

Chapter 4

The Supernatural Organism

Each of us is a complex being composed of body and soul, of matter and spirit, intimately united to form one person. It has been said that each of us is a microcosm, a synthesis of all creation. We have existence, as do inanimate things; we are nourished, reproduce, and grow, as do plants; we have sensate knowledge, passions, and the power of locomotion, as do animals; and like the angels, we can know the spiritual truth and be drawn to spiritual good. All these vital powers -- vegetative, sensitive, and rational -- constitute the natural life of man. They are not superimposed one on the other; they compenetrates one another and mutually complement one another, to lead to the natural perfection of the whole person.

There is nothing in our nature that postulates, either proximately or remotely, the supernatural order. The elevation to this order is a totally gratuitous favor of God that infinitely transcends all the exigencies of nature. Nevertheless, there is a close analogy between the natural and the supernatural orders, for grace does not destroy nature but perfects and elevates it.

The supernatural order constitutes a true life for us and has an organism that is similar to the natural vital organism. **As in the natural order we can distinguish four basic elements in human life -- the living subject, the formal principle of life, the faculties or powers, and the operations of those faculties -- so we can find similar elements in our supernatural organism. The subject is the soul; the formal principle of supernatural life is sanctifying grace; the faculties are the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and the operations are the acts of those virtues and gifts.**

The human soul is a spiritual substance that is independent of matter in its being and its operations, although while it is in the body it makes use of bodily powers for the exercise of various functions. But the soul is not a completely independent substance, nor can the soul alone be properly called a person. **A person is not the body alone nor the soul alone, but the composite that results from the substantial union of the two.**

We know from reason and from sound philosophy, and also from the teaching of the Church,⁽¹⁾ that the soul is the substantial form of the body. Consequently, the soul gives us our essential grade of perfection, and communicates to the body the same act of being by which the soul itself exists. **But the soul is not immediately operative; it needs faculties or powers for operation; and the specifically human faculties that emanate from the essence of the soul are the intellect and the will.**

Such is the subject in which our supernatural life resides. ***Grace, which is the formal principle of that supernatural life, is rooted in the very essence of the soul in a static manner. The virtues and the gifts, which are the dynamic elements in the supernatural organism, reside in the human faculties or powers and elevate them to the supernatural order.***

Sanctifying Grace

We have said that **sanctifying grace is the formal principle of our supernatural organism**, as **the spiritual soul is the formal principle of our natural vital organism**. As a participation in the very nature of God, grace elevates us to the status of children of God and heirs of heaven. "We are children of God," exclaims St. Paul. "But if we are children, we are heirs as well; heirs of God, heirs with Christ" (**Rom. 8:16-17**). And in his famous sermon before the Areopagus, he insists that we are the race of God: "We are God's offspring" (**Acts 17:29**).

Sanctifying grace can be defined as a supernatural quality, inhering in the soul, which gives us a physical and formal participation, although analogous and accidental, in the very nature and life of God. Grace is clearly *supernatural*, as the formal principle that elevates us and constitutes us in the supernatural life. It far excels all natural things and **makes us enter into the sphere of the divine**. St. Thomas has said that the minimum degree of sanctifying grace in individual is greater than the natural good of the entire universe.**(2)**

That **grace inheres in the soul** is denied by those who hold for extrinsic justification, but it is a truth of faith defined by the Council of Trent.**(3)** The theological explanation is contained in the following principle: "The love of God infuses and creates goodness in things." In us, love is born of the good object, by it **God creates goodness in an object by the mere fact of loving it**. And since love finds or makes things similar to itself, God's love for us elevates us to his level and deifies us, so to speak, by means of a formal participation in the divine nature. "It is necessary that God alone deify by communicating his divine nature through a certain participation of likeness."**(4)** Briefly, **God loves with a supernatural love, and since God's love is the cause of goodness, it follows that he produces in the person he loves the supernatural goodness that is grace.**

Participation is the assimilation by an inferior thing of some perfection existing in a superior thing. **Sanctifying grace gives us a physical, formal, analogous and accidental participation in the divine nature.** That it makes us participants in the divine nature is a truth constantly repeated in Sacred Scripture. St. Peter says, for example: "He has bestowed on us the great and precious things he promised, so that through these you ... might become sharers of the divine nature" (**2 Pet. 1:4**). The liturgy also proclaims this fact in the Preface for the feast of the Ascension: "He ascended to heaven to make us participants in his divinity." **And how persuasively St. Leo speaks of this truth when he says: "Recognize your dignity, O Christian, and having been made a participant of the divine nature, do not desire to return to the baseness of your former condition."**

But it is necessary to examine the manner in which sanctifying grace confers a participation in the divine nature. God is not like creatures, for he and he alone is being by his very essence, while all creatures are being by participation. Nevertheless, creatures are in some way similar to God because every agent produces something similar to itself in some respect. But it cannot be said that creatures are like God by reason of a communication of form according to genus and species, but only according to a certain analogy, because God is being by essence, whereas creatures are being by participation.

Hence, ***there are three classes of creatures that are like him in some respect: Irrational creatures*** participate in the divine perfection so far as they have being, but this likeness is so remote that it is called a trace or vestige. ***Rational creatures***, so far as they are gifted with a spiritual soul and faculties, represent the perfections of God in a more explicit manner; for that reason they are called the natural image of God. The ***souls of the just*** are united with God by sanctifying grace and for that reason they are called the supernatural image of God and, indeed, his adopted children.

But does sanctifying grace require a physical and formal participation in the very nature of God? Undoubtedly yes. Apart from the fact that this is a truth that is verified in revelation, there are theological arguments to support it.

First, the operations proper to a superior nature cannot become connatural to lower nature unless the latter participates in some way in the former, because as a thing is, so it acts, and ***the effects cannot be greater than the cause***. But some supernatural operations do become connatural to man through grace. Therefore, it is evident that man, through grace, participates physically and formally in the very *nature of God*.

Secondly, ***from grace springs an inclination to God as he is in himself***. But an inclination to God as he is in himself must be rooted in a nature that is divine, at least by participation. Moreover, this participation must be physical and formal, since the inclination proceeds physically and formally from that participation.

Thirdly, ***the infused virtues are the faculties of supernatural operations in us***; but, since operation follows being, a supernatural operation that proceeds from the soul presupposes in the soul the presence of a supernatural entity, and this can be nothing other than a physical and formal participation in the nature of God himself. It is true that through the power of an actual grace a sinner can realize a supernatural act without the need of sanctifying grace, but we are speaking of an act that proceeds from the soul connaturally, and not of an impulse to second act without passing through the proximate habitual dispositions.

It now remains for us to examine in what sense the physical and formal participation in the divine nature is *accidental and analogous*. Analogous participation signifies that the divine nature is not communicated to us univocally, as the Father transmits it to his Son by way of the eternal generation. We do not become divinized through grace by generation or by a pantheistic union of our substance with the divine substance. Rather ***it is an analogous participation in virtue of which that which exists in God in an infinite manner is participated by the soul in a limited and finite manner***. The mirror that captures the image of the sun does not acquire the nature of the sun but merely reflects its splendor. In like manner, says St. Leo, ***"the original dignity of our race lies in the fact that the divine goodness shines in us as in a resplendent mirror."***

The reason why participation in the divine nature through grace is an accidental one is explained by St. Thomas: "Every substance constitutes either the nature of the thing of which it is the substance, or it is a part of the nature, as matter and form are called substance. And because grace is above all nature, it cannot be a substance or a substantial form, but it is an accidental

form of the soul. Hence what is substantial in God becomes accidental in the soul that participates in the divine goodness."⁽⁵⁾

Moreover, the Council of Trent expressly teaches that ***habitual grace inheres in the soul of man.***⁽⁶⁾ But that which inheres in another is not a substance but an accident, as we learn in philosophy. Nor does this in any way lessen the dignity of grace, for as a supernatural accident it infinitely transcends all created or creatable natural substances. Let us not forget the words of St. Thomas, to the effect that ***the good of grace in one individual surpasses the good of nature in the entire universe.***

We have stated that ***through grace we share in the nature and life of God.*** There are several reasons for saying this:

1. ***Grace is the connatural principle of the operations*** that reach God under the formal aspect of deity. Therefore, grace, as the principle of these operations, must necessarily participate in the divine nature precisely as divine, that is, under the formal aspect of deity.

