

The Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity as Master Gifts from God

By Deacon Frederick Bartels

28 December, 2015

The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are master gifts from God, infused into the human soul in order for us to have the ability to live in right relationship to God and others, and to attain the fullness of human life found in union with God. They are gifts given from the hands of God that we might come to rest in the heart of God.

FREELY GIVEN DIVINE GIFTS

The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity can be thought of as sublime, incomparable gifts that are indispensable to human flourishing as well as attaining perfect human happiness. While each of these virtues has its specific purpose and character, each also works together in unity in order to “adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1812), and in this way shape human life in its most ultimate sense.

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Faith, hope and charity are, then, master gifts whose aim is not simply to dispose one to live a life of natural virtuous happiness, but more accurately to live as a member of the divine family, in right relationship to God and neighbor, and thereby attain to the fullness of life God offers (cf. CCC 1812, 1813). Below we will explore the theological virtues, their origin, purpose and the end to which they direct us, as well as their individual characteristics and how they serve to work together in order to guide us toward the fulfillment of human life: glorious eternal communion with God.

ORIGIN, PURPOSE AND OBJECT OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are called “theological” because they are infused into the human person by God. Therefore these master gifts, crucial to authentic living as a child of God, cannot be earned by human effort, but rather are of divine origin, freely given by our loving God in order to direct his children toward complete human fulfillment. The theological virtues, therefore, do not stem interiorly from human nature alone, but rather are implanted in the human soul by God. Their source is exterior to the soul; they are placed in the being of the human person by God

with nothing other than love, rightly ordered relationships, completeness and everlasting life in mind. These virtues are ordinarily infused into the human person in virtue of the sacrament of Baptism, in which man is incorporated into Christ and bestowed the gift of the Spirit of God through “new birth in the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1262). Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the person is justified and receives the theological virtues, which “are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1266, 1813).

The *Catechism* informs us that taken together these virtues “dispose Christians to live in right relationship with the Holy Trinity” (CCC 1812). Faith, hope and charity work in harmony to grant the Christian new, God-given and fundamental abilities in which he is enabled to live as an adopted child of God. These virtues, then, which flow from the Spirit of God himself and are a sign of his presence in the soul, enable one to live as a member of the divine family, granting the abilities and faith-perspective necessary to do so. This entails living in right relationship to God and to others because my neighbor is a child of God, which is one reason why the *Catechism* notes that the “human virtues [prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude, which are also called “moral virtues”] are rooted in the theological virtues” (Ibid.). Said another way, the theological virtues elevate, perfect and purify the moral virtues (concepts discussed in further detail below). This is so because the theological virtues originate in God through a participation in his divine nature as gifts of grace, have God as their object, and thus move us by the impulses of the Holy Spirit to live in a more fully human and morally excellent way in accord with God’s plan of loving goodness. The theological virtues are master gifts that enable us to live as God wants us to live, and to become the persons God intends us to be. These are, of course, immense advantages, not disadvantages, because these virtues give to the soul powers of supernatural origin.

There are some who deny the existence of the theological virtues. If anyone admits to having them, they are said to be purely human constructs and flights of fancy. They are thus viewed as limiting rather than freeing and enlightening. Yet those who possess these virtues know very well that they are real, that they offer incomparable advantages in right living, and that they are in fact priceless and divinely given treasures to be carefully nourished and constantly guarded. It is correct to say that a man cannot understand his real purpose, really know how to live in accordance with what is true and real, nor correctly envision his destiny, if he be devoid of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

In summary, the origin of the infused theological virtues is God, their purpose is to aid Christians in right living in relationship to God and others, and their object is God himself. These virtues, then, are ordered toward the fullness of life.

THE VIRTUE OF FAITH

To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible—St. Thomas Aquinas

The quote above from St. Thomas reminds us that the virtue of faith is indeed a gift, one which cannot be arrived at by mere reasoning, as a man might make a scientific discovery or come to a mathematical conclusion. Faith is also a mystery in a number of ways. Those who have faith know they have it; those who do not, cannot understand it nor why people claim to possess it. This, of course, does not mean faith is unreasonable or irrational or that Christians operate on “blind faith.” On the contrary, Christian faith—faith in Christ and all that the Church proposes for belief—is entirely reasonable. But what is the virtue of faith, exactly?

