

## QUESTION 24

### The Subject of Charity

We next have to consider charity in relation to its subject. On this topic there are twelve questions: (1) Is charity in the will as in a subject? (2) Is charity caused in a man by his previous acts or by God's infusing it? (3) Is charity infused in proportion to the capacity of a man's natural gifts (*secundum capacitatem naturalium*)? (4) Does charity increase in the one who has it? (5) Does charity increase by addition? (6) Is charity increased by every act [of charity]? (7) Does charity increase *ad infinitum*? (8) Can charity in this life be perfect? (9) What are the different stages of charity? (10) Can charity decrease? (11) Can charity once had be lost? (12) Is charity lost through a single act of mortal sin?

#### Article 1

##### Is the will the subject of charity?

It seems that the will is not the subject of charity:

**Objection 1:** Charity is a certain type of love. But according to the Philosopher, love (*amor*) is in the concupiscible appetite. Therefore, charity is likewise in the concupiscible appetite and not in the will.

**Objection 2:** As was explained above (q. 23, a. 6), charity is the most important of the virtues. But reason is the subject of virtues. Therefore, it seems that charity is in reason and not in the will.

**Objection 3:** Charity extends to all human acts—this according to 1 Corinthians 16:14 (“Let all your deeds be done in charity”). Therefore, it seems that charity resides especially in free choice as in a subject, and not in the will.

**But contrary to this:** The object of charity is the good, which is likewise the object of the will. Therefore, charity exists in the will as in a subject.

**I respond:** Since, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 80, a. 2), there are two appetites, viz., the sentient appetite and the intellective appetite, which is called the will, the good is the object of both of them, but in different ways. For the object of the sentient appetite is the good as apprehended through the senses, whereas the object of the intellective appetite, or will, is the good under the common concept *good*, insofar as it can be apprehended by the intellect.

Now the object of charity is not a good that can be sensed, but is instead the divine good, which only the intellect has cognition of. And so the subject of charity is the intellective appetite, i.e., the will, and not the sentient appetite.

**Reply to objection 1:** As was shown in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 81, a. 2), the concupiscible appetite is part of the sentient appetite, but not part of the intellective appetite. Hence, the love that exists in the concupiscible appetite is love of a good that can be sensed. However, the concupiscible appetite does not extend to the divine good, which is intelligible; only the will does. And so the concupiscible appetite cannot be the subject of charity.

**Reply to objection 2:** According to the Philosopher in *De Anima* 3, the will exists in reason. And so by the fact that charity is in the will, charity is not alien to reason.

Still, reason is not the rule of charity in the way that it is of the other virtues; instead, charity is regulated by God's wisdom and exceeds the rule of human reason—this according to Ephesians 3:19 (“... the charity of Christ, which surpasses scientific knowledge”). Hence, charity is not in reason as in its subject, in the way that prudence is; nor is it in reason as in that which regulates it, in the way that justice and temperance are. Instead, it is ‘in reason’ only because of the will's affinity to reason.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 83, a. 4), free choice is not a power different from the will. And yet charity does not exist in the will under the concept *free choice*. For [the power of] free choice, the act of which is to choose, is directed towards the means to an end, whereas the will (*voluntas*), as is explained in *Ethics* 3, is directed toward the end itself. Hence, charity,

whose object is the ultimate end, should be said to exist in the will rather than in free choice.

## Article 2

### Is charity caused in us by being infused?

It seems that charity is not caused in us by being infused (*non causetur in nobis ex infusione*):

**Objection 1:** What is common to all creatures exists naturally in men. But as Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus* 4, “What is lovable and delectable (*diligibile et amabile*) to all things is the divine good,” which is the object of charity. Therefore, charity exists in us naturally and not by being infused.

**Objection 2:** A thing can be loved more easily to the extent that it is more lovable. But God is maximally lovable, since He is the greatest good. Therefore, it is easier to love Him than to love other things. But we do not need an infused habit in order to love other things. Therefore, neither do we need an infused habit in order to love God.

**Objection 3:** In 1 Timothy 1:5 the Apostle says, “The end of the commandment is charity from a good heart and a pure conscience and an unfeigned faith.” But these three things belong to human acts. Therefore, charity is caused in us by our previous acts and not by being infused.

**But contrary to this:** In Romans 5:5 the Apostle says, “Charity is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given to us.”

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 23, a. 1) charity is a certain sort of friendship of man with God, founded on God’s sharing eternal beatitude (*fundata super communicationem beatitudinis aeternae*). However, according to Romans 6:23 (“The grace of God is eternal life”), this sharing has to do not with natural goods, but with the gifts of grace (*dona gratuita*). Hence, charity itself likewise exceeds the capacity of nature (*facultatem naturae excedit*).

Now what exceeds the capacity of nature cannot be natural and cannot be acquired by means of natural powers. For a natural effect does not transcend its cause. Hence, charity cannot exist naturally in us and is not acquired by our natural powers. Instead, it is acquired by an infusion of the Holy Spirit (*per infusionem Sancti Spiritus*), who is the love of the Father and the Son; and, as was explained above (q. 23, a. 2), created charity is itself our participation in that love (*et cuius participatio in nobis est ipsa caritas creata*).

**Reply to objection 1:** Dionysius is talking about the sort of love of God that is based upon the sharing of natural goods, and so this sort of love exists naturally in us. By contrast, charity is based on a supernatural sharing. Hence, the arguments are not parallel.

**Reply to objection 2:** Just as God is in Himself maximally knowable and yet not maximally knowable to us—and this because of the weakness of our cognition, which depends on things that can be sensed—so, too, God is maximally lovable in His own right insofar as He is the object of beatitude, but He is not in this way maximally lovable to us—and this because of our affective inclination toward visible goods. Hence, it is necessary for charity to be infused into our hearts in order for us to love God to the highest degree.

**Reply to objection 3:** When charity is said to proceed in us “from a good heart and a pure conscience and an unfeigned faith,” this should be taken to refer to the *act* of charity, which is aroused by these things when they precede it.

