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# On the Lowly, Yet Vital, Importance of Chastity

OCTOBER 19, 2017 BY [MATTHEW MINERD, PH.D.](#) [1 COMMENT](#)

## A Response to His Excellency, Bishop Robert McElroy



The reader likely needs no introduction to the recent uproar in Catholic media regarding the rescinding of various speaking engagements previously granted to Fr. James Martin, SJ. Those particular waters are so contentious that I think little good is done wading into them. Let us pray for unity in the Church and, without currently ascribing *any* blame to *any* parties involved, make our own an expression from the Anaphora of St. Basil: “By the power of Your Holy Spirit, end the schisms in the Church, quench the raging of nations, and quickly destroy the insurrections of heresy. Receive us all into Your kingdom, showing us to be children of light and children of the day. Grant us Your peace and love, O Lord our God, For You have given all things to us.”<sup>[1](#)</sup>

However, a recent response to these issues, offered by Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, does call for some comment. In particular, I wish to focus on his remarks regarding the virtue of chastity. In a recent article in *America*, Bishop McElroy states, “Chastity is a very important virtue of the Christian moral life. The disciple is obligated to confine genital sexual activity to marriage.”<sup>[2](#)</sup> We

should also recall that the bishop *did* issue a statement after the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, reiterating Church teaching.<sup>3</sup> If nothing else, his words deserve a charitable treatment, even if one wishes to differ, as I will in what comes below. Let us try to maintain this general attitude in what follows.

In the aforementioned article, the bishop goes on to remark: “But chastity is not the central virtue in the Christian moral life. Our central call is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves.” So far so good, especially since Bishop McElroy has used the word “the” instead of “a.” The central virtue of the Christian life is charity. Charity is the soul of the virtues, conforming us to the Divine Love itself.<sup>4</sup> Thus is our will divinized with a fire that should consume the world. Without charity, no other virtue can exist as a true and strong virtue.<sup>5</sup>

However, Bishop McElroy takes one step further, and it is here that I find need for comment: “Many times, our discussions in the life of the Church suggest that chastity has a singularly powerful role in determining our moral character, or our relationship with God. It does not.” In particular, the “it does not” rings in my ears, so to speak, each time that I read this statement. As one tasked with teaching college and seminary courses pertaining to such moral matters, I cannot help but reflect on such claims—especially since some of my students will quite soon have guardianship over the direction of souls. Such remarks, made in a significant public forum such as *America*, are imprudently overstated in our currently debased culture. If anything, we need *more* chastity today than ever before if we are to morally survive in the toxic environment of the West (and, most especially, America).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, let us remember the lofty words of the contemporary Catechism, which simultaneously notes the hierarchy of virtues while speaking in a lofty manner of the virtue of chastity:

Charity is the form of all the virtues. Under its influence, chastity appears as a school of the gift of the person. Self-mastery is ordered to the gift of self. Chastity leads him who practices it to become a witness to his neighbor of God’s fidelity and loving kindness. The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship. It shows the disciple how to follow and imitate him who has chosen us as his friends, who has given himself totally to us and allows us to participate in his divine estate. Chastity is a promise of immortality.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in reading the words, “It does not,” I cannot help but enunciate a distinction.<sup>8</sup> It is one thing to consider the fact that a given virtue is less lofty than other virtues in what it positively attains. It is wholly another matter to consider the fact that the same virtue *prevents the worst of all things*, in the case of chastity, utter dissipation and enslavement to all things sensual. Water does not provide *all* that we need for our biological life. Nonetheless, it does indeed play a singularly powerful role in providing the foundation without which our life and thought

would be impossible. Likewise, the canals that lead one to the sea are merely a presupposed pathway for water, but without them, the waters would spill over the ground and never reach their destination. So too with chastity. Like the immigrant workers of old digging the Erie Canal, chastity is an underappreciated underclass among the virtues. Without its backbreaking humanizing of the passions, the waters of divine life would find themselves quickly dissipated amid the temptations of the world.

What follows is not meant to be an attack on Bishop McElroy (or, by proxy, Fr. Martin). My immediate intention is to give some clarity to the moral weight of temperance and chastity, which are so important in a sensuality-soaked culture.

