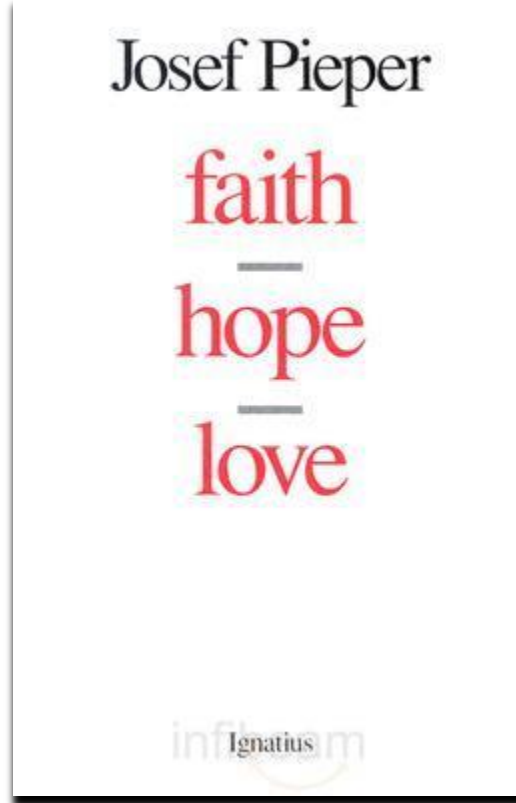


A Summary of Faith, Hope, and Love by Josef Pieper



A Summary of Faith, Hope, and Love by Josef Pieper

Ignatius Press, 1997

ISBN: 978-0898706239

Summary by Cara Whitaker, written exclusively for The Goldhead Group, Ltd.

[You can purchase the full text at Amazon.com](#)

About the Author

Josef Pieper first came to the attention of American readers when T.S. Eliot wrote the preface to the English translation of Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture*. In addition to this work, Pieper has composed numerous short books while on the faculty of the University of Munster. By using St. Thomas as a basis, Pieper addresses philosophical topics dear to all readers by using language not as removed from modern language as St. Thomas. Pieper simplifies difficult philosophical thought into practical wisdom. This simplification of the complicated to the practical is seen in this work on *Faith, Hope, and Love*.

General Overview

In his work entitled *Faith, Hope, & Love*, Josef Pieper established a philosophical foundation for the three theological virtues of *Faith, Hope, and Love*. This is a culmination of three different works written at separate times on the theological virtues. In regards to faith, he expounds on the necessary means of belief in order to make faith in the highest being possible. In regards to hope, he shows how man is a pilgrim on earth and by his nature seeks something beyond his nature. In love, man finds a reflection of the love shown by God to man in numerous different ways in the world but they should ultimately lead man back to God. The philosophical basis for supernatural virtues is shown, but so is their necessity, in God.

Faith

“He who wishes to learn must believe” – Aristotle

Pieper lays his foundation for a natural concept of faith. He first speaks on belief in which his concept of belief is solidified. In his first definition of belief, Pieper says, “Belief means that we think a statement true and consider the stated matter real, objectively existent.” In order to believe something, however, man must first possess some knowledge of the subject matter of belief. The believer is distinguished from the knower in that the believer believes in the subject without complete knowledge of the subject. The believer regards the subject in a different manner, as true and real without the experience of the knower. Thomas Aquinas articulates this same idea as follows, “Belief cannot refer to something that one sees . . . ; and what can be proved likewise does not pertain to belief.” The subject for belief can never be proven but is the basis of belief.

In order to believe something, however, man must possess a type of imperfect knowledge of the subject. Pieper references St. Augustine who says that there is no belief without at least some preceding knowledge and that no one can believe in God if he understands nothing. St. Thomas rearticulates this thought of St. Augustine when he states, “Man could not believably assent to any proposition if he did not in some way understand it.” When the word belief is used in its proper sense it means an unrestricted, unreserved, unconditional assent. How is it possible then for a man to say unconditionally that I believe the subject is thus and not different when man does not know it either directly, by his own perceptions, or indirectly, on the basis of conclusive arguments? It is based on an imperfect knowledge in line with a desire to believe.

