





**THE PARTICULAR EXAMINATION**  
**OF**  
**CONSCIENCE**  
**AND**  
**THE DOMINANT DEFECT**



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**T**his work has three parts. In the first, we present the nature and method by which to carry out the particular examination of conscience, which is truly the motor of the spiritual life; in the second, we discuss the dominant defect, which, in many cases, will be the matter proper to the particular examination of conscience. Finally, in the third section, we give some general ideas about the temperaments, the knowledge of which makes it easier to adequately seize hold of one's dominant passion.



# 1.

## The particular examination of conscience

The classics of Christian spirituality, beginning from the desert monks in the first centuries of our era, but especially starting from Ignatius of Loyola in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, have considered daily work on one well-established point in our spiritual or emotional life to be the most outstanding way to educate the will, that is, to acquire virtues, to uproot vices, and to correct defects.

### 1) Importance

I think that this is the *most useful* way a person can combat not only common defects, but also deeply rooted vices and even problems of addiction (provided that, in this case, it is done *in conjunction* with the necessary or appropriate therapies).

It seems to me that this method, which is at once simple but demanding, is most fitting for the one who wants to progress in

the spiritual life. Moreover, it is absolutely indispensable for anyone who wants to resolve emotional conflicts. Each spiritual director—just like each therapist—is free to choose his own methods, and perhaps many of them do not like this one (“to each his own,” as the saying goes). Respecting the freedom of each one to choose for himself, I propose this instrument which has already given abundant spiritual and psychological results throughout the centuries.<sup>1</sup> Saint Ignatius himself, its great organizer and promoter, carefully practiced it. As Fr. Laínez reported to Fr. Polanco: Ignatius took “so much care of his conscience that each day he compared week with week, month with month, day with day, seeking daily to advance.”<sup>2</sup> Fr. Narciso Irala cites “Dr. Schleich, a Protestant, professor of the Faculty of Medicine at Berlin, [who] asserts even more. ‘I say with all assurance and conviction that with these norms and exercises in our hands we could even today transform our asylums, prisons, and mental institutions, and prevent the commitment of two thirds of the people who are today within their walls.’”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XII wrote to priests: “Let him also not omit his daily examination of conscience which is undoubtedly the most efficacious means we have for taking account of the conduct of our spiritual life during the day, for removing the obstacles which hinder or retard one’s progress in virtue, and finally, for determining on the most suitable means to assure to our sacred ministry greater fruitfulness and to implore from the Heavenly Father indulgence upon so many of our deeds wretchedly done” (Pius XII, *Menti Nostrae*, 52).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. López Tejada, D., *Los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio de Loyola*, Comentario y textos afines, Madrid (2002), 191. Translation from W. W. Messner, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 305.

<sup>3</sup> Irala, *Achieving Peace of Heart* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1954), 154.

This method is at once the measure of one's will and productive of the will, "this is truly a control and stimulus to the will."<sup>4</sup> By this he means that it focuses a person's attention and energies on one precise point, which increases the will's capacity to perform acts that will culminate in the achievement of the desired goals.

It is a shame that so few people resort to this method, which is truly a walking stick for the journey in the formation of the will, for the effective uprooting of defects, and for growth in virtue. It's a still greater shame that this is the sad reality that we observe in so many lay Catholics, men and women in religious life, and priests who, all the while knowing and being fully aware of its importance and necessity, nonetheless disregard it, perform it with amazing indifference, and even abandon it entirely – then they are surprised when they continue dragging their vices and defects with them or, even more simply, that their spiritual life is at a standstill!<sup>5</sup>

This is to be attributed to several factors: in part it is a result of the general abandonment of the spiritual life, both on the part of the faithful as well as the pastors. Likewise, it is owed in part to

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<sup>4</sup> Irala, *Achieving Peace of Heart*, 154.

<sup>5</sup> Royo Marín writes: "There is no doubt that the faithful practice of examination of conscience will have profound effects on one's spiritual life. But in this, as in so many things, its efficacy depends to a great extent on perseverance. To omit the examination frequently or to make it in a purely mechanical fashion is to render it absolutely sterile. The soul that earnestly desires to become holy must be convinced that many of the other means of sanctification are frustrated if one does not make the daily examination of conscience" (Royo Marín, Antonio, *The Theology of Christian Perfection* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1962), 570).

the prejudice against any serious spiritual project, and this examination is undoubtedly an essential element of a serious spiritual project. It's also in part a consequence of ignorance regarding the examination's nature and end. Indeed, as Casanovas points out, the examination "becomes a complicated and fastidious device, like a sort of spiritual penance,"<sup>6</sup> when the reason for it is unknown.

## 2) What it consists of

The examination is at once both a "state" and an "operation of the spirit." It is a *state of the spirit* in the sense that it is "a general disposition of man that makes him always and intensely interested in knowing, discerning, and perfecting the reactions produced in his soul when they arise."<sup>7</sup> Here we have the first benefit for a person with deeply rooted defects or emotional disorders: the person's *attitude* becomes an *interest in changing, improving, and consciously living their life and its interior movements* (which doesn't happen when a person is drowning in the well of unhinged emotions). The examination is also an *operation* that "requires set times and precise rules for carrying it out. The operation without the spirit ends up becoming an annoying and sterile routine; the spirit without the operation has no practical efficacy."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Casanovas, Ignacio, *Ejercicios Espirituales de san Ignacio de Loyola* (Balmes: Barcelona, 1945), 363. Casanovas is one of the most celebrated commentators on Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

<sup>7</sup> Casanovas, Ignacio, *Ejercicios*, 364.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Casnovas continues by pointing out that “there are two classes of people who err in the understanding of Saint Ignatius’s examination: those who only seek to multiply the practical details, demanding their fulfillment in an almost superstitious way, and those who scorn it, taking it for a system of accountability, improper for spiritual affairs and one that weakens hearts. Both positions are equally superficial and unjust.”<sup>9</sup>

In short: the examination “seeks to keep the spirit awake and active at all hours of the day, so that man might achieve the end he has proposed for himself, in the way that is most serious and effective. This is what is primary and principal, since it is, we could say, the spiritual life of the soul. Whatever comes after this is secondary, no matter how important it might be, and it should be seen and treated as secondary by whoever wants to give things their proper value, without sinning either by excess or defect.”<sup>10</sup>

### 3) The way to practice it

The best *way* to practice this examination is the way that Saint Ignatius of Loyola explains it in his *Spiritual Exercises*.<sup>11</sup> The saint distributes the work into three fundamental moments:

1<sup>st</sup>: In the morning, after getting up, among the very first things that must be done, the goal of the work must be precisely determined, meaning, the *resolution or personal spiritual project* that is

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 364-365.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 365.

<sup>11</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, nn. 24-31.

at hand, that is, that which must be corrected, uprooted, or acquired, be it this or that defect, this or that virtue, this or that habit or custom. It is an awareness of the work at hand. Moreover, every Christian knows that the success of the work depends on God's help, and must therefore also ask for that help in this first moment so that he can perform his work well. For those for whom this step is very difficult, it can be very beneficial for them to write a small prayer that makes mention of what they want to achieve and why. For example, for a person who wants to work on *humility*, the prayer could be something like this:

“My Lord Jesus Christ, I ask for Your light and grace in order that this day I might direct my efforts to obtain and grow in the virtue of humility. Today I want to be humble especially by practicing humility in words, both in those that I say of myself, as well in those that I use to speak of my neighbor. I want to live in humility in imitation of Your Most Gentle and Humble Heart. I ask for this grace through the intercession of your holy and humble Mother.”

Note that in this possible prayer, I have not only pointed out the virtue that is to be sought, but also the concrete act in which we want to incarnate or realize it today. Further on we will see the importance and the way to determine the possible concrete acts that we practice *one by one*.

2<sup>nd</sup>: At the middle of the day (before or after lunch, more or less, or whatever is easier in each case) two things should be done:

a) Recall how many times I have failed in the particular resolution (or if positive acts that were proposed were carried out). For this, it might be convenient to *review* what was done during the morning, hour by hour, or



place by place, and to *record it* in a little book or notebook. Some complain about the “materiality” of this work, and prefer not to lower themselves to such a detail, limiting themselves to keeping their work in their memory. However, they forget that the end of this task is to overcome *luxury* and *laziness*. For this reason, I advise that the examination be made as it is indicated here, at least by those who suffer from emotional illnesses or have very deeply rooted defects. On the other hand, it is appropriate not only to *observe and write down* how many times one has fallen, but also the *reasons* why these falls occurred, in order to correct them and to build up prudence for the future.

b) In addition to this step, one should renew the resolution for the rest of the day.

Saint Ignatius proposes the following method of writing down the falls (which each person can adjust as best suits them):

Day 1	m.....
	a.....
Day 2	m.....
	a.....
Day 3	m.....
	a.....
Day 4	m.....
	a.....
Day 5	m.....
	a.....

Day 6	m.....
	a.....
Day 7	m.....
	a.....

There are two lines for each day: on the first line, the falls (or, on the contrary, the fulfillment of acts that were proposed) of the morning should be noted, whereas those of the afternoon on the second.

3<sup>rd</sup>: Lastly, as the day reaches its end, one should make the examination again, considering the falls that have occurred since mid-day until that moment. Record this on the corresponding line.

