

Presumption as a Form of Laxity unto Spiritual Sloth

--Epigraphs--

"What then is this Sloth which [as "a deadly sin," "a mortal sin"] can merit the extremity of divine punishment? Saint Thomas's [Aquinas'] answer is both comforting and surprising: *tristitia de bono spirituali*, **sadness in the face of spiritual good**. Man is made for joy in the love of God, a love which he expresses in service. If he deliberately turns away from that joy, he is denying the purpose of his existence. The malice of Sloth lies not merely in neglect of duty (though that can be a symptom of it) but in the refusal of joy. It is allied to despair....Sloth is the condition in which a man is **fully aware of the proper means** of his salvation and **refuses to take them because the whole apparatus of salvation fills him with tedium and disgust.**" (Evelyn Waugh, 7 January 1962, *The Sunday Times* of England; see also *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (1983), p. 573—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

"He [Colonel T.E. Lawrence] agreed with my view that **the means governed the end, ill means distorting the end.**" (B.H. Liddell Hart, *Lawrence of Arabia* (the 1989 re-printed edition), p. 367—my emphasis added)

"The **chief idea** of my life....That is **the idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted**....I never saw the two sides of **this single truth** stated together anywhere, **until** I happened to open the *Penny Catechism* and read the words, 'The two sins against Hope are presumption and despair.'" (G.K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton* (1936), p. 342—my emphasis added.

For many years it has been noticeable to me as a Roman Catholic layman that the deadly sin of presumption and the related sin of sloth are seldom mentioned, much less more deeply and even individually discussed. Consequently, neither is there much discussion of the largely unexpected interrelationship between prideful presumption and spiritual sloth: the former being one of the two sins against hope and the Holy Ghost, and the latter being the root of despair and a preparation for final despair.

Therefore, I have decided now to attempt presenting with clarity some of those important things I have harvested (or gleaned) over the years from my teachers concerning presumption and sloth as deadly sins. To honor more adequately some of my own formative teachers, I thus propose especially to consider the insights and the writings of men such as Evelyn Waugh, G.K. Chesterton, and Josef Pieper. Some of these insights I have already presented above in the three introductory Epigraphs to this essay; and I encourage the reader to read and savor them, also **sequentially** and even more than once, during any reading of this intentionally challenging essay.

For, today there are many circulating and accumulating doctrinal confusions, even about the nature, membership, indispensability, and final purpose of the mediating Catholic Church. By dealing with some of the traditional deadly sins against Hope and the Holy Ghost, we may also thereby bring out some deeper vivid aspects of the virtues: both the infused supernatural virtues and the four natural cardinal virtues, thus unto a life more abundant.

It used to be more often said among the learned who aspired to wisdom (and a greater mirth) that the opposite of "*distinctio*" is "*confusio*"; and that "*sapientis est ordinare*": that is to say, "it is characteristic of the qualities of a wise man (an aspirant wise man) to give order to things; and thus to make sound distinctions lest there be greater confusions." We therefore hope to present some such sound distinctions.

We start our continuing purposive aspiration now with the proposed elucidations of Evelyn Waugh himself, from in his 7 January 1962 article, entitled "Sloth," which was first published only nine months before the autumn opening of the very consequential Second Vatican Council: on 11 October 1962.¹

Waugh will also be an unmistakably useful and quite sobering introduction to our later consideration of sinful presumption, because he first clearly reminds us of — and in his plain and non-technical lucid prose — the very meaning of a "deadly sin" and thus of the grace-quenching "mortal sin," *stricto sensu*.

¹ In the late summer or earlier autumn of 1962, Evelyn Waugh's fine article would also be included in an Anthology: in Raymond Mortimer's edited book-length anthology entitled *The Seven Deadly Sins* (London, 1962). See, also, the now-published posthumous volume of Waugh's own collected essays, articles and reviews, entitled *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* (Edited by Donat Gallagher) (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983), and pages 572-576 ("Sloth"). All further page references to this original 1962 article will be to this later 1983 edition of Waugh's collected essays; and such references to that five-page article (pp. 572-576) will be now placed above in parentheses in the main body of this essay. As a small aid to our better understanding, the current writer's emphases will often also be added.

