

## Chapter 10

### The Theological Virtues

We have already discussed the theology of the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Chapter 4. Now it is necessary to treat of them in particular, as meritorious good works by which one grows in holiness. The detailed study of each of the virtues and gifts belongs to systematic moral theology, and therefore we shall not repeat what is treated in that section of theology. Rather, we shall focus our attention on the principal virtues that are necessary for the perfection of the Christian life.

The virtues contribute to Christian perfection and holiness in a variety of ways. First of all, when performed under the impetus of grace and motivated by charity, the acts of the virtues are meritorious of an increase of grace. Secondly, they pertain to the essence of Christian perfection, because charity is the principal virtue of Christian holiness while the other virtues relate to Christian perfection as imperated by charity. Thirdly, the virtues constitute a kind of goal in the sense that through the perfection of the virtues the individual is configured to Christ and thus gives glory to God.

Our treatment of the virtues and the gifts will concentrate especially on the virtues as constitutive elements of Christian holiness. It should be noted, however, that while all the virtues contribute to Christian perfection, the pattern of particular virtues that are operative in the life of the individual will be determined by one's vocation or state of life, as well as by one's particular gifts or charisms. Thus, in the saints we find that each one practiced the virtues to a heroic degree and was actuated by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but one saint differs from another in the virtues that formed the pattern of holiness.

The theological virtues are so called because they enable the individual to relate directly to God, whereas the moral virtues have as their objects the proper use and control of our faculties in relation to those things that can serve as a means to personal holiness and eternal life. Thus, by faith we believe in God and accept all that he has revealed; by hope we trust God to be faithful to his promises if we correspond to his grace; by charity we love God as our perfect good and ultimate end.

The three theological virtues are the Christian virtues *par excellence*, and yet they are not understood or appreciated by those who live according to purely human standards, though these same persons may admire the moral virtues of justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance. The reason is that the theological virtues draw us away from the natural order to the divine and the supernatural. Faith looks beyond the horizons of human knowledge and clings to the truths and mysteries revealed by God in Jesus Christ; hope causes us to regard the things of this world of little worth when compared to the life of glory to which we are called; charity impels us to love God above all else and to love all else in God, rejecting anything that is an obstacle to that love.

However, true Christians do not overreact against the world and brand all creation as evil, nor do they disdain anything that does not bear the label of Christian. At the same time, they have the courage to stand against the purely secular when it infringes on the rights of God and of true religion. The theological virtues, therefore, enable Christians to orientate their whole life and all their actions to God, as St. Paul points out:

We constantly are mindful before our God and Father of the way you are proving your faith, and laboring in love, and showing constancy of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ .... We who live by day must be alert, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet (1 Thess. 1:3-5; 5:8).

## Faith

If, as we have seen in the discussion on grace, the Christian life can be understood only in relation to the supernatural end to which it is directed and in view of which it must be evaluated, the first place "in the order of generation" must be given to the virtue of faith. **The Church has defined the virtue of faith as follows:**

**"It is a supernatural virtue by which, thanks to the movement and help of God's grace, we believe what God reveals to be true, not because its intrinsic truth is obvious under scrutiny according to the natural light of reason, but on the authority of God himself revealing."**

In virtue of the divine and Catholic faith, all those things are to be believed which are contained in the word of God-either the written or the traditional word-and are proposed for belief by the Church.(1)

The virtue of faith is an infused gift of God, but man "cannot give his adherence to God when he reveals himself unless, drawn by the Father, he submits to God with a faith that is reasonable and free."(2) The act of faith is an act of belief in truths revealed by God, and therefore it requires **assent of the intellect**. But the act of belief does not follow upon any discursus of the intellect or any evidence that necessitates belief; it rests on the authority of God revealing, and therefore it requires the **command of the will** preceding the faith-act. But proceeding as they do from a supernatural virtue, both the command of the will and the assent of the intellect in faith are supernatural acts, and hence the third element in the act of faith is the **movement of divine grace**, for actual grace is the intrinsic principle of all supernatural acts. As St. Paul says: "I repeat, it is owing to his favor that salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing, it is God's gift" (Eph. 2:8).

The perfect operation of the virtue of faith requires the state of sanctifying grace and the actuation of charity. Thus, the Council of Trent stated that a faith not united to hope and charity does not unite us perfectly to Christ nor make us living members of his Mystical Body.(3) However, the same Council declared that persons in mortal sin can still possess an *unformed faith* (not animated by charity). They still believe the truths of faith on the authority of God revealing, but lacking sanctifying grace, their acts are not meritorious.(4) Only a serious sin directed against faith will destroy the virtue of faith.

The Council of Trent states that faith is the beginning, the foundation, and the root of justification, and without faith it is impossible to please God and to be numbered among his children.(5) It is the *beginning* because it establishes the first contact between ourselves and God, the Author of the supernatural order. The first thing is to believe in God. It is the *foundation*, inasmuch as all the other virtues, including charity, presuppose faith, and are established upon it as an edifice on its foundation. Without faith it is impossible to hope or to love. It is the *root*, because in it, when vivified by charity, all the other virtues live. When animated by charity, faith produces, among other things, **two great effects in the soul: the filial fear of God that helps the soul keep itself from sin, and the purification of the heart that raises it to the heights and cleanses it of its affection for earthly things**.

Both objectively and subjectively faith can grow and develop in our souls until it reaches an extraordinary degree, but it is necessary to understand this doctrine correctly. No one has explained it better than St. Thomas, and we shall summarize his teaching.

**A habit or virtue can be considered in two ways: by reason of the object and by reason of its participation in the subject (objective faith and subjective faith). Now the object of faith (objective faith)** can be considered in two ways: according to its formal motive (the authority of God revealing) or according to the things proposed for belief (the truths of faith). The formal

motive of faith (the authority of God) is one and, from this point of view, faith is not diversified in believers, but it is the same in all (one either accepts the authority of God, or one does not). But the truths proposed for our belief are many, and they can be known more or less explicitly (the theologian knows many more and knows them more clearly than the simple believer). Accordingly, **one person can believe explicitly more truths than another person, and thus have a greater faith according to the greater explication of that faith.**

But if faith is considered according to its participation in the subject (subjective faith), it can also have two modes, because active faith proceeds from the intellect (the intellect assents to revealed truths) and from the will (which, moved by God and our free choice, imposes this assent on the intellect). In this sense also **faith can be greater in one than in another, by reason of the greater promptness with which the will commands the intellect to its assent.** (6)

There is nothing to add substantially to the foregoing doctrine. We shall now investigate the ways in which souls can intensify their faith in the various stages of the Christian life.