An alternative reply is that this assertion is made because acts of the sort in question dispose a man to receive the infusion of charity. Again, one should say about this (a) what Augustine says, viz., that “fear leads to charity,” and (b) what is said in a Gloss on Matthew 1:2, viz., that “faith generates hope, and hope generates charity.”

### Article 3

#### Is charity infused in proportion to the quantity of one's natural powers?

It seems that charity is infused in proportion to the quantity of one's natural powers (*secundum quantitatem naturalium*):

**Objection 1:** Matthew 25:15 says, "He gave to each one in proportion to his virtue." But there is no virtue or power that precedes charity besides natural virtue or power (*virtus naturalis*), since, as has been explained (q. 23, a. 7), without charity there is no virtue. Therefore, charity is infused in a man by God in proportion to his natural power.

**Objection 2:** Among all the things that are ordered to one another, the second is proportioned to the first; for instance, we see that (a) in material things the form is proportioned to the matter and that (b) among the gifts of grace, glory is proportioned to [habitual] grace. But since charity is the perfection of nature, it is related to one's natural capacity in the way that a second thing is related to a first thing. Therefore, it seems that charity is infused in proportion to the capacity of one's natural powers.

**Objection 3:** Men and angels participate in charity in the same way, since in both there is a similar sort of beatitude—this according to Matthew 22:30 and Luke 20:36. But, as the Master explains in *Sentences* 3, dist. 2, in the case of the angels charity and the other gifts of grace are given in proportion to the capacity of their natural powers. Therefore, the same thing seems likewise to hold true in the case of men.

**But contrary to this:** John 3:8 says, "The Spirit breathes where He will." And 1 Corinthians 12:11 says, "All these things are done by one and the same Spirit, apportioning to each as He will." Therefore, charity is given not in proportion to the capacity of one's natural powers, but rather according to the will of the Spirit who distributes His gifts.

**I respond:** The quantity of any given thing depends on the thing's proper cause, since a more universal cause produces a greater effect. Now since, as has been explained (a. 2), charity exceeds any proportion to human nature, it does not depend on any natural power but only on the grace of the Holy Spirit who infuses it. And so the quantity of charity does not depend on the nature's condition or on the capacity of its natural power; instead, it depends only on the will of the Holy Spirit distributing His gifts as He will. This is why, in Ephesians 4:7, the Apostle says, "Every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the giving of Christ."

**Reply to objection 1:** The power in accord with which God gives His gifts to everyone is the antecedent disposition or preparation, i.e., the effort (*conatus*) of the one who is receiving the grace. But the Holy Spirit likewise initiates (*praevenit*) this disposition or effort as well, moving the man's mind either more or less according to His will. Hence, in Colossians 1:12 the Apostle also says, "He has made us worthy to participate in the lot of the saints in light."

**Reply to objection 2:** A form does not exceed the measure of its matter; instead, they are of the same kind. Similarly, grace and glory are of the same kind (*ad idem genus referuntur*), since [habitual] grace is nothing other than a beginning of glory in us. By contrast, grace and nature are not of the same kind. Therefore, the two cases are not parallel.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 61, a. 6), an angel has an intellectual nature, and it belongs to him by his status (*secundum suam conditionem*) to enter fully into whatever he enters into. And so among the higher angels there was both a stronger striving (*conatus*) for the good in those who persevered and also a stronger striving for evil in those who fell.

By contrast, a man is a rational nature, and it belongs to a rational nature to be at some times in potentiality and at some times in act. And so a man does not have to enter fully into whatever he enters into. Instead, someone who has greater natural powers can make less of an effort (*minor conatus*), and vice versa. And so the two cases are not parallel.

## Article 4

### Can charity increase?

It seems that charity cannot increase:

**Objection 1:** The only thing that increases is a thing with quantity (*nisi quantum*). But there are two sorts of quantity, viz., (a) *dimensive* quantity and (b) quantity of *power* (*quantitas virtualis*). The first does not belong to charity, since charity is a spiritual perfection. And the quantity of a power has to do with [the number of] its objects. But charity does not grow in this regard, since even the least charity loves all the things that are to be loved out of charity. Therefore, charity does not increase.

**Objection 2:** What is already at the limit (*in termino*) does not receive an increase. But charity is at the limit, since it is the greatest of the virtues and the highest sort of love of the highest good. Therefore, charity cannot increase.

**Objection 3:** Increase is a certain sort of change (*quidam motus*). Therefore, that which increases is changed. Therefore, what is increased in essence (*essentialiter*) changes in essence. But a thing is not changed in essence unless it is either corrupted or generated. Therefore, charity cannot increase in essence, unless perhaps it were being generated or corrupted—which is absurd.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, “Charity deserves (*meretur*) to increase, so that, having increased, it might likewise deserve to be perfected.”

**I respond:** The charity of this life (*caritas viae*) can increase. For we are called ‘wayfarers’ (*viatores*) by reason of the fact that we are travelling toward God, who is the ultimate end of our beatitude. But in this life, the more progress we make, the closer we come to God, who is approached not by bodily steps but by the affections of the mind. But it is charity that effects this approach, since it is through charity that the mind is united to God. And so the charity of this life is by nature such that it can increase; for if it could not increase, then our progress in this life would cease. This is why the Apostle calls charity a “way,” when in 1 Corinthians 12:31 he says, “I now point out to you a still more excellent way.”

**Reply to objection 1:** Only quantity of power—and not *dimensive* quantity—belongs to charity. However, this sort of quantity has to do not only with the *number of objects*, viz., in the sense that more objects or fewer objects are loved, but also with the *intensity of the act*, in the sense that something is loved more or loved less. And it is in this latter sense that the quantity of charity increases.

**Reply to objection 2:** Charity is at the summit with respect to its object, viz., insofar as its object is the highest good; and it is from this that it follows that charity is more excellent than the other virtues. But it is not the case that every instance of charity is at the summit as regards the intensity of its act.

