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Stories of Friendship: The Generous Contributions of Paul Wadell

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AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS BOOK *The Moral of the Story* Paul Wadell tells of the anxiety he felt after having made the choice to pursue graduate studies in theology. Graduate study in theology would surely lead to teaching theology. But, as Wadell tells us, "In a past life I used to be an English major." But now that he had made the choice to pursue teaching theology, "With so many books to read in theology, how could I sneak time with a novel? Would novel reading be restricted to vacation and time spent on airplanes?" We can feel Paul's pain. But then, he tells a little story of traveling with a friend to the Midway airport in Chicago. He tells the friend of his fears, and the friend offers a "swift and nifty solution": "Why not teach a course exploring theological and moral themes in literature?"[1]

While this story introduces a book in which Wadell uses novels by the likes of Walker Percy and Anne Tyler to probe and display such themes such as love and forgiveness, it also fittingly introduces us to Paul's full corpus. On almost every one of the very many pages Paul has written, there is a story, either one he tells about an experience he had, one he has read in a novel, or one drawn from scripture. Indeed, a good deal of Paul's writing functions for his readers as a course exploring theological themes in literature. As we learn in this little story, Paul tells stories not just to keep his readers engaged, but Paul himself. For all his erudition in theology, Paul has remained that English major. He thinks in stories.

As this little story also illustrates, Paul's stories are often interwoven with friendship. In this one the connection is simple: Paul has a problem and his friend, whose name, he tells us, is Edward Beck, offers a solution. Now I know Paul pretty well and have heard him talk about many of his friends, but I don't think I have heard about Edward Beck—except here. But Paul had to include his name. Why? Well, he wants to honor his friend. Also, it is part of the story, and Paul wants to tell it truthfully. But, more than that, it is an *invitation* into Paul's

[1] Paul Wadell, *The Moral of the Story: Learning from Literature about Human and Divine Love* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2002), 1.

concrete, experienced human life. He had a friend named Edward Beck who one time drove him to the Midway airport. These details fill out an invitation to his readers to become his friends by knowing about and in some way joining Paul's concrete life. The stories that snake through all Paul's books have the corporate effect of inviting us into Paul's company. Once there, we can together consider what is genuinely good, what, in Paul's words, "is a story worth living for."

The fact that Paul remains in some deep part of his soul still an English major who loves and tells stories should not keep us from seeing that he has also become a subtle theologian. The theological themes he has explored are not presented willy-nilly; rather they are woven together in a tapestry that includes an exploration of the shape of Aquinas's ethics (primarily in *The Primacy of Love*[2]), the church (primarily in *Becoming Friends*[3]), a great variety of specific virtues and vices as they relate to happiness (in both *Friends of God*[4] and *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*[5]), and of course also friendship, which is in all his books, but most systematically in *Friendship and the Moral Life*.[6]

Nearer the end of this essay, I treat this last theme, friendship, more thoroughly, offering also some critical suggestions. It is surely the subject for which Paul is best known. Yet it is important to begin by saying that Paul is no friendship guru. Always, in his writing about friendship, or about anything else, Paul is principally concerned to clear the path and point the way to goodness, to holiness—and so to God. Here another story should suffice to show how, for Paul, even friendship subordinates to these ends to which it points. The story is one that he repeats in various forms many times is his writing, and in our own long friendship I have heard any number of oral versions; I don't believe there is a more important one for understanding both Paul's work and Paul himself.

Paul tells of returning to his high school, Warrenton, for a reunion after 33 years away. Not your typical high school, Warrenton was for formation of young men considering entering the Passionists, which, incidentally, out of about fifty, only Paul and one other of his classmates did so. He went to the reunion with some anxiety, wondering if the group could really find anything in common anymore. However,

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[2] Paul Wadell, *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).
[3] Paul Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).
[4] Paul Wadell, *Friends of God: Virtues and Gift in Aquinas* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).
[5] Paul Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life: An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 1st ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).
[6] Paul Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

as they celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday morning Paul tells us that they group came to an understanding of why "gratitude and thanksgiving were the dominant emotions for the weekend, and why, after so many years of separation, the bond among us remained amazingly fresh and resilient." In his homily the priest (Fr. Randal—remember that Paul always gives names), the same one who had served the group many years before,

