

Dolent gaudentque. Sorrow in the Christian life

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I

Moral and pastoral theology is a subordinate but not subservient element of theological science. It is subordinate, first, because – like all the various inquiries which make up theology – it must look beyond itself for its principles, ontological and cognitive. Theology is an exercise of sanctified intelligence in relation to an extrinsic object (the high mystery of God in himself and everything in God), an object known as God shares with rational creatures his perfect knowledge of himself and all things. Moral and pastoral theology is subordinate, second, because its access to these extrinsic principles is generally through other elements of theology. Primarily, it is subordinate to exegesis, that is, to the contemplative construal of God's instruction of the redeemed through Holy Scripture; secondarily, it is subordinate to dogmatics as the conceptual reconstruction of expansion of this divine instruction.

The subordination of moral and pastoral theology to exegesis and dogmatics does not, however, exclude a measure of ordered reciprocity between dogmatic and moral-pastoral science. Dogmatics possesses a certain priority because of the directness of its engagement with the being of God and creatures which precedes investigation of creaturely practices. But there is instruction about the order of being which can only be acquired or displayed as we consider those practices which form the matter of moral and pastoral theology. No element of theological science can be pursued in isolation, apart from the company of the other elements. Moral and pastoral theology, applying itself to the study of human action as a movement whose cause, setting and end are the presence and works of the triune God, is in especially close company with dogmatics, the theological articulation of first principles. Yet dogmatics would risk missing its object if it did not leave itself open to see its object through the eyes of moral and pastoral science; neither is autonomous in respect of the other, but they stand in an ordered and mutually informative and corrective

relation of first and second. A double rule obtains, then, for moral and pastoral theology as it investigates creaturely practice. First: *operari sequitur esse*; second: *omne ... quod est per aliud reducitur ad id quod est per se*.¹ These movements of *following* and *reduction* draw attention to the order of being and causality; coming-to-know is much less tidy. The order of being need not be replicated in the order of knowing; but the order of knowing must not be projected onto the order of being.²

A theological description of sorrow among the human emotions will exemplify this ordered reciprocity of dogmatic-metaphysical and moral-pastoral intelligence. The need for the first is both acute and easily overlooked. Sorrow is vividly and destructively present in the lives of very many persons; but understanding and alleviating their distress requires the application (under the tutelage of divine revelation and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit) of speculative or theoretical powers in order to reach understanding of sorrow's nature and causes. For though we customarily expect a formidable array of such powers on the part of psychotherapists, we rarely require them of Christian pastors, and assume that dogmatic-metaphysical reflection provides scant assistance in the cure of souls and threatens to distract us from practice. Not so: gospel-governed dogmatics and metaphysics show us what, in God, the world and creatures are, why their sorrows arise, how they may be eased. Yet moral and pastoral theology is not merely concerned to reduce cases back to their antecedent principles, as if moral ontology constitutes the totality of ethics and the ministry of consolation. Making sense of creaturely sorrow certainly requires intelligent investigation of moral nature as it appears in the light of the church's confession of the gospel: this is the dogmatic-metaphysical element of ethical science. But moral nature is not apart from the enactment of moral history ('nature' is causally but not temporally prior to history, and only to be isolated *rationaliter*); understanding and guiding that enactment, and

¹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 3.6 resp.

² On the relation of metaphysical and practical concerns in moral theology, see T. Hibbs, *Aquinas, Ethics and Philosophy of Religion. Metaphysics and Practice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

directing it to that which constitutes its healing, is the chief concern of the practical science of moral and pastoral theology.

What follows reflects on sorrow in the lives of human creatures as they are brought into being, sustained, governed and redeemed by God in his outer works of creation, reconciliation and perfection. For guidance I have looked backwards:³ to Augustine's comments on the passions in the ninth and fourteenth books of *City of God*, but most of all to Aquinas's consideration of sorrow in the course of the remarkably extensive treatment of the passions of the soul in the *Prima Secundae*.⁴ The latter treatment is unequalled in the theological literature. There we find an assumption, untroubled by later curricular tensions, that dogmatic and moral theology constitute a single sequence. And we find other things: clear, penetrating understanding of the biblical and theological inheritance; unsentimental observation of human detail; a profoundly evangelical instinct which places both pleasure and pain within the movement by which ruined creatures are returned to fellowship with God.⁵

³ Recent philosophical writing on the emotions has found it necessary to undertake a good deal of historical work, retrieving ancient understandings of the passions (examples would include Richard Sorabji's Gifford lectures *Emotion and Peace of Mind. From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], or Simo Knuuttila's *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004]), or tracing their eclipse in modern culture (see Thomas Dixon's *From Passions to Emotions. The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003]). The philosophical histories lack theological nuance, however, and even in reading classical Christian texts they commonly abstract elements of philosophical psychology from their spiritual-doctrinal setting in talk of the being and action of God.

