

DEADLY SINS—LIVING VIRTUE

Introduction

(6 February 2006)

The sense of sin

- “Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that people have begun to lose the sense of sin.” (Pius XII, 1946)
- The sense of sin is “. . . a fine sensitivity and an acute perception of the seeds of death contained in sin, as well as a sensitivity and an acuteness of perception for identifying them in the thousand guises under which sin shows itself.” (RP, 18)
- The sense of sin is linked to the sense of God, and can never be eliminated completely.
- It can be deadened or numbed by
 - secularism
 - misapplication of social sciences
 - historical relativism
- “Finally the sense of sin disappears when—as can happen in the education of youth, in the mass media and even in education within the family—it is wrongly identified with a morbid feeling of guilt or with the mere transgression of legal norms and precepts.” (RP, 18)

Defining sin (CCC 1849-50)

1. Disobedience: “An utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.”
 - all sin finds its root and principle in the original sin
 - original disobedience rejects God as source of everything, including the moral law
 - a rejection of the state of man as a creature and God as creator
2. An offense against God: “Love of oneself even to contempt of God.”
 - the result of the seduction of the devil: “Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy.” (CCC 391)
 - wounds the relationship with God: man begins to live as if God does not exist, and to eliminate him from daily life
3. An offense against reason, truth and right conscience
 - “Satan manages to sow in man’s soul the seed of opposition to the one who “from the beginning” would be considered as man’s enemy—and not as Father. (DEV, 38)
 - This is the Great Lie: that God is not worthy of trust and obedience, that God ought to be feared or ignored

- The Great Lie also falsifies the truth about man and his status as creature
- “Man is challenged to become the adversary of God! . . . *Throughout the history of humanity there will be a constant pressure on man to reject God, even to the point of hating him.*” (DEV, 38)
- “Man will be inclined to see in God primarily a limitation of himself, and not the source of his own freedom and the fullness of his good.” (DEV 38)

What now?

- Original sin entails “captivity under the power of . . . the devil.” (CCC 407)
- Baptism “erases original sin” but the consequences remain in the form of a triple *concupiscence* that inclines man to sin and “subjugates [men and women] to:
 - the pleasures of the senses
 - covetousness for earthly goods
 - self-assertion contrary to the dictates of reason.” (CCC 377)
- The consequences of sin “summon man to spiritual battle”

The Spiritual Battle

- “Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.” (Eph 5:11-12)
- Pope St. Gregory the Great, in the *Moral Reflections on Job*, identifies the army of the enemy:
 - a. Pride, the queen of sins
 - b. the “generals” of her army:
 - 1.) Vanity
 - 2.) Envy
 - 3.) Sloth
 - 4.) Anger
 - 5.) Greed
 - 6.) Lust
 - 7.) Gluttony
 - c. Each of these have a “multitude of vices”, an army which follow them

Strategists for the Spiritual Battle

- The Desert Fathers and Mothers
- Saint John Cassian (360–432): *The Institutes of the Cenobia and the Remedies against the Eight Principal Vices*
- Saint John Climacus (580–650): *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*
- Saint Philip Neri (1515-1595)
- Father Lorenzo Scupoli (1529-1610): *The Spiritual Combat*

