

“Spiritual Theology” by Jordan Aumann, OP

Study Questions - Chapter Seven

-Conversion from Sin-

References: CCC

Sin: 1846-1869

Other Suggested References:

“Spiritual Combat” by Dom L. Scupoli

“Abandonment to Divine Providence” by Jean-Pierre de Caussande

“Confession: The Encounter of Christ in Penance” by Adrienne von Speyr

“The People of the Lie” by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

“Money, Sex, and Power” by Richard J. Foster

Questions

1. What does grace do to/nature?

No two souls will follow the same path to perfection, identical in every respect. On the spiritual level the differences are rooted in the predominant moral predispositions of individuals as well as the particular graces that God gives to each one....But grace does not destroy or replace nature; it works through and perfects nature.

2. Which are the four major temperaments and what do they have to do with a propensity to virtue or vice? What are their principle defects?

a. Sanguine Temperament

A person of sanguine temperament reacts quickly and strongly to almost any stimulation or impression, but the reaction is usually of short duration. The stimulation or impression is quickly forgotten, and the remembrance of past experiences does not easily arouse a new response..... The principal defects of the sanguine temperament are superficiality, inconstancy, and sensuality. The first defect is due primarily to their immediate perception of ideas and situations.... They are more interested in breadth of knowledge than depth.

b. Melancholic Temperament

Persons of melancholic temperament are inclined to reflection, piety, and the interior life..... They have a sharp and profound intellect and, because of their natural bent to

solitude and reflection, they generally consider matters thoroughly....The unfavorable traits of the melancholic temperament are an exaggerated tendency to sadness and melancholy; an inclination to magnify difficulties and thus to lose confidence in self; excessive reserve and timidity, with a propensity to scrupulosity.

c. Choleric Temperament

Persons of a choleric temperament are easily and strongly aroused, and the impression lasts for a long time. Theirs is the temperament that produces great saints or great sinners, and while all the temperaments can contribute to sanctity, the choleric temperament is outstanding.The good qualities of the temperament can be summarized as follows: great energy and activity, sharp intellect, strong and resolute will, good powers of concentration, constancy, magnanimity, and liberality.....this temperament produces many leaders, superiors, apostles. It is the temperament of government and administration...The tenacity of the choleric temperament sometimes produces the following evil effects: hardness, obstinacy, insensibility, anger, and pride.

d. Phlegmatic Temperament.

The good characteristics of phlegmatic persons are that they work slowly but assiduously; they are not easily irritated by insults, misfortunes, or sickness; they usually remain tranquil, discreet, and sober; they have a great deal of common sense and mental balance....The defective qualities of the phlegmatic temperament are their slowness and calmness, which cause these persons to lose many good opportunities because they delay so long in putting works into operation.

3. Which factors affect character? Which factors does Fr. Aumann consider to be the most important?

Fr. Aumann identifies education, the environment, and personal effort as important factors affecting characterological development..... [Note: Freud spent his life trying to identify the many determinants to behavior]....*in the purely natural order it requires the balance and integration that are provided by the moral and intellectual virtues. For the perfect Christian, however, there is further required, as a superstructure built upon the natural foundation, the theological and moral infused virtues, as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

4. Give three definitions of sin. Of the three definitions, which do you find most helpful or accurate and why?

- a. *St. Augustine's description is classical: any thought, word, or deed against the law of God.*
- b. *sin is a deviation from man's true ultimate end; that sin is formally in the will; and that therefore every sin, whatever its name, is fundamentally an act of self-love in opposition to the love of God...*
- c. *sin, both in Scripture and in traditional theology, is primarily a defect in man's relationship with God.*

5. Which views of sin does Fr. Aumann reject as erroneous and why?

Some theologians use the anthropological sciences to reject sin completely; others imply that once a man makes his fundamental option for God, he cannot sin mortally and, as a result, he cannot fail to attain his ultimate end; still others see God as all-merciful, and exclusively so, or they maintain that so long as a person loves God, he need not resort to the sacrament of reconciliation for forgiveness of serious sins.

6. What is the difference between venial sin and mortal sin?

Mortal sin that which is deadly; it destroys the life of sanctifying grace in the soul or deepens the individual's alienation from God....Venial sin is referred to as "light sin" ...it is harmful to one's spiritual life, but it is not deadly.

