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# VIRTUES IN GENERAL

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## THE ESSENCE OF VIRTUE

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### NOMINAL DEFINITION

Having discussed the general notion of habit, we proceed to consider now a particular kind of habit, virtue, which is a good habit.

Virtue is far more than an ostentatious show of piety, far more than purity or chastity, even though modern thinking frequently identifies these particular qualities with virtue. The root meaning of the word should disabuse us of any such puerile notions.

The word virtue comes from the Latin *virtus*, meaning a force or power. Related to the word for “man” (*vir*), *virtus* signifies manhood or manliness, the sum of physical and mental excellence in man. Virtue connotes, in short, something virile or manly, powers that have been brought to their ultimate limit of development or perfection. Virtue expresses this fullness of development, this realized capacity or human perfectibility of man and his operative powers.

I-II, 55, 1, ad c.: Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power.

The ultimate perfection of an operative power is, of course, found in the actual exercise or operation of that operative power. Virtue, however, does not properly signify the act or operation, but rather the principle of that operation, the good habit from which that operation flows. In this sense of the word there are frequent references to virtue both in the Old and the New Testaments, and it is a favorite subject of Christian thinkers in their analysis of men’s journey to God.

Our analysis of virtue will be, like that of St. Thomas, in terms of the four causes: its formal cause or essence, its material causes or subjects, its final cause which reveals the kinds of virtue, and its efficient cause. The characteristics of virtue will be examined later, and our study will conclude by considering certain supernatural perfections closely related to virtue.

### ST. THOMAS’ DEFINITION

St. Thomas makes these notions more precise in his definition of virtue: virtue is a **good operative habit**.<sup>1</sup>

The genus of virtue is expressed by “operative habit”; the specific difference is “good”, for the true perfection of virtue consists in its ordination to the good of man’s nature.

Virtue in its more proper sense is a morally good operative habit. Aristotle said almost the same thing in defining virtue **as that which makes its possessor good, and what he does good as well**.<sup>2</sup> By virtue, not only are man’s actions rendered good, but man, too, is constituted morally good in his very being.

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<sup>1</sup> I-II, 55, 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. II, ch. 6.;

## ST. AUGUSTINE'S DEFINITION

St. Augustine defined virtue as **a good quality of the mind by which one lives rightly, which no one can use badly, and which God accomplishes in us, without us.**<sup>3</sup> This definition includes the entire essential concept of virtue, listing all of its causes, and in his analysis of it St. Thomas summarizes the whole theology of virtue.<sup>4</sup>

The first thing expressed in this is the genus to which virtue belongs – in this case, the genus of **quality**; this is the remote genus of the virtues, and it would be even better to specify its more immediate class, its proximate genus, which is that of **habit**. The specific difference in the definition, distinguishing virtue from other qualities or habits, the bad habits or vices, is that these qualities are **good**. Thus the *formal* cause of virtue, that which constitutes the kind of thing it is, is determined.

We are told what the subject of virtue is: the mind – that is, the **higher powers of the soul**; this indicates the *material* cause, that is, the matter in which virtue exists.

I-II, 55, 4, ad c.: [...] virtue has no matter *out of which* it is formed, as neither has any other accident; but its has matter *about which* it is concerned, and matter *in which* it exists, namely, the subject. The matter about which virtue is concerned is its object, and this could not be included in the [...] definition, because the object fixes the virtue to a certain species, and here we are giving the definition of virtue in general. And so, for *material* cause we have the subject [...].

Also included in the definition is the **end** or goal of virtue (its *final* cause), which is operation: a quality *by which one lives rightly*. This means that by these habits man acts in accord with reason, since some habits are always ordered to evil. Note, too, that these are habits which *no one uses badly*, which distinguishes virtue from imperfect habits, such as human faith or hope, which sometimes lend themselves to good, sometimes to evil. But virtue is the kind of principle of human acts which produces only good acts, never evil ones.

The last phrase of St. Augustine's definition –*which God accomplishes in us, without us*– indicates the *efficient* cause of the virtues, or at least of some of them. **God** effects the virtues, not man. Clearly, this last clause is verified only in supernatural infused virtues. For a definition of virtue applicable both to acquired and to infused virtues, these final words must be omitted.

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## THE SUBJECT OF VIRTUE

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Virtues are good operative habits. The subjects or localities where virtue inheres must be limited to the operative powers capable of such modifications and determination. So the primary subjects of operative habits are the intellect, the will and the two sensitive appetites, the concupiscible and the irascible.

I-II, 56, 1, ad c.: [...] virtue belongs to a power of the soul. Firstly, from the notion of the very essence of virtue, which implies perfection of a power; for perfection is in that which it perfects. Secondly, from the fact that virtue is an operative habit,[...] for all operation proceeds from the soul through a power.

### THE INTELLECT

The intellect is the subject of what we call the **intellectual virtues**, good operative habits which determine the intellect to work well.<sup>5</sup> But the intellectual virtues are not virtues in the full and perfect sense we have been speaking of to now. We say that these intellectual virtues are virtues in a special and restricted sense, embracing the essence of virtue only partially. These virtues make man good, perfect, in act – but only from a particular point of view, not entirely. It is only under a certain aspect that man is made perfect by the intellectual virtues – that is, as regards a particular power of his nature – whereas the moral virtues, virtues in the absolute and unrestricted sense, render man good absolutely, as regards the good of his whole nature.

It is necessary to understand that these virtues which make man relatively good give the particular power in which they inhere – in this case, the intellect – an aptitude to operate well, a capacity which is conducive to facile and pleasant operation. But these virtues do not proximately incline the intellect to use this aptitude. Those virtues which give only the facility or aptitude for a good work make man good in this restricted area, and are, therefore, virtues in

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<sup>3</sup> This definition is compiled from various writings of St. Augustine: *Against Julian*, bk. 4, ch. 3; *On Free Will*, bk. II, ch.19; *Epistle* 105; *Commentary on the Psalms*, Ps. 118, com.26.

