

**Retreat for Seminarians** St. Charles Borromeo Tuesday and Wednesday,  
May 29-30, 2001 **Third Presentation**

## **Virtues**

We can think of the virtues in a certain kind of way as likened to the diversity of persons in the Trinity. All right, one God subsists in three divine persons. We come to faith. Faith has to do with the vision of God. Where does the vision of God come from, or through whom does it come? It comes through the Word. We associate the Word with God, that is, the second person—faith. And I believe we can associate hope with the Spirit. And we don't have a very good theology of the Spirit. We don't have a very good grasp of the meaning of hope and its importance. And I think that we can say that of course the Father is the true source of everything: love is the true source of everything. It would not be incorrect to associate love with the Father. Not that I am saying you can really break the Trinity apart. But I'm trying to say that you can't divide faith, hope, and love either. So just as Father, Son, and Spirit subsist together, so do the three virtues. If one of them is ignored, it's like ignoring one of the persons in God, which is not a very good theological idea.

Now it seems to me we can also associate these with certain sacraments. I think we can associate faith with Baptism, hope with Confirmation and Eucharist with love. Again, what's the sacrament we have no theology for? It's Confirmation. You talk to a sacramental theologian and really press him on what is a good theology of Confirmation, and he won't come up with one. And the reason is we don't know what hope is. St. Paul says, "Hope is the first fruit given to those who believe." So it follows that—St. Paul also says in another place that the Spirit is given as the "first fruit given to those who believe." So in other words, in a certain way he uses the words "hope" and the "Spirit" interchangeably. Now of course, the origin of hope is the same as faith and love. The utter goodness, the rightness of God, and the transference of that utter goodness and rightness into the creation because the creation is of God. And therefore, hope as a virtue is our participation in that utter rightness. But the particular form of participation with hope is harmony, the harmoniousness of things. And here we're talking about something that is very visionary, very mental. The sins against faith are lack of vision—somewhat mental: cynicism, and so on. This [Faith] is very spiritual, and it relates to the depths of our soul and therefore the depths of our being.

And this [Hope] has more to do with our function, the way we function in the world. And if you know the Scripture refers to us as a body, mind, and soul. This [Love] of course is the depths of our identity. This [Faith] of course is our peculiar ability to know, to reason, and to judge. This [Hope] of course is our functional participation with organic life. Hope is our functional participation with the life of God in action. So we're talking about the role of action. So the universe, we will acknowledge, already is harmonious and perfect; but the perfection of the universe is not static. So that means part of the perfection of the universe is that you still have something to do to bring about further perfection. If it were totally static, we would have nothing to do. But we do have something to do. We are called to participate harmoniously with God. So something is

needed, but that something that's needed is all within the harmony that is already provided, so that we simply have to cooperate. We do not have to bring something that isn't already there.

Hope specifically looks toward the total unfoldment of the dynamic purpose that is in the creation itself, that is also within ourselves. And St. Paul talks about "until God is all in all." Hope has this perspective: this dynamic unfolding is leading to God filling everything in plenitude. So like faith and like love, hope is a virtue that transforms the soul and allows the soul to rest in nonaction, that is free of ego totally—and also free of agenda, mind you—so all of these virtues are really leading us into a transformed life. This particular one [Hope] is the one that helps us become most free from ourselves and from our own agenda because it's most concerned with our function in life, our mission in life, our action in life. But it allows us at the same time to be totally effective, according to God's will and action. So we become truly effective servants of God through the virtue of hope. In a sense a soul transformed by hope ceases to strive from the viewpoint of the ego, but cooperates perfectly with God, within whom we abide and have our being. So nonaction in this sense is not passive or inert, but it's completely responsive to God.

And the perfect example of this is the lives of the saints. That's why most spiritual directors recommend at one time or another that you really read the lives of the saints because they abide in hope. They have learned how to let go in that sense, but cooperate totally with God in action. Again, hope is a vision of all as connected really and harmonious. In such a vision, one's own plans, doings, are really not only irrelevant but actually disruptive. Hope looks to the continued growth of oneself and the world, and thus prevents fixations and bad habits from waylaying growth and inhibiting development. From that point of view it is the most psychologically relevant virtue, to bring us psychological help, freedom from fixations. Fixations are hang-ups and stuck-points, and they're always ego-centric. And it's hope that lets us let go of that. Objectively, hope is the harmony and purpose of God at work. The virtue of hope in us is the result of this work in our souls. Like love itself, hope embraces all circumstances, realizing everything will turn out for the best, and that judgments about what is good or bad are merely short-sighted workings of our egos and they have zero credibility. [If you notice, I'm rushing; I am, because I have a lot to get done.] But of course the perfection and loveableness of all creation does not imply that it's static. As I mentioned already it's still in need of help and we are here to do it, but we have to do it according to God's own purpose.

Again, as with love and trust, the sense of separate existence inherent in an ego, center of consciousness itself, cuts a person off from the very well-spring of love, so also confidence and harmony. This can turn against the self as the source of the problem with associated feelings. In other words, when we are cut off—I mentioned this already before—when we cut ourselves off from harmony, from union and unity with God, when we start becoming judgmental about others, that turns against us. And it's really because that sort of judgmentalism is rooted in our own ego; and so sooner or later we have to judge our own egos as inadequate, which they are, of course—that's not false. But then

that fills us with feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, and failure. And necessarily so! As long as we are relying on our egos, we are going to be a failure in this broader sense. There can be no ego-centered solution to any of our problems. We must see our solutions as beyond us. And insofar as we try independently to do for ourselves, we will be committing ourselves to failure.

