# PART SIX

## SIN: THE OBSTACLE TO FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

*I hope in the Lord, I trust in His word.*

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication.

*I hope in the Lord, I trust in His word.*

If you, O Lord, mark iniquities,
Lord, who can stand?
But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered.

*I hope in the Lord, I trust in His word.*

I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in his word.
My soul waits for the Lord more than sentinels wait for the dawn.
More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord.

*I hope in the Lord, I trust in His word.*

For with the Lord is kindness
and with him is plenteous redemption;
And he will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.

*I hope in the Lord, I trust in His word.*

Psalm 130

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE:  WHAT SIN IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

A.  Introduction

5        In chapter ten I treated original sin, which established humankind in the condi-
tion of alienation which gained for us the redemptive act of Christ.  Not only do human
persons, with the exception of Mary, share the common condition of sin, but also each
contributes by his or her personal sins to the evil from which Jesus redeems us.  Thus,
Jesus not only is the "'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'" (Jn 1.29)--
10  that sin in which the whole world shares together--but also is the priest who pours out
His own blood "'on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Mt 26.28).  The redemp-
tive act of Jesus brings acquittal and life to overcome the sin and death first brought
into the world by the sin of Man (cf. Rom 5.12-18); the blood of Jesus frees us not only
from the sin of Man but from our sins (cf. 1 Cor 15.3; Rv 1.5).
15        In part five I treated the norms for living one's life in the Lord Jesus; in part
seven I will treat the means by which we cling to Jesus and become more and more per-
fectly one with Him.  Unfortunately, although we are redeemed, growth toward perfection
is not a smooth process of maturation from imperfect to perfect goodness.  Evil remains
in us.  In this world, each of us must bear this fact constantly in mind:
20        If we say, "We are free of the guilt of sin,"
          we deceive ourselves; the truth is not to be found in us.
          But if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted
          to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong.*
          If we say, "We have never sinned,"
25        we make him a liar and his word finds no place in us (1 Jn 1.8-10).
Hence, we must battle against evil throughout this life (cf. GS 22).  We must "lay aside
every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies
ahead" (Heb 12.1); the fight against sin can require even the shedding of our own blood
according to the example of Jesus (cf. Heb 12.2-4).  Having died with Christ and been
30  raised with Him to new life, the gift of redemption imposes upon us the task of destroy-
ing the rule of sin in ourselves (cf. Rom 6).
          The present part treats sin primarily from the point of view of this task.  Sin is
the personal enemy we must fight; sin is the obstacle we must overcome in following
Jesus.  The enemy and obstacle is not so much outside ourselves as within ourselves.
35  Thus, here I treat primarily the personal sins of Christians; only incidentally to this
main theme do I consider the residual effects of original sin and the impact upon indi-
viduals of social sins in which they are involved willy-nilly.
          In this part, I do not attempt to provide sufficient information concerning sin
for the pastoral formation of seminarians who will later hear confessions.  A special
40  treatise in pastoral theology is devoted to this subject.  The present treatise on sin
is intended to deal with it sufficiently for the purpose of understanding Christian
moral principles, especially the obstacle which sin presents in the way of the pursuit
of Christian perfection.  This understanding is essential for preaching and teaching
about the Christian life, and the present work is directed primarily to these ends.
45  Still, what is said here will provide an essential framework for the task of pastoral
theology.
          In the present chapter, I explain what sin is; because many today offer for the
phenomena in which sin appears an account incompatible with Christian faith, I also ex-
plain with some care what sin is not.  In chapter twenty-six I will explain the differ-
50  ent kinds of sin and make many important distinctions which must be kept in mind if one ·
is to deal effectively with sin in one's own life and to help others deal with it in
theirs.  In chapter twenty-seven I will explain what constitutes grave matter, which is
one of the conditions for mortal sin; in explaining this point, I will examine and set
aside various false accounts, widely propagated today as theories of so-called "funda-
55  mental option."  In chapter twenty-eight I will deal with the effects of ignorance, in-
advertence, and false conscience on sin and moral responsibility.  In chapter twenty-
nine I will examine sin of weakness and treat with special care sins which follow com-
pulsive urges; these include many sexual sins, sins of alcoholism and other addictions,
and sins of anger.  In chapter thirty I will examine the dynamics by which a Christian
60  can move along the broad and easy road from imperfection through venial sin and mortal
sin of various degrees of gravity to loss of faith and eternal damnation.  As I will ex-
plain in part seven, this road must be traveled in the opposite direction; then it seems
narrow and steep, but it leads to life everlasting.

65  B.  Sins to be avoided in preaching and teaching concerning sin                      ·

          In preaching and teaching concerning sin, one must take care to remain on one's
guard against committing sin.  Sometimes the objectivity which reflection gives to this
ugly reality can distract one's attention from one's own personal involvement in the
70  evil under study.  As in any other activity, all sorts of sins can be done by one who
thinks, preaches, and teaches about sin.  Here I mention only a few which are especially
common and pernicious.
          First, one must be careful not to falsify the Gospel of Christ by separating sin
from redemption.  One does this in two ways.  In one way, by calling attention to sin--
75  for example, by moralistic teaching and preaching--without fully emphasizing the great
truth of God's mercy.  Vatican II warns us to avoid this error:
          . . .as the Church has always held and continues to hold, Christ in His boundless
          love freely underwent His passion and death because of the sins of all men, so
          that all might attain salvation.  It is, therefore, the duty of the Church's
80        preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love
          and as the fountain from which every grace flows (NA 4).
One also falsifies the Gospel by preaching grace without sufficient attention to the
awful reality of sin, its continuing presence in the lives of Christians, and the real
possibility of eternal damnation for those who evict the Holy Spirit from their hearts.

If we cheapen grace in this way, we not only encourage people to sin and to remain complacently in their sins, we also belittle the wonderful mercy by which God will save us from so great an evil if only we do not resist His love until death.

5 If a man drowning in an icy ocean were rescued from certain death by someone whom he had previously tried to murder, the person saved would be obliged to thank and praise his rescuer, to acknowledge the depth and reality of his own malicious will to kill, and the wonder and beauty of his rescuer's loving will to give life. So we in relation to God. To preach cheap grace—divine love without an acknowledgment of the whole truth of our sin, the Eucharist without the sacrament of Penance—is to inculcate pride rather 10 than humility, to direct people onto the way of alienation rather than onto the way of peace.

Second, one must take care not to falsify one's own position in relation to others in the matter of sin. One is not immune from sin; to think and preach and teach as if one were is pharisaism. At the same time, to pretend that others are immune from sin 15 also is false and is to flatter them into unreal complacency. One must not judge others; they judge themselves by accepting or rejecting the grace of Christ (cf. Jn 3.17-21). But all of us need this grace; none is sinless (cf. Rom 3.10). While one may doubt that certain others—for example, preadolescent children brought up in a Christian family—are likely to commit mortal sins, one must not exclude the possibility that even such a 20 child might do so, much less the likelihood that everyone will commit serious venial sins which can pave the way to hell if the practice of penance and moral effort is not begun early and carried on continuously.                                           .

Third, one must take care neither to belittle the true seriousness of sin nor to exaggerate the danger it poses. Today the true seriousness of sin often is belittled; 25 one hears priests begin the Mass by talking of mistakes, defects, and immaturities, for they are reluctant even to mention the sins. As I explained in chapter eleven, section A, we are at present in a cultural situation which makes difficult a realistic awareness of moral evil.

The danger sin poses is seldom exaggerated today in the precise ways in which it 30 was in the past. One does not hear sermons on the peril of sinners in the hands of an angry God, although some do emphasize the devil so greatly that people become anxious that they can be caused to sin despite God's grace and without their own free choice to resist this grace. However, the danger of sin is exaggerated in new ways. For example, some confuse sin with other sorts of evil, such as psychological illness and defect. A 35 student who is not called to task for his or her sins—such as laziness and deliberate self-indulgence—might be counseled regarding temperamental traits such as irritability or shyness, about which he or she can do almost nothing. To replace the norm of marital fidelity, which makes a specific moral demand, with the ideal of marital bliss in preaching concerning married life exaggerates the danger of sin, because the grace of the sac- 40 rament and a firm commitment is sufficient to exclude infidelity from Christian marriage, but nothing can exclude pain and misery from so intimate a relationship. In this way, a sense of moral hopelessness is nurtured, for people are made to feel responsibile for what is not subject to free choice and made to feel guilty for what they cannot help.

