

# The Corruption of the Good of Nature and Moral Action: The Realism of St. Thomas Aquinas

Jörgen Vijgen

## I. Introduction: The Sacramental and Moral Crisis in the Church and its Foundations

In his reflections on the theological virtue of hope, Joseph Ratzinger recalls a friend's journey to the Netherlands in the mid 1970's and the latter's witnessing of the collapse of the Church in that country. What surprised Ratzinger was not so much the factual information regarding the collapse of the Church in the Netherlands his friend brought with him, but more so the total absence of pessimism in his friend's interlocutor. On the contrary, this man looked at the future with optimism. Such a "general optimism" made people blind to reality and able to forget the "decadence and destruction" which occurred with the collapse of the Church. He writes:

I thought to myself: what would one say of a businessman whose accounts were completely in the red but who, instead of recognizing this evil, finding out its reasons, and courageously taking steps against it, wanted to commend himself to his creditors solely through optimism? What should one's attitude be to an optimism that was quite simply opposed to reality?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. RATZINGER, *The Yes of Jesus Christ*, 39-40 (Original edition: *Auf Christus schauen: Einübung in Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe*, 42-43).

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In his subsequent reflections on the causes of this optimism, Ratzinger names three elements which could have played a role. First, it could partly be a cover for despair but also partly a camouflaging method by those who wanted to build a totally different Church by dismantling the present one. Second, there could be a deliberate strategy to liberate oneself from the claim of the living God over one's life. Such an "optimism of the pride of apostasy," says Ratzinger, is then identified with the certainty of the theological virtue of hope. This "optimism", counters Ratzinger, is in fact a "parody" of faith and hope. Finally, such optimism could partly be the bourgeois substitute for the lost hope of faith.<sup>2</sup>

Since the first publication of these reflections in 1989, the situation only seems to have deteriorated. Ralph Martin has defined this "Post-Christendom Sacramental crisis" in the Church as follows: "The crisis consists in fewer and fewer baptized Catholics participating in the post-baptismal sacraments and fewer and fewer of the Catholics who do participate in further sacraments effectively realizing the fruits of these sacraments."<sup>3</sup> One aspect of this crisis is the radical decline in the numbers of those who are still interested in approaching the sacraments. The statistics reported below in the footnotes show these numbers for Belgium<sup>4</sup> and the Netherlands<sup>5</sup> but represent the current situation in many Western countries. Other statistics show a steep decline in Mass attendance,<sup>6</sup> the almost disappearance of the Sacrament of Confession, and the fact that those who do attend Mass regularly hold views which are contrary to the teaching of the Church.

This sacramental crisis has occurred simultaneously with a moral crisis. On the level of large-scale ethics or macro ethics, one can argue

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> R. MARTIN, "The Post-Christendom Sacramental Crisis: The Wisdom of Thomas Aquinas", 57.

<sup>4</sup> The situation in Belgium is as follows: infant baptism: 93,6 % of the population in 1967; 75% in 1990; 54,6% in 2007; catholic marriages: 86,1% in 1967; 59,1% in 1990; 25,6% in 2007; catholic funerals: 84,3% in 1967; 81,4% in 1990; 58,4% in 2007. Information for the period after 2007 is not available. Source: [http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/binaries/1809%20Rapport%20kerkpraktijk%20in%20Belgi%C3%83%C2%AB%202009\\_tcm325-244668.pdf](http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/binaries/1809%20Rapport%20kerkpraktijk%20in%20Belgi%C3%83%C2%AB%202009_tcm325-244668.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The situation in the Netherlands is as follows: infant baptism: 42,7% of the population in 1965; 25,8% in 1990; 9% in 2014; confirmation: 70,2% of the baptized children in 1990; 38% in 2014; catholic marriages: 41% in 1965; 19,5% in 1990; 3% in 2014; catholic funerals: 37,9% in 1960; 29% in 1990; 16% in 2014. Source: [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/542875/rapport\\_nr\\_641\\_kerncijfers\\_rooms-katholieke\\_kerk\\_2014.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/542875/rapport_nr_641_kerncijfers_rooms-katholieke_kerk_2014.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> In 2014, 5% of all Catholics in the Netherlands attended Mass weekly. Yearly this number declines with 5 to 9%.

that there has occurred over the last few decades a considerable moral progress in so far as there is an increase in moral awareness and collective responsibility in the areas of ecology, business, politics, etc. On the individual level, however, - and paradoxically - the exaltation of subjectivism, of conscience as a matter of feelings, the freedom of indifference (S. Pinckaers), and the consequent separation of the subject and his conscience from nature and its inherent teleology, all these have resulted in a moral regress that has affected and undermines the foundations of the individual's growth in virtues, the family and the political community as a whole.

This sacramental and moral crisis is but the practical effect of two views which became the prevailing opinions in the years after the Second Vatican Council: salvation optimism<sup>7</sup> and moral optimism. Already during and immediately after the close of the Council, Joseph Ratzinger criticized the "almost naïve progressivist optimism" and "Semi-Pelagian impression" of some parts of *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>8</sup> While this optimism could be viewed as an uncritical acceptance of the Enlightenment belief in progress, it quickly caused the loss of a crucial theological distinction. In the words of Ralph Martin:

An important distinction must be made, it seems to me, about an 'optimism' that sees the possibility of people who have never heard the gospel, or who have never heard it 'adequately', having a possibility of being saved under certain specific conditions ... and an 'optimism' that presumes that 'possibility' means in fact 'probability'. It is a short step from an assumed 'probability' concerning salvation to the widespread assumption now common in the culture of the Church as well as in the culture at large, that virtually everyone will be saved.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See R. MARTIN, *Will Many be Saved? What Vatican II actually teaches and its implications for the New Evangelization*; M. RAMAGE, "Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus' & the Substance of Catholic Doctrine: Towards a Realization of Benedict XVI's 'Hermeneutic of Reform'", 295-330. See also E. ECHEVERRIA, "Vatican II and the Religions: A Review Essay", 837-873.

<sup>8</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 161-165; see also J. KOMONCHAK, "Le valutazioni sulla Gaudium et spes: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger", 115-153.

<sup>9</sup> R. MARTIN, *Will Many be Saved? What Vatican II actually teaches and its implications for the New Evangelization*, 55.