⁴ The treatise on the passions comprises twenty-seven questions, divided into one hundred and thirty-two articles. I prescind from Aquinas's earlier treatments of the passions in *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* III.15 and *De veritate* X.

⁵ In reading Aquinas, I have been guided by, inter alia, M. Jordan, 'Aquinas's Construction of a Moral Account of the Passions', *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 33 (1986), pp. 71-97; E. C. Sweeney, 'Reconstructing Desire: Aquinas, Hobbes, and Descartes on the Passions', in S. F. Brown, ed., *Meeting of the Minds. The Relations between Medieval and Classical Modern European Philosophy* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 215-233; P. King, 'Aquinas on the Passions', in S. MacDonald, E. Stump, ed., *Aquinas's Moral Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 101-132; K. White, 'The Passions of the Soul (I-II qq. 22-48)', in S. J. Pope, ed., *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2002), pp. 103-115; C. Leget, 'Martha Nussbaum and Thomas Aquinas on the Emotions', *Theological Studies* 64 (2003), pp. 558-581; S. Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 239-256; S. Pinckaers, 'Reappropriating Aquinas's Account of the Passions', in J. Berkman, C. S. Titus, ed., *The Pinckaers Reader. Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), pp. 273-287; D. F. Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions. A Religious-Ethical Inquiry* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009); R. Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions. A Study of Summa Theologiae I-II qq. 22-48* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); N. E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire. Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010); E. Stump, 'The Non-Aristotelian Character of Aquinas's Ethics: Aquinas on the Passions', *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011), pp. 29-43.

II

How may sorrow become an object of spiritual intelligence? How may we penetrate its keenly-felt but only half-understood presence to its deeper reality: its causes and effects, its place in the unfolding history of redemption, the remedies by which it may now be eased, its ultimate banishment by happiness in the holy city which comes down out of heaven from God?

Sorrow is opaque. In the realm of the fall, where emotions are commonly disordered and destructive, sorrow can so perturb us as to inhibit understanding, including understanding of itself. There is a kind of blankness which may accompany sorrow, by which intelligence is stultified. In its intemperate manifestations, sorrow may seem to its sufferers an absolute, irreducible reality, requiring and allowing for no explanation. Like acute bodily pain, sorrow 'can be so intense as to absorb all the soul's energies',⁶ leaving us no desire or willingness or intellectual resources to stand back and think about its nature, causes, effects and remedies. Such knowledge as we have of it is simply knowledge of the sheer fact of our hurt. The healing of distress requires understanding; but understanding is overcome by distress.

A condition, therefore, of coming to understand sorrow is the awakening of intelligence (as well as of the will and the desires) by the gospel. Deep, disordered emotion is vivid and wakeful; but in the midst of it, reason may slumber and must be roused. The awakening is at the same time an illumination, shedding abroad light in darkness, dispelling shadows, and a healing, restoring our proper creaturely powers of knowledge. This evangelical awakening, illumination and healing is what is meant by 'revelation'. Revelation is the outer work of divine charity in which, from the Father of lights, there comes down from above to distraught and ignorant creatures every good endowment and every perfect gift, including 'the word of truth' (Jas. 1.17f.). This 'word' is the word of divine instruction, present to us now in the testimonies of the prophets and apostles. If we are to know and govern the

⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-IIae 37.1 ad 3.

passions, Augustine tells us, we need a ‘careful and copious exposition of the doctrine of Scripture, the sum of Christian knowledge, regarding these passions. It subjects the mind itself to God, so that he may rule and aid it, and the passions, again, to the mind, to moderate and bridle them, and turn them to righteous uses’.⁷ We come to know our sorrow ultimately from divine revelation, proximately from *scriptura divina, qua christiana eruditio continentur*, attending to revelation and Scripture, moreover, is itself a settling of potentially chaotic emotion by subjecting intelligence to the cure of divine rule.⁸

Coming to understand sorrow depends upon coming to understand the entire reordering of creaturely life which the gospel announces: in Jesus Christ, supremely in his resurrection from the dead, God has set an end to sorrow, and in the Holy Spirit is now gathering creatures into happiness in fellowship with himself. There is a confidence proper to the Christian understanding of sorrow which flows from the authority, clarity and effectiveness of the gospel announcement. Because Jesus Christ is and is present and eloquent, sorrow is not beyond our understanding. Yet the gospel revelation, perfect in itself, has not yet reached its creaturely term. Certainly, ‘we have the prophetic word made sure’, and the apostle can legitimately exhort believers to ‘pay attention to this, as to a shining lamp’ (2 Pet. 1.19). But the lamp shines ‘in a dark place’; we await the dawning of the day and the rising of the morning star (2 Pet. 1.19). Revelation does not mean the cessation of learning but rather its engagement by a new and wholly adequate object. We ‘have’ the word; but what we have is not an item of knowledge instantly comprehended and requiring no further appropriation, but something commanding the constant exercise of attention, in prospect of God’s eschatological illumination of us. We come to

⁷ Augustine, *City of God* IX.5.

