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INFUSED VIRTUE AND THE EFFECTS OF ACQUIRED
VICE: A TEST CASE FOR THE THOMISTIC THEORY
OF INFUSED CARDINAL VIRTUES

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SERVAIS PINCKAERS REPEATEDLY affirmed the importance of the infused cardinal virtues for the moral life.¹ For Pinckaers, what is at stake in this doctrine is the difference that grace makes in the life of virtue. Grace transforms the source and character of moral excellence. “The first source of moral excellence is no longer located in the human person, but in God through Christ.”² In this reorientation, the most important moral virtues “are not ‘acquired’ by unaided human effort, but implanted in the human person by the Holy Spirit.”³

Nevertheless, as dispositions residing in the powers of the human soul, the infused moral virtues are intimately the excellences of the agent himself. As such, they become the traits of character by means of which the Spirit teaches us the ways of holiness. “Thus, in the context of a gradual education guided by the light of the Gospel, an active cooperation between God and

¹ Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), 71-72; *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 180; “The Sources of the Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 23; “The Place of Philosophy in Moral Theology,” in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, edited by John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 67-68.

² Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, 71.

³ *Ibid.*

the human person can develop.”⁴ Pinckaers, therefore, did not see Aquinas’s doctrine on the infused moral virtues as a Scholastic vestige, but as something rooted in the scriptural account of moral development. “Some such theory seems necessary if we are to explain what the Scriptures teach concerning the way to live as followers of Christ.”⁵

A cursory analysis of the way New Testament authors employ the Greek terms for the cardinal virtues seems to support their status as infused by God. Ephesians, for example, describes God as having lavished upon us grace that grants us “all wisdom and prudence [*phronesis*]” (Eph 1:8), while 2 Timothy (1:7) tells us that “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power, love and temperance [*sophrosyne*],” where “power” (*dynamis*) is one of the New Testament equivalents for the pagan Greek word for courage.⁶ It is the strength (*kratos*) that comes from God and emboldens us to resist the devil (Eph 6:10). Lastly, although the New Testament authors radically reinterpret the meaning of justice (*dikaiosyne*), they affirm that Christ is our justice (1 Cor 1:30) and that in him we become the justice of God (2 Cor 5:21). Prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, therefore, are all described in the New Testament as given to us by God. In this the New Testament authors seem to be following an Old Testament theme that portrays God, through the mysterious action of his wisdom, as teaching the cardinal virtues: “if one loves justice, the fruits of [wisdom’s] works are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice and courage, and nothing in life is more useful for humans than these” (Wis 8:7).

These passages, however, while suggestive, are not of themselves probative. Indeed, many reject the doctrine of infused

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁶ One explanation for the virtual absence of the classical Greek term for courage (*andreia*) in the New Testament is that since its etymological root is the Greek word for man (*aner*, *andros*) the New Testament authors wanted to avoid the connotations of self-sufficiency that the term normally conveys. Instead, as Ceslas Spicq notes in his classic study of New Testament morality (*Théologie morale du Nouveau Testament* [Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1965], 354.), when offering their theology of courage the New Testament authors appeal to a cluster of more neutral terms, such as energy, vigor, firmness, constancy, endurance, power, and perseverance. See, for example, Col 1:11; Phil 4:1; and 1 Thess 3:8.

moral virtues as superfluous, affirming that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity sufficiently account for the new life granted to the Christian in the gift of grace.⁷ Even among medieval theologians there were dissenters.⁸ Duns Scotus, for example, asserted that faith sufficiently establishes the higher end (heavenly beatitude), while charity’s inclination adequately animates and moves the acquired virtues toward this higher end. On this account, by engaging in acts of faith, hope, and charity, the Christian gradually also acquires the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance.⁹

Dom Odon Lottin, a careful student of medieval theories of infused virtue, was perhaps the most eminent twentieth-century scholar to reject the existence of infused moral virtues.¹⁰ Although

⁷ Although contemporary interpreters of Aquinas often do not explicitly reject Aquinas’s teaching on the infused moral virtues, many simply neglect it or act as if it does not exist, presenting his virtue theory as equivalent to Aristotle’s understanding of acquired virtue. Angela McKay offers a helpful list of quotations from influential scholars who interpret St. Thomas in this way (Angela McKay, “The Infused and Acquired Virtues in Aquinas’ Moral Philosophy” [Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004], 1-2). See, for example, Austin Fagothy, *Right and Reason: Ethics in Theory and Practice* 5th ed. (Saint Louis: Mosby, 1972), 182; Eleanor Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 25; Philippa Foot, “Virtues and Vices,” in Roger Crisp and Michael Slote, eds., *Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 164.

⁸ Odon Lottin offers a thorough overview of the Scholastic authors who accepted or rejected this teaching. See Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Gembloux, Belgium: Duculot, 1942-54), vol. 3.1, pp. 99-252; vol. 3.2, pp. 459-535; vol. 4, pp. 739-807.

⁹ For an analysis of Duns Scotus’s understanding of the relationship between the infused and acquired virtues, see Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, vol. 4.2, pp. 739-42.