Finally, anyone who shares in the responsibility of Christian instruction must be 45 very careful to teach accurately what is a sin and how serious a sin each kind of action can be. It is a disastrous error to adapt one's teaching to the social and moral judgments of secular humanist society—for example, by joining its moral indignation concerning situations and conditions (which generally do involve real moral evil) instead of carrying out a Christian critique which traces responsibility to individuals who can and 50 ought to act in these matters. A child who confesses guilt for pollution has been badly instructed; one who confesses guilt for dropping candy wrappers around the neighborhood on the way to school has been well instructed. Also, it is scandalous to encourage the faithful to think that they can deliberately set aside and freely violate (at least in certain circumstances) moral norms proposed by the constant and very firm teaching of 55 the Church.

## C. Scriptural indications concerning sin—Old Testament

It is neither possible nor necessary to provide here a full study of sin in the 60 Bible.[1] Moreover, important points rooted in revelation will be illustrated by appropriate references when they are treated in subsequent sections. However, as a background for my analysis of the nature of sin, I summarize some of the central data of faith.

Fundamental is that in Scripture sin never is identified with the condition of creatureliness itself. All creatures as such are good; they come from the wisdom and 65 love of God. Therefore, their inevitable distinction from Him, their limitations, their need to develop into their own fulfillment, and their very potentiality for sin and defects of other kinds are not sin. Also fundamental in Scripture is that sin is a terrible reality, not an illusion—a reality which arises in the abuse by created persons of their power of free choice, as I explained in chapter eight, section A (cf. Sir 15.11-20).

70 In the Old Testament, apart from very few passages which suggest a more primitive view (cf. 2 Sm 6.6-7), sin is not regarded as mere behavior which violates a taboo. The act of sin involves a personal, inner, and enduring wrong (cf. Nm 32.23; Ps 51). More than in deviant behavior, sin is in the heart (cf. Jer 4.4; Ez 11.19; 1 Sm 16.7). To sin is to be stiff-necked and resistant to God (cf. Ex 32.9; Dt 31.27; 2 Chr 30.8; Is 75 48.4; Jer 17.23; and so on).

Although in some sense, due to their communal solidarity, the sins of ancestors persist to condition their children—most strikingly in the case of original sin (cf. Sir 16.22-17.18)—responsibility for sin always is a personal matter. One may not escape personal guilt by distributing one's own responsibility to the larger society (cf. 80 Ez 18.2-4; Jer 31.29-30; Dt 24.16). The richest treatment of this matter in the prophets makes clear that each person is fully responsible not only for his or her own acts, but also for his or her entire personal state of heart (cf. Ez 18).

Sin is against the Lord, even when it also involves an injustice to other persons (cf. 2 Sm 12.13). "'Against you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight'"

(Ps 51.6) are words attributed to David, repentant for the injustice of adultery and murder he did to Uriah. Within the context of the covenant, all sin is hatred of God, as all upright life is love of Him (cf. Dt 5.9-10).

Nevertheless, sin hurts sinners, not God Himself (cf. Jer 7.19; Is 59.1-2). The
5   commands of God are directions of divine wisdom for the flourishing of His created chil-
dren (cf. Sir 16.22-28). As I showed in chapter twelve, section C, the Lord's way is a
great gift and blessing for those to whom He reveals it. To the suspicion that God
rules in His own interests rather than in the interests of His creatures, one of the
participants in the dialectic of Job replies:
10        "Look up to the skies and behold; regard the heavens high above you.
          If you sin, what injury do you do to God?
          Even if your offenses are many, how do you hurt him?
          If you are righteous, what do you give him,
          or what does he receive from your hand?
15        Your wickedness can affect only a man like yourself;
          and your justice only a fellow human being" (Jb 35.5-8).
Commandments are given for one's own good (cf. Dt 6.24, 10.13). The persistent sugges-
tion that God's concern for morality is exploitative is a typical aspect of temptation
(cf. Gn 3.5). It must be firmly set aside. Sin is a form of foolishness (cf. Dt 32.6;
20  Is 29.14; Jer 5.4).

One often reads and hears today that in the Old Testament sin is a violation of the
covenant. The suggestion is that there is no sin except against the covenant. However,
this position is falsified by the teaching of the prophets, who denounce not only the
infidelity of Israel to the covenant, but also the sins of pagan nations which enjoyed
25  no such special, personal relationship with God. For example, cruelty in war, enslave-
ment of enemy people, slave-trading, perfidy, feuding, atrocities against civilians, and
the desecration of a corpse are crimes of pagans, denounced together with crimes of the
chosen people: infidelity to the law, enslavement, oppression of the poor, prostitution
with incest, usury, and false worship (cf. Am 1.3-2.8). In Egypt, even before the estab-
30  lishment of the covenant, the people's worship of idols was detestable to God; their re-
fusal to abandon their idols already was rebellion (cf. Ez 20.7-8).

Once the covenant is established, its violation and sin do become identical for
those within it. The great and constant sin is idolatry: turning to immanent, accessible,
manipulable objects of worship. Because the covenant is like a marriage bond between
35  Yahweh and His people, their violations have the character of adultery (cf. Ez 23; Hos 2;
Jer 3.19-25). Thus one finds sin identified with disruption of the bond of the covenant,
but such disruption does not define sin. Violation of the covenant is evil because the
covenant is a good which ought to be reverenced and piously fulfilled.

The description of the typical sin of Man contains important elements representa-
40  tive of sins in general. A known precept of God is violated (cf. Gn 3.3-6). The viola-
tion in outward behavior proceeds from an inner act of disrespect. The inner act is mo-
tivated in part by a suspicion concerning God's disinterestedness, in part by impatience
with the limits imposed by the norm, and in part by desire for the immediate good to be
realized in the sinful act. The sin engenders its own negative consequences in the sin-
45  ners themselves (cf. Gn 3.7).

It also alters without breaking off the relationship to God (cf. Gn 3.8-24). (One
often hears today that sin breaks one's relationship to God; this statement is false,
since the relationship cannot be destroyed, but only altered for better or worse.) In
defense, the sinners rationalize (cf. Gn 3.8-13), but these rationalizations help not at
50  all to forestall the disastrous consequences which follow from their sin (cf. Gn 3.14-
24). Still, God cares for Man and Woman; His care foreshadows redemption (cf. Gn 3.15,
21).

The dimensions of sin and redemption are marked out most perfectly in the Miserere.
Sin offends God and it spoils a person's true self. Repentance depends upon God's love
55  and one's own sincerity. Redemption requires not merely the washing away of a superfi-
cial stain, not only a thorough cleansing of ground-in dirt, but even a re-creation of
the entire, inner self (cf. Ps 51.12). Created anew by God's saving act, the sinner
gives thanks and praise, communicates God's ways to others, and offers God acceptable
outward sacrifices which manifest the renewed inward relationship.
60

D. Scriptural indications concerning sin--New Testament

Many of the themes which are rooted in the Old Testament are developed to full per-
fection in the New. For example, Jesus firmly rejects any notion that virtue is to be
65  identified with outwardly correct behavior and sin with outward deviance. Rather, sin
comes from the heart (cf. Mk 7.20-23; Mt 15.18-20). St. Paul fully develops the impli-
cations of this truth and shows that legalism means slavery; only the holiness of living
faith liberates one from sin (cf. Gal 3.19-25; Rom 7.7-25).

Like the prophets, Paul also makes clear that pagans living outside the covenant
70  are endowed with enough knowledge of God, simply by the natural light of reason, so that
their immoral action has the true character of sin (cf. Rom 1.18-22; 2.14-16). God as
creator, not only as covenant-maker, has provided a wise order of things; violation of
this true order of reality begins by a refusal to acknowledge that God is God and crea-
tures only creatures, and this refusal leads to all other sins. Ultimately, this intrin-
75  sic connection between God and created goods leads to the great insight: "One who has no
love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen" (1 Jn 4.20). God's
word is a truth which comes to earth from the Father; it is not an alien imposition, but
is as much one's own as the face one is born with (cf. Jas 1.16-25).

