as its object is a present evil.¹⁰² However, this does not mean that sorrow can never exist alongside joy.

Aquinas clarifies that the passions are specified by their objects, and this is what renders the relationship of joy and sorrow to be contrary in regards to the same object. However, in compatible aspects, sorrow and joy “have a certain mutual fittingness and affinity: for instance to rejoice in good and to sorrow for evil.”¹⁰³ In this regard, the objects of the passions are themselves contrary, and so in turn the contrary responses of joy and sorrow towards these objects are in fact complementary. In his *Commentary on the Book of Job*, Aquinas goes further in asserting that sorrow and joy can be comingled, “For it would not please God that someone should suffer from adversity unless he wished some good to come to him from it. So though adversity is bitter in itself and generates sadness, nevertheless it should be the cause of rejoicing when one considers the use because of which it pleases God.”¹⁰⁴ For example, a man in need of medical care can feel sorrow for the bitterness or pain of the medicine, while simultaneously rejoicing in the health it brings. The Christian can likewise sorrow for a present evil while still rejoicing in the good which God can bring forth from that evil. Aquinas goes yet further in the analysis by claiming that sorrow can even be a cause of joy:

Nothing hinders one contrary causing the other accidentally: and thus sorrow can be the cause of pleasure. In one way, insofar as from sorrow at the absence of something, or at

¹⁰⁰ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 2.

¹⁰¹ Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), 88. Cited in Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 192.

¹⁰² *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 3, co.

¹⁰³ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 4, co.

¹⁰⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, ch. 1, lect. 4, 36, trans. Aquinas Institute, Inc., <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Job.C1.L4.n36.4>.

the presence of its contrary, one seeks the more eagerly for something pleasant...In another way, insofar as, from a strong desire for a certain pleasure, one does not shrink from undergoing pain, so as to obtain that pleasure. In each of these ways, the sorrows of the present life lead us to the comfort of the future life. Because by the mere fact that man mourns for his sins, or for the delay of glory, he merits the consolation of eternity. In like manner a man merits it when he shrinks not from hardships and straits in order to obtain it.¹⁰⁵

It is in this regard that sorrow for sins leads the Christian to joy in redemption, and thus is fulfilled the beatitude, “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.”¹⁰⁶

Species of Sorrow

Because the object of sorrow is a present evil, which implies a privation of the good, sorrow is in some sense always partial and lacking, and therefore less perfect than the seeking of pleasure.¹⁰⁷ Yet sorrow, as interior pain, is “of itself, greater [than any bodily pain], as being caused by a greater evil, forasmuch as evil is better known by an inward apprehension,” for “the apprehension of reason and imagination is of a higher order than the apprehension of the sense of touch. Consequently inward pain is, simply and of itself, more keen than outward pain.”¹⁰⁸

Aquinas, following the authority of Saints John Damascene and Gregory of Nyssa, delineates four species of sorrow: pity, envy, anxiety, and acedia. While “the proper object of sorrow is one’s own evil,”¹⁰⁹ sorrow can be felt for another, whether for their evil (pity) or their good (envy). Anxiety relates to an inability to flee the evil at hand, while acedia can render the

¹⁰⁵ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 3, ad. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew 5:4 (NABRE).

¹⁰⁷ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 6, co.

¹⁰⁸ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 7, ad. 2, co.

¹⁰⁹ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 8, co.

sorrowful one unable even to physically move.¹¹⁰ As will be seen below, these species of sorrow can develop into particular vices, but can also be perfected by particular virtues.

Causes and Effects of the Passion of Sorrow

What then causes sorrow? As its object would indicate, a present evil is most fundamentally the cause of sorrow.¹¹¹ First, it is helpful to consider the nature of “present” evil. Insofar as man can presently bring to mind the apprehension of evil from another time, sorrow “extends to evils of the past, present, and future,”¹¹² which again distinguishes it from mere bodily pain. Evil is by definition a privation of the good,¹¹³ and so, in one sense, a desire for good also underlies sorrow, inasmuch as one sorrows for the lack of the good that one desires. Sorrow, caused by the apprehension of a present evil, also engenders certain effects. Aquinas states that sorrow denigrates one’s ability to learn and remember what one has already learned,¹¹⁴ as well as burdening both soul and body in depression or even paralysis.¹¹⁵ The evil at hand “depresses the soul, inasmuch as it hinders it from enjoying that which it wishes to enjoy.”¹¹⁶ In fact, Aquinas considers that,

Of all the soul’s passions, sorrow is most harmful to the body...[for] those passions which denote in the appetite a movement of flight or contraction, are repugnant to the vital movement, not only as regards its measure, but also as regards its species; wherefore they are simply harmful: such are fear and despair, and above all sorrow which depresses

¹¹⁰ *ST I-II* q. 35, a. 8, co.

¹¹¹ *ST I-II* q. 36, a. 1, co.

¹¹² Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 196.

¹¹³ *ST I* q. 49, a. 1.

¹¹⁴ *ST I-II* q. 37, a. 1.

¹¹⁵ *ST I-II* q. 37, a. 2.

¹¹⁶ *ST I-II* q. 37, a. 2, co.

the soul by reason of a present evil, which makes a stronger impression than future evil.¹¹⁷

Remedies for Sorrow

With all these adverse effects of sorrow, it is no wonder that man seeks for ways to alleviate it. Aquinas considers four main remedies for sorrow, which all have their roots in the relationship between pleasure and pain. Since sorrow arises from an apprehension of evil, it “implies a certain weariness or ailing of the appetitive faculty.”¹¹⁸ Aquinas compares this to the weariness of the body which is relieved by rest. “Therefore just as all repose of the body brings relief to any kind of weariness, ensuing from any non-natural cause; so every pleasure brings relief by assuaging any kind of sorrow, due to any cause whatever.”¹¹⁹ Consequently, when the appetitive power rests in pleasure of some kind, this relieves the experience of sorrow.

What sort of pleasures are best suited to remedy sorrow? Aquinas first considers what many associate immediately with sadness: tears. One might initially consider crying as an effect of sorrow with no connection to pleasure, but which would rather seem to increase distress. Yet, Aquinas contends that tears actually offer relief.

Tears and groans naturally assuage sorrow: and this for two reasons. First, because a hurtful thing hurts yet more if we keep it shut up, because the soul is more intent on it: whereas if it be allowed to escape, the soul’s intention is dispersed as it were on outward things, so that the inward sorrow is lessened. This is why men, burdened with sorrow, make outward show of their sorrow, by tears or groans or even by words, their sorrow is assuaged. Second, because an action, that befits a man according to his actual disposition, is always pleasant to him. Now tears and groans are actions befitting a man who is in sorrow or pain; and consequently they become pleasant to him. Since then, as stated

¹¹⁷ *ST I-II* q. 37, a. 4, co.

¹¹⁸ *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 1, co.

¹¹⁹ *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 1, co.

above [A1], every pleasure assuages sorrow or pain somewhat, it follows that sorrow is assuaged by weeping and groans.¹²⁰

Thus, Aquinas articulates what many have experienced. Sadness that is “shut up” inside causes great pain and seeks for release. And, since crying is appropriate to sadness, Aquinas contends that even here there is an element of restful pleasure.

Next, Aquinas considers the sympathy of friends as a relief for sorrow. This, he says, is fitting for two reasons. First, since sorrow is a kind of depression which weighs down the soul, the consolation of friends assists one in lifting the burden of sorrow.¹²¹ In a spiritual sense, friends act as other Simons to help carry the weight of the cross of sadness. Secondly, and more importantly for Aquinas, friendship is a sign of another’s love for the one who is sorrowing, which is in turn a source of pleasure, the foundational remedy for sorrow.¹²² Father Brian Davies, O.P., points out the importance of the communal nature of this remedy for Dominicans: “The last point is particularly interesting from a Dominican viewpoint...the emphasis on fraternal dependence is something found from the beginning of Dominican life.”¹²³ It is no surprise that Aquinas, ever faithful to his Dominican vocation, would highlight this communal charity.

Aquinas’ next medicine for sadness may be unexpected, but it is in many ways ideal. As the highest of joys, Aquinas reckons contemplation of the truth to be a fitting solace for sorrow, particularly as one is more disposed to be a “lover of wisdom.”¹²⁴ It is this remedy which allows the martyrs to rejoice even as they experience severe bodily pain and loss of earthly life. For some, this high ideal of contemplation may seem too lofty to be of use when weighed down by

¹²⁰ *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 2, co.

¹²¹ *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 3, co.

¹²² *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 3, co.

¹²³ Brian Davies, O.P., “St. Thomas Aquinas as a Dominican,” *New Blackfriars* 60, no. 706 (1979): 114.