Saint Ignatius himself teaches that it is appropriate, when one realizes that he or she has failed in the resolution, to make some external sign, the meaning of which only the one with the resolution knows (for example, to gently beat the chest), in such a way as to manifest one’s sorrow at having fallen. The same could be said when one performs an action that had been proposed. Casanovas indicates that this *being aware* of the act itself by means of which one falls into their defect (that we had proposed to avoid) or practices a virtue (that we had proposed to practice) has great importance: “after said foresight [that is, of foreseeing the acts that we will do or avoid], there is nothing more important than being aware of one’s own actions; likewise, there is nothing more fatal than being unaware of one’s falls or falling into routine in

one's actions. . . . This being attentive to the falls must be *entirely conscious*, and that careful awareness must be manifested even with an external action, leading one to, for example, place one's hand on their chest. This external gesture indicates repentance, if one has fallen into their defect, and it is, furthermore, a renewal of the resolution not to fall. It is simply not possible for someone to get used to falling if they are aware of every time that they do, they repent after each slip-up, and they take strength from each fall in order to renew their spirit. If this renewal is made as is appropriate, perhaps the very slip itself will serve as a stimulus and incentive to take a step forward, as tends to happen in physical slips."<sup>12</sup> This is not far from the so-called *healthy rituals* of those who fight against serious and deeply rooted problems.<sup>13</sup>

I am aware that some spiritual directors (often clumsy ones) consider this type of work as a *mechanization* of the spiritual life; nevertheless, even good psychologists consider it at least an effective method. It is beyond doubt that this examination, when poorly carried out, can convert spiritual or psychological work into a useless automation; this is why we warned about the need to create a *spirit*, since the letter without the spirit kills (cf. 2 Co 3:6).

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<sup>12</sup> Casanovas, *ibid.*, 368-369.

<sup>13</sup> Such is the case, for example, of those who suffer from an addiction and fight to leave it. Addictions create certain "rituals" that the addicted person must follow scrupulously when they begin their addictive cycle. This is why specialists indicate the importance of forming "healthy" rituals, that is, routines or reflexes, that are not sickly but rather proper to healthy people (cf. Miguel Fuentes, *La trampa rota* (San Rafael, Argentina: Ediciones del Verbo Encarnado, 2008), 279-281.

Furthermore, in the nightly examination, the person must examine if his or her conduct has improved when compared to that of the morning. Each day (or at least once a week) a comparison should be made between that day and other days, seeing if the behavior has improved or worsened. Then the person should look for the reasons why: if it has improved, the person should continue working in that direction; if it has worsened, the person will know correct those things that have made him or her slide back in the work). Lastly, every so often compare one week with the previous ones, in order to see if the goals are nearer to or further from being accomplished.

With a solid work by means of this method, in a few months even defects that have been deeply rooted for a long time can be corrected. However, this requires perseverance and tenacity, as well as sufficient humility in order to start anew when the person becomes aware that they have fallen again.

The effects of this examination are so important for behavior that I firmly believe that this type of work must be incorporated even into the treatment of those people with addictions and emotional disorders.

#### 4) Matter: What to examine?

In regards to the *matter* of the examination, it should always be something very precise and specific, as well as sufficiently known by the one who is doing the examination.

First and foremost, it must be some *specific good*. The main mistakes in work regarding the will (and also in other areas) comes from proposing very general plans (for example, “to want to be humble,” or “to want to be generous”). Even if humility and generosity are concrete virtues, they are still just general resolutions. Dealing with things in a generic way can never lead to advancement in the spiritual life. For this reason, the particular resolution must always be something concrete, and the more particular, the better. If, for example, a person desires to grow in humility, the resolutions must be focused: which concrete acts of humility (in looks, words, or deeds?), or with respect to whom (superiors, subordinates, spouse, friends, parents), or in which moments of the day, etc. After a time of work, once a certain habit with respect to this act has been formed, the person can move on to new acts of humility. What is true in other fields is true here as well: the fundamentals (meaning, the little things) must be mastered in order to later master the big things.

Secondly, how does one *choose* the matter on which they should work? I reproduce a text from the above-cited Casanovas:

Generally ascetical authors emphasize the need to choose with certainty the particular defect or virtue regarding which the particular examination should be carried out. In order to be certain about this point, they established the theory of the dominant passion, affirmed that first the principal vice should be attacked,<sup>14</sup> then secondary ones, and then, lastly, the virtues should be sought.

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<sup>14</sup> Although we will deal with this topic in the second part of this work, let's look ahead, in order to understand well what we have been saying: by dominant

All of this is very well established when seen as a theory based on the value of the vices and virtues; *however, if attention is paid to the end* towards which the spirit of Saint Ignatius's particular examination is ordered, *perhaps it is fitting to follow a different criteria.* Given that the end of the particular examination is to keep the desire for holiness alive and active, what pertains to the person's class and circumstances that surround them is to be given preference since it is more effective in stirring up that desire, even though this might break the molds of the objective order with which we give value to the vices and virtues. The variety of circumstances in which souls find themselves, even with respect to the same degree of perfection and imperfection, is so great that it is very difficult to decree *a priori* which is the most beneficial method. Let us never lose sight of the fact that holiness is a life and not a theory, no matter how well-thought out that theory might be, and that the particular examination is not an end to which a soul's life must be conformed, but rather a means to maintain and perfect that life.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, what a person should examine themselves about must be determined according to the needs of that concrete person "here and now." For this reason, for example, a person dominated by a vice like lust or alcohol, despite the fact that their dominant passion or vice is lust or alcohol, should perhaps examine themselves, at least at some point in their lives, regarding their

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passion or defect, Casanovas means the propensity or proclivity to a specific sinful act produced by the frequent repetition of the act itself. All of us are born with a natural disposition to certain acts that are good and others that are bad, a disposition which is part of our temperament. If the will does not oppose these con-natural predispositions to evil from the very beginning, these quickly acquire a great vigor and become true defects. The "dominant defect" in a person is that proclivity whose impulse is most frequent and strongest, even though it might not always be externally observed. It is usually the source of the other defects and sins that each person falls into most often.

<sup>15</sup> Casanovas, *ibid.*, 370-371.

confidence in and abandonment to God (since without these attitudes recovery is impossible), or regarding humility (when there is some inferiority complex at the root), or regarding other, different acts when the examination is being used primarily to strengthen or intensify the will.

## 5) Preliminary work

Again, I maintain that a virtue cannot be acquired, nor a vice fought, if the territory upon which one will work is not well known. A good military officer studies his own army, his enemy, and the land upon which the battle will take place in great detail: if he doesn't, his defeat is all but assured. In our case, something similar happens; if a person wants to acquire a virtue, he or she must become, in a certain sense, an "expert" in it. When someone tells me, for example, "I think that I need to work on meekness, because my biggest problem is anger," I usually reply, "That seems like a good idea; now give me fifteen different acts that you could put into practice in order to achieve this goal." The majority of people are simply left confused; at most, one or two actions come to mind. This means that they know little or nothing about that virtue. If that's the case, however, then serious work isn't possible, because the people won't realize when opportunities to practice that virtue arise if they don't know, and know well, what that virtue is and the different situations in which it acts. The same can be said of vices. Anyone who wants to work hard must (according to their possibilities and abilities) study the topic.

Thus, for a serious work, I recommend, before anything else, reading what the classics of spirituality of moral theology have to say about the virtue that is sought or the vice that needs to be uprooted (for example, some of the works of Antonio Royo Marín, Tanqueray, Garrigou-Lagrange, Merkelbach, Prümmer, etc.).

Once this is done, the person will be able to make a list, as exhaustive as possible, of all the acts that they see as connected both *directly* and *indirectly* with the virtue or vice that is their subject matter, and this as it is found in the daily life *of the person who is doing the work*. A list of fifteen to twenty acts is the ideal. Here I offer, as a sort of example, some lists to serve as guides regarding chastity (and its opposed vice, lust), sloth (and its opposed virtue, diligence), and humility (and its opposed vice, pride). The way that these lists are structured can inspire other possible outlines:

### Example 1

#### Material for work regarding chastity and lust

- a) The main cause of sins of lust are the *occasions of sin* that present themselves to the *sight*. Therefore:
- I will never watch television alone.
  - I will set a time limit for going to bed, and after that hour I will never allow myself to keep watching television or to go on the Internet.
  - I will never go on the Internet in any place where I can't be seen by others; I will use filters against pornography



and (if I am a religious) also programs that make it clear to my superiors the sites that I enter.

- I will never use online chats, or I will do so only in the sight of other people or family members.
- I will take care of what I see in magazines, the newspaper, etc.
- I will flee from dangerous places or settings.
- I will break off this or that friendship which is purely superficial and frivolous.

b) Another main cause of falls into lust is *sensuality* (or weakness of the senses); thus, in order to overcome this problem:

- I will seek to be mortified in what I eat.
- I will perform corporeal penances, in the measure that it's possible for me, in order to maintain control over my body.
- I will mortify my senses, depriving myself occasionally of things that are good (for example, from looking at something that's ok to see, from smelling a pleasant perfume, from feeling the soft touch of something; and this, not because these things are bad, but rather to *learn to renounce something licit*, which will make me stronger when I must say "no" to illicit temptations).
- I will maintain my bodily hygiene, not seeking my own comfort but rather to form my will: mortifying my senses

(for example, with a splash of cold water when showering), giving a brief time to washing, being ordered in my things, etc.

c) Another source of falls into lust is *idleness*, therefore:

- I will seek to always be occupied, even when I have no obligations: thus, I will try to have good books to read, to practice some hobby, to work on something practical, etc.
- I will try to do some physical exercise at least twice a week: to work, do sports, go to the gym, etc.

d) Many fall into sins of lust as a punishment for *pride*, therefore:

- I should keep a careful eye on this point, trying to be ever more humble; I will take advantage of the opportunities to humble myself with work and tasks that are “lowly” in the sight of others and in my sight as well.
- I will ask God for the grace to humbly accept the humiliations that others inflict upon me.

e) I cannot aspire to the virtue of chastity without *God's help*; hence:

- I will frequently receive communion, even daily if possible, and go to confession weekly.
- I will never set aside devotion to Our Lady, especially the daily Rosary.

f) Scripture says that the one who considers the nature of sin and their dying moments will not sin; hence:

- I will consider the malice of the sin of lust, the degradation that it imposes on my body.
  - Each day, above all before going to bed, I will recall that one day I must die, and that I do not know the day or time, and then I will be judged for all my deeds, and, according to the way I have acted, good or bad, I will be saved or I will be condemned.
- g) Chastity is a virtue that is acquired with positive acts, even indirect ones; hence:
- I will be modest in the way I dress.
  - I will be decent in my way of speaking and in my gestures (nothing of vulgarity or vanity to call attention).
  - I will be prudent and balanced in my emotional dealings with others.
  - I will be pure in my looks: I will look at each person as I want others to look at my brothers and sisters and mother and father.
  - I will ask for the grace of modesty and in everything I do I will act with modesty.

