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THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE OF FAITH
AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MORAL LIFE

By

Sister Mary Jacinta Li, O.P.

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in the theological virtue of faith began during a presentation given by Father Wojciech Giertych at the Motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia. Father Giertych, a member of the Dominican Order in Poland, is the papal theologian and a professor at the Angelicum. The topic of Father Giertych's presentation which I attended was "The Virtue of Faith and Contemplative Prayer."

At the beginning of his presentation, Father Giertych gave a description of the act of faith which, for me, was life-changing. The description came straight from Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, which I was sure to have learned about before this presentation. Following Thomas' reflections, he explained that it is within the act of faith – the act of faith in the sense of "*credere in Deum*" – "believing *unto* God" – that we *tend towards God – move towards Him* – and, this movement is the point of contact between God and the human person; it is in this process of dynamic *movement towards God* that we are personally *touched* by Him.

Subsequently, in my interactions with people – with my students and their parents, with my fellow teachers, with members of my family, and even strangers – I would sometimes wonder: has this person been touched by God? Has she received the gift of faith? In particular, during my visits to my family in Hong Kong, China – a very crowded city – I would look out into a sea of people and know that, for most of them, even though they know *about* Christ, they have not received the gift of faith and have not been touched by Him. There were moments when I felt overwhelmed by the reality that there are nations, such as China, which, as a whole, have never come under the influence of the Christian faith. And so I began to ponder more deeply and frequently questions such as "how do people live

without faith?” Or, “what difference does faith make?” Or, “what does it mean to live by faith?” These questions became more real, more urgent for me.

About two years after Father Giertych’s presentation, in a course on moral theology, I came across the works of Father Servais Pinckaers. Father Pinckaers’ claim that the moral life is essentially the equivalent of the Pauline concept of “life in Christ” and that the Person of Jesus Christ is at the center of Christian morality was, for me, the perfect answer to my question about the impact of faith on every human life. I fell in love with Father Pinckaers’ works; and then I found out that Father Giertych was a student of Father Pinckaers. Hence, this thesis is the result of the influence of the works of both Father Giertych and Father Pinckaers – to both I am greatly indebted and deeply grateful.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

GS *Gaudium et Spes*

PF *Porta Fidei*

ST *Summa Theologica*

VS *Veritatis Splendor*

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship between the theological virtue of faith and the moral life as presented in the Pauline letters, selected works of Thomas Aquinas, and recent ecclesial documents on morality.

Since the late Middle Ages, the discipline of moral theology has focused its attention on obligations, prohibitions and imperatives.¹ The main concerns of moral theology have centered on the study of the moral law and its application on man's external behaviors. In recent times, however, while maintaining that rules and consequences hold a rightful place in the study of morality, moral theology has paid increasing attention to the role that man's innate and natural desire for freedom and happiness has on his moral choices and conduct. Some would argue that this shift in focus towards freedom and happiness represents a return to what moral theology was – before the term “moral theology” existed – from the time of its infancy during the Patristic period to the era of Scholasticism in the Middle Ages.² As Servais Pinckaers describes, “Catholic morality is a response to the aspirations of the human heart for truth and goodness.”³ Man's longing for freedom and happiness is the root cause of his moral decisions and actions.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the virtues have gained or, as some would claim, regained, a prominent place in the arena of moral theology. The virtues are the dispositions which perfect the human person by inclining him to what is good, thereby leading him to act in ways that attain to true freedom and happiness. More current catechesis in the moral life, therefore, has shifted its approach towards formation in the virtues. Understandably,

¹ Pinckaers, Servais. *Morality: The Catholic View*, p.7

² Pinckaers, Servais. *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p.195

³ Pinckaers, *Morality*, p.1

consideration of the virtues has focused primarily on the moral virtues which guide and affect human conduct. Upon deeper examination, however, one may see that, in relation to the Christian moral life, the theological virtues actually precede the moral virtues. Although the moral virtues exert a direct and immediate influence over man's moral decisions and actions, the impact of the theological virtues on the moral life is more prior and more essential because the primary aim of the theological virtues is the right orientation of the human person to God. The theological virtues play a large role in shaping man's relationship to God, and it is man's relationship to God which ultimately sets the stage for all that he does in life – identity precedes conduct. The theological virtues incline the human person to respond to the workings of the moral virtues; they form the very character of the human person and dispose him to live according to his identity as a child of God who is created in God's "image and likeness".

Among the theological virtues, faith is the first to direct the human person towards God. As Aquinas explains, faith is the first of the theological virtues.⁴ It is faith which apprehends the ultimate end of man, namely, God Himself, as the supreme Good towards Whom the human person inclines. Faith puts the human person into relationship with God. Faith begins the process of the human person's development into the fullness of his identity as a child of God. A life which is grounded in and nurtured by faith conforms the person more and more to God's image and likeness; the person's interior dispositions, thoughts, and actions – in other words, his moral life – become increasingly permeated by a divine likeness. In this sense then, the moral life is essentially what Paul calls "life in Christ" (Gal. 2:20). Faith, which inaugurates this "life in Christ", is the cornerstone upon which the moral life stands.

⁴ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, 62.4; II-II, 4.7

In one of its opening paragraphs on the section on the moral life, entitled “Life in Christ”, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, Christians are “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” and so participate in the life of the Risen Lord. Following Christ and united with him, Christians can strive to be “imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love” by conforming their thoughts, words and actions to the “mind . . . which is yours in Christ Jesus,” and by following his example.⁵

Through his dramatic encounter with the Risen Christ on his way to Damascus, Paul entered into a relationship with Christ which was quintessentially life-changing. Paul’s encounter with Christ would cause him to assert: “All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life” (Phil 3:10-11). From the moment Paul received and accepted the light of faith – the knowledge of Christ – he wanted nothing more than to “become like” Christ, to become “imitators of God as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1). And, in order to become like Christ, Paul declares that he must live according to the pattern of Christ’s life: “This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God” (Gal. 2:20).

The genuineness of one’s encounter with Christ is attested to by the fruits of the encounter. True faith in Christ necessarily gives birth to and nourishes a “life in Christ.” Servais Pinckaers describes the relationship between faith and the moral life in this way:

The advent of faith effects an original and substantial transformation in the moral life. It centers the moral life on a particular person: Jesus, the Christ. In his historical particularity – in his body that suffered and was resurrected – Jesus becomes the source and cause of justice and wisdom. In short, he becomes the source and cause of moral excellence for those who believe in him....St. Paul will present the Christian life as “life in Christ.” He even affirms that, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal. 2:20*). This view is unique among the moralities and religions of the world: For Christians, the person of Jesus has become the center of the moral life, as he is also the center of prayer and the liturgy that nourishes it.⁶

⁵ CCC, n.1694.

⁶ Pinckaers. *Morality*. p.86.

Simply put, Pinckaers proposes that the single defining feature of Christian morality is the idea that Jesus Christ unites and integrates the act of believing with the art of living. The connection between faith and the moral life, as described in the above excerpt, is the chief interest of this thesis.

In its aim to explore the relationship between the theological virtue of faith and the Christian moral life, this thesis will explore specifically the validity of approaching the Christian moral life from faith as its starting point. It will look for possible responses to the question: in what ways does the Christian tradition support the notion that faith in Christ constitutes the keystone of the Christian moral life?

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter One will examine the scriptural notions of faith in Christ and “life in Christ”. Using the Pauline letters and the Letter to the Hebrews as primary sources and drawing from the works of various Pauline exegetes, this chapter aims to identify the chief features of the life of faith and describe their connections to the moral life. Paul’s letters to the early Christian communities contain many detailed expositions on the life of faith and exhortations to embrace this life of faith in concrete ways. Situated within the apostolic time and belonging to the canon of Sacred Scripture, Paul’s writings serve as an important primary source and an authoritative voice on the topics of faith and life in Christ. Chapter One will show that, according to Scripture, Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian moral life and that the essence and foundation of the Christian moral life – “life in Christ” – is rooted in “faith working through love”.

Chapter Two of the thesis will again examine the scriptural notions of faith in Christ and “life in Christ”, but this time according to the insights of Thomas Aquinas in his *Biblical Commentaries* on the Pauline Epistles and *Summa Theologiae*. Written more than one thousand

years after Paul, the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas on faith and the moral life as presented in his *Biblical Commentaries* and *Summa Theologiae* have developed many of Paul's ideas in a more systematic way. Aquinas' works have also integrated certain philosophical principles and analogies which support and elaborate upon Paul's reflections. In addition to the writings of Aquinas, Chapter Two will also draw from the works of moral theologians in the Thomistic tradition such as Servais Pinckaers, Romanus Cessario, and Michael Sherwin. Chapter Two aims to show that Aquinas' thoughts on faith and the moral life flow from and are faithful to Paul's understanding of "faith working through love".

Chapter Three of the thesis will examine current ecclesial teachings on faith and the moral life. It will draw from sources such as *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Porta Fidei*, a document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled, "The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct", and *Lumen Fidei*. It will highlight the main ideas of current works on moral theology and compare them with the thoughts of Paul and Thomas Aquinas. Chapter Three aims to show and describe the ways in which the Christian tradition supports the notion that the theological virtue of faith forms the foundation of the Christian moral life. Chapter Three seeks to demonstrate that the active and visible manifestation of "faith working through love" is the foundation and summit of the Christian moral life and the proper context of moral theology.

CHAPTER ONE: SCRIPTURAL NOTION OF FAITH AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

Introduction

Among the core concepts of Christianity, faith holds a prominent and preeminent place. In the introduction to his treatise on faith, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, Avery Dulles notes: “The word ‘faith’ might be described as *the* Christian word.”⁷ Later on in the same work, Dulles comments: “The term ‘believers’ is practically a synonym for ‘Christians’ (Rom. 3:22; 1 Cor 1:21).”⁸ To have faith – to believe – is a defining feature of a Christian.

Scripture, especially the New Testament, contains many references to faith. In the New Testament, the word “faith” (*pistis* in Greek) appears more than two hundred forty times, and “believe” (*pisteuo*) – the act of faith – is mentioned over two hundred forty times.⁹ Believing in Jesus Christ opens up one’s life to the infusion of the divine life. The act of faith in Christ initiates the believer into the very life of Christ. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul declares: “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (2:20). Faith is at the very heart of the Christian message.

The centrality of faith for Christians raises an essential and practical question: What is faith? To this question another question, one which is of particular interest to this chapter, follows: What does it mean to “live by faith”? In other words, how and in what ways does faith transform the life of a person who believes? Chapter One of this thesis seeks to respond to these

⁷ Dulles, Avery, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For*, p.3

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.11

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3

questions by examining the New Testament notion of faith in Christ and “life in Christ”. This chapter is divided into five sections and addresses five main ideas. The Pauline letters and the Letter to the Hebrews serve as primary sources. The secondary sources draw from the works of a number of Pauline exegetes and several commentaries on the topics of faith and the moral life.

Section One examines the idea that faith is God’s work of salvation in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thes. 3:1-13). This section presents the Person of Jesus Christ as the center and source of the Christian faith. Section Two examines the idea that faith has a specific and objective content, and that this content is the Gospel (Rom. 1:5, 4:3-25, 12:2; 1 Cor. 15:1-11; Eph. 3:14-21). As the Gospel testifies to Christ’s work of redemption and calls man to believe in Christ, it is through hearing and responding to the proclamation of the Gospel that man exercises the “obedience of faith” and enters into relationship with God through Christ. The objective content of faith establishes a bond between the believer and God through Christ. Section Three examines the idea that faith is a gift of God’s grace and that it is offered freely to all men (Rom. 3:21-26; Eph. 2:8-9). It is God who first calls man to faith, and it is God who enables man to respond to this call. Man’s response to faith, his “obedience of faith”, is itself a gift of grace. Section Four examines the ways by which faith transforms the life of the believer (Phil. 1:27; Gal. 2:15-20, 5:16; Eph. 4:17-24, 5:8-9). The believer leaves behind his “old self” and “former way of life” (Eph. 4:22). Through faith, he receives a new “mind” and becomes a “new self” (Eph. 4:24). Hence, the example of Christ’s life becomes the pattern of the new life of the believer. Section Five concludes Chapter One of this thesis by describing the life of faith as that of “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:1-6; Eph. 3:14-19). The life of faith necessarily expresses itself in concrete acts of love.

Section One: Faith as God's Work of Salvation in Jesus Christ

God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ is the source and foundation of faith. Dulles describes the Synoptic Gospels' presentation of Jesus as the "awakener or catalyst of faith."¹⁰ While Christ's act of redemption was accomplished definitively at a specific moment in history, the actualization of redemption in the life of every human person takes place within the life of each individual, by the affirmative response of the individual to the call to faith in Christ Jesus. Victor Paul Furnish highlights the importance of Paul's understanding of Jesus' identity as no mere human teacher but "the Lord": "Paul does not appeal to Jesus as an earthly teacher or to his sayings as the instruction of a distinguished rabbi. His appeals are to the risen, reigning *Christ*, the church's *Lord*."¹¹ Jesus is no mere human leader who gathers followers for the sake of a higher cause or greater being. Jesus is the Lord who draws all men to himself.

Jesus Christ is the risen Lord in who calls all men to put their faith in his very person. Jesus Christ is at the center of the life of faith. Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man. By His Incarnation, Christ reveals God to man; and, by His act of redemption, He reconciles man to God. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul emphasizes the connection between faith and justification:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested...through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...all have sinned...They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption of Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood...to prove his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus. (3:21-26)

Richard Hays comments that, for Paul, Christ's death on the cross is "an example, a paradigm for the life faith."¹² Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is the mediator who reconciles man with

¹⁰ Ibid., p.11

¹¹ Furnish, Victor, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, p.201, iBook

¹² Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p.27

God. Christ is the “gate” through Whom man enters into relationship with God. Through faith, the believer is “claimed” by Christ and encounters “the power and love of God which reconciles and makes new.”¹³

When describing the connection between faith and justification, Michael Gorman asserts that “Jesus embodied the faith to which Israel was called.”¹⁴ Through Christ’s entrance into human history, God calls everyone to “attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:13). In his discussion of the relationship between faith and baptism, Gorman alludes to the idea that it is Christ who inaugurates the reign of faith.¹⁵ Paul’s teachings to the Galatians would seem to support this idea: “Before faith came, we were held in custody under law, confined for the faith that was to be revealed. Consequently, the law was our disciplinarian for Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (3:23-24). Furnish, citing Galatians 3:7, “Those who live by faith are the sons of Abraham”, comments: “The object of this faith is always Jesus Christ; thus the apostle can say further that ‘in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith’ (Gal. 3:26).”¹⁶ Christ’s act of redemption opened the way to faith. Because Christ reveals God to man, man may now believe in Him. Christ is the “way” through Whom man may have access to God. Jesus Christ is at the center of the life of faith; He is the “alpha and omega” (Rev. 22:13), the “leader and perfecter of faith” (Heb. 12:2). Faith is made possible for man through

¹³ Ibid., p.496, iBook.

¹⁴ Gorman, Michael J., *Cruciformity*, p.120. *Gorman describes one way that “faith” maybe ascribed to Jesus: “[R]ecent interpreters of Paul have noted that he attributes ‘faith’ not only to believers but also to Jesus. Jesus’ ‘fundamental stance,’ as a true human being and as God’s Messiah, was a posture of faithful obedience to God, expressed supremely in his death....Corresponding to the obedient faithfulness of Christ, which was expressed in death, the believer’s faith – the cornerstone of the believer’s experience – is, from beginning to end, a liberating, life-giving ‘death,’ a response to God that Paul calls ‘the obedience of faith’ (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). This faith is somehow, as we will see, analogous to Christ’s total commitment or ‘faith.’” (Cruciformity, p.101) Richard B. Hays gives a brief and similar explanation of the translation “faith of Jesus Christ”: “The meaning of the ‘faith of Jesus Christ’ comes into focus when we perceive that Paul understands the cross as a pattern for the life of Christians....The faith(fullness) of Jesus Christ becomes the animating force in our lives.” (The Moral Vision of the New Testament, pp.31-32)*

¹⁵ Ibid., p.123

¹⁶ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, p.427, iBook

the Person of Christ, and it is by being “rooted in him [Christ] and built upon him and established in the faith” that the believer can stand firm in his relationship with God (Eph. 3:14). To believe, to have faith, means to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection.¹⁷

Section Two: The Gospel as the Content of Faith

Jesus Christ reveals God to man and calls man to believe in God. The call to faith, the call to enter into right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, is given to all men through the message of the Gospel. Hence, the message of the Gospel is this: Jesus Christ is the Son of God Who entered into human history in order to redeem man. For Paul, Christ’s death and resurrection is *the* central message of the Gospel; therefore, he wishes to preach nothing more and nothing less than “Jesus Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2).¹⁸ When exhorting the Corinthians to “hold fast” to the “Gospel”, the “word” which he had preached to them, Paul reminds them: “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (15:3-4). As Dulles describes: “The believers are those who recognize the presence of God in the person and ministry of Jesus and who accept the good news of the kingdom that is being inaugurated in and through Jesus.”¹⁹ The good news of the kingdom, the Gospel, constitutes the content of the Christian faith.

