

Fruits of the Spirit

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I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jn 15:5

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

Gal 5:22-3

...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 22:2

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Introduction

The tree is known by its fruit (*Mt 12:33*). The Christian life is a matter of becoming fruitful, by being grafted on to the true vine, the tree of life that is Jesus Christ, so that we may bear the fruit that God hopes to see from us. But what is this “fruit”?

This booklet is about the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It explores the imagery of trees and fruitfulness in the Bible, and offers a tentative sketch of Christian morality based on the relationship of spiritual fruits to the four cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues. The result is a kind of rough map, a guidebook of sorts to a life in the Spirit, inspired by teachings that we find in Holy Scripture and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Nine or Twelve?

The translation of Saint Paul’s Letter to the Galatians 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.

In case you were wondering, Saint Francis de Sales explains why it is appropriate to call love a *fruit*, and for good measure connects this idea with the story of Eden and the tree of life:

“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

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 implication of all this is that *each of us* is supposed to become a tree of life, a branch joined to the one Vine that is Christ. The fruits that we pluck and eat in the Kingdom of God are the fruits we will bear in ourselves. It is to these fruits that Jesus refers in John 4:32, when he says to the anxious disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me”.

The secret of the Christian life is to learn to be nourished continually from heaven, receiving in each successive “month” exactly what we need not only to live, but to live as God intended - to live in love. It is these mysteries of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, fruits that we receive by giving, and which we give to others by receiving in ourselves, that the following pages are intended to explore and meditate upon.

Symbolism in the Bible

I will be exploring some of the ways in which the symbolism of trees, and particularly that of the “tree of life”, plays an important role in both the Old and the New Testaments, but perhaps at the outset a note

would be helpful on the nature of symbolism itself, why it is so important, and how it works.

Language may not be the source of thought, but it does largely condition the way we think, and thus gives us the tools by which we understand the world. It seems to have two main functions - that of dividing, or analysing, or separating, on the one hand, and that of combining, connecting, and synthesizing, on the other. Both functions are necessary. We need to be able to tell one thing from another, to discriminate, and we also need to connect and compare disparate things together.

Symbolism is therefore a necessary part of language. It is based on the principle of “analogy” or similarity (in the original Greek the word *analogy* means “proportion”). Thanks to some similarity between them, one thing can be used to represent or evoke some other thing.

The word “symbol” itself means “thrown together”, and was once used to refer to a password or token of friendship, the two halves of which could be put together when the friends met. When the Virgin Mary is said by Luke to “ponder” in her heart the mysteries of her Son’s birth (*Lk 2:19*), the word used is *symbollo*, meaning that she was putting things together and seeing the pattern in them.

Interpreting symbols

Ancient mythologies were not simply entertaining stories to tell around the fireside. They were intended to communicate beliefs about the world and its meaning or purpose, and so every detail of the story is significant. But the characters and objects in the story are always meant to be read symbolically as well as literally. In the case of the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us (in paras 115-118) that there are at least four senses of Scripture - the literal sense and three spiritual senses.

1. The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words themselves, bearing in mind the genre and circumstances of each particular text, and reading these in the Spirit and context of the whole Bible and tradition.
2. The spiritual sense is the meaning conveyed by the actual events and realities that the text evokes and describes - whether this be allegorical, moral or mystical (anagogical).

Trees, lights, lamps and boats

The great thing about symbolism is how it can interconnect everything. That is because in reality everything *is* interconnected, held together by similarities

as well as direct causal links, and our use of symbols helps us to discover these connections. Take some of the Biblical symbols as examples: trees, light, lamps, boats.

The tree, by being rooted in the earth and reaching into the sky, represents the connectedness between earth and heaven, darkness and light. In some mythologies, the sun and the moon are the “fruit” of such a tree. Light represents life, and darkness death. The sap of a tree is its life, and in the case of an olive tree, when the oil of the tree is used in a lamp, it is as though the “light” that flows within the tree is being revealed.

The wood of the tree (its outer casing) is used to make boxes and boats, thus linking the symbol of the tree to that of the Ark - both Noah’s Ark, in which the life of the world is preserved, and the Ark of the Covenant, in which the Tablets of the Law are kept and the Holy Spirit is made present. The trunk of a tree is turned into the mast of a ship, and into the pillar of a temple, thus connecting tree symbolism with that of the journey and the sacred shrine.

