CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: CHRISTIAN LOVE AS THE PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

A. What is specifically different about Christian love?

The commandment to love God and neighbor as such is not exclusively Christian. As I explained in chapter seventeen, section N, divine revelation in the Old Testament already transformed the first principle of morality into the law of love. What is new and specifically different about Christian love is the manner in which Jesus fulfills the law of love and makes us able to fulfill it. He says:

> "I give you a new commandment: Love one another.
> Such as my love has been for you,
> so must your love be for each other.
> This is how all will know you for my disciples:
> your love for one another" (Jn 13.34-35).

Christian love is love like that of Jesus.

The love of Jesus is unique in its magnitude and unselfishness, and He commands that we love as He does, with a willingness to lay down our lives for others (cf. Jn 15.12-14). However, these properties themselves result from a more fundamental principle: The love of Jesus as man for us is rooted in His divine love, which He receives eternally in being begotten by the Father. Thus Jesus says: "'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love'" (Jn 15.9).

In chapter six, sections H and I, I explained what charity (Christian love) is as a sharing in the very life of God. Charity is a divine gift by which created persons are disposed to be united with the divine persons and with one another as the divine persons themselves are united; by charity created persons are given the power to share the full experience of divine life (cf. Jn 17.20-23; 1 Jn 3.1-2). This divine love is poured forth in human hearts by the Holy Spirit, and the gift of love inheres in those who receive it as their personal share in divine love (cf. Rom 5.5; DS 1530/800).

By upright human love, Christians are disposed to friendship with God; this friendship by charity becomes membership in the divine family; such membership is destined to mature from its present incipient state: God's children now, we are still to be like Him. Because of the gift of divine love, integral human fulfillment ceases to be a mere ideal and becomes a real possibility. As a disposition to the realization of this possibility, the human love of Christians forms them into an integrally human and Christlike pattern of life.

In Jesus, God is our neighbor; through Him, human persons become--or, at least, are called to become--members of the divine family. Hence Christian love of God includes love of neighbor, and Christian love of neighbor includes love of God. As Jesus makes clear in His description of the Last Judgment, what one does to one's fellows, one does to the Son of Man, the King who will distinguish between those to be welcomed into the Kingdom and those to be excluded from it (cf. Mt 25.31-46).

The love of Jesus is not merely an example to imitate. Christian love is received and carried out only in the community of the Church, by real unity with Jesus who is the initiator and head of this community. One loves as Jesus loves only be being united through baptism with His redemptive act. For this reason, Christian love is the unity of the Church, the Body of Christ, which binds together its many members and harmonizes their diverse gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12.10-13.13).

As a disposition to good, Christian love is a disposition to the perfect accomplishment of the divine-human community which God is building up upon Christ. The hope which springs from Christian love will be satisfied only when the fulfillment of all things in Christ is accomplished, when Christ hands over the Kingdom to the Father, and God is all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15.20-28; Eph 1.7-10, 22-23; Col 1.18-20; 2.9-11).

The first principle of all human morality is: In choosing, one should prefer possibilities compatible with integral human fulfillment. This fulfillment will be accomplished in the fullness of Christ. Therefore, for Christians the first principle of morality is transformed by Christian love into the more definite norm: One should choose only those possibilities which contribute to fulfillment in Christ by contributing to integral human fulfillment.

B. Additional considerations on specifically Christian love

In his first epistle, writing of the requirement of fraternal charity, John says:

> Dearly beloved, it is no new commandment that I write to you,
> but an old one which you had from the start.
> The commandment, now old, is the word you have already heard.
> On second thought, the commandment that I write to you is new,
> as it is realized in him and you,
> for the darkness is over and the real light begins to shine (1 Jn 2.7-8):

Clearly, the Christian requirement of love is in some way old and in some way new.

Jesus asserts that He does not propose to "'abolish the law and the prophets. I have come, not to abolish them, but to fulfill them'" (Mt 5.17). One fulfills a law by realizing the good toward which it directs action; one fulfills prophecy by accomplishing the good things it promises. The purpose of the law and the prophets was the overcoming of sin, and the establishment of communion between God and His people, and among the people themselves. Thus perfect love of God and love of neighbor as oneself were the basis of the whole law and of the prophets as well (cf. Mt 22.37-40).

By the very reality of the incarnation, Jesus embodies perfect love in person. Christian life is a sharing in the fullness of love, the personal divine-human communion Jesus is. The law of Moses pointed toward this fulfillment, and so that law expresses divine love and requires a response proportionate to the love it expresses. However, the consummation of the divine-human relationship is reserved to Jesus; the enduring love present in Him brings to completion the love story which began in the Old Testament (cf. Jn 1.14-17). Having been made children of God, Christians are required to love their heavenly Father and one another <u>as divine children</u>. Thus, the requirement to love

as Christ loves us is new, as the new and eternal covenant is new. As sons and daughters of God, Christians must love as the Son loves.

It is important that the true novelty of Christian love be understood. If one mistakenly supposes that Christian love is nothing more than the perfect love of God and neighbor already required in the Old Testament, two kinds of serious mistakes are likely to follow.

First, something of the actual nobility of the Old Testament ideal is likely to be denied in order to reinstate an important difference between it and Christianity. For example, some falsely say that the Old Testament focuses entirely upon law and justice, while the New introduces love and compassion.

Second, and even more important, anyone who fails to pay attention to what is specifically new about Christian love is likely either altogether to miss the more-than-human meaning of the Gospel (its invitation to communion in <u>divine</u> life) or to separate this meaning from morality, as if the "metaphysical" and "spiritual" dimension of Christianity had nothing to do with day-to-day human action.

Many have noticed that in the New Testament love of neighbor and brotherly love often are enjoined, while love of God is not. From this some have drawn the mistaken conclusion that Christian love primarily is in relationships among human persons, and that intimacy with God can take second place. Some even go so far as to suggest that good works toward one's neighbor should altogether replace prayer and the liturgy; they announce a "religionless Christianity."