Consequently, not only the very idea and necessity of Christian evangelization was put into question<sup>10</sup> but also the reality and universality of sin in favor of a Pelagian-like moral optimism.<sup>11</sup> The connection between salvation optimism and moral optimism has clearly been established by Ralph Martin who showed that most commentators of *Lumen gentium* nr. 16 simply ignored that last part of that section which reads that “very often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the reality of original sin and its effects have been minimized as part of this connection between salvation optimism and moral optimism. St. Thomas, however, describes the spiritual world of the first man after the Fall as “darkened by perversity and defects and ... full of ignorance.”<sup>13</sup> He follows St. Augustine’s mystical reading of the man blind from birth in Joh. 9:1 as referring to the entire human race<sup>14</sup> so that Pilate’s question “What is truth?” becomes for St. Thomas an indication “that truth was not known by the world and had vanished from almost everyone, as long as they remained unbelievers.”<sup>15</sup> He recognizes fully the

<sup>10</sup> See J. RATZINGER, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 245. E. ECHEVERRIA, “Dei Verbum and the Nature of Revelation”, 250-280 also highlights in this regard the widespread, erroneous reading of Dei Verbum according to which Vatican II denies propositional revelation as undermining the need for evangelization.

<sup>11</sup> Even Karl Rahner, whose positions were influential in developing this salvation optimism, blames *Gaudium et Spes* for its “underestimating sin.” See K. RAHNER, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 125, quoted in R. MARTIN, *Will Many be Saved? What Vatican II actually teaches and its implications for the New Evangelization*, p. 206. On Rahner’s position, see chapter 5 in R. Martin’s *Will many be saved*. For a very early criticism see L. ELDERS, “Die Taufe der Weltreligionen. Bemerkungen zu einer Theorie Karl Rahners”, 124-131. On the philosophical foundations of Rahner’s theory see G. CAVALCOLI, *La radice teoretica della dottrina Rahneriana del cristianesimo anonimo*, 51-71.

<sup>12</sup> See R. MARTIN, *Will Many be Saved? What Vatican II actually teaches and its implications for the New Evangelization*, 7-23.

<sup>13</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ioan.* 1, 9, c. 1, l. 5, nr. 130: “Quasi dicat: ideo indiget illuminari, quia venit in hunc mundum, perversitate et defectibus tenebrosum et ignorantia plenum.”

<sup>14</sup> See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ioan.* 9, 1, c. 9, l. 1, nr. 1294: “Mystice autem, secundum Augustinum, genus humanum est iste caecus. Nam spiritualis caecitas peccatum est, Sap. II, 21: *excaecavit eos malitia eorum*. Qui a nativitate caecus est, quia ex sua origine trahit peccatum. Haec enim caecitas contigit per peccatum in homine primo, de quo omnes originem traduximus; Eph. II, 3: *eratis natura*, idest naturali origine, *filii irae*.”

<sup>15</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ioan.* 18, 38, c. 18, l. 6, nr. 2364: “Non quaerens quae sit definitio veritatis, sed quid esset veritas cuius virtute de regno eius efficeretur: dans per hoc intelligere, quod veritas mundo incognita erat, et fere ab omnibus evanuerat, dum

moral disorder and the “perversity of human nature” affected by vice and ignorance<sup>16</sup> to such an extent that before the Incarnation there existed a “failure of the spiritual eyes of men to contemplate the divine light.”<sup>17</sup> A Pelagian-like moral optimism, by ignoring or minimizing the fallen condition of man, views moral action solely in terms of ‘human flourishing’ and assumes that fallen human action is befitting to both the proportionate natural and the supernatural end – if such an end even exists. The resurgence of interest in virtue ethics in the last few decades is to a considerable extent affected by this moral optimism.<sup>18</sup>

It is within the context, then, of the fact that today the vast majority of people in the Post-Christendom West are living either in the state of original sin or, when baptized, separated from the graces that flow from the Christian sacraments, that I want to explore the connection between the sacramental and moral crisis with the help of St. Thomas Aquinas. It is indeed only after a realistic assessment of the human condition that one can look for ways to overcome this crisis. I will therefore, first, recall some essential elements of the doctrine of original justice and original sin. Secondly, I will explore the wounding of human nature as an effect of original sin. Finally I will discuss the effects of man’s wounded nature on moral action.

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increduli essent. Is. LIX, 14: *corrui veritas in plateis, et aequitas non potuit ingredi; Ps. XI, 2: diminutae sunt veritates a filiis hominum.*”

<sup>16</sup> See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ioan.* 1, 10, c. 1, l. 5, nr. 141.

<sup>17</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Ioan.* 1, 14, c. 1, l. 8, nr. 182.

<sup>18</sup> As an illustration of the almost complete absence of sin in contemporary virtue ethics one can refer to D.C. RUSSELL (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, S. VAN HOOFT (ed.), *The Handbook of Virtue Ethics* and L.L. BESSER & M. SLOTE (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. But also a Thomist scholar like Eileen Sweeney at the beginning of her chapter “Vice and Sin” goes to great length to write, as a kind of disclaimer, that “the distinctions between mortal and venial sin, between original and actual sin” “now seem hopelessly irrelevant and even irrational” and consequently “my point is not to defend these elements, and it is certainly not to recommend a return to scholastic manuals” but they are, in her view “strategies and distinctions called up to retain and explain the complexity of human wrongdoing...”. It is telling that she equates without further nuances a defense of these distinctions with scholastic manualism. See E. SWEENEY, *Vice and Sin*, 152.

## II. Original Justice and Original Sin

In order to understand adequately original sin we first need to understand original sin's relation to original justice. For St. Thomas original justice - the "rectitude of the primitive state" - was the gift whereby God upheld Adam and Eve's reason in subjection to God, their passions in subjection to their reason, and their body in subjection to their soul.<sup>19</sup> The subjection of man's reason to God is of crucial importance here because it is the cause of the other two subjections. In the primitive state, there existed therefore a harmony between these three subjections in which the subjection of the passions to reason and the subjection of the body to the soul are ordered towards the subjection to God. This is for St. Thomas the essence or form (*ratio*) of original justice. It is called original 'justice' because justice is giving to each its due, and when each of the powers in an ordered hierarchy gives to its superior what is due, there exists a just state or condition.

St. Thomas calls original justice a good or gift of nature (*bonum vel donum naturae*).<sup>20</sup> He has two things in mind with this expression. First, although original justice is not a perfection that flows from the constituents of human nature, and in that sense is more than natural and is a divine favor, a gift of God and a grace, it nevertheless does not add any objective reality to the constituents of nature nor any perfection which would raise man to a higher order, the order of the specifically supernatural or of the divine. It is a *bonum naturae*. It perfects nature in its own order by making it whole and sound, by establishing in it the harmony and order that befit its components from their very essence. Original justice, in this aspect, is a natural, though preternatural good; it means nothing more than the integrity of nature, i.e. the true nature of man as willed by God.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, as *donum naturae*, original justice is not given to the person of Adam, as his individual good, but to the common nature. As such, and metaphysically<sup>22</sup>, it is to be considered as an accident of the specific

<sup>19</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 95, a. 1.