¹²⁴ *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 4, co.

depression and sadness. Fortuitously, Aquinas also seems to acknowledge that sometimes a simpler solution is needed. His final remedies for sorrow are basic human pleasures: sleep and baths. Because the passions, and especially sorrow, affect both body and soul, pleasures which “restore the bodily nature to its due state of vital movement”¹²⁵ both restore the body and alleviate sorrow in the soul. As composite beings, humans can look to both simple bodily remedies and high spiritual truths to assuage the pain of sadness.

Vicious Sorrow

Sorrow is not only harmful to the body; it can also harm the soul, and can even lead to sin. When reason and will fail to regulate sorrow according to right reason, the *passion* of sorrow leads to *sins* of sorrow. Since sorrow is contrary to that joy which is a fruit of charity, sloth and envy are sins of sorrow particularly against charity. Sloth is a blameworthy sorrow for a true interior good, especially the good of divine things, and sloth carries with it an oppression which weighs down man. Aquinas indicates that sloth is evil both in itself and in its effects, “for sorrow is evil in itself when it is about that which is apparently evil but good in reality...Since, then, spiritual good is a good in very truth, sorrow about spiritual good is evil in itself.”¹²⁶ For example, a religious man or woman who sorrows at the thought of “wasting” time in contemplation of God rather than working on his or her own personal projects experiences sloth. Sloth makes a man sorrowful and sluggish over the very things in which he should most genuinely rejoice. As such, it can even be reckoned as a mortal sin, and certainly reflects a disordered passion.

¹²⁵ *ST I-II* q. 38, a. 4, co.

¹²⁶ *ST II-II* q. 35, a. 1, co.

Envy, like sloth, is sorrow for that which should cause joy, namely, another's good. Envy occurs when one perceives another's good "as being one's own evil, insofar as it conduces to the lessening of one's own good name or excellence. It is in this way that envy grieves for another's good."¹²⁷ In charity, one ought to truly desire the good of another. Thus envy, which perceives another's good as an evil simply because it surpasses one's own good, is a sin against charity.¹²⁸ As Aquinas distinguishes, there can be other causes for sorrow over another's good which are not sinful, such as being threatened by another's temporal goods or wanting the good they possess though not at their expense. These, properly speaking, are not envy.¹²⁹ Both envy and sloth are considered not only sins but also capital vices.¹³⁰ It must be remembered that in both cases, the sorrow referred to is a sorrow which considers a genuinely good object as evil. As such, it is a disordered sorrow.

Sorrow as a Good

From the treatment of sorrow thus far, it would seem that sadness is a negative reality meant to be avoided or alleviated if at all possible. Is sorrow always an evil? In one sense, "all sorrow is an evil, because the mere fact of a man's appetite being uneasy about a present evil, is itself an evil, because it hinders the response of the appetite in good."¹³¹ However, Aquinas further distinguishes when he states: "supposing the presence of something saddening or painful,

¹²⁷ *ST* II-II q. 36, a. 1, co.

¹²⁸ *ST* II-II q. 36, a. 2, co.

¹²⁹ *ST* II-II q. 36, a. 2, co.

¹³⁰ *ST* II-II q. 35, a. 4 and q. 36, a. 4.

¹³¹ *ST* I-II q. 39, a. 1, co.

it is a sign of goodness if a man is in sorrow or pain on account of this present evil.”¹³² When a genuine evil is present, it is an entirely appropriate and good response for man to feel sorrow. In fact, if he did not, it would indicate either insensibility or a lack of recognition of evil as evil, which would be the very opposite of good. “The reason that it is good to be sad about an evil is because we have a passion of sadness that operates in certain ways, and it is good for the inclinations of our nature to reach their fulfillment.”¹³³ Father Nicholas Lombardo, O.P., expands on the idea of sorrow as a useful good that can help guide man to his proper end:

Sadness, or the experience of the frustration of a given desire of the sense appetite, also inclines the human person to pursue those other desires, including desires of the intellectual appetite, that are still open to fulfillment. Hence the educative and self-transcending consequence often noted about suffering: it inclines us to consider other ways in which fulfillment is still possible despite the suffering. So, in Aquinas’s account, even the frustration of appetite (or at least some kinds of frustration of appetite) ultimately moves us toward our *telos*.¹³⁴

Aquinas goes so far as to say that moderate or proper sorrow is even a virtuous good, insofar as it denotes a rightly ordered intellect and will.¹³⁵ Having sorrow for evil, primarily the evil of sin, is praiseworthy because it is the expression of a rightly ordered human nature. This is even more the case when that sorrow is expressed in tears, which involves man’s full composite nature in body and soul. Furthermore, sorrow can also be useful, as it helps man to avoid what he should

¹³² *ST I-II* q. 39, a. 1, co.

¹³³ Lombardo, O.P., *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*, 112.

¹³⁴ Lombardo, O.P., *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*, 40, note 78.

¹³⁵ *ST I-II* q. 39, a. 2, co: “I answer that, insofar as sorrow is good, it can be a virtuous good. For it has been said above (A1) that sorrow is a good inasmuch as it denotes perception and rejection of evil. These two things, as regards bodily pain, are a proof of the goodness of nature, to which it is due that the senses perceive, and that nature shuns, the harmful thing that causes pain. As regards interior sorrow, perception of the evil is sometimes due to a right judgment of reason; while the rejection of the evil is the act of the will, well disposed and detesting that evil. Now every virtuous good results from these two things, the rectitude of the reason and the will. Wherefore it is evident that sorrow may be a virtuous good.”

avoid, namely sin and near occasions of sin.¹³⁶ As Kevin White notes, “This allusion to a useful sorrow for sin in general anticipates the discussion in the *Tertia pars* of repentance, the sorrow for past sins that is a virtue and a sacrament (IIIa, q. 84, a. 1; IIIa, q. 85).”¹³⁷ Indeed, in the *Tertia pars*, Aquinas will consider this sorrow for sin as the virtue of penance, which “consists in weeping and tears.”¹³⁸ In his discussion of penance, Aquinas clearly places a great value on tears manifesting the penitent’s intentions, yet he also acknowledges that the interior disposition of penance can last longer than a person’s weeping. “Weeping and tears belong to the act of external penance, and this act needs neither to be continuous, nor to last until the end of life,”¹³⁹ so long as one maintains a habitual disposition of sorrow towards sin. Once again, sorrow is moderated by right reason. “Now it belongs to right reason that one should grieve for a proper object of grief as one ought to grieve, and for an end for which one ought to grieve. And this is observed in the penance of which we are speaking now; since the penitent assumes a moderated grief for his past sins, with the intention of removing them.”¹⁴⁰ As will be seen, penance is only one of the virtues integrally connected to sorrow.

¹³⁶ *ST* I-II q. 39, a. 3, co: “There are two reasons for which it may be right to avoid a thing. First, because it should be avoided in itself, on account of its being contrary to good; for instance, sin. Wherefore sorrow for sin is useful as inducing a man to avoid sin: hence the Apostle says (2 Cor 7:9): *I am glad: not because you were made sorrowful, but because you were made sorrowful unto penance.* Second, a thing is to be avoided, not as though it were evil in itself, but because it is an occasion of evil; either through one’s being attached to it, and loving it too much, or through one’s being thrown headlong thereby into an evil, as is evident in the case of temporal goods. And, in this respect, sorrow for temporal goods may be useful; according to Eccles. 7:3: *It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting: for in that we are put in mind of the end of all.* Moreover, sorrow for that which ought to be avoided is always useful, since it adds another motive for avoiding it. Because the very evil is in itself a thing to be avoided: while everyone avoids sorrow for its own sake, just as everyone seeks the good, and pleasure in the good. Therefore just as pleasure in the good makes one seek the good more earnestly, so sorrow for evil makes one avoid evil more eagerly.”

¹³⁷ Kevin White, “The Passions of the Soul (Ia IIae, qq. 22-48),” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 112.

¹³⁸ *ST* III q. 84, a. 9, ob. 1.

¹³⁹ *ST* III q. 84, a. 9, ad. 1.

¹⁴⁰ *ST* III q. 85, a. 1, co.