On a ship, the mast is the vertical reference in a world of wild water, pointing to the stars that give guidance. In the temple, the pillars by supporting the roof create the space between earth and heaven within which the sacred drama of worship takes place. The pillar of fire that guides the people of Moses in the wilderness represents the presence of an angel, but it combines

attributes of the tree, the lamp and the ship’s mast. And, of course, all of these symbols are elegantly combined in the “tree” of the Cross.

Symbolism is not random, therefore, but depends on very real analogies and connections that exist in the natural world between things. As such, it is the ideal language to communicate multiple meanings in relatively few words. That is why Christ’s parables remain inexhaustible. Symbolism is a way of exploring the unity-in-diversity of creation,² and echoes the way in which God actually creates - for Genesis portrays him creating by both separating and uniting (light and dark, land and sea, etc.); a process that culminates in the ordered harmony of the seventh day, the day of peace for all creation.

Nostalgia for Paradise

The mention in that quotation from St Francis de Sales of an “apple of paradise gathered from the tree of life” (not to mention his identification of the tree of life with the Holy Spirit) sends us back to the second chapter of the Book of Genesis.

There we are told that “the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.”

“And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (*Gen 2:8-9*).

The creation account in the second chapter of Genesis is written in a different order and from a different perspective from the account of the creation of the world in chapter one. (The two accounts are very different, but they are only contradictory if you read them in a very literalistic way. The first is more cosmological, and the second more anthropological, in that it is concerned primarily with the creation and meaning of man.) In what follows I will concentrate on

the second account, because this is the one that mentions the “tree of life”. In this story, the creation has not been divided up into seven days, but everything takes place on one day - “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (*Gen 2:4*).

The trees of Eden

According to the story, in the east of Eden there is a garden that is watered by four rivers flowing from one source. Man is placed there in the very beginning of his existence. His job is to cultivate and look after the garden (*Gen 2:15*). This is man’s mission, his purpose, his assignment from God. He is to be a gardener, a custodian.

The garden contains many trees - enough, we discover later, to tempt man to hide from God - but the *midst* of the garden is a special place and the trees there have unique but mysterious properties. God places *two* trees, not just one, in the middle of the garden: the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. God tells man that he may eat of all the trees except the tree of knowledge (*Gen 2:16-17*). The story revolves around this command concerning the fruit of the tree. As we shall see, this is a theme that extends right through the Bible, to the very end.

The early Church Fathers love to meditate on the story, and draw from it many meanings. They tend to find meaning not only in what the Bible says, but in

what it does *not* say. So, for example, they note that God does not mention the tree of life to Adam. He says simply, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (*Gen 2:16-17*). Was the second tree in some way reserved, or hidden, from man?

The tree of life

For St Ephrem in the fourth century, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was designed by God as a “boundary to the inner region of Paradise”, where, on the slopes above, the tree of life represented the higher state of glory.

Perhaps that blessed tree,
the Tree of Life,
is, by its rays,
the sun of Paradise;
its leaves glisten,
and on them are impressed
the spiritual graces
of that Garden.
In the breezes the other trees
bow down as if in worship
before that sovereign
and leader of the trees.³

The tree of knowledge was intended by God to be seen as a warning of the inner sanctuary above, which was not to be approached until the time was right. By his obedient service in the garden, including his respect for the divine command, man would have become worthy of the higher state.

Eve shows no sign of knowing about the tree of life in her conversation with the serpent (which St Ephrem assumes was not allowed into Paradise, so that the conversation must have taken place elsewhere). In answer to the Enemy’s question about the divine command, she simply tells him, “God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die’” (*Gen 3:3*).

The serpent informs her that she will not die and that instead, once knowing good and evil, she will become like God himself. Eve then takes and eats the fruit of the tree of knowledge. But the reason she does so is interesting. It is not simply that she is obeying the serpent. She has seen that the tree is “good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” (*Gen 2:6*). Tradition has identified here the *three types of temptation* possible for a creature who is composed of body, soul and spirit (1 *Thess 5:23*).