## **Example 2**

### **Material for work regarding sloth and diligence**

- a) Acedia is sorrow for spiritual things. For this reason, I will ask to be happy for spiritual things (Mass, prayer, trials, illnesses,

failures). In order to do this, I will include my daily failures in my daily thanksgiving.

- b) Sloth inclines us to perform our spiritual acts with negligence, to shorten them, or even to omit them entirely, and all these for trivial reasons. Hence, I propose:
- To not shorten any of the acts in which I am attacked by sloth, typically in every act of piety and prayer.
  - To not omit any act for any reason whatsoever that does not come from obedience, the urgency of charity, or pastoral duties.
  - On the contrary, I will seek to do these things with the utmost perfection.
- c) Sloth makes me rush to finish what I don't like to do. Hence:
- I will not rush in those offices that are the most repugnant to me.
  - I will give prayer the time it deserves, especially time for thanksgiving after Mass, my examination of conscience, and preparation for Mass.
  - I will never do any of the things that I find more pleasant when these activities would take the place or the time of other activities that I must do because of my state.
- d) Sloth also makes us choose offices according to the delight that they produce. Hence, I will choose my activities according

to urgency, the help they will be to my neighbor, or to the request of my superiors.

- e) The daughter of sloth is despair, meaning, repugnance or flight from what is difficult. Thus, I must fill my soul with the hope of being able to accomplish the works that God asks of me, even when they seem to me to be very annoying, difficult, or impossible to fulfill.
- f) Sloth gives rise to pusillanimity for undertaking what seems difficult. Hence: I will confront, with great energy and generosity, the detailed works of my daily sanctification.
- g) Sloth gives rise to resentment and bitterness towards those who give us commands or who ask us for things that are difficult for us or that we don't like. Therefore:
  - I will be obedient and have a good attitude towards the one who orders me (my superior) or who asks me to undertake a task that displeases me. This implies not complaining about what was asked, and not making it known that I was asked something difficult or unjust (a way of getting back at the superior by making him or her feel like a tyrant).
  - With an exquisite charity and patience I will deal with those who ask me for things that are difficult or change my plans (those who, for this reason, I treat badly, so that they don't come back to ask me for something else or so that their requests will be brief).

- h) Sloth gives rise to “digressions,” curiosity, verbosity, bodily restlessness . . . that is, things that are “palliative,” amusements by which we make up for the efforts of duty. In this, I will do everything possible not to distract myself or to seek to “run away” into amusements. I will leave recreation for when it’s time for recreation. During the time of work or prayer, on the other hand, I will put all my effort into doing my duty well.
- i) In order to combat the desolation that accompanies some spiritual acts, I should meditate on the value and importance that these acts have for my life.
- j) I will increase whatever gives rise to charity, since it is opposed to sloth:
- Devotion to the Eucharist.
  - Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
  - Reading and meditating on Sacred Scripture.
- k) The temptation to sloth can be a divine purification. Hence, I will ask God for patience . . . a lot of patience!

### **Example 3**

#### **Material for work regarding humility and pride**

- a) Humility flows from a correct understanding of myself, of my sins, and of God’s action in my soul, and this is a grace that I must ask for. Therefore, I must:
- Ask for the grace to grow in humility.

- Pray the litanies of humility by Cardinal Merry del Val.
- b) I must also put into place the means to know myself. For this, I must:
- Recall my sins.
  - Recall that all of the good that I have in me, God gave me gratuitously.
- c) Pride makes obedience difficult, above all obedience to those who are my equals or under me. Hence, I should:
- Docilely obey those who are my equals and my inferiors.
  - Ask others to tell me what to do, i.e., to seek obedience.
- d) Pride makes me feel that mockeries and humiliations are unjust. Therefore, I must:
- Bear mockeries and humiliations in silence.
  - “Go with the flow” when others make fun of me (to learn to laugh at myself).
- e) Pride leads me to think that I am superior to others, to judge others, and to refuse help from others. For this reason, I will make the effort to:
- Ask others for help in the form of advice, opinions, or explanations.
  - Seek the company of those who make me feel “overshadowed.”
  - Not to amuse myself by thinking of the defects of others.

- To speak well of others.
- f) Pride leads me to seek the vainglory that people give. Therefore, I will attempt to:
- Not speak of myself, especially if it is in praise of myself.
  - To not pay attention when others speak well of me.
  - To not give my opinion if it's not asked for or if it's not necessary.
- g) Pride makes it difficult for me to accept my mistakes. Therefore, I propose to:
- Accept corrections in silence.
  - Personally ask pardon of those whom I offend.
- h) Christ is the supreme model of humility; therefore, I must contemplate Christ's humiliation in the Passion.
- i) Pride makes me enjoy thinking of myself, in how others should think well of me. Therefore I will not allow myself to think about myself.
- j) In order to grow in humility, one must know what it is and how to come to possess it. Accordingly, I will read and meditate on this virtue.

## 6) The work itself

The above lists are only suggestions. Each person can add or remove elements or make an analogous plan for other virtues or for other defects, as was indicated above. As can be seen, in order



to come up with a list for the other virtues or vices, it's enough to make a list of the main elements of that virtue: its nature, cause, ways to acquire it, main acts, secondary acts, effects, occasions to practice it, the vices that are opposed to it, and so on. Later the various concrete acts can be determined in order to feed that particular aspect or to uproot it. The aforementioned examples are eloquent enough in themselves.

With these ideas in mind, the person who is to work on this attitude must examine themselves *on only one of those points* during whatever amount of time is needed until that element is uprooted. After that, he or she can move on to another. A person must not work on several points at a time, because this would be contrary to the goal of the particular examination (since the objective is to concentrate the will's energy and the intellect's attention on only one focus). It's understood as well that when the person begins to examine a new act to perform, *the exercise of those acts that have already been acquired must be kept alive*. The person should gain new ground with each examination. In this way, in a short time, a person can completely change, from apathetic to energetic, and from vicious to virtuous.

## 7) Effects

The work carried out in this way not only conquers or overcomes a defect or vice, or makes that virtue upon which attention had been centered grow, but rather, at the same time, it has another important effect: it strengthens the will itself, which, with

each firm and energetic act, becomes more invigorated and consolidated.

Moreover, above and beyond this benefit in the will, it also produces another, more important effect which, according to some authors, is its main fruit: it keeps the interest in one's personal sanctification and perfection awake and alive.

Above all, we must remember a great truth: with great frequency (to avoid saying, "almost always"), without a serious particular examination, all good desires and efforts, are condemned, sooner or later, to utter failure, and the Christian ends up incarcerated in lukewarmness and mediocrity. For this reason, not giving the examination the importance that it deserves could be taken as a sign of foolishness.

## 2.

# The dominant defect

When speaking of the object upon which to make the particular examination, we have said, following Casanovas, that it's not always necessary to make the examination on one's dominant defect. To be more precise, we should say that, even if some circumstances might demand that, in certain cases, more urgent work be done on some other point of our personality, a large part of our efforts will consist in the effort to uproot our dominant defect and, sooner or later, we will need to seriously concern ourselves with it.

### 1) Ignorance of the topic in good people

In spite of all that the classic authors of spirituality have written about the topic, there is notable ignorance about this issue. Or, more precisely, we must realize that a sizeable number of good Christians, Christians who understand what is meant by the

term “dominant defect,” are nonetheless unaware of their own dominant defect. This is shown by Fr. Amadeo Cencini’s work with consecrated men and women, citing L. M. Rulla’s study, which affirmed the following:

Upon entering into the theologate or into the novitiate, 86% of clerics were unaware of what their own central conflict (which was previously called the dominant defect) was, and *after four years of formation, 83% were still unaware of what their weak side was* (that is, in religious, at the beginning of their novitiate, 87% did not know their main inconsistency, and 82% after four years).<sup>16</sup>

And here he is speaking about people who, in theory, have consecrated their entire lives to the search for spiritual perfection!

Let us note that modern language has regrettably stopped using that very precise expression “dominant defect.” This is in part because of the invasion of psychology into what is properly spiritual territory. In the citation that we have just reproduced, we read the terms “central conflict,” “weak side,” and “main inconsistency,” terms which undoubtedly describe the reality that we are speaking of, but that lack the strength of that qualifier that had been given by tradition: *dominant*. The classic terminology has, nonetheless, not lost any of its strength or modernity. In addition to the expression “dominant defect,” other authors have used and continue to use equivalent expressions, such as “dominant disposition,” “dominant passion,” “dominant vice,” and others.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cencini, *Por amor...*, 111; the study that he is referring to is: L. M. Rulla-F. Imola-J. Ridick, *Antropología de la vocación cristiana II. Confirmaciones existenciales* (Madrid: Sociedad de Educación Atenas, 1994), 182ss.