**Reply to objection 3:** Some have claimed that charity increases only with respect to its rootedness in its subject, or with respect to its fervor, and not with respect to its essence. However, these people did not understand what they were saying (*propriam vocem ignoraverunt*).

For since charity is an accident, its being is to-be-in-another (*eius esse est inesse*). Hence, for it to increase with respect to its essence is nothing other than for it to exist in its subject to a greater degree, i.e., to be more deeply rooted in its subject.

Again, charity is by its essence (*essentialiter*) a virtue that is ordered toward its act, and so its increasing with respect to its essence is the same as its having efficacy in producing an act of more fervent love.

Therefore, charity increases in its essence not in the sense that it begins to exist or ceases to exist in its subject—as the objection imagines—but rather in the sense that it begins to exist in its subject to a greater degree.

## Article 5

### Does charity increase by addition?

It seems that charity increases by addition:

**Objection 1:** An increase with respect to quantity of power is just like an increase with respect to corporeal quantity. But an increase with respect to corporeal quantity is effected by addition; for in *On Generation and Corruption* 1 the Philosopher says, “Increase is an addition to a preexistent magnitude.” Therefore, an increase of charity, which is an increase with respect to a quantity of power, will likewise be by addition.

**Objection 2:** According to 1 John 2:10 (“He who loves his brother abides in the light”), charity in the soul is a sort of spiritual light. But light grows in the air by addition; for instance, light grows in a house when another candle is lit. Therefore, charity grows in the soul by addition.

**Objection 3:** According to 2 Corinthians 9:10 (“He will increase the growth of the fruits of your justice”), it belongs to God to make charity increase. But by infusing charity in the first place, God makes something in the soul that was previously not there. Therefore, by increasing charity God likewise makes something in the soul that was previously not there. Therefore, charity increases by addition.

**But contrary to this:** Charity is a simple form. But as is proved in *Physics* 4, when what is simple is added to what is simple, it does not make something bigger. Therefore charity does not increase by addition.

**I respond:** Every addition is an addition *of* something *to* something. Hence, in the case of every addition, one has to presuppose, prior to the addition, at least the distinction between the things, the one of which is added to the other. Therefore, if charity is added to charity, one must presuppose that the added charity is distinct from the charity to which it is added—not, to be sure, that it is distinct with respect to its *esse*, but at least that it is *understood* as distinct (*secundum intellectum*). By way of example, God could likewise increase a corporeal quantity by adding some magnitude that was created at that moment, not having previously existed, and yet even though it did not previously exist in reality, it would still in itself be such that one could *understand* its distinctness from the quantity to which it is added. Therefore, if charity is added to charity, one must presuppose—at least with respect to *understanding*—the distinctness of the one charity from the other.

Now in the case of forms there are *two* sorts of distinction, the *one* with respect to *species* and the *other* with respect to *number*. Among habits the distinction with respect to species has to do with a diversity in the *objects*, whereas the distinction with respect to number has to do with a diversity in the *subjects*.

Thus, a habit can grow by addition when it is extended to objects which it previously did not extend to, and it is in this sense that the scientific knowledge of geometry increases in someone who begins to know *de novo* geometrical matters that he previously did not know.

However, this cannot be said about charity, since even the most minimal instance of charity (*minima caritas*) extends to everything that should be loved out of charity. Therefore, in the case of an increase in charity, the addition cannot be understood as presupposing a distinction in species between the added charity and the charity to which it is added.

What remains, then, is that if an addition is made of charity to charity, then it is made on the presupposition that there is a distinction with respect to number—i.e., with respect to a diversity of subjects, in the way that whiteness increases when one white thing is added to another, even though it is not the case that by this increase something becomes more white.

But neither can this be said in the case under discussion. For the subject of charity is a rational mind, and so the sort of increase of charity described above could be effected only if by means of it one rational mind were added to another—which is impossible. Again, even if this sort of increase were

possible, it would effect a greater thing that loves and not a thing that loves to a greater degree.

Therefore, it follows that there is no way in which charity can increase by the addition of one charity to another, as some have claimed.

So, then, charity increases only by its subject's participating in charity to greater and greater degrees (*magis et magis participat caritatem*), i.e., only insofar as its subject is more easily led to acts of charity (*magis reducitur in actum illius*) and is more subordinated to charity. For this is the mode of increase that is proper to any form that is intensified, since being a form of this sort consists wholly in inhering in what is susceptible to it. And so since the magnitude of a thing follows upon its *esse*, for the form to be greater is for it to exist to a greater degree in what is susceptible to it (*formam esse maiorem hoc est eam magis inesse susceptibili*), and not for another form to arrive. For the latter would occur if the form had a certain quantity in its own right (*ex seipsa*) and not in relation to its subject.

So, then, charity increases by being intensified in its subject—and this is for it to increase with respect to its *essence*—and not by one charity being added to another.

**Reply to objection 1:** A corporeal quantity has (a) something insofar as it is a *quantity* and (b) something insofar as it is an *accidental form*:

Insofar as it is a *quantity*, it is distinct with respect to its location or distinct in its number. And so it is in this sense that an increase in quantity is thought of as being by addition, as is clear in the case of animals.

On the other hand, insofar as a quantity is an *accidental form*, it can be distinct only with respect to its subject. And it is in this sense that it has increase properly speaking (*habet propriam augmentum*) by way of its intensification within its subject (*per modum intensificationis eius subiecto*), in the same way that other accidental forms do. This is clear in case of things that become rarified, as the Philosopher shows in *Physics* 4.

Similarly, scientific knowledge (*scientia*), insofar as it is a *habit*, has quantity on the part of its *objects*; and in this sense it grows through addition insofar as someone comes to know more things. Likewise, insofar as it is an *accidental form*, it also has quantity by the fact that it *exists in a subject*; in this sense it grows in someone who now knows the same knowable things with more certitude (*certius*) than he had before.