> …told us that so many years earlier we had left our families and our homes and journeyed to an out-of-the-way place in Missouri to answer the call of goodness. It was the lure of goodness that had drawn us together and that explained the power of those years. The desire to be and to do good were at the heart of that erstwhile adventure, and its appeal continued to speak to us that weekend. As adolescents we had come together to pursue the good, and what those years, recollected now three decades later, taught us is that we could not have done so alone. We needed one another to know and do the good. We needed a community in our quest for goodness because it is impossible to become good without others who have made that desire their own.[7]

This story tells us mostly what we need to know about Paul: he was formed in friendship, given expression in the Eucharist, and so set off on a journey encircled by friends. Many years later, he means still to expand the circle, gathering in friends united in their desire to be and do the good.

A Context for Paul Wadell's Work

To comprehend the context for Paul Wadell's work, the way it has developed within and come also to influence that context, it is necessary to reach back some thirty years. *The Primacy of Love: An Introduction to the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas* was published in 1992. In it, Paul speaks of Thomas's ethics as a "hidden treasure" that we need to find again. As he puts it, "The core of Thomistic ethics is not the natural law, but the virtues, and virtues are best understood not as acts of reason, but as strategies of love whereby those devoted to God are transformed in God's goodness." And, as Paul adds a bit later, "The strategy of Thomistic ethics is not primarily to assist us in making good decisions or to help us in resolving problems of conscience; no, its goal is the total transformation of ourselves into people who can call God's Kingdom their home."[8] The effect of these sentences was different thirty years ago from their effect today. This is indicated especially by what Paul says Thomistic ethics is NOT. The ice was beginning to thaw, but thirty years ago "natural law," "acts of reason,"

[7] Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*, 24–25.
[8] Wadell, *Primacy of Love*, 1.

and "resolving the decisions of conscience" were still the topics commentators on Aquinas's ethics were spending most of their time on.

Similarly, in his very first book, *Friendship and the Moral Life,* Paul spends thirteen pages discussing the work of Anders Nygren.[9] Today, Nygren's name has faded into obscurity. But if you were writing about anything theological relating to love when Paul was writing in 1989, it was assumed you would deal with Nygren on *agape*. Many assumed Nygren had struck a death blow to "preferential loves" like friendship, which he took to be "exclusive and particularistic" in contrast to *agape*'s "universal scope." Again, the ice was thawing, but this was still the world into which Paul dropped his first book on friendship.

I am suggesting that some things have changed in the thirty or so years that Paul has been writing theology—and for the better. A snide way to put this is that in the middle of the twentieth century, both Protestant and Catholic theological ethicists spent a lot of time barking up the wrong trees: Protestants baying incessantly all about *agape*, and Catholics all about natural law. To be sure, these notions remain important for theological ethics, but neither can center and sustain its inquiry—and this is what they were being asked to do in the decades previous to Paul's entry into the discussion of Christian theological ethics.

Those of us who, like Paul, began writing in this period were the happy recipients of the first fruits of the work of those a generation or so before us who fought to change the scene for theological ethics. Four in particular are worth naming: Josef Pieper, Servais Pinckaers, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Stanley Hauerwas. It would be inaccurate to say that these thinkers took over the discipline. But they established a territory in which notions such as virtue, character, formation, and friendship could be discussed and debated. Following on their work, Paul and others of his generation had the good fortune to step into the space cleared by these thinkers as it was beginning to widen in the last decade or so of the twentieth century; our call was simply to help push out the boundaries of the new territory, exploring the many new and wondrous things (like friendship) that it was becoming permissible to write about.

This calling has fit Paul Wadell especially well. Unlike champions such as Stanley Hauerwas, Paul's teacher in graduate school at Notre Dame, Paul is not a warrior; at heart, he is a kind and generous pastor. Because the space was there and widening, Paul could speak into it in his distinctive pastoral way. Here we can recognize a key component that has come back with some force into theological writing like Paul's. Throughout his career, Paul has been able to write theology with the moral and spiritual formation of his readers as his target. This

[9] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life,* 84–96.

is how Paul was *meant* to write theology. We can rejoice in the fact that there was (and is) Paul and that there was (and is) a space for him to write, always inviting his readership into a deeper and more abundant goodness. Paul calls Thomas "a man who has designs on us."[10] This applies to Paul himself—although I think he might be better called "a man who wants to tell us some stories to help us grow in goodness and friendship."