The principal concern of *beginners* is to nourish and foment their faith so that it will not be lost or corrupted. In order to do this, certain things are required:

1. Realizing that faith is a gift from God, as St. Paul teaches (Eph. 2:8), they will ask God for the grace to strengthen their faith.
2. They will reject energetically, with the help of divine grace, anything that could be a danger to their faith: doubts and temptations against the faith; dangerous literature that promotes worldly or anti-Christian values; intellectual pride, which is the primary obstacle to a docile assent to divine revelation. "God 'is stern with the arrogant, but to the humble he shows kindness'" (1 Pet. 5:5).
3. They will attempt to increase their knowledge of the truths of faith by studying Catholic doctrine to the best of their ability, thus extending their assent to a greater number of specific truths.
4. They will endeavor to augment subjective faith by making devout acts of faith and by obedience to the Magisterium of the Church.

*Advanced souls* will cultivate a spirit of faith that will place them on a strictly supernatural plane from which they can see and judge all things. For this, the following things are necessary:

1. They should see God through the light of faith, without taking any account of self-love or selfish views. God is always the same, infinitely good and merciful, regardless of the consolations or dryness we may experience in prayer, and regardless of adversity or prosperity.
2. They should evaluate everything in accordance with the teachings of faith, in spite of anything that the world may say or think. For example, they must be convinced that poverty, meekness, repentance, mercy, cleanness of heart, and peace (Matt. 5:3-10) are of more value toward eternal life than anything the world can offer. They should **renounce all worldly criteria and any points of view that are purely human.** "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 John 5:4).
3. The spirit of faith intensely lived will be a source of consolation in the suffering of this life in bodily infirmity, in bitterness and trials of soul, in the ingratitude or hatred of men, in the loss of one's relatives and friends. **Suffering passes, but the reward for having suffered well will never pass.** Moreover, a holy life is much more important than a long life. The apostles, and after them all the martyrs, illumined by the light of faith, walked steadfastly and tranquilly to their death, joyful that they could suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

In *perfect* souls, illumined by the gifts of understanding and knowledge, faith reaches its greatest intensity. It shines forth resplendently as a prelude to the beatific vision and the light of glory.

### **The Gift of Understanding**

The gift of understanding is a supernatural habit, infused in the soul with sanctifying grace, by which the human intellect, under the illuminating action of the Holy Spirit, is made apt for a penetrating intuition of revealed truths, and even for natural truths, so far as they are related to the supernatural end. The gift of understanding resides in the speculative intellect, which it perfects (the intellect having been informed previously by the virtue of faith), in order to receive in a connatural way the motion of the Holy Spirit.

**The essence of the gift of understanding is a penetrating intuition, and this constitutes the specific difference between the gift and the virtue of faith.** Faith provides a knowledge of supernatural truths in an imperfect manner (*modo humano*), which is proper to, and characteristic of, the infused virtues; the gift of understanding makes the intellect apt for the profound and intuitive penetration (*modo divino*) of those same revealed truths. **Simply speaking, this is a type of infused contemplation, a simple and profound intuition of truth.**

The gift of understanding is distinguished from the other intellectual gifts (wisdom, knowledge, and counsel) inasmuch as its proper function is the profound penetration of the truths of faith by way of simple apprehension, without making any judgment concerning them. Judgment, so far as it relates to divine things, pertains to the gift of wisdom; so far as it relates to created things, to the gift of knowledge; and so far as it pertains to the application of these truths to particular actions, to the gift of counsel.

The object of the gift of understanding comprises speculative and practical revealed truths, and even natural truths so far as they are related to the supernatural end. It embraces everything that pertains to God, Christ, human beings, and all creatures, but primarily to the truths of faith and secondarily to all other things as related to the supernatural end.

The gift of understanding produces admirable effects in the soul, and all of them perfect the virtue of faith. **St. Thomas Aquinas points out different ways in which the gift of understanding enables us to penetrate into the truths of faith.** (7)

1. **It discloses the hidden meaning of Sacred Scripture.** This is what the Lord effected in regard to the disciples at Emmaus when he opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). In the profound understanding of some scriptural passage, many of the saints found the theme of their whole spiritual life: "The favors of the Lord I will sing forever" of St. Teresa (Ps. 89:2); "Let whoever is simple turn in here" of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (Prov. 9:4); "The praise of glory" of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity (Eph. 1:6). For that reason these mystics find great satisfaction in the inspired words of Scripture, and especially in the words of Christ himself.

2. **It reveals the mysterious significance of symbols and figures.** Thus St. Paul saw Christ in the rock that gushed forth with living water to appease the thirst of the Israelites in the desert: "And the rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). St. John of the Cross explains many of the symbols and figures of the Old Testament that reached their full realization in the New Testament or in the life of grace.

3. **It reveals spiritual realities under sensible appearances.** The liturgy of the Church is filled with sublime symbolism that for the most part escapes the notice of superficial souls. But the saints experienced a great veneration and respect for the slightest ceremony of the Church. The gift of understanding enabled them to see the sublime realities hidden beneath those symbols and sensible signs.

4. ***It enables one to contemplate the effects that are contained in causes.*** This is particularly noticeable in contemplatives and in prayerful theologians. After the long hours of meditation and study, everything is suddenly illuminated under an impulse of the Spirit. A word or a statement is then seen in all its depth and meaning.

5. ***It makes us see causes through their effects.*** In an inverse sense, the gift of understanding reveals God and his all-powerful causality in his effects without resorting to a lengthy discursive process. ***In a simple gaze and by a divine intuition the soul discovers the invisible hidden beneath the visible.***

Such are the principal effects produced in the soul by the actuation of the gift of understanding. Perfected by this gift, the virtue of faith reaches an astounding intensity. St. Thomas stated: "In this very life, when the eye of the spirit is purified by the gift of understanding, one can in a certain way see God." (8) On reaching these heights, the influence of faith is extended to all the movements of the soul, all its acts are illuminated, and it sees all things through the prism of faith. ***These souls seem to be guided entirely by the divine instinct as to their manner of being, thinking, speaking, or reacting to the events of their own lives or to the lives of others.***

The actuation of the gifts depends entirely on the Holy Spirit, but the soul can do much to dispose itself, with the help of grace, for that divine movement. ***These are the principal means of disposing oneself:***

1. ***The practice of a vital faith with the help of ordinary grace.*** The infused virtues are perfected by the ever more intense practice of their proper acts. And although it is true that unless they go beyond the human mode of operation they can never reach their perfection, the Holy Spirit will perfect the virtues with his gifts if the soul does all that it can by the exercise of the infused virtues. ***God gives his graces to those that are best disposed.***

2. ***Perfect purity of soul and body.*** The sixth beatitude, which pertains to the clean of heart, corresponds to the gift of understanding. Only through perfect cleanness of soul and body is one made capable of seeing God: in this life, by the profound illumination of the gift of understanding in the obscurity of faith; in the next life, through the clear vision of glory.