The antecedent of this argument is undeniable; all supernatural love and knowledge have God as their object. They focus directly on God as he is in himself, whether it be through the veil of faith or in the clear light of the beatific vision. The conclusion necessarily follows from the fact that ***grace is the root principle of the theological virtues.***

2. Supernatural participation in the divine nature could not otherwise be distinguished from a merely natural participation, which is also a formal participation, because man is an image of God. Therefore ***the sharing in the divine nature precisely as divine constitutes the distinction between the natural and the supernatural.***

3. In order to transcend the natural order, the supernatural form that is grace must be either God himself or something that touches God under the formal aspect of his deity. But grace is not God himself, as is evident, and hence it must necessarily be something that touches God precisely under the formality of his deity. In other words, ***it is a participation of the divine nature precisely as divine.***

Key point!

St. Thomas says that "grace is nothing other than a certain participated likeness of the divine nature."⁽⁷⁾ If we take the intimate nature of God as an exemplar, ***sanctifying grace is a perfect imitation that is effected in us by divine infusion. It produces in the soul a likeness to God that infinitely transcends that which is had in the purely natural order. By reason of this, we become God's children by adoption and form a part' of the family of God. Such is the sublime grandeur to which we are elevated by grace.***

Effects of Grace

The first effect of sanctifying grace is that it gives us that participation in the divine nature, of which we have already spoken. This is the root and foundation of all the other effects that flow from sanctifying grace.

Among the other effects, the three mentioned by St. Paul in his Epistle, to the Romans hold a place of preeminence: "You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of **adoption** through which we cry out, 'Abba!' (that is, 'Father'). The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God. But if we are children, we are heirs as well: **heirs of God, heirs with Christ**" (Rom. 8:15-17).

Grace Makes Us Adopted Children of God

God the Father has only one Son according to nature: the eternal Word. Only to him is there transmitted eternally, by an ineffable intellectual generation, the divine nature in all its plenitude. In virtue of this natural generation the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity possesses the selfsame divine essence of the Father and is God as fully as the Father is God. Therefore, **Christ, whose human nature is hypostatically united with the Person of the Word, is not the adopted Son of God, but the natural Son, in all the rigor of the word.**

Our divine filiation through grace is of a different kind. It is not a question of a natural filiation but of ***an adoptive filiation***. But it is necessary to understand this truth correctly in order not to form a deficient concept of this great dignity. ***Adoption is the gratuitous admission of a stranger to a family. The child is henceforth considered as a son or daughter and is given a right to inheritance of the family good. Our adoption through grace does this and much more.***

Purely human or legal adoption confers on the one adopted the rights of a legitimate child but without infusing in the adopted the blood of the family, and hence without causing any intrinsic change in the person adopted. On the other hand, ***on adopting us as his children, the one and triune God infuses sanctifying grace in us, which gives us a real and formal participation in the divine nature itself.***

It is an intrinsic adoption that places in our souls, physically and formally, a divine reality in virtue of which ***we share in the very life of God***. It is a true generation, a spiritual birth, and it reflects, analogically, the eternal generation of the Word of God. As St. John says explicitly, ***sanctifying grace not only gives us the right to be called sons of God, but it also makes us such in reality: "See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God! Yet that is what we are" (1 John 3:1).***

Grace Makes Us True Heirs of God

This is an inevitable consequence of our divine adoptive filiation. St. Paul says expressly: "If we are children, we are heirs as well" (Rom. 8:17). And it is God himself, one in essence and three in persons, who is our inheritance as adopted children. "I am your shield; I will make your

reward very great," God said to Abraham (Gen. 15:1); and he says the same to every soul in grace.

The beatific vision and the enjoyment of God that accompanies it are the principal part of the heritage that belongs, through grace, to the adopted children of God. This will cause the soul ineffable happiness, which will completely satisfy all its aspirations and longings. And the soul will receive all these benefits and gifts under the title of justice. ***Grace is entirely gratuitous; but once possessed, it gives us the capacity to merit heaven under the title of justice.*** Since grace is a divine form that inheres in the soul, any supernatural action of which grace is the root and principle ***bespeaks an intrinsic relation to glory and carries with it a title to the same.*** Grace and glory are situated on the same plane, and they are substantially the same life. There is between them only a difference of grade or degree. It is the same life in its initial or terminal stage. Thus, St. Thomas states that ***"grace is nothing other than the beginning of glory in us."***(8)

Grace Makes Us Coheirs With Christ

This relation derives immediately from the two already mentioned. The reason, as St. Augustine points out, is that he who says "Our Father" to the Father of Christ, what shall he say to Christ but brother?(9) By the very fact that sanctifying grace communicates to us a participation in the divine life that Christ possesses in all its plenitude, it necessarily follows that we become his brothers and sisters. ***He desired to be our brother according to his humanity, in order to make us his brothers and sisters according to his divinity.*** St. Paul states that God has predestined us "to share the image of his Son, that the Son might be the first-born of many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). By nature Christ is the only Son; but in the order of grace and adoption he is our elder Brother, as well as our Head and the cause of our salvation.

For this reason, the Father deigns to look upon us as if we were one thing with the Son. He loves us as he loves his Son; he looks on Christ as our brother and confers on us the title to the same heritage. We are coheirs with Christ. "Indeed, it was fitting that when bringing many sons to glory God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make their leader in the work of salvation perfect through suffering. He who consecrates and those who are consecrated have one and the same Father. Therefore he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will announce your name to my brothers, I will sing your praises in the midst of the assembly' " (Heb. 2:10-12). God has modeled us on Christ; with Christ, we are children of the same Father who is in heaven. All this will be effected by realizing the supreme desire of Christ: that we be one with him as he himself is one with the Father. ***The foregoing are the three principal effects of grace, but they are not the only effects. The others are as follows:***

Grace Gives Us Supernatural Life

The physical and formal participation in the very nature of God, which constitutes the essence of sanctifying grace, infinitely transcends the being and exigencies of every created nature, human or angelic. By it, we are elevated not only above the human plane but even above the angelic nature. We enter into the sphere of the divine, are made members of the family of God, and

begin to live in a divine manner. ***Grace, consequently, has communicated to us a new type of life, infinitely superior to that of nature; it is a supernatural life.***

Grace Makes Us Just and Pleasing to God

As a physical participation in the divine nature, grace necessarily gives us a sharing in the divine justice and sanctity, since all the attributes of God are really identified with his essence. Therefore, ***sanctifying grace is absolutely incompatible with mortal sin.***

The Council of Trent states that the justification of the sinner through sanctifying grace "***is not merely the remission of sins but also the sanctification and interior renovation of man by the voluntary reception of grace and the gifts,*** by which man is changed from unjust to just, and from an enemy into a friend." A little further on, the Council adds that the unique formal cause of the justification is "the justice of God, not that which makes him just, but that which makes us just; or rather, that which, given by him, renews us interiorly and makes us not only to be reputed as just but that we should be called such and should be such in very truth."[\(10\)](#)

Grace Gives Us the Capacity for Supernatural Merit

Without sanctifying grace, the most heroic natural works would have absolutely, no value for eternal life. ***A person who lacks grace is a corpse in the supernatural order, and the dead can merit nothing.*** Supernatural merit presupposes radically the possession of the supernatural life. This principle is of the greatest importance in practice. ***While people are in mortal sin, they are incapacitated for meriting anything at all in the supernatural order.***

Grace Unites Us Intimately With God

United as we are with God in the natural order through his divine conserving power, which makes him truly present to all creatures by his essence, presence, and power, sanctifying grace increases this union to an ineffable degree and transforms and raises it to an infinitely higher type of union. ***By reason of this new union, God is present in the just soul as a friend, and not merely as creator and conserver,*** establishing a mutual exchange of love and friendship between the soul and himself. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16).

