

Ad Totius Mundi Pacem atque Salutem
**Merit for Others and the Divine Plan
in Thomistic Thought**

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IN HER OFFICIAL TEACHING, the Catholic Church recognizes that persons who do not formally belong to the Church may receive the gift of salvation.¹ At the same time, the Church understands herself to be necessary for salvation.² This pair of theses has generated no little hardship for theologians who have attempted to grasp the two together, such as Jacques Dupuis.³ In this essay, I aim to make a short step toward an understanding of how the Church mediates salvation to non-Christians by considering merit and its application to others in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and a selection of his interpreters.

An understandable strategy for grasping this problem is to look at the human person and the capacity of the human to aim for the good by way of reason, language, culture, and the like. In other words, one solution

¹ Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (hereafter, *LG*), in *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, trans. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996 [1964]), §16. I do not include in this category those who explicitly intend to receive baptism, yet who are prevented from receiving this sacrament before death.

² *LG*, §14.

³ See The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Notification on the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father Jacques Dupuis, S.J.,” at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html.

seems to begin with theological anthropology. This kind of solution can take a number of forms. One might identify a basically Christological shape in the variety of ways that persons enact the good as they understand it. Or, one might talk about a natural desire to see God. These approaches begin with the nature of the human person. However, the point of this essay is to focus attention on salvation and justification as effects of the grace of God, that is, as moments in a divine motion in which the Church participates. In this sense, while I focus in this paper on Thomist accounts of merit for others, my end goal is to understand the mission of the Church.

Within the framework of an account of merit that has developed in a significant strand of the Thomist tradition, the Church acts as an instrument of salvation by performing meritorious acts for others, thus participating in the divine plan to elevate a people to communion with God. In order to make a case for this understanding of the mission of the Church, I undertake a reading of the understanding of merit for others in the *Summa Theologiæ* of St. Thomas Aquinas. This reading leads to Mariology, since merit for others belongs to the category of congruent merit, which the Blessed Mother exemplifies. Thus, by grasping the nature of the merits of Mary, the prototype of the Church, a view of the Church as participating in the divine plan by performing meritorious acts for others, particularly by offering the sacrifice of the Mass, comes into view.

Grace and the Divine Plan

To Elevate a People

Meritorious acts derive their significance from their place in the divine plan. God has ordained to create and sustain a universe that reflects his wisdom and love, and then to elevate a people to participation in supernatural life. While all Christian theologians recognize God as the Creator of all that exists, St. Thomas places particular emphasis on this aspect of God.⁴ For example, the well-known five ways of demonstrating the

⁴ Brian Davies claims that to understand God in Thomas, one must understand how Thomas understands God as Creator (*Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011], 39). Rudi te Velde makes a similar point, arguing that Aquinas's understanding of God as Creator structures much of his entire account of anthropology, God, and metaphysics (*Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiæ* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006], 123–125).

existence of God presume God as Creator.⁵ Although the created order reflects the wisdom of the Creator, it also subsists as radically distinct from God.⁶ In other words, God is not an “item in the universe.”⁷ Because God is the source of all that exists, God exists as completely other than the created order. In fact, the intimacy of God to with the created order derives from this fundamental distinction. This understanding of the radical distinction between God and creation, between the supernatural order and the natural order, provides the framework in which one can understand grace, as well as merit.

God wills to elevate a people to the supernatural order and to participation in the divine life itself. In the Thomistic scheme, individuals in the natural order of being cannot attain to the supernatural unless they are elevated by a supernatural agent. In other words, it does not lie in the power of creatures to elevate themselves above the natural order.⁸ So, while God desires that creatures share in the life of the Trinity, creatures are incapable of reaching this end on their own. Herein lies the fundamental meaning of grace. Grace is the gift of God by which he elevates creatures to a share in the divine life. From this basic sketch, it begins to become apparent that only God can initiate the movement of grace. Human agents cannot elevate themselves, so the movement to participation in the divine life begins with God.⁹ Thus, God grants creatures a share in the divine life, and this act of giving is what grace is. Thomas makes this point clear in a way that is especially significant for a discussion on merit, because he argues that the first grace (*primam gratium*)—

⁵ One can see the contrast here with the Anselmian ontological argument, which would simply prove the existence of God from the concept of God itself. Arguments for the existence of God do not simply prove that God exists; they say something about who God is. The understanding of God that issues from the *Proslogion* would tend to put less emphasis on God as Creator because it makes an *a priori* claim, that is, it does not say anything positive about the relationship of God as Creator to creation.

⁶ The distinction between creation and Creator receives treatment in any adequate treatment of God. It is singled out for particular attention by Robert Sokolowski in *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

⁷ See Herbert McCabe, O.P., “The Involvement of God,” in *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 42.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Matriti : Editorial Catolica, 1955), Ia-IIæ, q. 112, a. 1 *resp*: “Respondeo dicendum quod nulla res agere potest ultra suam speciem: quia semper oportet quod causa potior sit effectui.” Hereafter, *ST*.

⁹ William Lynn, S.J., *Christ's Redemptive Merit: The Nature of Its Causality According to St. Thomas* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1962), 146–147.

that is, the initiation into life according to the order of grace—cannot be merited by a human agent.¹⁰ So, *primam gratiam* identifies the initial gift by which God moves the person to faith informed by charity. In this sense, the first grace is the grace according to which God justifies the person, initiating that person into the life through which she will proceed until she arrives at the fullness of her supernatural end. Thus, the teaching of St. Thomas on grace works with the distinction between nature and supernature. Human beings exist and act within the natural order, and they can only enter the supernatural order by the agency of God. Grace moves the person to participation in the divine life.¹¹ By its very nature, then, grace is a gift from God, and it has as its end the elevation of nature to its supernatural end.¹²

Thomas and his interpreters make distinctions between types of grace, although they keep the end of grace firmly in mind when they do so. Thomas distinguishes between *gratia gratum faciens* and *gratia gratis data*—that is, the grace that makes one pleasing to God, more commonly called sanctifying grace, and the grace freely given.¹³ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange also makes a distinction between internal and external grace; sanctifying grace belongs to internal grace, because it directs the human agent to God, whereas grace *gratis data* belongs to external grace, because the one who receives it becomes an agent through whom God directs others to communion with God by means of external signs.¹⁴ In other words, sanctifying grace is the gift of grace that works in the human agent to draw that person deeper into the current of grace. When the justified person enters more fully into the divine life through increase in faith and charity within that person, it is sanctifying grace that is working to effect this development. Another key distinction is that between “habitual grace” and *auxilium Dei*. These two gifts of God refer to different aspects of the life of grace. Habitual grace derives from the

¹⁰ See *ST*, Ia-IIæ, q. 114, a. 5.

