

Excerpt from...

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DOMINUM ET VIVIFICANTEM

On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World

For the full text, please visit http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_18051986_dominum-et-vivificantem.html

3. The Witness Concerning the Beginning: the Original Reality of Sin

35. The Spirit, therefore, who "searches everything, even the depths of God," knows from the beginning "the secrets of man."¹³³ For this reason he alone can fully "convince concerning the sin" that happened at the beginning, that sin which is the root of all other sins and the source of man's sinfulness on earth, a source which never ceases to be active. The Spirit of truth knows the original reality of the sin caused in the will of man by the "father of lies," he who already "has been judged."¹³⁴ The Holy Spirit therefore convinces the world of sin in connection with this "judgment," but by constantly guiding toward the "righteousness" that has been revealed to man together with the Cross of Christ: through "obedience unto death."¹³⁵

Only the Holy Spirit can convince concerning the sin of the human beginning, precisely he who is the love of the Father and of the Son, he who is gift, whereas the sin of the human beginning consists in untruthfulness and in the rejection of the gift and the love which determine the beginning of the world and of man.

36. According to the witness concerning the beginning which we find in the Scriptures and in Tradition, after the first (and also more complete) description in the Book of Genesis, sin in its original form is understood as "disobedience," and this means simply and directly transgression of a prohibition laid down by God.¹³⁶ But in the light of the whole context it is also obvious that the ultimate roots of this disobedience are to be sought in the whole real situation of man. Having been called into existence, the human being—man and woman—is a creature. The "image of God," consisting in rationality and freedom, expresses the greatness and dignity of the human subject, who is a person. But this personal subject is also always a creature: in his existence and essence he depends on the Creator. According to the Book of Genesis, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was to express and constantly remind man of the "limit" impassable for a created being. God's prohibition is to be understood in this sense: the Creator forbids man and woman to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The words of the enticement, that is to say the temptation, as formulated in the sacred text, are an inducement to transgress this prohibition—that is to say, to go beyond that "limit": "When you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ["like gods"], knowing good and evil."¹³⁷

"Disobedience" means precisely going beyond that limit, which remains impassable to the will and the freedom of man as a created being. For God the Creator is the one definitive source of the moral order in the world created by him. Man cannot decide by himself what is good and

what is evil-cannot "know good and evil, like God." In the created world God indeed remains the first and sovereign source for deciding about good and evil, through the intimate truth of being, which is the reflection of the Word, the eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father. To man, created to the image of God, the Holy Spirit gives the gift of conscience, so that in this conscience the image may faithfully reflect its model, which is both Wisdom and eternal Law, the source of the moral order in man and in the world. "Disobedience," as the original dimension of sin, means the rejection of this source, through man's claim to become an independent and exclusive source for deciding about good and evil. The Spirit who "searches the depths of God," and who at the same time is for man the light of conscience and the source of the moral order, knows in all its fullness this dimension of the sin inscribed in the mystery of man's beginning. And the Spirit does not cease "convincing the world of it" in connection with the Cross of Christ on Golgotha.

37. According to the witness of the beginning, God in creation has revealed himself as omnipotence, which is love. At the same time he has revealed to man that, as the "image and likeness" of his Creator, he is called to participate in truth and love. This participation means a life in union with God, who is "eternal life."¹³⁸ But man, under the influence of the "father of lies," has separated himself from this participation. To what degree? Certainly not to the degree of the sin of a pure spirit, to the degree of the sin of Satan. The human spirit is incapable of reaching such a degree.¹³⁹ In the very description given in Genesis it is easy to see the difference of degree between the "breath of evil" on the part of the one who "has sinned (or remains in sin) from the beginning"¹⁴⁰ and already "has been judged,"¹⁴¹ and the evil of disobedience on the part of man.

Man's disobedience, nevertheless, always means a turning away from God, and in a certain sense the closing up of human freedom in his regard. It also means a certain opening of this freedom-of the human mind and will-to the one who is the "father of lies." This act of conscious choice is not only "disobedience" but also involves a certain consent to the motivation which was contained in the first temptation to sin and which is unceasingly renewed during the whole history of man on earth: "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Here we find ourselves at the very center of what could be called the "anti-Word," that is to say the "anti-truth." For the truth about man becomes falsified: who man is and what are the impassable limits of his being and freedom. This "anti-truth" is possible because at the same time there is a complete falsification of the truth about who God is. God the Creator is placed in a state of suspicion, indeed of accusation, in the mind of the creature. For the first time in human history there appears the perverse "genius of suspicion." He seeks to "falsify" Good itself; the absolute Good, which precisely in the work of creation has manifested itself as the Good which gives in an inexpressible way: as *bonum diffusivum sui*, as creative love. Who can completely "convince concerning sin," or concerning this motivation of man's original disobedience, except the one who alone is the gift and the source of all giving of gifts, except the Spirit, who "searches the depths of God" and is the love of the Father and the Son?

38. For in spite of all the witness of creation and of the salvific economy inherent in it, the spirit of darkness¹⁴² is capable of showing God as an enemy of his own creature, and in the first place as an enemy of man, as a source of danger and threat to man. In this way 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. Man is challenged to become the adversary of God!

The analysis of sin in its original dimension indicates that, through the influence of the "father of lies," throughout the history of humanity there will be a constant pressure on man to reject God, even to the point of hating him: "Love of self to the point of contempt for God," as St. Augustine puts it.¹⁴³ 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 good. We see this confirmed in the modern age, when the atheistic ideologies seek to root out religion on the grounds that religion causes the radical "alienation" of man, as if man were dispossessed of his own humanity when, accepting the idea of God, he attributes to God what belongs to man, and exclusively to man! Hence a process of thought and historico-sociological practice in which the rejection of God has reached the point of declaring his "death." An absurdity, both in concept and expression! But the ideology of the "death of God" is more a threat to man, as the Second Vatican Council indicates when it analyzes the question of the "independence of earthly affairs" and writes: "For without the Creator the creature would disappear...when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible."¹⁴⁴ The ideology of the "death of God" easily demonstrates in its effects that on the "theoretical and practical" levels it is the ideology of the "death of man."

133. Cf. 1 Cor 2:10f.

134. Cf. Jn 16:11.

135. Cf. Phil 2:8.

136. Cf. Gen 2:16f.

137. Gen 3:5.

138. Cf. Gen 3:22 concerning the "tree of life"; cf. also Jn 3:36; 4:14; 5:24; 6:40, 47; 10:28; 12:50; 14:6; Acts 13:48; Rom 6:23; Gal 6:8; 1 Tim 1:16; Tit 1:2; 3:7; 1 Pet 3:22; 1 Jn 1:2; 2:25; 5:11, 13; Rev 2:7.

139. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theo., Ia-IIae, q. 80, a. 4, ad 3.

140. 1 Jn 3:8.

141. Jn 16:11.

142. Cf. Eph 6:12; Lk 22:53.

143. De Civitate Dei, XIV, 28: CCL 48, p. 541.

144. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, n. 36.