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**Why “Mahal” is Preferable:
A Thomist Reading of the Concepts of
Pag-ibig and *Pagmamahal***

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Abstract

This paper explores and examines the Filipino concepts of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal*. As a response to Armando Bonifacio’s seemingly limited and positivistic approach in understanding Filipino concepts such as these two, this paper relies on a possible Christian conceptual parallel of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal* in an attempt to grasp their conceptual essences. By scrutinizing a possible correspondence between the Filipino categories mentioned and the distinctly Thomist concepts of *amor* and *caritas*, sensitive and intellectual love, respectively, the paper offers a way of understanding Filipino concepts by going back to Christian concepts which may have influenced or informed the contemporary use of the former. This endeavor is achieved by first marking the distinction between the metallic core of the concepts of *amor* and *caritas* as the two kinds of love present in Aquinas. The Thomist concepts will be analyzed and the similarity between the use and application of the said concepts and the Filipino words for love, *mahal* and *pag-ibig*, will be compared and contrasted. Yielding a close affinity and resemblance of use between the Filipino words and the Latin counterparts, it will be shown why in Aquinas as much as in the contemporary Filipino use, *pagmamahal* is preferable and ideal than *pag-ibig*. In the end, fuller understanding of the said Filipino concepts will be illuminated by looking at their Christian affinities.

Keywords: Love, *Pag-ibig*, *Pagmamahal*, Aquinas

In his collection of random essays about life and living aptly entitled *Jubilee*, Joseph A. Galdon, S.J.¹ reechoes one of the most common notions about love: its being eternally mysterious, amorphous, and ambiguous. He says:

“I love you” can be a barely audible murmur, full of surrender. Sometimes it means “I desire you” or “I want you sexually.” It may mean hope: “I hope you love me” or “I hope that I will be able to love you.” Often it means: “I hope a real love relationship can develop between us!” Or it can even mean “I hate you!” Often it is a wish for an emotional exchange: “I want your admiration for me in exchange for my admiration for you” or I give my love in exchange for romantic passion” or “I want to feel cozy and at home with you” or “I admire some of your qualities.” Very often “I love you” is mostly just a request: “I desire you” or “I want to gratify you” or “I want you to gratify me” or “I want your protection and security” or “I want to be intimate with you” or “I want to exploit your loveliness.”²

Galdon emphasizes the fluid nature of the concept love—its nature that escapes demystification and complete comprehension. People cannot pin down exactly what the ideas we often associate with the term mean. We often use the term *love* according to what suits our purposes and intent. We abuse its malleability and shape it according to our whim. One person can tell another how he loves them simply to gain their favor. Another person may reserve the use of the term only to select situations when what he feels is a strong feeling of desire. The term is also utilized to refer to objects, animals, or even places: “I love your shirt,” “He truly loves his pet,” or “I love the Philippines.” The English term ‘love’ allows for these multifarious ways of employing the concept, of understanding it in multiple manners, and as a result, this makes the term so loose that oftentimes, it already loses whatever essence it might have.

¹ Joseph Galdon, *Jubilee* (Pasig: Anvil Publishing Inc., 1996), 60.

² *Ibid.*

In Filipino, the noun ‘love’ has two common, important equivalents: *Pag-ibig* and *Pagmamahal*. What do these two words actually mean? Do they mean quantitatively the same? By quantitatively the same, we mean the numerical identity of these two terms. Noonan and Curtis assert that “[n]umerical identity requires absolute, or total, qualitative identity, and can only hold between a thing and itself.”³ By quantitatively the same, we ask whether these two terms are interchangeable and exactly alike? If they mean the same from the point of view of semantics, that is, that they mean quantitatively the same, why the use of two words? If not, what distinguishes them? Is there anything significant that delineates the use of the two?

The Possibility of Defining *Pag-ibig* at *Pagmamahal*

One of the quick challenges to a sufficient understanding of the concept of love is its inherent abstractness. We understand what it means for something to be taller than a mango tree in the backyard. We can likewise communicate what is meant by a deafening noise. Moreover, we can agree when something is boiling hot. Our senses inform us of these states-of-affairs. We can measure the height of a tree, sound in terms of decibel scale, or the temperature using a thermometer. The question, however, is whether love is measurable or operationalizable.

