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The Catholic University of America
Studies in Sacred Theology
(Second Series)
No. 109

The Remission of Venial Sin

A DISSERTATION

*Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Sacred Theology of The
Catholic University of America in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Sacred Theology*

John Joseph O'Brien, A.B., S.T.L.

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA PRESS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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This dissertation was conducted under the direction of Very Reverend Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., S.T.D., as major professor, and was approved by Reverend Alfred C. Rush, C.S.S.R., S.T.D., and Reverend Romaeus W. O'Brien, O.Carm., J.C.D., as readers.

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FOREWORD

Perhaps the most far reaching act which man can perform by his own power is the act of sin. Through this action man can sever his union with almighty God by expelling from his soul the gift of sanctifying grace which was won for him in the Redemption and through which he was made an adopted son of God and given the beginning of everlasting glory. Such an act is of great importance in the field of theology. The mystery involved in the rejection of God, and the means which can be employed to effect the reunion of the sinner to God, are subjects which have rightly interested theologians through the years. However, such a terrible act on the part of the Christian is to be looked on as the exception rather than the normal happening. Mortal sin should never enter the life of the follower of Christ. In the everyday life of the Christian there *is* found another type of sin which is of such frequent occurrence that in the early church it was known as *daily sin*. This type of sin is now known as venial sin.

The effects of venial sin are of a different kind than those of mortal sin, and the terrible choice between God and a created good as the final end of man does not enter into venial sin at all. Thus venial sin is far less harmful to man and is much more easily remitted. It is for this very reason, however, that its nature and its remission become more complicated than that of mortal sin when a theoretical explanation is attempted. Far less has been written on the remission of venial sin than on the remission of mortal sin. This is to be expected as mortal sin is the more awe-inspiring in its mystery and terrible in its results. There is a certain immediacy and danger involved in the matter of mortal sin and its remission which does not exist, and which should never be transferred, when the matter of venial sin and its remission is considered.

Venial sin, despite its frequency and its practical ease of remission, is still sin. As such it is a far worse evil than the combination of all physical evils and calamities. It is in the hope of clarifying the concept of venial sin and the manner of its remission that this work has been written. Venial sin must be seen as it is, a great evil and yet infinitely less of an evil than mortal sin. Perhaps the true evil of venial sin is not appreciated because the enormity of the evil involved in mortal sin is not appreciated. At no time in the consideration of venial sin, or in its comparison to mortal sin, is the impression intended that venial sin is a negligible matter. It is a constant threat in the life of every Christian, and for this reason the means by which it can be remitted are of importance to every Christian.

It is a pleasure to express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency, the Most Reverend Richard J. Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, for the opportunity of graduate studies and for his constant kindness; and to offer my thanks to Very Reverend Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., and to all of the Faculty of the School of Sacred Theology, the Catholic University of America, for their generous and valuable assistance.

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF VENIAL SIN

Any discussion of the remission of sin depends upon the nature of sin as its material element. Thus, a consideration of the nature of venial sin is a necessary preliminary to the discussion of the remission of venial sin. Through a comparison to mortal sin and through a brief treatment of the problems involved in the very concept of venial sin it is hoped that the true nature and results of venial sin will be made evident.

The traditional definition of sin is taken from the work *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* of Saint Augustine; "Sin is any deed, or word, or desire, which is contrary to the eternal law."¹ This definition was accepted by Saint Thomas and forms the basis for his definition of sin.* Relative to this definition there are several points worthy of note.

In the words "deed, or word, or desire" there can be included only human actions.' For these alone are the proper matter of morality, and here Saint Augustine is presenting the material element of *sin*.¹ In the constitution of every human act there are three essential elements.' There must be present a practical antecedent knowledge of the act which extends, at least in a confused manner, to the formality of the act. This knowledge must be more than a simple apprehension of fact, it must contain an act of

¹ Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, lib. 22, c. 27 (ML 42.418):

Peccatum est factum vel dictum vel concupitum aliquid contra legem aeternam.

* *Summa Theologica*, (hereafter to be referred to as *S.T.*), 1-2, q. 71, a. 6, in corp.

² *Ibid.*, q. 1, a. 1, in corp.; Billuart, Charles, *Summa Sancti Thomae*, (Palme, Paris, 1876) vol. 2, *De Peccatis*, Diss. 1, art. 2.

³ *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 71, a. 6, in corp.

⁴ Merkelbach, Benedict, O.P., *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, (8 ed., Descles, Paris, 1949) vol. 1, no. 52.

judgment as to the conformity of this action to the attainment of the true final end of man. In order to move the will the intellect must present the action as something which is good, and therefore desirable. This good can be real, as it is when there is congruity between this act and the rational seeking of man's true final end; or it can be apparent, as it is when there is incongruity between it and the attainment of this final end. Now, the act of the will is essential to the moral act, and it moves only toward the good which has been presented as desirable by the intellect. The act of the will is consequent to the act of the intellect, and its extension is limited exactly by the intellectual concept of the good thing in itself and in its relationships to other goods, both mediate and final. The third necessary factor is the freedom of the will in the pursuit of this good. This freedom is not an absence of motivation but a freedom of choice among various goods. In this life no good thing is presented to the will—and this includes our limited conceptual knowledge of the infinite Good—which is, of itself, so compelling as to strip the will of its freedom. The will retains the freedom of choice or at least the freedom to act or not to act. This freedom of the will is the basis of imputability. To the degree, however, that any one of these three factors is missing or impaired, to that same degree will the resultant act be an imperfect human act with a parallel and consequent decrease in imputability.

The human act which is imputed to the agent may be either an act of commission or of omission. In every act of omission there must be some positive act of the will on the part of the one responsible if there is to be a human act and imputability for the omission."

The phrase "contrary to the eternal law" refers to the formal element of sin.⁷ Sin is a morally evil human act. Now, human acts are morally evil in so far as they lack conformity to their proper norm, and the *lex aeterna* is the ultimate directive norm

⁷ *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 71, a. 5, *in corp.*; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 60; Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 1, art. 3.

⁸ *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 71, a. 6, *in corp.*; Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 1, art. 2.

of human acts. Reference will be made constantly to the *lex aeterna* since this is used by Saint Thomas as the criterion of sin. The relation of the eternal law to the natural law is clearly stated by Saint Thomas:

Therefore, since all things subject to divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law, as was stated above, it is evident that all things partake in some way in the eternal law, in so far as from its impression upon them they have their inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among the others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent manner, in so far as he is made a participant in providence, providing for himself and for others. So he also has a share in the divine reason through which he has his natural inclination to his proper act and end. And such participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.⁸

The natural law and the eternal law are, therefore, one in reality, the natural law being but a participation in the eternal law by rational beings.* However, in addition to the natural law and those “particular determinations, devised by human reason, which are called human laws”,¹⁰ there is need of divine positive law:

Now, if man were ordained to no other end than that which is proportionate to his natural ability, there would

⁸ S. T., 1-2, q. 91, a. 2, in corp.:

Unde cum omnia quae divinae providentiae subduntur, a lege aeterna regulentur et mensurentur, ut ex dictis patet; manifestum est quod omnia participant aequaliter legem aeternam, in quantum scilicet ex impressione eius habent inclinationes in proprios actus et fines. Inter cetera autem, rationalis creatura excellentiori quodam modo divinae providentiae particeps, sibi ipsi et aliis providens. Unde et in ipsa participatur ratio aeterna, per quam habet naturalem inclinationem ad debitum actum et finem. Et talis participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura lex naturalis dicitur.

* *Ibid.*, ad 1.

Et istae particulares dispositiones adinventae secundum rationem humanam, dicuntur leges humanae...

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, a. 3, in corp.:

be no need for man to have any further direction, on the part of his reason, in addition to the natural law and the humanly devised law which is derived from it. But since man is ordained to an end of eternal happiness which exceeds man's natural ability, as we have stated above, therefore it was necessary that, in addition to the natural and the human law, man should be directed to his end by a law given by God."

In reference to the eternal law Saint Thomas looks to the ultimate norm of morality and to the ultimate end of man. It will be useful to have the same concept of the eternal law as Saint Thomas when we consider his statement on the relation of venial sin to the eternal law.

Again, it is in the work of Saint Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, that the definition of the eternal law as the "divine intellect *anda* will of God commanding the conservation of the natural order and forbidding its disturbance." "is found. In the words of Saint Thomas the eternal law is "nothing else than the exemplar of divine wisdom, as directing all actions and movements." "It is the direction of all creatures to their proper ends in accord with their natures, Thus, for the irrational creature this direction will be matter of physical necessity, while for the intelligent creature it will be a matter of moral obligation. Now, taking

11 *Ibid.*, a. 4, *corp.*

Et si quidem homo ordinaretur tantum ad finem qui non excederet proportionem naturalis facultatis hominis, non oporteret quod homo haberet aliquid directivum ex parte rationis supra legem naturalem et legem humanitatis positam, quae ab eo derivatur. Sed quia homo ordinatur ad finem beatitudinis aeternae, quae excedit proportionem naturalis facultatis humanae, ut supra habitum est, ideo necessarium fuit ut supra legem naturalem et humanam, dirigeretur etiam ad suum finem lege divinitus data.

"Suarez holds that this "vel" should be translated as "and", *De Legibus*, 1-2, c. 6, no. 13.

"Augustine, *op. cit.*, (ML 42.418):

... ratio divina vel voluntas Dei ordinem naturalem conservari iubens, perturbari vetans.

11 S. T., 1-2, q. 93, a. 1, *in corp.*

Et secundum hoc, lex aeterna nihil aliud est quam ratio divinae sapientiae, secundum quod est directive omnium actu et motionum.

man as he is, the eternal law directs him and all of his actions, under fitting sanctions, to his proper supernatural ultimate end which consists in the immediate intuitive contemplation of the essence of God." In this direction it takes into account the three relationships of man; to God, to himself, and to other men. The eternal law, then, is concerned with the ultimate end of man and with his actions in so far as they affect his orientation to this ultimate end.

Man has the obligation of tending, in his every act, towards God. Retaining his freedom, man can, however, choose as to his ultimate end. In other words, man can choose as to whether he will seek his happiness in the uncreated Good where it truly exists; or in some created good which merely simulates the potency of true satisfaction of man's hunger for happiness. If this end is to be ultimate, in the sense of final, and so not referable to another, there can only be two ultimate ends; God, or some created good." When a man acts in virtue of his desire to seek his happiness in God as his ultimate end, he acts virtuously; but when a man acts in virtue of his desire to seek happiness in some creature as his ultimate end, he sins. Man in acting can choose only one final end.¹ Of course, since man has a moral obligation to seek God as his last end, he must realize whether his actions are leading him to this end or to some other end if he is to be imputable for them. He is guided in this knowledge by the various laws and his conscience. Whether he must have a final end in each action, apart from the sense in which God is the necessary ultimate end of every human act in that He is the ultimate Good which draws the will to seek the good in every act, even in mortal sin, is a problem which will be discussed fully below because of its peculiar application in the case of venial sin.

¹ Benedict XII, Apostolic Constitution: *Benedictus Deus*, Jan. 29, 1336, E. S. 530.

² Gredt, Joseph, O.SJB., *Elementa Philosophiae* (Herder, Friburg, 1937) vol. 2, no. 896:

... continet disiunctionem completam. Homo qui in omni actu humano agit propter finem ultimum, pro fine ultimo habet aut bonum creatum aut bonum increatum.

³ S. T., 1-2, q. 1, a. 5, *corp.*

It is important to note that the ultimate end, in the sense used above, refers to the good in itself, the thing in which man seeks his happiness, the material ultimate end. In Gredt it is stated:

The ultimate end is divided into the formal ultimate end and the material ultimate end. The formal ultimate end, or formal happiness, is happiness in general and in the abstract. The material ultimate end, or the ultimate end in the concrete and particular, is objective happiness, or the object which is sought as the ultimate end, in so far as it is not ordered to some further end, and the one seeking it depends on it for his formal happiness.¹⁸

Happiness, then, is the ultimate formal end of both virtuous and sinful actions. The object in which happiness is sought, in God or a creature, is the important criterion. Now, happiness in general, or *beatitudo in communi*, is not a third material ultimate end. It does not mediate between the two terms of the complete disjunction of created and uncreated good as the ultimate material end." This is, at least, the more common opinion.

The consideration of the material ultimate end is basic to morality. For it is in this choice by man as to the source from which he will seek his secondary final end," or happiness, that the essence of sin lies. Man has an obligation from the eternal law to perform every human act in such a manner that he will attain his true final end which is, objectively, God; and formally, the pos-

¹⁸ Gredt, *op. cit.*, (3 ed., Herder, Friburg, 1932) vol. 2, no. 742:

Finis ultimus distinguitur formalis et materialis. Finis ultimus formalis est ipsa ratio boni in abstracto: beatitudo in communi et in abstracto. Finis ultimus materialis seu finis ultimus in concreto et in particulari est beatitudo objectiva seu objectum quod appetitur pro fine ultimo, quatenus non ordinatur in aliud et appetens eo nititur habere beatitudinem suam.

¹⁹ For a presentation which might tend to confuse these two separate aspects see: Regatillo-Zalba, *Theologiae Moralis Summa*, (B.A.C., Madrid, 1952) vol. 1, no. 28:

Iam vero, finis ultimus propter quem homo potest agere triplex concipi potest: Deus, bonum infinitum; creaturae, bonum finitum; beatitudo in communi concepta.

²⁰ Cathrein, Victor, S.J., *Philosophia Moralis*, (Herder, Friburg, 1927) p. 32, no. 39.

session of God. His way to this goal is shown through the norms of morality, the manifestive norm which remotely is the divine Intelligence, and proximately is human reason, and the prescriptive norm which remotely is the eternal law and proximately the natural law, with human and divine positive law, when taken objectively, and man's conscience, when taken subjectively.

When a human act is performed which does not have God as its ultimate end, when any deed, word, or desire engages man's will in violation of the eternal law, sin in the full sense has been committed. For since man can have but one ultimate end,¹¹ the choice of one necessarily implies the rejection of the other. Man, then, by turning to a created good, and seeking in it his ultimate happiness, turns away from God. This conversion to a mutable good, with the consequent aversion from the immutable Good, is sin, perfect sin, or sin in the full sense. This is the violation of the eternal law, this is an offense against God, and only this.

THE EFFECTS OF SIN

Punishment is proportioned to sin. Now, sin comprises two things. First, there is the turning away from the immutable Good, which is infinite; and therefore, in this respect, sin is infinite. Secondly, there is the inordinate turning to a mutable good. In this respect, sin is finite, both because the mutable good itself is finite, and because the movement of turning toward it is finite, since the acts of a creature cannot be infinite. Accordingly, in so far as sin consists in turning away from something, its corresponding punishment is the pain of loss, which is also infinite because it is the loss of the infinite Good, that is, God. But, in so far as sin turns inordinately toward something, its corresponding punishment is the pain of sense which is also finite.¹²

© S. T., 1-2, q. 1, a. 5, *corp.*

a *Ibid.*, q. 87, a. 4, *corp.*.

Dicendum quod poena proportionatur peccato. In peccato autem duo sunt. Quorum unum est aversio ab incommutabili bono, quod est infinitum, unde ex hac parte peccatum est infinitum. Aliud quod est in peccato, est

Thus Saint Thomas indicates the major results of the act of sin. In turning away from God, the sinner has lost the principle of his supernatural life, charity. With reference to the powers of the sinner, this loss is irreparable and so everlasting.

Now, disturbance of an order is sometimes reparable, sometimes irreparable, because a defect which destroys the principle is irreparable, while defects can be repaired in virtue of the principle if the principle be saved... Now, in every order there is a principle by which one becomes a member of that order. Consequently, if a sin destroys the principle of the order by which man's will is subject to God, the disorder will be such as to be considered, in itself, irreparable, although it is possible to repair it by the power of God. Now, the principle of this order is the last end, to which man adheres by charity. Therefore, whatever sins turn man away from God, so as to destroy charity, considered in themselves, incur a debt of eternal punishment."

The resultant state of aversion, or sin, in which the agent remains after the sinful action has been performed, is known as the stain of sin. It is, simply, the privation of sanctifying grace

inordinata conversio ad commutabile bonum. Et ex hac parte peccatum est finitum, tum quia ipsum bonum commutabile est finitum; tum etiam quia ipsa conversio est finita, non enim possunt esse actus creaturae infiniti. Ex parte igitur aversionis respondet peccato poena damni, quae etiam est infinita: est enim amissio infiniti boni, scilicet Dei. Ex parte autem inordinatae conversionis respondet ei poena sensus, quae etiam est finita.

"Ibid., a. 3, corp..

Pervertit autem aliquis ordinem quandoque quidem reparabiliter, quandoque autem irreparabiliter. Semper enim defectus quo subtrahitur principium, irreparabilis est; si autem salvetur principium, eius virtute alii defectus reparari possunt --- Cuiuslibet autem ordinis est aliquod principium, per quod aliquis fit particeps illius ordinis. Et ideo si per peccatum corrumpatur principium ordinis quo voluntas hominis subditur Deo, erit inordinatio, quantum est de se, irreparabilis, etsi reparari possit virtute divina. Principium autem huius ordinis est ultimus finis, cui homo inhaeret per caritatem. Et ideo quaecumque peccata avertunt a Deo, caritatem auferentia, quantum est de se, inducunt reatum aeternae poenae.

which follows from the aversion of the agent from God; and it is this loss of grace which Saint Thomas calls “loss of splendor”.²⁴

Now, when a soul cleaves to things by love, there is a certain kind of contact in the soul; and when man sins, he cleaves to certain things against the light of reason and of the divine law, as was shown above, [q. 71, a. 6] Therefore, the loss of splendor, occasioned by this contact, is metaphorically called a stain on the soul.²⁵

As a result of mortal sin, then, the sinner has severed his union with God in charity, his privation of sanctifying grace remains as a stain in the soul, and through his state of aversion he renders himself liable to everlasting punishment and even to the danger of repeated sin.²⁵

VENIAL SIN, ITS DEFINITION

In every mention so far made, and necessarily so as a frame of reference, sin has been treated in its full sense, as aversion from God and complete conversion to some created good in which the sinner seeks his formal ultimate end. However, all sins are not of this nature. The Council of Trent speaks of “venial sins, by which we are not cut off from the grace of God, and into which we fall more frequently__”” This sin is compatible with the union of man to his final end through charity. Therefore in its very nature it is different from mortal sin.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 89, a. 1, corp.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 86, a. 1, corp.

Est autem quasi quidam animae tactus, quando inhaeret aliquibus rebus per amorem. Cum autem peccat, adhaeret rebus aliquibus contra lumen rationis et divinae legis, ut ex supradictis patet. Unde ipsum detrimentum nitoris ex tali contactu proveniens macula animae metaphoricè vocatur.

²² See: Scheeben, Matthias, *Mysteries of Christianity*, translated by Vollert, Cyril (Herder, St. Louis, 1951) pp. 248-259.

²¹ Council of Trent, Session 13, Chapter 5; *E. S. no. 899*:

Nam venialia, quibus a gratia Dei non excludimur et in quae frequentius labimur..

The definition of venial sin is simply this; it is a morally evil act without aversion from God." A sin can be of such a nature in two ways:

... a sin is called venial because it does not contain anything, either partially or totally, to prevent its being pardoned; partially, as when a sin contains something diminishing its guilt, for example, a sin committed from weakness or from ignorance, and this is called venial from the cause; totally, through not destroying the order to the last end, and therefore deserving temporal punishment, but not everlasting punishment."

In the first manner mentioned by Saint Thomas any sin could become venial. Due to imperfection in the human act there is consequent diminution of imputability on the part of the sinner which renders his offence venial. In such a case the act itself, taken objectively, would be sufficient for a mortal sin. It is the peculiar circumstance on the part of the sinner which prevents the sin from being mortal. In every mortal sin, as was said above, the sinner must realize, in a general manner at least, the seriousness of his action, and in view of this realization he must freely perform the act. If the perfection of the human act is not present the sin is, at most, venial. As far as the nature of venial sin is concerned, this type of venial sin presents no great problem. It is with deliberate venial sin that difficulties arise, when an evil moral act which is of its very nature a small offence, is freely performed with full realization of its evil nature. It is the second type of venial sin which will be the object of discussion below. To return to the consideration of venial sin in general, such sin; "—excludes only actual reference of the human act to God's

" Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 1, art. 2; Priimmer, Dominic, O.P., *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, (10 ed., Herder, Barcelona, 1946) vol. 1, no. 367; Aertnys-Damen, *Theologia Moralis*, (15 ed., Marietti, Rome, 1947) vol. 1, no. 233.

" S. T., 1-2, q. 88, a. 2, *in corp.*:

Alio modo dicitur veniale, quia non habet in se unde veniam consequatur, vel totaliter, vel in parte. In parte quidem, sicut cum habet in se aliquid diminuens culpam, ut cum fit ex infirmitate vel ignorantia. Et hoc dicitur veniale ex causa. In toto autem ex eo quod non tollit ordinem ad ultimum finem, unde non meretur poenam aeternam, sed temporalem.

glory, and not habitual reference; because it does not exclude charity, which refers man to God habitually.”” Although venial sin is a transgression of a law,⁵¹ and so is evil morally, it has no direct effect on man’s reference to his final end through charity.

Now, it has been seen above that sin is essentially the rupture of this reference of man to God, which takes place through the aversion of sin. How, then, can *venial sin* be correctly called sin? This point is treated by Saint Thomas:

The division of sin into venial and mortal is not a division of genus into its species, which have an equal share of the generic nature; but it is the division of an analogous term into its members, of which it is predicated according to priority and posteriority. Consequently, the perfect notion of sin, which Saint Augustine gives, applies to mortal sin. On the other hand, venial sin is called a sin according to an imperfect notion of sin, and in relation to mortal sin; even as an accident is called a being in relation to a substance, according to an imperfect notion of being. For it is not against the law, since he who sins venially neither does what the law forbids, nor omits what the law prescribes to be done; but he acts outside of the law, through not observing the mode of reason which the law intends.”

” *Ibid*, a. 1, ad 2:

Veniale autem peccatum non excludit habitualement ordinationem actus humani in gloriam Dei, sed solum actualement, quia non excludit caritatem, quae habitualiter ordinat in Deum.

” Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 1, art. 1, resp. ad 1.

” S. T., 1-2, q. 88, a. 1, ad 1:

Dicendum quod divisio peccati in veniale et mortale non est divisio generis in species, quae aequaliter participant rationem generis, sed analogi in ea de quibus praedicatur secundum prius et posterius. Et ideo perfecta ratio peccati, quam Augustinus ponit, convenit peccato mortali. Peccatum autem veniale dicitur peccatum secundum rationem imperfectam, et in ordine ad peccatum mortale; sicut accidens dicitur ens in ordine ad substantiam, secundum imperfectam rationem entis. Non est contra legem, quia venialiter peccans non facit quod lex prohibet, nec praetermittit id ad quod lex per praeceptum obligat; sed facit praeter legem, quia non observat modum rationis quem lex intendit.

Here is the phrase "outside of the law, not against the law" " used in the description of venial sin. In view of the previous discussion of the eternal law, this statement of Saint Thomas is easily seen in its true meaning. The eternal law directs man to his last end which is God; and venial sin, quite simply, has no direct effect upon man's relation to his ultimate end. Venial sin, then, is outside of the essence of the law, and so cannot be against the law. It is a deordination about the means to an end rather than about the end itself, and of its very nature, it is incapable of affecting the relation to the ultimate end, for once it does, it is no longer venial sin but mortal sin, as then it would be a violation of the eternal law.