<sup>4</sup> I-II, 55, 4.

<sup>5</sup> I-II, 56, 3, and *Quæst. Disp. de Virtutibus in Communi*, arts. 6 (for the practical intellect) and 7 (for the speculative intellect).

a restricted sense. Those virtues, on the other hand, which not only give the aptitude for good but also move man to use that aptitude are virtues absolutely, without restriction.

The skilled pharmacist, possessed of an intellectual virtue, his art of pharmacy, has a facility and capability to concoct either healing medicines and lethal potions for his clients. He has mastery over his particular domain of knowledge, but his possession of the knowledge and skill does not guarantee its good use. He need not use his virtue; even if he does use it, he need not use it rightly. But moral virtues, virtues in the absolute sense, demand to be used: a just man must perform just acts.

Virtues in the restricted sense fail to measure up to the most proper meaning of virtue. Only the moral virtues are those by which man acts rightly, and which no man can use badly.

As a consequence of this distinction, we can see that virtue is an **analogical concept**, which means that it does not convey exactly the same meaning when applied to different kinds of virtues.

## THE WILL

### THE DOMINANCE OF THE WILL

It follows from this distinction that the subject of a habit which is a virtue absolutely can only be the will, or some power moved by the will.<sup>6</sup> It is the will which moves all those other powers which in some way share in reason's guiding control. If man does anything good at all, as conducive to his true ultimate goal, it is because his will itself is good. The virtues which make man do good and do not merely give the aptitude for doing good must be either in the will itself, or in some power moved by the will.

That, from this aspect, the intellect may be the subject of virtue in its absolute sense is also possible. The intellect, when moved by a will which is well ordered to man's ultimate end, can be the subject of virtue in the absolute sense. In this way the speculative intellect becomes the subject of divine faith, and the practical intellect the subject of prudence.

### THE WILL AND THE SENSITIVE APPETITES

Both the concupiscible and irascible appetites in man are capable of being the subjects of virtue in the absolute sense.<sup>7</sup> These sensitive appetites have been endowed with a natural inclination to obey reason. Because these powers have their own proper activities, their movements may very well run counter to reason's dictates; the will must bring them under control.

I-II, 56, 4, ad c.: The irascible and concupiscible powers can be considered in two ways. First, in themselves, in so far as they are parts of the sensitive appetite; and in this way they are not competent to be the subject of virtue. Secondly, they can be considered as participating in the reason, from the fact that they have a natural aptitude to obey reason. And thus the irascible and concupiscible power can be the subject of human virtue: for, in so far as it participates in the reason, it is the principle of a human act. And to these powers we must needs assign virtues.

The function of reason and will in controlling the passions of the sensitive appetite is considerably abetted by the help of habit. Through these determinations and under the movement of the will the sense appetites are brought to a certain habitual conformity with reason, and thus ordered to good objects and the good of the whole man.

### THE WILL ITSELF

Virtues are necessary only when an operative power has something of indeterminate about it. The will does not need determination in order to will our own good, for the will of its very nature tends to this; man tends naturally, without need of any habit or virtue, to his own proper or personal good.

The will, however, is not so naturally disposed to pursue goods outside the sphere of personal good. That man be inclined to the good of neighbor, or to some good that completely transcends or rises above the natural order of things, his power of choice needs the determination of virtue. Hence, man's will can become the subject of virtue in the absolute sense when directed to God or society or to neighbor, as by charity and justice and their related virtues.

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<sup>6</sup> I-II, 56, 6; and *De Virt. In Comm.*, art.6.

<sup>7</sup> I-II, 56, 4; and *De Virt. In Comm.*, art.4.

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# THE KINDS OF VIRTUE

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The virtues are principles of good human acts, and by acts man attains the end of human life. Theoretically, at least, man can be conceived of as having two ultimate ends: one, natural and imperfect, a natural goal which he is capable of attaining by his natural powers; the other, supernatural and perfect, a supernatural goal which he is capable of attaining by the supernatural gifts of God. Merely human actions effected by mere human powers and habits could attain his supernatural end, the possession of God in the beatific vision, only by means of actions which flow from supernatural and infused virtues duly proportionated to such an end.

Leaving the theoretical order, however considering things as they concretely are, we know that man's natural end has been entirely subordinated to, and absorbed in his supernatural end. By divine revelation God has given man knowledge of a new goal of life, and he has gratuitously endowed man's powers with virtues capable of acting for that supernatural end.

In treating, therefore, of the different kinds of virtue, we shall consider: 1) the natural virtues, intellectual and moral, which are principles of purely natural acts; and 2) the supernatural theological virtues, principles of supernatural acts.

## THE NATURAL INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

There are five distinct kinds of intellectual virtues, three in the speculative intellect<sup>8</sup> and two in the practical intellect.<sup>9</sup> The speculative intellect seeks knowledge simply for the sake of knowing, while the practical intellect seeks knowledge with a view to putting what it knows into practice. Speculative knowledge rests in the contemplation of what is true, with no particular concern for practical consequences or the utility to which the knowledge may be put; such knowledge is sought simply as a perfection of the mind. Practical knowledge, on the other hand, has its whole reason for being in its conversion into action, that is to say, in its directing and regulating of man's operations, as in *making* things, and in *doing* things.

### VIRTUES OF THE SPECULATIVE INTELLECT

The virtues of the speculative intellect are those which perfect the speculative intellect in the consideration of truth. There are three virtues of the speculative intellect.

#### UNDERSTANDING OF FIRST PRINCIPLES

It is the ***virtue perfecting the intellect for knowing the self-evident, or immediately evident, first principles of knowledge.***

*De Virtutibus*, q.1, a.8: There are certain truths naturally known by man, immediately from the beginning, without any study or investigation; and these are the first principles, not only of the speculative order, such as that the whole is greater than any of its parts, but also of the practical order, such as evil is to be avoided and other like principles [...]. These constitute the principles of all subsequent knowledge, whether speculative or practical.