Sorrow Presupposes Love

Sorrow is more properly felt for a good that has been lost than for a good which has not yet been experienced. As a poignant example, “the pain felt by a couple who want children but cannot have them, while far from illusory, does not compare to the sorrow of parents who have lost their children to death.”¹⁴¹ As this instance illustrates, sorrow, as indeed all the passions, presupposes love, for one would not consider something as evil unless its contrary were already loved as a good.¹⁴² As Cates states succinctly, “If it were not for love, there would be no cause for hatred or sadness when one apprehends a relational transgression.”¹⁴³ Herein lies the root of sorrow’s inherent goodness. “Sorrow presupposes love and desire; love of the good is stronger than avoidance of evil. If human beings expend a large amount of energy avoiding evils, they do so in the name of goods which they care about. The intensity with which a person avoids an evil is a function of the intensity with which that person loves the contrary good.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, when one’s loves are properly ordered to the good, it follows that the experience of sorrow will also be rightly ordered. On its own, sadness is morally neutral, and one “cannot possibly judge whether any particular *tristitia* is good or bad without seeing it in relation to its surroundings.”¹⁴⁵ Sorrow, like the other passions, requires ordering and guidance by both reason and virtue.

¹⁴¹ Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 198.

¹⁴² See *ST* I-II q. 36, aa. 2-3.

¹⁴³ Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry*, 155.

¹⁴⁴ Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 195.

¹⁴⁵ Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 208.

Virtuous Sorrow

There must certainly be virtues which dispose the passions, and particularly sadness, to their proper end, for “moral virtue acts as the vehicle by which the sensitive appetite cooperates serenely with its ‘sovereign,’ reason and will. To moral virtue belongs the task of ‘humanizing’ the emotions, the movements of our lower sensitive appetite.”¹⁴⁶ These humanizing moral virtues are in turn guided by the theological virtues, which form the foundation for man’s ultimate happiness. Thus, even in the face of disordered emotions,

The Christian believer can still rationally choose the truth of God’s goodness...For although the virtue of faith is in the intellect, it nonetheless motivates the virtue of hope whereby the believer clings to God’s omnipotent mercy as the source of salvation. This spiritual clinging forms the basis for the whole moral life...Furthermore, the believer can make this efficacious choice for salvation through the agency of the rational appetite, even in the face of a whole range of disordered sense-urges.¹⁴⁷

Aquinas reflects on this choice for God in the face of sadness in his comments on the primordial example of the sorrowful man, the long-suffering Job. Job certainly had cause for sadness, given the loss of his property, family, and health. Aquinas notes, however, that Job’s actions and words reveal that his sorrow is moderated by faith and trust in God’s providence:

For though he suffered grief, but not a grief which penetrated as far as disturbing his interior reason...Therefore the fact that the mind of blessed Job was not dejected by sadness, but persisted in its righteousness, clearly shows that he humbly subjected himself to God... For it would not please God that someone should suffer from adversity unless he wished some good to come to him from it...For when taking a bitter medicine, one can rejoice with reason because of the hope for health, although he suffers sensibly...therefore Job concludes this third argument with an act of thanksgiving, saying, *Blessed be the name of the Lord.*¹⁴⁸

Job experiences genuine sorrow at the loss of many good things. Yet, he also looks to God as the author of all good, trusting in hope that He will ultimately provide what is best. This beginning

¹⁴⁶ Gondreau, “The Passions and the Moral Life,” 432.

¹⁴⁷ Cessario, O.P., “What Is a Moral Virtue?” 69-70.

¹⁴⁸ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, ch. 1, lect. 4, <https://aquinas.cc/en/la/~Job.C1.L4.v1.22.4>.

of hope from the Old Testament will ultimately find fulfillment in the paschal mystery of Christ. As the example of Job demonstrates (albeit in incomplete form), the organic network of the theological and moral virtues coalesce to order and unite the powers of the soul, including the passions, in striving for eternal beatitude, man's ultimate good.¹⁴⁹

Humanized by Hope

Recall that the main vices that disorder sorrow are sloth and envy. Sloth, that sadness over spiritual goods, can be connected to despair, which depletes man's desire to attain the good of eternal beatitude. This heaviness of heart is healed by hope. Hope is the virtue by which man desires eternal life and trusts in God's help to attain it, "Wherefore, insofar as we hope for anything as being possible to us by means of the Divine assistance, our hope attains God Himself, on Whose help it leans."¹⁵⁰ One who has hope has confidence in attaining eternal beatitude, not by his own powers, but by the help of God. Consequently, the hopeful person is able to overcome the disordered sorrows of this life, and to moderate this passion to a fitting end. Even one suffering the deep grief over a loved one's death is encouraged, "We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through

¹⁴⁹ For a more extensive treatment of sorrow, hope, and fear in the Book of Job, see Daria Spezzano, "The Fear and Hope of Blessed Job," in *Reading Job with St. Thomas Aquinas*. ed. Matthew Levering, Piotr Roszak and Jörgen Vijgen (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 261–314. Especially helpful is the recognition that "Thomas's assumption that the just who lived before Christ could have the gift of grace with some form of anticipatory faith and hope was well founded in patristic tradition," *ibid.* 272.

¹⁵⁰ *ST II-II* q. 17, a. 1, co.

Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”¹⁵¹ Even the greatest temporal sadness of death is moderated by hope which looks to eternal life.

Christianized by Compassion

There is also the perfection of sorrow which feels for the pain of others, which is proper to the virtue of mercy. While the proper object of sadness is one’s own evil, as stated above, some species of sorrow can extend to the evil afflicting others. This is why mercy is needed to order this sadness for others, for “as Augustine says (De Civ. Dei ix, 5), *mercy is heartfelt sympathy for another’s distress, impelling us to succor him if we can*. For mercy takes its name *miser cordia* from denoting a man’s compassionate heart (*miserum cor*) for another’s unhappiness.”¹⁵² Mercy is the virtue which directs the movement of sorrow for another,¹⁵³ insofar as in mercy one regards the pain of another as one’s own pain through a union of love.¹⁵⁴ “Mercy implies that we regard our neighbor’s good as our own, that in some sense we love our neighbor as another self, and so we are saddened over our neighbor’s loss as though it were our own. Consequently, mercy prompts us to come to the aid of our neighbors.”¹⁵⁵ As an effect of charity, “of all the virtues which relate to our neighbor, mercy is the greatest, even as its act surpasses all others.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, the virtue of hope can order a sadness which is disordered in its object, while mercy as related to charity perfects sorrow which is felt toward others.

¹⁵¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (NABRE).

¹⁵² ST II-II q. 30, a. 1, co (emphasis in original).

¹⁵³ ST II-II q. 30, a. 3, co.

¹⁵⁴ ST II-II q. 30, a. 2, co.

¹⁵⁵ Lombardo, O.P., *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*, 168.

¹⁵⁶ ST II-II q. 30, a. 4, co.

Dominican Implications

Having examined Aquinas' thoughts on sorrow in the moral life, important conclusions can be drawn about the experience of sorrow in the Dominican life. Placing Aquinas within the context of his Dominican vocation is imperative, for, as one commentator points out, "It needs to be emphasized therefore that Aquinas' choice of the Dominicans was an extraordinarily conscious one,"¹⁵⁷ and "it would be difficult to dissociate Aquinas's spirituality from his study."¹⁵⁸ First, sorrow is grounded in love. Properly ordered loves for God, oneself, and one's neighbor can be manifested in properly ordered sorrow, most especially for sin which offends God and wounds man. The virtue of penance perfects this sorrow for one's sins. Likewise, sorrow can be felt for others, especially through the virtue of compassion. In an Order founded for the preaching and salvation of souls, it is fitting that its members grow in mercy towards sinners and help to foster in them repentance for their sins. Additionally, sorrow is not incompatible with joy, and indeed, tears can often be a manifestation of both passions. Aquinas notes this relationship when commenting on the tears of devotion he himself experienced: "Tears are caused not only through sorrow, but also through a certain tenderness of the affections, especially when one considers something that gives joy mixed with pain...In this way tears arise from devotion."¹⁵⁹ In the contemplation of divine things, man simultaneously comes to know the misery of sin and the great mercy and goodness of God. It is this knowledge which impels him to spend himself fervently for the salvation of souls.

Finally, of profound importance for the Dominican, the expression of virtuous sorrow in tears is morally praiseworthy and meritorious because it involves the whole person, body and

¹⁵⁷ Davies, O.P., "St. Thomas Aquinas as a Dominican," 103.

¹⁵⁸ Davies, O.P., "St. Thomas Aquinas as a Dominican," 104.

¹⁵⁹ *ST II-II* q. 82, a. 4, ad 3.

soul. Recall that Saint Dominic founded the Order of Preachers precisely to combat the heresy that the physical world was evil. That the sensitive appetite can be expressed virtuously in the physical act of weeping counters this lie in a profound way. Man is meant to live and be perfected in the fullness of his humanity, and this extends from the sensitive appetite he shares with the animals to the rational appetite he shares with the angels.

