

The Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit

A Theory of the Virtuous Life

NOTE. This is an extract from the CTS Book, "Gift of the Spirit", by Stratford Caldecott. It has been slightly revised. For a list of this and other CTS titles go to www.cts-online.org.uk.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Rev. 22:1-2

The fruits of the tree of life, according to the Book of Revelation, are twelvefold, one for every month of the year. And these are the fruits of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Saint Paul in Galatians 5, because it is the Spirit who joins us to Christ and causes him to live within us.

The translation of Saint Paul's Letter in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible lists the fruits of the Spirit as nine: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*. But the older Vulgate and Douai versions give twelve: charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity. Finally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (para 1832) follows the older tradition, and lists twelve:

"The *fruits* of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: 'charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness [benignity], goodness, generosity [longanimity], gentleness [mildness], faithfulness [faith], modesty, self-control [continency], chastity'."

Guided by the *Catechism*, it is this list of twelve that will be followed in what follows. But whether nine or twelve we need to remember that all these diverse fruits are aspects of the *one* fruit that is mentioned at the beginning of all three lists; namely love, or charity. Saint Francis de Sales explains why it is appropriate to call love a *fruit*:

"Now charity is called a fruit inasmuch as it delights us, and inasmuch as we enjoy its delicious sweetness, the sweetness of a true apple of paradise, gathered from the tree of life, which is the Holy Spirit, grafted on our human spirits and dwelling in us by his infinite mercy."^[1]

Natural Virtues

One thing that we may find confusing is the distinction between *virtues* and *fruits*. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the result of the virtues. To put it more poetically, the virtues are the blossom on the tree of life, which we see in springtime, and the fruits are what come from these flowers at the time of ripeness. So at this point we need to consider the virtues. What are they, and how do they grow?

Virtues are defined as habits or dispositions or patterns of behaviour that enable us to live rightly.

The word “virtue” originally means “power” – for example, we still use the phrase “by virtue of”, meaning *what makes something possible*. So the virtues, in a sense, empower the soul to live rightly. They make it possible for us to bear fruit.

The so-called “cardinal” (or “hinge”) virtues were discussed by the Greeks and Romans long before the terms were adopted by Christian philosophers. Just as the world had four directions (north, south, east and west), so the cardinal virtues defined the four directions or dimensions of the human personality. Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance are the names given to the cardinal directions of the human soul. Scientists tell us today that the physical world is built on four fundamental forces. The cardinal virtues are the fundamental forces of the soul. Unlike the physical forces, they are developed and strengthened by repetition (we talk about “force of habit”).

These cardinal virtues are moral virtues. The philosophers say they perfect the appetitive or “seeking” part of the soul (will and desire) by directing it towards the rational good. There are also many other virtues – Aristotle includes friendship, love of honour, even wittiness – but the cardinal virtues are the principal ones. And in addition to moral virtues, which are about *acting* rightly, there is a whole category of intellectual virtues, which are about *thinking* rightly. Both Aristotle and Aquinas list Wisdom, Science, Understanding, and Art (Craft) as intellectual virtues in this sense, because they are ways of understanding.[\[2\]](#)

Theological Virtues

For Christians, there are also three *theological* virtues. These are called Faith, Hope, and Love. Like the others, these are powers, but powers infused into the soul directly by God as relating directly to him.

The theological virtues are not produced, as the natural or cardinal virtues may be, by the sheer repetition of good deeds, which creates a good habit of behaviour. They do not even, like those produced by repetition, make doing good any *easier*. Or at least, they don’t make it easier in the same way. They do make doing good more *attractive* to us, which helps a bit. (It is hardly possible to keep on being good if we don’t actually want to!)

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (para 1813) says of them:

The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being.

The effect of the theological virtues is therefore to “adapt our faculties” for participation in God’s nature.[\[3\]](#) They accommodate our soul to a supernatural goal, namely life with and in the Blessed Trinity, making possible the fulfilment that our nature yearns for but can never attain without the help of grace.

Relation Between Virtues and Fruits

As for the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit, these are not virtues at all – despite the fact that, confusingly, some of the names of the fruits are also the names of virtues. The Catholic tradition tends to call them “works”; that is, acts done under the influence of grace. As such they are not virtues but the *products* of virtue. We might think of them as traits of character, revealed in what we do and the way we act. They are the characteristics of the good person that come from trying to live rightly.