¹⁰ Odon Lottin, *Principes de morale*, vol. 2, *Compléments de doctrine et d’histoire* (Louvain: Éditions de l’Abbaye du Mont César, 1947), 213-25; *Morale fondamentale* (Tournai: Desclée, 1954), 408-14; *Au cœur de la morale chrétienne* (Tournai: Desclée, 1957), 134-38, 195-97; *Études de morale histoire et doctrine* (Gembloux, Belgium: Duculot, 1961), 131-49. Concerning the influence of Lottin’s work on his intellectual formation, Fr. Pinckaers offers the following observation: “In this type of [historical] research, Dom Lottin, with his *Psychology and Moral Theology in the 12th and 13th Centuries*, was a model, and furnished us with vast documentation. I had noticed, however, that when he set out to make his personal synthesis by way of conclusion, Dom Lottin reverted spontaneously to a systematization and to positions like those in the manuals, and began to restrict St. Thomas in their cramped manner. Thus, in his *Morale fondamentale*, he adopted the basic framework of the manuals and discarded the teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the infused moral virtues, which he had carefully studied in his historical section, as useless complications imposed by the Scholastic tradition of the Thirteenth century” (Servais Pinckaers, “Dominican Moral Theology in the 20th Century,” in Berkman and Titus, eds., *The Pinckaers Reader*, 81-82). For a critique of Lottin’s perspective, see Michel Labourdette, “Principes de morale,” *Revue*

he recognized that the doctrine was part of a longstanding Scholastic tradition, he saw it as a needless complication. Affirming that in matters of grace one cannot appeal to psychological experience, Lottin turns instead to the teaching of the Magisterium and draws from it two principles that must be maintained if one wishes to remain faithful to the gospel message: "First, in order to lead us to our supernatural end, our moral acts must be supernatural. Next, to be supernatural, our acts must flow from stable supernaturalizing principles."¹¹ He rightly defends the second principle by appealing to its fittingness or suitability.

One could, no doubt, explain this supernaturalization by means of actual graces successively intervening to move each of our acts, but it is much more in harmony with what we know of divine providence to recognize the existence in us of stable principles of supernatural operation added onto our natural faculties after the manner of *habitus*.¹²

Drawing on the Scotist tradition, Lottin affirms that faith and charity are the sufficient principles of this supernatural activity. He portrays charity as having the dominant role in this process.

The *habitus* of charity supernaturalizes the will in its two principal acts: love of the end, *voluntas*, and the efficacious search for this end, *intentio*. Now, the decisive influence of this *intentio* upon the whole psychological process of human action is well known: it is this *intentio* that makes affective charity, *voluntas*, become an effective charity; it is thus intention that penetrates with its influence the entire decision of free will, *electio*, and its entire realization, *usus*.

The virtue of charity, therefore, is in us a stable principle of supernaturalization for all of our moral acts, whether they relate to the end or whether they relate to the means.¹³

Lottin foresees two possible objections. The first concerns the passions. Do not the passions also require the ordering and elevating influence of infused virtue? Lottin grants with Aquinas that for the passions to be supernaturalized they must both be

thomiste 47 (1947): 572-76.

¹¹ Lottin, *Principes de morale*, 2:221.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

subject to reason and proportioned to our supernatural end. He argues, however, that the acquired moral virtues as "penetrated by the permanent influence of charity" suffice for this: "the acquired moral virtues subject the sense appetite to reason, and these same virtues as penetrated by the intention of charity fit the appetite for the supernatural end."¹⁴ He explains that although charity does not destroy the specific character of the acquired moral virtues, it nonetheless transforms them from within by means of the will's intention. "Once one envisions the acquired moral virtues as in this way habitually penetrated and saturated with a supernatural intention by charity, one no longer sees the necessity of infused moral virtues."¹⁵

The second objection concerns the cognitive element of human action, although here Lottin addresses the issue solely from the perspective of the different measures that must guide human action. Does not graced action require a distinct infused cognitive virtue (namely, infused prudence) that provides a new and higher "rule" and "motive" for action? Lottin responds by asserting that faith sufficiently plays this role.

One can secure these distinct norms without recourse to two different types of moral virtue, because these norms are, on the one hand, reason, and on the other, the theological virtue of faith. An act is naturally morally good when it conforms to natural reason, and it is supernaturally good when it conforms to reason as enlightened by faith, which provides the Christian with rules of life and motives for action worthy of our status as children of God.¹⁶

From this perspective, therefore, when the acquired moral virtues are animated by charity's intention of the end and enlightened by faith's knowledge of the end, they sufficiently empower us to judge rightly about the means to our supernatural end and to act according to these judgments.

But what happens if we don't have the acquired moral virtues? Specifically, how are we to account for adult conversion, whereby one who was formally living from his acquired vices is

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:221 and 222.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:222.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:222-223.

subsequently empowered to live the life of grace? Clearly we would want to hold with the Council of Trent that the grace of conversion empowers us to live the gospel: that it empowers us to obey the commandments and avoid mortal sin, by engaging in actions that are ordered to our supernatural end.¹⁷ Yet, if the infused psychology of grace presupposes the presence of acquired moral virtues, how is this possible? In other words, if sanctifying grace only orders us to our supernatural end on the level of the primary principles of action (on the level of our knowledge and intention of the supernatural end), how can this grace be effective for salvation in one who lacks the acquired virtues? For a person who has been steeped in vice, it matters little how profoundly or intimately faith and charity animate and elevate the acquired moral virtues: if he does not have them, faith and charity cannot animate and elevate them. It is precisely this issue that was one of the factors motivating the Scholastics to posit the existence of infused moral virtues. Such virtues are dispositions empowering the formerly vicious adult convert to do what he could not do on his own: reason practically and act according to this practical reasoning concerning those actions that are necessary for salvation.¹⁸

Lottin was certainly right to remind us that we cannot construct probative arguments about the character of grace by drawing upon psychological experience. As the *Catechism* states, “since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace *escapes our experience* and cannot be known except by faith.”¹⁹ Nevertheless,

¹⁷ See Council of Trent, session 6, chapters 11 and 13 as well as canons 18 and 22. For the context and implications of Trent’s decree on justification, see Philippe Delhay, “Les leçons morales du décret tridentin sur la justification (session VI),” *Studia moralia* 28 (1990): 177-93.