## 2) Its nature

What is the dominant defect? In a certain sense, it could be called, using Fulton Sheen's expression, "what is worst in us."<sup>17</sup> It is that from which all or at least the majority of the faults that a person commits are born, above all sins of affection. It is that which gives rise to the most violent and strongest desires in each one of us, that which brings us to exaggerated happiness or to profound sadness. It is that which grace reproaches the most, and that which has a particular connection with the natural way of thinking, feeling, and acting in each person. It is that which makes up the twisted foundation of our character and has an intimate link with our individual way of being. There are temperaments that are naturally inclined to complacency, to indolence, laziness, gluttony, sensuality; others are more inclined to pride, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

Garrigou-Lagrange defines it as:

our domestic enemy, dwelling in our interior; for, if it develops, it may succeed in completely ruining the work of grace or the interior life. . . . The predominant fault is so much the more dangerous as it often compromises our principal good point, which is a happy inclination of our nature that ought to develop and to be increased by grace. . . . In every man there is a mixture of good and bad inclinations; there is a predominant fault and also a natural quality. . . . Particular care must be taken that the predominant fault does not snuff out our principal natural quality or our special attraction of grace. Oth-

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<sup>17</sup> Sheen, Fulton, *Lift up Your Heart* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1955), 117 (See chapter 7: "The Emergence of Character").

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1947), 314.

erwise our soul would resemble a field of wheat invaded by tares or cockle, of which the Gospel speaks. . . . At times it is like a devouring worm in a beautiful fruit. . . . In the citadel of our interior life, which is defended by the different virtues, the predominant fault is the *weak spot*, undefended by the theological and moral virtues. The enemy of souls seeks exactly this easily vulnerable point in each one, and he finds it without difficulty.<sup>19</sup>

The dominant defect is more bound to the *temperamental foundation* of each person than the other vices that they have acquired throughout their lives, including those that have become addictions. For this reason, care must be taken not to confuse the dominant defect with other habits that could, circumstantially, be *more serious* than the defect itself and that, in some cases, demand that they be dealt with *greater urgency* than the defect itself. A person could have vices that are objectively more serious than the dominant defect that gave rise to them.

If I am not mistaken, the dominant defect coincides with the way in which each person takes on the *fomes peccati*, the moral tendency or disposition to slip up in the moral realm, the inheritance of original sin, which is linked to the person's distinct temperamental configuration.<sup>20</sup> From here it follows the importance of

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<sup>19</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN, 1947), 315-6.

<sup>20</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in n. 1264, reads: "Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls *concupiscence*, or metaphorically, 'the tinder for sin' (*fomes peccati*); since concupiscence 'is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ.' Indeed, 'an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.'"

knowing the theory of the temperaments, with their various positive and negative qualities. Even if none of the temperamental typologies—regarding which we will speak in the last section—is to be found in a pure state, and hence the forms in which they are actually found are really quite numerous, some general lines and some likewise general defects can be traced out: the explosive anger and bad character of the choleric, the superficiality and instability of the sanguine, sadness and the tendency towards bitterness in the passionate, laziness and indifference in the amorphous, and so on.

The dominant defect is so important that even in cases where charity demands that work first be done on another vice that is perhaps negatively affecting one's neighbor or one's duties of state, we must not forget that every vice *in some way bears the mark* of the dominant defect. The sins against charity committed by one with a choleric temperament and by one who is bitter or superficial are not the same; nor is the lust of the impulsive the same as the one who is an egoist. Pride has marks of despotism in a choleric, and of bitterness in a melancholic. . . . If this is not taken into account, the examinations of conscience will always be abstract and impersonal and, as a result, ineffective.

### 3) The need to fight it

Saint Alphonsus says that “we must endeavor, above all, to find out our predominant passion. He who conquers this, conquers all his passions; he who allows himself to be overcome by it,

is lost. . . . Some persons . . . abstain from certain defects of minor importance and, at the same time, allow themselves to be ruled by their predominant passion; but, if they do not destroy this passion, they will never gain the victory of salvation.”<sup>21</sup> Speaking of the “*frightening* effects of the dominant passion,” he adds: “It makes salvation morally impossible, it blinds its victim, and plunges him into all excesses. Unless we kill . . . the predominant passion, we will never be able to obtain salvation. The passion which brings man under its sway, first blinds him, and prevents him from seeing the danger.”<sup>22</sup>

#### 4) Means to know it

The number of good people who, after many years of spiritual life, continue their journey without knowing what their dominant defect is, is amazing.

In order to discover which passion it is that dominates us, two previous dispositions are needed.

The first: to ask God for the necessary means, namely, supernatural light in order to adequately know our interior world, and the sincere desire to work seriously on our personal reform. This latter has a capital importance, because it often happens that we are disposed to know ourselves, but not so much to change. In the face of such dispositions, it’s no surprise that God would not

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<sup>21</sup> Saint Alphonsus Liguori, *Sermón 41* in *Obras ascéticas*, vol. II (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1954), 810.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 811.



grant the light either, since He doesn't illuminate the path of the one who has no serious intention of walking on it.

The second: we must seek the courage to call things “by [their] right and ugly name when [they are] discovered; otherwise we shall excuse our lack of fortitude as an ‘inferiority complex’ and our inordinate love of the flesh as a ‘release of libido.’ Judas missed salvation because he never called his avarice by its right name—he disguised it as love of the poor.”<sup>23</sup> This observation is not without its importance, since there are few who are so resolved to accept that they have a foundation that is profoundly egotistical, or sensual, or greedy, or bitter. This fear of confronting the naked truth is one of the most important obstacles in the discovery of our dominant passion.

We can indicate the following among the resources that we can use to make our dominant defect appear before our eyes.

First and foremost, as Archbishop Fulton Sheen indicates, we can be helped by the observation of what defect angers us most when we are accused of it: the traitor becomes very angry when he is accused of being disloyal to his country for the first time. It can also be helpful to consider what failing or defect we most often or most vehemently condemn in our neighbor because, in those strange twists of our psychology, this is usually the same defect that affects us: thus Judas accused our Lord of not loving the poor enough. Perhaps this explains why that failing, seen in others, seems to accuse us as well.

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<sup>23</sup> Sheen, Fulton, *Lift up Your Heart*, 118.

Another means that permits us to discover our defect is the way in which others act with respect to us. This has something to do with the law in physics that says that every action produces an equal and opposite reaction; this is also valid in the psychological plane. Sometimes others distrust us, because we previously distrusted them. If we mistreat our neighbor, it's likely that our neighbor will mistreat us. However, this can't be taken as a general principle, because sometimes it happens that we are mistreated without having done the same thing, as happens, for example, to a persecuted saint. However, quite often we can trust that the attitudes of others towards us are like a mirror of our interior dispositions.

Another means consists of asking ourselves where our ordinary concerns go, what is the target of our thoughts and desires; what is the running origin of our sins: what is generally the cause of our sadness and of our happiness. It's also worthwhile to ask our spiritual director what he thinks of all this.

Likewise, it should be noted that this defect also tends to be connected with the most frequent temptations that the enemy raises up in our soul, because our enemy, as Saint Ignatius teaches, attacks us at our weakest point.

Finally, the dominant defect can also be found by bearing in mind that, in moments of true fervor, the inspirations of the Holy Spirit come to ask us for sacrifices in the things that produce us the greatest moral difficulty.

## 5) Method of combatting it

It does us no good whatsoever to know our dominant defect if we don't work to uproot it, and this is not possible unless we fight against it constantly. Superficial work, work done for a short amount of time, or work that misses the center of the problem, all leave either the problem itself or at least its roots intact. In this way, just like the phoenix, it is reborn again and again from its ashes, which are not as trivial as they seem.

The means that spiritual classics suggest for this work are well known.

The first is prayer. Without prayer, we can't do anything at all in the spiritual life, and even less correct or transform the hidden foundation of our personality.

The heart of the work is rooted in fidelity to the particular examination of conscience, which is the subject of the first part of this book. It is truly very difficult, even borderline impossible, to attempt to eradicate that passion without being faithful to this spiritual instrument.

It must be added, although some place it as part of the particular examination, the learning to impose a penance upon ourselves every time that we fail in the resolution that we have established to fight against the dominant defect. We will advance very little if our falls, even repeated ones, are left unpunished. In this, discipline has a very important pedagogical and corrective role.

Archbishop Sheen places great emphasis on another element: to make the dominant defect an opportunity to grow in virtue. This happens quite often in the physical plane when something is damaged; once it is repaired, however, it's even stronger than before. For example, once it recovers, scar tissue becomes the strongest part of the skin. In a similar way, a defect that is overcome can become the greatest strength of a person. In the lives of the saints, we see that many of them have distinguished themselves, and we recall them precisely for it, because of certain virtues that they had to develop in order to confront their personal defects. Such is the well-known case of Saint Francis de Sales, whom we praise for his meekness, which was the result of his battle against his choleric temperament. In this sense, the examples abound: "Drunkards, alcoholics, dope fiends, materialists, sceptics, sensualists, gluttons, thieves—all can make that area of life in which they are defeated the area of their greatest victory."<sup>24</sup>

## 6) The dominant defect and the capital vices

Many spiritual authors have indicated that the dominant defect coincides with one of the capital vices. In reality, it would be more accurate to say that every dominant defect can be traced back, as to its ultimate source, to one of the capital sins, the term used to describe those sins which are capable of causing other sins.

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<sup>24</sup> Sheen, Fulton, *Lift up Your Heart*, 124.