#### SCIENCE

It is the virtue perfecting the intellect in ***the knowledge of a particular area of reality through a consideration of its proper causes.*** Science is –of course– more than physical science; it also includes the theological and philosophical sciences.

Science and understanding of first principles differ in this, that the truths attained by understanding are *immediately* evident, while the truths attained by science are *mediately* evident, i.e. by means of proof. There are many different individual sciences about different areas of reality, and each is a different virtue.

#### WISDOM

It is the virtue perfecting the intellect in ***the knowledge of all reality through a consideration of its ultimate causes.***

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<sup>8</sup> I-II, 57, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> I-II, 57, 3-5.

While the sciences view reality as cut up into sectors, each sector to be considered separately, wisdom views reality in a comprehensive, unifying whole, not in terms of causes proximate to particular phenomena, but in terms of the highest causes of all phenomena. Wisdom also judges and defends the other intellectual virtues and habits.

## VIRTUES OF THE PRACTICAL INTELLECT

There are two virtues of the practical intellect: art and prudence.

### ART

It is ***the right procedure in making things*** (*recta ratio factibilium*). Art works in the sphere of exterior, physical matter-building.

Art, here understood as *servile* art, is to be distinguished from those liberal and fine arts, which do not involve exterior matter or transient action.

### PRUDENCE

It is ***the right conduct of specifically human acts*** (*recta ratio agibilium*). This, then, is the realm of man's moral deeds, considered as they lead toward or away from his ultimate end. The matter of the virtue of prudence lies, not in the physical worlds outside, but within man.

Prudence is a unique kind of virtue, for it is numbered among the moral virtues of the will as well as among the intellectual virtues. As regards its essence, knowledge, prudence is in the practical intellect as its subject, and is, therefore, an intellectual virtue. But as regards its content or matter, good human actions, prudence is a moral virtue.

It is by the goodness or badness of his will, which moves all the other faculties and habits in man, that a man is good or bad. A well-regulated intellect, for instance, only renders man good in a restricted sense, as regards the particular faculty alone. Hence because the first four of the five intellectual virtues confer an aptitude for the consideration of truth—the good of the intellect—they are virtues, not absolutely, but relatively, in a restricted sense. Since, however, the use of the knowledge that a man has depends upon the movement of his will, a virtue which itself perfects the will, such as charity or justice can oversee or control the good use of these speculative virtues. The practical conclusion is that the acts of these speculative intellectual virtues are good and meritorious when under the moving influence of a good will.

Prudence, on the contrary, disposes man to control his appetitive acts as a means to the end of human life. So it is not only, as an intellectual virtue, a virtue in the restricted sense; it is also, as a moral virtue, a virtue in the absolute sense.

## THE NATURAL MORAL VIRTUES

The moral virtues are habits by which man's appetites are well-disposed to be brought into conformity with reason, which is the norm determining the good, midway between excess and defect.

Moral virtues are necessary for man's proper moral activity because the rational and sensitive appetites in man are not entirely subject to reason. Because these faculties are properly operative in their own right, they can rise up against the control of reason. Hence, the various appetites of man must be disposed to obey reason by the discipline of the moral virtues. We speak here of the natural moral virtues, of acquired moral virtues, to distinguish them from the infused moral virtues, the supernatural counterparts of natural virtues which will be discussed later.

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MORAL AND INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

Not every virtue is a moral virtue, but only those that reside in the will, or in the sensitive appetites as controlled by the will.<sup>10</sup> Yet there are many in our day who deny any real difference between the moral and the intellectual virtues.

These trace their intellectual lineage to Socrates, for whom knowledge was supreme.<sup>11</sup> He maintained that if a man had sufficient knowledge, he could not sin; sin was the consequence of ignorance, and man had but to cultivate the intellectual virtues and he could not fail to attain his final destiny. A grain of truth lies hidden here, for the very core of distinctively human behavior lies in reason: it is reason which points out what is good and what is evil.

But we should recall that the appetitive powers can rise against reason.

Rom. 7:15, 17:19: "I do not understand what I do, for it is not what I wish that I do, but what I hate, that I do.... For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, no good dwells, be-

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<sup>10</sup> I-II, 58, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. I-II, 58, 2, ad c.

cause to wish is within my power, but I do not find the strength to accomplish what is good. For I do not the good that I wish, but the evil that I do not wish"

Conflicts arise in the pursuit of the reasonable good; knowledge alone fails to guarantee good conduct. The will can be so attached to self-love as to be disinclined to render to others what is reasonably due them, and the sense appetites can tend so strongly toward what is pleasurable and suffer such repugnance to what is hard and painful as to offer formidable opposition to reason:

For a man to do a good deed, therefore, not only must his reason be well disposed by means of a habit of intellectual virtue, but his appetite also must be well disposed by means of a habit of moral virtue. And so moral differs from intellectual virtue, even as the appetite differs from reason. Hence just as the appetite, insofar as it partakes of reason, is the principle of human acts, so moral habits are to be considered virtues insofar as they are in conformity with reason.

Human virtues, as habits inclining man toward the performance of good actions, must of necessity reside ultimately in one or the other of the two primary sources of human activity, the intellect or the will (or the sense appetite as moved by the will). Those habits perfecting the intellect in its consideration of truth are intellectual virtues those perfecting the appetites in the pursuit of good are moral virtues. Distinct though the intellectual and moral virtues are however, there is yet a mutual dependence among them.

1. **The moral virtues may exist without the intellectual virtues of wisdom, science and art, but they cannot exist without prudence and understanding.**<sup>12</sup> Prudence is required in order that the good of reason may be determined for the appetitive powers; the virtue of understanding is necessary because prudence must base its judgments on the first practical principles of reason.
2. **Any of the intellectual virtues, with the sole exception of prudence, may exist without the moral virtues.**<sup>13</sup> The reason why prudence is excepted is because the operation commanded by prudence must be directed to a good end, and it is the function, not of prudence, but of moral virtue to incline man to a good end. Hence prudence and moral virtue are inseparable.