Interestingly enough for those who thought morality was all about gritting one's teeth and getting on with something unpleasant, tradition associates them with the experience of *delight* (as Francis de Sales reminded us). A "fruit" that we pluck from a tree, ripe and delicious, is something to be enjoyed, and the person who unselfconsciously possesses these fruits is a person who is able to take pleasure in life. His day-today existence is filled with happiness and pleasure. When we lack these characteristics we are restless, discontented, morose, and unhappy. That is a sign that something is wrong with us.

A tree which is broken or diseased does not produce good fruit. If the sap is not flowing freely, the tree is not functioning as a whole and healthy organism. It needs to do so if it is to bear fruit, for the fruit is an expression of the whole tree. This analogy tells us a great deal about the moral life. Ethics is not just a matter of following a set of rules or performing certain duties. It is a function of *being healthy*, of operating normally and with integrity. (Thus in the same passage of the Letter to the Galatians where St Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit, he contrasts these with the "works of the flesh". These are the works – the "bad fruits" – that grow on a tree that is diseased, or damaged by sin: "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like..." , a potentially endless list.)

We may find it helpful to see the twelve fruits as the results of the four cardinal virtues being *energized by the Holy Spirit* through the three theological virtues. For these virtues constitute a threefold spiritual energy that is a special gift of God, one unknown to the pagan writers who first described the cardinal virtues. This supernatural energy can be imagined as flowing into us from the central axis of the Christian personality – symbolically speaking from the river in the New Jerusalem, which nourishes the sap of the trees of life growing on either bank.[\[4\]](#)

The Order of the Fruits

St Bonaventure (following St Augustine) divides the twelve fruits into four groups of three.

"Now, flowing down from charity, there are the twelve charismatic gifts, the fruits which the Apostle enumerates [in his Epistle] to the Galatians.... That these twelve fruits are sufficient may be understood in this way. According to Augustine, the disciple of Paul, four things must be loved with charity, and to them 'we must cleave because of their intrinsic value.' They are [1] God, [2] myself in God, [3] my neighbour in God, and [4] my body in God"[\[5\]](#)

Each of Bonaventure's four categories gives us a description of one of the cardinal virtues, and also furnishes some clues about the fruits to be expected from each when it is "supernaturalized" by the Holy Spirit. **Prudence**, the first of the cardinal virtues, is the habitual *cleaving to God*, whose nature is Wisdom and the enjoyment of whom leads to love, joy, and peace. **Justice**, the second virtue, is about loving *my neighbour in God*. **Fortitude**, the third cardinal virtue, is about loving *myself in God*, for (as Bonaventure says) "I cleave to my soul when I possess it," and "I possess [my soul] when I can face adversity with patience. But the patient toleration of adversity must not be casual, nor result from mere chance: it must come from an inner vision of mercy."[\[6\]](#) Finally, the fourth virtue, **Temperance**, is about loving *my body in God*, so that I keep clean and pure: "This I do when I remain moderate in the use of taste, continent in the use of touch, and chaste in all the senses."[\[7\]](#)

Thus the cardinal virtues as seen by Christians are the fourfold expression of love. A formulation based more directly on that of St Augustine may also be helpful. In Augustine's thinking, **Prudence** is love cleaving to the beloved, and so judging rightly.[\[8\]](#) **Justice** is love serving only the beloved, and so ruling rightly. **Fortitude** is love bearing all things for the sake of the beloved. **Temperance** is love giving itself entirely to the beloved.

We can lay out a picture of the virtues and fruits in the form of a table like this:

<i>Cardinal Virtue</i>	<i>Theological Virtue</i>	<i>Fruit of the Holy Spirit</i>
PRUDENCE <i>(God)</i>	Faith	Peace
	Hope	Joy
	Love	Love
JUSTICE <i>(Neighbour in God)</i>	Faith	Faithfulness
	Hope	Gentleness
	Love	Generosity
FORTITUDE <i>(Myself in God)</i>	Faith	Patience
	Hope	Kindness
	Love	Goodness
TEMPERANCE <i>(Body in God)</i>	Faith	Modesty
	Hope	Self-control
	Love	Chastity

In the next four sections I will take each of the four cardinal virtues in turn, and show how they give rise to the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit. (Josef Pieper's study, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, provides an helpful survey, and so I will be drawing on that, and the *Summa* of St Thomas, in what follows.)

PRUDENCE

Prudence is undoubtedly the king of the Cardinal Virtues. It is, Josef Pieper explains, the archetype of virtue, or the reason there are virtues at all. All other virtues participate in prudence, because prudence is the direction of the will towards reality. You cannot commit any sin without being imprudent, and to avoid sin is the most prudent thing you can do.

