

DAVENANT HALL

Cardinalibus Virtutibus:
A Defense of the use of Cardinal Virtues in Moral Theology.

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Natural Law and Scriptural Authority

By

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In the current climate of moral theology, an unbalanced and ahistorical approach has established itself as the norm. When one joins a new tradition, or is converted within a certain tradition,¹ likely, the only teaching in moral theology one is to receive is an exposition of the ten commandments, if that. From a Reformed perspective, in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 92-115), the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 98-148), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q. 42-81), and the Catechism of the ACNA (Q. 256-356) only an exposition of the ten commandments is given. It is much the same in other Protestant traditions.

Further, in the training that Protestant pastors receive, if moral theology is treated at all, it is only this restricted “list of sins and duties.” The results of an overview of popular systematic theologies used in American seminaries is grim. Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* contains no section on moral theology. Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* contains an exposition of the Ten Commandments (Chapter XIX). Berkouwer in his *Studies in Dogmatics* contains no section on moral theology. Unfortunately, this lack of moral theology is the rule rather than the exception.

The traditional way is opposed to this mere “sins and duties” way of going about moral theology. One needs only to look at the most important systematic theology in the history of the church. Lombard’s *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum in Liber III, Distinctio XXXIII, Cap. 120* treats “*De quatuor virtutibus principalibus*,” that is, “On the four principle virtues,” and, in other distinctions, he treats faith (Dist. XXV), hope (XXVI), and charity (XXVII),² also treating the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Dist. XXXIV), and the ten commandments (Dist. XXXVII).

¹ Here, I am speaking about Protestant traditions, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does teach the cardinal virtues to the laity, further, Mogila’s Catechism (Orthodox) also teaches such, while other Catholic and Orthodox catechisms do not.

² These three virtues, faith, hope, and charity, are called the “theological virtues.”

“What difference does it make,” you may ask. The difference is profound and makes a theological statement. The difference is that, while these modern systematic theologies treat “sins and duties,” catholic³ theology treats “virtues.” The former says “do this” and “don’t do that,” while the latter says “become this.” While there is an understanding of this on the level of the “theological virtues” (faith, hope, and love); on the level of the “cardinal virtues,” through biblicist tendencies, it has been largely abandoned. A reappraisal of these virtues (and the philosophy which underlies it) is necessary for contemporary moral theology to provide a satisfying account and guide of the Christian life.

To prove this thesis, first, a background account will be given, treating the nature of the virtues and the history of their usage in moral theology. Second, the reappropriation of these virtues will be argued for, from scripture, tradition, ecclesiastical consensus, theology, reason, and practice. Third, certain objections will be raised against the thesis and answered.

“A virtue is,” according to St. Thomas, “nothing other than a certain facility and inclination through the mode of nature toward the good of reason.”⁴ A virtue is a type of habit, yet is distinguished from a general habit in that they are “habits so far as they have a moral character.”⁵ These order the powers of man, intellect, will, and affections, towards “communion with divine love.”⁶

There are two major *genera* of virtues that are important to moral theology. First, there are the theological virtues. The theological virtues are those virtues “that have God as their

³ I am using the term “catholic” in a broad sense, and not necessarily referring to Roman Catholicism.

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, Sent.III.D33.Q1.A2.qa2.Obj

⁵ Sylvester Joseph Hunter, *Outlines of Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 3, Third Edition. (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1896), 147.

⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 443.

object and end.”⁷ These are only acquired by infusion from God, because they “do not preexist in the natural seedbeds of the virtues, but rather exceed human nature.”⁸ There are three of these, faith, hope, and charity. Second, there are the cardinal virtues. These have created goods as their end. In creation, the “seeds” of these virtues (cardinal virtues) are infused *in potentia*, which is actualized through habituation, i.e., “are acquired by repeated acts,”⁹ or, in restricted cases, these may be infused, providing the effect without the natural cause.

The cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Prudence is a habit wherein our practical reason is disposed to choose the good and the means to achieve it, or as St. Thomas writes prudence is “right reason in action.”¹⁰ Prudence “is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure.”¹¹ Justice, as it is classically phrased, is “*constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuendi*,”¹² or, simply put, to render to each man according to his due. Justice “disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good.”¹³ Fortitude is a strength of will towards achieving the good. “It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause.”¹⁴ Temperance is the regulation of the desires so as to not desire something beyond its rational limit. St. Augustine sums up the relation of the Cardinal Virtues to the Christian life nicely,

⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, Sent.III.D9.Q1.A1.qa3.2

⁸ Ibid., Sent.III.D33.Q1.A2.qa4.2

⁹ Hunter, *Outlines of Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 3, 144.

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, ST.II-II.Q47.A2.SC

¹¹ Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 444.

¹² Iustinianus et al., *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, vol. 1 (Venetiis: Iuntas, 1592), 1.

¹³ Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 444.

¹⁴ Ibid.

I need say no more about right conduct. For if God is man's chief good, which you cannot deny, it clearly follows, since to seek the chief good is to live well, that to live well is nothing else but to love God with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind; and, as arising from this, that this love must be preserved entire and incorrupt, which is the part of temperance; that it give way before no troubles, which is the part of fortitude; that it serve no other, which is the part of justice; that it be watchful in its inspection of things lest craft or fraud steal in, which is the part of prudence. This is the one perfection of man, by which alone he can succeed in attaining to the purity of truth. This both Testaments enjoin in concert; this is commended on both sides alike.¹⁵

Even before the coming of Christ, the people of God have adopted this four-fold division of the Cardinal virtues which was originally laid out by Plato¹⁶ and Cicero.¹⁷ The Book of Wisdom, which is canonical within the majority of Christendom, clearly alludes to these four cardinal virtues.¹⁸ Further, this is taught in 4 Maccabees.¹⁹ This is also taught by Phil and the *Letter of Aristeas*.²⁰

In the coming of Christ, ethics reached its *telos*. Victor Cathrein describes this flowering of ethical reflection,

A new epoch in ethics begins with the dawn of Christianity. Ancient paganism never had a clear and definite concept of the relation between God and the world, of the unity of the human race, of the destiny of man, of the nature and meaning of the moral law. Christianity first shed full light on these and similar questions...In consequence of their [Pagan] perverse inclinations, this law [the moral law] had to a great extent become

¹⁵ Augustine of Hippo, "On the Morals of the Catholic Church," in *St. Augustin: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 54.

¹⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, 426–435.

¹⁷ Cicero, *De Inventione*, II, LIII.

¹⁸ Wisdom 8:7, "If thy desire be for honest living, man's excellences are the fruit she labours to produce; temperance and prudence she teaches, justice and fortitude, and what in life avails man more?"

¹⁹ 4 Maccabees 2:23, "To the mind he gave the law; and one who lives subject to this will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good, and courageous."

²⁰ David Arthur deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 104.

*obscured and distorted among the pagans; Christianity, however, restored it to its pristine integrity. Thus, too, ethics received its richest and most fruitful stimulus.*²¹

The earliest fathers did not innovate; they synthesized. They took categories already present in Greek Philosophy and brought them into conformity with the revelation of Christ. The cardinal virtues was one of these categories brought in. It was used by Origen,²² St. Ambrose of Milan,²³ St. Jerome,²⁴ and St. Maximus the Confessor.²⁵ It becomes most prominent in the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, who writes extensively on the subject.²⁶

In the Medieval synthesis of faith and reason, the usage of the cardinal virtues was taken even further than the usage of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. The technical aspects of these virtues with the remainder of theology and philosophy was investigated in great detail and there was a general agreement established. Thinkers like St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, Bl. John Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, and St. Bonaventure reflected on the nature of the virtues in great detail. The reason behind this is traced to the inclusion of these virtues from St. Augustine into

²¹ Victor Cathrein, “Ethics,” ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press; The Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1907–1913).

²² Origen, *Homilies on Luke and Fragments on Luke*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. 94, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 146.

²³ Ambrose of Milan, “On the Duties of the Clergy,” in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 18.

²⁴ Jerome, “The Letters of St. Jerome,” in *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley, vol. 6, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 95.

²⁵ Maximus, *Letter 5* (PG 91:421C); *Chapters on Love*. 2.79 (ed. Caresa-Gastaldo, 132); *Disputation with Pyrrhos*. (PG 91:309C–312A); Evagrius, *Praktikos* 89 (SC 171:680–88); idem, *Gnostikos* 44 (SC 356:172–74); and *Ambigua to John and Thomas*. 21 (DOML 1:431–35)

²⁶ Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 73–98*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 18, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 199., and Augustine of Hippo, “On the Morals of the Catholic Church,” in *St. Augustin: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 54–55.