¹⁸ For recent studies in support of Aquinas’s theory of infused moral virtues, see not only the above cited dissertation by Angela McKay, but also her forthcoming monograph, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press). See also Renée Mirkes, “Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue and Its Significance for the Nature-Grace Question” (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1995); and Gabriel Baumann, “La surnaturalisation des actes humains par la grâce: L’enracinement ontologique des vertus morales infuses chez S. Thomas” (S.T.D. diss., University of Fribourg, Switzerland, 2008). The most thorough defense still remains Gabriel Bullet, *Vertus morales infuses et vertus morales acquises selon saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Fribourg: Editions universitaires de Fribourg, 1958).

¹⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2005. Emphasis in the original.

since the issue at hand is not the epistemological question of whether someone has grace, but the conceptual one of understanding how adult converts are able to live the virtues,²⁰ examples drawn from experience can help us in our efforts to construct arguments from fittingness or suitability. It is with this in mind that we turn to the example of Matthew Talbot. His case not only illustrates why something like infused cardinal virtues must exist, it also helps us understand some of the moral struggles faced by adult converts.

I. MATT TALBOT AND THE CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN CONVERSION: A TEST CASE

The example of this poor Irish laborer is of interest to us because of an event that occurred one Saturday afternoon in early 1884 outside a pub in a poor section of Dublin.²¹ Talbot, who had spent the week drinking, was awaiting the arrival of his coworkers. It was payday in Dublin, and although he hadn’t worked he looked forward to receiving a few free drinks from his friends. As he slouched beside the door of the pub, Matt Talbot would not have been viewed as the embodiment of the classical ideal of virtue. Indeed, Aristotle would most certainly have classified Talbot among those who “from the hour of their birth . . . are marked off for subjection.”²² In other words, Aristotle would have classified Talbot among the natural slaves, who, like beasts of burden, are incapable of virtue because of the poverty of their natural gifts and of the environments in which they were raised. Aristotle held out little hope for one raised in bad habits from birth. As he states in the *Ethics*, “It makes no small difference whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the

²⁰ For more on the distinction between epistemological and conceptual questions concerning grace, see Jean Porter, “Moral Language and the Language of Grace: the Fundamental Option and the Virtue of Charity,” *Philosophy and Theology* 10 (1998): 177.

²¹ For the details of this event, see Mary Purcell, *Matt Talbot and His Times* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 55-67.

²² Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5.1254a19.

difference.²³ Talbot had certainly been raised in bad habits from his youth. The second of twelve children, all but one of whom drank to excess, Talbot in great part received his education running free in the streets of the poor neighborhoods by the docks of Dublin. His formal education consisted of two years at a school run by the Christian Brothers, during much of which he was absent doing chores at home. In spite of whatever positive influence he may have received from school and from the example of his devout mother, by the time he was fifteen, Talbot was an inveterate drunk who lived for alcohol. For the next thirteen years, until he was twenty-eight, his daily routine was to work hard all day, and to drink hard all night. He worked to drink. On payday he would give his entire earnings to the pub manager and drink freely for as long as his wages lasted.²⁴

But on that Saturday afternoon in 1884, he had no wages, because he had spent the week drinking. That fact and the events surrounding it—not the least of which was that none of his coworkers would buy him a drink—led Talbot to change his life radically. That very day he stopped drinking, never to drink again. Moreover, from a life dedicated to the love of alcohol, he turned to a life dedicated to the love of God: to prayer, sacrifice, and the service of the poor. A turning point occurred that Saturday afternoon, a *metanoia*, a transformation. Earlier events may have prepared the way, but that afternoon was nonetheless a recognizable turning point.

Matt Talbot's life is an example of Christian conversion and points to the incomplete character of both Aristotle's conception of virtue and of the Scotistic tradition's theory of the sufficiency of the theological virtues. Talbot would agree with Aristotle that the habits we develop from youth make a very great difference, but do they make *all* the difference? The Christian experience of conversion points instead to the fact that in the grace of conversion other virtues are given—virtues of which Aristotle was unaware and the existence of which the Scotists deny. Even

²³ Aristotle, *Nic. Ethic.* 2.1.1103b24-25.

²⁴ See Purcell, *Matt Talbot and His Times*, 18-54.

though one may still struggle with the remaining effects of one's acquired vices, in the grace of conversion we have the infused capacity to live a life directed to a higher goal. We now have the capacity to judge rightly and do those actions that lead us to union with God in heaven. In short, we receive the infused cardinal virtues. The example of Matt Talbot is instructive because it sheds light on the complexity of the divided self: the experience of one who not only has faith, hope, and charity, but also has a new *phronesis* (a new capacity to reason practically) and a new *dynamis* (a new power) in his will and passions, even though he still feels drawn to his addiction. Talbot, for example, began to make judgments and to act in ways that radically reoriented his life toward God, judgments and actions he seemed incapable of making before his conversion. Nevertheless, he still retained, especially in the beginning, a strong desire (and inclination) to continue drinking and to return to his former way of life. Talbot's experience seems to embody Aquinas's affirmation that although sanctifying grace infuses cardinal virtues within the convert, the convert may still struggle with the residual effects of his acquired vices.²⁵ In what follows, I shall first sketch Aquinas's teaching on the infused cardinal virtues; I shall then propose some of the implications of this teaching for our understanding of moral development and of cases such as Matt Talbot's.

