

Saving Honor: The Ideology of Equal Esteem and the Good of Honor, Friendship, and Glory according to St. Thomas

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In his book *Natural Law and Human Rights*, Pierre Manent assesses and critiques a practical ideology that he finds pervasive within the European academy and sees increasingly informing the practical sensibilities of much of the Western world. “Our governing doctrine,” as Manent calls it, is chiefly characterized by the primacy of right over law and the rejection of any objective principle by which actions and persons might be judged.¹ It is “the plasticity of the human form” itself which demands respect.² The only non-constructed and thus normative characteristic of equal human nature is the power of being an “individual-*conatus*,” the power to be one’s own rule and reason for acting.³ And the only generally recognized purpose of this “individual-*conatus*” is to satisfy the desire for power, which is the sole universal motive of human action.⁴ Such an individual can be legitimately ruled and governed only by himself, a claim reflected in the ideal of the autonomous subject and representative government.⁵ In sum, Manent characterizes this ideology in terms of a thoroughgoing

¹ Pierre Manent, *Natural Law and Human Rights*, trans. Ralph C. Hancock (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 6.

² Manent, *Natural Law*, 6.

³ See Manent, *Natural Law*, 11–12.

⁴ Manent, *Natural Law*, 20–21.

⁵ See Manent, *Natural Law*, 93–95

rejection of any objective rule, “any law of God or of nature,” according to which man is defined and judged.⁶

Manent warns that this ideology is opposed to the very wellsprings of action, since an operation is rightly called an action only when it is performed according to some deliberate choice, which requires some rule and reason. If all rules and reasons are entirely self-generated, then there is no principle according to which deliberation might occur. Such a so-called autonomous subject purports to command himself, but in fact he is more patient than agent: the subject is moved by desires and preferences which cannot be weighed according to any discriminatory rule or principle, since the desires and preferences themselves are the only rule the subject acknowledges. Aside from submitting to the movement of the inexplicably strongest preference, the only positive reason for acting that remains is to destroy any vestiges of objective rules or reasons for acting—that is, the law—that might hinder the realization of individual preference: “The acting animal is now the prisoner of the very audacious and ingenious arrangement that he once devised to escape the urgency and to avoid the difficulty of the practical question. Caught in the realm of inaction, he seeks out, in a kind of terminal fever, the last corners of social existence that still escape the *laissez-faire* idea and where the very idea of the law might suffer its final defeat.”⁷

What is a Christian to make of this practical ideology? What natural inclinations does it privilege and how might the goods it seeks be sought rightly? Manent argues that the sole universal motive for action explicitly recognized by this practical ideology is a certain kind of power: the power of self-determination. According to the governing doctrine, this power is the only universal human motive that can be relied upon to construct common life and political order. Manent’s response to this ideology is therefore to propose a recovery of a natural law account of the heterogeneity of universal human motivations to include useful, pleasing, and honorable goods. In this article, I will argue that Manent’s own account of the ideology he critiques suggests a more fundamental motive driving the ideology, namely, a desire for an unassailable esteem. And since it is a desire for esteem that best explains the attractiveness of the ideology of modern freedom, an alternative vision of practical life will need to address the desire for esteem and articulate its proper bases. In advancing this argument, I will first show that Manent’s own analysis highlights the importance of the desire for esteem in motivating the ideology of modern freedom. I will then turn to the anthropology of Thomas

⁶ Manent, *Natural Law*, 121.

⁷ Manent, *Natural Law*, 117.

Aquinas to show that the desire for esteem is manifested in the desire for honor and for friendship and is rooted in a fundamental inclination to have certain knowledge of one's own goodness. Finally, in light of this analysis, I will suggest how Christians might best secure the true goods of honor, friendship, and the glory of a good conscience in the face of the ideology of esteem critiqued by Manent.

