

A Thomistic Appraisal of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the Capital Vices

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AS THE DESIRE FOR HAPPINESS underlies the desire for natural virtue, so the desire for God underlies the supernatural virtues, such that charity becomes the form or inspirer of all the virtues. What underlines all the vices is pride because pride influences all the mortal sins, since to choose spiritual, bodily, or material goods against reason tears one away from one's ultimate end, either directly by contempt of God or indirectly by preferring spiritual or material goods to God in such a way that envy of another's good brings sadness that tears away from a union with God. The arrogantly proud person reaches a point of not wanting to respect the limits of the natural law implanted in his soul by God or the divine precepts that are taught by revelation and associated with the theological virtues.

However, committing grave sin does not mean one has lost all affection for God, just as disobeying one's parents does not ipso facto mean definitively hating one's parents. Is there an overall principle at all for undermining virtue? It seems not, since some sins occur as a result of ignorance or weakness. Can a specific moral virtue be the result of ignorance or even weakness in another virtue? By accident this can happen if humility results. Sins of omission might be only materially evil and virtues only materially good when commanded by pride or one of the capital vices. In such cases, virtue is not implanted in the faculties of soul or in the passions.

Though St. Thomas did not know the work of Evagrius of Pontus (*Antirrhêtikos*, or *Talking Back*), he did know Cassian's *Institutes* and the

Moralia of St. Gregory the Great, which deal with the realities of evil thoughts, deadly sins, capital sins, or (what finally becomes settled terminology) the seven capital vices. But, before we get to Aquinas's helpful insights into human nature, it is important to see what the *Catechism* teaches about the capital vices.

Pride and Its Property, Vainglory

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* mandated by Pope St. John Paul II in 1992 has become a fine example of turning a corner concerning moral absolutes and other doctrinal disputes. However, I would suggest that a few supplements would be in order concerning the capital vices to flesh out more deeply some problems of the moral life. St. Thomas Aquinas's theology can be a great help especially when it comes to making an examination of conscience or preventing major falls from grace and in keeping the Christian faithful vigilant in their spiritual life. The spiritual combat takes place primarily against the enemies that flow from within, though often suggested from without by the media or the devil himself.

To begin with, unfortunately, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter, *CCC*) does not give a clear definition of what a capital vice is. Second, it prefers to call the seven dispositions capital "sins" instead of capital vices (§1866). Third, it merely gives a list of seven capital vices (*ibid.*), and it does not include vainglory in the list or follow Pope St. Gregory and Aquinas in teaching that pride is mother of the vices and not a capital vice in itself, strictly speaking, because pride pervades all the vices, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly.¹ The *Catechism* merely associates pride with selfishness (§1931) as causing both the hatred of God (§2094) and, often, the vice of envy (§2540), but it does not clearly show how and why pride causes these vices. Fourth, it merely states vainglory as an intention that can render a good action morally culpable without giving definition as to its underlying meaning (§1753). Nor does *CCC* mention the sins of contention or obstinacy, two daughters of vainglory, and it mentions discord only briefly, and without analysis. However, hypocrisy and boasting are mentioned as opposed to the virtue of truth (§§2468 and 2481), whereas Thomas places them as fruits or daughters of vainglory. Further, *CCC* does not define anger, acedia, or gluttony. Their

¹ *Summa theologiae* [hereafter, *ST*] II-II, q. 162, aa. 6–8. All English translation of *ST* is from *Summa theologiae*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948).

daughters or consequences are more or less ignored as well. While, in fairness, CCC cannot be expected to give a complete theology of the vices, its neglect of some of them should be rectified for the sake of greater intelligibility in a subsequent edition.

St. Thomas, on the other hand, clearly states that a capital vice is a fount or final cause of many vices and that from these flow sins that he calls daughters of the capital vices. Since pride can pervade all the vices either as an act of direct or implicit disobedience to God, Thomas will not call it a capital vice, but the beginning of all the vices' activation into sins (vice being a disposition). Mortal sins flowing from pride and the capital vices expel sanctifying grace from the soul. Therefore, pride, being an excessive craving for distinction, undue excellence, or exaltation, often leads to a specific refusal to accept the rule of God's law as known from the natural or divine law. It leads to arrogance toward others and an exaggerated sense of one's own perfections.² Some angels fell because they wanted to achieve their happiness exclusively by their own powers and did not want to submit to God for receiving the joys of heavenly beatitude.³

St. Thomas does not teach that pride is one of the capital vices, but rather something deeper or more widespread, like a queen over all the vices, which are her "lieutenants," and sometimes generals.⁴ What this means is that the excessive desire for excellence gives rise to an arrogant disposition. This in turn leads to the person "refusing to be subject to a higher rule, which any sinner does inasmuch as he does not submit to the law of God."⁵ This can develop a contempt for God to the extent of rejecting faith or love for him (affective love), or it can mean falling into mortal sin, choosing according to some disordered love for spiritual or material goods that pulls away from a love of God out of disobedience. But this does not mean that one has completely or definitively rejected God, since sin can come about from weakness or true or feigned ignorance.

