

“Spiritual Theology” by Jordan Aumann, OP

Study Questions - Chapter One

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Doctrinal Foundations

-Nature and Scope of Spiritual Theology-

References: Catechism of the Catholic Church

Grace: 1996-2005

Faith: 89-95

Meditation: 2705-2708

Holiness: 2014, 2015

Life in Christ: 1696, 1701-1709

Transmission of Divine Revelation: 75-79

The Magisterium of the Church: 77,85-88

Definition of Tradition: Page 901

Definition of Magisterium: Page 887

The Supernatural Sense of Faith: 91-95; 781-782, 787-789, 790-795

Scripture Reference: II Cor. 5:17-18

Questions

1. What is the definition of “spiritual theology”?

spiritual theology is that part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection.

2. What is the definition of the term, “ascetical”?

The word *ascetical* comes from the Greek *askeein*, meaning to practice or exercise in order to acquire a skill

3. How does one go about “*practicing*” the faith? How do “vows or the Promises we make as Dominican laity help us?”

Answer:

Via our charism:

- a. the relationship between spirituality and liturgical/sacramental life
- b. study of scripture
- c. pursuit and love of Truth

The adjective mystical is not found in the New Testament or in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers; it was introduced only in the third century, and with the passage of time it assumed three meanings: liturgically, it referred to religious cult; exegetically, it signified an allegorical or a typical interpretation of Scripture as distinct from the literal sense; theologically, it meant a more profound knowledge of the truths of faith -- knowledge not shared by all.

the total view, of the spiritual life should always embrace both aspects, since mysticism cannot be understood -- much less experienced -- without a concomitant asceticism, and any authentic Christian asceticism contains within itself the seed of the mystical experience.

4. Many contemporary Protestant theologians reject the terms *ascetical* and *mystical* and prefer to speak of *piety*, *pietism*, or *Christian lifestyle*. Is this a matter of “semantics” or is something else implied –viz. “Charism”? Contrast the “lifestyle” of the Franciscan, Benedictine and Dominican Charism.]

In Protestant theology the word asceticism usually refers to the practices of mortification and self-denial; mysticism signifies any experiential knowledge of suprasensible things, including occultism,, spiritualism, religious ecstasy, and extraordinary psychic phenomena. Many contemporary Protestant theologians reject the terms ascetical and mystical and prefer to speak of piety, pietism, or Christian lifestyle.

Because of the discrepancies in the use of the terms ascetical and mystical, there is no universally accepted name for the theology of Christian perfection. We prefer the succinct title, spiritual theology.

5. What does the word, “pneuma” refer to?

the word spiritus or pneuma refers to a divine power and therefore to the supernatural.

6. Vatican Council II affirmed that there is only one spirituality for all, and it consists in a participation in the mystery of Christ. How does the term “*spirituality*” differ from the term, “*Charism*”?

In the strict sense of the word, the only authentic spirituality is a spirituality centered in Jesus Christ and through him to the Trinity

Re: Fr. Gabriel O’Donnell, OP: Dominican spirituality is Christological and Pauline – a “*Wisdom Tradition*”

I like to think of “*spirituality*” as a state of “*being –being in relationship*” to the Trinity, and “*charism*” as the means by which we appropriate the life of virtue.

Christian spirituality is therefore a participation in the mystery of Christ through the interior life of grace, actuated by faith, charity, and the other Christian virtues

Through Christ, the spiritual life of the Christian is eminently Trinitarian.

7. What are the *three types* of spirituality literature described by Jordan Aumann?

(1) that which exhorts the reader to greater perfection and provides instruction for that purpose; (2) that which records and describes the religious experience of holy Christians and mystics; and (3) that which makes a scientific study of the nature of Christian perfection and the means to attain it.

8. What would be an example of the three types identified?

The first type of writing is exemplified by The Imitation of Christ, Introduction to the Devout Life, and the works of Louis of Granada.

The second type comprises autobiographical accounts composed by mystics themselves or special studies by experts in the field of religious experience.

The third type includes systematic studies of spirituality, and this is spiritual theology in the strict sense, as evidenced in the works of John Arinterro, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Auguste Poulain, and Adolphe Tanquerey. Sometimes, however, a work may be a combination of several types of writing.

Thus, the writings of St. Teresa of Avila are both instructive and autobiographical (the first and second types),

whereas the treatises of St. John of the Cross are a combination of all three types, but predominantly instructive and scientific.

9. The primary function of the theologian?

The traditional concept of theology was that of a science that studies God as revealed to mankind in the mysteries of his intimate life and all things else as related to God....