An Ideology of Equal Esteem: The Good Sought in the Flight from Law

*“Laissez-faire, laissez-passer—this is the simple but prodigiously seductive formula of modern freedom.”*⁸ Thus Manent summarizes the freedom from law sought in the dominant ideology of the West today, the “governing doctrine.” But I maintain that Manent’s simple formula does not do justice to the depth of his analysis. Manent’s own assessment of the right claims made according to the governing doctrine go beyond this formula of modern freedom. Manent begins his work adverting to “the Great Contradiction” of Western thought today by which human equality and human rights are affirmed as universal criteria of justice and yet regarding other cultures which violate human equality and human rights, judgment is withheld: “On the one hand, all human beings are equal; on the other hand, all ‘cultures’ have a right to equal respect, even those that violate human equality—for example, as happens in many cases, by keeping women in a subordinate position.”⁹ Manent observes that there is a certain logic underpinning this contradiction: if one takes human equality to entail equality of esteem, then to afford less esteem to one culture is to afford less esteem to its members, and therefore to violate the universal criterion of human equality with respect to merited esteem: “All cultures are equal because they are made up of human beings and it is human beings who give them life; if I belittle a given culture because that culture belittles women, then I belittle all the human beings that are members of that culture, and thus by my judgment I exhibit the very inequality that I had reproved and proposed to fight.”¹⁰ Notice that the claim at issue here is not a claim to non-interference, meaning a claim to *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*. The logic of the great contradiction is founded on a claim regarding the just distribution of a social good, namely, the good of esteem and recognition.

⁸ Manent, *Natural Law*, 87.

⁹ Manent, *Natural Law*, 4.

¹⁰ Manent, *Natural Law*, 4.

Making the proper distinction between positive and negative claim rights is essential to understanding the account of distributive justice those claim rights reflect. A negative claim right to some action is a claim that non-interference in the act is owed by certain third parties to the claimant—a claim to *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*. This is what the canonical tradition would call a *ius exigendi omissionem*, a right to claim the omission of any interfering action on the part of others.¹¹ Importantly, in some circumstances this right can be claimed against a political community for a shameful act, if for instance some sin is tolerated by human law due to some exigency of the common good.¹² A positive claim right to action is a claim that some positive assistance in the act is owed by certain third parties to the claimant. This positive claim right, in claiming that assistance is due, is at the same time a claim for positive authorization, since the debtors owe it to the claimant to make the act their own in some way by virtue of their assistance, becoming “coauthors” of the act. This assistance could take the form of positive endorsement, encouragement, or affirmation—important forms of social assistance that should not be discounted as principles of action and signs of authorization. The positive claim right is a *ius exigendi activam*, a right that claims more than *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*, and which is only properly claimed with respect to good acts. A positive claim right to action is a normative claim—it demands social recognition of the goodness, the honorability, of the action.

Manent acknowledges that the claims made according to the governing doctrine are positive claims of authorization rather than negative claims of toleration. Human rights are affirmed without any positive determination to specific goods, and “to declare human rights in a way that is perfectly indeterminate and actively resistant to determination is to grant to just anyone *the formal authorization to claim* whatever thing in the human world he judges or feels he has a right to.”¹³ Manent relates that it is aversion to exposure to judgment concerning one’s worthiness of esteem and honor that explains why the governing doctrine is not satisfied with mere toleration.

¹¹ See Basile Valuet’s analysis of subjective right in the canonical and manualist tradition in Basile Valuet, *Le droit à la liberté religieuse dans la tradition de l’Eglise* (Le Barroux: Sainte-Madeleine, 2005), 23–40.

¹² In analyzing claim rights, it is essential to identify the debtor and the creditor of what is claimed as due. Even though a negative claim right of non-interference in some sin might be made against the human political community, the same claim cannot be made against God.

¹³ Manent, *Natural Law*, 48 (emphasis mine).

This aversion further explains why even the mere authorization of particular actions falls short of the kind of esteem that is sought:

As a matter of fact, if we are doing or wish to do something, that presupposes that we could do or want to do something else. We cannot give an account of the choice we make, even in our own eyes, without reference to a rule, or rather in general to certain rules of diverse kinds and belonging to diverse registers. Every action and every plan of action confronts us with the question of the rule of the action and exposes us to the judgment of those close to us, of fellow citizens, or of our conscience. . . . To find ourselves under the law and exposed to judgment is what we refuse above all when we intend not only to have our rights respected but to define ourselves by our rights, rights *whose whole meaning resides in the authorization that they demand and promise*. The authorization of action does not include the rule of action, but it does not dispense us from seeking this rule. The authorization to do something, as extensive as it may be, does not deliver us from the law. In our frantic flight from law, in our principled refusal of law, *we covet an authorization that would suffice unto itself*, that would not require the complement of a personal search for the rule, however lazy or random our search might be. This is the point at which *the right to be all that we are or want to be* intervenes.¹⁴

Manent writes that the claim for authorization “to be all that we are or want to be” is motivated by a refusal to be exposed to judgment, but I maintain that this doesn’t capture the most important dynamic of what Manent is describing. The aversion he describes is not an aversion to being exposed to judgment per se. In fact, by claiming authorization, the subject is *demanding* judgment—a *positive* judgment. The exposure to judgment that the subject refuses is an exposure to the possibility of *negative* judgment—the possibility of being dishonored or shamed even in his own eyes. For this reason, the claim for authorization does not terminate in the authorization of particular actions, the authorization of which implies that the claimant has a reason to act rather than not to act, a reason which, when acknowledged, implies that the claimant could be susceptible to a negative judgment of esteem according to that reason.