7. What are the three classes of venial sin?

(1) those that *by their very nature involve a disorder or deviation*, although only a slight one, such as a small lie that does no damage to anyone;

(2) those that, because of the *smallness of the matter involved*, constitute only **a light disorder**, such as stealing a small amount of money;

(3) *those that lack complete deliberation or full consent of the will* in matters that would otherwise be serious sins, such as the taking of God's name in vain.

8. What is the harm of *deliberate venial sin*?

It is impossible to proceed in perfection if one does not renounce habitual voluntary imperfections. It is therefore necessary to wage an unceasing battle against our voluntary imperfections if we wish to arrive at perfect union with God. The soul must tend always toward greater perfection and try to do all things with the greatest possible intensity.

9. How do the venial sins which are committed continuously affect the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The venial sins which they commit continuously bind the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and it is no wonder that the effects of the gifts are not evident in them

10. The text describes four ways in which venial sins are especially detrimental to the spiritual life. What are they?

- 1. It deprives us of many actual graces that God would otherwise have given us*
- 2. It lessens the fervor of charity and one's generosity in the service of God*
- 3. It increases the difficulties in the exercise of virtue.,. The soul gradually loses more and more of its spiritual energy.*
- 4. It predisposes for mortal sin.. Little by little the soul has lowered its defenses*

11. What are the four types of sinners that Fr. Aumann identifies?

The first type sins because of ignorance

The second type of sinners comprises those who are weak, lacking in will power, strongly inclined to sensual pleasure, intellectually dull, listless, or cowardly. Basically they are weak rather than evil

The third type of sinners are those who sin with cold indifference.

The fourth class of sinners is the most culpable. These people sin through a refined malice and diabolical obstinacy

12. Name the three main sources of temptation.

the devil, the world, and the flesh.

13. Why does God allow us to be tempted?

God permits us to be tempted by our spiritual enemies to give us an occasion for greater merit

14. Name two ways in which the Christian can prepare for when temptation occurs?

Vigilance and prayer are necessary even before temptations arise.

15. Reflect on the following statement from the text: "A temptation that is declared is already half conquered." What is this in reference to?

To identify a temptation, to name it, own it, and ask for help with it is a powerful means of dealing with it.

16. The text describes four ways in which the "worldly spirit" is manifested. Name each of them.

- a. The first and most deceptive is that of the *false maxims* directly opposed to the precepts of Christ. The world exalts pleasure, comfort, riches, fame, violence, and might. *It advises its followers to enjoy life while they can, to make the most of what the world has to offer, to find security and the maximum bodily comfort. So far has this perversion of values been carried that thieves are considered to be efficient and adept in business; agnostics or atheists are people who think for themselves; persons who reject all authority and objective morality are champions of personal freedom; and people of loose morals are considered sophisticated and mature.*
- b. *The second manifestation of the mundane spirit is found in the ridicule and persecution of those who strive to live honestly and decently.* Sensate people declare themselves free of all moral restrictions and live as they please, and they make a mockery of any authority or law that would guide people along the path of self-control and obedience. Not wanting to observe the law themselves, they cultivate a special disdain for those who honestly strive to lead good lives.
- c. *The third manifestation of a worldly spirit is found in the pleasures and diversions of those who observe no control in regard to their lower appetites.* Excesses in sex and in the use of drugs, alcoholic drinks, and food are accepted as being in good taste socially. The theater, magazines, and other media of entertainment know no restriction except the strong arm of the law or the startled indignation of the public. The abnormal becomes normal in the lives of these persons.
- d. *The fourth mark of a mundane spirit is the scandal and bad example that confront the earnest Christian at every turn*

17. How can one avoid the occasion of sin?

The most efficacious remedy against the influence of the world and worldly persons is to flee, but since the majority of Christians must live in the world and still pursue Christian perfection, it is necessary that they strive to acquire the mind and spirit of Christ, who also lived in the world but was opposed to its spirit.

Vivify One's Faith

Meditate on the Vanity of the World.

Ignore What the World Thinks
Desire for Pleasure
Custody of the Senses.
Self-denial.
Beneficial Occupation.
Consideration of Sin's Punishment.
Remembrance of the Passion of Christ.
Humble and Persevering Prayer
Devotion to Mary
Reception of the Sacraments

18. What is the meaning of this statement: "*What the eyes do not see, the heart does not desire.*"

It is through the sense that the pleasure centers become activated.

19. What are some of the "typically Catholic" things that one can do to help resist sin?
(see '17' above)

20. Define the word, "*Conversion.*"

Essentially, to change direction in our lives.

21. How is character formed?

"Sow a thought, reap a deed; sow a deed, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny."

