

The Spiritual Life: a Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology

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FIRST PART: Principles

Chapter I: Origin of the Spiritual Life

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ART. III. THE FALL AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

I. *The fall*

67. In spite of these privileges man remained *free*, and in order to merit heaven he was put to a test. This test consisted in the fulfillment of the divine law. It consisted in particular in the carrying out of a *positive command* added to the natural law. Genesis expresses it in the form of a prohibition which forbade eating the fruit of the tree of *knowledge of good and evil*. Holy Writ narrates how the devil in the guise of a serpent came to tempt our first parents by raising a doubt in their minds as to the legitimacy of this ban. He tried to persuade them that if they ate the forbidden fruit, far from dying, they would become like gods, since they would know for themselves what was good and what evil, without need of recourse to the law of God: "*You shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil*" (Gen III, 5). This was a temptation to pride, to revolt against God. Man fell and committed a formal act of *disobedience*, as St. Paul remarks (Rom, V), but an act inspired by *pride* and soon followed by further delinquencies. It was a refusal to submit to God's authority, therefore, a grievous fault. The prohibition being an instrument to test the fidelity of the first man, this refusal amounted to a negation of God's wisdom and of His sovereign dominion. The violation was all the more grave since our first parents had full knowledge of God's liberality towards them, of His inalienable rights, of the importance of a precept carrying such a sanction, and since they were in no wise swept away by passion, having had ample time to weigh the frightful consequences of their act.

68. The question even suggests itself: how could they sin at all, since they were not under the sway of concupiscence. This we understand if we recall that no creature having a will of its own is impeccable. Free will gives it the power of turning away from real good towards what is but apparent good. It implies the power of holding to the latter, preferring it to the former. This very choice is what constitutes sin. As St. Thomas says, impeccability can only be found where free will identifies itself with the moral law. This is God's privilege.

II. *The consequences of the fall*

69. Punishment followed quickly for our first parents and for their posterity.

A) The personal sanction visited upon them is described in Genesis. Here again God's goodness is to the fore. He could have on the spot punished them with death. His mercy halted Him. He merely left them shorn of those special privileges with which He had vested them, that is, stripped of the gifts of integrity and of habitual grace. He did not touch their nature or the prerogatives flowing therefrom. Doubtless, man's will is weakened compared with the strength it possessed when integrity was his. However, there is no conclusive evidence that it is actually feebler than it would have been in a purely natural state, at any rate it remains free in choosing good or evil. God even condescended to leave our first parents in possession of faith and hope and gave their forlorn souls the hopeful assurance of a redeemer,--their own offspring, who would one day vanquish the devil and reinstate fallen humanity. By His actual grace, at the same time, He invited them to repentance, and as soon as they repented, He granted them pardon of their sin.

70. B) But what will be the condition of their descendants? The answer is that mankind will be likewise deprived of *original justice*, that is to say, of *sanctifying grace* and the *gift of integrity*. Those endowments, free gifts in every sense, a patrimony, so to speak, were to be handed to his heirs should Adam prove faithful. This condition unfulfilled, man comes into the world deprived of original justice. When through penance our first parents regained grace, it was no longer as a heritage for their posterity, but solely as a personal possession, a grant to a private individual. To the new Adam, Christ Jesus, who would in time become the head of mankind, was reserved the expiation of our faults and the institution of a sacrament of *regeneration* to transmit to each of the baptized the grace forfeited in Paradise.

71. Thus it is that the children of Adam are born into this world without *original justice*, that is, without sanctifying grace and the gift of integrity. The lack of this grace is called *original sin*, sin only in the broad sense of the term, for it implies no guilty act on our part, but simply a fallen condition. It constitutes, considering the supernatural destiny to which we are called, a privation of a quality that should be ours,--a blemish, a moral taint that places us out of the pale of God's kingdom.

72. Moreover, on account of the forfeited *gift of integrity*, concupiscence rages in us and unless courageously withstood, it drags us into actual sin. With regard, then, to our primeval state we are as it were *withered* and *wounded*, subject to ignorance, prone to evil, weak against temptation.