The absolute freedom from negative judgments of esteem, the absolute freedom from shame, requires an authorization, a right, that suffices unto

¹⁴ Manent, *Natural Law*, 77 (emphasis mine).

itself and does not render the person vulnerable to judgment or evaluation according to some rule. This absolute freedom from shame is sought by rooting the positive claim right to authorization of agency in a more fundamental authorization of the passivity of the subject—it is the suffering or enjoyment of the individual that demands to be recognized and authorized and given a value that resists any negative evaluation by some law or rule:

The human being also ceases to be a rational animal confronted with the challenge of acting well, since reason is the commanding and legislating authority par excellence and the point of the law of rights is to strip all legitimacy from reason as commanding. Henceforth the human being, if he is still susceptible to definition, is a sentient or sensitive animal, an “I” qualified by the way he “feels” his life, or is “affected” by it, a closed circle of self-adhesion, a tautology of self-feeling from which no question proceeds and which can hear no question: the living-individual without either city or reason, ceaselessly busy reducing its being to what it feels of it and at the same time to gaining recognition for his being as he feels it.¹⁵

Since the individual seeks an unassailable recognition, authorization, esteem, and honor, what Manent characterizes as a flight from law should be understood as first and foremost a seeking-after. The flight from law is a search for a new, unassailable basis for honor and esteem, an esteem that is secure and can be unconditionally demanded. Theologically, we could see in this endeavor a certain rejection of the *status viatoris*, as the time for conversion and growth in moral dignity. The governing doctrine immanentizes the last judgment according to the most favorable terms imaginable, a judgment as secure as a tautology: if you do you, you can do no better; if you are you, then you can be no better.

Here we touch upon a contradiction even greater than “the Great Contradiction” Manent observes in the West today. On the one hand, the modern subject Manent describes claims to be the measure of his own dignity and worth, the standard of the esteem which he is owed. On the other hand, the modern subject claims a right to an esteem he cannot produce himself, manifesting a persistent dependence upon others to give him the esteem he craves. The modern subject denies any measure of judgment and yet craves and demands positive judgment. And herein lies the contradiction, because one cannot be both the measure and the object of judgment. To

¹⁵ Manent, *Natural Law*, 78.

hold someone in esteem is to testify that that person's existence is good and desirable. But as the rationale for that esteem is rendered more and more formless and inscrutable because entirely particular to the experience of the living-individual-right-bearer, the *ratio* of desirability is rendered more and more inscrutable. The statements "you are you" and "you are good" begin to converge. Once the dissolution is complete, esteem can no longer be given or received. All affirmation becomes indication. Absent any *ratio* or rule of desirability, there is no way to apprehend being *qua* good. And yet the hunger to have my goodness affirmed remains. I do not need someone to tell me that I exist. That is not in question. I need someone to tell me that I am good. The question of my goodness is an existential question that my contingency and my free agency do not allow me to avoid.

In sum, Manent's description of the governing doctrine suggests that it is fundamentally motivated by a desire for unassailable esteem even more than it is motivated by a desire for power. This observation suggests the need for a supplement to Manent's positive proposal regarding the recovery of practical reason and common action. In his account of the anthropological foundations of the governing doctrine, Manent highlights the importance of the Hobbesian reduction of universal human motives to the desire for power. Since this doctrine recognizes only one common motive, a motive that is purely formal and contentless, fulfilled in the pursuit of an indeterminate number of concrete goods, law loses its intelligibility and the bases for common action and common life are disrupted. For this reason, Manent's positive proposal for reclaiming the intelligibility of law and common action involves recovering the heterogeneity of human motives along Aristotelian-Thomistic lines: the practical motives of the useful, the pleasant, and the honorable. But if the desire for an unassailable esteem is the motivating impulse for this practical ideology, as I have argued, then Manent's proposal will need to be supplemented with the recovery of the true bases for that esteem. Having identified the good to which this practical ideology is inclined, I will now turn to the thought of Thomas Aquinas to understand the natural inclination for honor, friendship, and glory, and how the unassailable esteem sought by modern freedom might be properly attained.