THE ULTIMATE END OF VENIAL SIN

The ultimate end of venial sin poses an oft treated problem," but a problem whose discussion will aid in the establishing of the true nature of venial sin and which will be of value in later discussions. The problem can be briefly stated, with Billuart:

Since venial sin, at least when it is fully deliberate, is a truly human act, it has a proximate end, as every human act is directed to an end, and it has not only a proximate end, but also an ultimate end, since the proximate end could exercise no influence, nor act as a final cause, save by the power of the ultimate end, just as a secondary efficient cause can have no effect, unless it be moved by the power of the prime efficient cause, as was stated of the ultimate end. The question is, then, what is the actual end of venial sin?"

⁷⁷ See also; *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

⁷⁸ On this point see: Lottin, Odon, *Principes de Morale*, (L'Abbaye du Mont Cesar, Louvain, 1946) vol. 2, pp. 241-249; Sagues, Joseph, S.J., *Summa Sacrae Theologiae, De Peccatis*, (B.A.C., Madrid, 1955) vol. 2, pp. 912-914; De Letter, P., S.J., *Penial Sin and Its Pinal Goal, Thomist*, vol. 16, (Jan. 1953) pp. 32-70; De Letter, P., S.J., *Penial Sin: Paradox and Illogicality, Irish Quarterly*, vol. 17, (July, 1955) pp. 258-264; McNicholl, A., O.P., *The Ultimate End of Penial Sin, Thomist*, vol. 2, (July, 1940) pp. 373-409.

⁸⁰ Billuart, *op. cit.* Diss. 8, art. 4, no. 2:

Cum peccatum veniale, saltem ex genere quando est perfecte deliberatum,

This question has, as might be expected, given rise to various solutions. As a preface to the consideration of these, it is well to note that Saint Thomas did not treat of this problem. Many of his statements are used in bolstering different opinions, yet no one can quote Saint Thomas definitely and explicitly as the defender of his opinion.

Briefly then, although with the danger of losing some slight nuances of meaning, the essential solutions can be classed as follows.

1. The opinion that the ultimate end of venial sin lies neither in God nor in a creature, but rather in *beatitudo in communi*, happiness in general." In explanation of this act by which the will seeks no ultimate material end, Billot holds that the will is but following the intellect which has an abstract concept of goodness in general." Sagues denies the possibility of an act of the will in such conditions, and demands a determined object from which happiness is to be sought."

Against this opinion there is the obvious difficulty that the end of mortal sin could also be considered as *beatitudo in communi*. There is no dichotomy between *beatitudo in communi* and an ultimate end which is objective, be it God or some created good. *Beatitudo in communi* is simply the formal aspect of the ultimate end. It must be sought in some determined object. In his discussion of the ultimate end for all human actions, Saint Thomas

sit actio proprie humana, habet finem proximum, siquidem omnis actio humana sit propter finem, neque solum habet finem proximum, sed etiam ultimum, quia finis proximus non influit, neque causât finaliter nisi virtute finis ultimi, sicut causa secunda efficiens non efficit, nec movet, aisi virtute primae causae efficientis, ut dictum est de ultimo fine. Quaeritur ergo quis sit iste ultimus finis actualis peccati venialis?

" Billot, Ludovico, S.J., *De Personali Et Originali Peccato*, (6 ed., Gregorianum, Rome, 1931); Regatillo-Zalba, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 631; De Wiart, Etienne, *De Peccatis et Fitiis*, (5 ed., Dessain, Mechlinae, 1932) no. 32.

" Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

" Sagues, *op. cit.*, p. 913.

demands a material final end as the ultimate end for all such acts."

2. The opinion that the venial sinner refers his act of sin to God as the ultimate end, but that he does so not actually but habitually." This opinion is based on this statement by Saint Thomas; "He who sins venially does not seek his happiness in a creature, but uses the creature; for he refers it habitually to God, although not actually. Nor in this does he act against the law, since he is not bound to refer actually to God at all times."⁴⁰ The proponents of this opinion hold that the ultimate material end of the act of venial sin is God. However, the act of venial sin is referred to Him only habitually, and so, ineffectually. A created good, which should be a means to the ultimate end, is used, but not as a means to an ultimate end. It is used only in so far as it is not destructive of habitual charity. In this manner the ultimate end would be exerting a negative influence on the act by setting limits beyond which it would not be allowed.

This solution seems to entail certain difficulties. In the performance of an act, an habitual reference or intention is the equivalent of no reference or intention. From its very definition, although it remains as never having been revoked, such an intention exerts no influence on the act. In the moral consideration of the act, if it has God as its ultimate end only habitually, then it has no ultimate end. In the ontological consideration of the act, the ultimate end has to be positive, for it is the prime moving cause. So a negative influence would certainly not suffice. Billuart in commenting on the above quoted statement of Saint Thomas says:

While the other mentioned manners of reference re-

" S. T., 1-2, q. 1, corp.; *Contra Gentiles*, 3, c. 2; Note that the term material here is used as the objective end, as distinguished from the enjoyment of the end or the subjective end. It is not used as opposed to spiritual.

40 John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus*, (Vives, Paris, 1885) vol. 1, In 1-2, disp. 1, a. 7, no. 40.

" *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 4:

Dicendum quod ille qui peccat venialiter non fruitur creatura, sed utitur ea; refert enim eam habitu in Deum, licet non actu. Nec in hoc contra praeceptum facit, quia non tenetur semper actu referre in Deum.

tain their probability, it appears to us that Saint Thomas, when he speaks of venial sin in the just man as being referred habitually to God as the ultimate end,'intends nothing else than to say that venial sin in the just man is compatible with the habit of charity, and that venial sin does not exclude charity..."

3. A third approach to the problem holds that venial sin is the only human act which lacks an ultimate end. This solution seems to have been presented because of the difficulties in the other solutions." This proposition denies one of the bases for the problem. However, since every act of venial sin must be a human act, for when there is no human act there can be no actual sin, it would seem that it should be the same as all other human acts and demand reference to a final end. If this element of reference to an ultimate end is to be denied there must be some explanation. The mere denial because of a difficulty encountered is not sufficient.

Another point which wisely is not mentioned in these solutions is the problem of venial sin in a person who is *not* in the state of grace. Such sins are possible. They certainly are not referred, even habitually, to God as the habit of charity is not present. Still they are venial sins and not mortal so they cannot have a creature as their ultimate end.

To dismiss easily all of these solutions as erroneous would be to slight the theological acumen of the authors who have presented them as their considered answer to this problem. It is possible, however, while granting them their due respect and probability to explore a more recent, and it seems more compelling, solution."

" Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 8, art. 4, no. 2:

His omnibus dicendi modis in sua probabilitate relictis, videtur nobis S. Thomam, dum dicit peccatum veniale in justo referri habitualiter in Deum ut in ultimum finem, nihil aliud velle quam quod peccatum veniale in justo compatiatur charitatem habitualemente non excludat...

" Scotus, In 4, d. 49, q. 10; Vasquez, In 1-2, d. 5, c. 2, no. 11; Suarez, *De Fine Hominis*, d. 1, s. 6, nos. 2-5; Sagues, *op. cit.*, p. 914.

" Lottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-249; De Letter, *art. cit.*, (*Thomist*, Jan., 1953).

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In the proposition that every human act demands reference to an ultimate end, Saint Thomas is alluding to the ontological necessity of this reference and to no other order. Thus, the ultimate end is absolutely necessary for the *existence* of the human act for without the influence of this first cause the will could not be attracted to any of the intermediate causes which are means to this end. In this sense God is the ultimate end of all human acts, whether they be mortal sins, or venial sins, or virtuous acts, in the moral order. He is the ultimate end from their very existence as human acts. This influence of the ultimate end, in the ontological order, need not enter into the consciousness of the agent, as would be necessary if this were in the moral order. This influence of the ultimate end is a requisite for the *existence* of the act not for its *imputability*.

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Now all of this has been applied in the ontological order. It has validity with reference to the existence of the human act, and since venial sin must be a human act, it has validity with regard to the existence of venial sin. However, as a moral act, venial sin must be considered in another order, the moral order. This order is based on human acts, and any influence of an ultimate end in this order must be a conscious influence. Thus, this opinion would hold that Saint Thomas demanded reference to an ultimate end as necessary for the existence of every human act and that he never brought this demand into the moral order. This transition would seem to have been made after Saint Thomas.

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As a moral action, then, it would be possible for venial sin to have no actual reference to a final end. In this order the ultimate end has an influence on acts only in so far as it enters the consciousness. It can be adverted to explicitly, or implicitly, as in the observance or breach of the law. Thus to seek a thing which is forbidden as a grave sin, would be implicitly to take this thing as an ultimate end. Now man can consider, in his discursive reasoning process, the principle and the conclusions from this principle separately. In the case in point the ultimate end is comparable to the principle and the means to this end are comparable to the conclusions which flow from this principle. Just as man

can consider the principle and the conclusions separately, so also can man focus his attention on an act which is a means to an end without considering the end. Of intelligent beings only man can do this. Thus it is precisely because of his intuitive knowledge, by which he sees the conclusion immediately in the light of the principle, that the angel cannot sin venially. For in every act he acts in the immediate light of the ultimate end.“

This distinction of the consideration of the ultimate end and the act as being performed is valid only in the case of venial sin. In the case of mortal sin the advertance to the final end, apart from God, enters into the very act of sin itself. Once the person realizes that this act is a serious transgression of the law, by that very fact he adverts to its opposition to God as his ultimate end, and so he cannot separate the two considerations of end and means to this end. Here there is an act which due to its gravity includes, necessarily, a conscious reference to an ultimate end. So in a case of theft, to steal a thousand dollars is a matter of such gravity that it seriously violates the law, and when the person realizes this, he is adverting to the ultimate ends which are concerned in his action. He chooses between the wealth and God as his ultimate end. In the case of the theft of ten cents there is no such necessary advertance to ultimate ends. The person tempted to this small theft knows that it will not separate him from God. He is not faced with the choice of ultimate ends. He can focus his attention on this small present good and not refer it actually to either God or a created final end. The very lightness of his act frees it from any necessity of choice between it and God.“^a

“ S. T., 1-2, q. 89, a. 4, in corp; Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

“^a The fundamental reason for the distinction between venial and mortal sin poses a difficult problem which is not the point of the present discussion. It is certain that venial sin exists, and as sin it is in some manner *contra Drum*. Now, what is the origin of the radical difference between venial and mortal sin, both of which are *contra Drum*? To answer that they are *contra Drum* in different manners, that one includes an aversion from the Ultimate End while the other does not, that one violates the Eternal Law while the other does not, is to beg the question. The precise problem is the reason for these facts. Considered objectively what reason can be given for the basic difference between venial and mortal sin? To say that they differ

The last explanation, which seems to be the best solution of the problem, takes a new approach which, in fact, eliminates the difficulty. In the other three solutions the problem was accepted and an answer attempted. For this reason the latter theory differs from the flat denial of the third solution. There the need *for* reference to an ultimate end was not questioned, while its existence, in the case of venial sin, was denied. Many of the elements of the previous solutions were certainly valid, but the difficulty was their failure to enter deeply enough into the problem. It is acceptable to hold, in the light of Saint Thomas' teaching, that the end of venial sin is *beatitudo in communi*, just as it is the end of mortal sin. However, the problem concerned the material and not the formal ultimate end. That venial sin is ordered to a final end habitually but not actually or virtually is also true. However, in the problem as presented this would not be a sufficient answer, and since Saint Thomas did not raise the question, it was not given as his answer. The psychological factor of discursive reasoning is a common point to all explanations. It explains how man can separate the end from the means, but in itself it would not be an answer to the problem.

The real newness of this approach lies in its conclusion from a study of Saint Thomas that the question of actual reference of venial sin, in the moral order, should not be asked. There is no such problem. This is presented as the mind of Saint Thomas.

In the admission that venial sin has no effective reference to an ultimate material end there lies the explanation of the statement of Saint Thomas that venial and mortal sin are divided as

or to show how they differ is not to explain the origin of this difference. Is the basic reason a positive act of God establishing a hierarchy of offenses, some of which are mortal and some of which, as a providential concession to human weakness, are venial? This is not to say that all sins are objectively mortal while some are imputed as venial, (cf. *Errores Michaelis, du Bay, ES. 1020*) but rather to say that some sins are objectively venial as a result of a positive act of God constituting them as such of their very nature, (cf. Sagues, I.F., op. rit., no. 890) This answer to the difficulty would seem to be tenable, and indeed, one which draws our assent because

accident is from substance in the genus of being." Accident is a partaker in being in relation to substance and according to an imperfect notion of being. Accident lacks the elements which are essential to separate, proper, existence. Venial sin lacks, in the moral order, and here only, the effective positive influence of an objective ultimate end. Thus, venial sin relies on the final end of virtuous acts, although this is done habitually and not actually.* Therefore, just as accidents exist but do not have their own direct and proper basis in the depths of being, so also, in the moral order, venial sin exists without its own direct and proper reference to an objective ultimate end. Venial sin exists in the substance of acts which are directed to God, as the final end, that is, in human acts which of their nature are referable to God.

Lottin, in his excellent study of the problem of the final end of venial sin, lists five places where Saint Thomas touches on venial sin and the final end." After a discussion of each place, he says with regard to the reference of venial sins to an ultimate end:

In each of the five texts, which we have tried to place in their context, we find not the slightest allusion to the metaphysical principle which, nevertheless, he was upholding from the very beginning of his *Commentary on the Sentences*. It is in another context that this idea is evoked, that of the moral obligation of tending towards God, the final end."

In his study he has concluded that the subject of the end of venial sin, which Saint Thomas considered only on the moral

* *Ibid.*, q. 88, a. 1, ad 1.

** *Ibid.*, q. 88, a. 1, ad 2.

*** *In 1 Sent.*, d. 1, q. 3, ad 4; *In 2 Sent.*, d. 42, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5; *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 88, a. 1, ad 2; *S. T.*, 2-2, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 4.

*** Lottin, *op. cit.*, p. 247:

Dans aucun des cinq textes que nous avons tenu à replacer dans leur contexte, on ne trouve la moindre allusion à ce principe métaphysique que cependant il prouvait dès son *Commentaire sur les Sentences*. C'est dans un autre contexte que se meut sa pensée, celui de l'obligation morale de tendre vers Dieu, fin dernière.

level, was taken by the commentators to the ontological level where they encountered the famous problem.⁵⁰

At the end of his article Lottin says:

God remains the final end of the just man who sins venially. Without a doubt, the act of venial sin is not performed under actual, or even virtual influence from God, for, in that case, the action would be morally good; but the just man who sins venially remains under the habitual influence of the true ultimate end, since, in conformity with his habitual disposition, he retains God as the ultimate end of his life, from which he certainly does not intend to separate himself, even in the act of sin itself. Thus we return to the very simple formula of Saint Thomas.⁵¹

This formula is that of the habitual reference to God of the venial sinner.”

Each of the proposed theories with regard to the final end of venial sin has its own value. The main divergence in viewpoint seems to center in the actual existence of the problem. The choice of one solution, or the admission or rejection of the problem, is not essential to the purpose of our discussion. However, the review of the presented difficulty and of its various solutions, has a very definite value in placing venial sin in its true perspective and in showing its true nature.

Venial sin, the human act which is a violation of a minor law, or of a major law in a small manner, and so not a violation of

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, P. 249:

Dieu reste la fin dernière du juste qui pèche véniellement. Sans doute l'acte du péché véniel ne se fait pas sous l'influence actuelle ou même virtuelle de Dieu, car, dans ce cas, cet acte serait moralement bon; mais le juste qui pèche véniellement reste sous l'influence habituelle de (a vraie fin dernière, puisque, selon sa disposition habituelle, il conserve Dieu comme le but suprême de sa vie, dont il entend bien ne pas se séparer, même dans l'acte du péché. Nous en revenons à la formule très simple de saint Thomas.

⁵² S. T., 1-2, q. 88, a. 1, ad 2.

the eternal law, is essentially an illogical act. It is the choice of a means which leads to an end with the separation of the means from the end and its use apart from any end. It is sin only through an imperfect notion of sin, through analogy to mortal sin. It does contain a certain deordination with regard to means but it does not extend to ultimate ends. There is present a turning towards a creature but there is no turning away from God, for the turning to the creature is limited to means and cannot reach to ultimate ends. Of its essence venial sin is outside of the eternal law as it does not extend to ultimate ends in itself or in its effects.

EQUALITY OF OFFENCES AGAINST GOD

The very distinction of sins into venial and mortal is often the occasion for an objection which is based on the equality of all offences against God. For if an offence is measured by the dignity of the person offended, and sins by the dignity of the person sinned against, it, would seem to follow that all sins are equal since all are offences against God. Therefore, the distinction of mortal and venial sins would seem not to be valid, or at most to be based upon a decision of the divine will not to give to venial sins their full imputability."

In a certain sense it must be admitted that all sins are equal. For aversion from God is either total or it is not present at all. In this way, then, all sins must be equal. However, in the conversion to a created good there must be admitted a variation among sins as to type, intensity, and opposition to the eternal law.

Venial sin is not sin in the full sense of the term because of its very nature it contains no aversion from God." Furthermore, since venial sin does not violate the eternal law it is not an offence against God." From its nature, and not from some certain

" Billot, *op. cit.*, p. 107; Billuart, *op. cit.*, *Diss.* 8, art. 1, Sagues, *op. cit.*, p. 910, Scholion 2; *E. S.*, no. 1020.

" *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 72, a. 8, *corp.*

" *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 2, ad. 10; Suarez, d. 2, s. 5, no. 14; Prümmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 367d.

non-imputability granted by the will of God, venial sin cannot be judged the equal of mortal sin on the basis of the person insulted, as venial sin is not an insult against God. It is precisely in the offence against God that the insult consists, and venial sin not being an offence cannot be an insult.

On the difference between mortal and venial sin Saint Augustine is most explicit:

If the two acts are equal because they are both crimes, then mice and elephants are equal because they are both animals, and flies and eagles are equal because they can fly in the air."

THE EFFECTS OF VENIAL SIN

As a result of the radical differences between the nature of venial sin and the nature of mortal sin," radically different results can be expected from the two types of sin. In considering the results of venial sin, emphasis must be placed on the relationship between venial sin and sanctifying grace as this will be of great importance in the treatment of the remission of venial sin.

Now, venial sin and sanctifying grace are completely compatible." It is on this point that venial sin differs infinitely from mortal sin." Mortal sin, of its very nature involves a turning away from God who is infinite, while venial sin involves no such aversion, and can exist with no direct effect on sanctifying grace through which the soul is united to God." Mortal sin, from its nature, requires that the sinner break the bonds of charity by which he is oriented to God. Venial sin, whose range of effect is essentially limited, reaches only to the means which were of themselves

" Augustine, *Efist.* 104, *cap.* 4, n. 14 (ML. 33.394):

Aut si propterea sunt paria, quia utraque delicta sunt, mures et elephanti pares erunt, quia utraque sunt animalia; muscae et aquilae, quia utraque volatilia.

" Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 8, art. 2, Appendix.

" Council of Trent, Session 14, Chapter 5, *E. S.*, 899: S. T., 1-2, q. 88, a. 1, *corp.*; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 11, *corp.*

S. T., 1-2, q. 72, a. 5, ad 1.

" *Ibid.*, q. 89, a. 1, *corp.*

intended to lead man to God. It can never penetrate to the principle of charity, effect its loss, or prevent its infusion. It can be stated as certain that venial sin does not affect sanctifying grace in the soul, and this is the specifying difference between mortal and venial sin."

Just as it is certain that sanctifying grace is not lost through venial sin, it is also certain that it is not diminished or lessened by the commission of venial sin. Here the measure of grace, or the degree of participation in the life of God, must be considered as a form," and so any increase or decrease in grace must follow the norms which are applicable to a form." Variation in the measure of grace will depend upon these factors:

1. The agent, according to the power which he applies for the reduction of potency to act.
2. The subject, according to its disposition to receive the form.
3. The form, as a habit, depending on its object for both its Species and for its quantity.

Now, in the third manner, grace can never be increased or decreased, for its object is indivisible and infinite, being God as the object of charity. However, grace can be greater or less in the first manner, according to the will of God, and in the second manner, according to the disposition of the person receiving grace.

Venial sin cannot directly cause the diminution of grace," for there is no opposition between venial sin and the form which is grace. Of its nature venial sin is beneath grace, as grace is a relation to the ultimate end and venial sin is limited to means to this end. An excessive attachment to the means to an end does not

" *Ibid.*, q. 87, a. 3, *corp.*, and q. 88, a. 1, *corp.*, and ad. 2; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1, *corp.*

" *In i Sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1.

" See: *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 2, *corp.*

** Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 520; Gonzalez, Severino, S.J., *De Gratia*, in *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, (B.A.C., Madrid, 1953) vol. 3, p. 633, *schol.* 2.

necessarily imply a lessening in the desire for this end.[®] If there were some opposition between grace and venial sin the multiplication of venial sins would result in the loss of grace, for grace is a finite thing, and so the nature of venial sin would change as it would no longer be reparable, it would be striking at the principle of charity, and turning the soul from God. Also, every decrease in grace brings a decrease in glory. So if venial sin caused a decrease in grace, and glory, it would be receiving an everlasting punishment and it does not merit this.

However, it is quite possible for venial sin to prevent an increase in grace. By the very act of sinning venially, the person fails to perform a meritorious act and as a reward for the meritorious act there would have been an increase in grace. This is actually a non-increase in grace, yet its effect is that the person lacks grace which he could have had. Venial sin here affects grace indirectly, but it has no effect on the grace already possessed by the person.

Just as venial sin does not decrease sanctifying grace, it does not lessen charity, the infused virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, nor merit which has been gained. This is true even when the venial sin is against an infused virtue.[®]

Now, although venial sin does not diminish charity it does lessen the fervor of charity. Due to the high importance of this concept in the remission of venial sin, it will be helpful to see precisely what this lessening of the fervor of charity is. According to Saint Thomas:

— fervor can be understood in two ways; the first way entails the intensity with which the lover tends toward the beloved; and such fervor is of the essence of charity, and this is not diminished by venial sin. The other manner of speaking of the fervor of charity considers it as

* The example is used of one who is over-attached to medicine, by this fact there is implied no diminution in his desire for health which is the end to which the means, medicine, is ordered.

** Regatillo-Zalba, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 627, note 71; See also Primmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 393.

the overflow of the motion of love into the lesser faculties, so that in some way, not only the heart, but even the flesh rejoices in God; and it is this type of fervor which is diminished by venial sin without any lessening of the virtue of charity."

This concept of the fervor of charity will be of prime importance throughout the following chapters. It is to be noted that the fervor is not that of tendency toward God. The diminution of fervor is the direct effect of venial sin and an increase in the fervor of charity will effect a remission of venial sin, for there is a formal opposition between the two. Thus the effect of venial sin is felt in the lesser faculties and not in the tendency of the intellect and will to God as the ultimate end.

On the stain of venial sin Saint Thomas says:

__a stain denotes a loss of splendor due to contact with something, as may be seen in corporeal things, from which the term has been transferred to the soul, by way of likeness. Now, just as in the body there is a twofold splendor, one resulting from the inward dispositions of the members and colors, the other resulting from an outward and added brightness, so too, in the soul, there is a twofold splendor, one habitual, and so to speak, intrinsic, the other actual, like an outward brilliance. Now venial sin is a hindrance to the actual splendor, because it neither destroys nor diminishes the habit of charity and of the other virtues . . . but only hinders their acts. On the other hand, a stain denotes something permanent in the thing stained, and therefore it seems, in the nature of a loss of habitual rather than of actual splendor. So,

"De Mala, q. 7, a. 2, ad 17:

... fervor potest accipi dupliciter. Uno modo secundum quod importat intensiorem inclinationem amantis in amatum; et talis fervor est essentialis caritati, et non diminuitur per veniale peccatum. Alio modo dicitur fervor caritatis secundum quod redundat motus dilectionis etiam in inferiores vires, ut quodammodo non solum cor, sed etiam caro exultet in Deum; et talis fervor diminuitur per veniale peccatum absque diminutione caritatis.

properly speaking, venial sin does not cause a stain in the soul.”