And this can only be seen rightly in a God-centered consciousness. Again, this condition can result from an inadequate family environment because the less adequate our family life is, the more we may be prone to take over our lives from even God; because, see, our parents are given to us as God's representative, so if we learn that our parents are inadequate at an early stage, we will start beginning patterns of behavior which are going to treat God in the same way, that God is not adequate to take care of our problems.

Now we see in Scripture that one of the great examples of the need for hope is Martha. What does Martha complain about? She says, "Tell my sister to help me. You tell my sister." The first thing is that Martha thinks she has to tell Jesus what to do. And what it is: "Tell her to help me." He doesn't know what to do, so she is going to tell him. "You tell her to help me." She knows enough for herself, for Jesus, and for Mary. See? Now that is an ego-driven life! And Jesus says, "Martha, you are worried about a lot of things, but only one thing matters. You're worried. You're upset." So the lack of hope emotionally leads to anxiety.

There are three fundamentally negative emotions that push us into fixations and compulsions. I can put them up to on the chart—I might as well. They are all together. Anger stems from a lack of a true felt-sense of being loved. Fear originally is in a lack of trust, and here anxiety comes from lack of harmony with the workings of God, which is another way of saying a lack of hope.

So Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing only matters." What is the one thing that only matters? He doesn't say. The one thing that matters is recognizing that everything is in God's hands. He says, "Mary has chosen the better part." This does not mean contemplation in the sense of sitting in prayer. It means a contemplative life in the sense of recognizing that God is taking care of everything. In fact, you could even say that God was taking care of everything by having Martha run around with all the needs of hospitality! See? Mary didn't have to work. She could count on Martha's compulsions to get everything ready! That's still the better part. Jesus says, "Look at the lilies of the field. They neither spin nor reap nor sow, but no one is so adorned, or no one is so attired as they."

Now this virtue of hope should be a wonderful relief to people who are full of anxiety, which actually we all are at some point. Actually, we all enter into all these at some point or another—just some more than others. That's the way it is with all virtues and all vices; some have more than others. However, some people experience a terrible unwillingness to let go of this self-centered anxiety and this compulsiveness. They do not want to surrender everything that seems real to them. Their entire life surrounds

themselves. And everything that they have developed has been developed by their own ego-centric, anxiety-driven, sense of reality. And to actually take on hope is utterly disruptive to everything they have known before. Now we don't usually think of that. We might recognize that faith is a total beginning, that faith would lead us totally away from what we've known before; but do we recognize the same is true for hope? To accept hope is as disruptive as anything because it's really taking everything out of our own hands. For some, anxiety and frustration and a feeling of inadequacy—all of which result from the separation of the self from the total goodness of the living, conscious universe—creates a real nightmare that they can awake from, but they often prefer the nightmare because it's the nightmare that they have created.

## Vices    Capital Sins

What are the vices that militate against the virtues? Well, one of the great vices that militate against hope is pride. Pride is one of the first capital sins. And because of pride some people don't want to wake up from the nightmare they are living. It's **their** nightmare. And they prefer **their** nightmare to the reality that we share together in Christ, because in this nightmare they can continue to be in charge; and in spite of the aforementioned negative experiences, continuing the pretense is actually more comforting than facing the truth. So there's a sense in which this is true, and you'll meet this yourself with some disturbed people. You actually can show them the way. They won't take it, because it's more comforting to remain screwed up and seek people's comfort and seek people's support than actually to change things so that they don't need it anymore.

On the other hand, when we face the truth and when we accept God's help, that requires great humility. Well, that's exactly what pride doesn't want. Pride is a great force keeping hope at bay. Of course no one's life is a total failure. Well, I wouldn't say no one's, but most people's life is not a total failure. There are these little successes partly under our own power, maybe. Also, even the grace of God is always at work. So there's hardly anyone's life that has never had any sign at all of God's grace. And so if the ego claims that grace for itself, and claims all the credit for all success, accomplishment, then we see that the soul, in this case the ego-centered view, will simply reject the virtue of hope and continue to live in delusion. And sometimes the word "vanity" is used for this particular kind of delusion. It's really almost identical to pride. Vanity really means a world where one's own activities are the center of everything.

Our Scriptures, beliefs, and sacraments point to a reality that is at odds with what we naturally experience in our culture and what we naturally feel, given the people around us, that is true about ourselves. But real change is nonetheless possible if we are open to it. Being aware of our conditions of subjective illusions may help open doors of our human experience to the power of transforming grace, which is, we believe, always at work.

Now some of the particular characters—that is some of us, some people, as we grow up and develop—are more prone to the opponents [of the virtues], you might say, the

devices or the sins that go against these various virtues, which I am going to bring up now quickly in the next forty minutes.

First of all, a message about the word “pathos.” It’s a Greek word meaning, translated, “passion.” “Pathos,” however has a negative meaning, and the negative meaning carries across in such words as pathetic, psychopath, those types of words. But it also is the base of words like empathetic and sympathetic, which are more positive words. But in Greek it’s negative, in Greek philosophy. Why? Because passion is a power that overwhelms the mind, really.

