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Man Elevated to Share in the Divine Life

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The Mystery of Grace



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The Mystery of Grace

The Nature of Grace

At the heart of God's revelation to Israel and the Church is the notion of God's grace. This notion is absolutely central to the Gospel—good tidings—of Christ. Grace is a mystery that exceeds the bounds of human reason, philosophy, and the natural religions of the world. It appears exclusively in the Revelation of the Old and New Testaments. The notion of grace, as understood in the Catholic sense, transcends the graciousness of God as known by the natural religions of the earth, and even by Islam. The grace of God means something more specific and mysterious than merely God's graciousness and mercy in our regard.

We saw in the first talk that God has graciously elevated man to a supernatural end. In order to reach our supernatural end consisting in the vision of God, it is absolutely necessary that we be given *supernatural means*. For the means to an end must always be proportionate to the end.

Natural things get to their natural ends because they have been equipped from the very start with an interior principle of movement and action leading them to their end. We call this interior principle the nature of a thing. Natural things have natural means built into them that correspond to their natural ends. In order for an oak tree to grow to its proper stature, it has to be equipped from the start—already in the seed—with an inner principle of growth proportionate to its final stature.

The same thing must be true analogously in the supernatural order. In order to journey effectively to a supernatural end, we have to be given a supernatural path, and be equipped with a supernatural gift that is already seed or germ of that end, to make us proportionate to it and capable of arriving. This seed or germ of the supernatural end must be an interior principle of supernatural movement and action. But this interior principle can't simply be our nature, for our nature is not proportionate to our supernatural end. This interior principle is called sanctifying grace.

These means that God gives us to get to our supernatural end are both external and internal. He gives us both a supernatural path, and a supernatural power to walk on that path. The supernatural path is something outside of us and the supernatural power is something that has to be within us. The supernatural path includes supernatural Revelation and the institution of the Church and her sacraments, by which we may direct our lives to the obtaining of our supernatural end. Miracles and prophecy are given to manifest the divinity of the supernatural doctrine that has been revealed to us.

The internal means include sanctifying grace, actual graces, the theological virtues, the infused supernatural moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To be proportioned to our supernatural end, it is absolutely necessary that we be given sanctifying grace, by which we receive a mysterious "proportionality" to our supernatural end, we are fitted for it, so to speak, by being made to "participate" mysteriously in the divine nature.

Since grace is a mysterious and complex reality, it can only be properly understood through an analysis, distinguishing it into various species, a Scholastic procedure indispensable for clarity. Grace is an analogous notion, which means that it is used in different senses, which nevertheless are closely related.

Our English word grace comes from the Greek word *charis*, and the Latin *gratia*. The word primarily indicates *favor* one finds in someone's eyes. The Old Testament very frequently uses the word "grace" (chen, חן) in this sense, both with regard to God and men. For example, when the angel Gabriel is sent to Mary, the angel says that she "has found favor with God" (Luke 1:30).

Secondarily it indicates the good or *favorable quality* that causes one to find favor in someone else's eyes. It is in this second sense that we speak of God *giving* grace. The gift of grace is the gift of the supernatural favorable quality that causes us to find favor in God's eyes. To return to our example of Mary, her having found favor in God's eyes was the cause of her having been greeted by the angel as "full of grace" (*kecharitomene*), which could also be translated as "having been graced to the full." God's favor does not remain merely in Him, but brings forth from Him a gift of grace that enriches the recipient with an interior gift that makes him or her pleasing to God.

Since this gift that causes us to find favor in God's eyes was not in our nature from the start, but is God's free gift, grace always indicates something *gratuitous*, a gift freely given and received, distinguished from all that is "due," whether to nature or merit. These two notions of favor and gratuitousness are intimately related. Grace is thus also a *free* gift that is given by the one who favors, to the one who has found favor. The notion of *gratuitousness* is the key element in the theological analysis of grace. Grace is a free gift of God to those whom He favors, making them pleasing to Him on account of the grace with which He has enriched them.