Prudence (sometimes translated as Intelligence) is not the same as wisdom, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. God himself *is* wisdom, in the sense of a kind of eternal pattern of beautiful goodness.

[9] The human gift of wisdom is an ability to share in that divine quality, and so to know the “end” or goal of human striving.

What is it we are all seeking, indeed what is it that *all things* seek, the reason they act at all? Obviously there are essentials like food and water, and everything else we need to survive and to exist in society with others. But we desire these things because we need them to complete one or other part of our nature. The discernment of our need for God is something that grows in us as we begin to see that all those other things are connected, all of them come from God, and that God is the source of all that we desire.

The vision of the wholeness of the good in one divine entity is wisdom. Prudence, on the other hand, is concerned with ways and means of bringing the good into fuller manifestation. It helps us find the way to obtain what we truly desire. So Prudence is eminently practical. It guides the other virtues in choosing the means to their ends.

The Three Fruits of Prudence

With these facts in mind, we can see how the three main fruits of Prudence must be none other than peace, joy, and love.

Peace. Firstly, if Prudence tends to the achievement of what we truly desire, this will certainly express itself in peace. In the famous expression of St Augustine, “my heart is restless till it rests in Thee.” To rest in God is perfect peace.

Prudence leads to the experience of peace under the influence of the infused virtue of Faith. Peace is a state of harmony, whether exterior (between political states, for example, or factions in society) or interior (between the parts of our own soul, such as our desires and emotions, or our will, reason, and imagination). Faith has an important role in bringing peace, because Faith is the virtue by which we freely commit our entire self to God.[10] Without that commitment we would be serving ourselves, and the service of self (one’s own nation or economic interest to the exclusion of others) will always, in the end, run counter to the common good, and to peace in society. In the interior life, as C.S. Lewis shows in *The Abolition of Man*, the service of self always boils down to a kind of slavery in which the self is controlled by whatever desire happens to be uppermost.

Joy. Secondly, the experience of peace leads to joy, which is a kind of delight and pleasure in the achievement of one’s heart’s desire. One might think that, like a dog chasing a car, we would not know what to do if we caught up with it, but the true good for our souls is not like that. It is what we were made for. If a thirsty dog finds a stream of water, he knows exactly what to do with it.

The infused virtue of Hope is this aspiration to the happiness that comes from giving oneself to God. It opens up the heart to eternal beatitude.[11] Like a kind of divine energy it floods into us and has the effect of producing joy out of Prudence. It brings the practical wisdom of Prudence to its fulfilment in God.

Love. Thirdly, peace and joy lead to love, in the sense that they reinforce it and cause it to grow. But more importantly, love itself is the perfection of peace and joy, as it is of Prudence, and their ultimate cause, because it is love that we most truly desire, and love is God. In the spiritual fruit we call love is comprised the experience of loving and being loved, and our own works of love that flow from a Prudence energized by the Holy Spirit, who is Love in person.

JUSTICE

St Thomas Aquinas puts Justice second in his hierarchy of cardinal virtues, since it “effects” or brings about the good that is known in Prudence.

If we define Justice as that habit of soul by which we consistently *give each person their due*, we see straightaway that it is a virtue concerned with the objective order of relationships, but we still need to understand what it means to be “due” something. This is not a matter of what one person happens to have agreed to give to another (although keeping one’s word would certainly fall under the virtue too). Even if I have never met or spoken with someone, there are certain ways in which I “must” treat them, or things that I “owe” them, if I am not to fail in justice. But how is this? How does something come to belong to someone? How does anyone have a “right” to anything?

If we do not believe in God or creation, there can be no ultimate answer to these questions. To grant someone a right is then purely the decision of a human will or wills. But if we believe in God, the answer surely lies in the fact of creation. What God creates, he affirms as good. “And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good” (Gen. 1: 31). There is no fact-value distinction for God, as there may be for modern philosophers. To be *good* is to be, in some sense, loveable; to have a claim on that which enables me to exist and flourish as myself. When God creates, he does not create each thing and each person individually, in isolation, but creates them in a complex web of interdependence. Flowers need water and air and light. Animals need food, and space to move around. The needs of a human being are as complex as human nature itself.