22. What is the role of family, friends, education, and environment in the development of character?

They greatly influence our attitudes, choices, values in life, etc.

23. Consider the following:

"Sow a THOUGHT, reap a DEED...
Sow a DEED, reap a HABIT...
Sow a HABIT, reap a CHARACTER...
Sow a CHARACTER, reap a DESTINY

24. How do “choices” figure into the development of character?

Our “choices” are responsible for the “hard-wiring” of our brain. We have two brains (so to speak): the primitive brain (the limbic system where the emotions rule) and the cognitive brain (which is controlled by intellectual reasoning, etc.). It all depends upon which of the two brains we choose to control and shape our brain.

ARTICLE 8: SIN

I. MERCY AND SIN

1846 The Gospel is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God’s mercy to sinners.¹¹³ The angel announced to Joseph: “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”¹¹⁴ The same is true of the Eucharist, the sacrament of redemption: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”¹¹⁵ (430; 1365)

1847 “God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us.”¹¹⁶ To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹¹⁷ (387, 1455)

1848 As St. Paul affirms, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”¹¹⁸ But to do its work grace must uncover sin so as to convert our hearts and bestow on us “righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹¹⁹ Like a physician who probes the wound before treating it, God, by his Word and by his Spirit, casts a living light on sin: (385; 1433)

Conversion *requires convincing of sin*; it includes the interior judgment of conscience, and this, being a proof of the action of the Spirit of truth in man’s inmost being, becomes at the same time the start of a new grant of grace and love: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Thus in this “convincing

¹¹³ Cf. *Lk* 15.

¹¹⁴ *Mt* 1:21.

¹¹⁵ *Mt* 26:28.

¹¹⁶ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 169, 11, 13: PL 38, 923.

¹¹⁷ *1 Jn* 8–9.

¹¹⁸ *Rom* 5:20.

¹¹⁹ *Rom* 5:21.

concerning sin” we discover *a double gift*: the gift of the truth of conscience and the gift of the certainty of redemption. The Spirit of truth is the Consoler.¹²⁰

II. THE DEFINITION OF SIN

1849 Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”¹²¹ (311; 1952)

1850 Sin is an offense against God: “Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight.”¹²² Sin sets itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become “like gods,”¹²³ knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus “love of oneself even to contempt of God.”¹²⁴ In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.¹²⁵ (1440; 397; 615)

1851 It is precisely in the Passion, when the mercy of Christ is about to vanquish it, that sin most clearly manifests its violence and its many forms: unbelief, murderous hatred, shunning and mockery by the leaders and the people, Pilate’s cowardice and the cruelty of the soldiers, Judas’ betrayal—so bitter to Jesus, Peter’s denial and the disciples’ flight. However, at the very hour of darkness, the hour of the prince of this world,¹²⁶ the sacrifice of Christ secretly becomes the source from which the forgiveness of our sins will pour forth inexhaustibly. (598; 2746, 616)

III. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SINS

1852 There are a great many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The *Letter to the Galatians* contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit: “Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.”¹²⁷

¹²⁰ John Paul II, *DeV* 31 § 2.

¹²¹ St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum* 22: PL 42, 418; St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I–II, 71, 6.

¹²² *Ps* 51:4.

¹²³ *Gen* 3:5.

¹²⁴ St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 14, 28: PL 41, 436.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Phil* 2:6–9.

¹²⁶ Cf. *Jn* 14:30.

¹²⁷ *Gal* 5:19–21; cf. *Rom* 1:28–32; *1 Cor* 6:9–10; *Eph* 5:3–5; *Col* 3:5–9; *1 Tim* 1:9–10; *2 Tim* 3:2–5.

1853 Sins can be distinguished according to their objects, as can every human act; or according to the virtues they oppose, by excess or defect; or according to the commandments they violate. They can also be classed according to whether they concern God, neighbor, or oneself; they can be divided into spiritual and carnal sins, or again as sins in thought, word, deed, or omission. The root of sin is in the heart of man, in his free will, according to the teaching of the Lord: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man.”¹²⁸ But in the heart also resides charity, the source of the good and pure works, which sin wounds. (1751; 2067; 368)

IV. THE GRAVITY OF SIN: MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

1854 Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture,¹²⁹ became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience.

1855 *Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. (1395)

Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.