The message of the Gospel announces man’s need for salvation; it also shows him the way to salvation, namely, through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, “the gospel...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). The message of the Gospel teaches

¹⁷ Ibid, p.543, iBook

¹⁸ Ibid, p.519, iBook

¹⁹ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.11

man how to enter into right relationship with God. Acceptance of the Gospel orients man back into right relationship with God. Reflecting on the statement in the Letter to the Hebrews, “But without faith it is impossible to please him [God], for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (11:6), Dulles points out that belief in the existence of a God who cares about “human conduct” is the “minimum content of saving faith.”²⁰ The Gospel teaches man that it is only by believing in God – believing in Jesus as the revelation of God and in Jesus’ work of redemption – that man is able to enter into relationship with God.

Faith, then, has a specific and objective content, namely, the Gospel which proclaims the good news of Christ’s work of redemption. The existence of an objective content of faith is verified by Paul’s statement in Romans 10:17, “Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” That which is heard comes from outside a person and is therefore objective rather than subjective.²¹ The fact that “faith comes from what is heard” presupposes the prior existence of an actual content which is proclaimed. Both Dulles and Gorman recognize Paul’s explicit affirmation of the objective and intellectual character of faith. Dulles points out that “[t]he true content of faith is the good news of God’s saving action in Jesus Christ.”²² And, Gorman states that faith “has a significant *cognitive* dimension; it affirms the content of the gospel as true.”²³ The life of Christ – His works and words and, most importantly, his death and resurrection – witnessed by the Apostles, preached by them and their

²⁰ Ibid., p.16 “Hebrews 11:6a (*‘Without faith it is impossible to please him’*) is the biblical text more frequently quoted to prove the necessity of faith for salvation – a doctrine that, as we have seen, pervades the New Testament. Hebrews 11:6b gives a reason: *‘For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.’* In the mind of the author these two elements are probably inseparable; there is no question of believing in a God who would be unconcerned about human conduct. Many Christian theologians have seen here the minimum content of saving faith, required even from those who have no access to the biblical revelation.”

²¹ Keck, Leander, *Paul and His Letters*, p.50

²² Dulles, *Assurance*, p.12

²³ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.124

successors, and later recorded and finally formed into the canon of Sacred Scripture constitutes the body of knowledge to which believers give their intellectual assent. Just as the Person of Christ is one, so the Gospel is one. Thus, as there is “one Lord...one God and Father of all”, so there is “one faith” (Eph. 5:6). Paul speaks strongly to the Corinthians regarding their claims that some “belong to Paul...to Apollos... to Cephas...to Christ” (1 Cor. 1:12). To the Philippians, Paul requests that they be “of the same mind...thinking one thing” (2:2). The content of faith is one, certain, and objective because it is revealed by the “one God” through His only Son. “[I]n these last days, he [God] spoke to us through a son” (Heb. 1:2). The content of faith is “the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of [Jesus] Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus Christ is the source and guarantor of faith, and the Gospel is the definitive concrete expression of this faith.

Since faith has a definite content and an essentially cognitive dimension, to believe – to make an act of faith – is a fundamentally (although not solely) intellectual exercise. Dulles notes that “Paul expects his converts to grow in knowledge and discernment.”²⁴ To know and to discern is primarily (again, although not solely)²⁵ an intellectual act. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds them that they have “learned Christ” and have “heard of him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus” (4:20-21). Acceptance of and fidelity to the objective content of faith is immensely important, as Paul cautions the Ephesians to “be renewed in the spirit of your minds” by adhering to the “truth” which they had learned. In contrast, he points out that those who refuse to listen to and accept the truth of faith are “darkened in understanding” and live “in the futility of their minds” and in “ignorance” (4:17-18). To the Galatians, he condemns

²⁴ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.13

²⁵ *Dulles’ observation of the element of “trust” in the scriptural notion of faith points to an affective aspect in the act of faith. (See Dulles, Assurance, p.13.)*

as “accursed” those who “pervert the gospel of Christ” (1:7-8). The act of faith is primarily an act of the intellect; man relates to God by exercising his intellect rightly. Right knowledge and right believing are the prerequisites of right relationship. Faith puts man into right relationship with God.

A difficulty arises when we consider that faith’s knowledge is imperfect. To believe, as Paul describes, is to “see indistinctly, as in a mirror...partially” (1 Cor. 13:12). This difficulty regarding faith stems from the fact that the subject of faith – the human person who believes – is inherently imperfect. The human mind, finite and darkened by sin, cannot grasp fully the truths of faith. From the perspective of the believer, faith’s knowledge lacks perfect clarity. The Letter to the Hebrews offers the classic scriptural definition of faith: “Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen” (11:1). Believers “hope for what we do not see” (Rom. 8:25). To believe is to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7) and to “look for...what is unseen” (2 Cor. 4:18). The things of faith are “not seen” because man is not disposed to see God “face to face” in this life (1 Cor. 13:12). In order to see God fully and directly, in other words, to “know fully”, man must first be “fully known” by God (1 Cor. 13:12), namely, be perfectly united to Him. This perfect union and full vision of God will take place only in the life to come. In a sense then, faith has an eschatological dimension: its fulfillment is in the life to come. Man is *in via* on the journey of faith in this life. Like Abraham, the believer is en route to the “promised land” (Heb. 11:9). Those who live by faith know that they are “strangers and aliens on earth” (Heb. 11:13). “The kind of faith Paul knows is...both dynamic and constant,”²⁶ and so he tells the Philippians with great frankness: “Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession [of perfect maturity of faith]...I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the

²⁶ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.145

prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus" (3:13-14). The life of faith is a process of ever-deepening understanding which requires consistent effort and which terminates only after death.

Even though faith's knowledge is "indistinct" and imperfect, it nonetheless possesses a level of certainty which transcends natural human knowledge. The content of faith – "God's wisdom" – is "mysterious, hidden" (1 Cor. 2:7), and so "faith...rest[s] not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:5).²⁷ Dulles highlights the claim which John makes in his First Letter: "If we accept human testimony, the testimony of God is surely greater" (5:9). God's testimony guarantees the certainty of faith.²⁸ Faith's knowledge concerns the "spiritual realities" (1 Cor. 2:13) which are "things freely given us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12). Only the "spiritual person" who has "the mind of Christ" is able to receive faith's knowledge, while "the natural person [who] does not accept what pertains to the Spirit of God...cannot understand it" (1 Cor. 2:14-16). Trusting in God's testimony and fully relying on God's power, the believer is empowered to grasp truths which are otherwise inaccessible to the human intellect.

The "obscurity of faith"²⁹ requires trust from the believer. The scriptural notion of faith involves a strong component of trust. Dulles observes: "[i]n many Pauline texts *pistis* and its cognates can be translated as 'trust' no less accurately than as 'faith'. To believe in Christ is to put one's trust in Him (Rom. 10:11; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 1:29)."³⁰ Gorman asserts that the initial intellectual response to faith by the believer must be followed and supported by "complete *trust and confidence*."³¹ Dulles also notes that Paul "holds up as a model for Christians the faith of Abraham, who did not waver but was fully convinced that God would be able to do what he had

²⁷ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.245

²⁸ Ibid, p.230

²⁹ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.234

³⁰ Ibid., p.13

³¹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.125

promised.”³² Paul refers to the example of Abraham’s faith in his Letter to the Galatians when he calls Abraham the “father of all...who believe” (4:11). And, in his Letter to the Romans, Paul connects Abraham’s faith with trust as well as hope:

He believed, hoping against hope, that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “Thus shall your descendants be”...He did not doubt God’s promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to do. (Rom. 4:18-21)

In spite of seemingly insurmountable difficulties and even impossibilities, Abraham “thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy” (Heb. 11:11). Abraham’s faith has the characteristic of unconditional and unwavering trust in the power, goodness, and integrity of God.³³ Thus, in chapter eleven of the Letter to the Hebrews, Abraham occupies a prominent place in the list of Old Testament personages whose trusting faith in God’s goodness and promises led them to accomplish great and astonishing feats.

Ultimately, trust and faith in God exceed human powers, for two main reasons. The first reason is that the very message of the Gospel appears to be “foolishness” according to human standards: the message of Christ’s crucifixion and death is “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:18-23).³⁴ The Gospel message of suffering and death as the precondition for eternal life is naturally repugnant to human nature. Gorman further points out that Paul names a number of “anti-human and anti-God realities and forces” which work against the message of salvation through the cross of Christ, namely, “sin, death, the world, this age, idols and cosmic powers, Satan (‘the god of this age’), the flesh, and even the self.”³⁵ The second reason that faith cannot be attained by human efforts alone is the infinite gap between

³² Dulles, *Assurance*, p.230

³³ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p.379

³⁴ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.528, iBook

³⁵ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.102

God and man, between Who God is and who man is. Faith concerns the relationship between God and man, and the infinite gap between God and man prevents man from joining himself to God on his own initiative and by his own power. Divine intervention is absolutely necessary. As Paul says, “Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6), thereby opening up the possibility of man’s relationship with God by mending man’s estrangement from God.

Section Three: Faith and the “Obedience of Faith” are Gifts of God’s Grace

Fully convinced of man’s absolute dependence on God, Paul makes his famous assertion: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Many of Paul’s discourses on faith highlight the absolute gratuity of faith. In one of his catechetical essays, in a section entitled “Attentive Reading of Aquinas in the Light of Saint Paul”, Wojciech Giertych uses the event of Paul’s conversion to illustrate the priority of grace in the life of faith: Paul did not seek out Christ but nonetheless encountered Him very unexpectedly; and, it is through this unexpected encounter that Paul arrived at the realization of man’s need for faith in Christ.³⁶ Indeed, “[t]he life of grace, including the grace of faith, is a free divine gift to be received.”³⁷ Man can neither merit nor earn faith, not even by engaging in acts of religion. Hence, over and over again, Paul insists that the precepts of “the law” do not have the power to repair the broken relationship between God and man. Referring to his own Jewish roots, Paul addresses his fellow Jews:

We, who are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles, [yet] who know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in

³⁶ Giertych, Wojciech, “Moral Formation in Catechesis” in *The Pedagogy of God*, p.117

³⁷ Ibid., p.115

Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Gal. 2:15-16)

The gratuitous nature of faith shows us that “[f]aith...is the reaching out towards Christ, who has made Himself available and has enabled that reaching out towards Him.”³⁸ To believe is to respond to the gift of God’s invitation to enter into right relationship with Him.

The first step of the response to the gift of faith is the assent to the truth of the Gospel. This response is the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5). Gorman points out that accepting the revealed testimony of God initiates man into right relationship with God: “[F]aith is the appropriate response to the gospel (Rom. 10:17).”³⁹ Again, as the Letter to the Hebrews states: “But without faith it is impossible to please him [God], for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (11:6). Man’s acceptance of the Gospel is the obedience of faith. While God’s grace is the primary and indispensable condition for the obedience of faith, man’s concurrent cooperation is essential. Man has the freedom and the power to accept or reject the Gospel and the gift of faith; he has the power to “suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18) within himself. Citing the rejection of Christ by some of the Jewish people during Christ’s public ministry, Dulles opines that the freedom of faith is “implied” if not “directly treated” by Paul.⁴⁰ Paul describes the reality of some who, “although they knew God they did not accord him glory as God or give him thanks. Instead, they became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless minds were darkened” (Rom. 1:21-22). The obedience of faith requires the free, humble, and trusting submission of man’s entire being to revealed truth.

³⁸ Giertych, “Moral Formation”, p.118

³⁹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.124

⁴⁰ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.226

Section Four: Faith Transforms the Life of the Believer

Since it is primarily the intellect which grasps the knowledge of faith, faith's influence upon the believer directly touches the intellect of the believer. The intellectual element of the act of faith can be seen in Paul's description of faith's transformation of the believer as a "renewal of...mind" (Rom. 12:2). This renewal of the mind is a deep and radical transformation. This transformation causes the believer to take up a likeness to God which may be compared to the cognitive and affective likeness of children to their parents. Children often espouse views, perspectives, and thinking processes which resemble those of their parents. Yet, unlike the involuntary physical resemblance which children often bear to their parents, intellectual and spiritual resemblances are by no means fixed and pre-determined. Children may be disposed to think like their parents, but ultimately, they can choose to think similarly or differently. In just the same way, the human person is free to think with or apart from God. Those who refuse to respond to the gift of faith have "[t]heir minds...occupied with earthly things" (Phil. 3:19), while those who accept the gift of faith "[t]hink of what is above" (Col 3:2) and grow more and more into the likeness of their Father in heaven.

While the acceptance of God's truths plays a very important role in fostering the "obedience of faith", the "obedience of faith" concerns more than intellectual truths. Faith's obedience extends beyond an intellectual assent to God's revelation of Himself. Intellectual assent must express itself in and develop into exterior actions. Gorman emphasizes the intimate connection between the "obedience of faith" and the concrete expression of the believer's life patterned according to the example of Christ's life, and he stresses repeatedly: "The gospel is not merely to be *believed*, but *obeyed*; obedience and faith are essentially synonymous."⁴¹

⁴¹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.133

“Obedience” in this sense requires concrete actions. The believer must demonstrate outwardly the interior disposition of his faith. One manner of external demonstration is to “confess” with one’s “lips that Jesus is Lord” (Rom. 10:9). This confession “place[s] oneself under the lordship of...Jesus” and removes one “from the sphere of any other lord.”⁴² By faith the believer submits to the kingship of Christ and belongs to Christ so completely that he becomes a “slave of Christ Jesus” (Rom. 1:1).

Another aspect of the “obedience of faith” is its filial attitude. Paul tells the Galatians: “For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus” (3:26), and, “you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God” (4:7). Jesus Christ is the Son whose obedience to the Father is perfect. Those who “belong to Christ” (Gal. 3:29) are the believers who, through union with Christ’s death and resurrection, are “joint heirs with Christ” and “children of God” (Rom. 8:16-17).⁴³ Echoing Paul’s references to the believers’ filial relationship to God, John expresses the reality of faith’s radical transformation of the believer into a child of God: “But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God” (Jn. 1:12-13). Again, Paul points to the truth of this transformation when he tells the Ephesians that God has “destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ” (1:5).

The new identity of the believer as a child of God is so radical that Paul describes the believer as a “new creation” or “new being” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). Pinckaers points out: “the

⁴² Ibid., p.144

⁴³ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, p.425-426, iBook

believer is called *symphytos*⁴⁴, since he shares being, nature, and life with Christ (Rom. 6:5).⁴⁵ According to Dulles, “[a]t the deepest level, faith is, for Paul, a new mode of existence.”⁴⁶ The new life of the believer is not governed by the “disciplinarian” (Gal. 3:24) of the law, a merely external force which controls behavior but does not change the heart. The force of faith is an interior one and marks the believer at the deepest level of his being, namely, his “heart.” Thus Peter states in the Acts of the Apostles that God purifies the hearts of the gentile believers not by the practices of the Mosaic law but by faith (15:9). “True circumcision is not outward, in the flesh. Rather, one is a Jew inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, in the spirit” (Rom. 2:28-29). In a section entitled, “Faith as Obedience”, Furnish explains that such a circumcision connotes a complete gift of one’s self to God and not just an adherence to a set of external moral code.⁴⁷ “Obedience of faith”, at its most fundamental level, is the thorough surrender of self to God. Christ is *the* pattern of such obedience: “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who...emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

As mentioned in the previous section, while the process of surrendering oneself in faith to God is initiated and sustained by God’s grace, it also requires man’s deliberate and ongoing cooperation. In a chapter which deals with the development of faith, Dulles explains that, within the schema of divine providence, God assigns to each person a certain “measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3).⁴⁸ This “measure of faith” given at the beginning of one’s life in faith must not remain stagnant but must “progress” (Phil. 1:25) and grow.⁴⁹ Dulles points out that the New Testament

⁴⁴ According to *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, “*Symphytos*” is “a primary preposition denoting *union; with or together.*”

⁴⁵ Pinckaers, Servais, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, p.117

⁴⁶ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.13

⁴⁷ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.192

⁴⁸ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.243

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.243

as a whole testifies that faith should increase throughout the life of a believer.⁵⁰ The Letter to the Hebrews compares the knowledge of faith – “utterances of God” – to food and distinguishes between believers who are like immature children who require “milk” versus the mature adults who are capable of taking in “solid food” (Heb. 5:12).