Now the passions are really a drive to sufficiency. Okay? So you go back to what we talked about, the origin of a child and the needs of a child. A child needs to feel held and has to be loved and cared for. But as soon as the child becomes more aware, the child has the need to be sufficient. And that’s actually a natural need, which you can see; a person wouldn’t mature and develop properly without it. You can’t remain a baby all your life. You can’t always be trusting in your environment all your life. You have to grow up to become sufficient. So, that’s the origin of the passions.

However, given the fact that our souls have been affected by original sin, the drive to sufficiency is warped. Okay? And the reason it’s warped is that it accompanies a sense of deficiency—a sense of deficiency. And we are really not deficient just because we’re young. I mean, there is something needed: we need to grow. But that isn’t a deficiency, but we experienced it as a deficiency. And again, more so when the holding environment isn’t trustworthy—but to some degree in everybody. So this drive to sufficiency implies an awareness of deficiency.

There’s also a drive for abundance. Now abundance is one of the aspects of love. Love is abundant. You know, in the fourth gospel, the word “abundant” comes up quite often. It is God’s will for “you to have life, and life in abundance,” life in fullness. Well, love has in the Scriptures three elements—in the Greek language really, that’s because Scriptures happen to be written in Greek: “eros,” which is abundance, often associated with sexuality, but not originally; “philia,” friendship, which is absolutely a needed thing, and Aristotle recognizes the need for friendship; and thirdly, “agape”; and agape is the unconditioned love that really comes from God. Now I don’t know that outside of Scripture there is really much about agape in Greek literature. But of course, Scripture is always talking about the unconditioned love God is. So all three are important: abundance, friendship, and unconditioned love. And those are needs we have.

The thing is we’re not deficient in them in the sense that God provides. But because we have not been brought up in a perfect environment that has this deep sense of God’s presence, we end up thinking we’re deficient—and again, some more than others. This “unawareness” then is an instinctive awareness of original sin. Existential dissatisfaction, which motivates a basic search takes different paths depending on how we perceive ourselves. This is a mystery. Why does one person perceive himself one way, another person another way? No one really knows. Is it inherited? I doubt it. Sometimes I think it is a roulette wheel. According to my understanding there are eight different capital

sins. Some say there's seven—Pope Gregory said there are seven. Others might have a different number. I find eight to be a good number. But there's a certain number; there's not an infinite number. There are not an infinite number of ways of getting screwed up, which is actually good news! There is always a limited number. Why do people choose one way rather than another? I don't know. Are you born with a certain weakness? I don't know. Okay.

So in regard to love, what are things that really push us away from love? Well, the first one is anger; and the second is lust. You know what lust is; we don't really know that too much. The Latin word is better: "luxuria." The reason why "luxuria" is a better word than lust is because lust in our mind has an overtly sexual connotation. That's because of the use of the word in English. But in its original meaning luxuria doesn't necessarily mean really sexual abuse or anything like that. It actually has to do with excessive desire—an excessive desire—rooted in lack of love.

Now if you want to look in Scripture for an example of this, you find it in the prodigal son. The prodigal son first of all demanded what he had no right to—his inheritance. He had no right to his inheritance because his dad wasn't dead yet. Then he went off and wasted all of his money. Now it says "on loose women," so the sexual element there is part of it. But it's not the whole thing; it's not just that he was with women. It was that he wasted all his money with them. See? The excessiveness, the wastefulness of luxuria—that's very important. And this is all—why? Why did he do this? What drove the prodigal son away? It doesn't say in the Scripture. You have to make it up. He didn't feel loved—that's right—for whatever reason! But the reason wasn't that there wasn't love there! The father was an unconditionally loving person and a perfect image of God: image of God, image of love, image of Eucharist—it's there! See? But this man did not feel or experience that love, so he went out on his own. He had a strategy; he took a strategy of self-fulfillment, and it was wastefulness.

Now there are people whose entire character now is going to be developed on that strategy, and they will have peculiar characteristics. Okay? They can be very harsh people, harsh and demanding people; they can be very vindictive people. All right? And this is because their character has been formed around what is really a sin. I think it's a good thing to look at this idea that our characters have all been formed around one of the capital sins; and again, I added an extra one, distrust or disbelief, because that puts flesh, if you will, on this idea of original sin, which we all have; but you know, it's kind of vague. But I think for it to be more concrete in each person's life original sin takes a different form. So one is this [lust].

Another is what we call "sloth." This is a dumb word because sloth is an animal, right? The Latin word is "accidia." Now accidia or sloth in a sense is the most common or basic of all the capital sins because what it really means is—accidia, according to St. Thomas—means indifference to love. Actually, he defines it as slowness in spiritual matters. So he uses that word "slowness," and slowness is where we get the word "sloth." But it isn't simply slowness; it's indifference in spiritual matters, slowness to response in spirit due to the indifference to love and to depression. So characters who are

founded along the line of sloth are people who always are cutting mountains down to molehills. They are people who go through life without a whole lot of excitement because they're indifferent to love; and if you're indifferent to love, there is not too much that's going to be exciting. But you have to see that this is not laziness now in the normal sense. It doesn't mean they don't go to work; it doesn't mean they wouldn't expend themselves heavily in, for example, making money or something like that, getting ahead.