II. THOMAS AQUINAS'S THEOLOGY OF INFUSED CARDINAL VIRTUES

Aquinas presents his theology of the infused virtues by analogy with his psychology of the acquired virtues. He agrees with Aristotle that the acquired virtues require training and discipline. We acquire the virtues (the dispositions of character) necessary for an adult moral life by repeatedly performing acts that are in accord with virtue.²⁶ This occurs through a moral apprenticeship. At first we do what virtue demands because we are disciplined if

²⁵ See *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3.

²⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 2; *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 9.

we don't. Gradually, however, we begin to acquire a taste for the joys inherent to doing the right thing, and we begin to imitate the actions of those whom we admire.²⁷ Doing deeds of temperance, courage, and justice, and making the practical judgments that these actions require, we acquire the four principal virtues of the moral life on the natural level. These virtues dispose us to act in accord with natural human flourishing and the common good of the temporal community.²⁸

None of this would be possible without the natural principles underlying the intellect and will.²⁹ The practical intellect in every act of knowing naturally apprehends the principles of practical reasoning (or what Aquinas elsewhere describes as the precepts of the natural law: that good is to be done, evil is to be avoided, and so on), while the will simultaneously naturally inclines toward the good in general and toward the particular goods that promote natural human flourishing.³⁰ In other words, the fact that we can acquire virtues that dispose us to act rightly with regard to the *means* toward human flourishing presupposes that there exist in us principles inclining us toward human flourishing as our natural *end*.

Aquinas underlines, however, that this natural flourishing is not the existential ultimate end of the human person. We are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem and our vocation is to know and love God for all eternity in heaven.³¹ Yet we cannot attain this end by our natural powers. Instead, we receive the power to attain it through a gift from God: through sanctifying grace and the infused virtues. In Aquinas's view, when grace elevates the powers of the human person, the theological virtues function in a way analogous to the natural principles underlying the intellect and will. Just as the principles of action orient our lives toward natural human flourishing, the theological virtues orient us toward the

²⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 95, a. 1.

²⁸ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 9.

²⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 3.

³⁰ *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2; *STh* I-II, q. 10, a. 1; *De Malo*, q. 6; *In Perihermeneias* I, lect. 14, n. 24.

³¹ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 9.

loving vision of God.³² God is the object of the theological virtues and these virtues have their own acts: to believe, hope in, and love God.³³ Nevertheless, just as in our natural life the principles orienting us toward our natural end depend on the acquired cardinal virtues with regard to the means to that end, so too in the life of grace. Although the theological virtues orient us toward God as our ultimate end, we require other infused virtues—the infused cardinal virtues—in order to act rightly with regard to the means to that end. The analogy, therefore, is as follows: natural principles are to the acquired cardinal virtues as the theological virtues are to the infused cardinal virtues.³⁴

Aquinas next contrasts the acquired and infused cardinal virtues. He asserts that although the subject matter (*materia propria*) of both sets of virtues is the same, they are guided by different measures. With the acquired virtues the good act is determined according to the rule of reason (we make judgments according to the principles of the natural law), while the acts of the infused virtues are determined according to a divine rule, namely, the divine law revealed in the Scriptures and at work in us through the action of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas offers the example of temperance.

For instance in eating, the measure fixed by human reason is that food should not harm the health of the body, nor hinder the use of reason; whereas the measure fixed by divine law requires that a man should *chastise his body, and bring it into subjection* (1 Cor 9:27), by abstinence in food, drink and the like. It is therefore evident that infused and acquired temperance differ in kind.³⁵

The context of the biblical quotation is important. It is from the First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter nine. After describing himself as “under the law of Christ,” Paul portrays the chastisements he imposes on his body as ordered toward his attaining the imperishable prize promised by the gospel. Unaided human reason knows nothing of our vocation to heavenly

³² *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 3; *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10.

³³ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 3, ad 2.

³⁴ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 3; *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10.

³⁵ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 4. See also *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 8.

beatitude or of the effects of original sin that can hinder our attainment of it. Thus, while reason measures acquired temperance according to our physical health and the proper functioning of natural reason, the divine rule measures infused temperance according to our spiritual health and the judgments of infused prudence. In other words, infused temperance is measured by a wisdom that understands our wounded nature and the priceless character of our supernatural end made possible for us by the elevating and healing action of grace.

Aquinas concludes this portion of his argument by stating that “the same reasoning applies to the other virtues.”³⁶ Indeed, as Angela McKay has noted, Aquinas offers a similar contrast in his treatment of courage.³⁷ Although acquired courage primarily concerns earthly combats and the temporal common good, infused courage pertains to spiritual combats and our struggle to attain eternal life. As with temperance, these two types of courage are regulated by two different measures. When judging what constitutes an act of acquired courage, we are guided by the measure of human reason (in other words, the precepts of the natural law), while when judging acts of infused courage we are guided by the measure of divine law. Thus, Aquinas states:

The precepts of the divine law, both about courage and the other virtues, are given with regard to what suits the direction of the mind toward God. This is why it is written in Deuteronomy, *Do not fear them, for the Lord your God is with you, and he will fight for you against your enemies*. Human laws on the other hand, are directed towards certain secular goods, and the precepts of courage are articulated to meet their conditions.³⁸

In the new law, humans are taught how through a spiritual struggle they come to possess eternal life, according to Matthew 11, *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away*. And Peter teaches, *your enemy the devil is prowling like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour; resist him solid in your faith*.³⁹

³⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 4.

³⁷ McKay, “Infused and Acquired Virtues,” 125-41.

³⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 140, a. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, ad 1.