Growth in faith is a challenging task of a lifetime. Dulles points to the analogy of being able to receive milk versus solid food as one way of measuring one’s growth in faith.⁵¹ Referencing Thomas Aquinas, Dulles also describes growth in faith in terms of an “assent” which becomes “more certain and steadfast” or a belief which is accompanied with “greater devotion or trust.”⁵² Growth in faith and perseverance on the journey of faith requires a believer to fix his gaze on the self-emptying and redemptive death of Christ. Gorman asserts that the Pauline sense of the “life of obedient faith” is “costly.”⁵³ Paul claims, “I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). The connection between Christ’s sacrifice and the moral life is alluded to by Hays’ statement: “there is a deep connection in Paul’s thought between Christology and ethics: to be in Christ is to have one’s life conformed to the self-giving love enacted on the cross, ‘always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies (2 Cor. 4:10).’”⁵⁴ Having been incorporated into the death of Christ, the believer dies to his old self. This death to one’s old self is the death to the life of sin; it is the death to all that is contrary to God’s truth and love. According to Gorman, Paul’s description of his being “crucified with

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.243

⁵¹ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.243

⁵² Ibid., p.243

⁵³ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.146

⁵⁴ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p.32

Christ” shows that “crucifixion with Christ is not a *supplement* to faith” but in fact “the *essence* of faith.”⁵⁵ It is only by dying with Christ that the believer is able to enter into new life with and in Christ.⁵⁶ Such a death is costly and painful.⁵⁷ Faith is always accompanied by persecutions and afflictions, as attested to by Paul’s life, in particular, by the many trials of his missionary activities.⁵⁸ Suffering can in fact be considered an infallible sign of the genuineness of one’s faith: “you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind struggling together for the faith of the gospel....For to you has been granted...not only to believe in him [Christ] but also to suffer for him” (Phil. 1:27-29). The “new mode of existence” always involves suffering and can only come about through the complete surrender of one’s self to Christ by dying to sin and sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Living according to a “new mode of existence” as children of God, believers receive the grace to put on “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Gorman states that, after the initial grace of conversion, believers must “daily rely...on Christ as the energizing force for all of life...allowing the faith of the Son of God, expressed in his self-giving, loving death, to reexpress [*sic*] itself in the life of the believer.”⁵⁹ Believers must labor daily to maintain and exercise this mind, so that their conduct may conform more and more to the pattern of Christ’s life. Paul exhorts members of the various Christian communities to live lives which give witness to their faith in Christ. To the Philippians he writes: “Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear news of you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind struggling together for the faith of

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.139

⁵⁶ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.184

⁵⁷ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.147

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.148

⁵⁹ Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.138-139

the gospel” (1:27). He reminds the Ephesians that they “were once in darkness but now...are light in the Lord” (5:8), and so they must “put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires” (4:22), and “[l]ive as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth” (5:9). The only reason that could justify such a radical and total change in the lives of believers is the magnitude of Christ’s act of redemption and the subsequent outpouring of divine grace:

For Paul, God’s transforming act in Christ conditions all of reality. Insofar as we perceive the truth about God’s redemptive work in the world, we will participate gladly in the outworking of God’s purpose...much of Paul’s moral exhortation takes the form of reminding his readers to view their obligations and actions in the cosmic context of what God has done in Christ.⁶⁰

Right conduct is the infallible sign and fruit of right faith. Faith in Christ necessarily entails commitment to obeying and living according to God’s will.⁶¹

Those whose faith is mature are able to “discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). The discernment between good and evil brings about true freedom. The freedom of the children of God is a result of their knowledge of God’s will through which they are able to recognize and reject sin. The freedom of God’s children is the freedom from sin and for God. Paul reminds the Romans: “you were once slaves of sin, you have become obedient from the heart to the pattern of the teaching to which you were entrusted” (7:17). In contrast, those who reject the gift of faith succumb to a “hardness of heart” and “become callous and [hand] themselves over to licentiousness for the practice of every kind of impurity to excess” (Eph. 4:18-19). The children of God are free and empowered to live according to their identity because they have “knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:26, 3:7; Heb. 10:26). Having been “transformed by the renewal of [their] mind[s]”, the children of God are able to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and

⁶⁰ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p.39

⁶¹ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.541, iBook

pleasing and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). The whole of Paul’s life after his conversion is very much directed by “God’s will”. Furnish further emphasizes that Paul’s understanding of “God’s will” is all-encompassing; it represents a “total ‘belonging’ to him [God]” whereby man “is to apply himself unto what is good.”⁶² He counts a total of at least seventeen references where Paul cites God’s will as the reason for his actions and the events of his life.⁶³ The acceptance of God’s will effected by faith – an acceptance of “the *total* sovereign claim” of God upon one’s entire life – penetrates every aspect of the life of the believer and transforms him into a “new creation.”⁶⁴

The transformation of believers into a “new creation” is very much the work of the Spirit. Hays highlights Romans 8:1-4: “For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death”; those who believe “walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Faith in Christ and the acceptance of the Gospel opens the believer to receive the power of the Spirit.⁶⁵ The obedience of the children of God can only be realized through the power of Christ’s Spirit.⁶⁶ Thus, Paul can tell the Galatians to “live by the Spirit” and “not gratify the desire of the flesh” (12:16). The newness of life of the children of God “comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Section Five: The Life of Faith is “Faith Working Through Love”

The freedom of the children of God is ultimately the freedom to love: “For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery...For through the Spirit, by faith, we await the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor

⁶² Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.189

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.188

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.191

⁶⁵ Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p.45

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.45

uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love” (Gal. 5:1-6). The close connection between faith and love can be seen by Paul’s ordering of the topics in his Letter to the Galatians. Immediately following his discussion of “faith working through love”, Paul devotes most of the rest of the chapter five and the first half of chapter six to a series of moral teachings. This long list of moral teachings gives clear indication that the life of faith makes explicit moral demands and leaves no area of the believer’s moral life untouched.

The first moral imperative which Paul cites in chapter five of the Letter to the Galatians is the commandment to love: “For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (5:14). By placing the believer into right relationship with God, faith enables the believer to enter into right relationship with other human beings. The man of faith is able to make moral judgments in light of God’s truths, and he is moved by the love of God to act according to his faith-enlightened judgments. Stepping outside the Pauline corpus for a moment, we see that the famous discourse on faith and works in the second chapter of the Letter of James uses the strongest and most insistent language when emphasizing the necessity of good works activated and sustained by faith: “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ...faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas. 2:14, 17). Genuine “obedience of faith” is animated by love towards God, one’s neighbor, and oneself.

Commenting on Paul’s moral catechesis in his Letter to the Romans, in particular, chapters twelve through fifteen, Pinckaers notes: “Here St. Paul presents the Christian life as a spiritual worship....The moral teaching here parallels the Sermon on the Mount. It focuses on charity, which acts through the virtues.”⁶⁷ Pinckaers goes on to explain:

⁶⁷ Pinckaers, “Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.56

It is important to note that the moral catechesis of Romans 12-15 cannot be separated from the earlier part of the Epistle to the Romans, which focuses on the faith that justifies. The moral teaching is the direct consequence and active realization of faith working through charity. This is indicated by the conjunction which connects the two sections of the letter: “*Therefore*, I exhort you, brethren...”⁶⁸

The Christian moral life is engendered by the life of faith and progresses toward full maturity by the life of faith working through love. Thus, “the virtues...flow from faith in Christ and are animated by charity.”⁶⁹ The various virtues which assist man in his efforts to live rightly – for example, humility, devotion, piety, hospitality – must be rooted in faith and activated and sustained by love.⁷⁰ In a sense, faith and love – faith working through love – encapsulate the moral life through the “logic” and action of an “intelligent and loving heart.”⁷¹

Gorman points out that the phrase “faith working through love” has a number of slightly different translations.⁷² He is of the opinion that the translation of “faith expressing itself in love” perhaps brings out most clearly faith’s connection to love. Faith transforms the life of the believer, and love is the visible and living expression of the reality of this transformation. A faith that is genuine must operate within the context and through the venue of love. Faith can be expressed and experienced only through acts of love. At the same time, faith precedes and gives rise to love, since it is faith which is being expressed through love and not vice versa. Love is the fruit of faith. True faith is inseparable from love.⁷³ Furnish sees that, for Paul, the obedience of faith requires “the surrender to love”, just as a lover gives himself totally to his beloved.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.56

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.57

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.56

⁷¹ Ibid., p.57

⁷² Gorman, *Cruciformity*, p.130

⁷³ Ibid., p.130

⁷⁴ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.200

Furnish describes the work of faith as the “labor of love.”⁷⁵ The believer expresses his faith through works of love because love is in fact “God’s own way with men.”⁷⁶

God’s love for man is the primary reason for the essential union between faith and love. “[F]aith’s obedience is an obedience in love...an obedience which has the *character* of love because its ground is God’s own love by which the sinner has been claimed by and thus reconciled to God.”⁷⁷ In knowing God, man comes to know God’s unconditional love for him: “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). To believe in God is to believe in God’s love. Paul’s life of faith is grounded in “the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). Belief in God’s revelation of Himself necessarily includes belief in His love for man, proven by Christ’s sacrifice of love on the cross. Paul prays for the Ephesians that:

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3:14-19)

Through faith, man comes to know God’s love for him. In faith, “[t]he Christian is summoned to love in a double sense: to be *loved* and to be *loving*.”⁷⁸ Through faith, the believer experiences the love of God and is subsequently moved by this love to love his neighbor.

Conclusion

Faith is the proper disposition of man before God; it is the right orientation of man towards the God Who reveals Himself to man. God calls man to faith because He loves him and

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.202

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.202

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.202

⁷⁸ Furnish, *Theology and Ethics*, p.202

He has in fact proven His love for man by the redemptive death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Responding to the free gift of faith by trusting obedience and filial love, man is transformed into a child of God and enters into a “new mode of existence”. Faith empowers the believer to know the will of God and to access knowledge about spiritual realities which transcend human wisdom and animates his conduct with love. Living out the graces of divine adoption, the believer patterns his entire life after the example of the crucified and risen Lord, and so daily grows in likeness to his heavenly Father by living a genuine life of faith through exercising acts of love. Paul’s treatment of faith is essentially bound up with his moral teachings: “The upright man finds life through faith” (Rom. 1:17).”⁷⁹ Pinckaers comments: “St. Paul laid bare the condition for all Christian ethics: its unique foundation was to be faith in Jesus Christ.”⁸⁰ Pinckaers’ reflections on Paul’s moral conscience may be aptly applied to his teachings on the moral life. “Paul’s conscience...is illumined by the revelation of Christ’s loving grace. Hence its source is faith...It is animated by charity’s thrust toward what pleases God, toward the perfect. At the center of Paul’s conscience dwells the person of Christ...[H]is moral teaching...is life with Christ, in Christ.”⁸¹ Through his writings, Paul teaches the essence of faith as well as the practical application of faith in the lives of believers. Paul’s reflections on faith would provide theologians and generations of Christians following him a solid foundation upon which to deepen their understanding of this Christian virtue and its central role in the moral life.

⁷⁹ Pinckaers, *Sources*, p.113

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.114

⁸¹ Pinckaers, “Conscience and Christian Tradition” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.327

CHAPTER TWO: THE MORAL THEOLOGY OF THOMAS AQUINAS AND FAITH IN CHRIST

Introduction

Chapter Two of this thesis continues to explore the role of the scriptural notion of “faith in Christ” in the moral life. At this point, a few preliminary remarks about moral theology in general will be helpful in situating the specific goal of this chapter of the thesis within the overall context of moral theology. Knowing the big picture of moral theology will bring out the importance of this thesis’ specific interest in the relationship between faith in Christ and the moral life.

Since its beginnings in the Patristic Period, moral theology has gone through much development and many theologians have made significant contributions to this field. Among the works of these theologians, the writings of Thomas Aquinas stand out by reason of their volume and breadth. Aquinas’ moral teachings have had tremendous influence on succeeding generations of moral theology. Some are of the opinion that Aquinas’ work on moral theology in the *Summa Theologiae* represents the finest of its kind. Servias Pinckaers comments: “It [Aquinas’ moral theology] reaches a point of perfection that has never been equalled, in the establishment of basic principles and elements, in the analysis and coordination of factors entering into moral action, and in the rigorous logic and order prevailing from beginning to end of the work.”⁸² Aquinas’ moral teachings are truly extensive. It is outside the intent and scope of Chapter Two of this thesis to investigate Aquinas’ moral teachings in their entirety. Chapter

⁸² Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p.220

Two concentrates on exploring the relationship of faith with Aquinas' treatment of happiness, man's perfection, and the New Law.

Specifically, Chapter Two seeks to examine Aquinas' moral teachings with the view of discerning evidence of their foundation in and connections with the scriptural notions of "faith in Christ" and "life in Christ." This chapter aims to explore the extent to which Thomistic moral theology relates to Paul's treatment of the life of faith and to discover insights which Aquinas' work can offer to the moral teachings presented in Scripture. Chapter Two draws its primary sources from Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* and *Biblical Commentaries*, especially those on the *Letter to the Romans* and *Letter to the Hebrews*. The works of moral theologians in the Thomistic tradition serve as secondary sources. The five sections of Chapter Two follow, to some degree, the structure of Aquinas' moral theology in the *Summa Theologiae* as highlighted by Servais Pinckaers in his *Sources of Christian Ethics*.⁸³

Section One examines happiness as the keystone of the moral life.⁸⁴ For Thomas, the foundation of the moral life rests upon man's nature as a being endowed with free will⁸⁵ and whose ultimate end is the "vision of the Divine Essence."⁸⁶ Man's true happiness consists in possessing the vision of God.⁸⁷ Here, faith's connection with the moral life begins to surface: the vision of God which is the essence of man's ultimate happiness is also faith's fulfillment. Section Two examines faith and its relationship to man's perfection and happiness. It is through faith that man progresses toward his ultimate end of the full vision of God. This section begins by surveying the object and act of faith in order to highlight the connections between faith and

⁸³ Ibid., p.221-222

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.222

⁸⁵ *ST I-II*, prologue

⁸⁶ *ST I-II*, 3.8

⁸⁷ Pinckaers, *Sources*, p.223

man's perfection. Next, it considers the workings of the intellect and will in the exercise of faith and their implications for the moral life. The discussion of the cooperation of the intellect and will in making the act of faith paves the way for Section Three, which aims to apply the dual contribution of the intellect and will to the development of fully formed faith or, in other words, "faith working through love." This section examines charity in its essential role of forming and animating "living faith."⁸⁸ Section Four examines the "Law of the Gospel" as the "New Law" and "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2). Working through the medium of faith in Christ, the New Law supplies the believer with both the external guidance of law and the interior help of grace necessary for living the Christian moral life. Section Five further considers the New Law and its relationship with "faith working through love." It examines how the New Law "justifies us by faith and makes us holy through charity."⁸⁹

Section One: Happiness as the Keystone of the Moral Life

Aquinas' claim that happiness is the keystone of the moral life is founded on the presupposition that all human beings desire and actively seek after happiness. In order to demonstrate the verity of this claim, he begins by examining the notion that the human person naturally acts in view and for the sake of a final goal. First, he lays down a fundamental premise: the human person is a rational being who "is master of his actions through his reason and will."⁹⁰ On account of his capacity for self-determination, man is an "agent" who "does not move except out of intention for an end."⁹¹ By nature, man acts for a purpose. Certainly, man can and does engage in actions which do not require deliberation: actions caused by instinct or

⁸⁸ *ST II-II*, 4.4

⁸⁹ Pinckaers, *Sources*, p.226

⁹⁰ *ST I-II* 1.1

⁹¹ *ST I-II*, 1.2

impulse are devoid of thought and are better described as actions performed by a man.⁹²

Properly “human” acts, however, are deliberately willed.⁹³

After having established and explained the criteria for properly human acts, Aquinas proceeds to an important implication for morality: it is because man is capable of making deliberate and voluntary acts that he is a moral being.⁹⁴ He cites Ambrose to support this point: “morality is said properly of man.”⁹⁵ In fact, “moral acts are the same as human acts”.⁹⁶ And, quoting Augustine, Aquinas describes the standards of judgment for human actions: “According as their end is worthy of blame or praise so are our deeds worthy of blame or praise.”⁹⁷ Human actions are good or bad insofar as they are ordered to the proper and true good of the human person. “Those who sin turn away from that in which their last end really consists: but they do not turn away from the intention of the last end, which intention they mistakenly seek in other things.”⁹⁸ Even when man chooses something which goes against his true good, he does so under the erroneous judgement of that thing as a good. It is the proper and true good of the human person which motivates human actions. While there are numerous and various ends for which man acts, all these ends are ultimately related to the one “last end” which satisfies man’s desire fully so that he will lack nothing else for his “perfection.”⁹⁹ “[A]ll agree in desiring the last end: since all desire the fulfillment of their perfection, and it is precisely this fulfillment in

⁹² *ST I-II*, 1.1 “Such like actions [when one moves one’s foot or hand, or scratches one’s beard] are not properly human actions; since they do not proceed from deliberation of the reason, which is the proper principle of human actions.”