And it isn't even religious indifference, because these people could be religious, but they're not spiritual. And herein lies one of the great problems in the Church, a spiritless religion. As leaders of the Church we don't ever want to promote a spiritless religion, a religion that relies on devotions or practices without inner participation. Now sloth makes people actually robotic, and they can live through life simply going through motions, in religious motions and life itself—just going through motions. They have no spirit. Although this is not exactly what is the leaven of the Pharisees, it is nonetheless a common problem in religious areas. It's a squandering of our energy. It leads to inner deadness, deafness, sadness, lifelessness, despondency, lack of self-awareness in regard to all personal inner-reality, a lack of desire to even pursue the journey—even ignorance that there is a journey. But on the surface it can be calm and matter-of-fact acceptance of everything and a kind of simplicity that really belies the spiritual suicide going on underneath. Just as divine charity is love par excellence, which is agape, which is the greatest of all virtues, without which we are nothing but a noisy gong or tinkling cymbal, so accidia is in a real way the most basic vice, because it's the vice where we become least human, most mechanical, machinelike—not animallike, machinelike because an animal has a soul but a machine doesn't. So from one point of view we can say that sloth is the worst sin. I think I said before that I could say from another viewpoint pride is the worst sin. If I didn't say it, St. John of the Cross did. But from another viewpoint disbelief is the worst sin. Well, that's a different perspective, but in some way each of these we have to face and look at in ourselves.

So there is luxuria, accidia, and the third one is "ira"—not IRA, "ira." Ira is anger, of course. What is meant is not necessarily wrath; it's surely not losing your temper—that is not anger. Anger is better said as resentment, a slow boiling animosity that senses a lack of perfection, a lack of justice, a lack of rightness in oneself and in others; and it is the brother of lust. Anger is the brother of lust.

And in the story of the prodigal son anger is there too. In where? The elder brother! The elder brother is bearing the anger from this poor dysfunctional family, and it's not dad's fault; we'll have to blame mom! That's a joke; you can laugh. So the elder brother—he's seething—he's seething with anger because his father never shared anything with him. But what is the problem? It's not the father. Both of these sons have the same problem: they are living a separate life. They are not enjoying the father's life, which is there for them to enjoy, but they're not with the father. Even though the elder brother never leaves, he does not squander, he does not demand like the lustful brother, but he's just as distant! See? And that's the nature of anger. It's very oh, obedient! Anger can be very obedient. Luxuria is not; lust is not obedient. Anger can be very obedient.

And you will see very angry people in the pews of your church, you know. And they're very angry at God, and they're very angry at their families, and they're very angry at everything, because it's not right and they are right! They have done everything right and, "damn it," nobody is pulling the load the way they are! And that's exactly the elder brother. And it's very common in religious circles. This [accidia] would be less common in religious circles; most people of this type, you know, tend not to be very religious, which doesn't mean they're hopeless; it just means that their way is not going to be the way of religion. If they ever come back, they come back but normally—but this way [luxuria] and this way [ira] can be very religious people, but they are spiritless; here [luxuria] they're spiritless, and here [ira] they're seething and they're doing everything right! And I believe that religious communities, especially religious communities of vows, vowed life, have a lot of angry people in them. And sometimes the motivation has to do with this unreal seeking of perfection, but it's a perfection that they're wanting in themselves and believe is rooted in themselves and their efforts; it's not a perfection that's rooted in God, in God's ways, so it's still separated. So anything that is rooted in the separation is going to be vicious rather than virtuous.

Furthermore, one more remark about the prodigal son in the story is that anger is actually pictured in that story as more dangerous than lust, because it's more prone to unforgiveness—anger is more prone to unforgiveness.

Now the second central area of theological virtue I mentioned already is faith. Faith is a very mental thing. It has to do with our outlook. It gives us direction in life and vision, whereas this [love] is more rooted in a deeper place, within our souls you might say. I'm not saying the mind is not deep. It is. I don't know how to talk about the different things, but there is a difference.

The absence of faith leads to the emotion of fear and the whole attitude of cynicism, which is a disbelieving attitude. Although all the capital sins possess both emotional and cognitive components, this [fear] is more of a mental type. So fear here is not instinctive fear; it's not like fear of danger. It's rather the unwillingness to see life as orderly already. It's a failure to see order that's already in life, in the creation. And therefore, it is a failure to find meaning also. So as I said, this [fear] is more mental. So it's very much concerned with meaning. And fear is an obstacle to meaning.

Now out of this nonmeaning, that is, of nonfaith, I'm going to add an extra capital sin: disbelief, because with disbelief we have an actual choice. See? If you just talk about fear, that's just an emotion. That's like saying anxiety. Well, that's not a choice. I want to put a word down that specifies what is the choice; the choice is "disbelief." And out of this kind of disbelief there are two other vices that arise. One is gluttony, which we really don't understand too much and the other one is greed.