#### *Temperance's Role in Preparing the Ground for Loftier Virtues*

It is one thing to consider the object of a given species of temperance. Whether it be sobriety, chastity, or any other parts of temperance, it most certainly is not the greatest of virtue from the perspective of its moral object. The point is quite obvious when we consider justice, which conforms our will not merely to our own private good but to that of others, both other individuals and the common good. Likewise, the essentially supernatural objects of the theological virtues most obviously are loftier than those of the parts of temperance, whether natural or (infused) supernatural temperance. Temperance puts *us* in right order with respect to our desires. Temperance, as such, does not achieve the *further* goods of the common life or the divine life.<sup>9</sup> Thus far, it certainly is true to say, “But chastity is not the central virtue in the Christian moral life.”

However, it is wildly dangerous to move on to the aforementioned second claim that chastity does not play a powerful role in our moral lives. Merely in the natural order, the moral virtues are connected in prudence precisely because prudence presupposes the rectification of our appetites so as to issue a true and certain command of action. When any virtue fails, we risk failing in other virtues as well. Thus, a cowardly person is unlikely to do his duty in defending his family against an unjust aggressor. Likewise, a wildly gluttonous person is unlikely to meet the duties of his or her state in supporting the poor.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to temperance, we are considering a very basic ordering of our internal “desiderative apparatus.” How are our desires related to fitting or non-fitting goods that we grasp in our moral reasoning? Let’s steal an image from Joseph Pieper. Temperance stems the tide of vice and provides a canal within which more important virtues can flow:

Discipline, moderation, chastity, do not in themselves constitute the perfection of man. By preserving and defending order in man himself, *temperantia* creates the indispensable prerequisite for both the realization of actual good and the actual movement of man toward his goal. Without it, the stream of the innermost human will-to-be would overflow destructively beyond all bounds; it would lose its

direction and never reach the sea of perfection. Yet *temperantia* is not the stream. But it is the shore, the banks, from whose solidity the stream receives the gift of straight unhindered course, of force, descent, and velocity.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, I greatly hesitate to accept the wording of the bishop in these matters. The various parts of temperance are the lowliest of virtues from the perspective of their formal objects, but as regards the establishment of the right order in our soul, they are of paramount importance. Temperance removes impediments to the moral life, and we can perhaps say that from the perspective of the presupposed “matter” out of which the moral life is built, it is indeed quite important. *Causae sunt invicem causae, sed in diverso genere*. Causes exhibit mutual dependence in many ways. Thus, the moral virtues are presupposed as giving the end to prudence, which itself actualizes that right intention by commanding the means.<sup>12</sup> So too, the higher moral virtues are indeed *formally* loftier than temperance and its parts, but some inclination to temperance is presupposed lest we be rendered totally incapable of virtuous action. The entire collapse of a house can come about because it was made of shoddy wood, and the loss of sanctifying grace through sin can occur because one readily sins mortally against temperance.<sup>13</sup>

Contemporary American culture suffices to show us the badlands of a social world bereft of temperance. Of course, this is not a truth to brandish like a sword against others. Without diminishing the reality of hell, we must make then-Fr.-Ratzinger’s words our own: “For the saints, ‘Hell’ is not so much a threat to be hurled at other people but a challenge to oneself.”<sup>14</sup> No, the life of the beatitudes requires us to *mourn* deeply for this state of affairs. Thus, St. John Chrysostom: “But He bids us mourn, not only for our own, but also for other men’s misdoings.” And let one meditate well on St. Thomas’s explanation of why the beatitude of mourning is connected to the Spirit’s gift of knowledge, which he describes as pertaining to a kind of divine awareness of things human and created:

Right judgment about creatures belongs properly to knowledge. Now it is through creatures that man’s aversion from God is occasioned, according to Wisdom 14:11: “Creatures... are turned to an abomination... and a snare to the feet of the unwise,” of those, namely, who do not judge aright about creatures, since they deem the perfect good to consist in them. Hence they sin by placing their last end in them, and lose the true good. It is by forming a right judgment of creatures that man becomes aware of the loss (of which they may be the occasion), which judgment he exercises through the gift of knowledge. Hence the beatitude of sorrow is said to correspond to the gift of knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