⁸ In the Christian tradition, reflection on sorrow has, of course, involved conversation with sources other than Holy Scripture; Aristotle and the Stoics, chiefly. That conversation is necessary, Christian faith having only a handful of native concepts, and many borrowings; and it is fruitful, for rational creatures cannot but bring to awareness some aspects of their creatureliness. But theology will be alert to elements which fit only awkwardly with the gospel or which do not fit at all; and even what it finds instructive (Stoic teaching about temperance, perhaps) will be placed in an overarching account of things in which what is annexed by the gospel will be extended, adapted and given a different role.

understand sorrow, accordingly, within the incomplete history of God's dealings with creatures, a history which is 'now day and yet night; night in comparison with the future day for which we yearn, day in comparison with the past which we have renounced'.⁹ In this age, Augustine continues, 'it is night until there shine forth day in the glorified advent of our Lord Jesus Christ ... There is therefore to come day after this night, meanwhile in this night a lantern is not lacking'. But 'even this light by comparison with a sort of ineffable day is called night. For the very life of believers by comparison with the life of unbelievers is day ...Night and day – day in comparison with unbelievers, night in comparison with the angels. For the angels have a day which we do not yet have'.¹⁰

Understanding of sorrow is given, acquired and exercised over time. This time is not random: it is a movement to an end. On the one hand, this counters the way in which great sorrow can make present pain seem an absolute moment, and so render us inert and unteachable (this is despair). On the other hand, it means that the knowledge of sorrow which revelation affords is pilgrim knowledge. It possesses its proper certainties: of our calling and the state into which that calling has introduced us; of the end to which we are being conducted by God; of the gifts which sustain us, including the gift of revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of the enlightening of our hearts to hope (Eph. 1.17f.). But it remains imperfect knowledge, an element of our movement towards 'the age which is to come' (Eph. 1.21). Certainty and imperfection are not dialectically balanced, such that we are poised precariously between stability and chaos. Certainty is our primary and principal state, imperfection simply the result of the fact that the reconciliation of intelligence to divine truth is not yet its full redemption. Even so, theological understanding of sorrow is not to be had in the absence of its exercise; and the gospel does not eliminate sorrow through understanding so much as instruct its hearers on when and how to sorrow, how to resist sorrow's aggravations, how to wait for our end.

⁹ Augustine, *Enn. in Pss.* LXXVII.4.

¹⁰ Augustine, *Enn. in Pss.* LXXVII.4.

III

Sorrow is one of the emotions or passions of the soul.¹¹ An emotion is not simply a subjective mood: sorrow, for instance, is more than merely ‘feeling miserable’, though it may engender the psychic state of dejection. Emotion has an object. It is a state and activity of a person in relation to circumstances, occurrences and agents other than the self. As such, it is an ‘undergoing’ or ‘suffering’: a movement of the inner self in response to being moved from outside, a reaction.

Martha Nussbaum speaks of emotion as an aspect of human vulnerability, that is, of the incompleteness which accompanies the fact that our human well-being involves our orientation to what escapes our control.¹² Call this, rather, an aspect of creatureliness. We do not have our being from ourselves or in ourselves, for we are contingent: absolutely upon God, whose love has given, and sustains us in, being; derivatively upon other creatures from whom we may not detach ourselves without damaging or destroying our well-being. The currently term of preference for this element of creatureliness is ‘being-in-relation’ or some variant of the same: unobjectionable enough, though often descriptively lush, and likely to be used in ways which solve too many problems too quickly and which threaten to confuse uncreated and created being. Aquinas’s more spare and powerful term is *coniunctio*.¹³ Unlike God who is *a se* and *in se*, human creatures have their being in conjunction, finding themselves by their very nature set alongside and engaged by other things. To this conjunction, human creatures respond by a movement which Aquinas calls ‘inclination arising from cognition, *inclinatio consequens*

¹¹ There is no obviously adequate word in English. ‘Passion’ has earlier usage behind it, and may remind the etymologically alert to the element of suffering (*passio*) in emotion; but in modern usage it tends to connote vehement emotional disturbance. ‘Affection’, similarly, underscores our being acted upon, and has especial resonances in the spiritual tradition of Puritanism, but its usefulness is restricted by the way it is commonly used for one particular emotion, namely fondness, often with a hint of sentimentality; as a consequence, it lacks the range required of a generic term. ‘Feeling’ is too malleable, covering both purely physical states and subjective moods. ‘Emotion’ is, therefore, probably as good as it gets, provided that use of the term does not invoke the nineteenth-century secular psychologies which made heavy use of the term.