Conclusion

In the perfection of man, the interconnectedness of the virtues reveals part of the beauty of the human person; to grow in one is to grow in all. Together, the virtues weave a tapestry of good order and beauty, perfecting all the powers of the soul to mutually strive for eternal beatitude. The passion of sorrow is an essential part of this tapestry. “To attain the state of moral perfection we need to become good in our emotions and desires as well as in the choices of our will.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the proper ordering of the passions is not merely a matter of repression. “Aquinas goes even further, insisting that moral virtue can heal the disordered nature of the passions to the extent that the virtuous individual is not merely untroubled by his passions, he is actually helped by his passions in living virtuously.”¹⁶¹ In this life there will always be a necessary admixture of joy and sorrow, for man is a wayfarer who has not yet reached his destination. Yet even in this life it is possible to taste the joy of eternity, primarily through Aquinas’ ideal remedy for sorrow. “Most pleasant actions are not unalloyed, but come with contrary pains...Contemplation, however, is the exception, precisely because it is the locus of

¹⁶⁰ Gondreau, “The Passions and the Moral Life,” 442.

¹⁶¹ Gondreau, “The Passions and the Moral Life,” 450.

human participation in divine timelessness.”¹⁶² God in His mercy also provides physical relief from sorrow, as He reminds that other great Dominican, Saint Catherine of Siena: “I want you to know that all tears come from the heart. Nor is there any other bodily member that can satisfy the heart as the eyes can. If the heart is sad, the eyes show it.”¹⁶³ As the eye expresses the movements of the heart, Saint Thomas Aquinas would wholeheartedly agree that weeping can relieve the heart of sorrow. “For both Thomas and Catherine, sorrow flows from the human capacity to love.”¹⁶⁴ It is this great capacity for love which impelled Saint Catherine of Siena to preach the truth a century later. It is to this great Dominican tertiary and her experience of tears that we now turn.

¹⁶² Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 192-193.

¹⁶³ Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 161-162.

¹⁶⁴ Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, 203.

CHAPTER III: SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

Having considered the tears of two Friars Preachers, it remains to be seen how this charism of compassion was lived amongst the sisters of the female branch of the Order. For this, there can be no better exemplar than the fourteenth century Dominican tertiary, Saint Catherine of Siena. Popularly known for her role in Italian politics and the quest to return the Roman pontiff to his residence in Rome, Catherine was primarily a mystic and a sought-after spiritual mother well acquainted with the reality of sin and salvation.

Personal Witness

The principal source of Catherine's biographical information comes from *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, written by Catherine's primary confessor, the Dominican Blessed Raymond of Capua. Raymond takes pains to repeatedly inform his readers of his sources for the material at hand, as he clearly aims to present a historically reliable account of Catherine's life and miracles, albeit within the genre of medieval hagiography.

Formation in Lamentation

The first place in Catherine's life that Raymond mentions her tears is at the tender age of six. Walking home with her brother, Catherine was favored with a vision of Christ in glory. When her attention was called away from this vision, "Catherine, unable to endure this without feeling a sharp sting of sorrow, burst into tears, upbraiding herself bitterly for having allowed her

eyes to stop looking up towards heaven.”¹⁶⁵ Already as a young child, Catherine’s sorrow demonstrates proper ordering, as she mourns the loss of heavenly goods more than earthly ones. A similar incident occurred later in Catherine’s life when she experienced a vision of St. Dominic. Distracted for a moment from her heavenly visitor, Catherine was distraught at her own inattention and “she immediately burst into tears, and was quite unable to speak.”¹⁶⁶ Catherine clearly valued the life of the spirit, and she lamented losing focus on God even in small matters.

As a young woman, Catherine was encouraged by her mother and older sister to spend more time on her appearance and less time in prayer. Reflecting back on this relatively trivial foray into vain self-love, Raymond says that Catherine “used to acknowledge this fault with so many tears and sobs that one would have thought she had committed heaven knows what sin...sobbing and crying and harshly upbraiding herself.”¹⁶⁷ Raymond pressed Catherine for the cause of her seemingly excessive sorrow, and “Catherine replied that the real trouble was that she had loved her sister more than she should have done, and in fact seemed to have loved her more than God.”¹⁶⁸ Here again, Catherine’s intense weeping over sin reveals a finely-tuned conscience and a rightly-ordered sorrow, attentive to how grievously any sin offends God. It is beautiful to note that at this time, Catherine began to develop a deep devotion to St. Mary Magdalene. In considering the taste of vanity she had experienced,

Prostrate with Mary Magdalene at the feet of her Lord, she gave herself to tears, imploring Him to have mercy on her...She began to develop a particular devotion towards the Magdalene, doing everything she could to imitate her to obtain forgiveness.

¹⁶⁵ Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans. George Lamb (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2011), 10.

¹⁶⁶ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 161.

¹⁶⁷ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 21.

¹⁶⁸ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 22.

This devotion grew and grew until, as with the Lord's help I [Raymond] shall explain in detail later, the Bridegroom of all holy souls and His glorious Mother assigned the Magdalene to the holy virgin [Catherine] as her own mistress and mother.¹⁶⁹

Catherine thus forged a deep connection with one of the principal patrons of the Dominican Order, a woman known for the fervor of her own tears of repentance.

Indeed, as she entered her teenage years Catherine's sense of a Dominican vocation was solidifying. She was filled with a deep desire to join the Sisters of Penance of St. Dominic, or the Mantellate, a group of women who were the precursors to contemporary Third Order active sisters and lay tertiaries. Catherine was consoled by a vision of St. Dominic in which he assured her that she would be clothed in the habit of the Order of Preachers, as she indeed was around 1363. "These words filled her with great joy, and with tears of happiness she gave thanks to God and to Dominic, the famous athlete of the Lord, for giving her such perfect consolation. Then she was awakened by her tears and came back to her senses."¹⁷⁰ The precisely Dominican character of Catherine's call should not be overlooked. As Kenelm Foster notes, "It is worth insisting on the immense importance for Catherine of being able to carry on her work under the wing of the Order...and her Dominican connection was a special advantage."¹⁷¹ As for St. Thomas Aquinas, so for St. Catherine of Siena, the vocation to the Dominican Order was intentional and providential, a place where the gifts of each saint could be placed at the service of the salvation of souls. For Catherine, being part of the Dominican Order included the emphasis on the goodness of the body and the freedom of itinerant movement that enabled her to develop and spread a spirituality of tears as part of the call to conversion.

¹⁶⁹ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 24.

¹⁷⁰ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 31.

¹⁷¹ Kenelm Foster, O.P., "The Spirit of St Catherine of Siena," *Life of the Spirit (1946-1964)* 15, no. 178 (1961): 437-438.

Tears as a Test of the Spirit

After Catherine joined the Dominican family, her unusual mystical experiences began to become more widely known. Raymond became personally familiar with Catherine at this time, and was appointed her formal spiritual director around 1374. Raymond relates that he devised a proof test to determine if Catherine's prayer and teaching were legitimate.

It occurred to me that if I could be certain that Catherine's prayers had brought me a great and unaccustomed contrition for my sins it would be perfect proof that all her actions were guided by the Holy Spirit, for no one can feel contrition except through the Holy Spirit, and though we can never know whether we are in God's grace and worthy of His hatred or His love, nevertheless when contrition for sin rises up in our hearts this is always a great sign of the grace of God.¹⁷²

Indeed, Catherine proved herself a true instrument of the Holy Spirit, for Raymond received a profound vision of the misery of his own sins face-to-face with God's mercy. He describes his reaction thus: "Under the effect of these reflections, or rather utterly clear visions, the cataracts of my flinty heart were loosened and the fountains of water overflowed to lay bare the depths of my sins: I burst out into tears...Catherine, in her wisdom...let me go on crying and sobbing."¹⁷³ Of course, it is first of all significant that Raymond's prayer was answered by his own experience of tears and that Catherine was vindicated as a true mystic. Yet, on a deeper level, it is noteworthy that Raymond considered tears of contrition to be a valid indicator of the action of the Holy Spirit. This reflects an understanding that indeed, under certain circumstances, tears can be a direct gift of the Spirit. This conclusion of Raymond's was influenced no doubt by the Dominican and Thomistic emphasis on the goodness of the body and man's hylemorphic nature, wherein God's actions can certainly manifest through physical means such as tears.

¹⁷² Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 57.

¹⁷³ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 59.