In treating the stain of sin, Saint Thomas applies what has been stated concerning the nature of venial sin. Since the stain of sin and the privation of grace are one, there can be no true stain from venial sin as it has no effect upon grace. The stain of mortal sin is like a bodily deformity while the so called stain of venial sin is like a splashing of mud upon the body. So mortal sin twists the intellect and will, the higher faculties of the soul, from their ultimate end which is God, and so deforms the soul permanently, as this sin is of itself irreparable.” Venial sin, however, is in the lower faculties, as it does not extend to the consideration of the ultimate ends, it is a transient act” which causes a lessening in the overflow of the fervor of charity.”

Venial sin is truly sin, and sin brings a state of guilt to the person who commits it.” The will of the sinner has been inordinately turned to some created good. As long as this state of the will perdures, the deordination perdures, and the person stands guilty before God. There is, of course, a great difference between

• S. T., 1-2, q. 89, a. 1, *corp.*.

... macula importat detrimentum nitens ex aliquo contactu, sicut in corporalibus patet, ex quibus per similitudinem nomen maculae ad animam transfertur. Sicut autem in corpore est duplex nitor, unus quidem ex intrinseca dispositione membrorum et coloris, alius autem ex exteriori claritate superveniente; item etiam in anima est duplex nitor, unus quidem habitualis, quasi intrinsecus, alius autem actualis, quasi exterior fulgor. Peccatum autem veniale impedit quidem nitorem actualem, non tamen habitualem, quia non excludit neque diminuit habitum caritatis et aliarum virtutum, ut infra patebit, sed solum impedit earum actum. Macula autem importat aliquid manens in re maculata, unde magis videtur pertinere ad detrimentum habitualis nitoris quam actualis. Unde, proprie loquendo, peccatum veniale non causat maculam in animam.

See also: S. T., 1-2, q. 86, a. 1, ad 3; Sagues, *op. cit.*, p. 909; Scheeben, *op. cit.*, p. 257; De Lugo, *Disputationes Scholasticae Et Morales*, (Vives, Paris, 1892) vol. 4, *De Poenitentia*, Disp. 9, Sect. 1.

” S. T., 1-2, q. 87, a. 3, *corp.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 88, a. 4, ad 3.

De Malo, q. 7, a. 3, ad 17.

” Scheeben, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

the guilt of mortal and of venial sin. The mortal sinner has to regain the principle of the supernatural life, which is charity, to erase his guilt, while the merely venial sinner, has the principle of charity still, and has but to withdraw his will from this deordination to erase his guilt." This will be treated in the next chapter.

With the guilt of the sin the sinner also incurs a debt of punishment. In the case of mortal sin this punishment is everlasting, while for venial sin it is temporal." At times, however, venial sin may receive an everlasting punishment. This can happen in the case of one who dies with both mortal and venial sin on his soul. The guilt of both and the punishment for both will be everlasting. This is the effect of the mortal and not of the venial sin. This point will be treated later in connection with the theory of Scotus on the remission of venial sin.

The most terrible result of venial sin is the fact that "venial sin, of its very nature, disposes to mortal sin . . . This applies particularly to fully deliberate venial sin, as the disposition to mortal sin comes as a result of habitual conversion to created goods. The repetition of this conversion establishes a pattern of behavior which will enable the will more easily to turn to some created good as its ultimate end. Such an absolute conversion is mortal sin. While the multiplication of venial sins will never cause a mortal sin, this multiplication can dispose the agent to commit a mortal sin. This disposition is the result of the repeated conversion to created goods, of the constant rejection of actual grace, and the constant stifling of the fervor of charity.

Having considered sin in its full sense and as contained in the concept of venial sin, and having examined the nature, the end, and the effects of venial sin, it remains now to determine precisely in what the remission of venial sin consists. This will be the burden of the following chapter.

" Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 520.

" S. T., 1-2, q. 87, a. 5, *corp.*; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 1, *corp.*; *E. S.* 1020.

" S. T., 1-2, q. 88, a. 3, ad 3:

See also: Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 8, art. 3, no. 1.

Sed peccatum veniale per se disponit ad mortale...

CHAPTER II

THE PROCESS OF REMISSION

RELATION OF REMISSION AND THE NATURE OF THE SIN

The nature of any sin is the determining factor in the process by which the sinner can return to God. As remission itself is an act proper to God, the aspect of remission which is considered here is the act by which the sinner renders himself disposed for the remission of his sin, and the acts by which he is returned to his sinless state. Now, the nature of venial sin is the basis for any discussion of the remission of this sin. The points which have been seen concerning the nature of venial sin must be constantly present if this process is to be kept in its proper perspective. Thus, the facts that venial sin causes no diminution of sanctifying grace or the virtues, and that its main effect is the lessening of the non-essential fervor of charity,¹ are of constant importance. The remission of venial sin is possible only when the sinner is in the state of sanctifying grace and it is achieved by the act of penance of the sinner himself. This act, its integral parts, and its necessary conditions will be the burden of this chapter, leaving the various means which can be utilized by the sinner in securing this remission to the next chapter.

With regard to the remission of sin in general, Saint Thomas has this statement:

The remission of guilt . . . is accomplished through a uniting of man with God, from whom guilt separates man in some fashion. But this separation is made in a complete manner by mortal sin, and only in an imperfect way by venial sin, for through mortal sin the mind is

¹ *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 3, ad 17; Tanquerey, Adolphe, *Spiritual Life*, (Newman, Westminster, 1930) no. 729.

completely turned from God, since the sinner is acting against charity; while through venial sin man's emotions are held back so that they cannot promptly spring towards God.²

Looking on the remission of sin as the reunion of the sinner with God, it is evident that the position of the venial sinner is quite different from that of the mortal sinner. This must be so because of the infinite difference between the two forms of actual sin.³ If, then, remission of sin is truly a reunion with God, is it possible to speak of the remission of venial sin, since this sin effects no separation from God? Venial sin, as has been seen, is not sin in the full sense, but rather is called sin through analogy with mortal sin. In the same manner, remission of venial sin is not remission in the full sense of a complete reunion to God in charity. It is remission by analogy with the remission of mortal sin. As a sinful action venial sin is an inordinate conversion to a created good. The remedying of this conversion by the elimination of the disorder *is* the remission of venial sin. This act of remission implies an act of correctly ordered conversion to God, a withdrawal of the will from its distraction, and the establishing of a proper relation to the means to the final end. In this action there is the return of the fervor of charity and the reunion of its outward brilliance to the soul.⁴

The nature of the remissive act depends, then, on the nature of the sin committed. Thus, there is a great difference between the elimination of the deathly result of mortal sin and the returning *of the* actual fervor of charity which is lost through venial

¹ *S. T., e.*, q. 87, a. 3, ad 17:

Dicendum quod remissio culpae --- fit per coniunctionem hominis ad Deum, a quo aequaliter separat culpa. Sed haec separatio perfecte quidem fit per peccatum mortale, imperfecte autem per peccatum veniale, nam per peccatum mortale mens omnino a Deo avertitur, utpote contra caritatem agens; per peccatum autem veniale retardatur affectus hominis ne promptly in Deum feratur.

See also: Noldin-Schmitt, *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, (26 ed., Newman, Westminster, 1951) vol. 3, no. 240.

² *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 87, a. 3, *in corp.*; and q. 72, a. 5, ad 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, q. 89, a. 1, *in corp.*; also: Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 457.

sin.⁵ This close nexus between the nature of sin and the nature of the remission act will be basic to this entire discussion.

VENIAL SIN AND THE FERVOR OF CHARITY

As has been seen, the direct effect of venial sin on the soul, the effect which is considered to be the stain of venial sin and the guilt which must be remitted, is the diminution of the fervor of charity. As Billuart says:

__ moreover, through this inordinate modification or determination of the will with regard to some created good, the emotions of the sinner are impeded, or retarded, so that they cannot promptly spring towards God; and this is known as the privation of the fervor of charity, and it is in this that the stain of venial sin, or habitual venial sin, is usually said to consist.'

The restoration of the fervor of charity, then, will be the object of the act of remission of venial sin. When the lost fervor is restored, the sin will be remitted. Now, this fervor must be understood correctly, if the object of the remissive act is to be seen as it is.

For the present consideration it will be useful to repeat the statement of Saint Thomas on the precise nature of this fervor:

— fervor can be understood in two ways; the first way brings in the intensity with which the lover tends toward the beloved, and such fervor is essential to charity, and is not diminished through venial sin. Another manner of speaking of the fervor of charity considers it as the overflowing of the motion of love into the lesser facul-

⁶ S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 1, in corp.

* Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 3, art. 3:

... per hanc autem modificationem seu determinationem inordinatam voluntatis circa bonum creatum, impeditur, seu, retardatur affectus ne prompte feratur in Deum; et hoc dicitur privatio fervoris charitatis, in qua reponi solet macula peccati venialis, seu peccatum veniale habituale...

See also: S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 2, in corp.

ties, so that in some way, not only the heart, but even the flesh, rejoices in God; and this is the type of fervor which is diminished by venial sin without any diminishing of charity.'

This overflow of the motion of love is the fervor of charity to which reference will be made frequently below. In the teaching of Saint Thomas, then, the purpose of the act of remission will be the return of the lost act of fervor. This view is not that of Scotus who equates the remission of venial sin with the fulfillment of the temporal punishment; .. and furthermore, one can be remitted without the other; since the guilt of venial sin incurs only a temporal punishment, the remission of venial sin is nothing else than the fulfillment of the temporal punishment which is due to it."⁸ This view of Scotus will explain his approach to some of the difficulties which arise with regard to the remission of venial sin. He encounters no problem in the case of those who die with unrepented venial sins on their souls as their sins are remitted by the payment of the due punishment in Purgatory. He goes even further, and does not require the venial sinner to be in the state of sanctifying grace to secure the remission of his venial sins:

— venial sin neither of itself, nor through any circumstance, can merit an eternal punishment, for it is of the nature of such an offence that it receive only a temporal

⁸ *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 17:

...fervor potest accipi dupliciter. Uno modo secundum quod importat intensionem inclinationis amantis in amatum: et talis fervor est essentialis caritati, et non diminuitur per veniale peccatum. Alio modo dicitur fervor caritatis secundum quod redundat motus dilectionis etiam in inferiores vires, ut quodammodo non solum cor, sed etiam caro exultet in Deum; et talis fervor diminuitur per veniale peccatum absque diminutione caritatis.

See also: S. T., 1-2, q. 89, a. 1, *in corp.*; and Tanquerey, *op. cit.*, no. 729.

* Scotus, John Duns, *Commentarium in 1F libros sententiarum*, d. 21, q. 1, no. S *Op. omnia*, vol. 18.

...imò magis unum dimitti posse sine alio; quia, cum culpae veniali non debeatur nisi poena temporalis, nihil aliud est venialis peccati remissio quam solutio poenae temporalis debitae.

punishment according to justice; for it does not avert the sinner from his end as does mortal sin. Nor can there be said to be any necessary connection between mortal and venial sin as far as their remission is concerned, neither from a positive law of God, nor from justice; therefore, the sinner can produce condign satisfaction for his venial sins, even though he remain guilty of mortal sin.'

This view of venial sin is, evidently, in direct opposition to that of Saint Thomas. The approach of Scotus seems to lack a distinction between the condition of guilt and liability to punishment. As in the case of mortal sin where the guilt of the sin must be remitted through the infusion of sanctifying grace, so that consequently the sinner may no longer be liable to the eternal penalty; so also the remission of venial sin has two parts, the remission of the guilt by an act of the fervor of charity, and the remission of the temporal punishment,¹⁰ which may, or may not, be simultaneous with the remission of the guilt. Scotus' view seems to divorce the effect of venial sin from the soul of the sinner, leaving no effect save the liability to punishment. Saint Thomas always requires a movement in the opposite direction, that is, towards God, to secure the remission of sin.^u Scotus' point on the lack of nexus between mortal and venial sin seems to be unrealistic in that it ignores the fact that these two are very definitely connected by the fact that they are both on the soul of *this* person. Thus, one of the necessary conditions for the remission of venial sin is lacking, and so the venial sin can never be remitted. If the sinner should die in this state, the punishment for the venial sin would, through the accidental fact of its being on a

• *Ibid.*, no. 6:

...peccato veniali neque per se, neque per accidens debetur poena aeterna, est enim ex natura sui talis offensa, quae punitur per temporalem poenam, secundum iustitiam; non enim a fine avertit ut mortale. Neque necessariam connexionem dicit cum mortali, quantum ad sui remissionem, neque ex statuta lege Dei, neque ex iustitia; ergo peccator poterit exhibere condignam satisfactionem pro suis venialibus, etiamsi remaneat obnoxius mortali peccato.

“ Noldin-Schmitt, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 250.

“ S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 2, ad 3; and a. 3, *in corp.*

soul which lacks sanctifying grace, be everlasting. In the same manner, a non-fatal injury, such as a broken finger, can be unrepaired, and so remain a defect, when a person dies of cancer. There is no intrinsic nexus between the two. Cancer should not prevent the mending of the finger. However, the two things have a very definite connection in the fact that they are in the same person. The ability to mend the finger has been denied, forever, through the fact that the cancer has halted the mending process by killing the patient. As cancer removed the principle of life which is necessary for all healing processes, so mortal sin removes the principle of charity which is necessary for the healing of venial sin. Saint Thomas teaches that the remission of venial sin is achieved by the act of fervent charity on the part of the sinner. This is impossible when the principle of charity is not present. Now, although the opinion of Scotus is not generally held, it does put the teaching of Saint Thomas in relief." Following Saint Thomas, then, all mention of remission will be centered on the remission of guilt. The remission of the penalty due for venial sin will be treated separately.

THE ACT OF THE PENITENT

So the act of remission of venial sin is the act of withdrawal of the penitent's will from the object of its inordinate attachment, an act by which the fervor of charity, lost by his sin, is aroused. The essential element of this withdrawal is the act of the penitent himself, and this act should be treated first. This act depends on the presence of both sanctifying and actual grace for its efficacy. The presence of both types of grace is to be presumed, and is to be regarded as a necessary element in this entire discussion, even when it is not mentioned explicitly.

The act of the will of the penitent is sufficient for the remission of venial sin, and moreover, there can be no remission of venial sin without this act of the will which is simply an act of the virtue of penance. Saint Thomas says:

"Ibid., a. 4, in corp.; and q. 86, a. 3, in corp.; also against this view of Scotus: Noldin-Schnitt, op. cit., vol. 3, no. 241; Merkelbach, op. cit., vol. 3, no. 4S7; Galtier, op. cit., Thesis 41; Regatillo-Zalba, op. cit., vol. 3, no. 380.

And so, in order that venial sin be taken away, there is not required an infusion of grace, but any movement of grace, or of charity, will suffice for its remission.¹⁵

This flows from the nature of venial sin, for this sinner retains his orientation towards God through the principle of charity. The inordinate adhesion of his will to some created thing makes him guilty of a venial sin, and as long as this adhesion lasts, the sin remains. When his will ends this adhesion it also ends the venial sin. The state of venial sin consists precisely in the continued determination of the will to the inordinate attachment,¹⁶ when this is revoked the state of sin is revoked likewise. Mortal sin is a different matter, for there the stain of sin consists in the habitual privation of the principle of charity. The cessation of the state of guilt for mortal sin requires more than a simple act of the will. There must be an act of perfect charity, or of attrition with the aid of a sacrament, to restore the principle of charity. Venial sin, however, according to the more common opinion,¹⁵ is remitted by a simple act of attrition or of fervor. Here the will has not been turned from God in any way and there is no need for turning back to God. Nor has this sin slowed man in his tendency toward God, for the fervor of charity which is affected is not that essential fervor by which one tends to God, as has been seen above.

Now, if the state of venial sin consists in an actual adherence of the will to some object in an inordinate manner, the question arises as to whether an act of penance, that is, an act opposed

¹⁵ S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 2, *in corp.*:

Et ideo ad hoc quod peccatum veniale tollatur, non requiritur quod infundatur aliqua habitualis gratia, sed sufficit aliquis motus gratiae vel caritatis ad eius remissionem.

Merkelbach is explicit on this point; *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459.

¹⁶ Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 3, art. 3; Scheeben, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

¹⁵ The sufficiency of attrition is held generally since the Council of Trent. The usual argument being based on the "many other remedies"—as perfect contrition would be the only remedy if it were required. Thus: Aertnys-Damen, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 270; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 460; Galtier, *op. cit.*, no. 458; De Lugo, *op. cit.*, de pen., disp. 9, s. 2, no. 29; and: Fanfani, Doronzo, Iorio Chretien, Lehmkuhl, Heylen, Priimmer, Cappello, Sabbetti-Barret.

to the act of sin, a retractation, is necessary for its remission; or whether a simple cessation of the act, a simple stopping of the act with no opposed action, would be sufficient for its remission. As will be shown below," Saint Thomas and most other authors demand a positive act of the will and not a mere cessation of the act for the remission of sin. When a sacrament is received, or whenever there is an infusion of sanctifying grace, this act of the will, if it has not been placed as an act of preparation, will certainly follow as a consequence. For an act of fervor which is remissive of venial sin is the result of such an infusion of grace into the soul of one who is capable of venial sin.¹⁷ The evident exception to this would come in the Sacrament of Penance with regard to those venial sins which are confessed. For these, or at least, for one of these, if no mortal sins are confessed or if there is no formal sorrow for past remitted sins, the penitent *must* have formal sorrow which would include a positive will act, and not merely place no obstacle to their remission through the resultant act of fervor. Actually, the remission takes place in the same manner in every case, but the act of fervor can be made by the individual himself with the help of actual grace, or it can come as the result of an infusion of sanctifying grace. Thus the use of all means for the remission of venial sin has this one point in common, they all seek to arouse an act of fervent charity which will be remissive of venial sin as an act of virtual penance, a turning of the will from its inordinate attachment. Thus:

In a word, consequent to, and by reason of, the act by which man has hatred of his venial sin and by which he acts against it, God will grant condonation from without, as long as the sinner is well disposed within."

Venial sin is remitted by the fervor of charity alone which includes a hatred of the sin. Although many other

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁷ *S. T.*, 3, q. 87, a. 2, *in corp.*

¹⁸ Galtier, *op. cit.*, no. 550:

Uno verbo, consequenter et ratione actus quo homo peccatum suum veniale odio habet atque contra illud agit, Deus dii, tamquam intrinsece bene disposito, condonat, ab extrinseco.

causes are usually listed, they can all be reduced to this one thing..

Thus the act of *the will* by which its complacency in its sinful attachment is ended is essential to the remission of venial sin, for such an act is, in reality, an act of the virtue of penance, and from the very nature of remission there must always be present an act of this virtue." The type of penance required and its qualities remain to be discussed.

QUALITIES REQUIRED IN THE ACT OF PENANCE FOR VENIAL SIN

The act of penance which is required for the remission of venial sin is essentially the same as that which is required for the remission of mortal sin. It is fundamentally a hatred of sin and a consequent sadness that this act, now so distasteful, is imputable to this person. There is also the desire to undo this evil. This desire extends to the past evil, where it can have no effect, and to the future where this evil can be avoided. For this virtue to be effective it must be based upon a supernatural motive. More exactly, there is no true act of this virtue without supernatural motivation. A purely natural motive such as shame or humiliation would not of itself effect true penance. Thus the act of the will by which venial sin is remitted must be one which has as its basis a supernatural motive. In speaking of the remission of sin, Saint Thomas says:

The remission of the guilt of sin . . . is accomplished through a reunion of man to God, from whom he was separated by the guilt of sin. But this separation is complete through mortal sin, and only imperfect through venial sin, for through mortal sin the intellect is com-

" Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459:

Peccatum veniale remittitur solo fervore charitatis qui eius displicentiam includit. Quamvis multae aliae causae recenseri soleant, ad hanc unam reduci possunt ---

* S. T., 3, q. 86, a. 2, *corp.*; and q. 87, a. 1, *corp.*, Doronzo, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 96; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 457.

pletely turned away from God, inasmuch as it acts against charity; while through venial sin man's emotions are held back so that they cannot promptly spring towards God. And therefore, both types of sin are remitted through penance, as in both there is a deordination of man's will through an immoderate conversion to a created good; so just as the mortal sin cannot be remitted as long as the will adheres to the sin, so also in the case of the venial sin, for as long as the cause remains the effect will remain.||

Granted that the act of sin, by which a man has departed from the light of reason or the light of the divine law, may cease, the man does not immediately return to his previous state, but there is required a motion of his will which is contrary to the sinful motion. Just as when someone is a distance from another through a certain motion, by the mere cessation of that motion he will not be near the other, but it will be necessary to come near through a contrary motion."

" S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 1, *in corp.*:

Dicendum quod remissio culpae --- fit per coniunctionem hominis ad Deum, a quo aliquantulum separatur culpa. Sed haec separatio perfecte quidem fit per peccatum mortale, imperfecte autem per peccatum veniale, nam per peccatum mortale mens omnino a Deo avertitur, utpote contra caritatem agens; per peccatum autem veniale retardatur affectus hominis ne prompte in Deum feratur. Et ideo utrumque peccatum per poenitentiam quidem remittitur, quia per utrumque deordinatur voluntas hominis per immoderatam conversionem ad bonum creatum; sicut enim peccatum mortale remitti non potest quamdiu voluntas peccato adhaeret, ita etiam nec peccatum veniale, quia manente causa, manet effectus.

So also; Suarez, *disp. 2, s. 4, no. 5*; Galtier, *op. cit.*, no. 547; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 457; Doronzo, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 96.

" S. T., 1-2, q. 86, a. 2, *in corp.*:

Licet autem cesset actus peccati, quo homo discessit a lumine rationis vel legis divinae, non tamen statim homo ad illud redit in quo fuerat; sed requiritur aliquis motus voluntatis contrarius primo motui. Sicut si aliquis sit distans alicui per aliquem motum, non statim cessante motu fit ei propinquus, sed oportet quod appropinquet rediens per motum contrarium.

On the necessity of an act of penance for the remission of venial sin Scotus seems to disagree:

... however I deny that such a one would have to have the virtue of penance; since venial sins can be remitted both as to guilt and to penalty, not only through the virtue of penance, but also through an act of fervent contemplation of God, just as a drop of water is totally consumed by an intense flame."

In this instance he is definitely referring to the virtue of penance, whereas in some other places" there seems to be a confusion between the sacrament of penance and the virtue of penance. However, even here it seems that he is referring to the fact that there is no need for an act of formal penance. In this sense Saint Thomas agrees with this statement, for he holds that an act of the fervor of charity is virtually an act of penance." It is the better interpretation of Scotus' words to suppose that he recognizes the need for at least virtual penance, although he did not make this distinction.

This penance which is necessary for the remission of venial sin must be, as in the case of mortal sin, *appréciative summa*." Thus the sinner must hold that venial sin, while it is infinitely less harmful than mortal sin, is above all other evils in creation. It must be held to be a greater evil than any punishment which it can incur, and, in fact, worse than the sum total of all evils outside of mortal sin.

Penance for venial sin must also include a purpose of amendment as an effect of its hatred for sin. While in the case of mortal

" *In 4*, d. 17, no. 25:

. . . nego tamen, propterea debuisse habere virtutem poenitentiae; quia venialia non solum per virtutem poenitentiae delentur quoad culpam et poenam, sed etiam deleri possunt, et remittuntur per actum ferventem contemplationis in Deum, sicuti gutta aquae totaliter absumitur a flamma vehementi.

" *In 4*, d. 21, q. 1, nos. 8, 9; and *In 4*, d. 17, no. 19.