In other words, we are tempted at a physical level by hunger and thirst, at a psychological or emotional level

by beauty and delight, and at a spiritual level by pride (for example, the prospect of being admired by others, or by the idea of knowing everything). In each case, what is sinful and wrong is not the food or the beauty or even the knowledge, but the fact that we are trying to take these things to ourselves and for ourselves, rather than waiting to receive them from God.⁴

St Ephrem's interpretation is that by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, man tore aside the veil that hid the sanctuary and so glimpsed the light of glory in the other tree before he was ready to do so. The light to which he was exposed in this way revealed his spiritual nakedness and sent him scurrying into the woods to hide his shame.

At any rate, having both succumbed to the threefold temptation, Adam and Eve are now turned in on themselves and have lost their innocent vision of the world. This is the dawn of an age of individualism, of selfishness.

Paradise Lost

The garden of Eden obviously represents a state of existence that we have now left behind. Can we ever return? Many of the Church Fathers would say yes. In fact they would say Christians have already returned. For the "garden of Eden" also represents the Church,

and the four rivers that flow into it are the four Gospels flowing from the one Christ.⁵

But before the coming of Christ and his Church, there is a long period of exile. Man has to till the hard earth and struggle to obtain what he needs to live. But the possibility of an Edenic state is never entirely forgotten, and is kept alive by the prophets. Throughout the Old Testament, the imagery of trees and forests is used by them to evoke the beneficence of God, and especially the paradisaic future state, the "new heavens and the new earth" (*Is* 66:22), in which peace and prosperity will be restored to the Chosen People forever.

"For you shall go out in joy,
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cyprus;
instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off."
(*Is* 55:12-13)

The prophet Ezekiel is particularly interesting. Ezekiel lived during the period of the Babylonian exile after the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century before Christ. (It

was in those seventy years that the Hebrew Scriptures as we know them today were edited.) He speaks as an exile not just from Eden, but from the land of Israel as well. His visionary writings look forward to the final return in ways that would later be echoed by the author of the Book of Revelation that closes the New Testament.

In the prophetic vision of Ezekiel, the faithless inhabitants of Jerusalem are compared to a useless vine among the trees of the forest, whose wood is taken for fuel (*Ezek 15*), and to a transplanted twig of cedar that cannot flourish.⁶ But the Lord makes them a promise (*Ezek 17:22-4*):

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain; on the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar; and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.’”

God will seek out his lost sheep, and will put a new heart within his people (*Ezek 34, 36*). The dry bones will live

(*Ezek 37*), and the Temple worship be restored (*Ezek 43*). Water will flow out from beneath the Temple,

“And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (*Ezek 47:12*).

The restored Holy City in Ezekiel’s final vision will be foursquare, and on each side there will be three gates, for three of the twelve tribes. “And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The LORD is there.”

The Tree of the Cross

All of this Jewish and ancient symbolism of trees and fruitfulness is present to the minds of the New Testament authors, and naturally of Jesus himself. Christianity takes over an existing symbolic language in order to communicate the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Jesus was the son of a carpenter, a craftsman (*tekton*). Whether or not he ever worked in this capacity himself before becoming a rabbi, the profession is symbolically quite apposite. We can imagine him as a man who understood wood, perhaps even a cross-maker. But he was a craftsman in another sense too, in that he took the elements of Scripture and of the world around him and fashioned something new out of them. His parables, of course, draw on the wide knowledge of the natural world that would be common among the people of that time.

When Jesus speaks of Israel, or of the new Kingdom that he brings with him, the images of vineyard, fig tree, olive, and wheat are never far away. We think of the vineyard where the wicked tenants stone the servants sent by the owner, and even kill the owner's son and heir in order to possess it for themselves; the fig tree that Jesus curses when he finds it barren, and the one in

the vineyard that gives no fruit for three years, but which is given another chance to flourish; the olive trees of the garden where he is arrested; the mustard tree in the parable that grows from a tiny seed to shelter the birds of the air; the grain of wheat that must fall into the ground and die before it yields a rich harvest (and the wheat that is cast by the sower on four types of ground, only one of which can sustain growth).

In the appearance of Jesus for the first time to Mary Magdalen after his resurrection, while she is still blinded with tears she mistakes him for a gardener (*Jn* 20:15). Just like the mistake of the Jews who thought him merely "the son of a *tekton*", Mary's mistake is full of symbolic meaning. The carpenter has become a gardener; one who worked with dead wood, cut off from the tree, is now working with the living. He will prune branches where necessary, but only to ensure that his trees will bear fruit.