3. ***Interior recollection.*** The Holy Spirit is the friend of recollection and solitude. Only there does he speak in silence to souls. The soul that is a friend of dissipation and worldliness will never perceive the word of God in its interior. ***It is necessary to empty oneself of created things, to retire to the cell of one's own heart in order to live there with the divine guest.*** When the soul has done all that it can to be recollected and detached from the world, ***the Holy Spirit will do the rest.***

4. ***Fidelity to grace.*** The soul must be always attentive and careful not to deny the Holy Spirit any sacrifice that he may ask. Not only must the soul avoid every voluntary thought, however small, that would sadden the Holy Spirit-according to the mysterious expression of St. Paul: ***"Do nothing to sadden the Holy Spirit"*** (Eph. 4:30) - but it must positively second all his divine movements until it can say with Christ: "I always do what pleases him" (John 8:29).

5. ***To invoke the Holy Spirit.*** We cannot practice any of these methods without the help and prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit. For that reason we should invoke him frequently and with the greatest possible fervor, remembering the promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to us (John 14:16-17). In imitation of the apostles when they retired to the Cenacle to await the coming of the Paraclete, we should associate our supplications with those of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Acts 1:14), the most faithful Virgin and the heavenly Spouse of the Holy Spirit. ***The divine Spirit will be communicated to us in the measure of our fidelity to grace, and this fidelity must be obtained through Mary, the universal Mediatrix of all graces.***

## The Gift of Knowledge

Some authors assign to the gift of knowledge the function of perfecting the virtue of hope, but St. Thomas assigns it to the virtue of faith, while to hope he assigns the virtue of fear of the Lord. (9) We follow the teaching of the Angelic Doctor on this matter but also admit that this gift can be related to prudence, justice, and temperance.

**The gift of knowledge is a supernatural habit through which the human intellect, under the action of the Holy Spirit, judges rightly concerning created things as related to eternal life and Christian perfection.**

It is not a question of human or philosophical knowledge, which gives certain and evident knowledge of things deduced by natural reason from their principles or proximate causes. Nor is it a question of theological knowledge, which deduces from revealed truths the virtualities contained therein by making use of natural reasoning. It is a question of a supernatural knowledge or **"divine instinct" which proceeds from a special illumination by the Holy Spirit, who enables us to judge rightly the connection between created things and the supernatural ultimate end.** As a habit it resides in the intellect, as does the virtue of faith, which it perfects. It is primarily speculative and secondarily practical.

Under the action of this gift the individual does not proceed by reasoning but judges rightly concerning all created things by a superior impulse and by a higher light than that of simple reason illumined by faith. This distinguishes the gift of knowledge from the gift of understanding. The latter, as we have seen, penetrates revealed truths by a supernatural intuition, but without forming any judgments. **The gift of knowledge, on the other hand, judges rightly concerning created things in relation to the supernatural end, and is thus distinguished from the gift of wisdom, whose function it is to judge divine things and not created things.** This right judging of creatures is the **"science of the saints,"** and it is based on charity, which relates not only to God but also to creatures, forming a judgment of them according to their properties, and then directing all of them to God.

The effects of this gift are admirable, and all of them have a great sanctifying value. **The following are the principal effects:**

- 1. It teaches us how to judge rightly concerning created things in relation to God.** This is proper to the gift of knowledge. Under its impulse, a double awareness is produced in the soul: it realizes the emptiness of created things and sees through them the God who made them.
- 2. It guides us with certitude concerning that which we must believe or not believe.** The soul instinctively possesses the sense of faith (**sensus fidei**). Without having studied theology or without having had any education, such souls are aware whether or not a devotion, a doctrine, a counsel, or any kind of maxim is in accord with faith or is opposed to faith.
- 3. It enables us to see promptly and with certitude the state of our soul.** Everything is clear to the penetrating introspection of the gift of knowledge. Our interior acts and the secret movements of our heart are seen in their goodness or malice. In this way we discover the evil or the good that previously escaped our notice. Rightly did St. Teresa say that "in a place where the sun enters, there is no hidden dust."
- 4. It inspires us concerning the best method of conduct with our neighbor as regards eternal life.** In this respect the gift of knowledge influences the virtue of prudence, whose perfection is directly under the gift of counsel. By this gift preachers know what they ought to say to their hearers and what they ought to urge upon them. Directors perceive the state of the souls under

their guidance, their spiritual needs, and the remedies for their faults. Superiors know in what way they ought to govern those under them, and parents, how to form their children. Here the gift of knowledge relates also to justice.

5. **It detaches us from the things of earth**. This is a consequence of that right judgment of things that constitutes the proper characteristic of the gift of knowledge. Compared to God, all creatures are as if they were not. For that reason it is necessary to rise above created things in order to rest in God alone. The gift of knowledge instructs the saints concerning the necessity of the detachment we admire, for example, in St. John of the Cross. **A soul illuminated by the gift of knowledge passes beyond creatures in order not to be detained in its journey to God. The whole of creation is not worth a glance from one who has experienced God.**

6. **It teaches us how to use created things in a holy way**. It is certain that created things are nothing when compared with God, and yet they are vestiges of God, and they can lead us to him if we use them rightly. There are countless examples of this in the lives of the saints. The contemplation of created things raised their souls to God because they could see the trace of God in creation. Sometimes the most insignificant detail, which would pass unnoticed by an ordinary person, made a strong impression on them and led them to God. Here the gift relates to the virtue of temperance.

7. **It fills us with repentance and sorrow for our past errors**. This is an inevitable consequence of a right judgment concerning created things. In the light of the gift of knowledge, souls discover the emptiness of created things, their short duration, their inability to make us truly happy, the harm that attachment to them can cause to the soul. Then, recalling the times they were attached to created things, they feel a most profound repentance manifested by intense acts of contrition. The pathetic accents of the **Miserere** spontaneously spring to their lips as a psychological necessity to alleviate their sorrow.

Such are the principal effects of the gift of knowledge. Through it, far from seeing creatures as obstacles to union with God, the soul uses them as instruments to be united to God. **Perfected by the gifts of understanding and knowledge, the virtue of faith reaches its greatest intensity.**

In addition to recollection, fidelity to grace and invocation to the Holy Spirit, which are the common means for fomenting the gifts of the Holy Spirit in general, we can point out some **special means for disposing oneself for the actuations of the gift of knowledge.**

1. **Consider the vanity of created things**. We can never attain by our own efforts the penetrating intuition of the gift of knowledge concerning the vanity of created things. And yet we can achieve something by meditating seriously on this point. God does not ask of us more than we can do at a given time, and those who do what they can, will not be refused the divine assistance for further progress.

2. **Accustom oneself to refer all created things to God**. We should never rest in creatures but should pass through them to God. Are not created beauties a pallid reflection of the divine beauty? We should endeavor to discover in all things the vestige or trace of God and thus prepare the way for the action of the Holy Spirit in us.

3. **Oppose energetically the spirit of the world**. The world is not concerned with anything but enjoying created things, putting all its happiness in them. There is no attitude more contrary to the spirit of the gift of knowledge. We should avoid the false maxims that are completely opposed to the spirit of God. We should always be alert lest we are taken by surprise by the artful enemy, who is constantly striving to turn our gaze away from the supernatural world.