Here we have to recognize a great difference between the way this favor exists in God and in men. Another person finds favor in our human eyes on account of a pre-

existing goodness they possess, which then attracts our love. However, God's favor or love cannot depend on any pre-existing goodness, because the creature simply did not exist to attract God's favor before becoming the recipient of favor in creation. Likewise, before receiving sanctifying grace the creature had no supernatural spiritual beauty to attract God's favor. Indeed, all goodness in creatures is the effect of God's prior love for them. Creatures find favor in God's eyes before they ever come to exist, and on account of God's creative favor they are created and are filled with gifts such as sanctifying grace. St. Thomas explains this as follows:

When a man is said to be in another's good graces, it is understood that there is something in him pleasing to the other; even as anyone is said to have God's grace - with this difference, that what is pleasing to a man in another is presupposed to his love, but whatever is pleasing to God in a man is *caused by the Divine love*.¹

It follows from this that we can speak of God's grace in two senses. First of all, grace refers to God's gratuitous love by which He wills some good for the creature. In this sense, grace is nothing other than the love of God for His creatures, which is the foundation for every gift that is given to the creature. In this sense we can say, "by the grace of God, I am what I am" (see 1 Cor 15:10). However, although this sense of grace is naturally primary, it is not the principal sense in which we speak of grace in theology, in which the word is more generally used to designate certain sublime effects of God's love *in* created persons. In this second sense, we can speak of grace as the gratuitous gift transforming the creature that results from God's prior love. Both senses are indicated in the text of St. Paul, 1 Cor 15:10:

But by the *grace* of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the *grace* of God which is *with me*.

In this sentence St. Paul speaks first of grace in the sense of the gratuitous good favor by which God favored him. This favor of God, however, is fruitful and produced in

¹ St. Thomas, *Summa of Theology*, I-II, q. 110, a. 1, ad 1. See also the body of this article: "According to the common manner of speech, grace is usually taken in three ways. First, for anyone's *love*, as we are accustomed to say that the soldier is in the good graces of the king, i.e. the king looks on him with favor. Secondly, it is taken for any *gift freely bestowed*, as we are accustomed to say: I do you this act of grace. Thirdly, it is taken for the *recompense of a gift given gratis*, inasmuch as we are said to be grateful for benefits. Of these three the second depends on the first, since one bestows something on another *gratis* from the love wherewith he receives him into his good graces. And from the second proceeds the third, since from benefits bestowed *gratis* arises gratitude. Now as regards the last two, it is clear that grace implies something in him who receives grace: first, the gift given *gratis*; secondly, the acknowledgment of the gift." For a commentary on this article, see Charles Journet in *The Meaning of Grace*, trans. by A.V. Littledale (Princeton: Scepter Publishers, 1996), 17-19.

Paul the gift of the grace of God that is said to be "with him" in an abiding way, aiding him to act through that grace. Thus when St. Paul speaks of the "grace of God which is with me" in the conclusion of the sentence, he is speaking of the gift of sanctifying grace and actual graces which are interiorly received.

Gratuitousness of Grace

Grace in the proper sense of the word refers to a special gift that is entirely above the nature of the creature, by which the creature is ordered to God's own beatitude and made a participant in God's own inner life. This gift received the technical name of grace, for it is *doubly gratuitous*. All of God's gifts are ultimately gratuitous. Nevertheless, some gifts are gratuitous in a double or special sense. The gift of grace, in this precise sense, presupposes the prior free gift of creation and nature, to which it is added as a *free supernatural gift*: a gift over and above the free gift of creation which is presupposed, a gift over and above anything *due* to the natural order that has been freely created.

In other words, God's prior love causes His gifts of being and goodness to the creature. However, there are two distinct types of being and goodness that God can give to the creature. First of all, God gives the gift of being and nature to a thing in creation. *This first gift establishes the natural order*. On the basis of this first gift, God maintains the natural order and the being of things, making it possible for them to reach their natural end.

Over and above this first gift of natural being and goodness, by which everything is established in its own nature and order, God can give another gift whereby He raises the creature up *over the order of its own nature*, to make it share mysteriously in God's own nature, life, and beatitude. In other words, God has the power to elevate the creature over its nature, to make it share in *God's* nature. This gift is thus very aptly called *supernatural*. It is also properly called *grace* (in the sense of an especially gratuitous gift), for it is absolutely gratuitous with respect to the natural order itself. Creation is gratuitous with respect to the nothingness out of which the creature was drawn. Supernatural grace is gratuitous not only with respect to nothingness, but *also with respect to the natural order* of the creature already created.