While pride is not a capital vice with its own daughters, but rather the beginning of all the vices, it has four species or kinds as outlined

² *De malo*, q. 8, a. 2, in *St. Thomas Aquinas, On Evil*, trans. Jean Oesterle, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

³ *ST I*, q. 63, a. 4.

⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 162, a. 8.

⁵ *De malo*, q. 8, a. 2. In *ST*, it necessarily leads to a lack of subjection to God's rule or measure of one's self and further leads a person to raise self above God's providential design for each person (*ST II-II*, q. 162, a. 5).

by Gregory the Great, which can lead or inspire one to give into the other seven vices and their daughters: “There are four marks, or species by which every kind of pride of the arrogant betrays itself; either when they think that their good is from themselves, or if they believe it to be from above, yet they think that it is due to their own merits; or when they boast of having what they have not, or despise others and wish to appear the exclusive possessors of what they have.”⁶

Further, Thomas makes note in the main body of the text that, while superiority results from the possession of a good, it is easy for the proud person to think he possess more worth than he actually has. Worse still, however, is that proud people do not want to be submissive to God, so that the vice “spurns the condition appointed for him by divine rule or mission, in defiance of the lesson of St. Paul (2 Cor 10:13), *But we will not glory beyond our measure, according to the measure of the rule which God has measured for us.*”⁷ Continuing from a religious perspective, Aquinas goes on to say that “the root of pride” is “somehow not being subject to God and his rule.” God’s rule, of course, means keeping his precepts or commandments as taught by the Church. When someone says that no pope is going to tell them what he or she can or cannot do in the bedroom, what they are objectively “doing” is making a choice of pride, not exclusively out of lust for pleasure.

All of these species indicate already a beginning of distancing oneself from God or of a disordered attitude to human beings, the image of God. And a failure to acknowledge one’s dependence on God, or a false imagining of having greater gifts that one does not have, leads to boasting, or vainglory (looking for praise—a daughter of vainglory). Also, the sin of pride, as it grows, inclines one to see any gift one possesses as if it were owed to oneself by God. Further, pride also undermines a certain sense of fraternity or solidarity with others equal in dignity. St. Thomas is quick to say that it makes a person “rigid.”⁸ Self-glorification, rationalizing to oneself that certain actions are not sins, being “intoxicated” with self, and displaying a condescending and patronizing attitude toward others all lead to an antisocial way of life.

Moreover, a proud person fails to respond to the splendor of truth because his self-love prevents him loving the truth with a certain

⁶ ST II-II, q. 162, a. 4, ad 1.

⁷ ST II-II, q. 162, a. 5, corp.

⁸ ST Suppl., q. 1, a. 1.

sweetness or relish.⁹ His failure to respond to the splendor of truth inhibits his contemplation of divine things. Pride also inclines a person to dwell on other people's failings and, because of exaggerated self-esteem, to appear singularly good.¹⁰ Often rash judgments based on vague signs are the products of "projecting" one's own unrecognized sins onto others.¹¹ All of these properties of pride undermine a central foundation for the spiritual life, which is humility before God and his image, the human person.

Due to this excessive desire for excellence without recognizing one's limitations, conceit, selfishness, and the inability to recognize one's faults and sins set in. Regarding the spiritual life as a battle and the vices as one's attackers, St. Thomas further calls the seven capital vices the lieutenants of the queen.¹² When these seven capital vices are activated by operative pride and consented to, they slowly weaken and blind the spiritual faculties (intellect and will) and bind the sense faculties (imagination, memory, and the unifying sense traditionally called the "common sense") against right reason and faith (though they do not provoke sins directly against faith). The vices in turn undermine both the passions and the good inclinations of the human person by directing them away from their fundamental inclination to the good of the human person.¹³

Of their nature, the vices are not so unified that one cannot act without the others. Gluttony is not the same as avarice, or envy the same as wanton anger or vainglory or acedia (often called sloth or spiritual boredom). Each is not the other, yet two vices can coexist, with one motivating the other. It is easy to see that, if someone is gluttonous, he may also become avaricious so that he can eat more. He may also become envious of the rich who can have sumptuous banquets and go to the best of restaurants and vacation spots. Moreover, the lustful person may become so filled with the love of pleasure that he eventually succumbs to acedia and no longer thinks sexual sins are evil, and may even come to the conclusion that it is a moral good to fornicate or commit adultery or contracept.¹⁴ A couple may contracept because of an avaricious desire for more homes, better

⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 162, a. 3, ad 1.

