

but he turned away from salvation through his prideful free will.

At the end of Stevenson's novel, we find Dr. Jekyll uttering the lament of all worldly men: "It was the curse of mankind... that in the agonized womb of consciousness, these polar twins [of good and evil] should be continuously struggling. How, then, were they dissociated?" This frustration with imperfection, and the quest for human beatitude, has haunted man for millennia. But however one chooses to concoct the *elixir vitae*, the outcome

is always the same — the dream morphs into a nightmare. By contrast, the realist is humble in the face of weakness. Even the noble pagans, like Socrates and Epictetus, understood that adversity was inescapable, and so were determined to turn patient suffering to their spiritual advantage. In *The Imitation of Christ* Thomas à Kempis says that goodness without struggle is no virtue. The paradox, brought vividly to life by these three Victorian fantasies, is that men very often commit evil in an attempt to avoid it. ■

TRANSGRESSIONS PERSONAL & SOCIAL

THOMAS STORCK

FOUR SINS THAT CRY TO HEAVEN

In Catholic tradition, sins are classified and arranged in many ways. All Catholics are familiar, or at least ought to be, with the division of sins into mortal and venial, the former being sins involving grave matter which, when committed with full knowledge and consent, break our friendship with God and put us on the road to Hell. Then there is original and actual sin, and of course the seven deadly sins, which are the roots from which all other sins come. The four sins we will examine here, however, compose a unique list, taken from certain passages of Holy Scripture, and preserved in the Church's "catechetical tradition" (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1867). Although they are not necessarily the worst of all possible sins, they are sins that are singled out in Holy Scripture as crying out to God in a unique way.

What sins are we talking about? Willful murder,

unnatural sexual acts (sodomy), oppression of the poor (typically expressed as widows and orphans), and defrauding the laborer of his wages. These are the four sins that "cry to Heaven for vengeance," and together they elucidate a good deal of Catholic morality, both personal and social.

The first of the four sins that cry to Heaven, willful murder, finds its origin in the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain. Cain was jealous that Abel's offering was acceptable to God while his own was not. After luring his brother into the fields, Cain suddenly rose up against him and killed him, and then he lied to God about what he had done. But God said, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (Gen. 4:10-12).

There is something especially heinous about a voluntary or premeditated murder. You are taking someone's life, all his hopes and desires, his very self in a way. Perhaps the person was the chief support of his wife and children, and possibly others. In any case, there are doubtless those who will grieve for his loss. Perhaps the person you killed was not in a state of grace. In that case, you have helped send him to Hell and thus mur-

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dered him twice — once in his body, the other in his soul. Furthermore, any occurrence of murder tends to weaken and can even destroy human society: We become more fearful of others and mutual trust is lessened; people become afraid to venture outside their homes after dark or to welcome strangers.

In speaking of murder we must not think only of individual acts of violence; we must remember the different kinds of mass murders whose evil character is often disguised with euphemistic rhetoric. The largest number of people murdered are the unborn babies, who are killed in huge numbers throughout the world. Because these victims are unseen they are forgotten by many, but God does not forget the violence inflicted on them. Nor may we forget collective acts of murder, such as the killing of whole populations by communist and Nazi regimes, or civilians killed in mass bombings during wars, including by our own armed forces.

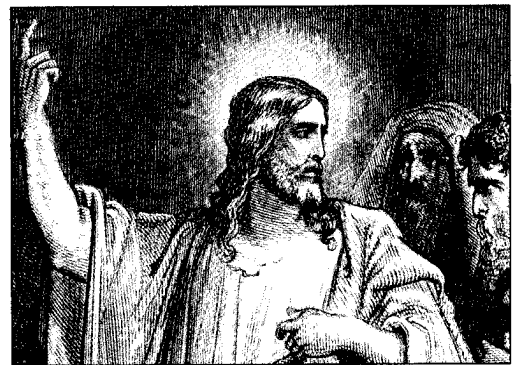
Not many Catholics are aware of the covenant God made with Noah after the flood, as recorded in Genesis 9. Unlike the covenant with Abraham, which established the Jewish people, the covenant with Noah applies to all nations. Genesis 9:6 reads, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image." The *Catechism* (no. 58) says, "The covenant with Noah remains in force during the times of the Gentiles, until the universal proclamation of the Gospel," that is, the "covenant with Noah. . . will remain in force as long as the world lasts" (no. 71). This does not mean that the death penalty for murder is obligatory for human societies — God spared even Cain's life — but it does mean that capital punishment for willful murder is not an essential injustice. We are free to substitute the mercy of the Gospel for justice (cf. *Catechism*, no. 2267), but we should never forget that voluntary murder is a detestable act, which of itself merits the punishment of death.