Immorality, then, is a self-imposed privation which blocks love of God, since He
80  is all goodness. When God reveals Himself and offers His love, those whose deeds are
evil flee the light to avoid exposure; thus the rejection of faith has a basis in prior
immorality, to which individuals can cling, even when Jesus invites humankind to abandon
immorality and death in favor of immortality and life (cf. Jn 1.12; 3.18-21). The revel-
ation of God in Jesus provides an adequate opportunity for sinners to accept divine love;

the rejection of this opportunity is a reconfirmation in sin which is utterly inexcusable (cf. Jn 15.21-25).

The parable of the prodigal son, the merciful father, and the resentful elder brother illuminates the nature of sin and the wonder of divine love. The elder brother
5    is outwardly obedient; he conforms perfectly, but he does not appreciate his father's great goodness and refuses to share in communicating the paternal love to his younger brother (cf. Lk 15.29-32). The younger brother is rebellious; he wishes to have his independence. For this reason, he takes what he can as his own, leaves the security of his father's love, wastes himself and his goods, and only then realizes his need for
10   mercy (cf. Lk 15.20). The father respects the freedom of his younger son too much to restrain him; nevertheless, the father's love flourishes in mercy and joy when the young man turns back to him in sincere submission (cf. Lk 15.12-23). It perhaps is worth noting as well that the father's response to the conformist and resentful elder brother also is patient and kindly (cf. Lk 15.31-32). One must avoid pharisaism in condemning phari-
15   saism.

In its deeper understanding of the intimacy which God wills to share with creatures, the New Testament reaches a far deeper understanding of sin, which is separation from God. As light and darkness have nothing in common, so uprightness and iniquity have nothing in common (cf. 2 Cor 6.14). Christ and the devil, belief and unbelief, God and
20   idols are absolutely opposed (cf. 2 Cor 6.15). The believer must walk according to the Spirit, who makes him or her a child of God (cf. Gal 5.16), not according to the God-less flesh, which obliterates divine life (cf. Rom 8.1-17).

To sin is to do iniquity--that is, to alienate oneself from divine life. The Word became flesh to take away sins; for Him alienation from God is impossible. Therefore,
25            The man who remains in him does not sin,
             The man who sins has not seen him or known him.
             Little ones, let no one deceive you;
             the man who acts in holiness is holy indeed, even as the Son is holy.
             The man who sins belongs to the devil,
30            because the devil is a sinner from the beginning.
             It was to destroy the devil's works that the Son of God revealed himself.
             No one begotten of God acts sinfully because he remains in God's stock;
             he cannot sin because he is begotten of God (1 Jn 3.6-9).
For John, to cling to Jesus is to remain God's child, and to remain God's child is to be
35   incapacitated for acting sinfully. Sinful deeds express the God-lessness of iniquity.[2]

Considered in this way, sin is not so much to be found in the millions of transgressions as it is in the one privation of divine life from a person's heart. Thus, in St. John "sin" tends to be used more often in the singular than in the plural. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus reveals Him to John the Baptist as the Lamb of God
40   who takes away the <u>sin</u> of the world (cf. Jn 1.29). This sin is the alienation of creation which has separated itself from God. Similarly, St. Paul speaks of sin as a unitary reality opposed to divine life, a reality which entered the world with the sin of Man, and which is overcome by the obedience of Christ (cf. Rom 5.12-19). Needless to say, neither St. John nor St. Paul takes less seriously the sinfulness of the deeds of
45   iniquity; rather, both more deeply realize the sinfulness of each single sinful act, for they see God-lessness in it.

E.   **What is sin?**

50           Sin is moral evil considered insofar as this evil is contrary to the good of religion--that is, to the fulfillment of humankind's potentiality for harmony with God.

Sin is moral evil. Moral evil is privation in the existential domain, which is the realm of those entities whose being depends upon free choice. One might say that moral evil precisely is in free choice which is not what it ought to be; St. Augustine
55   sometimes speaks like this (cf. FEF 1558 and 1560). More broadly, sin is not only in free choice itself, but in all the forms of voluntariness, which I described in chapter nine, sections G through O, which stem from an actual free choice or from the failure to make a free choice which could and ought to have been made.

Some of these forms of voluntariness affect persons other than those whose sin was
60   by a personal choice. Hence, as Augustine teaches, one person can be in sin by virtue of the choice of another (cf. FEF 1454). Such is original sin, which I discussed in chapter ten; similar in its corporate impact is the redemptive act of Jesus, which I discussed in chapter eleven (cf. Rom 5.12-19).

As there is a strong tendency to think erroneously of human acts as if they were
65   chunks of behavior adopted by human thought and intention, so there is a strong tendency to think erroneously of sins as if they were pieces of deviant behavior. In reality, moral evil is not primarily in performances; rather, it primarily is in choices. From individual and communal sinful choices, sin spreads into the behavior by which proposals adopted by sinful choices are carried out.
70           Likewise, from sinful choices, even if they eventuate in no outward performance, moral evil spreads through other modes of voluntariness, and gradually but inevitably spreads through and perverts the whole existential domain of personal and interpersonal relationship, engendering disharmony at every level. From the existential domain, the perversity which begins in free choice introduces disorder even into the other dimensions
75   of individual and social personal reality, causing disease and death, confusion and error, shoddiness and breakdown. In chapter ten, section J, I described how original sin spread through humankind and the world; the same process occurs with every personal sin.

Because sin primarily is in sinful choices, and because sinful choices are of themselves spiritual entities which persist, the guilt of sin, which is sin itself, per-
80   sists even after the sinful behavior is long past and forgotten. St. Augustine already pointed out this truth (cf. FEF 1873). Anyone who understands what sin is knows that no sin is merely a passing event or temporal process. In every free choice, one makes oneself be; in every sinful choice, one makes oneself guilty. There is no need to think of a state of sin or a habit of sin or an imputation of guilt distinct from sin itself, for

in and of itself sin is a state, a habit, a condition of guilt.

The expressions "formal sin" and "material sin" mark a useful distinction. Both expressions ought to be understood in reference to human acts; pieces of behavior which are not human acts—for example, an involuntary reflex such as a violent blow struck
5   without thinking or a nocturnal emission—are not sins in any sense at all, since they are not human acts. A sin is a human act which is not what it ought morally to be. A material sin is such a human act for which guilt is not incurred, either because it is done in accord with a blamelessly faulty conscience or because it is elicited by spontaneous willing, without a free choice. A formal sin is a morally defective human act
10  which is done by free choice and in violation of conscience. By this definition, a formal sin is sinful in itself and of itself; a material sin is sinful by virtue of the prior condition which engendered its moral defect. This prior condition might have been original sin, a sin or sins of others, a sin or sins of oneself, or some combination of these.
15      Moral evil is called "sin" precisely insofar as this evil is contrary to the good of religion. Moral evil blocks human fulfillment in every level of existence (cf. GS 13). In its privation, evil will disintegrates the self, disrupts personal life, dismembers community, and distorts the relationship of humankind with God; I explained these effects of sin in chapter five, section F, with respect to original sin. Each personal sin has
20  analogous implications. Thus every morally evil act offends God, although no such offense need be intended by one who chooses by a nonrational principle of self-determination, and is willing only to violate reasonable judgment for the sake of some particular satisfaction of a demand of determinant, sentient nature.[3] In sections G and H, below, I will discuss more fully precisely how moral evil involves a violation of one's relation-
25  ship with God, and so counts as sin.

### F.  How can a person choose to do what is morally evil?

In committing sin, one does not choose evil as such. One chooses a certain good.
30  For example, Eve chooses to eat the fruit, perceiving it as likely to be tasty, as beautiful, and as interesting to experience (cf. Gn 3.6). She is willing to violate the divine prohibition, but this willingness is not what she chooses; the violation is accepted as incidental to her choice. Similarly, David chooses to enjoy Bathsheba; he accepts the injustice of adultery to Uriah (cf. 2 Sm 11.3-8). Only in violations of the seventh
35  and eighth modes of responsibility does one choose to violate a human good; even in these cases, one does not choose the moral evil as such, but accepts it in seeking satisfaction by means of revenge or the attainment of some human good (or avoidance of some human evil) by the violation of another.