In part, to have faith is to believe; yet it is also more than that. William C. Mattison III notes that it is human to believe in things, to accept what we are told as true, and to live in accordance with what we believe to be true; yet Christian faith takes a person beyond simply believing in things or even in some-thing or living in what might be considered an ordinary way. Christian faith is a distinct and in fact very different way of believing, and has as its object not some-thing or some idea but Someone: Jesus Christ. Christian faith answers the important big-picture, life and death questions, and thus leads to a very extraordinary way of living in contrast to the world.¹ The *Catechism* defines faith this way:

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith man freely commits his entire self to God. For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. The righteous shall live by faith. (No. 1814)

Faith is a gift from God that gives to the person specific, elevated abilities and desires, which direct man toward his fulfillment in God who is truth itself. It enables man to give free assent of intellect and will to everything God has revealed and everything the Church proposes for belief. Faith moves us to look toward God, listen attentively and devoutly, and accept totally and lovingly what he has said or transmitted through his deeds and words in history, and especially through his Son, Jesus Christ. To say, “The righteous live by faith” (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), implies Christian faith is something necessary for living in right relationship to God and to others. This claim can be made precisely because of the way in which big-picture beliefs shape the way we live and choose and act. The person of virtuous faith seeks what is true and strives to live by it. The man of faith walks by the light of faith, choosing based on what God has revealed

¹ William C. Mattison III, *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues*, Baker Publishing Group, Chap. 11, Kindle Edition.

as true, in order to live in a way that is really true and authentic within the context of God's plan of love.

This means that virtuous faith seeks out what is really true with respect to God, both desires and commits to living by that same truth, and thirsts to attain it fully and definitively in the fullness of life found in union with God. The Love cherished in the heart of the man of faith is God, upon whose every utterance his attention rests.

Faith seeks understanding: it is intrinsic to faith that a believer desires to know better the One in whom he has put his faith, and to understand better what He has revealed; a more penetrating knowledge will in turn call forth a greater faith, increasingly set afire by love. The grace of faith opens the eyes of your hearts to a lively understanding of the contents of Revelation: that is, of the totality of God's plan and the mysteries of faith, of their connection with each other and with Christ, the center of the revealed mystery. The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood. In the words of St. Augustine, "I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe." (CCC 158)

The person of virtuous faith is a truth seeker who thirsts to not only acquire the truth but live fully in accordance with it. This is precisely why devout Catholics fall in love, so to speak, with the belief of the Church: because it is based on the certainty of truth found in God's divine revelation. The Church is the womb of faith, the place wherein it rests, and the home in which believers dwell in its peaceful arms.

Living by faith is not, however, something restrictive; on the contrary, it is freeing. In living by what is really true and real, we are set free and attain the destiny and happiness for which we were created because we fully become who we were meant—created—to be. Faith, then, gives us true sight; it directs and illumines our lives by divine light; it places in the human heart the warmth and security of God's truth. While this divine illumination moves us toward the fullness of life found in God, it also lights the path we walk through life temporally.

Faith, quite simply, shapes the way we see things; it forms our views and guides our habits; it alters positively our way of life provided we are not resistant to it and the gifts of grace God lavishes upon those he loves. But faith does not shape our life in a haphazard way, indifferently as to what is real and beneficial, but rather shapes our life according to what is really real and what matters most. Faith guides by divine light. The light of faith, then, is indispensable in rightly ordered living, in living a full and fruitful human life, and in living the life of excellence morally. Yet it is still more than that because, as stated above, the object of faith is the fullness of life found in the face-to-face vision of God.