In the 1970s, Armando F. Bonifacio, professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of the Philippines, forwarded a position on how to understand Filipino concepts. Bonifacio, having been trained in the analytic tradition in philosophy, employed analytic philosophy which Beaney describes as “characterized above all by the goal of clarity, the insistence on explicit argumentation in philosophy, and the demand that any view expressed be

³ Harold Noonan and Ben Curtis, "Identity," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2018 Ed., ed. E.N. Zalta (Stanford University Press, 2018).
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/identity>

exposed to the rigors of critical evaluation and discussion by peers.”⁴ Analyzing Filipino concepts under the lens of analytic philosophy demands distinguishing what Filipino concepts truly mean and what they refer to as if every idea or concept corresponds to a particular meaning, if not simply a referent. In Bonifacio’s mind, this kind of analysis requires distinguishing between Filipino concepts that can be sensed and those that cannot be perceived.⁵ Cognition according to him belongs to the latter category, just like, among others he mentions, love for country. Those that can be sensed meanwhile are measurable because of what he calls perceptible behaviors. Concepts that manifest through perceptible behaviors are understandable because they are verifiable and demonstrable. The concept of a tall building, a loud voice, or a hot water are all understandable because they are perceptible, verifiable, and demonstrable. They are concepts that may be operationalized and thus, are possible to understand on their own. Cognition, along with love and other Filipino metaphors (*pusok ng damdamin*, *pagtataguyod sa adhikain*, etc.) are still understandable however, because essentially these features of Filipino mentality and culture are manifested in actions and behaviors. There are external manifestations that signify what these concepts mean.

A question that can be raised however is this, what external manifestations do the concepts of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal* have? Do internal states necessarily have external manifestations, as suggested by Bonifacio? Do these internal states have a one-to-one correspondence with their external manifestations? How about internal modes of the mind that do not have any particular, corresponding expressions in the world? How can we make sense of the meaning of these covert states? Can’t a person be annoyed and yet muster the capacity to still sport a wide grin? Can meaning of these concepts be actually unraveled through their external manifestations?

⁴ Michael Beaney, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

⁵ Armando Bonifacio, “Hinggil sa Kaisipang Pilipino,” in *Ulat ng Unang Pambansang Kumperensya sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, eds. Almonte, N., Antonio, L., Pe, R. & Reyes, E., (Quezon City: Pambansang Saman sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino, 1976), 24-32.

Getting into the Core: Taking an Alternative Path

The suggestion of Bonifacio to use manifestation and measurable sense data to understand internal states such as cognition and love may not be particularly suited to the inquiry at hand. Understanding the concept of love and its equivalent Filipino words, *pagmamahal* and *pag-ibig*, seems a lot more complicated than what has been viewed and anticipated by Bonifacio. Therefore, the method of investigation appropriate into getting at the solution may also be different from that offered by Bonifacio.

The tacit assumption in Bonifacio's proposal is that linguistic items such as words and concepts are "inert abstract entities whose structure can be studied as if under a microscope"⁶ and that the physical manifestations of concepts and words are meant to lead us to the essence of these linguistic entities. With these manifestations examined and fully scrutinized, advocates of this school of thought, Bonifacio included, believe that fuller understanding of concepts and words may be attained. Exclusive of these demonstrable and verifiable manifestations, these concepts can hardly be pinned down and defined. *Pagmamahal*, *pag-ibig*, and other Filipino ethical concepts and values however, as we have pointed out, do not necessarily have evident expressions all the time. Their indices may also fail to surface every time the said Filipino concepts are present. As such and given this foregoing truth, one must consider an alternative way to take.

Another school of thought in analyzing the meaning of linguistic expressions, the use theory of meaning, zooms in on the particular uses of linguistic expressions. Indeed, for this school of thought, "[l]anguage is not a matter of marks on the blackboard bearing the "expressing" relation to abstract entities called "propositions"; language is something that people do and do in a

⁶ William Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 79.

highly rule-governed and conventional way.”⁷ What use do we have of the subject of inquiry here, the notions of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal*? If “a linguistic expression’s meaning is constituted by the tacit rules governing its correct conversational use,”⁸ what are the rules governing the correct conversational use of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal*?

The term *pag-ibig* has its roots in the word, “*ibig*”. *Ibig* means liking, desire, or a certain attraction towards the object of desire. This is seen in how Filipinos ordinarily use the term. “*Ano ang ibig mong sabihin*” means what do you mean, what do you intend to say, what do you like to communicate. *Ibig* also connotes an intention towards a particular object of desire. “*Ibig mo bang kumain na*” is an inquiry as to whether the second person already wants to eat, to approach the food. *Pag-ibig*, my suggestion then, has something to do with liking, intention to have a particular object, a movement from a subject of an action to his object of desire.

