

Liquefaction and Love: The Metaphysics of a Eucharistic Miracle*

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Early in the morning of December 16 last year, Monsignor Vincenzo De Gregorio, abbot of the Royal Chapel of the San Gennaro Treasure, of the Cathedral of Naples, entered the chapel to see if the miracle had already happened. But no, examining the safe, he confirmed that nothing was, as yet, out of the ordinary. December 16 is a special day in the Diocese of Naples: it is the day Neapolitans celebrate the miraculous preservation of their city from the volcanic eruption of nearby Mount Vesuvius. On December 16, 1631, a river of burning lava rushed upon the city. The residents prayed fervently to the city's patron, St. Januarius, to spare them. Inexplicably the flow of lava suddenly abated. Since that time, St. Januarius has always had a privileged place in Neapolitan lore.

But his connection with the city is much more ancient. Januarius was a fourth-century martyr-bishop who was beheaded during the persecutions of Diocletian. His body was brought to Naples and interred in the Church. At the site of his beheading, some of his blood was collected in a glass vial and brought to his tomb in the Cathedral of Naples. This blood liquifies in predictable intervals, usually three times a year: on the first Saturday in May, being the day the saint's relics were established in Naples, then on his feast day, September 19, and finally on December 16, the day he saved the city from the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. And, because it was December

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16, Monsignor De Gregorio went into the treasury chapel again later that same morning to see if there had been any development. He came out with the jubilant announcement that the miracle—the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius—had taken place at 10:56 that morning.¹

The Roman Breviary describes the miracle as follows: “It is also well known and is the plain fact, seen even unto this day, that when the blood of St. Januarius, kept dried up in a small glass phial, is put in sight of the head of the same martyr, it is wont to melt and bubble in a very strange way, as though it had but freshly been shed.”²

Now, the liquefaction of St. Januarius’s blood effects quite the commotion. On the days of the expected miracle—three times a year—thousands gather in and around the cathedral. A silver bust containing the head of St. Januarius is exposed on the altar and the vial containing the saint’s blood is brought near his head. The people pray ardently that the saint might work his miracle. Not infrequently, the blood begins to liquefy and bubble as if fresh. The cathedral erupts to loud cheers, the archbishop solemnly pronounces, “Il miracolo é fatto,” and the *Te Deum* is sung.

Sometimes the miracle does not immediately transpire. In this case, a group of elderly Neapolitan women step into the breach. These ladies, known as the *zie di San Gennaro* (aunts of St. Januarius) “make themselves specially conspicuous by the fervour, and sometimes, when the miracle is delayed, by the extravagance, of their supplications.”³ While their fervor is often rewarded, it sometimes happens that the blood of St. Januarius completely fails to liquefy, remaining in a solid state. For the people of Naples, this is a very bad omen indeed; it betokens impending war, famine, disease, or other disasters. For example, consider that it is rare for the blood not to liquefy on the saint’s feast day, September 19, and yet, in the year 1939, 1940, 1943,

¹ “A Napoli dopo le preghiere si rinnova il miracolo di San Gennaro,” December 16, 2022, ildenaro.it/a-napoli-dopo-le-preghiere-rinnova-il-miracolo-di-san-gennaro/; Courtney Mares, “St. Januarius’ blood liquefies in Naples for third time in 2022,” Catholic News Agency, December 16, 2022, catholicnewsagency.com/news/253094/st-januarius-blood-liquefies-in-naples-for-third-time-in-2022.

² For an in-depth analysis of the cultural and anthological significance of the miracle for the people of Naples, see Francesco Paolo De Ceglia, *Il Segreto di San Gennaro: Storia naturale di un miracolo napoletano* (Turin: Einaudi, 2016). For analysis of the miracle from the perspective of the physical sciences, see L. Garlaschelli, F. Ramaccini, and S. D. Sala, “Working Bloody Miracles,” *Nature* 353 (1991): 507; Garlaschelli, Ramaccini, and Sala, “The Blood of St. Januarius,” *Chemistry in Britain* 30 (1994): 123; Luigi Garlaschelli, “Better Blood through Chemistry: A Laboratory Replication of a Miracle,” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 6 (1992): 233–46.

³ Thurston, Herbert, “St. Januarius,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910); online at newadvent.org/cathen/08295a.htm.

1973, and 1980, the blood did not liquefy, and history confirms those to be very dark years, indeed, for the people of Naples.⁴

Extensive accounts of other liquefaction miracles could be recounted. The Naples area alone boasts the liquefaction of the blood of St. John the Baptist, St. Stephen, and St. Pantaleone, all martyrs—“blood brothers,” we might, say to St. Januarius. And accounts of Eucharistic miracles in which liquid blood is seen in or on the sacramental species abound in Catholic piety.