The ultimate perfection of grace in this life and even the indissoluble union of the beatific vision in glory are not substantially different from the union effected between God and the soul that enjoys even the minimal degree of sanctifying grace. ***There is, of course, a difference in the intensity and intimacy of union, but all the grades are of the same substantial order.***

Grace Makes Us Living Temples of the Trinity

This is a consequence of what we have just stated, and Christ himself revealed this truth when he said: "Anyone who loves me will be true, to my word, and my Father will love him; we will come to him and make our dwelling place with him" (John 14:23). ***The dogma of the indwelling Trinity is a cornerstone of the entire systematic structure of spiritual theology, for it***

constitutes that "kingdom of God within us" where the mystical experience and union are brought to their full perfection here on earth. We shall therefore consider in greater detail this effect of grace that under some aspects would seem to be identified with grace, or at least to touch the very formality of sanctifying grace.

Indwelling of the Trinity

The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the souls of the just is clearly revealed in the New Testament, as shown in the following:

If a man loves me, he will keep 'my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (**John 14:23**).

God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (**1 John 4:16**).

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are (**1 Cor. 3:16-17**).

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own (**1 Cor.6:19**).

Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (**2 Tim. 1:14**).

Scripture uses various formulas to express the truth that God dwells in the soul in grace. The indwelling is attributed to the Holy Spirit, not because there is any special presence of the Holy Spirit that is not common to Father and the Son, but because this is a work of the love of God, and the Holy Spirit is essential love in the bosom of the Trinity.

Theologians have written much and disputed much about the nature of the indwelling of the Trinity in the souls of the just. Perhaps none of the theories provides an adequate explanation; certainly no one of them has been commonly accepted. But what is important for our purposes is not so much the formality and mode of the indwelling as the fact, its purpose, and its consequences. And here we find common agreement among theologians and spiritual writers.

To acclimate ourselves to this mystery, it is well to recall that through sanctifying grace we are "begotten of God" (1 John 3:9). We live a new life, the participated divine life through which we become children of God. The doctrine of our divine filiation is constantly repeated in the pages of Scripture, as is that of the divine indwelling, to which it is closely related.

What does God do when he dwells in a soul? Nothing other than to communicate himself to that soul, to engender it as his child, which is to give it a participation in his nature and his life. And that generation is not verified, as is human generation, by a transient action through which the child begins to be and to live independently of the father who provided the seed. Rather, it presupposes ***a continued act of God so long as the soul remains in his friendship and grace.***

Through grace, the soul is constantly receiving from God its supernatural life, as the embryo in the womb is constantly receiving vital sustenance from the mother. For this reason did Christ come into the world, that we might live by him, as St. John says (1 John 4:9), and Christ himself says that he came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (*ibid.*). Now we can see why St. Paul says: "And the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Our divine adoptive generation has some similarity with the eternal generation of the Word in the bosom of the Father, and our union with God through grace is somewhat similar to that which exists between the Word and the Father through the Holy Spirit. No theologian would ever have dared to say this, were it not for the sublime words of Christ, spoken at the Last Supper:

I do not pray for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be (one) in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are one -- I living in them, you living in me -- that their unity may be complete. So shall the world know that you sent me, and that you loved them as you loved me (John 17:20-23).

The Son is one with the Father by the unity of nature; we are one with God by the formal and physical participation of his divine nature, which participation is nothing other than sanctifying grace. The Son lives by the Father, and we live by participation in God. He is in the Father, and the Father is in him; we are also in God and God is in us.

Thus, through grace we are introduced into the life of the Trinity, which is the life of God, and God dwells in us and communicates his divine life to us. And it is the three Persons who dwell in us, since it is not the property of any one Person in particular to engender us as children of God, but it ***is an action common to the Three***. They are in the just soul, all three Persons, engendering that soul supernaturally, vivifying it with their life, introducing it through knowledge and love to the most profound relationships. Here ***the Father engenders the Son, and from the Father and the Son proceeds the Holy Spirit, thus realizing in the soul the sublime mystery of the triune unity and the one Trinity, which is the inner life of God himself.***

It is a fact testified by the mystics, that in the most profound center of their souls they experienced the august presence of the Blessed Trinity working intensely in them. And the experience of the mystics is a verification of the lofty teachings of theology. St. Thomas, writing as a theologian, makes the following startling statement: "By the gift of sanctifying grace, the rational creature is perfected so that it can freely use not only that created gift but enjoy the divine Person himself." And in the same place he writes: "We are said to possess only what we can freely use or enjoy; and to have the power of enjoying the divine Person can only be through sanctifying grace."⁽¹¹⁾

Here in all its sublime grandeur is the purpose of the indwelling of the Trinity in our souls. God himself, one in essence and three in Persons, becomes the object of our intimate experience, and when this experimental joy reaches the culmination of the transforming union, the souls that have reached this summit are unable to express themselves in human

language. They prefer to taste in silence that which in no way could be explained to others. As St. John of the Cross points out:

“There are no words to expound such sublime things of God as come to pass in these souls; ***the proper way to speak is for one that knows them to understand them inwardly and to feel them inwardly and enjoy them and be silent concerning them*** This alone can be said of it with truth, that it savors of eternal life. For although in this life we may not have perfect fruition of it, as in glory, nevertheless, this touch, being of God, savors of eternal life.⁽¹²⁾ In these sublime heights, where the soul experiences the divine indwelling that it believed and knew through faith, it now experiences as if by sight and touch, as St. Teresa explains: So that what we hold by faith the soul may be said here to grasp by sight, although nothing is seen by the eyes, either of the body or of the soul; for it is no imaginary vision. Here all three Persons communicate themselves to the soul and speak to the soul and explain to it those words which the gospel attributes to the Lord, namely, that he and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul, which loves him and keeps his commandments.⁽¹³⁾”

Actual Grace

The process of sanctification is primarily the work of God, since it pertains to the order of grace, but it also requires human cooperation with the help of grace. Habitual or sanctifying grace, as we have seen, is the basic bond of union between God and the soul and, as such, it is meant to be permanent. Actual grace, on the other hand, is a transient stimulation or movement by which the soul is prompted to do or receive something relating to justification, sanctification, or salvation. ***Sanctifying grace is central to the Christian life, since it is the very principle of that life,*** and therefore we have treated it at length. ***Actual grace is more closely related to man's cooperation with God,*** and since it touches the freedom and choice of man's will, and the causality and intervention of God in human acts, it has given rise to many disputed questions concerning man's need of actual grace to attain justification or to perform salutary acts when justified. It is not necessary for us to enter the field of controversy, but simply to demonstrate the necessity of actual grace in the Christian life and to note the principal types.

If we accept the basic division of grace into the grace that sanctifies the recipient (*gratia gratum faciens*) and the grace that sanctifies others (*gratia gratis data*), and then divide the former into habitual grace and actual grace, we would have to say that ***actual grace comprises all the powers, movements, dispositions, and inspirations by which we are empowered to do or receive something on the supernatural level.*** On God's part, grace is one; the divisions are made on the basis of man, and therefore ***theologians have further divided actual grace into external or objective graces,*** which comprise any means at all by which God's loving presence can be encountered (e.g., the liturgy, sacramentals, sermons, good example), and ***internally operative graces that touch the human will effectively.***⁽¹⁴⁾ It should be evident, however, that actual grace must be interiorized, that is, it must internally influence our will and arouse our cooperation; otherwise it remains ineffective.

The necessity for actual grace in the Christian life lies in the fact that even the just person needs special help from God to avoid all sin and to persevere in grace. Following the teaching of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas maintains that a person in the state of sanctifying grace

still needs the further assistance of grace, first, "because no created thing can proceed to any action whatsoever except in virtue of the divine motion," ***and secondly, because of the actual state of human nature, subject to ignorance and weakness of the flesh and further hampered by the wounds of original sin.*** Moreover, even when endowed with sanctifying grace and the infused virtues, the just person needs the stimulus of actual grace to actuate those supernatural powers. ***Every act of an infused virtue requires a previous movement of grace to set that virtue or gift in motion.*** This follows from the metaphysical principle that a thing in potency cannot be reduced to act except by something already in act, and since we are dealing with the supernatural order and actions, an actuating grace is needed to initiate a supernatural act.