Charity likewise has two sorts of quantity. But, as has been explained, it does not increase in the quantity that is taken from the objects. Hence, it follows that charity increases only through intensification.

**Reply to objection 2:** The addition of light to light can be understood to occur in the air because of the diversity of the light-sources that are causing the light. But this sort of distinction has no place in the case under discussion, since there is just one light-source that causes the light of charity.

**Reply to objection 3:** The *infusion* of charity implies a change with respect to *having charity* and *not having charity*, and so it must be the case that something arrives that had previously not existed in the subject. By contrast, an *increase* of charity implies a change with respect to *having less* and *having more*. And so it does not have to be the case that something now exists that previously had not been infused; rather, it has to be the case that what had previously existed in the subject to a lesser degree now exists to a greater degree. And this is what God effects by increasing charity, viz., that it now exists [in the subject] to a greater degree, and that the likeness of the Holy Spirit is participated in more fully in the soul.

## Article 6

### Does charity increase with every act of charity?

It seems that charity increases with every act of charity:

**Objection 1:** What is capable of a greater effect is capable of a lesser effect. But every act of charity merits eternal life, which is greater than a simple increase of charity, since eternal life includes the perfection of charity. Therefore, *a fortiori*, every act of charity increases charity.

**Objection 2:** Just as a habit among the acquired virtues is generated by acts, so too an increase of charity is caused by acts of charity. But every virtuous act contributes to the generation of a virtue. Therefore, every act of charity likewise contributes to an increase of charity.

**Objection 3:** Gregory says, “On the way to God, to stand still is to go backwards.” But no one goes backwards when he is moved by an act of charity. Therefore, anyone who is moved by an act of charity makes progress on the way to God. Therefore, charity increases with every act of charity.

**But contrary to this:** An effect does not exceed the power of its cause. But sometimes an act of charity is done with lukewarmness (*tepor*) or lack of intensity (*remissio*). Therefore, it does not lead to a more excellent charity, but instead disposes one toward a lesser charity.

**I respond:** A spiritual increase of charity is in some way similar to a corporeal increase. However, corporeal increase in animals and plants is not a continuous movement in the sense that if something increases to such-and-such an extent in such-and-such a temporal interval, then something is added proportionally in each part of that temporal interval, as happens in local motion. Instead, for a time nature operates to dispose the plant or animal for the increase and does not increase anything in actuality, and afterwards it produces the effect that it had disposed the subject for by increasing the plant or animal.

So, too, not every act of charity increases charity in actuality, but every act of charity does dispose one for an increase of charity, insofar as by one act of charity a man is rendered more prompt to act out of charity once again. And as this facility increases, the man breaks out into a more fervent act of love by which he strives to make progress in charity; and it is at that point that charity increases in actuality.

**Reply to objection 1:** Every act of charity merits eternal life—to be procured not immediately, but in its own proper time. Similarly, every act of charity merits an increase of charity, and yet charity does not increase immediately, but increases when one strives for such an increase.

**Reply to objection 2:** Even in the case of the generation of an acquired virtue, not every act brings the generation of the virtue to completion; instead, every act contributes to the generation by disposing one for it; and it is the last act, which is more perfect and acts in the power of all the previous acts, that brings the generation to actuality—just as in the case of the many drops of water that hollow out a stone.

**Reply to objection 3:** One is making progress on the way to God not only when his charity is actually increasing, but also as long as he is disposed for an increase.

## Article 7

### Does charity increase *ad infinitum*?

It seems that charity does not increase *ad infinitum*:

**Objection 1:** As *Metaphysics 2* explains, every movement is toward some terminus and end. But an increase of charity is a sort of movement. Therefore, it tends toward some end and terminus. Therefore, it is not the case that charity increases *ad infinitum*.

**Objection 2:** No form exceeds the capacity of its subject. But the capacity of a rational creature, which is the subject of charity, is finite. Therefore, charity cannot increase *ad infinitum*.

**Objection 3:** Every finite thing is such that through continuous increase it can attain the quantity of another finite thing, no matter how big the latter is—unless, perchance, what accrues to it through the increase is ever-diminishing (*id quod accrescit per augmentum semper sit minus et minus*). For as the Philosopher explains in *Physics* 3, if we add to one line what is taken from a second line that is being divided *ad infinitum*, and if these additions are made *ad infinitum*, we will never reach any determinate quantity which is composed of the two lines, i.e., the line that is being divided and the line to which what is subtracted from the divided line is being added. However, this does not occur in the case under discussion, since a second increase in charity does not have to be less than the previous increase; rather, it is more probable that it is equal to the previous increase or greater than it. Therefore, since charity in heaven is a limit, if charity in this life could increase *ad infinitum*, it would follow that the charity in this life could be made equal to the charity in heaven—which is absurd. Therefore, it is not the case that charity in this life can increase *ad infinitum*.

**But contrary to this:** In Philippians 3:12 the Apostle says, “Not that I have already attained it or already become perfect, but I pursue it in the hope that I might possess it.” A Gloss on this passage says, “None of the faithful, even if he has made great progress, says, ‘That is enough for me.’ For anyone who says this has left the road before reaching the end.” Therefore, in this life charity can always increase more and more.

**I respond:** There are three ways in which a terminus can be fixed for the increase of a form:

In *one* way, on the basis of *the nature of the form itself*, which has a fixed measure that is such that, once it is reached, the increase cannot go any further in the form, and if it does go further, then one arrives at a different form. This is clear in the case of grayness, the limits of which one crosses by means of continuous alteration, arriving at either whiteness or blackness.

In the *second* way, on the part of *the agent*, whose power does not extend to increasing the form any further within the subject.

In the third way, on the part of *the subject*, which is not capable of any greater perfection.

Now in none of these ways is a limit imposed on the increase of charity in this life:

Charity does not itself have a limit of increase according to the proper nature of its species, since it is a sort of participation in unlimited charity, i.e., in the Holy Spirit (*participatio quaedam infinitae caritatis, quae est Spiritus Sanctus*). Similarly, the cause that effects an increase in charity has unlimited power (*est infinitae virtutis*), viz., God. Again, a limit to such an increase cannot be fixed even on the part of the subject, since it is always the case that when charity grows, the capacity for further increase grows.