Evelyn Waugh begins his gradually deepening essay by capturing our fresh attentiveness. He does it by way of his deft irony, as he also prods a little our own doubtful sense of sloth's contemporary pertinence:

The word "Sloth" [Latin "*acedia*" or "*accidia*"] is seldom on modern lips. When used, it is a mildly **facetious** variant of "indolence" [Latin "*pigritia*" or "*ignavia*"], and, **surely**, so far from being a deadly sin, [such indolence] is **one of the most amiable of weaknesses**....How then has Sloth found a place with its six **odious** companions as one of the Mortal Sins [Latin "*Peccata Mortalia*" or "*Peccata/Vitia Capitalia*"²]? (572—my emphasis added)

After this charming approach to our attentive benevolence, Waugh goes on to discuss theology more earnestly, and thus also some more disciplined theological definitions:

Theologians [except for the Modernists and the Neo-Modernists?] are the least rhetorical of writers. Their vocabulary is elaborate and precise, and **when they condemn an act as a mortal sin** they are **not merely** expressing disapproval in a striking phrase. **They mean something specific and appalling; an outrage against the divine order committed with full knowledge and consent which, if unrepented before death, consigns the doer to eternal loss of salvation**.... Indeed, many [now] speculate that, the sanctions being so awful and the conditions [required to be "under pain of mortal sin"] so stringent, very few mortal sins have ever been committed. **We only know that Hell is for those who deliberately choose it....What then is this Sloth which can merit the extremity of divine punishment?....Sloth is the condition in which a man is fully aware of the proper means of his salvation and refuses to take them because the whole apparatus of salvation fills him with disgust.** (572-573—my emphasis added)

This last passage just extensively quoted — along with the more affirmative complementary words presented in our first Epigraph above (on page one, and on page 573 of the Anthology, as well) — should lead us now, if we be humble enough ourselves, to pray for that fuller and vivifying Gift of **Holy Fear** (the "*Donum Timoris*"), which is especially meant to guard and to protect us from the prideful insolence and deadly sin of **Presumption**, and from the deeper danger of **Final Impenitence**.

Waugh will now invite us to consider some of the secular, not just religious, manifestations of spiritual Sloth — and not just indolence or indifference and moral slackness:

It [Sloth] is, one might suppose [as of 1962, and before the pastoral Second Vatican Council], a rare condition most often found among those who have dedicated themselves to a specifically religious vocation [to include a layman

² The traditional "Seven Mortal Sins" in English are: "Pride, Avarice, Envy, Wrath, Lust (venereal, lewd), Gluttony, and Acedia." In Latin, the seven mortal sins or capital vices are "*Superbia, Avaritia, Invidia, Ira, Luxuria, Gula, et Acedia*."

in the celibate single state] for which they find themselves unworthy, and not **the prime temptation of men living in the world**. Sixty years ago [in 1903, when Waugh was born] it would have been pedantic to treat of it in a secular journal, but, curiously enough, in this generation **the man of Sloth, in all his full theological implications**, has become one of the stock figures of stage and novel. The **protagonists** of these popular spiritual dramas, French, English, American, sometimes priests, are spoken of as having "lost their Faith," **as though Faith were an extraneous possession**, like an umbrella, which can be **inadvertently left behind** in a railway-carriage; but **in fact their predicament is quite different** from that of their unhappy great-grandfathers **who**, confronted with **plausible** arguments that the universe took longer than six days in the making, **decided that the whole foundation of their religion was spurious**. These **new apostates** [sic] do **not** wrestle with historical and philosophical doubts [*dubia*]; they simply **lapse** into "sadness in the face of spiritual good" [*"tristitia de bono spirituali"*]. (573—my emphasis added)