The term *pagmamahal* on the other hand, does not carry with it the same use as *pag-ibig*. When someone asks another, “*mahal mo ba sya*”, it doesn’t seem to signify an element of desire that *ibig* has. If “*ibig kong kumain*” literally means the speaker wishes to eat, the same cannot be said of “*mahal kong kumain.*” In fact nobody uses *mahal* to replace *ibig* in that kind of sentence. Rather, *mahal*, aside from its use to mean love, is also used to mean value. Aside from its use in the literature of loving, *mahal* is also used as an adjective which means expensive, something that is too valuable. *Mahal* usually implies that the monetary value attached to an object that is described as *mahal* is high. When something is *mahal*, therefore, the kind of love ascribed has more to do with value than desire.

⁷ Ibid. p. 80. Here, William Lycan is obviously referring to Wittgenstein’s concept of language-games.

⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

In the Filipino context, the seeming difference between the two terms, despite not clearly laid down or taught in books and schools, is quite clear in ordinary usage. Parents tell their children, “*mahal kita*” and not “*iniibig kita*.” That children are valued by parents and not desired is clear in this use of the terms *mahal* and *ibig*. Is it possible to be an object of *ibig* but not *mahal*? Sure. Moreover, the emotional rapture that is present in *ibig* is also present in the use of the term in reference to a love for the country by Andres Bonifacio in his work entitled “*Pag-ibig sa Tinubuang Lupa*.” The deep longing for one’s own country is effectively transmitted by the use of the term, “*pag-ibig*”. *Ibig* then effectively connotes desire, longing, movement towards its object.

Where did we get this differentiation of these two modes of loving? Has it been innate in our language to use two words to signify these two? Is this exclusive to us?

De Castro, another scholar from the University of the Philippines, noted in his introduction to his book, “*Etika at Pilosopiya Sa Kontekstong Pilipino*” that it is possible to illustrate some of the concepts in ethics among Filipinos by comparing and contrasting these concepts or their characteristics with those in the west. For him, we will be in a better position to study exhaustively our own concepts and ethical orientations if we can trace their similarities and differences from and with primary concepts and orientations studied in the history of philosophy. He reminds however that this does not assume that the uses of similar or related concepts in the western canon are to be the measure of our own concepts.⁹

⁹ Leonardo de Castro, *Etika at Pilosopiya Sa Kontekstong Pilipino*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995), 1.

Seeking an Aid from Aquinas in understanding *Pag-ibig*

Following de Castro’s counsel, providing an alternative way to disentangle this philosophical question might prove to be very helpful. Consulting philosophical canon may truly be instructive because one of the earliest philosophers to draw a sharp contrast between two aspects of love is Thomas Aquinas. While Thomas Aquinas is one of the Doctors of the Roman Catholic Church, he is also “so central a figure in the history of philosophy that one may be surprised that he is not better known than he is.”¹⁰ It is not at all surprising if the Philippines and the Filipino language, having assimilated much of the Roman Catholic doctrines brought to us by the Spaniards, will yield distinctions similar to that of Christian distinctions, especially one that has been made by one of its most influential figures. As such, Aquinas’ theory of love will be examined in this part of this paper.

Aquinas offers an eloquent discussion of love in his magnum opus, *Summa Theologiae*. In Article I of the ST I-II, q. 26, Aquinas asserts that love or *amor* is the “principle” of the sensitive appetite’s motion toward a perceived good¹¹. The soul for Aquinas, is the seat of life and motion in every living entity. This soul, it must be noted, has a particular power called appetite. Appetite is that which moves one’s soul towards an object of appetite. A person salivates in the thought of a steak because a steak is an object of appetite as apprehended by a human person. When a person sees a steak and smells its aroma, his appetite is activated, and he is drawn towards the object of appetite (i.e. appetible). The power in the soul that moves us towards this object of the appetite, the good, is what we call an appetite. Now this appetite may be situated either in the sensitive or the rational part of the soul.¹² If the motion of the appetite involves an object of appetite apprehended by the senses, then the sensitive appetite is

¹⁰ Peter Eardney and Carl Still, *Aquinas: A Guide to the Perplexed*. (New York: Continuum, 2010), 1.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 26, a. II res.