“Capital status,” therefore, designates a particular mode of causality. It doesn’t refer to material causality, in the sense that one sin is the occasion to commit another, as gluttony gives rise to the occasion to fall into lust, and avarice gives way to arguments and quarrels. Nor is it efficient causality, as happens when a repeated sin forms a habit that leaves an inclination to go back to commit the same sin (a vice), nor in the sense that it opens the door to other sins by destroying what could have been a brake or an impediment for sin (as, for example, a sin that destroys modesty becomes a *cause* of many other sins that the person will commit from then on as a result of having lost their shame).

In fact, the causality here referred to is final causality: the capital vice is the directive and conducting (*ductivus*) principle.<sup>25</sup> That is, it gives rise to a certain number of sins (principle), and directs them (directive) towards its own interests. It is the root and beginning of other sins that are useful for achieving its own end. A “capital sin” is that sin whose end (sexual pleasure in the case of lust, vengeance in that of wrath, exaltation of one’s self in pride) is maximally desired by a person, and for this reason it pushes the person to carry out many other sins that permit that person to achieve that end. For example, avarice, whose end is the unlimited accumulation of riches, moves the psychology of the avaricious person to commit fraud, deceit, thefts, to hardness of heart and to a lack of mercy . . . all acts that, without them, the person could not achieve their end of collecting money.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 84, a. 4.

Moreover, the capital vice “plasters” a proper style in the sins that it gives rise to as means to achieve its end: “that in which a man rests as in his last end, is master of his affections, since he takes his entire rule of life from it,” says Saint Thomas.<sup>26</sup> The ways in which the other sins that stem from the capital vice are lived are taken from the capital vice. For instance, the lustful man who steals in order to obtain money with the goal of satisfying his concupiscence, and for the same reason lies and performs other deeds, gives a lustful style or tinge to all of these actions, since it is lust that dominates him. For this reason, Aristotle said that the one who steals in order to commit adultery is more an adulterer than a thief. Thus, the capital vices outline the various psychological parameters of sinners.

Sacred Scripture gives neither a number nor a list of these sins; however, in the first seven centuries of the Church, the spiritual authors developed three different classifications. Cassian mentioned the principle vices in this order: gluttony, concupiscence, fornication, avarice, wrath, sadness, acedia or weariness of heart, vainglory, and pride; he splits vainglory and pride, distinguishes between sadness and acedia, and omits envy.<sup>27</sup>

Saint John Climacus lists seven principle vices, identifying vainglory and pride; in the others, his list coincides with that of Cassian, and he likewise omits envy.<sup>28</sup>

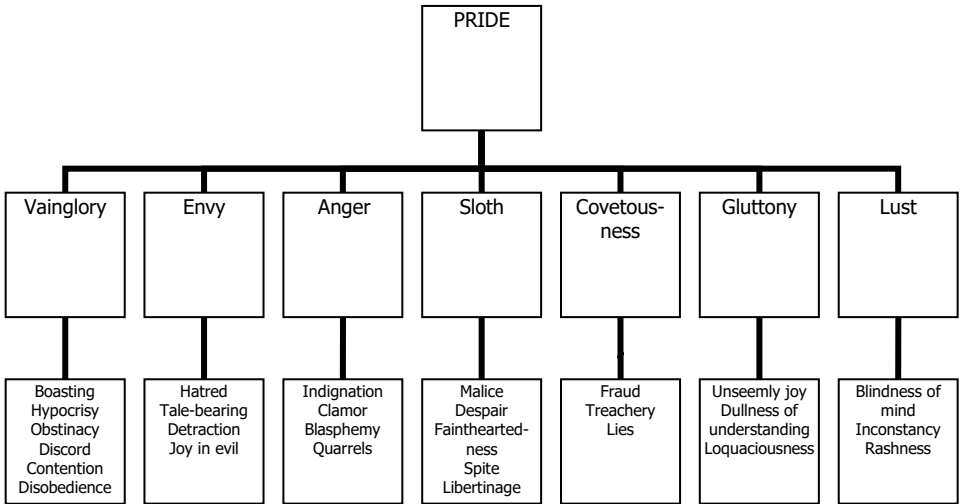
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<sup>26</sup> *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 1, a. 5, sed contra.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Cassian, *De coenobiorum institutis*, l. V, c.1; PL 49,202 ss.; *Collationes* V,X; PL49, 621 ss.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Saint John Climacus, *Scala paradissi*, grado 12; PG 88, 948 ss.

The strongest tradition, on the other hand, is that of Saint Gregory the Great,<sup>29</sup> who established three interlocking levels: 1<sup>st</sup>, above all is pride, which is the “beginning of all sin” (Sir 10: 15), which is like a super-capital vice, since all the others take their origin from it; 2<sup>nd</sup> then follow the seven capital vices, which are begotten by pride: vainglory, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, lust; 3<sup>rd</sup>, those sins that Saint Gregory calls the “daughters of the capital vices,” which are the sins that each of those capital sins gives rise to in a special way:



Later authors (among them, Saint Isidore of Seville, Alcuin, and Peter Lombard are particularly outstanding) reproduce these different classifications. Saint Thomas prefers the Gregorian list but modifies it slightly. According to him, the capital vices arise in

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Saint Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, VI, book 31, cap. 45, nn° 87-91.

the different ways that the appetite or emotions refer to the good (seeking it or fleeing from it):

- a) The disordered seeking of the spiritual good of one's own excellence is *vainglory*.
- b) The disordered desire for physical well-being gives rise to *gluttony*; for sexual pleasure, to *lust*; and for material goods, *avarice*.
- c) When instead of seeking a good, the person flees from it out of fear of the effort that it entails, we have *acedia* (if it concerns a spiritual good) or *sloth* (if it is just any sort of good).
- d) If a neighbor's good is rejected because it is seen as rivaling one's own honor or excellence, we fall into *envy*; and if, in addition to that rejection, desires of vengeance and violence are added, there is *anger*.

## 7) Conclusion

In short: it is impossible for people who do not know themselves to reach perfection, if only because they will forge illusions about their state (falling either into a presumptuous optimism or a depressing discouragement). Clear and well thought out knowledge of one's self encourages a person to tend for perfection and helps such a one to work on solid ground. This knowledge must be complete, embracing not only our natural qualities and defects, but also our supernatural gifts and defects on the spiritual level.



## **3.**

# **The temperaments, or the innate dispositions**

Earlier we indicated the importance of knowing our temperament since the dominant defect has a close relationship with the negative aspects of our temperamental base, just as it is appropriate to promote and foster those positive elements that we have received as a gift. For this reason, I end this book by dedicating some paragraphs to this topic.

## **1) Temperament and character**

First of all, a clarification regarding terminology: not all authors are in agreement regarding terminology when speaking of characterological questions. Some speak of temperament and character as two different things; others identify them. Some give each of these terms different meanings, including those who label

as *character* what others call *temperament*.<sup>30</sup> I will use the term *temperament* in the more classical sense of the word, as the totality of the profound tendencies that derive from the physiological constitution of the individual, that is, “the totality of innate inclinations, proper to each individual, that result from their psychological constitution and that are intimately linked to biochemical, endocrine, and neurovegetative factors, which imprint some distinctive characteristics on the primary operative conduct of a person.”<sup>31</sup>

The ancients, like Hippocrates and Galen, made temperament depend on the *four fundamental humors*: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. From this understanding comes the division of the temperaments into sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic, respectively, according to the humor which predominates in each one. In Latin, the term *temperamentum* means precisely “the proportioned combination of the elements of a whole.” More recently, it has been set in connection with the functioning of the endocrine system.<sup>32</sup> In a similar way, Lersh

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Le Senne, whose typology we will follow later on, calls *character* what I will here call *temperament*: “Character means the totality of the congenital dispositions that form the mental skeleton of a person” (*Tratado de Caracterología* [Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 1953], 16).

<sup>31</sup> Polaino Lorente, A., “Temperamento,” *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp* (Madrid: Rialp, 1989), tome 22, 169. J. M. Poveda Ariño says: “temperament represents the instinctive-affective layer of personality, something of itself more closely linked to biology, more dependent on the body” (s.v., “Carácter” in *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, [Madrid: Rialp, 1989], tome 5, 50).

<sup>32</sup> “Temperament depends particularly on the pituitary secretions (of the hypophysis), and those of the thyroids and the adrenal glands, inasmuch as said secretions determine the preponderance of the impulse to fight or to pleasure” (Bednarski, *L'educazione della affettività* [Milan: Massimo, 1986], 22-23).

connects it with the “endothymic ground.”<sup>33</sup> Others connect it with other elements, such as the “physical complexion,” as Saint Thomas says: “some are disposed from their own bodily temperament to chastity or meekness or such like.”<sup>34</sup> Saint Albert the Great indicates that: “Some are naturally disposed to fortitude, others to generosity, and others to chastity. . . . In like manner, some are disposed naturally to vices, such as melancholics to envy and choleric to wrath.”<sup>35</sup> In harmony with this, I use the term *temperament* for “what has been given by nature.”<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, I use the word *character* for the totality of psychological dispositions that result from work done on the temperament by means of education and acts of will, and which come about as a result of the totality of good or bad habits (virtues or vices). “It encompasses the totality of psychological dispositions and habitual behaviors of a person, all shaped by the intellect and

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<sup>33</sup> Lersh defines the “endothymic ground” as our emotional-affective reality: “Here belong above all those events and states of the soul which we habitually designate as affects, emotions, feelings, moods, and passions, as well as drives, desires, and tendencies” (Lersh, Philipp, *La estructura de la personalidad*, [Barcelona: Scientia, 1974], 478-79). Translation from James Hillman, *Emotions: A Comprehensive Phenomenology of Theories and Their Meanings* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 91.

<sup>34</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Teologicae*, I-II, q. 51, a. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Saint Albert the Great, *Quaestiones super De animalibus*, I, q. 21.