» *S. T.*, 3, q. 87, a. 1, ad 1.

• Council of Trent, sess. 14, cap. 4, *E. S.*, no. 897; Doronzo, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 96.

sin this intention must be absolutely universal, for the aversion from God which is implicit in every mortal sin does not admit of degrees, this is not true of venial sin. Venial sins lack the inner unity of aversion from God. There are any number of created things to which the soul can be venially attached. A venial sin against one virtue can be remitted while the soul clings to a venial sin against another virtue. And while mortal sin can be avoided entirely, venial sin cannot be avoided for any great length of time without a special privilege from God. Saint Thomas says:

Man in the state of grace can avoid each and every mortal sin: he can also avoid each venial sin, but not all venial sin . . . And so penance for mortal sins requires that man propose to avoid all and every individual mortal sin. But penance for venial sins requires that man propose to avoid individual venial sins, but not all venial sins, since the weakness of this life precludes this. He should, however, have the *propositum* of making himself ready to lessen the number of venial sins; for otherwise he would be in danger of falling back, as the desire to move ahead, or to remove the obstacles to spiritual progress, which venial sins are, would be lacking.”

The continual corruption of the sensuality is to be understood as referring to the *fomes* which is never completely destroyed in this life, since, though the stain of original sin passes, its effect remains. However, this corruption of the *fomes* does not hinder man from using rational will to check individual inordinate movements,

” *S. T.*, 3, q. 87, a. 1, ad 1:

Dicendum quod homo in gratia constitutus potest vitare omnia peccata mortalia et singula; potest etiam vitare singula peccata venialia, sed non omnia --- Et ideo poenitentia de peccatis mortalibus requirit quod homo proponat abstinere ab omnibus, et singulis peccatis mortalibus. Sed ad poenitentiam peccatorum venialium requiritur quod homo proponat abstinere a singulis, non tamen ab omnibus, quia hoc infirmitas huius vitae non patitur. Debet tamen habere propositum se praeparandi ad peccata venialia minuenda; alioquin esset ei periculum deficienti, cum desereret appetitum proficiendi, seu tollendi impedimenta spiritualis profectus, quae sunt peccata venialia.

if he be presentment of them, for instance by turning his thoughts to other things. Yet while he is turning his thoughts to something else, an inordinate movement may arise about this also . . . Consequently a man cannot avoid all such movements, because of the aforesaid corruption; but it is enough, for the conditions of a voluntary sin, that he be able to avoid each single one.”

In view of this frequency of venial sin there arises a question of the required purpose of amendment. It need not, and practically cannot, be universal as in the case of mortal sin. An intention to lessen the frequency of venial sins, or to avoid certain types, or all deliberate ones, would be a sufficient purpose of amendment. On this point there is a good treatment in Merkelbach. These things apply to the remission of venial sin in general even though in Merkelbach they are applied to the confession of venial sin. For the only difference between the penance required for the remission of venial sin in general and the penance required in the confessional is that the latter penance must be formal, and this is necessary because the act of penance is part of the matter for the sacrament and is not due to any exigency on the part of venial sin in itself.

So Merkelbach:

But if only venial sins are confessed, for the validity of the sacrament at least this is required;

- a) A purpose of amendment with regard to one of the sins confessed, namely; of avoiding a completely similar sin in the same circumstances, or of avoiding

”. S. T., 1-2, q. 74, a. 3, ad 2:

Dicendum quod perpetua corruptio sensualitatis est intelligenda quantum ad fomitem, qui nunquam totaliter tollitur in hac vita; transit enim peccatum originale reatu et remanet actu. Sed talis corruptio fomitis non impedit quin homo rationabili voluntate possit reprimere singulos motus inordinatos sensualitatis, si praesentiat, puta divertendo ad alia. Sed dum homo cogitationem ad alia divertit, potest etiam circa illud aliquis inordinatus motus insurgere --- Et ideo non potest homo vitare omnes huiusmodi motus, propter corruptionem praedictam; sed hoc solum sufficit ad rationem peccati voluntarii, quod possit vitare singulos.

- all sins, not necessarily of the same species, but those of the same species and the same circumstances; or
- b) of avoiding a certain genus of venial sins; or
 - c) of avoiding the more serious venial sins; or
 - d) of avoiding fully deliberate venial sins; or
 - e) of lessening the number of venial sins.

The purpose of amendment can be to avoid each individual venial sin or of avoiding all of them taken distributively, but not of avoiding all venial sins taken together, since we can avoid individual venial sins, whereas we cannot avoid all venial sins at once.”

So much, then, for the purpose of amendment which flows from that hatred of sin which is sorrow. Both sorrow and the purpose of amendment have been found necessary for the remission of venial sin. It remains to see exactly what type of sorrow is required.

Habitual penance is certainly not sufficient for the remission of venial sin. This inadequacy stems from the very nature of venial sin which is not opposed to the state of grace, charity, or the other virtues. If there were an opposition between venial sin and the virtue of penance as a habit, the act of venial sin would drive the virtue from the soul. Saint Thomas says:

... for the remission of venial sins. That habitual displeasure, which is had from the habit of charity or from the virtue of penance, does not suffice, for if it did then

"Merkelbach, *op. cit.* vol. 3, no. 488:

Quod si sola venialia declarentur, ad validitatem sacramenti requiritur saltem a) propositum de uno veniali declarato, scilicet; de vitando peccato omnino simili in iisdem omnino circumstantiis, seu de omnibus peccatis, non quidem eiusdem speciei, sed eiusdem omnino conditionis; vel b) de vitando certo genere venialium; vel c) de vitandis gravioribus; vel d) de vitandis plene deliberatis; vel e) de minuendo numero venialium. Propositum etiam haberi potest de vitandis singulis venialibus seu de omnibus distributive vitandis, non autem de omnibus collective vitandis, quia singula vitare possumus, omnia autem simul vitare nobis est impossibile.

charity would not be compatible with venial sin, but this is clearly false. Whence it follows that a certain virtual displeasure is required; as, for example, when a person is borne by affection toward God and divine things, in such wise, that whatever would happen to him that would retard him, from this motion would displease him, and he would be sorry that he committed such an act, even though he did not think of it."

Thus virtual penance is adequate for the remission of venial sin. This term, *virtual*, has a twofold implication here. It is opposed to habitual penance, and in this sense it can be looked on as exerting an influence on the act which is performed by the agent. This influence renders the act formally opposed to the sinful act. So in this, virtual penance differs from habitual penance which would exert no influence upon the act. There is also the sense of *implicit* penance contained in this term. So the sorrow for the sin is contained in the act performed by the sinner which is of its nature opposed to the act of sin. Thus any act of fervor is an act of virtual sorrow, as in this act the act of sorrow is implicit. This type of sorrow is, except in the confessional where sorrow must be formal, sufficient for the remission of venial sin.

Virtual sorrow, then, from its definition must be a retraction of the will from the sinful act. There must be a formal opposition between the new act and the sin. This opposition can be found whenever the new act is the opposite of the sin, as an act of reverence is the opposite of an act of irreverence. Here the opposition in the act itself is evident. In any other good act the agent can make an opposition between the act and the sin through his intention to perform the act in atonement for the sin. Here the

" S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 1, *in corp.*

--- ad remissionem peccatorum venialium. Non tamen sufficit habitualis displicentia, quae habetur per habitum caritatis vel poenitentiae virtutis, quia sic caritas non compateretur peccatum veniale, quod patet esse falsum. Unde sequitur quod requiratur quaedam virtualis displicentia; puta cum aliquis hoc modo fertur secundum affectum in Deum et res divinas ut quidquid ei occurrat quod eum ab hoc motu retardaret, displiceret ei, et doleret se commisisse, etiam si de illo non cogitaret.

opposition is evident in his intention. Further, any act by which the fervor of charity is increased is virtually an act of sorrow for venial sin, as venial sin is opposed to the fervor of charity." Now, since any act of the fervor of charity does include a virtual act of sorrow for venial sin, can it be held that any act of the fervor of charity, apart from any degree of intensity, would suffice for the remission of *all* the venial sins on the soul of the agent?

Here there is a difference of opinion. The basic problem is whether a certain intensity of attrition is necessary for the remission of venial sins or whether the presence of attrition is sufficient to remit all venial sins. Merkelbach says:

Indeed, every even minimal act of contrition for venial sin, if it be sincere, is a retractation of the sin__ ; venial sin is not opposed to any determined intensity or grade of charity, since it neither takes away nor diminishes the habit of charity, with which it has no opposition; just as a minimal act of perfect contrition suffices for the remission of all mortal sins, so also a minimal act of imperfect contrition made with the aid of grace suffices for the remission of all venial sins."

There is an obvious difficulty in the comparison of the role of perfect contrition in the remission of mortal sin and the role of imperfect contrition in the remission of venial sin. For all mortal sins are unified in their aversion from God and there is a formal opposition between this aversion and an act of perfect contrition. So when such an act is made all mortal sins are remitted. There can be no question of some not being remitted. In the case of venial sin, however, where there is no such unity of aversion, imperfect contrition need not remit every venial sin. At least this

" *Ibid.*, ad 3; also Noldin-Schmitt, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 243.

" Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 460:

Etenim omnis etiam minima contritio de peccato veniali, si sit sincera est retractio eius . . . peccatum veniale non opponitur determinatae intensitati seu gradui charitatis, quia nihil aufert nec minuit de charitatis habitu, cui non opponitur; sicut minima contritio perfecta sufficit ad remissionem omnium peccatorum mortalium, ita minima contritio imperfecta ex gratia facta sufficit ad remissionem omnium venialium.

is not a necessary consequence of the act of imperfect contrition as the remission of all mortal sins is a consequence of the act of perfect contrition.

The view of Merkelbach differs from De Lugo's," who, granting that venial sin consists only in a conversion to a created good, holds that all conversions are not equal in gravity and intensity, and so some require a greater degree of attrition than others for their remission. This argumentation will be treated below with reference to confession. However, for present purposes, De Lugo's opinion is not as far removed from that of Merkelbach as it may appear at first glance. Certainly all venial sins are not equal. Some conversions to created goods involve a stronger turning of the will than others. However, for attrition there must be a reversal of this motion of the will. This return of the will implies greater effort where the inordinate motion was greater. But, and this is the important point, attrition, even the minimal attrition of which Merkelbach speaks, is *this retraction of the will*. So it can be said that in the case of the more serious venial sins, that while a minimal attrition is sufficient for their remission, this minimal attrition requires a greater intensity and act on the part of the will than does minimal attrition in the case of lesser venial sins, and this is due to the different degrees of conversion of the will to created goods.

It would seem, then, that the answer to the question asked, as to whether the virtual act of sorrow contained in an act of the fervor of charity would be sufficient for the remission of all venial sins, apart from any degree of intensity, would be yes, provided that the will is really withdrawn from the inordinate conversion. This seems to be the mind of Saint Thomas who mentions that *any* motion of grace or of charity is sufficient for the remission of venial sin," as long as this motion is applied to the sin, and who makes no stipulation as to the intensity of attrition required for remission. With regard to the remission of venial sins through the fervor of charity, this passage from Saint Thomas is of interest:

" De Lugo, *op. cit.*, disp. 9, s. 2, no. 39.

" S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 2, in corp.

Although those who are withdrawn from the care of temporal things sometimes sin venially, yet they commit but slight venial sins, and very frequently they are cleansed by the fervor of charity. Hence they do not build up venial sins, because these do not remain long in them. But the venial sins of those who are busy about earthly things remain longer, because they are unable to have such frequent recourse to the fervor of charity in order to remove them."

SANCTIFYING GRACE AND THE REMISSION OF VENIAL SIN

For the remission of venial sin, sanctifying grace must be present in the soul. In this requirement venial sin stands alone, for it is the only sin which can exist in the soul along with grace. It has no effect on grace or charity but only upon the non-essential fervor of charity. Now, in like manner, the remission of venial sin has no direct effect on the habit of charity or on sanctifying grace, but is merely a return of the previously lost fervor of charity. If the soul lacks sanctifying grace and the habit of charity, it is impossible to return the fervor of charity, as this is related to the habit of charity as an accident to a substance. With regard to the necessity for the presence of sanctifying grace Saint Thomas says; "He who is in mortal sin lacks the grace of God. Therefore no venial sin will be forgiven him." And; "Mortal sin excludes completely habitual grace, without which no sin is remitted whether venial or mortal."*]

K S. T., 1-2, q. 89, a. 2, ad 3:

Dicendum quod illi qui sunt abstracti a cura temporalium rerum, etsi aliquando venialiter peccent, tamen levia peccata venialia committunt et frequentissime per fervorem caritatis purgantur. Unde tales non superaedificant venialia, quia in eis modicum manent. Sed peccata venialia ipsorum qui circa terrena occupantur, diutius manent, quia non ita frequenter recurrere possunt ad huiusmodi peccata venialia delenda per caritatis fervorem.

"S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 2, in corp.-. "Ule autem qui est in peccato mortali, caret gratia Dei. Unde nullam veniale sibi remittitur."

"Ibid., a. 4, ad 3: "Sed peccatum mortale excludit totaliter habitum gratiae, sine quo nullum peccatum mortale vel veniale remittitur."

Now, this last statement of Saint Thomas has this meaning. There is remission of mortal sin through the infusion of sanctifying grace, for there is formal opposition between grace and mortal sin. The two cannot exist together. The relation of venial sin to habitual grace is different. The two are compatible and so can exist together. Every infusion of sanctifying grace can remit venial sins, although it will not necessarily remit all of them, but not for the same reason that such an infusion of grace remits mortal sin. The infusion of grace causes an act of fervor and this act in turn is formally opposed to venial sin, and so through this act which is consequent to the infusion of grace, the venial sins are remitted. Such an infusion of grace is not necessary for the remission of venial sins as it is in the case of mortal sin. As Saint Thomas says; "For the removal of venial sin, no infusion of habitual grace is required, but rather, any motion of grace or charity is sufficient for its remission." "

In the case of remission of mortal and venial sin the remission is not, then, simultaneous. The venial sins cannot be remitted until habitual grace is present in the soul. So the infusion of sanctifying grace takes place, and this effects immediately, through its formal opposition to the state of mortal sin, the remission of the mortal sin. Then, as a consequence of the infusion of grace, there is an act of fervor, which can remit venial sin. There can also be the causality of the act of attrition, or contrition, on the part of the sinner for the venial sins. While the sinner lacked habitual grace this cause lacked the necessary condition for its operation. By the infusion of habitual grace this cause was allowed to become operative. It should be noted that it is possible for the sinner to return to the state of habitual grace and to retain his attachment to his venial sins and thus to have none of them remitted. There is no necessary relation between venial sin and mortal sin, nor between venial sin and habitual grace. However, the presence of habitual grace is a necessary condition for the remission of venial sin.

" *Ibid.*, a. 2, in corp.: "Et ideo ad hoc quod peccatum veniale tollatur, non requiritur quod infundatur aliqua habitualis gratia, sed sufficit aliquis motus gratiae vel caritatis ad eius remissionem." Also: Galtier, *op. cit.*, no 550; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 458; Scotus, *In 4*, d. 21, q. 1, no. 1.

Every increase of sanctifying grace can, then, remit venial sin, It does this not of itself but mediately through the act of fervor which it arouses in the sinner. Thus Saint Thomas says:

Since, however, in all of those who have the use of free will, and it is these alone who can commit venial sin, an infusion of grace cannot happen without an actual motion of the free will with regard to God and to sin; therefore whenever there is a new infusion of grace venial sins are remitted.”

So the act of the penitent is the immediate cause of the remission of venial sin when there is an infusion of grace. There is no formal opposition between the infused grace and the venial sin so the grace would have no more effect on the venial sin than the venial sin had on the state of grace if it were not for the act of the will which is the result of the infusion of grace. Between this act and venial sin there is formal opposition, and so through this act venial sin can be remitted. This fact will be of great import when the remission of venial sin through the sacraments is discussed. For the sacraments confer sanctifying grace and they effect the remission of venial sin through the resultant act of fervor. So Billuart says:

I suppose, before all else, that neither the sacraments, nor the sacramentals, remit venial sin immediately, but only mediately through the act of virtual penance which they can arouse through their special aids And the reason for this is that since venial sin consists in neither a privation of grace or of charity, but of its aptitude for fervor, then the sacraments and the sacramentals cannot take venial sin away in any other way than by causing or obtaining supernatural aids by which man can elicit acts of fervent charity or penance, so that through these

“ *Ibid.*.

Quia tamen in habentibus usum liberi arbitrii, in quibus solis possunt esse venialia peccata, non contingit esse infusionem gratiae sine actuali motu liberi arbitrii in Deum et in peccatum; ideo quandocumque de novo gratia infunditur, peccata venialia remittuntur.

acts the venial sins will be formally or virtually retracted; for no privation can be eliminated save through the placing of an opposed form."

And in the same matter Merkelbach says:

Venial sin is remitted by the fervor of charity alone which includes a displeasure with the sin. Although many other causes are customarily listed; they can all be reduced to this one, since they are only means for the arousing of an act of fervor, and they do not immediately remit the sin, but only mediately through the act of virtual penance."

On this important matter both of these authors are but reflecting the teaching of Saint Thomas:

... through the fervor of charity venial sins are remitted; and so whatever can arouse the fervor of charity can cause the remission of venial sins."

And according to Saint Thomas no sacrament was instituted for the prime purpose of remitting venial sin for this same reason:

" Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 2, art. 2, no. 3:

Suppono ante omnia, neque sacramenta, neque sacramentalia, remittere peccata venialia immediate, sed mediante tantum actu virtualis poenitentiae, ad quem per auxilia specialia excitant --- Et ratio est, quia cum venialia consistant in privatione non gratiae et caritatis, sed eius fervoris habitatis, sacramenta et sacramentalia non possunt ea aliter tollere, quam causando seu obtinendo auxilia supematuralia quibus homo applicetur ad eliciendos actus ferventes caritatis vel poenitentiae, per quos peccata vel formaliter vel virtualiter retractantur; nulla enim privatio potest tolli nisi . per positionem formae oppositae.

" Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no 459:

Peccatum veniale remittitur solo fervore charitatis qui eius displicentiam includit. Quamvis multae aliae causae recenseri soleant; ad hanc unam reduci possunt, quia non sunt nisi media ad fervorem charitatis procurandum, ac non immediate remittunt sed mediante actu virtualis poenitentiae.

" De Malo, q. 7, a. 12, in *corp.*: ". . . , per fervorem caritatis peccata venialia remittuntur; ideo quaecumque nata sunt excitare fervorem caritatis possunt causare remissionem peccatorum venialium."

For the remission of venial sin an infusion of grace is not required. So, since in every sacrament of the New Law there is an infusion of grace, no sacrament of the New Law was instituted directly against venial sin, which can be removed by any of the sacramentals, for example by holy water and by others in the same manner."

The fact that venial sin is remitted mediately, that is, through the act of fervor which is aroused by the infusion of grace from the sacraments, does not mean that this effect is not a result of the sacramental action itself. Due to the nature of venial sin, which is compatible with sanctifying grace, and the nature of the sacraments, which were instituted to confer grace, the remission of venial sin in the sacraments must be mediate. The act of fervor, or virtual sorrow, which is a result of the conferred grace is the immediate cause of remission. Yet the act of fervor is an effect of the sacrament and so is the remission of the venial sin.

That this seems to make all of the sacraments alike in the remission of venial sin is a valid observation. Limiting the statement to what has been said, and to the remission of the guilt of venial sin, it is true. All sacraments are alike in the conferral of grace, and every conferral of grace results in the remission of venial sin." This matter will be discussed in full in the following chapter and the various opinions will be given on the role of the various sacraments in the remission of venial sin.

COMPARISON OF REMISSION OF MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

In order to set the remission of venial sin in clear relief it will be helpful to compare it with the remission of mortal sin. Be-

« S. T., 3, q. 65, a. 1, ad 8:

Dicendum quod ad deletionem venialis peccati non requiritur infusio gratiae. Unde cum in quolibet sacramento novae legis gratia infundatur, nullum sacramentum novae legis instituitur directe contra venialia, quod tollitur per quaedam sacramentalia, puta per aquam benedictam et alia huiusmodi.

“ Merkelbach, *of. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459, 1; See, for contrary opinion, Noldin-Schmitt, *of. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 244, b.

cause there is such a great difference between the natures of the two types of sin, their remission will also be very different. The basic difference is the presence of sanctifying grace. Venial sin cannot be remitted unless the sinner has habitual grace and so is capable of an act of fervent charity; whereas the presence of habitual grace itself is remissive of mortal sin. Mortal sin can be remitted immediately by the sacraments, and two of the sacraments have the remission of mortal sin as their principal effect. Venial sin can be remitted only mediately by the sacraments, and no sacrament was instituted for the primary purpose of remitting venial sin.

With regard to the act of penance itself, in the remission of mortal sin the motive for the act of penance is of prime importance. If the act is one of perfect contrition it will, of itself, remit all mortal sins. An act of attrition will remit mortal sin only with a sacrament. As for the venial sin, at least in the more common opinion," the act of penance can be either contrition or attrition. The act need only be a true act of penance, a true retraction of the will, for the remission of venial sin.

Every act of the fervor of charity is an act of virtual penance. In like manner, every act of attrition which is remissive of venial sin, and this demands the presence of sanctifying grace, is virtually an act of fervor of charity. Since venial sin involves no aversion from God, the act by which it is remitted need not be an act of conversion to God but rather an act of acceleration of the movement of the affections toward God. Now, since the act of venial sin is a diminution of the fervor of charity caused by an act of conversion to a created thing, the act of hatred and sorrow for this conversion, an act which reverses the movement of the will, involves an increase in the fervor of charity, and so is virtually an act of fervor. This is also evident in the fact that it is only an act of fervor which is formally opposed to venial sin, and so it is only through this act that venial sin is removed from the soul. Now attrition is sufficient for the removal of venial sin. So this act of attrition must be virtually an act of fervor to achieve its effect.

* See note no. 15 on this chapter for list of authors.

Venial sins are essentially conversions to created goods. They are as unrelated as are their objects. Unlike mortal sins which have an internal nexus in their common aversion from God and destruction of the principle of charity, they have no inner bond. So one venial sin can be remitted while others are not; whereas the remission of mortal sin requires the total remission of all mortal sins. Otherwise none are remitted.

The means to be used for the remission of mortal sin are clearly defined. After Baptism they can be limited to the Sacrament of Penance and an act of perfect contrition with a desire, at least implicit, for confession. Mortal sin may be remitted, *per accidens*, by the reception of a sacrament of the living with attrition and good faith. The means which is, *per se*, obligatory, is the Sacrament of Penance. Venial sins need not be confessed, and anything which can arouse an act of fervor in the venial sinner is an apt means for the remission of venial sin.

Since the state of mortal sin renders the sinner liable to everlasting punishment there is an obligation to repent for mortal sin. This obligation is an affirmative precept and as such it would bind at certain times, such as in danger of death or on the verge of perpetual insanity. There is no such obligation to repent for venial sin. Venial sin cannot cause the loss of everlasting happiness, nor can it lessen this reward, so there is no danger to salvation from non-repentance as there is in mortal sin. In fact, venial sin can be remitted after death, an element which demonstrates the absence of any obligation to repent at a particular time, and which also shows the great difference between mortal and venial sin.

REMISSION OF VENIAL SIN AFTER DEATH

The case in point is that of the soul which has habitual grace and passes from this life with unrepented venial sin on it. Now, venial sin does not deserve an everlasting punishment nor should it deprive the soul of everlasting happiness. However, the soul cannot enter heaven as long as it retains the guilt of sin. In some manner, then, this guilt must be remitted.