Honor, Friendship, and Glory: Thomas Aquinas on the Desire for Esteem

It is common in contemporary social psychology to distinguish the desire for esteem into two related but fundamentally distinct desires: the desire for

status and the desire for social belongingness.¹⁶ “Status,” also called regard or prestige, is defined as a recognition of one’s instrumental social value which elicits respect, admiration, and voluntary deference.¹⁷ Social belongingness, also called acceptance, relational value, affiliation, or inclusion, denotes the value that others place on being in relationship with an individual.¹⁸ If status tracks relative position and differentiation within a vertical hierarchy, social belongingness tracks the degree of social union and identification. Employing Thomistic mereology, we might say that belonging is a recognition of how essential the end of a part is to the end of a whole (i.e., how integral the part is to the whole), and status is a recognition of how essential the activity of the part is to achieving the end of the whole (i.e., how beneficial the influence of the part is to other parts within the whole). Esteem can be understood then as signaling status and belonging, and within this literature, self-esteem typically involves the ability to recognize these signals and to track one’s status and belonging within a social context.¹⁹

¹⁶ For an exemplary literature review, see Cameron Anderson, John Angus D. Hildreth, and Laura Howland, “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive? A Review of the Empirical Literature,” *Psychological Bulletin* 41, no. 3 (2015): 574–601.

¹⁷ See Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive?,” 575. When used in its strictest sense, “status” refers to social rank within a prestige hierarchy, rather than rank within a dominance hierarchy, the former being stratified by voluntary deference to socially beneficial qualities and the latter being stratified by fear of coercive power. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists have theorized that each route to social rank benefits social animals in different ways: prestige fosters cultural transmission of socially advantageous habits by drawing attention to exemplars and motivating imitation, whereas dominance aids in conflict resolution and in coordinating responses against external threats. See: Joseph Henrich and Francisco J. Gil-White, “The Evolution of Prestige: Freely Conferred Deference as a Mechanism for Enhancing the Benefits of Cultural Transmission,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22, no. 3 (2001): 165–96; Joey T. Cheng, Jessica L. Tracy, Tom Foulsham, Alan Kingstone, and Joseph Henrich, “Two Ways to the Top: Evidence That Dominance and Prestige are Distinct Yet Viable Avenues to Social Rank and Influence,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 104, no. 1 (2013): 103–25; Mark Van Vugt and Jennifer E. Smith, “A Dual Model of Leadership and Hierarchy: Evolutionary Synthesis,” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 23, no. 11 (2019): 952–67.

¹⁸ See Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland, “Is the Desire for Status a Fundamental Human Motive?,” 576; See also Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation,” *Psychological Bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 497–29.

¹⁹ Some theorists distinguish self-esteem into two component parts as they relate to the fundamental desire for status and for social belongingness: sociometer theory describes the ability to track one’s social inclusion and belongingness; hierometer theory describes the ability to track one’s position within a social hierarchy and the “fit” within that

Thomas Aquinas has his own way of conceptualizing this fundamental human desire for esteem that bears some remarkable similarities with the literature of social psychology, especially in consideration of the goods of friendship and honor. In his taxonomy of human goods, Thomas distinguishes three different genera of goods: external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul.²⁰ Among external goods, honor and friendship are the greatest that can be desired.²¹ Honor is defined as a testimony to excellence, where excellence denotes some relative superiority of goodness.²² The testimony of honor signals both the excellence of the one honored and the reverence of the one who honors, where reverence denotes a kind of disposition of voluntary submission caused by a filial fear, a fear not of the revered person's coercive power, but rather a fear of offending or being separated from the revered person.²³ This reverence motivates the testimony of honor which signals a desire for communion with the honored person and benefits the honored person by inciting him to greater excellence, giving him greater certitude about his own goodness, and by inducing others to think well of him, to desire communion with him through reverence, and to imitate his excellence.²⁴

Honor also has an important social effect of ordering the affections of

position, so as not to overreach and fail a status contest (Nikhila Mahadevan, Aiden P. Gregg, and Constantine Sedikides, "Is Self-Regard a Sociometer or a Hierometer? Self-Esteem Tracks Status and Inclusion, Narcissism Tracks Status," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 116, no. 3 [2019]: 444–66).

