

“Spiritual Theology” by Jordan Aumann, OP

Study Questions - Chapter Fourteen

by Mr. George H. Bercaw, O.P.

St. Cecilia Chapter of the Dominican Laity (Nashville, Tn)

- Discernment of Spirits –

References: CCC / Spiritual Resources

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: 2690 Charisms: 800 Religious Sense: 1676 Of Trials: 2847	Thomas a Kempis “The Imitation of Christ,” Book 3, Chapter 54
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Additional References:

“Possessed; The True Story Of An Exorcism” by Thomas B. Allan

Questions

1. What is meant by the term, “spirit”?
the word spirit refers to two different types of motivating factors or powers. The spirit of an individual refers to the internal inclination to good or evil
2. What are the two types of *discernment of spirit*?
 - a. Acquired - Acquired discernment of spirits is complementary to ordinary spiritual direction and can be cultivated by all who use the proper means
 - b. Infused - *Infused discernment of spirits is a charismatic gift or gratia gratis data, which is granted by God to certain individuals. It is extremely rare, even among the saints, but when it occurs it is infallible because it is the result of an interior movement or inspiration received from the Holy Spirit, who cannot err.*
3. Name various means by which one can acquire the art of discernment of spirits.
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Study
 - c. Personal experience
 - d. Removal of obstacles

4. *Spirits can be summarized under three headings: the divine spirit, the diabolical spirit, and the human spirit. Define the divine spirit and its characteristics.*

Truth

Gravity.

Enlightenment,

Docility

Discretion.

Humility.

Peace.

Confidence in God.

Flexibility of will.

Purity of intention

Patience in suffering

Self-abnegation.

Simplicity.... Any duplicity, arrogance, hypocrisy, or vanity must be attributed rather to the spirit of the devil, the father of lies.

Liberty of spirit.... Liberty of spirit enables the soul to live in a state of constant joy and eagerness for the things of God.

Desire to imitate Christ.

Disinterested love.

- a. Define the *diabolical spirit* and its characteristics.

Normally diabolical influence on the individual Christian is restricted to simple temptation, although it is not likely that the majority of temptations proceed from the immediate and direct intervention of the devil. At other times, with God's permission, the devil may concentrate his power on an individual by means of diabolical obsession or diabolical possession.

Spirit of falsity. The devil is the father of lies, but he cleverly conceals his deceit by half-truths and pseudo-mystical phenomena.

Morbid curiosity. This is characteristic of those who eagerly seek out the esoteric aspects of mystical phenomena or have a fascination for the occult or preternatural.

Confusion, anxiety, and deep depression.

Obstinacy. One of the surest signs of a diabolical spirit.

Constant indiscretion and a restless spirit. Those who constantly go to extremes, as in penitential exercises or apostolic activity; or neglect their primary obligations to do some personally chosen work.

Spirit of pride and vanity. Very anxious to publicize their gifts of grace and

mystical experiences.

False humility. This is the disguise for their pride and self-love.

Despair, lack of confidence, and discouragement. A chronic characteristic that alternates with presumption, vain security, and un-'founded optimism.

Disobedience and hardness of heart.

Impatience in suffering and stubborn resentment.

Uncontrolled passions and strong inclination to sensuality, usually under the guise of mystical union.

Hypocrisy, simulation, and duplicity.

Excessive attachment to sensible consolations, particularly in their practice of prayer.

Lack of deep devotion to Jesus and Mary.

Scrupulous adherence to the letter of the law and fanatical zeal in promoting a cause. This characteristic readily opens the door to diabolical influence in reformers and demagogues.

5. Define the *human spirit* and its characteristics.

The human spirit is always inclined to its own satisfactions; it is a friend of pleasure and an enemy of suffering of any kind. It readily inclines to anything that is compatible with its own temperament, its personal tastes and caprices, or the satisfaction of self-love. It will not hear of humiliations, penance, renunciation, or mortification. If any director or confessor goes against its inclinations, he is immediately branded as inept and incompetent. It seeks success, honors, applause, and pastimes. It is always a great promoter of anything that will arouse admiration or notoriety. In a word, the human spirit neither understands nor cares for anything except its own egoism.