To believe something always means to believe both in someone and in something. According to Pieper, “The believer accepts a given matter as real and true on the testimony of someone else.” What usually happens when man believes a proposition is that one person accepts and believes the proposition of another but not solely on another's word. At the human level, if men did not believe other men than man would be robbed of, “the uniquely human possibility of one man's participation, by listening, in another's possession of reality.” An element of the belief of one person in another is the inner probability of the validity of the statement. To believe in anything involves something inhuman that takes place. The ancients expressed this when they said, “The cognition of one man is not by nature so correlated with the cognition of another man that the former man may be governed by the later.” Pieper interprets this as meaning that no man, however wise or mature he may be, can serve as an absolutely valid authority for another man. One essential condition drawn from this is

that Someone exists who stands higher than all men and He has spoken in a manner audible to the mature man. Man is assenting to a reality found in God's creation.

Many things can be compelled of man but never an assent of the intellect or will. This premise applies to belief. Belief in anything can never be forced. No one believes unless by his free will. Belief rests upon volition. Volition involves the wanting or the affirming of something seen as good that already exists. Love is a participation in the basis of belief. John Henry Newman sums this thought up most cogently: "We believe because we love." Theologically belief puts man into contact with knowledge of God himself. This acceptance of the knowledge of God by the free will of man cannot be compelled.

Belief is received through the transmission of one who is already knowledgeable of the subject matter. How does certainty play a role in the belief of one who has faith? There are two definitions of certainty Pieper references. The first definition is a, "firm assent, that is, assent excluding all doubt and regarded as ultimate," followed by the second definition which is, "a firm assent founded on the evidentness of the matter." When St. Thomas takes up the issue of certainty and uncertainty pertaining to belief, he coined a phrase for the duality of the matter: in belief there is an element of perfection and an element of imperfection. The perfection is found in the firmness of the assent and the imperfection in the lingering mental unrest. The Latin term for this mental unrest is *cogitatio*. This term when further examined means "a searching investigation, probing consideration, conferring with oneself before deciding, being on the track of, a mental reaching out for something not yet finally found." All this supports Pieper conclusion about the certainty of belief: it is part of the nature of belief to leave doubts possible. Man is not a perfect knower.

How is the transition between human belief and supernatural faith to be made? Pieper as a Thomist here quotes St. Thomas, "Faith refers to the reality of God insofar as it is inaccessible to human knowledge." The distinction between religious belief and every other kind of belief is in whom the testimony rests. In faith, the testimony rests in God. As this is a philosophical treatise, the philosopher when dealing with the issue of faith fixes himself upon the reality that is empirically encountered by the knower. Pieper then also articulates the need for faith in accord with man's end. Man possesses a supernatural end, an end beyond himself, and this end relates to the virtue of faith: "If anyone should therefore ask whether what is naturally knowable should not be sufficient for man, he can answer adequately only if he has first formulated what he considers a meaningful human life to be, that is to say, a life in keeping with man's true nature and also with his real situation in the world." Because man is capable of belief he is also capable of the highest type of belief: faith in the God.

What presents an obstacle in faith for the believer? The true of faith can never be proved by any rational argument. The only possible opposition that the believer can offer is his own defensive arguments; the believer cannot attack, he can only hold steadfast. The ultimate test of faith is found in the martyr. The martyr's faith has held steadfast in spite of the opposing argument of imminent violence resulting in death. It is the faith of the martyrs that has helped to make it possible for man to today possess a belief in God.

By examining the manner in which man is able to believe in earthly things, Pieper demonstrates the manner in which man is able to possess a belief in the higher things according to the virtue of faith. This belief or this faith stems from some type of imperfect knowledge to which one can give credence. This imperfect knowledge either comes from one's own experience and examination or through a trust in the experience of another. Faith is a supernatural elevation of this. God has given man a transmission of the faith that man cannot know solely through natural reason. Man believes in God and with the other theological virtue of hope and charity has a faith in his promises.