It is clear that the virtue of faith is of supreme value. Faith in Jesus Christ and God the Father who sent him is not something arbitrary but necessary for justification before God and obtaining eternal life:

Believing in Jesus Christ and in the One who sent him for our salvation is necessary for obtaining that salvation (Jn 3:36, 6:40 *et al.*). "Since "without faith it is impossible to please [God]" and to attain to the fellowship of his sons, therefore without faith no one has ever attained justification, nor will anyone obtain eternal life 'But he who endures to the end.'"²

The *Catechism* reminds us that faith is to be kept as a treasured gift, carefully nourished and guarded against the dangers posed by carelessness, indifference, and sin:

Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: "Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim. 1:18-19). To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith (Cf. Mk 9:24; Lk 17:5; 22:32); it must be "working through charity," abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church (Gal 5:6; Rom 15:13; cf. Jas 2:14-26; CCC 162).

The incomparable gift of the virtue of faith gives us in advance a taste of eternal life and the "light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below" (CCC 163). It must be remembered that faith is a gift given from the hands of God himself that we might find our way to him, immerse our lives in his, and enjoy eternal communion with him forever. Its priceless worth can never be accurately stated. Those, therefore, who squander it, willingly toss to the wind what is of infinite value and cannot be purchased, weighed, or measured. Faith is a gift to be loved and cherished at all costs. It is one that can only be accepted and exercised in freedom, for God never coerces anyone to embrace the faith against their will (CCC 160). It is through this gift that life begins to make sense, that our eyes are opened to what is really real, and our hearts are turned toward what is of greatest and everlasting value: God.

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 1817)

Hope is the God-given gift that instills in us the desire for heaven and eternal life as our final state of perfect happiness. It disposes us to trust in the promises of Christ in order to arrive at such an end, not relying on our own efforts, but embracing the aid of the Spirit of God whose grace strengthens us spiritually and gives us the ability to live in heaven. Hope serves to focus our gaze in the right direction and toward the ultimate goal. This is especially important when facing the trials of life which might tempt us to fall into despair or feel as if there is nothing left for which to live.

² *Dei Filius* 3:DS 3012; cf. Mt 10:22; 24:13 and Heb 11:6; Council of Trent: DS 1532; CCC 161.

Additionally, as Mattison points out, the human being is a wayfarer in this earthly life, always seeking to arrive at some new goal or do some new thing. Yet there is always this question: what, really, is the goal? Hope helps us to understand why we continue to seek a more satisfying or full life even though we have arrived at some preset goal that was previously viewed as potentially satisfying.³ It helps us to understand why some level of disappointment is inevitable, certain even, because we cannot be fully satisfied by earthly goals or treasures or things. Yet hope does more than simply temper disappointment, it reorders it and lifts it up so as to enlighten our understanding and refocus our life.

A life devoid of the virtue of hope is truly a life of darkness, for there is no earthly hope that is lasting. Hope reminds us that things (creatures) of this world will not bring perfect happiness. It points us instead to the true path that leads to the fulfillment of all our desires: Jesus Christ. It thus brings the light of the promise of everlasting life. This has a stabilizing affect on the way we live life temporally, it fortifies us, positively shaping the choices we make and the directions we take. Also, the virtue of hope has the characteristic of moving us to respond to the desire for happiness placed in our heart by the Creator; it takes up earthly hopes that inspire our activities here, elevating and purifying them, “so as to order them to the kingdom of heaven” (CCC 1818). Hope gives purpose to our actions, helps to prevent discouragement, and sustains us in times of trial, suffering, and abandonment, that our hearts may be opened to eternal beatitude (Ibid.).

Further, when afflicted by severe tragedy as we so often are here in this present, earthly life, and we feel it is impossible to carry on, the virtue of hope lifts our eyes, hearts and minds to the “glory of heaven promised by God to those who love him and do his will” (CCC 1821). The promises of Christ that remind us the fullness of life awaits those who love God are indispensable in withstanding these tragedies. The fact is, while we cannot avoid them, they are passing events soon to unfold in the light and joy of eternal life, provided we stay the course in virtuous hope and continue to direct our love toward God:

Hope, O my soul, hope. You know neither the day nor the hour. Watch carefully, for everything passes quickly, even though your impatience makes doubtful what is certain, and turns a very short time into a long one. Dream that the more you struggle, the more you prove the love that you bear your God, and the more you will rejoice one day with your Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end.⁴

³ Mattison, *Introduction to Moral Theology*, Chap. 13, Kindle Edition.