The second sin that cries to Heaven is found in the well-known story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the two cities destroyed on account of the sin of sodomy (cf. Gen. 18:16-19:29). When the angels are preparing to visit the cities, God tells Abraham, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me." The sin of Sodom was the greater in that it seems to have consisted not only of homosexual acts among consenting individuals, but the desire to rape others, for example, Lot's guests, who were in reality angels in disguise.

The essential evil of homosexual acts consists in the turning of something away from its natural end — that is what *perversion* means. In the matter of human sexuality we are dealing with something that is both intimate to the human person and vital for human life and society. It does not matter what the cause of the homosexual condition is, whether due to early social or familial disturbances (as seems most likely) or even if due to developmental malformations before birth. Homosexual acts are always wrong because they are a perversion of a natural human function. It is true, as St. Thomas Aquinas pointed out, that in a sense *all* sin is unnatural, because committing evil does not accord with human nature. But we generally call those sins unnatural which offend against the nature we share with other animals — that is, our bodily structure and being. Some currents of thought in the modern world, even among Catholics, tend to look upon man as merely a spiritual creature. But that is not the case. God created us with bodies and pronounced that creation good. Neither matter nor our bodies are evil, and our natural bodily desires are not evil. They are, however, blind, and thus need to be controlled by our intellects. Just as the body is good, its acts, when rightly performed, are also good. Thus, the rightness of our bodily acts, when used according to the moral law, is at the root of the sense of disgust that men throughout history have felt toward homosexual acts. This sense of disgust is healthy; indeed, it should go further to include the misuse of heterosexual acts, such as contraceptive sex and heterosexual sodomy.

The fact that we rightly feel disgust toward such

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acts does not mean that we ought to cultivate a sense of disgust toward those afflicted with homosexual inclinations, or toward those who willingly indulge them. The *Catechism* says of persons with homosexual proclivities, "They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (no. 2358). It is important to note the word *unjust*. We are *not* forbidden to discriminate in every case. For example, it would not be unjust to forbid homosexuals to adopt children; and it goes without saying that so-called same-sex marriage is a nullity as regards the natural law and therefore has no legitimate place among human laws. The word *discrimination* itself, because of the practice of racial discrimination, has assumed pejorative connotations, but to discriminate merely means to make distinctions among people and things based on their qualities, something we do every day. We discriminate when we choose the best athletes for sports teams and when we punish criminals. These are both examples of just and reasonable discrimination. But were we to choose athletes on the basis of something unrelated to their abilities — for example, their skin color — that would be unjust discrimination. We need not shy away from discriminating, only from discriminating in an unjust or unreasonable way.

Next we turn to a kind of sin that does not get much attention today. It is true that sexual sins are hardly noticed by those who are not Christians, but this next category of sin is hardly noticed even by Christians. This is the category of sin involving offenses against justice, particularly in the economic arena. The third of the four sins is sometimes expressed as "grinding the faces of the poor," that is, oppressing the poor. It is based on two Old Testament texts, one from Exodus and the other from Sirach (Ecclesiasticus):

- "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. . . . If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's garment in pledge you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down. . . . And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate" (Exod. 22:21-27).

- "He [God] will not ignore the supplication of the fatherless, nor the widow when she pours out her story. . . . And the Lord will not delay, neither will he be patient with them. . . till he repays man according to his

deeds, and the works of men according to their devices. . ." (Sir. 35:14-19).