Hope

Although he should kill me, I will trust in him. – Job 13:15

Man is a pilgrim on earth. He is in a state of the *status viatoris*, the condition or state of being on the way. In this world man is on his way. The proper antonym for the former Latin coinage is *status comprehensoris*. One who has comprehended, encompassed, arrived, is no longer a *viator* but a *comprehensor*. It is the virtue of hope for man that is the proper virtue for man as in the state of one who is in the state of being of a *status viatoris*. Hope is the virtue where man is seeking for something that is not yet present, the perfect happiness that is also known as the beatific vision. Virtue is an enhancement of the human person in a way befitting his nature, but the virtue of hope is a theological virtue. Hope enables man's nature to strive for what surpasses temporality in his pilgrimage through life.

According to Pieper, "Hope is a virtue only when it is a theological virtue, we means that hope is a steadfast turning toward the true fulfillment of man's nature, that is, toward good, only when it has its source in the reality of grace in man and is directed toward supernatural happiness in God." It is in hope that man's restless heart strives for something not yet possessed. The disposition of the sensuous-intellectual hope that aspires to the "not yet" of man's natural fulfillment is ordered to two virtues: magnanimity and humility. Magnanimity is the aspiration of the spirit to great things and humility is the knowledge and acceptance of the inexpressible distance between Creator and creature. The proper order of hope lies between magnanimity and humility. Hope as a theological virtue differs from faith in charity insofar as it lies between magnanimity and humility.

The relationship amongst the theological virtues is most evident in the virtue of hope. In hope, man strives for what he loves, God, and man holds his love for God through faith. Hope possesses the power in its *status viatoris* to wait for a "not yet" that is more distant the more one approaches. Pieper posits that this is most evident in the words of Job, "Although he should slay me, I will trust in him." Job remains hopeful in eternal things even amidst his imminent destruction. The integral relationship between faith, hope, and charity is most seen through the virtue of hope.

In opposition to hope is hopeless of which there are two kinds: despair and *praesumptio*. *Praesumptio* is a perverse anticipation of the fulfillment of hope while despair on the other hand is an anticipation of the non-fulfillment of hope. Both despair and *praesumptio* destroy the essential character of the *status viatoris*. Man no longer strives on a journey towards something, he is merely awaiting something. Despair, rooted in acedia, is one of the sins against the Holy Spirit. Acedia is defined by Pieper as sadness in view of the divine good in man." This sadness results in the secondary effects of inactivity, depression, and discouragement. Pieper then continues to classify acedia as a result of today's age which seeks fulfillment in itself. In seeking itself, modernity disregards the obligations but also the nobility of being that is conferred by Christianity. Both despair and *praesumptio* have lost essential character of the *status viatoris* and no longer hope.

Praesumptio, while still diametrically opposed to hope, is less opposed to hope than despair. Despair is the true antitype of hope while *praesumptio* is a false similitude or fraudulent imitation of hope that is closer to hope than despair. The person who participates in *praesumptio* possesses a reliance or a false security that has no existence in reality. A person's will achieves an invalid certainty that has no extrinsic foundation. When speaking on presumption and despair, St. Thomas states the following, "Because of His infinite goodness, it is more proper to God to spare and to show mercy than to punish. For the former belongs to Him by reason of his nature, the latter only be reason of our sins." It is only hope that can overcome the uncertainty of human existence.

An essential part of hope is a proper fear of the Lord. A proper fear of the Lord and the theological virtue of hope are naturally ordered to each other in their complementarity. The link between hope and fear is the concupiscent love which first seeks God for man's own sake. There are two types of fear of the Lord: servile fear and filial fear. Servile fear is an imperfect fear of the Lord that finds its source in love. Servile fear first and foremost fears eternal damnation. However, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, servile fear is in itself good. It is servile fear that is the beginning of the wisdom that paves the way for true love (*caritas*) of God. Filial fear, on the other hand, possesses more of the concept of fear than servile fear. Filial fear sees the evil itself as evil and hates that more than the punishment from the choice of evil.