Those who have made their peace with the metaphysical assumptions of late modernity pay no attention. And, for most Catholics—particularly we denizens of the northern hemisphere—such disregard is for the better. Better to avoid the embarrassing attention: the commotion is unseemly and the whole business of blood rather squalid. Anyway, we might think to ourselves, after the Second Vatican Council, we have moved beyond all that excessively grisly and ensanguined theology. (There is a reason, we say, why we celebrate our unity in *sacramental* means.) While exuberant piety occasioned by Eucharistic miracles might leave many of us—contemporary Western Catholics—somewhat flustered and abashed, it retains a decisive place in Catholic liturgical and devotional practice.

Why liquefaction? Is there any theological significance to the particular mode of the miracle—the melting of a solid state of congealed blood? My contention is that the liquefaction of blood in miracles like that of St. Januarius is a conspicuous testament to Aquinas’s teaching about the nature of love, in which liquefaction also plays a pronounced (but underappreciated) role. The miracle of liquefaction is not a sort of magic trick, but rather possesses a profound fittingness, corresponding to the nature of authentic holiness and charity. Januarius’s liquefied blood is a metaphorical and even heuristic attestation to the liquidity of all true love, a principle central to Aquinas’s theology of love. I will first analyze liquefaction in Aquinas’s treatment of love in his early-career commentary on Lombard’s *Sentences* (Thomas’s *Scriptum*) and then consider the same in his mature *Summa theologiae* (*ST*). I will conclude with the argument that the miracles of the liquefaction of blood—both of the martyrs and of our Lord—are theologically consonant with a Thomistic metaphysics of love.

Commentary on the Sentences

In distinction 27 of *Scriptum* III, Aquinas treats Dionysius’s definition of love as a unifying force—a *vis unitiva*—as the framing structure for his theology

⁴ Also, the blood conspicuously failed to liquefy the year Naples elected communist mayor Maurizio Valenzi in 1975. However, in 1978, in the presence of the archbishop of New York, Cardinal Terence Cooke, the blood spontaneously liquefied.

of love. In this regard, Aquinas emphasizes how love effects a new union of form. Appealing to Aristotle's definition of a friend as "another self" ("amicus est alter ipse") and the Apostle Paul's assertion that "whoever adheres to God is one spirit with him," Aquinas contends that love entails the union of lover with the beloved in a common form: "Through love the lover becomes one with what is loved, which becomes the lover's form."⁵ Aquinas speaks of this shared form as a mutual indwelling:

Because love transforms the lover into the beloved, it draws the lover into the interior of the beloved and vice versa, with the result that nothing remains in the beloved that is not united to the lover: just as the form enters deeply into the one informed by it and vice versa, so too the lover in a certain way enters the beloved.⁶

Michael Sherwin has pointed out that Aquinas's early account of how the lover is *transformed* into the beloved approximates his account of the operation of the intellect.⁷ Just as knowledge entails the impression of a species or

⁵ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1. All translations from Aquinas are my own, taking the translations published by the Aquinas Institute as my starting point. See also *ST* I-II, q. 27, a. 3: "Any two things which possess the same form are somehow one in that form."

⁶ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4. The transformation of the lover is on account of the possession of the new form of the beloved, which has become connatural to him. And, since act follows being, the affect of the lover now acts according to this new form. Aquinas writes: "The lover whose affection is informed by the good itself . . . is inclined through love to act according to the demands and needs of the beloved. . . . For, since the lover takes up the beloved as though he were the same as himself [amans amatum assumpserit quasi idem sibi], he must, as it were, act as though he were the beloved in all that regards the beloved" (*In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1). Michael Sherwin explains: "By containing the form of the beloved in his appetites, the lover now acts according to this form. . . . Aquinas justifies love's role as the principle of the agent's actions by appealing to the natural connection between forms and inclinations: just as each thing inclines and acts according to the exigencies of its form, so too the lover acts according to the exigencies of his beloved's form existing in his will as love" (*By Knowledge and by Love* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005], 67–69).