<sup>20</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra gentiles* IV, 52; *Ad Rom.* 5, 12, c. 5, l. 3, nr. 411.

<sup>21</sup> See M. LABOURDETTE, *Cours de théologie morale. Tome 1. Morale Fondamentale*, 609 : "...il s'agissait d'un don qui, sans être surnaturel en lui-même, venait surnaturellement achever et compléter la nature humaine à son plan même."

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 607-608: "D'un point de vue métaphysique et logique, oui, en ce sens

human nature, *accidens naturae speciei*<sup>23</sup>, a specific property of the nature.<sup>24</sup>

The loss of original justice “dissolved the obedience of the flesh to the soul” and consequently wounded human nature.<sup>25</sup> Aquinas defines original sin as follows: it is “an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice,” and he compares original sin to a bodily disease that destroys the “equilibrium which is essential to health.”<sup>26</sup> While the gift of original justice preserved human nature from such disorder, the rebellion of the first humans dissolved this justice. In the words of St. Thomas: “the sin of our first parent is the cause of death and all such like defects in human nature, in so far as by the sin of our first parent original justice was taken away, whereby not only were the lower powers of the soul held together under the control of reason...but also the whole body was held together in subjection to the soul.”<sup>27</sup> Adam’s sin was a freely chosen act of injustice because by disobeying God Adam failed to give God what is due to Him. As a result, the subjection of the lower powers of the soul to reason and the subjection of body to soul were destroyed. This destruction is immediately manifest in the resulting disharmony between man and women, between man and man and between man and nature.

In so far as “all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, inasmuch as they have one common nature, which they receive from their first parents,”<sup>28</sup> we are all born into a state of punishment for Adam and Eve’s sin. All this obviously raises questions about the transmission of original sin and its justice, given that original sin in us is not a personal sin, but these questions exceed the limits of this article.<sup>29</sup>

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qu’elle ne fait pas partie de l’essence; et la preuve en est qu’elle peut être perdue. Mais d’un point de vue historique, qui considère la nature en l’intégrité de son premier état, appelée à entrer dans l’amitié divine, non, la grâce n’est pas accidentelle, elle fait partie de ce qui est indispensable à l’homme pour faire face à son destin concret.”

<sup>23</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 95, a. 1

<sup>24</sup> Sanctifying grace, on the contrary, is of its very essence a gift to a person; it cannot mean or be a gift to nature, because it means adoptive filiation which regards persons only, and it is intended to enable persons for a new life and destiny. The state of grace is a state of the person, its presence or absence does not affect specific nature as such.

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 95, a. 1, and *ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 3; cf. *ST* I-II, q. 85, a. 5.

<sup>26</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 82, a. 1.

<sup>27</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 5.

<sup>28</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 81, a. 1.

<sup>29</sup> On the basis of Porphyrius’ statement that “by sharing the same species, many men

What is important for our purpose is the distinction St. Thomas makes between original sin in Adam and in us: “original sin [in us] is not the sin of this person, except inasmuch as this person receives his nature from his first parent, for which reason it is called the *sin of nature*.”<sup>30</sup> While nature is equally present in every human individual and comprises everything which the essence of man requires, it is multiplied in individuals and finds a particular realization, substantially different in every human person. Equally important for our reflections is St. Thomas’ remark that, had Adam not sinned, he would have transmitted human nature in its state of original justice, since he received it in this state. Now that original justice has been lost, Adam can only transmit human nature in its wounded state. In other words, the damage done by Adam’s first sin concerns human “nature as nature” whereas Adams’s subsequent sins damage human nature in the person who sins and not human nature as such. In the words of Aquinas: “The first sin infects nature with a human corruption pertaining to nature; whereas other sins infect it with a corruption pertaining only to the person.”<sup>31</sup> For this reason St. Thomas holds that only Adam’s first sin has been transmitted.

Given that original sin is a permanent state, it is not enough for St. Thomas to describe original sin as a pure privation. As a permanent reality, it also must be described as habitus. Obviously, the kind of habitus he has in mind cannot be the result of a succession of personal acts and decisions but has to be a habit which precedes all the acts. Such an entitative habit touches upon the nature itself of a thing, c.q. the human person even before that person acts freely. An entitative habit is therefore not an addi-

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are one man” (*participatione speciei plures homines sunt unus homo*), St. Thomas gives two analogies to clarify the justice of our reception of Adam’s punishment. The first is the soul-hand analogy. Just as “the action of one member of the body, of the hand for instance, is voluntary not by the will of that hand, but by the will of the soul, the first mover of the members”, so also “the disorder which is in this man born of Adam, is voluntary, not by his will, but by the will of his first parent” (*ST I-II*, q. 81, a. 1). A second analogy is that of a man who from birth is “under a family disgrace, on account of a crime committed by one of his forbears.” (*ST I-II*, q. 81, a. 1, ad 5). Although Adam was the one who rebelled and lost original justice, the whole human family is justly in a state of disgrace due to the action of Adam. The analogies are, therefore, not mere metaphors as Pesch claims but rest on the logical and metaphysical principle of the unity of all men in human nature. See THOMAS VON AQUIN, *Die Sünde*. Kommentiert von OTTO HERMANN PESCH, 916-917.

<sup>30</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 81, a. 1.

<sup>31</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 2, ad 3.

tional positive quality or habitus which inclines the powers of the soul to act in definitive ways (operative habit), but it denotes rather a generalized disharmony and disposition toward disordered actions and in this sense it is a corrupt habit or “faintness of nature” (*languor naturae*).<sup>32</sup>

What is the relation between original sin and baptism? St. Thomas makes it clear that baptism only frees man from the guilt of original sin and its consequent debt of punishment, which has affected the nature of the person, but baptism does not free man from the penalties of sin that belong to this life. In this sense, human nature remains wounded even after baptism. Certainly, baptism, by which “man is incorporated in the Passion and death of Christ, according to Rm. 6:8: ‘If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ.’”, an incorporation which frees man from the debt of punishment, “just as if he himself had offered sufficient satisfaction for all his sins”<sup>33</sup>, has the power to take away the penalties from this life and to heal human nature. For St. Thomas, however, it is more fitting (*conveniens*) that baptism does not remove these penalties in this life, that is until the general resurrection. He gives the following three reasons.