Lombard's *Sententiarum*. From this, every student of theology would have been exposed to this system.

In the Reformation, on the side of the Roman Church, this focus remained unchanged, finding its “*summa*” in the Moral Theology of St. Alphonsus Liguori two and a half centuries later.²⁷ On the Protestant side of the Reformation, these virtues continued to play a central role in moral theology.²⁸ On the Reformed side, a shining example of this is Peter Martyr Vermigli's *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁹ In Lutheran thought, while early Luther certainly spoke against the Aristotelian virtues,³⁰ there is this same focus, as is seen in Melancthon³¹ and in Niels Hemmingsen's *On the Law of Nature*,³² who closely follows Cicero's exposition of the virtues. In later Protestant thought these virtues fell into disuse, expositions of the Decalogue taking the place of the traditional model.

The thesis will now be proven, first from appeals to authorities (scripture, tradition, and ecclesiastical consensus), and then argued theologically and philosophically. Early argumentation for the cardinal virtues from scripture are often allegorical. Philo argues that the four rivers found in Genesis are the Cardinal virtues,³³ St. Bernard of Clairvaux argues for them from the Cantic of Canticles,³⁴ and St. Thomas Aquinas argues from the fact that there were “four thousand men”

²⁷ St. Alphonsus Liguori, *Theologia Moralis*.

²⁸ See: David S. Sytsma, "Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Protestantism," *Academia Letters*, July 2021.

²⁹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*.

³⁰ “Virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace.” Martin Luther, *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, thesis 41.

³¹ Sytsma, "Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Protestantism," 2.

³² Niels Hemmingsen, *On the Law of Nature: A Demonstrative Method*, trans. E. J. Hutchinson (Grand Rapids, MI: CLP Academic, 2018).

³³ Philo, *Legum allegoriae* 1.63

³⁴ Saint Bernard, *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Cantic of Canticles*, trans. A Priest of Mount Melleray, vol. 1 (Dublin; Belfast; Cork; Waterford: Browne and Nolan, 1920), 232–233.

who were fed in the gospels.³⁵ On the principle that, “the testimonies of scripture that exist under a figure [allegorical]...do not establish matters of faith unless they would be certain from another passage of Scripture”³⁶ more is needed than these allegorical interpretations (while they certainly have value).

From the scriptural text, the cardinal virtues are proven on two counts. First, the cardinal virtues themselves summarize New Testament ethical teaching most fittingly, even appearing explicitly. Second, the philosophy that underlies the teaching itself is the same ethical principle that underlies New Testament ethical teaching.

The clearest example of the first argument is found in St. Peter’s Second Epistle and his usage of the term *ἐγκράτεια*, which, “indicat[es that] 2 Peter adapts to, or has internalized, some of the common philosophical moral principles of the day,” including “the four Platonic cardinal virtues.”³⁷ Interestingly, this same point is picked up by Non-Conformist Matthew Henry,

*Here we cannot but observe how the believer’s way is marked out step by step. He must get virtue, by which some understand justice; and then the knowledge, temperance, and patience that follow, being joined with it, the apostle may be supposed to put them upon pressing after the four cardinal virtues, or the four elements that go to the making up of every virtue or virtuous action.*³⁸

This is also seen in St. Paul’s various lists of virtues. Especially, in Romans 12:3, “Thus, in virtue of the grace that is given me, I warn every man who is of your company not to think highly of himself, beyond his just estimation, but to have a sober esteem of himself, according to the measure of faith which God has apportioned to each.” We see here that a prudent estimation

³⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, Matt.C15.L3.n1350

³⁶ St. Robert Bellarmine, S.J., *On the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, trans. Ryan Grant, De Controversiis Fidei Christianae (Post Falls, ID: Mediatrix Press, 2020), p.51-52.

³⁷ Andrew M. Mbuvi, *Jude and 2 Peter: A New Covenant Commentary*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Craig Keener, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 79.

³⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2434.

of oneself is viewed as a root of the rest of the virtues, following the principle that “the ends of moral virtue must of necessity pre-exist in the reason.”³⁹ Thorsteinsson comments,

*Paul’s allusions to two of the four cardinal virtues [prudence and moderation] suggest that he was familiar with current Graeco-Roman moralistic discussions. Moreover, it is unlikely that the Roman audience would have missed his playing on the root (phron-) of the...primary virtue [prudence].*⁴⁰

Second, the New Testament ethic as a whole is focused towards “virtues and vices” rather than *strictly* an approach which lists obligations and sins. The New Testament ethic “is a dynamic one...with a view towards virtue or character ethics.”⁴¹ The New Testament does not, principally, “come from obeying rules, but...certain virtues...are upheld as leading one to a good life.”⁴²

Next, the argument from tradition. This argument has been dealt with in detail in the historical portion of this essay, and the particulars do not need to be repeated. The model of the cardinal virtues were accepted by the earliest Christian writers in the catechesis and as a mode of summarizing the biblical text.

Further, the Cardinal virtues are established by universal ecclesial consensus. In the Roman Church, this is established in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*⁴³ and in the theological manuals used to train Priests.⁴⁴ It is also established among the Greeks, as is found in

³⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, ST.II-II.Q47.A6

⁴⁰ Thorsteinsson, ‘Paul and Roman Stoicism’, 149–50. in Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 487.

⁴¹ Nijay K. Gupta, “Ethics, Christian,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Catholic Church, *Catechism*, 444.

⁴⁴ See, for example: Joseph Pohle and Arthur Preuss, *Grace, Actual and Habitual: A Dogmatic Treatise, Dogmatic Theology* (Toronto: W. E. Blake & Son, 1919), 366.

the influential *Orthodox Confession of the Catholic and Apostolic Eastern Church*.⁴⁵ The authority of which is reflected on by Parthenius, Patriarch of Constantinople,

*We have found that this book follows faithfully the dogmas of the Church of Christ, and agrees with the sacred canons, and in no respect differs from them...With our common synodical sentence, we decree, and we announce to every pious and orthodox Christian subject to the Eastern and Apostolic Church, that this book is to be diligently read, and not to be rejected. Which, for the perpetual faith and certainty of the fact, we guard by our subscriptions.*⁴⁶

Further, as was stated before, this is reflected in the practice of the early Lutherans and Reformed. Aristotle's Nicomedian Ethics was a textbook for ethics both in Oxford and Wittenburg.⁴⁷ Sytsma reflects on its influence,

*Indeed, Melancthon initiated a philosophical tradition of Protestant commentary on Aristotle's Ethics. There exist at least fifty Protestant commentaries published ca. 1529-1682...This Protestant commentary tradition is only the most obvious aspect of a wider academic culture of ethics shaped by the Nicomachean Ethics. Since Protestant university curricula during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often required Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics to be used as a textbook for the ethics professor, there was great demand for new editions...In Protestant ethical systems of the sixteenth seventeenth centuries, Aristotle typically appears as the foremost authority for method and content...there are easily hundreds of books that discuss a broad range of topics originating with Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. In Addition, there exist at least 5,000 ethical disputations at Protestant universities until the year 1750, and a fairly large percentage of these address topics from the Nicomachean Ethics. There are thousands of disputations on such topics: the supreme good, virtue in general, moral virtue, intellectual virtue, heroic virtue, fortitude, temperance, justice, friendship [etc.].*⁴⁸

To understand why these virtues in particular are necessary for the task, we must investigate the nature of man. There are three faculties of the soul, the reason, the will, and the

⁴⁵ Peter Mogila, *The Orthodox Confession of the Catholic and Apostolic Eastern Church*, ed. J. J. Overbeck and J. N. W. B. Robertson (London: Thomas Baker, 1898), 128.

⁴⁶ In *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Sytsma, "Aristotle's Nicomedian Ethics and Protestantism," 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

appetites, and the appetites are divided “into the concupiscible and the irascible.”⁴⁹ The reason is that faculty whereby we “advance from one thing understood to another, so as to know an intelligible truth.”⁵⁰ The will is that faculty which “moves the intellect and all the powers of the soul.”⁵¹ The concupiscible appetite “is a faculty by which the animal is led to seek what is useful to it, and to shun what is harmful”⁵² and the irascible “a faculty by which the animal is roused to acquire a good that is difficult to attain, and to remove any evil that would destroy this good or prevent its attainment.”⁵³ For example, by the concupiscible appetite, a dog seeks to eat his food, and by the irascible appetite a dog bites the hand of someone trying to steal his food.