Evelyn Waugh's speaking of a simple lapse into an inordinate and a joyless sadness also implies a weariness and drift and slackness: a *pigritia* that is also much more than mere indolence:

The **plainest** representation of **this depth of Sloth**, and the one likely to be freshest in the reader's memory [as of January 1962], is Querry, **the central character** of Mr. Graham Greene's recent [1961] novel, *A Burnt-Out Case*. He is an eminent architect **who...is sickened by the applause of admirers who persist in attributing his achievements to a love of God he has ceased to exercise. Love of his fellow men also dies in him. Eaten by apathy, self-pity and the sense of futility he tries to escape** to the most remote refuge....

We must not impute damnation to a human soul. With fictitious characters we are free to speculate. I should say that **on the facts given us** by Mr. Greene, Querry was guilty and in Hell. He is one of a rather large company of modern fictitious characters. **The fact that they have so captivated the artists and public of the day suggests that the problem is not so recondite as might have been supposed** [even supposed by the optimistic Second Vatican Council itself?—in view of its enthusiastically positive spirit and its seemingly indulgent pastoral view and treatment of "the natural modern man" which entirely omitted, it seems, any consideration of the very existence of, much less the grave sin of, Spiritual Sloth?]. It must not be thought that I am accusing Mr. Greene [an openly professed Catholic then] of Sloth. Artists often express vicarious experiences....It would [moreover] be impossible for a man who was really guilty of Sloth to write about it, for he would be incapable of the intense work required to produce a novel like *A Burnt-Out Case*.

So much for **the Sloth of the theologian**, technically dubbed *accidia* (or *acedia*). (573-574—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

Making some references to the ancient Greco-Roman world, Waugh helps us understand a little more by way of contrast, and with own his sense of mercy:

The last centuries of European paganism **before the revelation of Christian joy** were **sunk deep** in *accidia* ["though there is no true classical term for this state....because it was too commonplace to require identification"]. Now that paganism is returning [as of 1962] we see the symptoms again. Can we [or Vaticanum II ?] accuse [justly] **our listless and torpid contemporaries of Sloth** in the sense defined above. **I think not, because the great majority have been deprived** by the state [and Church?] **of religious instruction**. The phrase "spiritual good" is totally foreign [sic] to them, **and they lack the full knowledge** of its nature which is an essential element in the commission of **mortal sin**. (574—my emphasis added)

To what extent, we may fittingly ask in this context, have the teachers of the Catholic Church — to include the current Prelates — now sufficiently provided us with this substantive instruction which Waugh had found so lacking in 1962? Did the 1962-1965 Pastoral Vatican II (or its innovative and novel Aftermath) accomplish this task of providing a fuller (and truly formative) theological doctrinal education? Or, have the recent 2005-2017 Magisterial and Non-Magisterial writings and interview-books on Mercy and on Hope (e.g. Pope Benedict's *Spe Salvi*—30 November 2007; Cardinal G.L. Mueller; Cardinal R. Sarah) even spoken of the Gift of Fear or the Sin of Presumption, or of **the Virtue** of Hope as well as the dangerous Sins against Hope, in general? For, Hope is only a Virtue as a Theological Virtue: as an infused theological virtue within the Supernatural Order of Grace. Otherwise hope is a grappling, contending (irascible) passion in the Natural Order, and not even a natural virtue like Fortitude or the other three Cardinal virtues. Are these things now widely and loyally taught? And with a consideration of their implications for the risk-filled adventure unto salvation and eternal life?