First, “what takes place in the Head should take place also in the member incorporated”. Even Christ, who was full of grace, had a passible body, and hence someone who receives grace in baptism retains a passible body “so that he may suffer for Christ therein: yet at length he will be raised up to a life of impassibility.” This will occur at a “fitting time”<sup>34</sup> because the call to a life in conformity with Christ requires us first to be conformed with His suffering before meriting His glory. Secondly, it is fitting “for our spiritual training: namely, in order that, by fighting against concupiscence and other defects to which he is subject, man may receive the crown of victory.” Thirdly, -and here again St. Thomas shows how well he knew the secrets of the human heart-, a restoration of human nature in the unfallen state would have caused people “to seek to be baptized for the sake of impassibility in the present life, and not for the sake of the glory of life eternal.”<sup>35</sup>

It is in this discussion in *ST III*, q. 69, a. 3 that St. Thomas raises a most interesting objection, namely that “if the cause be removed, the effect is re-

<sup>32</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 1.

<sup>33</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 69, a. 2.

<sup>34</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 5, ad 2.

<sup>35</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 69, a. 3.

moved. But the cause of these penalties is original sin, which is taken away by baptism. Therefore, such like penalties should not remain.” His answer is of immediate importance for our purposes. He begins by summarizing as it were in one sentence the existence and transmission of original sin. He writes incisively: “original sin spreads in this way, that at first the person infected the nature, and afterwards the nature infected the person.” Christ, however, -so he remarks- works in reverse order because He “first repairs what regards the person, and afterwards will simultaneously repair what pertains to the nature in all men.” Thus, what happens in baptism is that the guilt of original sin, caused by the person of Adam, is being taken away, that is the state of being deprived of heavenly beatitude, but the penalties in this life (death, inclination towards sin, etc.) pertain to the nature of man and arise from the principles of human fallen nature. One has to await, therefore, the general resurrection for the restoration of these effects to occur.<sup>36</sup>

### **III. The corruption of the good of human nature as an effect of original sin**

Aquinas addresses the effects of sin in questions 85-87 of the *Prima Secundae* of his *Summa Theologiae*. The effects of sin, according to Aquinas, are three-fold: corruption, stain, and debt of punishment. The last two are a direct consequence of the first and therefore I will limit myself to question 85.

#### **III. 1. Three ways in which human nature is good**

First, he explains the three ways in which human nature is good. He writes:

The good of human nature is threefold. First, there are the principles of which nature is constituted, and the properties that flow from them, such as the powers of the soul, and so forth. Secondly, since man has from nature an inclination to virtue, as stated above (60, 1; 63, 1), this inclination to virtue is a good of nature. Thirdly, the gift of original justice, conferred

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<sup>36</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 69, a. 3, ad 3.

on the whole of human nature in the person of the first man, may be called a good of nature.<sup>37</sup>

First, human nature is good in the very principles of nature (i.e. the principles out of which nature is constituted) and in the properties that follow upon these principles. By ‘principles’ here he is referring to the internal principles of form and matter. From our form and matter we have the properties and powers that are natural to members of our kind. He gives as an example the powers of the soul, since the soul’s powers follow from the kind of soul that it is. A rational soul, for example, has by its very nature the power of rationality. Why are these principles good? Elsewhere St. Thomas explains that one of the ways in which a thing is perfect is “according to the constitution of its own being” (*quod in suo esse constituitur*)<sup>38</sup>, and everything is good insofar as it is perfect. This is just another way to express one his basic metaphysical insights, i.e., *ens et bonum convertuntur*.

Secondly, human nature is good in its natural inclination to virtue. Man’s reason, according to St. Thomas, naturally comes to know both the first principles of knowledge and the first principles of action. The very first principle of action, for example, is that good should be done and evil avoided. These first principles, according to St. Thomas, are the nurseries (*seminalia*) of the intellectual and moral virtues. Moreover, man’s will has a natural appetite for the-good-which-is-according-to-reason (*naturalis appetitus boni quod est secundum rationem*).<sup>39</sup>

The third way in which human nature can be good is by way of the gift of original justice, which I discussed in part II.

### III.2. Three ways in which human nature is affected by sin

These three ways in which human nature can be good are not equally affected by sin. He writes:

Accordingly, the first-mentioned good of nature is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. The third good of nature was entirely destroyed

<sup>37</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 1.

<sup>38</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 6, a. 3c.

<sup>39</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 63, a. 1.

through the sin of our first parent. But the second good of nature, viz. the natural inclination to virtue, is diminished by sin. Because human acts produce an inclination to like acts, as stated above (question 50, Article 1). Now from the very fact that thing becomes inclined to one of two contraries, its inclination to the other contrary must needs be diminished. Wherefore as sin is opposed to virtue, from the very fact that a man sins, there results a diminution of that good of nature, which is the inclination to virtue.<sup>40</sup>

So according to St. Thomas, the good of human nature in its very principles, is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. Sin does not make us into a different species nor into a species of lesser goodness or worth. After sin we remain in essence human (i.e. rational animal). Hence the expression he frequently borrows from Pseudo-Dionysius: *bona naturalia manent integra*.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, the good we had in the gift of original justice, i.e. the harmony and rectitude of the “primitive state”, was entirely destroyed by Adam’s sin.

The second good of human nature, however, that is, the good of our natural inclination to virtue, is diminished (*diminuitur*) by sin. This is because our actions affect our inclinations. An inclination or disposition is an act in potency. Dispositions exist in the powers of the soul. If a particular power of the soul can operate in different ways, then repeated acts in one particular way, by means of that power, implant in that power a potency to act in that particular way. This is how habits are formed, i.e. habits in proportionate to their operations. And this is what St. Thomas, following Aristotle,<sup>42</sup> means when he says that “human acts produce an inclination to like acts”.<sup>43</sup> Now, if something becomes inclined to one of two contraries (e.g. good or evil), it follows that its inclination to the other contrary must be diminished. Therefore, since sin is the contrary of virtue, then from the

<sup>40</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 1.

<sup>41</sup> See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 1, obj. 1; *In De divinis nominibus* c. 4, l. 19, nr. 541; *In II Sententiis* d. 3, q. 4, a. 1, ad 5: “Ad quantum dicendum, quod bona naturalia, prout in esse naturae absolute considerantur, remanent integra post peccatum, tamen pervertuntur quantum ad rectum ordinem quem habebant in gratia vel virtute; et hanc rectitudinem consequatur, super omnia Deum diligere.” See also B. QUELQUEJEU, “Naturalia manent integra”, 640-655.