The four Cardinal virtues are the perfecting of each of the powers. Together, they provide all the necessary perfections of powers to do the good. First, prudence is the perfecting of the intellect, for, “prudence is in reason,”⁵⁴ it “enlightens the reason as to what should be done,”⁵⁵ and “prudence rectifies the rational faculties.”⁵⁶ As Bl. Scotus writes, “the wayfarer is sufficiently perfected by prudence – provided the prudence is most perfect, for then it is about everything doable as to every condition of the doable that is also most perfectly known.”⁵⁷ It is

⁴⁹ Pseudo-Plutarch, *Plutarch's Morals.*, ed. Goodwin, vol. 3 (Medford, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1874), 162.

⁵⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, ST.I.Q79.A8.C

⁵¹ Ibid., ST.I.Q82.A4.C

⁵² Louis of Poissy, *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy: Based on the Principles of the Best Scholastic Authors* (New York: P. O’Shea, 1893), 273–274.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, QDeVirt.Q5.A1.C.10

⁵⁵ Louis of Poissy, *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy*, 386–387.

⁵⁶ Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, trans. José De Vinck, vol. 2, *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal Seraphic Doctor and Saint* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), 193.

⁵⁷ John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio III Dd. 26-40*, trans. Peter L. P. Simpson, vol. 10, 14 vols., *Ordinatio of Blessed John Duns Scotus*, 81.

by prudence that our intellect is able to know and discern the good, our discursive faculties are able to reason to what is good.

Second, justice is the perfecting of the will, “justice [is] in [the] will.”⁵⁸ Justice “inclines the will to render to everyone his due.”⁵⁹ It is a certain habitual disposition whereby the good is willed in relation to others. In this, justice plays a central role in achieving the good, as St. Bonaventure writes, “justice directs all of these powers in their relation to a given person.”⁶⁰ Without justice, one may know the good and desire the good, yet the good is not actively willed and sought.

Third, temperance is the perfecting of the concupiscible appetite, “temperance [is] in the concupiscible.”⁶¹ Temperance is that which “regulates the concupiscible appetite and checks the inordinate pursuit of sensible goods.”⁶² The mean is sought out by temperance. We do not ignore that things that are necessary for our preservation, neither do we overindulge in those things. The simplest example is in food. We do not despise food so much as to starve, neither do we desire it beyond our need.

Fourth, fortitude is the perfecting of the irascible appetite, “fortitude [is] in the irascible.”⁶³ Fortitude is that which “perfects the irascible part when there is difficulty either in

⁵⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, QDeVirt.Q5.A1.C.10

⁵⁹ Louis of Poissy, *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy*, 387.

⁶⁰ Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 195.

⁶¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, QDeVirt.Q5.A1.C.10

⁶² Louis of Poissy, *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy*, 387.

⁶³ St. Thomas Aquinas, QDeVirt.Q5.A1.C.10

acquiring good or avoiding evil.”⁶⁴ In this, that good which we know is sought no matter the obstacles which are placed in our way.

It is from this position of establishing the cardinal virtues in the entirety of the soul that we are able to argue for their necessity in moral theology. First, it is necessary to the doing of good. For, in the doing of the good, it is not merely the intellectual apprehension of the good, or the desiring of the good, and it would be irrational to conceive of merely “willing” the good without a desire for the good or a knowledge of that good. We need prudence in order to reason to the good. We need justice in order to will the good. We need temperance in order to rightly desire the good. We need fortitude in order to do the good without regard to the consequences that may be endured. While scripture and reason certainly can deduce other virtues, since these are the only powers of the soul, all other virtues may be reduced under these as genera.

Second, it is necessary from the *summum bonum* of man. The glorification and enjoyment of God is this *summum bonum*. This is a task which is achieved socially “in a society and kingdom of perfected persons—the communion of saints.”⁶⁵ Part of this “is the immediate end of acquiring spiritual perfection both for one-self and for others...men cannot perfect themselves unless they also devote themselves to helping others towards perfection.”⁶⁶ This is a good which needs to be rightly thought in each of our faculties by the virtues.

