

## A Virtue and More than a Virtue: Charity as Fellowship with God

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### I. Charity in the *Prima Pars*: the Invisible Divine Mission of the Holy Spirit

“God’s love (charity, ἀγάπη) has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5)

[1] *Summa theologiae* I, 43, 3 (*Whether the invisible mission of the divine person is only according to the gift of sanctifying grace?*), corpus: “The divine person is fittingly sent in the sense that He exists newly in any one; and He is given as possessed by anyone; and neither of these is otherwise than by sanctifying grace. For God is in all things by His essence, power and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is said not only to exist in the rational creature but also to dwell therein as in His own temple.”<sup>1</sup>

[2] ST I, 43, 5 (*Whether it is fitting for the Son to be sent invisibly?*), reply to argument 2: “The soul is made like to God by grace. Hence for a divine person to be sent to anyone by grace, there must needs be a likening of the soul to the divine person Who is sent, by some gift of grace. Because the Holy Spirit is Love, the soul is assimilated to the Holy Spirit by the gift of *charity*: hence the mission of the Holy Spirit is according to the mode of *charity*. Whereas the Son is the Word, not any sort of word, but one Who breathes forth Love. Hence Augustine says (*De Trin.* 9, 10): ‘The Word we speak of is knowledge with love.’ Thus the Son is sent not in accordance with every and any kind of intellectual perfection, but according to the intellectual illumination, which breaks forth into the affection of love . . . .”

### II. Charity in the *Prima Secundae*: Its Place within Moral Theology

[3] ST I-II, 62, 1 (*Whether there are any theological virtues?*), corpus: “Man is perfected by virtue, for those actions whereby he is directed to happiness, as was explained above (I-II:5:7). Now man's happiness is twofold, as was also stated above (I-II:5:5). One is proportionate to human nature, a happiness, to wit, which man can obtain by means of his natural principles. The other is a happiness surpassing man's nature, and which man can obtain by the power of God alone, by a kind of participation of the Godhead, about which it is written (2 Peter 1:4) that by Christ we are made "partakers of the Divine nature." And because such happiness surpasses the capacity of human nature, man's natural principles which enable him to act well according to his capacity, do not suffice to direct man to this same happiness. Hence it is necessary for man to receive from God some additional principles, whereby he may be directed to supernatural happiness, even as he is

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa theologiae* excerpts taken from *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., 1920, Online Edition Copyright © 2017 by Kevin Knight. Henceforth abbreviated as ST.

directed to his connatural end, by means of his natural principles, albeit not without Divine assistance. Such like principles are called "theological virtues": first, because their object is God, inasmuch as they direct us aright to God: secondly, because they are infused in us by God alone: thirdly, because these virtues are not made known to us, save by Divine revelation, contained in Holy Writ."

[4] ST I-II, 65, 5 (*Whether charity can be without faith and hope?*), corpus: "Charity signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with Him; which implies, besides love, a certain mutual return of love, together with mutual communion, as stated in Ethic. viii, 2. That this belongs to charity is evident from 1 John 4:16: "He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him," and from 1 Corinthians 1:9, where it is written: "God is faithful, by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son." Now this fellowship of man with God, which consists in a certain familiar colloquy with Him, is begun here, in this life, by grace, but will be perfected in the future life, by glory; each of which things we hold by faith and hope. Wherefore just as friendship with a person would be impossible, if one disbelieved in, or despaired of, the possibility of their fellowship or familiar colloquy; so too, friendship with God, which is charity, is impossible without faith, so as to believe in this fellowship and colloquy with God, and to hope to attain to this fellowship. Therefore charity is quite impossible without faith and hope."

### **III. Charity in the *Secunda Secundae*: Charity as Friendship and Fellowship with God**

*"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."* (Jn 5:5)

[5] ST II-II, 23, 1 (*Whether charity is friendship*), sed contra: "... (Jn 15:15): 'I will not now call you servants... but My friends.' Now this was said to them by reason of nothing else than charity. Therefore charity is friendship."

[6] ST II-II, 23, 1 (*Whether charity is friendship*), corpus: "According to the Philosopher (Ethic. viii, 2,3) not every love has the character of friendship, but that love which is together with benevolence, when, to wit, we love someone so as to wish good to him. If, however, we do not wish good to what we love, but wish its good for ourselves, (thus we are said to love wine, or a horse, or the like), it is love not of friendship, but of a kind of concupiscence. For it would be absurd to speak of having friendship for wine or for a horse. Yet neither does well-wishing suffice for friendship, for a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication."

[7] ST I-II, 26, 4 (*Whether love is properly divided into love of friendship and love of concupiscence?*), corpus: "Accordingly, man has love of concupiscence towards the good that he wishes to another, and love of friendship towards him to whom he wishes good."