4. **See the hand of God in the government of the world and in all the events of our life, whether prosperous or adverse**. It costs a great deal to acquire this point of view, and it will

never be acquired completely until the gift of wisdom operates in us as well as the gift of knowledge. Nevertheless, we must endeavor to do as much as we can in this respect. God cares for us with a loving providence. He is our Father, and he knows much better than we what things are good for us. He leads us with an infinite love, although many times we cannot discover the secret design in that which he disposes or permits to happen to us.

5. **Cultivate simplicity of heart.** This will attract the blessing of God, and he will not neglect to give us the gifts we need to attain perfect purity of heart, if we are faithful to his grace. There is a close relationship between custody of the heart and the exact fulfillment of all our obligations. "I have more discernment than the elders, because I observe your precepts" (Ps. 119:100).

### Hope

**Hope is the theological virtue infused by God into the will, by which we trust with complete certitude in the attainment of eternal life and the means necessary for reaching it, assisted by the omnipotent help of God.** The primary object of hope is eternal beatitude; the secondary object consists in all the means leading to it. The formal motive of hope is the assisting omnipotence of God, connoting divine mercy and God's fidelity to his promises.

Hope resides in the will, because its proper object is the good, which is the object of the will, but charity and faith are more perfect than hope. Absolutely speaking, both **faith and hope can exist without charity (unformed faith and hope), but no infused virtue can exist in the soul without faith.**

Hope tends to its object with absolute certitude, a truth that requires some explaining. The Church teaches that without a special revelation we cannot be certain we shall attain our eternal salvation,<sup>(10)</sup> although we can and ought to have absolute certitude that with the assistance of the omnipotent help of God, no obstacle to our salvation is insuperable.

The goods of this world fall under the secondary object of hope, but only to the extent that they can be useful to us for salvation. For that reason, St. Thomas says that, apart from the salvation of our soul, we ought not to ask God for any good unless it is in some way related to our salvation.<sup>(11)</sup>

The act of hope, even of unformed hope, is of itself good and virtuous. This is expressly stated in Sacred Scripture (cf. Ps. 119:112; Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:1; Heb. 11:26) and can be demonstrated theologically because eternal life is the supernatural ultimate end of man. Therefore, to work with one's gaze fixed on this end is not only good and virtuous but also necessary.

By the same token, in this life there is no state of perfection that habitually excludes the motives of hope. The error of the Jansenists and the Quietists consisted in the affirmation that to work out of hope is immoral and imperfect and gives evidence that individuals desire God as a good for themselves, thus subordinating God to our own personal happiness. But such is not the case. We desire God for ourselves, not because of ourselves but because of himself. **God continues to be the end or goal of the act of hope, not ourselves.**

Like any other virtue, hope can increase more and more. Let us consider the principal phases of its development in the various stages in the spiritual life.

**Above all, beginners should avoid falling into one of the two extremes contrary to hope: presumption and despair.** To avoid the first, they should consider that without the grace of God we can do absolutely nothing in the supernatural order. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Without God's help one could not have a single good thought or even pronounce worthily the name of Jesus (1 Cor. 12:3). They should remember that God is infinitely good and merciful, but that he is also infinitely just (Gal. 6:7). He is disposed to save us, but on the

condition that we cooperate with his grace (1 Cor. 15:10) and that we work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

**To avoid despair and discouragement, beginners should realize that the mercy of God is untiring in pardoning the repentant sinner**; and if it is certain that of ourselves we can do nothing, it is likewise certain that with God's grace we can do all things (Phil. 4:13). **It is necessary, then, to rise courageously from one's falls and renew the journey with greater effort and zeal**, taking occasion from the fault itself to redouble one's vigilance and effort. "All things work together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his decree" (Rom. 8:28); and St. Augustine adds, "even sins," so far as they are an occasion of making the soul more vigilant and cautious.

**Beginners should also endeavor to raise their thoughts to heaven, and this for several reasons:**

1. **In order to disdain the things of earth**. No created thing can fill completely the heart of man, in whom God has placed an infinite capacity. And even in the event that such things could satisfy man completely, this would be a transitory and fleeting happiness, as is life itself on this earth. Pleasures, wealth, honors, the applause of others -- all these things pass and vanish like smoke. When all is said and done, "What profit would a man show if he were to gain the whole world and destroy himself in the process?" (Matt. 16:26).

2. **To be consoled in the midst of their labors and sufferings**. Suffering accompanies us inevitably from the cradle to the grave, and no one escapes it. But Christian hope reminds us that all the sufferings of this life are as nothing in comparison with the glory to be manifested in us (Rom. 8:13). If we bear them in a holy manner, these momentary tribulations prepare us for the eternal weight of a sublime and incomparable glory (2 Cor. 4:17). What a consolation for the soul that suffers tribulation if it is able to contemplate heaven through its tears!

3. **To be encouraged to be good**. The practice of virtue is arduous indeed. It is necessary to be detached from everything, to renounce one's own tastes and caprices, and to turn back the continuous attacks from the world, the devil, and the flesh. **Especially at the beginning of the spiritual life this constant battle is most difficult**. But what great encouragement the soul can experience in raising its eyes to heaven! It is well worthwhile to struggle for a short time during the brief years of this life in order to enjoy eternal blessings in heaven. Later, when the soul begins to advance along the path of union with God, the motives of disinterested love will prevail over those of the soul's own happiness, but these desires for perfect happiness will never be completely abandoned. Even the greatest saints experienced a nostalgia for heaven, and this is one of the most powerful stimuli for advancing without discouragement along the way of heroism and sanctity.

**The advanced soul will strive to cultivate the virtue of hope by intensifying as much as possible its confidence in God and in his divine assistance**. To this end, the following practices are helpful:

1. **Never to be preoccupied with anxious solicitude for tomorrow**. We are submerged in the divine and loving providence of God. Nothing necessary will be lacking to us if we trust in him and if we hope for all things from him. We have the promise of Christ himself: "Look at the birds in the sky .... Think of the flowers growing in the fields .... Will he not much more look after you?" (Matt. 6:26-30). Christ also tells us: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

2. **To simplify their prayer as much as possible**. "In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do .... Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:7-9). The formula of the Our Father, which came from the lips of the divine Master, will be their favorite prayer, together

with the other prayers from the Gospel that are so brief and filled with confidence in the goodness and mercy of God. What simplicity and sublimity in the Gospel, but how much complication and confusion in us when we pray!

3. **To advance in detachment from all earthly things.** Of what value are all created goods when compared with the graces of God. Before the thought of the sovereign beauty of God, the soul will readily renounce all earthly things, and reach the point of conquering the threefold concupiscence to which so many souls are subject on earth and which prevents them from flying to heaven (1 John 2:16).