The first thing to notice is that it is not the case--as has sometimes been asserted--that the love of man for God is ignored outside the passages in the Gospel which allude to the Old Testament. St. Paul clearly presupposes and takes for granted the Christian's love for God (cf. 1 Cor 2.9, 8.3; Eph 6.24; 2 Thess 3.5). He goes so far as to say: "If anyone does not love the Lord, let a curse be upon him" (1 Cor 16.22). While "Lord" here no doubt refers to Christ, Paul makes no sharp distinction between the humanity and divinity of Jesus when our personal relationship with Him is in question. St. John likewise presupposes the Christian's love for God; he insists that this love be realized in keeping God's commandments and in doing the works of love toward one's neighbor (cf. 1 Jn 2.5-6).

Still, if one ignores what is specific about Christian love, namely, its divine component, one might find it puzzling that the New Testament so often presupposes and takes for granted the Christian's relationship of love to God, and so often focuses upon love of neighbor and fraternal love. If one takes into account the divine component of Christian love, then one realizes that the communion of the Christian with God proceeds primarily from God, that the part of the Christian is to abide in this relationship, and that one does this by doing the will of God and communicating His love to others (cf. 1 Jn 4.7-16). Jesus Himself provides the model, for His love of the Father takes the form of carrying out God's redemptive will (cf. Jn 14.31).

Underlying the effort to make Christianity religionless is the erroneous supposition that there is some inherent tension between the supernatural and the natural, between the transcendent and the immanent, between divine good and human goods. The whole of part two, above, was devoted to the dissipation of this illusion. Divine revelation does open up an interpersonal relationship of humankind to God, and so establishes the human good of friendship with God as the primary good to be pursued in human life. However, religion itself is an aspect of human existential fulfillment, and harmony on all levels of the person is demanded by friendship with God.

Moreover, the Christian vocation to fulfillment in Christ demands, not competes with, the quest for integral human fulfillment, and only in Christ will integral human fulfillment be realized. For this reason, the New Testament does emphasize love of neighbor and fraternal love, and "love" always is understood in practical rather than in merely sentimental terms.

Apart from the revelation of God's plan for fulfillment in Christ, upright human persons might ignore or remain indifferent to many human goods and might fulfill their moral responsibilities toward their neighbors by avoiding harm to them. Christian love does fulfill these minimal requirements (cf. Rom 13.8-10). But it demands more: that we care about every human person and every human good, and that we direct our efforts to realize the divine plan, which includes integral human fulfillment (cf. GS 1, 34). The salvation of humankind requires as an essential part the renewal of the whole temporal order (cf. AA 5).

At the same time, it is a serious error to reduce Christian love to merely human beneficence and self-sacrifice. Conceivably, without a share in divine life, one might do great works of "charity" (cf. 1 Cor 13.3). But if one is not living in the love of God, such works are of no value to oneself and ultimately they will contribute nothing to fulfillment in Christ.

One who undertakes to fulfill love's requirements by doing the works of love must abide in love; otherwise, the outward works are emptied of the meaning they ought to have. If they are done, some other meaning must be substituted--for example, the enjoyment one obtains from doing these works or the honor doing them brings. Any such purpose eventually will become a block to continuing choices consistent with integral human fulfillment. The willingness of secular humanists to kill for the sake of liberty and justice illustrates this point.

C. <u>What is most central to the new Law of Christian love?</u>

As I explained in chapter twelve, section P, the Christian lives by the Spirit. What is most central in the new law is the gift of the Holy Spirit. By this gift the Christian is nurtured to maturity in Christ--that is, to everlasting life. The new law, unlike the old law (and any other law with which fallen men and women are confronted) not only indicates the right way, which is Christ as the way toward fulfillment, but actually empowers one to follow this way, the way of Christ, and draws one along it toward fulfillment in Him.

The prophets looked forward to the time when God would give a new law written in

the heart (cf. Ez 11.19-20, 18.31, 32.26; Jer 24.7; Bar 2.30). The psalmist prayed that God would bring about a change in heart (cf. Ps 51.12; 119.32). The renewal will be accomplished by an outpouring of the Spirit of God (cf. Is 32.16; Ez 39.29).

Jesus announces that the Father will give the Spirit to those who ask (cf. Lk 11.13). At the Last Supper, He promises to send the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 14.16-17, 26; 16.7-14). The Spirit will complete the work of Jesus, for He will remain with Christians permanently, lead them to the fullness of Christ's truth, and bring to a victorious conclusion the struggle against evil. The promise of the Spirit is fulfilled after the resurrection at Pentecost (cf. Jn 20.22-23; Acts 2.1-4); the hope of the prophets is fulfilled (cf. Acts 2.16-21). The new law is no mere extrinsic word, read out to guide, to challenge, and to condemn; it is placed in the mind, written in the heart, and is effective in overcoming sin and uniting God's people with Him (cf. Heb 8.7-10; 10.15-18).

The law of the Spirit frees Christians from sin and death (cf. Rom 8.2), for the Spirit dwells in Christians, pours God's love into their hearts (cf. Rom 5.5), and makes them children of God (cf. Rom 8.8-17). In other words, what is most central in the new law of Christian love is not a commandment of love or a requirement that one do works of fraternal charity, but rather the actual gift and endowment by the Spirit of the <u>reality</u> and effective power of divine love, which one accepts in living faith (cf. Rom 3.27-31). This is the reason why the new law is not so much expressed outwardly as in the inner transformation of those who receive it (cf. 2 Cor 3.2-8).

For fallen humankind, any law short of the new law of transforming love seems alien; it is the imposition of a burden which cannot be fulfilled. This alien character of all law is true even of the natural law as it is experienced by fallen humankind, for although the natural law is written in one's heart, its dynamism toward human fulfillment is at odds with the stunted disposition of fallen persons and with the compromises of conventional morality.