<sup>42</sup> ARISTOTLE, *EN* II, 2 (1103b23-25).

<sup>43</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 50, a. 1.

fact that a man sins, it follows that the good that consists in his inclination to virtue must diminish.

In summary:

<b>Integral nature</b>	<b>Wounded nature</b>
The principles of which nature is constituted and the properties that come from these principles, e.g. the powers of the soul: reason and will	Neither destroyed nor diminished by sin
The harmony of original justice	Entirely destroyed
The natural inclination towards virtue	Diminished

### III.3. Sin cannot remove the entire good of human nature

St. Thomas writes:

As stated above (Article 1), the good of nature, that is diminished by sin, is the natural inclination to virtue, which is befitting to man from the very fact that he is a rational being; for it is due to this that he performs actions in accord with reason, which is to act virtuously. Now sin cannot entirely take away from man the fact that he is a rational being, for then he would no longer be capable of sin. Wherefore it is not possible for this good of nature to be destroyed entirely.<sup>44</sup>

Here he refers back to his argument in article 1, to show that the good of nature that is diminished by sin is the natural inclination to virtue. We have this natural inclination to virtue because we are by nature rational beings, and our rational power is by nature our highest power. Moreover, an action becomes virtuous if it is in accord with reason. Therefore, only a being with a rational nature has the capacity to sin. A sinful act, however, does not erase in us the capacity to sin and therefore sin cannot make us into something other than a rational being by nature. And since our natural

<sup>44</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 2.

inclination to virtue follows from the very fact that we are rational beings by nature, therefore because sin cannot make us into something other than a rational being by nature, it follows that sin cannot entirely destroy our natural inclination to virtue, even though sin can diminish our natural inclination to virtue.

St. Thomas continues in article 2 by arguing that our natural inclination is a middle term between two others “for it is based on the rational nature as on its root, and tends to the good of virtue, as to its term and end”. Given that our rational nature cannot be diminished by sin, our inclination to virtue cannot be diminished at its root. Our natural inclination can, however, be diminished regarding the attainment of its end, i.e. virtue if by sin an obstacle (*impedimentum*) is placed against our natural inclination’s attainment of its end. Hence, our natural inclination to virtue cannot be destroyed entirely, because the root of this inclination always remains (*semper manet radix talis inclinationis*). St. Thomas draws from this its logical conclusion when he remarks that “even in the lost the natural inclination to virtue remains, else they would have no remorse of conscience.”<sup>45</sup> This inclination is, however, not brought to act as a result of divine justice.

#### III.4. The wounds of nature as a result of sin

St. Thomas summarizes the loss of original justice as follows: “all the powers of the soul are left, as it were, destitute of their proper order (*quodammodo destitutae proprio ordine*), whereby they are naturally directed to virtue” and it is this destitution he calls a “wounding of nature” (*vulneratio naturae*).<sup>46</sup> I take this to mean that, precisely due to this disordering and disintegration of the soul’s power, man can no longer achieve the complete good proportioned to his human nature, let alone the good that surpasses his human nature.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 2, ad 3. He gives the following analogy: “Thus even in a blind man the aptitude to see remains in the very root of his nature, inasmuch as he is an animal naturally endowed with sight: yet this aptitude is not reduced to act, for the lack of a cause capable of reducing it, by forming the organ requisite for sight.”

<sup>46</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3.

<sup>47</sup> See also THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 2c: “Sed in statu naturae integrae, quantum ad sufficientiam operativae virtutis, poterat homo per sua naturalia velle et operari bonum suae naturae proportionatum, quale est bonum virtutis

The wounds of nature correspondent to the four powers that can be subject to virtue: (1) reason (*ratio*), in which is the virtue of prudence (*prudentia*), (2) will (*voluntas*), in which is the virtue of justice (*iustitia*), (3) the irascible appetite (*irascibilis*), i.e., the appetite whereby one resists the attacks of any agents that hinder what is suitable and inflict harm and which has as its object something arduous, which it tends to overcome, and in which is the virtue of fortitude (*fortitudo*), and (4) the concupiscible appetite (*concupiscibilis*), i.e., the appetite whereby one is simply inclined to seek what is suitable according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful,<sup>48</sup> and in which is the virtue of temperance (*temperantia*). These four virtues are called the cardinal virtues, because all the other moral virtues depend upon them. Insofar as reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the wound of ignorance (*ignorantia*). Insofar as the will is deprived of its order to the good, there is the wound of malice (*malitiae*), which Aquinas describes as a certain proneness of the will to evil (*pronitate voluntatis ad malum*).<sup>49</sup> Insofar as the irascible appetite is deprived of its order to the arduous good, there is the wound of weakness (*infirmittatis*). And insofar as the concupiscible appetite is deprived of its order to the delectable-moderated-by-reason (*delectabile moderatum ratione*), there is the wound of concupiscence.<sup>50</sup>

Aquinas writes:

Accordingly, these are the four wounds inflicted on the whole of human nature as a result of our first parent's sin. But since the inclination to the good of virtue is diminished in each individual on account of actual sin, as was explained above (Question 1, Article 2), these four wounds are also the result of other sins, in so far as, through sin, the reason is obscured, especially in practical matters, the will hardened to evil, good actions become more difficult and concupiscence more impetuous.<sup>51</sup>

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acquisitae, non autem bonum superexcedens, quale est bonum virtutis infusae. Sed in statu naturae corruptae etiam deficit homo ab hoc quod secundum suam naturam potest, ut non possit totum huiusmodi bonum implere per sua naturalia.”

<sup>48</sup> See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 81, a. 2.

<sup>49</sup> Not to be confused therefore, as St. Thomas notices, with the sin of malice: THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3, ad 2. On malice as the cause of sin, see THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 78.

<sup>50</sup> On the origins of these four wounds in the Church Fathers see O.H. PESCH, *Die Sünde*, 626-628.

<sup>51</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3.

These four wounds were inflicted on the whole of human nature as a result of Adam's sin. But these four wounds are not the same as original sin. Original sin is the loss of the good of original justice, as we saw in part II. But the four wounds, though consequent on sin, are due to the loss (in the sense of diminution, not total destruction) of the good of our natural inclination to virtue. Therefore, since original justice was wholly destroyed upon Adam's sin, original sin cannot be made worse by additional sinful acts. By contrast, because human acts produce an inclination to like acts in the very powers through which those acts are performed, and because the four wounds are wounds to the powers in their natural inclinations to their respective virtues, therefore the four wounds can be made worse by additional sinful acts.