After Evelyn Waugh's considerations of the presence or the lack of sufficient knowledge — even to examine honestly and reliably one's own well-formed conscience — he goes on to make another sobering observation and reflection, which was offered, partly, in light of his own vivid military and dangerous experiences in World War II as an Officer and as a Commando:

There are, however, very near parallels [to genuine Sloth], especially in those whose calling has a superficial resemblance to monastic life, the armed services. These men accept higher standards of obedience than civilians and are expected on occasions to make greater sacrifices. "*Browned-off*" [discouraged and annoyed] and "*bloody-minded*" [selfishly oppositional for no good reason] troops **present a type of Sloth**. I have seen soldiers [as on Crete] in defeat who could **not** be accused of laziness. They were making strenuous exertions to get away from the enemy [the Germans]. Nor were they impelled by fear. They had simply become **bored by the mismanagement** of the battle **and indifferent to its outcome** [!]. There were ill-found camps and stations in the war **where men refused to take actions which would have alleviated their**

own condition, but instead luxuriated in apathy and resentment. There was a sense of abandonment there which, though it was not regarded as such, was **theological in essence**; instead it [the spiritual Sloth] found expression in complaints, just or unjust, against the higher command and the politicians. (574—my emphasis added)

Then Waugh recalls what he had earlier, perhaps all too facilely, said about "indolence" or certain forms of more nonchalant laxity:

It was suggested above [at the outset] that we were not putting ourselves in danger of Hell by indolence but, just as he is a poor soldier whose sole aim is to escape detention, so [too] is he a poor Christian whose sole aim is to escape Hell. Besides *accidia* there is *pigritia*, **plain slackness, which is a deflection from, if not an outrage against the divine order....**It is strange, in an age when the conscience is **directed** so constantly to **social aims**, that **this vice** [*pigritia*] so largely escapes censure, for if, as has been said, the personal motives of industry [industriousness] may be base, **the consequences of idleness on society are conspicuously deleterious.**

It is a fault about which we are particularly liable to **self-deception**. Almost all the men and women in England [now in 1962] **proclaim themselves to be busy** [as well as restlessly roaming and uprooted?]. They have **"no time"** to read or cook or **take notice of the ceaseless process of spoliation of their island....**We have **voted for a Welfare State** but are everywhere frustrated because we are **too lazy to man the services....That way lies national disaster**; but the subject of this essay [on Sloth] is moral, not political. **There is something unattractive about those who gaze out of the window for long periods of time studying the idleness of the navvies** [the manual laborers or construction workers] **"at work" outside.** (575—my emphasis added)

Waugh then gives us a vivid set of examples from his "own trade" (575) as a "writer" and thus from the increasing evidence of "the imposture of writers" (576), especially their shoddy "laziness":

These [specific examples of shabby slackness and of inertial laziness] are **the evidence of Sloth** in a single trade [*i.e.*, in the literary trade] in a country where **the vice** is widely **prevalent**. This may seem of minor importance **in the history of national decline** but they are **symptomatic of the whole disease** [of Sloth], and literature [especially in England] was **formerly the one art** in which we could claim equality with (if not superiority to) the rest of the civilized world. **Sloth is not such an innocent weakness as at first glance it appeared.** (576—my emphasis added)

Our honest and unflinching Waugh (at 58 years of age in early 1962) was soon himself — after his knowing many later personal sorrows in society, also about the Catholic Church and Vaticanum II and its newly introduced Liturgy with its restless Novelties — so suddenly to die at home four years later. (It was on Easter Sunday on 10 April 1966, and just after assisting at the traditional

Latin Mass he loved.) Thus, the final paragraph of his 7 January 1962 essay on Sloth has a special poignancy to us who now read it again in early 2017. For Waugh will ask us to consider Sloth and Old Age, and he will candidly remind us, lest we ourselves also be or become too slack in our own youth:

But Sloth is not primarily the temptation of the young. Medical science has **oppressed** [sic] us with a **huge new burden** of **longevity**. It is **in the last undesired decade, when passion is cold, appetites feeble, curiosity dulled and experience has begotten cynicism,** that *accidia* [in ambush] **lies in wait as the final temptation to destruction.** That is the time which is given a man to "make his soul". **For few of us** [is there] **the hero's and the martyr's privilege** of a few **clear** days ending on the scaffold; **instead** [it is for us] **an attenuated, bemused drifting into eternity.** Death has not lost its terrors **in the new clinical arctic twilight.** **In this state** [but for a merciful gift] **we shall have to face the last deadly assault** of the devil. It is then, **perhaps,** that we shall be able to resist only by **the spiritual strength we have husbanded in youth.** (576—my emphasis added)

That is to say, after our having recurrently cooperated with Grace, and having then also remained faithfully in the state of sanctifying grace, hence supernaturally alive in our soul and not being spiritually slothful, instead.