Hence, it follows that no limit to an increase of charity can be fixed in this life.

**Reply to objection 1:** An increase in charity is ordered toward some limit, but that limit exists in the future life and not in this life.

**Reply to objection 2:** The capacity of a spiritual creature increases through charity, since the heart is enlarged through charity—this according to 2 Corinthians 6:11 (“Our heart is enlarged”). And so further capacity still remains for a greater increase.

**Reply to objection 3:** This objection goes through for those things that have quantity of the same type, but not for things which have a diverse sort of quantity. For instance, no matter how much a line increases, it does not attain the quantity of a surface. But the quantity of charity in this life, which follows upon the cognition of faith, is not of the same type as the quantity of the charity in heaven, which follows upon clear vision. And so the argument is invalid.

## Article 8

### Can charity be perfect in this life?

It seems that charity cannot be perfect in this life:

**Objection 1:** This sort of perfection would have existed especially in the apostles. But it did not exist in them; for in Philippians 3:12 the Apostle says, “Not that I have already attained it or already become perfect ...” Therefore, charity cannot be perfect in this life.

**Objection 2:** In *83 Quaestiones* Augustine says, “The nourishment of charity equals the diminishment of disordered desire (*diminutio cupiditatis*); the perfection of charity equals the absence of disordered desire.” But the latter cannot occur in this life, in which we are unable to live without sin—this according to 1 John 1:8 (“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves”). Now every sin proceeds from some sort of disordered desire. Therefore, charity cannot be perfect in this life.

**Objection 3:** What is already perfect cannot grow any further. But as has been explained (a. 7), in this life charity can always increase. Therefore, charity cannot be perfect in this life.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Primum Canonicum Ioannis [In Epistolam Ioannis Ad Parthos]* Augustine says, “When charity has been strengthened, it is perfected; and when it has arrived at perfection, it says, ‘I want to be dissolved and to be with Christ’.” But this is possible in this life; for instance, it occurred in the case of Paul. Therefore, charity can be perfect in this life.

**I respond:** There are two ways in which to understand the perfection of charity: (a) on the part of *what is lovable* and (b) on the part of *the one who does the loving*.

On the part of what is lovable, charity is perfect insofar as a thing is loved to the extent that it is lovable. But God is as lovable as He is good, and His goodness is infinite. Therefore, He is infinitely lovable. But no creature can love Him to an infinite degree, since every created power is finite. Hence, the charity of a creature cannot be perfect in this sense; instead, only the charity by which God loves Himself can be perfect in this sense.

By contrast, on the part of *the one doing the loving*, charity is called perfect when someone loves with all his capacity (*quando aliquis secundum totum suum posse diligit*). There are three ways in which this can happen:

(a) In one way, a man’s whole heart is borne toward God in actuality. And this is the perfection of *charity in heaven*, which is not possible in this life. For in this life it is impossible, because of the infirmity of life, to always be thinking in actuality about God or to be always moved in actuality by love for Him.

(b) In a second way, a man directs his efforts to leaving time for God and divine things, setting aside other things except insofar as the necessity of the present life requires them. And this is the perfection of charity that is possible in this life, even though it is not common to everyone who has charity.

(c) In a third way, a man puts his whole heart in God habitually, so that he does not think about or will anything that is contrary to divine love. And this is the perfection common to everyone who has charity.

**Reply to objection 1:** The Apostle is denying that he has the perfection of heaven. Hence, a Gloss on that passage says, “He was a perfect wayfarer, but had not yet arrived at the perfection aimed at by the journey itself.”

**Reply to objection 2:** He says this because of venial sins. Venial sins are contrary to the *act* of charity, but not to the *habit* of charity, and so they are incompatible with the perfection of heaven, but not with the perfection of this life.

**Reply to objection 3:** The perfection of this life is not perfection absolutely speaking. And so it is always such that it may increase.

### Article 9

#### Is it appropriate to distinguish three stages of charity, viz. *beginning* charity, *proficient* charity, and *perfect* charity?

It seems that it is inappropriate to distinguish three stages of charity, viz., *beginning* charity, *proficient* charity, and *perfect* charity:

**Objection 1:** Between beginning charity and its ultimate perfection there are many stages in the middle. Therefore, one should not posit just one middle stage.

**Objection 2:** As soon as charity begins to exist, it likewise begins to progress. Therefore, proficient charity should not be distinguished from beginning charity.

**Objection 3:** As has been explained (a. 7), no matter how perfect the charity one has in this world, his charity can increase. But for charity to increase is for it to become proficient. Therefore, perfect charity should not be distinguished from proficient charity. Therefore, the three stages in question are not appropriately assigned.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Primum Canonicum Ioannis [In Epistolam Ioannis Ad Parthos]* Augustine says, “After charity has been born, it is nurtured, and this belongs to the *beginners*; when it has been nurtured, it becomes stronger, and this belongs to the *proficient*; when it has been strengthened, it is perfected, and this belongs to the *perfect*.” Therefore, there are three stages of charity.

**I respond:** The spiritual increase of charity can be thought of as somewhat similar to a man’s corporeal growth. Even though the latter can be divided into many parts, it nonetheless has some determinate divisions according to the determinate actions or pursuits which a man attains to through growth. For instance, a man’s age is called infancy before he has the use of reason; after that, the man’s second stage is distinguished when he begins to speak and to use reason; again, his third stage is the stage of puberty, when he begins to be able to generate, and so on up to the point where he reaches perfection.