For one who lives in Christ, transformed by the love of God poured forth by the Spirit, the disposition to fulfillment in Christ comprehends and more than fulfills the human requirement to choose consistently with integral human fulfillment. Hence love fulfills all the commandments (cf. Rom 13.9; 1 Cor 13; Gal 5.14-23; 1 Jn 3.9).

D. <u>Misconceptions concerning the law of the Spirit</u>

St. Paul no sooner explains that Christians are liberated from slavery to the yoke of the law than he warns that the freedom of the children of God to which Christians are called is not freedom to do as one pleases. Rather, it is a freedom from sin and a power to do the works of love (Gal 5). This warning of Paul's still is necessary today and it is so important that further explanation is necessary.

In every law except the new law of Christ, there are two aspects which must be distinguished.

On the one hand, to the extent that it truly is law and not merely arbitrary imposition of an exploiting human authority, a law indicates what is necessary or appropriate for action to contribute to human fulfillment. In other words, every true law is a norm which shapes the actions of individuals and groups toward the good to be realized by and shared in through these actions.

On the other hand, except in the new law of love, for fallen humankind every true law is experienced as a demand which is more or less unwelcome. One who has done wrong perceives the law as the source of the reproach of conscience and of society. One who is tempted perceives the law as a curb on inclination. Even one who wants to do what is right perceives the law as a standard difficult to live up to.

When most people think about law, this second aspect--its burdensomeness--is foremost in their minds. Of course, exploiting human authorities also call their impositions "laws"--the arbitrary demands of unjust authorities, such as Nazi decrees, unjust Supreme Court decisions, and so on are put forth with the trappings of legality. Therefore, law is experienced as even more burdensome than it truly is.

Christians, insofar as they are such and are true to their calling, are altogether freed from law in its burdensome, alien aspect. The Spirit communicates a share in divine love, and this love is a disposition to divine goodness, and so to everything good to the extent that it is such, since every good other than God comes from God, participates in His perfection, and contributes to the fulfillment of all things in Christ according to the plan of His wisdom. To hearts formed by divine love, nothing good is alien, and right ways of action--that is, ways to the good--are spontaneously preferred. For this reason, St. Paul stresses that the Christian is liberated from the law. One who lives by the Spirit spontaneously does what is conducive to good, and does not need to be warned about what he or she <u>ought</u> to be doing.

The law of the Spirit, the new law of love, does not nullify or replace natural law, although the new law does redeem natural law from its aspect of alien imposition. As long as the human heart is alienated from itself by sin, even the law written in the heart must be experienced as an alien imposition. When the gift of the Spirit creates a new heart in men and women, the law written upon the human heart by God from the beginning begins to be experienced as the inclination of the real self. Were this not so, divine goodness, to which the love of God disposes Christians, would be an alternative to genuine human goodness, to which natural law directs, and one would be forced to choose between these two incompatible possibilities.

Therefore, in the Christian, the natural law written in the human heart by the creator and the law of love poured forth in the heart of redeemed men and women by the Holy Spirit form a harmonious principle of living. This principle is the law of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 9.21; Gal 6.2). The natural law gives its indications concerning what is necessary and appropriate for human action to contribute to human fulfillment. This indication, which follows from obvious truths by reasonable reflection, is clearer to the extent that a heart renewed by love is freed from the obscurity of self-deception and rationalization which had been generated to protect the sinful self. The love of God provides its thrust toward divine goodness.

The natural law disposes toward friendship with God as one form of humanly

fulfilling harmony; the love of God superabundantly satisfies this natural disposition. The new law of love disposes to a human life in perfect harmony with God's will, and so disposes to the perfect carrying out of the natural law, since God wills integral fulfillment for His human children.

The harmonious unity between natural law and the new law of the Spirit renders questionable any suggestion that Christian love makes unimportant the careful observance of duly enacted norms for orderly cooperation in the worship, teaching, and common life of the Church. A careless and easy-going attitude toward any norm of legitimate authority hardly comports with the Christian attitude: "Let everyone obey the authorities that are over him, for there is no authority except from God, and all authority that exists is established by God" (Rom 13.1). The Spirit of love is the Spirit of the Word who is incarnate; between the gifts of this Spirit and the institutional extension of Christ in His body, the Church, there can be no opposition. The argument of which St. Paul's beautiful hymn to charity is the centerpiece is making precisely this point (cf. 1 Cor 12-14, taken as a unified whole).

E. How is the new law of love related to Christ as the norm of Christian life?

In section C, above, I explained that what is most central to the new law is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In chapter twelve, I explained at length that Christian life is the following of Jesus, not merely in the sense of accepting His life as a pattern to be imitated, but more in the sense of conforming oneself to Him by living one's life in communion with Him. The central act of Jesus' life is a community-forming commitment to carry out God's redemptive will; Christian life is the acceptance and living out of the fruit and the task of what Jesus has done and continues to do. How are the grace of the Spirit and the life of Jesus related to each other in the new law? Put simply: Is the love which is poured forth by the Spirit the norm of Christian morality or is the Lord Jesus in His concrete totality the norm of Christian morality?

The answer is: Both. We have here not two separate realities which could be considered as normative, but two distinct aspects of a single, complex reality. The law of the Spirit is that of life in Christ Jesus (cf. Rom 8.1-2). The Spirit and His gift of love is received by acceptance of Jesus in faith, and baptism into His death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6; DS 1528-1531/799-800). Jesus is so important because He embodies the fullness of divine life in human form; He communicates divine life to those who accept Him (cf. Jn 1.1-18). The communication is carried out precisely by the gift of the Spirit who inwardly transforms sinful created persons into adopted children of God, thus to make them new persons in Christ. We are called to live our lives in union with Jesus; the love poured forth by the Spirit is the most important principle of real union with Him, for this love is sharing through the Spirit with Jesus in the life which comes from the Father.