¹¹ Joseph P. Wawrykow, *God's Grace & Human Action: 'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 164–67.

¹² So, Domingo Bañez, O.P.: “In primis ordo gratiae praesupponit ordinem naturae et perficit ipsum. Quapropter totus ordo gratiae adjunctus ordini naturae potest dici auxilium Dei elevantis et perficientis naturam praexistentem ad operationem supernaturalem et ad supernaturalem finem tendentem” (*Comentarios Inéditos a la Prima Secundae de Santo Tomás, Tomo III: De Gratia Dei, [qq. 109–114]*, edición preparada por Vicente Beltrán de Heredia [Madrid: 1948], 374).

¹³ *ST*, Ia-IIæ, q. 110, a. 4 *resp.*

¹⁴ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *Grace: Commentary on the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas, Ia IIæ, q. 109–114*, trans. Dominican Nuns of Corpus Christi Monastery (Menlo Park, CA: B. Herder Book Co., 1952), 150–151.

understanding that St. Thomas develops on habit, which he describes as a disposition to act in a certain way. Grace is a gift from God to act at the supernatural level, and so habitual grace involves a gift in which God moves the human agent to be disposed to act toward the ends proper to the supernatural order. God infuses habitual grace to incline the agent to act toward the goods of divine life. Thus, as Joseph Wawrykow explains, the theological virtues “flow from” this grace: faith heals the intellect, while love and hope heal the will. In this sense, habitual grace helps to restore what is lost by sin.¹⁵ *Auxilium*, help, is given even after God has infused habitual grace. The justified person might “be drawn back to sin” after justification, because “the transformation entailed in justification is never so complete in this life that the individual can no longer sin.”¹⁶ So, although the justified person generally is disposed toward the good, she needs the help of God in order to achieve her true end. For this reason, God gives help not only to act, but to act in accord with the good.

Operative and Cooperative Grace

The distinction that helps bring the final pieces of the puzzle into place is the one between operative and cooperative grace. This distinction involves the issue of how an agent wills both the means and the end of an act. One can name the end of one’s action by answering the question, “what are you doing?”¹⁷ The means for attaining the end is the object of the act. So, for example, one might ask me at this very moment, “what are you doing?” I would respond, “writing a paper on merit for others,” or, “trying to understand the priestly activity of the Church,” or “preparing an article to submit to *Nova et Vetera*.” Any of these answers would identify a legitimate end. I would not say, “lifting and lowering my fingers above a keyboard,” or “typing sentences,” or “authoring a text in English.” Of course, all of those latter actions are true, but they represent the means by which I achieve an end. For actions in which God moves the agent toward an end, while the human agent wills the means to that end, cooperative grace is at work. Here, the human person cooperates with God through her act of will. However, in acts where God moves

¹⁵ Wawrykow, *God’s Grace*, 169–170.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 171–172.

¹⁷ See G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), §23. Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar point when he discusses the necessity of narrative for an account of human action (*After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed., [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984], 206–208).

the human agent at every step, so to speak, operative grace is at work.¹⁸ Thus, operative grace is that grace by which God moves the creature to will both the means and the end.

These distinctions merit attention in the current discussion because they clarify what kind of action is meritorious. The typical meritorious act proceeds from cooperative, habitual grace.¹⁹ In other words, meritorious acts belong to the category of acts performed from cooperative grace, because God has infused grace into the soul of the human person—that is, they follow from the reception of habitual grace—empowering the person to pursue proper ends, but the human agent selects the means to the ends by her free will.²⁰ Thus, meritorious acts proceed from human agents who have been moved by grace to act in the supernatural order in accordance with the divine ordinance. The focus on election and the divine ordinance provides the context for understanding meritorious acts, including acts that merit grace for others, because teaching on merit takes its place in teaching on grace, which is the divine gift according to which the triune God draws creatures into the divine life.

Excursus on Gratia Gratis Data

It is worth providing a brief description of *gratia gratis data* in order to clarify the question that this study seeks to answer. Sanctifying grace consists of those gifts that God gives to the believer over the course of her life in order to draw that person into closer communion with God. On the other hand, the graces *gratis data* refer to gifts given to a person for the purpose of bringing others into communion. These graces do not necessarily bring one into closer fellowship with God. In fact, an enemy of God could be given one of these graces, and it would simply mean that God used the person to fulfill the divine plan, even if that person were not elected to salvation. The grace would not have the effect of bringing about sanctification in the agent, but would rather aim to bring others into the Church.²¹ St. Paul identifies these gifts in his First Letter to the Corinthians, and he includes gifts of healing, prophecy, and the like (see 1 Cor 12). Some translators of St. Thomas refer to these graces as the “charismatic graces,”²² since they are associated with the classical charisms

¹⁸ Wawrykow, *God's Grace*, 173–175.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 176–177.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

²¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 157, 162.

²² So, T.C. O'Brien in *Summa Theologiae, Volume 7 (Ia. 33–43): Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 215–219; c.f. *ST*, Ia, q. 43 a. 3.

by which the Church is built up. The Church performs a mission to the world with the help of these graces, but these are not the graces that I am discussing, particularly since they are distinct from sanctifying grace. Cooperative grace, to which merit properly belongs, is a species of sanctifying grace. The activity that these gifts bring about is distinct from the activity that I am seeking to describe insofar as the ministries that issue from the graces *gratis data* involve the explicit proclamation of the Gospel or the external activity that elicits a response from the unjustified. However, the work that I am seeking to understand may involve works that the unbeliever never sees. Thus, one might say that I am seeking to describe those activities wherein the person participates in the elicitation of faith in a remote way.