If a human being needs water, light, clothing, shelter, companionship, education, and truth in order to achieve the end for which it was created, then God’s creative act lays on all others an obligation to supply those things. God *wants* us to help his creatures to achieve the end for which he created them, and “his wish is our command”. Ultimately, the only obligation is the one laid on us by love – our love for God, and his love for everything he has made. This obligation is, of course, limited by two conditions: it must be possible to supply these things, and doing so must not deprive others of their own most fundamental goods.[\[12\]](#)

That is the basis for the whole Christian theory of rights and indeed of moral duties, although it would need a lot more space to develop all the implications. It explains, among other things, why Saint Thomas thinks that property rights are not absolute. A person may own some land in order to develop his life and support his family. The more he works on that land, putting something of himself – his energy, time, other resources – into it, the more *right* he has to it. But if a poor man through no fault of his own needs something of mine in order to survive, he is (within rational limits) entitled to take it. The doctrine strikes us as somewhat shocking, but it is deeply embedded in the Christian understanding of justice. No man is an island, and Justice serves the common good.

Since Justice reflects the rational and objective order of things, there is also a hierarchy of rights. Some are more important than others. This has applications, for example, in the debates over abortion, war, and capital punishment. I have a certain claim to health and peace of mind, but I am not entitled to preserve these lower-level goods at the cost of another’s life. A human being’s right to life is so fundamental that the only possible justification for taking it away would be to defend one’s own, and then only in response to deliberate aggression, and if there is no other way to do so.

The Three Fruits of Justice

If the concept of Justice concerns the way we live with others, respecting them according to their created natures, it also contains a vital subjective element. I may happen to perform a just act without being myself a “just man,” but if the soul is to be just it must interiorize Justice. To be just

towards others, we must be just within ourselves. In fact, we must also be just *to* ourselves, since we certainly owe ourselves the respect that is due to any created person. (To love my neighbour as myself presumes that I love myself first.)

We were created in a state that the theologians call “original justice,” but that interior and exterior order was disrupted by sin. The human soul should naturally reflect the cosmos. It should be in tune with truth, so that it can harmonize with the music of reality. The original harmony has been shattered. If our capacity for Justice is to be healed we need the help of grace: we need the infused energy of the Holy Spirit.

Faithfulness. Infused with Faith, the soul has confidence in what is revealed to be true. The manifestation of this confidence in our relationship with others is faithfulness. The faithful person is loyal and consistent, not blown in all directions by whim or passion. His loving respect for the other is anchored in what is true. Faith in God supplies the foundation for our confidence in our neighbour, and our keeping faith with him is part of what we owe him – a person created by God as a gift to the world.

Gentleness. Infused with Hope that transcends time by making the future seem already present, we can treat our neighbour with the kindness, affability, and consideration due to one who has already achieved perfection. We behave towards him as though he were already not simply created by God, but in God. So doing, we manifest the state of justice within our own soul, from which all selfish concerns and irrational passions have been purged, leaving only the “rational passion” of love.

Generosity. Infused with Charity, *agape*, the state of Justice overflows the limits of reason. The fruit it bears is the ability to give more than is due, more than is required. At this point Justice, energized by grace, begins to resemble the completely free self-giving of God, who is under no obligation to give to his creatures yet does so unstintingly. To act “generously” in this sense is in fact the only way we can begin to pay back a fundamental debt we all owe to God, namely the infinite debt of our very existence. But we can only *begin* to pay, never ourselves pay it in full, any more than we can pay back what we have stolen by sin. This is where religion enters the picture, and the Eucharist by which God pays in his human nature the debt we owe him.[\[13\]](#)

FORTITUDE

Josef Pieper, following Aquinas, defines Fortitude in terms of the readiness to die, whether in battle for a good cause or as a martyr for the truth. The orientation to the true and the good is an essential part of it. The virtues have an inner order, and Fortitude depends on Justice. As Pieper says, “Without the ‘just cause’ there is no fortitude” - no *virtue* of Fortitude, in any case.

It also depends on Prudence. The fact that Fortitude involves a readiness to die does not imply a lack of fear, on the one hand, or a devaluation of the life one is prepared to forfeit, on the other. Quite the contrary. Fortitude is not reckless: that is what Aquinas means by saying it depends upon Prudence. It is based on a right evaluation of things, a putting of everything in proportion. So I do value my own life, and I cannot help but fear any injury that may diminish it or take it away. I do not love suffering for its own sake, or take it upon myself willingly, but I am prepared to accept it if necessary. “The brave man suffers injury not for its own sake, but rather as a means to preserve or to acquire a deeper, a more essential intactness.”[\[14\]](#)