Here the theory of Scotus with regard to venial sin would answer the difficulty very nicely:

__venial sins are expiated in so far as their guilt is concerned, (if any soul of the just should remain guilty of venial sin), through the fire of Purgatory. For it seems to me that the remission of the guilt of venial sin is nothing else than the payment of the punishment due to it. For once the act has passed, the guilt which remains is nothing else than liability to a certain penalty: this guilt for venial sin is only for a temporal punishment . . . therefore when the penalty is fulfilled through the fire of Purgatory for venial sins, by this very fact the venial sins are remitted and entirely expiated as regards guilt."

In his *De Malo* Saint Thomas gives a different opinion:

And so it should be held that venial sins are remitted, even as to guilt, after this life, in the same manner in which they are remitted in this life; namely, through an act of charity towards God, an act opposed to the venial sin committed in this life."

These two solutions follow the views of their authors on the nature of venial sin. Following the opinion of Saint Thomas there is nothing to prevent the remission of venial sin in this manner. This is not an essential change in the condition of the deceased

" Scotiis, *In 4*, d. 21, q. 1, no. 6:

. . . per ignem Purgatorium expiari venialia (si quibus obnoxiae fuerint iustorum animae) quoad culpam. Nam mihi non aliud videtur esse culpae venialis dimissio et expiatio quam solutio poenae temporalis debitae illi. Post actum enim transeuntem, culpa quae manet nihil aliud est, nisi reatus ad poenam debitam: iste autem reatus venialis non est nisi ad poenam temporalem . . . igitur persoluta poena temporali per ignem Purgatorium pro venialibus, ex hoc ipsa venialia dimissa sunt atque penitus expiata quoad culpam.

See: De Lugo, *of. cit.*, disp. 9, sect. 2, no. 34.

" *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 12, in corp.: "Et ideo oportet dicere, quod venialia remittuntur eis post hanc vitam etiam quantum ad culpam eo modo quo remittuntur in hac vita; scilicet, per actum caritatis in Deum, repugnantem venialibus in hac vita commissis."

and it is not a meritorious act. There is no need of an infusion of grace, but simply an act of fervor coming from the habitual charity already possessed by the soul, an act which would be made in the first moment after death. This opinion is preferable as it retains the distinction between the guilt and the liability to punishment which comes from venial sin.

REMISSION OF THE TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT FOR VENIAL SIN

The matter of the temporal punishment due to venial sin has been separated from the treatment of the remission of the sin itself, as the guilt and the penalty are separate subjects. It is the guilt of sin which renders the sinner liable to punishment. Thus Saint Thomas:

Further, a just punishment may be inflicted either by God or by man; and hence the punishment itself is the effect of sin, not directly, but dispositively. Sin, however, makes man deserving of punishment, and that is an evil ... Consequently the debt of punishment is considered to be directly the effect of sin."

The liability to temporal punishment, which is the only type of punishment due for venial sin," can last after the guilt has been remitted. Thus:

When the stain is removed, the wound of sin is healed as regards the will. But punishment is still requisite in order that the other powers of the soul be healed, since they were disordered by the sin committed. In other words, the punishment is required so that the disorder may be remedied by the contrary of that which caused it. Moreover, punishment is required in order to restore

" *S. T.*, 1-2, q. 87, a. 1, ad 2:

Dicendum quod poena quidem iusta esse potest a Deo, et ab homine inflicta; unde ipsa poena non est effectus peccati directe, sed solum dispositiva. Sed peccatum facit hominem esse reum poenae quod est malum . . . Unde reatus poenae directe ponitur effectus peccati.

" *Ibid.*, a. 3, *in corp.*; and a. 5, *in corp.*

the equality of justice, and to remove the scandal given to others, so that those that were scandalized at the sin may be edified by the punishment..

This temporal punishment can be remitted with the guilt of sin. The same act by which the will turns from venial sin may gain remission of the temporal punishment. Now, while this can be so, and would often seem to be the case, especially when the venial sin is remitted by an intense act of fervor, or by contrition, or attrition based on high motives; there can be no certainty that the temporal punishment was remitted with the guilt of the sin. However, until the guilt of the sin is remitted, the temporal punishment cannot be remitted, for it is as a result of this guilt that there is liability to punishment and this effect will remain as long as the cause remains.

The remission of the temporal punishment due to venial sin which has been remitted is the same as the remission of the temporal punishment due to mortal sin which has been remitted. The same means can be used to achieve the remission of both. The reception of any of the sacraments with the consequent increase in grace is an act remissive of temporal punishment since it is a meritorious act. In particular the reception of the Sacrament of Penance is useful for this purpose, since through the sacramental satisfaction which is a part of this sacrament, temporal punishment is remitted in proportion to the dispositions of the recipient.

Apart from the sacraments any salutary act can be applied for the remission of this punishment.⁵¹ Such acts must be free, or freely accepted, they must be morally good, and the agent must be in the state of grace, and be in this life.

“ *Ibid.*, a. 6, ad 3:

Dicendum quod remota macula, sanatum est vulnus peccati quantum ad voluntatem. Requiritur autem adhuc poena ad sanationem aliarum virium animae, quae per peccatum praecedens deordinatae fuerunt; ut scilicet per contraria curentur. Requiritur etiam ad restituendam aequalitatem iustitiae, et ad amovendum scandalum aliorum, ut aedificentur in poena qui sunt scandalizati culpa ---

“ Council of Trent, r«r. 14, cap. 8, 9, de poen.; E. S., nos. 904, 905, 906.

In addition to the sacraments and good acts which depend entirely on the effort of the penitent for their effect, there are indulgenced acts. The concept of indulgence is concisely defined in the *Code of Canon Law*:

A remission, before God, of the temporal punishment due to sins already remitted with respect to their guilt, which the ecclesiastical authority, drawing from the treasure of the Church, grants to the living after the manner of absolution, and to the dead after the manner of suffrage.”

\ These indulgences, then, are an application, in payment for the temporal punishment due to this penitent, of some of the satisfactions which belong to the spiritual treasury of the Church. These indulgences are usually attached by the Church to some good act. This act, then, becomes the condition on which the application of the indulgence depends. The stated requirements for the indulgence must be strictly fulfilled. These indulgences are granted in virtue of the jurisdiction of the church, and since this jurisdiction does not extend to the dead, indulgences can be applied to them only after the manner of a suffrage, or request.^

In the life after death, the temporal punishment due to sin is fulfilled in Purgatory.” Here, by the willing endurance of the expiatory suffering imposed by God, the soul atones for the temporal punishment which was not remitted during this time on earth. No merit can be gained by this suffering as the time of merit ended with death. The souls which are in this state of suffering can be helped by the prayers and actions of those who are still on earth and by the indulgences gained by them and applied for the souls in Purgatory.

In summary of the discussion thus far, it can be stated that the remissive act consists in the retraction of the will from the sinful

“ *Codex Iuris Canonici*, Canon no. 911:

Omnes magni faciant indulgentias seu remissionem coram Deo poenae temporalis debitae pro peccatis, ad culpam quod attinet iam deletis, quam ecclesiastica auctoritas ex thesauro Ecclesiae concedit pro vivis per modum absolutionis, pro defunctis per modum suffragii.

" Council of Trent, *sess. 25, Decretum de purgatorio*; *E. S.*, no. 983.

motion and the recovery thereby of the lost act of the fervor of charity. This act of the will, since it is an act of virtual penance, must have a supernatural motivation. No infusion of sanctifying grace is necessary for the remission of venial sin, but as a result of every infusion of grace there is an act of fervor which can be remissive of venial sin, so that every infusion of grace can effect a remission of venial sin. Since there is no formal opposition between grace and venial sin, it follows that the sacraments, which were instituted to confer grace, were not instituted for the prime purpose of remitting venial sins. This applies to the sacraments in general and to each sacrament in particular. However, since each sacrament confers grace, and as a result of the infusion of grace venial sin can be remitted, then every sacrament *can* effect the remission of venial sin. And as all the sacraments are alike in the conferral of grace, all are alike in the remission of the guilt of venial sin, although some may have special efficacy for the remission of the temporal punishment, and by their sacramental grace give a special aid for the prevention of a recurrence of sin and the prevention of more serious sin.

The role of the sacraments and the other means which are available for the remission of venial sin will be treated in the next chapter. It is as a basis for this that the precise object to be achieved by these means, the act of the penitent by which his sin is remitted, has been sought out. With this object in view, it is possible to judge the effectiveness of the various means and their relative importance for the remission of venial sin.

CHAPTER HI

REMEDIES FOR VENIAL SIN

The Council of Trent has this statement on the remission of venial sin:

As for venial sins, those sins by which we are not cut off from the grace of God, and into which we fall more frequently; now while rightly, and profitably, and without any presumption, these can be told in confession, as is evident from the practice of pious individuals; it is also possible not to mention them in confession without any blame, and to atone for them by the use of many other remedies.¹

It is from this passage that the division of the matter for this section on the remedies for venial sin has been taken. The "many other remedies" will be treated first. In these are included extra-sacramental means and all of the sacraments with the exception of Penance. Then Penance, because of its special power and its special problems with regard to venial sin, will be treated separately.

Preliminary to the discussion of individual remedies and the role they play in the remission of venial sin, it would be well in summary fashion to consider the role of all remedies for venial sin in general. As has been seen above,² the purpose of any remedy for venial sin is to assist the sinner in eliciting an act of fervor. This act of fervor is the only entity which is formally opposed to venial sin, and as such it is immediately remissive of

¹ Council of Trent, *Sessio 14, Cap. 5, de confessione; E. S. no. 899.*

Nam venialia, quibus a gratia Dei non excludimur et in quae frequentius labimur, quamquam recte et utiliter citraque omnem praesumptionem in confessione dicantur, quod piorum hominum usus demonstrat: taceri tamen citra culpam multisque aliis remediis expiari possunt.

² Chapter 2; see also: Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 460.

venial sin. All of the other means which effect the remission of venial sin, then, do so mediately,' that is, through the medium of an act of fervor. Now, it is possible for the sinner to elicit an act of fervor without recourse to any remedy, and in such a case the venial sin would be remitted without any dependence upon an external remedy. So, just as the sinner is free to choose any remedy from the many others which are available, he is also free to use one of these remedies or not.

In considering these remedies it should be remembered that there is no one which was instituted principally for the purpose of remitting venial sin.' This point will be treated below especially with regard to the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. Also, any thing, or act, which aids the sinner to elicit an act of fervor can be considered a means for the remission of venial sin, although all such means are certainly not equal in efficacy.

"MULTISQUE ALIIS REMEDIIS"

SACRAMENTAL MEANS FOR THE REMISSION
OF VENIAL SIN

In the opinion of Saint Thomas all of the sacraments remit venial sin. Thus:

And so there are three ways in which the remission of venial sin can be caused. The first way is through the infusion of grace, since through the infusion of grace venial sin is taken away, as was stated above. [And so for the remission of venial sin an infusion of habitual grace is not required, but any motion of grace or charity will suffice for their remission. Since, however, in those who

- Chapter 2, p. 59; see also: Billuart, *op. cit.*, *Diss. 2, art. 2*, no. 3; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459; Doronzo, Emmanuel, O.M.I., *De Eucharistia* (Bruce, Milwaukee, 1947) vol. 1, p. 468; Saint Thomas, *S. T.*, 3, q. 87, a. 3, ad 1; q. 65, a. 1, ad 8; *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 8, *in corp.*; Saint Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences*, dist. 23, a. 1, q. 2.
- 4 Saint Thomas, *S. T.*, 3, q. 65, a. 1, ad 8; Suarez, *Disp. 22, sect. 8*, a. 1.

have the use of reason, and these alone can be guilty of venial sin, there cannot be an infusion of grace without a motion of the free will with reference to God and to sin; therefore whenever there is a new infusion of grace, venial sins are remitted. *S.T. 3, q. 87, a. 2, corp.*] And in this manner venial sins are remitted through the Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, and universally through all of the sacraments of the New Law in which grace is conferred.⁶

While this opinion of Saint Thomas is, in the words of Cappello, "*valde probabilis*" both from the authority of Saint Thomas and the reasoning on which it is based, the note of certain with regard to the remission of venial sins is reserved for Baptism, Penance, Extreme Unction, and the Eucharist. The remaining three sacraments are not mentioned in authoritative statements as having this power, nor is such a power necessary for the fulfillment of their established ends. Thus Lugo; "With regard to the other three sacraments, Confirmation, Orders, and Matrimony, there is a major difficulty; as it is not clear how, from their institution and their signification they have received the

⁶ Saint Thomas, *S. T.*, 3, q. 87, a. 3, *in corp.*.

Et ideo triplici ratione aliqua causant remissionem venialium peccatorum. Uno modo, inquantum in eis infunditur gratia, quia per infusionem gratiae tolluntur venialia peccata, ut supra dictum est. [Et ideo ad hoc quod peccatum veniale tollatur, non requiritur quod infundatur aliqua habitualis gratia, sed sufficit aliquis motus gratiae vel caritatis ad eius remissionem. Quia tamen in habentibus usum liberi arbitrii, in quibus solis possunt esse venialia peccata, non contingit esse infusionem gratiae sine actuali motu liberi arbitrii in Deum et in peccatum; ideo quandocumque de novo gratia infunditur, peccata venialia remittuntur. *S. T.*, 3 q) 87, a. 2, *in corp.*] Et hoc modo per Eucharistiam et extremam unctionem, et universaliter per omnia sacramenta novae legis, in quibus confertur gratia, peccata venialia remittuntur.

* Cappello, Felix, S.J., *De Sacramentis* (ed. 5, Marietti, Rome, 1947) vol. 2, no. 96. See also: Merkelbach *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459; Heylen, V., *De Poenitentia* (ed. 8, Dessain, Mechlin, 1946) p. 27; Fanfani, Ludovicus, O.P., *Manuale Theorico-Practicum Theologiae Moralis* (ed. 1, Ferrari, Rome, 1950) vol. 1, no. 334; Gonzalez, S., S.J., *De Poenitentia*, no. 157, in *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, vol. 4 (B.A.C., Madrid, 1953).

power to remit venial sins.” In this same passage Lugo grants the fact that the opinion of Saint Thomas is commonly held by theologians.

For particular consideration here the Sacraments of Extreme Unction and Eucharist will be of importance, and they will be treated separately and in that order. The Sacrament of Baptism offers no special problem. It has a special efficacy with regard to the remission of venial as well as mortal sins. In the *Decree for the Armenians* this effect is mentioned; “The effect of this sacrament is the remission of the entire guilt of both original and actual sin, and of all the penalties which, are due because of this guilt.” So, not only the venial sins themselves, but also the temporal punishments which are their due, are remitted in full by this sacrament. In the reception of this sacrament the infusion of sanctifying grace would have to *precede* the remission of venial sins. The act of fervor consequent upon this infusion would achieve the remission of venial sins. This remission is still an effect which flows from the intrinsic power of the sacrament.’ The infusion of sanctifying grace is an effect of this sacrament and this infusion, in turn, arouses the act of fervor which is opposed to venial sin. So the sacrament causes the remission of venial sin, and does this from its own power, even though it achieves this effect mediately.” This remission of venial sin in Baptism, as in all other cases, requires the presence of sorrow on the part of the sinner. If the sinner adheres to and continues in his venial sin, it is not remitted. This continuance in venial sin would not be an impediment to the sacrament. It would not prevent the infusion of sanctifying grace. The only effect, apart from the reception of a

⁹ De Lugo, John, S.J., *Disputationes Scholasticae et Morales* (ed. nov., Vives, Paris, 1892) vol. 4, *De Poen.*, disp. 9, sec. 3, no. 48:

De aliis tribus sacramentis, confirmatione, ordine, et matrimonio est major difficultas; quia non apparet, quomodo ex eorum institutione, et significatione colligatur iste effectus tollendi venialia.

⁹ Council of Florence, *Decree for the Armenians*, E. S., no. 696:

Huius sacramenti effectus est remissio omnis culpae originalis et actualis, omnis quoque poenae, quae pro ipsa culpa debetur.

• That is, *ex opere operato*.

¹⁰ See Billuart, *op. cit.*, Diss. 2, a. 2, no. 3.

smaller measure of grace because of the less than perfect disposition of the recipient, is the non-remission of the venial sin. The incidental question arises as to how this sin will be remitted. Certainly this sin committed before Baptism is not matter for the Sacrament of Penance. It would seem, then, that this sin can be remitted by any means save Penance. Its remission could be effected through an act of fervor, or even through the reviviscence, *secundum quid*, of the Sacrament of Baptism.

EXTREME UNCTION AS A REMEDY FOR VENIAL SIN

Furthermore, the thing signified and the effect of this sacrament are explained in these words: "And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him." (*James 5:15*) For the thing signified is the grace of the Holy Spirit, whose anointing wipes away sins, if there be any to be expiated, and the remains of sin, and relieves and strengthens the soul of the sick person by exciting in him great confidence in divine mercy, supported by which the sick person bears more lightly the miseries and pains of his illness, and resists more easily the temptations of the evil spirit who "lies in wait for his heel" (*Gen. 3:15*), and sometimes attains bodily health, when it is expedient for the salvation of the soul.¹¹

This chapter from the Council of Trent sums up the effects of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. Important to our consideration is the certainty that this sacrament can remit sin. This effect

¹¹ Council of Trent, *Sess. 14, De sacramento extremæ unctionis, caf. 2, E. S., 909:*

Res porro et effectus huius sacramenti illis verbis explicatur: 'Et oratio fidei salvabit infirmum, et alleviabit eum Dominus; et, si in peccatis sit, dimittentur ei? (*James 5:15*) Res etenim hæc gratia est Spiritus Sancti, cuius unctio delicta, si quæ sint adhuc expianda, ac peccati reliquias abstergit, et aegroti animam alleviat et confirmat, magnam in eo divinæ misericordiæ fiduciam excitando, qua infirmus sublevatur et morbi incommoda ac laboris levius fert, et tentationibus daemones 'calcaneo insidiantis' (*Gen. 3:15*) *facilius* resistit, et sanitatem corporis interdum, ubi salutis animæ expedit, consequitur.

is mentioned in the text of the Epistle of James which refers to this sacrament and in the Council of Trent, both in the quoted chapter and in the canons on this sacrament which declare anathema those who deny this effect of the sacrament.¹³ Now, for our present purpose this power to remit sin is of interest with regard to venial sin.

In his discussion of this sacrament Saint Thomas has this passage:

There are some who hold that this sacrament was instituted principally for the remission of venial sin; because it is impossible, as long as this life is being lived, for one to be perfectly free from such sins; and so this sacrament of the dying is specially established to free from venial sin. But this does not seem to be true. Indeed penance suffices, even during life, for the remission of the guilt of venial sin. The fact that venial sin cannot be avoided after the act of penance, does not take away the effect of the preceding act of penance.”

Saint Thomas has reference here to the Franciscan school in general, for their opinion on the spiritual effect of this sacrament was that it was intended primarily for the final remission of venial sins. In this opinion they were following the view of Saint Bonaventure in his *Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences*.

“Extreme Unction is principally for the cure and alleviation of spiritual infirmity, namely, venial sin, and secondarily for the cure and alleviation of bodily infirmity.”¹⁴ Now, Saint Bonaventure

¹³ *Epistle of Saint James 5:15; E. S., no. 909, and no. 927.*

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Suffi.*, q. 30, a. 1, in *corp.*.

Quidam vero dicunt quod principaliter est institutum contra veniale; quod quidem non potest, dum haec vita agitur, perfecte curari; et ideo sacramentum exeuntium specialiter contra veniale ordinatur. Sed hoc non videtur verum. Quia poenitentia sufficienter, etiam in vita, delet venialia quoad culpam. Quod autem non potest evitari post peractam poenitentiam, non aufert praecedenti poenitentiae suum effectum.

¹⁴ Saint Bonaventure, *of. cit.*, *In 4*, dist. 23, a. 1, q. 1:

Extrema unctio principaliter est ad curationem et alleviationem infirmitatis spiritualis, scilicet, peccati venialis, et per accidens ad curationem et alleviationem infirmitatis corporalis.

admits the fact that every sacrament has as an effect the remission of venial sin, but the point of his opinion is that at the time of death there is a special situation, as this will be the end of the commission of venial sins. Thus he says; "However, it should be noted that venial sin can be considered in two ways, either as it is on the soul of the sinner while living his life, or as it is on the soul of the sinner at the moment of death."¹ It is for venial sin in this second case that the sacrament was intended, so that the soul will be cleared of the obstacles which would retard it from the enjoyment of glory. The manner in which Extreme Unction achieves this effect is, according to Saint Bonaventure, mediate, or through the devotion and acts of fervor which it arouses in the soul." This is in accordance with his view on the manner in which the sacraments generally remit venial sin. Thus he states: "All of these means, whether sacraments or sacramentals, achieve the remission of venial sin not through their own proper nature, but rather through their common nature through which they can aid and invigorate sanctifying grace to this act."¹ Scotus follows the opinion of Saint Bonaventure and holds the view that the principal effect of this sacrament is the remission of venial sin:

It is fitting that when one is about to depart from this life he should be finally absolved from venial sins, since these sins, if they were not remitted, would be an impediment to the attainment of glory, and they can-

¹³ *Saint Bonaventure, Ibid:*

Sed notandum quod de veniali peccato est loqui dupliciter, aut prout est quis in statu viae, aut prout est in egressu.

¹⁴ *Ibid., concii. 2:*

Modus autem curandi veniale peccatum in hoc sacramento respondet modo infirmitatis. Veniale autem peccatum gravat animam deprimendo, ut non ita intendat in Deum per devotionem et amorem, pro eo quod est ibi conversio inordinata ad commutabile bonum, et pro eo quod est ibi amor minor Dei, et ideo cum curatio directe sit per contrarium, per illud curatur, quod animam aggravatam per devotionem sursum elevat.

¹⁷ *Ibid., q. 2:*

Omnia illa sive sacramenta sive sacramentalia faciunt ad venialium deletionem non per propriam naturam, sed per eam naturam, qua gratiam gratum facientem ad hunc actum adjuvant et vigorant.

not be remitted until the moment of death, as the sinner, as it were, almost continually commits such sins. This is indeed true. It is proven from the very text of *James 5*: 'If he be in sin, they will be forgiven him.' This is not intended with reference to mortal sins, since these are remitted only in Baptism and Penance, so it must refer to venial sins."

The teaching of these two gives the main stream of the teaching of the Franciscan school to which Saint Thomas voiced his objection. It now remains to see what his teaching is on the relation of Extreme Unction to the remission of venial sin.

Each sacrament is principally instituted for one effect, although it may happen that other effects follow as consequences. And since the sacrament effects what it signifies, from its signification the principal effect of a sacrament should be taken. This sacrament is applied after the manner of a medication, just as Baptism is after the manner of an ablution. Medicine, however, is for the removal of sickness. So this sacrament was instituted principally for the curing of the infirmity or weakness of sin; so, just as Baptism is a spiritual regeneration, and Penance a spiritual resurrection, so also Extreme Unction is a spiritual healing or medication."