[8] ST I-II, 27, 3 (*Whether likeness is a cause of love?*), c: "Likeness, properly speaking, is a cause of love. But it must be observed that likeness between things is twofold. One kind of likeness arises from each thing having the same quality actually: for example, two things possessing the quality of whiteness are said to be alike. Another kind of likeness arises from one thing having potentially

and by way of inclination, a quality which the other has actually: thus we may say that a heavy body existing outside its proper place is like another heavy body that exists in its proper place: or again, according as potentiality bears a resemblance to its act; since act is contained, in a manner, in the potentiality itself. Accordingly the first kind of likeness causes love of friendship or well-being. For the very fact that two men are alike, having, as it were, one form, makes them to be, in a manner, one in that form: thus two men are one thing in the species of humanity, and two white men are one thing in whiteness. Hence the affections of one tend to the other, as being one with him; and he wishes good to him as to himself. But the second kind of likeness causes love of concupiscence, or friendship founded on usefulness or pleasure: because whatever is in potentiality, as such, has the desire for its act; and it takes pleasure in its realization, if it be a sentient and cognitive being.”

[9] ST II-II, 23, 1 (*Whether charity is friendship*), corpus: “...since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor 1:9): ‘God is faithful: by Whom you are called unto the fellowship of His Son.’ The love which is based on this communication, is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.”

[10] ST II-II, 23, 1 (*Whether charity is friendship*), reply to argument 1: “...man’s life is twofold. There is his outward life in respect of his sensitive and corporeal nature: and with regard to this life there is no communication or fellowship between us and God or the angels. The other is man’s spiritual life in respect of his mind, and with regard to this life there is fellowship between us and both God and the angels, imperfectly [in an inchoate manner] indeed in this present state of life, wherefore it is written (Phil 3:20): ‘Our conversation is in heaven.’ But this ‘conversation’ will be perfected in heaven...”

[11] ST II-II, 23, 2 (*Whether charity is something created in the soul?*), corpus: “For when the Holy Ghost moves the human mind the movement of charity does not proceed from this motion in such a way that the human mind be merely moved, without being the principle of this movement, as when a body is moved by some extrinsic motive power. For this is contrary to the nature of a voluntary act, whose principle needs to be in itself, as stated above (I-II:6:1): so that it would follow that to love is not a voluntary act, which involves a contradiction, since love, of its very nature, implies an act of the will. [ . . . ] Now no act is perfectly produced by an active power, unless it be connatural to that power of reason of some form which is the principle of that action. Wherefore God, Who moves all things to their due ends, bestowed on each thing the form whereby it is inclined to the end appointed to it by Him; and in this way He "ordereth all things sweetly" (Wisdom 8:1). But it is evident that the act of charity surpasses the nature of the power of the will, so that, therefore, unless some form be superadded to the natural power, inclining it to the act of love, this same act would be less perfect than the natural acts and the acts of the other powers; nor would it be easy and pleasurable to perform. And this is evidently untrue, since no virtue has such a strong inclination to its act as charity has, nor does any virtue perform its act with so great pleasure. Therefore it is most necessary that, for us to perform the act of charity, there should be in us some habitual form superadded to the natural power, inclining that power to the act of charity, and causing it to act with ease and pleasure.”

[12] ST II-II, 23, 2 (*Whether charity is something created in the soul?*), reply to argument 3: “Charity works formally. Now the efficacy of a form depends on the power of the agent, who instills the form, wherefore it is evident that charity is not vanity. But because it produces an infinite effect, since, by justifying the soul, it unites it to God, this proves the infinity of the Divine power, which is the author of charity.”

[13] ST II-II, 23, 6 (*Whether charity is the most excellent of the virtues?*), corpus: “Since good, in human acts, depends on their being regulated by the due rule, it must needs be that human virtue, which is a principle of good acts, consists in attaining the rule of human acts. Now the rule of human acts is twofold, as stated above (Article 3), namely, human reason and God: yet God is the first rule, whereby, even human reason must be regulated. Consequently the theological virtues, which consist in attaining this first rule, since their object is God, are more excellent than the moral, or the intellectual virtues, which consist in attaining human reason: and it follows that among the theological virtues themselves, the first place belongs to that which attains God most. Now that which is of itself always ranks before that which is by another. But faith and hope attain God indeed in so far as we derive from Him the knowledge of truth or the acquisition of good, whereas charity attains God Himself that it may rest in Him, but not that something may accrue to us from Him. Hence charity is more excellent than faith or hope, and, consequently, than all the other virtues”

[14] ST II-II, 23, 8 (*Whether charity is the form of the virtues?*), corpus: “In morals the form of an act is taken chiefly from the end. The reason of this is that the principal of moral acts is the will, whose object and form, so to speak, are the end. Now the form of an act always follows from a form of the agent. Consequently, in morals, that which gives an act its order to the end, must needs give the act its form. Now it is evident, in accordance with what has been said (Article 7), that it is charity which directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end, and which, consequently, also gives the form to all other acts of virtue: and it is precisely in this sense that charity is called the form of the virtues, for these are called virtues in relation to "informed" acts.”