⁷ H. D. Simonin's monumental study of love in Aquinas drew attention to the ubiquity of the language of "form" in the Angelic Doctor's early treatment of love ("Autour de la solution thomiste du problème de l'amour," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 6 [1931]: 181). See also, Guy Mansini, "Duplex amor and the Structure of Love in Aquinas," in *Thomistica*, ed. E. Manning (Leuven: Peeters, 1995); Emmanuel Durand, "Au principe de l'amour: *formation* ou *proportion*?" *Revue thomiste* 104 (2004): 551–78; Sherwin, *By Knowledge and by Love*, 65–70; and Christopher Malloy, *Aquinas on Beatific Charity and the Problem of Love* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2019).

form on the intellect, so too love entails the impression of the good on the appetite. And, just as the known is possessed according to the mode of the knower, so too the beloved is possessed according to the mode of the lover. Consider the *respondeo* that opens distinction 27, devoted to an exposition of Dionysius's definition of *amor* as a *vis unitiva*:

Love pertains to the appetite. Now, the appetite is a passive power; hence, the Philosopher affirms (*De anima* 3) that the appetite moves as a moved mover. Now, every passive power is perfected by being informed by the form of an active power, and through this motion it is brought to its term and rests. The intellect before it is informed by an intelligible form doubts and inquires, but when it has been informed ceases to inquire and becomes fixed in this form, and then the intellect is said to adhere to the thing firmly. Similarly, when the affect or appetite is entirely imbued with the form of the good, which is its object, it takes pleasure in it and adheres to it as being affixed to it, and then it is said to love it. Hence, love is nothing other than a certain transformation of the affection into the loved object [transformatio affectus in rem amatam].⁸

Aquinas's account of love articulated in the *Scriptum* mirrors that of knowledge: just as the intellect is "informed" by the intelligible species, so too, the appetite is "informed" by the good. The good impresses itself on the appetite, *transforming* the will into the object of its affection so that it now acts according to the new form of the good.⁹ Hence Aquinas's definitive conclusion: "Love is nothing other than a certain transformation of the affection into the loved object."¹⁰

An objection to the Dionysian definition of love as a *vis unitiva* points to the violent properties that accompany love which have the effect of division rather than union. The objector contends that love is not a unitive force, but a divisive one:

⁸ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1.

⁹ Aquinas is simply giving metaphysical framing to Augustine's frequently repeated injunction that one becomes that which he loves. Sherwin summarizes: "Love is the form of the beloved existing in the appetite and in which the appetite rests" (*By Knowledge and by Love*, 65).

¹⁰ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1. See esp. ad 2: "Love is itself the union or nexus or transformation by which the lover is transformed into the beloved and is in a certain way converted into him."

Furthermore, in the *Celestial Hierarchy* Dionysius includes piercing [actum] and burning [fervidum] among the properties of love, and liquefaction [liquefactio], too, is included as love's effect, as in the Song of Songs 5:6, *my soul melted* [anima mea liquefacta est] *when he spoke*. In *On the Divine Names*, Dionysius also sets down as an effect of love "ecstasy" [extasim], that is, being placed outside oneself. But all these things seem to pertain to division. The piercing is what divides by penetrating; the burning, what dissolves by exhalations. Liquefaction, too, is a kind of division opposed to freezing. And anything that is placed outside itself is divided from itself. Therefore love is more a divisive force than a unitive one.¹¹

In response, Aquinas reaffirms the formal Dionysian definition of love as a unifying force—that which transforms the lover into the beloved. However, he admits that such union necessarily also involves the threefold *division* articulated in the objection: piercing, burning, and liquefying.¹²

Piercing

"Piercing" (*actus*) is the division that results from the entry of the lover into the beloved. For the lover to become one with the beloved, he must enter completely and profoundly into the depths of the beloved. Aquinas writes: "The lover in a way penetrates into the beloved, and so love is called piercing; for to come into the innermost recesses of a thing by dividing it is characteristic of something piercing."¹³ There can be no union of love without such wrenching and wounding division in which the lover pierces the beloved. Peter Kwasniewski articulates this well: "The lover coming into the beloved's interior divides the beloved from himself, for the lover is now, in a sense, at home there, has opened up a place in the other's soul—and for this reason love is said to be 'piercing': it makes its way into the deepest recesses of the beloved person."¹⁴ Aquinas explains that, because the union of love is not a superficial "touching" of two separate bodies, but a total

¹¹ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, obj. 4

¹² Peter Kwasniewski writes: "The objection brings to the foreground the spiritual violence, the psychic displacement and self-rupturing, caused by vehement love, an experience to which poets and mystics from all ages and traditions have given expression" (*The Ecstasy of Love in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas* [Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021], 59–60).