¹² Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae: 1a2ae 22-48* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press),13.

activated. *Amor* is a motion of the sensitive appetite, and thus, properly speaking, a passion. Aquinas says:

Accordingly, the first change wrought in the appetite by the appetible thing is called love, and is nothing else than satisfaction in that thing; and from this satisfaction results a movement towards that same thing, and this movement is desire; and lastly, there is rest which is joy. Since, therefore, love consists in a change wrought in the appetite by the appetible thing, it is evident that love is a passion: properly so called, according as it is in the concupiscible part; in a wider and extended sense, according as it is in the will.¹³

There are different passions or tendencies of the sensitive appetite towards its object. The sensitive appetite in the soul may be kindled in different ways. *Amor* or love is only one of these passions, together with anger, sorrow, pain and the others. What differentiates love from the other passions is its object, the good. When the soul and its sensitive appetite is activated by an appetible that is perceived to be good, then we call the passion, *amor*. This is not true for the other passion. Anger, sorrow, and pain do not have the good as their objects. They are not instigated by the good. Rather, the good only instigates *amor*. One should readily notice that this is very similar to the Filipino term *ibig*. While we only develop *amor* for something that is good, something is *kaibig-ibig* only when it possesses something good that attracts the subject whose appetite has been activated. *Pag-ibig* is never realized in the absence of an object that is deemed *kaibig-ibig* by the agent of love: an object considered to be good.

According to Aquinas, passion is in the soul's appetitive (rather than apprehensive) part and in the sensitive (rather than rational) appetite.¹⁴ While the appetitive part of the soul is concerned with the movement of the human

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 26, a. II res.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.22, a. II-III.

person towards the object of the appetite, the apprehensive part is in-charge of the movement of pulling the object of apprehension toward the human person apprehending. When a person, an agent, apprehends an object, say a dog, the apprehensive power of the soul moves the image of the object (the dog) towards the agent’s cognition. In contrast, when an agent is moved by an object, the agent is said to be attracted by the object of the appetite towards it through the power of appetite. In the case of *amor*, the object of appetite is any instance of the good.

To understand love in Aquinas, we must first locate it in the context of the soul. Does love or *amor* happen only within the soul? In his response to an objection, Aquinas asserts that,

I answer that, As stated above (a. 1) passion is properly to be found where there is corporeal change. This corporeal change is found in the act of the sensitive appetite, and is not only spiritual, as in the sensitive apprehension, but also natural. Now there is no need for corporeal change in the act of the intellectual appetite because this appetite is not the power of a corporeal organ. It is therefore evident that the notion of passion is found more properly in the act of the sensitive appetite and this is again evident from the definitions of Damascene¹⁵ quoted above.¹⁶

As stated above, Aquinas thinks that passions, including *amor*, transpire only if there is a corporeal or physical change. While the operation happens properly in the soul, physical manifestation has also to be noted. Therefore, physical features found in a body are necessary for passion to take place. Passion involves a subject’s reaction to the external affairs around him. Our capacity to

¹⁵ In ST I-II, q. 22, a. III sed contra, Aquinas says: “*On the contrary*, Damascene says (De Fide Ortho, ii, 22), while describing the animal passions “Passion is a movement of the sensitive appetite when we imagine good or evil; in other words, passion is a movement of the irrational soul, when we think of good or evil.”

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I-II, q.22, a. III res.

perceive these things around us, in our environment, belongs, properly speaking to the faculty of the sensitive soul. In a similar way, we only notice that we are already *umiibig* when corporeal change happens in us. We blush. We smile all the time. We palpitate in the presence of the object of love. *Pag-ibig* just like *amor* necessarily involves the sensitive soul that has the power of the sensitive appetite. Faculties for sensing are the primary facility for *amor* and *pag-ibig*'s operations.

Aquinas opens his response to the question of whether love is in the concupiscible or desiring power by saying, “*I answer that, Love is something pertaining to the appetite, since good is the object of both.*”¹⁷ Again, love is nothing but the attempt at reaching for the appetible, the object of the appetite, the good. Aquinas locates where in the human *psyche* this ability is found. Appetite is how he calls the power in one's soul that is not entirely exclusive to the intellect, but also to the sensitive aspect that allows for the attainment of the good in the world. In the same manner, something is *iniibig* if and when it is attractive to the subject, when it is capable of pulling a subject's appetite towards it through what is sensed. Much like *amor*, it does not require the intellect. People in fact, profess to be *umiibig* without any reason. People normally refer to this as “love at first sight.”