¹² M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.2.1 resp.

apprehensionem.¹⁴ This is the movement of appetite, whether of attraction or repulsion, consequent upon perception of the state of conjunction in which we exist. The picture here – of being intelligently conjoined to objects which draw or repel – reinforces a conception of human nature as ‘open’: incomplete, not self-contained or fully resolved or at perfect rest. We are mobile, seeking out other realities in order to find out what may help us towards our good, and, in the course of that, recoiling from the evil which inhibits the fruition of our nature. This creaturely dynamic, in which we respond to our ‘conjoined’ state by cognition and appetite, is the motor of emotion, for the emotions are the various movements of attraction to and recoil from other things.

Emotion is intrinsic to human creatureliness, but it acquires a special character in the wake of the depredations of the fall. In our integral state, the ‘conjunctions’ in which human creatures exist invariably promoted our good, and so always generated pleasurable emotion. Eden’s innocence and the happiness enjoyed there were, in part, the absence of evil and of the consequent need to recoil; before the fall, there was no fear that being united to that which is other than ourselves might not lead to our good, and so there was no disinclination. After the fall, the situation and movement of conjunction remains; its absence would spell the end of the creaturely nature in which it is elemental. But intelligent participation in this state and movement makes us aware that our natural vulnerability may cause damage. Evil is present in the world, and so to ‘suffer’ the world – to enact ourselves as the incomplete, needy creatures that we are – is to risk sorrow.

There are three elements in sorrow: conjunction with evil; awareness of that conjunction; flight. First, the object of sorrow is some present evil; ‘it is union with an

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 35.1 resp. In this respect, Aquinas’s account is companionable with recent work on the cognitive character of emotions, such as R. de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987); J. Deigh, ‘Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions’, *Ethics* 104 (1994), pp. 824-854; .C. Solomon, *The Passions. Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997); P. Goldie, *The Emotions. A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); R. Roberts, *Emotions. An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

evil that is the cause, in the sense of the object, of pain or sorrow',¹⁵ the evil being judged evil precisely because 'it denies one some good'.¹⁶ This evil object is properly intrinsic – we sorrow over our own misfortune; but it may have an extrinsic object, as in sorrow over the misfortune of another, though even in such a case there must be an element of intrinsic sorrow if we are to be engaged by the other's situation (in this case, we call the 'intrinsic' element 'sympathy', in which another's sorrow is appropriated). Second, sorrow presupposes perception (*perceptio*¹⁷) of the present evil, a perception which is not simply bodily (the pain associated with ill-health) but interior (awareness of the loss of well-being). Third, sorrow is flight from the evil which threatens. Aquinas uses the idiom of the movements of approach (*accessus*) and withdrawal (*recessus*) of physical bodies to convey this psychic movement. 'Sorrow is a kind of flight or withdrawal, and pleasure a kind of pursuit or approach.'¹⁸ The generic term for the movement of recoil is pain, of which sorrow – 'internal' pain, the opposite of joy – is a species; 'pain', however, may also be used in a more restricted way to designate an evil which is repugnant to the body, that is, 'external' pain, the opposite of physical pleasure.

Emotion is depicted as a movement of aliveness in which creatures seek to fulfil their natures in relation to other realities. Because only certain sorts of unity or conjunction 'contribute to a thing's goodness',¹⁹ withdrawal (sorrow) is as essential to the fulfilment of our nature as approach (pleasure). '[A]pproach is, of itself, directed towards something in harmony with nature; withdrawal is, of itself, directed towards something discordant with nature.'²⁰ The distinction (*quod est conveniens ... quod est contrarium*) indicates that sorrow is part of the good order of creaturely life after

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* lallae 36.4 resp.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* lallae 35.1 resp.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* lallae 35.1 resp.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* lallae 36.1 resp.

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* lallae 36.3 ad 1.

²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* lallae 36.1 resp.

the fall, a way in which human nature is sustained and protected. Sorrow always has 'some element of good',²¹ not, of course, in the sense that sorrow is to be sought out as if it were pleasure, but in the sense that the sheer operation of repugnance for what harms us indicates the vitality of our nature, indeed, our opposition to death. 'Pain,' Augustine says, 'which some suppose to be in an especial manner an evil, whether it be in mind or in body, cannot exist except in good natures. For the very fact of resistance in any being leading to pain, involves a refusal not to be what it was, because it was something good.'²²

The principle to which Augustine and Aquinas draw our attention – that sorrow can only exist in good natures – is of immense metaphysical, moral and psychological importance. It indicates the fundamental asymmetry between good and evil. God is wholly good, and has made a good creation. Pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, are therefore not commensurable realities. The creature is not posed between them as between two principles; there is no fundamental ambivalence to creaturely being, for the basic movement of the creature is the movement of *life*, that is, animate movement towards the good. Reflecting on the question 'Is sorrow to be shunned more than pleasure is to be sought?', Aquinas announces the principle: '*Bonus est fortiori quam malum*, good is stronger than evil', and continues: 'pleasure is desirable because its object is good; and sorrow is a shunned because of its evil object. The desire for pleasure is therefore stronger than the aversion for sorrow'.²³ One reason Aquinas advances for this has to do with the supereminence of the good in creaturely being. Aquinas firmly rejects any idea of total evil: 'the cause of pleasure is something agreeable and good; the cause of pain or sorrow is something disagreeable and evil. Now it is possible to find something agreeable and good without anything at all discordant in it; but it is impossible to find anything totally evil and disagreeable, with nothing good in it at all. It is therefore possible for pleasure to

²¹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 39.4 ad 2.