¹⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 162, a. 4.

¹¹ *ST* II-II, q. 60, a. 3.

¹² *ST* II-II, q. 162, a. 8.

¹³ *ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

¹⁴ *De malo*, q. 9, a. 3.

vacations, and other luxuries. Or someone may so love to be honored and praised that he becomes envious or saddened when someone else is honored. Further, someone may unreasonably desire more material things because, for him, it is a sign of importance and meets his need to be honored and praised. A vainglorious person may even become unreasonably angry when, at work, he is not given esteem and reward for contributions he may have made to the common good of his company.

From this quick glance at all the capital vices under the queen of pride, vainglory emerges as an offspring of pride, though, for Aquinas, there is no rigidly logical order of the vices. Each is a kind of final cause for a string of vices under its own lieutenant as a fountain of vice. This sin boils down to an excessive desire for attention, affirmation, popularity, yearning to be a celebrity, to impress, and, as a result, to receive applause and to stand out from the crowd. Thanks to the internet, social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are some of the more popular means of satisfying an excessive craving for recognition; however, they can also be means for the new evangelization. All of these attributes of false desire are related to pride because they are part of fulfilling the excessive yearning for excellence that is not in keeping with one's nature or talents, together with a desire for pre-eminence—that is, having other people notice how important one is. Therefore, this desire for vainglory helps intensify the vice of pride.

Thomas is careful to assert that movements of pride and vainglory, more often than not, are first movements of the soul, rather than deliberate venial sins. However, when pride and vainglory lead to grave harm to individuals and the common good due to grave sins, pride and vainglory share in the gravity of injustice. More precisely, vainglory is the desire to want others to know of one's excellence as an added bonus to one's sense of greatness. By reason of a certain affinity, other sins, mortal or venial, flow from this fount: disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contention, obstinacy, discord, and presumption of novelties (attention seeking).¹⁵ None of this analysis, which can be of great help in the spiritual life, is found in CCC.

The Motivation of Envy

The envious are the have-nots of this world because of a lack of self-worth compounded by feelings of inferiority. Feeling offended at the

¹⁵ *De malo*, q. 9, a. 3, obj. 4 and ad 4.

talents, successes, and good fortune of others leads the envious to selfish kinds of rivalry and competition together with pleasure at another's difficulties or distress, besides reading bad motives into another's behavior or just belittling others. The envious may also want others to be as unsuccessful as they are. Aquinas and Gregory say that envy often arises from vainglory because a false sense of self-worth rests conditionally on another's approval.

From a global perspective, wealth inequality and class conflict within and among nations can be instigated and exploited by their leaders. However, the roots of envy begin in childhood when some are compared to others as more intelligent, beautiful, stronger, or richer than their neighbors. However, greed and lust may also lay the groundwork for envy due to spiritual blindness. What is petty and unsubstantial becomes central to a person's identity. Sometimes it takes hours of psychotherapy to get someone to admit that it is envy behind their emotional negativity. Self-worth tends to be measured by things, talents, beauty, riches or success, and praise from others. Saul's hatred of David was obviously motivated by envy, whereas Jonathon's humility and friendship with David remained as the latter became the king of Israel. St. Paul teaches that love envies no one.¹⁶ Contentedness is the solution to this problem as we come to love the people toward whom we feel the sting of envy. Also envy can change into emulation of the other's virtues in some way.

So another's good diminishing an individual may lead to self-bellittlement and at the same time motivating the envious person to pull down another's good. This makes it impossible or at least difficult to admire, respect, and be grateful to what is nobler, lovelier, or greater than self. As Aquinas says, envy may lead to various sins of speech that are similar to vainglory, though the daughters of envy are hatred, tale-bearing, detraction, exulting over another's misfortune, and sorrow over another's prosperity.¹⁷

The Catechism's Developed Idea of Envy

Envy has a plethora of numbers in CCC.¹⁸ It is defined and explained in the following numbers:

¹⁶ 1 Cor 13:4–8.