This is a wonderful doctrine, and it explains much about the true nature of heroism. There is a deeper injury that I can suffer than the loss of my life, and it is the loss of my soul, my integrity, my essential self. Provided this is preserved, then I will live, even if I die. There is also a psychological truth here, as Pieper points out. Mental illness is often associated with a kind of self-obsession or

exaggerated concern with one's own safety. But knowledge of this does not make dying (or, let us say, torture, of the kind inflicted upon the martyrs in the early Church or in Elizabethan England, or in various parts of the world today) any easier to bear. Fortitude *presupposes* that we will be terrified of physical injury; "its essence lies not in knowing no fear, but in not allowing oneself to be forced into evil by fear, or to be kept by fear from the realization of good."[\[15\]](#)

The Three Fruits of Fortitude

That is why the perfection of Fortitude (as in the case of the martyrs) depends upon receiving the help of the infused virtues. It is not something that our nature can achieve without the assistance of grace. And the same grace of the Holy Spirit that makes Fortitude possible also makes it fruitful.

Patience. In my little table I have suggested that Fortitude infused by Faith bears fruit in patience. Pieper in fact describes patience as a "necessary component" of Fortitude, because it "keeps man from the danger that his spirit may be broken by grief and lose its greatness." It is, according to St Hildegard of Bingen, the "pillar which nothing can soften." For Pieper and St Thomas it is nothing less than the way we possess our soul, the radiant embodiment of true integrity.[\[16\]](#) (Faith, of course, is the first stage of direct trust in God. It is because we are able to believe in God and in his promises that we are able to wait patiently for their fulfilment.)

Kindness and goodness. As for the other fruits, kindness and goodness, these grow from Fortitude with the help of Hope and Love respectively. Hope anticipates the fulfilment that has been promised to Faith and will be received in Love. Through that anticipation we are enabled not merely to wait patiently, but actively to give forth of ourselves to others, as though we had already received what we wait for. Being the fruit of Hope from the stem of Fortitude, kindness is therefore a warmth, a benign hospitality or consideration, that can be seen as an aspect of goodness and a step towards it, indicating that we are no longer putting ourselves first but are concerned with helping others. Goodness in its completeness, however, can come only with the actual possession, in Love, of what our nature yearns for, for "No one is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19).

TEMPERANCE

Temperance, finally, concerns the relationship I have with my own body. It is the virtue that keeps my body close to God.[\[17\]](#) *Temperantia* is often taken to mean little more than "moderation" in bodily things. The original Greek word *sophrosyne* ("directing reason") points toward something much greater: the disposition of the soul into a unified and ordered whole, the result of which (according to St Thomas) is nothing less than a profound and unshakeable serenity of heart, *quies animi*.[\[18\]](#)

What holds the deeply-rooted forces of our nature in harmony is our rationality or reason, if we understand "reason" here to mean not merely a process of mental cogitation but a "power to grasp reality." Temperance conforms the soul to an "order of reason" which is the truth of things. And because of this, Temperance is the virtue that can make us *beautiful*, for beauty is "the glow of the true and the good irradiating from every ordered state of being."[\[19\]](#) A sin such as adultery or cruelty is not wrong simply because it damages my relationship with another person; it also damages myself, and in so doing it makes me ugly.

It is worth dwelling on this, because the virtue of Temperance is so little understood. We assume too often that our beauty is a matter of physical configuration alone, but this is an illusion brought on by looking at ourselves in mirrors and photographs which detach and display a superficial image. In reality the real attractiveness of a person depends on how he or she moves and acts, the personality and character he expresses in every gesture or motion. This is largely the result of

habits, of virtues and vices, that have become settled in us.

There is also the very interesting question of perception. How many of us realize that temperance changes our ability to *see and hear*? Christ tells us that the pure are blessed because they “shall see God,” but in fact it is only the pure that can truly see *any* reality.