The primary function of the theologian is to investigate the truths of divine revelation, arrange them according to a logical subordination, and arrive at conclusions that are substantiated by the certitude of faith and the rational process of demonstration.

10. It has been said that “when one meets “a” Dominican, one has met “a” Dominican.” What does this say about the Dominican Charism?

We share much in common as Dominicans, but our journey is also very private and individualistic.... One might say: the psychology of individual differences is also the differences of one’s spiritual journey.

“..... the spiritual life is a dynamic and interior mystery that accommodates itself to the personality and existential situation of the individual Christian; therefore the theology of the spiritual life ought to treat of individual cases, particular charisms, and extraordinary phenomena, which do not pertain to theology as a science.

Also:

the mystery of Christ is so complex and perfect that it can never be duplicated by an individual Christian or by a school of spirituality. It is a treasure that we share but never exhaust. The greatest of the saints exemplified in their lives one or another aspect of Christ, but never "the whole Christ." The total Christ is best manifested, as St. Paul teaches, in the Church as the holy people of God and the Mystical Body of Christ.

the temperament of individuals, the moral predispositions to virtue or vice, the type of character cultivated -- all these factors exert a great influence on one's response to grace and the use one makes of it

11. Define the term “Dogmatic Theology”

***Dogmatic theology** has to do with revealed mysteries, principally the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments, and the future life.*

12. Define the term “Moral Theology

***Moral theology** treats of human acts, of revealed precepts and counsels, of grace, of the Christian virtues, both theological and moral, and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are principles of action ordained to the supernatural end made known by revelation Moral theology thus understood evidently contains the principles necessary for leading souls to the highest sanctity.*

13. What is “Ascetical and Mystical Theology”?

***Ascetical and mystical theology** is nothing but the application of this broad moral theology to the direction of souls toward ever closer union with God.*

14. The text states that “God is both the object of theology and, through faith, the principle of theology. Faith is therefore the very foundation of the knowledge acquired through theological study.” How does this relate to the importance of “Contemplation” in the Dominican Charism?

Spiritual theology describes the process by which people normally advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to full perfection

That is, how we think about God, how we pray to God, and how we live-out the life we are called to – creating a Christic community in the marketplace.

15. How can the study of spiritual theology help the individual with their spiritual growth?

To summarize, spiritual theology comprises three elements:

- (1) *the psychological data of spiritual experience;*
- (2) *the application of theological principles; and*
- (3) *practical directives concerning progress in the spiritual life with a view to Christian perfection.*

[Note use of two terms:]

*Spiritual theology must express itself in both **ontological** and **psychological** terms*

Ontological: referring to “the nature of being”

Psychological: referring to “(individual) experience

16. What is the relationship between *liturgy* and *spiritual theology*?

The relation of the liturgy to spiritual theology stems from the fact that "it is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.

17. What is meant by the term, “*sacramental life*”?

Where the sacraments become both the source and summit of our lives. They become central to who we are, what we are, and how we live our lives.

18. What is meant by the expression, ‘*I am spiritual, not religious*’ and why is this a contradictory statement?

The first step toward the rediscovery of authentic spiritual life in the Church ... must be the integration, or reintegration, of theology and religious experience

19. The text talks about “schools of spirituality emerge as a response to the needs of the Church at a given time.” Sts. Dominic and Francis responded to different needs of the Church in their time. What were the needs they responded to? In Spain? In Italy? Do these needs still exist in the Church?

St. Francis’s mission was to **re-build** the Church.

St. Dominic’s mission was to **defend** the Church

First, the cause of the diversity: St. Paul teaches the same doctrine: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us" (Rom.12:4-6).

Second, St. Paul repeatedly admonishes the Christian to strive to become transformed into Christ as completely as possible. But the mystery of Christ is so complex and perfect that it can never be duplicated by an individual Christian or by a school of spirituality. It is a treasure that we share but never exhaust. The greatest of the saints exemplified in their lives one or another aspect of Christ, but never "the whole Christ." The total Christ is best manifested, as St. Paul teaches, in the Church as the holy people of God and the Mystical Body of Christ.

Third, schools of spirituality emerge as a response to the needs of the Church at a given time..... if we see the Church, not as an institution or static structure, but as a vital organism constantly evolving toward "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), the various schools of spirituality can be appreciated as contributing to the progressive building-up of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Finally...

First, the cause of the diversity, as St. Thomas Aquinas states, is that God "dispenses his gifts of grace variously so that the beauty and perfection of the Church may result from these various degrees."[\(21\)](#) St. Paul teaches the same doctrine: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. We have gifts that differ according to the favor bestowed on each of us" (Rom.12:4-6).