Tears of an Evangelizing Mystic

As Catherine's mystical life developed, she became more and more enclosed in a life of prayer. Describing her rigorous fasts and time spent in silence and solitude, Raymond remarks, "She also decided always to eat her bread with tears: by making God an offering of tears before each meal she would first irrigate her soul and then take food to sustain her body... Who could describe her vigils, her prayers, her meditations? Who shall number her tears?"¹⁷⁴ Yet, after several years of seclusion in her home receiving formation in prayer from the Lord Himself, the Lord called Catherine from her life of contemplation to an apostolic mission. Catherine's response was one of dismay, begging God not to ask her to leave His presence. "Catherine would cry bitterly and say, 'Why sweetest Bridegroom, are you sending me away?'... the virgin, lying prostrate at the feet of the Lord, had spoken more by way of tears than with her lips."¹⁷⁵ Catherine's sorrow at being asked to abandon her enclosure of prayer was only consoled when the Lord reminded her of the zeal for souls that He Himself had planted in her heart, and that He would always be with her in her ministry of charity.

Catherine began to engage in works of mercy toward the sick and poor in Siena. Along with material assistance, Catherine encouraged those she encountered to a greater love of God and neighbor, and she soon gathered a following of those who sought to learn from her spiritual teaching. Distinct from the formal homilies and lectures of the friars, Catherine's preaching exercised the Dominican charism by extending material and spiritual compassion to sinners, calling souls to repentance, and inspiring deeper love of God. These apostolic labors continued to be nourished by tears. Praying for the conversion of a woman who despised her, "the holy virgin went on praying until she so to speak had conquered the Unconquerable and captured the

¹⁷⁴ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 54.

¹⁷⁵ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 89.

Almighty with humble tears.”¹⁷⁶ For another hardened sinner persisting in blasphemy and impenitence, Catherine prayed: “From the fifth hour of the night until the break of day, Catherine, weeping continuously and without a wink of sleep, fought with the Lord for the salvation of Andrea’s soul.”¹⁷⁷ In praise of this apostolic compassion, Raymond writes:

You [Lord] inflamed her heart to conquer with her poor tears yourself who are the unconquerable one, and, as it were, put your own omnipotence in thrall. Who was it but you yourself who infused such audacity into her? Who fired her with such sisterly compassion? Who gave her the tears to influence your clemency if not you yourself?¹⁷⁸

Clearly for Catherine’s confessor, her compassionate tears were a direct gift of prayer from God.

Catherine came to live almost entirely on the Lord’s Eucharistic presence, and her whole being, body and soul, came to pine for Him. “The virgin of Christ languished with love of her Lord, and the only relief she could find was in weeping of soul and body. Every day there were groans and tears.”¹⁷⁹ “Catherine wept so loudly during Mass,”¹⁸⁰ that at times priests even asked her to sit further back from the altar so as not to disturb others. Obediently, Catherine moved, yet she also “begged the Lord to grant her confessor [not Raymond] a special illumination that would enable him to realize that there are some movements of the Spirit of God that cannot be repressed.”¹⁸¹ Catherine’s desire for frequent reception of Holy Communion, extreme fasting, and immovable ecstasies were considered by some to be signs of the demonic, rather than the actions of grace.¹⁸² When Catherine was censored or judged by others, she sought humble

¹⁷⁶ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 180.

¹⁷⁸ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 181.

¹⁷⁹ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 131.

¹⁸⁰ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 149.

¹⁸¹ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 149.

¹⁸² See Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 132-135.

obedience to those in authority over her, especially her spiritual directors. Not wanting to cause scandal by disobedience, yet drawn by the Lord's interior promptings, Catherine had recourse to prayer: "To the Lord she shed tears of sorrow and hope."¹⁸³

Catherine's compunction was not merely a gift for herself. Raymond recounts how her sorrow for sin bore fruit for others.

I have at times seen an endless stream of men and women coming...and I have seen them all stung with remorse not only by her words but at the mere sight of her and crying and sobbing over their own sins. They would run to the priests, including me, and confess with such compunction of heart that no one could doubt but that a great shower of graces had poured down upon them from heaven.¹⁸⁴

Catherine's presence and preaching caused events like this to occur so often that she had special permission to travel with priests in tow so as to be prepared for many to receive the sacrament of confession. Weeping in prayer was not merely a personal gift of Catherine's, it was part of the spiritual heritage that she conveyed to her followers, as can be glimpsed below in an examination of her letters. Beyond her own life experience, the letters of St. Catherine of Siena reveal a deep interest and emphasis on Christian tears.

Catherine's Correspondence

The sheer volume of letters dictated by Catherine is astounding, especially when one considers that she was a functionally illiterate woman of the fourteenth century. Catherine corresponded with people from all walks of life: male, female, religious, lay, commoners, royalty, even the pope. A brief survey of the index to the four volume English translation of her letters yields nearly one hundred references to tears. The topic extends across the years of

¹⁸³ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 134.

¹⁸⁴ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 193.

Catherine's correspondence and transcends the diversity of her audience. Considering the breadth and frequency of these references, one can question if Catherine always referred to literal weeping, or if she only spoke metaphorically. While the repeated vehemence of her words seems to indicate a literal interpretation, Catherine is also known for her vivid imagery. Regardless, the image of tears, physically or spiritually shed, is a fitting choice for the themes which Catherine emphasizes in her letters. She considers the role of sorrow in personal contrition, prayer for the Church, and prayer for sinners, all worthy motives for Christian tears.

Personal Compunction and Contrition

First of all, Catherine weeps for her own sins: "I Caterina, a useless servant, am in agony with desire as I search the depths of my soul; I grieve and weep when I see and really understand our foolish apathy, our failure to give our love to God after he has given us such great graces with so much love."¹⁸⁵ Catherine stands as an inheritor of the Christian tradition of compunction, that is, the personal sorrow for sin which is essential to conversion. She mourns for the way her own sins have offended God, and for her own lack of love in the face of Love incarnate. Speaking for herself and encouraging others, she sees tears as a way to make amends for one's past sins and thoughtlessness: "Let's redeem with holy sorrow and grief the time we have spent carelessly or lost..."¹⁸⁶ Here, Catherine supports what Saint Thomas had written earlier about the virtue of penance, wherein "sorrow is displeasure or disapproval with regard to the past deed, with the intention of removing its result, viz. the anger of God and the debt of punishment."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, 4 vols. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000-2007), 1:39.

¹⁸⁶ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:45.

¹⁸⁷ *ST III* q. 85, a. 1, ad. 3.

Tears shed in sorrow for sin, like prayers and sacrifices, can thus become part of each man's call to penance oriented towards repairing the relationship with the loving, merciful God.

Thus, holy tears rooted in love of God will in fact lead to joy. “[M]y own sins are numberless. So I promise you that I will take both mine and yours and make of them a bundle of myrrh which I will keep in my breast with constant bitter weeping. This sort of bitterness based on true charity, will bring us to the real sweetness and consolation of everlasting life.”¹⁸⁸ While Catherine's references to tears are overwhelmingly connected to sorrow for sin, on at least one occasion she encourages tears as a sign of joy. When the city of Florence made peace with Rome, a sacramental interdict that had been in place for two years was lifted. Writing to her followers in Siena to share the good news she says, “Rejoice, rejoice dearest children, with sweet, sweet grateful tears before the supreme eternal Father!”¹⁸⁹

In a letter that references the exposition on tears found in *The Dialogue* (a work which will be treated below), Catherine offers a reflection on how tears manifest divine charity:

In this light [of God], we are clothed in fire. Then little by little follow the tears, because our eyes when they sense that the heart is sad want to satisfy it and so they weep, just as green wood when it is put into the fire weeps because of the great heat. Just so, when we feel the fire of divine charity in which our desire and affection are burning, our eyes weep to show externally, in what little way we can, what is within us. Our weeping has its source in the various things we feel interiorly according to where our love is directed. You know this from the tract on tears, so I won't say any more about it here.¹⁹⁰

The various loves which can motivate tears will be expounded on by Catherine in greater detail in *The Dialogue*. Yet even this brief passage expresses beautifully how man's hylemorphic nature can be touched by divine grace. When one's soul has encountered the mercy of God, one's body shares in the response. As for Aquinas, so for Catherine, tears and sorrow are

¹⁸⁸ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:158-159.

¹⁸⁹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:168.

¹⁹⁰ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 4:50.

ultimately rooted in love and manifest the intentions of one's heart. If love is ordered rightly, so too will be a person's tears.