This is the nub, I think, for understanding the impact Paul has had in his writing, the key to his many generous contributions. Paul's writing is always an invitation to moral and spiritual growth. To review the contextualizing points just made, I believe it would have been significantly more difficult for a theologian writing in the 1960s and 70s to consistently have this as his or her target and garner the reputation that Paul has today. Paul has written for the academy, yes, but also for the church, as well as for students in the academy who are reaching for meaning as they consider the direction of their lives. There is a subtle and, I believe, happy unity in this. What we write and how we think matters, not so much simply to discover something completely new, advance our "disciplines," or bolster our reputations, but rather to help form us, both those who read and who write, in goodness and truth. Paul has demonstrated this unity throughout his career, teaching us in it how the task can be done well. It is in one sense nothing new; as Paul has pointed out, Thomas wrote the *Summa* with just this in mind. But its recovery in our time, when the common life of both academy and the church is frayed and uncertain, is a significant achievement. We are fortunate to be able to stand on the shoulders of those who have opened that space in which such a vision can inform our work and also have it demonstrated in the thinking and writing of the likes of Paul Wadell.

PAUL WADELL ON FRIENDSHIP

Paul has written on a number of theological topics, but surely two in particular bubble to the top: Aquinas's moral theology and friendship. Of course, they are closely tied together; in fact, in any treatment of either one, Paul will always bring us to the climax of friendship with God, which he gets from Aquinas. As well, Aquinas is attractive to Paul partly because of the way his work concerns our formation, inviting us into a discussion about our moral and spiritual lives. For instance, in a section entitled "Why the Truth Is Something We Do Together," Paul calls attention to the disputational form of the *Summa* and comments: "That Thomas saw the need for others in formulating his own conclusions is seen in the very careful, respectful way he articulates their positions ….Thomas listens carefully to what other people have to say, and he does so not to catch the weak spots in their

[10] Wadell, *Primacy of Love*, 7.

arguments, not even to refute their arguments, but in order to glean from their position whatever is true."[11]

In style, Paul's writing differs wildly from Thomas's. It is leisurely, inviting, reiterative and, as we have seen, brimming with illustrations and stories. By contrast, of course, in reading Aquinas, if you miss a couple of words you miss the argument, and you had better go back because his next move has already been made. Yet Paul's point here about how Aquinas engages his interlocutors is correct and important. Another way of putting it is simply that Aquinas writes assuming we need each other as we seek the truth. Despite the differences in style, Paul shares this with Aquinas. He listens to others attentively. He looks always for points of agreement, quoting other contemporary authors generously—and the group from which he draws is large and covers a wide ideological spectrum. This is to write both in and for friendship.

Which brings our attention to the other principal subject of Paul's writing: friendship itself. As already stated, this is not separate from the first; Aquinas remains at Paul's elbow throughout. Yet as a theme, friendship not only connects what Paul wishes to say within the Thomistic tradition but also is the key to the good life, lived as it must be in relationship with others. Four points are essential in his many discussions of friendship. They are not all unique to him, but he has drawn them out in fuller and more subtle ways than anyone else. For Paul, friendship: (1) is necessary for the good life; (2) forms us to mutual growth in goodness and towards truth; (3) comes as gift, and so leads to gratitude; and (4) is what we need to keep our journeys hopeful and our stories worthy.

The first point comes initially from Aristotle: "For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods."[12] Working with Aristotle, Paul reminds his readership of our essentially social nature and that we languish without community. Theologically, this prepares the way for church and also for the solidarity articulated in Catholic social teaching which is essential to any account of the kingdom of God. And, indeed, since both Aristotle and Aquinas teach us that the good life, or happiness, is not a state but rather an activity, then we see that we cannot "go it alone."