The one who has the acquired cardinal virtues, therefore, still needs their infused equivalents if he is to act rightly with regard to the means to his ultimate end. Indeed, the infused cardinal virtues become the focus, while “the acts of acquired virtue can only be meritorious by the mediation of the infused virtues.”⁴⁰ Thus, from the Thomistic perspective, the Christian’s primary concern should be to grow in charity and the infused virtues (which we only do dispositively by means of merit, because the infused virtues are caused solely and directly by God).⁴¹

Aquinas’s teaching on the two measures that guide our actions explains why “love alone” is not enough. It explains why the theological virtues cannot be the only virtues the Christian receives with sanctifying grace. If faith, hope, and love are truly to be human acts lived in the context of a human life, they require (1) the ability to judge practically about what we should do and when and how we should do it (infused prudence), as well as (2) an inclination in the will toward a higher justice (infused justice) and (3) a receptivity in the passions to be guided by these higher judgments and inclinations (infused courage and temperance).

At this point, however, we might imagine an objector responding as follows. If Aquinas is affirming that all Christians in the state of grace are models of virtue, this is simply wrong, because at the very least we see misjudgments (imprudent actions) among those whom we would classify as loving God with true charity. Focusing simply on the issue of practical wisdom, history points to patently imprudent actions even among the saints and even with regard to spiritual things. An example from Aquinas’s lifetime is Louis IX, King of France. Saint Louis was recognized by his contemporaries as a man of great personal sanctity, but reproached even by his personal friend and biographer, the Seneschal Jean de Joinville, for his deeply unwise decision to undertake the disastrous seventh crusade. (Joinville very frankly states that it would have been better for France if Louis had spent more time with the internal affairs of his country and paid more

⁴⁰ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 4.

⁴¹ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 11; *STh* II-II, q. 24, aa. 5 and 6; *STh* I-II, q. 114, a. 8, ad 3.

attention to the needs and concerns of his wife the Queen.)⁴² So, one form of the objector's complaint could be summarized as follows: Sanctity does not necessarily imply practical wisdom (*prudential/phronesis*). Therefore, it is false to affirm that sanctifying grace necessarily imparts infused cardinal virtues (an integral component of which would have to be infused prudence).

Aquinas himself recognizes this type of objection to his theology and responds to it characteristically by making a distinction. He specifies that the infused moral virtues do not concern all actions, but only those actions necessary for salvation. This distinction enables him to account for how even saints can lack prudence (and by implication the other virtues) while still maintaining that the saints and all Christians receive infused moral virtues. In other words, Aquinas integrates into his theology the objector's counter examples by affirming that the infused moral virtues pertain to a narrow band of action: they pertain only to those acts necessary for the agent's personal salvation.⁴³

But the objector might easily remain unsatisfied. Indeed, Aquinas's response might push him to formulate the deeper concern underlying his objection. Granted that by limiting the scope of infused virtue one can account for how a Christian in the state of grace can lack virtue in certain domains, there is still a more fundamental problem. Even if we focus only on those actions that are necessary for salvation, many Christians don't seem to live those actions from virtues—from what we normally understand by good dispositions of character. They don't seem to do these actions with ease, promptness, and joy.⁴⁴ Here again the example of Matt Talbot is instructive. When he stopped drinking—a decision inspired by his newfound love for God and his desire to serve him—he nevertheless retained (especially in the beginning)

⁴² Jean de Joinville, *Vie de Saint Louis*, edited and translated by Jacques Monfrin (Paris: Garnier, 1995), n. 594, pp. 498-501; nn. 733-737, pp. 584-87.

⁴³ *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 14, ad 3.

⁴⁴ For more on these three characteristics of the virtues, see Romanus Cessario, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 47; and Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, ed. Vukan Kuic (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986). For a text where St. Thomas considers these three characteristics, see *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 1.

a deep and abiding desire to drink to excess.⁴⁵ The thought of getting drunk and of all the practices integral to the life of a drunkard (the illusory camaraderie, the bravado, etc.) still brought him great pleasure. Such a life still felt connatural to him. His whole character was inclined to it. Just as a professional athlete even when he is not playing his sport experiences psychologically an inclination to play it and the concomitant awareness that he can play it with ease, promptness, and real pleasure, so too Talbot during the early years of his conversion experienced psychologically an inclination to return to the life of a drunkard with the concomitant awareness that this was a life he could live easily, promptly, and with pleasure. Even though he refused to return to such a life, how can we describe his acts of sobriety as acts of virtue? In other words, when Christians do what the divine law requires, but apparently do so without the psychological inclination to do it, in what sense can these actions be said to spring from virtues? This objection brings us to the core concern of our study: infused virtue in relation to the residual effects of acquired vice.

Aquinas himself formulates this objection by contrasting the Aristotelian requirements of virtue with the Christian experience of the divided self.

Those who have a *habitus* of virtue perform with ease the acts of that virtue, and these acts are pleasing to them for their own sake . . . as is noted in the *Ethics*. But many who have charity and are free from mortal sin, nonetheless have difficulty performing acts of virtue; nor do they find these acts pleasing for their own sake, but only for the sake of charity. Therefore many have charity, without having the other virtues.⁴⁶

He responds to this objection by employing an example from the speculative virtues. A person who habitually knows some scientific truth (and therefore normally has ease and pleasure engaging in

⁴⁵ Talbot's first biographer, Sir Joseph Glynn, in his narrative, based on the testimonies given by those who knew Talbot well, affirms that during the early days of his conversion, Talbot "All the time suffered intensely from the craving for drink" (quoted in Purcell, *Matt Talbot and His Times*, 97). The temptation to drink was so strong that he no longer carried money on his person (*ibid.*, 153-54).

⁴⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3, obj. 2.

acts of knowing that truth) may nonetheless experience difficulty actually knowing or understanding that truth because of some "extrinsic impediment." For example, sickness or drowsiness may impede his ability to know in act what he knows habitually. Moreover, since the sick or drowsy person no longer experiences ease in knowing, neither does he experience the same pleasure in knowing. It is possible, therefore, to have a speculative virtue, but not have ease and pleasure in engaging in that virtue's acts because of some impediment extrinsic to the virtue itself.