⁴ St. Teresa of Avila, Excl. 15:3.

THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

Love is the key upon which the entire Christian life turns. To possess the virtue of charity is to possess God; without it, one has nothing and is nothing.

Charity is the *form* of all the virtues. It is the “theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God” (CCC 1822). Charity is often referred to as “Christian love,” and is expressed in Christ’s greatest commandment in the synoptic gospels: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10: 25-28; see also Matt. 22: 35-40; Mark 12: 28-31). Jesus makes clear its importance: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love” (John 15:9); and “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). The Gospel teaches that Christ so loved us as to submit himself to death on a cross for our sake.

Some think charity means loving God and using creatures disinterestedly in order to achieve union with God; that is, charity moves us to act with a type of love (feigned?) toward our neighbor only because we love God and he commands us to treat others respectfully. People, then, are viewed as stepping stones to God. Further, some think charity means loving God so as to receive reward and avoid punishment. Others say charity is synonymous with alms-giving. These examples are not what charity is, however.

Christian charity means that we love God for his sake because of who he is, not simply because of what he can do for us or what he might do to us. It also means we love our neighbor because he is a child of God, created in God’s image and likeness, redeemed in Christ and destined to eternal life. We see, then, how charity in the context of love of neighbor is inseparable from human dignity. Charity means we love all our neighbors, everywhere, unconditionally because in and through and with God they are of infinite value. This does not mean that it is necessarily uncharitable to admonish or correct, or that there is no place whatsoever for incarceration, or that a person should silently endure abuse. Charity does not mean absence of judgment or letting people carry out any desire. Charity does not approve of disorder and sin but delights in order, beauty, purity and holiness.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Charity is always ordered toward willing what is truly good for other persons, within the context of God's love and plan of salvation. Charity wants what is best for our neighbor and what is authentically beneficial for him; it moves us to see him as another self; it desires his beatitude. It is charity that moves the Christian to live selflessly in service to others as did Christ. Additionally, charity motivates us to give ourselves over entirely to Christ, to think as he thinks, to will as he wills, to live in complete union with him. Charity is like a divine flame that ignites the heart with burning, otherworldly love. This love is directed fully toward God and desires to be united with him even at the cost of the loss of earthly life. It sees God as its Beloved; it desires to know him more thoroughly and deeply, to be united to him completely and forever. It sees, experiences and loves others in the context of this divinely infused love of God called charity.

Through the virtue of charity our love for others is increased because it enables us to love as God loves. This can be a difficult concept for others to understand, such as family members or a spouse, when they see someone they love turn more fully their attention toward God and grow in their love of him. It is often thought that, for example, if a person truly loves God more than his spouse, he somehow loves his spouse less than would otherwise be possible with a more naturally human-centered love. It is the idea that, if God is first, a spouse can no longer remain as the object of self-giving love. This misunderstanding sets up a type of competition between one's love of God and love for spouse. It is also one reason why a person might become jealous when his spouse shows sudden signs of increased love of God. There is a fear that this new-found love of God is going to be detrimental to the unity of the spouses and the marriage. It is important to here mention the affects of pride, with its self-centered interests and habit of seeing everything through the lens of selfishness. The prideful person wants to be adored as God, in a manner of speaking, and will not tolerate anything less. Pride views love of God as a threat.

The virtue of charity, however, does not in any way decrease our love for others; on the contrary, it increases our love for neighbor, spouse, family members and children because it supernaturally increases our love for all other human persons. This takes place because charity properly orders our love, places it in the right context, and virtuously directs it toward its proper end: God. Additionally, the virtue of charity, with all its sighs of love for God and acts of love for neighbor, stems from a participation in the divine nature. It is only through charity that we can truly see another person as another self, as a fellow brother or sister in Christ, and as a child of God because charity is acquired, accessed and lived out by sharing in the life of God. Therefore charity illumines the real value in others as we look upon their being with the eyes of God. We must not forget that charity is made possible only by the divine impulses of the Spirit of God. It is God alone who knows how to love fully, completely, perfectly. Loving others

through and in and with the Holy Spirit purifies our love, helps us to see what is a truly loving way to speak and act, and directs us to seek what is truly beneficial for others. Charity elevates and purifies our love supernaturally because it is the product of God himself acting in the soul. C.S. Lewis writes:

The difference between a Christian man and a worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections and the Christian has only 'charity.' The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he 'likes' them: the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not have imagined liking at the beginning.⁵

The man of charity acts and loves in and through and with God. For example, again speaking of marriage and love for one's spouse, when a man loves God above all else, the true meaning of self-gift becomes something held in his heart and lived out in his marital life, rather than merely something intellectualized or feigned. His love for his spouse is elevated by his love of God beyond what was before naturally possible. The goal, which is complete gift of self to the other, can only be realized through charity because without loving God above all else it is not possible to achieve a rightly ordered love for others in the fullest sense. Love of God for his sake completes us, perfects our way of seeing, thinking, acting and relating to God and others.

A practical example is offered in the man who says he adores his wife but lacks the virtue of charity. The question that must be asked is: does this man love his wife in a complete, rightly ordered and selfless way, or is he perhaps mostly in love with her superficial beauty? As age progresses and beauty wanes, will this man continue to love his wife as Christ loves his Bride, the Church (see Eph. 5:25), remaining always faithful to her and giving of his life for her? This is not to say that a person who lacks charity will always divorce his wife as soon as some obstacle arises, but it is to say that relationships devoid of charity are far more difficult to maintain, whatever type they may be. Through the virtue of charity, on the other hand, this same man would not only be enabled to grasp what real love is but live it out. When combined with the moral virtue of fortitude, he would do so even in the face of extreme difficulties and trials. Love of God above all else increases our love for others because we love by a divinely infused love. This is a very different, extraordinary and beautiful level of love that is not otherwise possible for human nature alone.

In summary, the greatest of the theological virtues is charity: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). Charity is the origin and goal of the Christian way of life (CCC 1827). It is the *form* of the virtues; it animates and inspires them; it orders them among themselves, and binds them together in "perfect harmony" (Ibid.). We might think of charity as the guiding light of well ordered, perfect and sacrificial love that illuminates, directs and helps to complete all the virtues, both theological and moral.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 131; Qtd. in Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, (Kindle Locations 6674-6677), Kindle Edition.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES ELEVATE AND PERFECT THE MORAL VIRTUES

The theological virtues elevate and perfect the moral (human) virtues through grace and the divine impulses of the Holy Spirit. This can be thought of as God himself raising up, refining and purifying the moral virtues through our cooperation with his grace and in combination with our human efforts.

These moral virtues we are here speaking about are called “cardinal virtues” due to the pivotal role they play in the moral life and the way the other human virtues encircle them (CCC 1805). They are listed as: prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. The cardinal virtues form the foundation of virtuous, moral living. Nevertheless, the foundation these virtues form is fortified and elevated to a new level by the theological virtues. This aspect of fortification, elevation and purification is due to the fact that the theological virtues are supernatural in origin and are directed toward the ultimate and highest object: God. It can be said that the man who lives freely and obediently the life of faith, hope and charity within the context of God’s plan of love and salvation lives a virtuously superior type of life in comparison to those who do not have the benefits of the infused theological virtues. It might be described as the difference between seeing by a natural light as compared to a divine light.

In order to better understand the importance of the theological virtues in relation to the moral virtues, consider the cardinal virtue of prudence, for example: following Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas observed that prudence is “right reason applied to action.”⁶ In light of that, the obvious question is: what is the best course of action to take?

Say you are considering sending one of your children to college. There are many things to take into consideration in deciding what might be the best college, including what the best course of action is in order to enroll the child and get him there, where he will live, how the tuition is to be paid, what subjects to study and what is to be the major for a college degree. Is a loan appropriate or not? What type of degree will afford significant employment opportunities? and so forth. In this process, you are considering available choices, a course of action, and an intended goal. This process involves the virtue of prudence. Yet prudence is about more than simply making choices and intending to arrive at *some type of goal*: it is about making the right choices in light of what is really true, with the intention of arriving at the *best possible goal*. Prudence involves, then, a process of deliberation over contingent matters, but it does not stop there; it includes taking appropriate action, using the best means and proper agents in doing so, with the aim in mind of arriving at the correct and best possible good destination. Prudence is concerned with choosing, acting, and living in conformity with what is really true in order to attain the highest outcome.