So, too, diverse stages of charity are distinguished by the diverse endeavors to which a man is led by an increase of charity. For at first the principal endeavor that falls to a man is to withdraw from sin and to resist those desires of his that move him in a direction contrary to charity. And this belongs to *beginners*, in whom charity must be nourished or kept warm in order not to be corrupted. A second endeavor follows, viz., that the man principally intends that he should make progress in the good. And this endeavor belongs to the *proficient*, who principally intend that charity should be strengthened in them by increasing. And the third endeavor is that a man should principally intend to adhere to God and enjoy Him. And this belongs to the *perfect*, who “want to be dissolved and to be with Christ.” In the same way, we see in the case of a corporeal movement that first there is a withdrawal from the terminus [*a quo*], and, second, there is a drawing near to the other terminus, and, third, there is rest in that terminus.

**Reply to objection 1:** Every determinate distinction that can be made within the increase of charity is included under the three stages that have been explained. In the same way, as the Philosopher explains in *On the Heavens* 1, every division of continuous things is included under the triad of *beginning*, *middle*, and *end*.

**Reply to objection 2:** For those in whom charity is beginning, even if they are making progress, the main immediate concern is to resist sins, by whose attacks they are disquieted. But afterwards, sensing that these attacks have lessened and that they are now more secure, as it were, they undertake to become proficient (*ad profectum intendunt*)—“on the one hand doing the work, and on the other holding a sword,” as Esdras 2 [Nehemiah] 4:17 says of those who were building Jerusalem.

**Reply to objection 3:** The perfect are also making progress (*proficiunt*) in charity, but this is not their principal concern; instead, they turn their efforts especially toward adhering to God. And even though the beginners and proficient likewise seek this, they nonetheless experience concern for other

things; the beginners are concerned about avoiding sins, and the proficient are concerned about making progress in the virtues.

## Article 10

### Can charity decrease?

It seems that charity can decrease (*possit diminui*):

**Objection 1:** Contraries are apt to be effected with respect to the same thing. But decrease and increase are contraries. Therefore, since, as has been explained (a. 4), charity increases, it seems that it can likewise decrease.

**Objection 2:** In *Confessiones* 10, in speaking to God, Augustine says, “He loves You less who loves something else along with You.” And in *83 Quaestiones* he says, “What nourishes charity decreases disordered desire (*cupiditas*),” and from this it seems that, conversely, an increase of disordered desire decreases charity. But disordered desire, by which something other than God is loved, can grow in a man. Therefore, charity can decrease.

**Objection 3:** In *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 8 Augustine says, “It is not the case that God makes a man just by justifying him in such a way that if he turns away from God, what God did remains in the now absent man.” From this one can gather that in conserving charity in a man, God operates in the same way that He operates when He first infuses charity into him. But in the first infusion of charity, God infuses less charity in a man who has prepared himself less for it. Therefore, in the conservation of charity He conserves less charity in a man who has prepared himself less for it. Therefore, charity can decrease.

**But contrary to this:** In Scripture, charity is compared to fire—this according to *Canticle* 8:6 (“Its torches (i.e., charity’s torches) are fire and flames”). But as long as fire remains, it is always ascending. Therefore, as long as charity remains, it is able to ascend but not able to descend, i.e., to decrease.

**I respond:** The quantity that charity has in relation to its proper *object* cannot decrease—in the same way that, as was explained above (a. 4), it cannot increase, either. However, since charity increases in the quantity that it has in relation to its *subject*, here we have to consider whether it can decrease in this respect.

Now if it decreases, then it must decrease either (a) through some act or (b) merely through the cessation of its own act.

Now as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 53, a. 3), virtues that are acquired by acts decrease—and are sometimes even corrupted—through the cessation of their act. Hence, in *Ethics* 8 the Philosopher says of friendship that lack of communication (*inappellatio*), i.e., not calling on or talking with one’s friend, dissolves many friendships. And the reason for this is that the conservation of a thing depends on its cause, and the cause of an acquired virtue is the human act; hence, when the human acts cease, an acquired virtue diminishes and in the end is totally corrupted.

However, this sort of thing has no place in the case of charity, since, as was explained above (a. 2), charity is caused solely by God and not by human acts. Hence, it follows that even if its act ceases, it is neither decreased nor corrupted by this if there is no sin involved in the cessation. Therefore, it follows that a decrease of charity can be caused only by God or by some sin. But no defect is caused in us by God except by way of punishment, in accord with which He takes grace away as a punishment for sin. Hence, it is appropriate for Him to decrease grace only by way of punishment. Hence, it follows that if charity decreases, the cause of its decrease is sin, either as an efficient cause or as a meritorious cause.

However, *mortal sin* does not decrease charity in either of these ways; instead, it totally corrupts it—both (a) as an *efficient* cause, since, as will be explained below (a. 12), every mortal sin is contrary to

charity, and also (b) as a *meritorious* cause, since if someone does something contrary to charity by committing a moral sin, then he deserves to have God take charity away from him.

Similarly, neither can charity decrease through *venial sin*, either as an efficient cause or as a meritorious cause. Not as an *efficient* cause, because venial sin does not touch charity itself. For charity has to do with the ultimate end, whereas venial sin is a sort of disorder with respect to the means to the end. But love for the end does not decrease by one's doing something disordered with respect to the means to the end—just as it sometimes happens that sick people who mightily love health are disordered when it comes to observing their diet, and just as, in the case of speculative matters, false opinions concerning matters that are inferred from the principles do not decrease the certitude of the principles. Similarly, venial sin likewise does not *merit* a decrease of charity. For when someone is delinquent in a lesser matter, he does not deserve to suffer a greater loss, and God does not turn away from a man to a greater degree than that to which the man turns away from Him. Hence, someone who is disordered with respect to the means to the end does not deserve to suffer a loss of charity, through which he is ordered toward the ultimate end.

Hence, the result is that charity can in no way decrease, speaking *directly*. However, a disposition toward the corruption of charity, which is effected either by venial sins or by ceasing to exercise the works of charity, can *indirectly* be called a decrease of charity.