²² Augustine, *De natura boni contra Manichaeos* XX.

²³ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 35.6 sed contra.

be completely perfect; but sorrow is always partial only.²⁴ Evil is not a mode of being but declension from being; 'to be' is 'to be good' (though not necessarily in a moral sense); and so sorrow is not on a plane with pleasure as an object of emotion. It is, rather, a negation which accompanies the affirmation of the good which is the dynamic of creaturely life. Such a description, however, functions at the level of theological metaphysics, not psychology. To speak of sorrow as a negation does not mean that it is illusion, or that it has no object, but that it is a real movement whose object is a privation. Privation can exercise great power.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of this for understanding sorrow, on a couple of counts. First, it prohibits the conclusion that sorrow is an indication that evil is a natural element of creaturely existence. Quite the opposite: sorrow, not evil, is natural, its operation being the way in which the good creature opposes evil as something supervenient, an intrusion into the good order of creation. Sorrow is thus bracketed on the one side by the state of integrity in which sorrow was not yet, and on the other by eschatological glorification in which sorrow will be no more (Rev. 21.3f.). This, in turn, points to something of moral-pastoral resonance: the prohibition of any tragic understanding of or resignation over sorrow. Both arrest the movement of creaturely life in the realm of reconciliation; both concede too much to present evil; both inhibit the proper operation of sorrow, whose purpose is to direct us to the goodness of God.

IV

In the present passage of human life in which we are being gathered back into fellowship with God, our emotions are caught up by the Spirit's regenerative work, but remain in some measure fragile and unstable. Though they are being educated to serve in the good conduct of our lives, they can still slip the leash, they are not always fitting to circumstances. Noting this feature of the infirmity of human life after the fall, Augustine considers that it signifies, not the natural viciousness of emotion

²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 35.6 resp.

but its imperfection: indeed, 'so long as we wear the infirmity of this life, we are rather worse than better if we have none of these emotions at all'.²⁵ Augustine does not commend impassibility, which not only deadens emotion but attempts to anticipate in our present life what can only be ours in the next: 'to be quite free of pain while we are in this place of misery is only purchased ... at the price of blunted sensibilities both of mind and body. And therefore that which the Greeks call ἀπαθεια, and which the Latins would call, if their language allowed them, "impassibilitas", if it be taken to mean an impassibility of spirit and not of body, or, in other words, a freedom from those emotions which are contrary to reason and disturb the mind, then it is obviously a good and most desirable quality, but it is not one which is attainable in this life ... When there shall be no sin in a man, then there shall be this ἀπαθεια.'²⁶ Given that emotions are intrinsic to life in the pilgrim state, what is important is not rooting them out but getting them right, suffering and exercising them as reconciled creatures who are returning to their creator and who are learning how to live well now in anticipation of the future: 'we must live a good life in order to obtain to a blessed life.'²⁷ Hence the rule: 'a good life has all these affections right, a bad life has them wrong'.²⁸ To measure ourselves against this rule and deal well with the emotions as we are conducted to God, we need to come to understand two things about ourselves: 'what manner of persons the citizens of the city of God must be in this pilgrimage, who live after the spirit, not after the flesh', and 'what manner of persons they shall be also in that immortality whither they are journeying'.²⁹ How might this govern our dealing with sorrow?

Sorrow is an especially striking instance of how sin disturbs the emotions which are basic to human nature, and so of the need to make the emotions a matter

²⁵ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

²⁶ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

²⁷ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

²⁸ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

²⁹ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

of rational reflection and governance, in order that right and disordered emotion can be distinguished and the emotions can serve rather than inhibit progress towards God.

Sorrow is not intrinsically morbid,³⁰ but regenerate persons must sorrow in the right way. There was no sorrow in paradise, because there were no objects of sorrow; but *post lapsum* sorrow can be a right affection, *affectio recta*.³¹ The proper functioning of sorrow, indeed, indicates that by virtue of divine grace human nature has survived the fall and its powers have not been entirely eradicated. Sorrow is flight from present evil which harms or threatens to harm us, and the flight signifies the enduring good order of human life. It is not flight in the sense of 'rout' (fearful running away as the only escape from what may overcome us), but in the sense of aversion, measured, well-judged turning from what opposes our good. Sorrow arises from a deep sense of and trust in the eminence of the good which is opposed: we are impelled to flight not only by repugnance for evil but by inclination to good.³² Moreover, the aversion of sorrow is itself an exercise of created power; it is not mere disarray, but action against what is *contra naturam*, and so a movement which affirms that nature by enacting it.