#### IV. The Wounds of Nature and Moral Action

This is therefore the situation of both the baptized and the unbaptized. In this final part I will ask what the effects are of the diminution of the natural inclination to virtue. Scattered throughout the *Summa*, one can discern at least four such effects, which determine to a considerable extent the nature and possibility of moral action, if man in his wounded nature is left to himself.

##### IV.1. The rebellion of the flesh against the spirit

Regarding original sin, St. Thomas writes: "Through the bond of original justice being broken, which held together all the powers of the soul in a certain order, each power of the soul tends to its own proper movement, and the more impetuously, as it is stronger."<sup>52</sup> For St. Thomas, the natural capacities of postlapsarian man are left to follow their own proper natural inclinations according to the strength of each. What is missing is first an order between the different powers of the soul, an order established by reason, which, in the state of innocence, held the lower powers subject to itself<sup>53</sup>, and secondly an overall orientation of these different powers to a

<sup>52</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 82, a. 4, ad 1.

<sup>53</sup> See *De Veritate*, q. 25, a.6: "So too since the loss of original justice, through which reason held the lower powers altogether subject to itself in the state of innocence, each of

supernatural good. In addition, although original sin is equally present in all, differences between men can arise “on account of the different temperaments” in men.<sup>54</sup>

Commenting on Paul’s statement in Romans 7, 14: “But I am carnal, sold under sin” (*ego autem carnalis sum, venumdatus sub peccato*), Aquinas explains that man’s reason can be called “carnal” (*carnalis*) in a twofold way:

in one way from the fact that it is submissive to the flesh and consents to things to which the flesh urges it... In this way it is understood of man not yet healed by grace. In another way reason is said to be carnal, because it is under attack from the flesh... In this way, even the reason of a man in the state of grace is said to be carnal.

He continues by saying:

it should be noted that the carnality, which implies rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, arises from the sin of the first parent, because this pertains to the inclination to sin derived from that sin. But the carnality which implies submission of reason to the flesh arises not only from original sin but actual, through which a man by obeying the desires of the flesh makes himself a slave of the flesh; hence he adds: sold under sin, namely, of the first parent or of the self.<sup>55</sup>

This rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, as he frequently calls it<sup>56</sup>, alluding to the same letter of St. Paul to the Romans, causes post-

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the lower powers tends to what is proper to it: the concupiscible to pleasure, the irascible to anger, and so on.”

<sup>54</sup> Thomas gives the following example: “Now it happens that some of the soul’s powers are stronger in one man than in another, on account of the different bodily temperaments. Consequently, if one man is more prone than another to acts of concupiscence, this is not due to original sin, because the bond of original justice is equally broken in all, and the lower parts of the soul are, in all, left to themselves equally; but it is due to the various dispositions of the powers, as stated.” THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 82, a. 4, ad 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ad Rom.* 7, 14, c. 7, l. 3, nrs. 560-561

<sup>56</sup> See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 10, ad 3; *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 164, a. 1; *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 27, a. 3; *De Malo* q. 4, a. 2, ad 7; *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 192.

lapsarian man to be pulled by opposing tendencies. He writes: “when the harmony of a mixed body is destroyed, the elements have contrary local tendencies. In like manner, when the harmony of original justice is destroyed, the various powers of the soul have various opposite tendencies.”<sup>57</sup>

Although the natural light of reason in itself is not diminished by sin, the natural light can easily be darkened by the sensitive appetites,<sup>58</sup> resulting in ignorance and difficulty in finding the truth, “especially in practical matters.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, St. Thomas writes: “human nature is more corrupt by sin in regard to the desire for good, than in regard to the knowledge of truth.”<sup>60</sup> This is, according to St. Thomas, most clearly illustrated by the influence of the vice of lust, an influence which can even corrupt natural reason. More in particular, he is convinced that immoral sexual practices, arising from the vice of lust and which are culturally accepted and well established within a society, contribute to the corruption of natural reason so that, apart from the first principle of the natural law (“the good is that which all things seek after”), not much is naturally accessible for such a corrupted reason.<sup>61</sup>

Aquinas gives a summary in chapter 192 of the *Compendium Theologiae*:

The harmonious integrity of the original state depended entirely on the submission of man’s will to God. Consequently, as soon as the human will threw off the yoke of subjection to God, the perfect subjection of the lower powers to reason and of the body to the soul likewise disintegrated. As a result, man experienced in his lower, sensitive appetite the inordinate stirrings of concupiscence, anger, and all the other passions. These movements no longer followed the order set by reason but greatly rebelled against it,

<sup>57</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 82, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>58</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3.

<sup>59</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3.

<sup>60</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>61</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 154, 2, ad 1: “For among the Gentiles, fornication was not deemed unlawful, on account of the corruption of natural reason: whereas the Jews, taught by the Divine law, considered it to be unlawful. The other things mentioned [abstaining from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, Acts 15, 29] were loathsome to the Jews through custom introduced by the law into their daily life. Hence the Apostles forbade these things to the Gentiles, not as though they were unlawful in themselves, but because they were loathsome to the Jews, as stated above.”

both frequently darkening the mind and, in a way, disturbing it. This is that rebellion of the flesh against the spirit which Scripture mentions.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, even prior to having committed rational choices and actual sins, and even taking into account that the inclination towards virtue is not destroyed but merely diminished, postlapsarian man holds an extremely fragile position when it comes to morally good actions.

#### IV.2. The additional effect of actual sin

Although the natural inclination to virtue can never be destroyed, it is diminished by original sin. St. Thomas, however, immediately adds that actual sin can infinitely diminish (*diminui in infinitum*) this natural inclination even further. This infinite diminution should not be understood in a mathematical sense but it could be compared to a stained window, which always retains its root capacity to receive light, even when that capacity is more and more diminished by the environmental pollution that occurs through the ages.<sup>63</sup> The environmental pollution acts as an obstacle placed against the natural inclination's attaining its goal. One can place these obstacles indefinitely inasmuch as man can go on indefinitely "adding sin to sin".<sup>64</sup> In other words, just as through habituation man becomes inclined towards future virtuous acts, so too do habitual sins incline man towards future sinful acts. The very fact that a man sins, results in a diminution of that good of nature, which is the inclination to virtue.<sup>65</sup> Although Aquinas affirms that the root (*radix*) of the incli-

<sup>62</sup> *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 192: "Quia igitur dicti status tam ordinata integritas tota causabatur ex subiectione humanae voluntatis ad Deum, consequens fuit ut subducta humana voluntate a subiectione divina, deperiret illa perfecta subiectio inferiorum virium ad rationem et corporis ad animam: unde consecutum est ut homo sentiret in inferiori appetitu sensibili, concupiscentiae et irae et ceterarum passionum inordinatos motus non secundum ordinem rationis, sed magis ei repugnantes, et eam plerumque obnubilantes, et quasi perturbantes: et haec est repugnantia carnis ad spiritum, de qua Scriptura loquitur."