Aquinas affirms that analogously the same thing can occur with the infused cardinal virtues. We can have the infused virtues but our ease and pleasure in engaging in their acts may be impeded by the residual effects of our acquired vices. "One may experience difficulty in performing the actions proper to the *habitus* of the infused moral virtues because of certain contrary dispositions surviving from previous acts."⁴⁷ Aquinas elsewhere explicitly links these "contrary dispositions" to the vices by describing them as "lingering dispositions caused by the acts of one's prior sins."⁴⁸ He refuses, however, to portray these lingering dispositions themselves as vices because they are no longer the principles of our action. He explains, for example, that when an intemperate person is led to conversion, the grace of contrition destroys the vice of intemperance within him. What remains is not the "*habitus intemperantiae*" properly so called, but a certain disposition on the way to corruption (*in via corruptionis*).⁴⁹ In other words, although the disposition to sin is no longer the principle from which we act, it still can impede our ability to act from our new principle of action, which is infused temperance. Aquinas's response to the objection therefore runs as follows. Even though some Christians in the state of grace fail to perform acts of moral virtue with ease and pleasure, this does not imply

⁴⁷ *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 3, ad 2.

⁴⁸ *De virtut.*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 2.

⁴⁹ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 16. See also *STh* III, q. 86, a. 5. Saint Thomas distinguishes between "*dispositio*" and "*habitus*": "the word *habitus* implies a certain lastingness, while the word *dispositio* does not" (*STh* I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3). For more on this distinction, see *Bullet, Vertus morales infuses et vertus morales acquises*, 110-16.

that therefore infused moral virtues do not exist. It means only that the ease, promptness, and joy proper to infused moral virtue can be impeded by the lingering dispositions caused by our previous sinful actions.

Several features of this response deserve our attention. First, Aquinas explicitly affirms here that the infused moral virtues impart ease, promptness, and joy.⁵⁰ This is integral to what it means for them to be virtues: they empower us to act with facility, promptly, and with joy. This is internal to what they are. Second, however, he simultaneously affirms that our ability to experience psychologically this ease, promptness, and joy can be impeded by something akin to a spiritual malady or drowsy lethargy caused by the residual effects of our former life, the residual effects of our acquired vices. This means that infused moral virtues are a very strange type of virtue and impart a unique type of facility. Aquinas is even willing to liken the beginner's experience of these virtues to Aristotle's account of a soldier's experience of courage. Although the annoyances of warfare inhibit a soldier's ability to experience pleasure in courage, he at least is able to live his courage without sadness. So too, Aquinas maintains, does the beginner experience his infused virtues. Although the residual effects of his acquired vices (which we can number among the annoyances proper to spiritual warfare) inhibit his ability to experience pleasure in virtue, he can at least live these virtues without sadness.⁵¹ Aquinas also appeals to Paul to explain that virtue always entails struggle. "There always remains the struggle [*colluctatio*] between the flesh and the spirit, even with moral virtue. The Apostle speaks of this in Galatians (5:17) where he states: 'for flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.'⁵² Aquinas then contrasts the two ways by which acquired and infused virtues help us in this struggle.

Acquired virtue prevails in this, that the struggle [*impugnatio*] is felt less, and this is due to how this type of virtue is caused, which is by repeated acts: for one

⁵⁰ *STh* III, q. 89, a. 1, ad 3.

⁵¹ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 15.

⁵² *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 14.

looses the custom of obeying such passions when one becomes accustomed to resisting them and that is why one is troubled by them less. But infused virtue prevails in this, that although such passions are felt, they in no way dominate, for infused virtue brings it about that the concupiscence of sin is in no way obeyed, and as long as infused virtue remains, it does this infallibly.⁵³

The post-conversion Christian, therefore, has the power to overcome his inclination to sin, even though he might still not experience this power as something he can exercise with ease, promptness, and joy. In other words, the beginner finds himself in the unique position of having virtues that he does not psychologically feel like he has. It is at this point that we can consider some of the implications of Aquinas's teaching.

III. SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THOMAS AQUINAS'S THEOLOGY OF INFUSED VIRTUE

Jean Porter has noted that any effort to appropriate Aquinas's theory of virtue for contemporary issues must offer "some account of the relation of acquired to infused virtues in the case of the individual who possesses both."⁵⁴ The above analysis would perhaps suggest, however, that the best way to develop an account of this relationship is by beginning with the equally important issue of the relationship between the infused cardinal virtues and the theological virtues in one who *lacks* the acquired cardinal virtues. As we have seen, after his conversion, such a person has the power to act according to his vocation to holiness, but because of the residual effects of his former vices, he might not feel like he has this power. Not only will he still be inclined to sin, this inclination may dispose him to regard sin as good for him here and now. Moreover, depending on how he lived before his conversion, virtues such as chastity, sobriety, or even justice may feel unnatural to him. In other words, he may still experience the morality of the gospel as an external imposition. If, therefore, he is to act according to what grace enables him to do, he must live

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jean Porter, "The Subversion of Virtue: Acquired and Infused Virtues in the *Summa theologiae*," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 12 (1992): 38.

from a twofold trust: he must trust that gospel morality is good for him and he must trust that God gives him the grace (the power) here and now to live according to this morality. This trust is necessary because on the level of psychological experience neither feature of gospel morality may *feel* true. Consequently, the infused virtue that predominates in the beginner is not a cardinal virtue, but a theological virtue: the virtue that predominates is faith as animated by hope and charity.