Actual graces have three functions: to dispose the soul for the reception of the infused habits of sanctifying grace and the virtues, to actuate these infused habits, and to prevent their loss.

Actual grace disposes the soul ***for the reception of the infused habits*** either when the soul has never possessed them or when the soul has lost them through mortal sin. In the latter case actual grace will stimulate repentance for one's sins, the fear of punishment, and confidence in the divine mercy.

Actual grace also ***serves to activate the infused virtues***, and if the individual is in the state of sanctifying grace (for faith and hope can exist without grace), the actuation perfects the infused virtues and is meritorious of increase and growth in the supernatural life.

The third function of actual grace is to prevent the loss of sanctifying grace and the infused virtues through mortal sin. ***It implies a strengthening in the face of temptations, an awareness of special dangers, mortification of the passions, and inspiration through good thoughts and holy desires.***

It is evident, therefore, that actual grace is a priceless treasure. It gives efficacy to sanctifying grace and the infused virtues. It is the impulse of God that places our supernatural organism in operation and prevents us from forgetting that our soul, in the state of grace, is the temple of the Blessed Trinity.

The Infused Virtues

The existence and necessity of the infused, supernatural virtues follow from the nature of sanctifying grace. Although ***grace is classified as an accident and not a substance***, its role in the supernatural life of man is similar to that of the human soul. Therefore, sanctifying grace is not immediately operative but static, although it is the remote principle of all the activities of the person in grace. And since habitual grace is the principle of the supernatural life, it needs faculties or powers as the immediate principles of operation.

If this were not the case, we would be elevated to the supernatural order only as regards our soul but not as regards our operative powers. And although, absolutely speaking, God could elevate our faculties to the supernatural order by means of continual actual graces, this would produce a violence in the human psychological structure by reason of the tremendous disproportion between the purely natural faculty and the supernatural act to be effected. And such violence

could not be reconciled with the customary suavity of divine providence, which moves all things according to their natures. As St. Thomas points out:

“It is not fitting that God should provide less for those he loves, that they may acquire supernatural good, than for creatures whom he loves that they may acquire natural good. Now he so provides for natural creatures that not merely does he move them to their natural acts, but he bestows on them certain forms and powers, which are the principles of acts, in order that they may of themselves be inclined to these movements, and thus the movements whereby they are moved by God become natural and easy to creatures Much more, therefore, does he infuse into those he moves toward the acquisition of supernatural good, certain forms or supernatural qualities whereby they may be moved by him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good.[\(15\)](#)”

Nature of the Infused Virtues

The infused virtues may be defined as operative habits infused by God into the faculties of the soul to dispose them to function according to the dictates of reason enlightened by faith.

"Operative habits" is the generic element of the definition, common to all natural and supernatural virtues. On the purely natural level an operative habit is a quality, difficult to remove, that disposes the subject to function with facility, promptness, and delight. It gives the subject facility for operation because every habit is an increase of energy in relation to its corresponding action; it gives promptness because it constitutes, so to speak, a second nature in virtue of which the subjects quickly give themselves to action; and it causes delight in the operation because it produces an act that is prompt, facile, and connatural.

"Infused by God" is a radical difference between the infused and acquired virtues. The natural or acquired virtues are engendered in us by means of repeated acts; the only cause of the supernatural or infused virtues is the divine infusion. Their purpose is to supernaturalize the faculties by elevating them to the order of grace and making them capable of performing supernatural acts. Without them, or without the actual grace that substitutes for them (as in the case of the sinner before justification), it would be impossible for us to perform a supernatural act. St. Thomas says: "As from the essence of the soul flows its powers, which are the principles of deeds, so likewise the virtues, whereby the powers are moved to act, flow into the powers of the soul from grace."[\(16\)](#)

The principal difference between the acquired and infused virtues is by reason of the formal object. ***The infused virtues dispose the faculties to follow the dictate or command, not of reason alone, as do the acquired virtues, but of reason illumined by faith.*** The acquired moral virtues, however heroic and perfect, could never attain the formal object of the infused virtues. With good reason does St. Thomas say that the principal difference between the acquired and infused virtues is by reason of their formal objects:

The object of every virtue is a good considered as in that virtue's proper matter; thus the object of temperance is a good with respect to the pleasures connected with the concupiscence of touch. The formal aspect of this object is from reason, which fixes the mean in these concupiscences. Now it is evident that the mean that is appointed in such concupiscence according to the rule of

human reason is seen under a different aspect from the mean that is fixed according to the divine rule. For instance, in the consumption of food, the mean fixed by human reason is that food should not harm the health of the body nor hinder the use of reason; whereas according to the divine rule it behooves man to chastise his body and bring it under subjection (1 Cor. 9:27) by abstinence in food, drink, and the like. It is therefore evident that infused and acquired temperance differ in species; and the same applies to the other virtues.(17) Nor does it change matters to object that the act of infused temperance is identical with that of acquired temperance (namely, the moderation or control of the pleasures of touch) and that therefore there is no specific difference between them. St. Thomas admits the identity of the material object but insists on the specific and radical difference by reason of the formal object: "Both acquired and infused temperance moderate desires for pleasures of touch, but for different reasons as stated: wherefore their respective acts are not identical."(18)

But the infused virtues lack something of the perfect definition of habits because they do not give complete facility in operation, which is characteristic of true habits. ***They confer, it is true, an intrinsic inclination and promptness for good, but they do not give an extrinsic facility because they do not remove all the obstacles to good, as is evident in the case of converted sinners who experience great difficulty in the performance of good because of their past acquired vices.*** St. Thomas distinguishes clearly the facility proper to the two kinds of virtue: "Facility in performing the acts of virtue can proceed from two sources: from custom (and the infused virtue does not give this facility from its beginning) and from a strong inhesion as regards the object of the virtue, and this is found in the infused virtue at its very beginning."(19)

The principal differences between the acquired and infused virtues can be summarized as follows:

By reason of their essence. The natural or acquired virtues are habits in the strict sense of the word. They do not give the power to act (for the faculty has that already), but they give facility in operation. ***The supernatural or infused virtues give the power to act supernaturally*** (without them it would be impossible, apart from an actual grace), but they do not give facility in operation.

By reason of the efficient cause. The natural virtues are acquired by our own proper acts; the supernatural virtues are infused by God together with sanctifying grace.

By reason of the final cause. The acquired, natural virtues enable us to conduct ourselves rightly in regard to human acts in accordance with our rational nature. The supernatural virtues, on the other hand, ***give us the ability to conduct ourselves rightly in regard to our condition as adopted children of God, destined for eternal life, and to exercise the supernatural acts proper to the life of grace:***

By reason of the formal object. The natural virtues work for the good according to the dictate and light of natural reason; the supernatural virtues work for the good according to the dictate and supernatural light of faith.

There are four properties that the infused virtues have in common with the acquired natural virtues: (1) they ***consist in the mean or medium between the two extremes*** (except for the theological virtues, and even these do so by reason of the subject and mode); (2) in the state of perfection they ***are united among themselves by prudence*** (and the infused virtues by charity also); (3) they are ***unequal in perfection or eminence***; and (4) those that imply no imperfection ***perdure after this life*** as to their formal elements.