²⁰ See, for example, *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 104, a. 3, corp.; *In IV sent.* d. 15, q. 1, a. 4, ad qa. 3.

²¹ In some places Thomas reckons honor to be the highest external good and in other places friendship has first place. This is likely due to the ambivalence of friendship, which can be reckoned as either an external or spiritual good depending upon if one considers the good on the part of the friend or on the part of the habit of friendship. See *In II sent.*, d. 42, q. 2, a. 4, corp.; *ST* II-II, q. 131, a. 1, obj. 1 (although it is stated here in an objection, Thomas's reply does not dispute the premise that honor is the greatest among external goods); q. 74, a. 2, corp.; *In IX eth.*, lec. 10, no. 1888.

²² See *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 2, corp. See also II-II, q. 103, a. 1, corp.; q. 131, a. 1, corp.; q. 144, a. 3, corp.; *In II sent.* d. 42, q. 2, a. 4, corp.; *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] III, ch. 28.

²³ See *ST* II-II, q. 131, a. 1, corp.; q. 81, a. 2, ad 1. Thomas's account of the reverence given to God applies more generally to reverence held towards parents or to any excellent person. To revere God is an act of the Holy Spirit's gift of fear, a filial fear of offending or being separated from him. A similar fear of offending or being separated from excellent persons motivates the disposition of submission characteristic of reverence in general.

²⁴ See *ST* II-II, q. 91, a. 1, corp. Here Thomas speaks of the ends of praise, but in this context he is considering praise as honor given by way of words. The ends of praise enumerated here are also ends of honor given by means of different signs. For reverence as motive and end of honor, see also q. 103, a. 1, ad 1.

others to the honored person such that their affective disposition is also one of benevolence and devotion, a readiness to serve and to aid in the diffusion of the honorable good. This affective ordering caused by honor gives rise to a social cohesion facilitating common action, a practical and social end mediated through a more immediate cognitive end, namely, that others might know the witness's good opinion of the one honored. This promulgation of good opinion increases the *fama*—the renown and reputation—of the honored person. Depending on the strength of the credibility of the witness (a credibility strengthened by the witness's own good *fama*), this testimony of honor can cause others to adopt the same opinion. In this way, honor builds on honor and itself facilitates the giving of honor. And this good opinion now widespread gives the honored person a resplendent reputation joined with praise and approbation, what Thomas, following Cicero and Augustine, calls glory.²⁵

For Thomas, honor is an external good of the honored that properly exists in those who honor.²⁶ One's honor endures after an actual act of honorific testimony is given, since the reverent dispositions remain in those who give honor and in those who assent to the testimony. Thomas refers to this habitual honor sometimes as reverence (denoting the affective habitual disposition to fear to give offense and to be separated from the revered) and sometimes as *fama* (denoting the cognitive habit of good opinion which gives rise to reverence).²⁷ Suffice it to say that one's honor can persist even when actual testimony isn't being given, such that honor denotes a kind of prestige status.

While Thomas's account of the good of honor tracks with the status aspect of esteem, his account of friendship sheds light on the belonging aspect of esteem. The identification and union effected through friendship is best illuminated by considering how the will, the rational appetite, is changed by a friend. The first change that any good causes in the appetite is a certain adaptation to and aptitude for the good, an adaptation which Thomas calls love (*amor*).²⁸ The good imparts a certain form to the appetite, an appetitive form or complacency (*complacencia*). Whereas apprehensive

²⁵ Following Cicero, Thomas defines glory as *fama cum laude*, renown with praise, and following Augustine (misattributed to Ambrose), as *clara cum laude notitia*, clear knowledge with praise. See *SCG* III, ch. 29. For a detailed treatment of Thomas's conception of glory, see Francisco J. Romero Carrasquillo, "The Role of *Gloria* in Aquinas' Philosophy of Religion," *Acta Philosophica*, 23, no. 2 (2014): 311–30, esp. 315. For Aquinas sources, see Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* 2.55, and Augustine, *Contra Maximinum* 2.13.

²⁶ See Aquinas *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 2, sc.

²⁷ For example, see *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 2; q. 131, a. 1, corp.