Experience indeed shows that the force of concupiscence is not equally strong in all men. Each differs in temperament and character and therefore passions also vary in ardor and violence. Once the controlling check of original justice was lifted, explains St. Thomas, the passions regained full sway and prove more unruly in some, more subdued in others.

73. Must we go further and admit, with the Augustinian school, a positive, *intrinsic*, impairment of our *natural* energies and faculties? It is quite unnecessary. There is nothing to prove it. Should we admit, though, with some of the Thomists an *extrinsic* impairment of our powers? It consists, they say, in the fact that we have *more obstacles* to surmount, specially, the tyranny the devil wields over the vanquished, and the withdrawal of certain natural helps God would have granted us in a purely natural state. This is possible, nay, rather probable. But, in justice, we must add, that such hindrances find compensation in actual grace given us by God in virtue of the merits of His Son, and also in the

protection accorded to us by His angels, particularly, our guardian angels.

74. Conclusion. This much we can safely say: owing to the Fall, man has lost the right balance he had as he came from the hands of God; in comparison with his primeval state, he is now injured, *unbalanced*, as the actual plight of his faculties plainly shows.

A) This unbalanced condition becomes evident first of all with regard to our sensitive faculties. **a)** Our *exterior senses*, our eyes, for instance, eagerly light on what our curiosity craves, our ears are ever ready to catch every novelty, our flesh is alive to every sensation of pleasure, heedless the while of the moral law. **b)** The same is true of our *interior senses*. With each flight of fancy our imagination represents to us all sorts of images more or less sensual. Our passions run headlong, oft times madly so, toward sensible or sensuous good, and utterly ignoring all moral good, endeavor to wrest compliance from the will. True indeed, such tendencies are not irresistible, for our lower faculties remain, in a measure, under the control of the will yet, their submission, once they revolt, demands much strategy and effort.

75. B) The *intellectual* faculties, intellect and will, also have been injured by original sin.

There is no doubt that our intellect remains capable of knowing truth, and that with patient labor, even without the aid of revelation, it can obtain knowledge of certain fundamental truths in the natural order. The failures, however, in this regard, are most humiliating. The preoccupations of the present blind the mind to the realities of eternity.

a) Instead of seeking God and the things that are God's, instead of rising spontaneously from the creature to the Creator, as it would have done in the primeval state, man's intellect gravitates earthward. The study of creatures frequently absorbs it and prevents its ascent to their Maker. **1)** Its power of attention, drawn by curiosity, centers round its own whims to the neglect of the realities that lead man to his end. **2)** It *falls most readily into error*. Innumerable prejudices to which we are victims and the passions that agitate our spirit drop a thick veil between our souls and the truth. Alas! only too often we lose our bearings upon the most vital questions, on which the course and direction of our moral life depend.

b) Our will, instead of paying homage to God, has, on the contrary, the most daring and pretentious aspirations to *independence*. It finds it bitter and painful to submit to God or to yield to His representatives on earth. When the issue is to conquer those difficulties that oppose themselves to the realization of good, its efforts are weak and inconstant. How frequently does it not allow sentiment and passion to carry it away! Saint Paul describes such weakness in striking terms: "For the good which I will, I do not: but the evil which I will not, that I do. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ Our Lord" (Rom. VII 19-25). On the testimony of the Apostle the remedy for this wretched condition is the *grace of redemption*.

CHAPTER II: The Nature of the Christian Life

I. The Fight Against Our Spiritual Enemies

These enemies are concupiscence, the world, and the devil. Concupiscence is the foe we carry within us. The world and the devil are the foes from without that feed the fires of concupiscence and fan its flames....

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III The Fight against the Devil

219. (1) The existence of and reasons for diabolical temptation. We have seen, n. 67, how the devil, jealous of the blessedness of our first parents, incited them to sin, and how well he succeeded. Therefore, the Book of Wisdom declares that it was "by the envy of the devil that death came into the world" (Wisdom, II, 24). Ever since, he has not ceased to attack the children of Adam or to lay snares for them. And even though, since our Lord's advent into the world and His triumph over Satan, the latter's power has been greatly curbed, it is none the less true that we have to battle not only against flesh and blood, but also against the powers of darkness, against the spirits of evil. This is exactly what St. Paul teaches: "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness" (Eph., VI, 12.) St. Peter compares the devil to a roaring lion prowling about, seeking to destroy us: "Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter, V, 8-9).