⁹³ *ST I-II*, 1.1 & 1.3 “[T]hose actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will”. (1.1) “[A]s Ambrose says (*Prolog. super Luc.*) morality is said properly of man, moral acts properly speaking receive their species from the end, for moral acts are the same as human acts”. (1.3)

⁹⁴ *ST I-II*, 1.3

⁹⁵ *ST I-II*, 1.3

⁹⁶ *ST I-II*, 1.3

⁹⁷ *ST I-II*, 1.3

⁹⁸ *ST I-II*, 1.7

⁹⁹ *ST I-II*, 1.5

which the last end consists.”¹⁰⁰ Man’s last end concerns the “perfect good”¹⁰¹ which is “happiness.”¹⁰²

The “perfect good” of happiness consists of the “perfection of the soul.”¹⁰³ Since the human soul is a spiritual composite of intellect and will, its perfection requires that both of these powers attain their final ends, the true and the good, respectively. However, man’s “supreme perfection”¹⁰⁴ involves firstly and primarily his intellect: in the perfect state of happiness, “man’s mind will be united to God by one, continual, everlasting operation.”¹⁰⁵ Aquinas cites The Gospel of John to support his assertion that the mind is the primary locus of man’s perfection and happiness: “This is eternal life: that they may know Thee, the only true God” (17:3). He then draws the following conclusion: “Now eternal life is the last end....Therefore man’s happiness consists in the knowledge of God, which is an act of the intellect.”¹⁰⁶ The “contemplation of Divine things”¹⁰⁷ produces happiness. Ultimately, “[f]inal and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence.”¹⁰⁸ Vision of God Who is the source of all goodness constitutes man’s perfect happiness: “the vision of the Divine Essence fills the soul with all good things, since it unites it to the source of all goodness.”¹⁰⁹ Here, the connection between happiness – and therefore the moral life – and faith begins to emerge: the vision of God is both the essence of man’s ultimate happiness and faith’s fulfillment. The Beatific Vision is the goal of both the moral life and the life of faith.

¹⁰⁰ *ST I-II*, 1.7

¹⁰¹ *ST I-II*, 1.6 “[W]hatever man desires, he desires it under the aspect of the perfect good.”

¹⁰² *ST I-II*, 1.7 “[A]ll men agree in desiring the last end, which is happiness.”

¹⁰³ *ST I-II*, 2.7

¹⁰⁴ *ST I-II*, 3.2

¹⁰⁵ *ST I-II*, 3.2

¹⁰⁶ *ST I-II*, 3.4

¹⁰⁷ *ST I-II*, 3.5 “[H]appiness consists principally...in the contemplation of Divine things.”

¹⁰⁸ *ST I-II*, 3.8

¹⁰⁹ *ST I-II*, 5.4

While man's supreme perfection of beholding the vision of God concerns primarily his intellect, his will has an equally indispensable role. Once the intellect knows the truth, the will must also move towards the truth. It is not enough for the mind to know the truth. In order for the human person to possess the truth, his will must reach out to gain possession of it. The movement of the will towards truth is actually an act of love.¹¹⁰ As the "vision of the Divine Essence" constitutes man's "[f]inal and perfect happiness", it is "by knowing and loving God" that man will be fully and everlastingly happy.¹¹¹ Intellect and will – knowledge and love – have equally crucial roles in man's attainment of happiness.

The role of the will in the pursuit of perfection is another point whereby happiness and the moral life are intrinsically joined. In raising the question, "Whether rectitude of the will is necessary for happiness?", Aquinas begins his response with one of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8).¹¹² Right order of the will is necessary for the vision of God; and, to the extent that one sees God, one loves rightly, namely, loves God above all and everything that is good "in subordination to God."¹¹³ Happiness is proportionate to the right order of the will towards God. Man's happiness is greater or less to the degree that he is "disposed or ordered to the enjoyment of Him [God]."¹¹⁴ And, the disposition of the will towards God requires "good works."¹¹⁵ Unlike God, to Whom happiness belongs naturally, man's capacity for happiness is a work in progress.¹¹⁶ It is through the commission of good

¹¹⁰ *ST* I-II, 4.3 "Now man is ordered to an intelligible end partly through his intellect, and partly through his will: - through his intellect, in so far as a certain imperfect knowledge of the end pre-exists in the intellect: - through the will, first by love which is the will's first movement towards anything; secondly, by a real relation of the lover to the thing beloved".

¹¹¹ *ST* I-II, 1.8 "For man and other rational creatures attain to their last end by knowing and loving God."

¹¹² *ST*, I-II, 4.4. *Incidentally, in II-II, 7.2, Aquinas names purification of the heart as one of the effects of faith.*

¹¹³ *ST*, I-II, 4.4

¹¹⁴ *ST*, I-II, 5.2

¹¹⁵ *ST*, I-II, 5.7 "Rectitude of the will...is necessary for Happiness; since it is nothing else than the right order of the will to the last end....Now since Happiness surpasses every created nature, no pure creature can becomingly gain Happiness, without the movement of operation, whereby it tends thereto....[M]an obtains it [happiness] by many movements of works which are called merits."

¹¹⁶ *ST*, I-II, 5.7

moral actions directed by the theological virtues that man gains a greater and greater degree of perfection and happiness.

In one very succinct passage from one of his essays on Christian morality, Servais Pinckaers masterfully summarizes Aquinas' main ideas on the intrinsic relationship between man's final end of happiness and the Christian moral life which we have considered in this part of this thesis:

At the center [of the path to beatitude] there runs the line of finality. Like a spinal column it controls the structure of morality. Thanks to a person's reason, it is proper to her to act in view of an end, which specifies the quality of her acts, and joins them to an ultimate finality which orders her whole life, as well as her acts. This ultimate end transcends individual action, and works as the chief unifying principle with regard to all persons, through the societies which they form. The ultimate end even creates an active solidarity between human persons and all other creatures. Thus we rise from the finality that informs our particular acts to an ultimate finality which rejoins the Divine finality operating in the government of the universe, and particularly in human beings.¹¹⁷

As this section concludes our consideration of happiness as the keystone of the moral life, one final remark can be drawn from Aquinas' teaching that man's perfection – a perfection which equals his happiness – lies in loving vision of God. Because man desires to satisfy his final end of “beatific fellowship or union with the blessed Trinity,”¹¹⁸ every moral act of the human person is intrinsically motivated and ought to be shaped by this desire. Concerning this point Romanus Cessario comments: even though “the fact that God remains our final goal does not provide immediate responses to the complicated ethical questions that arise in the course of a lifetime...the vocation of each human person to participate in the beatific vision does significantly influence the work of the moral theologian.”¹¹⁹ Cessario goes on to remark that, for

¹¹⁷ Pinckaers, “Beatitude and the Beatitudes in Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.119-120

¹¹⁸ Cessario, Romanus, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, p.17

¹¹⁹ Cessario, *Moral Virtues*, p.17

this reason, Aquinas “placed the Christian affirmation that the beatific vision serves as the ultimate destiny of each human person at the very start of his treatment of the moral life and virtues.”¹²⁰ The starting point for moral theology is truly and rightfully man’s desire for the beatitude of the vision of God – and on this point, faith’s importance in the moral life begins to unfold.

Section Two: Faith and Man’s Perfection and Happiness

Having examined Aquinas’ establishment of a “theological anthropology”¹²¹ oriented toward eternal beatitude as an integral component of Christian morality, we can now proceed to a consideration of Aquinas’ treatment of the virtue of faith and its impact on the Christian moral life. Commenting on Aquinas’ understanding of the role of the theological virtues on the moral life, Cessario notes, “Aquinas recognizes that the foundations – the first principles – of authentic Christian behavior remain the ‘theological virtues’: faith, hope, and charity...these virtues constitute the supernatural capacities given to the Christian that enable him or her to adhere personally to the triune God.”¹²² As a theological virtue, faith has a vital influence on the moral actions of man and, subsequently, his perfection and happiness.

Aquinas begins his treatment of faith in the *Summa* by stating that the First Truth is the object of faith.¹²³ This statement is short but it has important and lengthy implications. While it is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss all of these implications in depth, some reflections on the object of faith are necessary for exploring faith’s relationship to man’s perfection and happiness.

¹²⁰Ibid., p.46

¹²¹Ibid., p.17

¹²² Cessario, Romanus, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, p.5

¹²³ *ST* II-II, 1.1

After stating that the object of faith is the First Truth, Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of object: formal and material. In a sense, formal and material objects can be described as the means and the end, respectively. Using the example of geometry, Aquinas explains that the object of geometry consists of both the “demonstrations” and “conclusions”: both the formulae and proofs make up the stuff – the “object” – of geometry. Yet, the demonstrations and conclusions differ as means and ends: the conclusions are the end while the demonstrations are the means by which one arrives at the conclusions.¹²⁴ In a similar way, faith has a formal object and a material object. However, faith’s formal and material objects are the same: the First Truth Who is God. God is both the means to faith and the end of faith. God is both the authority by Whom faith knows (the formal object, means, or “whereby”) and the “what” that is known (material object).¹²⁵

As the formal object of faith, God reveals Himself to man and witnesses to the truth about His Being. By his own initiative and unaided, man cannot know God in a way that brings supreme happiness. The mediation of grace is essential for faith. “The firmness of faith is due to the divine authority, which is made present through divine grace. Grace inclines the mind to assent, not by making the object of faith evident, but by moving the will, which in turn commends the intellect to assent.”¹²⁶ When considering the question of “Whether faith is infused into man by God?”, Aquinas cites Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, “By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves...for it is the gift of God” (2:8-9).¹²⁷ Man can neither merit nor appropriate faith by his own efforts. However, although man’s natural powers

¹²⁴ *ST II-II*, 1.1

¹²⁵ *ST II-II*, 1.1 “The object of every cognitive habit includes two things: first, that which is known materially, and is the material object...and, secondly, that whereby it is known, which is the formal aspect of the object...in faith the formal aspect of the object...is nothing else than the First Truth...also the object of faith is, in a way, the First Truth, in as much as nothing comes under faith except in relation to God”.

¹²⁶ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.34

¹²⁷ *ST II-II*, 6.1

are not sufficient to place him in touch with supernatural truths and he must have divine assistance in order to do so, the free cooperation of the human will is nonetheless absolutely necessary. Man may accept or resist the divinely inspired impulse to believe in God. Commenting on Romans 10:10, “For man believes with his heart”, Aquinas associates the “heart” with the will and adds: “[M]an cannot believe, unless he wills. For the intellect of the believer, unlike that of the philosopher, does not assent to the truth as though compelled by force of reason; rather, he is moved to assent by the will.”¹²⁸ Assisted by grace, acts of faith are free and deliberate human acts.

As the material object of faith, God obviously stands above all the finite things of creation which can be known by man’s intellect. It is not possible for the finite human intellect to grasp fully the First Truth. The First Truth is the “unseen” object of faith: “The Apostle says (Heb. 11:1) that *faith is the evidence of things that appear not.*”¹²⁹ Here, too, it is evident that “[f]ree will is inadequate for the act of faith since the contents of faith are above human reason.”¹³⁰ The assistance of divine grace, which Aquinas describes as the “light of faith,” is necessary for the act of faith.¹³¹ Cessario comments that “‘the light of faith’ conditions the intellect to give its assent to what the human heart delights in adhering to.”¹³² The light of faith convinces the will to direct the intellect to accept as true those things which the intellect cannot otherwise perceive and comprehend with certainty. Faith is “a light of the intellect;”¹³³ it leads man to the First Truth and thereby augments man’s spiritual sight by endowing his intellect with a sensitivity and acuity for detecting supernatural truths.

¹²⁸ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, #831*

¹²⁹ *ST II-II, 1.4*

¹³⁰ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians, Chapter 2, Lecture 3*

¹³¹ *ST II-II, 1.4*

¹³² Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.79

¹³³ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 11-2*

In addition to describing faith in terms of its formal and material objects, Aquinas also uses the classic scriptural definition of faith given in the Letter to the Hebrews: “Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not” (11:1).¹³⁴ Both in the *Summa* and *Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews*, he interprets this definition as “faith is a habit of the mind by which eternal life is begun in us and makes the intellect assent to things that it does not see.”¹³⁵ Cessario offers some helpful insights about this translation, which he commends for shedding greater light on two important points: “First, the human mind’s native inability to fathom the reality of divine beatitude and, second, the end-term of divine faith, which is the believer’s sure possession of eternal life.”¹³⁶ Concerning the first point about man’s inability to grasp the Divine Truth, Aquinas’ translation again draws attention to the necessity of man’s reliance on and submission to the testimony of another person who, in this case, is none other than God: “[T]he sureness and firmness of Christian belief ultimately rest on the believer’s loving self-commitment to the Truth that is God.”¹³⁷ As to the second point regarding the advent of eternal life in the believer, Aquinas’ translation highlights the reality that “faith inaugurates and sustains the promise of eternal life and beatitude, even though this virtue of the pilgrim Church can never fully attain the goal that here below it establishes.”¹³⁸ The life of faith is the prelude to the perfect vision in the life to come. The life of faith is the way by which man travels towards his eternal beatitude.

The life of faith is the life of a pilgrim; thus, the nature of faith includes an inherent element of movement. In his considerations of Augustine’s distinctions among the three modes

¹³⁴ *ST II-II*, 4.1

¹³⁵ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, #558 ; *II-II*, 4.1

¹³⁶ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.133

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.134

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.134

of the act of faith – to believe in a God (*credere Deum*), to believe God (*credere Deo*), and to believe in God (*credere in Deum*)¹³⁹ – Aquinas notes that the sense of movement is particularly evident in the third mode. While the first two modes of the act of faith concern chiefly the intellect, the third mode is a concerted movement of the intellect and the will.¹⁴⁰ When man “believes in God,” his will moves his intellect towards the First Truth.¹⁴¹ “The act of faith...is an act of the intellect narrowed to one thing by the command of the will.”¹⁴² The “formulation [of ‘believing in God’] points to the direction or dynamic aspect of faith, its eschatological movement,”¹⁴³ a movement that “tends toward union with God.”¹⁴⁴ Such a movement is necessarily associated with charity.

The end of faith’s knowledge is union with God, a union which is essentially a relationship. Faith’s knowledge, then, ushers man into an active relationship with God, a relationship of knowing and loving: “[T]he act of faith ‘tends toward’ and finds its term in the divine Being itself. By directing the subject toward another being, believing resembles other intentional acts – acts of knowing and loving – that come to completion by resting in their appropriate objects.”¹⁴⁵ The desire to rest completely in God stirs the human person to strive to know and love God more and more deeply throughout this life’s journey.

¹³⁹ *ST II-II*, 2.2; *Christian Faith*, p.95

¹⁴⁰ *ST II-II*, 2.2 “Now the object of faith can be considered in three ways...to believe in a God....to believe God....to believe in God.”

¹⁴¹ *ST II-II*, 2.2 “Thirdly, if the object of faith be considered in so far as the intellect is moved by the will, an act of faith is to believe in God.”