²⁸ See *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 2, corp.

form, which informs the apprehensive powers, is a form of representational presence, the form the good initially imparts to the appetite is the form of appetitive absence—a lack or a wanting. As an appetitive form, the form initially imparted by the beloved is an appetitive void that yearns to be filled by that which causes and fits the void. Already this change wrought in the appetite causes a certain kind of union between the appetite and the appetible, between the lover and that which is loved, because the formal void is a void discovered in the lover himself: “Union pertains to love inasmuch as, through the complacency of the appetite, the lover relates to that which he loves just as he relates to himself or to something belonging to him.”²⁹

The lover relates to the appetitive void of love either as to himself (e.g., as a missing part of himself) or as something belonging to the perfection of himself (e.g., as something perfecting some part of himself). These two ways in which the lover relates to what he loves correlate with two tendencies of love, one which is primary, namely the love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*), and another which is secondary, namely the love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*). Primarily, the lover relates to the beloved as he relates to himself, as another self. This is the love of friendship, which we might call absolute love (or *amor simpliciter*). Secondarily, the lover relates to what he loves as something belonging to him as ordered to his perfection. This is the love of concupiscence, which we might call relative love (or *amor secundum quid*).³⁰ That which is loved secondarily and *secundum quid* is loved for the sake of something else, namely, for the sake of what is loved primarily and *simpliciter*.³¹ Secondary love depends on primary love. The appetitive forms of primary love stand as matter for the appetitive forms of secondary love.

These two tendencies of love permit a distinction between two kinds of honorable goods. For Thomas, that which is desirable for its own sake is said to have the *honestum* formality of goodness—it is an honorable good, worthy of testimony to its excellence among goods as good *per se* and not on account of something else. But in light of the distinction between the love of friendship and the love of concupiscence (what I have called primary and secondary love), we can distinguish between two kinds of honorable goods: one kind which is desirable for its own sake qua perfective accident (e.g., virtue and virtuous operation) and one kind which is desirable for its own sake qua substance (e.g., my friend and my self). Although Thomas

²⁹ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 2, ad 2. All translations from the Latin are my own.

³⁰ Thomas does not employ this terminology of love *simpliciter* and love *secundum quid*, but I find it helpful to denote how *amor concupiscentiae* always presupposes and is relative to some *amor amicitiae*.

³¹ ST I-II, q. 26, a. 4, corp.

does not use the terms, we might even call the former *honestum accidentalis* and the latter *honestum substantialis*.

The love of friendship causes an affective union with my friend, such that my friend is truly loved as another self for his own sake as an *honestum substantialis*. When perfected, the love of friendship habituates the will such that the center of affectivity is neither myself nor my friend's self, but rather *our-self*. Friendship admits of degrees, of course, and those loved in a civic friendship, a familial friendship, or a conjugal friendship may have different degrees and different kinds of affective union, but some identification and union is essential to every friendship. All friendship is constituted by a sharing in common, a *communicatio*, and this sharing is caused in the first place by the identification effected by the love of friendship.³²

The belonging proper to friendship is further evidenced by the three characteristic works of friendship which Thomas adopts from Aristotle: *concordia*, *benevolentia*, and *beneficentia*. *Concordia* refers to a congruence of estimation and affection that makes *benevolentia* and *beneficentia* possible. This congruence of affections especially regards important things to be done such that friends can will the same goods and delight in a common life together. For the truest form of friendship (and the only form truly worthy of the name), the friendship of honor, this concord must include a common estimation of what is truly honorable and excellent. This concord facilitates benevolence, since knowing what is good, I can will the good of my friend, who in turn can recognize my good-willing, since we share a common vision of the good. Benevolent good-willing then leads to actual well-doing and benefaction.³³

For Thomas, honor is ordered to friendship, but the desire for both bears upon a more fundamental desire to have certain knowledge of my goodness, a desire that bears remarkable similarities to the desire motivating the governing doctrine critiqued by Manent. Honor is ordered to friendship, since a good reputation disposes to friendship while a bad reputation disposes to enmity.³⁴ Recall that reverence denotes a fear of giving offense or a fear of separation. Positively, this reverence reflects a certain devotion, a readiness to facilitate the operation of the honored person, and a kind

³² See *In VIII eth.*, lec. 9, no. 1657.

³³ Here we can observe that honor and friendship both involve a recognition of excellence and facilitate common action, but in two distinct ways. Honor unites an inferior to the action of a superior through reverential deference, uniting agents in common action as an instrumental cause participates the action of a principal cause. Friendship unites the action of friends by ordering multiple principal causes to a common end.