Inasmuch as we, although children of God, remain human persons with moral responsibility to act in ways consistent with integral human fulfillment, the perfect unity (without loss, separation, or commingling) of the divine and human in the being of Jesus and in His life is the standard to which our own being and lives must conform. Jesus "fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear" (GS 22). The words and deeds of Jesus manifest the perfect love of God and the perfect human response to this love; it is the truth contained in this manifestation which the Spirit teaches (cf. Jn 14.26). The Spirit gives to Jesus' followers His mind and renews their hearts in conformity with His sacred heart.

The reality of the incarnation--that Jesus is a man as we are human, in everything except sin--demands that human nature in Him not be nullified. By this very fact, human nature in us is recalled to all of the perfection toward which God originally ordered it when He made man and woman in His own image and likeness (cf. GS 22, 34, 38, 45). Therefore, the requirements of natural law--the humanly intelligible conditions for human fulfillment--remain in Christ and are satisfied in Him. Insofar as He is our norm, these requirements of our own humanity become demands of Christian love, and this same love satisfies these requirements.

For this reason, Vatican II teaches that the perfection of charity which comes from following Christ and living in Him is a holiness by which "a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society" (LG 40). Christian holiness is not an alternative to true humanism and involves no escape from human responsibility for the pursuit of human goods in this world.

F. Some additional implications of Jesus as a living norm of Christian morality

One should distinguish between human nature understood as that which is actually given and human nature understood as that fulfillment of which human persons are radically capable.

If one takes the former, static concept of nature as normative, one either must reject natural law or develop an unacceptable theory of the sort I criticized in chapter fourteen, section I. When it is admitted that human nature is given in diverse historical conditions, the conclusion inevitably follows that human nature--and so any moral norms based upon it--changes.

However, if one takes the latter concept of nature as normative and articulates it by a description of the various basic categories of human goodness, then one can develop a dynamic theory of natural law, which can account both for the stability and for the legitimate unfolding of human moral insight. (In chapter sixteen, section S, I explained how true development of moral teaching is possible.) One can know enough about the possibilities of human persons to exclude absolutely some kinds of acts as incompatible with integral human fulfillment without knowing enough to make a definite judgment about every kind of act.

Despite this distinction, which takes us some way toward answering objections against Catholic moral teaching insofar as it articulates the requirements of natural law, the human condition subsequent to the fall obscures the real possibilities of human

persons. Moreover, the changes which occur in conventional morality as one moves through diverse times and places, humanly organized as diverse cultural units, raise doubts as to what is the real, stable core of human possibility.

The concretization of the norm of Christian morality in the character of Jesus provides a remedy for these difficulties. In Him, human persons see what a man can be. His good life is not rendered ambiguous by mixed motives; His human commitments are not limited by compromises with sin. The possibilities of human nature, which can be and are known naturally (up to a point and with more or less mixture of error), are revealed in Jesus and become accessible to every man and woman by the faith in Him which accepts Him in His total, incarnate reality.

Moreover, Jesus is not a mere historical figure out of the past. He remains--the same yesterday, today, and forever--a standard by which false teaching can be rejected (cf. Heb 13.7-9). This remaining is real for us because Christian life is not merely an independent life modeled upon His life, but is a real, communal sharing in the central action of His life. This point was explained at length in chapter twelve; in chapter thirteen I also showed how Christian life is lived by membership in a definite community: the Church.

The stoic philosophers who shaped so strongly the more noble secular moral standards of Greco-Roman culture at the beginning of Christianity articulated a moral ideal in terms of the cardinal virtues of wisdom, justice, temperance, and fortitude. St. Paul confidently asserts the autonomy of the culture centered upon Jesus, whose death and resurrection struck the "wise" as foolish: "God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption" (1 Cor 1.30). Stoicism has long since died out with the classical culture to which it belonged; Christ's standard for a renewed humankind remains.

Human culture is rooted in the basic human goods, which any culture more or less adequately serves (cf. GS 53). In Jesus, the Word of God enters into history as the perfect man and reorganizes the wreckage of human community into a culture worthy of human dignity (cf. GS 38). Christian holiness, therefore, conforms to human nature (cf. LG 40). Yet, in Jesus human morality also is renewed and transformed. Wisdom and justice take on a new depth and meaning. Self-control yields to holiness and fortitude to redemption, as limited goods are embraced by the prospect of glory and human evils are overcome by the might of God's intervention.

G. How do Christian moral norms add to the general human norms of morality?

Catholic moral theologians generally agree with the position of St. Thomas, that Jesus did not give moral directives beyond those required by human virtue.[1] Precisely because moral norms guide human acts to human fulfillment and because Jesus perfects human nature and does not annul it, this thesis seems to be essential to Catholic teaching.

However, in recent years some Catholic theologians have drawn the conclusion that Christian morality adds nothing of normative content to the general human norms of morality, which belong to the natural law and which, in principle, can be known to everyone even without the light of faith.[2] (Various additional conclusions are then drawn concerning the status of Catholic moral teaching in relation to divine revelation and rational criticism.) I hold that this conclusion is a mistake.

My thesis is that Christian morality does add normative content to the general human norms of morality. The evidence for this thesis is provided by the data of revelation, which I will present and explain in chapters twenty and twenty-one. Here I wish only to make clear how Christian morality can add normative content to the general human norms of morality without giving any moral directives other than those required by human virtue.

The general human norms of morality follow from the principle that one should choose compatibly with integral human fulfillment. The revelation of God in Christ makes clear that integral human fulfillment is not merely an ideal, but is a real possibility to be achieved in the fulfillment of all things in Christ. Moreover, revelation provides some information as to how the evil which affects humankind as a whole is to be overcome and how human acts can contribute to the accomplishment of the divine plan. These data of faith do not lead to the denial of general human moral norms nor to the positing of some norms altogether independent of them. However, the data of faith do lead to the specification of general human moral norms. Under conditions as they are, one can be a good man or woman only by being a good Christian.