The characteristics or properties that are exclusive to the infused virtues are the following:

1. They ***always accompany sanctifying grace and are infused together with grace***. This doctrine is common among the theologians, although it is not exactly defined by the Church.
2. They ***are really distinct from sanctifying grace***. It suffices to recall that grace is an initiative habit infused into the essence of the soul, while the infused virtues are operative habits infused into the potencies, which are really distinct from the soul.
3. They ***are specifically distinct from the corresponding acquired natural virtues***. This has been previously demonstrated.
4. They ***are supernatural in their essence but not in their mode of operation***.
5. ***They increase with sanctifying grace***. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "Rather let us profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head" (***Eph. 4:15***). To the Philippians he says: "My prayer is that your love may more and more abound, both in understanding and wealth of experience" (***Phil. 1:9***). And he prays for the Romans "that through the power of the Holy Spirit you may have hope in abundance" (***Rom. 15:13***). St. Peter writes: "Grow rather in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (***2 Pet. 3:18***).
6. ***They give us the intrinsic power for supernatural acts but not the extrinsic facility for those acts. This explains why the repentant habitual sinner experiences great difficulty in the practice of virtue. The difficulty can be overcome by perfecting the acquired virtues***. The acquired virtues cannot assist the infused virtues intrinsically, of course, because a natural, acquired habit cannot perfect a supernatural, infused virtue. However, it can help extrinsically by removing obstacles or by correcting disordered concupiscence. ***When the obstacles are removed, the infused virtues can begin to work promptly and delightfully***.
7. ***Except for faith and hope, they are all lost as a result of mortal sin***. The reason is that the infused virtues are like properties flowing from sanctifying grace, and when grace is destroyed they also are destroyed. Only faith and hope can remain, and they in an unformed and imperfect state. ***(20) But if a person sins directly against these two virtues, they also are destroyed, and the soul is then deprived of every trace of the supernatural***.
8. They cannot diminish directly. This diminution could be caused only by venial sin or by the cessation of the acts of virtue. But they cannot be diminished by venial sin because this sin leaves intact the orientation to the supernatural end proper to the infused virtues. Nor can they be diminished by the cessation of the acts of the virtues, for these virtues were not acquired by

human effort and hence do not depend on repeated acts. Nevertheless, ***the infused virtues may be diminished indirectly by venial sins so far as these sins stifle the fervor of charity, impede progress in virtue, and predispose to mortal sin.***

Division of the Infused Virtues

Some of the infused virtues ordain the faculties to the end or goal; others dispose them in regard to the means. The first group is the ***theological virtues***; the second group is the ***moral virtues***. The first corresponds, in the order of grace, with the principles of the natural order that direct us to our natural end; the second corresponds with the acquired virtues of the natural order that perfect us in regard to the means. Once again the close similarity and analogy between the natural and the supernatural orders are evident.

Theological Virtues.

The existence of the theological virtues seems to be clearly indicated in several texts of St. Paul, including:

"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5); "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Moreover, ***the Church has stated in equivalent formulas that we receive with sanctifying grace the gifts of faith, hope, charity, and the other virtues.***⁽²¹⁾

The existence of the theological virtues is postulated by the very nature of sanctifying grace. Since grace is not immediately operative, it requires operative principles to grow and develop to perfection. ***Among these principles, some must refer to the supernatural end (theological virtues), and others must refer to the means that lead to that end (moral virtues).*** This argument takes its force principally from the divine economy and the workings of divine providence, made known to us through revelation.

The theological virtues are operative principles by which we are ordained directly and immediately to God as our supernatural end. They have God himself as their material object and one of his divine attributes as their formal object. ***Since they are strictly supernatural, only God can infuse them into the soul.***

There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. The reason for this number is that, by these three, immediate union with God is realized perfectly. ***Faith enables us to know God as First Truth; hope makes us desire him as the Supreme Good for us; charity unites us to him by the love of friendship, so far as he is infinite Goodness.*** There are no other aspects of union with God, for although the divine perfections are infinite, they cannot be attained by human acts except under the aspect of truth (by the intellect) and goodness (by the will). And only this latter admits of a twofold aspect, namely, good for us (hope) and goodness in itself (charity).

That the theological virtues are distinct among themselves is something beyond doubt, since they can actually be separated. ***Faith can subsist without hope and charity*** (as in one who commits a mortal sin of despair without losing his faith); ***charity will perdure eternally in heaven, separate***

from faith and hope, which will have disappeared (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8); and finally, in this life faith and hope can subsist without charity, as always happens when one commits a mortal sin not directly opposed to faith or hope. In these instances faith and hope remain in the soul in an unformed state, since charity is the form of the virtues.

In the order of generation or of origin, the first is to know (faith), then to desire (hope), and lastly to attain (charity). According to the order of perfection, charity is the most excellent of the theological virtues ("and the greatest of these is love" -- (1 Cor. 13:13) because it unites us most intimately with God and is the only one of the three that perdures in eternity. As to the other two virtues, faith is superior to hope because it bespeaks a relation with God in himself, whereas hope presents God as a good for us. Moreover, faith is the foundation of hope. On the other hand, hope is more closely related to charity, and in this sense it is more perfect than faith.

Moral Virtues.

The existence of the infused moral virtues was denied by numerous ancient theologians, but today it is admitted by almost all theologians, in accordance with the doctrine of St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Thomas. The basis of this doctrine is to be found in Scripture. Thus, in the Book of Wisdom we are told that nothing is more useful in the life of a person than temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice: "If one loves justice, the fruits of her works are virtues; for she teaches moderation and prudence, justice and fortitude, and nothing in life is more useful for men than these" (Wis. 8:7).

St. Peter, immediately after speaking of grace as a participation in the divine nature of God, states: "For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love" (2 Pet. 1;5-7). In these and other texts we have the scriptural basis that was later elaborated by the Fathers and theologians to give us a body of doctrine that is perfectly organized and systematic. It is true that the Church has not expressly defined anything on this question, but today the doctrine on the existence of the infused moral virtues is generally accepted.

The theological virtues are demanded by the very nature of grace so that it can be dynamically orientated to the supernatural end; the moral virtues are demanded by the theological virtues because to be ordained to the end requires a proper disposition to the means. Hence, the infused moral virtues are habits that dispose the faculties of man to follow the dictate of reason illumined by faith in relation to the means that lead to the supernatural end. They do not have God as their immediate object -- and in this they are distinguished from the theological virtues -- but they rightly ordain human acts to the supernatural end, and in this way they are distinguished from the corresponding acquired natural virtues.

The infused moral virtues regulate all the acts of man, including (at least on the part of prudence) the very acts of the theological virtues, in spite of the fact that these latter virtues are superior to the moral virtues. For although the theological virtues, considered in themselves, do not consist in the mean or medium as do the moral virtues, one can nevertheless go to excess in the manner

of operation, and it is that manner or mode that falls under the moral virtues. So it is that the moral virtues must be numerous, as St. Thomas points out: "For every act in which there is found a special aspect of goodness, man must be disposed by a special virtue."⁽²²⁾ Accordingly, there will be as many moral virtues as there are species of good objects that serve as means leading to the supernatural end. ***St. Thomas studies and discusses more than fifty moral virtues in the Summa theologiae***, and perhaps it was not his intention to give a complete and exhaustive treatment.

However, since ancient times it has been the custom to reduce the moral virtues to four principal ones, namely, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. They are expressly named in Sacred Scripture, as we have already seen, and they are called the virtues most profitable for man in this life. ***Among the Fathers of the Church, St. Ambrose is apparently the first to call them cardinal virtues.***⁽²³⁾ The Scholastic theologians unanimously subdivided the moral virtues on the basis of these four virtues.

St. Thomas maintains that these virtues can be called cardinal from two points of view: in a less proper sense, because they designate general conditions or characteristics necessary for any virtue (***every virtue calls for prudence, justice, fortitude, and moderation***); more properly, because they pertain to special activities that require the control of virtue. Hence, the cardinal virtues are special virtues, not merely general virtues that comprise all the other virtues.

The principality of the cardinal virtues can be seen in the influence they exercise over their subordinated virtues. The latter virtues function in secondary related matters, leaving the principal matter to the corresponding cardinal virtue. Hence, each of the cardinal virtues can be divided into integral parts, subjective parts, and potential parts.

The integral parts refer to conditions or characteristics necessary for the perfect exercise of the virtue. Thus, patience and constancy are integral parts of fortitude.

The subjective parts are the various species of the principal virtue. Thus, sobriety and chastity are subjective parts of temperance.