How is sorrow as *affectio recta* to be distinguished from its disordered counterpart? Sorrow is right affection when it is set in motion by and corresponds to rightly ordered love. 'Among ourselves ... the citizens of the holy city of God, who live according to God in the pilgrimage of this life, both fear and desire, and grieve and rejoice. And because their love is rightly placed, all these affections of theirs are

³⁰ Augustine criticizes the Stoics for not allowing that sorrow can exist in the mid of the wise person: *City of God* XIV.8. Aquinas, similarly, because he consider the emotions a constituent element of human agency and beatitude (on which see Pinckaers, 'Reappropriating Aquinas's Account of the Passions', 276f.), judges that *tristitia moderata* is a necessary condition for the rational creature's ascent to God. On this, see Miner's treatment of Aquinas on sorrow in *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, pp. 188-211. S. Loughlin is incorrect to argue that Aquinas simply wants to eliminate sorrow from the life of pilgrims: '*Tristitia et dolor*. Does Aquinas have a Robust Understanding of Depression?', *Nova et Vetera* 3 (2005), pp. 761-83; the opposite view of Sweeney, 'Reconstructing Desire' – that Aquinas does not commend rational governance of emotion – is surely exaggerated.

³¹ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

³² See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.36.1, 36.2.

right.³³ Further, when love is attached to proper objects, reason is able intelligently to moderate sorrow. ‘The emotions are not “diseases” [*morbi*] or “disturbances” of the soul [*perturbationes animae*], except precisely when they are not under rational control’;³⁴ ‘Emotion leads one towards sin in so far as it is uncontrolled by reason; but in so far as it is rationally controlled, it is part of the virtuous life.’³⁵ This *moderatio rationis* ought not to be considered mere suppression of emotion to avoid perturbation and retain equanimity; it is, rather, discrimination of occasions and modes of sorrow, and direction of its exercise.

Sorrow is right affection when it is ‘sorrow for evil’,³⁶ propelled into motion by objects which are abhorrent and from which we must take flight. Believers groan inwardly as in present circumstances of bondage they wait for the coming fulfilment of their filial relation to God (Rom. 8.23); they suffer the ‘godly grief’ which ‘produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret’ (2 Cor. 7.10); they weep with those who weep (Rom. 12.15). These various modes of sorrow – distress at the delay of the fulfilment of our nature in perfect fellowship with God, remorse over wrongdoing, pity for another’s misfortune – are indications that created nature is being realised in proper odium towards evil, whether inside us or in some external object.

Sorrow goes wrong when in some way it breaks free from well-ordered love and governance by truthful apprehension of our nature and calling and our regenerate condition. Sorrow gets caught up in the war between the law of the mind and the law of sin; it no longer consents to and delights in the given shape (‘law’) of the inmost self which faithful reason apprehends, but is captive by ‘another law’

³³ Augustine, *City of God* XIV.9.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.24.2 resp.

³⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.24.2 ad 2.

³⁶ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.39.1 sed contra.

(Rom. 7.23). As with all the emotions, so with sorrow: *malum insideat*. What forms does this threat take?

Consider the ‘godly grief’ of repentance, being ‘displeased over sinning’ (*displicere quod peccavit*).³⁷ Penitential sorrow is godly grief when it ‘leads to salvation and brings no regret’ (2 Cor. 7.10) – we might say it is *productive*, both an aversion from past sin and intention for amendment of life. ‘See what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment!’ (2 Cor. 7.10) To undergo such godly grief is to suffer no loss (2 Cor. 7.9). Worldly grief, by contrast, is no such movement of aversion from evil and towards the promised good; all it produces is ‘death’ (2 Cor. 7.10). Unlike the godly sorrow whose underlying principle is our being conducted to perfect life, worldly grief inhibits progress. It is a kind of collapse, ‘the desertion of better things’.³⁸

Worldly grief is a mode of ‘aggravated sorrow’ (*tristitia aggravans*)³⁹ or *acedia*;⁴⁰ the term has been applied to a range of affective phenomena, but is best understood as referring to ‘sorrow over spiritual good, *tristitia de spirituali bono*’.⁴¹ It is bound up with false judgements: that spiritual goods do not exist, or are not promised, or, for certain persons at least, are impossible to obtain, or even that they are in reality evil. But the root of aggravated sorrow is the unchecked dominion of the flesh, and refusal of or disbelief in the superabundance of regeneration. Sorrow of this order is aversion to God and good, consent to ‘the horror, the loathing of the divine good due to the flesh’s victory over the spirit’.⁴² Much might be said of the

³⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* IIIa.84.8 resp.