Okay, Gluttony. Now the word gluttony is all about eating too much. Well, it could involve eating too much. But it has to do with filling the emptiness. Now you don't have to fill the emptiness with food. At least what I'm trying to get you to do is look beyond simple definitions in a moral textbook and look at something fuller. What is really going

on in a gluttonous person? It isn't that they have no control over food. It's something much deeper, otherwise you wouldn't have all these clinics around. It's an inability to feel sufficiency; it's part of the same thing. It's just a different approach to the feeling of being deficient. And it's taking actually the road of pleasure and consumption—it's actually the road of pleasure and consumption. It is a hedonistic vice; gluttony is hedonistic. Lust is hedonistic, and there will be another one too, another hedonistic vice—pride actually is hedonistic, meaning oriented toward self and pleasure.

Now the difference between gluttony and greed is that greed has to do with filling the emptiness by having, not by consuming. So actually they are very similar. The real desire is to substitute a material object for the real need of the soul—we're talking about gluttony. Some believe gluttony should be understood like lust is a desire for pleasure. Chaucer says, I quote, "He who is addicted to gluttony may withstand no other sin." This sin brings with it a dreaminess and a lack of grounding in that which is obscured; it is the basic sense that life—I can't read my own notes, so I'm going to skip it. But this sin brings with it a certain sense of not wanting ever to grow up. It's a perpetual adolescence. Now what is the connection? I don't know; I really don't know why it is, but somehow the whole experience of gluttony impairs one's growth and development in this particular way. Everything impairs growth and development. This one impairs maturation. It often involves an excess of food, drink, drugs, etc. But in its nature it's simply self-indulgent because I don't ever want to grow up.

Now growing up is actually a matter of self-denial, and that's what's missing in gluttony; there's no self-denial. That's maybe its essence. And with a lack of self-denial you can't ever grow beyond adolescence; you can't become a real adult in a psychological sense. So the glutton is always forever young and irresponsible, always wanting more, and always taking more, but not giving more. And that's another aspect of gluttony: that it's always taking more not out of a sense of need, but out of a sense of wanting, and not really giving in reciprocation. That would be too adult, the idea that we give and take—no, we just take! So that's the immaturity of it. As I say, you will meet people like this. Therefore there's always something narcissistic about this particular vice in a person and a character that is completely warped around this sin. Sin has the power of warping characters; that's what I'm trying to get at. So a glutton is permissive; egalitarian, as youth can be egalitarian—doesn't respect authority; entitled—again, without giving anything; optimistic, and the optimism is not, of course, the same thing as the virtue of hope, you know—it's like Peter Pan—it's an unrealistic attitude toward life; and beyond good and evil—there's not a deep sense of conscience. Gluttony blinds consciousness; it blinds consciousness and conscience. That's why Chaucer said that. If you're a glutton, you can't resist anything. There is no sense of duty or responsibility, and there's no desire to exert effort. Life should be fun, so always associate gluttony with fun and "I have a right to have fun." That's the fundamental message of a character that has been warped by gluttony.

Now I have much less to say about greed because I think you know greed more from the culture we live in. Greed is a substitution of having for being—it's substituting having for being! It's taking the route—the passion is to possess. The felt need, the felt

sense of deficiency is made up for by holding onto things. Now whether or not greed really is a desire for more and more, I'm not sure. Often you hear people say that. But I feel it's gluttony that wants more and more. Greed I think is very often just happy to hold onto everything. In literature we have who? The famous greedy person? Well, Scrooge, but also Silas Marner. Remember Silas? He just counted his coins, you know. He didn't need more coins, but he was never going to let go of one of them. See? Now greed we have to understand can be also for more intangible realities like knowledge, but it's a knowledge one holds for oneself for power, or anything else that's concerned with having in order to have power. Money, of course, is probably the most famous or most popular. The Latin word is "avaritia." It's related to disbelief, and it's really related to fear, if you think of fear of want as leading to a desire to over-possess. These different sins are actually almost reasonable. Greed has to do with a jealous holding onto what one has, having totally lost the proper sense of being and having substituted having. And it applies again to some people more than others and to some cultures more than others. And surely it applies to our culture, where having is almost what constitutes the true goal of life, so much so that people who lose a fortune commit suicide.

Now you can remember from yesterday this page and the idea that people don't always grow and develop into a spiritual sense of who they are. You can see that greed would be a powerful force keeping people on this [physical, material] level of identification, and if they lost all that they owned, they had already lost themselves. Suicide then is almost a logical consequence for a person in that state of thinking, of mind.

So now we move over to the right side and getting back to hope where we started a few moments ago, and we talked then about the perception of God as working in all things, filling all things. The opposite of hope is not necessarily despair, as some people say; even St. Thomas talked about the sins against hope. I'm not saying despair is not a sin against hope, but I'm not really talking about that right now in that way. I'm trying to show how all this interrelates—pride and envy are the sins that oppose hope. Or pride and envy are really sins where hope is the absent virtue—let's put it that way. The absence of hope does not necessarily lead to despair but to self-reliance. You see here [gluttony] it's self-indulgence; here [pride] it's self-reliance; here [luxuria] it's self-abuse, also self-aggrandizement. And self-aggrandizement is different from this [gluttony]. You know, gluttony is filling oneself up, trying to make the most out of life. In a sense self-aggrandizement is the opposite because whereas the glutton never wants to become responsible, never wants to contribute anything, self-aggrandizement over here with pride and vanity loves to develop, loves to achieve, loves to perform, loves to—see, we're back with the Pharisees; I mentioned that before—loves to be successful in life. Self-aggrandizement in that sense, the performing wonder of life. So it's a different approach. But it's also isolated, separated from the source.