³⁴ See *ST II-II*, q. 74, a. 2, ad 2.

of initial affective union with the honored party in esteeming a common excellence. In this way, the reverence caused by your honor and reputation manifests and reflects an initial *concordia*, an agreement concerning the most important things to be done and the measure of the excellence of action. Reverence likewise motivates a form of *benevolentia*, namely, a will that the honored person exist and that his excellent operation may be unhindered. And the giving of honor is itself also a form of *beneficentia*, insofar as the testimony of honor benefits me by allowing me to delight in my goodness, to be incited to even greater excellence, and to benefit from a diffusion of reverence. This establishes a communication of goods, a sharing in common, which constitutes the basis of friendship.

While honor is desirable for the sake of friendship as dispositive thereto, it is also desirable for another fundamental reason. Thomas teaches that, in seeking honor from the wise and the virtuous, people seek a spiritual good thereby, namely, “to confirm their own opinion about their own goodness, and therefore they rejoice in themselves on account of the fact that they are good, as it were, believing the judgment of good men who, by the very act in which they honor them, seem to say that they are good.”³⁵ Honor is desirable for friendship, but also because it is natural for human beings to desire to have a firm opinion of their own goodness.

This fundamental desire is also implicitly and more perfectly affirmed in the love of friendship. The desire to be good and to know that I am good is at once a desire to be honorable, to be an *honestum substantialis*, to be worthy of being another self, which is to say, to be worthy of existing as an end, not just of my own willing, but of the will of another. To be honorable in such a way opens up the possibility for an our-self to be the end of a common will, making it possible for me to delight in my friend delighting in me for *our* sake, multiplying the good in which I delight. But certain knowledge of this kind of worthiness cannot be self-generated. It belongs to the very structure of my will to will my own good for its own sake, and so it is more excellent and a greater sign of my goodness for me to be the chosen end of the will of another that might choose otherwise. To know my excellence as an end for another depends upon the testimony of others, the testimony of potential friends and the testimony of actual friends given most convincingly through the acts of *benevolentia*, *concordia*, and *beneficentia*, which manifest the love of friendship and my goodness as an honorable good.

The good of having a certain opinion about one’s own goodness is what Thomas calls the *gloria bonae conscientiae*, the closest conceptual counterpart

³⁵ In VIII *eth.*, lec. 8, no. 1643.

to the psychologist's self-esteem. But for Thomas, this certain opinion is not merely self-estimation; it is a form of glory, a *clara cum laude notitia*, a clear knowledge with praise. And as glory, this good involves a manifestation and a testimony of my goodness. As Thomas explains, it is testimony similar to and yet distinct from one's *fama*: "These two, conscience and *fama*, in this way are constituted towards each other, in that conscience is to be preferred to *fama*; because the testimony of conscience is in the sight of God, but the testimony of *fama* pertains to human favor."³⁶ The *gloria bonae conscientiae* is a testimony in the sight of God, or we might say, it is an estimation of God's estimation of my good. It testifies to the judgment of God, and the desire for this *gloria bonae conscientiae* manifests a fundamental desire for a positive universal judgment regarding my good, to be measured by goodness itself and not to be found wanting, to receive approbation from the most perfect witness that the contingency of my being and agency is in some sense necessary for the delight of perfect being and pure act.

To know that I am good is to know that I am desirable, and not just desirable as an instrumental good, but desirable as another self, desirable for union with the love of friendship, such that the good of another and my good might become our good. By virtue of sanctifying grace and the supernatural virtue of charity, this love of friendship has been made possible even with God. And when the sanctified soul enters into glory, we might speculate that the beatific vision of God is beatifying in part because the intellectual operation by which God himself is apprehended is itself a co-operation, a *convivere* of friends, a theandric act, by which the beatified soul knows God's glory and is in turn glorified, seeing the approbation of the Father in seeing the Father.³⁷ Understood in this way, we might even dare to say that the divine judgment is not just a means to beatitude, a threshold crossed and left behind once the vision is given; but rather that the divine judgment is essential to beatitude itself, constituting how the beatified soul now sees itself through the *clara cum laude notitia* of God, the *gloria bonae conscientiae* now illuminated by the perfect knowledge of God's own testimony.

³⁶ *De virtutibus*, q. 3, a. 2, corp.

³⁷ I am not aware of Thomas making such a claim. I think such an eschatological vision is consonant with his principles, but I do not claim to rely on his authority in this speculation.