Nothingness can do nothing to merit creation. Thus creation is gratuitous. Likewise, the natural order, once created, can do nothing to merit being elevated to participate in God's own inner life, for it is *infinitely* above the proportionality of any creature. Therefore, the supernatural elevation of the rational creature to participate in the beatitude of God is *doubly gratuitous*, for it is a gift so good that it cannot belong to the nature of any creature (for the beatitude of God is *proper and natural* to God alone).

Why is this? To participate by nature in God's own inner life and beatitude would imply that a creature is *divine by nature*, and thus would not be distinct from God, nor a creature.

Grace: Above What Is Due to Nature

The word “grace” (*gratia*) comes from the Latin *gratis*: freely given, and we have seen that grace is something doubly free or gratuitous. The central notion of grace, therefore, is that it excludes the notion of something being *due*. In order to explain this, St. Thomas distinguishes two ways in which something can be due: either on the basis of nature or on the basis of personal *merit*,² in that a reward is promised to certain acts. Everything that God's creative wisdom has ordained a species to have is *due* to it: its properties, natural potencies, inclinations, ends, etc. Natural gifts are gratuitous in the sense that they are completely unmerited, but nevertheless they are *due to the nature itself* which God has willed to institute. Supernatural gifts are *not due in either sense*, and this constitutes their special *double* gratuitousness, on account of which they are given the name of “grace.”

The free gift of the creation of a being with a given nature carries with it something that is due to that created nature, in order for it to be and unfold according to its nature: “To each is due that which is his.”³ Everything that belongs to a nature by the title of God's *idea* of it is due to it. This includes what is essentially *ordered* to it according to God's providence. The ultimate basis of what is due to a given nature lies in the divine wisdom which instituted that nature according to the divine archetype. *That which a given nature requires* according to the divine plan, both in essential and accidental respects, *is due to a given nature*.⁴ These things are due to the creature, not because God is a debtor to His creature, but because they are due to the order of God's own wisdom.⁵

The notions of *what is due to nature* and grace are illustrated by an analogy that St. Thomas gives of a king who freely wills to make someone a knight.⁶ On the basis of this prior free decision, the king is now “bound” to provide him with a horse, without which he cannot be a knight. However, he is not “bound” to give him a horse with a special excellence, or special arms or other marks of distinction, for without these things one can still be a knight. These additional gifts augment the well-being and excellence of the knighthood that has already been willed, but are not

necessary for its coherent existence. Thus these additional gifts are given freely, over and above what is due.

St. Thomas then applies these distinctions to the divine will with regard to man. Once God freely wills man's existence, then what is necessary for man's nature, and without which it cannot exist, is due to that nature. However, everything that augments his well-being—if his nature can still exist coherently and properly without it—is not willed as something due to man, but is willed “according to pure generosity.”⁷

Once God wills to make man, then reason is due to man, for man cannot be man without reason. Likewise, who could deny that a proportionate final end would be due to him? If he could reach no final end his existence would be absurd and incoherent. The perfection of grace and glory, however, falls into the category of perfections that are maximally fitting to man and immeasurably augment his “wellbeing,” but which are not such that the nature cannot exist coherently and properly without them. Therefore, St. Thomas concludes that grace and glory are not given to man as something due to him, but by “pure liberality.” It follows that predestination to grace and glory is not due to man, but is caused solely by God's goodness.

Yet how can one define what a given nature demands? The key lies in the notion of *proportionality* with regard to the principles of the nature and to its active powers. The knowledge of God that is due to the condition of human nature and to angels is that which we can gain through creation. The vision of God can be due only to God, because only the divine nature can be naturally proportioned to knowing Himself. Although this cannot be *due* to any creature, men and angels are raised to this ineffable dignity by glory.