## THE PRINCIPAL OR CARDINAL VIRTUES

Some of the moral virtues are called cardinal virtues, from the Latin *cardo*, hinge, that upon which the door hangs. Cardinal virtues, then, are **those principal virtues upon which man's moral life pivots**, like the door upon its hinge.<sup>14</sup> These cardinal virtues are **prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance**.

The cardinal virtues are moral virtues, for the principal virtues surely must be virtues in the most proper sense of the word, and virtue in the absolute or perfect sense is moral virtue, i.e., good habits conferring both the aptitude for a good work and the guarantee of its good use.

The number of cardinal virtues may be deduced either from a consideration of their formal objects or from the subjects in which they are found to reside.

1. By reason of **formal object**. In general, the formal object of a moral virtue is simply the good as fixed by reason; it is the function of moral virtue to assist man's rational and appetitive powers in working to that end. St. Thomas thus derives the cardinal virtues from a consideration of their formal principles:

The formal principle of [natural moral] virtue... is the good as defined by reason, a good which can be considered in two ways. First, inasmuch as it consists in the very act of reason, and thus we have one principal virtue called **prudence**. Secondly, insofar as reason establishes order in something else: either in operations, and then we have **justice**, or in the passions, and then we need two virtues. For it is necessary to put the order of reason into the passions in view of their rebelliousness to reason, an opposition occurring in two ways: in one way, by the passions inciting to something against reason; hence it is necessary that the passions be curbed: and so we have **temperance**; in a second way, by the passions withdrawing from that which reason dictates, as through fear of danger or of labor; and then man needs to be strengthened in that which reason dictates lest he turn back: and so we have **fortitude**.<sup>15</sup>

2. By reason of **subject**. There are four faculties of the soul in which the moral virtues reside, and in each of them one of the cardinal virtues: prudence in the intellect, justice in the will, temperance in the concupiscible appetite and fortitude in the irascible appetite.

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<sup>12</sup> I-II, 58, 4.

<sup>13</sup> I-II, 58, 5.

<sup>14</sup> I-II, 61, 1.

<sup>15</sup> I-II, 61, 2.

Above all the virtues which regulate human action and behavior, prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude earn the right to be called cardinal virtues,<sup>16</sup> because each has an object which is more important and more difficult than the objects of other virtues.

*Prudence* is concerned with the principal act of the practical intellect, to command, rather than with counseling or judgment; *justice* is concerned with maintaining due responsibility for what is rightly due in such things as commercial and private bargaining and debts with another person; *temperance* restrains one from the more vehement pleasures of food, drink and sex; *fortitude* strengthens one to stand firm in the face of great danger or death itself.

The primacy of these virtues is evident. One who is able to restrain the most vehement of his carnal passions, for example, is by that fact more easily disposed for controlling his lesser passions or emotions; because he has mastered more difficult matter, he can more easily master less difficult. The individual who has the cardinal virtues possesses, at least in a rudimentary way, all the other moral virtues.

Cf. I-II, 61, 5.

The other moral virtues are related to these four principal virtues as allied or **annexed virtues**, since they are either concerned with secondary acts or objects, or they lack the full nature of the principal virtue to which they pertain. Thus religion, piety, reverence, obedience, gratitude are some of the virtues allied or annexed to the cardinal virtue of justice.

## THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

### THEIR EXISTENCE AND NATURE

The theological virtues are **operative habits by which we are ordered to God, our supernatural end.**<sup>17</sup>

Theological, a derivation of the Greek words meaning “knowledge about God”, is the proper characterization of these virtues for three reasons:

- 1) because both their material object and formal object or motive is God;
- 2) because they are infused in us by God;
- 3) because even their existence is known only because of God's revelation to us.

If man had ever been ordained to a merely natural goal in this life natural powers would have been sufficient to attain it. As a matter of fact, however, man's ultimate goal is a supernatural one, a goal consisting in the immediate, direct vision of the essence of God. In the face of the transcendent nature of this supernatural goal, man's natural operative equipment is hopelessly inadequate. Consequently, there must be some special supernatural apparatus given to man which will be proportioned to his supernatural goal. The fundamental supernatural principles of human action are the theological virtues.

Note that the object of these theological virtues is man's supernatural end, God himself; they have no direct bearing on those things that are as means to the end. That man's powers be set aright as regard the means for attaining his supernatural goal there is need for yet other supernaturally infused virtues, the supernaturally infused moral virtues.

The Council of Trent affirms the existence of these three theological virtues, to which Sacred Scripture bears abundant testimony:

“In the very act of justification, at the moment when his sins are remitted, man receives through Jesus Christ, to whom he is joined, the infused gifts of faith, hope and charity...”<sup>18</sup>

Though the Council did not declare in so many words that faith, hope and charity are theological virtues, i.e., permanent habits, the universal teaching of theologians holds that faith, hope and charity are infused theological virtues.

The fact that there are three, and only three, theological virtues is abundantly clear from innumerable scriptural passages as well.

“So there abide faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”<sup>19</sup>

That there be three such virtues as faith, hope and charity, is also seen, in retrospect, to be eminently reasonable.<sup>20</sup> To set his steps toward his supernatural goal, man must know this goal, and this is accomplished by faith. Man must move toward this supernatural end as something good and attainable, even though difficult, and this is the function of hope. Finally, man must attain God as good in himself, and this is brought about by charity.

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<sup>16</sup> I-II, 61, 3.

<sup>17</sup> I-II, 62, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Session VI, Decree on Justification, Ch. 7 (Dz 800).

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 13:13.

<sup>20</sup> I-II, 62, 3.

## THE ORDER AMONG THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

If we were to ask which is first among the theological virtues, we would have to answer the question with a distinction<sup>21</sup>.