This leads to the second point, regarding how friendships form us. The activity of our lives always leads somewhere, and this needs to be in growth towards goodness and truth; such growth requires friendship—it is a school of virtue. As mentioned earlier, Paul always writes in the hope that what he writes will help us grow; this is why he never tires of reminding us of the training that comes in friendship. Paul rarely attacks our culture in a full-frontal way, but he makes clear how

[11] Wadell, *Primacy of Love,* 27.
[12] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.8.

this crucial point about friendship is particularly hard for us to process. "The moral importance of friendship and community is often overlooked. We may enjoy our friends and seek out communities, but we seldom think that the development of our character and our growth in happiness and goodness are inherently linked to them; in fact, we may see friendships as a pleasant escape from the moral life, not its core or center."[13] A hook Paul often uses to open minds on this point is to note how all of us, even today, expect the truth from our friends, and know we must give it to them in return.

This point about formation in friendship directs it towards something deeper, truer and more theological. Indeed, it gives Paul room to speak about Aquinas's "certain kind of friendship with God," which is our true end. It also quiets all that noise about the incompatibility of friendship love and *agape*. True friendships form us in the truth and coax us toward the full realization of our lives in the theological virtue of charity.

The third point about friendship relates to a theme that figures prominently in all of Paul's work, namely that human life is a guided journey. Since the journey is to God who loves us and beckons us, even pursues us, then the friendships that form us are signs of God's providence. They are gifts. Paul draws this point especially from Augustine, who "considers friendship a divine gift, a sign of God reaching down into our lives and actively working on our behalf."[14] Understood as gift, as Paul's seminal story about this high school reunion earlier illustrated, "gratitude and thanksgiving" are our proper response.[15] Theologically, and as that earlier story also illustrated, friendship informs Eucharist, where church, the "community of friends of God,"[16] finds its center. The Eucharist recalls what we have been given in Christ and sends us out on our journey strengthened by what we have received.

As the fourth point indicates, the Christian story is a story worth living and dying for since it speaks the truth about God and the world, but to live into it involves a *difficult* journey. Here is where we also need a hope sustained through friendship. "Without the support, presence, and encouragement of friends and communities, we are easily defeated. Without others to turn to, we lose hope. Any difficult undertaking demands perseverance, but we can hardly persevere without others who struggle with us precisely because they believe the goal we seek, no matter how difficult, is worth the effort it requires."[17] Theologically, we have come round to the theological virtue of hope, which

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[13] Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*, 25.
[14] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 98.
[15] Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*, 24
[16] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 17.
[17] Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*, 33.

lies beside charity and is completed in it. When we reach our final destination, only charity will remain, but in the present journey, we need hope; and hope comes in the company of those who travel with us.

Paul has drawn out these points about friendship in various ways and linked them movingly. Taken together, they stand as a key part of his lasting contribution to our field. And they also show, as I have been suggesting is true for all of what Paul writes, how theology, lovingly written in friendship, can form us in goodness and direct us to God.

DISTINGUISHING FRIENDSHIP

Friendship has proved extraordinarily fruitful ground for Paul Wadell, not only because of the richness of the topic and Paul's attentiveness to it but also because friendship resonates. We can see this in our undergraduates, for whom having friends means having life—and not having them means "not having a life." There is promise in this, although possibly also mixed with desperation. The promise is that the concern to have friends, the sense that they should tell us the truth, the longing for friendships to last, which implies that they must grow with us—all these remind us, and perhaps especially our students, that we need others. As the first point above accents, we cannot "go it alone," and friendship shows us that we don't have to. Embracing friendship as an answer to all our relationship questions, however, can also blur our moral vision. Friendship can (and should) be stretched to help us describe and negotiate various features of the human relationships we need and find ourselves in. While we need not hold, with Aristotle, that a person can really manage no more friends than he can reasonably live with,[18] there is sense in holding that friendship has its limits. What is needed is not so much a delineation, as Aristotle sometimes gives us, of who we can't be friends with (at least in his third sense of "perfect" or "virtue" friendship) but rather a description of other relationships, good and necessary ones, that are not friendships, or at least not so clearly.

I am suggesting that for friendship to have its full effect in an analysis of the moral and the Christian life, we need to mark its distinctiveness, how it differs from other relationships we also need to live well and grow. Because of the wide channel friendship follows as it flows through Paul's work, and because he successfully makes it do so many things, it is sometimes difficult to know where are its shorelines and if it has them. For instance, Paul calls friendship a "*model* for the moral life" because it begins in recognition of the other.[19] Friendship also functions as a "fitting *metaphor*" for the church, as

[18] Perhaps ten friends? See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.10.
[19] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 152.

friends of God.[20] He also calls it "the *constitutive moral activity* of our life"[21] since by it we receive from another our identifying good. But can friendship do and be all these things? Or, better put, what might friendships do specifically that other relationships do not, and what is the importance of this?