For one who is not thinking of life in a religious perspective which embraces every
40  choice, all or most morally evil acts seem only to be violations of the dictates of his or her own reasonableness. To be reasonable is a human good, but it is only one good alongside others and incommensurable with them. In the condition of fallen humankind, consistent reasonableness appears to be virtually impossible and certainly pointless. Hence, apart from the light of faith, morally evil choices are practically inevitable
45  (cf. DS 241/132, 383-385/186-188, 389/192, 391/194, 393/196).

Even if one considers the possibilities involved in a situation of temptation in the clear light of faith, and realizes fully that the morally evil choice is an offense against God, one does not face a choice between God and the wrongly desired good. Rather, one chooses between the wrongly desired good and one's actual, present relationship with
50  God, which is only one human good alongside others, and which usually seems to be at stake only for the time being, not forever. Considered thus, one's relationship with God is not understood as absolutely a greater good than the wrongly desired alternative to it, for it does not here and now include all that is appealing in this alternative. If it did, and if it were understood as absolutely greater, then no one could choose to
55  sin.

Prior to free choice, one understands the human goods and spontaneously wills them, but one's will is not determined to respect all of them fully in every instance. In making an evil choice, one responds to some of the principles of practical reason but not to all of them; one determines oneself to some good, but fails to determine oneself
60  consistently with integral human fulfillment. The privation which constitutes the evil of sin precisely is this lack of the reasonableness and openness which could and ought to be present in every free choice. One's choice could and ought to conform to conscience; a morally evil choice does not conform to conscience; in this lack of due conformity is the privation which constitutes the moral evil of the act.
65      The privation is the evil; the sin centrally is choice subject to this privation. The privation is not imposed upon the choice from without; the privation is voluntarily accepted in the free choice by the free choice itself (cf. FEF 1549). St. Augustine explains:

Let no one, therefore, seek the efficient cause of an evil will; it is not effi-
70      cient but deficient, because the will in this case is not an effecting of something but a defecting. To defect from that which supremely exists to that which has less being is to begin to have an evil will. But to try to find causes of these defections, since, as I said, they are not efficient but deficient, is as if someone tried to see darkness or to hear silence (FEF 1754).
75  Thus a sin is something real, namely, a choice; it is a sin because of something real, namely, privation of right order; yet this privation is not a positive reality, not a something which needs explanation, as if it were some distinct creature. For this reason, sin arises in no way from God; rather, its source is one's own bad will (cf. Jas 1.13-15).
80      Insofar as choice is morally evil, the execution of the choice participates in moral evil. Thus the sinful deed, the deviant behavior, has the character of moral evil not from its positive reality, but rather from the sinfulness of the choice it executes, and this choice itself is not evil by what it positively is, but rather by the privation which one accepts in making it. Sin is unreasonable, unnecessary self-limitation.

For this reason, it is a great mistake to base moral criticism and exhortation on positive qualities of sinful behavior. Sexual immorality, for example, is not sinful because it is ugly or because it can lead to disease or because it can end in pregnancy. Murder is not sinful because it gets blood on the floor. Criticism and exhortation
5  based on such grounds distract attention from real moral concerns, and encourage people to find more acceptable ways of sinning--for example, sex which is not ugly, unhealthy, or unwantedly fruitful, and murder with the blood neatly washed down the drain.

G. In what sense is all sin a violation of the law of God?
10

St. Augustine provided a famous definition of sin: "Sin, therefore, is anything done, said, or desired against the eternal law. Truly, the eternal law is the divine reason or will of God, commanding that natural order be preserved and forbidding its breach" (FEF 1605). When we confess sin to God, saying: "I have sinned through my own
15  fault in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do," we follow the pattern outlined by Augustine, although we make explicit that omissions as well as deeds are sins.
As I explained in chapter nineteen, section B, the primary moral principle can be formulated in many conceptually different but really equivalent ways. Correspondingly,
20  the nature of sin can be expressed in conceptually diverse but really equivalent ways. The formulation of St. Augustine is of special importance both because it has shaped so much Catholic preaching and teaching to the present, and because it brings to the front the offense against God which is the particular aspect under which moral evil is sin, as I said in section E, above. Here I will explain this aspect more fully.
25  The eternal law is God's plan and will. To the extent that God's people in the Old Covenant or we in the Covenant of the Gospel accept Him in living faith as our Lord, the opposition between immorality on our part and God's wise plan and loving will is clear enough. His plan and will is that we should worship Him alone, for other worship is senseless and degrading; that we should treat one another as befits our dignity as
30  persons made in His image and called to share His own intimate life; that we should be liberated from self-imposed limitations and enjoy fulfillment in Christ. Thus, whenever the Law of Moses forbade something, the pious Jew knew it to be against God's wisdom and love; similarly, when the Church of Christ teaches that something is a mortal sin, the faithful Catholic knows it to be against God's wisdom and love. Sin violates our
35  covenant-friendship with God; therefore, sin is against the eternal law, which is the plan and love that shapes and bestows this covenant friendship.
Noticing this way in which sin is against the eternal law, and mistakenly thinking it to be the only possible way to relate moral evil to God's plan, some taught that there is a real distinction between "theological sin" and "philosophical sin." Theological
40  sin, on their account, is a deliberate transgression of God's law, done by one who is aware of God and who is conscious of the fact that the act is a violation of His will. Philosophical sin is a morally evil act done by one who does not know God or by one who is not thinking about Him--the immorality, for instance, of a pagan who does not know God or of a Christian who knows that something is wrong but who has never heard that it
45  is a mortal sin. Those who held this view wished to deny that "philosophical sin" could be mortal. The Church firmly condemns this position (cf. DS 2291/1290).
As I pointed out in sections C and D, both the Old Testament (cf. Am 1.3-2.8) and the New (cf. Rom 1.18-22; 2.14-16) make clear that the pagans can sin. Even those who are not within the covenant can know enough about right and wrong, and about the divine
50  source of reality to realize that immorality involves the violation not only of one's own reason and (often) of one's neighbor's rights but also of the more-than-human source of meaning and value which we call "God." Indeed, one way to read the account of the typical sin of Man, with its effort to "know good and evil," is to consider the temptation to be simply to set aside the moral boundaries and to try to put oneself above limi-
55  tations as God is above them (cf. Gn 3.5).[4]
In chapter fourteen, section C, I summarized the account which St. Thomas gives of the relationship between conscience, natural law, and the eternal law. The point with which we are concerned now concerns this same relationship: In rejecting the boundaries moral norms mark out, human persons implicitly reject the meaning and value which God
60  has embodied in creation, and so they implicitly reject His reason and love which are the font of this meaning and value. Therefore, every morally evil act has the character of sin; there are not purely "philosophical sins."
From the preceding, one can draw the following conclusion. There are at least two senses in which an unreasonable, morally evil act can be a sin, for there are two dis-
65  tinct routes by which it comes to be against God's mind and will. In violating one's conscience, one violates the natural law, and so violates the eternal law in which the natural law is our participation--in other words, one violates the light of reason and so violates the divine light which shines in reason. But also, in violating conscience which is formed in the light of faith, one violates the covenant of faith, and so vio-
70  lates the eternal law which faith makes known--in other words, one violates the teaching of the Church and so violates the divine truth which one hears in this teaching. Either way, one commits a sin; Christians who realize they are sinning sin in both ways at once.
The fact that one is sinning in two ways at once does not make one's sin twice as bad. Rather, sin for the Christian is significant in a different way than it is for the
75  pagan. If I sin, I violate both of the laws written upon my heart: the natural law written there by God the creator and the law of the Spirit written there by His gift. In other words, sin for me violates both my human nature and my divine nature. If I sin, I both deface the image of God and abort the child of God which I am.