Certainly in the order of **time** none of them is first, because all of them are infused into the soul together as properties of the life-principle of supernatural existence, sanctifying grace.

In the order of **nature**, faith comes first, followed by hope, then charity, for man must first know what he is to hope for, and this hope must precede love.

In the order of **excellence**, charity is first among the theological virtues, since it unites man perfectly to God: it is the perfection of all the other virtues.

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# THE CAUSES OF VIRTUE

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## NATURE

Nature has implanted in man a foundation for virtue<sup>22</sup> – namely, a natural inclination to the good of reason, and certain naturally known principles both of knowledge and action, “the nurseries of virtue”, in St. Thomas' phrase. Individual men, moreover, because of bodily dispositions (**temperament**) may be disposed more to the development of one virtue than of another. But these are but the beginnings of virtue. No natural virtue, intellectual or moral, is found in its full state of development as an innate endowment of nature.

And, of course, no supernatural virtue, theological or moral, is found in man from nature.

## HUMAN ACTION

Those virtues which are directed to man's natural good as determined by the rule of human reason are caused by human actions, just as any natural operative habit is.<sup>23</sup> Those virtues, however, which are directed to man's supernatural good, that which is determined by the rule of divine reason transcending human reason, can be caused by God alone, since the goal is higher than the powers of nature.

## DIVINE ACTION

That God can infuse into the powers of the soul the natural virtues attainable by repeated effort is beyond dispute.<sup>24</sup> Certainly He can directly accomplish what he ordinarily produces through secondary causes; this He did do, St. Thomas holds, in the case of our first parents, and the lives of the saints contain many instances of the same divine action. And He alone is the only possible cause of the theological virtues, by which we are directly ordered to our supernatural end, God as He is in himself. Our present question is this: does God give us certain supernatural moral principles of action?

## EXISTENCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL MORAL VIRTUES

The primary reason for asserting the existence of the infused or supernatural moral virtues is that, just as man must be disposed in the natural order not only for the end but also for the means to the end (the work of the acquired moral virtues), so also in the supernatural order man must be disposed not only for his last supernatural end but also for the supernatural means to this supernatural end. Proper determination with respect to the means is the work of the supernatural or infused moral virtues. God does not provide less perfectly and less generously for the order of grace than he does for the order of nature.

The Church has never definitively declared anything of the existence of these virtues, but their existence is denied by no Catholic theologians and commonly affirmed by saints, doctors and theologians. The most common opinion regarding their number is that there are as many supernatural moral virtues as there are natural moral virtues.

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<sup>21</sup> I-II, 62, 4.

<sup>22</sup> I-II, 63, 1.

<sup>23</sup> I-II, 63, 2.

<sup>24</sup> I-II, 63, 3.

## THE NATURE OF THE SUPERNATURAL MORAL VIRTUES

The supernatural moral virtues **differ specifically** from their respective natural moral virtues. Although the material objects or content of the supernatural and the natural moral virtue are the same, **their formal objects differ**.<sup>25</sup>

The natural moral virtue has for its formal object a good determined by reason alone, whereas the supernatural moral virtue has for its formal object a good determined by reason illumined by faith, in other words, by a supernatural standard. Infused abstinence and acquired abstinence are both concerned with the same material object, the moderate use of food. But their norms or standards regulating this moderate use of food are quite different. The natural virtue moderates the use of food to protect the health of the body, while the supernatural virtue moderates the use of food to discipline the body and bring it into subjection in view of the goal of eternal life.

The infused virtues give an intrinsic facility for performing certain supernatural acts, but must depend upon the extrinsic facility of the acquired virtues as a condition for the actual performance of these virtuous acts.

A man who habitually drinks too much will receive, after a good confession, sanctifying grace and the infused virtue of sobriety; but without the acquired virtue of sobriety he will remain sober only with the greatest difficulty.

The intrinsic facility for placing a certain act consists in the inclination, rooted in the very power itself, for performing a particular operation; the extrinsic facility consists in the removal of external obstacles which impede the performance of the operation. The supernatural virtues confer this intrinsic facility for acting supernaturally, for they so elevate and strengthen man's natural operative powers as to give him not merely an inclination for, but the very power itself of supernatural action. But they do not confer the extrinsic facility; they do not remove the external obstacles.

The acquisition of the acquired virtues, therefore, is of tremendous importance for the Christian. The infused virtues are not intrinsically aided by the acquired virtue, but the acquired virtues do assist extrinsically by removing obstacles, such as the inordinate inclinations and desires of man's lower nature. Once these obstacles are removed, the infused virtues enable man to act easily and promptly at producing supernatural works in the various areas of human action.

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# THE PROPERTIES OF VIRTUE

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## THE "MEAN" OF VIRTUE

Prov. 4:27: "Decline not to the right hand, nor to the left; turn away thy foot from evil"

This notion of avoidance of extremes must be carefully understood: certainly virtue is far from being a continual compromise resulting in mediocrity.

The mean of virtue is *not on the part of the subject*, as though a man could not exercise virtue more than halfheartedly, could not strive with great moral energy for the perfection of goodness.

The mean of virtue is **on the part of the object**. This means that virtue has for its object a middle way in its proper matter between excess and defect, precisely to the degree that right reason dictates. Thus, virtue consists in a **mean**, conforming man's actions to a standard or measure, neither going beyond it nor falling short.<sup>26</sup>

A man can fully enjoy drinking, but he may not enjoy it beyond the measure set by his nature as man and his vocation to heaven, right reason and divine law. Excess would be to drink too much, or to drink when, where or how drinking should not be done; defect would be not to drink in the proper circumstances and under the proper conditions as laid down by right reason.

An act is good which conforms to the measure or rule of human reason or faith, morally evil if it does not. The mean of virtue becomes, therefore, the mean of reason (taking "reason" as including both the case of reason alone or as illumined by divine faith).