The Love of God is the Source of Grace

Everything that God creates has its source in the divine love. However, the elevation of man by grace is the fruit of a higher love from God to the creature. God loves everything He creates, but He is said to love things more or less according to the good that He freely grants them (for love is the willing of good to another). Thus He loves man more than beasts because He grants them a higher gift: rational nature by which we can come to know and love God. Similarly, His gift of grace manifests a greater love, by which He clothes us with a greater good—*sharing in His own nature*, enabling us to know and love Him

⁷ *De veritate*, q. 6, a. 2: “His will is inclined first to create something, not as due, but freely, in that His goodness is manifested in His work. But given that God wishes to make something, it follows as something due, on the supposition of His liberality, that He make those things also without which those that He has first willed cannot exist. For example, if He wills to make a man, He must give him reason. But wherever something occurs that is not *necessary* for what God wills, then that thing comes from God, not as something due, but through His pure generosity.”

² See *ST I-II*, a. 111, a. 1, ad 2; *Comp. theol.*, I, ch. 214.

³ *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴ See *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 6, ad 3: “It is due to each natural thing that it have that which its nature requires (*exigit*), both in essential and accidental aspects. That this is due depends on the divine wisdom, in that natural things should be such that they imitate the proper idea of them which is in the divine mind.”

⁵ See *ST I*, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3.

⁶ *De veritate*, q. 6, a. 2.

in an immeasurably higher way. All of creation manifests God's love, but the gift of grace manifests a higher and more amazing love, for through it God communicates to us a share in His own life. St. Thomas explains:

And according to this difference of good the love of God to the creature is looked at differently. For one is common, whereby He loves "all things that are" (Wisdom 11:24), and thereby gives things their natural being. But the second is a special love, whereby He draws the rational creature above the condition of its nature to a participation of the Divine good; and according to this love He is said to love anyone simply, since it is by this love that God simply wishes the eternal good, which is Himself, for the creature.⁸

John Paul II, in his Marian encyclical *The Mother of the Redeemer* 8, makes a similar analysis of the nature of grace with regard to Mary, whom the angel Gabriel proclaimed to be "full of grace":

In the language of the Bible "grace" means a special gift, which according to the New Testament has its source precisely in the Trinitarian life of God himself, God who is love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8). The fruit of this love is "the election" of which the Letter to the Ephesians speaks. On the part of God, this election is the eternal desire to save man through a sharing in his own life (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4) in Christ: it is salvation through a sharing in supernatural life. The effect of this eternal gift, of this grace of man's election by God, is like a seed of holiness, or a spring which rises in the soul as a gift from God himself, who through grace gives life and holiness to those who are chosen. In this way there is fulfilled, that is to say there comes about, that "blessing" of man "with every spiritual blessing," that "being his adopted sons and daughters . . . in Christ," in him who is eternally the "beloved Son" of the Father.

Participation in the Divine Nature and Divine Filiation

Since sanctifying grace is a participation in the divine life, it follows that this grace makes possible an intimate friendship with God which would be impossible without it, for all friendship presupposes a sharing of life with the friend. This is especially true of the spousal friendship proper to marriage, which is a natural image or sacrament representing the union of the soul with God. Without sanctifying grace there can be no sharing of life with God so as to make possible a spousal friendship with Him.⁹

John Paul has written about this mystery in *Dominum et vivificantem* 34:

And at the same time that same man in his own humanity receives as a gift a special "image and likeness" to God. This means not only rationality and freedom as constitutive

⁸ ST I-II, q. 110, a. 1.

⁹ See *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 9-10, which speaks of the "life-giving power of the Sacrament [of Baptism] which brings about sharing in the life of the Triune God, for it gives sanctifying grace as a supernatural gift to man. Through grace, man is called and made "capable" of sharing in the inscrutable life of God."

properties of human nature, but also, from the very beginning, the capacity of having a personal relationship with God, as "I" and "you," and therefore the capacity of having a covenant, which will take place in God's salvific communication with man. Against the background of the "image and likeness" of God, "the gift of the Spirit" ultimately means a call to friendship, in which the transcendent "depths of God" become in some way opened to participation on the part of man.

The fact that man is created in the "image and likeness of God" does not only refer to the natural perfection of man. The "image and likeness of God" is an analogical notion with two distinct levels: nature and grace. According to the tradition of the Church, Adam and Eve were created in a state of grace or friendship with God, which can be seen in the intimacy with which they walked with God in the Garden of Eden. Through the gift of grace, man's likeness with God receives an incommensurate elevation, enabling him to participate in the divine friendship.