80  H. In what sense is all sin turning from God to the creature and oneself?

St. Augustine also undertakes to clarify the notion of sin in terms of turning: It is an inordination and wrong-turning by which one turns from the supreme Creator toward inferior created things.[5] There is a sense in which this formulation is correct, but

it also is likely to lead to misunderstandings.

The formulation clearly is correct in the sense that sin does violate the law of God in the ways indicated in the preceding section. One who sins settles for a possibility marked out by nonrational desire, whose good certainly is limited unnecessarily;
5 the sinful choice is not in line with consistent openness to integral fulfillment in Christ. Moreover, a well-instructed Christian who is tempted to commit a sin is acutely aware that the immoral choice also means accepting a violation, more or less serious, of the relationship with God. In choosing between the object of one's wrong desire and the morally upright alternative to it, one therefore can be said to be choosing between a
10 certain created, quite transitory good and the goodness of God, whose friendship one freely violates.

The misunderstandings to which this formulation of Augustine's is likely to lead arise from the particular theological framework in which he worked--a kind of neoplatonism. As I explained in chapter seven, section P, Augustine did not sufficiently appre-
15 ciate the inherent importance of created goods and of human life in this world. He tended to think of the human soul as if it were naturally oriented to the divine as to its only adequate fulfillment. For him, then, the human person about to choose stands between the infinite goodness and beauty of God, on the one side, and the very limited and smudged beauty and defective goodness of creatures, on the other. Sin consists in
20 turning from God toward the creature--a turn so hard to understand that it can only appear either insane or utterly perverse.

In terms of our day to day experience, sin is by no means so dramatic an encounter. A woman whose husband has abandoned her must choose between lonely faithfulness to him and a new chance at marital happiness, in the form of an appealing man who wishes to
25 marry her. A businessman must choose between losing his investment and using methods of competition which he considers fraudulent. Even Thomas More's choice was between pleasing the king with the empty gesture of an oath and giving his life to avoid perjury. In none of these cases would one who does not share Augustine's metaphysics be inclined to formulate the issue as whether to turn from God to a created good.

30 Thus, Augustine's formulation, which has a true sense, can lead to the erroneous idea that one who does not see matters in a neoplatonist perspective is incapable of sin. Augustine would have been the first to deny such a conclusion. Nor should anyone claim that the Council of Trent has adopted St. Augustine's definition, and canonized the concept that sin is turning from God. Trent used the language of turning from God, common
35 enough in Catholic theology, not to define sin, but only to say that by sin sinners are turned from God (cf. DS 1525/797). I accept this in the sense in which I have explained that the Augustinian formula is correct.

Augustine refined his formulation by contrasting the two loves: "Two loves, therefore, have made two cities. There is an earthly city made by the love of self even to
40 the point of contempt for God, and a heavenly city made by the love of God even to the point of contempt for self" (FEF 1763). Here, again, the formula has a sound sense. To sin is to violate the mind and will of God, and so to express contempt for Him; a morally upright life, by contrast, is the fruit of charity, which is divine love. Still, charity does not require contempt for oneself absolutely, but only contempt for one's sinfulness
45 which separates one from God and from one's own fulfillment.

Sinners are not great lovers of themselves; saints who love God perfectly love themselves far more richly than do sinners, for saints seek the finest good for themselves. Moreover, not all sin is selfishness. One can sin by egoism and lack of sympathy for others; one also can sin through partiality which prefers oneself and those
50 with whom one is identified to others equally or more deserving of one's concern. But one also can sin in many other ways--for example, by a fanatical act which destroys both oneself and a hated enemy out of revenge. (People often cut off their own noses to spite someone else.)

In what sense does every sinner improperly love himself or herself? As I explained
55 in chapter fourteen, section M, and chapter nineteen, section C, one is tempted to sin by the appeal which a nonrational, emotional principle gives to a possibility concerning which one is deliberating. The emotion as such is not evil, but the choice is evil--to act on its impulse rather than in accord with intelligible principles (and more or less extensively to the disregard of the indications of principles of practical reason). One
60 might ask: How can the will, which is a spiritual power, determine itself by the non-rational principle of emotion?

The answer is that this impulse itself is part of oneself. One who experiences it can recognize its nonrational character, yet reduce it to a certain intelligible good, namely, self-integration. To make this move in a temptation situation is to decide to
65 get oneself together by sacrificing reason to feeling, rather than by bringing feeling in line with reason. One who does this realizes that the self-integration achieved is only an apparent good. Yet one can choose wrongly with this apparent good as the intelligible ground of making the nonrational impulse of emotion prevail. (One gets rid of temptation by giving in to it.)

70 The self which is constituted by such immoral choices is insubstantial; it is the "I" in search of its own emotional peace, security, success, and satisfaction--in short, it is the sinful self St. Augustine so well analyzed in all of his work. This is the self which Jesus teaches one must lose if one is to find one's true self (cf. Mt 16.24; Mk 8.34; Lk 9.23). Therefore, in this sense of "self-love," all sin is perverse self-
75 love, for it is the pursuit of a "me" defined by sinful passion, not the pursuit of the "we" in which divine and human persons will be united in the fulfillment of all things in Christ.

I. The prudence of stressing law and selfishness in Christian teaching today

80 In Christian teaching today, I think it would be wise not to stress selfishness or self-love as a danger. Even more, I think it is very important to avoid emphasis on law.

In saying that self-love and selfishness should not be stressed as a danger, I do not mean that lack of sympathy and unfairness should be ignored. Especially when one

deals with children, one must confront rather gross forms of egoism. However, the ef-
fort must be to help children understand that their genuine self-fulfillment is in Christ
rather than elsewhere.

It is a mistake to overcome egoism by transforming it into the irrational partial-
5   ity of a group; in such partiality, sin resides more securely than in the fragile egoism
of the selfish little child. When one deals with adults, one must try to help them to
understand that their group biases and prejudices, their partiality to selected classes
and types of people, can have a nonrational ground which is much more seriously immoral
than is the naive egoism of the child or the social misfit.
10        However, in our culture, individualistic as it is and dominated as it is by social
controls necessary to keep selfishness in check, to stress self-love and selfishness as
a moral danger is in practice to put Christian moral teaching in the service of sociali-
zation into the culture as it is. Hence, in Christian teaching it is more important to
stress the inadequacy of the self-love of the sinner, to point out his or her failure to
15  move toward the true self-fulfillment which can be found in Christ.

In short, where "self" for Augustine and most medieval thinkers pointed to a center
of resistance to communion in intelligible goods, "self" for people living in our time
points to unenlightened and immature egoism. In earlier times, warnings against self-
love might turn sinners toward God; today, warnings against self-love turn everyone
20  toward the organization, the group, the lonely crowd--the association of whatever sort
in which individuals surrender their personal dignity for a feeling of community and in
return gain only participation in a larger and less self-conscious center of resistance
to communion in intelligible goods. Against this sort of surrender, one ought to advo-
cate the genuine self-concern of the saint. Today, the call for repentance should be a
25  call to give up one's conformism and self-lessness for the sake of finding one's true
identity and fulfillment in Christ.

Any emphasis on law is very likely to be confusing. "Law" has a bad name, for it
has been much abused as an instrument of formal social control, to enforce the conven-
tional norms, regardless of their moral foundation or lack of any such foundation.
30  Hence, the aspect in which law is an alien imposition upon one's freedom is paramount in
most people's thought today. Moreover, small children necessarily view morality in a
rather legalistic way, and adolescents inevitably rebel against this childish view. To-
day, such rebellion is in full flower, with the whole culture setting law aside as an
encumbrance of childhood, hardly worthy of people come of age.
35        For these reasons, I do not talk about "natural law," but rather about human modes
of responsibility, human moral principles, and so on. One must understand what "law"
means in Scripture, in traditional teachings, in the Fathers, and in recent documents of
the magisterium. But one can hardly hope to bring the faithful at large to understand
the realities to which the Church refers by "law" if one insists upon using this word.
40        Faced with a set of moral norms, a Christian is not confronted with a set of arbi-
trary choices, made for some purpose which he or she might or might not share, and is
more likely not to share than to share. Rather, moral norms in Christian instruction
clarify the truths which everyone more or less knows at heart and add to these norms the
light of faith which makes clear the way of Christ for finding both human and divine ful-
45  fillment. To sin is not to break a law (taking "law" in any ordinary sense); to be pun-
ished for sin is not to experience the sanction imposed upon lawbreakers. Rather, to
sin is to limit oneself unnecessarily, to damage one's true self and block one's real
fulfillment; the punishment of sin is the sin itself, as I will explain more fully in
chapter thirty.
50        The difficulty with avoiding an emphasis upon law is that one must take care not
to lessen the sense of seriousness of sin. This sense of seriousness can be maintained
without legalism only if one stresses the intrinsic relationship between morally evil
acts and the blocking of human fulfillment, and the further intrinsic relationship be-
tween human fulfillment and fulfillment in Christ. Today one often reads that to sin is
55  to say "No" to God. The metaphor can be correctly understood, but it does not convey
very fully the reality. Perhaps it might be better to say that to sin is to cut one's
own divine umbilical cord--as if an unborn infant were to abort itself.