Revelation makes clear that as things are human persons cannot live good lives without special divine help. It also makes clear that the evil which pervades the human condition can be overcome--but in only one way, by redemptive love which undergoes evil out of love of God. Revelation further makes clear that redemptive love is humanly worthwhile, because it unites humankind in a community of friendship with God--that is, in the redemptive community built on Christ which will reach fulfillment, including integral human fulfillment, in Him. Therefore, revelation makes clear that human persons who wish to be humanly virtuous not only must be generically good men or women but must be humanly good in a specific style of life--that of Jesus.

H. Further comments on the specific character of Christian morality

Every Catholic theologian agrees that in fact most conventional morality falls more or less drastically short of moral truth. Everyone agrees that the light of revelation helps to rectify and confirm human moral insight, so that the norms articulated in the Christian tradition can have an accuracy and completeness which one might not find elsewhere. The problem discussed in the previous section is not how Christian morality rectifies conventional morality--the norms accepted in various societies--but how Christian morality adds to the general requirements of natural law, assuming these norms are correctly understood.

Moreover, every Christian thinker holds that the Gospel provides some fresh incentives for virtue and clarifies the importance of moral rectitude by showing the immense

dignity of human persons, the true depth of human goods, and the concern which God has for human morality--at least, for some aspects of it. (Some Christians are firm in stating God's concern for matters of justice and human rights but doubtful about His interest in personal morality--for example, in sexual purity.) But the question considered in the previous section goes beyond such features of moral practice; the issue is about what is right and what is wrong.

The thesis I am defending can perhaps be clarified by analogy. A dietician can set down certain general norms for an adequate and balanced human diet. If the general norms are incomplete or partly incorrect, someone might add to them by completing and correcting them. Also, someone might add to the norms by making clear to people how important good diet is to them.

But there is another way in which the general norms of dietetics can be supplemented. Only this other way will add any normative content to a complete and correct general set of norms. It is by specification. If one tells the dietician that the patient is suffering from a certain condition, and if the dietician knows that this condition limits the ways in which the common requirements of good diet can be fulfilled, then the dietician will produce a specific set of norms--for example, for an ulcer patient--which are fully in accord with the general norms, yet which add to the general norms. Certain foods which are generally permissible will be excluded; a special pattern and frequency of eating, special preparation of acceptable foods, and perhaps certain vitamin and mineral supplements will be required.

Christian morality is something like this. The human race is in a special, pathological condition. At the same time, it must be in training to accomplish the spectacular feat of actually reaching integral fulfillment. These factual conditions must be taken into account when one considers the implications for practice of the true, general requirements of human virtue. If these conditions (fully disclosed only by revelation) are ignored, then men and women will behave more or less unrealistically. Even if they do not know it, they will be acting incompatibly with integral human fulfillment rather than acting compatibly with it. Christian morality takes the actual conditions into account, with the result that the general norms of human morality are specified.

Precisely how the general norms must be specified would be difficult even to begin to figure out if we did not have the life and character of Jesus as both the model and the social basis for our own lives. From Him we learn that certain kinds of acts which otherwise might sometimes be justified are altogether excluded (for example, lying), that human goods must be pursued with an active effort to form community with all humankind (and so, for example, that enemies must be forgiven), and that certain supplements are essential to a good human life (for example, particular forms of religious activity such as those involved in the reception of the sacraments).

Thus, Christian moral norms add to the common requirements of sound human morality by specification. In thinking about the analogy with diet, one should bear in mind that the whole human race is fallen and redeemed. Thus the specific norms of Christian morality are not a set of optional ideals for those who freely choose to adopt a Christian lifestyle. They are norms which every human person, having been called to holiness in Christ, ought to fulfill if he or she is to fulfill consistently the common requirements of human morality. However, those who are not conscious of the requirements of Christian morality because through no fault of their own they have had no opportunity to accept the Gospel and be instructed in the way of Christ do not incur moral guilt for failing to fulfill the law of Christ. More is expected from those to whom more is given.

I. Why does specifically Christian love require moral goodness?

Specifically Christian love is a participation in divine life; it is a disposition to a more-than-human fulfillment in the experience of the intimate life of God. Moral goodness is a characteristic of human acts which are in accord with integral human fulfillment. Why does Christian love (charity) require moral goodness? This question already has been treated in chapter seven, sections D and E, and the answer to it is implicit in previous sections of the present chapter. However, the question is so important that I treat it explicitly here, with the hope of making the matter clearer in and for the present treatise.

It is important to notice that moral goodness is not required as a necessary condition or a means for gaining or receiving Christian love. Charity is a gift of God, and this gift itself justifies fallen human persons and makes them capable of living virtuous lives. No one merits anything without God's grace. To suppose that a person can be saved by good works, as though the prodigal son could earn his father's love, is no part of Catholic faith (cf. DS 1523-1531/795-800). However, once one has received the gift of divine love, then one both can and is held to fulfilling the moral requirements of the commandments (cf. DS 1536-1539/804). St. Paul says that it is due to God's grace

> . . .that salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing, it is God's gift; neither is it a reward for anything you have accomplished, so let no one pride himself on it. We are truly his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to lead the life of good deeds which God prepared for us in advance (Eph 2.8-10).

Salvation by God's grace demands a good life not as a means but as a consequence. A morally good life and the merit it entails is itself part of God's gift; indeed, it is to live the good life that the Christian is recreated in Christ.

Love fulfills the law (cf. Rom 13.8-10). Saving faith is the faith which works through love (cf. Gal 5.6-14). One must act upon the saving word and not merely listen to it (cf. Js 1.22-25). One must not merely say, "Lord, Lord," but must build on sound foundations and do the will of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 7.21-27; Lk 6.46-49).

If one loves one's father, one will obey one's father. By charity we love God as our Father. (He is a perfect Father whose commands are never arbitrary or mistaken--possibilities which might justify one in not obeying one's human father although one loves him.) Therefore, charity requires us to obey our heavenly Father. Part of the good which He wills to be done on earth is that His redeemed and adopted children live

humanly good lives. Therefore, charity requires moral goodness.

