

## Preface

STRUCK WITH A CHRONIC disease while in my late twenties, I decided to go back to school to read. I wanted to read everything I could about how I was to live faithfully with this disease. Books, for this bookworm, were my way to cope.

I spent over a year of my doctoral work trying to find an ethical strategy for Christian care of health. A possible answer came in my second year of reading (for which I'm profoundly grateful, otherwise I may still be in my degree program). While reading Thomas Aquinas in a Catholic Moral Theology seminar, I noticed an example repeated over and over again. In fact, in every question of Thomas's *Prima Secundae* questions 49–54 on Habit, references to "health" appeared. Struck by this repetition, I read these questions closely to see what, if anything, Thomas was saying about health.

This book comes out of that deep reading. Despite some inconsistencies, I believe Thomas Aquinas does indeed understand practices of health as a part of the moral life—thus contributing to how Christians might live toward a faithful life with God. How Thomas understands habit, health, and the workings of the body, soul, and heart (passions) gives support to this thesis.

I didn't want my surmise about Thomas's practices of health to only live in theory; I wanted to find embodied, communal examples of St. Thomas's insights. I did field research with United Methodist clergy participants in the Clergy Health Initiative pilot program, and with missionaries in the evangelical organization Word Made Flesh. For each I obtained an Institutional Research Board approval and used sociological methods to analyze the qualitative data from my interviews. Again, to my profound gratitude, I found that Thomas' insights actually "worked." The clergy and missionaries who engaged in habits of health, were (though not perfectly) happier, more vital human beings with improved relationships with God and greater service to others.

## *Preface*

I offer to you, my readers, not a quick-fix diet book or exercise plan for greater physical health. To practice health as a virtue in accordance with Aquinas's thinking engages all of our being. However, flourishing with God is worth the moral effort. May you be well.

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