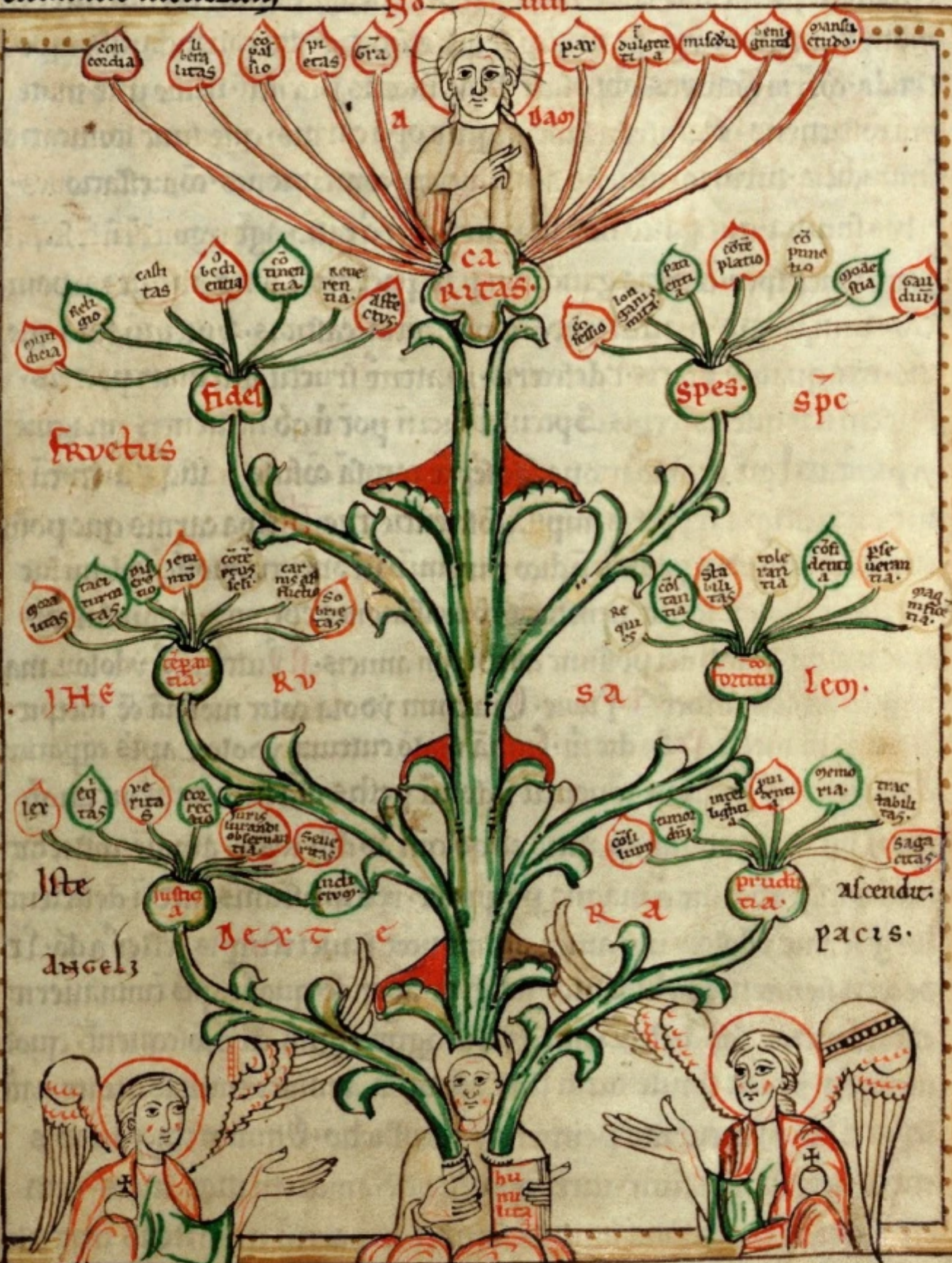


Christian Platonism

Rediscovering Ancient Wisdom

The Seven Virtues and Fifty Sub-Virtues of Medieval Christianity

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Hac itaq; arborum ul' fructuum dissimilitudine. considera differentia

Tree of Virtues" from Speculum Virginum, Walters Art Museum Ms. W.72, fol. 26r.