³⁸ Augustine, *De natura boni contra Manichaeos* XX.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-IIa.35.1 resp.

⁴⁰ See R.K. De Young, ‘Resistance to the Demands of Love: Aquinas on the Vice of *Acedia*’, *The Thomist* 68 (2004), pp. 173-204.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-IIa.35.2 resp.

⁴² Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-IIa.35.3 resp.

pathology of aggravated sorrow. We are immobilised by it: because it is an aversion to good, it inhibits the flight from evil which is integral to the movement of life.⁴³ One overcome by *acedia* 'wants to do nothing', is 'dragged away from good work',⁴⁴ active concurrence to the propelling energy of divine vocation fails. And this is accompanied by resentment, a sullen frame, listlessness, apathy, shunning of fellowship with God, disgust at spiritual things: all symptoms of 'ceasing to expect a personal share in the divine goodness'.⁴⁵ In short: sorrow of this kind 'kills the spiritual life'.⁴⁶

V

Aggravated sorrow is an onslaught on happiness; but Christian faith finds its remedy in the gospel, which quickens the movement of creaturely life. The healing and the proper direction and use of the emotions follow from the gospel's instruction. Emotional restoration requires cognitive advance, that is, coming to truthful apprehension of our nature and state before God. Disordered sorrow is set right by immersion in the gospel's pedagogy, through which we come to know what we must be in this pilgrim state, and what we will be in immortality. We have earlier intimated what kind of knowledge this is: knowledge awakened by divine revelation, acquired over time, imperfect yet of sufficient certainty. What is its content?

The gospel instructs us about sorrow by turning (sometimes dragging) our attention to the alteration of all things which has been effected by the redemptive work of the Son of God and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah says of the *vir dolorum* that *dolores nostros ipse portavit*. In willing consent to the Father's determination and appointment, the eternal Son takes upon himself the office and work of the man of sorrows, appropriating the evils which afflict

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 35.8 resp.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II 35.1 resp.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II 20.3 resp.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II 35.3 resp.

us and with which we afflict ourselves, making them his own and suffering them in the way which is proper to his free majesty. In becoming like us, he acquaints himself with our sorrows and their grief, he bears the pain which they inflict; and all this at the Lord's pleasure, in fulfilment of the divine resolve to bless creatures and cause them to prosper. Because his bearing of sorrow has this end, it is not to be considered merely the removal of an oppressive weight from us onto him, his relieving us of a burden by shouldering it himself. There is more here than an exchange of suffering subject: he appropriates our sorrows in order to eliminate them; he carries them in order to carry them *away*. And because this is so, he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

By virtue of the saving mission of the Son of God, the faithful have been set in the domain of consolation, their lives taking place in the new created reality whose ground is the abundance of God's charity in its character as solace and comfort. The principle of this reality is the divine nature. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the 'God of all comfort' (2 Cor. 1.13), made known in the cross and resurrection of Christ (2 Cor. 1.10), and presently active as God 'comforts us in all our affliction' (2 Cor. 1.4). His past deliverance of the saints is the ground for hope that 'he will deliver us' (2 Cor. 1.10). Further, the domain of consolation sustains a community of mutual comfort: God comforts us 'so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God' (2 Cor. 1.4).

The gospel announces the good of our consolation, and instructs us how to repose in that good, there to find pleasure and happiness. Yet we do not delight in that good by instinct; we must come to see that it is, indeed, congenial, *conveniens*.⁴⁷ Muddled loves and hatreds, erratic movements of attraction and recoil, must be converted to the good in which our happiness lies. Such conversion, wholly beyond our damaged capacities, is effected by the second saving mission of

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.38.1 resp.

God, in which the Spirit so moves upon and in us as to bestow the new nature, reintegrate us into the domain of divine consolation and complete the healing of sorrow. The work of the Spirit is *physical*, the bringing about of a new nature. The Spirit, that is, does not merely propose realities to the minds and wills of creatures as material upon which they are to go to work: that would not be regeneration but merely the provoking of creaturely self-formation. The Spirit reconstitutes the mind and will from within, so that they become capable of embracing and living gospel consolation. Knowledge of and desire for this consolation generate a life-movement in which aggravated sorrow is overcome by a combination of tranquillity and resistance: tranquillity, because such is the divine solace that serene confidence in our situation is proper; resistance, because divine solace enables movement against continuing affliction. In the realm of regeneration as in that of nature, the Spirit works graciously and sovereignly, but benevolently, as the extension of divine charity, and therefore not simply extrinsically. As Lord he is life-giver, communicating the new nature and quickening it into activity. The Spirit does not simply manifest comfort as an external reality of which we are onlookers in the midst of sorrow; we *are* in the domain of consolation, and that consolation is not only a condition but a form of life.

