

QUESTION 86

The Stain of Sin as an Effect of Sin

Next we have to consider the stain of sin (*macula peccati*). On this topic there are two questions: (1) Is the staining of the soul an effect of sin? (2) Does the stain of sin remain in the soul after the sinful act?

Article 1

Does sin cause a stain in the soul?

It seems that sin does not cause any stain in the soul:

Objection 1: A higher nature cannot be defiled by contact with a lower nature; this is why, as Augustine remarks in *Contra Quinque Haereses*, a solar ray is not defiled by being touched by fetid bodies. But the human soul is of a much higher nature than the changeable things to which it turns in sinning. Therefore, it does not contract a stain from them when it sins.

Objection 2: As was explained above (q. 74, aa. 1 and 2), sin exists mainly in the will. But as *De Anima* 3 says, the will exists in reason. But reason, or intellect, is perfected rather than stained by its consideration of any entity whatsoever. Therefore, neither is the will stained by sin.

Objection 3: If sin causes a stain, then that stain is either something positive or a pure privation. If it is something positive, it can only be a disposition or habit, since nothing else seems to be caused by an act. But the stain is not a disposition or habit, since it is possible for it still to remain even after the disposition or habit has been removed; this is clear in the case of someone who committed a mortal sin of prodigality and afterwards changed to the opposite vice by committing a mortal sin. Therefore, ‘stain’ does not posit anything in the soul. Similarly, it is not a pure privation. For all sins agree as regards the turning-away and the privation of grace. Therefore, it would follow that there is a single stain for all sins. Therefore, it is not the case that sin effects a stain (*macula non est effectus peccati*).

But contrary to this: In Ecclesiasticus 47:22 Solomon is told, “You have made a stain in your glory.” And Ephesians 5:27 says, “... so that He might present to Himself a glorious Church without stain or wrinkle.” And in both cases what is being talked about is the stain of sin. Therefore, the stain is an effect of sin.

I respond: ‘Stain’ is used properly in the case of corporeal things, when a shiny body like a garment or gold or silver loses its luster (*perdit suum nitorem*) because of contact with another body, whereas in the case of spiritual things ‘stain’ has to be used by analogy with this (*ad similitudinem huius oportet maculam dici*).

The soul has two sorts of luster: (a) a luster from the refulgence of the light of natural reason, through which it is directed in its acts, and (b) a luster from the refulgence of the divine light, viz., wisdom and grace, through which a man is likewise perfected in acting suitably and well.

Now the soul has, as it were, a sort of contact when it adheres to certain things through love. But, as is clear from what was explained above (q. 71, a. 6), when the soul sins, it adheres to these things in a way that is contrary to the light of reason and divine law. Hence, the loss of luster that results from such contact is metaphorically called a stain in the soul.

Reply to objection 1: The lower things do not defile the soul by their power, as if they acted on the soul. To the contrary, the soul instead defiles itself by its own action when it adheres to them in a disordered way that is contrary to the light of reason and divine law.

Reply to objection 2: The intellect’s action is perfected because intelligible things exist in the intellect in the mode of the intellect itself, and so the intellect is perfected rather than infected by them. By contrast, the will’s act consists in a movement toward the things themselves, so that the love glues the soul to the thing that is loved. And it is because of this that the soul is stained when it adheres to things

in a disordered way—this according to Hosea 9:10 (“They have become abominable, just like the things they loved”).

Reply to objection 3: The stain is not anything positive in the soul, but neither does ‘stain’ signify just a privation. Instead, it signifies a privation of luster in the soul *in relation to its cause*, viz., the sin. And, for this reason, diverse sins induce diverse stains. The stain is like a shadow, which is a privation of light stemming from an interposed body (*ex obiecto alicuius corporis*), and the shadows are diversified by the diversity of the interposed bodies.

Article 2

Does the stain remain in the soul after the sinful act?

It seems that the stain does not remain in the soul after the sinful act:

Objection 1: Nothing remains in the soul after an act except a habit or a disposition. But as was established above (a. 1), the stain is not a habit or a disposition. Therefore, the stain does not remain in the soul after the sinful act.

Objection 2: As was explained above (a. 1), the stain is related to a sin in the way that a shadow is related to a body. But when the body passes, the shadow does not remain. Therefore, when the sinful act passes, the stain does not remain.

Objection 3: Every effect depends on its cause. But the cause of the stain is the sinful act. Therefore, when the sinful act is removed, the stain does not remain in the soul.

But contrary to this: Joshua 22:17 says, “Is it a small thing to you that you sinned with Beelphegor, and that the stain of that crime remains in you to this day?”

I respond: The stain of sin remains in the soul even after the sinful act passes. The reason for this is that, as has been explained (a. 1), the stain implies a certain lack of luster because of a withdrawal from the light of reason or the light of divine law. And so as long as a man remains outside of this sort of light, the stain of sin remains in him, whereas after he returns to the divine light and the light of reason—something that occurs through grace—the stain goes away.

Now even if the sinful act by which the man had withdrawn from the light of reason or divine law ceases, nonetheless, the man does not immediately return to the state he was previously in; instead, what is required is some movement of the will contrary to the first movement. In the same way, if someone is distant from another because of some movement, he does not immediately come to be close to him when the movement ceases. Rather, he must approach him by returning through a contrary movement.

Reply to objection 1: After the sinful act nothing positive remains (*nihil positive remanet*) in the soul except a disposition or habit, but something ‘privative’ does remain (*remanet aliquid privative*), viz., the privation of being conjoined to the divine light.

Reply to objection 2: When the body blocking the light passes (*transeunte obstaculo corporis*), the diaphanous body remains equally close to the illuminating body and equally related to it, and so the shadow immediately passes away. By contrast, when the sinful act is removed, the soul does not remain in the same relation to God. Hence, the arguments are not parallel.

Reply to objection 3: A sinful act creates a distance from God, and the loss of luster follows upon this distance, just as a local movement creates a distance in place. Hence, just as the distance in place is not removed when the movement ceases, so neither is the stain removed when the sinful act ceases.