## THE MEAN OF THE MORAL VIRTUES<sup>27</sup>

All of the moral virtues observe this mean of reason. But it also happens sometimes that this rational mean is in addition a real mean – in the virtue of justice. Justice gives to another what is due him. Because justice is concerned

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<sup>25</sup> I-II, 63, 4.

<sup>26</sup> I-II, 64.

<sup>27</sup> I-II, 64, 1-2.

with objective external obligations to others, the mean or standard is something wholly independent of whatever reason may determine without reference to reality.

There is a right here established by objective quantity: if a man borrows ten dollars, he is obliged to pay back ten dollars. The real mean of justice consists in paying back ten dollars. To give five dollars would be an injustice; to give fifteen would go beyond justice.

The other moral virtues – prudence, fortitude and temperance – attain the mean of reason alone, a rational mean rather than a real mean.

There is in the virtue of sobriety no objective mean, a departure from which would also be either an excess or a defect. The reasonable amount one may drink differs radically with different individuals. These virtues regulate man's internal emotions or desires, which cannot be measured by the same external, quantitative rule we find in justice.

### **The rational mean is not something mathematical.**

It could not be argued, for instance, that, because eating six hamburgers makes one ill, and guilty of gluttony, and eating none at all shows lack of care for the body, therefore the reasonable norm is always to eat three. Sometimes this rational mean will be found in complete abstinence, as when a diabetic eats absolutely no sugar, or when John the Baptist abstained completely from alcoholic drink in a spirit of penance.

The rational mean is not mediocrity or compromise but **the apex of perfection determined by prudence** between excess and defect in a particular case.

## THE MEAN OF THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES<sup>28</sup>

The intellectual virtues, too, attain a real mean, for the measure of truth is objective reality itself, something external to, and independent of the consideration of the mind. An intellectual virtue is perfect when it attains things as they are.

Falsehood, which is the evil of the intellect, can be had both by failing to know what is to be known and also by attributing to some object more reality than it truly has.

## THE MEAN OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES<sup>29</sup>

Because God himself who is beyond any created measure is their object, there is no mean for the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. It is not possible to believe too much, hope too much, love too much; their only measure is to believe, to hope, to love without measure.

Any excess or defect which might seem to be attached to the theological virtues actually comes from the circumstances or state of the subject of these virtues. One may, for instance, give himself too much to certain practices connected with contemplative prayer, which pertains to the theological virtues, if he finds it necessary to neglect the duties of his state of life—his work, his family, his health. But this excess is not really an excess in the virtue itself, because it does not pertain to the proper acts or proper matter of any of the theological virtues. It rather stems from the extrinsic circumstances or state of the subject in which these virtues reside.

## **CONNECTION OF THE VIRTUES**

The connection of virtues refers to an essential dependence of one virtue upon another, so that one cannot exist without the others in the same individual.<sup>30</sup> To determine the existence of this relationship we shall have to consider each class of virtue.

### THE INTELLECTUAL VIRTUES

The intellectual virtues are **not necessarily connected** among themselves nor with the moral virtues.

One may know logic without knowing biology; a theologian may know all about charity without being a saint.

Nevertheless, since all that the intellect grasps is founded on first principles, all the intellectual virtues depend on understanding.

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<sup>28</sup> I-II, 64, 3.

<sup>29</sup> I-II, 64, 4.

<sup>30</sup> I-II, 65.

## THE MORAL VIRTUES<sup>31</sup>

The moral virtues **in their imperfect state are not connected among themselves.**

A woman who by temperament might be generous to the poor might at the same time be engaged in prostitution.

**But in their perfect state both the acquired and the infused moral virtues are essentially connected among themselves.**<sup>32</sup>

The virtuous man is orientated toward morally good goals, and chooses means suitable to attain those goals; it is the work of the moral virtues to dispose and incline man toward morally good goals in life, and the work of prudence to counsel, judge and command the use of means to attain these goals.

Justice, temperance and fortitude, in consequence, depend upon prudence for the realization of their perfection in human behavior. This dependence, however, is mutual, for all means are measured by the end they must attain. If prudence is to command the use of means that are truly suitable for an ultimate goal, then a man must be disposed for that goal by the right order with respect to particular goals which is set up by the moral virtues. Perfect prudence can only exist with the moral virtues. To act bravely, a prudent man must have fortitude; to act courageously, a brave man must have prudence.

The **supernatural virtues, infused together simultaneously with grace and charity, are obviously linked with one another.** Charity is "the bond of perfection", joining them all together in attaining an object and destiny far beyond the most perfect human capabilities, where the least defection is a total loss. Like their counterparts of the same name, they are also connected in prudence, a supernatural prudence which dictates, subject to the goals established for it, the immediate means for the proximate goals the supernatural virtues have directed and empowered human powers to realize as steps to the attainment of God.

## THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES<sup>33</sup>

**In the state of perfect virtue, the theological virtues of faith and hope are connected in charity,** for charity perfects all the virtues, directing them, informing them, as it leads them to God.

**In the state of imperfect virtue, however, faith and hope can exist without charity.** Men continue to believe in God and to hope in him even when in the state of mortal sin, when they have ceased to love him, or to direct their actions to him. But charity itself presupposes both faith and hope: we cannot love what we do not know, nor can we love what is impossible to attain. Faith may exist without hope (knowledge without desire), but hope always presupposes faith (desire for something known).

## EQUALITY AND INEQUALITY AMONG THE VIRTUES

In considering relations of equality, virtues may be compared in terms of their objects and in terms of their subjects.<sup>34</sup>

1. **In terms of their objects, the theological virtues are supreme because they have God as their object:** charity is superior to faith and hope because by it man approaches nearer to God. Faith is of what is not seen, and hope is of what is not possessed, while the love of charity is of what is already possessed.

The intellectual virtues, which attain universal truth, have a more noble object than the moral virtues, which are concerned with particular goods.