As regards the particular topic eliciting my remarks here, one must mourn not merely because intemperate sexual acts happen privately. We must look, more importantly, to those places where intemperance leads to injustice. How many are the broken families because of fleeting desires! How numberless the cases of

emotional and relational numbness of spouses who have been inundated by a pornographic culture! And, turning away from chastity, we can say too: How culpable we all are in our rapacious desires for cheap goods that we close our eyes to the systemic injustice of wage slavery, whether it be close to home or in distant nations! We ought to tremble that we despise the order of right reason in our personal desires!

There really is a kind of “utilitarian face” to temperance, as Elizabeth Anscombe observes:

If Christian standards of chastity were widely observed, the world would be enormously happier. Our world, for example, is littered with deserted wives—partly through that fantastic con that went on for such a long time about how it was part of liberation for women to have dead easy divorce: amazing—these wives often struggling to bring up young children or abandoned to loneliness in middle age. And how many miseries and hang-ups are associated with loss of innocence in youth. What miserable messes people keep on making, to their own and others’ grief by dishonorable sexual relationships! The Devil has scored a great propaganda victory: everywhere it’s suggested that the troubles connected with sex are all to do with frustration, with abstinence, with society’s cruel and conventional disapproval... Ludicrous error! The idea lacks any foundation, that the people who are bent upon and who get a lot of sexual enjoyment are more gentle, merciful, and kind than those who live in voluntary continence.

The trouble about the Christian standard of chastity is that it isn’t and never has been generally lived by; *not* that it would be profitless if it were. Quite the contrary: it would be colossally productive of earthly happiness.<sup>16</sup>

However, as Anscombe also notes, there is a something beyond utility in temperance. There is a kind of root-level, (broadly speaking) “mystical” moral intuition by which we know that an absolutely intemperate life dishonors who we are as creatures. It debases the right order that should exist between what is loftier in us and what is less lofty. We are temperate so that we can be truly human. Or to put it another way, temperance enables us to escape from that ever-present urge to become bestial and non-human. Let’s allow Anscombe’s words to summarize it with British pithiness: “Those who try to make room for sex as mere casual enjoyment pay the penalty: they become shallow.”<sup>17</sup> And let us remember that man is not made to be shallow. Each human has an infinite depth—an infinite thirst for truth and goodness by one’s intellect and will, both of which are doubly “infinite” when we consider the fact that we live existentially in the order of grace.

#### *Considering Matters from the Perspective of the Opposed Excessive Vices*

I always recommend that my students recall the sage words of Aristotle: “Now incontinence and continence are concerned with that which is in excess of

the state characteristic of most men; for the continent man abides by his resolutions more and the incontinent man less than most men can.”<sup>18</sup> One inculcates a sane practical outlook by starting with the obvious fact that most humans are somewhere right in the middle—between incipient virtue and incipient vice. We settle into mediocrity quite easily. The words of the angel to the Church of Laodicea apply rather broadly: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth” (Rev. 14-15).

These comments are not meant to minimize our lofty vocation to divine perfection. They are meant merely as a sane reminder of the *starting place* for one’s practical moral analysis. More often than not, our vices are not fully developed to the point of absolute vice. However, it is also the case that we have not brought all things into captivity to Christ. Our virtues are not always deeply animated by charity, even when we have it in our souls. We are often the imperfect sorts of men who invest two talents when we have received five.<sup>19</sup> Or to put it another way, we allow even our natural virtues to exist as though they were in a weak state (*in statu facile mobilis*) when, in fact, they ought to be deeply lived, lived in the full strength of the Spirit who abides in us (*in statu difficile mobilis*).<sup>20</sup>

Granting all this, it is important to consider the vice toward which a “weak” intemperance *tends*. The path to fully rooted vice is still the *path*; that is, by being on the path, one is not quite there. Nonetheless, it remains the path *to fully rooted vice*. We can only understand that pathway, precisely *as a path to somewhere*, if we understand its essential character, namely as an inchoate form of a vice. One may also add that it is important to consider the *speed*, so to speak, with which it tends thereunto.