Merit and Participation in Christ

According to St. Thomas, human persons can perform acts that deserve reward because they truly are acts that belong to the human agent. This is the upshot of the division of grace into operative and cooperative: when the human will cooperates with divine grace, that human merits reward from God. However, merit must be rightly understood here, and so this section sketches the basic distinction between merits *de condigno* and merits *de congruo*. The sketch not only clarifies how merit functions in the Thomistic framework, but it also shows how merit, rather than functioning primarily as a kind of accounting concept, actually involves participation in Christ.

Condign and Congruent Merit

A meritorious act gives the agent a right to a reward.²³ However, merit is credited to the agent in one of two ways. First, there is condign merit, which is merit according to justice. In other words, there is a sense in which God owes reward to the agent, although the term “owe” does not indicate that justice is set over against God. Rather, God acts in accord with the divine wisdom and promise, and so, in this sense, God does not act under a kind extra-divine compulsion.

There are two principle kinds of condign merit. First, acts of Christ are meritorious in the strict sense of *de condigno*. As the perfect and holy Son of God, his sacrificial self-offering obtains merit in accordance with justice strictly speaking. Second, the justified earn condign merits also, although in a qualified sense. To be sure, they do not merit initiation

²³ See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 363. See also Lynn, *Christ's Redemptive Merit*, 166.

into the supernatural life because of the disproportion between supernatural and nature, as well as because of the state of sin, which prevents the human agent from performing an act that deserves justice in itself.²⁴ However, meritorious acts are condignly meritorious when viewed from the side of grace, because the Holy Spirit enables the human agent to act with charity, thus transforming the agent.²⁵ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange provides a helpful summary: the condign merit of Christ is merit in the strictest sense of justice, and so the reward for the act and the merit are equal; for the justified, reward is proportionate to merit.²⁶ Domingo Bañez sums up this understanding of grace, merit, and proportionality nicely: “[O]pera procedentia ex gratia habent omnis requisita ad meritum de condigno, quia sunt proportionate intrinsece fini ultimo quod est praemium, et facta sunt cum directione ad illius consecutionem referente caritate.”²⁷

Wawrykow identifies a development in Thomas’ thinking on merit and justice, and seeing this development clarifies his teaching. In his earlier discussions of merit, meritorious acts receive reward in accordance with distributive justice. However, in his later work, Thomas seems to discuss merit in terms of commutative justice. It is commutative because it involves commerce between God and those who have been elevated to spiritual fellowship with God.²⁸ In other words, in the earlier work, the nature-supernature distinction prohibited from understanding acts for and gifts from God in terms of exchange. In his development, he maintains the proper distinction between creature and Creator, while emphasizing the effect of grace as participation in the divine life. Thus, Wawrykow argues that Thomas came to locate merit in a more profound way within the whole of the divine economy. Since human persons enter into communion with the Triune God by being made like the Son,²⁹ one can say that the justified gain merits by virtue of their

²⁴ See *ST*, Ia-IIæ, q. 114, a. 2: “Vita autem æterna est quoddam bonum excedens proportionem naturæ creatæ . . . [N]ullus in statu peccati existens potest vitam æternam mereri, nisi prius Deo reconciletur, dimisso peccato, quod fit per gratiam. Peccatori enim non debetur vita, sed mors: secundum illud Rom. 6:23: Stipendi peccati mors.”

²⁵ Wawrykow, *God’s Grace*, 193–197.

²⁶ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 367.

²⁷ Bañez, *Comentarios*, 323.

²⁸ Wawrykow, *God’s Grace*, 207–209.

²⁹ See Gilles Emery, O.P., *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 204–209. On the activity of the Holy Spirit in making creatures like the Son, that is, conforming persons to the Son, see Gilles Emery, O.P., “The Personal Mode of Trinitarian

communion with Christ. In this sense, God truly owes reward to the justified for good works.

Merit is not limited to reward in accordance with justice. The second type of merit is merit *de congruo*. Congruently meritorious acts receive reward from God because of a certain kind of fittingness. Persons can obtain congruent merit in two ways. Garrigou-Lagrange identifies the first kind of congruent merit as congruent merit in the proper sense, the second in the improper sense. Congruent merit, properly speaking, derives from friendship with God. In this sense, God grants reward to certain persons on account of the love that comes from shared life with those persons, not because God owes the person reward for action. In this sense, as Garrigou-Lagrange explains, only the justified can obtain this kind of merit, for only the justified participate in the supernatural life and thus are capable of friendship with God.³⁰ When one merits for another, the act is congruently meritorious because it does not belong to the order of justice to grant a reward to a person who has not personally performed the meritorious act. At the same time, it is fitting that God would reward the meritorious actions of friends who impetrate God on behalf of the unjustified. So, a Christian can merit condignly for herself and congruously for others.

Garrigou-Lagrange also mentions the merit that derives strictly from the mercy of God, which he calls improper merit. In this case, God gives in a way that coheres strictly with mercy. Thus, God may count the act of an unredeemed sinner as meritorious, but the merit derives neither from justice nor from friendship. Now, God is both just and merciful, and so this kind of merit is fitting in the light of God's mercy, but it is not fitting in the proper sense of the term.

Merit and Participation in Christ

While the notion of merit might seem, *prima facie*, like a kind of mere accounting system, the picture that emerges from Aquinas and others reveals a profoundly participationist understanding of the Christian life. The justified obtain merit precisely insofar as they act, as free agents themselves, in accord with the divine will and wisdom. Wawrykow makes this point when he discusses the issue of reward. The motion of grace moves creatures to a supernatural end in order to fulfill the divine

Action in St. Thomas Aquinas" in *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007).

³⁰ *The Mother of the Saviour and Our Interior Life*, trans. Bernard J. Kelly, C.S.Sp. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Company, 1959), 180–181.

plan. Acts within this motion merit reward because they are acts that move in synch with the movement of the triune God. When one avoids sin and pursues the good, one acts in harmony with the supernatural ends of human being, and thus, one merits reward.³¹ In a similar way, Michael Root emphasizes the teleological dimension of merit, noting that Thomas' teaching on merit indicates a fittingness between redeemed persons and their end.³² Persons merit reward from God because they are acting in the order of grace and thus moving toward fuller participation in the divine life. One might say that the reward for performing meritorious acts is that the agent gains momentum in the motion of grace. Or, one could compare it to different currents in a river; meritorious acts allow the human agent to get closer to the swift-moving water, and as one gets closer, the pull of the water becomes stronger. Thomas agrees with the Augustinian notion of God crowning his own gifts.³³ In this sense, God does not really give a reward to an other so much as rewards himself, yet this act of giving reward draws the human agent closer to God. Hence, the human, not God, benefits from meritorious acts.³⁴ Merit brings about an increase in grace for the justified, because a meritorious act draws the person closer to God, who gives out of utter gratuity.³⁵ In this sense, meritorious acts are acts in which the person participates in the divine plan.