4. **To advance with great confidence along the path of union with God.** Nothing can detain the soul if it wishes to proceed at any cost, God, who calls the soul to a life of intimate union with himself, extends his divine hand with the absolute guarantee of his omnipotence, mercy, and fidelity to his promises. The world, the devil, and the flesh will declare war against the soul, "but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31). With good reason did St. John of the Cross say that hope is that which especially makes the soul pleasing to the beloved, and that by it the soul will attain all that it desires.

**The following are the principal characteristics of the virtue of hope in perfect souls:**

1. **Universal confidence in God.** Nothing is able to discourage a servant of God when he or she enters upon an enterprise pertaining to the divine glory. One would say that contradictions and obstacles, far from diminishing the virtue of hope, intensify and augment it. Such a soul's confidence in God will sometimes reach the point of holy audacity. As St. Paul said of Abraham, these holy souls hope "against hope" (Rom. 4:18). They are disposed at any moment to repeat the heroic phrase of Job: "Slay me though he might, I will wait for him" (Job 13:15). This heroic confidence glorifies God greatly and is of the greatest merit for the soul.

2. **Indestructible peace and serenity.** This is a natural consequence of their universal confidence in God. Nothing can disturb the tranquillity of their spirit. Ridicule, persecution, calumny, injury, sickness, misfortune -- everything falls upon their souls like water on a stone, without leaving the slightest trace or alteration in the serenity of their spirit. One would say that their souls had lost contact with the things of this world and were as tranquil as if they were already in eternity.

3. **The desire to die in order to reach heaven.** This is one of the clearest signs of the perfection of hope. Nature experiences an instinctive horror of death. **Only when grace has taken complete possession of the soul can one desire death in order to live the true life hereafter.** Then the soul gives expression to the "I die because I do not die" of St. Augustine, which was repeated later by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. "Pressing on the Christian, to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope."<sup>(12)</sup>

4. **Heaven begins on earth.** The saints desire to die to go to heaven, but in reality their life in heaven has already begun on earth. What do the things of this world matter to them? The servants of God live on earth only in their bodies, but their souls and their yearning are fixed on heaven. It is simply another way of stating the phrase: "We have our citizenship in heaven" (Phil. 3:20).

### **The Gift of Fear**

According to St. Thomas, the gift that pertains to the perfection of the virtue of hope is fear of the Lord. This gift also relates to temperance under certain aspects.

**The gift of fear is a supernatural habit by which the just soul, under the instinct of the Holy Spirit, acquires a special docility for subjecting itself completely to the divine will out of reverence for the excellency and majesty of God.** God in himself, as supreme and infinite goodness, cannot be an object of fear; he is an object of love. But so far as he is able to punish us for our sins, he can and ought to be feared. St. Thomas harmonizes fear and hope by saying that **in God there are justice and mercy, the first of which arouses fear in us, the second, hope.** And thus, for different reasons, God is the object of fear and of hope.(13)

It is necessary to examine the nature of this fear, however, because there are many types of fear and not all of them are gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of them are not even virtues. **Fear can be divided into mundane fear, servile fear, filial fear and initial fear.**

**Mundane fear is that which would not hesitate to offend God in order to avoid some temporal evil.** This fear is always evil because it places its end and goal in this world and turns its back upon God.

**Servile fear is that which serves God and fulfills his divine will because of the punishment that would fall upon us if we did not do so** (temporal punishment or the eternal punishment of hell). This fear, although imperfect, is substantially good; it enables us to avoid sin, and it is directed to God as to its end.

**Filial fear (also called reverential fear) is that which serves God and fulfills his divine will, fleeing from sin because it is an offense against God and for fear of being separated from him.** This fear, as is evident, is good and perfect. It flees from sin without taking any account of punishment.

**Initial fear is that which occupies an intermediate place between the last two types of fear.** It flees from sin principally as an offense against God, but there is mixed with this flight a certain fear of punishment. This fear is better than servile fear, but it is not as perfect as filial fear.

The question now arises: which of these types of fear is the gift of the Holy Spirit? Evidently the gift of fear is not a mundane or servile fear. Mundane fear is sinful, and servile fear, although not evil of itself, could be found even in a sinner by means of an actual grace that would move him to sorrow because of the fear of punishment. **According to St. Thomas, only filial or chaste fear is the gift of fear, for it is based on charity or reverence of God as Father, and it fears to be separated from him.**

**Three principal virtues are perfected by the operation of the gift of fear: hope, temperance, and humility.** The gift of fear gives us supernatural awareness of our dependence on God and inclines us to rely only on the infinite power of God, the formal motive of hope. Therefore St. Thomas states that **the gift of fear looks principally at God,** and in this sense it pertains to the virtue of hope; but secondarily it helps to correct the disorderly tendency by which we experience a strong attraction to carnal delight, thus aiding and strengthening the virtue of temperance. The gift of fear also perfects humility by making the soul realize its nothingness before God and acknowledge the punishment it deserves for its offenses against God's infinite majesty.

**In addition to these three fundamental virtues, the gift of fear also exercises its influence in regard to other moral virtues. It acts on the virtues of modesty and chastity by imparting a repugnance to anything shameful; on the virtue of meekness, by controlling disordered anger. Moreover, it serves as a brake on the passions when they would otherwise exceed the limits of reason.**

**The effects of the gift of fear are of great value in the sanctification of souls. The following are the principal effects of this gift:**

1. **A lively sentiment of the grandeur and majesty of God, which arouses in the soul a profound adoration filled with reverence and humility.** This is the most characteristic effect of the gift of fear, and it follows from its definition. Before the infinite majesty of God the soul feels as if it is nothing or less than nothing. It is filled with such reverence, submission, and subjection that it feels great desires to suffer for God (St. John of the Cross). This reverence for the majesty of God is also manifested in all the things that have any relationship to God. A church or oratory, the priest, sacred vessels, the images of the saints all are regarded with respect and veneration. The gift of piety produces similar effects, but from another point of view, as we shall see later.

2. **A great horror of sin and a lively sorrow for ever having committed sin.** Once its faith is illumined by the splendor of the gifts of understanding and knowledge, and once its hope has been subjected to the action of the gift of fear, the soul understands as never before the malice of any offense against God, however insignificant. It understands the rigor with which divine justice must punish sin in the next life if penance is not done in this life. The repentance of such souls for the slightest fault is most profound. From it proceeds the anxious desire to make reparation for sin and an irresistible tendency to crucify oneself in a thousand ways.

3. **An extreme vigilance to avoid the occasion of offending God.** This is a logical consequence of the previous effect. These souls fear nothing so much as the slightest offense against God. They have seen clearly that in reality the only evil in the world is sin and that the others do not deserve to be called evil.