Tears for a Suffering Church

Catherine's deep love for the Church is evident from reading nearly any of the passages in her writings. Yet, she lived in a tumultuous time for the Christian faithful, a time of great division among the clergy and faithful alike, the Avignon papacy, and even schism over competing popes. In the face of such outrages, Catherine again and again had recourse to prayer and weeping. "In her [the Church] I want to end my life with tears and sweat and sighs, and give my blood and the marrow of my bones for her. And I won't care if the whole world rejects me, because I will be resting with weeping and great suffering on the breast of this dear bride."¹⁹¹

However, it was not enough for Catherine to weep for the sins afflicting the Church; she also encouraged other Christians to do so. "Give our greetings to all of my sons and daughters. Tell them that it is time to weep and sigh and pray for Christ's dear bride and for the whole Christian people, so afflicted because of our sins,"¹⁹² and, "Never cease praying with great watchfulness, tears, and sweat for the reform of Christ's dear bride..."¹⁹³ This prayer for the Church was intimately bound up in the Dominican charism of preaching for the salvation of souls, for "how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe

¹⁹¹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:476.

¹⁹² Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:52. Note that here, as elsewhere, Catherine frequently attributes the sufferings of the Church to her own personal sins and the sins of others. While the link is not directly causal, it reflects a deep understanding of the union of all Christians in the Mystical Body of the Church.

¹⁹³ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 4:142.

in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?”¹⁹⁴

Here Catherine, by her intercessory prayer, builds up the spiritual foundation that underlies the formal preaching that leads to conversion and the salvation of souls. “Let me see you growing in hunger for God’s honor and the salvation of souls, shedding rivers of tears in continual humble prayer in God’s presence for the salvation of the whole world, and in particular for the reform of Christ’s dear bride, whom we see coming into such darkness and disaster.”¹⁹⁵ Again, “I long to see you and the others as faithful spouses and servants of Christ crucified, so that you will continually renew your weeping for God’s honor, the salvation of souls, and the reform of holy Church.”¹⁹⁶

It was certainly not on her own merits that Catherine relied. Her belief in the efficacy of tears in prayer was tied to another of her great devotions, the power of the Precious Blood of Jesus. “The tears we shed in remembrance of the blood are our drink...No, with anguished sorrow and weeping over the offenses against God, let’s enter the open storehouse of the side of Christ crucified, where we will find the blood.”¹⁹⁷ It is this confidence in the merciful power of God that made Catherine sure of being heard. “Now is the time to cry out, to weep, to grieve. The time is ours, son, because Christ’s bride is being persecuted...But take courage, because God will not scorn the tears and sweat and sighs poured out in his presence.”¹⁹⁸

In her correspondence with both Pope Gregory XI and Pope Urban VI following him, Catherine called on the true Roman pontiffs to share in this great confidence in God’s mercy and

¹⁹⁴ Romans 10:14 (NABRE).

¹⁹⁵ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:293.

¹⁹⁶ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:118 and 132.

¹⁹⁷ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:633.

¹⁹⁸ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 1:182.

to act on the merits obtained by those interceding for the Church in tears: “Have pity on the sweet loving desires being offered for you and holy Church in continual tears and prayers.”¹⁹⁹ “I trust that God will not scorn so many prayers made with such blazing desire and with so much sweat and tears.”²⁰⁰ Even when reproving those in ecclesiastical authority, Catherine’s tone is filled with a holy sorrow: “I write this with sorrow, grief, great bitterness and weeping!”²⁰¹ Writing to certain cardinals of the Church, Catherine exhorts them even to bathe and be purified in the tears being offered for them: “don’t offer any more resistance to the tears and sweat God’s servants are pouring out for you. You could wash yourself in them from head to foot...”²⁰² In *The Dialogue*, the Father speaking to Catherine will eloquently express this purifying bath of tears for the entire Church: “Bring then, your tears and your sweat, you and my other servants. Draw them from the fountain of my divine love and use them to wash the face of my bride. I promise you that thus her beauty will be restored.”²⁰³ Holy tears shed in love and penance thus become an efficacious means for purifying the Church.

Suffering with Sinners

Catherine’s compassion did not merely extend to the corporate body of the Church. The most frequent references to tears in her letters are those enjoining individuals either to weep for their own sins or encouraging them to join in the apostolate of intercessory prayer for sinners. Writing to a woman engaged in prostitution, Catherine calls on her to remember her dignity: “So,

¹⁹⁹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:202.

²⁰⁰ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:213.

²⁰¹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:216.

²⁰² Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:225.

²⁰³ Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 54, #15.

my daughter, I weep with sorrow that you who are created in God's image and likeness and redeemed by his precious blood have no concern for your dignity or for the great price that was paid for you."²⁰⁴ To noblemen in Florence who had fallen into wars of revenge: "It is clear that by your disobedience and persecution (believe me, my brothers, I am saying this with heartfelt sorrow and tears), you have fallen into death and into hatred and contempt for God...My sons, I tell you weeping: I beg you, I urge you, in the name of Christ crucified, to be reconciled and make peace with him."²⁰⁵ To a queen notorious for her sinful behavior (including murder, adultery, and persecution of the Church) Catherine enjoins: "Don't make my eyes pour out rivers of tears over your poor little soul and body—for I think of your soul as my own."²⁰⁶

This identification of one's very self with the sinner is a living out of the virtue of mercy. Recall that, according to Saint Thomas, mercy enables one to regard the pain of another as one's own pain through a union of love, and propels one to act to alleviate this pain.²⁰⁷ "We weep with those who weep and are frail with those who are frail because we regard the sins of others as our own."²⁰⁸ It is this exterior virtue of mercy combined with the interior virtue of compassion ("to suffer with") which Catherine encourages in her followers when she enjoins them to weep for sinners. "I am inviting you, as God invites my soul, to extend your fervent loving desires, with compassionately tearful eyes in the presence of divine compassion to all the world."²⁰⁹ Mercy and compassion are both effects of charity, and thus is lived out the dual commandment of love

²⁰⁴ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 1:290-291.

²⁰⁵ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:141-142.

²⁰⁶ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 4:168.

²⁰⁷ *ST II-II* q. 30, a. 2, co.

²⁰⁸ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:249.

²⁰⁹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:237.

preached by Christ, “It is time to give honor to God and our best efforts to our neighbors—I mean the physical effort of great suffering and the spiritual effort of offering tears and sweat and continual humble prayer in God’s presence with bitter sorrow and restless desire.”²¹⁰ In regards to this love of neighbor, Catherine offers an interesting role for tears for those who might be tempted to curiosity or judgement: “We should, in fact, *want* to see our own faults and those of our neighbors. We should bring them into God’s presence, not to complain about them or judge them rashly, but in a holy and sincere compassion, with sighs and weeping, grieving over the offense done to God and the harm done to these souls.”²¹¹ Here knowledge begets not judgement, but compassionate weeping.

In several places, Catherine even speaks of giving birth to souls through tears. In writing to the mother of one of her devoted followers, Stefano Maconi, Catherine comments, “You, his mother, gave birth to him once; now I want to give birth to him and to you and to your whole family in tears and in sweat, by my constant prayers and desire for your salvation.”²¹² She also encourages her followers to engage in the same spiritual activity: “In fact, a love of great and sincere compassion will grow in you, and you will give them birth with tears and sighs and continual prayer in God’s dear presence.”²¹³ Catherine urges her own director, Raymond of Capua, to intercede for sinners with tears, saying, “They are the wicked sinners for whom I am asking you to pray to me, and for whom I am asking your sweat and tears because they are lying in the darkness of deadly sin,”²¹⁴ and “bitterness will become sweet refreshment to you as you

²¹⁰ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:533.

²¹¹ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:47. Emphasis in original.

²¹² Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:258.

²¹³ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:598.

²¹⁴ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:498.

offer your tears with tender sighs in restless desire for the poor little sheep who are in the devils' clutches. Those sighs will be food for you, and those tears your drink."²¹⁵

Catherine's calls to weep for sinners are repeatedly tied to the themes of compassion, desire, and charity. It seems that for Catherine, tears are a physical expression of an interior disposition of heart and an indicator of the intensity of one's prayer and desire. Tears become a way to physically enact the desires of one's prayer, especially towards others in fraternal charity:

And the love you have discovered at the breast of Christ crucified you must show to your neighbors, carrying them into God's presence with tears, loving affection, and great compassion, in watchfulness and in continual humble prayer. We must end our lives only in bitter weeping until we see such darkness lifted—the darkness we see in those who ought to be a source of light in the mystic body of holy Church. So let our life be dissolved; let's give our eyes a river of tears...²¹⁶

Her own desires were clearly ardent: "As for me, I want to take your sins and dissolve them with prayers and tears in the fire of divine charity."²¹⁷ It was Catherine's experience of the fire of divine charity which impelled her to weep for others. It was also this profound encounter with the merciful God that prompted her to dictate her great theological work, *The Dialogue*.

