The Cardinal Sins



P. S. Langeslag

GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN IN PUBLICA COMMODA SEIT 1737

Biblical Inspiration

The Ten Commandments (in Paraphrase; See Exodus 20)

1. No other gods
2. (or 1b) No graven images
3. (or 2) No taking the Lord's name in vain
4. (or 3) Keep the Sabbath
5. (or 4) Honour your parents
6. (or 5) No killing
7. (or 6) No adultery
8. (or 7) No stealing
9. (or 8) No bearing false witness
10. (and 9) No coveting of anything of your neighbour's (Aug. counts his wife separately)

→ The seeds of lust, greed, perhaps wrath.

The Sermon on the Mount

Mt 5.21–22 You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. [...] But I say to you, that whosoever is **angry** with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment.

Mt 5.27–28 You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to **lust** after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.

→ The seeds of wrath and lust.

Other Bible Passages

Isaiah on pride (addressing the King of Babylon, interpreted as Lucifer/Satan)

Isaiah 14.11 Thy pride is brought down to hell [...].

Paul on greed

1 Timothy 6.10 For the desire of money is the root of all evils.

Ecclesiasticus on pride

Sirach 10.14 The beginning of the pride of man, is to fall off from God.

Mis?quoted by Gregory as "pride is the beginning of all sin." (*Moralia in Iob* ch. 45)

(Translations follow Douay-Rheims, and Parker for *Moralia*.)

The Cardinal Sins in the Latin Tradition

John Cassian's Translations of Evagrius Ponticus's Greek

No.	Greek	Latin	English
(1)	gastrimargia	gula	gluttony
(2)	porneia	fornicatio	lust
(3)	philargyria	auaritia	greed
(4)	lypē	tristitia	melancholy
(5)	orgē	ira	wrath
(6)	akēdia	acedia	sloth
(7)	kenodoxia	uana gloria	vanity/vainglory
(8)	hyperēphania	superbia	pride

Gregory I's Hierarchy of Sins

For when **pride**, the **queen** of sins, has fully possessed a conquered heart, she surrenders it immediately to seven principal sins, as if to some of her **generals**, to lay it waste. But seven principal vices, as its first progeny, spring doubtless from this poisonous root, namely, vain glory, envy, anger, melancholy, avarice, gluttony, lust. [...] But these several sins have each their **army** against us. For from vain glory there arise disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contentions, obstinacies, discords, and the presumptions of novelties. [...] But of these seven, five namely are spiritual, and two are carnal. But they are, each of them, so closely connected with other, that they spring only the one from the other. [...]

(*Moralia in Iob* ch. 45; trans. Parker, emphasis mine)

Three levels: queen, generals, armies.

Gregory I's List of the Seven (!) Cardinal Sins

No.	Latin	English
(0)	superbia	pride
(1)	inanis gloria	vainglory
(2)	inuidia	envy
(3)	ira	anger
(4)	tristitia	melancholy
(5)	auaritia	greed
(6)	uentris ingluuies	gluttony
(7)	luxuria	lust

- Pride stands *above* the seven, so we still have a total of eight above the fold!
- Sloth does not occur in this list but may be included under melancholy; the term *torpor* occurs in the discussion, but *acedia* never occurs in Gregory's *Moralia in Iob*.

High Medieval Developments

When referenced today, the cardinal or capital or deadly sins typically refer to:

No.	Latin	English
1	superbia	pride
2	inuidia	envy
3	ira	anger
4	acedia	sloth
5	auaritia	greed
6	gula	gluttony
7	luxuria	lust

Though often associated with Gregory I, the list so codified reflects scholastic thinkers like Thomas Aquinas.

The Cardinal Sins in Old English Preaching Texts

Overview

English	Latin	Old English
pride	superbia	ofermōd
envy	inuidia	anda
wrath	ira	yrre/wēamōdnes
melancholy	tristitia	unrōtnes
greed	auaritia	gitsung
gluttony	gula/uentris ingluuies	gifernes/oferfyll
lust	luxuria/fornicatio	gālscipe/dyrne geliger/forliger
vanity/vainglory	uana gloria	īdel gylp
sloth	acedia	īdelnes/sleac(mōd)nes/asolcennes

- English authors appear to have had access to both pre- and post-Gregorian lists (the above table counts nine items, but they are never all found in one text)
- They merged e.g. sloth and melancholy to reach a count of eight (not seven)
- The order varies, but pride stands at one end