Since sanctifying grace mysteriously makes us sharers in the divine nature, it follows that it gives us a share in the inter-Trinitarian life of the three divine Persons. This manifests itself above all in awakening in us a sense of our divine filiation, by which we participate in the filial love between Christ and His Father. In the Trinity, the mutual love between the Father and the Son is the source of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, who is the personal gift of love of the Father and Son for each other.

In the soul gifted with sanctifying grace, the Holy Spirit is given to us to awaken the filial love of sons for their heavenly Father. In Gal 4:6-7, St. Paul writes: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir." And again in Rom 8:14-17:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

In this way sanctifying grace (and the virtue of charity which flows from it) immeasurably and progressively perfects the image of the Trinity in us, by which we are called to filial love of God.

The Theological Virtues

When sanctifying grace comes to the soul, it enriches the soul with other magnificent supernatural gifts which further specify the sharing in the divine life given by sanctifying grace. The principal gifts that flow from sanctifying grace are the theological virtues.

A theological virtue is one whose *object* is God Himself; it is also caused directly by God, and known only by divine Revelation.¹⁰ The virtue of faith has God—insofar as he is the living Truth—as its object, to whom we must conform our minds and give the obedience of faith. The virtue of hope is directed to God as the source and content of our beatitude, to be attained through God’s grace. Charity is directed to God as He whom we are to love above all things for His own sake.

The theological virtues are necessary to rightly order and incline us to our *supernatural* end, to which we are not sufficiently ordered by our natural spiritual faculties,¹¹ for both our intellect and will naturally lack a proper order to our supernatural end. To this effect St. Thomas cites 1 Cor 2:9: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the *heart* of man, what things God has prepared for those who love Him.” Therefore, with regard both to the intellect (the “eye”) and to the will (the “heart”), “something needs to be supernaturally added to man to order him to a supernatural end.” The intellect needs to be perfected by the habit of faith in order to know the end to which we are ordered and the means by which to arrive. The will or heart needs to be ordered to that end in two ways.¹²

First, it must tend to that end as to something possible to attain, for no one can intend to reach an end deemed to be impossible. In order to orient one’s activity effectively to an end, it is not enough to have a mere wish or conditional desire for that end, which can exist even when an end is judged to be unattainable. On the contrary, ordered activity towards an end presupposes the intention to gain that end, and an effective intention presupposes a judgment of real possibility. In the case of our supernatural end, this is given by the virtue of hope.

However, this intention in itself is insufficient to fully order the will to the vision of God, because nothing tends to something that is not similar to itself, and God in His inner life is maximally dissimilar to us. For this reason, the will needs to be perfected by a certain conformity or union with the end to which it is ordered. This conformity with God in His inner life is produced by the spiritual union of

10 See *ST I-II*, q. 62, a. 1: “Such like principles are called ‘theological virtues’: first, because their object is God, inasmuch as they rightly order us 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 Scripture.”

11 See *ibid.*: “It is necessary that certain divine principles [the theological virtues] be super-added by God, by which a man may be ordered to supernatural beatitude just as he is ordered to his connatural end by means of his natural principles, although not without divine assistance.”

12 See *ibid.*, a. 3, ad 1: “The very nature of the will suffices to give it a natural order to the [natural] end, both with regard to intending the end and to its conformity with the end. But for the will to be ordered to things above its nature, the nature of the power is insufficient in both of these respects. Consequently there is need for an additional supernatural habit in both respects.” Hope is necessary with regard to *intention* for the supernatural end, and charity with regard to *conformity* with it.

charity.¹³ It follows that we need three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. Faith perfects the intellect, and hope and charity perfect the will.

The supernatural infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit derive from sanctifying grace, from which they flow in an inseparable way.¹⁴ Every soul that has sanctifying grace possesses faith, hope, charity, the other supernatural infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The greater the degree of sanctifying grace, the greater the supernatural virtues and gifts, all of which grow together like the fingers of a child’s hand.