Once again, the experience of those who struggle with addiction can be instructive. One of the cofounders of *Alcoholics Anonymous* describes how trust in God played the decisive role in overcoming addiction. There was first an encounter with a friend who had made the discovery before him.

My friend sat before me, and he made the point-blank declaration that God had done for him what he could not do for himself. His human will had failed. Doctors had pronounced him incurable. Society was about to lock him up. Like myself, he had admitted complete defeat. Then he had, in effect, been raised from the dead, suddenly taken from the scrap heap to a level of life better than the best he had ever known!⁵⁵

This encounter and other preparatory events eventually led the future cofounder to the following experience.

At the hospital . . . I humbly offered myself to God, as I then understood him, to do with me as he would. I placed myself unreservedly under his care and direction. I admitted for the first time that of myself I was nothing; that without him I was lost. I ruthlessly faced my sins and became willing to have my new-found friend take them away, root and branch. I have not had a drink since.⁵⁶

Although aspects of *Alcoholics Anonymous's* approach remain controversial, Bill Wilson articulates in these passages the almost universal experience among former addicts that their road to recovery began with a personal encounter with a loving God and a twofold act of loving trust that this encounter elicited. My thesis

⁵⁵ Bill Wilson, *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism*, 3d ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous Press, 1976), 11.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

is that the best way to understand the dynamics of this healing conversion is by appealing to Aquinas's theology of the relationship between the residual effects of acquired vice, the infused cardinal virtues, and the theological virtues. In the beginning, the former addict still feels drawn to his addiction, but has the ability from the infused moral virtues to act against it. To do so successfully, however, he must trust that God gives him the power to do so and that so doing is truly for his good.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Aquinas himself explicitly affirms the primacy of faith in the life of the beginner. In his treatise on charity, when considering the stages of moral development, he explains that the principal task of the beginner is to avoid sin and to resist the inclinations of his disordered desires; he does this by obeying the precepts of the Decalogue.⁵⁷ But in order to obey the Decalogue he must enter into a moral apprenticeship that implies loving trust in the master, whereby he "believes God the way a disciple believes the master who is teaching him."⁵⁸ Importantly, however, this is only the beginning of the moral life. As the Christian progresses, the focus shifts to acts of virtue in harmony with the Sermon on the Mount, and the predominant virtue becomes hope: the Christian's focus is no longer behind him toward what he is striving to give up (sin), but ahead of him toward the good he increasingly thirsts to attain: heaven. Then, when he has reached spiritual maturity he is no longer primarily concerned with growing in virtue, but with maintaining and deepening his union with Christ. Being configured to Christ, the Christian both participates in his suffering and shares in his joys.⁵⁹ The focus is no longer on desiring God as his own fulfillment, but on loving God for himself and on loving what God loves, even unto death for love of one's enemies. He now enjoys the freedom of the saint: a creative freedom that enables him in intimate friendship with God to act in new and surprising ways: to live the

⁵⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 24, a. 9.

⁵⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 2, a. 3: "credat deo tanquam discipulus magistro docenti." See Servais Pinckaers, *La vie selon l'Esprit: Essai de théologie spirituelle selon saint Paul et saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Luxembourg: Editions Saint-Paul, 1996), 160-63.

⁵⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 24, a. 9. See Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 359-74.

beautiful and creative excellence proper to the Spirit.⁶⁰ It is a freedom analogous to an athlete's excellence or a musician's creative freedom (like jazz improvisations). Here again the example of Matt Talbot is instructive. As the years passed, the focus was no longer on avoiding drink but on love for God and neighbor: he learned to read so that he could study Scripture and theology; he meditated on the life of Christ and participated actively in the sacraments.⁶¹ Although he worked long hours, he continued to be virtually penniless. Now, however, the reason for his penury was different. Instead of drinking his wages, he was giving them to the poor, especially to poor families.⁶² At the end of his life, the extraordinary penances that he joyfully embraced revealed a man configured to Christ, who as a pauper had lived a surprising freedom, and the desire for drink was long in his past. As he revealed to friends, he had long since ceased to be troubled by it.

At this point we can return to the question of the relationship between the infused and acquired cardinal virtues in one who has both. We should begin by recognizing that Aquinas says virtually nothing explicitly about this relationship. Generations of commentators, therefore, have had ample space to debate and discern between the lines what Aquinas actually held on the issue.⁶³ At some point, however, the theologian must move from textual interpretation to creative theological reflection. The example of adult converts such as Matt Talbot can perhaps promote just such creative reflection. For the adult convert the issue is first one of understanding the relationship between the infused virtues and the remaining effects of his acquired vices. How does the adult convert reduce these lingering effects? The most obvious answer seems to be that he does this by doing good

⁶⁰ Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics*, 354-57, 366-68.

⁶¹ See Purcell, *Matt Talbot and His Times*, 68-117.

⁶² Philip Maynard, *To Slake a Thirst: The Matt Talbot Way to Sobriety* (New York: Alba House, 2000), 103-5. See also Purcell, *Matt Talbot and His Times*, 184, 203-5, 212-13.