¹³ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, obj. 4

¹⁴ Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love*, 72.

transformation—"the lover is transformed into the inner identity of the beloved"—love pierces to the very *depths* of the lover.¹⁵

Mystical and romantic literature abounds with descriptions of the piercing effects of love. Gian Lorenzo Bernini's striking Baroque marble sculpture *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*, housed in the Basilica of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, provides a paradigmatic visual depiction of such rending. Melding the spiritual and the sensual, Bernini gives vivid expression to Teresa of Avila's own description of the piercing of love she experienced in a mystical divine encounter:

I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great, that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain, that I could not wish to be rid of it.¹⁶

The emblematic Hellenic expression of love is, of course, Cupid bearing an arrow. Christian spirituality retains the Greek literary and philosophical intuition that the unitive force of love first pierces and wounds.¹⁷ (Consider that a number of the Church Fathers develop the motif of "Christ our Cupid.")¹⁸

Burning and Liquefaction

For the lover to become one with the beloved—to enter so totally into the beloved so as to be transformed into the beloved—demands that the lover first withdraw from himself. Aquinas describes such self-withdrawal as a type of "ecstasy," inasmuch as "the lover in tending toward the beloved, is separate from himself."¹⁹ In other words, a prior "division" of the lover from himself is required for the lover to pierce the beloved and become one with her. We might say, he first needs to be detached from himself so as to become

¹⁵ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 5.

¹⁶ *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus*, trans. David Lewis (New York: Benziger, 1904), ch. 29, par. 17.

¹⁷ Augustine so often availed himself of the arrow-of-charity metaphor that it became the emblem of the Augustinian order.

¹⁸ See Barbara Newman, "Love's Arrows: Christ as Cupid in Late Medieval Art and Devotion," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 263–86.

¹⁹ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4.

capable of being attached to the beloved.²⁰ Such ecstasy takes two forms: “burning” and “liquefying.”

That which burns, explains Aquinas, “rises beyond itself and vanishes into smoke” (“extra se bullit, et exhalat”).²¹ Burning is a twofold movement: rising and vanishing; ascent and evanescence. Like fire, the ecstatic, self-forgetful character of love rises beyond its own concerns and occupations to such an extent that it evaporates. “It has become so identified with its exigency to go up that it dies into the air.”²² Fire leaps up and then passes away.

For Aquinas, liquefaction shares the ecstatic properties of burning: “It is therefore necessary that that boundedness by which the lover was contained within his own bounds be taken away from him.”²³ Hardness of heart (*cordis duritia*), explains Aquinas, describes a heart constricted and contained (*continetur*) within its own limits. By contrast, love is said to melt the heart (*liquefacere cor*). Only a melted heart is free to flow into its beloved. Liquefaction liberates the lover from self-constricting attachment; rendering the lover free to direct his love in an unreserved manner to the beloved.

The metaphor of a melted heart articulates a particularly potent feature of Aquinas’s metaphysics of love. A substance which has been liquified is no longer contained by its former boundaries; it is free to take the shape of that into which it is poured. Likewise, a melted heart is rendered capable of taking on the form of another—of being *transformed*—and such is, of course, Aquinas’s definition of love. By contrast, a hard-hearted person remains bound up within himself, within his own prejudices and desires, unable to enter into another’s needs and wants, unable to assume the form of the other.

The treatment of love in the *Scriptum* aims to show that Dionysius’s definition of love as a *vis unitiva* “furnishes a most complete definition of love.”²⁴ Aquinas argues that the appetite of the lover is transformed into the beloved in such a complete manner that the two come to share a common form. Such union entails three “divisions.” First, entering the very depths of the beloved involves the division of “piercing.” This wrenching, rending, divisive quality

²⁰ See Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love*, 83: “It is clear that *extasis* precedes . . . the union, for unless one had already escaped the ego’s field of gravitation, one could not approach the other as a true center of one’s thought, will, and deed. Without the *extasis* that follows from the melting of limits, without the burning desire that carries the lover beyond himself to the beloved, there could not be the giving and receiving, the capacity for co-acting and co-suffering, conveyed by the language of ‘passing into the beloved’ and ‘piercing to the innermost.’”

²¹ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4.

²² Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love*, 78.

²³ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4.

²⁴ *In III sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 1.

of love is an inextricable part of love's union. Further, to thoroughly pierce the beloved, the lover needs first be separated from himself. Such *ekstasis*—the withdrawal from self—is captured in the other two “divisive” qualities of love: burning and liquefaction.²⁵ First, the lover must ascend beyond his own egotistical concerns and desires, which are burnt up and evaporate. Second, the liquefaction of the heart (*liquifacit cor*) is necessary for the lover to pour himself out wholly into the beloved.

Summa theologiae I-II, q. 28

Aquinas's mature treatment on love in the *ST* I-II corresponds with the account offered in the *Scriptum*, indeed, the *ST* proposes a genealogy of love identical to that outlined in the *Scriptum*. The first article of question 28, on the “effects of love,” begins once again with the Dionysian definition of love as a *vis unitiva*: “Every love is a unitive force.”²⁶ The next article spells out what precisely this *vis unitiva* effects, namely, making the lover dwell in the beloved and vice versa. This “mutual indwelling” is the principle effect at which love aims.²⁷ The lover “seeks to possess the beloved perfectly, by

²⁵ Kwasniewski helpfully describes such “divisive” qualities as love's *via negativa*: “Love not only builds up the union, it destroys whatever is incompatible with it; Love not only sees to it that friends are rooted in the common good, it uproots them from whatever private goods may stand in the way of communion. In order to unite, love also divides; it divides a man from himself so that he can give himself as a gift” (*Ecstasy of Love*, 67).

²⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 1. Such unitive power express itself as either a “real” or “affective” union. A “real union” obtains when the lover is in the presence of the beloved. In this case, love is the formal cause of the union; love actually *is* the bond or union between them. An “affective union” obtains when the lover desires the beloved; here love *effectively* causes the union.

²⁷ Mutual indwelling can be considered both according to the intellect and according to the will, that is, according to the apprehensive power (*vim apprehensivam*) and the appetitive power (*vim appetitivam*). In the first case, love disposes the intellect to dwell intently on the beloved; the lover desires to *know* the other intimately, from the inside out, so to speak. Aquinas explains: “The lover is not satisfied with a superficial apprehension of the beloved, but strives to gain an intimate knowledge [intrinsic disquirere] of everything pertaining to the beloved, so as to penetrate into his very soul [ad interiora eius ingreditur].” (*ST* I-II, q. 28 a. 2). In the second case, the beloved comes to dwell in the lover according to the appetitive power, inasmuch as the beloved dwells in his lover's affections by a kind of complacency (*complacentiam*) that causes delight when the beloved is present and longing when she is absent. In sum, mutual indwelling, which is love's principle effect, obtains with respect to both the intellect and the will.

penetrating into his heart, as it were [quasi ad intima illius perveniens].”²⁸ The rest of question 28 unpacks how love’s other effects achieve this ultimate unitive aim.

As in the *Scriptum*, Aquinas holds in the *ST* that, for the lover to dwell within the beloved, he needs to stand outside of himself. Such, “ecstasy” is, once again, shown to be an essential feature of love and constitutes the subject of article 3. Every love is a participated likeness in divine love, maintains Aquinas in the *sed contra*, and according to the authority of Dionysius, not only does divine love produce ecstasy, but “God himself suffered ecstasy through love.” The *respondeo* of the third article proposes a definition of ecstasy: “To suffer ecstasy means to be placed outside of oneself [extra se ponitur].”²⁹ Ecstasy is the very movement by which the lover, not satisfied

²⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 2.

²⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 3. As with the previous article devoted to mutual indwelling, Aquinas distinguishes here between the apprehensive and appetitive power. A person can be ecstatically “placed outside of oneself” according to his apprehensive power when he comes to possess a knowledge above that which is proper (*propriam*) or connatural (*connaturalem*) to him. It is not clear from Aquinas’s description here of being “raised up so as to comprehend things that surpass sense and reason” whether he is referring to a distinctly grace-inflected cognitive experience or, instead, to a feature proper to natural human knowing as such. If such *ekstasis* is the knowledge that belongs to a special mystical grace, then Aquinas’s consideration of *raptus* would serve as an analogous point of reference (see *Super II Cor* 12, lec. 1, esp. nos. 447 and 452, and *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 1). However, Raymond McGinnis argues that Aquinas considers *ekstasis* simply to be a constitutive feature of human knowing as such: “For while ecstasy in its theological sense requires grace, nevertheless, it is entirely possible to have something analogous to it on the purely human level—that is, a going out from self that carries one beyond the natural and ordinary reaches of intellectual activity to the intuitions and flights of genius, a genius that is at times not untinged with certain defects of personality and mind” (*Wisdom of Love* [Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1951], 117). In addition to *ekstasis* that elevates the mind, *ekstasis* can also debilitate one’s cognitive powers, as when a person is “cast down into a state of debasement.” Aquinas associates this with the grip of “violent passion or madness.”

For Aquinas, cognitive *ekstasis*—either that which ennobles and elevates the mind or that which debases—is caused by love. Love disposes the lover to dwell so intently on the beloved that he is taken out of himself. The broad Augustinian-Platonic intuition of *pondus meum amor meus* informs this *ekstasis*: if the beloved is higher than the lover, he is raised up to it. Perhaps the quintessential literary example of such *ekstasis* is Dante’s love of Beatrice, which takes him out of himself and raises him to celestial heights. Conversely, if the beloved is inferior to the lover and all his cognitive attention is transfixed on what is base, the lover becomes debased, brought low to that which he loves. Here we might think of Othello and King Lear, Shakespearean characters who are paradigmatic attestations to Aquinas’s notion of debasing *ekstasis*: *in furiam vel amentiam cadit*.