Concerning the theological virtues in general, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1812-1813 says:

The human virtues are rooted in the theological virtues, which adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature: for the theological virtues relate directly to God. They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive, and object.

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.

There is an interesting difference between the theological and the moral virtues. Whereas the moral virtues such as temperance and fortitude realize their perfection in a golden mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency, the theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—can never be excessive. One can never love God for His own sake in an excessive way, nor can one hope in Him too much, nor believe too much in His word of truth.

Distinction between Sanctifying Grace and the Theological Virtues

A difficult theological problem with which the medieval theologians wrestled concerns the distinction between sanctifying grace and charity. Are they merely different terms designating the same reality, or are they really distinct?

Both sanctifying grace and charity are habitual gifts that abide in the soul. Furthermore, everyone who has sanctifying grace has charity, and vice versa. Nevertheless, St. Thomas argued that they are really distinct, opposing the view of various earlier medieval theologians (including Peter Lombard).

13 See *ST I-II*, q. 62, a. 3.

14 *Ibid.*: “Hence man through Jesus Christ, into whom he is ingrafted, receives in the said justification together with the remission of sins all these [gifts] infused at the same time: faith, hope, and charity. For faith, unless hope and charity be added to it, neither unites one perfectly with Christ, nor makes a living member of his body.”

He addresses this question in a masterful way in *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 2. In order to show their difference, St. Thomas makes reference to a threefold distinction found in natural things between *nature*, *inclination*, and *action*.¹⁵ St. Thomas gives the example of a rock which has a certain *nature*, from which there results an *inclination* towards the center. If there is nothing to obstruct it, it naturally *moves* towards the center to which it is inclined.¹⁶

If we apply this scheme to man, then we have (1) *rational nature*, which gives rise to (2) a *natural inclination of the will* for the end to which we are naturally proportioned, and which can be (3) *naturally attained* by the operation of our natural faculties.

St. Thomas specifies that this end consists in a certain contemplation of divine things such as is possible to man according to the capabilities of his nature, and which even philosophers such as Aristotle saw to be the final happiness of man:

Man by his nature is proportioned to a *certain end*, for which he has a *natural appetite*, and which he *can work to achieve by his natural powers*. This end is a certain contemplation of the divine attributes, in the measure in which this is possible for man through his natural powers; and in this end even the philosophers placed the final happiness of man.

However, by faith we know that God has destined man for an end which exceeds the proportionality of human nature or any nature which has been or could be created, and which is proportionate only to God Himself.¹⁷ In order for man to achieve this end, it is not enough for God simply to give man the means requisite for attaining it. This would correspond only to the third element of the threefold scheme that St. Thomas has analyzed. Each of the three elements needs to be re-proportioned, so to speak, so that man's movement towards his supernatural end can have the same perfection found in nature with regard to

¹⁵ This same distinction can be found in *De malo*, q. 6, in which these three factors as they exist in creatures without knowledge are compared with the way they exist in men: "As in irrational creatures there is found form, which is the principle of action, and inclination following form, which is called natural appetite, from which action follows; likewise in man there is found an intelligible form, and an inclination of the will following on the form that is known, from which exterior action follows."

¹⁶ *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 2: "Since different natures have different ends, three things are necessary in natural things for the attainment of some end: namely, a *nature proportioned to that end*; an *inclination to that end*, which is the *natural appetite* for the end; and *movement to that end*. This can be seen in the earth [or in a rock], for example, which has a *certain nature* by which it is fitting for it to be in the center [of a gravitational field], and there follows on this nature an *inclination* to that center insofar as it naturally desires that place, even when it has been removed from the center by a violent motion, and when the violence is removed it *moves* downwards."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: "But God has prepared man for another end that exceeds the proportionality of human nature. This end is eternal life which consists in the vision of God in His essence, an end which exceeds the proportionality of any created nature, being connatural to God alone."

natural ends. A new proportionality needs to be given to man's nature, by which he will be proportioned to the end of eternal life. From this new proportionality (participation in the divine nature, according to 2 Pt 1:4) there must flow a new inclination to the supernatural end. Finally, the acts by which that end is acquired must be proportioned to the elevation of that end. The new proportionality is given by sanctifying grace, the new inclination by the theological virtue of charity, and the acquisition or meriting of the end is given by means of the other infused virtues, which are directed by charity.