“An unchaste man wants above all something for himself; he is distracted by an unobjective ‘interest’; his constantly strained will-to-pleasure prevents him from confronting reality with that selfless detachment which alone makes genuine knowledge possible. St. Thomas here uses the comparison of a lion who, at the sight of a stag, is unable to perceive anything but the anticipated meal. In an unchaste heart, attention is not merely fixed upon a certain track, but the ‘window’ of the soul has lost its ‘transparency,’ that is, its capacity for perceiving existence, as if a selfish interest had covered it, as it were, with a film of dust. (We cannot repeat too often: only he who is silent hears, only the invisible is transparent.)”[\[20\]](#)

By contrast, the virtue of Temperance establishes a kind of purity in the soul that is impossible for someone whose perception is clouded by desire to achieve. “Therefore only a chaste sensuality can realize the specifically human faculty of perceiving sensual beauty, such as that of the human body, as beauty, and to enjoy it for its own sake, for its ‘sensual appropriateness,’ undeterred and unsullied by the self-centred will to pleasure.”[\[21\]](#) This reminds me of the story about two monks vowed to celibacy. As they walk together they meet a beautiful young woman by the side of a river, who asks for their help in getting to the other side. One monk makes as if to ignore her but the other lifts her into his arms and wades into the stream, putting her down gently on the other bank with a smile. Hours later his friend, who has been silently fuming, can control himself no longer, and bursts out, “Why on earth did you do that? Don’t you know we are forbidden even to look at a woman, let alone touch her?” His companion replies gently, “Brother, I put that woman down beside the river. Are you still carrying her?”

It is not desire that is wrong, but allowing desire to determine what we see. Thus Pieper goes on: “It has been said that only the pure of heart can laugh freely and liberatingly. It is no less true that only those who look at the world with pure eyes can experience its beauty.” The temperate person experiences a “crystal-clear, morning-fresh freedom from self-consciousness” which makes possible a “selfless acceptance of the world,”[\[22\]](#) and therefore an accurate perception of it.

The Three Fruits of Temperance

To get back to our list of Virtues and Fruits, we need to see how the theological virtues, each in turn acting on Temperance, produce the three fruits called modesty, continence, and chastity. It actually isn’t too difficult.

Modesty. Faith in God brings to maturity in Temperance the fruit of modesty by making us aware of God’s presence at all times. Modesty is impossible for someone who is not to some degree conscious of that presence. The contrast here is between the “self-consciousness” that accompanies pride and its opposite, the recollectedness that signifies awareness of one’s dignity as a beloved child of God. Modesty is an expression of humility.

Continence. Whereas modesty concerns the outward expression of virtue in the way one behaves or dresses (within the norms and conventions of the society in which one lives), continence requires the inner discipline of desire and imagination and thought. It is particularly an effect of the virtue of Hope, because that virtue has a strengthening quality, being the inward assurance of eventual union with God. We *hope* in the resurrection of the flesh, and in this way we are able to live according to the Spirit, rather than expecting perfect fulfilment in this life. As St Paul writes, “Since we have

these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). Hope in the promises, along with holy fear, enables Temperance to bear fruit in continence.

Chastity. The perfection of both modesty and continence is found in chastity, just as Faith and Hope are perfected in Love. Chastity is not the same as virginity, understood as a physical state. The two converge, however, in the spiritual sense. Chastity is that most radiant of virtues in which passion is aligned with reason, with the way things are at their deepest level. It concerns specifically the fulfilment of our sexuality, and is equally applicable to married and unmarried people. Temperance is raised by supernatural influence to its highest expression in that purity and integrity of the human spirit that is the manifestation within creation of the Holy Spirit. Chastity is *integrity* in the sense of a complete overcoming of the disintegration caused by sin, whose effect is always to divide the spirit against itself and against its conscience in particular.

Chastity is a foretaste of the purity of heart by which we shall see God, and is a necessary condition for seeing the Heavenly Jerusalem which is the out-shining of God’s light into the created world. This light or glory, sometimes called Sophia, is the “result” of the Incarnation and redemption, the perfection in beauty of the cosmos as Church.

Gifts of the Spirit

In addition to the twelve fruits of the Tree and seven virtues (four cardinal and three infused), Tradition and Scripture also speak of seven *gifts* of the Holy Spirit, which are received in the sacrament of Confirmation.^[23] Like the virtues, the gifts are also aspects of the one supreme gift, Love. But they are not acts, or habits of action, or powers to act. They are about receptivity rather than action. They are the seven main ways of being receptive to God’s Spirit, and opening oneself to his inspiration. They manifest themselves to the degree we are able to free ourselves from our passion for anything less than God – the attachments that prevent the Spirit flowing smoothly.

The Latin names of the Gifts are *Sapientia* (Wisdom), *Intellectus* (Understanding), *Consilium* (Counsel), *Fortitudo* (Strength, or Courage), *Scientia* (Knowledge), *Pietas* (Piety), *Timor* (Fear, or Awe). This is the order in which the gifts are listed in Isaiah 11:2-3, and generally the order in which they were treated by the medieval Latin commentators. But, like the colours of the rainbow, they are not very easy to tell apart. So let’s look at each one in turn to see if we can define them more sharply.