⁶³ The question has recently received new and surprising attention as part of a controversy concerning the extent to which Aquinas offers an "Augustinian" account of the virtues. See Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., "The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas's Moral Theory," *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 279-305; Angela McKay, "Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue," *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 535-55; Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 39-64; and McKay, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*.

actions that are contrary to his disordered inclinations. Repeated good actions, however, do more than just destroy disordered inclinations, they also develop good dispositions within us. These good dispositions are what we normally call acquired virtues. How, then, do these newly acquired virtues relate to our infused moral virtues? An earlier cited quotation from Aquinas can perhaps provide some guidance: "the acts of acquired virtue can only be meritorious by the mediation of the infused virtues."⁶⁴ To explain this, he likens the relationship to the one existing between two different types of acquired courage: "just as the courage proper to man as a man does not order its act to the political good except by mediation of the courage proper to him insofar as he is a citizen,"⁶⁵ so too, by implication, the acquired virtues are not ordered to the good of the eternal Jerusalem except by means of the infused virtues. This seems to imply that the (elicited) acts of the acquired moral virtues are commanded by the infused moral virtues.⁶⁶

A problem arises, however, when we remember that according to Aquinas these two types of virtues have two different measures. One way out of this bind is to affirm that often these two measures correspond: often infused temperance (guided by infused prudence) disposes us to the same healthy consumption of food to which acquired temperance (and prudence) would dispose us. It is only in certain contexts that the two measures necessarily diverge, as in the case proposed by Aquinas.⁶⁷ In situations where the two measures correspond, acts of infused temperance concomitantly develop the habit of acquired temperance.⁶⁸

Whatever the exact relationship between these two types of virtues, something like this solution seems required if we are to

⁶⁴ *De virtut.*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ See Baumann, "La surnaturalisation des actes humains par la grâce," chap. 6.

⁶⁷ See *STh* I-II, q. 63, a. 4.

⁶⁸ Precisely stated, the elicited act of infused temperance would simultaneously be the commanded act of acquired temperance, whereby acquired temperance would retain its own proper elicited act. The relationship between the two would thus be analogous to that between form and matter. See Baumann, "La surnaturalisation des actes humains par la grâce," chap. 6.

account for the gradual integration of the personalities of adult converts. Talbot's example is once again instructive. At the moment of his conversion, the infused virtues empowered him to live soberly, even as he continued to feel a burning desire to drink. Over time, however, this desire began gradually to disappear. The easiest way to account for this gradual integration is by seeing it as the result of many acts of sobriety. It is thus at least partially an acquired integration obtained by developing the acquired virtues, but as animated and commanded by the infused virtues. In other words, when the acquired virtues are integrated into the life of grace, they begin the process of integrating our wounded nature into the activities that the infused virtues make possible. The acquired virtues, therefore, are not—as some recent commentators have affirmed—a prerequisite to living the infused virtues.⁶⁹ On the contrary, for many adult converts, the infused virtues are what make developing the acquired virtues possible at all. Stated another way, we do not become well ordered with regard to eternal beatitude by first being well ordered toward the temporal community. Instead, we become well ordered to our temporal community by first becoming citizens of heaven in the gift of grace.⁷⁰

The experience of those who struggle with the lingering effects of their acquired vices, therefore, points to the continued usefulness of Aquinas's theology of the infused cardinal virtues. Although these experiences are not probative, they are suggestive. They imply that grace imparts to us more than simply the theological virtues. Indeed, they further suggest that accounts that rely on the acquired cardinal virtues—no matter how much these virtues are animated by charity and illuminated by faith—remain inadequate, because they cannot explain how the adult convert who lacks the acquired virtues is nonetheless able to live the

⁶⁹ See, for example, Lee Yearly, "The Nature-Grace Question in the Context of Fortitude," *The Thomist* 35 (1971): 572-73 (cited in McKay, "Infused and Acquired Virtues," 190).

⁷⁰ The above cited dissertations by Renée Mirkes ("Aquinas on the Unity of Perfect Moral Virtue") and Gabriel Baumann ("La surnaturalisation des actes humains par la grâce") both give detailed attention to the relationship between the infused and acquired moral virtues and offer creative (if not always successful) solutions to some of the issues that Aquinas left unaddressed.

Christian life. The doctrine of infused cardinal virtues, therefore, especially when seen in relation to the lingering effects of acquired vice, continues to offer resources for a renewed understanding of Christian moral development. As Servais Pinckaers well understood, the doctrine helps us grasp what it means for the Christian life to be an "active cooperation between God and the human person,"⁷¹ a cooperation that becomes especially important for those who struggle with the lingering effects of their past actions.⁷²

PASSIONS IN CHRIST:
SPONTANEITY, DEVELOPMENT, AND VIRTUE

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THE GOSPELS DESCRIBE Jesus Christ as passionate and emotional. He wept over the death of a close friend (John 11:35) and shed tears over the fate of Jerusalem (Matt 23:37; Luke 19:41). He rejoiced with his disciples (Luke 10:21) and expressed affection for particular people—men (Mark 10:21; John 13:23) and women (Mark 9:36), adults and children (Matt 19:13-14; Mark 10:13-14). He was roused to anger (30 references: Mark 10:14; 11:15-19), but also to express compassion (25 references: Luke 7:13).¹ He suffered physical hunger; thirst, pain, and death. These passages (and many others) demonstrate that the four canonical Gospels describe Jesus Christ as passionate, even spontaneous in the expression of his emotions.

Directly or indirectly, the passions in Christ have been debated throughout the centuries. Although this essay will neither address the particular emotional emphases of each Gospel nor the details of the great Christological controversies, it will address the quality of Christ's passions and their relevance for Christian ethics. Contemporary moral theologians, especially those that are

¹ Throughout this essay, I have drawn upon the most extensive study on the passions in Christ to date, that of Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ's Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, n.f. 61 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002), which is remarkable for its historical method and comprehensive reflections on Aquinas's Christology.

⁷¹ Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View*, 71.

⁷² An earlier and much less developed version of this article was first published in French as "Les vertus morales infuses: Une tradition en quête de renouveau," in *Sujet moral et communauté*, ed. Denis Müller, Michael Sherwin, Nathalie Maillard, and Craig Steven Titus (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2007), 196-211.