What all these have in common over here [pride, envy] is judging life by externals. It's not feeling good that's important. It's not having that's important. It's judging by externals that's important—and again, as I mentioned, even in religious matters, which is the leaven of the Pharisees. So what one really cares about is success, good works,

wealth, achievement, respect, praise—the praise of others, the company of others. This over here [pride, envy] is much more openly emotional. See? These people over here [greed, gluttony] aren't that emotional; in fact this area here [greed] is an area of isolation. Greed isolates people because if you have other people in your life, then you would have to share something with them. So it's a life of utter isolation. Greed is an area which accentuates individualism. That's what we have in our culture, this excessive individualism.

But over here [pride] no. Here [pride] it's the life of the limelight. It's a life of being honored. It's a life of being praised. It's a life of being recognized—again, in secular and religious ways. Jesus says, “Call no man teacher, and do not be called teacher.” He talks about the Pharisees who perform works to be seen. Again, we're picking religious examples, but it could be true of anybody who likes achievement and who needs achievement, mind you. Or that's the strategy of self-development. So it's either pride or it's envy. The difference between pride and envy is the difference between comedy and tragedy. They're both plays, right? They're both done on stage, right? In comedy the hero wins, right? In tragedy the hero loses. That's the difference. If love has to do with the very center of the soul, faith, the mental vision and strength needed to lead a virtuous life, then hope is functional harmony with God. The trio allows our actions to reflect divine grace. This is called “actual grace,” “*gratia operans*,” as St. Thomas calls it. That means where God actually directs our actions. He gives us insights into what to do. He gives us grace to do it. “*Gratia operans*.”

Jesus chided Martha for being “upset about many things, only one thing is needed.” This upset is anxiety, the emotional component of the hopeless condition of nonbeing. While pride and egoism are involved in all sin, when sin becomes disharmonious action, the self-centeredness of this dysfunction becomes more clearly obvious. In other words, we can see over here when people act this way how self-centered they are. It's hard to see over here. I mean it's less obvious. This is more outward. Because it's more outward, it's more obvious; people can see. Such terms as conceit or deceit, deception, vanity, arrogance, could all be used in one way or another to name the absence of hope in action.

The result of this is overfocus on the false self and an ignoring of the true self. Pride and envy have been described by Dr. Naranjo as related as tragedy is to comedy. Claudio Naranjo, a psychiatrist from Chile.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, pride denies neediness and substitutes caring for the neediness of others. So pride sometimes does not come across as arrogant. Pride sometimes comes across as the one who is going to help, very often the unsolicited help that puts someone in power over your life, that gives someone power over you. That can be the work of pride. It's seductive. But it supplies a person with the power of being over and the Latin word for pride is—you know? “*Superbia*” See, what is in *superbia*? See, the word “super,” “over.” And we can be over others by being in charge of them or being helpful.

Now we find a lot of this again in the helping professions, including the priesthood. That can also be true among teachers! A lot of the motivation is really pride because I'm

now the one who is going to help everybody; and everyone's going to look to me, and they're really going to be happy that I'm around. And that's really a neediness that has to be uncovered because no one will ever satisfy their neediness by helping others. You know, Mother Teresa was not out in the streets to help herself. But many people do come at so-called "ministry" from this pride point of view, motivated by desire for power over people. And many of the problems we've had in the priesthood with sexual abuse and other forms of abuse have come because the people involved were coming from the wrong motivation. They were coming into ministry from a pride place, which is a place of power over—"superbia."

Now pride is often hedonistic, although more cautiously. Manipulation and abuse is very common in pride. Again, one must see in pride a profound absence not only of divine hope, but also of self-worth that is thinly covered over in the scheming and manipulation of other people's lives. Of course the building up of the self would be admirable, if it were the true self that pride was building up—but it isn't. It's always the false self pride is working on. And in this place, in particular the inner life, this whole area here, [the right side of diagram] the inner life is particularly small and undeveloped. Not that the inner life is really developed by any sin. It isn't. But in particular here [the right side of diagram] it shrinks away so that people actually don't believe they have an inner life.

Similar to pride—and that is, rooted in smallness and in an unacceptable interior starved of being—is envy. So we see envy; we think of a person whose soul is in his or her own awareness something small and dark and starved of being. Envy like all forms of pride is overconcerned not with true self or its needs but with the image of self. So on this side over here [the right side of diagram] what people with envy try to work on, and pride and vanity tend to work on, is the image of the self, the image out there in the world, not the real self, the true self.

That's another thing we can mention. We talk about people today mentioning that self-esteem is so low in people, and they try to build up their self-esteem. That's what happens over here [again, the right side of diagram]. The point is forget your self-esteem; try to build up the true self, or try to get in touch with it—better yet.