The potential parts are those annexed virtues that do not have the full force and power of the principal virtue but are in some way related to it. Thus, the virtue of religion is annexed to justice because it has to do with rendering to God the cult that is due, although this can never be done perfectly, because one cannot achieve the equality required for strict justice.

But does the principality of the cardinal virtues make them superior to the secondary related virtues? Evidently not, for religion and penance are superior to justice, since their object is nobler. Humility is related to temperance, but is more excellent than temperance.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to preserve the principality of the cardinal virtues as hinges of the others, because they comply more fully with their definitions as virtues. For example, commutative justice has more of the aspect of justice than religion or penance. An annexed or related virtue may be superior, by reason of its object, but the cardinal virtue is superior precisely as a cardinal virtue.

We shall treat of particular virtues when we discuss the positive means for growth in grace and holiness (Chapter 9). Now, however, we shall investigate the last and crowning element of the supernatural organism, namely, the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

In general usage, ***a gift signifies anything that one person gives to another out of liberality and with benevolence***. We say "out of liberality" to signify that on the part of the giver a gift excludes any notion of debt or obligation. And we say "with benevolence" to signify the love that prompts the gift. Nevertheless, the notion of a gift does not exclude gratitude on the part of the one receiving the gift; even more, ***it sometimes demands the good use of the gift, depending on the nature of the gift and the intention of the giver, as when one gives something in order that the receiver be perfected by its use. Such are the gifts that God bestows on his creatures***.

The first great gift of God is the Holy Spirit, who is the very love by which God loves himself and loves us: The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the first gift of God, not only because he is the substantial love in the intimate life of the Trinity, but also because he dwells in us through sanctifying grace. ***From this first gift proceed all other gifts of God***. In the last analysis, whatever God gives to his creatures, both in the supernatural and in the natural order, is a completely gratuitous effect of his liberal and infinite love.

Existence of the Gifts

The existence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be known to us only through revelation, since they are supernatural realities that completely transcend the light of natural reason. St. Thomas begins with this supposition in the treatise on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the *Summa theologiae*, and says that in the doctrine on the gifts we should follow the mode of speaking as found in Sacred Scripture, where they are revealed to us.[\(24\)](#)

The classical text of Isaiah is usually quoted as the scriptural foundation for the doctrine on the gifts of the Holy Spirit: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord" ([Isa. 11:1-3](#)).

This text is clearly messianic and properly refers only to the Messiah. Nevertheless, the Fathers of the Church and the Church herself have extended the meaning to the faithful of Christ in virtue of the universal principle of the economy of grace that St. Paul enunciated: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren" ([Rom. 8:29](#)). From this it is inferred that whatever perfection is found in Christ, our Head, if it is communicable, is found also in the members united to him through grace. And it is evident that the gifts of the Holy Spirit pertain to communicable perfections, if we bear in mind the need we have of them. Hence, we may rightly conclude that the seven spirits that the prophet saw descend and rest upon Christ are also the patrimony of all those who are united to him in charity.

In addition to this text, which the Fathers and the Church have interpreted as a clear allusion to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, authors are wont to cite other texts from the Old and New Testaments.⁽²⁵⁾ However, **the doctrine on the gifts of the Holy Spirit rests almost exclusively on the text from Isaiah.**

The teaching of the Church is explicit in the liturgy. In the Divine Office for Pentecost Sunday the hymn at evening prayer addresses the Holy Spirit as follows: "Thou who art sevenfold in thy grace"; and in the prayer for the feast the Church asks God to "pour out the gifts of the Spirit on all mankind." In the Sequence for the Mass of Pentecost we sing: "On the faithful, who adore and confess you, evermore in your sevenfold gifts descend." Lastly, in the administration of the sacrament of confirmation, the bishop extends his hands over those to be confirmed and prays:

"All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen."

The Catechism of the Council of Trent says that "from these gifts of the Holy Spirit we derive the rules for Christian living, and through them we are able to know whether the Holy Spirit dwells in us."⁽²⁶⁾ In his encyclical, *Divinum Illud Munus*, Pope Leo XIII recalls and reaffirms the traditional teaching of the Church concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

"More than this, the just man, that is to say, he who lives the life of divine grace and acts by the fitting virtues as by means of faculties, has need of those seven gifts which are properly attributed to the Holy Spirit. By means of these gifts the soul is furnished and strengthened so as to be able to obey more easily and promptly his voice and impulse. Wherefore, these gifts are of such efficacy that they lead the just man to the highest degree of sanctity; and of such excellence that they continue to exist even in heaven, though in a more perfect way. By means of these gifts 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 signs and harbingers of eternal beatitude."

The number of the gifts presents two principal difficulties: (1) in Sacred Scripture the number seven is classically interpreted to signify a certain indefinite plenitude; (2) in the text of Isaiah only six distinct gifts are enumerated, for the gift of fear is mentioned twice.

Some exegetes think that the text of Isaiah refers to an indefinite plenitude and therefore to more than seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Theologians who accept this exegesis will likewise hold for an indefinite number of gifts.

An indefinite plenitude may refer to a number that is left undetermined, or it may signify a definite number that contains all possible applications. It is this second sense that St. Thomas seems to accept, for he says that "it is evident that these gifts extend to everything to which the moral and intellectual virtues also extend."⁽²⁷⁾ Consequently, just as the seven infused virtues suffice for all the needs of the Christian life, but admit of a certain indefinite plenitude (especially the moral virtues, which can be divided into integral, subjective, and potential parts),

so also it would seem logical to say that the gifts are seven in number but admit of an indefinite plenitude because they perfect the infused virtues. Therefore, ***the indefinite plenitude can be understood as a determined number of gifts possessing multiple modalities.***

Various explanations have been offered for the omission of the gift of piety in the text of Isaiah, but it is explicitly mentioned in the patristic tradition, in the official teachings of the Church, and in the unanimous teaching of theologians. To prescind from this weight of authority because of certain textual obscurities would seem to be unwarranted. ***Many things formally revealed in Sacred Scripture did not appear in their fullness except through the interpretation of the Fathers and the Magisterium of the Church.*** Whatever the text of Isaiah, St. Paul describes the reality when he writes to the Romans: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption through which we cry out, 'Abba!' (that is, 'Father'). The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (**Rom. 8:14-16**).

The Nature of the Gifts

St. Thomas studies the metaphysical nature of the gifts of the Holy Spirit by asking whether they are habits,⁽²⁸⁾ in order to determine the proximate genus in the essential definition of the gifts. The reply is in the affirmative, and theologians of all schools hold for the same response, with few exceptions.

Two objections have been raised against the classification of the gifts as habits. Their solution will enable us to see more clearly the nature of the gifts.

First, for a person to be moved by the inspiration or instinct of the Holy Spirit an actual grace suffices. Therefore, the gifts are not habits but actual graces.

To this we respond that insofar as the supernatural movement proceeds from the Holy Spirit, it could be classified as an actual grace. On the part of the soul, however, a distinction is necessary. ***If the Holy Spirit acts upon the soul by bestowing some grace by way of an impulse (and such a grace can be offered even to sinners) or as a charism (gratia gratis data), these graces, as received, are also actual graces.*** But if the Holy Spirit's action on the soul requires a previous disposition so that the soul may be moved easily and promptly, then the soul needs habits that can be actuated in a supernatural mode, and such are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, ***it is commonly taught by theologians that the gifts are the perfection of the infused virtues; therefore, the gifts must, like the virtues, be operative habits.***

Secondly, it is objected that the Holy Spirit is an infinite agent of operation and needs no previous disposition on the part of the soul. Therefore the gifts are not habits.

We reply that we have already admitted that the Holy Spirit can act on a soul however and whenever he wishes. But the ordinary working of divine providence is smooth and connatural. Moreover, we are faced with the fact of the existence of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as infused habits, as we have already seen.