Among the cardinal virtues prudence is most perfect because it resides in the reason, which is the norm of morality. Justice follows prudence, because it establishes the order of reason in man's deeds, not only regarding himself, but also regarding others. Fortitude comes third, because it strengthens man against the dangers pertaining to life and death, which are of primary concern to man. Temperance is last; it regulates the appetites in less important matters, even though matters which are necessary to preserve the individual or the species.

The infused moral virtues, since they are supernatural, are by essence superior, of course, to the acquired moral virtues.

2. **In terms of their subjects, different men possess virtues in different degrees.** Some men are better disposed than others by practice, others have a stronger natural inclination to a particular virtue, while still others have a more discerning judgment in these matters or receive a greater grace, for grace is given to each

"according to the measure of the giving of Christ (Eph. 4:9).

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<sup>31</sup> I-II, 65, 1.

<sup>32</sup> I-II, 65, 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> I-II, 65, 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> I-II, 66.

## THE DURATION OF THE VIRTUES

The virtues are good operative habits, inhering in a soul that is immortal. Will the virtues themselves perdure into the next life with the human soul in which they reside? In the souls in heaven do there remain any of those virtues which include no imperfection, an imperfection repugnant to the state of the blessed?<sup>35</sup>

**The moral virtues remain in the souls of the blessed as regards the essence of the virtue, but not as regards its inclination to act.** This merely means that there will no longer be dangers and death, and hence none of the passions concerning them for fortitude to regulate, nor desires for food or drink or sex to be controlled by temperance. Yet the appetites' conformity to right reason will remain, and this is the essence of virtue. In heaven these virtues will be applied to new operations, more fitting to the kind of life that exists there, and not to the exercises of this life.

**Temperance, fortitude and other virtues concerned with the passions will be present only radically,** however, until the resurrection of the body, as these virtues govern faculties requiring the use of the body.

**The knowledge of reality attained by the intellectual virtues,** which is their essential element, is itself a participation of the immortality of the intellect, and hence **remains after this life.** The images in the senses and the imagination (from which the intellect now gathers the raw material for its ideas) will cease to exist with the body in which they function. Truth will remain, immeasurably more meaningful, but its worldly vehicles will not be necessary.

Of the theological virtues, **neither faith nor hope will exist in heaven.** The obscure knowledge of faith will give way to the brilliance of vision in which we possess God and are possessed by him; the blind groping of hope will give way to the unchangeable possession of God which is the happiness of heaven. Only charity will remain. Faith and hope are essentially imperfect, and in heaven they will flower in perfection into vision and possession. But charity will live on, for the perfection of love does not destroy the basic nature of love: its intensity will increase beyond measure; its object, God himself, is exactly the same. Charity never fails.

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## ADDITIONAL AIDS FOR EXERCISE OF VIRTUES

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### THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

The life of a Christian is a journey back to God. Like every journey, this one is set apart from all others by its goal. The goal of the Christian is the vision, the possession of God Himself. It is a supernatural goal, one surpassing all the power and all the ability of created nature. And because the goal is supernatural, the means to it are also supernatural; but they must remain within the reach of man, for it is his journey, and no one else can travel the road appointed for him. The means are placed within man's reach when God elevates him to the supernatural order by grace, when he makes him a "partaker of the divine nature", infusing into him the supernatural virtues that enable human powers to perform acts that attain a divine goal and have eternal value.

With all this help, however, these acts remain more human than divine. The way in which a man exercises a supernatural virtue is very evidently human. It is still an act that requires thought, deliberation and the exercise of free choice on the part of man. To attain a goal so lofty and so far above us as is the vision and possession of God, we have need of a kind of activity that is more flavored with divinity. We are led by the Spirit of God through the gifts of the Holy Ghost.<sup>36</sup>

### THE EXISTENCE OF THE GIFTS

Isaias 11;2-3: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness (piety). And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.<sup>37</sup>

From the very beginning of the Church, the Fathers, theologians and spiritual writers have attributed these gifts to the souls of all the just.

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<sup>35</sup> I-II, 67.

<sup>36</sup> I-II, 68.

<sup>37</sup> I-II, 68, 7.

## THE NATURE OF THE GIFTS

The virtues, both natural and supernatural, dispose us to obey promptly the commands of reason and reason enlightened by faith. The gifts dispose us in a higher manner, to obey promptly the movement or inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Who dwells in us through charity. And it seems, therefore, that just as our powers require habits for disposing them to be obedient to reason, so too they require habits, and not mere passing dispositions, by which we are made obedient to the Holy Ghost.

The gifts of the Holy Ghost may be defined, then, as ***supernatural habits by which we are disposed for obeying promptly the movement or inspiration of the Holy Ghost.***

These habits are called gifts, not only because they are given by God, but because they dispose us to follow the impulse or suggestion of the Giver, and because they render man movable by a divine inspiration which is a special gift of actual grace. For this motion of the Holy Ghost is a very specialized kind of gift; otherwise it would not differ from the ordinary movement of actual grace which is required even for the acts flowing from the supernatural virtues.

The gifts, then, condition man's operative powers, not for acting from their own instigation (i.e., through the ordinary channels of counsel, judgment and command) as is the case with the supernatural virtues, but for being moved from the outside, as it were, by the very movement of the Holy Ghost himself.

Jn 3:8: "The wind blows where it will, and thou hearest its sound but dost not know where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the spirit"

As the sails of a ship place that ship in readiness to follow the impulse of a favorable wind, so the gifts dispose and prepare man to obey promptly the impulse of the Holy Spirit. "By means of them the soul is furnished and strengthened, – writes Leo XIII – so as to be able to obey more easily and promptly [the Holy Ghost's] voice and impulse".<sup>38</sup>

## THE NECESSITY OF THE GIFTS

This movement and inspiration of the Holy Ghost is necessary, not only for those who perform the more extraordinary and more excellent works of the Christian life, but also for each of the just, that they might persevere and grow in grace. Such is the common teaching of theologians.

The gifts are necessary that the Christian save his soul. Life on earth is too complex an affair for him to cope with in terms of his strictly human powers, even when elevated and strengthened by the supernatural virtues, theological and moral.