**Reply to objection 1:** Contraries have to do with same thing when the subject is related in equal ways to both contraries. But charity is not related in the same way to increase and decrease, since, as has been explained, it is able to have a cause that increases it, but it is unable to have a cause that decreases it. Hence, the objection does not go through.

**Reply to objection 2:** There are two types of disordered desire (*cupiditas*):

(a) By the *first* of them the end is set up in creatures. And this type of disordered desire totally kills charity, since, as Augustine says in *Confessiones* 10, it is poisonous. And this makes it the case that God is loved less—that is, that He is loved less than He ought to be loved by charity—by a total destruction of charity and not just by a decrease of charity. And this is how one ought to understand the claim that “He loves You less who loves something else along with You.” This occurs only in the case of mortal sin and not in the case of venial sin, since what is loved in venial sin is loved for the sake of God in *habit*, even if not in *act*.

(b) The *second* type is the disordered desire that belongs to venial sin, and this type of disordered desire is always decreased by charity, but, as has already been explained, it cannot decrease charity.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 113, a. 3), a movement of free choice is required in the infusion of charity. And so whatever decreases the intensity of free choice operates dispositively in such a way that less charity is to be infused. By contrast, a movement of free choice is not required for the conservation of charity; otherwise, charity would not remain in those who are sleeping. Hence, charity does not decrease because of any obstacle having to do with the intensity of a movement of free choice.

## Article 11

### Can charity once had be lost?

It seems that charity once had cannot be lost:

**Objection 1:** If charity is lost, it is lost only because of sin. But he who has charity cannot sin; for 1 John 3:9 says, “He who is born of God does not commit sin, since His seed abides in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” But only the children of God have charity, since, as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 15, charity is what distinguishes “the children of the Kingdom from the children of

perdition.” Therefore, one who has charity cannot lose it.

**Objection 2:** In *De Trinitate* 8 Augustine says, “If love is not true, it should not be called love.” But as he himself says in *Epistola ad Julianum Comitem*, “Love that can be deserted was never true love.” Therefore, neither was it charity. Therefore, if charity is once had, then it is never lost.

**Objection 3:** In a homily on Pentecost, Gregory says, “The love of God does great things if it exists; if it ceases to operate, it is not charity.” But no one loses charity by doing great things. Therefore, if charity is present, it cannot be lost.

**Objection 4:** Free choice is inclined toward a sin only through some motive for sinning. But charity excludes every motive for sinning—love of self, disordered desire, and anything else of this sort. Therefore, charity cannot be lost.

**But contrary to this:** Apocalypse 2:4 says, “I have a few things against you, that you have abandoned your first charity.”

**I respond:** As is clear from what was said above (a. 2), through charity the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Therefore, there are three ways in which we can think about charity.

In the *first* way, on the part of the *Holy Spirit* moving the soul to love God. On this score charity has impeccability by the power of the Holy Spirit, who unfailingly does whatever He wills. Hence, it is impossible for these two things to be true simultaneously: (a) that the Holy Spirit moves someone to an act of charity and (b) that this individual loses charity by sinning. For the gift of perseverance is counted among those benefits of God by which, as Augustine puts it in *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, “whoever is liberated is liberated with most certainty.”

In the *second* way, charity can be thought of in *its proper nature*, and in this sense charity is just that which belongs to the nature of charity. Hence, charity cannot sin in any way—just as heat cannot effect cooling, and just as injustice cannot effect anything good, as Augustine points out in *De Sermone Domini in Monte*.

In the *third* way, charity can be thought of on the part of the *subject*, which is variable in keeping with its freedom of choice. Now the relation of charity to its subject can be thought of both (a) in the general way in which a *form* is related to its *matter* and (b) in the specific way in which a *habit* is related to its *power*.

Now a *form* is by its nature such that it exists in the subject in a “lose-able” way when it does not fulfill the whole potentiality of its matter. This is clear in the case of the forms of things that are generable and corruptible; for the matter of such things receives one form in such a way that the potentiality for another form remains in it, as if the whole potentiality of the matter were not fulfilled by the one form. And so the one form can be lost through the reception of the other form. By contrast, the form of a celestial body, which fulfills that whole potentiality of the matter in the sense that there does not remain in it the potential for another form, exists in its subject in such a way that it cannot be lost.

So, then, the charity of heaven, which fulfills the whole potentiality of a rational mind, viz., insofar as all its actual movements are carried toward God, is had in such a way that it cannot be lost. By contrast, the charity of this life does not fulfill the potentiality of its subject in this way, since its subject is not always being carried toward God in actuality. Hence, when it is not being carried toward God in actuality, something can occur through which charity is lost.

On the other hand, it is proper to a *habit* that it should incline the power to do what is appropriate to the habit insofar as (a) it makes what is appropriate to the habit seem good and (b) it makes what is incompatible with the habit seem bad. For just as the sense of taste judges flavors according to its own disposition, so too a man’s mind judges something to be done according to his own habitual disposition. Hence, in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “As each one is, so will such-and-such an end seem to him.” Therefore, charity is had in such a way that it cannot be lost when what is appropriate for charity cannot but seem good, and this is in heaven, where God is seen through His essence, which is the very essence of goodness. And this is why charity cannot be lost in heaven. But charity can be lost in this life,

wherein one does not see God's very essence, which is the essence of goodness.

**Reply to objection 1:** This passage is talking about the power of the Holy Spirit, who, by His conservation of charity, renders immune from sin those whom He moves as He will.

**Reply to objection 2:** Charity that can be deserted by the very nature of charity is not true charity. For this would occur if someone had in his love something which he loved for a time and afterwards ceased to love—something that would not belong to genuine love.

On the other hand, if charity is lost because of the mutability of the subject and contrary to the intention of charity, which is included within the act of charity, then this would not be opposed to the genuineness of the charity.

**Reply to objection 3:** The love of God always does great things *in its intention*, which belongs to the nature of charity. However, because of the condition of the subject, charity does not always accomplish great things *in actuality*.