Appetites as the starting points of love

According to Miner, the term “*appetitus*” is a combination of ‘*ad*’ (towards) and ‘*petere*’ (aim at or desire); therefore, appetite has something to do with an attempt at reaching toward something, an object.¹⁸ Miner is clear when he says “*appetitus* denotes the disposition of the creature's potency

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.26, a. I res.

¹⁸ Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae: 1a2ae 22-48* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press),15.

toward actualization”.¹⁹ A little bird is propelled by its appetite to learn how to fly because flying will complete its being. A plant is drawn towards growth and bearing flowers because that is how it might be fulfilled and actualized. It is this completion of potency that completes the very being of the being concerned. In a human being, appetite is what makes a man love a woman (or vice versa or whatever permutation of sexual preference is applicable) whose characteristics match the qualities he yearns for in a chosen partner in life. When someone is *umiibig*, the person sometimes feels that the object of love has the potential to complete the former’s being. For Aquinas, whichever completes a being of a particular subject and attains its actuality is desirable and thus, is good. We are *umiibig* with a person whose very characteristics we perceive to be good and complimentary of our own.

But what is this end that serves as the goal of an appetite? The good that each being looks up to differs variably from one another as there are also different kinds of love—*amor* and *caritas*. What is the main difference between *amor* and *caritas*? The difference according to Aquinas owes to the difference in appetite—the starting point of all loves—that moves each of these two kinds of loves to pursue their rightful ends. Aquinas declares:

Therefore love differs according to the difference of appetites. For there is an appetite which arises from an apprehension existing, not in the subject of the appetite, but in some other, and this is called the natural appetite. Because natural things seek what is suitable to them according to their nature, by reason of an apprehension which is not in them, but in the Author of their nature, as stated in the First Part (q. 26, a. 1. res 2; q. 113, a. 1. res 1, 3). And there is another appetite arising from an apprehension in the subject of the appetite, but from necessity and not from free choice. Such is, in irrational animals, the sensitive appetite,

¹⁹ Ibid, 16.

which, however, in man, has a certain share of liberty, in so far as it obeys reason. Again, there is another appetite following from an apprehension in the subject of the appetite according to free choice. And this is the rational or intellectual appetite, which is called the will.²⁰

Considering that appetite is the power that draws beings toward their end, what makes sensitive appetite distinct from another appetite, the intellectual appetite? Aquinas asserts in the quoted passage above that sensitive appetite is what human beings share with irrational animals. It is that which holds a lover, renders him powerless, and consequently, makes him ‘*fall in love.*’ *Amor*, akin to *pag-ibig*, is that instant drowning over in an emotional rush. Someone who is *napaibig* by another person is someone, in Aquinas, whose sensitive appetite has been kindled.

The sensitive appetite cannot, however, aspire directly for the *bonum honestum* or true good. It can only move toward the particular goods it perceives either as pleasant (*dilectabile*) or useful (*utile*). This is because again, sensitive appetites are only kindled by the senses and sensation. A person is *umiibig* only because the *iniibig* is either pleasant or useful. Aquinas here recognizes that man, first, owing to his body and senses, is drawn towards the objects of his sensation. We only are *umiibig* when there is something that is *kaibig-ibig*, something that attracts us. Despite being drawn toward the direction of the good, man first communes with what is easily accessible to him, that which is accessible to the senses. Due to human beings’ embodiment, Aquinas agrees that all loves begin with what is sensed and this is why sensitive love or *amor* is primordial. Notice here the similarity of the use of the adjective, *kaibig-ibig* in Filipino for something pleasant and desirable and not *kamahal-mahal*. *Mahal* seems to agree more with another kind of love.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.26, a. I res.

Caritas and Pagmamahal

It seems that *pag-ibig* and how we commonly use the term finds it parallel in Aquinas’ notion of *amor*. Aquinas, however, finds it necessary to posit another kind of love, one that is distinct from the operation of *amor*. According to his account, love, *amor*, just like *pag-ibig* comes into being first because of the senses of man, which foremost, appeal to his immediate surroundings, the object of sensation and perception. Aquinas here affirms the subjectivity of man in his autonomy and freedom in pursuing a beloved through the process of apprehension and appetite. What one senses is can make him engage in *pag-ibig*, if said object of senses were good.