<sup>36</sup> Following Caspi and Silva, Gladys Sweeny defines it as “the tendency of the individual to respond in predictable ways to events in their surroundings, ways that constitute emotional pieces, and of behavior, with which the adult personality is constructed” (cf. Sweeny, G., *La formación sana de la madurez afectiva*. Ecclesia, XXII, n. 2 [2008], 139-158).

will.”<sup>37</sup> This is the terminology most commonly used by educators of virtue.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, temperament is the result of the physiological predominance of an organic system. It is something innate in the individual; it is the natural nature, that is, something that nature imposes on us. For this reason, it never entirely disappears. Each one of us is “a temperament and a figure until death.” However, an opportune education and the supernatural strength of grace, especially if the dominant defect is identified and fought against by means of the particular examination of conscience, and if, at the same time, the good qualities that each person has are discovered and made to bear fruit, that temperament, even if it can’t be totally transformed, can at least have its loud complaints reduced to a *minimum*, and even entirely eliminate its exterior manifesta-

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<sup>37</sup> Poveda Ariño, J. M., *Carácter*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> For example, it can be read in Tihamer Toth’s beautiful book, *The Young Man of Character*. “What do we mean when we say: this is a young man of character? By character we mean the steadfastness of the human will directed towards the good; a young man of character has noble principles and will not compromise them even if sticking to them involves sacrifices. . . . This reveals the nature of character development. First you have to acquire noble ideals and principles. . . . The second, and harder, task is always to follow these right principles, that is, to develop your character. Character is not given as a gift; one has to earn it with decades of thorough, painstaking work. Your character may be influenced by your environment, inherited traits, good or bad qualities, but ultimately it is your personal creation, the result of your self-education. Everybody receives two kinds of education: one from parents and schools, and the other, the more important one, from ourselves. Do you know what formation is? It is influencing the human will so that it will pursue the good in every situation with certainty and gladness. Do you know what character is? It is a consistent way of acting that follows firm principles, the steadiness of the will in the service of ideals recognized as true, the persevering steadfastness of a soul in the service of a noble conception of life,” (Kansas City, MO: Angelus Press, 2012), 7-8.

tions, as well as strengthen to the *greatest degree possible* all of its positive qualities.

We said that it “never disappears” as the root of tendencies (since a person will always have these or those tendencies according to their own biophysical constitution), but it can be modified by education (and, more properly, by self-education. Later on in the text cited above, Saint Albert the Great says, “Some are naturally disposed to fortitude, others to generosity, and others to chastity, and *nonetheless by habit they can change and incline themselves in the opposite direction*. In like manner, there are those who are naturally disposed to vices, such as melancholics to envy, choleric to wrath, *and yet, nonetheless, by the intellect’s discernment they can accustom themselves to act in the opposite way.*” Hence, *character* has a part *given by nature* (the temperamental basis), and another part acquired by habits and acts (the acquired habits, which can be either virtues or vices).

Here I will limit myself to discussing the temperaments, or the profound natural dispositions, since, as we have mentioned, we will find the dominant passion among the constitutive defects of each person. It is against this passion that we must fight in order to forge a harmonious and virtuous personality.

The most widely spread classification is the four-fold division that harkens back to Hippocrates and Galen, who distinguished four fundamental temperaments: sanguine, melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic. This is still valid and gives some direction, but it is too broad.

Now, different divisions are used, based on different criteria. I will here take advantage of another division that is well-known, that of Heymans and Le Senne, who posit eight characterological types, according to the possible combinations of three variables<sup>39</sup>:

- 1<sup>st</sup> emotionality (degree of openness to exterior and interior stimuli);
- 2<sup>nd</sup> activity (greater or lesser propensity of the temperament to action);
- 3<sup>rd</sup> resonance (permanence of the stimulus in the person, that is, if the impressions remain for only a short time, as happens in those labeled “primary function,” or a long time, as happens in those called “second function”).<sup>40</sup>

Of all of these, we will give some general characteristics as well as their main positive and negative qualities.

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<sup>39</sup> Other authors indicate some more: 1<sup>st</sup> one’s level of activity, typical rhythm, vigor of activity; 2<sup>nd</sup> irritability or negative emotion, that is, how easy or intensely a person is annoyed when faced with negative events; 3<sup>rd</sup> the “calmability,” that is, how easily a person is calmed after having been annoyed; 4<sup>th</sup> fear, that is, concerns regarding very intense or unusual stimuli; and 5<sup>th</sup> sociability, or receptivity to social stimuli.

<sup>40</sup> The descriptions of these characters of Heymans and Le Senne can be seen in greater detail in: Ibáñez Gil, J., *Pastoral Juvenil Diferencial: Tipología y Pastoral* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guadalupe, 1970); a brief summary can be found at: *Autoeducación: Análisis de los 8 Temperamentos*, publicado en: [http://www.jmcordoba.org.ar/formacion/material-para-grupos-de-vida/doc\\_download/205-8-temperamentos](http://www.jmcordoba.org.ar/formacion/material-para-grupos-de-vida/doc_download/205-8-temperamentos) (Schoenstatt Movement); I have taken a great deal from this synthetic presentation. One can also consult: Benedit, Magdalena, *Apuntes para la comprensión del carácter* (La Plata: UCALP, 2003); Benedit, Magdalena, *Una mirada insustituible. Reconocer el carácter de los hijos* (Buenos Aires: no publisher, 2010).

## 2) Types of temperament

### 1<sup>st</sup> The Passionate

This is an *emotive* temperament (that is, it is impressionable by any sort of stimulus), *active* (with an interior tendency to action, regardless of whether there are definite goals or not), and *secondary* (that is, the received impressions are kept for a long time, and the temperament is very linked to the past).

In general, it's difficult for the passionate to be inactive; however, the passionate is not impulsive, but rather energetic, although this is externalized little. This is why when it overflows, it is violent and overwhelming.

Such a one knows how to recall the lessons of past experiences and to take advantage of them for the future. The passionate's initiatives and energies are great, although often exteriorly calm with few exceptions; these energies are consciously directed to distant and constant ends. The passionate's emotions and passions are strong, profoundly and deeply rooted, influencing conduct for long periods of time. In the face of injuries, their anger flames up interiorly, although it does not immediately become evident exteriorly. If the injuries are repeated, that anger ultimately bursts forth in a tempest of long-lasting anger that easily degenerates into bitterness and the desire for revenge.

In the face of danger, the passionate first reflects and then quickly makes a decision; if the decision is to attack, such a one proceeds with unprecedented violence, until either conquering or

dying; if they judge it better to take a passive attitude, they remain firm in that position.

Their own faults, and those of others, cause them great anger, and they firmly propose to correct them. They are constant in action and unchangeable in their judgments, even to the point of stubbornness. They have stable emotions, such that their friendships are extremely faithful, even after the passage of time, but it is also difficult for them to forgive and forget an offense. They have a notable capacity for organization and leadership, not only one that is kindly and attractive, but also effective, vigorous, and ordered. Energetic, and without great danger of dissipation, they know how to be firm, systematic, and directed to an end, such that they advance towards the goal in well-planned stages.

Their mind is broad and rather deductive. Their imagination is fertile, and often they have an excellent memory. They are interested in social, moral, religious, and philosophical problems, and are naturally honorable and worthy of trust. They know how to be faithful to their word. With respect to the less gifted, they spontaneously adopt an attitude of protection and compassionate help. In social interactions, they tend to be disordered and simple without any great inclination for winding diplomacy, but not for rough clashes either. Exteriorly they are generally correct, but not very warm.

*Positive aspects:* When they direct themselves towards a great ideal, they are capable of consecration, abnegation, and extraordinary activity. Their logical rigor in thought, capacity for invention,



and efficiency in execution allows them to undertake great things, undertakings that under their direction or leadership can achieve great results. They take their own affairs and those that are entrusted to them very seriously, and their word is to be trusted when they give it or promise something. In giving orders, they know how to precisely unite those who are under them, although sometimes they lack something of an attractive sympathy. Lastly, the passionate is consistent with his natural uprightness; such a one prevails on account of their justice and nobility. They do not forget favors and are thankful. Their power of foresight and sense of responsibility are notable. They are born leaders, with an affective and well-founded tendency towards great plans and objectives. They generally have big goals in whatever field they dedicate themselves to. Such a one is apt for almost all higher careers, though perhaps not so much for art. If they direct their spiritual life well, they have the gifts necessary for a fruitful apostolate, and they aren't content with mediocrity, but rather will aspire to true holiness. Generous and altruistic, they require close contact with God.

*Negative aspects.* Such a one has great passions that are not easily erased. Obedience to a superior is difficult for them. They can be sensitive, critical, and distrusting, to the point of being like a hermit. When they hate, they do it with their whole hearts, and it's difficult to make them reconcile with their enemies. They tend spontaneously to bitterness and revenge, and also to stubbornness.

Their passion often blinds their judgment, and thus their criticisms are severe and often unjust. Their self-love is notable, since they won't accept being defeated or surpassed by anyone. It's not uncommon that such a one is impatient with respect to the defects of others, and mistrusting towards some people. In action, they often sin through their excess of energy, which leads them to be tough and demanding with others.

Excessively independent and very proud, work and humiliations are difficult for them to accept. In their tasks, they often seek to work alone.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> The Choleric

The choleric is *emotive* (that is, it is impressionable by any sort of stimulus), *active* (with an interior tendency to action, regardless of whether there are definite goals or not), and *primary* (that is, the reactions are immediate, but with a prompt return to their prior state, meaning, they are easy to calm).