This brief article on *ekstasis* (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 3) invites more questions than it

to remain bound up within his own self, “seeks to enjoy something outside himself.”³⁰

A look back over the first three articles of question 28 is illuminative. The first article identifies the primary effect of love as union; the subsequent two articles pinpoint the opposing vectors proper to this *vis unitava*—namely, *mutua inhaesio* and *extasis*. The former underscores the fusion of two *into one*, whereas *ektasis* stresses the duality of love, namely, that love is *of another*. Both are essential, and together they express the necessary tension that animates the union of love. Kwasniewski articulate this dialectic well:

Absolute unity is neither possible nor desirable. What is certainly possible and most desirable is a communion of minds and hearts rooted in truly common goods that are, because common, the greatest and most perfective goods each person can have in himself. *Mutua inhaesio* emphasizes the overcoming of ontological separateness in the inward communion of affection that spills over outwardly into a sharing of life, conversation, feelings, and works. In contrast, *extasis* seems to emphasize the *otherness* of the other in the affective sphere—the equally important fact that I love the other *for his own sake*. He is not merged into me like an extra limb, but retains all the while the dignity and autonomy that belongs to him as a person.³¹

answers. However, it remains a scintillating gem for considering the question of the relation between love and knowledge and, more particularly, the role divine charity plays in supernatural knowing. Kwasniewski comments:

[For Aquinas] the best and worst loves are capable of affecting the soul to such an extent, either for good or for ill, that the result is justly called *extasis*—a standing outside of oneself in a mode of knowing, seeing, tasting, understanding that is otherwise beyond reach. [Aquinas] wants to explain how it is that love can bring about an *extasis* in the cognitive domain, so as to bear off the subject to a perception of things beyond sense or reason. (*Ecstasy of Love*, 232)

In addition to cognitive ecstasy, notes Aquinas, there is also appetitive ecstasy. In this case the appetitive power is “borne toward something else, so that it goes forth out from itself, as it were.” Whereas love *disposes* cognitive ecstasy, love *is* volitional ecstasy.

³⁰ The love of concupiscence (*amore concupiscentiae*) is not wholly ecstatic, explains Aquinas, because the lover is carried outside of himself only in a “certain sense”: “In so far, namely, as not being satisfied with enjoying the good that he has, he seeks to enjoy something outside himself.” The love of concupiscence redounds to the lover—he wants an external good *for himself*—and so “he does not go out from himself simply, and this movement remains finally within him.” By contrast, the love of friendship (*amore amicitiae*) entails a total movement *ad extra*. In wishing and doing good to a friend, the appetitive *ekstasis* is complete and total: “A man’s affection goes out from itself simply” (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 3).

³¹ Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love*, 239.

As in the *Scriptum*, Aquinas argues in the *ST* that the negative or divisive qualities of love are an inextricable part of love's union. The searing, cutting, violent properties of love—vividly attested to by countless mystics and poets—are necessary for the lover to dwell in the beloved.

In a way that corresponds to the fourth objection of distinction 27 in the *Scriptum*, the fifth article of question 28 in *ST* I-II inquires, "Whether love is a passion that wounds the lover?" The three objections each appeal to the Song of Songs in the contention that love wounds and is therefore harmful and defective. After all, the Song of Songs explicitly states, "Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart with one of thine eyes, and with one hair of thy neck" (4:9).

The objections canvas three "wounds" that love effects. First, love causes suffering or "languor": "But love causes languor [*amor causat languorem*]: for it is written (Song 2:5): *Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love*. Therefore love is a wounding passion."³² Second, the melting (*liquefactio*) of love entails the dissolution of the lover. "Love melts that in which it is: for it is written (Song 5:6): *My soul melted when my beloved spoke*. Therefore love is a dissolvent: therefore it is a corruptive and a wounding passion." Finally, love causes fervor which destroys through excessive heat: "It is said of love (Song 8:6) that *its lamps are fire and flames*." In short, according to the objections, the three effects of love—languor, liquefaction, and fervor—entail that love is a destructive rather than unifying force.

The *sed contra* appeals once again to the authority of Dionysius: "Everything loves itself with a love that holds it together." Love is a unifying force inasmuch as it seeks to hold itself together—it desires its own coherence, unity and a direction—and inasmuch as it seeks to integrate another within itself. Most formally, then, love is not a "passion that wounds," but one which "preserves and perfects" ("conservativa et perfectiva"). Nevertheless, Aquinas grants the principal truth in the objectors' observations: the violence of love entails a material change that wounds the lover. In an argument that follows the same logic as that advanced in the *Scriptum*, Aquinas explains that the wounding effects of love are neither the end of love nor its

³² In his 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson defines *languor* as "a faintness, which may arise from want or decay of spirits, through indigestion, or too much exercise; or from an additional weight of fluids, from a diminution of secretion by the common discharges" (johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/1755/languor_ns). Kwasniewski better expresses Aquinas's use of the term: "*Languor* describes the condition of one who is faint, feeble, listless, or ill, and it can also convey grief: 'surely he hath borne our griefs (*longiores nostros*) (Isa 53:4, KJV)' (*Ecstasy of Love*, 254).

formal definition. Rather, we might describe them as “necessary accidents”—attendant on the formal nature of love as *vis unitiva*.