¹⁴² *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, 11-1*

¹⁴³ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.95

¹⁴⁴ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.35

¹⁴⁵ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.55

The acts of knowing and loving which are fundamental to the exercise of faith reveal faith's intrinsic connection with the moral life. Aquinas cites Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."¹⁴⁶ Hence, he affirms that "to believe is meritorious":

[O]ur actions are meritorious in so far as they proceed from the free-will moved with grace by God. Therefore every human act proceeding from the free-will, if it be referred to God, can be meritorious. Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God, so that it is subject to the free-will in relation to God and consequently the act of faith can be meritorious.¹⁴⁷

Concerning the above passage, Dulles notes: "Like other free acts, the act of faith is amenable to the norm of morality, which requires that the thing done be apprehended as good."¹⁴⁸ Knowing and loving requires the cooperation of both the intellect and will. Divine grace moves the will toward the perfect good of the vision of God, and man acts rightly to the extent that he responds to this divine influence and freely assents to the Truth about God which constitutes his ultimate beatitude.¹⁴⁹

Section Three: "Living Faith" and "Faith Working Through Love"

In making the act of faith, the human person accepts the assistance of divine grace and reaches out freely and deliberately toward God as First Truth. The "intentionality" of such an act shows the dual workings of knowing and loving in the exercise of faith.¹⁵⁰ "The blessed Trinity revealed by Christ draws forth the intentionality of the knowledge of faith and the loving adherence of hope and charity. Thus, the Christian believer experiences union with God 'in the

¹⁴⁶ *ST II-II*, 2.3

¹⁴⁷ *ST II-II*, 2.9

¹⁴⁸ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.34

¹⁴⁹ Dulles, *Assurance*, p.34; *Summa*, II-II, 2.7 "[T]he object of faith includes, properly and directly, that thing through which man obtains beatitude."

¹⁵⁰ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.55

same way that the knower rests in the known and the lover in the beloved.”¹⁵¹ And again, “faith’s knowledge of God always remains dynamically ordered to love’s perfect fulfillment in God.”¹⁵² Faith seeks the “beatific fellowship” which unites man with God.¹⁵³ The knowledge of faith is akin to the knowledge between a lover and a beloved. Cessario suggests that this kind of loving faith supposes a kind of “friendship” between God and man.¹⁵⁴

A faith that is living – a faith that actively sustains a relationship between “the knower and the known” and a “lover and a beloved” – is animated by charity. “[F]aith works through charity.”¹⁵⁵ And, charity disposes the intellect to move toward the truth as a good to be desired. “Charity is called the form of faith because it quickens the act of faith.”¹⁵⁶ Michael Sherwin explains: “Charity vivifies faith, making it a virtue by directing it to its end.”¹⁵⁷ “Charity is called the form of faith in so far as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity.”¹⁵⁸ A faith that is virtuous – a faith that perfects the human person – recognizes and desires the truth as a good. Such a faith engages both the intellect and will in knowing and loving.¹⁵⁹

At first glance, it would seem that, in the realm of the moral life, charity has a more foundational role than faith. In considering the question, “Whether faith is the first of the virtues?”, one objection against faith’s priority is raised because “it is owing to charity that faith

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.55; *Summa* I, 43.3

¹⁵² Ibid., p.132

¹⁵³ Cessario, *The Moral Virtues*, p.17

¹⁵⁴ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.55. *While the passages in the Summa that deal with faith do not make explicit mention of such a “friendship”, the section dealing with charity describes charity as friendship: “since there is a communication between man and God, inasmuch as He communicates His happiness to us, some kind of friendship must needs be based on this same communication, of which it is written (1 Cor. i.9): God is faithful: by Whom you are called into the fellowship of His Son. The love which is based on this communication is charity: wherefore it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God.” (II-II, 23.1)*

¹⁵⁵ *ST* II-II, 4.3

¹⁵⁶ *ST* II-II, 4.3

¹⁵⁷ Sherwin, Michael, *By Knowledge and By Love*, p.154

¹⁵⁸ *ST* II-II, 4.3

¹⁵⁹ *ST* II-II, 4.5

is a foundation [of the Christian community]” (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11).¹⁶⁰ Another objection is raised that, since it is “the will which is perfected by charity” which moves the intellect to assent to divine truth, charity must precede faith.¹⁶¹ Aquinas responds to these objections by explaining that charity’s “foundational” role exists in the sense of a “bond” that joins the various parts of a building; he cites Colossians 3:14: “Above all...things have charity which is the bond of perfection.”¹⁶² Charity joins together the various virtues but does not for this reason precede faith. And, with regards to the will’s role in moving the intellect to the First Truth, Aquinas points out that “the will cannot tend to God with perfect love, unless the intellect possesses right faith about Him.”¹⁶³ Knowledge precedes love and desire.

While Aquinas maintains that faith is the first of the theological virtues, he also notes the manner by which charity surpasses faith. In his treatment of charity, he explains: “Since to love God is something greater than to know Him, especially in this state of life, it follows that love of God presupposes knowledge of God.”¹⁶⁴ Commenting on this passage, Sherwin notes: “Charity presupposes faith’s knowledge, but goes beyond it to attain the unseen reality expressed in faith’s propositions.”¹⁶⁵ Knowledge comes before love, but it is a greater act to love than merely to know. True love cannot exist without knowledge, but knowledge is perfected by love. Faith presents the truth to the intellect which in turn apprehends the truth as a good to be loved and moves the will to take possession of the truth.

Right knowledge leads to and must bear the fruit of right love. “[S]ince faith belongs to the whole person, the divine gift by its very nature makes a person crave the perfection that only

¹⁶⁰ *ST II-II*, 4.7

¹⁶¹ *ST II-II*, 4.7

¹⁶² *ST II-II*, 4.7

¹⁶³ *ST II-II*, 4.7

¹⁶⁴ *ST II-II*, 27.4

¹⁶⁵ Sherwin, *By Knowledge*, p.153

theological charity can impart. For only faith ‘formed’ by charity realizes the goal of ‘faith working through love’ (Gal 5:6).”¹⁶⁶ A living faith necessarily produces “good works”.¹⁶⁷ Commenting on the vital relationship between faith and good works, Cessario cites Maximus the Confessor: “faith must be joined to an active love of God which is expressed in good works. The charitable person is distinguished by sincere and long-suffering service to other people; faith also means using things aright.”¹⁶⁸ A living and fully-formed faith necessarily expresses itself in works of love.

A faith that is animated by charity purifies the heart.¹⁶⁹ Such a faith enlightens the intellect with right knowledge of God and moves the will to seek after God: “the first beginning of the heart’s purifying is faith; and if this be perfected through being quickened by charity, the heart will be perfectly purified thereby.”¹⁷⁰ Living faith causes the heart to love rightly, namely, to love God as the “supreme good, separation from which is the greatest evil.”¹⁷¹ And, right knowledge is supported by right love: “Only when charity is present does faith rightly direct the believer to the divinely appointed end for which all human beings are destined.”¹⁷² Purity of heart in turn produces an attitude of filial fear, enabling believers to love God as His children.¹⁷³

Section Four: Faith and the “New Law”

“Faith working through love” leads to purification of the heart. Whereas man’s heart becomes “impure” through a disordered love of transient things over God, “faith working

¹⁶⁶ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.139

¹⁶⁷ *ST II-II*, 4.4

¹⁶⁸ Cessario, *Christian Faith*, p.139

¹⁶⁹ *ST II-II*, 7.2

¹⁷⁰ *ST II-II*, 7.2

¹⁷¹ *ST II-II*, 7.1

¹⁷² Dulles, *Assurance*, pp.35-36

¹⁷³ *ST II-II*, 7.1

through love” puts proper order into man’s love and thus purifies his heart.¹⁷⁴ It is upon the heart that the “New Law” is placed so that man may love rightly: “The New Law is the law of the New Testament...instilled in our hearts.”¹⁷⁵ The New Law is an interior law, “through which are directed not only external works but even the very motions of the heart, among which the act of faith is first.”¹⁷⁶ The significance of the interior nature of the New Law is a point to which we shall return in Section Five.

Faith is the entry point into the New Law. It is by faith that man submits himself to God in obedience: “Obedience...is requisite for faith.”¹⁷⁷ By obedience, man becomes properly disposed to live under the reign of the New Law. The New Law is “the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is given through faith in Christ.”¹⁷⁸ The specificity of faith “in Christ” is central to the New Law. Aquinas notes: “No man ever had the grace of the Holy Ghost except through faith in Christ either explicit or implicit: and by faith in Christ man belongs to the New Testament. Consequently whoever had the law of grace instilled into them belonged to the New Testament.”¹⁷⁹ It is through faith *in Christ* that man can go towards God. And, God justifies man by granting man the gift of faith in Christ: “God’s justice is said to exist through faith in Christ Jesus...because in the very justification, by which we are made just by God, the first motion of the mind toward God is through faith.”¹⁸⁰ The faith that justifies is specifically faith *in Christ* because “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:14).¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ *ST II-II*, 7.2 “[T]he rational creature...becomes impure through subjecting itself to transient things by loving them. From this impurity the rational creature is purified by means of a contrary movement, namely, by tending to that which is above it, viz. God.”

¹⁷⁵ *ST I-II*, 106.1

¹⁷⁶ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #316

¹⁷⁷ *ST II-II*, 4.7

¹⁷⁸ *ST I-II*, 106.1

¹⁷⁹ *ST I-II*, 106.1

¹⁸⁰ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #302

¹⁸¹ *ST I*, 108.1

Faith in Christ justifies man through Christ's work of redemption. Aquinas uses Romans 8:2 to highlight the centrality of Christ's Incarnation and Passion in man's justification through faith: "God sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, of sin hath condemned sin in the flesh, that the justification of the Law might be fulfilled in us."¹⁸² Commenting on the power of "faith in his [Christ's] blood" (Rom. 3:25) that justifies, Aquinas remarks:

For in order to satisfy for us, it was fitting that he undergo the penalty of death for us, a penalty man had incurred by sin.... This death of Christ is applied to us through faith, by which we believe that the world has been redeemed by His death.... the power of Christ's blood works through man's faith."¹⁸³

As Paul declares, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). It is Christ's work of redemption which merits the justifying power of faith in Christ for the human race.

The centrality of faith *in Christ* in the New Law is further explained by Pinckaers by way of reference to Aquinas' treatment of man's last end, which is the keystone of the moral life. Recall that Aquinas begins the section in the *Summa* on man's last end by describing the human person as a being who "is master of his actions through his reason and will."¹⁸⁴ It is by reason of the powers and operations of his intellect and will that man is said to be created in the image of God. Pinckaers draws out Aquinas' insights on the connections between man created in God's image and the role of faith in Christ in the moral life. The excerpt is lengthy but well worth quoting:

[T]he light of the intellect and the movement of the will... render us master of our actions.... The image of God in human beings is precisely this light of truth and attraction to the good, like a warming ray within us rendering us capable of imitating God in knowing and loving him freely and personally.... The image of God in us... will become still more personal through the intervention of Christ, who came to restore this resemblance, effaced by sin, by conforming us to

¹⁸² *ST I-II*, 106.3

¹⁸³ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #309-310

¹⁸⁴ *ST I-II* 1.1

himself, the perfect Image of God. . . . The action of the Holy Spirit in particular will be engrafted precisely upon this moral source in our depths. . . . by infusing within our spirit new principles of action through the theological virtues, which will effect our conformation to Christ by making us children of the Father through grace.¹⁸⁵

Christ is the source of faith which heals man's wounded powers of the intellect and will, and He is also the perfect model of restored humanity after Whom believers may pattern their lives. Life according to the New Law is essentially "life in Christ."

Those who are justified by faith in Christ live under the dispensation of the "law of faith" (Rom 3:27). Since both the Old and the New Laws have "the same end, namely, man's subjection to God", faith is actually an essential element in both the Old and the New Laws, but under different states.¹⁸⁶ Faith in the New Law transcends the sense of faith in the Old Law. "The New Law is called the law of faith, in so far as its pre-eminence is derived from that very grace which is given inwardly to believers, and for this reason is called the grace of faith."¹⁸⁷ Whereas the Old Law functions like a "pedagogue" who guides and monitors the external conduct of its pupils from without, the New Law forms the mind and heart of its pupils so that they "are inclined of themselves to those objects [spiritual and eternal goods], not as to something foreign but as to something of their own."¹⁸⁸ Faith "confers the help of grace to fulfill the moral precepts of the Law."¹⁸⁹ The "healing grace of faith"¹⁹⁰ is a grace which "does

¹⁸⁵ Pinckaers, "Conscience and Christian Tradition" in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.331

¹⁸⁶ *ST I-II*, 107.1

¹⁸⁷ *ST I-II*, 107.1

¹⁸⁸ *ST I-II*, 107.1

¹⁸⁹ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #321 "Then when he says *Do we therefore overthrow* he excludes an objection. For someone might claim that he is overthrowing the aforementioned Law; therefore, he asks: *Do we therefore overthrow the law by faith*, inasmuch as we say that men are justified without the works of the Law? He answers: *By no means!* in keeping with Matt 5:(18), 'Not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law.' Rather, he adds: *On the contrary, we uphold the law*, i.e., by faith we complete and fulfill the Law, as Matt 5:(17) says, "I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it." This is true as regards the ceremonial precepts because, being figures, they were upheld and fulfilled by the fact that the truth signified by them is shown forth in the faith of Christ. This is also true as regards the moral precepts, because the faith of Christ confers the help of grace to fulfill the moral precepts of the Law and even adds special counsels, through which the moral precepts are more safely and securely kept."

¹⁹⁰ *ST I-II*, 106.1

not dwell in the flesh but in the mind.”¹⁹¹ And, whereas human law leads man to the good “by merely indicating what ought to be done...the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the intellect but also inclines the affection to act aright.”¹⁹² By facilitating in man a ‘graced’ desire for all that is good, faith in Christ enables the believer to live according to the demands of the New Law. The grace of faith engenders a kind of connatural affinity between man and all that is truly good. Through faith, man is able to recognize, choose, and do what is good from an interior impulse and with ease.

Section Five: The New Law and “Faith Working Through Love”

The grace of the Holy Spirit can perhaps be considered as the defining feature of Aquinas’ conception of the New Law and the moral life articulated in the *Summa*: “[T]he New Law consists chiefly in the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is shown forth by faith that worketh through love.”¹⁹³ Pinckaers describes: “[T]he grace of the Holy Spirit, acting through faith and charity, is truly the head of the organism of virtues that shapes the structure of St. Thomas’s moral teaching...it also engenders dispositions for receiving the spiritual inspirations and

¹⁹¹ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #573 “First, therefore, he proves that sin dwelling in man does the evil which man commits. This proof is clear when the words are referred to a man in the state of grace, who has been freed from sin by the grace of Christ. Therefore, as to a person in whom Christ’s grace does not dwell, he has not yet been freed from sin. But the grace of Christ does not dwell in the flesh but in the mind; hence it is stated below (8:10) that ‘if Christ is in us, the body is indeed dead because of sin, but the spirit lives because of righteousness.’ Therefore, sin, which the desire of the flesh works, still rules in the flesh. For he takes “flesh” here to include the sensitive powers. For the flesh is thus distinguished against the spirit and fights it, inasmuch as the sensitive appetite tends to the contrary of what reason seeks, as it says in Gal. (5:17): ‘The desires of the flesh are against the spirit.’”

¹⁹² *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #602 “In one way this law can be the Holy Spirit, so that the *law of the spirit* means the law which is the Spirit. For a law is given in order that through it men may be led to the good; hence, the Philosopher says in *Ethics* II that the intention of the lawgiver is to make citizens good. Human law does this by merely indicating what ought to be done; but the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the intellect but also inclines the affection to act aright: ‘But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things,’ as to the first, ‘and suggest to you all things,’ as to the second, ‘all that I have said to you’ (Jn. 14:26). This citation from 1John does not precisely match the Vulgate or modern editions.”

¹⁹³ *ST I-II*, 108.1

impulses needed for producing perfect works.”¹⁹⁴ The grace of the Spirit has an intrinsic connection with “faith working through love.”