<sup>63</sup> This is my reformulation of St. Thomas' phrase in *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 2: "An example of this may be seen in a transparent body, which has an inclination to receive light, from the very fact that it is transparent; yet this inclination or aptitude is diminished on the part of supervening clouds, although it always remains rooted in the nature of the body."

<sup>64</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 2.

<sup>65</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 85, a. 1.

nation towards virtue remains present, the fulfillment of that natural inclination can, by placing obstacles in its way, become continually and ever more difficult.

The actual and personal sins of postlapsarian man, therefore, only seem to make the situation worse. And there is more. Although Aquinas affirms man's rational will "to check individual inordinate movements ... for instance by turning his thoughts to other things"<sup>66</sup>, this turning to other, virtuous things can sometimes give rise to an inordinate movement itself. He gives the following example:

thus, when a man, in order to avoid the movements of concupiscence, turns his thoughts away from carnal pleasures, to the considerations of science, sometimes an unpremeditated movement of vainglory will arise. Consequently, a man cannot avoid all such movements, on account of the aforesaid corruption.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, even a well-intended good act, performed to counter an actual sin, can sometimes result in the production of another sin.

### IV.3. The necessity of healing grace even for moral actions proportionate to man's natural end

In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas argues that it is beneficial for man and an act of divine mercy that even those truths human reason can investigate are part of revelation. Otherwise only a few could reach these truths after a great deal of effort and even than these truths could lack the

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<sup>66</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 74, a. 3, ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod perpetua corruptio sensualitatis est intelligenda quantum ad fomitem, qui nunquam totaliter tollitur in hac vita, transit enim peccatum originale reatu, et remanet actu. Sed talis corruptio fomitis non impedit quin homo rationabili voluntate possit reprimere singulos motus inordinatos sensualitatis, si praesentiat, puta divertendo cogitationem ad alia. Sed dum homo ad aliud cogitationem divertit, potest etiam circa illud aliquis inordinatus motus insurgere, sicut cum aliquis transfert cogitationem suam a delectabilibus carnis, volens concupiscentiae motus vitare, ad speculationem scientiae, insurgit quandoque aliquis motus inanis gloriae impraemeditatus. Et ideo non potest homo vitare omnes huiusmodi motus, propter corruptionem praedictam, sed hoc solum sufficit ad rationem peccati voluntarii, quod possit vitare singulos."

<sup>67</sup> Corruption means here the *fomes peccati* or the effects of original sin which remain, even in the baptized.

certainty they require<sup>68</sup> Similarly, one could say that it is a sign of God's mercy that in the present, fallen state, man is offered not only elevating grace by which man is elevated to that which surpasses his nature, i.e. sharing in God's life, but also healing grace by which human nature is restored to its proper capacities, i.e. to love God above all things. Without this healing the appetite of man's rational will "follows its private good, on account of the corruption of nature."<sup>69</sup>

In a clear attempt to underscore that man's wounded nature diminishes his ability for moral actions, even proportionate to his natural end, St. Thomas gives examples of good, non-meritorious works which man even in the state of wounded nature can perform, solely by way of his natural endowments, such as "build dwellings, plant vineyards, and the like."<sup>70</sup> Other examples he gives and which originate from a Pseudo-Augustinian text: "to toil in the fields, to drink, to eat, or to have friends."<sup>71</sup> Clearly these examples are rather paltry but St. Thomas gives them on purpose. Good moral actions, as stemming from a stable, virtuous disposition require the unity of all the virtues. His examples are what they are, i.e. (rather paltry) examples of externally morally

<sup>68</sup> See *Summa contra gentiles* I, c. 4.

<sup>69</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 3.

<sup>70</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 2.

<sup>71</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 5. St. Thomas' quote stems from the Pseudo-Augustinian text *Hypomnesticon*. The full quote is as follows: "Bonis dico, quae de bono naturae oriuntur, id est, velle laborare in agro, velle manducare et bibere, velle habere amicum, velle habere indumenta, velle fabricare domum, uxorem velle ducere, pecora nutrire, artem discere diversarum rerum bonarum, velle quidquid bonum ad praesentem pertinent vitam." (See J. E. CHISHOLM (ed.), *The Pseudo-Augustinian Hypomnesticon against the Pelagians and Celestinans*). Does the having of friends constitute an exception in an otherwise paltry list of examples? However, what kind of friendship is implied here? This text refers, I think, to friendship of utility understood by Aristotle as the lowest kind of friendship. A little earlier (I-II, q. 109, a. 4, ad 2), St. Thomas has quoted Aristotle's *NE* III, 3 (1112b27: "quae per amicos possumus, aequaliter per nos possumus"), a phrase which Thomas comments as follows: "inasmuch as the principle of the work is found in us, for they themselves do this in consideration of us. (*In III Ethic.* c. 3, l. 8, nr. 477). J. Ramirez rightly points out that the author of this text exaggerates the position of St. Augustine and also that in the context in which St. Thomas uses this phrase he not only has a "natural or physical good" in mind but also a moral good. Ramirez expresses his agreement with Dominicus de Soto who wrote: "Homo corruptae naturae differ ab homine integrae respect naturalis boni in materia morum, non sicut mortuus a vivo, ut ille possit *totum* ex suis naturalibus, nos vero *nihil*..., sed sicut infirmus et debilis a sano et valido. Porro, quod ille habebat potestatem in *totum* bonum, nos vero non possumus totum, idest in universum omnia bona facere naturalia, possum tamen aliquod". J. RAMIREZ, *De Gratia Dei*, vol. I, 143-144.

good actions but they are not the actions of a person possessing morally perfect virtues.