Fear of the Lord. This kind of “fear” is not the fear we feel for something that threatens us, but the fear of falling away from someone we love. It thus perfects the virtue of Hope. The Holy Spirit inspires us with the loving desire not to offend or go against God, as we did in the garden of Eden. Fear is the beginning of the road to Wisdom.

Piety. Saint Thomas talks about “religion” as a moral virtue or habit of devotion to God, and this gift is all about the perfection of that virtue. It means the inspiration to serve God out of pure love of him, to devote oneself to him. We feel a natural piety towards God as Creator, as we might do towards our parents or benefactors. In Piety the gift, though, we venerate God as our Father in Christ (Rom. 8:15). It is the difference between Christianity and the other religions – in other religions we may worship and love God, but only in Christianity are we expected to participate through the Holy Spirit in the life of the Trinity.

Knowledge refers to what is known through philosophy and theology – the truth of things, revealed and taught to us, and accepted by us as the correct description of the world.

Fortitude (also the name of one of the cardinal virtues). It is the way the Holy Spirit helps us to have the strength and resolution of will to do what we know to be right.

Counsel applies to our actions in the world of human relationships, to discernment, to knowing what we should do or not do – how we should act.

Understanding. This spirit or gift enables us to penetrate the world of truths, all the essences of things known and created by God, and to submit ourselves to this truth.

Wisdom. This, the highest of the gifts, is the spirit of contemplation, of absorption into God, and of union through love. There is a mystique about Wisdom (*Sophia* in Greek), which comes partly from those wonderful praises of her that we find in the biblical Wisdom of Solomon:

...she is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail (vv. 29-30).

Can we correlate these seven gifts with the cardinal and other virtues, and the fruits, as those have been laid out in relation to each other in the Table above? I am not sure we can. Or rather, we can legitimately do so in many different ways. Both Aquinas and Bonaventure relate them to the virtues, but in different ways.[\[24\]](#)

The Gifts and the Lord's Prayer

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray secretly (that is, interiorly) to our heavenly Father for what we truly need (Matt. 6:5-15). This "need" is divided into seven aspects. But in fact, God already knows all that we need. It is God himself, and his desire is to give himself to us. All our needs, all our ultimate desires, are fulfilled in union with God, who gives himself to us in the Holy Spirit. Our need is sevenfold, and the Spirit has seven gifts. So the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit correspond to the petitions of the Our Father.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. **Fear of the Lord** is the gift that most closely corresponds to the first petition of the prayer. Through Fear we respect God as transcendent, sacred, numinous – we remember and hallow his name.

Thy kingdom come. **Piety** leads us from the level of respect for God as God, to devotion to God as Father. We become members of his Son, no longer "servants" but "friends" or "adopted sons" of the Father. This is how we enter the kingdom of God.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **Knowledge** reveals our own lives in the light of heaven. We know that earth can become like heaven, and that our lives will become heavenly, if God's will is done here and by us.

Give us this day our daily bread. **Fortitude** comes from being nourished (fortified) by the Holy Spirit and by Jesus himself in the Blessed Sacrament. Without this "bread" we can have no eternal life in us (John 6:53).

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. **Counsel** reveals precisely what we must do in our lives in order for God's will to be done on earth. The golden rule

is to do to others as we would have them do to us. We must forgive, if we are to be forgiven.

And lead us not into temptation. **Understanding** reveals the true nature of things and their relationship to each other, so that we are no longer tempted by them as we are when we take them out of context and blow them out of proportion.

But deliver us from evil. **Wisdom** is the final deliverance from all evil, for it absorbs us completely into God himself, where nothing can harm or distract us. Against her “evil does not prevail”.

The Fruits and Counsels of Perfection

There is one other significant “triad” in our Tradition worth mentioning. The “Counsels” represent three dimensions of the call to perfection through Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, traditionally associated with Jesus’ words to the rich young man in Matthew 19:21 (“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me”).

The promise to live in perfect Poverty, Chastity and Obedience defines a special consecration to God. But the spirit of the Vows is universal. In other words, we may not all enter the state of consecrated religious life, but we all need to become “poor in spirit” (i.e. inwardly detached from worldly things), chaste (self-controlled) and obedient (to the promptings of God and the duties of the moment that are put before us), if we are to live in the Way of Jesus. More will be said about this in the final chapter.