It is interesting in this regard to consider a story Paul tells of what he calls his "most memorable, formative moral experience." He is riding on the F Train in NYC, alone in a sea of strangers. Yet "suddenly, amidst all that diversity, I felt at one with them.… Rocking back and forth on the train that afternoon, I looked at all those people, people whose otherness was startling, and felt a novel kinship with them."[22] Paul does not say "friendship" here, but rather *kinship*—and rightly so, for this is one place "friendship" would not fit. The reason, of course, is that he cannot know all the people on the train—in fact, in this case it is important that he does not know them—and friendship requires a kind of intimate knowledge of the other, the sharing of activities, and a mutual well-wishing. We do often share a certain kind of friendship with those we also call "kin," but we can have kin who are not friends, if "friendship" is understood in an ordinary way, rather than metaphorically or analogically.

But now, what can be said about the difference between, say, kinship and friendship, and how might what we say help us consider what friendship specifically does in our moral lives? Friendship is a rich and important notion that grasps essential aspects both of the human journey and of our relationship to God and one another. But room must be kept around it for other notions that can work to illumine these essential matters in ways friendship cannot.

I believe passing back through Paul's work, with this narrowed channel in mind, can reveal to us more about how friendship uniquely carries through the moral life, beginning in nature and flowing on in grace. To begin, as Paul does, with Aristotle, he says famously that friendship

> …seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for unanimity seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, and expel faction as their worst enemy; and when men are friends they have no need of justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality.[23]

Aristotle's implication seems to be that friendship has a uniquely political character. We might note that this is less true of kinship or

[20] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 10.
[21] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 134.
[22] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 144.
[23] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8,8.

family relations. This is in part because the unit to which kinship refers is already constituted. We are born into families, which means that the relations that define them are already in place; we come into them at the same time we come into being. Of course, it is possible to enter families by adoption—an important caveat for St. Paul since the Christian church for him involves the adoption or grafting of the Gentiles into the family of Abraham. But here again adoption into the family presumes its prior existence: by it one is gathered into a community that pre-existed her; she had nothing to do its constitution. By contrast, friendships are brought about as those who were previously strange to one another *become* friends. The relationship we call their friendship comes to be precisely as they become friends.

This point about how friendship comes to be is not lost on Paul. One of his many books about friendship is just that: *Becoming Friends.* The book is also ecclesiological in a way that his others on friendship are not. Friendship in the church, thinks Paul, is rooted in a "life of friendship with God," which "should create a church of distinctive character and witness and, therefore, special responsibilities. At the very least, it suggests that people should be able to look at the church and see embodied there genuine joy, peace, mercy, kindness, generosity, hospitality, and a people who are not afraid to be truthful with one another."[24]

It is also not a coincidence that Paul ends this book with an extended discussion of justice, which, he says (without citing Aristotle—although he might), is tied essentially to friendship. "[F]riendships are morally important because in them we learn how to honor consistently the claims another person has on us. If the heart of justice consists in respecting the dignity of other persons and giving them their due, these are precisely the dispositions and skills that are honed in us through friendships."[25] This reminds us of the first two points mentioned above that consistently run through Paul's work on friendships. First, friendship is a clear sign to us of our sociality, which in turn means that we are bound to one another; we don't go it alone. Second, friendship, for Paul, forms us—it is a kind of school of virtue.

A third point noted above is that friendship is a gift. This is how we rightly come to see it, as it forms us, and we fully recognize its grace. Yet here, and recalling the difference just mentioned between friendship and family relations, there is a twist that is worth noting. For at least in some degree, we do choose our friends. In this way friendship typically does not begin in gratitude but rather in a sort of natural attraction and a mutual choice that follows. We begin our lives already indebted to our parents; we didn't choose them, but we have depended (and depend) on them. By contrast in the case of our friends,

[24] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 11.
[25] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 153.

there is a kind of free choice or "election" in our relationship, which, as John Bowlin notes, teaches us a good deal about what is required of us to share the full fruits of social life.