Third, it is soteriologically necessary. In our salvation, Christ redeems our entire faculties by grace. We are redeemed, not only to love God, but also to obey the moral law. In the words of Ezekiel, “and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,

⁶⁴ Louis of Poissy, *Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy*, 387.

⁶⁵ Francis J. Hall, *Creation and Man*, Dogmatic Theology (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 243.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

that they may walk in my commandments, and keep my judgments.”⁶⁷ In order to understand this process, we must understand how the different faculties of our soul are healed, and which virtues are acquired to counteract those vices. St. Bonaventure describes this grace, “Although the grace sanctifying the soul is one, there are seven freely given virtues by which human life is ruled. These are the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice.”⁶⁸ To understand grace and its effects, we must understand the cardinal virtues.

In our salvation, God gives us all those things which are necessary in the “guidance of these faculties to their supernatural end.”⁶⁹ Pohle describes it thus, “the infusion of the cardinal virtues and of the other virtues subordinate to them has for its object the government of intellect and will in their relation towards created things and the guidance of these faculties to their supernatural end.”⁷⁰ While speaking of faith, hope, and charity is sufficient in speaking of our supernatural duties, our duties are not *merely* supernatural, and, thus, a discussion of the cardinal virtues is necessary. As St. Bonaventure writes, “therefore the one vivifying grace branches out into various habits for the sake of these various activities.”⁷¹

Fourth, it is eschatologically necessary. The purpose of the church militant is to be the “training school of the communion of saints.”⁷² In this, the church militant is elevated by grace in preparation for the perfection that is to come. The perfection of righteousness which we are

⁶⁷ Ezekiel 11:19

⁶⁸ Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 193.

⁶⁹ Joseph Pohle, *Grace, Actual and Habitual*, 366.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Saint Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 194.

⁷² Francis J. Hall, *Creation and Man*, 243.

being prepared for in the eschaton is both the elevation of our natural faculties and infusion of grace beyond these faculties. In the eschaton, we will not only adore God with perfect charity, but we will also, in our relationship with other saints, will the good for them. In this willing of the good for the other, we will be expressing temperance, justice, prudence, and fortitude.

Therefore, we must account for the growth of these virtues in our preparation for the eschaton, and the perfection of these virtues that we will possess in the eschaton. St. Augustine reflects on this,

If it belongs to justice to be subject to the government of this nature, then justice is certainly immortal; nor will it cease to be in that blessedness, but will be such and so great that it cannot be more perfect or greater. Perhaps, too, the other three virtues—prudence although no longer with any risk of error, and fortitude without the vexation of bearing evils, and temperance without the thwarting of lust—will exist in that blessedness: so that it may be the part of prudence to prefer or equal no good thing to God; and of fortitude, to cleave to Him most steadfastly; and of temperance, to be pleased by no harmful defect. But that which justice is now concerned with in helping the wretched, and prudence in guarding against treachery, and fortitude in bearing troubles patiently, and temperance in controlling evil pleasures, will not exist there, where there will be no evil at all.⁷³

Fifth, it is necessary from a pastoral perspective. In leading the faithful, a priest ought to guide them to righteousness by the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments. A central part of this task is to be able to discern the causes of sin and the causes of righteousness. Pastorally, it would be insufficient to *merely* inform the faithful of the sins they have performed and the duties that they need to form. This is not in accordance with the human person. Rather, a vision ought to be presented of the vices which cause patterns of behavior, and the virtues which ought to be cultivated to oppose these vices. In order to have a sustainable “choosing of the good” in a person, habits towards that good must be formed. In choosing the good, the cardinal virtues involve the entire human person in being formed towards this good. It

⁷³ Augustine of Hippo, “On the Trinity,” in *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan, vol. 3, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 190.

sheds the hypocrisy of merely “knowing the good” or merely choosing the good, rather, one contemplates the good, chooses the good, desires the good, and is willing to face resistance for the good.

In conclusion, the cardinal virtues in theology must undergo a retrieval. It provides us with a deeper understanding of God’s creation and redemption of man. Further, it provides a satisfying account of the moral life for Christians. In this age, it is necessary, pastorally, to guide Christians towards forming the habits necessary to seek the good.

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