**A Christian Response to the Ideology of Equal Esteem:
Courageous Testimony to the Love and Noble Commands of Christ**

The desire for certain esteem which motivates the modern flight from law is a fundamental human desire recognized by Thomas and contributes to the desirability of honor and friendship. Seeing the governing doctrine critiqued by Manent as an ideology of equal esteem clarifies both what it threatens and how it might be surpassed by a Christian alternative. In some sense, the governing doctrine harbors the seeds of its own destruction, since in seeking to render esteem unassailable, the governing doctrine destroys the interpersonal and communal basis of esteem itself. The individual futilely aspires to be both the measure and the object of the testimony of excellence.

For a time, this self-destruction might be delayed as mutual recognition lingers under the guise of the old order of honor, as is sometimes in evidence when the demand for identity authorization is hailed as courageous. But as objective measures of excellence and honor are torn down as so many obstacles to esteem and inclusion, the demand for recognition may gradually lose its semblance of courage. It seems likely to me that the ideology of equal esteem remains in a kind of parasitic dependence upon the old order of honor in this way. If so, there may be strong incentives to seek novel threats to esteem, since it is in the face of such threats that courage may be manifest. This dynamic could also explain why the commitment to objective measures of dishonor remain remarkably salient. As the social consensus of esteem is undermined, a consensus of resentment and reproach might be expected to take its place. A *concordia* of resentment takes the place of a *concordia* of honor as opposition to a common enemy provides the last redoubt of friendship and belonging once mutual esteem in the pursuit of a common good has been abandoned.

I concur with Manent in the need to reclaim the heterogeneity of human motivation—the useful, the pleasant, and the honorable—in order to base our common life in mutual recognition of the kinds of goods that actually motivate people’s actions, but I would propose that Thomas points us to a yet more pressing need. The governing doctrine—what I have called the ideology of equal esteem—is motivated by a fundamental human desire for unassailable esteem and borrows its appeal in part from the virtue of courage. Efforts to restore *concordia* regarding the honorable must respond to these two hallmarks of the ideology. Christians have been given to know the true basis for unassailable esteem: that the Son of God died for all, though we were yet sinners, and all are potential members of his body as his love of friendship is extended to all. As Thomas teaches, this gift of grace makes it

possible for any Christian to esteem any other person as better than himself: "There is something found in every man on account of which he may be reputed superior to ourselves, according to which Philippians 2 states: 'In humility judge each other superior. And in this way also, all should be ready to honor each other.'"³⁸ In humility, we truthfully acknowledge our own defects and recognize God's gifts in every other person, including the particular and incommunicable love of friendship with which Christ died for that person.³⁹ The love of Christ provides an unassailable basis for my own self-estimation in his sight, an unassailable core to the *gloria bonae conscientiae*, which provides at the same time a basis for me to give unconditional esteem to others.

Of course, in affirming the universal esteem of Christ, the Christian affirms at the same time his commands which communicate an order of honorable goods that must be received in reverent submission to sustain the love of friendship with Christ and establish true *concordia*, *benevolentia*, and *beneficientia* with God. This is the order of honorable goods so often the object of reproach according to the ideology of equal esteem. But herein lies an opportunity for the Christian to manifest the courage implicitly recognized by the ideological opponent. In giving testimony to the nobility of God's law, to the excellence of virtue, to the dignity of asceticism and self-sacrifice, the Christian may be reproached as upholding obstacles to universal esteem, but the very act of courage lays claim to an important source of the opposing ideology's appeal. While debate, dialogue, and consensus-building certainly have their place, there is no substitute for the act of testimony: to stake your credibility on the honorable by bearing it witness with reverence and devotion and grateful approbation.

The privatization of honor is the greatest threat to honor itself, because the recognition of the honorable is largely dependent upon public testimony. The recognition of what is good, excellent, and honorable suffers when its true witnesses lack the courage to bear it witness in the face of false human opinion and the risk of public shame. If the governing doctrine is as dominant as Manent fears, the price paid to give this honor will likely come at the cost of worldly honor, status, and esteem. But in contests of honor like we face today, honor must die to be reborn. It is in losing honor that we will find it. And since the desire for honor, friendship, and esteem is so fundamental, it is Christian friendship based on a true *concordia* of estimation and affection for what is truly honorable that will sustain our collective witness

³⁸ ST II-II, q. 103, a. 2, ad 3.

³⁹ See ST II-II, q. 161, a. 3, corp.

and give us the courage to pay that price. The necessary Christian response to the errors of this age is arguably the same as it has been in every age: to proclaim the love of Christ crucified and the nobility of his commands, and to be willing to suffer in fidelity to our proclamation. N.V.