In the *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, the element of “faith working through love” under the impulse of the grace of the Spirit emerges: “The New Law, which consists in the action of the Holy Spirit through faith, touches our deepest interiority through charity that makes us sharers in the very love of God and impels us to act according to his will in all things.”¹⁹⁵ “Faith working through love” is the medium by which the New Law functions in the life of the believer. Charity causes a kind of spontaneity within the human person towards morally good actions.¹⁹⁶ In the *Summa*, Aquinas explains: “[T]he grace of the Holy Ghost is like an interior habit bestowed on us and inclining us to act aright, it makes us do freely those things that are becoming to grace, and shun what is opposed to it.”¹⁹⁷ Pinckaers describes the grace of the Spirit when he states that “the active principle of justification and of sanctification, of forgiveness and perfection, is within us.”¹⁹⁸ The grace of the Spirit not only affects the outward conduct of a person but transforms the deep-seated, interior moral dispositions of the human person in a truly radical way by placing intelligent love for God and neighbor at the root of his moral choices and actions.

Under the New Law, the Holy Spirit has a direct and concrete influence on man’s moral actions. First of all, it is the Spirit who “writes the New Law on the hearts and in the lives of the faithful. All the energy of this law comes from the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹⁹ The Spirit energizes the believer with a “strength of grace for action” and “becomes our master in a unique

¹⁹⁴ Pinckaers, *Sources*, p.178

¹⁹⁵ Pinckaers, “Aquinas and Agency” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.181

¹⁹⁶ *Sources*, p.185

¹⁹⁷ *ST I-II*, 108.1

¹⁹⁸ Pinckaers, “The Return of the New Law to Moral Theology” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.378

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid* p.378

way...obtaining for us an understanding of the Scriptures and a knowledge of the ways of providence in our own lives and in this history of the Church.”²⁰⁰ It is also the Spirit who, “possess[ing] the power of the Word...reveals the truth to us interiorly and gives the grace that transforms our hearts and actions.”²⁰¹ And, it is the Spirit, who in the Augustinian concept of the Trinity is described as the Love between the Father and the Son, who acts on the heart and mind of the human person to incline him to know, love, choose, and do the good.

On account of the interior grace and influence of the Spirit, the New Law is also called “the *Law of love*.”²⁰² Whereas “the Old Law is described as *restraining the hand, not the will*; since when a man refrains from some sins through fear of being punished, his will does not shrink simply from sin, as does the will of a man who refrains from sin through love of righteousness: and hence the New Law, which is the Law of love, is said to restrain the will.”²⁰³ This restraint of the will against evil is the restraint of love. Filial fear instead of the servile fear of extrinsic punishment motivates the believer to act according to the dictates of love.²⁰⁴ [T]he New Law which derives its pre-eminence from the spiritual grace instilled into our hearts, is called the *Law of love*: and it is described as containing spiritual and eternal promises, which are objects of the virtues, chiefly of charity.” Citing Augustine, Aquinas notes: “[L]ove makes light and nothing of things that seem arduous and beyond our power.”²⁰⁵

The New Law is “the proper effect of the Holy Spirit, namely, faith working through love. This faith teaches what is to be done: ‘His anointing teaches you about everything’ (1 Jn. 2:27) and inclines the affections to act: ‘The love of Christ controls us’ (2 Cor. 5:14).”²⁰⁶ The

²⁰⁰ Pinckaers, “The Sources of Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.22

²⁰¹ Pinckaers, “The Role of Virtue in Moral Theology” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.303

²⁰² *ST I-II*, 107.1

²⁰³ *ST I-II*, 107.1

²⁰⁴ *ST II-II*, 7.1

²⁰⁵ *ST I-II*, 107.4

²⁰⁶ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #603

actions of the Holy Spirit contribute to the moral life particularly through the graces of the Spirit's gifts: the gifts of the Holy Spirit perfect the virtues – both theological and moral – and, together with the virtues, order man towards supernatural happiness.²⁰⁷ Aquinas describes the necessity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the moral life when he states that “the gifts are perfections of man, whereby he is disposed so as to be amenable to the promptings of God. Wherefore in those matters where the prompting of reason is not sufficient, and there is need for the prompting of the Holy Ghost, there is, in consequence, need for a gift.”²⁰⁸ The gifts of the Holy Spirit dispose man's heart to be docile to the movements of Christ's Spirit. Through faith in Christ and the promptings of His Spirit, the children of God know the mind of their Father and gladly choose to conduct themselves in a manner of loving reverence toward Him.

Conclusion

The Thomistic view of morality begins with man's desire for happiness. This desire for happiness is written upon the human heart. This desire is the ever-present goal which motivates and informs man's moral choices and actions. Since the Christian tradition holds that it is the vision of God which constitutes man's ultimate beatitude, the theological virtue of faith is the starting point from which man begins his journey toward perfect happiness. Faith effects a union between God and man even in this life, albeit an imperfect one which will be perfected in the life to come. Man's relationship with God in this life is sustained by a faith which is animated by charity. “Faith working through love” describes the course of knowing and loving which conforms man more and more to the likeness of Christ, the perfect Image of God. “Faith working through love” is made fully possible by the inauguration of the New Law. Through

²⁰⁷ *Sources*, p.180

²⁰⁸ *ST I-II*, 68.2

faith in Christ, the believer receives the grace of the Spirit – the essence of the New Law – to know and love the First Truth Who is God. The active presence of the New Law in the life of the believer informs his mind and will with a loving intelligence by which he is able to know, love, and choose the good.

The emphasis which Aquinas places on “faith working through love” and the “New Law” of the Gospel shows that his reflections on the moral life follow closely those of Scripture, especially the writings of Paul. The emphasis on the importance of these scriptural notions for Christian morality began to regain a prominent place in moral theology following the call for renewal by the Second Vatican Council.²⁰⁹ As we shall see in Chapter Three of this thesis, recent ecclesial documents display strong connections with Scripture and turn to faith in Christ as the source, measure, and summit of Christian morality.

²⁰⁹ *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.xvii

CHAPTER THREE: FAITH AND THE MORAL LIFE IN POST-VATICAN II ECCLESIAL DOCUMENTS

Introduction

The renewal of moral theology called for by the Second Vatican Council is in large measure a call for moral theology to re-connect with its scriptural roots. The Decree on the Training of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, states:

Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.²¹⁰

As such, this renewal is an appeal to re-emphasize the primacy of Christ and His teachings, along with the “biblical categories of love, grace, discipleship and transformation in Christ”, in the Christian moral life.²¹¹ The role of faith in Christ in the moral life as described in recent magisterial teachings, therefore, figures prominently in this renewal and is the topic of Chapter Three of this thesis.

The encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor*, with its “aim of treating ‘more fully and more deeply the issues regarding the very foundations of moral theology,’”²¹² begins with the following statement:

The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and, in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26). Truth enlightens man’s intelligence and shapes his freedom, leading him to know and love the Lord. Hence the Psalmist prays: “Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord” (Ps 4:6).²¹³

²¹⁰ *Optatam Totius* 16

²¹¹ DiNoia, J.A. “Veritatis Splendor: Moral Life as Transfigured Life” in in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, p.2

²¹² *Veritatis Splendor* 5

²¹³ VS

The Church proclaims that it is the “Truth” that illumines man’s mind and fashions his power of self-determination in order that he may exercise his freedom according to his identity as an image of God. Christ is the Truth, and it is through faith in Him that man can come to “know and love the Lord.” Christ is also the light that brings clarity to the true meaning of human life. Whereas morality may be described as the guidance and regulation of human acts according to the standard of goodness,²¹⁴ so the moral life may be said to be the orientation of man towards his true good. This true good consists of experiencing the light of God’s face upon one’s own face – seeing God face-to-face – being engaged in the loving and perfect vision of God. In its aim to turn man’s gaze towards God, the moral life must begin with faith in Christ.

Chapter Three of this thesis explores the notion of the centrality of faith in Christ in the moral life in recent ecclesial documents. Its primary sources are *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Porta Fidei*, a document issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled, “The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct”, and *Lumen Fidei*. Commentaries on these documents and other reflections on recent development in moral theology serve as secondary sources. It has three sections. Section One examines the Person of Christ as the center of the moral life. Through His Incarnation, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is the source of Christian morality. Some theologians are of the opinion that, in addition to being situated within a Christological context, recent ecclesial moral teachings, especially those expressed in *Veritatis Splendor*, represent and champion a “Christocentric” morality.²¹⁵ Christ is the Truth who answers the question of the meaning of human existence and man’s deepest yearning for happiness. Section Two examines the essential role of faith in Christ in the moral life. It is the grace of faith in Christ which heals man’s

²¹⁴ VS 29

²¹⁵ Melina, Livio, *Sharing in Christ’s Virtues*, p.117

wounded image of God and elevates man to his new identity as a child of God. Restored and sustained by grace, man is empowered to imitate the example of Christ's life and thus to make progress in the moral life. Section Three examines "faith working through love" as the summit of the Christian moral life. "Faith working through love" is an essential element of the New Law because the New Law is "received through faith in Christ" and "operate[s] through charity."²¹⁶ Faith places man along the path of the moral life while love sustains and transforms him on this journey toward eternal beatitude.

Section One: Jesus Christ is the Center of the Moral Life

Just as Aquinas structured his treatment of the moral life in the *Summa* by situating it on the foundational premise of man's desire for happiness or, in other words, the ultimate Good, so *Veritatis Splendor* begins its reflections by presenting the desire for the ultimate Good of "eternal life" expressed by the rich young man in the Gospel of Matthew, "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mat 19:16)²¹⁷ *Veritatis Splendor* goes on to observe that, by virtue of the rich young man's question being addressed to the Person of Christ, Scripture points to Christ as the center of Christian morality: "Christ is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself....At the source and summit of the economy of salvation, as the Alpha and Omega of human history (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Christ sheds light on man's condition and his integral vocation."²¹⁸ Pinckaers comments: "Christian moral teaching...consists principally, as *Veritatis Splendor* says, in 'holding fast to the very person of Jesus.' And so for every believer,

²¹⁶ Pinckaers, "Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology" in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.53

²¹⁷ VS 6

²¹⁸ VS 8

‘following Christ is the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality.’²¹⁹ Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christian morality.

Before we consider how Christ addresses and satisfies man’s desire for the ultimate Good, it may be helpful to reflect briefly on the notion that Christ is first and foremost the very source of this desire in man. In his reflections on the first chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*, Livio Melina comments that the encyclical proposes the moral life as an “encounter” with Christ.²²⁰ “Encounter”, in this instance, consists of a deeply intimate exchange between persons. Melina goes on to observe that it is through his encounter with Jesus that the desire for eternal life is awakened in the rich young man with such strength that it moves him to ask his question.²²¹ Furthermore, it is owing to the encounter with Christ that this desire “is saved from its withdrawal into self and lifted up toward a goal, in which one can find fulfillment in a form heretofore unknown.”²²² Left to its own device, the human desire for happiness tends to become “errant and vagrant;”²²³ it is prone to make mistakes about what constitutes man’s highest good; it sinks to a level that is beneath man’s dignity. *Gaudium et Spes* describes the condition of man plagued by disordered desires: “He is the meeting point of many conflicting forces...he is subject to a thousand shortcomings, but feels untrammelled in his inclinations and destined for a higher form of life...he feels himself divided.”²²⁴ Man’s desire for happiness must be guided by Christ. It is the spiritual beauty of Christ’s countenance – full of love and compassion – which

²¹⁹ Pinckaers, “Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology”, p.48

²²⁰ Melina, Livio. “Desire for Happiness and the Commandments in the First Chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, p.152

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p.152

²²² *Ibid.*, p.153

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.153

²²⁴ *GS* 10

attracts man towards the true good.²²⁵ An encounter with Christ forms and orders man's desire for happiness towards its proper fulfillment.

Christ's preeminent place in the moral life is evident in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The very title of its section on morality emphasizes this centrality: it is called "Life in Christ". Equating "life in Christ" with the moral life suggests that man must look to Christ in order to understand the true meaning of human life and therefore know how to live. It is Christ alone Who can offer "the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions in particular."²²⁶ Man's religious and moral questions find their answers in Christ because He is the very source of man's being. Therefore, the *Catechism* states: "[t]he first and last point of reference of this [moral] catechesis will always be Jesus Christ himself, who is 'the way, and the truth, and the life.'"²²⁷ Referencing Christ's response to the rich young man – "No one is good but God alone" (Mk. 10:18, cf Lk. 18:19) – *Veritatis Splendor* affirms that God alone can satisfactorily show man what is good, because He is the very essence of Goodness.²²⁸ Indeed, if one believes in the existence and goodness of God, then "one cannot give a fully satisfactory answer to the question of 'what is good,' and the desire for happiness, without bringing in God."²²⁹ There is no area in man's life which falls outside of God's sphere of influence, least of all the domain of morality. Exclusion of God from the arena of morality causes a *de facto* sabotage of one's possibility for true happiness. "Jesus brings the question about morally good actions back to its religious foundations, to the acknowledgment of God, who alone is goodness, fullness of life, the final end of human activity, and perfect happiness."²³⁰

²²⁵ Melina, *Sharing*, p.33

²²⁶ VS 2

²²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1698

²²⁸ VS 9

²²⁹ Pinckaers, "Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology", p.21

²³⁰ VS 9

Christ alone offers “the full and definitive answer” to man’s question about what is true and good.²³¹ And so, “[e]ach day the Church looks to Christ with unfailing love, fully aware that the true and final answer to the problem of morality lies in him alone.”²³² The Person and life of Christ is intrinsically bound to Christian morality.

Viewing the Person of Christ as the fulfilment of the human desire for beatitude and the key to Christian morality leads to a fresh perspective of what Scripture offers as moral teachings. Pinckaers notes that “the teaching of the authors of the New Testament is indeed linked to a moral system, to a presentation and organization of moral teaching which responds to the question of beatitude and salvation and which is based upon the teaching of the virtues, beginning with faith in Christ and charity.”²³³ The rule of life presented by Scripture is not viewed primarily as a set of obligations and prohibitions but the very life of Christ. Melina points out that, according to *Dei Verbum*, the “Gospel...is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching.”²³⁴ Since Scripture is seen primarily as God’s revelation of Himself, it becomes clear that Scripture “is the bearer of a Word which touches us personally and puts us in an intimate relationship with Christ in faith....the moral teachings of the Gospel...converge in the person of Jesus.”²³⁵ Scripture’s presentations of external moral laws, in particular the Decalogue, continue to be valid and retain their importance. However, the significance of the Decalogue is undergirded by a prior *raison d’être*, namely, “intimate relationship with Christ in faith.” Seen from this viewpoint, the value of the Decalogue receives its proper place; it is not diminished but elevated: the Decalogue is the external means by which man enters into a deep

²³¹ VS 25

²³² VS 85

²³³ Pinckaers, “Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology”, p.55

²³⁴ Melina, *Sharing*, p.28; DV 7

²³⁵ Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future: Veritatis Splendor” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, p.20

relationship with God. Hence, “the entire Bible possesses a moral meaning centered upon the application of the teaching and the life of Christ to our own conduct.”²³⁶ In the moral life, the “moral meaning” of Scripture – relationship with God – precedes but is expressed by the teachings and actions of Christ. “It is the Gospel which reveals the full truth about man and his moral journey.”²³⁷ Therefore, the *Catechism* calls Scripture “the light of our path” and affirms its use for the formation of conscience, with the reminder to “assimilate it [Scripture] in faith and prayer and put it into practice.”²³⁸ In revealing God to man, Scripture also reveals man to himself. As Christ is the living expression of the moral life, so Scripture is the written form that transmits this living expression to all believers.

The primacy of Christ’s role in the moral life begins with His Incarnation and culminates in His salvific death and Resurrection. *Gaudium et Spes* notes: “The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all, can show man the way and strengthen him through the Spirit in order to be worthy of his destiny.”²³⁹ Further on, “[i]n reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear... Christ the new Adam... fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.”²⁴⁰ The Pontifical Biblical Commission points out that Christ “presents himself as a guide who knows both the destination and the way to reach” beatitude.²⁴¹ Jesus Christ as Son of the Father shows man his vocation to beatitude through becoming adopted children of the Father. It is within the context of his identity as a child of God, of being “sons in the Son,”²⁴² that the human person finds the most convincing reason to live according to the demands of the moral life. This call to become

²³⁶ Pinckaers, “Scripture and the Renewal of Moral Theology”, p.50

²³⁷ VS 112

²³⁸ CCC 1785

²³⁹ GS 10

²⁴⁰ GS 22

²⁴¹ “The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct” 46

²⁴² VS 18

adopted children of God and its implications for the moral life will be discussed further in Section Two.