Thomas gives this discussion on participation and merit a Christological focus in his commentary on Colossians, in which the Apostle states that he completes what is lacking of Christ's suffering (Col 1:24). According to Thomas, "we could say that Paul was completing the sufferings that were lacking in his own flesh. For what was lacking was that . . . Christ should also suffer in Paul, his member, and in similar ways,

³¹ See Wawrykow, *God's Grace*, 184.

³² See "Aquinas, Merit, and Reformation Theology after the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*" in *Aquinas in Dialogue: Thomas for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Jim Fodor and Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 8–9.

³³ Wawrykow, *God's Grace*, 203.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

³⁵ *ST*, Ia-IIæ, q. 114, a. 8 *resp*: "Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra (a.3.6.7.) dictum est, illud cadit sub merito condigni, ad quod motio gratiae se extendit. Motio autem alicuius moventis non solum se extendit ad ultimum terminum motus, sed etiam ad totum progressum in motu. Terminus autem motus gratiae est vita aeterna: progressus autem in hoc motu est secundum augmentum caritatis vel gratiae, secundum illud Prof. 4, 18: Iustorum semita quasi lux splendens procedit, et crescit usque ad perfectum diem, qui est dies gloriae. Sic igitur augmentum gratiae cadit sub merito condigni."

in others.”³⁶ He goes on to note that, “in the same way all the saints suffer for the Church.” The Church continues to suffer until her treasure house of merits is full, until the end of the world.³⁷ So, the justified obtain merits in Christ because “Christ and the Church are one mystical person.”³⁸ This short statement makes the connection between merit and participation in Christ clear; the Church and her members accrue merit because the Church is the body of Christ. Romanus Cessario raises this issue in an analogous way when he discusses satisfaction.³⁹ He makes the point that members of the body of Christ can offer satisfaction for others, but the acts offered up for others derive their worth from the meritorious self-offering of the God-man.⁴⁰ Jesus Christ, as divine and human, has merited salvation for the entire world.⁴¹ At the same time, he is the head of a body, and so the members of his body can act in a way that is coextensive with his act on the cross.⁴² According to William Lynn, Christ is the meritorious, final, instrumental, and efficient cause of justification for all who are justified.⁴³ It would follow from this understanding of causality that, if a human person who is not Jesus were to act meritoriously for another—that is, cause, in some sense, the justification of another—then that person could only have done so to the extent that that one participates in Christ.⁴⁴ Thus, merit, both for oneself and for others, involves entering more deeply into the person and work of Christ through the Holy Spirit as a member of his Body.

Congruent Merit, Participation, and Prima Gratia

With this sketch of creation, grace, merit, and participation in the work of Christ, the position that Thomas Aquinas takes on meriting the first

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Colossians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2006), §61 (Larcher, 36–37).

³⁷ Ibid., (Larcher, 37).

³⁸ Ibid., (Larcher, 36).

³⁹ Satisfaction and merit name different, yet similar, kinds of exchanges. Satisfaction involves the payment of a debt that is owed, while merit consists of a reward for a work. See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Grace*, 371 and 378, and *Mother of the Saviour*, 179.

⁴⁰ Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Satisfaction in Aquinas: Towards a Personalist Understanding* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982), 165.

⁴¹ Lynn, *Christ's Redemptive Merit*, 157.

⁴² See Ibid., 147–148.

⁴³ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁴ Lynn also states that Christ contains within himself “whatever gifts of grace are upon creatures,” and so Christians, as members of Christ’s body, participate in the fullness of Christ’s grace (ibid., 153–154).

grace for others begins to come into focus. To be sure, the notion of meriting for another sounds rather strange, since merit itself seems to be strictly personal. That is, the actions of one person “cannot directly affect the soul of another.”⁴⁵ A person cannot merit the first grace for another condignly, but a person can obtain congruent merit for the first grace for another.⁴⁶ A person could not merit condignly for another, in part, because it would not be just to reward one person for another’s work, and in part, for the same reason that one could not merit for oneself. Bañez summarizes the point well: *quia offensa contra Deum habet rationem infinitatis propter infinitam maiestatem Dei offensi; et ideo requiritur ex parte satisfaciens infinitam dignitatem personæ*.⁴⁷ It would be impossible to obtain merit for the first grace in accordance with justice because the offense of sin against God is greater than a human person could possibly satisfy. Therefore, only Christ, the God-man, can merit condignly for others.

Although the justified person cannot obtain condign merit for another, the baptized Christian does have access to the treasury of the Church and participates in the redeeming work of Christ. This person also enjoys friendship with God, and God will respond to the impetratory prayers of the justified *secundum amicitiae proportionem*. In other words, God would grant grace in proportion to the friendship between God and the one seeking merit for another. This would be fitting, and it is interesting to consider why it would be fitting. For example, consider that I, assuming that I am in a state of grace, give alms and pray to God to apply my meritorious act to a family member who is not a Christian, and then God moves that person to freely enter into communion with the Catholic Church. On the one hand, my act merited salvation for that person. On the other hand, my act simply participated in the divine action that elected and moved my family member. So, it is fitting that God would reward my act because my act would be congruent with the divine will. At the same time, there is a sense in which the reward for my act would simply be its participation in the election of my family member by God. That is, I have been given the privilege, which comes with friendship, of joining my action to the action of God. This is the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1–2.

⁴⁶ ST, Ia-IIæ, q. 114, a. 6 *resp*: “Sed merito congrui potest aliquis alteri mereri primam gratiam. Quia enim homo in gratia constitutus implet Dei voluntatem, congruum est, secundum amicitiae proportionem, ut in salvation alterius: licet quandoque possit habere impedimentum ex parte illius cuius aliquis sanctus iustificationem desiderat.”