In order to fully and correctly envision such a course, one must be aware of not only the precise path to walk but the proper and well-ordered destination that lay on the horizon.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa II-II, q. 47, a. 2.

In other words, the *object* or goal of the action taken governs one's course and affects one's intention. Recall that we asked this question above: what is the best course of action to take? The correct answer to such a question requires true and accurate big-picture knowledge, which entails something beyond mere human knowledge: it entails faith. This is so because if we speak of taking action or making choices without including such things as what God has revealed through his Son, and what is really true in light of faith, such as what it really means to be human and what the goal of the human person is, then our choices and/or actions are likely to be deficient, misdirected or incomplete in some way. In the example above, in which a parent and a child are deliberating about what college to attend and the questions surrounding such a choice, faith will shape the perspective, the choices, and the intentions involved. It will certainly impact the ultimate goals behind seeking out and receiving a college education. Further, it will even influence how one will define what an education is or should be.

Faith involves big-picture beliefs that shape our decisions and the path we walk in order to arrive at a particular end. Additionally, faith affects how we view and understand the end-goal itself. The horizon of life is *different* when viewed through the lens of faith. This means that important decisions devoid of the light of faith are going to be deficient in the long run in comparison to faith-based decision making. This is not to say that faith is *always* required in order to make correct decisions about anything and everything; but it is to say that the light of faith affords a definite advantage in making important choices in life and living in a truly happy, fulfilling and morally excellent way. This is true for the simple reason that nothing makes any real sense devoid of God, his revelation and truth, and the fullness of life to which he calls us.

In using the example of the virtue of faith, it is not difficult to see how prudence, as a process of right reason in action, is elevated and perfected as a moral virtue by the infused theological virtues. The virtue of faith, for example, most definitely helps the Christian to understand that Christ is his ultimate goal in life and life-choices must be made within the context of such a perspective. Faith allows the Christian to know that Christ is the "way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6), and that any other path leads eventually to loss not gain. Faith provides assistance in helping the Christian to turn toward and embrace what is really true and real, as well as how one should go about ordering one's life in accordance with these things with the aim in mind of arriving at the correct destination. The gift of faith gives us these abilities and sets us on the path leading to the horizon of fulfillment found in the Beatific Vision and eternal communion with God.

The theological virtues, then, give to the Christian a number of advantages in living the moral life; these gifted abilities are of supernatural origin, divinely infused into the soul by God himself, and enable us, through our cooperation with the impulses of the Holy Spirit, to become who God intends us to be. The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity are freely given divine gifts; these master gifts work together to enable the Christian to live as a child of God in right relationship with God and with others, and so have true unity, virtuous living, and fulfillment in God as their purpose and motive.

Additionally, these virtues are ordered toward a specific object: everlasting life in union with God.

IN SUMMARY

The theological virtues are infused into man by God for the purpose of complete human fulfillment. They give to Christian moral activity its special character, which is ordered toward not only right living in accordance with the moral virtues but also toward man's proper end in eternal communion with God. They are crucial to the life of Christians because, working together, they dispose us to truly live as God's adopted children, as members of the divine family, in "right relationship with the Holy Trinity," and thus have the "Triune God for their origin, motive and object" (CCC 1812).

© Deacon Frederick Bartels, 2015.

Permission to reproduce and distribute this work is hereby granted for individual, non-commercial use only. Republishing on the web is prohibited. This work must be reproduced in its entirety and without alteration.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica: Second Part of the Second Part*. Catholic Encyclopedia. Accessed 17 Dec., 2015. Available online at newadvent.org: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3047.htm#article2>. Internet.

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Second Edition. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994.

Mattison III, William C. *Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues*. Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2008. Kindle edition.

The Holy Bible. RSV. Sec. Catholic Edition. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006.