The preceding argument is sound, but it can be misunderstood. The connection between loving God and the requirement of moral goodness is not an extrinsic one, arbitrarily imposed, which God might reverse (or simply waive, like an indulgent parent who has demanded that a child work to obtain a bicycle, but who gives the bicycle even though the child refuses to do the work).

The intrinsic connection is this. Anyone who loves God--whether God Himself or Christians who have received the gift of charity--loves perfect goodness, for He is perfect goodness. Every other good reflects and participates in God's goodness. Therefore, in loving God one must love created things to the full measure of their goodness. A human person who does not love human fulfillment insofar as it is in his or her own power fails to love a created good to the full measure of its goodness. The requirements of morality are nothing but the implications of love of human fulfillment to the extent that it is within human power. Therefore, a consistent human person who loves God with charity cannot fail to meet the requirements of morality. If one's love of God is sincere and consistently carried out, one will detest what is morally evil and cling to what is humanly good (cf. Rom 12.1-9).

To sum up the matter negatively, as I did in chapter seven, section E: One cannot be disposed to infinite goodness by divine love if one is closed by one's morally evil act to that participation in infinite goodness which could and should be in the human fulfillment one negates by the evil of one's act.

J. A false notion of the specific requirements of Christian morality

Sometimes the relationship between love of God and Christian morality has been explained differently than I explain it here, in such a way that divine love is thought to impose requirements upon human action which in no way conduce to the fulfillment of human persons as such. For example, it has been said that charity is an unselfish, personal love of communion with God, such that by it one finds more pleasure in God and His interests than in oneself and one's own interests. It has even been suggested that Christ is the model of charity because His selflessness is necessarily grounded in His divine personality. According to this view, Jesus has no human self with which to be selfish, and Christians are perfect in charity only to the extent that they become as selfless as possible considering that they cannot get rid of their human selves!

This view is perhaps extreme, since it approaches docetism--the heresy which denies the full humanity of Christ--by excluding a human self from Jesus. But in a subtler form, many Christians have tended to suppose that human nature itself and the proper self-interest of human persons in their own fulfillment constitute alienation from God.

Underlying this sort of mistake is a twofold confusion. One is to fail to recognize that divine goodness and human goods are so utterly diverse that there simply can be no direct competition between them. The other is to confuse the self whose identity is defined by sin with the true human self.

The first confusion is apparent as soon as anyone begins talking about God's interests, as if God had a set of interests of His own. Truly, in the sense that human individuals (including Jesus as man) have a self, God has none. His love of His own goodness cannot be a source of selfishness, for He can gain nothing from others. His love of others is all-embracing, altogether nondiscriminatory, and purely generous. It follows that when the love of God which is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit is turned upon ourselves and our fellow human beings, the result is a reconciliation of ourselves with our own true interests, not an alienation of ourselves from our own interests in favor of "God's interests."

The second confusion is apparent as soon as anyone fails to recognize the sense in which Jesus does and does not have a normal, human self. What He lacks is the sort of self all of us sinners have insofar as we are sinners, namely, a self part of whose identity is defined by sinful commitments and sinful divisions from other humans. However, Jesus really has a human self in the sense that He is able to make and does make that sincere gift of Himself without which no human individual is able to find his or her true self (cf. GS 24). The reason is that the human self is perfected not in isolated fulfillment but in community.

An important effect of original sin was that human community was dissolved. The communion in which every human individual must find fulfillment was rendered impossible; every person became an individual more or less at odds with every other. It is the self defined by this situation which one must lose if one is truly to find oneself.

"I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2.19-20), should not be detached from what follows immediately: "I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2.20). The point is that one whose life is lived in communion with the redemptive act of Christ does not constitute his or her own identity by an independent basic commitment, but only has an identity by sharing in Christ's redemptive act.

Similarly, the point of saying that Christians live no longer for themselves but for Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5.15) is that a Christian has no private, personal life. The redemptive community formed by Jesus embraces the totality of one's life. In respect to it, one has not the private sphere and the liberty one has in relation to lesser societies, such as the family and civil society. One's whole human life falls within one's responsibilities as a member of the body of Christ.

K. In what ways does charity transform the significance of human life?

Christian morality not only has some specific normative content, it also is characterized by the supernatural significance which charity lends to human acts. This significance is fivefold.

First, human acts which are done out of love of God are meritorious. I have explained what this means in chapter seven, section M. According to the explanation

proposed there, merit is not an extrinsic relationship, but the inner connection between one's actions done out of a disposition toward fulfillment in Christ and the inclusion of these actions in this fulfillment. One gains one's place in the divine plan by playing now (to the extent possible and always by God's grace) the role God assigns one to play in it forever.

Second, human acts which are done out of love of God are redemptive--that is, they are a cooperation with God in reconciling humankind with Himself. The specific manner in which loving human acts are redemptive is that they are a medium by which God's love encounters human evil. Evil cannot be overcome by being attacked and destroyed; it cannot be overcome by being treated as unreal; it cannot be overcome by being ignored. It can be overcome only by the divine work of recreation, which is begun in the resurrection of Jesus. Human acts done out of love of God are dispositive to God's ultimate, redemptive act, because they come to grips with evil by undergoing its effects while remaining faithful to God's love. This point has been developed in chapter eleven, section O.

A third significance of human acts done out of love of God is that they become revelatory. The life of Jesus reveals the Father because of the love with which Jesus acts. His teaching interprets the meaning of His action in precisely these terms. Similarly, the lives of Christians will reveal and communicate the truth and love of God only to the extent that these lives are lived out of divine love and interpreted by the preaching of the Gospel. This point has been developed in chapter thirteen, section L.

Fourth, human acts which are done out of love of God constitute a holy and pleasing sacrifice. One who receives the gift of divine life owes in response to it the fruit of this same life. This fruit, which will be abundant if one abides in the love of Christ (cf. Jn 15.1-8), is the only gift one can offer God which is worthy of Him, since this gift alone has divine quality. The whole unfolding of this point pertains to the present part.