Second, St. Paul repeatedly admonishes the Christian to strive to become transformed into Christ as completely as possible. But the mystery of Christ is so complex and perfect that it can never be duplicated by an individual Christian or by a school of spirituality. It is a treasure that we share but never exhaust. The greatest of the saints exemplified in their lives one or another aspect of Christ, but

never "the whole Christ." The total Christ is best manifested, as St. Paul teaches, in the Church as the holy people of God and the Mystical Body of Christ.

Third, schools of spirituality emerge as a response to the needs of the Church at a given time. The history of spirituality demonstrates that from the earliest days of the Church to the present, the Christian lifestyles and practices that later became stabilized as schools of spirituality were always introduced to help live the mystery of Christ more intimately and thus grow in holiness. Moreover, if we see the Church, not as an institution or static structure, but as a vital organism constantly evolving toward "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), the various schools of spirituality can be appreciated as contributing to the progressive building-up of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Finally, schools of spirituality are justified by reason of the fact that grace does not destroy but works through and perfects nature. The supernatural life of grace respects the human personality and condition, and therefore the differences in Christian lifestyles are rooted in the individuality of the human person and the particular characteristics of groups and nations. Thus, the temperament of individuals, the moral predispositions to virtue or vice, the type of character cultivated -- all these factors exert a great influence on one's response to grace and the use one makes of it. These factors will also determine to a great extent one's aptitude or need for particular ascetical practices, devotions, and styles of prayer. They will likewise affect the choice of one's vocation or state in life, and that, in turn, introduces another set of factors that define one's spirituality in view of vocational commitments and duties of state.

When, therefore, saintly Christians follow Christ in a way that appeals to other persons, or when they formulate a spiritual doctrine that can lead souls to greater perfection, they frequently attract followers who adopt the same pattern of Christian living. In time the lifestyle or the doctrine is expressed in a corporate manner by the followers, and this social manifestation emerges as a distinct school of spirituality. Christians follow Christ in a way that appeals to other persons, or when they formulate a spiritual doctrine that can lead souls to greater perfection, they frequently attract followers who adopt the same pattern of Christian living. In time the lifestyle or the doctrine is expressed in a corporate manner by the followers, and this social manifestation emerges as a distinct school of spirituality,

Reference: Catechism of the Catholic Church

GRACE: IN BRIEF

2017 The grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Uniting us by faith and Baptism to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the Spirit makes us sharers in his life.

- 2018** Like conversion, justification has two aspects. Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, and so accepts forgiveness and righteousness from on high.
- 2019** Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man.
- 2020** Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted us through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us. It has for its goal the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life. It is the most excellent work of God's mercy.
- 2021** Grace is the help God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons. It introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life.
- 2022** The divine initiative in the work of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits the free response of man. Grace responds to the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom.
- 2023** Sanctifying grace is the gratuitous gift of his life that God makes to us; it is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it.
- 2024** Sanctifying grace makes us "pleasing to God." Charisms, special graces of the Holy Spirit, are oriented to sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. God also acts through many actual graces, to be distinguished from habitual grace which is permanent in us.
- 2025** We can have merit in God's sight only because of God's free plan to associate man with the work of his grace. Merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and secondly to man's collaboration. Man's merit is due to God.
- 2026** The grace of the Holy Spirit can confer true merit on us, by virtue of our adoptive filiation, and in accordance with God's gratuitous justice. Charity is the principal source of merit in us before God.
- 2027** No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods.
- 2028** "All Christians ... are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (*L^G 40 § 2*). "Christian perfection has but one limit, that of having none" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Mos.*: P^G 44, 300D).

GLG Lumen gentium

G 44, 300D).PG J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris, 1857–1866)

2029 “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (*Mt* 16:24).¹

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- 2029** “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (*Mt* 16:24).²

PRAYER: IN BRIEF

- 2720** The Church invites the faithful to regular prayer: daily prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday Eucharist, the feasts of the liturgical year.
- 2721** The Christian tradition comprises three major expressions of the life of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. They have in common the recollection of the heart.
- 2722** Vocal prayer, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ’s example of praying to his Father and teaching the Our Father to his disciples.
- 2723** Meditation is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Its goal is to make our own in faith the subject considered, by confronting it with the reality of our own life.
- 2724** Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.³

GLG Lumen gentium

G 44, 300D).PG J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris, 1857–1866)

2 Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (489–490). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

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