J.  How do unbelievers account for sin?
60

Those who do not believe in God have no place in their worldviews for sin as sep-
aration from God. The reality of moral evil in the world remains, however, and requires
some sort of explanation. In the various forms of secular humanism which take the place
of Christian faith for many modern atheists, moral evil itself is explained away by the
65  denial of free choice. The evil which Christians regard as moral is accounted for in
nonmoral terms.

For example, many provide a naturalistic account of the human condition and of hu-
man action. According to one such account, humankind is only recently evolved from
brute animals, and nonrational emotions are a residue of an earlier evolutionary stage.
70  On some versions of naturalism--for example, that of Freud--the stresses and strains of
civilization, which brings about an environment very different from that of any other
species, generate all sorts of conflicts in modern men and women. On other versions of
naturalism--John Dewey's is an example--what formerly was considered moral evil must be
regarded as inevitable crises of development, which pose challenges for human intelli-
75  gence. These problems either will be solved and humankind will evolve further, or they
will not be solved and humankind will become extinct.

Some who take a naturalistic view and some who are less interested in naturalistic
explanations stress another factor: ignorance and error. For Freud, neurosis can be
cured by insight; for Dewey, progressive education can liberate intelligence to solve
80  problems. For many other modern thinkers, religious belief and superstitious thinking
are similar forms of error, whose obliteration would allow science to prevail; in the
age of science, presumably, the difficulties formerly considered sin and its consequences
can be healed or repaired, as one heals a fever with an antibiotic or repairs an engine
by finding and fixing what is causing trouble.

Jeremy Bentham, an important thinker who popularized consequentialist reasoning, firmly denied free choice and moral evil. On his view, people behave wrongly simply because they do not consider all the consequences of their acts and calculate carefully and cooly. In a well-arranged society made up of a well-informed people who could
5 handle the arithmetic necessary, enlightened self interest and the needs of society always would coincide, and so there would be no moral evil. While superficially very different from it, at bottom Bentham's view is not so different from some forms of Eastern religion (and from Christian Scientism) according to which evil is an illusion which will dissolve if one simply realizes that the world of experience, with its passions and
10 practicalities, is unreal. The difference is that Bentham's way of enlightenment is activist while the more mystical alternative is quietist.

Marxists also explain evil in deterministic terms. There is a naturalistic basis for marxism; it claims to be a science of history and society. The special feature of marxism is its emphasis on economic factors. The economy is for marxism what sex is for
15 freudian psychology. The source of all difficulty is scarcity, which leads to economic systems with class divisions and oppression. More than other naturalists, marxists analyze in great detail, and at times with acuteness, the permeating distortions social injustice brings into every aspect of the human.

Atheistic existentialists also deny free choice and personal responsibility; al-
20 though some of them talk extensively about freedom, they are concerned with "freedom" in one of the other senses, which I described in chapter eight, section F. Nietzsche, for example, is mainly interested in creative freedom; for him, what is bad is the mediocrity, the stodginess, the routine existence which most people thoughtlessly and dully accept. Heidegger develops a very elaborate metaphysical description of the human in
25 which he makes extensive use of traditional moral categories; however, his thought leaves no room for objective moral norms based upon human goods, and he substitutes aesthetic for moral responsibility, demanding that humankind make <u>something</u> of itself. Failure to respond to this vocation to creativity, however, Hiedeggar explains by lack of metaphysical insight rather than by the privation of reasonableness in which moral evil consists.
30

K. <u>The notion of deviant behavior and the criticism of conventional morality</u>

For the most part, the social sciences in the liberal, democratic nations are dedicated to helping the established social order solve its problems and maintain itself more
35 or less intact. From this point of view, what formerly was considered sin appears as deviant behavior. A person who does not fit into the society, who annoys others, who behaves contrary to the common norms of conventional morality is a nuisance and a trouble maker. Various methods of social control, both formal (such as the criminal process) and informal (such as public education), are used to try to engineer the desired level
40 of conformity.

In carrying out this undertaking, several of the accounts of sin discussed in the preceding section are very widely used. For example, psychology is widely used to treat supposed ills; information is provided to help people satisfy their desires in socially acceptable ways (for example, children are taught to avoid venereal disease and pregnancy);
45 social and economic structures are tinkered with by the use of government funds and agencies of regulation (for example, in adjusting welfare programs and in compelling integration of schools by busing). Some of these approaches might be justifiable in other terms; some are very questionable if they are considered in the light of Christian standards. Virtually all of them, however, prescind from or even deny the moral dimension of human
50 life; they proceed as if all socially deviant behavior were a product of some sort of maladjustment and none of it an expression of sin.

This state of affairs is not as absurd as it appears to many persons of Christian faith who view the inept efforts of social engineering as presumptuous pelagianism--that is, as an effort to attain salvation from sin by purely human means.
55 In the first place, social engineering is not directed to salvation; it is based on a denial of free choice and the reality of sin. The aim of those working for social control is simply this: control and the elimination of troublesome, deviant behavior. No Christian ought to confuse this objective (whatever one thinks of it) with the redemption accomplished by God in Christ.
60 In the second place, much of the deviance which the social engineer wants to eliminate is not immoral human action. The standards of conventional morality, as I explained in chapter seventeen, section F, diverge greatly from moral truth; they establish a workable, livable level of immorality necessary for a moderately satisfactory, this-worldly existence for fallen humankind. Deviation from these conventional standards often is
65 the result of psychological illness, ignorance, especially unfavorable environmental conditions, and so on. (Of course, the morally upright person also will appear deviant in any society by its conventional standards, and is likely to be dismissed as sick, confused, maladjusted, and so on.)

Conventional morality often is criticized by proponents of philosophies and ideol-
70 ogies such as the ones I described in the preceding section. In many cases, conventional morality has a mixture of Christian moral teaching; many people utterly confuse the two. Hence, criticism of conventional morality often is thought to be criticism of Christian morality, and defects discovered in conventional morality often are mistakenly regarded as errors in Christian teaching. Marxists, for instance, make some telling points against
75 the conventional morality of the liberal, capitalist societies; they erroneously think that this morality derives from (or, at least, is compatible with) Christian moral teaching. In general, secular humanists tend to confuse Christian morality with whatever they were told was Christian morality when they were young.

The business of the Christian teacher is neither to defend conventional morality
80 as such nor to attack it from points of view themselves incompatible with Christain faith. Christians ought to examine in the light of faith the argument between those who attack and those who defend conventional morality. Some behavior which is deviant by the standards of conventional morality does manifest sin; some of the social order protected by conventional morality also manifests sin; the philosophies and ideologies used by secular

humanist critics of conventional morality themselves serve as elaborate systems for ra-
tionalizing sin.  Marxism, for example, serves to rationalize the dehumanization it
works--amply documented by critics such as Solzhenitsyn.  Freudian psychology owes its
fascination partly to its utility in rationalizing certain sexual sins; in part, Jung's
5    personal quarrel with Freud arose because of this factor.