220. If divine Providence allows these attacks, it is in virtue of the general principle that God governs men not only directly, but also through the agency of secondary causes, leaving to creatures a certain freedom of action. On the other hand, He warns us to be on our guard, and sends His Angels, particularly our Guardian Angels, to help and protect us (n. 186 sq), to say nothing of the assistance that He gives us directly, or through His Son. By availing ourselves of such helps we triumph over the enemy of our salvation, grow in virtue and lay up to ourselves treasures of merit in heaven. These wonderful ways of Providence show us all the more clearly the great importance we must attach to the affair of our salvation and sanctification, an affair in which both heaven and hell so concern themselves that around the soul, at times within the soul itself, fierce combats rage between the powers of heaven and those of hell,--and it is the eternal life of the soul that is at stake. In order to obtain the victory, let us see how the devil proceeds.

221. (2) The devil's strategy. A) The Evil One can not act *directly* on our higher faculties, the intellect and the will. God has kept these as a sanctuary for Himself, and He alone can enter there and touch the mainspring of the will without doing violence to it. The devil, however, can act directly on the body, on our exterior and interior senses, and particularly on the imagination and the memory as well as on the passions which reside in the sensitive appetite. Thus, the devil acts *indirectly* on the will, soliciting its consent through the various movements of the sensitive appetite. The will, however, as St. Thomas remarks, remains ever free to give or refuse consent. (See *Sum. Theol.* I, q. III, a. 2.)

B) No matter how extensive the power of the devil over our faculties, there are nevertheless limits set to it by God Himself, who will not allow him to tempt us beyond our strength. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue" (1 Cor., X, 13.) Whoever leans upon the Almighty in humble trust can be sure of victory.

222. C) We must not believe, says *St. Thomas*, (*Sum. Theol.*, I, q. 114, 1. 3.) that all the temptations we experience are the works of the demon. Concupiscence stirred up by habits formed in the past and by imprudences committed in the present, is sufficient to account for a great number of them. "Every one is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured" (James, I, 14). On the other hand, it would be rash to assert, and contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture and Tradition, that there is no diabolical influence in any of our temptations. The envy the devil bears mankind and his desire to bring men into subjection adequately explain his intervention. (*Sum. theol.*, I, q. 114, a. I.)

How then will diabolical temptation be recognized? This is no easy matter, for our concupiscence itself may sufficiently account for the violence of temptation. It may be said, however, that when a temptation is sudden, violent, and protracted beyond measure, the devil is largely responsible for it. One can especially suspect his influence if the temptation casts the soul into deep and prolonged turmoil; if it excites a desire for the spectacular, for strange and conspicuous mortifications, and particularly if it induces a strong inclination to be silent about the whole affair with our spiritual director and to distrust our superiors. (See the rules for the discernment of spirits in the first and second weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*.)

223. (3) The remedies against diabolical temptation. The Saints, and particularly St. Theresa (*Life by Herself*, C. XXX-XXXI), point out the following remedies.

A) The first is humble and confident prayer to secure the help of God and His holy Angels. If God is for us who will be against us? (Rom., VIII, 31.) For, "who is like unto God?" Our prayer must be *humble*, for there is nothing that so quickly puts to flight this rebellious spirit, who, having revolted through pride, never knew the virtue of humility. To humble ourselves before God, to acknowledge our inability to conquer without His help, defeats the schemes of the prince of pride. Our prayer must also be *full of confidence*. God's own glory is bound up with our triumph and we may, therefore, fully trust in the power of His grace. It is likewise a good practice to invoke the intercession of St. Michael, who, having once obtained a signal victory over Satan, will gladly complete his triumph in us and through us in the day of our struggle. He will have a powerful ally in our Guardian Angel provided we place our trust in him. But above all, we must not forget to have recourse to the Blessed virgin. Her foot did crush the serpent's head and she is more terrible to the demon than a whole army in battle array.