> Relationship and requirement, goodness and authority, grace and freedom—these features of our social life are displayed most prominently in our friendships. The point is not that I'm obliged to bestow friendship's grace willy-nilly, to offer my love and well-wishing to whoever asks. Rather the point is that once I make this choice—this election, we might say—and receive the love and well-wishing of another in return, a relationship is created, a fellowship of mutual love and care with its own requirements, its own tacit expectations and explicit demands.[26]

The point is this: in friendship we learn especially that as we move toward, choose, elect a friend, precisely in so doing, we enter a relationship that binds and obliges us. It cannot be otherwise. These obligations may at first glance seem easy and natural: who wouldn't go to bat for a friend? Yet they are not always—and encountering the difficulties when they come also teaches us more about the meaning of our "choice." Friendship can require significant sacrifice, giving up some other good such as wealth or comfort or even (as Jesus says) one's life. And, moreover, as the life of the friendship passes through time, there will surely be significant disappointments and failings on one or the other friend's part, and these will require not only sacrifice but also forgiveness.

As Bowlin points out, these ties and obligations relate to the very meaning of friendship; they are located in the concept itself. When "friendship" is referred to, a person hearing and understanding the reference will "assume they are good human relationships, not perfect, but good nevertheless, that they can be known as such, again imperfectly, and that our discourses of friendship not only pick out that goodness but also presuppose that knowledge."[27] Put simply, if I say, "This man is my friend," you will rightly assume that this is a good thing, that we are joined in some sort of mutual affection, that I think well of him, am obliged to him, that I would (at least to some degree) sacrifice my own interests for his, and that I would tell him the truth. These sorts of judgments do not depend on any specifically Christian notion of friendship; rather, they come with the concept. No matter who you are, or who I am, if I claim "this man is my friend" and you later discover that, in fact, I do not really like him, or I repeatedly lie

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[26] John Bowlin, "Barth and Aquinas on Election, Relationship, and Requirement," in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Thomas Joseph White, OP (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 244–245.

[27] Bowlin, "Barth and Aquinas," 247.

to him, or that I beat him when he does not do as I say, you would say, rightly, that this is not really a friendship. As Bowlin says, "We cannot use the concept 'friendship,' for example, without, at the same time, knowing how to set apart, more or less, those relationships that count as friendships from those that do not. We will have to be able to distinguish paradigmatically good friendships from the obviously bad, the plainly real from the merely apparent, and so on."[28]

"Friendship" is a relational concept that brings with it moral standards and judgments. It is not unique in this. But it is unique in the precise sorts of standards it brings, and the way these standards apply. To recall our earlier discussion of how family ties work, if I tell you that this man is my father, you will assume, rightly, that I have some obligation to him. But if I do not fulfil these, or if I tell you later on that I do not care for my father at all, you might say that I am a bad son, but not that my relationship to him is wrongly described as father-son.

Aristotle, it seems to me, is on to something like this when he says that "friends have no need of justice." Justice, of course, sets requirements and obligation on us. Aristotle assumes, however, that these are already internal to the friend to friend relation. If we are truly a friend to another, we will treat him or her justly. And, we might add, there is a certain freedom and fluidity in how friendship works that helps us see why Aristotle could see it as a kind of glue for cities. Not any person can become my father (in a literal sense); but any person can become my friend, in the full sense and meaning of the term. (Although, precisely here we also must recognize that for Aristotle this was limited, at least to some degree, by class and sex and station—a point that Christians later needed to revise.) Friendship in this way can expand to include others by the mutual choice of the two who have become friends. As C.S. Lewis notes, friend love is "the least jealous of loves."[29]

There is important moral instruction in this; it is, moreover, distinctive to friendship. To become a friend is also to change morally—even if only slightly. Before I came to know this person as a friend, I did not have, or could not see, how I was connected to her, nor what I owe her. Now, I see. The addition of a friend is also the addition of a new set of obligations and responsibilities; yet, importantly, I view this as a good thing, and the new obligations and responsibilities do not seem, at least initially, at all burdensome. Indeed, it can happen again, with joy. The two of us can add a friend—or, as is as often the case, the friendship was already a circle as it came to be initially, not only the two of us but the three or four or more of us. These are my friends; of course I will go to bat for them. Here, the combination of