Catherine's Contribution in *The Dialogue*

With these reflections from Catherine's letters in mind, one can now turn to Catherine's writing in *The Dialogue*, which recounts her mystical experiences of prayer in dialogue with God the Father. Full of vivid imagery and mixed metaphors, *The Dialogue* offers a window into the role of tears in the soul's spiritual journey to know God more intimately.

²¹⁵ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 3:42.

²¹⁶ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 4:292.

²¹⁷ Catherine of Siena, *The Letters*, 2:581.

Stages on the Journey

Nestled near the center of *The Dialogue* is Catherine's "Treatise on Tears." This section follows directly after the image of the bridge, in which Catherine describes the spiritual stages of the soul's journey in Christ, as detailed by God the Father. These reflections prompt Catherine to ask the Father about tears, for "she saw that the soul passes through these stages with tears, so she wanted Truth to show her the difference among the kinds of tears, what was their source, how they came to be, what fruit was to be had from such weeping, and what different reasons there were for it."²¹⁸ It is important to understand this context for tears, since for Catherine, sorrows are indicative of a soul's place in the spiritual journey. As Kerra Hanson notes, "St. Catherine focus[es] not only on the soul's voyage toward perfection, but also on the stages of conversion, exemplified by degrees of physical lamentation. . . . The soul who successfully achieves purification, through tears, may ascend the Bridge."²¹⁹ These stages of conversion are deeply connected to self-knowledge, another great theme of Catherine's. "The beatitude of weeping, in Catherine's spirituality, follows from the gift of knowledge which is rooted in truth and humility, and which bears fruit in love through the affective stages of the spiritual life."²²⁰ For Catherine, understanding tears can offer insight into the stages of a soul's passage to God.

Catherine distinguishes among six stages of tears:

First of all, there are the *tears of damnation*, the tears of this world's evil ones. Second are the *tears of fear*, of those who weep for fear because they have risen up from sin out of fear of punishment. Third are those who have risen up from sin and are beginning to taste me. These weep tenderly and begin to serve me. But because their love is *imperfect*, so is their weeping. The fourth stage is that of souls who have attained *perfection* in loving their neighbors and love me without any self-interest. These weep and their

²¹⁸ Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 160, #87.

²¹⁹ Kerra Gazerro Hanson, "The Blessing of Tears: The Order of Preachers and Domenico Cavalca in St. Catherine of Siena's "Dialogo Della Divina Provvidenza"," *Italica* 89, no. 2 (2012): 150.

²²⁰ Maria Agnes Karasig, O.P., "Affective Self-Transcendence in Catherine of Siena's Beatitude of Tears," *Review for Religious* 49, (1990): 420.

weeping is perfect. The fifth stage (which is joined to the fourth) is that of *sweet tears* shed with great tenderness. I will tell you, too, about *tears of fire*, shed without physical weeping, which often satisfy those who want to weep but cannot.²²¹

All of these tears can be considered heartfelt, as they manifest an affection springing from the heart. For Catherine, it is not the intensity of emotion, but rather the motivation which makes tears either deadly or life-giving, blameworthy or praiseworthy. Closer examination of these types of tears reveal a soul's progression from mere emotional sorrow to true prayer of lament.

Lament: A Matter of Life and Death

Although treated in detail last, the tears of damnation are the first mentioned by Catherine. These are tears shed out of sensual love and loss of worldly goods, because the person has placed their hope and happiness in something of this life. Because the misappropriation of happiness can vary, “their laments are as different as they are many . . . as many as their different loves.”²²² These tears give birth to spiritual death because they come from a corrupted heart, leading to all manner of judgements and sins. A person shedding tears of damnation is trapped in himself, for his insatiable desire cannot be met in any of the finite goods of this world. Here, sorrow is hardly a prayer, but simply a self-pitying movement of the emotions.

Catherine considers the other types of tears as life-giving, albeit in varying degrees. The tears of fear are shed by those who know their sin and lament consequent punishment, for “the most ordinary motivation for compunction and distress of heart is the fear of punishment for one's sins.”²²³ Imperfect tears are shed by those who have begun to practice virtue and mourn their sins, yet still with a mix of selfish love. It is this soul which has begun to cross the Christ-

²²¹ Catherine, *The Dialogue*, 161, #88. Emphasis added.

²²² Catherine, *The Dialogue*, 171, #93.

²²³ Karasig, O.P., “Affective Self-Transcendence,” 421.

Bridge and pursues the will of God. As one commentator points out, “The healing of emotions means living through her frustrations, guilt, anger, and remorse, and surrendering all this to God in prayer. At this stage the eyes truly weep to cleanse and heal the heart-wounds caused by sin.”²²⁴ As the soul draws near to God, both perfect and sweet tears are shed, reflecting true love of God and love of neighbor. This weeping is sorrow for sin mixed with joy at God’s mercy, considered sweet because it does not disturb the soul’s peace. Here, hope, mercy, and charity meet, “for in that charity she discovers the lover’s lament of my divine mercy and sorrow for her neighbors’ sins, and so she weeps with those who weep and rejoices with those who rejoice.”²²⁵ For Catherine, these two kinds of weeping, rooted in love of God and love of neighbor, are as the two lungs of charity, essential for truly Christian living.

In this schema, tears cannot be separated from desire. The motive for weeping lies in what the heart loves and desires, and its object determines whether sorrow brings good or ill. For example, tears shed over loss of excessive material goods may manifest an ill-ordered love of comfort, while lament over an unkind word spoken to a loved one demonstrates repentance and goodwill. Yet, what of those whose hearts have great, pure desires, yet cannot physically weep? The Father says that for these souls, “there is a weeping of fire, of true holy longing, and it consumes in love . . . in this fire the Holy Spirit weeps in my presence for them and for their neighbors.”²²⁶ In this lament, tears need not be a physical reality, for “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.”²²⁷ Sister Maria Agnes Karasig, O.P., offers a helpful caveat: “Tears express an abiding sorrow for human sinfulness and gratitude for God’s

²²⁴ Karasig, O.P., “Affective Self-Transcendence,” 421.

²²⁵ Catherine, *The Dialogue*, 164, #89.

²²⁶ Catherine, *The Dialogue*, 168-169, #91.

²²⁷ Romans 8:26 (NABRE).

mercy and forgiveness. For some temperaments, to force tears would be frustrating and even harmful. Weeping is not necessary to true conversion, although in many cases it announces the triumph of grace over wounded nature.”²²⁸ Certainly, no action of the Holy Spirit can be forced, and these tears of fire demonstrate that it is the reality of the heart, more than the physical sign, which matters. Catherine is here situated solidly in the tradition of the Scriptures, for “tears, particularly the gift of tears, abound in Biblical text[s]. For example, in the Psalms, tears are directly correlated to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit.”²²⁹ For one who is moved by great longing and desire, the Holy Spirit Himself provides the tears.

Turning Point of a Tradition

There can be no doubt that the theme of tears was one of great importance for Saint Catherine of Siena. Throughout her life and writings, tears serve as guideposts along the Christian journey, offering insight into the motives of the heart and moving the weeper from selfish self-love to a deep compassion for individual sinners and the entire Church. Catherine’s theology of tears certainly did not come from a vacuum; she stands in the line of a great Christian tradition. Raymond of Capua himself notes that Catherine followed “the teaching and example of Martin, Jerome, and Augustine, who teach the faithful that no Christian who wills to be perfect should pass into the other life without tears of repentance and sincere contrition for the sins he has committed.”²³⁰ Yet, Catherine’s contribution to this tradition of tears is unique. Citing the Italian scholar Giacinto D’Urso, Father Thomas McDermott, O.P., notes,

²²⁸ Karasig, O.P., “Affective Self-Transcendence,” 427-428.

²²⁹ Hanson, “The Blessing of Tears,” 149.

²³⁰ Raymond, *The Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, 306.

‘The mysticism of weeping that was for long centuries a rich tributary in the Christian spiritual stream attains in these ten chapters [of *The Dialogue*] a summit never before reached through its expository perfection, the breadth of its concepts, the logic of its development, and its high psychological connections.’ He says that the soul’s passage through the stages with tears is completely original to Catherine.²³¹

Catherine’s spiritual insights into the role of sorrow in the Christian life cannot be separated from her Dominican vocation, with its emphasis on compassion for sinners and preaching the call to repentance for the salvation of souls. It is precisely this concern for others, beyond mere personal compunction, which sets Catherine’s tears apart. “What is perhaps most remarkable and innovative about Catherine’s typology is her emphasis on the importance of ‘the other’ in the levels and types of tears.”²³² Catherine was concerned with the salvation of her brothers and sisters in Christ as a faithful daughter of the Church. “Prayer and weeping push Catherine into the heart of the Church. Her beatitude of tears is both mystical and ascetical. It is an experience of oneness with God in the depths of her being, and it is also a service to be performed for others in faith and obedience.”²³³

St. Catherine of Siena, although certainly recognizing the dangers posed by indulging the body, shared the Dominican vision of the goodness of man’s human nature, including the affections and emotions. Yet, this emotional sorrow is only the starting point. “Catherine is much more optimistic; she believes in the soul’s conversion and her ability to transform *lacrimae di morte* [tears of death] into *lacrimae di vita* [tears of life].”²³⁴ Here, the place for authentic Christian tears begins to take shape. Truly Christian lament is a mourning over the loss of *spiritual* goods, namely through sin. Tears thus become a sign of repentance; as the soul matures

²³¹ Thomas McDermott, O.P., *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 148-149.