⁴⁷ Bañez, *Comentarios*, 334.

point that Charles Journet makes. Although he does not discuss the issue of merit for another at great length or detail, he does mention that when a person in a state of grace prays effectually for the salvation of those whom God elects, then that person enters more deeply into friendship with God, because the will of the justified aligns with the will of God.⁴⁸ In a meritorious act for another that proves to be efficacious, the Christian loves what God loves, and in this sense, meritorious acts for others flow from charity, from a will healed by the Holy Spirit. The act draws its power from the one condign meritorious act for others; it applies the merits of the loving act of Christ on the Cross.

Suffering and Congruent Merit

A question that St. Thomas does not address in article 6 of the question on merit comes quite naturally: what sorts of acts would merit the first grace for another? In his commentary on this article, Bañez discusses issues concerning the efficacy of offering the sacrifice of the Mass for others, given different ways that those others may “block,” so to speak, the grace offered by the means of this meritorious act. To engage the text on this particular question would take my paper afield, since Bañez is dealing with objections to meriting for others that are concerned with clerical abuse. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that he assumes that offering the sacrifice of the Mass would be an act that one could perform on behalf of another. In fact, he spends approximately half of his commentary on the article discussing problems with how the merits from the sacrifice could be applied to others.⁴⁹ At the same time, as a reflection on the work of Mary in the divine economy reveals, there is an intimate connection with suffering and sacrifice. Although this study has not put suffering in the foreground up to this point, it has laid the groundwork for beginning to see how Christian suffering might obtain merit for others.⁵⁰

The notion of vicarious suffering has roots in the Thomistic tradition. For example, according to Cessario, punishments may render satisfaction for sin by removing the stain of sin from the sinner.⁵¹ Thus, the goal of punishment is to restore the sinner to the order of divine justice.⁵² In

⁴⁸ Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Grace*, trans. A.V. Littledale, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1962), 61.

⁴⁹ See Bañez, *Comentarios*, 334–336.

⁵⁰ See Thomas Joseph White, O.P., “Redeemable Suffering? St. Thomas Aquinas on the Meaning of Human Suffering and the Passion of Christ,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 9, no. 3 (2011): 558.

⁵¹ Cessario, *Satisfaction in Aquinas*, 146.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 148.

this sense, punishment may be remedial. The punishment achieves its restorative aim when the punished person undertakes the satisfactory act with charity.⁵³ However, not all punishment is remedial, for a person can take on punishment for the sins of another, and so the one who undergoes punishment does not need remediation. The satisfactory act will be efficacious to this other person deserving of punishment when the two persons are united in love.⁵⁴ So, a person can obtain satisfaction for another, although the other does not receive the effect unless she joins her will to the one who represented her. This gives a sense of how consent on the part of the represented would be necessary. That is, it begins to suggest that salvation does not just happen to people because the Church prays for it; the other must consent in some way to receiving what the justified person has obtained.

The Merits of the Mother of God

The Blessed Mother provides the most striking example of suffering and sacrifice that obtains merit for others. Only the suffering of Christ condignly merits for others, because he suffers as the Son of God, and so his suffering is of infinite worth. Moreover, as the one whom the Father has sent into the world in order to redeem the world, it belongs to the mission of Christ to obtain merit *de condigno* for others. That is, since if God has willed from eternity to elevate creatures to the divine life, then the Son whom the Father sends to obtain merit for the sake of redeeming and elevating the elect obtains those merits in accordance with strict justice, that is, in complete, rather than proportionate, accordance with the divine plan. The Blessed Mother's merit is congruent merit in the proper sense, and thus her work exemplifies meritorious action for others.

Matthias Scheeben considers the merits of Mary at great length. With her meritorious works, she participates in the saving mission of her son, Jesus Christ. Mary, through her piety and desire for the coming of the Messiah, obtained the sending of the Son by congruent merit.⁵⁵ He notes that her *fiat mihi* provides an excellent example of a work that obtains merit and is chosen freely. And yet, God chose her freely, not because of her merits; God elected her to bear the Incarnate Word, and the plan of God could not have been frustrated. Her free decision coincides with the divine decision, and so, by consenting to participate in the redemp-

⁵³ Ibid., 147.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁵ Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *Mariology*, vol. 2, trans. T.L.M.J. Geukers (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book, 1948), 211–214.

tive plan of God, Mary shows herself to be a friend of God.⁵⁶ As friend of God, she obtains congruent merit in the proper sense, and thus, she procures grace for all those whom God justifies. Hence, Scheeben discusses Mary as the mother of the redeemed. Now, mother can be understood in two ways here. On the one hand, one might understand her ministry and place in the Church as one who nurtures like a mother. In other words, Mary acts maternally to the redeemed. On the other hand, Mary continues to impetrate God, obtaining grace for others,⁵⁷ and so she gives birth to the redeemed.⁵⁸ That is, she effects spiritual re-birth.⁵⁹ Or, as Garrigou-Lagrange puts it, Mary acts as a cause in God's act of giving the first grace to sinners.⁶⁰ So, she participates in the movement in which God moves the human agent in intellect and will toward faith informed by charity. In other words, all those whom God saves owe, in a sense, the grace that has saved them to the merits of Mary. She is mother not only in the sense that she nurtures the faith of the redeemed, but also in that she gives birth to the redeemed through her meritorious work and through her efficacious impetration.

In contemporary popular Catholic piety, the work of Mary seems to be primarily associated with her role in the Incarnation and her current activity of intercession on behalf of the Church. However, there is another strand of tradition that associates her with the Crucifixion, arguing that Mary obtains merit through participation in the immolation of her Son. Garrigou-Lagrange discusses this aspect of Mariology in his study of the Mother of God. Mary participates in the sacrifice of her son because she offers him on Calvary. She shares his suffering in her mourning the sins of humanity, but perhaps most significantly, *stabat juxta crucem*: she stood by the cross. So, while Jesus offers himself, the charity of Mary comes into view as she stands next to the cross, offering up her son for the salvation of the world. In a somewhat astonishing statement, Garrigou-Lagrange says that Mary represents a kind of priest, although she does not participate formally in the priesthood, because she does not confect the Eucharist or absolve sins.⁶¹ She participates in the sacrifice that merits satisfaction for the world. Our Lady also suffers with our Lord. It is worth noting here, as Matthew Levering has noted, that

⁵⁶ See also Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 180–181.