As general characteristics, we can point out, first of all, their exuberant activity and their impulsive way of doing things. They seek tasks where they can unleash their vital impetus. They are combative and enthusiastic, those who start things and who take initiative. Generally speaking, they are optimists and happy and, although they rapidly go from one feeling to another, their great energy continually provides them with enthusiasm and spirit to undertake their activities. Many times that activity is feverish, without great consistency in its direction or depth in their work.

Their feelings are many, strong, and expansive to the utmost degree. They have an innate inclination to convey what they are thinking and feeling, which is aided by their notable ease in using words. All of their emotions have a touch of the extreme; they are capable of great tasks, since they cannot be contented with distant views or halfway points.

In the face of injuries, they react violently in their words, and they often pass to actions without awaiting additional provocations. They get worked up and filled with enthusiasm in moments of danger, and throw themselves into an attack without stopping to consider the consequences. When they fall or fail, they are filled with indignation at themselves. When faced with the faults of others, they reprehend and seek for those faults to be corrected. They have an instinct to command and to be in charge, and they are not content to be a subordinate. Their intelligence is lively and penetrating, intuitive, and not infrequently of great potential. Their exterior appearance is usually in agreement with their being: manly features, a look of determination, a firm step, and energetic movements.

*Positive aspects.* Their natural strength, audacity, and bravery enable them to undertake great tasks. They are men and women of high ideals, and are capable of undertaking important tasks in the social life. They have a determined will and a vast vision. This has been the particular temperament of many famous leaders.

Able to work in politics, teach, or govern, they have a great talent for improvisation and the qualities of good orators. Often

they properly organize the activities of the social groups to which they belong and, in those groups, they know how to seduce others with their contagious optimism.

A fan of sports and very suited for them, in the spiritual life they can, helped by divine grace, reach a high degree of sanctity.

*Negative aspects.* They live in the present moment, concerning themselves exclusively with immediate results. There is a great danger of dissipation and waste of their vital energy, beginning many things without finishing them, committing themselves to more tasks than they can finish, or having many jobs at the same time without doing any of them well.

Being impulsive, they can easily make risky decisions, without foreseeing the consequences.

Their psychological richness and the recognition of their own superiority in action can easily lead them to pride or to vanity. They trust in themselves, and always want to impose their will on others. It is difficult for them to acknowledge their defects, and they easily criticize others. They are indulgent with themselves and demanding with those around them. They can even reach the point of defending their defects as though they were good qualities and even glorify themselves for those defects. They can be so short-tempered that they refuse to admit even the smallest contradiction without bursting into rage, a rage that can even reach the point of becoming cruelty.

Another danger in their actions is that, since they want to reach their ends so badly, in order to reach them, they resort to using inappropriate means.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> The Sentimental

The sentimental is *emotive* (that is, it is impressionable by any sort of stimulus), *inactive* (without an interior tendency to action), and *secondary* (they hold on to received impressions for a long time, and are very bound to their past).

As general characteristics, we can point out the depth and perseverance of their feelings which, nonetheless, are manifested exteriorly only very little. They are very sensible to all classes of emotions or external impressions, but the personal reaction is concentrated in the depths of the soul, and it is there that it is stubbornly recorded, even to the point of being emphasized more and more each time. For example, when they are offended, it's not uncommon that exteriorly they appear little affected but, even after only one time, they will taste resentment, making the offense even greater in their imagination. If the offenses are repeated, there will come a point when they violently explode; this is accompanied by great difficulty in forgiving, on account of the depth of the wound in their soul. On the other hand, in their friendships they are faithful and constant. They don't tend to have many friends, and prefer to have a small group of close ones. They remember and give thanks for any favor and attention that

someone gives them. They aren't prone to laughter and relaxation, but rather to seriousness, melancholy, and scruples.

Their strength is not in physical or intellectual activity, but rather in their affectivity. They are easily moved by the pains of others and, upon seeing so much suffering in the world, they want to fix it. More than many others, they suffer from the defects of those around them, and can even become vulnerable.

They are very prone to reflection and self-analysis. They are indecisive, returning a thousand times to their feelings and actions which, together with their profound moral sense, often impedes them from going ahead and acting; they always fear not having done things well and in the right way. In their actions, they tend to be slow and to not begin works of their own initiative. In times of danger, they appear lost, and prefer to adopt a passive, rather than active, defense. In the face of their own defects, they are easily discouraged and give up hope of ever correcting themselves. When faced with the defects of others, interiorly they are stirred to anger, but many times they aren't able to give the proper remedy. They aren't very practical, but are, rather, dreamers, and can have great literary gifts. Oftentimes sentimentals are sensitive to meteorological changes.

They have a serious understanding of life, and in general they love everything that is great and deep. Their ordinary attitude is one of exterior sweetness and friendliness. Although they don't tend to offer it spontaneously, they will help when it is needed. Very suited for works that demand dedication, silence, and chari-

ty, their perseverance is a distinguishing characteristic. Fulfillers of their duties, they know their responsibilities and seek to attend to them with care. They are usually simple in appearance and are not fans of things that are flashy.

*Positive aspects.* They are kind and honorable, incapable of being cruel or rough with others, even though their external reserve seems like apathy. Often they are pleased to care for the sick. Their limited tendency to action is compensated by their ease of prayer. In general, they find consolation and interior peace in their intimate contact with God. Simple, humble, and trustworthy, they are little inclined to sensuality. The sentimental is prone to help others, in addition to being persevering, a hard worker, and one who fulfills their obligations. Many moral theologians, teachers, psychologists, as well as men and women of letters and art critics, have this sort of temperament.

*Negative aspects.* They can sin through their indecision. They have a tendency to discouragement and to undervalue their own talents, which can lead to pessimism, bitterness, or a timidity that is annoying for them and for those around them. As a way to compensate for that, they grow accustomed to interiorly and uncharitably judging and classifying their neighbors. The danger of pride and interior emotional arrogance is not rare, as a compensation for feeling inferior to those whose action and appearance might be more outstanding. They find it very difficult to forgive offenses and when they hate, they do so intensely. One injury makes them feel underappreciated and hated, and thus they dis-

trust everyone and assume that everyone is out to get them. They run the risk of embittering their character if they give in too often to their tendency to solitude, which can make them proud.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> The Nervous

The nervous is *emotive* (that is, it is impressionable by any sort of stimulus), *inactive* (without an interior tendency to action), and *primary* (that is, the reactions are immediate, but with a prompt return to their prior state).

In general, their emotions vary greatly; their vitality is tumultuous, with little order or coherency. They are principally interested in their subjective life, rich and complex as it is: a man (or woman) of interior problems, tensions, intense joys and sufferings, which all follow one after another and make them think a great deal about themselves. They can also hold on to those impressions for a long time.

Their imagination is very lively, and their ingenuity great; they have artistic qualities and musical talent. However, for that very reason, they are readily influenced and curious, and love what gives momentary pleasure, what is impressive. They deeply feel insults or injuries, and they show it with outbursts of bad temper, however momentary they might be. This excitability can make them very undisciplined, rebellious, and rough in their treatment of those who offend them (or who they believe have offended them). They easily break down after falling, and make resolutions to amend their ways, but promptly forget them. They also have a tendency to overvalue themselves, mentally highlighting their



good qualities and paying little attention to their defects. They have a need to call attention, to be admired, as well as to vent their frequent outbursts or impulses.

Their intellect is more intuitive than deductive, more concrete than abstract. They are agile. Their nerves are always tense, but they don't persevere for long in a continuous and difficult effort. Very easy to influence, they tend to quickly come to think, feel, and act like those whom they are in contact with. This is because of their great capacity for psychological harmonizing. They easily adapt to new circumstances. They know how to wield a certain influence over others because they tend to be very kind in their treatment of those who get along with them.

*Positive aspects.* They have a very sensitive heart; they are inclined to compassion and are extremely generous. They are very attentive to the needs and preferences of others, with a spontaneous and loving helpfulness when dealing with those whom they admire or with those whom they know love and appreciate them. They possess a fine sense of tact, and can be very diplomatic when they want. If they are sent as a subject to someone who they appreciate, they are docile and obedient. Their delicate spirit gives them a grace and special gift for dealing with others, and they are apt for consoling someone who is downcast.

*Negative aspects.* The root of their defects is their sensibility. In order to deal with them, you must first see "which way the wind is blowing today." If they let themselves be dominated by their feelings, they become unbearable to their companions. They can be-

come so sensitive that they perhaps feel hurt if we look at them, precisely because we look at them, but, if we don't look at them, they feel scorned. They are also inclined to vanity and sensuality. They live off of impressions, of momentary forces. If they abandon themselves to them, they will never do anything great or serious. They are improvisers, and the enemy of anything that demands effort and methodical discipline (mental or physical). This inconsistency is their main defect. In addition, on account of their dependence on the momentary impression, they easily change their opinion and activity. They can become the slave of the present moment.

### 5<sup>th</sup> The Phlegmatic

The phlegmatic is *not emotive* (that is, they are not easily impressionable), *active* (with an interior tendency to action, regardless of whether there are definite goals or not), and *secondary* (they hold on to received impressions for a long time, and are very bound to their past).

As general characteristics, we can say that phlegmatics have a vigorously structured personality, one without breaks, with a rich foundation of active energy. They don't have interior feelings, but rather constancy and tenacity in action.

They are men and women without great passions, difficult to excite, who keep themselves constantly in emotional tranquility. In their actions, they are rarely violent or overexcited. Supremely patient, they speak little, and, when they do, they do in a moderated way and almost never raising their voice. They reduce to a min-

imum their expressions and manifestations of emotion, giving many the impression of coldness. They are constantly busy, ordered in the smallest things, and methodical in everything they do. They don't tend to enjoy the social life, although they are faithful to their friendships.