In responding to the objections, Aquinas explains that there are four proximate effects of love: melting, enjoyment, languor, and fervor. Once again, melting (*liquefactio*) takes priority in the genealogy of love. Love fits the appetite of the lover to receive the good loved; that is to say, love shapes the lover so as to welcome the object of affection into his embrace. However, such reception demands that the lover first be malleable—*capable* of being so shaped and molded. In short, the precondition for love is the plasticity of the lover’s appetite. More accurately, however, the “melting” of love is not so much a precondition, as the first movement in the genealogy of love.³³

A heart that is melted is a heart in love. Aquinas is clear that the fire of love causes a softening of the heart, while the absence of such fire leaves a heart hard and frigid, indeed frozen (*congelationi*).

For things that are frozen, are closely bound together [in seipsis constricta], so as to be hard to pierce. But it belongs to love that the appetite is fitted [coaptetur] to receive the good which is loved, inasmuch as the object loved is in the lover, as stated above [a. 2]. Consequently the freezing or hardening of the heart [cordis congelatio vel duritia] is a disposition repugnant to love: while melting [liquefactio] denotes a softening of the heart [mollificationem cordis], whereby the heart shows itself to be ready for the entrance of the beloved.³⁴

A heart that has been made soft and supple by the fire of love is open to the penetration of the beloved. It is like soft wax ready to receive the impress of

³³ Commenting on Ps 21:15 [22:14]—“My heart has become like wax melting in the midst of my bowels”—Aquinas distinguishes the “bad melting” (*mala liquefactione*) that occurs through fear, which is seen for instance in the flight of the disciples and Peter’s denial of Christ, from the “good melting” (*bona liquefactione*) borne of love. Aquinas prefaces his explanation of “good melting” with his favorite proof-text, Song 5:6: “My soul was melted [anima mea liquefacta est].” He explains: “Before being melted, a thing is hard and closed in on itself; if it melts, it is poured out and tends from itself into another. When love comes upon a person, a man who before was in himself then turns into another” (*In Psalmos* 21).

³⁴ *ST I-II*, q. 28 a. 5. Aquinas’s account of a “hard” and “icy” heart finds a literary echo in the Charles Dickens’s evocative description of Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*: “Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, was Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! External heat and cold had little influence on him. No warmth could warm, no cold could chill him.”

a seal. A hard heart, by contrast, remains impenetrable to the beloved. As Kwasniewski points out, Aquinas's description of a hard and frozen heart provides not only a rich "psychological vocabulary" calibrated to the philosophic dynamism of love, but illustrates the logic of the ubiquitous scriptural image of a "hard heart": "The Article is giving a formal account of what Scripture *means* when it says 'hard' or 'hardened' heart."³⁵

Not developed in question 28, but foundational to Aquinas's theology, is that the liquefaction of the heart is the work of grace. The heart of post-lapsarian man is constricted by epicardial ice; it is hard and frozen—rigor mortis has set in. Only the fire of the Spirit can liquefy the heart, dissolving and dislodging its glacial obstructions, and dispose it to *ekstasis*—standing apart from itself—in order to assume the form of the other. Wholly in keeping with the theology of liquefaction enunciated in *ST* I-II is Aquinas's remark in the *Scriptum*: "God is called fire, because as fire stands to that which it melts, making it to flow by its heat, so too God in his goodness pours out perfection into all creatures."³⁶

The liquefied heart—"whereby the heart shows itself to be ready for the entrance of the beloved"—responds in distinct ways depending on whether the beloved is present or absent, explains Aquinas. Pleasure or enjoyment (*delectatio* or *fruitio*) ensue when the beloved is present and possessed. Aquinas terms this "real union," and that is, of course, precisely what the *vis unitiva* of love aims at. And so, a profound sense of satisfaction, arrival, and finality accompany the real union of love. Should the beloved be absent, the liquefied heart will experience two passions: sadness (*tristitia*), which was referenced by the objector as languor, and intense desire (*intensum desiderium*), which was referenced by the objector as fervor (*fervorem*).

In short, Aquinas admits the objector's contention that love "is a passion that wounds the lover." However, it does not follow that love is a destructive

³⁵ Kwasniewski, *Ecstasy of Love*, 260–61.