BEGINNING in the 11th century we find in Western medieval manuscripts frequent portrayal of the canonical virtues and vices as tree diagrams. These vary in details, but always include the four cardinal virtues of the Greco-Roman ethical tradition (Fortitude, Temperance, Prudence and Justice) the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity) from the Bible. Each virtue is shown as a branch of the tree, along with seven sub-virtues (except for Charity, which may have ten sub-virtues) as leaves. Typically a parallel tree of the seven deadly vices and their sub-vices accompanies the Tree of Virtues. Pride (*Superbia*) is considered the common root of all vices, and Humility (*Humilitas*) of all virtues.

One early version is contained in the work, *De fructibus carnis et spiritus* (*On the Fruits of the Flesh and the Spirit*), once attributed to Hugh of Saint-Victor (c. 1096–1141); some consider Conrad of Hirsau the author.

The seven Virtues and their sub-virtues are listed below. In some cases I've merely guessed at a modern English translation (and in those cases have supplied the definition supplied in the text. The selection of sub-virtues and their definition seems influenced by a variety of patristic and biblical sources. Possibly writers consulted precursors of the *Glossa Ordinaria* (collections of glosses on the Bible by Church Fathers and later writers) in selecting definitions.



***Prudentia* (Prudence)**

- *timor Domini* (fear of God)
- *alacritas* (promptness)
- *consilium* (counsel)
- *memoria* (memory)
- *intelligentia* (intelligence)
- *providentia* (foresight)
- *deliberatio* (deliberation)

***Justitia* (Justice)**

- *lex* (law)
- *severitas* (strictness)
- *aequitas* (equity)
- *correctio* (correction; *Correctio est erroris innati vel consuetudine introducti freno rationis inhibitio.*)
- *jurisjurandi observatio* (honoring a pledge; *Jurisjurandi observatio est quae, plebescito civibus promulgato, transgressionem ejus temerariam arcet praestito juramento de conservatione illius perpetua.*)
- *judicium* (judgment)
- *veritas* (truth)

***Fortitudo* (Courage)**

- *magnanimitas* (magnanimity)
- *fiducia* (fidelity)
- *tolerantia* (tolerance)
- *requies* (rest)
- *stabilitas* (stability)
- *constantia* (constancy)
- *perseverantia* (perseverance)

Temperantia (Temperance)

- *discretio* (discernment)
- *morigeratio* (obedience; acquiescence)
- *taciturnitas* (silence)
- *jejunium* (fasting)
- *sobrietas* (sobriety)
- *afflictio carnis* (physical penance; mortification of flesh; *Afflictio carnis est per quem lascivae mentis seminaria castigatione discreta comprimuntur.*)
- *contemptus saeculi* (contempt of the world)

Fides (Faith)

- *religio* (practice of religion)
- *munditia* (decorum; *Munditia est consummata integritas utriusque hominis intuitu divini vel amoris vel timoris.*)
- *obedientia* (obedience)
- *castitas* (chastity)
- *reverentia* (reverence)
- *continentia* (continence)
- *affectus* (good desire)

Spes (Hope)

- *contemplatio supernorum* (heavenly contemplation; *Contemplatio supernorum est per sublevatae mentis jubilum mors carnalium affectuum.*)
- *gaudium* (joy)
- *modestia* (modesty)
- *confessio* (confession of faults)
- *patientia* (patience)
- *compunctio* (sorrow for faults)
- *longanimitas* (longsuffering)

Caritas (Charity)

- *gratia* (forgiveness)
- *pax* (peace)
- *pietas* (piety)
- *mansuetudo* (mildness; leniency)
- *liberalitas* (liberality)
- *misericordia* (mercy)
- *indulgentia* (indulgence)
- *compassio* (compassion)
- *benignitas* (benignity)
- *concordia* (concord)

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Art: “Tree of Virtues” from *Speculum Virginum*, Walters Art Museum Ms. W.72, fol. 26r; early 13th century manuscript from the Cistercian abbey of Himmerode, Germany.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Virtues_Speculum_Virginum_W72_26r.jpg

Written by John Uebersax

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