

**Faith & Virtue Formation:  
Christian Philosophy in Aid of Becoming Good**

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*“For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge ...”* – 2 Peter 1:5, ESV

“The purpose of the present study is not, as it is in other inquiries, the attainment of theoretical knowledge: we are not conducting this inquiry in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good.” – Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.2

“unless there is a telos which transcends the limited goods of practices by constituting the good of a whole human life, the good of a human life as a unity, it will both be the case that a certain subversive arbitrariness will invade the moral life and that we shall be unable to specify the context of certain virtues adequately. These two considerations are reinforced by a third: that there is at least one virtue recognized by the tradition which cannot be specified at all except with reference to the wholeness of human life—the virtue of integrity or constancy. ‘Purity of heart,’ said Kierkegaard, ‘is to will one thing.’ This notion of singleness of purpose in a whole life can have no application unless that of a whole life does.” – Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 203

“If we are to make progress [in trying to understand how our ‘love of the good’ may properly guide our fundamental life choices], what we need above all is a multiplicity of perspectives, concerning the ways in which a human life may count as good and even as beautiful. And for this purpose, spiritual traditions are indispensable: for here we find thought and lived out, across times and cultures, and in dialogue with the constraints that are given with our human nature, a myriad of stories concerning the sort of significance a human life can bear. So here is a reason for thinking that far from imposing alien values, and constricting human possibilities, as some have supposed, spiritual traditions offer, in fact, our surest way of expanding and enriching the stock of those possibilities—and our clearest vision of what it would be for a human life to be lived well.” – Mark Wynn, *Spiritual Traditions and the Virtues* (Oxford UP, 2020), 245–6

## “Cultivating Christian Love”

“It is true that love proceeds from the heart, but let us not be hasty about this and forget the eternal truth that love *forms* the heart.” – Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments of the Hebrew Law was the greatest, he replied: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

– Matthew 22:37–40

Learning to love God and our neighbors well, therefore, is the very heart of the Christian life. Yet, for a variety of philosophical and theological reasons, it might seem that the project of trying to cultivate Christian love is a misguided, if not impossible, project from the start.

“This is the very mark of Christian love and is its distinctive characteristic—that it contains this apparent contradiction: to love is a duty.” – Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

Two Paradoxes for cultivating Christian love:

1. Christian love seems to involve emotions, which are not within our control

Solution: Christian love does ideally involve loving emotions toward God and our neighbors (even our enemies), but those emotions can be indirectly cultivated.

2. Christian love is an infused virtue, possessed only by a gracious gift of God

Solution: Even though God must implant love in our hearts, we can cultivate it in each other by “presupposing love” in each other.

“Have you not experienced this yourself, my listener? If anyone has ever spoken to you in such a way or treated you in such a way that you really felt built up, this was because you very vividly perceived how he presupposed love to be in you.” – Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

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Edited by Adam C. Pelser and W. Scott Cleveland

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