224. B) The second means consists in making use in all confidence of the *sacraments* and the *sacramentals*. Confession being an act of humility routs the devil; the absolution which follows applies to us the merits of Jesus Christ and renders us invulnerable to the thrusts of the enemy. Holy Communion brings into our hearts Christ who triumphed over Satan and who now fills him with terror. Even the sacramentals, the sign of the Cross, or the prayers of the Liturgy, said in the spirit of faith in union with the Church, are a precious help. St. Theresa recommends in a special way the use of holy water (*Life by Herself*, C. XXXI), perhaps because of the humiliation Satan must suffer at seeing himself baffled by such a simple device.

225. C) The last means against diabolical temptation is *an utter contempt of the devil*. It is once more St. Theresa who assures us of this. "These cursed spirits torment me quite frequently, but they do not frighten me in the least, for I am convinced that they cannot stir except by God's leave. Let this be known well, that every time we make them the object of our contempt, they lose their strength, and the soul acquires over them greater ascendancy. They have no power except against cowardly souls who surrender their weapons. Against such they do show their power." It must be, indeed, a bitter humiliation to those proud spirits to be contemned by weaker beings such as men are. As we have said, if we humbly lean on the strong arm of God, it is our right as well as our duty to despise them. "If God

is for us who will be against us?" The evil spirits can bark; they cannot harm us unless through lack of prudence or through pride we put ourselves into their power. Thus it is that the fight that we must wage against the devil, the world and the flesh strengthens us in the supernatural life and enables us to make spiritual progress.

CONCLUSION

226. (1) We have just seen that the Christian life is a *warfare*, a harassing warfare that entails a lifelong and intricate maneuvering ending only with death, a warfare of supreme importance since it is our eternal life that is at stake. As St. Paul teaches, there are within us *two men*: **a)** the *regenerated* man, the new man, with tendencies which are noble, supernatural, divine. These the Holy Ghost produces in us through the merits of Christ and the intercession of the Blessed virgin and the Saints. We strive to correspond to the higher tendencies by making use, under the influence of actual grace, of the supernatural organism wherewith God has endowed us. **b)** But there is also in us the *natural* or *carnal* man, the Old Adam, with all the evil inclinations which remain even after Baptism, with the threefold concupiscence inherited from our first parents. This concupiscence is stirred up and intensified by the world and the devil; it is an abiding tendency inclining us toward an inordinate love of sensual pleasure, of our own excellence, and of the goods of this world. These two men necessarily engage in conflict. The Old Adam, the *flesh*, seeks pleasure without regard to the moral law. The spirit in turn reminds the flesh that there are forbidden pleasures and dangerous pleasures which must be sacrificed to duty, that is to say, to the will of God. The flesh, however, is persistent in its desires; it must, therefore, with the help of grace be mortified and, if need be, crucified. The Christian, then, is a *soldier*, an *athlete*, who fights unto death for an immortal crown (II. Tim., II, 1-7. St. Paul describes the Christian's armor in Eph. VI, 10-18).

227. (2) This warfare is *constant*, for in spite of all our efforts we can never fully divest ourselves of the *Old Adam*. We can but weaken him, bind him, while at the same time we fortify the New Man against his attacks. At the outset the fight is keener, more obstinate, and the counter-attacks of the enemy more numerous and more violent; but as we by earnest and persevering efforts gain one victory and then another, our enemy weakens, passions subside and, except for certain moments of trial willed by God to lead us to a higher degree of perfection, we enjoy a relative calm, a pledge and a foretaste of final victory. All success we owe to the grace of God. We must not forget that the grace given us is the grace for struggle and not the grace for peace; that we are warriors, athletes, ascetics; that like St. Paul we must fight on to the end if we would merit the crown. I have fought the good fight: I have finished my course: I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day" (II Tim., IV, 7-8). This is the means of perfecting in us the Christian life and of acquiring many merits.