   L.  How can Christians explain the data used to support other accounts of sin?

        The accounts described in section J, above, are based upon a denial of free choice.
10   In working them out, their proponents have pointed to a great many interesting facts,
     some of them previously ignored, which indicate ways in which personal freedom (and moral
     responsibility) is limited.  A variety of individual biological and psychological condi-
     tions together with a multitude of factors in the natural and social environments limit
     the ability of individuals to think of possible courses of action, to become interested
15   in them, and so to choose them.
        For example, experiments show that people can be led to act spontaneously, without
     any choice, by hypnotic suggestion.  Psychological descriptions suggest that many people
     have emotional urges which they do not understand and by which they make choices, includ-
     ing some very important ones such as the choice of a marriage partner.  Sociological
20   studies make clear that children raised in a slum simply do not face the set of practical
     possibilities confronted by children raised in a middle-class neighborhood; often, one
     who reads such studies becomes aware that in similar circumstances one would probably
     behave far differently than one considers morally upright.  All such evidence points to
     the conclusion that in fact many people are not in a position to make the choices which
25   someone else--for example, a comfortable, middle-class, psychologically healthy Chris-
     tian--might think they morally ought to make.  This conclusion reinforces the Christian
     norm that no one ought to pass ultimate moral judgment on anyone else.
        However, a Christian ought not to make the mistake of following the nonbeliever in
     generalizing from limited data to deny free choice and moral responsibility.  All that
30   the data show is that people often act without choosing and that people who choose often
     act without being in a position to consider as interesting possibilities which seem obvi-
     ous--and perhaps obligatory--to others.  The data do not show that a person could be
     mistaken who thinks he or she is making a free choice between possibilities consciously
     considered in deliberation--an experience I described with care in chapter eight, sections
35   G and H.  Free choice and personal moral responsibility remain intact, despite all mod-
     ern attempts to explain sin away.[6]  We simply have to be careful not to suppose that
     we ourselves or anyone else can be morally responsible in a personal way for that over
     which there can be no personal, voluntary control.
        Deterministic theories remain tempting for two reasons.  First, we would like to
40   think that we are not as responsible as we are.  We talk about "falling" into sin, as if
     we sinned by accident, rather than to acknowledge that we sin by freely choosing a path
     apart from God, along which we naturally fall since we have abandoned His necessary sup-
     port.  We also become very charitable in explaining away the apparent sins of others--
     not only to avoid unfavorable judgment but presumptuously to render an acquittal--because
45   this sort of indulgence allows us to exculpate ourselves:  "If Titus, who commits murder,
     cannot help it, how could I be held responsible for a bit of malicious gossip?"
        Second, a deterministic theory remains attractive because it seems to explain hu-
     man action; free choice leaves human action ultimately mysterious.  Not only could we
     distance ourselves from sin but we also could feel it to be in our power if we could
50   point to an adequate cause which would explain it.  Unfortunately, no free choice as
     such can be fully explained.  By it we cause ourselves to be--for good or ill.  If for
     ill, we suffer the burden of our own, inalienable guilt.  Of course, if for good, we
     know the joy of cooperating with God in the work of creating ourselves.
        Christians, then, should not accept deterministic theories.  Some of the data which
55   support nonbelieving theories of moral evil--namely, the data which are caused by free
     choices--should be attributed to free choices, and the irreducible character of free
     choice must be defended.  To this extent, Christians must not try to explain sins and
     their consequences precisely to the extent that these data depend upon the very freedom
     of the free choice, for this freedom simply cannot be explained.  If it could, it would
60   not be freedom.  At the same time, Christians should not deny the operation of determining
     factors where they really are operative, and ought to appeal to such factors to explain
     what they do explain.  For example, a Christian might admit his or her own alcoholism to
     have many determining conditions--it is a disease of sorts--and also to be a state which
     goes on because he or she freely chooses (when sober) not to join Alcoholics Anonymous.
65      A Christian also will be able to trace to the moral roots many of the psychologi-
     cal and social determining factors which are invoked by alternative theories of sin.
     Marxism, for example, does point out many real relationships between social conditions
     and questionable motives, such as greed.  It is not difficult to see how the social con-
     ditions limit real choices for many people subject to them, and thus to provide a deter-
70   ministic explanation for certain aspects of their behavior.  At the same time, one need
     not accept as valid a deterministic account of the greedy behavior of the wealthy and
     powerful who create these exploitative conditions.  Similarly, and even within one indi-
     vidual, a psychological account of certain behavior in terms of neurotic compulsion can
     be accepted at times, but the compulsion itself might be traced back to real, moral guilt
75   of the individual.  If Lady Macbeth could not help washing her hands, there nevertheless
     was a time when she freely chose to bloody them.

   M.  Moral evil extends beyond individuals but originates in individuals

80      In Scripture, sin often is treated as if it were almost an autonomous power at
     work in the world.  St. Paul speaks this way when he says: "Sin will no longer have
     power over you" (Rom 6.14); sin misused the commandment so that it "might go to the limit
     of sinfulness" (Rom 7.13); and the very cosmos is in "slavery to corruption" (Rom 8.21).
     According to John, the world shares a common condition of sin (cf. Jn 1.29); it hates

those who believe in Jesus (cf. Jn 3.12-13); Jesus will not even pray for it (cf. Jn 17.9).
          Clearly, in this perspective, sin is not limited to isolated acts of individuals.
But, as I explained section E, above, sin never is correctly understood if it is imagined
to be deviation in isolated acts. Sin is evil in the existential domain; it extends
5   through all that exists by or is affected by wrong choice. Thus, of itself moral evil
persists as the being of a person who chooses immorally. A morally evil commitment will
issue in many morally evil acts; a person who opts for a career in the rackets will ex-
press malice throughout the life overarched by this option.
          Moral evil in an act of a person who has communal responsibility can affect the
10  moral situation of members of the community who do not participate in the act; thus Man's
sin affects humankind at large. In a somewhat similar--although not precisely similar--
way, every citizen is involved when a nation embarks upon an immoral war. A constitution
which involves sinful compromises--as the United States Constitution originally did by
accepting slavery and now does by denying the personhood of the unborn--institutionalizes
15  immorality, provides sin with its own bureaucracy, and gives it power in the working of
government.
          Original sin led to death, the fear of death to an unbalancing of human emotion,
and this unbalancing to biases in human experience and judgment which make it hard to
see what is given and to know what is real and true. Similarly, social injustice leads
20  to disease, generates anxiety, leads people to seek various escapes from the harsh reali-
ties of life. Not only the particular sins of individuals, but the whole system of evil
which derives both from original and personal sin confronts humankind and challenges
those who follow Christ. Not only are there souls to save; there also is a world to be
redeemed (cf. GS 13 and 25). Humankind must be saved from the slavery of the fear of
25  death (cf. Heb 2.14-15) and from the illnesses which accompany sin (cf. Jn 5.14).
          A particular aspect of human misery is not always explicable in terms of sin on
the part of the person who suffers that misery (cf. Jb 42.1-6; Jn 9.2-3). Nevertheless,
moral and other misery within persons and among them cannot be separated into neat com-
partments, as if some of it had no moral source. Because of this fact, there always is
30  a temptation to attribute to sin a reality in itself, to erect it into a sort of super-
human power (sometimes identified with the devil), independent of God and opposed to Him.
By this line of thought one comes to manichaeism. Evil is objectivized, and the reality
of personal responsibility is undermined. Much modern, secular humanistic thought moves
in this direction.
35        Christian faith makes clear that while all human misery does have a moral element,
this element of sin which pervades humankind and the human world is not apart from the
human. Our belief in original sin clarifies this matter. Similarly, social sin does
not mean that since everyone is involved, no one at all is guilty--for example, in the
conduct of an unjust war, in discrimination against an oppresssed minority, in the waste
40  of natural resources, or in the damaging of the environment by avoidable pollution. Some
people's personal wrong choices (sometimes only materially, not formally, sinful choices)
originate and perpetuate every social sin.
          The choices can be of very different kinds, yet share in common effects. For ex-
ample, various businesses might collaborate in carrying on an industry which unjustly
45  exploits the poor in an underdeveloped nation; consumers in industrialized nations might
indulge themselves with the products of such an industry with no concern for the source
of supply; government officials, including corrupt ones, might collaborate to make the
system work; many people who could bring the matter to light and work to rectify it in-
stead choose to spend their time in idle chatter and pointless amusements.
50        A serious Christian analyst of complex social problems must refrain from the easy
moralism common among less committed social critics and from the deterministic analysis
of secular humanists. Rather, Christian social reflection must trace the lines of re-
sponsibility back to the wrong choices in which they originate. At the source, the rem-
edy of the truth of the Gospel and the grace of Christ can be offered and, if it is not
55  resisted, applied with redeeming effect. At the same time, without excessive concern
about who must make up for what misery, Christians should work with the mercy of Christ
to overcome the massive consequences of sin, to alleviate human misery wherever it can
be alleviated.