[28] Bowlin, "Barth and Aquinas," 248.
[29] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 191), 61.

the concept of friendship—which I know, and which now has come to apply to a particular case—and the new friend(s) have opened my moral world by at least one step. I love more and I am more obliged, more bound to other human beings. Becoming a friend, and learning in friendship what it takes really to be a friend, is by its very nature morally transformative. We cannot become friends without being morally formed toward the good.[30]

In this context, Bowlin makes a particularly important point about Aquinas and friendship, one that I think can add to and enhance the very many points that Paul has made about these two together. Bowlin believes the theologian will need to say a good deal about where the concept of friendship (and others like it) leads when transformed by the Holy Spirit. Friendship in Christ will far exceed, and even challenge, some of the normative assumptions in the friendship we have been so far discussing—the concept that comes packaged with mutuality and well-wishing and even sacrifice. Yet, he adds further that the theologian will also need to

> say something about the source of the normative content that comes loaded with the concept and something about the prospects of that concept after sin and grace. For Thomas, that source is God's eternal law, our participation in which according to our created nature provides both knowledge of the basic outlines of the human good and inclination toward that outline (ST I-II, 93, 6). That inclination forms the seedbed of acquired virtue, and, given the power of sin, Thomas admits that this seedbed will not come to full flower (I-II, 85, a. 2). Yet he also assumes that some of us can, "even in the state of corrupted nature," cultivate some variety of scraggly virtue and that nearly all of us can "work some particular good" (I-II, 109, a. 2). He mentions building dwellings, planting vineyards, and the like, and presumably the person who takes up these tasks will usually do so in the company of others, and presumably this social character of work will demand rudimentary judgments about the goodness of the relationships involved, friendships among others.[31]

It seems to me that Bowlin's comments provide a Thomistic framework that helpfully illumines Paul's work. For his part, Paul never fully articulates it—understandably, since, first, making the framework explicit is not by itself part of the work, and, second, because it involves understanding what Paul has done partly in terms of the natural law—and this term, especially when Paul began writing, came

[30] Aristotle notes that bad men cannot be friends, at least friends of the highest sort, namely friends of virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.4). He says little about how bad men might become good—it is not clear he believed they could. But if we can imagine that it is possible, we might say that if a bad man really learns to become a good friend, he will no longer be bad.

[31] Bowlin, "Barth and Aquinas," 249–250.

with significant baggage. Fortunately, we have gotten beyond most of that, and it is now easier to see.

As Russell Hittinger has shown, Thomas regards the natural law as a "first grace."[32] As such, it is the starting point of our moral growth—an initial gift that, if properly nurtured and cultivated, can grow in the direction of virtue, and towards full perfection in the shared life of the Trinity. As Bowlin continues, "When, through the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, our participation in God's eternal law becomes ever more substantial and our subjection to it ever more complete, Thomas contends that those same tasks [e.g., the planting vineyards, etc.], friendships and virtues will be graciously gathered up into the love of God."[33]

We have already noted the prevalence and power of the theme of friendship in Paul's work. In the two books specifically targeting the theme, *Friendship and the Moral Life* and *Becoming Friends*, while the division is not overly sharp, it is helpful to think of the first primarily in terms of the beginning of moral instruction in the natural law and the second primarily in terms of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit that draws us upward in our friendships into full fellowship of Christ. As Paul says near the end of *Friendship and the Moral Life*, "Friendship is a paradigm for moral growth and wholeness. It is also a paradigm for different understanding of the self. Friendship is a model for the moral life which insists that the self is social and relational, not autonomous and solitary."[34] Friendship in this way gets us going on the journey away from the individualism of our time; it forms and instructs us, becoming the "seedbed" (as Bowlin suggests) for our moral growth.