Let us now consider how Josef Pieper — like Saint Thomas Aquinas himself — especially sees why "the uprooted and roaming unrest of soul" is also an important component element of the deadly sin (and vice) of *Acedia*, or spiritual Sloth.³ In Latin such an uprooting and restless disorder was called "*evagatio mentis*" — a "roaming unrest of spirit" along with the added incapacity to have a "repose of the mind in God" (one's humble and reverent "*quies mentis in Deo*").

We shall now allow Josef Pieper (1904-1997) to introduce us to some fresh and reality-revealing aspects about Sloth (*Acedia*), one of whose multiple offspring is, indeed, Despair:

There are two kinds of hopelessness [*i.e.*, "two forms of hopelessness" (48)]. One is despair [*desperantia*]; the other, *praesumptio*. *Praesumptio* is a perverse [a premature and overconfident] **anticipation** of the [final] fulfillment of hope. Despair is also an anticipation—a **perverse anticipation of the [final] nonfulfillment of hope**: "to despair is to descend into hell."

By describing both despair and presumption as [forms of] "**anticipation,**" we disclose that fact that both of them destroy the pilgrim character of human existence in the *status viatoris* [in the created status of a wayfarer still

³ Josef Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 58—"evagatio mentis." The original German title is *Über die Hoffnung* (1977, the 7th Edition). This little book of five chapters, which is especially to be recommended to the reader, also has three excellent chapters on Despair, Presumption, and the Gift of Fear: the last three chapters, respectively. All further page references will be to this 1986 English edition, and again placed above in parentheses.

journeying in time]. For they are both opposed to man's true becoming [while still in time, and thus loyally abiding in **"the tension of hope"**]. Against all reality, they transform the [tense] **"not yet"** of hope into either **the "not"** or **the "already"** of [final] fulfillment...."There are **two things that kill the soul**," Saint Augustine tells us, **"despair and false hope."** (47-48—my bold emphasis added)

Pertinent to our earlier examination of Sloth, Josef Pieper then importantly says:

The beginning and the root of despair is *acedia*, sloth....According to the classical theology of the Church, *acedia* is a kind of sadness (*species tristitiae*)—more specifically, **a kind of sadness in view of the divine good in man**. This sadness because of the God-given **ennobling** of human nature [also elevated in grace] causes inactivity, depression, discouragement....The opposite of *acedia* is not industry and diligence, but **magnanimity and joy which is a fruit of the supernatural love of God....**The **indolence expressed** by the term *acedia* is **so little** the [often proposed] opposite of "work" in the ordinary meaning of that term that **Saint Thomas says**, rather, that ***acedia* is a sin against the third of the Ten Commandments**, by which man is enjoined to **"rest his spirit in God."**

In the classical theology of the Church, *acedia* is understood to mean "*tristitia saeculi*," that **"sorrow according to the world"** of which Saint Paul says [2 Corinthians 7:10]...that it "produces death."

This sorrow is a lack of magnanimity; it lacks courage for the great things that are proper to the nature of the Christian. It is a kind of anxious vertigo that befalls the human individual **when he becomes aware of the height to which God has raised him....**He would prefer to be **less great in order to avoid the obligation of greatness.** *Acedia* is a **perverted** humility; it will not **accept** supernatural goods [to include grace] **because** they are, by their very nature, **linked to a claim on him** who receives them. (53-56—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

Josef Pieper then soberly depicts for us some of the darker developments of *acedia*:

The more *acedia* advances from the region of emotion **into that of intellectual decision**, the more it becomes a **deliberate** turning away [an aversion!] from, an actual fleeing from God. Man **flees** from God **because** God has **exalted** human nature to a **higher**, a divine, state of being **and has thereby enjoined** on man a **higher standard of obligation.** *Acedia* is, in the last analysis, a **"*detestatio boni divini*,"** with the monstrous result that, upon reflection, **man expressly wishes that God had not ennobled him**, but had "left him in peace." (56—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

Before our Catholic German philosopher will revealingly present what Saint Thomas Aquinas himself has called the offspring or **daughters** of *acedia* — the "*filiae aediae*" — he will mention a valuable insight of the Danish Protestant philosopher, Kierkegaard:

Acedia is what Kierkegaard, in his book on despair (*Sickness unto Death* [1849]), has called the "despair of weakness," which he considers a **preliminary** stage of despair proper and which consists in the fact that an individual "is **unwilling**, in his despair, to be himself [in full integrity and active virtue]." (57—my bold emphasis added)

The other "*filiae acediae*", the other "offspring of *acedia*" (57), in addition to despair, also "will be rewarding to consider" (57), and they are, in general, as follows:

In addition to despair, acedia gives birth to that uneasy restlessness of mind that Saint Thomas calls *evagatio mentis*.... For its part, *evagatio mentis* reveals itself in loquaciousness...in excessive curiosity...in an irreverent urge "to pour oneself out from the peak of the mind onto many things"...in interior restlessness...and in instability of place or purpose.⁴ *Evagatio mentis* and despair are followed by a **third offspring of *acedia*—a sluggish indifference (*torpor*) toward those things that are in truth necessary for man's salvation**; it is linked by an inner necessity to the denial of man's higher self that springs from sadness and [the slackness of] sloth. (58-59—my bold emphasis added)

The last three "offspring of *acedia*" will also cultivate and concentrate our attention:

The fourth offspring is **pusillanimity** (*pusillanimitas*) toward all the mystical opportunities that are open to man. The fifth is **irritable rebellion** (*rancor*) against all who are charged with the responsibility of preserving man's true and divinized self from falling prey to forgetfulness, to "self-forgetfulness." The last [sixth] offspring is *malitia*, **malice** par excellence, a conscious inner choice and decision in favor of evil as evil that has its source in hatred for the divine in man.⁵

Now, after considering "the offspring of sloth" more specifically and closely, we may also more fully appreciate some of Josef Pieper's larger insights about our secularized age and civilization:

Slothful sadness (*acedia*) is **one** of the determining characteristics of **the hidden profile** of our age....[Indeed,] This sloth, as a **visible mark** of secularization, determines the face of **every** age in which the call to tasks that are genuinely Christian begins to lose its official power to bind. *Acedia* is the **signature** of every age that **seeks**, in its despair, **to shake off the obligation of that true nobility** [elevation in grace] that is **conferred by Christianity**....

Is not the mere listing of "the offspring of sloth" ...a most striking confirmation of this diagnosis?....Does not the present era witness **the ripening of all these fruits of despairing sadness?** (59-60—my emphasis added)

4 The five conceptual Latin words to be found in Saint Thomas' assemblage (*Summa Theologiae*, Pars II-II q. 35, a.4 ad 3) are, respectively: *verbositas*, *curiositas*, *importunitas*, *inquietudo*, et *instabilitas loci vel propositi*.

5 See Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, Q. 2, A, 14 ad 8—in his disputed questions concerning evil.

Do we not also witness that second form of hopelessness: the facile, even glib, "delusion of presumption" (61), with "its perverse anticipation of [final] fulfillment" and with its own "inordinate trust in God's mercy" (69), as if we were now almost indefectible and there was no longer any sense of grave risk in our final attaining to eternal salvation? To this false sense of security, an unwarranted certainty, Josef Pieper offers, for our greater good, a polite but firm and sobering warning:

Presumption...is **the lesser**, and despair **the greater**, sin....In other words, the anticipation of fulfillment is not so contrary to man's real existential situation as is the anticipation of nonfulfillment. The underground **certainty** [and assured overconfidence] of presumption is **less contrary** to human nature than is despair.