Fifth, and finally, human acts which are done out of love of God make that love pervade one's whole self. Only by enlisting every part of oneself in the service of love do all of these parts become integrated with the divine life which is present by the Spirit's gift in one's heart. If one is to be perfect in love--to love with one's whole mind and heart and soul and strength--human acts engaging all of oneself must be done out of love of God. This point will be developed in part seven.

L. Is charity a human act?

Charity--that is, specifically Christian love--requires morally good acts and transforms the significance of human life. But is charity itself a human act? It seems so, because there is a commandment to love God and neighbor (cf. Mt. 22.37-40; Mk 12.29-31; Lk 10.27). Moreover, children are taught to make acts not only of faith and hope, but also of charity; they learn suitable prayers by which to make such acts. Finally, charity is a virtue, and virtues are dispositions to good actions; hence, there must be acts of charity corresponding to the virtue of charity.

However, according to St. Paul, "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5.5). Now, what the Holy Spirit primarily gives is the status of adopted children of God, by which we share in the love with which Jesus as the Word is filled--that is, by which we share in the divine nature (cf. Rom 8.14-17; 2 Pt 1.4; Jn 1.14, 16). Participation in the divine nature is not a human act. Therefore, charity in itself is not a human act, although it is related to human acts.

As I explained in section A, above, charity is a divine gift by which created persons are disposed to be united with the divine persons and with one another as the divine persons themselves are united. This gift overcomes original sin and makes those who receive it upright and pleasing to God; it is received initially through Christ in baptism (cf. DS 1530/800). Although adults must prepare themselves (with the help of God's grace) for this gift by prior human acts, these acts are not themselves charity; moreover, even infants, who are altogether incapable of human acts, receive the gift of charity and are transformed by it (cf. DS 1525-1526/797-798; 1514/791).

As I explained in chapter six, section B, love itself is not an action but a disposition toward fulfillment. As a disposition toward fulfillment, all love is a principle of actions by which goods are realized and fulfillment shared in. Charity is divine love and a disposition toward fulfillment in divine life (cf. 1 Jn 3.1-2). As a disposition to fulfillment, charity is not something one is asked to <u>do</u>, but something one is asked to <u>remain in</u> (cf. 1 Jn 4.7-16; Jn 15.9). Because charity is not a human action, love toward God itself is presupposed, not directly commanded, as I explained in section B, above.

The commandment to love God and neighbor which is affirmed in the Gospels is a command to integrate one's entire self and relationship with others with charity--that is, to love God with one's whole mind and heart and soul and strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, which entails doing good to the neighbor as one does for oneself. This totalization of charity is accomplished by human acts done out of love of charity. Therefore, the perfection of charity can be required, although charity itself cannot.

The commandments indicate which acts must be done to integrate oneself with charity and to conform all one's relationships to it. Hence, so far as human acts are concerned, love of God is reducible to keeping His commandments (cf. Jn 14.21; 15.10; 1 Jn 2.3-5, 3.21-24), which is to "love in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3.18), and love of neighbor is reducible to serving one's neighbor (cf. Mt 7.21; 25.31-46; Jn 13.15, 34; Rom 12.9-21; 1 Jn 3.11-17).

The saying of prayers by which one expresses one's love toward God is properly a religious act of devotion. If this act is done out of charity, then it is an act of charity in the same sense as is every other human act done out of charity. However, the prayer which expresses love of God can be said without charity--for example, by those in mortal sin who deceive themselves about their relationship with God. Such so-called acts of charity belong to the empty talk condemned in Scripture (cf. Mt 7.21; 1 Jn 3.18).

The virtue of charity is a disposition to good actions, but the fulfillment to which it is most properly and specifically a disposition is not a human act, but the divine act of seeing God as He is (cf. 1 Jn 3.2). Hence, only the Spirit of God knows this depth of God and disposes human persons to it by a love which transcends human nature (cf. 1 Cor 2.6-12). By way of consequence, charity disposes to integral human fulfillment, as I explained in section I, above. Hence, all good human acts done by a person out of charity are acts of charity.

Further, since specifically Christian morality adds normative content to the common human moral requirements, as I explained in section G, above, virtuous acts done out of charity and formed by this specific content are called "acts of charity" in an especially appropriate sense. For this reason the requirements of Christian mercy which add to the common requirements of justice are said to refer to works of "charity." Most especially, the act of living faith, which includes a human act done out of charity, is an act of charity, for by this act we accept God's self communication, as I explained in chapter seven, section B, and chapter thirteen, section E.

M. Further comments on charity and human acts

Since charity itself is not a human act, one need not and cannot make a choice between loving God out of charity and anything else, for choices are of human acts. This conclusion agrees with the position that divine goodness is not an alternative to any created good, since no other good is of the same order as divine goodness, and every other good depends upon it. Moreover, this conclusion agrees with the position that charity is a disposition to the ultimate end, since choice always presupposes a good as an end to which the chosen action is an appropriate means.

The actuation of the human will established by the gift of charity is more like the simple volition of a basic human good than it is like an act of choice; however, charity is unlike the love of any of the basic human goods insofar as it disposes to fulfillment in divine goodness, which includes all the basic human goods as participations.

A correct understanding of this matter obviates the illusion that in loving God above all things one must set aside or downgrade anything which properly pertains to true human goodness. At the same time, since charity does demand moral goodness, one who chooses in a way which is incompatible with true human goodness also violates charity, as I explained in chapter seven, section E. Human persons cannot by their own choice make themselves sharers in divine love, but they can by their own choice separate themselves from the love of God and evict the Spirit from their hearts. Hence, St. Paul teaches both that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (cf. Rom 8.35-39) and that if one lives according to the flesh--that is, according to sinful human dispositions--one will lose everlasting life (cf. Rom 7.13; Gal 5.16-21).