The Gifts and the Infused Virtues

There are numerous characteristics common to both the gifts and the virtues. The principal ones are as follows:

1. They are generically the same because **both are operative habits**.
2. They **have the same efficient cause, namely, God, and therefore they are both infused supernatural habits**.
3. They **have the same subject of inhesion: the human faculties**.
4. They **have the same material object: all moral matter**.
5. They **have the same final cause: the supernatural perfection of man, incipient in this world and consummated in the world to come**.

The differences between the gifts and the virtues are likewise numerous, but we can list them briefly in a series of statements.

1. The motor cause of the infused virtues is human reason-reason illumined by faith and prompted by an actual grace. The gifts operate under the impetus of the Holy Spirit, who actuates the gifts by direct contact. For that reason, **the habits of the infused virtues can be used when we wish, presupposing an actual grace, but the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate only when the Holy Spirit so desires**.

2. Because **the infused virtues function under the direction and control of reason illumined by faith, their operations are restricted to a human mode of action. The gifts, on the other hand, have the Holy Spirit as their motor cause; therefore they operate in a divine or supernatural mode**.

3. In the exercise of the infused virtues, the soul is fully active; its acts are produced in a human manner or mode, and the soul is fully conscious that it works when and how it pleases. The exercise of the gifts is entirely different. The Holy Spirit is the unique motor cause of the gifts; the soul is receptive, though conscious and free. Thus we preserve freedom and merit under the operation of the gifts, but the soul merely seconds the divine motion, which belongs entirely to the Holy Spirit.

Such are the principal differences between the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The first one establishes the radical and specific differences between the virtues and the gifts; the others are logical consequences of the first one.

Necessity of the Gifts

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are in no sense extraordinary or purely charismatic graces. They are given with sanctifying grace and form part of the supernatural organism. Moreover, the gifts are necessary for the perfection of the infused virtues and also for salvation.

First of all, if the gifts are said to perfect the virtues, this signifies that even the infused virtues are subject to imperfection.

Now there are five principal reasons or occasions of imperfection in any given habit or virtue:

- 1. When a habit does not attain its complete material object. Such is the case of students of theology who have not yet studied certain tracts. They know something of theology, and they have the habit of theology, but incompletely and imperfectly.***
- 2. When the habit lacks the intensity by which it should attain its object. For example, the student who has gone over an entire assignment, but superficially and carelessly.***
- 3. When the habit is weakly rooted in the subject (e.g., through lack of sufficient use).***

These three imperfections can be found in the infused virtues but can be corrected by the virtues themselves. They do not need the influence of the gifts to be extended to the total object of the virtue, to increase in intensity, or to multiply their acts.

4. When there is an intrinsic imperfection that pertains to the nature of the habit itself. This occurs, for example, in the habit of faith (of things not seen) and hope (of things not yet possessed). Neither the virtues themselves nor the gifts can correct these imperfections without destroying the virtues in question.

5. Because of the disproportion between the habit and the subject in which it resides. This is precisely the case with the infused virtues. They are supernatural habits, but the subject in which they are received is the human faculties. Consequently, on being received into the soul, the infused virtues operate in a human mode. They accommodate themselves to the psychological operations of man. This is why the infused virtues do not give facility in operation; that is provided by the acquired virtues.

Now, if we possess imperfectly the habits of the infused virtues, the acts that proceed from them will also be imperfect unless some superior agent intervenes to perfect them. This is the purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Moved and regulated, not by human reason, as are the virtues, but by the Holy Spirit, they bestow on the virtues, and especially the theological virtues, that divine atmosphere that they need in order to develop all their supernatural virtuality.

The theological virtues give us a participation in the supernatural knowledge that God has of himself (faith) and of his very love of himself (charity), and make us desire him as our supreme good (hope). These lofty objects, absolutely transcendent and divine, are necessarily constrained to a modality that is human so long as they remain under the rule and control of

reason, even though enlightened by faith. They demand a regulation or rule that is also divine—that of the gifts.

This argument is also valid for the infused moral virtues. Although they do not transcend the rule of reason as regards their immediate objects, they are directed to a supernatural end and receive from charity their form and their life in that transcendent order. Therefore, to be perfect, they must receive a divine mode that will adapt and accommodate them to this orientation to the supernatural end. Therefore, the gifts embrace all the matter of the infused virtues, both theological and moral.

Secondly, the necessity of the gifts for salvation is a logical consequence of the need of the gifts for the perfection of the infused virtues. St. Thomas Aquinas gives the following theological proof:

The gifts are perfections by which a person is disposed to be amenable to the promptings of God. Hence in those matters where the promptings of reason do not suffice and there is need for the prompting of the Holy Spirit, there is consequently need for a gift.

Now human reason is perfected by God in two ways: first, with its natural perfection, namely, the natural light of reason; secondly, with a supernatural perfection, the theological virtues.

And though the latter perfection is greater than the former, the former is possessed by us in a more perfect manner than the latter; for we have the former in our complete possession, but we possess the latter imperfectly, because we know and love God imperfectly

Accordingly, in matters subject to human reason and directed to our connatural end, we can work through the judgment of our reason; and if we receive help even in these things by way of special promptings from God, it will be out of God's superabundant goodness But in matters directed to the supernatural end, to which reason moves insofar as it is imperfectly informed by the theological virtues, ***the movement of reason does not suffice; there must be present in addition the prompting and movement of the Holy Spirit.*** This is in accord with Romans 8:14: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"; and Psalm 143:10 states: "May your good Spirit guide me on level ground"; because no one can ever receive the inheritance of the blessed unless he be led and moved thither by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, ***in order to accomplish this end, it is necessary to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit.***[\(29\)](#)

Some theologians have considered this doctrine excessive, but that is because they confuse the question ***de jure*** with the question ***de facto***. It is true that many are saved without any operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but never without the habits of the gifts. On the other hand, the actuation of the gifts is morally and sometimes physically necessary in order to preserve grace, and in this case the actuation of the gifts would be necessary for salvation. ***The reason is the insufficiency of human reason, even enlightened by faith, to lead us to the supernatural end without obstructions. But there is still another reason, based on the corruption of human nature as a consequence of original sin. The infused virtues do not reside in a sound nature but in a nature inclined to evil, and although the virtues have sufficient power to conquer all temptations opposed to them, they cannot de facto overcome some of them without the help of the gifts, especially the violent temptations that arise unexpectedly.*** In those circumstances in

which resistance or a fall is a decision of the moment, a person must act quickly, as if by a supernatural instinct, that is, under the influence and movement of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts in Particular

The difficulty in establishing an exact correlation between the virtues and the gifts is twofold. First, the virtues cover such a wide range of human acts that one virtue may relate to several gifts; for example, the virtue of faith relates to both understanding and knowledge. Second, some of the gifts, such as knowledge, counsel, and fear of the Lord, apply to more than one virtue; thus, fear of the Lord relates to the virtues of hope and temperance. ***We shall divide the gifts according to the faculties in which they reside and describe the function of each gift. Then, in treating of the virtues in particular (Chapters 10-11), we shall discuss briefly the gift or gifts that perfect each virtue.***

Two important points should be stressed before we discuss the gifts in particular. ***First, our participation in the divine life is not a transitory thing; rather, we are meant, through sanctifying grace, to share in a permanent manner in the very life and nature of God, beginning here in time and continuing through all eternity in glory.*** Moreover, our operations under grace are meant to become "connatural" to us and for that reason we receive the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as habits in the original sense of the Latin word *habitus*. When we speak of the movement or *instinctus* of the Holy Spirit in relation to the gifts, we are referring to the *actuation* of the gifts, but ***the gifts as habits are our possession so long as we remain in grace.***

Second, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, unlike the infused virtues, operate in a *supernatural mode* or manner. The reason for this is that even our highest virtues, the theological virtues, operate imperfectly in us. ***Precisely because they function under our direction, their mode of operation is always human and hence imperfect.*** The gifts of the Holy Spirit, therefore, are not simply emergency measures used by the Holy Spirit when we are in special difficulty, they are the means by which an individual attains the "divinization" that is the goal of sanctification. The supernatural modality of the gifts must be kept in mind especially when we discuss the gifts in relation to the virtues, for we may easily overlook the fact that though the names are sometimes identical or the material objects are the same, the operation of the gifts is always a movement in which the Holy Spirit is the primary agent.