Animating this form of life is contemplation of the God of all comfort. Living well in the domain of consolation and embracing happiness requires *cogitatio perseverans*: 'the more we think about spiritual goods the more delightful they become to us'.⁴⁸ Sorrow is assuaged and rightly ordered by contemplating God and his goodness which embraces us and gives us a share in his benefits. Contemplation of this kind is difficult when we are overtaken by sorrow, for 'contemplation requires complete repose', and sorrow 'can be so intense as to absorb all the soul's energies and make it impossible to learn anything new'.⁴⁹ Moreover, in the wake of the fall our capacity for contemplation is impaired, and

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 35.1 ad 3.

⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 37.1 resp.

renewing its exercise requires that the Spirit kindle in us love of wisdom.⁵⁰ But the domain of consolation is also the domain of the awakening and illuminating power of the Spirit.

Contemplation of God's goodness enables reason to govern emotion. This governance is not self-governance, but perception of the good of divine governance. Reason governs as it defers to and repeats the divine rule. And so, once again, what matters is taking up our place in the realm of the divine pedagogy. Living in that realm, we are to be eager in seeking out the gospel's teaching which 'subjects the mind itself to God, that he may rule and aid it, and the passions ... to the mind, to moderate and bridle them, and turn them to righteous uses.'⁵¹

The creaturely subject of divine consolation, instruction and governance is the person in the church, whose common life is both the setting for and an instrument of the distribution of God's comfort. *Non unus homo est, sed unum corpus est.*⁵² 'Let all ... who have "tasted" the sweetness of the "Lord", and who own in Christ that for which they have a relish, think that they are not the only ones; but that there are such seeds scattered throughout the "field" of the Lord, this whole earth; that there is a certain Christian unity...'⁵³ Aggravated sorrow isolates, so compounding grief; the companionship of believers assuages sorrow by love, and moves us to seek out and take pleasure in the divine solace. More especially, the common life of believers can be an instrument of cognitive and emotional advance. Disordered sorrow is exacerbated by existing in hurtful emotional regimes or cultures which block apprehension of spiritual goods, and so stimulate or reinforce the misperception and misperformance of our nature. Fitting emotions are learned in part by participation in the community of the saints which has been taught *how* to rejoice, *how* to weep; and

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II.28.4 resp.

⁵¹ Augustine, *City of God* IX.5. On 'righteous uses' of sorrow, see P.J. Griffiths, 'Tears and Weeping: An Augustinian View', *Faith and Philosophy* 28 (2011), pp. 19-28.

⁵² Augustine, *Enn. In Pss.* XLII.1.

⁵³ Augustine, *Enn. In Pss.* XLII.1.

such participation also enables discernment of fitting occasions for emotions: *when* to rejoice, *when* to weep. Further, sorrow may find fitting expression in the common life of the saints. Private, unexpressed sorrow causes secret damage, and may come to destructive expression as inarticulate, uncommunicative rage which further isolates the one who sorrows. Taking part in the common life, one can learn to express sorrow in a way which is not simply an isolating cry of pain but an act of *communication*, part of life in conjunction with others who have spiritual goods in common, and in conjunction with God who is present and attentive. The expression of sorrow is then no longer a howl of anguish but a *lament*, directed not to a void but to God and the company gathered around God, and, because so directed, already holding out the prospect of some refreshment and ease. 'Hurtful things hurt still more if they are pent up within us, for the soul is then more concentrated upon them; but if they are released, the soul's energies are turned to things outside itself and interior pain is lessened. This is why sorrow is assuaged by outwardly expressing it in tears or sobs or even words.'⁵⁴

Last: the soul which sorrows is embodied, and *remedia corporalia* are not to be despised. Take a bath, get some sleep, Aquinas counsels, for they afford pleasure, restore the body's vital motions, and so impede and relieve the smarting of the soul.⁵⁵

VI

The Christian gospel is instruction in human happiness, vouchsafed to us by revelation and reconciliation: by revelation, because it is first spoken to us not by a fellow creature but by God through the mouth of Christ; by reconciliation, because only as wickedness, pride and resentment are pardoned and friendship with God is renewed can we attend to the divine word concerning our restoration to happiness. Included in the restoration is the repair of the emotions, and of sorrow among the

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 38.3 resp.

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II 38.5.

emotions. Restored to fellowship with God, we are summoned, not to the eradication of sorrow but to its disciplined, well-instructed cultivation and enactment in accordance with our new nature, and within the setting of the history of the redemption of the saints. Even in our restored condition, the penal consequences of the fall linger, one of which is the sheer hard work which an emotion like sorrow requires of us. Yet the one who has borne our sorrows once for all continues to bear them, and will do so until we attain the final happiness for which God destines us, when mourning, crying and pain shall be no more because the former things will have passed away.