Now like lust, envy has a sense of exaggeration and an exaggerated need, but not for any external thing, not for pleasure, but rather for an impossibly ideal image of oneself. So what envy really envies is an ideal of oneself that is impossible anyway. Each one of these strategies is self-defeating in a different way. None of them work. What works is faith, hope and love. They work to bring about fullness of being. Envy brings about a substantial disaffection from everything, common or ordinary. So envy and people whose characters are based on envy disdain everything common, and they try to fill themselves with things that are refined; and they have a sense of superiority, which is actually true in one sense because they make themselves superior. I mean, they refine themselves. They learn all kinds of wonderful things. So in one sense they are superior, but it's all on the outside. The trouble is this is a sad attempt to create something inward

that it is not doing. Meanwhile the real beauty of life and the real goodness of life is completely avoided by envy. It can't appreciate it. It can't accept it.

Now people are often quite shocked how people whose passion is envy feel inferior although they seem superior, feel like failures although they seem to be so successful, feel that they are ignorant even though they appear to be so knowing. And finally they are—well, in a certain sense everything about them is phony because of the fear of letting people know who they are. So lamenting, complaining, self-pitying are constant occupations of the envious soul.

Now what I'm trying to do is give you an insight into the capital sins. Now we have seven of them, right? Greed, Envy, Pride, Lust, Anger, Sloth, Gluttony. That's seven. And I'm adding Disbelief, I mean, I already included disbelief earlier. I think it's just as worthy of attention as greed is or gluttony. Disbelief is a way in which a person can orient his entire life. Okay. But you don't have to accept it, if you don't like. You can do whatever you like.

## Summary

Now let's summarize what we've done in these last couple of days.

- ◆ I started out saying I was going to talk about the need for personal theology and a spirituality that would verify it. Okay? We verify our theology in spirituality through faith practice, prayer, and life itself—but life only when it's lived consciously. Okay? We talked about responding to the signs of the times. We live in times of skepticism and times of science. So that was my recommendation that you verify your life in such a way that you can share yourself with others in a way that's really coming from you.
- ◆ We talked about a deeper sense of self and if you remember the first image. We talked about the true self being hidden and the more common experience of self being on the outside of who we are. We talked about the idea of boundaries.
- ◆ Then yesterday and this morning we talked about human perceptions and how they either do or don't lead us to the truth, and how they often don't, and how we really need metanoia, which is allowing the grace of God to enter into our lives and teach us how to see ourselves and how to come to the true self and how the false self acts as a filter that actually blinds us to reality.
- ◆ So then we looked through this blinding element in terms of love and faith and hope.
- ◆ And then finally in this hour we went through the various capital sins, and how they could be clustered with some of the theological virtues to see them as more or less opponents. So the capital sins were common dysfunctional warps in the human consciousness and I've tried to show you new ways of looking at them.

Now, any questions?

## Questions

- ◆ Question: You were talking about—right when you first started you said that you wished you knew this stuff when you were sitting here. One of the things we were talking about is now that I know this, in what aspect is it supposed to, what do you envision changing the operation of—my life—What should be going on in me? A lot of it is semi-abstract, what we were talking about. How am I going to measure it? How am I going to feel am I being successful?

Well, I would say, you're not supposed to measure it. See, that is all part of the strategy that I'm trying to get you away from. The whole idea is that God is in charge. Each of us has a character that has been formed in a sinful world that is to some degree deficient and defective. Now how much we can find our own defectiveness is not something you really should go looking for, nor should you be preoccupied with it. But when you run into it—and you will—then you'll know what it is! You won't be so surprised. You'll say you'll know where it's coming from. Not to own it—you don't own your sins. You get rid of them. You are absolved from sin. Our job is not to own sin; it's to be freed from it. You don't have to maintain any of these dysfunctional manners of living.

Now to some degree you wouldn't be here today if you weren't drawn by grace. But that doesn't mean that you are not really still being driven by some of these more compulsive drives. I think we are. And I tried to point out likely areas where religious-type people would be driven. I mentioned this [sloth] and this [pride]. And actually, believe it or not, even disbelief is a very common thing because what I tried to show you what faith really was, was a courage to withstand. Okay? Now a lot of people who are in religion don't have courage to withstand. In fact, they're very skeptical and cynical and full of suspicion. I mentioned those things. See? And they set up things like the Inquisition. And they think they are defending the faith! They're not defending the faith at all! They themselves have no faith. See? To see this in yourself, to see this in others, to see this in the institution, that's what I thought would be good for you. Not only for yourself, but you're going to meet people who are driven in these various ways because these are the fundamental distortions in human life. In my seminary days, I don't know about your theology, but we had very little about this in our theology, our moral theology, spiritual theology—very little! And I found that a real lack, which is why I got involved in it. So, no, it's nothing you're supposed to measure. And you're not supposed to see how you're doing. That type of thing is too outside. We have to let it come in and let God take care of it.

- ◆ Question: How do you know if you are letting God take care of it? Or how do you let God take care of it?

Well, you talk about it with a spiritual director. You have a group of people that you discern with. You can't actually know it the way you know a fact, but you find a way through your friends, through spiritual direction. You seek discernment, and eventually you find the way. In a sense it is groping in the dark, but we need to be comfortable groping in the dark. It's okay to grope in the dark, because really God is with us all along anyway. So, certainty is not important. I avoided altogether talking about certainty with faith. In fact, I believe certainty is an illegitimate demand that the ego places upon God, if you will, life if you will; and people want to be certain about what? That is really an offense against faith more than an expression of faith. That's why I mentioned that in the

early Church, faith was basically a courage to suffer death. Now if you think about that—that's a really good question: Are you ready for that? Are you ready for death? Now life will bring you death. It will come in the form of failure. It will come in the form of a loss. It will come in many forms. And with faith you meet them. But if faith is simply a matter of certainty, then all these losses will threaten your faith and in fact will show your faith to be wrong.