60  N.  How can sin and redemption coexist both in humankind and in the individual?

          Sin affected the whole of humankind and the human world; it pervaded every dimen-
sion of each human person (Mary apart). The human as a whole and each human individual
is a complex, made up of many parts and elements more or less incompletely united with
65  one another. Hence, redemption is fully present in the risen Lord Jesus, but divine
truth and life still must reach from Him to all people at all times and in all places
(cf. Mt 28.19-20). The kingdom of God is like leaven or like a mustard seed; its coming
is gradual (cf. Mt 13.31-33). The preaching of the Gospel to men and women of all places
and times begins the work of redeeming humankind (cf. AG 8). Only gradually does the
70  Word permeate a culture and its environment, and draw the reality from alienation back
to fulfillment; only little by little are things being restored to God in Christ.
          Each human individual bears within himself or herself a similar multiplicity and,
due to sin, self-alienation, division, and conflict (cf. GS 20). In the heart of any
person who does not refuse the gift of the Spirit, the love of God is poured forth. At
75  that precise point, the act of living faith exists in what had been a sinful human mind
and will. Just to this extent, the person is redeemed; redemption is an accomplished
fact. Note that it is accomplished by God's gift, not by the merit of the one who re-
ceives this gift.
          However, a heart redeemed to the extent that it is animated by living faith also
80  remains largely unredeemed. Many choices can be made with no reference to living faith;
these must be eliminated or tightly joined with living faith by one's personal, voca-
tional commitments. A child is incapable of making such commitments; spontaneous action
will more or less seriously obstruct them, as I explained in chapter twenty-four, sec-
tion H. Many of one's commitments are a further source of potential conflict for the
Christian.

Moreover, much of one's thinking can be more or less inconsistent with faith. Sincere Christians hold many opinions--for example, ones they consider to be science of various sorts--absolutely incompatible with their faith. The contradictions are not explicit, and so they remain unnoticed. Many such false opinions have practical implications.

5  One's redemption is incomplete as long as one's whole mind is not suffused by the light of Christ, so that no darkness can remain in it.

Further, both choices and intellectual judgments depend upon sentient nature. This dimension of the person is skewed by the common human inheritance, so that experience and emotion do not readily fall in line with the better self of the Christian. Moreover,

10  early training and the constant input of a perverse cultural environment add to the difficulties one faces. One's whole soul is won over to Christ only by a lifelong, constant struggle.

Finally, thinking and commitments are only the principle of a full human life; the human person needs expression in words and deeds. Words and deeds are instruments; by

15  them a person has the power to communicate with others and to change the world. Unfortunately, the available instruments are more or less recalcitrant to the purposes of one who wishes to manifest divine truth and love in the world. Language and the media of action have been shaped by the sinful uses to which things have been put. The Christian must wrestle with words and must work with tools which are not well adapted to serve

20  Christ's cause. It takes one's whole strength to work with the culture which exists and to try to purify and renew it so that it will be better adapted to the redemptive work and the life of the redeemed community.

In short, it is one thing for the love of God to be poured forth in one's heart; it is another thing to love God with one's whole heart and whole mind and whole soul and

25  whole strength. Perfection requires that all of one's choices be integrated with living faith; that all of one's thinking be consistent with it; that all of one's sentient dispositions and actuations be at the disposal of Christian love and truth; and that all of one's powers have at hand suitable means for manifesting divine truth and love in the world.

30  At every step of the way, the advance of love will meet and have to overcome the residues and effects of sin--one's own sin, original sin, and the sin of the world. Conversion is only a beginning; one becomes a Christian little by little (cf. AG 13). The good news of redemption becomes the bad news of the task of Christian struggle (cf. Rom 6.12-23). Yet the power of the Spirit, the power of divine love, makes this impossible

35  task possible, sweet, easy, light, and joyful (cf. Rom 8.14-17; Mt 11.28-30). Salvation is both a given, and a hoped for fulfillment, which must be worked out with fear and trembling (cf. Phil 2.12).

In sum, sin and redemption can coexist both in humankind and in each Christian because human reality is complex. The multiplicity of persons, of dimensions of each per-

40  son, and of actuations in each of these dimensions must be worked through. If the human had the simplicity of the angelic, sin and grace could not coexist in it. But since the human can be in sin without being wholly perverted by sin, the human can be redeemed, and redemption can be accomplished gradually both in the race as a whole and in each individual. This complexity means that Jesus as man needs us to carry out His work; con-

45  versely, it means that we, although ourselves sinners in need of redemption, can be blessed with a share in the dignity of Him who redeems.

O.  Ought one to say that the Church herself is sinful?

50  The coexistence of redemption and sin both in the world and in the individual Christian raises the question: Is the Church herself at once a sinner and redeemed? Many today speak this way. Vatican II teaches:

While Christ, "holy, innocent, undefiled" (Heb 7.26) knew nothing of sin (2 Cor 5.21), but came to expiate only the sins of the people (cf. Heb 2.17), the Church,

55  embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal (LG 8).

At the same time in speaking of ecumenism, the Council carefully avoids saying that the Church herself can sin; rather, she sins "in her members" (UR 3).

In the Old Testament, communal infidelity to the covenant occurred; the whole people

60  as a body was unfaithful (cf. Ez 23; Hos 2; Jer 3.19-25; Rom 3.10-11). However, the covenant sealed with the blood of Jesus is superior to the former one; Jesus lives as its unbreakable principle (cf. Heb 8.10-13, 13.8). Hence, He always faces the Church herself as a bride fresh from her baptismal bath (cf. Eph 5.22-33). The Church of Christ which lives in this world on pilgrimage, and whose members are liable to sin, also exists in

65  heaven (cf. LG 50). There, in Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was spotless even during her earthly life, "the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle" (LG 65; cf. LG 56). Looking upon Mary, the Church on earth struggles to overcome sin and to become like her, for she is the model of our hope (cf. LG 65).

70  Thus, one ought not to say that the Church herself is sinful. The Church is holy; we, her members, during our earthly lives remain sinners who, at best, strive for perfection in holiness. The acts of the Church herself--her teaching, her shepherding, her worship and sacramental work--all these are sinless; the acts of members of the Church, including her officials, remain imperfect and subject to defect. This defect can be

75  slight or it can be great. In either case, the holiness of the Church prevails over the sinfulness of her ministers. Sin in the Church? Yes. Sin of the Church? No.

Notes to chapter twenty-five

     1.  Although not perfect, a generally sound and very useful introduction is Eugene
H. Maly, <u>Sin: Biblical Perspectives</u>  (Cincinnati, Ohio: Pflaum/Standard, 1973); for
5  greater depth and very helpful references to other works, see Stanislaus Lyonnet, S.J.,
and Leopold Sabourin, S.J., <u>Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic
Study</u>  (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), pp. 1-57.
     2.  See Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., and Stanislaus·Lyonnet, S.J., <u>The Christian
Lives by the Spirit</u>  (Staten Island, N. Y.: Alba House, 1971), pp. 174-196.
10     3.  See St. Thomas Aquinas, <u>Summa theologiae</u>, 1-2, qu. 71, art. 6, ad 5.
     4.  See Lyonnet and Sabourin, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 5.
     5.  See M. Huftier, "Péché Mortel et Péché Véniel," in <u>Théologie du Péché</u>, ed. Ph.
Delhaye <u>et al</u>. (Tournai: Desclée & Cie., Éd., 1960), p. 315.
     6.  See Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen, <u>Free Choice: A
15  Self-Referential Argument</u>  (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976),
pp. 48-103.