Lignum Vitae

This imagery of trees and growth and fruitfulness, running through the Bible, flows together dramatically in that supreme symbol of Christianity, the wooden cross on which Christ is crucified.

The cross - a symbol of death in all its cruelty - becomes the new "tree of life". Jesus himself is the fruit that hangs upon its branches, his body the food that

nourishes eternal life. Symbolically speaking, this tree, the tree of the cross, is the very same that grew in Eden's garden. In fact, you could say it includes within itself *both* of the trees that grew in the midst of the garden. Not only is it a tree of life, but it is a "tree of knowledge" because it reveals the nature of evil (by showing us the results of our sins) and of good (by showing us the supreme love of God). Thus medieval legend suggested the cross was made from wood derived from the original tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden.

The bronze serpent

Raised up like the bronze serpent that Moses erected in the desert to cure the Israelites who had been bitten by snakes (*Num* 21:4-9), Jesus allows himself to be made into an image of evil so as to cure his people from the power of death.

The serpent in the tree is often used as an image of the temptation of Eve. But in that case the serpent was descending - an angel fallen from heaven was reaching down from the tree to whisper lies into the ears of the woman. The new image reverses the symbolism. For now Christ is the serpent of wisdom, ascending not descending, offered up to his Father in heaven. He is whispering words of life and truth to his Mother, the Woman at the foot of the Cross who has become the New Eve.

Fruits of life

The fruits of this "tree of life", the fruits of God's sacrifice, are the body and blood of Jesus made into food for us (as Jesus explains in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel). In order for Jesus to give us his own flesh to eat, he must make himself entirely gift, holding back nothing for himself. This is accomplished only by being willing to die. The separation of the blood or soul of Jesus from his body (his death) is represented sacramentally by the separate consecration of the bread and the wine in the Mass. And on the cross itself, his death is revealed when blood and water streams from the wound opened by the soldier's lance (*Jn* 19:34). Medieval paintings of the scene portray this blood being caught by a weeping angel in a golden cup. Commentators identify the stream with the waters flowing from the temple in the vision of Ezekiel, for the body of Jesus is the true Temple.

The blood is the life of the body, and the blood of Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit who gives life to the faithful. The Holy Spirit is love, the source and animator of all the sacraments. In the sacraments themselves all the imagery of growth and life and fruitfulness, all the symbolism of the parables, is woven. Water, oil, wheat and the juice of the grape are thus used by the Church to fashion vehicles for grace. They

make it possible for us to assimilate consciously and deliberately the love of God poured out for us on the cross, and so to become bearers of the new life. Having died with Christ in baptism, like a grain that lies in the earth, we can then rise with him to life, bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.

The Pattern of the Moral Life

Up until now I have been looking at the imagery and symbolism of the fruits. But the words that scripture and tradition have chosen to describe the fruits are far from arbitrary. These symbols repay careful analysis.

One thing that many 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?

Natural Virtues

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.⁷

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.⁸

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.

Fruits of the Spirit

As for the *fruits* of the Holy Spirit, these are not virtues at all - despite the fact that, rather 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-to-day 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.

The Works of the Flesh

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. Let me quote the passage as a whole (*Gal 5:13-26*).

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are

against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

“Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.”

There seems to be no particular significance in the precise number of “works of the flesh”, because the list (of fifteen) ends with the words “and the like” as though it could be extended indefinitely. And so it could, for such works as fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger,

selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness and carousing multiply like maggots and lead to the breaking down of all order and harmony. They are legion, like the devils that Jesus exorcised in the country of the Gadarenes.

The Secret of True Freedom

As creatures who possess a certain measure of free will, our morality (or lack of it) is an expression of that freedom in action. It is the relation of the fruits of the Holy Spirit to freedom that we need to examine next.

Our modern world tends to understand freedom as the simple multiplication of choices and the absence of external restraint, so that the more choices we have (for example, the more varied cans of beans or packets of juice we can find in the supermarket) the freer we think we have become. But the Catholic tradition recognizes that this kind of freedom may still leave us prisoners. A person who can do a million things but never *the one right thing he wants to do* is still not free.

What constrains us is more often not some external cage or wall but an interior weakness, a kind of fracture in our soul. “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells in me” (*Rom 7:18-20*).