Nevertheless, it remains true that presumption is a sin in the real and strict sense; in its most extreme [prideful] form, it is, indeed, a sin against the Holy Spirit.

The ultimate existential uncertainty [hence risk]—so long as we remain [as a *Homo Viator*, as a wayfarer in time] in the *status viatoris*—**is the ever-present possibility of voluntary defection**. (71-72—my emphasis added)

Before we go on to consider, finally, "the gift of fear" — especially filial and chaste fear, but also servile fear — as a guard against sinful presumption, we should also face — with Josef Pieper's indispensable help — the matter of sinful pride:

The root and origin of despair is the slothful sadness [*tristitia*] of *acedia*. But its "perfection" is **accompanied** by pride [*superbia*]. Theology has pointed out often enough the relationship between pride and despair. When an individual whose despair springs **initially** from "weakness" comes "to realize **why** he does **not** want to be himself [more fully to be elevated, so as better to exercise his set of gifts], **then** it changes **suddenly, and defiance steps in**" (Kierkegaard).

Pride is the **hidden conduit** that **links** the two diametrically opposed forms of hopelessness, **despair and presumption**. At the nadir of despair, the self-destructive and perverse **rejection of fulfillment** borders on the the most extreme form of **the not less destructive delusion of presumption**—the [effective] affirmation of nonfulfillment **as though it were** [already attained] **fulfillment**. (60-61—my emphasis added)

In this "*falsa similitudo*" (65) of an achieved final fulfillment — actually a "fraudulent imitation" and an objective self-deception — there is a sign of prideful "overconfidence" and of what Saint Augustine himself called a "*perversa securitas*, a self-deceptive reliance on a security that has no existence in reality." (67) For, Saint Thomas said that "hope presupposes not only magnanimity, but also humility. Saint Augustine [also] says in his *Commentary on the Psalms* [Psalm 118] that only to

the humble is it given to hope." (69-70) G.K. Chesterton understood that very well and, for our inspiration, he also so graciously lived it!

Before we conclude with some additional words from G.K. Chesterton's own posthumously published 1936 *Autobiography*, we shall make a few comments about the lesser known "gift of fear" as a humble and effective protection against complacency and tepid insouciance, and also against an all-too-prideful attitude of presumption.

The final chapter (Chapter 5) of Josef Pieper's book *On Hope* is entitled "The Gift of Fear" (77-88), and it is a fitting conclusion to his cumulatively fresh and profound understandings. For, he had already told us that:

The **uncertainty** of human existence cannot be totally removed. But it can be "overcome"—by hope, and only by hope. **The precariousness of ...creaturally existence is reflected in the fact that hope lives intimately with fear.** This union of hope and fear is **operative not only** in the natural sphere, **but also**—a concept that is full of mystery and is difficult to comprehend—in **the supernatural sphere.** Theological hope [an infused virtue] is essentially linked to the fear that is counted among the [seven] gifts of the Holy Spirit: the "fear of the Lord" ["*Timor Domini*"].

It is **this fear** that is **excluded** [or delusively bypassed!] **by the false certainty of presumptuous anticipation.** And **because presumption shuts our fear, it also shuts out the virtue of hope,** which [along with grace] is **based on the fact that fulfillment has "not yet" been accomplished and nonfulfillment has "not yet" been excluded....**

The very real **possibility** of sin is **not excluded** for "pilgrim man" ["Man the Wayfarer," "*Homo Viator*"] even on the highest level of the love of God; **a voluntary defection from God is always "wholly possible" ("*omnino possibilis*")** [S.T. II-II q. 19 a. 11] **for him as long as he has "not yet" attained the *status comprehensoris*** [after his risk-filled **adventure** and death]. (72-73, 85—my emphasis added)

