

DEADLY SINS—LIVING VIRTUE

Avarice

Divine Providence

- God is the sovereign master of his plan
- to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures' cooperation.
- human beings cooperate with God by exercising dominion over the earth
- God entrusted the earth at the beginning to the stewardship of the human family

Universal Destination of Goods and Private Property

- The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race.
- the earth is divided up among men to assure
 - to assure security of their lives
 - to guarantee the freedom and dignity of persons
 - to help people to meet their basic needs and the needs of those in their charge.
- allows for the development of *solidarity*
 - a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood.
 - manifested by
 - the distribution of goods
 - remuneration for work.
 - presupposes efforts for social justice
- equality and differences
 - no one has everything he needs — each person needs others
 - differences tied to
 - age
 - physical abilities
 - intellectual or moral aptitudes
 - social benefits
 - distribution of wealth
 - differences belong to God's plan,
 - God wills that each receive what he needs from others
 - those endowed with particular "talents" should share the benefits with those who need them.
 - differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness and sharing of goods

Stewardship

- goods of production must be shared to benefit the greatest number:

- land
- factories
- practical or artistic skills
- goods should be used with moderation
- external goods not merely exclusive to oneself but common to others also

Greed and Avarice

- Concupiscence from the Original Sin leads to
 - *greed*: the desire to amass earthly goods without limit
 - *avarice*: a passion for riches and their attendant power
 - “a worship of idols and the offspring of unbelief” (*Ladder*)
 - often affects the older man rather than the younger
- the pattern of avarice
 - concern over acquiring a small sum
 - tortured concern over how to save it, double it
 - distraction over what to buy with it, how to increase it
 - worries about what will happen when it is gone, if it is enough for old age
 - preoccupation with gain, at the expense of faith and good morals
- offspring of avarice
 - hatred
 - theft: usurping another’s property against the reasonable will of the owner
 - deliberate retention of goods lent or objects lost
 - business fraud
 - paying unjust wages
 - forcing up prices by taking advantage of the ignorance or hardship of another
 - envy
 - separations
 - hostility
 - stormy blasts
 - remembrance of past wrongs
 - various other crimes
 - speculation in which one contrives to manipulate the price of goods artificially
 - corruption in which one influences the judgment of those who must make decisions according to law
 - appropriation and use for private purposes of the common goods of an enterprise
 - work poorly done
 - tax evasion
 - forgery of checks and invoices
 - excessive expense and waste
 - inhuman acts and even murder
- games of chance (card games, etc.)
 - not in themselves contrary to justice

- become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others
- passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement
- unfair wagers and cheating at games constitutes grave matter.
- justice in business practices
 - contracts must be strictly observed to the extent that the commitments made in them are morally just.
 - subject to commutative justice which regulates exchanges between persons and between institutions in accordance with a strict respect for their rights.
 - Commutative justice obliges strictly; it requires safeguarding property rights, paying debts, and fulfilling obligations freely contracted.
- principles of the Church's social teaching:
 - Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his acts.
 - A theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable.
 - A system that "subordinates the basic rights of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production" is contrary to human dignity.
 - Regulating the economy solely by centralized planning (communism) perverts the basis of social bonds;
 - Regulating it solely by the law of the marketplace (capitalism) fails social justice, for "there are many human needs which cannot be satisfied by the market."

Overcoming Avarice

- very difficult to get rid of once it enters the heart
- best to avoid it before it takes root
- detachment
 - God must take precedence over everything and everyone
 - detachment from riches is obligatory for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven
 - a little avarice quickly increases: it is stamped out by voluntary poverty
 - does not mean ignoring temporal affairs
 - according to one's state in life and responsibilities
 - life in the world need not hinder growth in holiness
 - family responsibilities are primary: parents to (young) children; (grown) children to parents
 - fruits and benefits of property communicated first to family
 - learn to regard worldly things in proper perspective: "And then? . . . And then?"
- voluntary poverty
 - an evangelical counsel
 - learn to acquire things only out of necessity, and give away things we do not need
 - learn contentment with what we have (especially food, clothes, etc.)
 - should never strive to have every last thing
 - leads to peace of mind and freedom from anxiety
 - learn to trust in divine providence
- love for the poor
 - in imitation of God's love for the poor

- in response to Christ's command
- "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." (John Chrysostom)
- works of mercy: charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities
 - giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity
 - it is also a work of justice pleasing to God
 - reliable remedy for avarice: "He who feels that the vice of avarice has got hold of him should not wish to observe fasts . . . but to give alms." (St Philip)

I have learned, in whatever situation I find myself, to be self-sufficient. I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.

Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress. You sent me something for my needs, not only once but more than once. It is not that I am eager for the gift; rather, I am eager for the profit that accrues to your account. I have received full payment and I abound. I am very well supplied because of what I received from you. . . .

My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.

(Philippians 4:11–13. 14. 16–18. 19–20)

Suggestions for Further Reading

Benedict XVI. Encyclical Letter on Christian Love (*Deus caritas est*, 25 December 2005), Part II: “*Caritas: The Practice of Love by the Church as a ‘Community of Love’*”.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Social Justice” (nn. 1928–48); “The Seventh Commandment” (nn. 2401–63); “The Tenth Commandment” (nn. 2534–57).

St. John Cassian. The Institutes. Book Seven: “The Spirit of Avarice”. Translated by Boniface Ramsey, O.P. Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, Number 58. New York: The Newman Press, 2000.

St. John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent. Step Sixteen: “On Avarice”, Step Seventeen: “On Poverty”. Translated by Colm Lubheid and Norman Russell. The Classics of Western Spirituality. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982.

John Paul II. Encyclical Letter on Human Work for the Ninetieth Anniversary of *Rerum novarum* (*Laborem exercens*, 14 September 1981).

John Paul II. Encyclical Letter for the Twentieth Anniversary of *Populorum progressio* (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 30 December 1987).

John Paul II. Encyclical Letter on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum novarum* (*Centesimus annus*, 1 May 1991).

Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity, Book Three, Chapter Three: “Social Morality”, and Chapter Nine: “Charity”. [First published 1952.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Lewis, C.S. The Screwtape Letters, especially Letters 21 and 28. [First published 1942.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Paul VI. Encyclical Letter on the Development of Peoples (*Populorum progressio*, 25 March 1967).

Please refer also to the general reading list provided with the course outline.