By His Incarnation, God the Son becomes True God and True Man and so is able to provide the perfect example of how man can and should live according to his adoptive sonship. Because Christ assumed human nature and lived a fully and truly human life, His words and actions are genuinely human. Yet Christ's words and actions are also those of perfected and divinized humanity: "The light of God's face shines in all its beauty on the countenance of Jesus Christ."²⁴³ As such, Christ's words and actions are at once worthy and able of being imitated by man.²⁴⁴ *Veritatis Splendor* points to the Sermon on the Mount, in particular, the Beatitudes, as the outstanding likeness of Christ's life. The Beatitudes present "*a sort of self-portrait of Christ*" by which man may imitate Him.²⁴⁵ By imitating the Son, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), man grows more and more in likeness to the Father.²⁴⁶ Through His Incarnation, Christ identifies Himself so completely with man that man may aspire to identify himself with God.

The example of Christ's life reaches its climax in His sacrifice on the Cross. "Indeed, his actions, and in particular his Passion and Death on the Cross, are the living revelation of his love for the Father and for others....It is *the 'new' commandment*."²⁴⁷ Christ's Passion and Death show that sacrificial love is the apex of human perfection. *Porta Fidei* tells us that it is "[i]n the mystery of his death and resurrection [that] God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins (cf. *Acts* 5:31)."²⁴⁸ Christ crucified on the Cross – his "obedience unto death" (Phil. 2:8) – shows man that obedience to the

²⁴³ *VS* 2

²⁴⁴ *GS* 22

²⁴⁵ *VS* 16

²⁴⁶ *VS* 19

²⁴⁷ *VS* 20

²⁴⁸ *Porta Fidei* 6

moral law is the ultimate act of trust in God's love and wisdom.²⁴⁹ Just as Christ's death leads to His Resurrection, in just the same way, far from casting doubts on God's wisdom and goodness, the challenges of the moral life are opportunities by which man may grow in his faith and love. By carrying his own cross faithfully along the rugged terrain of the moral life, man arrives at the realization that God's ways always lead to the fullness of life. Not only does Christ's sacrifice reveal to man the heights of perfection to which he is called, it also proves to man that he is indeed capable of reaching such heights, thanks to the graces merited for and made available to him by Christ's act of redemption.²⁵⁰

The moral life is indeed "life in Christ"; it is "a life lived in Christ and through his grace."²⁵¹ It is a life which invites man to "enter him [Jesus] with all his own self... 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself."²⁵² Jesus Christ is the perfect Man whose example of life reveals the measure of human perfection. "Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life."²⁵³ "Jesus' authority makes his actions a model for imitation and the foundation of moral obligation."²⁵⁴ Without denying the rightful place of "doctrinal statements" and laws and precepts, *Veritatis Splendor* wishes to remind us that it is by "*constantly looking to the Lord Jesus*" that we can discern, choose, and act "in accordance with the truth."²⁵⁵ For this reason, the Church urges all peoples to turn and look to Christ "in order to receive from him the

²⁴⁹ VS 84-85

²⁵⁰ VS 103

²⁵¹ DiNoia, J.A., "Veritatis Splendor: Moral Life", p.2

²⁵² VS 4

²⁵³ VS 20

²⁵⁴ "The Bible and Morality" 50

²⁵⁵ VS 85

answer to their questions about what is good and what is evil”²⁵⁶ and thus to discover the very meaning of human life.

Section Two: Faith in Christ and the Moral Life

The question about eternal life posed by the rich young man reveals a profound truth about the human person: man has an innate desire to know and obtain the true good. “In the depths of his heart there always remains a yearning for absolute truth and a thirst to attain full knowledge of it.”²⁵⁷ This “yearning” and “thirst” for truth is the movement of faith. Faith moves man to ask the questions which are at the heart of the moral life: what does it mean to be human? What is happiness, and how does one become perfectly happy? For this reason, man may be said to be at once an essentially religious and moral being. And, from this, it follows that an intrinsic relationship exists between faith and morality.

Veritatis Splendor describes the act of faith as the foundational moral choice which requires man’s obedience: “Called to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ ‘the true light that enlightens everyone’ (Jn. 1:9), people become ‘light in the Lord’ and ‘children of light’ (Eph. 5:8), and are made holy by ‘obedience to the truth’” (1 Pet. 1:22).²⁵⁸ The rich young man’s question of attaining the ultimate good of eternal life is fundamentally a “religious question”; it is a question which requires the turning towards God which is the essence of faith.²⁵⁹ The moral life consists of following Christ in faith: “*Following Christ is...the essential and primordial foundation of Christian morality.*”²⁶⁰ Therefore:

²⁵⁶ VS 8

²⁵⁷ VS 1

²⁵⁸ VS 1

²⁵⁹ VS 9

²⁶⁰ VS 19

Christian moral teaching...acknowledges the specific importance of a fundamental choice which qualifies the moral life and engages freedom on a radical level before God. It is a question of the decision of faith, of the *obedience of faith* (cf. Rom. 16:26) “by which man makes a total and free self-commitment to God, offering ‘the full submission of intellect and will to God as he reveals.’”²⁶¹

The act of faith is the first step on the journey of Christian morality. Together with the theological virtues of hope and love, faith forms “the foundation of Christian moral activity”, “inform[s] and give[s] life to all the moral virtues”,²⁶² and “dispose[s] Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity.”²⁶³ It is within a relationship with the Trinity that man can embrace a life of truth and goodness.

All questions of morality have “religious foundations” because God is the “fullness of goodness.”²⁶⁴ And, it is faith that “throws a new light on all things and makes known the full ideal which God has set for man, thus guiding the mind towards solutions that are fully human.”²⁶⁵ Through faith, the human mind has access to the knowledge of what is true and good. Furthermore, by its power to transform the mind of believers (cf. Rom 12:2), faith contributes to the development of a proper conscience.²⁶⁶ In its task of judging the “moral quality of a concrete act”, the conscience is neither omniscient nor inerrant.²⁶⁷ God speaks through man’s conscience to the extent that his conscience “bears witness to the authority of truth in reference to the supreme Good to which the human person is drawn.”²⁶⁸ The conscience requires the assistance of faith: “A good and pure conscience is enlightened by true faith, for charity proceeds at the same time ‘from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere

²⁶¹ VS 66

²⁶² CCC 1813

²⁶³ CCC 1812

²⁶⁴ VS 9

²⁶⁵ GS 11

²⁶⁶ VS 85

²⁶⁷ CCC 1777, 1790

²⁶⁸ CCC 1777

faith.”²⁶⁹ Through faith, God speaks to man in his conscience. When man listens to his conscience, he is listening to God.²⁷⁰ Thus faith forms man’s conscience and disposes it to discern the moral quality of concrete acts according to divine wisdom.

The Christian faith is “first of all a concrete way of living, a praxis that is born of faith.”²⁷¹ The fact that faith engages firstly the interior spiritual faculty of the human intellect does not exclude its influences on man’s outward conduct. Indeed, “faith is a lived knowledge of Christ, a living remembrance of his commandments, and a *truth to be lived out*.”²⁷² The judgments of man’s faith-enlightened-conscience are expressed in concrete moral decisions and actions. “Faith does not *exclude* but rather *includes* human morality, showing the ultimate meaning of the requirements that reason also can discover on its own.”²⁷³ To “separate faith from morality” is to deprive morality and the conscience of their most fundamental and essential element; such a separation gravely harms the integrity of morality.²⁷⁴ Without faith, “man is left without...divine support and without hope of eternal life” and, consequently, “his dignity is deeply wounded,”²⁷⁵ and he loses sight of his true “destiny.”²⁷⁶ Only within the context of faith can the moral life reach its potential.

“Faith...possesses a moral content.”²⁷⁷ This content is the revealed truth of Scripture which culminates in the Person of Christ. The centrality of Christ in the moral life implies the existence of an objective and stable content of Christian morality.²⁷⁸ Jesus Christ is “the same

²⁶⁹ CCC 1794

²⁷⁰ CCC 1778

²⁷¹ Melina, *Sharing*, p.29

²⁷² VS 88

²⁷³ Melina, *Sharing*, p.30

²⁷⁴ VS 88

²⁷⁵ GS 22

²⁷⁶ GS 10

²⁷⁷ VS 89

²⁷⁸ GS 16

yesterday and today and forever.”²⁷⁹ The example of Christ’s life and His teachings – available to all who approach Christ in faith – does not waver over time or change in different situations. Along the journey of the moral life, a “path traced by Jesus”, Christ walks with man and invites him “to enter a close and cordial communion of life with him (Mt. 11:28-30)” so that man may “learn from Jesus the way of right conduct”.²⁸⁰ This invitation to walk with Christ in communion with Him “is not something limited in time...[but] is a model for all generations.”²⁸¹ The sureness of Christ’s life is like an anchor which offers moral security to people of all places and times as they weather the storms of confusion and challenges in the moral life. Therefore, *Veritatis Splendor* urges Christians to “rediscover *the newness of the faith and its power to judge*” the practices of human societies and cultures.²⁸² Tragically, in societies where faith has become irrelevant or completely lost, the moral sense of the people is diminished or distorted.²⁸³ “When faith is weakened, the foundations of life also risk being weakened.”²⁸⁴ The moral compass of a nation can only be rectified along with the rekindling of its faith in God.

The convergence of faith and the moral life can again be seen in man’s desire for perfection and happiness. The perfection and happiness for man as envisioned by God is nothing short of eternal beatitude. The *Catechism* describes beatitude as “the vision of God,”²⁸⁵ which is also the goal of the life of faith. “[E]ternal life’, which is a participation in the very life of God...is attained in its perfection only after death, but in faith it is even now a light of truth, a source of meaning for life, an inchoate share in the full knowing of Christ.”²⁸⁶ Both the life of

²⁷⁹ VS 53

²⁸⁰ “The Bible and Morality” 46

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 46

²⁸² VS 88

²⁸³ VS

²⁸⁴ LF 55

²⁸⁵ CCC 1720

²⁸⁶ VS 12

faith and the moral life are a work in progress. Just as faith's movement towards the vision of God is fully realized only in the life to come, so the consummation of the moral life takes place only when man is eternally united with the God of love.

Through faith in Christ, man "becomes a son of God. This filial adoption transforms man by giving him the ability to follow the example of Christ."²⁸⁷ Faith bestows the great grace of divine adoption upon man without which man cannot live up to the standards of God's goodness. By virtue of his transformation into a child of God, man becomes "capable of acting rightly and doing good."²⁸⁸ The rich young man's sad departure upon hearing that, in order to be "perfect" he must sell what he has, give to the poor, and then follow Christ (Mt 19:21), shows that time and divine assistance are necessary for the process of filial adoption to mature. The disciples' astonishment at Jesus' exclamation that "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" meets with the assurance that "[f]or human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible."(Mt 24-26). Man's perfection within a relationship of adopted sonship is possible only by God's free gift of grace. "In union with his Savior, the disciple attains the perfection of charity which is holiness. Having matured in grace, the moral life blossoms into the eternal life in the glory of heaven."²⁸⁹ All men are called to perfect union with God, a union which begins with the life of faith in Christ.

Section Three: "Faith Working Through Love" as the Summit of the Moral Life

The life of faith in Christ is intrinsically connected to love. Man "is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can

²⁸⁷ CCC 1709

²⁸⁸ CCC 1709

²⁸⁹ CCC 1709

give in his stead.”²⁹⁰ To know and love God are essential elements of man’s vocation. Whereas faith initiates the believer onto the journey of the moral life, love, which is “at the heart” of this journey, sustains his momentum along the way.²⁹¹ After all, the moral life is a “response” to the “gratuitousness of God’s love.”²⁹² In the Old Testament, it was for the sake of “draw[ing] him [man] into his divine love” that the God of Israel made a covenant with His people bound up with the observance of the Decalogue.²⁹³ The *Catechism* describes how God uses man’s desire for happiness in order to draw him along the path of moral goodness which is also the path of love: “The beatitude we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is...found...in God alone, the source of every good and of all love.”²⁹⁴ The moral life is a life which seeks to “profess the truth in love (cf. Eph. 4:15).”²⁹⁵

Man does not travel alone on the journey of the moral life. As Section One discusses at length, the moral life consists chiefly of the “following” of Christ. Highlighting *Veritatis Splendor*’s persistent call to believers to “follow” and “imitate” Christ, Pinckaers comments that to “follow Christ” in faith means, in fact, to “imitate” Him.²⁹⁶ The term “imitation” connotes an element of interiority.²⁹⁷ To imitate Christ therefore means to be conformed to Him in the very depths of one’s being.²⁹⁸ On their own, external actions cannot arrive at true imitation of Christ.

²⁹⁰ CCC 357

²⁹¹ VS 15

²⁹² VS 10

²⁹³ VS 10

²⁹⁴ CCC 1723

²⁹⁵ VS 110

²⁹⁶ Pinckaers, “An Encyclical for the Future”, p.33

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.33

²⁹⁸ VS 21

Love is the interior movement which makes imitation of Christ possible because it leads to “union with the beloved”.²⁹⁹

The *Catechism* likewise points to the importance of following and imitating Christ; it cites Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians to be “imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love” (5:1-2).³⁰⁰ Love’s actions are intimately bound with faith. “It is by looking to him [Christ] in faith that Christ’s faithful can hope that he himself fulfills his promises in them, and that, by loving him with the same love with which he has loved them, they may perform works in keeping with their dignity.”³⁰¹ Faith is the channel through which God’s love enters into and permeates man’s life. Citing Scripture, *Veritatis Splendor* reminds us that “Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (cf. Eph. 3:17), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord.”³⁰² True faith in Christ necessarily leads to love of Him. “Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love.”³⁰³ Through faith, God’s love works through the life of the believer. “*Jesus asks us to follow him and to imitate him along the path of love, a love which gives itself completely to the brethren out of love for God.*”³⁰⁴ The moral life is a response to the “vocation to perfect love.”³⁰⁵ God’s love, engendered by and exercised within a spirit of faith, is the measure of Christian morality.

Hence, the Christian moral life is lived within the context of “faith working through love” and leads to the “newness of life” spoken of by Paul (Rom. 6:4).³⁰⁶ *Lumen Fidei* comments: “We come to see the difference...which faith makes for us. Those who believe are transformed

²⁹⁹ *LF* 27

³⁰⁰ *CCC* 1694

³⁰¹ *CCC* 1698

³⁰² *VS* 21

³⁰³ *PF* 14

³⁰⁴ *VS* 20

³⁰⁵ *VS* 18

³⁰⁶ *PF* 6

by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith.”³⁰⁷ *Porta Fidei* describes the new life of “faith working through love”:

Through faith, this new life shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the resurrection. To the extent that he freely cooperates, man’s thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed, on a journey that is never completely finished in this life. “Faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life (cf. Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:17).

The choice to believe in Christ must give external proofs of this life-changing decision: “This faith, which works through love (cf. Gal. 5:6), comes from the core of man, from his ‘heart’ (Cf. Rom. 10:10), whence it is called to bear fruit in works (cf. Mt. 12:33-35; Lk. 6:43-45; Rom. 8:5-10; Gal. 5:22).”³⁰⁸ While faith renews the mind, love converts the heart. The transformed mind and heart together bring about “a sort of ‘connaturality’ between man and the true good” which is then further developed and perfected through the virtues, beginning with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity.³⁰⁹ Again, we see that the theological virtues precede the moral virtues in that they dispose the believer to exercise the moral virtues. “Faith working through love” underlies and supports the actions of the moral virtues.