The gradual formation of virtues in us leads to growing self-mastery, which is an image of the freedom of God. The virtues, says the great Dominican moral theologian Servais Pinckaers, “are like a sheaf of interior energies bound together by our persevering efforts to follow our vocation and grace. Self-mastery draws together our faculties, ideas, desires, and feelings, directing them all to the higher end we are pursuing. In this way, our personality is integrated and acquires autonomy in regard to external events.”

In other words, we are no longer merely pushed and pulled around by the things happening around us and to us. Instead, “We use these to further our plans, drawing profit even from the opposition and trials they occasion.” The crack in our soul is mended. In this way “A profound interiority is developing within us. It does not isolate us, but becomes the needed pivot for our ongoing, fruitful exchange with the outer world. Thus our actions can slowly take shape and ripen into life’s true fruits, the authentic outgrowth of our freedom.”⁹

So we can see the fruits of the Holy Spirit as the results of freedom growing within us, as we are gradually empowered by the virtues.

This is why an understanding of the laws of the moral life is so important for us. It is not like trying to understand a legal code invented by human beings, or a

set of rules to govern the flow of traffic on busy streets. Those kinds of laws can be useful, but they are not very *interesting*. There is always something a bit arbitrary about them. In France and America we drive on the right, in England on the left. So what?

No, the laws of the moral life are written into our hearts, and they are the only way we can become happy. After all, what is the root of depression, of despair? It is the sense that we have no energy flowing into us from above, or from deep within, nourishing our existence and changing us for the better. We have become closed off from it, the thrill has gone. Everything in us is old and stale.

To become virtuous is to be connected with an infinite source of energy. That energy can only flow through us when we achieve a degree of integrity; that is, when we heal the rifts in our nature made by sin. Every sin, unless we repent of it, creates a subdivision in our soul, an alternative magnetic centre that drains life out of the personality God is calling us to be. The full energy of grace needs the whole human organism, the whole person, to function as one.

Dividing the Fruits

How are we to understand the fruits of the Holy Spirit in detail? What can we say about them? In what follows I have been very specific - perhaps too specific for some people. But I want to show that the twelve fruits are not just vague terms to describe the attributes or behaviour of a typically nice person; they are the actual results of the four cardinal virtues being *energized by the Holy Spirit* through the three theological virtues.

The theological virtues constitute a threefold spiritual energy that is a special gift of God, one completely 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 or main street 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.¹⁰

The Franciscan 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”....¹¹

This is extremely useful, because 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.

According to Bonaventure, **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.”¹²

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.”¹³

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

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

Objection. Sometimes talking about the virtues and the gifts can seem a bit artificial, because it gives the impression that the soul is a kind of black box with various bits and pieces in it, namely the various moral and psychological faculties. But if we were to break into the box, how could we identify the bits? At least in biology there are fleshy organs to be labelled. We may therefore feel that all this talk about the life of the soul is like drawing a map in the sand. How can we know it bears any relationship to reality, to what we are really like inside?

It is true that a virtue is not like a bit of machinery, or a biological organ. We are misled by a metaphorical way of speaking if we think of it as such. But the giving of a name to something is our only way of identifying it. In this case, though there are clearly different possible ways of describing a process as subtle as the operation of a soul, the way developed by the saints in the mainstream Christian tradition is the most highly developed, and remains one of the most useful. Josef Pieper’s study, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, provides an enormously helpful survey, and so I will be drawing on that, and the *Summa* of St Thomas, in what follows.

Fruits of 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ 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.

Fruits of 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

Fruits of 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.”¹⁹

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.”²⁰

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.²¹ (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” (Lk 18:19).

Fruits of Temperance

Temperance, finally, concerns the relationship I have with my own body. It is the virtue that keeps my body close to God.²² *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*.²³

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.”²⁴ 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.)”²⁵

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.”²⁶ 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,”²⁷ 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.

The Healing of the Nations

Our moral life is infinitely complex. All I have tried to suggest above is that according to our tradition it contains some basic structural elements. Just as there is an infinite range of human varieties, all made to the same design with virtually identical organs, and just as all kinds of music can be played with a handful of instruments, so the variations of human life illustrate well-defined types of act and habit.

When the energies of the Holy Spirit are allowed to be active in our lives, the result is a transformation of everything, so that the virtues become directed towards an end the heart could never otherwise have reached. That end is portrayed in the Book of Revelation as the City descending from heaven, with the river of life flowing through the main street, a forest of trees bearing twelve-fold fruit, and the serene glory of the Lamb illuminating it all like sunshine within a crystal.