A few remarks first on the vice toward which intemperance tends. What should we say about its objective status? Notice the shift in perspective involved here. We are no longer talking about the formal object of chastity or of temperance. Yes, in this matter, Bishop McElroy is correct to note that it is not the loftiest virtue, speaking from the perspective of the formal objects of the virtues. Instead, we are asking about the formal object of intemperance and how we should react to it; and by intemperance, I mean *full blown intemperance, not taking into account the agent in which it exists*, i.e., not concerned with its state (perhaps not quite “full blown”). We want to ask, “How should we react to the vice of intemperance as such?”

Here, I believe it worthwhile to make the words of the Philosopher our own as well: “Self-indulgence would seem to be justly a matter of reproach, because it attaches to us not as men but as animals. To delight in such things, then, and to love them above all others, is brutish.”<sup>21</sup> Understanding “disgrace” appropriately,

we must say that chastity, while indeed only a first step, is an important first step in preventing us from undertaking the greatest of disgraces:

Disgrace is seemingly opposed to honor and glory. Now honor is due to excellence, as stated above, and glory denotes clarity. Accordingly, intemperance is most disgraceful for two reasons. First, because it is most repugnant to human excellence, since it is about pleasures common to us and the lower animals, as stated above. Wherefore it is written (Psalm 48:21): “Man, when he was in honor, did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them.” Secondly, because it is most repugnant to man’s clarity or beauty; inasmuch as the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue arises: wherefore these pleasures are described as being most slavish.[22](#)

Since most humans are somewhere between continence and incontinence, and hence not *fully intemperate*, it is correct to note that their faults are less culpable. When passion alone is the moving cause of our sin, it is less deeply rooted, and our intellect and will are not fixed in lower goods in the same way as they are when we are wholly intemperate.[23](#) True intemperance is a kind of freely-willed brutishness. Whether or not it exists often, it does represent the *terminus ad quem* toward which individual intemperate acts tend. In sinning against temperance in its various forms, one is on the path to full-blown intemperance. Even if one never arrives there, one remains a more or less eager traveler toward a base kingdom wherein the law of the land is that the lower should rule the higher.

In addition to the general question of the formal character of intemperance, we must ask, also, about the “speed” with which one falls into intemperance, and in this matter, I will focus only on one aspect that most directly applies to the matter at hand in the general controversy being addressed by Bishop McElroy. Although we cannot undertake a full reflection on these matters here,[24](#) I think it is important to reflect for a minute on the gravity of so-called sins against nature. While, given the recent controversies in this matter, one will likely think of homosexual intercourse, one would do well to recall that contracepted intercourse ought to be numbered among such “unnatural” acts, so called insofar as they wholly “denature” the essential elements of human sexuality. In proclaiming this fact, the Church clearly remains a sign of contradiction.[25](#)

Beyond the basic sorts of lust that one may entertain in thought and deed, there are certain acts that denature the very possibility of human sexuality, replacing it with a kind of counterfeit that no longer acknowledges any aspect of the natural orientation of sexual intercourse as part of the fruitful and generative function of human life. Such acts have traditionally been classed as being “sins against nature” (e.g, masturbation, bestiality, contracepted sexual relations, homosexual activity, sexual acts *in vase indebita*[26](#)). By intentionally rendering a

sexual act non-generative, one renders it a completely different sort of act. Indeed, such acts completely deny the nature of sexual intercourse and render impossible the affirmation of human sexuality in its essential lineaments.<sup>27</sup>

An insightful summary concerning these matters can be taken from Fr. Martin Rhonheimer. Without necessarily endorsing all that he says on the relationship between natural teleology and moral reasoning, we can agree with the basic points he articulates in the following manner:

The moral problem of “sins against nature” must be analyzed in the context of such an integral and personal anthropology. Sins against nature are offenses not simply against the ordering part of the soul (reason), but against what this ordering task naturally *presupposes*; it is not directed against the order established by reason *in* the natural inclinations and thus against the due act of these inclinations, but it is a manipulation and perversion of the proper natural goal of some of these inclinations itself, and consequently—considering the dependence of practical reason and intellect altogether on the naturally given—a basic disorientation of practical reason.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, when Aquinas discusses the gravity of the various species of lust, he clearly states that sins against nature are categorically the worst kinds of sins against chastity.<sup>29</sup> One could say that they corrupt the principle root from which the virtue of chastity ought to arise. One cannot begin to speak of inculcating “responsible parenthood” by a given act that directly and intentionally removes all possibility of parenthood from practical reasoning. One cannot begin to speak of “sexual union,” when the denatured action of copulation equivocates on “sexual activity,” which as a free human action implies that it be *just that sort of action by which one lives in accord with the generative capacities that are a pre-given aspect of being human*.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, sexual activity involves more than procreation. It is a human encounter between two persons. Nonetheless, *just that sort of embodied activity* is by nature generative. Otherwise, it can be any sort of sexual stimulation whatsoever. Let us note that our culture thinks that sex is just that—any sort of sexual stimulation whatsoever.

Such are the claims of a howling wasteland wherein anything goes and *nothing* is essential or stable as regards the teleology of the human sexual grammar. One should be careful, though, for the denial of the distinction of the *per se* and the *per accidens* involves the denial of the principle of non-contradiction. This principle is as wide as the entire domain of being and is unlikely to allow itself to be denied only in the domain of sexuality. At first it is applied to the order of sexual acts: “there is nothing essential to sexual activity.” However, the mind is dominated by this principle, and not the other way around. When allowed the freedom to range about, the aforementioned sexual denial may lead its adherents to a universal wasteland wherein nothing can be denied or affirmed—a wasteland

wherein the uncontrolled winds of Heraclitus's flux whip around their ears and deafen all mankind. All that will remain is the will to dominate this world wherein nothing has a sure footing, this world from which the *per se* has been driven out.

But, that is rhetoric—hopefully to the correct effect in this delimited article. Thus, returning to the main thread of our discussion: there is a kind of celerity, so to speak, by which sins against nature careen toward intemperance and lust. This is true to such an extent that one can say with good reason, “Contraceptive intercourse within marriage is a greater offence *against chastity* [i.e. though it may be greater in other ways, such as against justice] than is straightforward fornication or adultery. For it is not even a proper act of intercourse and *therefore* is not a true marriage act.”<sup>31</sup> The same applies to all sins against nature.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

Of course, the question of subjective culpability is another matter, and this matter is of major importance in pastoral discussions. Nonetheless, one should not say with Bishop McElroy, “Many times, our discussions in the life of the Church suggest that chastity has a singularly powerful role in determining our moral character or our relationship with God. It does not.” **It does have such a powerful role**, just as the soil has a powerful role in ensuring that the majesty of the forest may grow in the mountains, or as the canal leads the waters to the sea. Temperance is the soil from which we rise by means of the other virtues to the heights of the Divinity. It is the canal that leads us to the life of perfection, which is a kind of anticipation of the Beatific Vision, in which experience will see Him of whom St. John Damascene wrote: “He keeps all being in His own embrace, like a sea of essence infinite and unseen.”<sup>32</sup>

It is a profound angelic pride that bends the will of the Angel upon itself. We cannot begin to estimate the pride of the angel, who much better than us sees the evident reasonableness of revelation but nevertheless bends his will so as to avert himself from supernatural beatitude.<sup>33</sup> Human pride represents a kind of echo of this primordial fall; it is our own spiritual inversion. Compared to this, intemperate desires are all too human and seem to be all too insignificant.<sup>34</sup> Yet, by drib and drab we can end up in a state wherein we pridefully subordinate our entire lives to our particular desires. Given that we live in an era, not of drib and drab, but of a torrent of temptations to lust, ought not our pastors emphasize the need for *everyone* to strive for an excellence that is so difficult to attain in these days? Given these temptations, temperance *does* have a singularly important and powerful role, if only—to use yet one more metaphor—to help right the ship so that it may sail to the eternal fatherland by means of the wood of the Cross and the wind of the Holy Spirit.