¹⁷ *De malo*, q. 10, a. 3; *ST* II-II, q. 36, a. 4.

¹⁸ CCC, §§391, 412, 413, 1852, 1866, 2259, 2317, 2475, 2538, 2559, 2553, and 2554.

§2539: Envy is a capital sin. It refers to the sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly. When it wishes grave harm to a neighbor it is a mortal sin: St. Augustine saw envy as "the diabolical sin." "From envy are born hatred, detraction, calumny, joy caused by the misfortune of a neighbor, and displeasure caused by his prosperity."

§2540: Envy represents a form of sadness and therefore a refusal of charity; the baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will. Envy often comes from pride; the baptized person should train himself to live in humility: Would you like to see God glorified by you? Then rejoice in your brother's progress and you will immediately give glory to God. Because his servant could conquer envy by rejoicing in the merits of others, God will be praised.

However, one aspect of the definition is not mentioned: the perverse joy that can come from seeing the envied person suffer a setback or a loss of some good. Further, "humility" as a counter weight against the vice is mentioned twenty-three times in *CCC*, but it is not explained (what it is or how to grow in this essential virtue against pride or vainglory through daily life). *CCC* presumes everyone knows what humility is and how to grow and guide oneself in it through daily life. But, if there is a clear definition of neither pride nor of vainglory, then humility remains in a kind of fog of meaning, rather than in a challenge to do something to become a saint based on understanding the counter root to pride in the spiritual life.

St. Thomas's Contribution in Understanding Humility

The two virtues that challenge envy, pride, and vainglory are humility and magnanimity. First, humility means for Aquinas a right appraisal of one's gifts and talents so as not to press for high things beyond one's abilities and so as to accept one's limitations (natural and supernatural) under God. Humility exists primarily in the will, while in the intellect it makes a correct appraisal.¹⁹ It is likewise based on the reverence the human person owes to God. I think that *CCC* would have profited by citing the following from the *Summa theologiae*:

¹⁹ ST II-II, q. 161, a. 1.

The reason why Christ chiefly proposed humility to us, was because it especially removes the obstacle to man's spiritual welfare consisting in man's aiming at heavenly and spiritual things, in which he is hindered by striving to become great in earthly things. Hence our Lord, in order to remove an obstacle to our spiritual welfare, showed by giving an example of humility, that outward exaltation is to be despised. Thus humility is, as it were, a disposition to man's untrammelled access to spiritual and divine goods. Accordingly as perfection is greater than disposition, so charity, and other virtues whereby man approaches God directly, are greater than humility.²⁰

With these words of Thomas, we discover what humility can do for the virtue of prayer when it is really understood and lived when CCC says: "Humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that 'we do not know how to pray as we ought,' are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. Man is a beggar before God" (§2559).

CCC goes on to assert that humility must also penetrate the prayer of adoration (§2628), petition (§2631), and contemplation (§2713) and fight dryness and distraction in the battle of persevering prayer (§§2728 and 2753). It accompanies faith (§2854) and penance (§1450) and enables the human mind to know God through reason (§299). Finally, it is an antidote to envy (§2540). Given all these various doors or avenues to virtue that humility opens, the only logical conclusion is that it is a precept of the Lord (§768) that, if followed, brings us to our eternal homeland.

Avarice, Greed, Coveting, the Root of the Vices

St. Thomas calls the vice of avarice the root of all the vices because it includes excessive desires for created goods, riches, and power. But the Catechism refers to it as an idolatry (§2534) without explanation. Citing the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent in relationship with the tenth commandment, CCC asserts that man's desire for material goods is "infinite" but that these should never be envied. CCC does not clearly analyze how and why envy causes avarice.

Following St. Paul, Thomas sees why the root of sin is avarice: avarice is a sign of material success, which can be the cause of false security. Ample opportunities for self-indulgence lead to a neglect

²⁰ ST II-II, q. 161, a. 5 ad 4.

of the common good of one's family or society. The loss of material goods may cause depression, since enough is never "enough" to those controlled by avarice. The daughters of this vice include treachery, fraud, deceit, and perjury, all of which lead to injustice and violence. Further obduracy can lead to grave injustice to one's fellows and the community if one refuses to cooperate practically for specific common goods.