As the gospels command, Sts. Paul and John also make clear that charity can and should grow (cf. 1 Jn 2.5; 1 Thess 3.13). The growth of charity must be understood not as if the divine gift itself were subject to intrinsic change, but as a process by which the gift of charity is more perfectly and totally received through one's becoming more and more totally integrated in respect to it.[3] Living faith is the primary act of charity. As the whole of one's life is tightly organized by faith and lived through the power of love, charity grows. One might explain this point by analogy with the way in which the earth in summer increases in the warmth of the sun. The sun in itself is not hotter, but the earth sometimes more fully shares in this warmth.

If one supposes that charity itself is a human act, one is likely to seek in experience for some action with which charity can be identified. If one is unable to find any such action, one is likely to become discouraged about one's spiritual life. If one identifies some particular experience or performance with charitable love of God, one is likely to be misled into the excessive cultivation of this experience or performance to the detriment of other dimensions of human life which might be equally or more essential to a life of charity.

Someone might suppose that if so far as human acts are concerned charity reduces to keeping God's commandments and serving one's neighbor, then the mystical dimension of Christian life is removed and Christianity will be reduced to ethical behavior. But this supposition would be a mistake. The good of religion is a human good, and charity requires appropriate acts pertaining to this good, such as prayer and sacrifice, just as it requires appropriate acts pertaining to other goods. The carrying out of appropriate human acts pertaining to the good of religion, when they are done out of charity to practice one's faith, creates a context in which God brings about spontaneous actuations of a person's capacities which transcend natural powers. Such actuations, which are conditioned upon and therefore express charity, constitute the mystical dimension of Christian life.

It is worth noticing that if one recognizes that all virtuous acts of one who has charity are acts of charity, then one thing is removed which creates a dichotomy between one's personal, spiritual life and one's duties in charity toward one's neighbor. The integration of one's life is a matter of organizing all other commitments within one's act of faith, so that one's whole life will be a fulfillment of one's personal vocation. Particular acts are undertaken according to the demands of one's total, personal vocation.

N. Whether there is an order in charity?

Charity is a disposition toward fulfillment in divine life. Since fulfillment in divine life is a communion of persons, and since among these persons there is a definite order, there is an order in charity. No one comes to the Father except through the Son (cf. Jn 14.6). Thus the natural unity of the Father and the Son is the precondition of the communion of human persons in divine life, for Jesus loves His human brothers and sisters as the Father loves Him (cf. Jn 15.9). United in Christ, not as isolated individuals, human persons share in divine life and become children of God (cf. Jn 1.16; 17.20-26). The Spirit who pours forth charity (cf. Rom 5.5) is the Spirit of the Son (cf. Gal 4.6).

Among human persons likewise there is an order in charity, since some are the medium by which others are redeemed. All who are saved are saved by being united with Christ as members of His body, the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12.27; Eph 2.11-22). But within this body there are different roles and a definite order, since, for example, the apostles and prophets provide a foundation (cf. Eph 2.20; 1 Cor 12.28-29).

The inherent orderliness of charity explains why fraternal charity among Christians is so strongly stressed. Jesus demands that His disciples love one another (cf. Jn 13.34); St. John repeatedly stresses love of believers for one another (cf. 1 Jn). Love among Christians has a certain priority over love for those outside: "While we have the opportunity, let us do good to all men--especially those of the household of the faith" (Gal 6.10; cf. 1 Pt 2.17). But this priority is not partiality and discrimination. The love of Christians for one another is the necessary precondition for the revelation and effective communication of divine love to others:

> "I give you a new commandment: Love one another.
> Such as my love has been for you,
> so must your love be for each other.
> This is how all will know you are my disciples:
> your love for one another" (Jn 13.34-35; cf. Jn 17.22-23).

The priority of love within the Church is determined by its mission of service in the redemption of the whole of humankind. The Church can communicate divine love to the world only if divine love is present in the Church. Moreover, the intensity of love within the Church will condition its effectiveness in its mission to the world, much as the intensity of heat in a furnace will condition its effectiveness in heating a whole building.

0. Further notes on the order of charity

St. Paul presents the relationship between husband and wife as an instance of the order of charity (cf. Eph 5.22-33). I discussed this instance in chapter six, section F. Priority in the order of charity does not mean human superiority; rather, it means a prior responsibility to serve and to sacrifice one's personal interests. One who is second in the order of charity owes the submission of a recipient to a source (cf. 1 Cor 11.3). In certain relationships, women are prior to men--for example, mothers are prior to their sons (cf. 1 Cor 11.12). Self-oblation is required of mothers and submissiveness of children, including boys toward their mothers.

Charity is community-forming; love builds up the Church (cf. 1 Cor 8.1; Eph 4.15-16). This quality follows from the nature of charity as a communion of divine and human persons. For this reason, one ought not to think of Christian love individualistically, as if it were a bond only between individuals--individual souls and God, or any other pair as "I" and "thou." The relationship of love begins with a single "I" in only one case: that of the Father from whom everything proceeds. In this case, it immediately unfolds into the "we" of the Father and the Son together, from whom as a single source the Spirit proceeds, and then by generous freedom into the "we" of the Creator who says: Let Us. . ..

In loving with charity, then, one always loves as part of a body and loves a body. As a member of the Church carrying out the apostolic mission to the world, one loves mankind outside faith. As part of His created family loving its triune source, one loves God.

This characteristic of charity solves the problem, often raised, how love can be universal without being diluted to such an extent that it becomes a mere abstract philanthropy, like that of secular humanists who love humankind in general but are willing to kill their own kin and neighbors. By Christian charity, one's love on whatever scale is engaged in a real and cooperative work. The larger the scale of this work, the greater the demand for charity in deed and in truth among those who share in the more immediate relationships necessary to carry it out.

Notes to chapter eighteen

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 1-2, qu. 108, art. 2.
2. See Timothy E. O'Connell, Principles for a Catholic Morality (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), pp. 199-208, and p. 227, note 11.
3. St. Thomas Aquinas, op. cit., qu. 24. art. 5.