[15] ST II-II, 24, 8 (*Whether charity can be perfect in this life?*), corpus: “On the part of the person who loves, charity is perfect, when he loves as much as he can. This happens in three ways. First, so that a man's whole heart is always actually borne towards God: this is the perfection of the charity of heaven, and is not possible in this life, wherein, by reason of the weakness of human life, it is impossible to think always actually of God, and to be moved by love towards Him. Secondly, so that man makes an earnest endeavor to give his time to God and Divine things, while scorning other things except in so far as the needs of the present life demand. This is the perfection of charity that is possible to a wayfarer; but is not common to all who have charity. Thirdly, so that a man gives his whole heart to God habitually, viz. by neither thinking nor desiring anything contrary to the love of God; and this perfection is common to all who have charity.”

[16] ST II-II, 24, 9 (*Whether charity is rightly distinguished into three degrees, beginning, progress, and perfection?*), corpus: “. . . the divers degrees of charity are distinguished according to the different pursuits to which man is brought by the increase of charity. For at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity: this concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed

or fostered lest it be destroyed: in the second place man's chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose chief aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it: while man's third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who "desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."

[17] ST II-II, 25, 4 (*Whether a man ought to love himself out of charity?*), corpus: “. . . we may speak of charity in respect of its specific nature, namely as denoting man's friendship with God in the first place, and, consequently, with the things of God, among which things is man himself who has charity. Hence, among these other things which he loves out of charity because they pertain to God, he loves also himself out of charity.”

[18] ST II-II, 25, 5 (*Whether a man ought to love his body out of charity?*), reply to argument 2: “Although our bodies are unable to enjoy God by knowing and loving Him, yet by the works which we do through the body, we are able to attain to the perfect knowledge of God. Hence from the enjoyment in the soul there overflows a certain happiness into the body, viz., "the flush of health and incorruption," as Augustine states (Ep. ad Dioscor. cxviii). Hence, since the body has, in a fashion, a share of happiness, it can be loved with the love of charity.”

[19] ST II-II, 25, 6 (*Whether we ought to love sinners out of charity?*), corpus: “Two things may be considered in the sinner: his nature and his guilt. According to his nature, which he has from God, he has a capacity for happiness, on the fellowship (*communicatio*) of which charity is based, as stated above (Article 3; II-II:23:5), wherefore we ought to love sinners, out of charity, in respect of their nature.”

[20] ST II-II, 25, 12 (*Whether four things are rightly reckoned as to be loved out of charity, viz. God, our neighbor, our body and ourselves?*), corpus: “As stated above (II-II:23:5), the friendship of charity is based on the fellowship of happiness (*communicatio beatitudinis*). Now, in this fellowship, one thing is considered as the principle from which happiness flows, namely God; a second is that which directly partakes of happiness, namely men and angels; a third is a thing to which happiness comes by a kind of overflow, namely the human body. Now the source from which happiness flows is lovable by reason of its being the cause of happiness: that which is a partaker of happiness, can be an object of love for two reasons, either through being identified with ourselves, or through being associated with us in partaking of happiness, and in this respect, there are two things to be loved out of charity, in as much as man loves both himself and his neighbor.”

[21] ST II-II, 26, 1 (*Whether there is order in charity?*), c: “As the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, text. 16), the terms "before" and "after" are used in reference to some principle. Now order implies that certain things are, in some way, before or after. Hence wherever there is a principle, there must needs be also order of some kind. But it has been said above (II-II:23:1; II-II:25:12) that the love of charity tends to God as to the principle of happiness, on the fellowship of which the friendship of charity is based. Consequently there must needs be some order in things loved out of charity, which order is in reference to the first principle of that love, which is God.”

### III. Charity as the Root of Merit

[22] ST II-II, 23, 2 (*Whether charity is something created in the soul?*), corpus: “Likewise, neither can it be said that the Holy Spirit moves the will in such a way to the act of loving, as though the will were an instrument, for an instrument, though it be a principle of action, nevertheless has not the power to act or not to act, for then again the act would cease to be voluntary and meritorious, whereas it has been stated above (I-II, 114, 4) that the love of charity is the root of merit...”

[23] ST I-II, 114, 4 (*Whether grace is the principle of merit through charity rather than the other virtues?*), corpus: “I answer that, As we may gather from what has been stated above (Art. 1), human acts have the nature of merit from two causes: first and chiefly from the Divine ordination, inasmuch as acts are said to merit that good to which man is divinely ordained. Secondly, on the part of free-will, inasmuch as man, more than other creatures, has the power of voluntary acts by acting by himself. And in both these ways does merit chiefly rest with charity. For we must bear in mind that everlasting life consists in the enjoyment of God. Now the human mind’s movement to the fruition of the Divine good is the proper act of charity, whereby all the acts of the other virtues are ordained to this end, since all the other virtues are commanded by charity. Hence the merit of life everlasting pertains first to charity, and secondly, to the other virtues, inasmuch as their acts are commanded by charity. So, likewise, is it manifest that what we do out of love we do most willingly. Hence, even inasmuch as merit depends on voluntariness, merit is chiefly attributed to charity.”