Any Thomist account of love cannot be completed without talking about another form of love, *caritas*, or friendship. While *caritas* is more commonly translated as charity, friendship provides, for Aquinas, “the paradigm through which the theological virtue of charity can be best conceptualized.”²¹ Thus, in most discussions of the Thomist concept of *caritas*, the term is translated as friendship. After all, “charity is a sort of all-embracing friendship with rational beings.”²² If love has a sensitive aspect, owing to the sensitive part of the soul that produces it, how about the rational aspect of the man? Is there a love that is not motivated or instigated by the senses alone? This is *caritas*.

If a man is attracted to a particular woman, a specific version of the good for him, thus generation of *amor*, what makes him different from a dog that runs after and licks a bone that it considers appetible? What may explain a love that does not seemingly approach what is beautiful? Is it possible for one person to be *umiibig* when the object is not *kaibig-ibig*? Could it be that there is much more than *amor* in man? Might we be capable of much more than reacting to a

²¹ Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5.

²² *Ibid*, 6.

stimulus, an appetible, that takes the form of beauty and good?²³ Aquinas thinks so.

The act of loving in its purest sense is called *caritas*. Pieper writes “[t]he word *caritas*, too, as its basic meaning indicates, pertains to an act that can be performed only in the mind, namely, evaluation.”²⁴ The choice to engage in love and who to love are aspects of this evaluation. Evaluation involves thinking through why a particular set of actions should be engaged in and why the reason for these actions is warranted. Why love a particular object even if he is not beautiful enough? There is a good reason to suppose that this is the metallic core of *pagamamah* too. In the Philippines, we often find people who are engaged in loving others who might not be, ideally, worthy objects of love. As one song goes, “*mahal kita maging sino ka man.*” We find people who whole-heartedly love another not “because of” but “despite of”. In other words, we find a love that does not depend on what is seen and felt, but in what is decided upon.

That *amor* comes before *caritas* is no accident because man, foremost, starts with what his body can perceive. Aquinas reminds though that man does not just have a sensitive nature, he too, has an intellectual life that allows him to go beyond the sensation, to engage in *caritas*.

Aquinas raises the question in ST II-II, Q, 23, a. 1 whether charity is friendship. He says that “...not every love has the character of friendship but that love which is together with benevolence, when, that is, we love someone so as to wish good to him.”²⁵ In *amor*, there is no element that promotes the object’s good. In actuality, it is because of the appetible’s good that one becomes an object of *amor*. Friendship differs in that it is not anchored on the goodness of

²³ Much of my discussions on *Caritas* here also appeared in another published article. See Bernardo Caslib, Jr., “*Caritas* and Experience-based Learnings: Teaching Love to Filipino College Students,” *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis* 34-2(2014): 47-56.

²⁴ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 155.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.23, a. I res.

the object of love, but also on its potential as a worthy beneficiary of the good. This is what Aquinas meant when he says:

If, however, we do not wish good to what we love, but wish its good for ourselves, (thus we are said to love wine, or a horse, or the like) it is not love of friendship, but of a kind of concupiscence. For it would be absurd to speak of having friendship for wine or for a horse, Yet neither does well-wishing suffice for friendship, for a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend and this mutual well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication. Accordingly, since there is a communication between man and God, in so far as He communicates His happiness to us, there must be some kind of friendship based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor. I. 9): *God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son.* The love that which is based on this communication, is charity. And so it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.²⁶

Caritas has two characteristics, qualities that remarkably are present in our own notion of *pagmamahal*. First, there must be benevolence. *Caritas* allows a person to extend himself and go out of his own good and comfort zone to wish good with all sincerity for another person or object of love. A friend is someone who looks after the welfare of his friend. A person who is *nagmamahal* is willing to forego of his own good for the benefit of the *minamahal*. A person who is *nagmamahal* is willing to sacrifice, forget his own benefits, and focus on the good of the *minamahal*. This is the metallic core of parenthood and true friendship, and, needless to say, God’s love for humans. In the Philippines, we find parents who are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of their children. We find parents who are willing to forego of their dreams because they love, and they value their children regardless of the worthiness of these children. Parents are

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.23, a. I, res.

the ones who truly are *nagmamahal*. Parents and true friends, approximating the love that God has for all creation, especially humans, attempt at loving not just because the objects are good and because said objects of love are worthy to receive such love, but simply because *caritas* knows no measure. It is benevolent.