⁵⁷ Scheeben, *Mariology*, 254.

⁵⁸ See *Ibid.*, 249.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.

⁶⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 177.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 194.

Jesus suffers in part because he knows the great chasm between God and humanity that occasions his crucifixion.⁶² In other words, his suffering involves more than physical suffering. In a similar way, Mary undergoes great sorrow, not only because she sees her son die, but because she mourns the wickedness that separates humanity from God. In this sense, the work of redemption and the sin of the world cause Mary to suffer.⁶³ Thus, Mary participates in a preeminent way in the sufferings of Christ. So, her suffering and offering unites her in a special way to the suffering and offering of her son, and in this sense, she mediates salvation to the world, deserving the title Mediatrix of All Graces.⁶⁴

Scheeben makes claims similar to the ones that Garrigou-Lagrange makes about Mary and the Cross, although he extends the reflection to the whole life of Christ. Before offering Christ on the Cross, Mary offers Christ in the Temple. Furthermore, because she gave Christ his flesh, she, in a sense, also offered up the body of Christ when she consented to bear Jesus. So, when she stands beneath the Cross offering her son, who offers himself up for the salvation of the world, this event functions as the culmination of all of her other acts. In other words, if the Incarnation leads to the sacrifice at Calvary, then Scheeben makes the move of saying that the acts of Mary, which are intimately involved in the mission of the Incarnation, are ordered to a participation in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Thus, her cooperation in the sacrifice of her son reaches its climax when she stands underneath the cross.⁶⁵ In this sacrifice, Christ obtains condign merit, since he is the God-man whose acts possess infinite worth, while Mary obtains congruent merit, since she participates in a most intimate way in every one of these acts.

Mary, the Mother of the Redeemed, continues to obtain merit for the faithful. Gary Anderson has argued that, in patristic teaching, a poor person who receives alms is like an altar, giving the almsgiver a direct connection to the supernatural order. Thus, by putting money on this altar, the Christian funds a heavenly treasury.⁶⁶ In a similar way, Scheeben refers to Mary as an altar that communicates the effects of the one sacrifice of Christ,⁶⁷ and so through her, there is a communication of

⁶² Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 78.

⁶³ See Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 187–189.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 190–191.

⁶⁵ Scheeben, *Mariology*, 220–221.

⁶⁶ Gary Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 140.

⁶⁷ Scheeben, *Mariology*, 226.

the effects of Christ. Like the Church, she represents a deposit of merit.⁶⁸ Through her participation in the work of the Savior, Mary has obtained a treasury from which she may draw in order to bring about the conferral of grace onto humanity.⁶⁹

Two elements in particular stand out from this venture into Mariology. First, Mary achieves merit by offering Jesus on the Cross. Christ offers himself, and so he is the priest and victim of this sacrifice. Yet, at the same time, his mother participates in his priestly activity when she stands at the Cross. She has so thoroughly associated her own work with the work of her son that, when she offers up her son, she also offers up herself.⁷⁰ Second, Mary obtains congruent merit through her suffering. This element follows from the first. It seems important to note here that it is not any suffering that makes this achievement, but rather, it is that suffering which comes to her by way of her participation in the divine plan to bring redemption to the world. She participates in the divine plan in all of those acts that she performs, which culminate in her offering of her son. This culminating act coincides with her suffering. She suffers as she does because of her special friendship with God. Through this suffering, she attains merit that may apply to the entire human race.

St. Stephen the Martyr

Bañez mentions an additional saint who obtains merit for another: St. Stephen. Bañez points out the work of Stephen in his conclusion to the commentary on the question *utrum homo possit alteri mereri primam gratiam*. Like the Angelic Doctor himself, he is brief. Nevertheless, reading him in light of those who share in his tradition allows one to draw some conclusions about the significance of his commentary. He states that

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, 215.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 239. This basic argument for Mary as mediatrix of all graces by virtue of her participation in the work of her son has been taken up in the teaching of the Church. So, Pope St. Pius X: “Ex hac autem Mariam inter et Christum communione dolorum ac voluntatis ‘promeruit’ illa, ‘ut reparatoris perditum orbem dignissime fieret’ (Eadmeri Mon. De Excellentia Virg. Mariae, c. 9), atque ideo universorum munerum dispensatrix, quae nobis Iesus nece et sanguine comparavit” (Encyclical Letter on the Jubilee of the Immaculate Conception *Ad diem illum laetissimum*, Promulgated February 2, 1904 [Kansas City, MO: Angelus Press, 1999], §12). The Holy Father further notes that, through her association with the work of her son, she merits for others *de congruo* what Christ merits *de condigno* (§14).

⁷⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Mother of the Saviour*, 193.

the martyrdom of Stephen merits the conversion of Saul.⁷¹ Bañez draws attention to important features of this meritorious act. Stephen prays for the forgiveness of those who stone him, and Scripture mentions that Saul stands there (Acts 7:60–8:1). However, as Bañez notes, Scripture does not reveal that the others received grace as a result of Stephen's prayer. Conversion comes only to Saul. Therefore, Bañez claims that a meritorious act can only be efficaciously applied to another if God has ordained to move the one for whom the act is offered. In other words, Stephen merited the conversion of Saul, but he did so because God had elected to move Saul to conversion.

The passion of Stephen the proto-martyr clearly echoes the Passion of the Lord. Thus, martyrdom, for Christianity, works within the framework of the Christ who suffered death on the Cross. That is, while other religions, such as Judaism and Islam, have people who bear witness to their faith, the Christian faith is unique in that its martyrs, in death, emulate and thus point to their head. So, the suffering of Stephen is joined to the suffering of Christ, and just as the suffering of Mary joined with the work of Christ to obtain merit, so the suffering of Stephen also obtains merit by virtue of the merits of Christ. With his meritorious suffering, which efficaciously obtains grace for Saul, Stephen acts as a cause in the conversion of Saul. In accordance with the divine plan, God acts as the primary cause, moving Saul, who freely assents. One can see here a parallel with the account of Mary that Scheeben provides. Although Scheeben is explicit in his affirmation of the freedom that Mary possesses when she says *fiat mihi*, he still claims that Mary had been ordained to play a particular role, and nothing can frustrate the will of God. In a similar way, God had elected Saul to serve as an apostle, and nothing would frustrate the will of God. Thus, Stephen, by performing this work, participates in the divine plan to redeem the world by playing a role in the salvation of the Apostle. Stephen serves as an instrument in the Apostle's salvation.

