



Good day Worthy Knights,

Bro. Anthony N Wilson  
Golden Harvest Lodge 9234 EC  
Hamilton, Canada

In this part 110, the Theological Virtues

To approach an understanding of the three Theological Virtues, as they appear in the three theological orations in the Red Cross of Constantine ritual, it may be beneficial to explore firstly a little philosophy, then to review the theological virtues themselves, and finally to express the implications in more practical terms.

### **Philosophical Considerations**

Semantics are especially important in this context.

The adjective moral refers to standards of behaviour based on principles of right and wrong according to customs, from the Latin *moralis*, from *mos*, *moris*, a custom.

Hence the noun mores, or customs/conventions (of society).

Ethics refers to principles that govern a person's behaviour. As a philosophical concept, there are three major Western schools of ethics:

**Aristotelian ethics**, which holds that virtues are dispositions to act in ways that benefit both the person possessing them and that person's society.

**Kantian ethics**, in which the concept of duty is central to right behaviour, that is, humans are bound, from knowledge of their duty as rational beings, to obey the imperative to respect other rational beings.

**Utilitarian ethics**, which asserts that the guiding principle of conduct should be the greatest happiness or benefit of the greatest number.

Aristotle first used the term ethics to name a field of study developed by his predecessors Socrates and Plato. Philosophically, ethics is the attempt to offer a rational response to the question of how humans should best live. Aristotle regarded ethics as a study to examine the worth of the individual, and he emphasized the practical importance of developing virtue (excellence) of character as the way to achieve what is ultimately more important, virtuous (excellent) conduct.

The Aristotelian intellectual virtues:

Scientific knowledge,  
Artistic knowledge,  
Intuitive reason,  
Philosophical wisdom,  
Prudence, which Aristotle described as practical wisdom.

The four Platonic cardinal virtues, so-called because all other virtues hinge on them, from the Latin *cardinalis*, from *cardo*, *cardinis*, a hinge:

Prudence (wisdom),  
Temperance (moderation),  
Fortitude (courage),  
Justice.

These virtues constitute a "package" of virtuous behaviour.

Both Plato and Aristotle argued that all the highest forms of virtuous behaviour require each other, that is, being virtuous in one area, but falling down in another, could not be considered authentically virtuous behaviour.

## **Theological Context**

From a theological viewpoint, ethics and morality are not the same things.

Moral theology is based on the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity (love), the full practice and attainment of which requires the intervention of, and illumination by, God.

The cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice are the ethical practices through which one prepares oneself for the assimilation, by the grace of God, of the theological virtues.

What are these theological virtues?

**Faith** is defined as a supernatural virtue by which, with the inspiration and assistance of God's grace, one is able to give rational assent to, and believe as truthful, those things which God has revealed. Faith is not blind belief, however, for one cannot give assent to the teaching of sacred scripture in a complete way without the illumination provided by God.

**Hope** is defined as a supernatural virtue which acts upon the will, and by which one trusts with confidence, grounded in Divine assistance, that one will attain eternal life with God. The virtue of hope may be considered to be the opposite of the sin of despair.

**Charity** is defined as a supernatural virtue, inclining the human will to cherish God for his own sake above all things, and man for the sake of God. To love God is to wish Him all honour and glory and every good, and to endeavour, as far as one can, to obtain it for Him. The virtue of charity (love) may be considered to be the opposite of the sins of hatred, anger and indifference

In the gospel of John, chapter 14, reciprocity as a principle in virtuous behaviour is clearly stated, making charity a bridge of friendship between God and man: "Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and reveal myself to him."

This reciprocity is echoed in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 22: " 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.' " Refer to the book of Leviticus, chapter 19, where this virtue is pre-empted: "You will not exact vengeance on, or bear any sort of grudge against, the members of your people, but will love your neighbour as yourself. I am Yahweh."

The ethic of reciprocity is generally known as the Golden Rule.

## **Conclusion**

The three theological orations, then, make it the weighty and far-reaching responsibility of the Knight to allow the theological virtues to be a guide to the choices he makes and the manner in which he chooses to conduct himself.