Restlessness and the lack of due regard to mercy, all of which border on mortal sin, are attitudes that lead one to forget about the family and especially the poor. In particular, the desire for luxury goods often quashes the virtue of liberality or the wise distribution of goods to the needy. Restlessness or worry about the future tempts one to workaholicism, which, in the case of both parents, can cause them to ignore their children's immediate needs for attention. While thinking of the long-term of their college education and the like, they forget the children's short-term needs. When money and things are desired as ends in themselves, one is prevented from using them in a reasonable way. One who has lost the sense of God as creator and author of all goods also loses trust in divine providence and governance. His heart is hardened toward other people's needs and opportunities for generous acts of mercy.

Thomas explains and experience shows that covetousness looks to the great, illusory promise of self-sufficiency.²¹ Excessive material goods feed the desire for more than one truly needs.²² When it is unchecked, the love of material goods as ends in themselves turns the heart to stone. CCC wisely warns: "St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls this: 'Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.' 'The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity': When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice" (§2446). Until one's heart is purified of avarice so that one lives within the measure of one's true material and cultural needs, this teaching of the Catechism cannot be understood.

Finally, Thomas gives a fine outline of what happens when the Christian seeks temporal goods too earnestly:

²¹ *ST* II-II, q. 118, a. 7; Jas 5:1–6.

²² *ST* II-II, q. 118, a. 6.

Solicitude denotes an earnest endeavor to obtain something. Now it is evident that the endeavor is more earnest when there is fear of failure, so that there is less solicitude when success is assured. Accordingly solicitude about temporal things may be unlawful in three ways. First on the part of the object of solicitude; that is, if we seek temporal things as an end. Hence Augustine says (*De Operibus Monach.* xxvi): “When Our Lord said: ‘Be not solicitous,’ etc. . . . He intended to forbid them either to make such things their end, or for the sake of these things to do whatever they were commanded to do in preaching the Gospel.” Secondly, solicitude about temporal things may be unlawful, through too much earnestness in endeavoring to obtain temporal things, the result being that a man is drawn away from spiritual things which ought to be the chief object of his search, wherefore it is written (Mt. 13:22) that “the care of this world . . . chokes up the word.” Thirdly, through over much fear, when, to wit, a man fears to lack necessary things if he do what he ought to do. Now our Lord gives three motives for laying aside this fear. First, on account of the yet greater favors bestowed by God on man, independently of his solicitude, viz. his body and soul (Mt. 6:26); secondly, on account of the care with which God watches over animals and plants without the assistance of man, according to the requirements of their nature; thirdly, because of Divine providence, through ignorance of which the gentiles are solicitous in seeking temporal goods before all others. Consequently He concludes that we should be solicitous most of all about spiritual goods, hoping that temporal goods also may be granted us according to our needs, if we do what we ought to do.²³

Anger or Wrath, Often a Vice but Sometimes a Virtue

Anger can be expressed in a virtuous way or a sinful way, depending upon its purpose. Its use comes down to reasonably defending oneself and others from serious injustices. Quoting St. Gregory, Aquinas says, “Let anger stand up robustly against vice, says Gregory, like the body-guard of reason.”²⁴ Anger is a violent reaction caused by real or illusory unjust physical or moral suffering arousing energies to overcome the difficulty against persons, animals, and even things. Bodily changes

²³ ST II-II, 55, 6.

²⁴ ST II-II, q. 158, a. 1, ad 4.

occur such as a change of color in the face and rising blood pressure due to a rising heartbeat. The angry person also wants to repel and punish an aggressor. Anger can be legitimate if it is just, moderate, and animated by motives of divine love. It becomes a capital vice when it is an inordinate and violent desire to punish without proper conditions. The intensity of impatience, agitation, blows, or hatred betray an unreasonable kind of anger.²⁵ Gregory says the vice of anger can make us lose good judgment, gentleness, a sense of justice, and a spirit of recollection.²⁶ Remedies must have to anticipate problems arising such as learning how to think before acting and developing a benign and humble spirit that is able to oppose a proud and vainglorious heart blowing apparent injustices out of all proportion.

Wrath can become obsessive, even though, under certain conditions, it must be expressed when necessary, and if not expressed, it becomes a sin. (Thomas reminds the reader that there is no name for a particular sin of failing to be angry.²⁷) Self inflation can dispose one to anger if one feels unjustly treated, but disproportionate anger can inflame other vices, making one more proud, more envious, more avaricious, or more filled with acedia.