⁷¹ Bañez, *Comentarios*, 336: "Nec ex parte operantis bonum opus factum ex gratia ea intentione, ut Deus convertat peccatorem, habet aliam proportionem, nisi ex ordinatione speciali Dei, qui misericorditer vult illam petitionem sui amici ordinare ad conversionem alicujus peccatoris; atque ita ordinavit de facto orationem protomartyris Stephani ad conversionem Sauli, et non ordinavit ad conversionem quorundam aliorum lapidantium. Itaque in assecutione effectus meriti de congruo non est alia infallibilitas nisi ordinatio divinae misericordiae."

Congruent Merit as Ecclesial Participation in the Divine Plan

Through their meritorious suffering for others, both Stephen and Mary exemplify the mission of the Church, which is the sign and instrument of communion with God and between people.⁷² Stephen acts as a sign of the salvific act of God insofar as his martyrdom quite clearly recapitulates the redemptive suffering of Jesus in his Passion. At the same time, in his meritorious suffering, he is not merely a sign; he is an instrument. In a similar way, the Blessed Virgin shows how the sacrifice and suffering of the Church is instrumental in the salvation of the world. Scheeben discusses Mary as a prototype of the Church,⁷³ making the interesting point that she represents the Church at the Cross, because St. Peter was absent.⁷⁴ Thus, Mary, the one who bears the Incarnate Word and offers the immolation of the Son of God, serves the whole world as the Mediatrix of All Graces, and hence an instrument of salvation for the world.

Scheeben makes a strong connection between Mary and the Church. Likewise, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*) associates the work of Mary with the ministry of the Church. The Council Fathers refer to Mary as Mediatrix,⁷⁵ who cooperates with the work of her son,⁷⁶ but only because of the superabundance of his merits.⁷⁷ Mary can be referred to as source of the Church, since she cooperates in the mediation of the merits of

⁷² LG, §1.

⁷³ Although my discussion of Mary and the Church relies primarily on conciliar texts, Gary Culpepper also mentions a line of thinking on Mary that could be fruitful for this study. He notes in an article on the prophecy of Simeon, which concerns the suffering of Mary, that “modern exegesis underscores that the character of Mary in the Gospel of Luke has both literal and symbolic significance, and can refer both to the historical mother of Jesus and to the *anawim* or pious remnant of Israel” (“‘A Sword Will Pierce through Your Own Soul Also’: The Sanctification, Conversion, and Exemplary Witness of the Blessed Mary,” *Pro Ecclesia* 19, no. 1 [Winter 2010]: 29–30). This point could also illuminate the Catholic understanding of Mary as a type of the Church, the people of God.

⁷⁴ Scheeben, *Mariology*, 240–241.

⁷⁵ LG, §62.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, §57. LG, §61 puts it well: “She conceived, gave birth to, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared his sufferings as he died on the cross. Thus, in a very special way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace.”

⁷⁷ LG, §§53 and 60: “[All the Blessed Virgin’s salutary influence on men and women] flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it.”

Christ to humanity, while at the same time, the pilgrim Church looks to Mary as the apex of cooperative activity with the God-man.⁷⁸ Scheeben discusses Mary as intimate with the Lord through her discipleship, and then, because of her unique intimacy with her son, she participates in the work of redemption. Like Mary, and like Stephen, the Church acts as an instrument of salvation when she obtains merit for others. Her principle means of obtaining merit for others is her associating herself with the self-offering for others of Christ on the Cross, which she achieves when she offers the sacrifice of the Mass for the whole world. Thus, in Eucharistic prayer number three, the priest beseeches God, “*Haec Hostia nostrae reconciliationis proficiant, quaesumus, Domine, ad totius mundi pacem atque salutem.*”⁷⁹ The examples of Mary and Stephen suggest a relationship between the offering of the Mass and suffering for the salvation of others. The sacrifice of the Mass and martyrdom are both forms of participation in the meritorious suffering of Jesus Christ. The Body of Christ, the Church, is joined to Christ in these acts, and this meritorious suffering operates within the divine plan to elevate a people to the supernatural order. In this way, by her participation in the suffering of Christ, which obtains the merits that are proper to friendship with God, the Church, like Mary and Stephen, participates in the salvation of the world.



These reflections on the nature of the role of the Church in the salvation of others carry with them implications for how the Church undertakes her mission. As an example, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) criticizes the Second Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) statement on salvation and the Church for suggesting that the Church primarily communicates grace to the extent that she bears witness to the works of Christ, although she herself does not make those works “efficaciously . . . present.”⁸⁰ In other words, according to the CDF, while it is true that ministries of explicit witness and making the mysteries visible are important, the Church also acts as an instrumental cause of salvation through her sacramental ministry.

⁷⁸ Ibid., §65: “But while in the most Blessed Virgin the church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (see Eph 5:27), the faithful still strive to conquer sin and grow in holiness.”

⁷⁹ One could read this essay as an attempt to understand how the Church can pray such a prayer.

⁸⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Observations on ‘Salvation and the Church,’” *Origins*, December 15, 1988, p. 433.

Certainly, this understanding of causality is clear in terms of the way that the sacraments of the Church communicate grace to members of the Church. But, is there also an aspect of mission in which the Church is a secondary cause of salvation for persons outside the Church by her meritorious actions, particularly the offering of the body and blood of Christ in the sacrifice of the Mass? In fact, the very issue that raises the concerns of the CDF is the lack of reference to Eucharistic sacrifice in the statement that it is criticizing. Practically, then, it seems that, in the Church-as-witness view, the Church only performs real work for others when she does work whose results are empirically verifiable. Such a Church would certainly put time and treasure into missionaries, but would she support the ministry of monastics, whose whole way of life involves a kind of self-gift on behalf of others, a self-gift that, perhaps, only God sees?