While some Catholics may indeed act out of malice in denouncing intemperance and lust, I sincerely wish that Bishop McElroy would have avoided

name calling<sup>35</sup> and would have at least recognized that it is, in fact, *quite understandable that one have a holy zeal against a culture that risks denaturing the entire order of human values*. Nay, such a culture does not merely risk doing so—it does in fact do so in countless ways (not limited to lust, mind you). There should be a strong sense of concern that we live in a spiritual-cultural milieu wherein human persons, who are “made little less than a God” (Ps. 8:5), find themselves instead careening toward a moral life (in reality, a moral death) in which the very possibility of temperance is deracinated from the start. One should never minimize temperance, for without it, true purity is impossible:

The sixth beatitude proclaims, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” “Pure in heart” refers to those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God’s holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity; chastity or sexual rectitude; love of truth and orthodoxy of faith. There is a connection between purity of heart, of body, and of faith: The faithful must believe the articles of the Creed “so that by believing they may obey God, by obeying may live well, by living well may purify their hearts, and with pure hearts may understand what they believe.”

The “pure in heart” are promised that they will see God face to face and be like him. Purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God. Even now it enables us to see according to God, to accept others as “neighbors”; it lets us perceive the human body—ours and our neighbor’s—as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty.<sup>36</sup>

- 1 After much prayer and reflection, I have decided to leave this reference in, for this ancient prayer of the Eastern Church is indeed appropriate during these trying times in ecclesiastical history. Let it not be lobbed as an accusation at any parties involved in these contentious matters but, instead, be a sincere prayer from the ancient wellsprings of the faith. ↩
- 2 Robert W. McElroy, “Attacks on Father James Martin expose a cancer within the U.S. Catholic Church,” *America*, September 18, 2017, [americamagazine.org/faith/2017/09/18/bishop-mcelroy-attacks-father-james-martin-expose-cancer-within-us-catholic-church](http://americamagazine.org/faith/2017/09/18/bishop-mcelroy-attacks-father-james-martin-expose-cancer-within-us-catholic-church) (accessed Sept. 25, 2017). ↩
- 3 Robert McElroy, “Bishop Robert W. McElroy’s Statement on the Supreme Court of the United States Ruling on Same Sex Marriage,” [diocese-sdiego.org/Portals/0/content/2015-06-26-Supreme\\_Court\\_Ruling\\_on\\_Marriage.pdf?ver=2015-06-26-140733-543](http://diocese-sdiego.org/Portals/0/content/2015-06-26-Supreme_Court_Ruling_on_Marriage.pdf?ver=2015-06-26-140733-543) (accessed Sept. 25, 2017). ↩
- 4 On the primacy of charity in Christian perfection, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation According to St. Thomas*

- Aquinas and St. John of the Cross*, trans. Sr. M. Timothea Doyle (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1958), 114-177 (esp. 129-155). [↩](#)
- 5 See ST II-II, q. 23, a. 6. However, see my remarks below associated with note 19. [↩](#)
- 6 Turn on the television or look at a newsstand. This is not prudery on my part but, instead a frank affirmation of the state of affairs plaguing Western culture. Some things cannot be proven, strictly speaking. They are either seen or not seen. We have reached a point that this applies even to this particular moral-experiential datum. [↩](#)
- 7 CCC, 2346-2347. [↩](#)
- 8 That is all I am attempting to articulate here. The intention of this article is only to register an initial reflection in what I hope is a measured manner. [↩](#)
- 9 See ST II-II q. 141, a. 8c. [↩](#)
- 10 As will be seen, my use of “wildly” is important here, as my general opinion is that we rarely reach this level of vice. But, looking at the “extremes” gives us clarity about the murky middle. [↩](#)
- 11 Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Daniel F. Coogan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 175. [↩](#)
- 12 See Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, “La prudence dans l’organisme des vertus.” *Revue Thomiste* 31, N.S. 9 (1936): 411-426. Publication of an English translation of this article is anticipated in the near future in a volume of collected essays by Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange. [↩](#)
- 13 Likewise, one can sin mortally out of a lack of temperance. In the eliciting of all moral acts, the virtues are united in setting straight the path to command. Thus, someone could decide at the last moment not to go to Mass on Sunday because he would prefer to stop at a restaurant for brunch. On this topic, as it applies to the natural moral order, see Yves R. Simon, *The Definition of Moral Virtue*, ed. Vukan Kuic (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 125-131. On the general topic of the connection of the virtues, see *ST I-II*, q. 65. [↩](#)
- 14 Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Michael Waldstein, ed. Aidan Nichols (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 217. [↩](#)
- 15 *ST II-II*, q. 9 a. 4. See the whole question as regards his explanation of the gift of knowledge. All citations from the *Summa* are taken from the 1920s translation by the English Dominican Province. [↩](#)