Some people become excessively angry with themselves, with life, their place in life, the world, and everybody else. Unfortunately, this is an age of wrath, as we think of the terrorist, the kidnapper, the hijacker, the looter, the demonstrator, or even a man terrorizing his wife and family. Wrath also rises when one demands false rights of all kinds. Any felt want or need or longing construed as a right can lead to discord and, on a collective scale, to a violent society. When people claim a right to something they desire and this alleged right is not granted, their grievance will yield to anger, which becomes a warrant for physical or verbal violence, as in demonstrations against an institution. One becomes an extremist against “the system, the establishment, the pigs.”

Sinful wrath is often linked to pride, envy and hatred—vices that can flow from lust, envy, or acedia, as well as from frustrated greed. A perfectionist temperament can also become obsessive with people in his household or workplace because he wants them to be like him. Nevertheless, bravery in battle, due chastisement of disobedient children, or police work against crime requires some anger.

²⁵ ST II-II, q. 158, aa. 1–2.

²⁶ *De malo*, q. 12, a. 1, obj. 5 and obj. 7.

²⁷ ST II-II, q. 158, a. 8.

A gentle or forgiving personality sees slights not as grave or malicious insults; and again, a mark of true greatness, according to Seneca, may even be to not notice that one has received a blow. Parents who are angered at their children without just cause and hasty in punishment eventually lose their children's respect and incur their resentment. Forgiveness, compassion, and recognition of human frailty can help. While the Lord Jesus as portrayed in the gospels would on occasion become angry or annoyed, in general, he was pervaded with the spirit of gentleness and merciful love.

Anger, as defined by CCC §2302, following St. Thomas, can be a vice or a virtue:

By recalling the commandment, "You shall not kill," our Lord asked for peace of heart and denounced murderous anger and hatred as immoral.

Anger is a desire for revenge. "*To desire vengeance in order to do evil to someone who should be punished is illicit,*" but it is praiseworthy to impose restitution "*to correct vices and maintain justice.*" If anger reaches the point of a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound a neighbor, it is gravely against charity; it is a mortal sin. The Lord says, "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment." (emphasis mine)

It becomes a mortal sin when grave injustice is inflicted upon someone, and in CCC §2534, this is reduced to physical violence. However, one can inflict not physical but moral violence by words, as Aquinas explains throughout his Summa. This would be akin to modern "bullying" or attempting to manipulate people. The daughters of the vice are sixfold: quarreling, swelling of the mind, contumely, clamor, indignation, and blasphemy.²⁸ The last daughter St. Thomas places under the sins against faith when actually intended but as a venial sin when words against God slip out spontaneously in anger.²⁹ CCC has only a developed idea of this last daughter of anger when it teaches. CCC evidently is concerned only with the mortal sin against faith, not the venial sin that is the daughter of anger that St. Thomas speaks of:

Blasphemy is directly opposed to the second commandment. It consists in uttering against God—inwardly or outwardly—

²⁸ *De malo*, q. 12, 5; *ST* II-II, q. 158, a. 7.

²⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 13, aa. 1–4.

words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of God; in failing in respect toward him in one's speech; in misusing God's name. St. James condemns those "who blaspheme that honorable name [of Jesus] by which you are called." The prohibition of blasphemy extends to language against Christ's Church, the saints, and sacred things. It is also blasphemous to make use of God's name to cover up criminal practices, to reduce peoples to servitude, to torture persons or put them to death. The misuse of God's name to commit a crime can provoke others to repudiate religion. (§2148)

Blasphemy is contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. It is in itself a grave sin.

Gluttony or Modern "Foodies"

Wise eating habits are what Thomas calls the virtues of abstinence, sobriety, and fasting. These may be called "pro-life" virtues, since they concern health of the body, a gift of creation. Rarely has anyone written in this vein except for an occasional article in the field of bioethics and medicine. Concerning gluttony, CCC has no analysis, even though the health crisis in the first world has been in part produced by overeating and drinking. Some theologians would also include smoking cigarettes made from tobacco or from cannabis, as well as ingesting drugs to create a certain euphoria, as another species of gluttony, since these substances are consumed for physical pleasure and, from experience, harm the common good of society. In addition, gluttony affects the common good of society when illnesses caused by gluttony lead to expensive healthcare. Gluttony's daughters result from intemperance in food and drink namely: unseemly joy, scurrility (coarse and obscene conversation), garrulousness (excessive talkativeness), uncleanness (sexual arousals and discharges), and dullness of sense (unclear thinking).³⁰ Since all the cardinal virtues are meant to work together, inordinate eating and drinking and other forms of intemperate consumption harm the good of friendship within the family and society at large. CCC, I believe, has erred in failing to articulate the norms for enjoying the pleasurable gift of food from God. Even mentioning the species of gluttony could help family life when parents articulate them: namely, eating "hastily, sumptuously, excessively, ravenously and fastidiously."³¹

³⁰ *De malo*, q. 14, a. 4; *ST* II-II, q. 148, a. 6.