In a general way, these texts prohibit exploitation of those unable to help themselves, especially orphans, widows, and foreigners. What would examples of such exploitation be today? Defrauding widows or orphans of their inheritance would be an obvious example. So would treating foreigners unjustly in employment situations, knowing that if they are illegal residents they would fear bringing a complaint to the authorities. Regardless of what one thinks of immigration, legal or illegal, any employer who profits from the availability of illegal workers is required to treat his employees with justice, as regards both pay and working conditions.

Of particular note is the prohibition in Exodus of loaning money at interest. For centuries the Church strongly prohibited charging interest on a loan simply because a loan was made. Although this teaching remains valid today and always, what theologians for centuries have called "extrinsic titles" to interest justify a moderate rate of interest. These extrinsic titles are based on the fact that if one gives up a sum of money because of a loan, he is deprived of an opportunity to profit from other kinds of business transactions, or he might suffer a loss because he cannot get access to the money he has lent out. But such extrinsic titles do not justify simply any rate of interest. They limit one roughly to the amount he could otherwise obtain through some legitimate business deal. Anything more than that is unjust and demands restitution of the excessive amount taken.

The last of our four sins lies also in the realm of economic injustice. It is condemned by St. James in his epistle in the New Testament: "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (5:4). Like the condemnation of lending money at interest, this prohibition also has a rich history in the Church's teaching. Failure to pay wages owed is a kind of theft and especially unjust to those who live from paycheck to paycheck.

But ever since Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Re-rum Novarum*, this moral doctrine has been given an added twist. One might think that all an employer is bound to here is to pay the amount contracted for, but this is not the case. Consider how Pope Leo presents the matter, first raising the objection that will occur to most of us: "Wages, we are told, are fixed by free consent; and, therefore, the employer when he pays what was agreed upon, has done his part, and is not called upon for any-

thing further. The only way, it is said, in which injustice could happen, would be if the master refused to pay the whole of the wages, or the workman would not complete the work undertaken; when this happens the State should intervene, to see that each obtains his own, but not under any other circumstances.”

But Leo has a ready answer to this:

This mode of reasoning is by no means convincing to a fair-minded man, for there are important considerations which it leaves out of view altogether. To labor is to exert one's self for the sake of procuring what is necessary for the purposes of life, and most of all for self-preservation.... Therefore, a man's labor has two notes or characters. First of all, it is *personal*.... Secondly, a man's labor is *necessary*; for without the results of labor a man cannot live; and self-conservation is a law of nature, which it is wrong to disobey. Now, if we were to consider labor merely so far as it is *personal*, doubtless it would be within the workman's right to accept any rate of wages whatever.... But this is a mere abstract supposition; the labor of the working man is not only his personal attribute, but it is *necessary*; and this makes all the difference. The preservation of life is the bounden duty of each and all, and to fail therein is a crime. It follows that each one has a right to procure what is required in order to live; and the poor can procure it in no other way than by work and wages.

Therefore, Pope Leo continues, when a worker is forced to accept wages that are too low “because an employer or contractor will give him no better, he is the victim of force and injustice.”

Both Leo, in the very next paragraph of the encyclical, and his successors make clear that the support of the worker means support of his wife and children as well, and that this support does not mean a mere minimum, but must include the possibility of the worker being able to save and better himself financially. This teaching is entirely reasonable: If a man's wages are fixed too low to support himself or his family by his day's work, what is he supposed to do? Work all night too? Send his wife and children to work? Thus, the scope of this sin is not limited to a refusal to pay workers what is legally due to them, that is, the wage that was contracted for or agreed upon. Rather, it looks to the demands of the law of God, not just those of men.