³⁶ *In I sent.*, d. 34, q. 3, a. 1, ad 2. In his commentary on the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13), Aquinas describes the hard ground on which the seed was unable to penetrate deeply as a metaphor for hardness of heart (*cordis duritia*): "This is opposed to charity, because it belongs to love to melt [the heart]: 'My soul was melted, when my beloved spoke,' etc. (Song 5:6). For that is hard which is constrained within itself [durum enim est quod est in se constrictum] and bound to its own measurement. Love works to transfer the lover into the beloved; hence [the one loving] is poured forth [Amor facit transferre amantem in amatum: unde diffunditur]" (*Super Matt* 13, lec. 1, no. 1089). As in the question on the wounding effects of love (*ST* I-II, q. 28, a. 5), Aquinas contends that the first movement in the logic of love is the liquefaction of the affections. Only then can the soul pour itself out ecstatically into the beloved and make space in himself to receive the beloved (i.e., *mutua inhaesio*).

force. The three wounding effects of love articulated by the objectors—languor, liquefaction, and fervor—are like the negatives of a still photograph: the counterpart to the truth that love is a unifying force. When the heart of a lover is liquefied, it delights to pour itself into the beloved, transforming itself to assume her form. In the absence of the beloved, the lover is in a state of languor and fervor until the beloved appears and his melted heart can achieve its end.

Conclusion

According to Aquinas, liquefaction is essential to love. The martyr-bishop Januarius gave his life for love. His complete self-sacrifice was a libation poured out on the altar of love. The martyr is not a testament to Stoic resolve—of his unstinting commitment to principle. Rather, the dying act that gives the martyr his title is an extension of his life, his life of discipleship, of imitating the self-giving love of Christ. St. John the Baptist, St. Stephen, St. Pantaleone, St. Januarius—all martyrs whose blood continues to liquefy—sought to be absorbed into the mystery of Christ, to be transformed into the form of the beloved. Their life and death testify to the truth of Aquinas's teaching: "Love transforms the lover into the beloved, it draws the lover into the interior of the beloved and vice versa, with the result that nothing remains in the beloved that is not united to the lover." St. Januarius could exclaim with the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Only a heart completely melted—one in which self-constricting attachments are dislodged and any frozen bricolage of egoisms dissolved—can pour itself without reserve into the beloved. And so, it is wholly fitting that the blood of these martyrs continues to liquefy, continues to bear testimony to the fact that love is liquid.³⁷

The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity; it is principally a *vis*

³⁷ Almost invariably, when St. Januarius's blood liquefies, the archbishop presiding in the cathedral of Naples will proclaim that the saint is enjoining those who witness the miracle to follow his model of self-sacrificing love. Holding up the ampoule containing the relic of the martyr-bishop's blood in the Naples cathedral on September 19, 2022, Archbishop Domenico Battaglia exhorted the faithful, "Here is the meaning of this blood which, united with the blood shed by Christ and that of all martyrs of every place and time, is a living testimony that love always wins" (Courtney Mares, "Blood of St. Januarius Liquefies in Naples on Feast Day," CNA: Catholic News Agency, September 19, 2022, catholicnewsagency.com/news/252327/blood-of-st-januarius-liquefies-in-naples-on-feast-day).

unitiva—effecting the unity of the mystical body and of the Christian believer with her Lord. The liquefaction of Christ’s blood in the many Eucharistic miracles the world over testifies most fittingly to the truth about love as a *vis unitiva*.³⁸ “God suffers ecstasy through love,” writes Aquinas in question 28. The Holy Eucharist is the supreme realization of such divine *ektasis*, of Christ’s promise that “we will come to him, and make our home with him” (John 14:23). “To suffer ecstasy,” explains Aquinas, “means to be placed outside of oneself.” *Ektasis* allows one to dwell intimately in the other, to share the other’s form. And such mutual indwelling—he in us and we in him—is the fruit of Holy Communion. Only a liquid heart can ecstatically pour itself into the beloved, to come to dwell in the other. And the Sacred Heart is most liquid.

The liquefaction of blood—that of the martyr and of Christ—is a fitting testament to the truth that love is a *vis unitiva* that seeks to transform the lover into the beloved. Only a heart that has been made soft and supple—a *cor liquificatio*—can ecstatically transcend its own preoccupations and egoism to experience the mutual indwelling of love. The liquefied blood of the martyr, which proclaims his ecstatic desire to pour his whole self into the divine beloved, is an answering word to the liquefied blood of the Eucharistic species, which proclaims Christ’s ecstatic desire to pour his whole self into the created beloved. We love because he first loved us. N·V

³⁸ Of course, the Eucharist itself, in which Christ also gives himself in a liquid form, testifies to the liquefied nature of love.