1856 Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us—that is, charity—necessitates a new initiative of God’s mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation: (1446)

When the will sets itself upon something that is of its nature incompatible with the charity that orients man toward his ultimate end, then the sin is mortal by its very object ... whether it contradicts the love of God, such as blasphemy or perjury, or the love of neighbor, such as homicide or adultery.... But when the sinner’s will is set upon something that of its nature involves a disorder, but is not opposed to the love of God and neighbor, such as thoughtless chatter or immoderate laughter and the like, such sins are venial.¹³⁰

1857 For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: “Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.”¹³¹

1858 *Grave matter* is specified by the Ten Commandments, corresponding to the answer of Jesus to the rich young man: “Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother.”¹³² The gravity of sins is more or less great: murder is graver than theft. One must also take into account who is wronged: violence against parents is in itself graver than violence against a stranger. (2072; 2214)

¹²⁸ Mt 15:19–20.

¹²⁹ Cf. 1 Jn 5:16–17.

¹³⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I–II, 88, 2, *corp. art.*

¹³¹ *RP* 17 § 12.

¹³² *Mk* 10:19.

1859 Mortal sin requires *full knowledge* and *complete consent*. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart¹³³ do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin. (1734)

1860 *Unintentional ignorance* can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense. But no one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man. The promptings of feelings and passions can also diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures or pathological disorders. Sin committed through malice, by deliberate choice of evil, is the gravest. (1735; 1767)

1861 Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God. (1742; 1033)

1862 One commits *venial sin* when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.

1863 Venial sin weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness."¹³⁴ (1394; 1472)

While he is in the flesh, man cannot help but have at least some light sins. But do not despise these sins which we call "light": if you take them for light when you weigh them, tremble when you count them. A number of light objects makes a great mass; a number of drops fills a river; a number of grains makes a heap. What then is our hope? Above all, confession...¹³⁵

1864 "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."¹³⁶ There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁷ Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss. (2091; 1037)

¹³³ Cf. *Mk* 3:5–6; *Lk* 16:19–31.

¹³⁴ John Paul II, *RP* 17 § 9.

¹³⁵ St. Augustine, *In ep. Jo.* 1, 6: PL 35, 1982.

¹³⁶ *Mt* 12:31; cf. *Mk* 3:29; *Lk* 12:10.

¹³⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *DeV* 46.

V. THE PROLIFERATION OF SIN

1865 Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root. (401; 1768)

1866 Vices can be classified according to the virtues they oppose, or also be linked to the *capital sins* which Christian experience has distinguished, following St. John Cassian and St. Gregory the Great. They are called “capital” because they engender other sins, other vices.¹³⁸ They are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth or acedia. (2539)

1867 The catechetical tradition also recalls that there are “*sins that cry to heaven*”: the blood of Abel,¹³⁹ the sin of the Sodomites,¹⁴⁰ the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt,¹⁴¹ the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan,¹⁴² injustice to the wage earner.¹⁴³ (2268)

1868 Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when *we cooperate in them*: (1736)

- by participating directly and voluntarily in them;
- by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them;
- by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so;
- by protecting evil-doers.

1869 Thus sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to reign among them. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. “Structures of sin” are the expression and effect of personal sins. They lead their victims to do evil in their turn. In an analogous sense, they constitute a “social sin.”¹⁴⁴ (408; 1887)

IN BRIEF

¹³⁸ Cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 31, 45: PL 76, 621A.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Gen* 4:10.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Gen* 18:20; 19:13.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Ex* 3:7–10.

¹⁴² Cf. *Ex* 20:20–22.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Deut* 24:14–15; *Jas* 5:4.

¹⁴⁴ John Paul II, *RP* 16.

- 1870** “God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all” (*Rom* 11:32).
- 1871** Sin is an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law (St. Augustine, *Faust* 22: PL 42, 418). It is an offense against God. It rises up against God in a disobedience contrary to the obedience of Christ.
- 1872** Sin is an act contrary to reason. It wounds man’s nature and injures human solidarity.
- 1873** The root of all sins lies in man’s heart. The kinds and the gravity of sins are determined principally by their objects.
- 1874** To choose deliberately—that is, both knowing it and willing it—something gravely contrary to the divine law and to the ultimate end of man is to commit a mortal sin. This destroys in us the charity without which eternal beatitude is impossible. Unrepented, it brings eternal death.
- 1875** Venial sin constitutes a moral disorder that is reparable by charity, which it allows to subsist in us.
- 1876** The repetition of sins—even venial ones—engenders vices, among which are the capital sins.¹

PL J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: 1841–1855)

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (452–458). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.