¹⁷ Scotus, *In 4*, dist. 2J, q. 1, no. 2:

Congruum est recessurum, scilicet, ab hac vita finaliter a venialibus absolvi quia ista non remissa essent impedimentum gloriae consequendae, et non remissa possunt esse usque ad exitum, quia peccator quasi continue peccat talibus peccatis. Hoc etiam factum est. Probatum ex illo verbo Jac. 5:15: 'Si in peccatis est, remittentur ei.' Non intelligit de mortalibus, quia haec non remittuntur nisi in baptismo vel poenitentia, ergo de venialibus.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Suppi.*, q. 30, a. 1, *in corp.*:

Dicendum quod quodlibet sacramentum est institutum principaliter ad unum effectum, quamvis etiam alios ex consequenti inducere possit. Et quia sacramentum efficit quod figurat, ideo ex ipsa significatione sacramenti debet accipi eius principalis effectus. Adhibetur autem hoc sacramentum secundum modum cuiusdam medicationis, sicut baptismus per modum ablutionis. Medicina autem est ad pellendum infirmitatem. Unde principaliter hoc sacramentum est institutum ad sanandum infirmitatem pec-

So the principal effect of this sacrament, in the mind of Saint Thomas, is the removal of the consequences of sin. Still the sacrament has the power to remit sin: "But since this sacrament gives an added strength to grace, which is not compatible with sin, as a consequence of this, if there be any sin present, whether mortal or venial, as long as the recipient places no impediment in the way, it will be remitted even as regards guilt;"* This effect will not always take place as there will not always be sin on the soul of the recipient. Yet, this effect is directly from the sacrament, even though it is a secondary effect. Then, Extreme Unction does remit venial sin, and it seems with a special efficacy. And in accord with the general teaching of Saint Thomas this effect will be achieved mediately through the arousing of an act of fervor which will be formally opposed to venial sin. So he states in this same question:

Although the guilt of sin, in so far as it is a stain, cannot be taken away without contrition, nevertheless, this sacrament, through the grace which it pours into the soul, effects that the act of free will towards sin is contrition, as likewise could happen in the Eucharist and in Confirmation."

In this mention of sin Saint Thomas does not distinguish mortal or venial. This process would certainly be effective in the case of venial sin, so, in view of his general treatment of the remission of venial sin and his explicit reference which was quoted

cati; ut, sicut baptismus est quaedam spiritualis regeneratio, et poenitentia quaedam spiritualis suscitatio, ita et extrema unctio est quaedam spiritualis sanatio vel medicatio.

" Ibid..

Sed quia hoc robur gratia facit, quae secum non compatitur peccatum, ideo ex consequenti, si invenit peccatum aliquod, vel mortale vel veniale, quoad culpam, tollit ipsum, dummodo non ponatur obex ex parte recipientis; ---

" Ibid., ad 2:

Quamvis enim culpa quoad maculam sine contritione non dimittatur, tamen hoc sacramentum per gratiam quam infundit, facit quod ille motus liberi arbitrii in peccatum sit contritio, sicut etiam in Eucharistia et confirmatione potest accidere.

above” in full, it can be concluded that Saint Thomas holds that Extreme Unction remits venial sin and that it remits it mediately though through its own intrinsic power.”

The opinion of Saint Thomas appears to be the better one. He avoids the danger of eliminating the effect of the sacrament on the bodily health of the recipient, a danger into which Scotus fell, and the difficulty of withholding the reception of the sacrament until the instant of death so that no more venial sins could be committed. He has a strong reason, in the compatibility of grace and venial sin, behind his statement that no sacrament was instituted principally for the remission of venial sin, as all of these were instituted to give grace. His opinion retains the fittingness of the sacrament as a means for the final remission of venial sin, as he holds that the sacrament does remit sin even though he denies that this is its principal effect. That this sacrament remits venial sin mediately does not mean that it does not do so of its own intrinsic power. This sacrament pours grace into the soul and there is no formal opposition between grace and venial sin. This infusion of grace effects an act of fervor and between this act of fervor and venial sin there *is* formal opposition, so through this means which is caused by the power and action of the sacrament, the venial sin is remitted. If immediate remission is to be held, there must be some formal opposition shown between the grace given and venial sin, and this is a difficult task. The view of Saint Thomas is simple and reasonable.”

RECEPTION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST AS A MEANS FOR THE REMISSION OF VENIAL SIN

In treating the reasons for the institution of this sacrament, the Council of Trent mentions the remission of venial sins:

Moreover, He wished that this sacrament be received as the spiritual food of souls (*Matt. 26:26*), by which

” Chapter 3, Note 19.

“ See note 3, Chapter 3.

” See: Kem, Joseph, S.J., *De Sacramento Extremae Unctionis* (Pustet, Ratisbon. 1907) P. 186, for summary of views on manner of remission.

they may be nourished and strengthened, living by the life of Him who said: 'He who eateth me, the same also shall live by me.' (*John 6:58*), and as an antidote, whereby we may be freed from daily faults and be preserved from mortal sins.²⁵

The choice of verbs in this passage is significant. With regard to daily faults, a traditional term for venial sins, the Eucharist grants freedom, or remission, however, with regard to mortal sin, this sacrament, primarily, is intended as a preventive means, an aid in the avoidance of mortal sin. In the *Roman Catechism* the remissive power of the Eucharist with regard to venial sins is clearly stated: "Indeed, the fact that those light sins which are usually called venial are remitted and forgiven through the Eucharist, must not be doubted."²⁵ That this sacrament had the power to remit venial sins has been the constant and traditional teaching of the church, and the statement of the Council of Trent confirms this as the traditional opinion. All of the authors had treated this power in their works on the Eucharist, and with regard to the existence of this power they were in agreement. In their treatment of the manner in which this power achieves its effect, however, there was a difference of opinion. The problem centers on this question, does the Eucharist remit venial sin immediately or mediately through the act of fervor which is consequent upon the infusion of grace which is conferred by the sacrament? Both opinions are tenable, so in our consideration of the problem the view of Saint Thomas will be given first, both as a guide to the problem and as the solution of the problem.

The teaching of Saint Thomas on the remission of venial sin is that the remission is mediately achieved through the act of the

²⁵ Council of Trent, *Sessio 13, de Eucharistia, cap. 2; E.S.*, no. 875:

Sumi autem voluit sacramentum hoc tamquam spirituales animarum cibum (Mt. 26:26), quo alantur et confortentur, viventes vita illius, qui dixit: 'Qui manducat me, et ipse vivet propter me.' (*John 6:58*), et tamquam antidotum, quo liberemur a culpis quotidianis et a peccatis mortalibus praeservemur.

Roman Catechism, Part 2, Chap. 4, no. 52:

Remitti vero Eucharistia et condonari leviora peccata quae venialia dici solent non est quod dubitari debeat.

fervor of charity, as this is the entity to which venial sin is formally opposed.²¹ This act of fervor can be caused in several ways:

I answer that as it was stated above venial sins are remitted through the fervor of charity; and so whatever can arouse the fervor of charity can cause the remission of venial sins. Now, the act of charity is proper to the will; and the will can be inclined towards something in three ways: at times this will be the demonstration of something by the reason alone; at times, however, this inclination may come from the reason and at the same time from another interior incitement, which is from a superior cause, namely God; and at times with this, also from the tendency of an inhering habit.

There are some things which cause the remission of venial sins in so far as they incline the will to a fervent act of charity in all three of the aforementioned ways; and it is this way that venial sins are remitted by the sacraments of the New Law: since the intellect considers them as a salutary medicine, and the divine power contained in them acts secretly to assure salvation, and also through the sacraments is conferred the gift of habitual grace.²⁸

²⁷ *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 11, *in corp.*; a. 12, *in corp.*; *S. T.*, 3, q. 87, a. 2, *in corp.*; a. 3, *in corp.*

²⁵ *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 12, *in corp.*; "sicut supra dictum" refers to q. 7, a. 11, *corp.*:

Dicendum quod sicut supra dictum est per fervorem caritatis peccata venialia remittuntur; et ideo quaecumque nata sunt excitare fervorem caritatis possunt causare remissionem peccatorum venialium. Actus autem caritatis ad voluntatem pertinet; quae quidem tripliciter ad aliquid inclinatur: aliquando quidem ex sola ratione aliquid demonstrante; aliquando autem ex ratione simul et aliquo interiori instinctu, qui est a causa superiori, scilicet Deo; aliquando autem cum hoc etiam ex inclinatione habitus inhaerentis.

Sunt quidem quaedam quae causant remissionem peccati venialis in quantum inclinant voluntatem ad ferventem caritatis actum secundum tria praedicta; et sic per sacramenta novae legis venialia peccata remittuntur: quia et ratio ea considerat ut quasdam salutare medicinas, et divina virtus in eis secretius operatur salutem, et etiam per ea confertur habitualis gratiae donum.

Thus the sacraments achieve the effect of remitting venial sins, in the above passage from Saint Thomas, through the medium of an act of fervor which they cause through their intrinsic power. Note that Saint Thomas speaks of the sacraments in general. He makes no special mention of the Eucharist, and so, from this passage it seems that the Eucharist achieves this effect in the same manner as the other sacraments. This implication is present in many statements of Saint Thomas. For example:

There are three ways in which anything can cause the remission of venial sins: One manner is in so far as the thing causes an infusion of grace, as venial sins are taken away through an infusion of grace. And it is in this manner that venial sins are remitted through the Eucharist and Extreme Unction, and universally through all of the sacraments of the new law, in which grace is conferred."

Worthy of note in this passage is the equality of all of the sacraments with regard to the manner in which venial sins are remitted. This does not necessarily imply that all of the sacraments have the same efficacy for the remission of venial sins. For example, the Sacrament of Baptism would remit all of the temporal punishment due to venial sin, while this effect could not be expected from the Sacrament of Matrimony. However, this statement *does* imply that all of the sacraments are equal in their basic ability to remit venial sins. This remission would result from the very fact that all of the sacraments confer grace and it would be effected in the same manner in all of the sacraments. It is significant that Saint Thomas places emphasis on the similarity in the manner of remission of venial sin by Extreme Unction and by the Eucharist. This should be borne in mind as we consider the following statement by Saint Thomas:

" S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 3, *in corp.*:

Et ideo triplici ratione aliqua causant remissionem venialium peccatorum. Uno modo, inquantum in eis infunditur gratia, quia per infusionem gratiae tolluntur venialia peccata, ut supra (art. 2. corp.) dictum est. Et hoc modo per Eucharistiam et extremam unctionem, et universaliter per omnia sacramenta novae legis, in quibus confertur gratia, peccata venialia remittuntur.

I answer that in this sacrament there are two elements which should be considered: the sacrament itself and the thing signified by the sacrament. And from both it is apparent that this sacrament has the power to remit venial sin. For this sacrament is received under the species of nourishing food. The nourishment of food is necessary for the body to restore that which it daily loses through the activity of natural heat. Spiritually also, something is daily lost in us by the heat of concupiscence through the commission of venial sins, which diminish the fervor of charity, as was held in the *Second Part*, [IIa IIae, q.24, a.10; q.54, a.3] And so it is that this sacrament has the power to remit venial sins. As Ambrose says in his book *De Sacramentis*, [Lib.5, Cap. 4; M.L.16,472] that this daily bread is taken as a remedy for our daily infirmities. Furthermore, the thing signified by this sacrament is charity, not only in so far as it is a habit, but also in so far as it is an act which is aroused in this sacrament, and through which venial sins are remitted. So it is evident that venial sins are remitted through the power of this sacrament."

This statement with reference to the effect of this sacrament being charity as an act as well as a habit, and the remark that

" S. T., 3, q. 79, a. 4, corp.:

Dicendum quod in hoc sacramento duo possunt considerari: scilicet ipsum sacramentum, et res sacramenti. Et ex utroque apparet quod hoc sacramentum habet virtutem ad remissionem venialium peccatorum. Nam hoc sacramentum sumitur sub specie cibi nutrientis. Nutrimentum autem cibi est necessarium corpori ad restaurandum id quod quotidie deperditur per actionem caloris naturalis. Spiritualiter autem quotidie aliquid in nobis deperditur ex calore concupiscentiae per peccata venialia, quae diminuunt fervorem caritatis, ut in Secunda Parte [IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 10; q. 54, a. 3] habitum est. Et ideo competit huic sacramento ut remittat peccata venialia. Unde et Ambrosius dicit in libro *De Sacramentis*, quod iste panis quotidianus sumitur in remedium quotidianae infirmitatis. Res autem huius sacramenti est caritas, non solum quantum ad habitum, sed etiam quantum ad actum, qui excitatur in hoc sacramento, per quod peccata venialia solvuntur. Unde manifestum est quod virtute huius sacramenti remittuntur venialia peccata.

this act would be remissive of venial sin, has been taken by some to mean that the Eucharist has the power of remitting venial sin immediately. This is difficult to see. Saint Thomas in this very passage points out the direct effect of the sacrament as an act of charity, and it is through this medium, this act of charity, that the venial sin is to be remitted. This is still mediate remission of the sin. Furthermore, in the passage previously cited³¹ Saint Thomas states that all of the sacraments, and he specifically lists the Eucharist, act in the same manner to remit venial sin, that is, mediately, or through the aroused act of fervor.

In favor of the mediate remission of venial sin through the Eucharist many authors can be quoted:

Billuart: I suppose before all, that neither the sacraments nor the sacramentals remit venial sins immediately, but only through the medium of an act of virtual penance, to which the sinner is aroused through special aids ..

Van Noort: Hence the Eucharist is called by the Council of Trent, 'an antidote, by which we are freed from our daily faults'. However, the Eucharist achieves this effect in this manner; it arouses fervent acts of charity, which are, indeed, directly opposed to venial sins and to tepidity."

Merkelbach: Those venial sins to which the recipient is not adhering in his desires the Eucharist remits directly. For these are directly opposed to the prime end

³¹ S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 3, in corp.

“ *Billuart, op. cit., Diss. 3, a. 2, no. 3:*

Suppono ante omnia, neque sacramenta neque sacramentalia remittere peccata venialia immediate, sed mediante tantum actu virtualis poenitentiae, ad quem per auxilia specialia excitant . . .

“ *Van Noort, G., Tractatus De Sacramentis (Van Langenhuysen, Amsteldam, 1910) vol. 1, no. 407:*

Hinc Eucharistia a conc. trid. vocatur, 'antidotum, quo liberamur a culpis quotidianis'. Hunc autem effectum Eucharistia operatur eo, quod excitat fervidos actus charitatis, quippe qui culpis venialibus et tepiditati directe opponuntur.

of this sacrament, namely, the fervor of charity. So this sacrament remits them in so far as it arouses the recipient to such acts of charity as at least implicitly and virtually include a hatred for venial sin."

Aertnys-Damen: The effects of the Eucharist on the soul of the recipient are: . . . The remission of venial sins, according to Trent, Session 13, Chapter 2, which calls this Sacrament the 'antidote by which we are freed from our daily faults, and by which we are preserved from mortal sins'. It confers this remission, not immediately, as many hold, but in so far as it arouses an explicit or implicit act of hatred for venial sins; and especially by arousing fervent acts of charity, for there is contained in these acts, by reason of their fervor an implied hatred of venial sin."

Prümmer. The reason for the remission of venial sins by the Eucharist is the increased fervor of charity, and this comes not only *ex opere operantis* but also *ex opere operato*, that is from the power of the sacrament itself. For venial sin and the fervor of charity are mutually exclusive."

“ Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 263:

Venialia quibus homo non adhaeret affectu, Eucharistia remittit directe. Directe enim opponuntur effectui primario sacramenti, scilicet fervori charitatis. Unde illa remittit quatenus excitat tales actus charitatis qui saltem implicite et virtualiter includunt venialium displicentiam.

“ Aertnys-Damen, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, no. 102:

Effectus Eucharistiae in anima sunt: --- 4. Remissio peccatorum venialium, secundum Trid. sess. 13, cap. 2, quod vocat Sacramentum hoc 'antidotum quo liberemur a culpis quotidianis et a peccatis mortalibus praeservemur'. Confert remissionem illam, non immediate, ut plures volunt, sed quatenus excitat actum displicentiae explicitum vel implicitum peccatorum venialium; praesertim excitando actus fervidos charitatis, in quibus ratione fervoris iam implicita displicentia peccatorum venialium continetur.

” Prümmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 182:

Ratio cur eucharistia deleat peccata venialia, est fervor caritatis auctus, et quidem non solum ex opere operantis, sed etiam ex opere operato, id est vi ipsius sacramenti. Peccatum enim veniale et fervor caritatis se invicem destruant.

Remedies for Venial Sin

Doranzo: The theologians dispute whether the Eucharist remits venial sins immediately or only mediately as through the medium of an act of charity. It seems that the Eucharist remits them through the medium of an act of charity, for, as was shown in the tract *De Poenitentia*, it is only through an act of charity, as through a contrary, that venial sin can be removed; and nevertheless the fact is that the Eucharist through its own action and nature remits venial sin, both in so far as it is unitive to Christ through the production of charity, not only as a habit but also as an act, and by this venial sin would be remitted, and in so far as it is a food which is reparative of spiritual powers, so that, it is true that if the sacrament were not otherwise productive of an act of charity, from this fact, that it is reparative, it should produce such an act, so that through it venial sins would be removed.

From this can be seen the difference between the manner in which venial sins are remitted through any infusion of grace, and consequently through the reception of any sacrament, [see *S.T.*, 3.q.87s a.2 and 5] and the manner in which the Eucharist remits the punishment due to sin; for these two effects are achieved indirectly and as a consequence, while the Eucharist remits venial sins *per se* and through itself."

K Doranzo, Emmanuel, *De Eucharistia* (Milwaukee, Bruce, 1947)
vol. 1, p. 468:

Disputant theologi utrum Eucharistia peccata venialia remittat immediate an tantum mediate seu mediante actu charitatis. Dicendum videtur quod Eucharistia ea remittat mediante actu charitatis, nam, ut probatur in tractatu *De Poenitentia*, tantummodo per actum charitatis, tanquam per contrarium, peccatum veniale auferri potest; et tamen cum hoc stat quod Eucharistia ea remittit mediante actu charitatis, nam, ut probatur in unitiva Christo per productionem charitatis non tantum secundum habitum sed etiam secundum actum, quo venialia destruuntur, tum quatenus est cibatio reparativa virium spiritualium, ita nempe quod si aliunde non esset productiva actus caritatis, ex hoc ipso quod sit reparativa deberet illum producere ad hoc ut ad ipsum peccata venialia destruantur.

Ex quo intelligitur discrimen tum cum modo quo peccata venialia re-

*Connell: The remission of venial sin and of the temporal punishment due to sin. This effect would seem to be only indirect—that is, through the acts of charity aroused by this sacrament venial sins are remitted if there is contained in these acts at least a virtual hatred for these sins.*⁸⁸

Some authors, such as Cappello and Lehmkühl,³⁰ place emphasis on the fact that this sacrament remits venial sin through its own power. Now, while they are not explicit, it does seem that they consider immediate remission and remission through the power of the sacrament itself to be identical. Prümmer" and Doronzo" both implicitly deny this equivocation in their statements that the sacrament remits venial sin through the act of the fervor of charity and their emphasis that the remission is effected through the power of the sacrament itself.

The authors who hold that the sacrament remits venial sin immediately would appear to be following the teaching of Suarez on the remission of venial sin. He does, in fact, hold that the Eucharist remits venial sin immediately.⁴² However, more important here is his view of the manner in which venial sin is remitted, a more basic consideration than the manner in which it is remitted in the sacraments or in the Eucharist in particular. For the very concept of immediate remission of venial sin through the sacraments requires a different view of the manner in which

mittuntur per quamlibet gratiae infusionem et consequenter per quodlibet sacramentum (cf. q. 87, a. 2 et 3), tum cum modo quo ipsa Eucharistia remittit poenam peccati; haec enim duo fiunt per accidens et es consequenti, dum Eucharistia peccata venialia remittit per se et ratione sui.

⁸⁸ Connell, Francis J., *De Sacramentis Ecclesiae*, (Beyaert, Brugis, 1933) p. 253, no. 3:

Remissio peccatorum venialium et poenae temporalis. Hic effectus videtur esse indirectus tantum—scilicet, per actus caritatis hoc sacramento excitatos, remittuntur peccata venialia dummodo eorum displicentia virtualitatis saltem in illis actibus contineatur.

³⁰ Lehmkühl, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, no. 116; Cappello, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 235.

⁴⁰ Priimmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 182.

⁴² Doronzo, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 468.

⁴¹ Suarez, q. 79, a. 4, dis. 63, sect. 10, no. 1, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 21.

venial sin is remitted from that which is presented by Saint Thomas. The formal opposition between venial sin and the remissive entity which is required by Saint Thomas is not required in the view of Suarez.

Having mentioned the power of the sacraments to remit mortal sin *ex opere operato*, Suarez considers their power to remit venial sin:

But perhaps someone will deny the similarity, since through the sacrament grace is poured into the soul, and this grace is a form which of its very nature is incompatible with mortal sin, and therefore the sacrament can of its own intrinsic power drive out mortal sin; however, this form is not incompatible with venial sin; and hence it does not follow that in respect to this type of sin there can be a sacramental effect which is *ex opere operato*. But the contrary is true, for, in order that God may remit venial sin it is not necessary that there be infused into the soul a real form which is formally incompatible with venial sin, since, strictly speaking, there is no such thing..."

In this passage Suarez is speaking of the intrinsic power of the sacrament to remit venial sin and not necessarily about the immediate remission of venial sin. He refers to venial sin when joined to mortal sin, but still his statement is of value to our present consideration because of the mention of an opposed form with regard to the remission of venial sin. This form has been the very thing demanded and recognized by Saint Thomas in the act of the fervor of charity. It is here that the basic difference

a Suarez, q. 87, a. 4, dis. 12, sect. 1, no. 1:

Sed fortasse negabit aliquis similitudinem, quia per sacramentum infunditur gratia, quae est forma natura sua impossibilis cum peccato mortali, et ideo potest ex opere operato excludi, non est tamen illa forma impossibilis cum peccato veniali; et ideo non sequitur respectu illius esse possibilem efficacitatem ex opere operato. Sed contra, nam, ut Deus remittat peccatum veniale, non est necesse, ut infundat formam physicam formaliter impossibilem illi, quia revera, in rigore loquendo, nulla talis est . . .

lies between the opinion of Saint Thomas and that of Suarez. Following the opinion of Saint Thomas this opposing form must be present or there can be no remission, and so the sacraments by causing an infusion of grace, a form which is compatible with venial sin, cannot remit venial sin immediately. Again it should be noted that this is not to say that the sacraments cannot remit venial sin *ex opere operato*; but that they, through the infusion of grace, arouse an act of charity, and that this act is formally opposed to venial sin and so is remissive of this sin. However, this act of fervor flows from the sacrament as an effect, mediate, but an effect of the sacrament nevertheless."

Following the opinion of Suarez are these:

Noldin-Schmitt: There are those who hold that this sacrament produces this effect [*remission of venial sins by the Eucharist*] only mediately by the act of the recipient, in this manner, that this sacrament arouses in us acts of charity and of penance, and by these acts the venial sins are remitted. But this does not seem to draw out fully what was said by the Council of Trent. Therefore, the more common opinion holds that venial sins are remitted immediately and through the intrinsic power of this sacrament; presuming, at least, the proper disposition, which need not be attrition of such a nature that the sin be remitted through its power, but at least a removal of any obstacle to remission, or an aversion of the will to sin."

Suarez does admit the possibility of an effect which is *ex opere operato* and still a mediate effect of the sacrament in dis. 63, sect. 10, no. 1, on q. 79, a. 4:

Nam si tam perfecta dispositio esset necessaria, per illam esset ablatum peccatum veniale; et ideo sacramentum numquam hunc effectum conferret ex opere operato, nisi forte mediate et remote, quatenus auxilium ad talem actum datur per sacramentum et tunc ille actus non esset dispositio ad sacramentum, sed potius effectus eius ---

“ *Noldin-Schmitt, op. cit., vol. 3, no. 104*:

Sunt qui dicant hunc effectum solum produci mediate ex opere operantis, eo quod hoc sacramentum in nobis excitant actus caritatis et poenitentiae, quibus dein deleantur venialia. Sed hoc non videtur exhaurire quod

Noldin would not admit the possibility of mediate remission flowing from the intrinsic power of the sacrament, as did Priimmer." In this he is in agreement with Cappello and Lehmkuhl as was mentioned above."