And I brought up religion because, you know, there are many forms of religion that are very hidden forms of sin. They're nonspiritual ways of being religious. They're prideful ways of being religious, angry ways of being religious, disbelieving ways of being religious, gluttonous ways of being religious, greedy ways of being religious. And I brought that up because it's important to see it in the institution itself—not only in yourself, but in the institution. When you find yourself being judgmental, you know, just kind of note it. Take it easy though. You know, you're not supposed to be perfect right now; that's all part of the deal.

- ◆ Comment: I think transfer time and assignment time can be a time when some of the obstacles really come out. How come he got to go to that assignment? Who gets the plums? One of the things I have noticed in vocation ministries in the last year or so is the role of the vocation director, men in discernment, is to help people look at the obstacles that they perceive in their path of following a way of life, and help them determine whether it is a real obstacle or whether it's a perceived obstacle; and a lot of the obstacles that men face are in precisely some of the capital sins that you describe. And sometimes they are real obstacles. In most cases these are things that when they bring them to light, things connect better for them.

Right. Because they have them because that's how they start out in life, but God is bringing them away from them. And that may be a really sacred moment when they actually can see it.

- ◆ Comment: Just conversations come to light. I was talking to one young man about times when he felt loved, and he had a very difficult time identifying times when he felt loved. And what he substituted for love was admiration. He said that he felt admired, but he did not feel loved.

That's very common. That's over on this [right] side. True. Now that doesn't mean his parents didn't love him, but it means he didn't perceive it. So that's why I did bring up the bit about a trusting, holding environment—because it's needed. But I think it's a big mistake today, but we always go back and try to look at the home life and say, "Well, what went wrong in that home?" Nothing might have gone wrong in that home! It could have been great! In fact, they had a story last night on about the kid who killed his parents and all the kids at school up in Oregon, said he had a great home life, supposedly, as far as they can tell. His parents are dead, so that can't ask them. But see, I do think children are born with their own peculiarities already. So this particular child, in this particular family could have had problems; but that particular child in another family could be great. Vice versa, parents—you know, they have an easy time with one kid. They say, "Oh, my first child was so easy to get along with—the second one—I don't know how I can take it!" So it's both ways: sometimes the kid is a pain for the parents and sometimes the parents are a pain for the kid! And that's just life; and we get through

somehow. But it does distort the perceptions. And I'm wondering if sometimes what happens in life when parents clash with children if it's not a clash of these false perceptions. It could be. We tend to be easy on people who have the sin we have, we understand it—but a different sin, it's like what, isn't that weird! How could they do that? But one of the good things to is to realize through Myers-Briggs, or any other way you have of knowing this, is that people are really not all the same inside. That is something that a lot of people naively think, well, we're really all the same. Oh, no. No, we're not!

- ◆ Question: I appreciate the mixture of psychology with the spiritual life. For most of us we don't really have thorough knowledge of ourselves. If, for example, my motivation is absolutely envy, does that absolutely nullify everything that I do—only because my motivation is not exactly what I thought it was?

I don't know. Maybe if you really are motivated to do something good, maybe that is already trying to alter you motivation bringing it to some higher level.

- ◆ Comment: Most people would probably claim that I am doing it out of love or concern for you, but you know, they don't even know that.

Well, you wouldn't do something for someone else out of envy, but you might do something for someone else out of pride. Yeah, very much so. Well, that's what you have to discover. Christ said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Be aware of the motivations. Yeah, it is important.

- ◆ Comment: What happens when we make a decision in action, there is one of them that I think is less important, and that is the physical outcome to the other individual, but the more important outcome is the way that it forms yourself. We're in this to form ourselves. We do that by helping others, I mean giving ourselves away. But, for instance, in a case of even doing something evil like shooting someone, in a case of murder, the person who is killed is actually much better off in this case than the person who did the murder. The one who is killed is with God. The one who has committed the murder has malformed himself in a very terrible way. So in the same case you are talking about, the intent, it's not so much that you are worried about nullifying the outward good, as how it is actually inwardly forming you to either move in closer to your true self or to build up your false self. So it wouldn't necessarily nullify an objective action toward somebody else, but it does ruin the more important formational aspect.

Right. I think that is what he was asking. He was asking about the merit of the act, which is formational—and it is.

- ◆ Comment: In your answer I thought of the word "Harmatia," which is one way to define sin, which is "missing the mark." But missing the mark means that you're trying to hit the mark, so there is merit implicit in the attempt even if—

Well, "harmatia" could mean wrong target too. St. Thomas said, "To go fast on the wrong road is worse than going slow on the right road." It's headed in the wrong direction.

Now actually, I did kind of rush toward this last hour. And the reason is I had too much material, and I knew I did so—

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Endnote

<sup>1</sup> For further references on the vices and passions see Claudio Naranjo, M.D., Ennea-type Structures. (Gateways/IDHBB, Inc.: Nevada City, CA.), 1990-1991.