6. What are some of the remedies for *possession*?

- a. Sacrament of Confession
- b. Holy Communion
- c. Fasting and Prayer
- d. Use of sacramental: holy water, the cross, the sign of the cross, etc.
- e. Relics of the saints
- f. The holy names of Jesus and Mary

7. Any phenomenon of religious experience must be attributed to one of those three causes. What are they?

- a. *God*
- b. *the devil*
- c. *or some natural power.*

8. What is the difference between **grace gratum faciens** and **grace gratis data**?
- grace gratum faciens is related to sanctifying grace*
 - grace gratis data is related to free grace*

[See Thomas Aquinas: *WHETHER GRACE IS APPROPRIATELY DIVIDED INTO SANCTIFYING GRACE AND FREE GRACE*]

9. How is it that mystical activity is possible in the life of a person who is not in the mystical state?

Mystical activity is essentially an experience of God, passively received and more or less intensely felt through the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And since the gifts of the Holy Spirit pertain to the supernatural organism of the spiritual life, whatever proceeds from. [Personally, I believe that God does, from time to time, "spoil" his children by giving us a "taste" of this advanced spiritual state simply because He chooses to do so; perhaps, as an encouragement to persevere.]

10. The following are the principal and concomitant mystical phenomena, from the beginning to the end of the mystical state (explain each):

- An intuition of God or divine things
- An experiential knowledge of God or divine things
- Passive purification of the senses*
- Continued awareness of the presence of God*
- Passive purgation of the spirit*
- Total death to self*

11. The following are the principal extraordinary phenomena observed in the lives of saints and mystics. Identify the name(s) of a saint(s) who is associated with each phenomena. (Ah, c'mon...you can name some of them!)

- Visions
- Locutions
- Revelations
- Reading of hearts
- Hierognosis
- Flames of love
- Stigmata
- Tears of blood and sweat
- Exchange of hearts

- j. Inedia
 - k. Prolonged absence of sleep
 - l. Agility
 - m. Bilocation
 - n. Levitation
 - o. Penetration of bodies
 - p. Mystical Aureoles
 - q. Sweet odor
 - r. Incombustibility
 - s. Bodily enlogation
 - t. Incorruptibility of the body
 - u. The absence of rigor mortis
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PRAYER: IN BRIEF

- 2692** In prayer, the pilgrim Church is associated with that of the saints, whose intercession she asks.
- 2693** The different schools of Christian spirituality share in the living tradition of prayer and are precious guides for the spiritual life.
- 2694** The Christian family is the first place for education in prayer.
- 2695** Ordained ministers, the consecrated life, catechesis, prayer groups, and “spiritual direction” ensure assistance within the Church in the practice of prayer.
- 2696** The most appropriate places for prayer are personal or family oratories, monasteries, places of pilgrimage, and above all the church, which is the proper place for liturgical prayer for the parish community and the privileged place for Eucharistic adoration.¹

CHARISMS: IN BRIEF

Charisms

799 Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world. (951, 2003)

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (647). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

800 Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.²⁵³

801 It is in this sense that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds. "Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good,"²⁵⁴ so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together "for the common good."²⁵⁵ (894; 1905)²

Popular piety

1674 Besides sacramental liturgy and sacramentals, catechesis must take into account the forms of piety and popular devotions among the faithful. The religious sense of the Christian people has always found expression in various forms of piety surrounding the Church's sacramental life, such as the veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals,¹⁸⁰ etc. (2688; 2669, 2678)

1675 These expressions of piety extend the liturgical life of the Church, but do not replace it. They "should be so drawn up that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."¹⁸¹

1676 Pastoral discernment is needed to sustain and support popular piety and, if necessary, to purify and correct the religious sense which underlies these devotions so that the faithful may advance in knowledge of the mystery of Christ.¹⁸² Their exercise is subject to the care and judgment of the bishops and to the general norms of the Church. (426)

At its core the piety of the people is a storehouse of values that offers answers of Christian wisdom to the great questions of life. The Catholic wisdom of the people is capable of fashioning a vital synthesis.... It creatively combines the divine and the human, Christ and Mary, spirit and body, communion and institution, person and community, faith and homeland, intelligence and

²⁵³ Cf. *1 Cor* 13.

²⁵⁴ *LG* 12; cf. 30; *1 Thess* 5:12, 19–21; John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 24.

²⁵⁵ *1 Cor* 12:7.

² Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (212). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Council of Nicæa II: DS 601; 603; Council of Trent: DS 1822.

¹⁸¹ *SC* 13 § 3.

¹⁸² Cf. John Paul II, *CT* 54.

emotion. This wisdom is a Christian humanism that radically affirms the dignity of every person as a child of God, establishes a basic fraternity, teaches people to encounter nature and understand work, provides reasons for joy and humor even in the midst of a very hard life. For the people this wisdom is also a principle of discernment and an evangelical instinct through which they spontaneously sense when the Gospel is served in the Church and when it is emptied of its content and stifled by other interests.¹⁸³

IN BRIEF

- 1677** Sacramentals are sacred signs instituted by the Church. They prepare men to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different circumstances of life.
- 1678** Among the sacramentals blessings occupy an important place. They include both praise of God for his works and gifts, and the Church's intercession for men that they may be able to use God's gifts according to the spirit of the Gospel.
- 1679** In addition to the liturgy, Christian life is nourished by various forms of popular piety, rooted in the different cultures. While carefully clarifying them in the light of faith, the Church fosters the forms of popular piety that express an evangelical instinct and a human wisdom and that enrich Christian life.³