²³² Gutsell, “The Gift of Tears,” 245.

²³³ Karasig, O.P., “Affective Self-Transcendence,” 425.

²³⁴ Hanson, “The Blessing of Tears,” 153.

she moves from imperfect to perfect contrition. Furthermore, these tears come to be shed also for fellow sinners in an expression of compassion. Commenting on Catherine's treatise, Hanson notes: "though a fear of death and an awareness of offending God are preliminary forms of the *pianto buono* [good cry], only charity . . . advances the soul."²³⁵ Lament is ultimately a sign of love, for one laments the loss of who or what one loves, be it an apparent or real good. Tears express the desire of the heart, and "Catherine hoped to express the magnitude of the soul's yearning for purification, and her presentation of tears allows the soul to pay for her transgressions physically while simultaneously achieving spiritual growth and wisdom."²³⁶ Tears, a silent expression of the heart, are thus simultaneously penitential and life-giving, sorrowful and yet leading to joy.

Conclusion

The theology of tears in both the life and writing of Saint Catherine of Siena is an important expression of the Dominican charism. As a daughter of Saint Dominic, Catherine was consumed by a zeal for souls that impelled her from a life of secluded contemplation to the religious and political centers of her day. Nourished by her own deep encounters with the merciful God, Catherine sought to preach this mercy by her letters, *The Dialogue*, and ultimately her life offered for the Church. As a sister of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Catherine's mysticism complements the scholastic understanding of the passion of sorrow and its role in the Christian life. "A mystic such as Catherine apprehends the truth of God in a different way from a

²³⁵ Hanson, "The Blessing of Tears," 151.

²³⁶ Hanson, "The Blessing of Tears," 156.

theologian, although both speak of the same truth.”²³⁷ Running throughout the course of her life is a steady stream of tears, a gift of the Holy Spirit and the physical manifestation of Catherine’s abiding love of God and neighbor, and her supreme desire for the salvation of souls, the very aim of the Dominican Order.

²³⁷ McDermott, O.P., *Catherine of Siena: Spiritual Development in Her Life and Teaching*, 4.

CONCLUSION

For the Dominican Order, the lives of Saints Dominic, Thomas Aquinas, and Catherine of Siena demonstrate that truth may indeed be accompanied by tears. The heritage of Saint Dominic's prayer, which he bequeathed to his Order, includes a robust, embodied piety. Tears were the visible witness of Dominic's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and compassion for sinners, the spiritual cement that holds together the inherent tension in a contemplative-apostolic life. Dominic's zeal for the salvation of souls poured out in weeping, both in sorrow for sin and joy at the revelation of the mercy of God.

Saint Thomas Aquinas's tears were a sign of his devotion and humility before the incomprehensible mystery of God. In his exquisite exposition of the moral life, Thomas demonstrates that properly ordered sorrow is rooted in true charity. Tears shed in compunction for one's own sins and in compassion for the sins of others are signs of moral virtue and praiseworthy, acts which involve man's full composite nature.

Saint Catherine of Siena reveals how a full flowering of Dominican compassion can be manifest in tears. Her writings on tears develop the tradition of the Church towards consideration of weeping as not only a display of personal repentance, but also as a gift of the Holy Spirit and an act of charity for the conversion of others.

While the scope of this study allowed only for the close examination of three prominent Dominican saints, tears are not a gift reserved to these three. The early chronicles of the Order are full of references to the friars' holy tears. The fifteenth century saw Blessed Constantius of Fabriano known for the gift of tears,²³⁸ and Blessed John Liccio has been pictured holding lilies

²³⁸ "The Feast of Bl. Constantius of Fabriano," Dominican Friars Foundation, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://dominicanfriars.org/the-feast-of-bl-constantius-of-fabriano/>.

of the valley as a symbol of his copious tears.²³⁹ The preaching of Saint Vincent Ferrer called forth holy weeping in many of his hearers.²⁴⁰ Several contemporary Dominican friars have also recognized the spiritual riches to be found in the Dominican heritage of tears.

When we encounter the tears of our father Dominic, we are confronted with the reality that those who are closed to faith are lacking the possibility of true and lasting friendship with God, a friendship which requires filial trust and a loyal heart... Seeing another bearing such a burden awakens our Christian sympathy and draws us out of our private concerns to beseech the Lord of all consolation for his mercy and compassion.²⁴¹

After some time, I felt the Lord answer me with words that went something like this, “You are asking me about when I am going to do a new work and bring these people revival and renewal... Well, when are you going to weep for these people?”... We need Eucharistic mourning, Eucharistic compunction, Eucharistic pleading for this. Perhaps this is a particularly Dominican contribution to revival. Our Dominican Saints did a lot of weeping!²⁴²

Truly, across times and places, the Dominican charism of preaching for the salvation of souls finds a fitting expression in the gift of tears.

Dominic founded the Order of Preachers in an age when the goodness of creation was being challenged by the Albigensian heresy. While this particular form of heterodoxy may have died out, the contemporary world is still replete with challenges to the goodness of the human body and emotions. Exercising properly ordered sorrow through the physical act of crying is one way in which modern Dominicans can preach the goodness of human nature. Likewise, in a culture with little regard for moral regulations, authentic sorrow for sin rooted in the love of what is truly good preaches man’s need for a Savior, and the good news that salvation is found in

²³⁹ “800th Jubilee Painting Commissioned by the Province of St. Joseph,” Dominican Province of Saint Joseph 800th Jubilee, accessed June 7, 2023, <http://jubilee.opeast.org/carstensen/>.

²⁴⁰ See Christopher Swift, “A Penitent Prepares: Affect, Contrition, and Tears,” in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 85.

²⁴¹ Dominic Verner, O.P., “The Tears of Saint Dominic,” *Dominicana*, September 23, 2011, <https://www.dominicanajournal.org/the-tears-of-saint-dominic/>.

²⁴² Ignatius John Schweitzer, O.P., “Eucharistic Revival and Eucharistic Birth-Pangs,” *eLumen* 19, no. 1 (2022): 2.

Jesus Christ. The virtue of penance recognizes that sin is worth sorrowing for, and repentance in tears sings the praises of the God of mercies. Dominicans can accompany sinners of all stages on the journey of conversion with virtuous sorrow, and compassion modeled on the heart of Dominic himself.

For the Order of Preachers, which values so highly theological study and the pursuit of truth, it is fitting that the Holy Spirit's Gift of Knowledge is associated with the beatitude, "blessed are they who mourn." It is knowledge of one's sins and the corresponding knowledge of God's mercy which brings one to weep, and the Dominican is impelled by love of Christ and souls to share this knowledge. In writing of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Dominican saints, Father Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., eloquently calls on Dominicans to model their lives on Saint Dominic, the man of this Gift of Knowledge:

The countenance of St. Dominic owes its particularly moving character to his special gift of tears which is the outcome of the Gift of Knowledge. The Saint [Dominic] is a scholar who also weeps. We well know both the tears of repentance and the tears of love: here we have the tears of a man who, thanks to an outstanding intellectual gift, has penetrated into the true knowledge of the world, of men and of God, has attained insight into its misery and its goodness...But it is for his children to be living copies of the untranslatable expression of the Blessed Patriarch [Dominic].²⁴³

The Dominican Order's charism of preaching for the salvation of souls is thus fittingly expressed in the gift of tears. Dominicans seek to sow the seed of the word of God by preaching both formal and informal, desiring to reap an abundant harvest of souls for the Lord's vineyard. As they continue this mission in the modern world, may it be said of the Dominican Order that "Those who sow in tears will reap with cries of joy. Those who go forth weeping, carrying sacks of seed, will return with cries of joy, carrying their bundled sheaves."²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Dominican Saints*, trans. Anselm M. Townsend, O.P., (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2016), 83-84.

²⁴⁴ Psalm 126:5-6 (NABRE).

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