4. **Perfect detachment from all created things.** We have already seen that the gift of knowledge produces this effect in the soul, but from another point of view. The gifts are interrelated among themselves and with charity, and for that reason they mutually influence each other. This is perfectly understandable. The soul that has become aware of the grandeur and majesty of God must necessarily consider all created things as empty and useless. Honors, wealth, power, and dignity -- all are considered as less than straw and unworthy of a moment of attention.

In addition to the general means for disposing oneself for the impetus of the Holy Spirit -- recollection, purity of heart, fidelity to grace, frequent invocation of the Holy Spirit -- there are other methods more closely connected with the gift of fear.

1. **To meditate frequently on the infinite grandeur and majesty of God.** We can never by our gifts of the Holy Spirit. But we can do something by reflecting on the power and majesty of God.

2. **To accustom oneself to converse with God with filial confidence, filled with reverence.** We should never forget that God is our Father, but that he is also a God of terrible grandeur and majesty. Sometimes pious souls forget the latter and allow themselves to be excessively familiar with God and even to give expression to irreverent audacity. It is certainly incredible to see the extent to which the Lord gives expression of his familiarity with souls that are pleasing to him, but it is necessary that he take the initiative and not the soul. Meanwhile the soul should remain in an attitude of reverence and submission, which is not incompatible with the sweet and intimate confidence of adopted children.

3. **To meditate frequently on the infinite malice of sin and to arouse a great horror for sin.** In itself, love is much more powerful and efficacious than fear as a motive for avoiding sin. Nevertheless, the consideration of fear is a great help in keeping souls from sin. The recollection of the terrible punishment God has prepared for those who definitively reject his law would be sufficient to make us flee from sin if we would meditate on it. **It is a fearful thing, as St. Paul**

**says (Heb. 10:31), to fall into the hands of an offended God.** To this end, it will be of great help if we avoid all dangerous occasions that may lead us to sin, practice the daily examination of conscience with fidelity, and consider Jesus crucified as the victim of propitiation for our crimes and sins.

4. **To be meek and humble in dealing with our neighbor.** He who has a clear concept of what God is in his infinite majesty and realizes that God has mercifully pardoned him thousands of times, how can he dare to exact with haughtiness and disdain that which is owed to him by his neighbor (Matt. 18:23-35)? We must pardon injuries, and we must treat all our neighbors with exquisite humility and meekness. We should consider them to be better than we are, at least in the sense that perhaps they have not resisted grace as much as we have, or they would not have sinned if they had received the gifts God has given us.

5. **To beg frequently of the Holy Spirit a reverential fear of God.** When all is said and done, every perfect disposition is a gift of God, and it can be attained only by humility and persevering prayer. Scripture is filled with sublime formulas by which we can petition holy fear and make us understand that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Sir. 1:16). We must work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), as the Holy Spirit warns us through the psalmist: "Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way" (Ps. 2:11).

### Charity

St. Thomas begins his treatise on charity by stating that it is friendship between God and man. Like every friendship, it implies a mutual love based on the communication of some good. For that reason charity necessarily presupposes sanctifying grace, which makes us children of God and heirs of glory. By nature we are nothing more than servants of the Creator, but through grace and charity we become the children and friends of God. And if our servitude ennoble us so greatly, since to serve God is to reign, how much more are we elevated by the charity of God, which is "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). Such is the lofty dignity of the Christian.

**Charity is a supernatural habit infused by God into the will, by which we love God for himself above all things, and ourselves, and our neighbor for God. The object of charity is primarily God, secondarily ourselves and our fellow human beings.** The object of charity is God as supreme goodness in himself and as our ultimate end.

As an infused habit, charity resides in the will because it involves a movement of love toward the supreme good, and love and the good constitute the act and the proper object of the will. It is a supernatural habit God infuses in the degree that pleases him, without taking into account the natural qualities or dispositions of the one who receives charity.

Charity as a virtue is specifically one, for although it embraces various objects (God, ourselves, and all human beings), the motive of charity in all cases is the divine goodness. Hence, when we love ourselves -or our neighbor for any motive other than the goodness of God, we do not make an act of charity, but an act of natural human love, whether selfish love or benevolent love.

**Purely human love as such is of no value in the supernatural order.**

**Charity is the most excellent of all virtues, not only because it is the virtue that intimately unites us with God, but also because it is the form of all the infused virtues.** Its intrinsic excellence derives from the fact that it is the virtue that unites us most intimately with God. It far surpasses the theological virtues of faith and hope, as St. Paul teaches: "There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

By the act of charity, the will goes forth from itself to rest in God as he is in himself. This profound doctrine gives us the key to the solution of the much-debated question concerning the superiority of the intellect or the will. The will in itself is inferior to the intellect, for it is a blind faculty and cannot produce its acts if the intellect does not place the desirable object before the will. The intellect precedes and guides the will, which could not love anything without the intellect. ***It is impossible to love what one does not know.*** But the operation of the intellect is distinct from that of the will. The intellect draws things to itself or absorbs them, so to speak, into its own intellectual mold. Consequently, when it knows inferior beings such as material things, it ennobles them and dignifies them by raising them to the intellectual order; but when it knows superior beings such as God or supernatural truths, it limits them by obliging them to assume an inferior intellectual mold.

The exact opposite is true of the will. By reason of its proper act, which is to love, the will goes forth from itself to rest in the beloved object as it is in itself. Consequently, if the will loves objects that are inferior to itself, such as the things of earth, it is degraded to an inferior level; but if it loves superior beings, such as God, it is ennobled and elevated to the level of those superior beings in which it rests through love. For that reason St. Augustine could say: "If you love the earth, you are earthly; but if you love God, what must be said except that you are God?"

It follows, therefore, that although the intellect is in itself more perfect than the will, nevertheless, in this life, by the very nature of the operation, ***it is more perfect to love God than to know him. A theologian may know a great deal about God, but in a manner that is cold and purely intellectual, while a humble and simple soul who knows almost nothing about theology may love God intensely, and this is much better.***

Another practical consequence of great importance follows from this sublime doctrine. ***The only way to avoid debasing ourselves by the love of inferior created things is to love them in God,*** through God, and for God; in other words, for the formal motive of charity. Charity can transform whatever it touches, even the things inferior to us but directed through charity to the glory of God.

Charity can increase in this life because it is a movement toward God, our ultimate end, and so long as we are wayfarers in this life it is possible to approach more and more closely to the goal. This greater proximity is effected precisely through the increase of charity. Moreover, charity does not admit of any term or limit in this life; it can grow indefinitely. This does not mean, however, that charity cannot reach a relative perfection, as we have already explained (see Chapter 5).

Like all the other habits, charity increases, not by the addition of one form to another form, but by a greater radication of the virtue in the subject. It cannot increase by addition because such an increase is not possible in qualitative things but only in quantitative things, and habits are classified as qualities. Thus the will participates more and more in charity so far as it is more penetrated by charity.