³¹ *De malo*, q. 14, a. 3; *ST* II-II, q. 148, a. 4.

Gluttony can be an effect of another vice called “prodigality” (spending money beyond one’s means), which flows from avarice. It can also be the effect of vainglory when it results from showing off one’s wealth, or eating the most delicate of foods, or drinking too much to show that one can “outdrink” others. It can also be the cause or an effect of not caring for the poor and destitute by wasting money on costly foods and drinks, as well as an effect of many different kinds of sins that dull the mind. While it may not be easy to determine what is moderate eating, St. Thomas says that “a person can discern it with the help of God.”³² The purposes of food and drink are manifold. When consumed reasonably, they keep us alive (the most fundamental inclination is to keep oneself in existence). Since it is so necessary for life, it is reasonable too that it is pleasurable. One does not have to be consciously motivated, because hunger is instinctual. The problem is to make certain that hunger is proportionate or according to reason. Even when a woman is pregnant, proper eating of certain foods also nourishes the child in her womb. Occasionally, consuming certain foods may even facilitate pregnancy.³³ It is also clear that common meals with family members enhance family unity. Imbibing in alcoholic drinks stimulates hunger and is often healthy for certain members of the body such, as the heart (among potential medical problems). Some beverages possess many nutrients and vitamins necessary for good health. In earlier times, drinking wine prevented many diseases coming from tainted drinking water that could not be identified as harmful by appearance. St. Paul even suggested that wine was good for stomach ailments (1 Tim 5:23).

Lust versus the Natural Inclination for Marriage and Family Life

Perhaps the best understanding of a vice in the *Catechism* is found in the section dealing with lust. Its definition is very sound when it says: “Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes” (§2351). Likewise, throughout this section under the sixth commandment, the reader discovers the mainline particular vices and practical considerations on how to grow in chastity away from sins of the flesh. Chastity is premar-

³² *De malo*, q. 14, a. 2 ad 2.

³³ For more details, see *Fertility: Cycles and Nutrition*, ed. Marilyn M. Shannon, 4th ed. (Cincinnati, OH: Couple to Couple League, 2009).

ital (virginal and celibate), marital, and post-marital. Aquinas will give much further insight into some daughters of lust that are not brought out in *CCC*.

Traditionally, from Pope St. Gregory the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas, lust's daughters are named blindness of mind, thoughtlessness, inconstancy, and rashness, all of which undermine solid prudence. These moral problems, the consequences of lust, are not mentioned in *CCC*, unfortunately. Decisions of right and wrong and when, how, and where to do any good act become murky due to lust wounding the intellectual virtue of prudence. Failure to think before acting, thinking too much and never acting, and rarely seeking advice from persons of virtue all go to frustrate the effort to lead a reasonable and holy life under grace. Lust deforms the conscience in this scenario, and following one's deformed conscience is following a fool.

Another daughter of lust is self-love or self-centeredness, which makes one unwilling to think of others and fulfill their reasonable needs when it is the right course of action. This is akin to pride. Worse still are the other daughters of lust: hatred of God, love of this world, and abhorrence or despair of a future world, which is also called the sin of folly against the virtue of wisdom.³⁴ These enervate the desire to know God and his will in the practical order as the means to achieving union with him on earth, as well as to one's ultimate goal of heaven. The common good of societies, beginning with one's home, becomes subordinated to one's inordinate desire for the goods of this world.³⁵ Material goods (money and property) become one's "be all and end all," and thus the vice of avarice settles into one's soul. The notion that all things have a universal or common destination that includes others when in need is lost. Sharing one's bounty with others in need, the virtue of liberality according to Aquinas, becomes meaningless.³⁶

These daughters of lust within the soul battle in varying degrees against God the creator, the redeemer, but above all God the consummator of human life. When these daughters of lust entrench

³⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 46, aa. 1–3.

³⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 77, a. 4.

³⁶ As we shall see, the knowledge of the daughters of acedia is also apt warning for every Christian in the slavery of lust, for what happens once someone or a group loses its idealism and becomes influenced by the following: malice, despair, spite, faintheartedness, sluggishness with the commandments, and a wandering of the mind after unlawful things.

themselves in the human soul, damnation, or eternal death naturally follows, either because one has forgotten or denied an eternal destiny beyond this life or because one falsely assumes that heaven will be granted anyway—the sin of presumption, opposing divine hope. The hope for a final prize (eternal glory) slowly deteriorates as the heart (intellect, will, and passion) is captivated by lust. Put simply, anger, blasphemy, vainglory, and envy are not easily resisted unless a foundation of chastity is solidly informing both the will and the concupiscible appetite.