The three Counsels correspond to the theological virtues – Poverty to Faith, Chastity to Hope, and Obedience to Love. So if we reassemble the “fruits” that derive from each of the theological virtues, according to our Table, we can find out the particular fruits most associated with each of the Counsels. These will be the fruits of the religious life especially, but also the fruits of Christian existence lived even in the lay state.

Poverty – peace, faithfulness, patience, modesty

Chastity – joy, gentleness, kindness, continence

Obedience – love, generosity, goodness, chastity

[1] Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, bk 11, ch. 19.

[2] *Understanding* considers underlying principles, *Science* (reasoning that involves induction and deduction) considers secondary causes, while *Wisdom* considers first causes. *Art* involves thinking rightly about things to be made, rather than things that already exist.

[3] Aquinas tells us that, to accompany the theological virtues, the Holy Spirit also infuses versions of the other moral virtues, rendering them proportionate to the transcendent goal that is now within the soul’s reach. This is what I am trying to describe later on as the “supernaturalization” of the cardinal virtues. Each of the virtues in fact has a pre-moral, an ethical, and a “mystical” level. See *Summa I-II*, Q 63, a 3 and 4, and Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 138-9.

[4] There is a foreshadowing of this in Genesis. Cf. “A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches” (Gen. 2:10). Saint Ambrose compares the four rivers to the cardinal virtues: “The Pishon which flows over gold is Prudence, the Gihon which bathes Ethiopia (whose name signifies impurity) is Temperance, the Tigris (in Hebrew the swift) is Fortitude, and the Euphrates (the fertile) is Justice” (Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, 110 fn.).

[5] St Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, 279-80. The fruits can of course be divided in other ways. St Thomas Aquinas divides them into three groups of five, four, and three, according to whether they concern the correct ordering of the mind towards good and evil (his first group), towards one’s neighbour (the second), and towards what is “below us” (the third). The first group is composed of charity, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. The second group is goodness, generosity, gentleness, and faithfulness. The third group is modesty, continence, and chastity. I have followed Bonaventure’s simpler arrangement. The two descriptions are complementary.

[6] *Collations on the Six Days*, 280.

[7] *Collations on the Six Days*, 281.

[8] Or, as Augustine puts it, love distinguishing between what hinders and what helps it.

[9] In the Book of Wisdom (8:7-8), divine Wisdom describes herself as the teacher of the cardinal virtues: “her labours are virtues: for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable than these.”

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 1814.

[11] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 1818.

[12] I am speaking of human beings here, because although animals and even plants are due the respect appropriate to their natures, so that it would be a sin needlessly or cruelly to harm them, this is respect that *we* must pay them, since they themselves are not conscious of such obligations or rights. Also it is worth noting that while a mosquito or germ may be said to have a right to exist and to feed, I also have a right to prevent it feeding on *me*.

[13] Thomas also speaks of *religio*, *pietas*, and *observantia* (the latter meaning respectfulness, e.g. towards office) in connection with this unpayable debt (Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 104-10).

[14] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 119.

[15] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 126.

[16] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 129.

[17] Of course God is always close to us. The question is whether we are close to him.

[18] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 147.

[19] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 203.

[20] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 161.

[21] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 166-7.

[22] J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 205.

[23] The Book of Revelation describes the Holy Spirit as one and yet also as seven: “From the throne issue flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder, and before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God; and before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass, like crystal” (Rev. 4:5-6). Perhaps these “spirits” are intended to be angels, but we may also understand them to represent the refractions of the one Spirit, like the seven colours that make up white light. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are sevenfold because, for the Hebrew tradition, seven is the number of completeness and perfection. Not only are there seven days of creation in the Book of Genesis, but there are seven petitions or requests that we make of God in the Lord’s Prayer – not to mention, of course, seven sacraments.

[24] **Aquinas:** *Fear-Hope, Piety-Justice, Knowledge-Faith, Fortitude-Fortitude, Counsel-Prudence, Understanding-Faith, Wisdom-Love.* Temperance is omitted from his list, and Faith inserted twice. **Bonaventure:** *Fear-Temperance, Piety-Justice, Knowledge-Prudence, Fortitude-Fortitude, Counsel-Hope, Understanding-Faith, Wisdom-Love.* Bonaventure also correlates each of the gifts with one of the seven sins that it counteracts, in the following order: Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, Dissipation. Each of these is then linked to one of the Beatitudes (Poverty, Meekness, etc.), and one of the petitions in the Our Father (Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, etc.). See *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, Works of St Bonaventure Vol. XIV (Franciscan Institute, 2008).