Hope is the second theological virtue described by Pieper. Fear of the Lord helps to provide the foundation for a proper theological concept of hope. Man is to have a proper reverence, or holy fear of the Lord in order for this to be possible. In hope man strives for God in his pilgrimage through earth in order to be able to see God in the afterlife. It is hope that unites the theological virtues the most in order for this to be possible.

Love

Love is the prime gift. Whatever else is freely given to us becomes a gift only through love. – Anonymous

A proper depiction of love includes both the selfishness and selflessness involved in love. The modern problem with an improper notion of love is due, accord to Pieper, to the limitation of some languages: there is only one word in English or German to indicate what other languages express in many words. In other languages, a single word would underlie a variety of vocabulary which expresses the different particulars of love. It is this dilemma that causes the modern disparity of the linguistic use of the term *love*. The Christian learns much about love through the term *caritas*. In order to learn the nature of love in the English language, we must examine the contexts in which the term love is used. Pieper thus states, “Keeping in mind the incompleteness and the accidental character of our information, we may still say that we learn quite a good deal about the phenomenon of “love” by carefully considering the vocabulary associated with it.” There are numerous classical terms for love that include *caritas*, *dilection*, *eros*, *philia*, *storge*, and *agape*. By examining the use of the English term *love*, man can discern which particular type of love that he is referencing.

Pieper then poses the question: What is the nature of love? The tentative answer that he provides is that love signifies approval. Loving someone or something fundamentally means affirming something that has already been accomplished as good. This approval is found in an act of the will of man. St. Augustine expounds on this in his concept of love. Love as the primal act of the will is simultaneously the point of origin and the center for existence of man. What one loves will decide his mode of existence. “*Ex amore suo quisque vivit, vel vene vel male*” (Whether for good or evil, each man lives by his love). A person as a rational being must correctly order his loves. When one loves another person, the first thing that a lover “wills” is the existence of the beloved. In human love something more than a willing of the existence of the beloved takes place: it is, “a continuation and in a certain sense even a perfecting of what was begun in the course of creation.” Affirmation in a perceived good is a part of the nature of love.

When one affirms the goodness of someone’s existence, what is the affirmer affirming? Is the lover affirming the beloved’s weaknesses or excusing guilt? No, one is loved in spite of his weaknesses, not on account of those weaknesses. The distinction then between excusing the beloved and forgiving the guilt is crucial. There is very little that the lover should ever excuse in the beloved. Forgiveness, however, is essential: “To love a person does not mean to wish him free of all burdens. It means, rather, to wish that everything associated with him may truly be good.” When there is no longer a way for man to compensate for his wrong actions, the beloved will forgive them. This is the manner in which forgiveness is crucial in the affirmation of another person.

European theology has answered the question: ultimately what is it that we are willing for our beloved? It is an eternity with God in the beatific vision. St. Thomas expounds on the Latin translation of Aristotle on love, “*Amare est velle alicui bonum*,” to love means to wish someone the good.” Aristotle later adds that it is also to wish the beloved everything that we think is good for the other’s sake, not for our own sake. St. Thomas makes a distinction in love between *caritas* and *benevolentia*. Benevolence is something quite different than love and one cannot equate the two terms. The missing element in benevolence that makes it distinct from love is *unio affectus*, volition directed toward the other person, the wish to be with them, and to identify with them. To say that “It is good that you exist” indicates the desire of the lover to be united as one with the beloved. Man also must have an experience in the mental and sensuous faculties of perception in order to begin to love. He must possess a prior knowledge of the one for whom he is willing the good.

What are the beginnings and the effects of love? When one loves another, the true lover does not look merely to the qualities of the person but to the being from which those qualities emanate. To attempt to love a person merely for the external qualities in which they possess deteriorates the love into a type of prostitution in which the person is used and valued for what he does and has. An exceptional love offered toward a single partner makes both of the lovers into better people. It places the lovers at a vantage point from which they first realize the goodness and lovableness of all people. Love produces a positive effect in both lovers.