If we follow Aristotle, what will spring up from this seedbed may strengthen and unify the civitas. Justice will flourish, he hopes, in a community of friends. And, if we are right to associate friendship (as Bowlin does) with the natural law, there is promise in this. Yet as Bowlin also notes, in a world and a politics stunted and deformed by sin, what typically grows is at best "scraggly virtue." "Friend groups" quickly become exclusive, favoring their own and grabbing for power. They can easily become toxic factories, belching out pride and disdain. One might argue that when this happens such friendships are no longer what Aristotle would call "perfect" or "virtue" friendships—and there is something to this argument. On the other hand, when one reviews

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[32] Russell Hittinger, *The First Grace: Rediscovering the Natural Law in a Post-Christian World* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2003). Hittinger accents that natural law is a form of participation in God's eternal law and characterizes our essentially social nature, a crucial anthropological point that liberalism left behind and that must be recovered if human associations and relations are to be brought once again back to their center of the moral life.

[33] Bowlin, "Barth and Aquinas," 250.

[34] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 152.

some of Aristotle's particular views, such as whether men and women can be friends, or whether one really ought to share one's grief with one's friends, one wonders if they yield justice so fruitfully as Aristotle hoped.[35]

Christians believe that the offer to become friends with the (soon to be) crucified Jesus in John 15 transforms friendship, fully "gathering it up into the love of God," as Bowlin again expresses it. This sort of friendship is the main subject of Paul's *Becoming Friends,* practicing, as the subtitle indicates, "Christian friendship." Rather than the polis, the community in which this friendship can be described, and where it can grow, is the church. In focusing on the church in this second book, Wadell is not saying that "every person in the Christian community must be an intimate friend with every other person." Yet, Christian friendship does mean for our churches that they "should be communities in which people respect one another, support one another, challenge one another, encourage one another, love one another, and share together a gracious and hopeful vision of life. In such communities real friendship can be learned and blessed intimacy experienced."[36]

Of the four themes that pervade Paul's work on friendship, the first two—that our need for friends marks us as social beings, and that friendships are morally formative—speak widely, and can draw anyone into the moral life. Developed further, they carry on for Paul to speak in more directly theological terms to Christians, although he invites anyone to listen. Here the third and fourth points—that friendship is a gift, and that friends strengthen one another in hope as they travel together towards their final destination in communion with God—can emerge in the context of a worshiping community that shares the sacraments and tells a story in which we are saved by grace. According to that story we do not simply choose our friends—and so bind ourselves by the choice—but rather our friends are brought to us as a form of divine help, which we do not deserve, yet to which we can respond, with the help of our friends, with gratitude and thanksgiving.

CONCLUSION

I have suggested that virtually everything Paul Wadell has written involves a gracious invitation, a consistent encouragement, to his readership towards moral and spiritual growth. Paul writes for formation. Friendship has turned out to be one of the clearest means by which Paul has encouraged this growth in what he has written. This begins at a "natural" level, embedded in the very concept of friendship we all

[35] For a discussion of Aristotle's friendship that identifies some of these features, see Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), chapters 3 and 5.
[36] Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 53.

know the meaning of, and carries on towards a fuller apprehension of God's grace by which both we and our friendships are transformed.

Paul's use of friendship shows keen insight into what topics might awaken in us an inclination for considering and reaching towards moral growth. If someone imagines he is entirely his own master, or is focused only on fulfilling his own individual desires, it can be instructive to ask if he can imagine a good life that is devoid of friends. In fact, in our time friendship is especially prized—on the face of it much more than other named relationships, such as those in the family. One finds this especially among the youth. Paul's work of formation has involved people of all ages, but as a university professor, it has especially involved undergraduates in their early twenties. Even at a Catholic university, most of them arrive with very little sense of theology and certainly do not imagine that it can provide them with ideas and practices that can begin to mold their lives into something truthful, beautiful and fulfilling. But they have friends and know this matters. We can begin here.

Discussions of friendship at this level in Paul's books always serve as invitations. And the invitations almost always come in the form of stories. Paul's stories are full of friends, friends he cannot help but honor by giving us their names. Such stories, leisurely and intimately told, extend to Paul's readership a personal hand of friendship. And so we are invited up beyond simply recognizing our sociality to seeing within it God's generous provision. We can see ourselves as on a moral journey that requires that we consistently and tirelessly work for justice, learning even to love and forgive our enemies. So extended and recalibrated, we can discover that the journey is also a spiritual one that includes the even more arduous work of freeing us from the weight of our own self-absorptions. It is a difficult journey, but also hopeful, particularly as we walk it with companions like Paul Wadell. JM

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