Like the other virtues, charity is not increased by any act whatever, but only by an act that is more intense than the habit as actually possessed here and now. If charity were increased by addition, then any act of charity, however weak and remiss, would increase charity. Thus, simply by the multiplication of many remiss acts, the thermometer of habitual charity would rise to a surprising degree and even surpass the charity of many of the saints. Such an explanation of the increase of charity leads only to absurdity.

The true nature of the increase of charity is far different. As a qualitative form, it can increase only by a more profound radication in the subject, and this is impossible without a more intense

act. This is in conformity with the increase of habits even on the natural level. **They need a more intense act to increase as habits.**

We now have an important practical conclusion. Persons who live in slothfulness and tepidity can paralyze their Christian life completely, even if they live habitually in the grace of God and perform a large number of good but remiss works. This is amply verified in daily experience. A large number of good souls live habitually in the grace of God, without committing any serious faults but performing many good works and acts of sacrifice, but they are far from being saints. If they encounter any contradiction or difficulty, they become angry; if they are lacking anything, their laments are raised to heaven; if their superiors command something that does not please them, they murmur and complain; if anyone criticizes or humiliates them, they become enemies of those persons. All this shows clearly that such individuals are still very far from Christian perfection.

But how can one explain this phenomenon after these persons have performed so many good works for so many years in the Christian life? The theological explanation is simple: **they have performed a great many good works, it is true; but they have performed them in a lukewarm manner and not in such a way that each new act is more fervent.** Rather, each succeeding act is more remiss and more imperfect. They are as lukewarm and imperfect as if they were at the very beginning of the path to holiness.

But one may ask: "Then are all those good works that were remiss and imperfect of no avail whatever? Are remiss acts completely useless and sterile?"

To this we reply that the remiss acts are not completely useless and sterile. They serve a twofold purpose, one in this life and the other in glory. In this life they prevent the dispositions of soul from becoming completely cold, which would put these people in the proximate occasion of committing a grave sin and thus destroying their Christian life completely. A person who does not perform an act that is more intense than the virtuous habit he or she possesses will not increase the virtuous habit, but neither will the habit be lost completely. The degree of charity attained will never diminish of itself, even if a person lives for many years in tepidity and performs acts that are remiss or less intense. Therefore, something is achieved by these remiss acts because they at least help to preserve the soul in the state of grace. They likewise preserve the essential degree of merit already gained.

Remiss acts do not remain without their proper reward in the life to come, although they do not increase the degree of essential glory that corresponds to the *habitual* degree of one's grace and charity at the time of death. In addition to the essential reward in heaven, however, there are many different accidental rewards. Each remiss act, since it was good and meritorious for having been performed in a state of grace and under the influence of charity, will receive its corresponding accidental reward in heaven.

Charity does not refer to God alone, but also to one's neighbors. The love of God causes us to love whatever pertains to God or whatever reflects his goodness, and it is evident that one's neighbor is a good of God and shares, or can share, in eternal happiness. For that reason the love of charity with which we love our neighbor is exactly the same charity with which we love God. **There are not two charities but only one,** since the formal motive of loving one's neighbor is the goodness of God reflected in him. Hence, when we love our neighbors for any other motive distinct from God, we do not love them with the love of charity.

We should also love ourselves with the love of charity, although strictly speaking, one cannot love oneself as a friend, for that requires another person. However, our love for ourselves is the model and root of friendship because friendship for others consists precisely in the fact that our

attitude to them is the same as to ourselves. Moreover, love is divided into "friendship-love" and "desire-love." The former is directed to a person; the latter to a thing desired for a person. Therefore, not only does love of self come under the virtue of charity, but it has priority over love of neighbor.<sup>(14)</sup> In loving ourselves in charity we love ourselves as persons sharing in the nature and life of God through grace, and at the same time we love God as our ultimate end and source of our perfect happiness.

The love that is charity is "friendship-love." It is a generous love or gift love, and it consists more in loving than in being loved. ***When this type of love predominates, it should produce the following effects:***

1. ***Union with the beloved***, which in the spiritual life means living constantly in the presence of God and fostering this recollection by the practice of mental prayer, which is the language of love.
2. ***Detachment from created things***, which means that one uproots all attachments to created things in order to advance toward ever greater union with God.
3. ***Spiritual joy***, which is the fruit of gift love, accompanied by the interior peace that flows from living in God's grace.
4. ***Zeal for the beloved***, which is manifested by total submission to God's will and the works of the apostolate that are stimulated by love of neighbor.
5. ***Spirit of sacrifice***, which enables one to bear the cross of trials and sufferings out of love and, eventually, to seek to be conformed to Jesus crucified.

#### **The Gift of Wisdom**

***The gift of wisdom is a supernatural habit, inseparable from charity, by which we judge rightly concerning God and divine things through their ultimate and highest causes under a special instinct and movement of the Holy Spirit***, who makes us taste these things by a certain connaturality. The gift of wisdom perfects charity by giving it the divine modality it lacks so long as charity is subject to the rule of human reason, even illumined by faith. So far as it presupposes a judgment, the gift of wisdom resides in the intellect as in its proper subject, but as a judgment by a kind of connaturality with divine things, it presupposes charity, for this is not a purely speculative wisdom but a practical wisdom. ***It is true it belongs to the gift of wisdom, in the first place, to contemplate the divine, but in the second place, it pertains to wisdom to direct human acts according to divine things.***

***The philosophers defined wisdom as certain and evident knowledge of things through their ultimate causes.*** Those who contemplate a thing and know its proximate or immediate causes have ***scientific knowledge***. Those who can reduce their knowledge to the ultimate principles of the natural order possess ***philosophical wisdom, which is called metaphysics***. Those who, guided by the light of faith, investigate the revealed data of revelation deduce conclusions from them and possess ***theological wisdom***. But those who, presupposing faith and sanctifying grace, judge divine things and human things through their ultimate causes by a kind of divine instinct possess ***supernatural wisdom, and this is the gift of wisdom***. Beyond this, there is no higher type of wisdom in this life. It is surpassed only by the beatific vision and the uncreated wisdom of God.

It is evident, therefore, that ***the knowledge given by the gift of wisdom is incomparably superior to all human sciences, even theology***. For that reason a simple and uneducated soul lacking the theological knowledge acquired by study may sometimes possess, through the gift of wisdom, a more profound knowledge of divine things than an eminent theologian.

A certain connaturality is another note that characterizes the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and it reaches its highest perfection in the gift of wisdom. Souls that experience this will understand very well the meaning of the words: "Taste and see how good the Lord is" (Ps. 34:9). They experience a divine delight that sometimes enables them to know something of the ineffable joy of eternal beatitude.

From this sublime doctrine follow two inevitable conclusions of great importance in the theology of Christian perfection. The first is that **the mystical state is not something extraordinary in the full development of the Christian life; it is the normal atmosphere that grace demands, so that it can develop in all its virtualities.**

The second conclusion is that an actuation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the human mode, besides being impossible, would be utterly useless for the perfecting of the infused virtues, and especially of the theological virtues. Since the latter are superior to the gifts of the Holy Spirit by reason of their nature, the only perfection they could receive from the gifts is that of the divine mode, which is exclusive and proper to the gifts.