#### IV.4. The impossibility of perseverance without grace

In his question whether man without grace can avoid sin, Aquinas returns to the impossibility for the postlapsarian man to avoid all movements of the lower appetites. “For man can, indeed, repress each of its movements ... but not all, because whilst he is resisting one, another may arise...”<sup>72</sup> Aquinas explicitly denies that postlapsarian man is, as it were, condemned to always actually sinning and he recognizes that man’s reason can premeditate and set out a course that is different than the course set out by the inclination of his sinful habit but he also realizes that man cannot remain for a long time without mortal sin. He quotes Saint Gregory to the effect that “a sin not at once taken away by repentance, by its weight, drags us down to other sins.”<sup>73</sup>

Why is it inevitably so that man will fall without grace? Ultimately it has to do with the reality that, as a consequence of original sin, man’s reason is not entirely subject to God. A complete subjection to God is in fact that which constitutes an act of formed faith, i.e. an act in which both the intellect and the will are perfected by respectively faith and charity, such that “the act of faith is completed and shaped by charity.”<sup>74</sup> If man is not placing in God “the end of his will” (*in ipso constituere finem suae voluntatis*), if “man’s heart is not so fixed on God as to be unwilling to be parted from Him for the sake of finding any good or avoiding any evil, many things happen for the achieving or avoiding of which a man strays from God and breaks His commandments, and thus sins mortally..., unless, by grace, he is quickly brought back to the due order.”<sup>75</sup>

Aquinas is, moreover, firm in claiming that no one can rise up from sin without the help of grace nor can someone prepare himself for grace by himself and

<sup>72</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 8.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*. A detailed description of this “impotentia perseverandi” as a result of the corruption of human nature can be found in his *Expositio super Job*, c. 7 (Leonine edition, pp. 51-52, ll. 459-492).

<sup>74</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 3.

<sup>75</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 8c: “Cum enim homo non habet cor suum firmatum in Deo, ut pro nullo bono consequendo vel malo vitando ab eo separari velle; occurrunt multa propter quae consequenda vel vitanda homo recedit a Deo contemnendo praecepta ipsius, et ita peccat mortaliter ... nisi cito per gratiam ad debitum ordinem reparetur.”

without the external help of grace.<sup>76</sup> An important objection to all this could be drawn from Romans 2:14: “For when Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, these, although they have not the law, are a law to themselves.” The crucial element lies in the meaning of “by nature”. St. Thomas recognizes the Pelagian outlook of the use ‘by nature’ and therefore limits its meaning to two possibilities. Either ‘nature’ is already reformed by grace as is the case in someone who receives the faith and, with the help of God’s grace, starts to obey the moral law or ‘nature’ refers to the light of natural reason. Both cases, however, do “not rule out the need of grace to move the affections any more than the knowledge of sin through the Law (Rom 3:20) exempts from the need of grace to move the affections.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, knowledge of sin is not enough to avoid it because, regarding particular moral actions, “concupiscence subverts the judgment of reason” Consequently, “the Law is not enough to make one just; another remedy is needed to suppress concupiscence.”<sup>78</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The ongoing sacramental and moral crisis facing the Church in the West has its roots in the “thoughtless optimism”<sup>79</sup> of today’s culture; an optimism which has been expressed theologically by a denial of the reality and universality of (original) sin. In light of this crisis, St. Thomas’ account of the postlapsarian human condition is at the same time frightful and realistic. While St. Thomas is adamant in affirming that the root of man’s inclination to virtue as a good of nature remains, he is equally realistic regarding the moral fragility of postlapsarian man as a result of the diminution of the same inclination to virtue.<sup>80</sup> The moral fragility and consequently the salvation fragility comes to light in man’s rebellion against the spirit, in the ever more weakening of the already diminished inclination to virtue by actual sins, in the necessity of healing grace to perform moral actions proportionate to man’s nature and finally, in man’s inability to persevere in virtue and to avoid moral sin without elevating grace.

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<sup>76</sup> See THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 109, a. 6-7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ad Rom.*, 2, 14, c. 2, l. 3, nr. 216.

<sup>78</sup> *Ad Rom.*, 3, 20, c. 3, l. 2, nr. 298.

<sup>79</sup> See A. DULLES, *Church and Society*, 477-500.

<sup>80</sup> Naturally, the picture St. Thomas paints of the postlapsarian human condition needs to be supplemented by an account of the effects of grace. For this I refer to the contributions by Piotr Roszak and Ignacio Andereggen in this and the previous issue.

It is an illusion, however, to think that man's greatness is extolled by not taking seriously this postlapsarian human condition.<sup>81</sup> Such a denial of the human condition is moreover, for St. Thomas, "not suited to the Christian faith".<sup>82</sup> In commenting on 1 Corinthians 17, he distinguishes between "teaching in wise words" (*docere in sapientia verbi*) and "using wise words in teaching" (*uti sapientia verbi in docendi*).<sup>83</sup> In the former case, one takes human wisdom, i.e. the kind of wisdom "the wise of this world have invented for themselves against the true wisdom of God"<sup>84</sup> as the sole foundation of its teaching; whereas in the latter case faith itself is the sole foundation for constructing the edifice of the Christian faith, in which subsequently the wisdom of the world is used in the service of the faith. Those who merely 'teach in wise words' empty the cross of Christ of God's power by instituting a salvific and moral autarky.<sup>85</sup> The Christian realism of St. Thomas Aquinas, however, is a "realism of the Cross" which fully recognizes that the act of faith cuts through his earthly, postlapsarian existence.<sup>86</sup>

Jörgen Vijgen

*Thomas Institute (Faculty of Catholic Theology), Utrecht*  
 jvijgen@tiltenberg.org

<sup>81</sup> In his commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*, dating from 1968, Joseph Ratzinger already wrote: "Sich nicht ernst zu nehmen heisst, nicht groß vom Menschen zu denken, sondern ihn über den Ernst seiner Lage hinwegzutauschen." J. RATZINGER, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Zweiter Teilband*, 827.

<sup>82</sup> *In I Cor.* 1, 17, c. 1, l. 3, nr. 44.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, nr. 43.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, nr. 50.

<sup>85</sup> See J. RATZINGER, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Erster Teilband*, 326: "Die Sündigkeit der Menschen in der Kirche ist das, was sie notwendig nach oben hin offen hält, auf das Wort der Vergebung hin und was ihr unmöglich machen muss, je sich selber genug zu sein." (Originally: *Sentire ecclesiam. Geist und Leben* 36 (1963), 321-326.)

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, 329: "In einer Welt, die unter dem Schatten des Kreuzes steht, kann der christliche Dienst nicht einfach in einem fröhlichen ‚Taufen‘ der weltlichen Werte bestehen, sondern schließt immer die Passion, das Kreuz ein. Wer als Christ in der Welt lebt und wirklich als Christ, nicht nach dem Schema dieser Welt‘ ... zu leben versucht, wird notwendig den Glauben auch als ‚Schwert‘ erfahren, das seine irdische Existenz durchschneidet... Der christliche Realismus ist ein Realismus des Kreuzes, der vor solchem Einsatz des ganzen Menschen nicht zurückschreckt, weil er die Aufgabe, der er dienen darf, dessen für würdig hält."

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