Another characteristic of *caritas* is its being built on a stable ground: communication of happiness between and among friends. God communicates His love to humans in so many ways, one of these is his sending His Son to save humankind.²⁷ Despite their unworthiness, humans are loved by God intensely. One does not experience this love through one's sensitive faculty. It is through one's intellectual faculty that humans communicate with God, presumably through prayer and meditation. Aquinas concurs:

Man's life is twofold. There is his outward life in respect of his sensitive and corporeal nature, and with regard to this life, there is no communication or fellowship between us and God or the angels. The other is man's spiritual life in respect of his mind, and with regard to this life there is fellowship between us and both God and the angels.²⁸

This is the crux of love, *caritas*, for Aquinas.

But can this friendship, this intellectual love or *caritas* be directed among humans? Can humans love others with the love of *caritas*? Is this akin to how Filipinos employ the word *mahal*? Aquinas thinks this is possible. We can duplicate the love of God for man by routing our love for God to others especially those who are most in need. Aquinas thinks we can love a person in two ways:

...first in respect of himself, and in this way friendship never extends but to one's friend; secondly, it extends to someone in

²⁷ Bernardo Caslib, Jr., "Caritas and Experience-based Learnings: Teaching Love to Filipino College Students," *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis* 34-2(2014): 50.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.23, a. 1, res.

respect of another, as, when a man has friendship for a certain person, for his sake he loves all belonging to him, be they children, servants, or connected with him in any way. Indeed, so much do we love our friends that for their sake we love all who belong to them even if they hurt or hate us.²⁹

Friendship is in effect then, more distributive. Unlike *amor* that involves only the lover and the object of love, in *caritas*, the object of love may multiply the love given by the lover. In *caritas*, an object of love may distribute love to those whom he himself loves. Someone who is a recipient of *pagmamahal* may also engage in *pagmamahal* in relation to others such as a friend who may also love other friends or other people who may be more wanting of this love such as the underrepresented and the impoverished. In the Filipino language, we don't use *ibig* to refer to our love for the family. We use *mahal*. When we render love to our fellow men and women, victims of typhoons for example and other natural calamities, we rightly use the term *mahal* when referring to what we feel for them (i.e. *mahal ang kapwa Pilipino*). We do not use the term *ibig* to denote that kind of distributive, all-encompassing love reminiscent of God's love for all of creation.

Winding up

While direct linguistic correlation or relation between the Filipino terms *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal* and the Latin Thomist counterparts *amor* and *caritas* cannot be established, a meticulous comparison can yield a very strong affinity between the two pairs of categories. While *amor* and *pag-ibig* tend towards fulfillment of desire, of sensitive appetite, *caritas* and *pagmamahal* are rooted in valuing the beloved for who she is. *Caritas* and *pagmamahal* are both rational too as opposed to the former that is founded on sensation.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, trans. 1964, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q.23, a. I, res. 2

The literature of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal* in the Philippines, based on this initial study, is still very promising. If university libraries and journal indices online are at all valid indicators, we can safely assume that scholarship on these two widely used concepts and the whole gamut of emotions attached to them is still available for further mining.

This initial exploratory essay is an attempt to provide an alternative view of looking at the concepts of *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal*. Shying away from Bonifacio's suggestion and turning to de Castro's proposal, comparing and contrasting some of the ways by which we make sense of our own concepts and categories with that of the western canon can be very instructive in clarifying our own categories of thought as mirrored in our language. While Bonifacio's analytic approach has its own merits, history has already revealed that such positivistic take on meaning can be limiting. Aquinas' distinction rooted in human beings' embodiment then proffers a more meaningful way to capture our lived experience with the phenomenon of loving. That a look at how our native concepts in the Philippines and the way they are used are very similar with how they were conceived in the 13th century by one of the most erudite philosophers in the history can be very exciting. Further study is, definitely, recommended, as the linguistic origins of these two Filipino concepts *pag-ibig* and *pagmamahal* might be very useful in tracing any linguistic connection that they have with the Latin concepts of Aquinas.

Truly, our language which is a product of many cultural influences mirrors the way that the Philippines as a country is truly an amalgamation of these myriad cultural influences too. That Christian concepts trickled down into our regular vocabulary doesn't seem to be surprising because after all, Christianity has been one of the foundations of this country. This year, as we celebrate 500 years of Christianity in this country, we look back and witness how far the influences of Christianity have been, not just in our religiosity as a people, but more so, in our day-to-day existence, particularly in our language.

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