By reason of its elevation and grandeur and by reason of the sublimity of the virtue it perfects, the effects produced by the gift of wisdom are truly remarkable. **The following are the principal effects of this gift:**

1. **It gives to the saints a divine sense by which they judge all things.** This is the most impressive of all the effects of the gift of wisdom so far as they are manifested externally. One would say that the saints have completely lost the human manner of judgment and that it has been replaced by a divine instinct by which they judge all things. They see everything from God's point of view, whether the commonplace episodes of daily life or the great events of life. They never fix their attention on secondary causes but pass them by, to arrive immediately at the Supreme Cause, who governs and rules them from above.

2. **It makes saints live the mysteries of faith in an entirely divine manner.** Introduced by charity into the intimacy of the divine Persons, the divinized soul, under the impulse of the Spirit of love, contemplates all things from this center. **God is present to the soul in all his divine attributes and in all his great mysteries.** In the measure in which it is possible for a simple creature, the gaze of the soul resembles the vision God has of himself and of the entire universe. It is a godlike type of contemplation experienced in the light of the Deity, and in it the soul experiences ineffable sweetness.

3. **It makes them live in union with the three divine Persons through an ineffable participation in their trinitarian life.** The gift of knowledge acts by an ascending movement, raising the soul from creatures to God; the gift of understanding penetrates God's mysteries from without and within by a simple loving gaze; the gift of wisdom penetrates the very life of the Trinity. Thus the soul sees things only from their highest and most divine cause.

The soul that has reached these heights can give itself to all types of work, even the most absorbing, but in the center of the soul it experiences the divine company of the Three. Martha and Mary have been joined in an ineffable manner, so that the prodigious activity of Martha in no way compromises the peace and tranquillity of Mary, who remains at the feet of the divine Master.

4. **It raises the virtue of charity to heroism.** This is precisely the purpose of the gift of wisdom. Freed from human limitations, charity reaches tremendous proportions. It is incredible what the love of God can do in souls that are under the operations of the gift of wisdom. Such souls love God with a pure love only for his infinite goodness and without the mixture of any human motives or self-interest. True, they do not renounce their hope for heaven; they desire it more

than ever, but they desire it primarily because there they shall be able to love God with even greater intensity and without any interruption.

Love of neighbor also reaches a sublime perfection through the gift of wisdom. Accustomed to see God in all things, even in the most minute details of daily life, the saints see him in a special way in their neighbor. They love their neighbor with a tenderness that is completely supernatural. They serve their neighbor with heroic abnegation. Seeing Christ in the poor, in those who suffer, in the heart of all their brothers and sisters, they hasten to serve all with a soul filled with love. They are happy to deprive themselves of even the necessities of life in order to give them to their neighbor, whose interest they place and prefer before their own, as they would put the interests of Christ before their own.

5. ***It gives to all the virtues their ultimate perfection and makes them truly divine.*** Perfected by the gift of wisdom, charity extends the divine influence to all the other virtues, because charity is the form of all the virtues. The whole supernatural organism experiences the divine influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All the Christian virtues acquire a godlike modality that admits of countless shades and manifestations. Having died definitively to self, being perfect in every type of virtue, the soul has arrived at the summit of the mount of sanctity, where it reads the inscription written by St. John of the Cross: "Here on this mountain dwell only the honor and glory of God."

Apart from the general means such as recollection, a life of prayer, fidelity to grace, and humility, ***one can dispose oneself for the actuation of the gift of wisdom by using the following means, which are within the workings of ordinary grace:***

1. ***By seeing and evaluating all things from God's point of view.*** How many souls, even among those who are consecrated to God, fall into the habit of judging things from a purely natural and human point of view! If things do not go their way, they accuse others of all sorts of imperfections and even malice; ***but when things proceed according to their personal good and pleasure, they attribute everything to God. Actually, they are willing to do God's will whenever it happens to coincide with their own interests.*** Truly spiritual persons accept all things, whether pleasant or painful, with a spirit of equanimity, and if things are painful or even unjust, they can still see the spiritual value of such experiences, if only as a means of purification and penance. Even the smallest works are seen in the light of supernatural value and merit and, although they are conscious of the defects of others, they are even more aware of their own imperfections.

2. ***By combatting the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness in the eyes of God.*** St. Paul speaks frequently in this manner, but the greater percentage of us rely on this world's wisdom. ***Yet Christ constantly warns us in his teaching that we should expect to be a contradiction and a paradox to the world. This does not mean that the world as such is evil, but it does mean that those who live and act for worldly goals and according to worldly standards will inevitably have to jettison the standards of God.*** The lives of the saints are replete with instances in which the gift of wisdom caused them to perform actions that were foolish in the eyes of the worldly but were divine and prudent from a supernatural point of view.

3. ***By detaching oneself from things of this world, however good and useful.*** Everything in its proper place. Even the holiest and most beneficial created goods can become a source of temptation and sin if we are too attached to them. As soon as anything outside of God becomes a goal or end in itself rather than a means to God, the soul is diverted from its proper orientation to God. This applies not only to the obvious dangers, such as wealth and pleasure and ambition, but also to things good in themselves, such as the study of theology, the liturgy, private devotions,

penitential practices -- even to the use of the means to sanctify itself. ***All of these, if exaggerated or sought after with a selfish spirit, can become obstacles to union with God and the operation of the gift of wisdom that flows from that union.***

4. ***By cultivating indifference to spiritual consolations.*** It is God's way to lead a soul to him by conferring spiritual consolations, but the time comes when these consolations are removed and the soul is tested, purified, and made strong in love. ***One must strive diligently to cultivate true devotion, which implies a resolute will to serve God at any cost.*** We naturally are drawn to those things that give us pleasure, whether spiritual or sensual; hence all the more reason for detachment and self-denial. ***The common error is to love the gift rather than the giver, and for that reason God withdraws consolations when the soul is ready to pass on to another phase of its spiritual development. To love and serve God in darkness and privation is by far a greater proof of one's fidelity than to love him in periods of delight and consolation.***

#### CHAPTER NOTES

1. Vatican Council I, Denz.-Schön. 3008, 3011.
2. Vatican Council II, Declaration on Religious Liberty, n. 10.
3. Cf. Denz.-Schön. 1530.
4. *Ibid.*, 1544; 1578.
5. *Ibid.*, 1532.
6. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 5, a. 4.
7. *Ibid.*, q. 8, a. 1.
8. *Ibid.*, q. 69, a. 2, ad 3.
9. *Ibid.*, qq. 9 and 19.
10. Denz.-Schön. 1540.
11. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 17, a. 2, ad 2.
12. *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 22.
13. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 19, a. 1, ad 2.
14. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 26, aa. 1-4.