Like the virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be divided according to the faculties through which they operate and then specifically by their formal objects. The human faculties are classified in general as either ***cognitive***, relating to knowledge, or ***appetitive***, relating to orexis. Now, human knowledge may be either speculative or practical, while human orexis may involve the operations of the will or the emotions. And just as there are virtues to perfect the operations of all these faculties, so there are gifts of the Holy Spirit to perfect the virtues, as we have already seen. ***Consequently, we can divide the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as follows:***

Cognitive faculties:

speculative intellect:

deeper insight into divine truths: **Understanding**
proper judgment concerning truths of faith: **Knowledge**
judgment according to divine norms: **Wisdom**

practical intellect:

decisions regarding human actions: **Counsel.**

Appetitive powers:

volitional appetite (the will):

in relation to others: **Piety**

sensitive appetites (the emotions):

proper use of the irascible emotions: **Fortitude**

proper use of pleasure emotions: **Fear of the Lord**

Understanding: to give a, deeper insight and penetration of divine truths held by faith, not as a transitory enlightenment but as a permanent intuition.

Knowledge: to judge rightly concerning the truths of faith in accordance with their proper causes and the principles of revealed truth.

Wisdom: to judge and order all things in accordance with divine norms and with a connaturality that flows from loving union with God.

Counsel: to render the individual docile and receptive to the counsel of God regarding one's actions in view of sanctification and salvation.

Piety: to give filial worship to God precisely as our Father and to relate with all people as children of the same Father.

Fortitude: to overcome difficulties or to endure pain and suffering with the strength and power infused by God.

Fear of the Lord: to avoid sin and attachment to created things out of reverence and love of God.

Fruits of the Spirit and Beatitudes

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul provides a listing of the fruits of the flesh and the fruits of the spirit. **The latter fruits are nine in number: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, meekness, and continence.**⁽³⁰⁾ Theologians from the time of St. Augustine have maintained that St. Paul's enumeration of the gifts is by no means a complete list, but only a sampling, as it were, of the fruits of the Spirit. This is indicated by the fact that **St. Paul lists fifteen fruits of the flesh and makes it clear that the list is not complete.**

The first thing to be noted about the fruits of the Spirit is that they are virtuous acts or works performed by those who are "guided by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:18). These works are in opposition to those that proceed from the flesh, as St. Paul states: "My point is that you should live in accord with the Spirit and you will not yield to the cravings of the flesh. The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly opposed" (Gal. 5:16-17). Consequently, the works of the spirit give testimony that one is being guided by and is obedient to the Holy Spirit.

The second observation is that St. Paul demands of Christians that they be detached from the things of the flesh and of this world. He says, after enumerating the fruits of the spirit: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the spirit, let us follow the, spirit's lead" (Gal. 5:24-25).

Thirdly, though the fruits of the Spirit are highly perfected virtuous acts, they are called fruits precisely because of the spiritual delight that they produce. "If these works are so perfect, abundant and permanent," says John Arintero, "that one is found to be in the state of producing them with facility and perfection, then they are so joyful and delightful that they constitute, as it were, a prelude to eternal happiness. Although they may be performed at the cost of annoyance and tribulation, yet they produce in us an ineffable joy to which nothing in this life can be compared. They are truly comparable to the joys of heaven." (31)

Still more perfect than the fruits are the beatitudes. Like the fruits, they are acts that flow from the virtues and the gifts, but they are so perfect that they are more closely related to the operations of the gifts than of the infused virtues. In a strict sense there is only one Gift and one Fruit - the Holy Spirit; and there is only one beatitude -the beatific vision in glory. But the beatitudes enunciated by Christ are a foretaste of the delights of heaven.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

(Matt. 5:3-10).

Each beatitude contains two parts; the first part refers to a meritorious act, and the second part refers to a reward. The reward applies primarily to the life to come, and yet there is likewise the promise of happiness even in this life.

St. Thomas discusses the beatitudes by linking them with the three types of life in which we hope to find happiness: the life of pleasure, the active life, and the contemplative life. But the life of pleasure is false happiness; therefore ***the first three beatitudes refer to the detachment required from worldly pleasures and satisfactions*** if one is to receive the reward that is promised. The active life, on the other hand, is a disposition for the happiness to come, since it consists in the practice of virtue; therefore ***the fourth and fifth beatitudes refer to the active life,***

and ***the sixth and seventh beatitudes refer to the effects of the active life that are proximate dispositions for the contemplative life. The eighth beatitude, according to St. Thomas, is a manifestation and confirmation of all those that precede it.***[\(32\)](#)

The beatitudes provide a summary of the magnificent ideals proposed for Christian living. They ***also provide a contrast between the life of those attached to the things of this world and the life of those who follow Christ.*** This is clearly manifested in [Luke 6:17-26](#), where we are told that Jesus came down from the mountain to a stretch of level ground and, fixing his gaze on his disciples amid the crowd, he said:

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.
Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.
Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.
Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.
Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

CHAPTER NOTES

1. Denz.-Schön. 902.
2. Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 113, a. 9, ad 2.
3. Denz.-Schön. 1561: "If anyone say that men are justified only by the imputation of the justice of Christ, or simply by the remission of sins, thus excluding the grace and charity that are infused in hearts by the Holy Spirit and inhere in them, or that the grace by which we are justified is simply the favor or benevolence of God, let him be anathema."
4. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 112, a. 1.
5. *Ibid.*, q. 110, a. 2, ad 2.
6. Denz.-Schön. 1561.
7. *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 62, a. 1.
8. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 24, a. 3, ad 2.
9. *In Joan.*, tr. 21, n. 3 (M.L. 35:1565).
10. Denz.-Schön. 1528.
11. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 43, a. 3, corpus and ad 1.
12. St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Westminster, Md.: Newman. 1957), stanza 2.
13. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, Chap. 1, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946).

14. In relation to the act of the will, which is the first principle of human acts, actual graces are divided into the following types: operating grace, the movement or prompting from God; cooperating grace, movement of the soul in conjunction with God's assistance; prevenient grace, offered prior to the response of the will; concomitant grace, accompanies the human action in response to prevenient grace; sufficient grace, offered in view of a work or goal; efficacious grace, producing its effect in accomplishing the act or attaining the goal.
15. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 110, a. 2.
16. *Ibid.*, q. 110, a. 4, ad 1.
17. *Ibid.*, q. 63, a. 4.
18. *Ibid.*, ad 2.
19. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. 14, q. 2, a. 2, ad 5; *De virtutibus*, a. 10, ad 15.
20. Cf. Denz.-Schön. 1578; 2457; *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 4.
21. *Ibid.*, 1528; 1529; 1561.
22. *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 109, a. 2.
23. *Expositio in Lucam* (M.L., 15:1738).
24. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 68, a. 1.
25. Old Testament texts: Gen. 41:38; Exod. 31:3; Num. 24:2; Deut. 34:9; Judg. 6:34; Ps. 31:8; 32:9; 118:120; 142:10; Wis. 7:28; 9:17; 10:10; Sir. 15:5; Isa. 11:2; 6:1; Micah 3:8. New Testament texts: Luke 12:12; 24:25; John 3:8; 14:17 and 26; Acts 2:2; Rom. 8:14 and 26; 1 Cor. 2:10; 12:18; Rev. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6.
26. See *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. J. Donovan (Baltimore: J. Myres, 1833), Part I, art. 8.
27. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 68, a. 4.
28. *Ibid.*, a. 3.
29. *Ibid.*, a. 2.
30. See Gal. 5:22-23. In the Greek text of Scripture only nine fruits of the Spirit are listed. By the time of St. Thomas Aquinas there were twelve fruits named in the Clementine Vulgate version, due perhaps to errors made by the scribes.
31. John G. Arinterro, *The Mystical Evolution*, trans. Jordan Aumann (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1949), Vol. I, pp. 275-76.
32. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 69, a. 3, corpus and ad 5.

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