Regatillo-Zalba. The remission of venial sins is achieved, not only mediately, in so far as the Eucharist arouses us to acts of charity and sorrow, by which venial sins are remitted; but also, as is commonly held, the Eucharist remits venial sins immediately and through the intrinsic power of the sacrament, supposing a disposition sufficient for the removal of any obstacle to remission, even though such a disposition may, of itself, be insufficient to secure remission of the venial sins."

The best treatment of this opinion is given in De Lugo: There is a doubt as to whether this remission [*of venial sins*] results immediately from the Eucharist or mediately, in so far as it arouses in us an effect of devotion or of sorrow, to which the remission of venial sin would be a consequence, this second manner of remission appears to be indicated in the *Summa Theologica*, q. 79/trt. 4.^o) But the more common opinion teaches that this effect is achieved immediately, granted that

dicit cone, trident. Ideo communior sententia tenet immediate et ex opere operato remitti venialia; supponitur utique dispositio sufficiens, quae non necessario debet esse attritio talis, ut vi ipsius iam remittatur peccatum, sed saltem remotio obicis, id est aversio voluntatis a peccato.

* Priimmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 182.

" Cappello, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, no. 235; Lehmkuhl, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, no. 116, see above, p. 92.

" Regatillo-Zalba, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 302:

Remissio peccatorum venialium; non solum mediata, quatenus ad actus caritatis et doloris nos excitat, quibus haec peccata remittuntur; sed etiam ut communiter, tenetur, immediata ex opere operato, supposita dispositione sufficiente ad obicem tollendum, quamvis insufficiente ex se ad ipsam remissionem (S. Th., 3, q. 79, a. 16). (Sic)

" It is interesting to note that same reference to the *Summa Theologica* of Saint Thomas, namely, S. T. 3, q. 79, a. 4, is appealed to in Regatillo-Zalba, as quoted in the previous note, in support of the immediate remission of venial sin; and is taken by De Lugo, in the following note, to

the Eucharist can act in this second manner, it can also act in the first manner, that is without the mediation of any act, when it is preceded by some at least virtual displeasure and some drawing back from venial sin; this would also seem to be taught in the *Summa Theologica*, q.87, art.3; concerning all of the sacraments, which opinion is followed by Suarez in his, *disp.12,sect.1*, on the present subject, and in *vol.3,disp.63,sec.10*; and Vasquez in his *dub. 2*, on the present subject, and also commonly by others. Nor does Saint Thomas seem to have taught the opposite to this opinion in article four, for he merely indicated both manners in which venial sin could be remitted through the Eucharist, not that both manners would be necessary at the same time, as Suarez explains so well in his exposition on the article. So this opinion would seem to be the more probable one; because in the contrary opinion there does not seem to be a sufficient explanation of how the liberation from venial sin is an effect of the Eucharist: for often it will happen that this effect is not achieved, either due to the fact that the man has no memory of the sin, or because he lacks reflection, or because of other impediments, in which cases this food would not be reparative of the losses brought about through the heat of concupiscence."⁰

support mediate remission. The reference to the *Summa* as given in Regatillo-Zalba is quoted in note 48; however, this reference is evidently incorrect as there are but eight articles in this question in the *Summa Theologica*. The classical reference, and the only one pertinent to the matter being considered by Regatillo-Zalba, is article four. So the presumption stands that the reference intends article four.

“ De Lugo, *op. cit.*, *De Poenitentia*, Disp. 9, Sect. 3, no. 46:

Dubium est, an haec remissio proveniat immediate ab Eucharistia, an vero mediate, quatenus excitat in nobis effectum devotionis, et doloris, ad quem consequitur remissio venialium, quem secundum modum videtur indicare S. Thomae in q. 79, art. 4. Sed communior sententia docet, provenire etiam immediate, licet enim possit secundo modo conducere Eucharistia, potest tamen etiam primo modo, sine eo quod mediet alius actus, dum tamen praecedat aliqua saltem victualis displicentia, et retractatio venialium: quod etiam videtur docuisse S. Thomae in praesenti

This consideration of the two currents of thought on the manner in which the Eucharist remits venial sin shows that they are based on a different evaluation of the basic requirement for the remission of venial sin, with Saint Thomas demanding the positing of an act which has formal opposition to venial sin and the proponents of the other view which was stated in the passage from Suarez⁵¹ seeing no need for such a formally opposing act. Both opinions are tenable but the opinion of Saint Thomas seems to be the more reasonable, and it will require more than a mere denial, as that of Suarez, to shake it. It is certain that this sacrament remits venial sin and that it does this *ex opere operato*, probably, following the opinion of Saint Thomas, it achieves this effect mediately. Since the direct effect of this sacrament is the arousing of acts of charity, it has mediate power against venial sin which is formally opposed to acts of the fervor of charity. Hence the traditional teaching that this sacrament is intended for the remission of our daily faults has an excellent theological foundation, and this fact should be taught more often and more clearly to the faithful.

EXTRA-SACRAMENTAL REMEDIES FOR VENIAL SIN

The 'many other remedies' mentioned in the Council of Trent⁵² extend beyond the sacraments. Since the infusion of grace is not required for the remission of these sins, there is no reason why instruments which confer grace through their own power should

q. 87, art. 3; de omnibus sacramentis quam sententiam sequuntur Suarez in praesenti disp. 12, sect. 1, et tom. 3, disp. 63, sect. 10, Vasquez in praesenti dubio 2, et alii communiter. Nec S. Thomas videtur oppositum docuisse illo art. 4, solum enim indicavit utrumque modum tollendi peccata venialia per Eucharistiam, non tamen ita ut uterque esset simul necessarius, ut explicat bene Suarez ibi in expositione articuli. Quare probabilior videtur haec sententia; nam in sententia contraria non videtur satis explicari, quomodo liberatio a venialibus sit effectus Eucharistiae: saepe enim continget, effectum illi non poni, vel quia homo non attendit ad memoriam peccatorum, vel quia caret iudicio, vel propter alia impedimenta, quo casu cibus non repararet, quod per calorem concupiscentiae deperditum fuerat.

⁵¹ See note 43; Suarez, *op. cit.*, disp. 12, sect. 1, no. 1, on q. 87, a. 4.

⁵² Council of Trent, *Sessio 14, Cap. 5, de confessione; E. S.*, no. 899.

be required as means for the remission of these sins. In fact, in the view of Saint Thomas there is scarcely any limit to these "other remedies":

... for the remission of venial sin an infusion of new grace is not required, but any act which proceeds from grace, and by which one shows his hatred for venial sin, either explicitly, or at least implicitly, as when one fervently turns towards God, would suffice for the remission of these sins."

So the external remedies for venial sin need only the ability to arouse in the venial sinner an act by which he will withdraw his will from the venial sin. This has been considered in the previous chapter where it was concluded that the purpose of any remedy for venial sin is to lead the sinner to an act of fervor which is formally opposed to venial sin. Merkelbach is explicit on this point:

Venial sin is remitted by an act of the fervor of charity alone, which act includes a hatred for this sin. Although many other causes are customarily listed, they can all be reduced to this one, since they are but means for the arousing of an act of fervent charity, and they remit venial sin not immediately, but through the medium of this act of virtual penance.**

Now this view would mean that anything could be a remedy for venial sin. The criterion would be the ability *of* the thing to cause, or be the occasion for the eliciting of, an act of fervent

" S. T., 3, q. 87, a 3, *in corp.*:

... ad remissionem venialis peccati non requiritur novae gratiae infusio, sed sufficit aliquis actus procedens ex gratia quo aliquis detestetur peccatum veniale vel explicite, vel saltem implicite sicut cum aliquis ferventer movetur in Deum.

" Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459:

Peccatum veniale remittitur solo fervore charitatis qui eius displicentiam includit. Quamvis multae aliae causae recenseri soleant, ad hanc unam reduci possunt, quia non sunt nisi media ad fervorem charitatis procurandum, ac non immediate remittunt sed mediante actu virtualis poenitentiae.

charity on the part of the venial sinner. Thus any good act of the sinner could gain the remission of his venial sins. This could happen, in the first place, by the meriting of a new infusion of sanctifying grace for we have seen that the teaching of Saint Thomas in this matter is that an act of fervor is the consequence of every infusion of grace, and that for this reason, every infusion of grace results in a remission of venial sin." Again, the good act of the sinner could be one of fervor or of penance, explicit, or implicit in the performance of an act contrary to the act of sin, and as this act would be directly opposed to venial sin it would immediately remit the sin. The sinner could, in like manner, make use of any of the sacramentals which are placed at his disposal by the Church, and through the special power entrusted to them, achieve the acts of fervor which are necessary for the remission of his venial sins. The sacramentals will merit special attention after consideration of one difficulty.

It would seem from what has been said, that any good act would suffice for the remission of *all* of a person's venial sins. As stated this is not generally true, although it is possible. If the sinner were to make an act of sufficient fervor that it would be a virtual withdrawal of the will from all venial sins this would be true. The ordinary good act is not of such intensity. The difference from mortal sin must be recalled here. All mortal sins are one in their effect which is the privation of sanctifying grace. Thus, as long as a person bears the guilt of a mortal sin it is ontologically impossible for sanctifying grace to be in the soul. In the same manner, once grace is infused all mortal sins are remitted. This effect is total or it does not exist. Venial sins lack this unity. Nor can it be objected that since all venial sin is against the fervor of charity, then an act of fervor will remove all venial sins in every case. For venial sin lessens the fervor of charity, it does not remove it. This lessening of fervor of charity can occur through an act against any of the virtues by which man tends toward God. These venial sins are distinct in so far as they are against the various virtues. They lack that inner unity which mortal sins possess, since they are, from their very nature, unable

“ S. 7., 3, q. 87, a. 2, *in corp.*”

to strike at the principle of these various virtues which is charity. So an act against the virtue of temperance, when a venial sin, is so distinct from a venial sin against fortitude, that an act of the virtue of fortitude would not necessarily remit it. A venial sin against a virtue does not destroy or diminish the habit of the virtue, but only hinders the act of the virtue." Thus an act of the virtue, of equal intensity, suffices to remit entirely the previous sin; or an act of the fervor of charity, which is the principle of all the virtues, would suffice to remit the sin. Here, as constantly in this discussion, the fervor of charity has a very restricted meaning. It refers to the overflow of charity and not the essential fervor of tendency toward God." With regard to the remission of venial sin through any good act, then, it can be stated that this remission of all venial sins does not follow every good act. This is so because of the diversity of venial sins through their objects, their lack of unity in their effect, and the possibility of performance of an act of one virtue while acting in a venially sinful manner against another virtue. Essential to this situation is the basic difference between mortal and venial sin; the fact that while mortal sin destroys the virtue of charity, the principle of all of the virtues, venial sin has no effect on charity.

The sacramentals possess a special efficacy for the remission of venial sin. With regard to sacramentals the *Code of Canon Law* states:

Sacramentals are things or actions which the Church, somewhat in imitation of the sacraments, is accustomed to use for obtaining effects, and especially spiritual effects, through her intercession."

New sacramentals can be instituted or having been accepted, can be authentically interpreted, only by the

*. *Ibid.*, 1-2, q. 89, a. 1, *in corp.*

** *De Malo*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 17.

''' *Codex Juris Canonici*, (Newman, Westminster, 1949):

*Canon 1144. Sacramentalis sunt res aut actiones quibus Ecclesia, in aliquam Sacramentorum imitationem, uti solet ad obtinendos ex sua im-
petrationem effectus praesertim spirituales.*

Holy See, The Holy See alone can abolish any of the sacramentals or change any of them."

The law, then, gives as a general division that of actions and things. There are different methods of listing sacramentals among the theologians. For our present purpose there is no necessity of an exhaustive listing, but rather an indication of the things which fall under both headings. Under actions would fall; consecrations of persons, constitutive blessings, ordinary blessings, and exorcisms." Under things should be listed all of the various items such as; blessed candles, holy water, rosaries and the like, which the Church makes available for the use of the faithful.

More to the present purpose is the question of how these sacramentals effect the remission of venial sin. In this question there are two elements. First it can be stated as the common opinion that the sacramentals achieve the remission of venial sin through the arousing *of* an act of fervor on the part of the recipient, and mediately through this act they remit venial sin." Now, they act to arouse this act of the recipient, not through an intrinsic power, as in the sacraments, but still the act does not originate entirely in the powers of the person" in the manner in which it would if these things being used were not sacramentals, for the sacramentals act with the intercession of the Church. In the words of Prümmer:

The effectiveness of the sacramentals does not consist only in the good works, or prayers, or salutary inspirations, which are usually associated with them, but in

" *Ibid*:

Canon 1145. Nova Sacramentalia constituere aut recepta authentice interpretari, ex eisdem aliqua abolere aut mutare, sola potest Sedes Apostolica.

⁴⁰ Leeming, Bernard, S.J., *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (Newman, Westminster, 1956) p. 615, no. 751.

⁴¹ S. T., J, q. 87, a. 3, corp., ad. 1, ad 3; De Lugo, *op. cit.*. *De Poenitentia*, disp. 9, sect. 4; Billuart, *op. cit.*, diss. 3, a. 2, no. 3; Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 459; Regatillo-Zalba, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 999; Noldin-Schmitt, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 51; Iorio, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 40; Prümmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 89; Van Noort, *op. cit.*, no 157; Aertnys-Damen, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, no. 39.

* Presupposing, of course, the action of actual grace.

the special intercessory power granted to them by the Church. To be sure, the sacramentals do not have the same effectiveness as the sacraments, for that is from the power which was given to them directly by Christ, but rather the sacramentals have joined to them the prayer of the Church itself as suppliant, requesting these graces...“

In this sense it can be said that the sacramentals operate through their own power which they receive from the Church, or better, to avoid any ambiguity, it should be said that the sacramentals achieve their effect through the act of the Church and the person using the sacramental.**

The sacramentals, then, pose no great difficulty with regard to the remission of venial sins. They are another means of eliciting the act of the fervor of charity which will be remissive of venial sin. In arousing this act they have a greater effectiveness because they make use of the intercessory power of the Church to achieve their effect.

SACRAMENTAL PENANCE AS A REMEDY FOR VENIAL SIN

Having considered the “many other remedies” mentioned in the Council of Trent,** there remains for discussion the remedy of sacramental confession of venial sins. Here, as above, the case in point is that of the sinner who, while guilty of venial sins, is

** Priimmer, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 91:

Efficacia sacramentalium non consistit solum in bonis operibus aut precibus aut salubribus excitationibus, quae solent coniungi cum illis, sed in speciali virtute impetratoria illis ab ecclesia concessa. Sane sacramentalia non habent efficaciam sicut sacramenta, nempe ex virtute illis concessa directe a Christo, sed quia habent adnexas preces ab ipsa Ecclesia supplicante pro gratiis obtinendis . . .

“ *Ibid.*, no. 92:

In hoc sensu potest dici sacramentalia operari ex opere operato ab Ecclesia, sed melius, ad evitandas ambiguitates, dicendum est, sacramentalia operari ex opere operantis cum Ecclesiae tum suscipientis hominis.

** Council of Trent, *Sessio 14, Cap. 15. De Conessione, E. S.*, no. 899.

in the state of grace. The use of Penance by this person, while certainly valid, licit, and useful, does present some difficulties. In the case of the sinner with both mortal and venial sin, his recourse to confession is necessary, and his remission of venial sin is effected in the same manner as that of the sinner with venial sin only. It is possible, of course, that his venial sins may not be forgiven, due to some obstacle which he placed in the way of their remission. So, in fact, the only difference between the sinner with venial sin alone, and the sinner who has venial and mortal sin, is the necessity of confession for the latter, and this necessity pertains to the remission of the mortal sin only. However, as the entire consideration so far has been of a sinner with venial sin only, this section will consider the same situation.

The confession of venial sins is certainly lawful. Canon Seven of the Council of Trent says; "If anyone says . . . that it is not lawful to confess venial sins: let him be anathema." The lawfulness of the confession of venial sin had been questioned by Luther and this was condemned in the Bull *Exsurge Domine*." Later, Pope Pius the Sixth, in the Constitution *Auctorem Fidei*, in which he condemned the errors of the Synod of Pistoia, made this declaration with regard to the confession of venial sins:

The declaration of the synod about the confession of venial sins, which it does not wish, it says, to be so frequently resorted to, lest confessions of this sort be rendered too contemptible; this is rash, dangerous, and contrary to the practice of the saints and of pious persons which was approved by the Council of Trent."

" *Ibid.*, Canon 7, *E. S.*, no. 917: "Si quis dixerit . . . demum non licere confiteri peccata venialia: A. S."

" Bull: *Exsurgi Domini*, Pope Leo X, June 15, 1520, *E. S.*, no. 748: "Nullo modo praesumas confiteri peccata venialia, sed nec omnia mortalia, quia impossibile est, ut omnia mortalia cognoscas. Unde in primitiva Ecclesia solum manifesta mortalia confitebantur." This statement is condemned.

" Constitution: *Auctorim Eidi*, Pius VI, August 28, 1794, *E. S.*, no. 1539:

Declaratio synodi de peccatorum venialium confessione, quam optare se ait non tantopere frequentari, ne nimium contemptibiles reddantur huiusmodi confessiones: — temeraria, perniciosa, Sanctorum ac piorum praxi a sacro Concilio Tridentino probatae contraria.

Worthy of note here is the point that it is the *frequency* of confession of venial sins which is the matter of this disagreement. The Synod of Pistoia and Pius the Sixth both presume the validity and the lawfulness of the confession of venial sin. They disagree as to the use of this means, not to its existence.

In our own times Pope Pius XII has spoken strongly in defence of frequent confession of venial sins:

The same result would follow from the opinions of those who assert that little importance should be given to the frequent confession of venial sins. Of far greater importance, they say, is that general confession which the Spouse of Christ, surrounded by her children in the Lord, makes each day by the mouth of the priest as he approaches the altar. It is true indeed, Venerable Brothers, that venial sins may be expiated in many ways which are to be highly commended. But to hasten daily progress along the path of virtue, We wish the pious practice of frequent confession to be earnestly advocated. Not without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was this practice introduced into the Church. By it genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are conquered, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and grace is increased in virtue of the sacrament itself. Let those, therefore, among the young clergy, who make light of, or weaken esteem for, frequent confession, realize that what they are doing is foreign to the Spirit of Christ, and disastrous for the Mystical Body of our Saviour."

Such a strong statement requires little comment. However, it may prove useful later to note that all of the effects listed by His Holiness with the exception of an increase in grace, are not effects which are achieved through the intrinsic power of the sacra-

“ Encyclical Letter: *Mystici Corporis*, Pope Pius XII, 1943, translated by Bluett, Joseph, S.J., (America Press, New York, 1943) no. 103.

ment itself. In other words, while all of these things are the result of frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Penance, many of them come as a result of the acts of the penitent which are performed on the occasion of confession.

Again in *Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII referred to the confession of venial sins:

But because the opinions which are expressed by many concerning frequent confession of sins, are absolutely foreign to the Spirit of Christ and to that of His unspotted Spouse, and are, in fact, disastrous to the spiritual life, we recall those things which we wrote with a heavy heart on this subject in the Encyclical Letter on the Mystical Body; and again and again we insist that you make known to your flocks those things which there we set out in most serious words, and especially to the candidates for the priesthood, and to the young clerics, to be seriously meditated, and to be followed with a docile mind."

From these teachings there can be no doubt as to the value of the confession of venial sin. Now, the effects of the Sacrament of Penance with regard to the person who is guilty of venial sin are numerous. These are not all effects which come from the intrinsic power of the sacrament. Many are the result of preparation for the reception of this sacrament or are made possible through the manifestation of conscience and humiliation which are a part of this sacrament. So in the consideration of the effects of Penance in the remission of venial sin these two types of effects must be considered. The first effects for discussion will be those which come from the intrinsic power of the sacrament, the effects of the sacramental operation itself.

" Encyclical Letter: *Mediator Dei*, Pope Pius XII, 1947, translated by Treacy, Gerald, S.J. (Paulist Press, New York, 1948) no. 211.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SACRAMENTAL PENANCE
FOR THE REMISSION OF VENIAL SIN

EFFECTS *EX OPERE OPERATO*, OR FROM THE
INTRINSIC POWER OF THE SACRAMENT ITSELF

The Sacrament of Penance has as its proper and prime object mortal sins committed after Baptism. Venial sin is also a proper object, but it is so secondarily." As a sacrament it has the conferral of grace as its purpose, and this infusion of grace is remissive of mortal sin. When the recipient is in the state of grace already, the sacrament effects an increase of sanctifying grace. In comparing Baptism and Penance Saint Thomas mentions this increase of grace in the sinner who has been justified by his contrition and desire for the sacrament:

And it should be held in like manner with regard to confession joined to absolution, that through a desire of the penitent which precedes confession, he is freed from guilt; afterwards in the act of confession and absolution his grace is increased; and remission of sins is also granted, if the preceding sorrow for sins was not sufficient for contrition, and if there is then present no obstacle to grace."

In the case of the venial sinner, this increase in grace is the main effect of the sacrament, and through it he receives remission for his venial sin. Thus the Sacrament of Penance which is a sacrament of the dead is used as a sacrament of the living. The purpose in its reception is not the reception of first grace, but second grace.

This use of the sacrament is easily justified in this manner. The sacrament was instituted with sin as its object. It is sin as

²² Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 399; *S. T.*, 3, q. 65, a. 1, ad 8.

²³ *S. T.*, 3, *Suppl.*, q. 10, a. 1, *in corp.*:

Et similiter dicendum est de confessione adiuncta absolutioni, quod secundum quod in voto poenitentis praecessit, a culpa liberavit; postmodum autem in actu confessionis et absolutionis gratia augetur; et etiam remissio peccatorum daretur, si praecedens dolor de peccatis non sufficiens ad contritionem fuisset, et ipse tunc obicem gratiae non praerberet.

committed, and not, as not-remitted, that is the object of this sacrament. Now venial sin is truly sin, and as such it is the object of this sacrament. Entering into the sacrament itself, the acts of the penitent, in the more common opinion, constitute the *quasi-matter* of this sacrament rather than the sin itself. Now, for any sin the penitent can exercise the act of sorrow an unlimited number of times, and each time this act of sorrow would be sufficient for the valid reception of this sacrament. In like manner, the valid reception of this sacrament does not necessarily imply the reception of first grace. It is a necessary *effect, however*, since this is a sacrament, that grace be conferred when the matter and form are posited and there is no obstacle to grace. Thus the use of Penance for an increase of grace is a correct use of the sacrament, and its use for the remission of venial sin only, in the case of a penitent who is in grace, is a correct use of the sacrament.

One of the problems connected with the confession of venial sins by one in the state of grace is this. In the Sacrament of Penance the penitent must make a formal act of sorrow and must manifest this act in some manner. Now, the common opinion is that attrition remits venial sin apart from the sacrament, and since in confession this act must be made before the granting of absolution, it would appear that venial sin, even though it is a secondary object of this sacrament, is never remitted by it except in the case where the recipient has both mortal and venial sin on his soul. With regard to this difficulty Merkelbach says:

Venial sins are very frequently not taken away immediately by the Sacrament of Penance, since the majority are already remitted by the act of sorrow which precedes absolution; but then they are again condoned by the absolution in the same manner as mortal sins which were previously remitted; at times, however, it may happen that they are not remitted before the absolution: 1. If they are joined to mortal sins, since then they will be remitted at the same time as the mortal sin; 2. when the sorrow is sufficient for the remission of some venial sins, but not for the remission of all of

the venial sins: then the grace conferred by the sacrament can arouse sorrow which will suffice for the remission of those not already forgiven.”

Worthy of note in this passage is the view of Merkelbach, which he expresses in passing, that even in the case of venial sins remitted through the Sacrament of Penance, they are remitted mediately, that is, through the sorrow which is aroused by the infusion of grace. This is consonant with his view, in following Saint Thomas, that all of the sacraments remit venial sin mediately.

