

Objection 1. It would seem that the gifts are not set down by Isaias in their order of dignity. For the principal gift is, seemingly, that which, more than the others, God requires of man. Now God requires of man fear, more than the other gifts: for it is written (Dt. 10:12): “And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but that thou fear the Lord thy God?” and (Malachi 1:6): “If . . . I be a master, where is My fear?” Therefore it seems that fear, which is mentioned last, is not the lowest but the greatest of the gifts.

Objection 2. Further, piety seems to be a kind of common good; since the Apostle says (1 Tim. 4:8): “Piety [Douay: ‘Godliness’] is profitable to all things.” Now a common good is preferable to particular goods. Therefore piety, which is given the last place but one, seems to be the most excellent gift.

Objection 3. Further, knowledge perfects man’s judgment, while counsel pertains to inquiry. But judgment is more excellent than inquiry. Therefore knowledge is a more excellent gift than counsel; and yet it is set down as being below it.

Objection 4. Further, fortitude pertains to the appetitive power, while science belongs to reason. But reason is a more excellent power than the appetite. Therefore knowledge is a more excellent gift than fortitude; and yet the latter is given the precedence. Therefore the gifts are not set down in their order of dignity.

On the contrary, Augustine says*: “It seems to me that the sevenfold operation of the Holy Ghost, of which Isaias speaks, agrees in degrees and expression with these [of which we read in Mat. 5:3]: but there is a difference of order, for there [viz. in Isaias] the enumeration begins with the more excellent gifts, here, with the lower gifts.”

I answer that, The excellence of the gifts can be measured in two ways: first, simply, viz. by comparison to their proper acts as proceeding from their principles; secondly, relatively, viz. by comparison to their matter. If we consider the excellence of the gifts simply, they follow the same rule as the virtues, as to their comparison one with another; because the gifts perfect man for all the acts of the soul’s powers, even as the virtues do, as stated above (a. 4). Hence, as the intellectual virtues have the precedence of the moral virtues, and among the intellectual virtues, the contemplative are preferable to the active, viz. wisdom, understanding and science to prudence and art (yet so that wisdom stands before understanding, and

understanding before science, and prudence and synesis before eubulia): so also among the gifts, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel are more excellent than piety, fortitude, and fear; and among the latter, piety excels fortitude, and fortitude fear, even as justice surpasses fortitude, and fortitude temperance. But in regard to their matter, fortitude and counsel precede knowledge and piety: because fortitude and counsel are concerned with difficult matters, whereas piety and knowledge regard ordinary matters. Consequently the excellence of the gifts corresponds with the order in which they are enumerated; but so far as wisdom and understanding are given the preference to the others, their excellence is considered simply, while, so far, as counsel and fortitude are preferred to knowledge and piety, it is considered with regard to their matter.

Reply to Objection 1. Fear is chiefly required as being the foundation, so to speak, of the perfection of the other gifts, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 110:10; Eccclus. 1:16), and not as though it were more excellent than the others. Because, in the order of generation, man departs from evil on account of fear (Prov. 16:16), before doing good works, and which result from the other gifts.

Reply to Objection 2. In the words quoted from the Apostle, piety is not compared with all God’s gifts, but only with “bodily exercise,” of which he had said it “is profitable to little.”

Reply to Objection 3. Although knowledge stands before counsel by reason of its judgment, yet counsel is more excellent by reason of its matter: for counsel is only concerned with matters of difficulty (Ethic. iii, 3), whereas the judgment of knowledge embraces all matters.

Reply to Objection 4. The directive gifts which pertain to the reason are more excellent than the executive gifts, if we consider them in relation to their acts as proceeding from their powers, because reason transcends the appetite as a rule transcends the thing ruled. But on the part of the matter, counsel is united to fortitude as the directive power to the executive, and so is knowledge united to piety: because counsel and fortitude are concerned with matters of difficulty, while knowledge and piety are concerned with ordinary matters. Hence counsel together with fortitude, by reason of their matter, are given the preference to knowledge and piety.

* De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 4