"By the theological and moral virtues, man is not so perfected in respect of his last end as not to stand in continual need of being moved by the yet higher promptings of the Holy Ghost."<sup>39</sup>

And since, as St. Thomas points out, the need is continual and permanent, it is necessary that the gifts be in us as permanent, infused dispositions, i.e., as habits.

No man can be certain of the extent or degree of divine influence exercised in his life through the instrumentality of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Their activity must always be appreciated and prayed for, and never underestimated.

## THE BEATITUDES

The beatitudes, of which St. Matthew lists eight (Mt 5:3 ff) and St. Luke four (Lc 6:30 ff), are ***actions*** and not habits, the perfect acts of the virtues and particularly of the gifts, the most proper effects of the divine-human action which flows from these supernatural principles.<sup>40</sup>

The name beatitude is appropriate for these more perfect actions because they are especially conducive to man's beatitude, leading to, and meritorious of his true final beatitude or happiness: thus even in this life they bring a certain foretaste or firmly founded expectation of that happiness.

We may define the beatitudes as: ***acts that flow from the workings of the Holy Ghost in man by which man possesses happiness, beginning even in this life and perfected in the next.***

Thus the words of Leo XIII express the sentiment of the Church:

"By means of these gifts [of the Holy Spirit] the soul is excited and encouraged to seek after and attain the evangelical beatitudes which, like the flowers that come forth in the springtime, are the signs and harbingers of eternal beatitude."

Here, then, in the program of happiness Christ announced in the Sermon on the Mount, is the perfection of human living, a level of action diametrically opposed to the ideals of the world, its means and its goals. In these great and

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<sup>38</sup> *Divinum Illud Mag.*, May 9, 1897.

<sup>39</sup> I-II, 68, 2, ad 2.

<sup>40</sup> I-II, 69.

more perfect activities is realized, by guarantee and anticipation, the aspiration for eternal life which wells from the Christian soul transformed by grace.

## THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY GHOST

The fruits of the Holy Ghost are *human actions produced by the virtues and the gifts which refresh man with a certain holy and genuine delight*.<sup>41</sup>

Gal. 5:22: "The fruit of the Spirit is: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, modesty, continency"

The fruits are *not habits or dispositions* found in the soul, but rather *actions* which flow from habits. An action which is a fruit of the Holy Ghost is something ultimate and delightful, as the fruit of a tree or plant is the ultimate flowering of the tree and the source of pleasure for those who eat it. While these acts lack the perfection and excellence of those perfect works which are the beatitudes, they are nonetheless virtuous actions of the Christian life which are directly opposed to the works of the flesh.

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Dubuque, The Priory Press, 1959 [pp. 125-158, modified].

### ++Catalogues of vices in the Epistles of St. Paul:

- **Romans 1:29-31** –Being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness: full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity: whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute: without affection, without fidelity, without mercy.
- **Romans 13:13** --Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ: and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.
- **I Corinthians 5:11** -- But now I have written to you, not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator or covetous or a server of idols or a railer or a drunkard or an extortioner: with such a one, not so much as to eat.
- **I Corinthians 6:9-10** -- Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God? Do not err: Neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers: nor the effeminate nor liars with mankind nor thieves nor covetous nor drunkards nor railers nor extortioners shall possess the kingdom of God.
- **II Corinthians 12:20** -- For I fear lest perhaps, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found by you such as you would not. Lest perhaps contentions, envyings, animosities, dissensions, detractions, whisperings, swellings, seditions, be among you. Lest again, when I come, God humble me among you: and I mourn many of them that sinned before and have not done penance for the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness that they have committed.
- **Galatians 5:19-21** -- Now the works of the flesh are manifest: which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like.
- **Colossians 3:5-8** -- Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, lust, evil concupiscence and covetousness, which is the service of idols. For which things the wrath of God cometh upon the children of unbelief. In which you also walked some time, when you lived in them. But now put you also all away anger, indignation, malice, blasphemy, filthy speech out of your mouth.
- **I Timothy 1:9-10** -- Knowing this: That the law is not made for the just man but for the unjust and disobedient,

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<sup>41</sup> I-II, 70.

for the ungodly and for sinners, for the wicked and defiled, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for them who defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and whatever other thing is contrary to sound doctrine.

- **II Timothy 3:2-5** -- Men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasure more than of God: having an appearance indeed of godliness but denying the power thereof. Now these avoid.
- **Titus 3:3** -- For we ourselves also were some time unwise, incredulous, erring, slaves to divers desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

### ++Catalogues of virtues in the Epistles of St. Paul:

- **I Corinthians 13:4-7** -- Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil: rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
- **Galatians 5:22-23** -- But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity.
- **Ephesians 4:2** -- With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity.
- **Ephesians 5:9** -- For the fruit of the light is in all goodness and justice and truth:
- **Colossians 3:12** -- Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience:
- **I Timothy 3:2-5** -- It behoveth therefore a bishop to be blameless, the husband of one wife, sober, prudent, of good behaviour, chaste, given to hospitality, a teacher, not given to wine, no striker but modest, not quarrelsome, not covetous: but one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all chastity. But if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?
- **I Timothy 3:8-11** -- Deacons in like manner: chaste, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre: holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved: and so let them minister, having no crime. The women in like manner: chaste, not slanderers, but sober, faithful in all things.
- **I Timothy 6:11** -- But thou, O man of God, fly these things: and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, mildness.
- **II Timothy 2:22** -- But flee thou youthful desires: and pursue justice, faith, charity and peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

### ++See also the Epistle of St. James:

- **James 3:13-18** -- Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge, among you? Let him shew, by a good contestation, his work in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter zeal, and there be contention in your hearts: glory not and be not liars against the truth. For this is not wisdom, descending from above: but earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and contention is: there is inconstancy and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above, first indeed is chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation. And the fruit of justice is sown in peace, to them that make peace.