To say in love that it is good that you exist: for whom is it good? The lover or the beloved or both? The proper answer is it is good for both the lover and the beloved. The difficulty begins when we love another person solely for our own sake. When describing love between a man and a woman, Pieper delves into the distinction between *agape* and *eros*. *Eros* is a demanding need based love. It begins with a human need and it is essentially determined by the object of its desire. Man, however, as a rational creature should only desire what is good. Should then man only possess *agape*? *Agape* signifies an almost entirely unselfish love, a yielding rather than a self-assertive love. It is *agape* that is in opposition to eudemonistical action, action based on the desire for happiness. Both *eros* and *agape* are necessary forms of love for man. It is *eros*, however, whose goal is its own fulfillment, which is the beginning of all love for man. Man naturally desires what is good. St. Augustine says thus concerning man's desire, "*Pondus meum amor meus*," (my love is my weight; where it goes I go). This first movement of love or desire toward a perceived good is in accord with man's nature and is necessary in order to stimulate man's sustentation of himself. It is in accordance with both lovers that the other exists.

Where does joy factor into a proper concept of love? Joy is something that is secondary and subsidiary; it is the effect of something. A man cannot solely rejoice in joy itself, he must have a reason to rejoice. Pieper asks the question, "How can joy being something secondary, be the response to receiving or possessing something beloved?" Man loves to love! Man receives something beloved by loving. Joy is another example of love as a gift. Pieper ties the topic of joy into the subject of paradise and hell when he says, "Even unhappy or unrequited love has broken through the principle of isolation on which 'the whole philosophy of hell rests' and so has gained a solid basis for joy, a part no matter how small of 'paradise.'" Joy is an effect of love.

Does all love stem from self-love? What Pieper here builds upon is that acts of man take place by man's nature and are not something at his command. They are not receptive to our free will but have been imposed on us by our nature. Self-love is the original source of love by nature and self-love is the model and standard of love for others. Pieper states, "This desire for existential fulfillment, acting in us by virtue of creation, is really 'self-love.'" Self-love is the foundational love that all other types of love are based. This is in accord with St. Augustine's love as a weight. Man's love, in this context, is describing man's first initial inclination toward a perceived good. Since man's love is first based on self-love, if man does not know how to properly love himself then he cannot properly love others. The question then arises, how does one move from self-love to unselfish love? It is a process in which one cannot exactly pinpoint but it does occur in order for one to truly love. The reward that comes from the basis of self-love but has progressed to selfless love is expounded upon by St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "All true love is without calculation and nevertheless is instantly given its reward, in fact it can receive its reward only when it is without calculation. . . . Whoever seeks as the reward of his love only the joy of love will receive the joy of love. But whoever seeks anything else in love except love will lose both love and the joy of love at the same time." Natural acts of man are based upon a self-love but man is called to move beyond that.

How is the union, the desire to be one with the beloved, classified? It is best seen in a proper union of man and woman. *Eros* is a natural part of this but there is more than just a physical aspect. There should be *agape*. When this proper union is degraded to a mere physical pleasure as happens today, Goethe's universal law is posited, "Every century. . . tries to make the sacred common, the difficult easy, and the serious amusing – to which there really could be no objection if it were not that in the process seriousness and amusement are destroyed together." Man should seek the highest type of love when he seeks it with another person.

Caritas is not solely the form of Christian love, as it encompasses all other forms of love into itself. The whole conception of *caritas* is dominated by felicity, felicity for us and for others. We, however, can only love in the mode of *caritas* what is capable of sharing beatitude with us. What would happen if all men regarded all other men as people designed to partake in eternal beatitude with us? A new dimension of reality would be opened for man. *Caritas* can be regarded as an elevation in man's nature in the similar manner as grace perfects nature. *Caritas* allows the natural forms of love to remain intact yet it elevates them.

Caritas can be thought of as a completion of all the loves. This is what the Christian is called to practice. Pieper in this section provides the etymology of the word. It comes from the Latin *carus*, which mean something expensive or beloved. This indicates that the lover pays a high price for what he believes to be very dear to him. *Caritas* begins in a self-love, according to the nature of man, but finds a culmination in a self-less love. This self-less love is what man is called to show before himself and before God.