De Lugo, in his defence of the necessity of a proportion of attrition to the venial sins remitted by it outside of the sacraments, an opinion denied by Merkelbach, mentions the problem under consideration:

I hold, in the fourth place, that attrition with the Sacrament of Baptism, Penance, and Extreme Unction, suffices for the remission of all of the venial sins to which the attrition extends, but it is not necessary that the act of attrition posited will always take away all venial sins. The basic supposition of Vasquez proves this conclusion for me, for if once an act of attrition is posited, the guilt of venial sin is immediately remitted; then the guilt of

” Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 460:

Peccata venialia saepius non tolluntur immediate a Sacramento Poenitentiae, quia plerumque iam sunt remissa actu contritionis praecedente absolutionem; at tunc rursus absolutione condonantur eodem modo ac peccata mortalia iam antea dimissa; aliquando tamen fit ut non deleantur ante absolutionem: 1) si coniuncta sunt peccatis mortalibus, quia tunc simul cum eis remittuntur; 2) si contritio sit sufficiens ad aliquorum sed non ad omnium venialium remissionem; tunc gratia a sacramento collata excitare potest ad contritionem sufficientem de aliis non remissis.

Although Merkelbach denies the need of attrition of a certain intensity for the remission of certain venial sins, in effect he agrees with De Lugo. For he admits here that at times the sorrow is not sufficient for remission, and that it becomes so only as an effect of the sacrament. It should be noted that in such a case there must be attrition truly present for other venial sins, or sins which have been previously remitted, since this is necessary for the validity of the sacrament.

venial sin would never be removed through the Sacrament of Penance: for its remission is already presupposed through the preceding act of attrition: to say, then, that venial sin is never remitted in the Sacrament of Penance, except when it is joined to a mortal sin, would seem to be contrary to the belief of the faithful, who utilize the remedy of frequent confession to secure the remission of venial sins; and consequently they think that this sacrament has a certain effectiveness for the remission of these sins, that it is a useful means, and that it has power which is proportionate to the achievement of this end__"

The solution to this difficulty, according to De Lugo, is the fact that, while attrition is sufficient for the remission of venial sin, even apart from the sacraments, for some venial sins the posited act of attrition is not sufficient, whether from lack of intensity, or from imperfection in motivation, *for* their remission without the power of the sacrament. This opinion is opposed at some length by Merkelbach:

There is not required attrition of a determined intensity or grade for the achieving of the remission of venial sin apart from the Sacrament of Penance, as is held by many recent authors following Lugo, who say that attrition will not suffice for the removal of every

⁷⁸ De Lugo, *op. cit.*, *De Poenitentia*, Disp. 9, sect. 2, no. 29:

Dico quarto: licet attritio cum sacramento baptismi, poenitentiae, et extremae unctionis sufficiat ad remissionem omnium venialium, de quibus est attritio, sed tamen extra sacramentum non est necesse, quod posita attritione tollantur semper omnia venialia. Hanc conclusionem probat mihi fundamentum P. Vasquez nam si posita attritione, statim tollitur culpa venialis; ergo per sacramentum poenitentiae nunquam remittitur culpa venialis; jam enim praesupponitur remissa per attritionem praecedentem: dicere, enim, quod nunquam remittantur in sacramento poenitentiae, nisi quando junguntur cum peccato mortali, videtur esse contra sensum fidelium, qui ad obtinendam eorum remissionem utuntur remedio frequentis confessionis; et per consequens concipiunt illud sacramentum habere aliquam efficaciam in ordine ad expianda ea peccata, esseque medium utile, et proportionatum ad eum finem obtinendum...

venial sin outside of the Sacrament of Penance, but for fewer or more according to its higher motive, its greater intensity and duration, and the good works to which it is joined. For a) every, even minimal, act of *contrition* for a venial sin, if it is sincere, is a withdrawal of the will from the venial sin, as has been said (no. 457); b) venial sin is not opposed to a certain intensity or gradation of charity, since it neither takes away from nor lessens the habit of charity to which it is not opposed; c) just as a minimal act of perfect contrition suffices for the remission of all mortal sins, so a minimal act of imperfect contrition elicited with the help of grace suffices for the remission of all venial sins.

Nor is the common belief of the faithful who confess their venial sins in order to secure remission for them, opposed to this doctrine: for they do this, just as for mortal sins which have already been remitted, for a more certain and full remission, and as a precaution against a relapse into sin; or preferably, they believe that the sacrament has an effectiveness for the remission of venial sins without knowing precisely of what nature this effectiveness is.¹⁵

ra Merbelbach, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, no. 460:

Hinc non requiritur attritio determinatae intensitatis vel gradus ad obtinendam remissionem peccati venialis extra sacramentum Poenitentiae, uti tenent multi recentiores cum Lugo, qui aiunt attritionem non sufficere ad delenda quaecumque venialia extra sacramentum Poenitentiae, sed ad pauciora vel plura secundum quod sit ex meliore motivo, cum maiore intensitate vel duratione, aut cum pluribus bonis operibus. Etenim a) omnis enim minima contritio de peccato veniali, si sit sincera, est retractatio eius, ut dictum est (n. 457); b) peccatum veniale non opponitur determinatae intensitati seu gradui charitatis quia nihil aufert nec minuit de charitatis habitu, cui non opponitur; c) sicut minima contritio perfecta sufficit ad remissionem omnium peccatorum mortalium, ita minima contritio imperfecta ex gratia facta sufficit ad remissionem omnium venialium.

Nec huic doctrinae obstat sensus communis fidelium qui peccata confitentur ad obtinendam venialium remissionem: id enim faciunt, sicut pro peccatis mortalibus remissis, ad certiores remissionem ac pleniores atque contra relapsus; ve) potius credunt sacramentum efficaciam habere ad

The point of comparison between the remission of all mortal sins by an act of perfect contrition and the remission of all venial sins by an act of imperfect contrition does not seem acceptable. There is, after all, an inner nexus of all mortal sins in their aversion from God, and it is just this aversion which is formally opposed to even a minimal act of perfect contrition. There is no such inner nexus among venial sins, and so one can be remitted even as another is being committed. However, the possibility must be granted that all the venial sins of which a person is guilty may be remitted by one act of attrition which includes them all. De Lugo would not deny this, if the act were of sufficient intensity and based on adequate motivation.

Now, if there is any act of the will which is a true withdrawal of the will from the venial sin, or simply, when attrition is *truly present* for any venial sin, it is, in the more common opinion, remitted. It is true that because of stronger conversion of the will in certain venial sins the required withdrawal will require greater effort. However, this withdrawal must be effected before the sin can be remitted. Now this greater effort, and hence the required attrition, may not be present in the soul prior to the reception of the impetus to an act of fervor which is given through the infusion of grace resulting from the sacrament. Thus the opinion of De Lugo seems to be the better one on this point. With regard to the sins for which the penitent does not have adequate attrition, or simply, does not have attrition, the sacrament would effect remission if there is no actual adherence of the will to the sin. This comes close to the view of Galtier:

remissionem venialium quin praecise cogitent qualis illa sit.

This assumption of Merkelbach as to the reason for confession of venial sins by the faithful seems entirely gratuitous; his second assumption appears closer to the truth. It is interesting to note that in the first paragraph he uses "*attritio*" until he lists his arguments. In the first argument he uses "*contritio*" and as the statement stands no author would disagree. In no. 457, to which he refers, he states; "Atqui omnis contritio seu displicentia etiam imperfecta et minima, dummodo sit vera et sincera, peccatum veniale sufficienter retractat,..." So it can be assumed that *contritio imperfecta* is intended here as it is used in his third argument.

... it is probable that for the remission of venial sins through the power of the sacrament, attrition is not required, but the absence of an impediment, such as the actual adherence of the will in this sin, suffices for their remission; so it would follow that venial sins for which the penitent did not have attrition, and which, therefore, would not have been remitted by the act of the penitent, would be remitted through the power of the sacrament ..."

The sin for which the penitent had no attrition before reception of the sacrament would be remitted by the attrition which is the result of the sacrament. This opinion of Galtier would be too lax if it were interpreted to mean that there would be no necessity for attrition in the Sacrament of Penance when venial sins are to be remitted. It must be admitted that the sacrament does confer grace and that this infusion of grace can arouse within the recipient acts of fervent charity. Now these acts *could* remit venial sins for which the penitent had neither actual adherence nor actual attrition at the moment of confession. In such a case the sins would not have been submitted to the power of the keys and so would not have, required an act of formal penance. Their remission would come as a result of the infusion of grace from the sacrament. In this case, and in any case where the venial sin is remitted through the power of this sacrament, the remission takes place mediately, that is, through the act of fervor or of sorrow which is the consequence of the infusion of grace which is the direct and immediate effect of the sacrament." With the venial sins for which the penitent has no attrition should be included those venial sins which are not mentioned in confession or included in the act of contrition before confession, these would be remitted if there is no obstacle on the part of the penitent.

TM Galtier, *op. cit.*, no. 458:

... probabile est ad remissionem peccati venialis vi sacramenti non requiri attritionem sed sufficere absentiam obicis, qui esset actualis adhaesio tali peccato; hinc autem sequitur peccata venialia de quibus quis non habuerit attritionem, quaeque proinde nondum remissa essent ex opere operantis, posse remitti ex opere operato ---

" S. T., 3, q. 87, a. 2, and 3, *in corp.*; See also note 3 on this chapter.

Along with the increase of sanctifying grace and the exciting of acts of sorrow the Sacrament of Penance aids the venial sinner by the remission of part of the temporal punishment due to his sins, and especially by sacramental grace through which the sinner is helped to avoid repetition of his sins. In the case of venial sin this can be of great import since venial sins are of themselves dispositive to mortal sins. All of these reasons argue for the frequent confession of venial sins, and all of these effects are the results of the intrinsic power of the sacrament itself.

EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

EX OPERE OPERANTIS

Now, there are other effects which come from the confession of venial sins, although they do not come from the action of the sacrament. The Sacrament of Penance is a tool to be used for spiritual progress even apart from its sacramental power. Thus it is a powerful means for the gaining of self knowledge. The examination of conscience which precedes every confession necessarily aids in this knowledge, and the direction of the confessor may also aid in the exposure of dangerous Weaknesses. Frequent confession is the only opportunity in most cases for the penitent to receive the personal spiritual guidance and instruction necessary for spiritual progress. The humiliation which is inherent to every confession is helpful to the penitent, as are the specific acts of sorrow which he must perform as part of the sacrament. All of these benefits are added to the great benefit which comes to the soul through its mysterious union with Christ in the intrinsic operation of the sacrament. However, to gain these added benefits more than the bare minimum of instruction is necessary for the faithful. They should be taught to seek direction in the confessional, to present to the priest not a catalogue of real or imagined faults, but rather those faults into which they more frequently fall and against which they sincerely wish to make progress. They should be instructed to seek in their examination of conscience not only the superficial fault, but also the deeper fault which was the motivation for the act. Above all there should be aroused in those who come frequently to confession a desire

for spiritual perfection. If these aims were added to the practice of frequent confession, the plea of Pope Pius XII would be heard and the Mystical Body would be made strong. Yet, even when these added things are not done, the essential effects of the sacrament are still achieved, and this in itself is sufficient reason for the frequent confession of venial sins.

In his work; *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, Leeming holds the following:

The meaning of the words of absolution, according to a sound opinion, is, first of all, a reconciliation with the Church, which is efficacious of reconciliation with God. Whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven', seems to indicate that the loosing upon earth is prior to the loosing in heaven, at least in logical dependence. Evidence as to the words which in the ancient Church were used for what we now call 'absolution' indicates that reconciliation with the Church was primarily envisaged, through which came reconciliation with God."

Now, granting this opinion, in spite of the problems which exist in the early history of Penance, and the confusion of excommunication and its absolution so often with serious sin and its absolution, difficulties can be anticipated with regard to the confession of venial sins. This is especially true since the union of charity which perfects the union of member with the Church is not affected by venial sin, and so the role of absolution as a reconciliation with the church presents a difficulty. Thus:

The custom of confessing venial sins needs more theoretical justification than is often suggested; for there is some obscurity about the precise effect of the absolution *ex opere operato*..."

And his solution to the difficulty, following Mersch:"

" Leeming, Bernard, S.J., *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (Newman, Westminster, 1956) p. 361, 362.

" *Ibid.*, p. 365.

" Mersch, E., (Kelly, J., trans.) *The Whole Christ*, (Bruce, Milwaukee, 1938).

Hence a venial sin, in so much as it is against God, is against the Church, and, although it can be forgiven by good deeds other than confession, nevertheless is most appropriately confessed in order that the Church which was offended in its member may give reconciliation and forgiveness to that member."

It can be granted that the first meaning of absolution is reconciliation with the Church, and this would coincide with the prime object of this sacrament. Though it must be emphasized that even the serious sinner remains a member of the Church, the Mystical Body, and so the absolution and reconciliation cannot be a readmission into the Church. However, it is difficult to see how this interpretation of absolution extends to the secondary object of this sacrament. A diminution of the fervor of charity, in the sense of Saint Thomas, could scarcely be a lessening of even the perfection of union to the Church. It would seem that the theoretical difficulty arises mostly from this interpretation of absolution. This view is of interest here only in so far as it touches on venial sin, and, without further justification, it would seem unacceptable in the case of venial sins.

In *Mystici Corporis*, Pope Pius XII says; "Not without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was this practice introduced into the church." The introduction of the frequent confession of venial sin into the church was a gradual process and its history is somewhat obscure. Most of the texts concerning Penance in the early church mention the *Capital Sins* of; apostasy, murder, and adultery; and the difficult class of minor offences, in relation to the major three offences, which would still, in our terminology, be serious or mortal sin. Mention of venial sin is usually not in connection with confession. Thus Tixeront says in commenting on Ambrose;

Saint Ambrose merely distinguishes between the *delicta leviora* and the *delicta graviora*. Sinners atone for the latter in public penance which is performed only

" Leeming, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

" *Mystici Corporis*, translation and edition cited, no. 103.

once; the former must be atoned for daily. How? Probably by expiating them by means of good works; *'Bonis operibus saepe relevantur'**

Likewise in the works of Saint Augustine there is this same attitude on the manner in which these light sins are to be remitted:

I do not claim that you will live without sin; for there are venial sins without which this life cannot be lived. Baptism was instituted for all sins; prayer was instituted for those light sins without which we cannot live. What is this prayer? 'And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.' (*Mt. 612*). We are cleansed once by Baptism, we are cleansed each day by prayer. However, do not commit those sins for which it would be necessary to separate you from the Body of Christ: do not allow such a thing to be among you. Those whom you see doing penance have committed crimes, adultery, or some monstrous deed; and for this they do penance. For if their sins were light the daily prayer would have been sufficient to remit them."

And further in the same sermon:

Then there are three manners in which sins are forgiven in the Church; in Baptism, in prayer, and in the

* Tixeront, Joseph, *History of Dogmas* (Herder, St. Louis, 1914) vol. 2, p. 320.

** *Sermo ad Catechumenos, cap. 7, M. L., 40, 636:*

Non vobis dico quia sine peccato hic vivetis; sed sunt venialia, sine quibus vita ista non est. Propter omnia peccata Baptismus inventus est; propter levia, sine quibus esse non possumus, oratio inventa. Quid habet oratio? 'Dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris.' (*Mt. 6:12*) Semel abluimur Baptismate, quotidie abluimur oratione. Sed nolite illa committere, pro quibus necesse est ut a Christi corpore separimini: quod absit a vobis. Illi enim quos videtis agere poenitentiam, scelera commiserunt, aut adulteria, aut aliqua facta immania: inde agunt poenitentiam. Nam si levia peccata ipsorum essent, ad haec quotidiana oratio delenda sufficeret.

humility of major Penance, however, God does not forgive any sins, save for the Baptized.®

Watkins' judgment on the confession of venial sins in the early church:

The sins known as venial in the moral theology of modern times, the offences into which the just man falls seven times a day, are not regarded by any ancient writer as the proper matter for the exercise of formal penance.®

This conclusion agrees with that of O'Donnell:

But the chief explanation is, without a doubt, found in the fact that Christians generally, never dreamt of undergoing public penance, whether strict or not, for sins which were generally recognized as venial. Though the period with which I am concerned offers little explicit testimony to this fact, the impression conveyed by the records is that the faithful looked on penance, not as a devotional practice, or as a method of attaining greater personal perfection; but merely as a means to escape from mortal sin and its consequences."

In speaking of the history of private penance, Tixeront says:

... in the first half of the sixth century, private penance was practiced in southern Gaul and probably in Italy. Two facts contributed to spread and strengthen the practice. The first is the foundation of the Benedictine order and the drawing up of its rule (about 480-543). The influence of that rule was constantly felt outside the

A Ibid., cap. 8:

Ergo tribus modis dimituntur peccata in Ecclesia; in Baptismate, in oratione, in humilitate majore (majoris) poenitentiae, tamen Deus non dimittit peccata, nisi baptizans.

" Watkins, Oscar, *A History of Penance* (Longmans, Green, London, 1920) vol. 1, p. 415.

" O'Donnell, M. J., *Penance in the Early Church* (Gill, Dublin, 1907) p. 82. See also: Jungmann, Josef A., *Public Worship*, translated by Howell, Clifford (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn., 1957) pp. 77-81.

monasteries for which it was composed. Now, it demanded of the monks frequent accusations and confessions . . . The other fact, which was more directly influential, was the importation, by Saint Columbanus, into France and Italy, of the British customs concerning private penance.⁸⁸

Moreover, the disciples of Saint Columbanus did not remain within the walls of their monasteries; as they became bishops, abbots, missionaries, and pastors of souls, many of them introduced the customs of their order in the exercise of their functions and duties. Thus it happened that private penance, which first appeared in France and Italy in the fifth century, was definitely organized during the seventh century, and became the ordinary and normal practice, public penance being for the exceptionally scandalous and revolting sins. During the eighth century, penitentials were current everywhere.⁸⁸

Accepting, then, this account of the gradual change to private, and hence more frequent confession, it is but a step for the confession, even frequently, of venial sins alone. Still the term *frequent* would not be taken in our sense of monthly or even weekly confession. In the fourteenth century, when the cause of repeated confession was being furthered by the mendicant orders, Pope Benedict XI approved this exercise and advised them "in their sermons exhort that they confess to their own priests at least once a year, declaring without doubt this pertains to the advancement of souls."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Tixeront, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 386.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 388. See also: Galtier, Paul, S.J., *L'Eglise et la Remission des Péchés aux Premiers Siècles* (Beauchesne, Paris, 1932) p. 492.

⁹⁰ Constitution: *Inter Cunctas Sollicitudines*, Benedict XI, Feb. 17, 1304, *E.S.*, no. 470.

. . . districte iniungimus, ut Fratres (Praedicatores et Minores) ipsi confitentes attente moneant, et in suis praedicationibus exhortentur, quod suis sacerdotibus saltem semel confiteantur in anno, asserendo, id ad animarum profectum procul dubio pertinere.

Amann in his article on Penance in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, has this statement about the spread of frequent confession:

Thus, apart from the Lenten confession, which seems to be definitely included in the practice of the times, there were certainly some confessions which we would call confessions of devotion. These were multiplied towards the end of the twelfth century; certain monasteries were able to exercise, from that point of view, a munificent influence, this is the case, most certainly, with the abbey of Saint-Victor at the gates of Paris. But it was necessary to wait, we think, for the appearance of the two great mendicant orders at the beginning of the thirteenth century, to see this practice become general. The Preachers and the Minors have played, in their effect on the spread of frequent confession, the same role as that played by the Celtic monks and the Anglo-Saxon monks in the spread of private penance."

At the time of the Council of Trent, as has been seen, the confession of venial sins was the practice among the pious persons in the Church." In the eighteenth century Pope Pius VI spoke out in favor of the frequent confession of venial sins." This note of frequency was not mentioned in the statement of Trent although it was probably intended. From this time on, the practice

" Vacant, A., Mangenot, E., Amann, S., *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, (Letouzey, Paris, 1933) vol. 12, part one, *Penitence*, Amann, E., col. 930:

Ainsi, en dehors de la confession quadragésimale, qui semble être entrée définitivement dans les mœurs, il y a certainement des confessions que nous pourrions appeler de dévotion. Elles ont dû se multiplier vers la fin du XIIe siècle; certains monastères ont pu exercer, à ce point de vue, une influence bienfaisante, c'est le cas, très certainement, pour l'abbaye de Saint-Victor, aux portes de Paris. Mais il faut attendre, pensons-nous, l'apparition des deux grands ordres mendiants du début du XIIIe siècle pour voir cette pratique se généraliser. Prêcheurs et mineurs ont joué, par rapport à la diffusion de la confession fréquente, le rôle que les moines celtes et anglo-saxons avaient joué dans la propagation de la pénitence privée.

" E. S., no. 899.

" E. S., no. 1539.

of frequent confession of venial sins is general. The encyclicals of Pope Pius XII confirm this practice and encourage its continuance. Thus the full utility of the Sacrament of Penance as a means of spiritual progress has gradually unfolded in the Church, It is not the only means for the remission of venial sin, but it is the most effective of the ordinary means which are available to the faithful, for it insures the remission of the sin itself, and of at least part of the temporal punishment due to the sin. As in all of the sacraments, sacramental grace is given, and the purpose of this aid in the case of Penance is the avoidance of future sin. Here lies the great advantage of Penance over other methods of remission, it gives a definite aid for the avoiding of future sin thus looking not only to the past in remission, but also to the future in prevention.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) For the remission of venial sin sorrow is always necessary. This sorrow includes a hatred of the sin, and a displeasure at its effect, with a motion of the will to eradicate the sin through an act of the fervor of charity. This sorrow need only be implicit except in the confession of venial sin, and there, due to the requirements of the sacrament, the sorrow must be explicit.

(2) For the remission of venial sin the penitent must be in the state of sanctifying grace. Thus there can be no simultaneous remission of mortal and venial sins. The remission of mortal sin must always precede the remission of venial sin.

(3) Every infusion of sanctifying grace can effect the remission of venial sin, and every act which is remissive of venial sin will be accompanied by an increase of sanctifying grace.

(4) The immediate cause of the remission of venial sin is an act of the fervor of charity. This act is necessary as it alone is formally opposed to the venial sin. The eliciting of this act is the purpose of all means which are used to effect the remission of venial sin.

(5) All means which can be utilized to effect the remission of venial sin do so mediately, as they all achieve their effect through the medium *of* an elicited act of the fervor of charity.

(6) While no sacrament was instituted for the primary purpose of remitting venial sin, all of the sacraments do remit venial sin, since every infusion of sanctifying grace is remissive of venial sin through the act of charity which is consequent to every infusion of grace.

(7) Certain sacraments have special efficacy for the remission of venial sins:

Baptism remits the entire temporal punishment as well as the sin itself.

Extreme Unction removes venial sin and probably the temporal punishment due while the penitent is in danger of death, thus preparing him for entrance into heaven.

The Eucharist has as an effect the eliciting of an act of charity as well as the increase of the habit of charity, and so it has as an effect 'the remission of venial sin in a twofold manner; through the act of charity which it directly effects, and through the act of charity which is always consequent upon an increase in habitual grace. Emphasis should be placed on the Eucharist as the daily remedy for daily faults.

The Sacrament of Penance has as a secondary effect the remission of venial sins. From the long practice in the Church of not confessing venial sins and the present practice of not requiring integral confession of venial sins, it is evident that venial sin, while sufficient matter, is not necessary matter for the sacrament. Many benefits come from the confession of venial sins; sacramental grace is given as an aid in avoiding all sin, explicit sorrow for venial sin is aroused, an examination of conscience is made, there is the humiliation of confessing sins, and there is the opportunity for spiritual consultation and direction. While the frequent confession of venial sin is not of general obligation, it is generally desirable for spiritual progress.

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