The fruits that we pluck, or that the "nations" pluck, from the trees of life growing by that river are not offered to us from outside ourselves. The City of God is

within, as well as without. Those who enter it are those who inherit eternal life, who belong there. It is the home they have always sought. The New Jerusalem is a picture of what they have become, transfigured by the radiance that emanates from God's throne.

The Bible is about vocation, or "calling". Man flees from God in the garden of Eden, and tries to hide among the trees. "But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (*Gen 3:9*). God goes on calling, and each of the prophets learns to answer "Here I am, Lord" (the reply Adam should have given, but did not). In the end we are all called to be prophets, as we are called also to be priests and kings. We are called to holiness in Christ, who is priest, prophet and king *par excellence*. God addresses us each by name, and calls us to holiness in the unique manner that corresponds to our own secret identity.

Only one who is without sin can respond perfectly, willingly, lovingly to God's call. Mary responded with the words, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk 1:38*). The more accurate translation reads, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord...." She does not use the phrase "I am", *ego eimi*; perhaps because the phrase is associated more often by the Gospel writers with Christ. When Jesus uses it at his trial echoing the divine name revealed to Moses it prompts the accusation of blasphemy (*Mk 14:62*).

When he is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane (not hiding from God, like Adam, but revealing himself as God to man), he responds to the soldiers who say they are seeking Jesus of Nazareth, "I am he" (*Ego eimi*) - in fact he says it three times (*Jn 18:4-8*) to emphasize the point, and the soldiers "fell to the ground". They fall to the ground because God has revealed himself in the very moment that "the son of man" has revealed himself. Christ is both God and man, the one called and the one calling, the one sent and the one sending, the image of the invisible Father.

We are called to bear fruit, to become the trees of life. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another" (*Jn 15:16-17*).

So the Bible began with God calling man out from among the trees. It culminates with a man emerging from among the trees - but this man is revealing himself as God. Raised upon a wooden cross, he becomes the new tree of life for all, the source of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity. And the Bible ends with man calling to God, impatient for the fulfilment of love: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (*Rev 22:20*).

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All Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition.

Endnotes

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

² The unity of creation stems from the Unity of God; the diversity of creation (and its distinction from God himself) is founded in the Trinity.

³ Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 91.

⁴ Much later, Jesus will defeat the same three temptations in the wilderness after his baptism in the Jordan (*Mt* 4:1-11).

⁵ In an extension of this interpretation, Hippolytus thought the tree of knowledge of good and evil represented the Law, and the tree of life the Word of God. (As I mentioned, St Francis de Sales identified the tree of life not with the Word, but with the Spirit.)

⁶ In ancient times the mountains of Lebanon were covered in great cedar forests, the wood of which was used by Solomon in the construction of the inner sanctuary of the temple. According to Ezekiel 31:8, “no tree in the garden of God was like [the cedar] in beauty”.

⁷ *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.

⁸ Cf. David Meconi SJ, *Union with God* (CTS). 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.

⁹ S. Pinckaers OP, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 366.

¹⁰ As we saw earlier, 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.).

¹¹ 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. But in this book I have followed Bonaventure's simpler arrangement. The two descriptions are complementary.

¹² *Collations on the Six Days*, 280.

¹³ *Collations on the Six Days*, 281.

¹⁴ 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."

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 1814.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para 1818.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ 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).

¹⁹ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 119.

²⁰ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 126.

²¹ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 129.

²² Of course God is always close to us. The question is whether we are close to him.

²³ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 147.

²⁴ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 203.

²⁵ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 161.

²⁶ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 166-7.

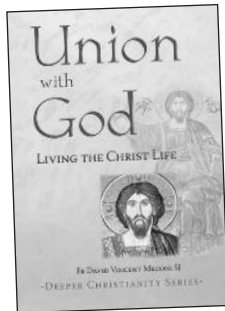
²⁷ J. Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, 205.

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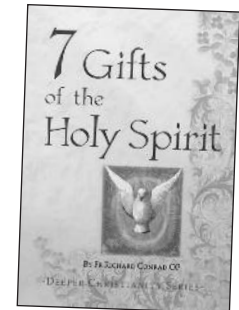
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