**Reply to objection 4:** By the nature of its act, charity excludes every motive for sinning. But sometimes it happens that charity is not doing anything in actuality. And at such a time it is possible for some motive for sinning to intervene, and if this motive is consented to, then charity is lost.

## Article 12

### Is charity lost through a single act of mortal sin?

It seems not to be the case that charity is lost through a single act of mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** In *Periarchon* Origen says, "When self-satisfaction seduces a man away from those things that have put him at the highest and most perfect stage, I do not think that he will become empty or fall away suddenly; rather, he has to fall little by little and gradually." But a man falls by losing charity. Therefore, it is not the case charity is lost just through a single act of mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** In *Sermo de Passione*, Pope Leo, addressing Peter, says, "The Lord saw that in you faith had not been conquered and love had not been turned away, but that constancy had been shaken. Tears abounded where affection never failed, and the fount of charity washed away the words that stemmed from fear." Bernard took this to mean that "charity had been lulled to sleep in Peter but not extinguished." But in denying Christ, Peter sinned mortally. Therefore, it is not the case that charity is lost through a single act of mortal sin.

**Objection 3:** Charity is stronger than an acquired virtue. But the habit of an acquired virtue is not destroyed by a single contrary act of sin. Therefore, *a fortiori*, charity is not destroyed by a single contrary act of mortal sin.

**Objection 4:** Charity involves love of God and neighbor. But someone who commits a mortal sin retains, it seems, his love of God and neighbor, since, as was explained above (a. 10), a disordered affection for the means to an end does not destroy one's love for the end. Therefore, charity with respect to God can remain even when a mortal sin is committed because of a disordered affection for some temporal good.

**Objection 5:** The object of a theological virtue is the ultimate end. But it is not the case that the other theological virtues, viz., faith and hope, are excluded through a single act of mortal sin; to the contrary, they remain as unformed. Therefore, charity, too, can remain as unformed even when a mortal sin has been perpetrated.

**But contrary to this:** Through mortal sin a man comes to be deserving of eternal death—this according to Romans 6:23 ("The wages of sin is death"). But everyone who has charity merits eternal life. For John 14:21 says, "He who loves me is loved by my Father, and I love him, and I will manifest

myself to him”—and eternal life consists in this manifestation, according to John 17:3 (“This is eternal life, that they know You, the true God, and the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ”). But no one can be simultaneously worthy of eternal life and deserving of eternal death. Therefore, it is impossible for someone to have charity along with a mortal sin. Therefore, charity is destroyed through a single act of mortal sin.

**I respond:** The one contrary is destroyed when the other contrary supervenes. But every act of mortal sin is contrary to charity according to the proper nature of charity, which consists in God’s being loved above all things and in a man’s totally subjecting himself to God by referring all things to Him. Therefore, it is of the nature of charity that a man loves God in such a way that he wills to subject himself to Him in all things and to follow the rule of His precepts in all things. For whatever is contrary to His precepts is clearly contrary to charity and, hence, can in its own right exclude charity.

To be sure, if charity were an acquired habit that depended on its subject’s own power, then it would not be immediately destroyed by a single contrary act. For an act is directly contrary to an act and not to a habit, whereas the conservation of a habit in a subject does not require a continuous act (*non requirit continuitatem actus*); and so an acquired habit is not directly excluded by a supervening contrary act.

However, since charity is an infused habit, it depends on the action of God infusing it, and, as has been explained (a. 10), in infusing and conserving charity God behaves like the sun illuminating the air. And so, just as light would immediately cease to exist in the air if some obstacle were posed to the sun’s illumination of the air, so too charity immediately ceases to exist in the soul if some obstacle is posed to charity’s being infused into the soul by God. But it is clear that through every mortal sin, which is contrary to God’s precepts, an obstacle is posed to the aforementioned infusion, since by the very fact that a man, in choosing the sin, prefers it to friendship with God, which requires that we follow God’s will, it follows that the habit of charity is immediately lost through a single act of mortal sin. Hence, in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 8 Augustine says, “A man is illuminated when God is present, but when God is absent, he is continually in the dark; for one recedes from Him not by spatial distances but by turning away from His will.”

**Reply to objection 1:** In one way, what Origen says can be taken to mean that a man who is in a perfect state does not suddenly fall into an act of mortal sin but is instead disposed for this by some sort of antecedent negligence. This is why venial sins are called a disposition for mortal sin, as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 88, a. 3). Nonetheless, it is still through a single act of mortal sin, if he commits it, that he falls and loses charity.

However, given that Origen himself adds, “If a brief lapse occurs and he quickly recovers, then he does not seem to fall completely,” an alternative reply is that Origen means that someone “becomes empty and falls” when he falls in such a way as to sin out of malice. This does not happen all at once in a man who was perfect to begin with.

**Reply to objection 2:** There are two ways in which charity is lost:

(a) in one way, *directly*, through actual contempt, and Peter did not lose charity in this way.

(b) in a second way, *indirectly*, when an act contrary to charity is committed because of the passion of desire or of fear. And it is in this way, acting contrary to charity, that Peter lost charity. But he regained it quickly.

**Reply to objection 3:** [*There is no reply here to objection 3; see the body of the article.*]

**Reply to objection 4:** Not every disordered affection that has to do with the means to the end, i.e., with created goods, constitutes a mortal sin. This occurs only when the affection is such that it is incompatible with God’s will; and, as has been explained, this is directly contrary to charity.

**Reply to objection 5:** Charity implies a certain union with God, but faith and hope do not. Now as was explained above (q. 20, a. 3 and *ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 5), sin consists in a turning away from God. And this is why every mortal sin is contrary to charity. However, not every mortal sin is contrary to faith or to

hope; only certain determinate sins are, viz., those by which the *habit* of faith or the *habit* of hope is destroyed—in just the way that the *habit* of charity is destroyed by every mortal sin. Hence, it is clear that charity cannot remain in an unformed state, since, as has been explained, it itself is the ultimate form of the virtues because it relates to God as the ultimate end (*in ratione finis ultimi*).