2847 The Holy Spirit makes us *discern* between trials, which are necessary for the growth of the inner man,¹⁵² and temptation, which leads to sin and death.¹⁵³ We must also discern between being tempted and consenting to temptation. Finally, discernment unmasks the lie of temptation, whose object appears to be good, a "delight to the eyes" and desirable,¹⁵⁴ when in reality its fruit is death. (2284)

God does not want to impose the good, but wants free beings.... There is a certain usefulness to temptation. No one but God knows what our soul has received from him, not even we ourselves. But temptation reveals it in order to teach us to know ourselves, and in this way we discover our

¹⁸³ CELAM, Third General Conference (Puebla, 1979), Final Document, § 448 (tr. NCCB, 1979); cf. Paul VI, *EN* 48.

³ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (417–418). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

¹⁵² Cf. *Lk.* 8:13–15; *Acts* 14:22; *Rom* 5:3–5; *2 Tim* 3:12.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Jas* 1:14–15.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Gen* 3:6.

evil inclinations and are obliged to give thanks for the goods that temptation has revealed to us.¹⁵⁵⁴

The Fifty-Fourth Chapter

THE DIFFERENT MOTIONS OF NATURE AND GRACE

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

MY CHILD, pay careful attention to the movements of nature and of grace, for they move in very contrary and subtle ways, and can scarcely be distinguished by anyone except a man who is spiritual and inwardly enlightened. All men, indeed, desire what is good, and strive for what is good in their words and deeds. For this reason the appearance of good deceives many.

Nature is crafty and attracts many, ensnaring and deceiving them while ever seeking itself. But grace walks in simplicity, turns away from all appearance of evil, offers no deceits, and does all purely for God in whom she rests as her last end.

Nature is not willing to die, or to be kept down, or to be overcome. Nor will it subdue itself or be made subject. Grace, on the contrary, strives for mortification of self. She resists sensuality, seeks to be in subjection, longs to be conquered, has no wish to use her own liberty, loves to be held under discipline, and does not desire to rule over anyone, but wishes rather to live, to stand, and to be always under God for Whose sake she is willing to bow humbly to every human creature.

Nature works for its own interest and looks to the profit it can reap from another. Grace does not consider what is useful and advantageous to herself, but rather what is profitable to many. Nature likes to receive honor and reverence, but grace faithfully attributes all honor and glory to God. Nature fears shame and contempt, but grace is happy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus. Nature loves ease and physical rest. Grace, however, cannot bear to be idle and embraces labor willingly. Nature seeks to possess what is rare and beautiful, abhorring things that are cheap and coarse. Grace, on the contrary, delights in simple, humble things, not despising those that are rough, nor refusing to be clothed in old garments.

Nature has regard for temporal wealth and rejoices in earthly gains. It is sad over a loss and irritated by a slight, injurious word. But grace looks to eternal things and does not cling to those

¹⁵⁵ Origen, *De orat.* 29: PG 11, 544 CD.

⁴ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (684). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

which are temporal, being neither disturbed at loss nor angered by hard words, because she has placed her treasure and joy in heaven where nothing is lost.

Nature is covetous, and receives more willingly than it gives. It loves to have its own private possessions. Grace, however, is kind and openhearted. Grace shuns private interest, is contented with little, and judges it more blessed to give than to receive.

Nature is inclined toward creatures, toward its own flesh, toward vanities, and toward running about. But grace draws near to God and to virtue, renounces creatures, hates the desires of the flesh, restrains her wanderings and blushes at being seen in public.

Nature likes to have some external comfort in which it can take sensual delight, but grace seeks consolation only in God, to find her delight in the highest Good, above all visible things.

Nature does everything for its own gain and interest. It can do nothing without pay and hopes for its good deeds to receive their equal or better, or else praise and favor. It is very desirous of having its deeds and gifts highly regarded. Grace, however, seeks nothing temporal, nor does she ask any recompense but God alone. Of temporal necessities she asks no more than will serve to obtain eternity.

Nature rejoices in many friends and kinsfolk, glories in noble position and birth, fawns on the powerful, flatters the rich, and applauds those who are like itself. But grace loves even her enemies and is not puffed up at having many friends. She does not think highly of either position or birth unless there is also virtue there. She favors the poor in preference to the rich. She sympathizes with the innocent rather than with the powerful. She rejoices with the true man rather than with the deceitful, and is always exhorting the good to strive for better gifts, to become like the Son of God by practicing the virtues.