External acts of love are indispensable to the Christian moral life. “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness.”³¹⁰ Faith in Christ must extend beyond the “motivational” level of interior intentions and materialize into concrete acts.³¹¹ “By responding in faith and following the one

³⁰⁷ *Lumen Fidei* 21

³⁰⁸ *VS* 66

³⁰⁹ *VS* 64

³¹⁰ *PF* 7

³¹¹ Melina, *Sharing*, p.110-111

who is Incarnate Wisdom...along the path of love”, the believer becomes and lives as a true “disciple of God.”³¹² The demand for concrete acts of love comes from Christ’s example of “self-giving love” on the Cross.³¹³ Christ’s Cross is “the sign of his indivisible love for the Father and for humanity.”³¹⁴ The “*degree* of Jesus’ love”, expressed by His commandment to “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12), shows the summit of Christian morality. The Gospels express in no uncertain terms that authentic love for God must exist alongside an explicit love for one’s neighbor.³¹⁵ Therefore, “[t]he commandments...represent the basic condition for love of neighbor; at the same time they are the proof of that love.”³¹⁶ *Porta Fidei* cites James’ dictum that a faith that saves necessarily shows itself through works (cf. Jas, 2:14-18).³¹⁷ *Lumen Fidei* paints a vivid picture of genuine faith: “The hands of faith are raised up to heaven, even as they go about building in charity a city based on relationships in which the love of God is laid as a foundation.”³¹⁸ *Veritatis Splendor* issues the sober warning that a grievous transgression of God’s law strips man of “charity” so that, “even if he perseveres in faith”, “eternal happiness” is lost to him.³¹⁹ The loss of charity deprives faith of its life and results in a faith that is dead.³²⁰ “Faith is a decision involving one’s whole existence. It is an encounter, a dialogue, a communion of love and of life between the believer and Jesus Christ...it entails an act of trusting abandonment to Christ, which enables us to live as he lived (cf. Gal. 2:20), in

³¹² VS 19-20

³¹³ VS 107

³¹⁴ VS 14

³¹⁵ VS 14

³¹⁶ VS 13

³¹⁷ PF 14

³¹⁸ LF 51

³¹⁹ VS 68

³²⁰ Jas 2:26; CCC 1815

profound love of God and of our brothers and sisters.”³²¹ A living faith is animated and nourished by love, and it must bear the fruits of love.

Inspired by faith and under love’s impulse, man recognizes that the commandments exist for the sake of love. The commandments “safeguard *the good* of the person, the image of God, by protecting his *goods*” and “thus represent the basic condition for love of neighbor” and are “the proof of that love.”³²² Melina cites the First Letter of John: “The way we can be sure of our knowledge of him is to keep his commandments” (2:3).³²³ The believer’s claim to know and believe in God is verified by his corresponding conduct. For this reason, when proclaiming the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict stated: “The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity....Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity require the other, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path.”³²⁴ Authentic Christian moral life is always a living expression of its “faith working through love”.

By practicing the commandments to love God and neighbor, man is actually put in touch with his true good. *Gaudium et Spes* explains: “there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons of God in truth and love. It follows, then, that...man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere gift of himself.”³²⁵ Reflecting the image of God – the image of a communion of love among the divine Persons – man reaches his fulfillment to the extent that his life is one of communion in truth and love with God and with his fellow brothers and sisters. Melina describes the relationship among love, man’s true good,

³²¹ VS 88

³²² VS 13

³²³ Melina, *Sharing*, p.109

³²⁴ PF 14

³²⁵ GS 24

and moral actions as follows: “Human actions correspond to the good of the person to the extent that they promote the communion of persons in love....Love, as the recognition and practical affirmation of the personal dignity of the other, is a condition of the truly personal truth of the subject.”³²⁶ Man’s true good is intimately bound to his ability to love.

The power to respond to the requirements of love likewise comes from the power of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, which gained for man the superabundant grace to be “equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds.”³²⁷ This grace is the grace of Christ’s Spirit, the “active presence of the Holy Spirit in us.”³²⁸ The Spirit “[h]eal[s] the wounds of sin...renews us interiorly through a spiritual transformation....enlightens and strengthens us to live as ‘children of light’ through ‘all that is good and right and true.’”³²⁹ Not only does the Spirit restore the original image of God in man wounded by sin, He forms and fashions this image according to the perfect and divinized human visage of Christ. It is the Spirit Who writes the “New Law” of love upon the heart of the believer (cf. Rom. 8:2).³³⁰ The *Catechism* highlights Aquinas’ definition of the New Law: “the New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through faith in Christ.”³³¹ It is the Spirit who yields the “first fruit” of charity which enables man “to fulfill the new law of love.”³³² “[T]hrough the Spirit, he [Christ] gives the grace to share his own life and love and provides the strength to bear witness to that love in personal choices and actions (cf. Jn. 13:34-35).”³³³ The Pontifical Biblical Commission states:

For the apostle Paul moral life cannot be understood except as a generous response to love and to the gift God gave us. God, who wants to make us his sons and daughters, sent his Son and put into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying

³²⁶ Melina, *Sharing*, p.74

³²⁷ VS 107

³²⁸ VS 21

³²⁹ CCC 1695

³³⁰ VS 45

³³¹ VS 24

³³² VS 22; GS 22

³³³ VS 15

Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6; cf. Eph. 1:3-14), so that we may no longer walk as captives of sin but “according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5).³³⁴

Obedience to the demands of love does not result from a slavish but a filial fear; such obedience is the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the believer, inspiring him to understand and appreciate these demands as “an expression of God’s love.”³³⁵ “In Christ the person is called to a communion of charity with the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the same Spirit the person receives the call to charity toward his brothers and sisters.”³³⁶ Man is thus able to “fulfill spontaneously through love, guided by the Spirit, what the law commands.”³³⁷ The New Law of the grace of the Spirit ushers in and nurtures the new life of grace by which man becomes free to live according to the demands of love.³³⁸

The children of God enjoy genuine freedom when, through faith, they pattern their lives according to the New Law of the Spirit:

The practice of the moral life animated by charity gives to the Christian the spiritual freedom of the children of God. He no longer stands before God as a slave, in servile fear, or as a mercenary looking for wages, but as a son responding to the love of him who “first loved us”.³³⁹

Dulles comments on the relationship between love, freedom, and the true good of man: “Those who love God serve him freely....The truly free person is one who does what is good out of love for goodness itself.”³⁴⁰ Man grows in freedom to the extent that faith works through love in him, empowering him to live according to the true good. This growth in faith, love, and true freedom is a work-in-progress. Man has a “permanent need for...inner conversion....the conversion of

³³⁴ “The Bible and Morality” 53

³³⁵ MacIntyre, Alasdair. “How Can We Learn What Veritatis Splendor Has to Teach?” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, p.89

³³⁶ Melina, *Sharing*, p.84

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.68

³³⁸ VS 22-23

³³⁹ CCC 1828

³⁴⁰ Dulles, Avery. “The Truth about Freedom: A Theme from John Paul II” in *Veritatis Splendor and the Renewal of Moral Theology*, p.133

the heart.”³⁴¹ This life-long conversion is supported by divine help. *Veritatis Splendor* affirms that, “with the help of grace, the more one obeys the new law of the Spirit, the more one grows in the freedom to which he or she is called by the service of truth, charity and justice.”³⁴² And, the *Catechism* explains: “Conversion *requires convincing of sin*; it includes the interior judgment of conscience, and this, being a proof of the action of the Spirit of truth in man’s inmost being, becomes at the same time the start of a new grant of grace and love.”³⁴³ The moral life moves toward full maturity when “the *help of divine grace* and...*the cooperation of human freedom*” function together.³⁴⁴

Conversion to Christ – conversion to a life of “faith working through love” – is at the heart of the Christian moral life. It is within this context that *Veritatis Splendor* exhorts moral theology to maintain and grow in its fidelity “to the supernatural sense of the faith” and to “take into account first and foremost *the spiritual dimension of the human heart and its vocation to divine love*.”³⁴⁵ At the heart of *Veritatis Splendor*’s message is the call for Christian moral theology to reconnect with faith in Christ. The encyclical goes so far as to state that the efforts of the new evangelization are “aimed at generating and nourishing ‘the faith which works through love’ (cf. Gal. 5:6).”³⁴⁶ This is to say that Christian moral formation is an integral part of the proclamation of the good news of Christ. Indeed, *Veritatis Splendor* declares: “*Evangelization* – and therefore the “new evangelization” – *also involves the proclamation and presentation of morality*. Jesus himself, even as he preached the Kingdom of God and its saving love, called people to faith and conversion (cf. Mk. 1:15).”³⁴⁷ Along this path of the Christian

³⁴¹ CCC 1888

³⁴² VS 107

³⁴³ CCC 1848

³⁴⁴ VS 103

³⁴⁵ VS 112

³⁴⁶ VS 108

³⁴⁷ VS 106

moral life, the disciple encounters Christ and receives from Him the grace of faith and conversion. Living within a communion of faith and love with Christ through the indwelling of the Spirit,³⁴⁸ the disciple progresses toward the fullness of the moral life until he arrives at its summit of the loving vision of God.

Conclusion

In its conclusion, *Veritatis Splendor* makes a bold and somewhat surprising statement. It claims that the Christian moral life is an extraordinarily simple one: it “consists of the simplicity of the Gospel.”³⁴⁹ Christian morality is simple because it is nothing more or less than “following Jesus Christ...abandoning oneself to him...letting oneself be transformed by his grace and renewed by his mercy, gifts which come to us in the living communion of his Church.”³⁵⁰ “Gospel simplicity”, however, “is not always easy” because “man is constantly tempted to turn his gaze away from the living and true God.”³⁵¹ The “Gospel simplicity” of the moral life is in fact rigorous; it is rigorous with the rigors of “faith working through love”, of holding onto Christ with an intelligent and loving fidelity, of receiving the “*anointing of the Spirit*”³⁵² and thus submitting oneself under the reign of the New Law, of accepting the Father’s invitation to live as His adopted children. The moral life is the journey towards the fullness of life which consists of seeing God “with unveiled faces, reflecting the glory of the Lord, [and] being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3: 17-18).³⁵³

³⁴⁸ “The Bible and Morality” 56

³⁴⁹ VS 119

³⁵⁰ VS 119

³⁵¹ VS 1

³⁵² VS 117

³⁵³ VS 117

CONCLUSION

An excerpt from an article by Servais Pinckaers in the introduction of this thesis alludes to Christianity's unique stance on the moral life. In that excerpt, Pinckaers observes that "[t]he advent of faith effects an original and substantial transformation in the moral life" because faith "centers the moral life on a particular person: Jesus, the Christ."³⁵⁴ Pinckaers' statement resonates with one of the main ideas of *Veritatis Splendor*, namely, that Christian morality is "moral theology" and is therefore concerned with "morality" and "theology."³⁵⁵ It is "morality" because it seeks to discern "the good and evil of human acts and of the person who performs them"; and, it is "theology" because "it acknowledges that the origin and end of moral action are found in the One who 'alone is good' and who, by giving himself to man in Christ, offers him the happiness of divine life."³⁵⁶ The source, meaning, and end of morality are intrinsically bound to theology. The moral life achieves its fulfillment and perfection within the context of faith.

The writings of Paul and Thomas Aquinas show much evidence to support Pinckaers' observation that Jesus Christ is at the center of the Christian moral life. Through various expressions and repeatedly, Paul urges Christ's followers to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh" (Rom. 13:14). He encourages them to allow their minds to be transformed by and renewed in Christ so that they may "discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). Paul's insistent call to Christians to pattern their lives according to Christ's example of life is the basis for Pinckaers' claim: Paul

³⁵⁴ Pinckaers. *Morality*. p.86

³⁵⁵ VS 29

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 29

“present[s] the Christian life as ‘life in Christ.’ He even affirms that, ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’ (*Gal. 2:20*).”³⁵⁷ For Paul, faith in Christ necessarily leads to life in Christ, whereby the believer “put[s] away the old self of your former way of life” and instead “[l]ive[s] as children of light” (*Phil. 4:22*).

Aquinas’ description of the New Law continues and develops the Pauline theme of “life in Christ.” In defining “the law of the New Testament” as “the grace of the Holy Ghost, which is given through faith in Christ,”³⁵⁸ Aquinas builds upon the scriptural notion that, through faith in Christ, believers open their lives to the actions and influence of Christ’s Spirit. Thanks to the grace of Christ’s Spirit – the New Law – believers are able to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 13:14*). Aquinas describes the New Law as “the proper effect of the Holy Spirit, namely, faith working through love” and adds the following: “This faith teaches what is to be done: ‘His anointing teaches you about everything’ (*1 Jn. 2:27*) and inclines the affections to act: ‘The love of Christ controls us’ (*2 Cor. 5:14*).”³⁵⁹ Aquinas’ description of the New Law echoes and expounds the Pauline appeal that it is “through the Spirit, by faith...in Christ Jesus” that believers are able to engage in “faith working through love” and thereby “await the hope of righteousness” (*Gal. 5:1-6*). The New Law touches the very depths of man’s interior dispositions because “the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the intellect but also inclines the affection to act aright”.³⁶⁰ The New Law transforms

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.86

³⁵⁸ *ST I-II*, 106.1

³⁵⁹ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #603

³⁶⁰ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, #602 “In one way this law can be the Holy Spirit, so that the *law of the spirit* means the law which is the Spirit. For a law is given in order that through it men may be led to the good; hence, the Philosopher says in *Ethics II* that the intention of the lawgiver is to make citizens good. Human law does this by merely indicating what ought to be done; but the Holy Spirit dwelling in the mind not only teaches what is to be done by instructing the intellect but also inclines the affection to act aright: ‘But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things,’ as to the first, ‘and suggest to you all things,’ as to the second, ‘all that I have said to you’ (*Jn 14:26*). This citation from 1John does not precisely match the Vulgate or modern editions.”

the inmost being of the human person in such a way that the truth of Paul's claim, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), becomes more and more fully realized in him.

Aquinas' description of the New Law shows that the actions of the Spirit upon the mind and heart of man is the essence of the New Law and the Christian moral life. Pinckaers remarks:

The Thomistic moral system, as well as right reason, brings into play the universalism of faith issuing from the action of the Holy Spirit, which actually defines the Evangelical Law as the summit of the moral system, and operates directly through the theological virtues and the gifts to attain and transform even the moral virtues....According to this morality, only the action of God through faith in Jesus Christ answers fully to those natural aspirations of the human person to beatitude and truth that reason strives to govern.³⁶¹

Thomistic moral theology affirms the scriptural notion of "faith working through love" as the hallmark of the presence and action of Christ's Spirit in the believer. "Faith working through love" is an essential element of the Christian moral life.

Drawing from the rich tradition of Scripture, recent ecclesial documents, in particular, *Veritatis Splendor*, propose that the Christian moral life begins when man encounters Christ and looks to Him in faith as the One who can answer man's question about "the full meaning of life"³⁶²: "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16) In an attempt to respond to a salient characteristic of many cultures and societies of today – the divorce between faith and morality – contemporary ecclesial statements on morality show a never-before level of emphasis on the intimate relationship between man's acceptance of his identity as an image of God and his moral actions. To a large extent unlike the times of Paul and Aquinas, the Church of today has to speak to societies of peoples who collectively and individually experience the external discords and interior "dichotomy" which result from agnosticism and atheism.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Pinckaers, "Aquinas and Agency" in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.175

³⁶² VS 7

³⁶³ *Gaudium et Spes* 10

Recent ecclesial documents purposefully aim to invite man to enter into a meaningful and personal relationship – an encounter – with the living God before presenting the case for living according to God’s standards. Hence, with vigor and persistence, *Veritatis Splendor* proclaims that it is through an encounter with Christ that man comes to realize that God alone can satisfy his innate desire for perfection and eternal happiness. When man looks to Christ, he “senses a connection between moral good and the fulfillment of his own destiny.”³⁶⁴ Putting his faith in Christ, man embarks on the path of the Christian moral life. Faith makes a decisive “difference” in the lives of believers.³⁶⁵ “‘Faith working through love’ (Gal. 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life.”³⁶⁶

The Church’s moral teachings in the recent times affirm the notion that the Christian moral life is “life in Christ” whereby Christ’s followers “participate in the life of the Risen Lord”³⁶⁷; these teachings call believers to imitate Christ by “[f]ollowing Christ and [being] united with him” so that they may “be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”³⁶⁸ The life of faith – believing in Christ and living in Christ – is “the first source of Christian action”.³⁶⁹ Faith does not merely direct man to measure his moral acts according to God’s definition of truth and goodness; through faith, man looks to God’s very Being as the source and ultimate standard of the moral life. The transformative power of faith leads and sustains man on his way toward ultimate beatitude, the goal of the Christian moral life: “He who believes in Christ has new life

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 8

³⁶⁵ *Lumen Fidei* 21

³⁶⁶ *Porta Fidei* 6

³⁶⁷ CCC 1694

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 1693, 1694

³⁶⁹ Pinckaers, “Revisionist Understandings of Actions in the Wake of Vatican II” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, p.269.

in the Holy Spirit. The moral life, increased and brought to maturity in grace, is to reach its fulfillment in the glory of heaven.”³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ CCC 1715

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