Vercelli XX

se forma heafodleahtor is ofermodignys [...]	(*pride*)
ðonne is se oðer heafodleahtor gecweden gyfernys [...]	(*gluttony*)
ðonne is se þridda heafodleahtor gecweden forlyr [...]	(*lust*)
ðonne is se feorða heafodleahtor gecweden gytsung [...]	(*greed*)
ðonne is se fifta heafodleahtor gecweden yrre [...]	(*wrath*)
ðonne is se sixta heafodleahter gecweden sleacnys [...]	(*sloth*)
ðonne is se seofoða heafodleahter gecweden unrotnys [...]	(*melancholy*)
ðonne is se eahteoða heafodleahtor gecweden idel wuldor	(*vainglory*)

(This list is numbered, starts with pride, and omits envy.)

Vercelli III

Ærest is þæt forme gyfernys, þæt is þære wambe frecnyss;	(*gluttony*)
oðer is dyrnegelygr;	(*lust*)
þridde is sleacmodnys and unrotnys;	(*sloth; melancholy*)
feorðe is gytsung;	(*greed*)
fifte is idel wuldor;	(*vainglory*)
sixte æfest;	(*envy*)
seofoðe yrre;	(*wrath*)
ehteoðe oferhyd; seo is cwen ealra yfela	(*pride*)

(This numbered list ends with pride, and merges sloth and melancholy.)

(The phrase *cwēn ealra yfela* reveals Gregory as a source; the merger of sloth with melancholy suggests the same.)

Bethurum X

And wið ða deoflican eahta heafodleahtras dæges and nihtes warnige symle;

þæt is gitsung	(*greed*)
and gifernes,	(*gluttony*)
galnes	(*lust*)
and weamodnes,	(*wrath*)
unrotnes,	(*melancholy*)
asolcennes,	(*sloth*)
gilpgeornes,	(*vainglory*)
and ofermodignes	(*pride*)

(This unnumbered list omits envy and ends with pride.)

The Corresponding Virtues (Bethurum X)

Đonne syndan eahta healice mægenu þurh godes mihte mannum gescyfte; ðæt is

rumheortnys	(*generosity*)
and syfernys	(*temperance*)
clænnes	(*chastity*)
and modþwærnes	(*meekness*)
glædnes	(*joy*)
and anrædnys	(*resolve*)
sibgeornnys	(*a peaceful disposition*)
and eadmodnys	(*humility*)

The Cardinal Sins in Old English Verse

Pride in Old English Poetry

The Battle of Maldon

Þā se eorl ongan for his ofermōde / alȳfan landes tō fela laþere þēode. (87–88)

Beowulf

þē þæt sēlre gecēos, / ēce rædas; oferhyda ne gȳm, / mǣre cempa. (1759–1761a)

Daniel

Đā for ðām gylpe gumena drihten / forfangen wearð and on flēam gewāt, / āna on oferhyd ofer ealle men. (612–614)

Wæs Baldazar burga aldor, / weold wera rices, oðþæt him wlenco gesceod, / oferhygd egle. (676–678a)

Vainglory

Sum on oferhygdo / þrymme þringeð, þrinteð him in innan / ungemedemad mod; / sindan to monige þæt. (23b–25)

Lust in Old English Poetry

- *Judith*: Holofernes

Wrath in Old English Poetry

- *Precepts*

Greed in Old English Poetry

- *Soul and Body* (*I*, *II*): the body

Envy in Old English Poetry

- *Homiletic Fragment I*
- *Vainglory*

The Virtues in Old English Poetry

- *Judith*: chastity, resolve
- Saints' lives: chastity (*Juliana*), temperance (*Guthlac*: *A*, *B*), meekness, humility, etc.

The Wanderer 65b–74 as a Reflection on Virtue

Wita sceal geþyldig,
ne sceal no to hatheort ne to hrædwyrde,
ne to wac wiga ne to wanhydig,
ne to forht ne to fægen, ne to feohgifre
ne næfre gielpes to georn, ær he geare cunne.
Beorn sceal gebidan, þonne he beot spriceð,
oþþæt collenferð cunne gearwe
hwider hreþra gehygd hweorfan wille.
Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið,
þonne ealre þisse worulde wela weste stondeð.

Bibliography

Newhauser, Richard. *The Early History of Greed: The Sin of Avarice in Early Medieval Thought and Literature*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Newhauser, Richard G., and Susan Ridyard, eds. *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*. York: York Medieval Press, 2012.

Stanley, E. G. "Idle lustas." *English Studies* 93, no. 5 (2012): 509–18.

Wenzel, Siegfried. *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1967.