Nature is quick to complain of need and trouble; grace is stanch in suffering want. Nature turns all things back to self. It fights and argues for self. Grace brings all things back to God in Whom they have their source. To herself she ascribes no good, nor is she arrogant or presumptuous. She is not contentious. She does not prefer her own opinion to the opinion of others, but in every matter of sense and thought submits herself to eternal wisdom and the divine judgment.

Nature has a relish for knowing secrets and hearing news. It wishes to appear abroad and to have many sense experiences. It wishes to be known and to do things for which it will be praised and admired. But grace does not care to hear news or curious matters, because all this arises from the old corruption of man, since there is nothing new, nothing lasting on earth. Grace teaches, therefore, restraint of the senses, avoidance of vain self-satisfaction and show, the humble hiding of deeds worthy of praise and admiration, and the seeking in every thing and in every knowledge the fruit of usefulness, the praise and honor of God. She will not have herself or hers exalted, but desires that God Who bestows all simply out of love should be blessed in His gifts.

This grace is a supernatural light, a certain special gift of God, the proper mark of the elect and the pledge of everlasting salvation. It raises man up from earthly things to love the things of heaven. It makes a spiritual man of a carnal one. The more, then, nature is held in check and conquered, the more grace is given. Every day the interior man is reformed by new visitations according to the image of God.

The Imitation of Christ
Thomas A' Kempis
The Fifty-Fifth Chapter

THE CORRUPTION OF NATURE AND THE EFFICACY OF DIVINE GRACE

THE DISCIPLE

O LORD, my God, Who created me to Your own image and likeness, grant me this grace which You have shown to be so great and necessary for salvation, that I may overcome my very evil nature that is drawing me to sin and perdition. For I feel in my flesh the law of sin contradicting the law of my mind and leading me captive to serve sensuality in many things. I cannot resist the passions thereof unless Your most holy grace warmly infused into my heart assist me.

There is need of Your grace, and of great grace, in order to overcome a nature prone to evil from youth. For through the first man, Adam, nature is fallen and weakened by sin, and the punishment of that stain has fallen upon all mankind. Thus nature itself, which You created good and right, is considered a symbol of vice and the weakness of corrupted nature, because when left to itself it tends toward evil and to baser things. The little strength remaining in it is like a spark hidden in ashes. That strength is natural reason which, surrounded by thick darkness, still has the power of judging good and evil, of seeing the difference between true and false, though it is not able to fulfill all that it approves and does not enjoy the full light of truth or soundness of affection.

Hence it is, my God, that according to the inward man I delight in Your law, knowing that Your command is good, just, and holy, and that it proves the necessity of shunning all evil and sin. But in the flesh I keep the law of sin, obeying sensuality rather than reason. Hence, also, it is that the will to good is present in me, but how to accomplish it I know not. Hence, too, I often propose many good things, but because the grace to help my weakness is lacking, I recoil and give up at the slightest resistance. Thus it is that I know the way of perfection and see clearly enough how I ought to act, but because I am pressed down by the weight of my own corruption I do not rise to more perfect things.

How extremely necessary to me, O Lord, Your grace is to begin any good deed, to carry it on and bring it to completion! For without grace I can do nothing, but with its strength I can do all things in You. O Grace truly heavenly, without which our merits are nothing and no gifts of nature are to be esteemed!

Before You, O Lord, no arts or riches, no beauty or strength, no wit or intelligence avail without grace. For the gifts of nature are common to good and bad alike, but the peculiar gift of Your elect is grace or love, and those who are signed with it are held worthy of everlasting life. So excellent is this grace that without it no gift of prophecy or of miracles, no meditation be it ever so exalted, can be considered anything. Not even faith or hope or other virtues are acceptable to You without charity and grace.

O most blessed grace, which makes the poor in spirit rich in virtues, which renders him who is rich in many good things humble of heart, come, descend upon me, fill me quickly with your consolation lest my soul faint with weariness and dryness of mind.

Let me find grace in Your sight, I beg, Lord, for Your grace is enough for me, even though I obtain none of the things which nature desires. If I am tempted and afflicted with many tribulations, I will fear no evils while Your grace is with me. This is my strength. This will give me counsel and help. This is more powerful than all my enemies and wiser than all the wise. This is the mistress of truth, the teacher of discipline, the light of the heart, the consoler in anguish, the banisher of sorrow, the expeller of fear, the nourisher of devotion, the producer of tears. What am I without grace, but dead wood, a useless branch, fit only to be cast away?

Let Your grace, therefore, go before me and follow me, O Lord, and make me always intent upon good works, through Jesus Christ, Your Son.⁵

⁵ Thomas à Kempis. (1996). *The Imitation of Christ* (212–218). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.