Advice from *The Spiritual Combat*

- “No one should delude himself that he can acquire virtue and serve God in the proper way, unless he is willing to undergo a violent struggle. He must conquer the difficulty he will experience when he deprives himself of the pleasures, great or small, to which he has been viciously attached.”
- Four things are necessary:
 1. Distrust of one’s self
 2. Confidence in God’s power and wisdom
 3. Training of the understanding and the will
 4. Devotion to prayer and the sacraments
- Rules of Engagement
 1. Check the first impulse of the passions and emotions. Avoid the evil action.
 2. When you have recovered calm, call the temptation to mind again, and face and hate the sin.
 3. Repeat the process, reinforcing your desire to overcome the sin.
 4. Perform acts of the opposing virtues.
- In temptations against purity
 1. Avoid the occasion of sin. Avoid idleness.
 2. Do not presume your own strength.
 3. Never judge others in similar struggles.
 4. Do not over-analyze the temptations. Direct attention peacefully elsewhere.
 5. Above all, turn to Christ. Have confidence in his ability and his desire to help.
 6. Stay faithful to the sacraments.
- When you feel overpowered
 1. Do not be disheartened, and don’t panic. “The will incurs no guilt unless it gives consent to act.”
 2. Resist the temptation as best you can. Say (out loud if it helps) “I shall not submit to you.”
 3. Call on the Lord, the Blessed Mother and the saints to assist you.
- When you have fallen
 1. Do not lose courage. Do not panic. Turn to God with confidence: “*See, O Master, what I am able to do. When I rely on my own strength, I commit nothing but sins.*”
 2. Give thanks to God for assisting you: “*O Lord, I would not have stopped at this had not Your goodness restrained me.*”
 3. Confidently seek God’s mercy: “*O Master, show forth Your divinity and pardon me! Never permit me to be separated from You . . . never permit me to offend you again!*”
 4. Get back to work: “*Place yourself in the merciful arms of God, and plunge into your usual duties as if nothing had happened.*”
 5. Go to confession frequently. Recall your sins, confess them sincerely. Repent of them and resolve to amend your life.
- The Enemy’s Tactics
 1. He says that change is impossible.
 2. He says that there is plenty of time to change—later.
 3. He directs our attention to preparing for “great big things” that will never happen.

4. He convinces us to act rashly and take on too much at once.
 5. He inflates our egos with our progress.
- General Tactics
 1. Prepare early for the battle. Be prepared to fight every day and at every occasion. Remember Providence.
 2. Do not try to do everything at once. Attack the vices one by one, and by degrees. Persevere.
 3. Seek out the dominant struggle and concentrate attention there first. Address the others as needed, but return to the dominant one.
 4. Be prudent regarding mortification. Use exterior practices sparingly, but always seek interior mortifications.
 5. Avoid the luxuries and comforts of life that lead to complacency.
 6. Incorporate daily examination of conscience and frequent confession of sins.
 - Focus of Prayer
 1. The goodness of God.
 2. The power and willingness of God to help us in our need.
 3. Our need to increase our desire to do God’s will.
 4. The many gifts we have received that deserve our gratitude.
 5. The life and example of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin and the Saints.
 6. Our connection with them in the Communion of Saints.
 - Examination of Conscience
 1. Turn to the **Father** in gratitude for the gifts and opportunities he has offered to you throughout the day.
 2. Turn to the **Son** and seek forgiveness for the sins you have committed that day.
 3. Turn to the **Holy Spirit** and ask for help to meet the challenges that are coming that night and the next day.

“It does not matter how weak you are—how strong the enemy may seem, either in number or in power. **Do not be discouraged.** The help you have from heaven is more powerful than all that hell can send to destroy the grace of God in your soul. **God**, the Creator and the Redeemer, **is Almighty**, and more desirous of your salvation than the devil can be of your destruction.”

The Spiritual Combat, ch. 16

Suggestions for Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: “The Fall” (nn. 385–421); “Sin” (nn. 1846–1876).

John Paul II. Encyclical Letter on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World (*Dominum et vivificantem*, 18 May 1986), especially Part II: “The Spirit Who Convinces the World Concerning Sin”

John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance in the Mission of the Church Today (*Reconcilatio et paenitentia*, 2 December 1984), especially “The Mystery of Sin” (nn.14–18).

John Paul II. A Catechesis on the Creed. Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1996.
Volume Two: *Jesus, Son and Savior*. Part I: “The Mystery of Evil”.

Lewis, C.S., Perelandra. [First published 1943.] New York: Scribner, 1996.

Lewis, C.S. The Problem of Pain, especially Chapter Four: “Human Wickedness”, and Chapter Five: “The Fall of Man”. [First published 1940.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Robinson, Jonathan. Spiritual Combat Revisited. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003.

Scupoli, Lawrence. The Spiritual Combat and a Treatise on the Peace of Soul. Translated by William Lester and Robert Mohan. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

Tolkien, J.R.R. The Silmarillion, Second Edition, especially the “*Ainulindalë*”. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Please refer also to the general reading list provided with the course outline.