It is necessary that man be given something not only by which he works for the end, or to incline his appetite to that end, but also by which the nature of man is elevated to a certain dignity, according to which such an end is fitting to him. And for this he is given grace. Charity is given him to incline his affection to this end; the other virtues are given him for the execution of the works by which this end is acquired.

In this way one can clearly see the distinction between sanctifying grace and charity, for the former corresponds (on the supernatural order) to the nature while the latter corresponds to the inclination flowing from that nature. Sanctifying grace perfects nature by giving the creature a new proportionality with his supernatural end, and charity perfects the natural inclination of the will by giving it a new orientation so that it is directed not merely to God as the author of nature, but to God as the author of grace who invites the creature to share in His intimate life.

The Theological Virtue of Charity

Is our love of God *eros* or *agape*, love of desire, or love of friendship? Both aspects must be present. It is natural for us to love God with the love of desire, for we desire to be perfected in happiness through union with God. This corresponds to the theological virtue of *hope*. Hope is love for God as the object of our beatitude.

Nevertheless, the theological virtue of charity corresponds to the love of friendship or *agape*. The writers of the New Testament have manifested this in their terminology with regard to love, for they have consciously chosen to avoid the word "*eros*" (love of desire) and always use the word "*agape*" (love of benevolence) when speaking of the theological virtue of love for God (charity). In a similar way, the English word "charity" is used to indicate the theological virtue of supernatural love and the acts of fraternal love that flow from it, to distinguish it from other kinds of love.

In common English today, we normally use the word "charity" only in the secondary sense of good works of disinterested love for our neighbor. Nevertheless, we should remember that the principal meaning of the word should be the love for God above all things, which is the theological virtue of charity. "Charity" is our English equivalent of

agape, and it means a love of friendship with God, and, for His sake, a love of benevolence for the children of God.

This is a teaching that is very profound, although very simple. The love that God commands us to have for Him is a love of *friendship*, a love directed to a Person. It includes rejoicing in the fact that God is who He is, and in His infinite goodness; and it includes the desire to give ourselves to Him and belong to Him entirely in a spousal and filial way.

It is a mutual love. God has loved us first. Furthermore, there is a sharing of life, although it may seem hard to understand. The life that is shared between God and his adopted sons and daughters is the life of sanctifying grace. By giving us grace, God has given us a certain sharing in his own inner inter-Trinitarian life. It follows that the virtue of charity can only exist in those who are made adopted children of God by sanctifying grace. Charity flows directly from sanctifying grace, and is inseparable from it.

Charity, therefore, is something entirely supernatural and produced in us directly by God.¹⁸ It is true that in everyday language we speak of charity as if it were something natural: the natural virtue of generosity or friendliness. True fraternal charity, however, differs greatly from natural generosity in its motive. True fraternal charity is always motivated by love of God above all, and directed to our neighbor as a beloved child of God. Someone who fails to see his neighbor as a creature loved immensely by God cannot love him with supernatural charity, although he can be very generous to him. Charity in the proper sense of the word thus always presupposes faith and grace. Charity elevates natural generosity and directs it, as grace elevates nature.

Since charity is a love of friendship with God, it is clear that it is absolutely incompatible with mortal sin, which always involves preferring a creaturely satisfaction to God's Law, and thus despising God in comparison with the satisfaction that one desires over God. Charity, therefore, must always include contrition for the grave sins that one has committed. Charity, in fact, will include *perfect contrition* for sin, which is sorrow for offending God, not only because one will be punished or go to hell, but principally because it offends God whom one loves above all things. Without contrition for sin, there can be no communion of life with God.

¹⁸ See *ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 2: "Charity is a friendship of man for God, founded upon the fellowship of everlasting happiness. Now this fellowship is in respect, not of natural, but of gratuitous gifts . . . on account of which charity itself surpasses our natural facilities. Now that which surpasses the faculty of nature, cannot be natural or acquired by the natural powers, since a natural effect does not transcend its cause. Therefore charity can be in us neither naturally, nor through acquisition by the natural powers, but by the infusion of the Holy Spirit, Who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of Whom in us is created charity."