- 16 G.E.M. Anscombe, "Contraception and Chastity," in *Faith in a Hard Ground: Essays on Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2008), 187-188. [↩](#)
- 17 *Ibid.*, 186. [↩](#)
- 18 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross and J.O. Urmson in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 7.10 (1152a25-28). [↩](#)
- 19 On imperfection as opposed to sin, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "Imperfection" in *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, trans. Jeanne Marie (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1948), 318-344. [↩](#)
- 20 On this important topic, see Thomas M. Osborne, "Perfect and Imperfect Virtues in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 49-64. Also, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "L'instabilité dans l'état de péché mortel des vertus morales acquises." *Revue thomiste* 43 (1937): 255-262. Publication of an English translation of the latter article is anticipated in the near future in a volume of collected essays by Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange. [↩](#)
- 21 Aristotle, *EN* 3.10 (1118b2-4). [↩](#)
- 22 *ST* II-II, q. 142, a. 4. [↩](#)
- 23 See *ST* II-II, q. 156, a.3. [↩](#)
- 24 The interested reader can benefit significantly on this topic by consulting G.E.M. Anscombe, "Contraception and Chastity." [↩](#)
- 25 To this end, one would benefit from the reflections offered in Douglas Farrow, "Same-Sex Marriage and the Sublation of Civil Society," in *Desiring a Better Country: Forays in Political Theology* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 25-40. [↩](#)
- 26 Among which, I would perhaps argue could be numbered oral sex, but that should be treated on its own and at length. Also, it goes without saying that the discussion here is *only* concerned with the formality of the moral object in question and not the circumstantial and subjective conditions that mitigate responsibility in almost all such acts. [↩](#)
- 27 On this, one does well the work of Anscombe already cited, "Contraception and Chastity." [↩](#)
- 28 Martin Rhonheimer, "The Moral Significance of Pre-Rational Nature in Aquinas," in *The Perspective of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy*, ed. William F. Murphy (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 141-142. [↩](#)
- 29 See *ST* II-II, q. 154, a. 12. [↩](#)

- 30 It is here that the concerns regarding the role of natural teleology expressed by thinkers like Steven Long and Steven Jensen are understandable. See Steven A. Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007). Steven J. Jensen, *Knowing the Natural Law: From Precepts and Inclinations to Deriving Oughts* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015). ↩
- 31 Anscombe, “Contraception and Chastity,” 185. ↩
- 32 St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*, [newadvent.org/fathers/33041.htm](http://newadvent.org/fathers/33041.htm)(accessed September 21, 2017), bk. 1, ch. 9. ↩
- 33 Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Sense of Mystery*, trans. Matthew K. Miner (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 241, 286, 287. Also, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le réalisme du principe de finalité* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1932), 322-335. An English translation of this text is anticipated in 2018 by Emmaus Academic. ↩
- 34 Cf. ST II-II q. 162 a. 6. ↩
- 35 I refer here to the choice and use of the word “cancer” in his title and in the article. ↩
- 36 CCC, 2518-2519. ↩

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### **About Matthew Miner, Ph.D.**

Matthew K. Miner, Ph.D., is an instructor in philosophy at Mount St. Mary’s University and at Ss. Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Seminary. He is a translator of works from French and Latin. His translation of Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange’s *Le sens du mystère et le clair-obscur intellectuel* is scheduled to be translated in Fall 2017, followed by several additional translations in 2018. His writing has appeared in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, and the proceedings of the American Maritain Association.