After discussing the proper and reverent meaning of "Fear of the Lord" as a Gift — and some of its supplementary distinctions ("*timor filialis*," "*timor castus*," and "*timor servilis*") — Josef Pieper concludes with three short short, philosophically compact, paragraphs:

Fear of the Lord assures the genuineness of hope. It eliminates the danger that hope may be **turned into** its *falsa similitudo*, its false image: **into a presumptuous anticipation of fulfillment.** Fear of the Lord keeps ever before the mind of one who hopes **the fact** that that fulfillment [*Beatitudo, Vita Aeterna*] has **"not yet" been accomplished.** Fear of the Lord is the constant reminder that human existence, **although** destined for and oriented toward

fulfillment by the Highest Being, is, **nevertheless**, perpetually threatened in the *status viatoris* by the closeness of nothingness [as well as still "the possibility of voluntary defection"].... "**Holy fear guards the summit of hope.**"

In Holy Scripture (Psalm 115:11), the same thought is expressed in language at once simple and elegant: "**They who fear the Lord trust in the Lord.**" (88—my emphasis added)

Once again there enters the abiding and sustaining importance of **trust** (*fiducia*) and of the "*fiducia spei*": the intimate and deep trust characteristic of genuine hope. No counterfeits. No fakery.

CODA

Near the end of his posthumously published *Autobiography* (1936),⁶ which is so warmly marked throughout by the qualities of his magnanimity and humility — and with his sense of risk and high adventure — G.K. Chesterton makes an especially fresh and profound observation and personal disclosure:

I am not here [now] defending such doctrines as that of the Sacrament of Penance; anymore than the equally staggering doctrine of the Divine love for man. I am not writing a book of religious controversy....I am here engaged in the...degrading task of telling the story of my life; and have only to state what actually were the effects of [both] such doctrines on my own feelings and actions. And I am, by the nature of the task, especially concerned with **the fact that these [two] doctrines seem to me to link up my whole life from the beginning, as no other doctrines could do**; and especially to settle simultaneously the two problems of my childish happiness and my boyish brooding. **And they [these two doctrines] specially affected one idea**; which I hope it is not pompous to call **the chief idea of my life**; I will not say the doctrine I have always taught, but **the doctrine I should always have liked to teach. That is the idea of always taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted.** Thus **the Sacrament of Penance gives a new life**, and reconciles a man to all living, but it does not do it as the optimists and the hedonists and the heathen preachers of happiness do it. **The gift is given at a price, and is conditioned by a confession.** In other words, **the name of the price is Truth**, which may **also be called Reality**; **but it is facing the reality [the truth] about oneself....**

The thing that I was trying to say then [at the outset of my deeper religious quest] is the same thing that I am trying to say now; and even the deepest revolution of religion [*i.e.*, my 1922 conversion to the Catholic Faith] has only

6 G.K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography of G.K. Chesterton* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1936), 360 pages.

confirmed me in the desire to say it. **For indeed, I never saw the two sides of this single truth** ["the idea of always taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted"] stated **together** anywhere, **until** I happened to open the *Penny Catechism* and read the words, "***The two sins against Hope are presumption and despair.***" (341-342—my emphasis added)

In light of these humble and magnanimous words from the heart of G.K. Chesterton, Josef Pieper's own eloquently expressed insights, largely rooted in the admirable wisdom of Saint Thomas Aquinas, might also give us further discernment, as well as our added gratitude:

The proper ordering of natural hope is born, then, from **the interaction of magnanimity and humility.**

This explains **the fact** that these two **natural** virtues, **magnanimity and humility, are the most essential prerequisites for the preservation and unfolding of supernatural hope—insofar as this depends on man.** Together they represent **the most complete preparedness** of the natural man, whose existence is postulated [*i.e.*, presupposed] by grace.

One the other hand, **the culpable loss of supernatural hope has its roots in two principal sources: lack of magnanimity and lack of humility.**⁷

--Finis--

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⁷ Josef Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 30—my emphasis added.