The view of merit for others that appears in the writings of St. Thomas and a selection of his interpreters would suggest that the Church brings the world into communion with God through her cultic, as well as her explicitly *ad extra*, activities. In this sense, acts of witness and worship both have participation in the divine plan as their common end. As a martyr, St. Stephen certainly witnesses to faith in Jesus Christ. Even so, the biblical narrative does not claim that Saul is moved by the semiotic accomplishment of Stephen. Rather, according to the strand of Catholic theology that I have been studying, God moves Saul because Stephen offers himself up as a living sacrifice (see Rom 12:1), and so the latter serves as an instrumental cause by virtue of his merit. In an analogous way, the sacrifice of the Mass acts as a cause by which God elevates persons to the supernatural life, and in this sense, this meritorious act participates in the salvation of the world.

I have reflected on the priestly dimension of the mission of the Church by looking at congruent merit for others, which led to an account of Mary and suffering. To focus the study, I have considered St. Thomas Aquinas and some of his influential interpreters. My selection of Thomists has given a predestinarian flavor to the reflection. Even if one were to move away from this theology, the Bañezian interpretation of Thomas draws attention to four elements of what one might call a priestly missiology that should be carried over to a theology of ecclesial mediation of salvation to non-Christians. First, the idea of offering is crucial. This idea connects very strongly with Eucharistic sacrifice, and this act is distinct from intercessory prayer. What Matthew Levering calls Eucharistic idealism—that is, an overemphasis on “presence” alone—seems to denature the Eucharistic framework necessary for a priestly mission to

others.⁸¹ That is, certainly the Eucharist serves as a means of encounter with Christ for the faithful, but the sacrificial dimension also allows for an account of Church mission in which the faithful offer up the body and blood of Christ on behalf of their neighborhoods, cities, and nations. Second, suffering and martyrdom do bear witness to something of the truth of the Christian faith, but they are not limited to the proclamatory dimension of ministry. When Christians suffer, they may offer up the merits of their sufferings for others, including their persecutors. Thus, martyrdom may be an efficacious act for the conversion of persecutors, apart from the semiotic value of the act. Third, congruent merit is based on friendship with God, for God acts in accordance with his love for the one who offers for another. There is an objective dimension to merit, but merit involves a subjective dimension as well. Attention to the affective dimension should complement, rather than contradict, the objective dimension of merit. For example, lovelessly and thoughtlessly dropping dollars in the poor box may bear little resemblance to acts of friendship with God. At the same time, giving alms counts for something, and perhaps a Christian who mechanistically does so finds himself drawn to a deeper relationship with God over time. In other words, external, objective meritorious acts may prove to be means of grace by which God moves the inner person, and interior love for divine things should lead to acts that participate in life of the body of Christ. Fourth, not only does God act out of love for a friend, but suffering on behalf of others also accrues merit for the justified because the justified is a member of the body of Christ. That is, the suffering is meritorious because it is joined to the suffering of Christ on the cross. In this sense, merit for another draws one into closer communion with the God who acts to save the lost.

Finally, this essay has brought to the fore the significance of meritorious suffering as an aspect of the ecclesial mediation of salvation. I see two major lacunae that will need to be addressed to carry this inquiry forward. First, what makes suffering meritorious?⁸² Does the sufferer have to intend the act that leads to suffering, and must the object of that intended act be good? This is the kind of point that John Howard Yoder has frequently raised. To bear the Cross is not identical with any suffering, but with suffering for the sake of the kingdom of God. Offering the sacrifice of the Mass obtains merit. Does that offering commit the believer to a way of life that entails suffering? Further development

⁸¹ See Levering, *Sacrifice and Community*, ch. 1.

⁸² Garrigou-Lagrange also states that a meritorious act that is painful is satisfactory (*Mother of the Saviour*, 186).

on suffering will be necessary. Second, what does the first movement of grace entail? The discussion here has assumed that God moves some persons, in accord with congruent merits accrued by the justified, to an explicit faith. This discussion has not taken up the issue of the possibility of implicit faith. Journet makes an interesting distinction between grace of contact and grace at a distance. It may be the case that those who are distant from the hierarchy of the Church and the fullness of sacramental life may, in varying degrees, come to be moved by God to desire, in an inchoate way, that life.⁸³ In this sense, it is proper to say that these “unconvenanted graces” develop a rudimentary Church in the life of those peoples and that the Church may come into full flowering should the grace of contact become available to them.

Every theologian that I have covered assumes that if merit for another is efficacious, then God moves the other in an explicit way, that is, presumably, to baptism, or at least to the desire for baptism. For example, Bañez states the following: “[S]icut meritum de condigno non infallibiliter assequitur semper suum effectum, propter impedimentum peccati sequentis, usque ad mortem, ita neque meritum de congruo consequitur suum effectum propter impedimentum illius pro quo justus orat, vel bene et pie operator.”⁸⁴ This statement would seem to imply that if the one *pro quo justus orat* is not moved to conversion to the Church, then that one does not receive salvation. Perhaps the understanding of “conversion to the Church” can be understood in different ways, but clearly my essay has not argued that the world is saved by virtue of impetratory prayer apart from consent of those for whom the Church prays.⁸⁵ However, might it be possible that, for those people whom the gospel never explicitly reaches, a justified person could obtain merit? This

⁸³ Journet, *Meaning of Grace*, 118–119.

⁸⁴ Bañez, *Comentarios*, 336.

⁸⁵ In an essay from early in his theological career, Joseph Ratzinger discusses vicarious representation. See “Vicarious Representation,” trans. Jared Wicks, in *Letter & Spirit*, vol. 7, *The Bible and the Church Fathers: The Liturgical Context of Patristic Exegesis*, ed. Scott Hahn, (Steubenville: Emmaus Road, 2012). Ratzinger argues that vicarious representation plays a significant role in the faith of Israel, as well as ancient religious practice in general. For example, some Hebrew prophets, such as Moses and Jeremiah, understand themselves to represent the people of Israel and to suffer on their behalf before God. However, Israel differs from her Near Eastern counterparts in that, for Israel, the one who serves as the vicarious representative does not identify with the entity that he represents in a purely objective or “magical” way. In this sense, “Israelite piety was even in its cultic expressions thoroughly personalistic” (210). In other words, a person can suffer on behalf of the people of God, but the people must somehow participate in the transaction; they do not stand justified before God without coming to conversion.

question opens up a difficult territory, and the way forward will take its bearings from a robust account of ecclesial mediation. An understanding of Mary's congruent merits takes a step in this direction. 