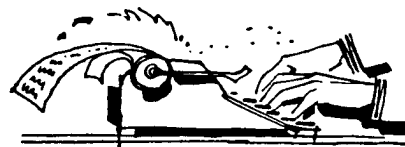
Does this mean then that all employers, regardless

of any and all circumstances, must raise wages immediately to what would be well above the minimum wage in the U.S.? Not necessarily. The popes are well aware that the economic system of free-market capitalism makes it difficult for those employers who desire to pay just wages to do so. So while some employers do have the capacity, and thus the duty, to raise wages immediately, for others this would be impossible because the business could not continue to operate in a competitive market. But what is required of all employers, universally and immediately, is that they work for whatever reforms would allow each and every worker to receive a just wage. Further instructions for achieving this can be found in the social doctrine of the Church, especially in Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which deals with the topic of reconstructing the entire social order to conform it to the teaching of the Gospel.

The Church's social doctrine is not a set of vague ideals. It contains specific goals we must work to achieve, and in some cases specific means for achieving them. Not all the means are prescribed in advance, of course, but

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Catholics are not free to accept just any economic theory or any means of achieving economic justice. We must become aware of the whole of the Church's social teaching and work to shape both our own lives and the life of society according to its precepts.

The oppressed and exploited have always known that they have no one to cry to except God, and that God will hear them. The Church's tradition of the four sins that cry to Heaven for vengeance makes this clear. Even though someone might escape punishment for sin in this world, eventually his sins will catch up with him. As the epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament says, "It is appointed to man once to die, and after that the judg-

ment" (9:27). We must all someday stand before Jesus Christ, the just judge. Only our sins and our lack of repentance can keep us out of Heaven.

The sins that cry to Heaven are powerful reminders that God does hear the prayers of the poor and is not oblivious to our sins, even if those sins are little noted by the world or even by many Christians. The purpose of this life is to attain the life to come, and if we let the riches, pleasures, or honors of this world defraud us of eternal life, we are fools. We must therefore guard against sin and occasions of sin. As God told Cain just before he murdered his brother, "Sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7). ■

QUEST COLUMN

CATHOLIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN OF SAME-SEX COUPLES?

One day after he rescinded the school admission of a boy being raised by two lesbians, Fr. James Rafferty heard from the Associated Press. The women had called the AP claiming discrimination. Forty-eight hours later, television satellite trucks and news crews converged on St. Paul's Church and Elementary School. Helicopters circled the small town square in Hingham, Massachusetts.

Global publicity enveloped the Archdiocese of Boston, the pastor, and the beleaguered parish, whose parishioners Fr. Rafferty had ministered to for sixteen years as the sex-abuse scandal unraveled, exposing the guilt of four of its former priests, including the infamous John J. Geoghan, who in 2003 was murdered in prison.

The "gay-parent" controversy that hit in May stemmed in part from the particular individuals involved. The women were less than truthful, and key archdiocesan

players castigated the pastor in the press days before Sean Cardinal O'Malley finally rose to his defense. Still, the general factors at play here will continue to challenge other Catholic schools. Should they admit children being raised by practicing homosexuals? As it stands, some do and some don't.

In any case, it would seem reasonable that at least the following four issues should be considered: Church teaching on homosexuality, a school's mission as defined by the Magisterium, the role of parents as partners in faith, and the consequences of accepting same-sex couples as part of the school community.

Apparently, none of these issues was raised publicly by Boston archdiocesan spokesmen during the first week Fr. Rafferty was pilloried in the media — and sadly by many Catholics — as "punishing the child for having gay parents."

The women, to whom the AP granted anonymity, told the press they had been forthcoming about their relationship, having written both names as "parents" on the application form when the boy was accepted for third grade in the upcoming 2010-2011 school year.

Actually, they had written the mother's full name and under "father," and listed the other woman's last name and first initial only, according to numerous reliable sources who asked to remain anonymous because Fr. Rafferty, who adamantly guarded the women's privacy for the child's sake, chose not to speak publicly about it.

The mother reportedly said that she was not Catholic, but her lesbian partner, whom she referred to as her "husband," was a fallen-away Catholic. When the pastor scheduled a parental meeting, a normal practice at the small school, he hoped that his offer of spiritual guidance could help them.