With a clear and logical spirit, their prevailing interests are rather intellectual: speculative studies, mathematics, law, and literature. They are simple in their things and rarely conceited.

Their action is assiduous though slow and calm. Their works are in accord with their ideas and principles. They show a great, almost inflexible, moral uprightness. Reflexive and highly prudent, no task is undertaken until the final possibilities for success have been calculated and all the difficulties considered. Once decided, phlegmatics dedicate themselves to the task with seriousness and constancy.

Thrifty, honorable, and sincere, the phlegmatic does not become perturbed in the face of insults, because perhaps they aren't aware of them, or they take them with happy humor. In moments of difficulty, the phlegmatic is indecisive, but is not easily disturbed. They keep their peace but do not resolve the situation quickly. If they fall, they do not get too worked up.

Their intellect is more suited for delving profoundly into a study rather than for rapid thinking. They are outstanding in their common sense and their knowledge of people. A good organizer, objective and realist, a phlegmatic has little imaginative strength and is not very inclined to artistic creation.

*Positive aspects.* We must point out their tranquility in receiving any and all events; difficulties do not bother them. They easily maintain the balance between thought and deeds, between feeling and action. Without violent passions, they are sober and moderated, and don't allow themselves to be carried away by their gut reactions. A friend of reflection and of slow consideration of things, they are mature and profound thinkers in their religious convictions and their fundamental criteria of things. Patient in putting up with others, their feelings are easily of benevolence and friendliness. Little inclined to pomp and flashiness, they are natural and simple, without exaggerated ambitions. They rarely, if ever, lie. What they don't achieve by rapid action, they obtain through their constancy. As the practical people they are, they know how to take advantage of means and they seek what is useful more than what is merely attractive. They like to have well-defined obligations. Well-suited for whatever requires order and constancy, they have the gifts needed to be a great team member. This, and their deep sense of duty qualify them for leadership positions of great responsibility and delicate administration. In their tasks, they are usually efficient, sure, and assiduous.

*Negative aspects.* Their emotional tranquility can degenerate into a sort of apathy, disregarding everything without showing interest or enthusiasm for anything. Phlegmatics tend to notably harden their hearts, rendering them unfeeling and cold towards others, little by little leading them to shrewd egoism and pride in their self-sufficiency.

They tend to be slaves to their organization, habits, and methods. It's possible for them to exaggerate their prudence and foresight to the extreme, to the point of not starting anything because they think too much about the possible difficulties and thus not taking advantage of opportune moments. This makes the phlegmatic lose courage on more than one occasion, and what is paradoxical in this active character is that it can make them lazy by shunning action in order to avoid possible failures or dangers, or simply to defend their solitude and independence from the hustle and bustle and from social interactions. In these cases, they tend to take refuge in mental activity (preferably imaginative), systematically preferring what is comfortable and easy in their external action, distancing themselves from anything that could seem difficult or arduous.

### **6<sup>th</sup> The Sanguine**

The sanguine is *not emotive* (that is, they are not easily impressionable), *active* (with an interior tendency to action, regardless of whether there are definite goals or not), and *primary* (that is, the reactions are immediate, but with a prompt return to their prior state).

*General characteristics.* Sanguines cannot be inactive, although they aren't very consistent in following through with what they begin. Generally speaking, they are always happy, smiling, and very talkative with lively and animated speech. They are friends of exaggeration, making noise, and making things lively. Sociable, attentive, and courteous, they enjoy companionship and friend-

ships. They love freedom. Religion and politics don't get them excited and, in general, their passions are not very strong. They usually have a disposition well suited for music and delight in sports. Their imagination is lively, but needs to be continually occupied. Sanguines prefer what is more pleasant, tasteful, and flashy. They easily let themselves be led by appearances and, because of this, they are often superficial in their judgments. In order for them to persevere in a work, they always need new stimuli; they always want change and, for this reason, it's difficult for them to be completely generous in their gift of self. Expansive and effusive, everything that they think, they comment on, discuss, and communicate to others. They aren't easily irritated by offenses, and, if they are, they easily pounce on the offender without thinking, and it's not easy for them to back down. When they commit some fault, they easily console themselves and renew their good resolutions.

*Positive aspects.* Sanguines are agreeable people in the social life. They are good-natured and kind-hearted, full of happiness and good humor, lively and communicative, and very service-minded and courteous with everyone. They easily realize what others need and happily give their assistance; they are also compassionate and merciful with the weaknesses of others. They have noticeable common sense and an intuitive intellect. They don't let themselves work anxiously, nor do they drown in their problems. They have a special knack for reprimanding the faults of others with tact but also with sincerity. A friend of always speaking the truth,

very rarely do they take part in deceptions. They don't harbor grudges and easily forgive others. They are very docile to the directions of the superiors, with a simple spirit.

*Negative aspects.* Their main problem is the lack of reflection and letting themselves be swept along by their tastes and their first impressions, and not by reason. They are superficial and don't have much discernment. Both discipline and mortification cost them a great deal. Their desires and imagination easily overflow. They allow themselves to be caught up by anything that, at first glance, seems attractive and nice, since their personality is neither very solid nor serious.

### **7<sup>th</sup> The Apathetic**

The apathetic is *not emotive* (they are not easily impressionable), *inactive* (without an interior tendency to action, and thus is passive rather than active), and *secondary* (they hold on to received impressions for a long time, and are very bound to their past).

Among the general characteristics of apathetics, what stands out are their lack of vitality and their isolation. They avoid mixing with others in conversation or activities. They don't feel annoyed by their companions; rather, their companions just don't mean much to them. However, regarding this, it must be kept in mind that there are many intermediate degrees. They are also docile, at least in appearance, because what is really observed is what little emotional tension they have. They prefer a calm life, away from the social hustle and bustle. They aren't particularly inclined for practical tasks, and tend to theoretical ones instead. They are

docile and conformist, which means they adjust well to the rules of the place where they live.

*Positive aspects.* One positive aspect is their constancy, firm roots, and tenacity. They are able to be disciplined and consistent. They don't usually have problems with others. Their preferred field is the abstract, and they would prefer mathematics to the experimental sciences and practical work.

For *negative aspects* we must highlight the lack of psychological dynamism which almost always results from an imbalance in the neurovegetative system and, consequently, probably an endocrine insufficiency. They don't usually concern themselves about themselves or others in order to live calmly. As a result of their reserve and their meditative air, they feign a certain interior richness. There is danger, however, that this appearance is just that, simply a mask, and that in reality they lack interest and enthusiasm in their lives. They can also focus themselves on themselves, to the point of forming a closed egocentrism in which they are moved only by their own well-being, to care only for themselves and their happiness. They tend to avoid committing themselves to altruistic activities that demand effort and sacrifice.

### **8<sup>th</sup> The Amorphous**

The amorphous is *not emotive* (they are not easily impressionable), *inactive* (without an interior tendency to action, and thus is passive rather than active), and *primary* (that is, the reactions are immediate, but with a prompt return to their prior state).



Although this temperament is not very common, we can point out some general characteristics: they are highly influenced by their setting, they are optimists and are friendly in their interactions, and are readily influenced. They are sociable, but with a tendency to avoid the personal effort that communal works require. They are lazy, but in some this laziness is disguised as activity, doing things that they like to do while fleeing from those that they should do, or they content themselves by doing what is strictly necessary. They tire easily, and have little understanding of reality.

*Positive aspects* are their courage, which is seen mostly in the ability to resist; they are unshakeable in the face of danger. They tend to have a practical understanding, and are extremely social; they need others in order to work, and they do it with joy. Often they are very gifted for theater and music. They are rather clumsy with things that require order, and are often negligent and sometimes even careless in cleaning.

*Negative aspects:* the most notable is their laziness. For this very reason, they leave their work and efforts for the last minute, until necessity obliges them to act. This naturally and quite often makes them late and forces them to leave tasks undone. Many times this has an organic cause (either a constitutional or accidental weakness). They are easily influenced by the setting in which they live, and this can put them in serious danger. Their inactivity is an obstacle to helpfulness, making them ever more egocentric. They are

also in danger of simply allowing themselves to crawl instead of flying.

### 3) How do these descriptions help us?

None of these “types” is in fact found in its “chemically pure” state; rather, in real life there are numerous mixes. Nonetheless, with all this, it is unquestionable that certain temperamental features dominate in each individual, which allows, with due reserve and caution, for everyone to be set into one of the aforementioned categories.

These outlines can only give us an understanding that is partial (since it is only the basic structure, without any mention of surroundings, history, education, or freedom), summary (because it offers only some references for some aspects, and not for others), and schematic (because these models are rather theoretical and rigid, and must later be adapted in each individual case).<sup>41</sup> However, they are sufficient to permit us to better understand some of our characteristics, to see the intimate connection between some characteristics, and to help us to understand ourselves better (and to understand others better!<sup>42</sup>). Likewise, it is invaluable for help-

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Benedit, Magdalena, *La comprensión del carácter*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> I fully share these assessments of Magdalena Benedit: “Each of us instinctively has a *model* within us; we imagine others from *our* personal parameters or ideals, and we even *moralize*, if we think this or that reaction seemed good or bad to us. . . . The basic premise of characterology is that we are all different and that, in order to understand each other, it’s helpful for us to think of ourselves as united by the characteristics that we might have in common” (Benedit, Magdalena, *La comprensión del carácter*, 36). Castellani already said the same: “‘He’s a strange guy,’ said the Ram. ‘What does that mean, to be strange?’ asked [the lamb]. ‘To be strange means to not be like me,’ said the Ram.”

ing us to identify the most relevant points of our deepest dispositions, to notice the direction of our reactions, and, in the depths, to more adequately outline our positive and negative aspects and find the roots of our defects in order to work against them.