Acedia and Looking at a Real Good as an Evil

With regard to the vice of acedia, CCC has the following to say: “Another temptation, to which presumption opens the gate, is acedia. The spiritual writers understand by this a form of depression due to lax ascetical practice, decreasing vigilance, carelessness of heart. ‘The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ The greater the height, the harder the fall. Painful as discouragement is, it is the reverse of presumption. The humble are not surprised by their distress; it leads them to trust more, to hold fast in constancy” (§2733). While it is true as far as it goes, this paragraph is still vague. Lax ascetical practice really implies a lack of contemplation of spiritual things that might generate convictions against all the capital vices. Depression is a kind of sadness—but why is one sad? This sadness and lack of enthusiasm is over something spiritually good that in some way is felt or judged to be evil. If sin is the choice of an apparent good, acedia judges something objectively good to be not so and rejects it. Such objective goods might be spiritual exercises such as prayer, confession, attending Mass and so on, as Aquinas points out in his treatment.³⁷ The sadness of acedia is similar to envy, but for different reasons.

Dejection that gives rise to apathy of mind, feeling, and heart, sluggishness, a poisoning of the will, despair, faintheartedness, and lack of desire for anything even for what is good creates a morbid inertia. One is disinclined to practice any virtue. A feeling of “I couldn’t care less” or “whatever” or a lack of purpose prevents one’s striving for perfection. What is left is a leaning toward self-indulgence and self-entertainment. As this vice grows, hatred of all spiritual things that entail effort to attain and faintheartedness in matters of difficulty lead to either not caring about others or criticizing those that do care about the spiritual life. Children become slow to obey,

³⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 35, aa. 1–4.

parents too uninterested to command, pupils too lazy to do home-work, teachers not caring to update their notes, and preachers lacking in enthusiasm and too lukewarm to inspire. Such apathy leads to sins of neglect or omission.

Zeal and joy in the service of God are moral duties. Someone not directed by a self-transcending religious or moral commitment has little reason to go on in the face of pain, bereavement, loss of wealth or status, or the inability to experience delight. Effort and sacrifice are pitted against a popular culture of immediate pleasures.

As if the previous moral pitfalls are not deep enough, acedia's final coup de grâce looks upon grace itself as a kind of evil due to spiritual boredom and a desire for any pleasure. As Aquinas understands this vice, he says: "For acedia signifies a kind of sadness from the repugnance of human affections to a spiritual divine good; indeed such repugnance is obviously contrary to charity, which adheres to a divine good and rejoices in it."³⁸ St. Thomas further elaborates what this could mean in the practical order when he says that "acedia is contrary to the command of keeping holy the Sabbath in which repose of the mind in God is commanded according as it is a moral precept."³⁹ This is withdrawing from the joy of a divine good because spiritual goods are perceived as something to avoid with disgust and sadness, rather than pursued is morally evil. In the throes of acedia, divine goods are seen and felt to be distasteful. Spending time before the Blessed Sacrament becomes repulsive or boring. These are some of the reasons why Aquinas places the vice of acedia and its daughters as opposed charity, since they are opposed to joy.

Finally, an acquaintance with the daughters of acedia offers timely warnings for every Christian. When someone or a group loses idealism for union with God and virtue, the daughters of acedia emerge: malice, despair, spite, faintheartedness, sluggishness with the commandments, and a wandering of the mind after unlawful things.⁴⁰ This confirms the insight of Aristotle that "no man can be a long time in company with what is painful and unpleasant (*Ethic. Viii*, 5, 6)."⁴¹ In conclusion, it would be helpful for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to supplement the CCC's teaching about the capital vices with many of the practical insights of St. Thomas. This would, in turn, clarify some of the vagueness and lacunae in CCC's

³⁸ *De malo*, q. 11, a. 3.

³⁹ *De malo*, q. 11, a. 3, ad 2.

⁴⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 4, obj. 2.

⁴¹ *ST II-II*, q. 35, a. 4, ad 2.

account of the capital vices. To clearly understand virtue theory, one needs a good grasp of vice theory as well so as to know not simply the names and definitions of the vices, but also all the ways they operate on souls along the way to heaven to set them off this road to damnation. N&V