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Temples
Polluted *and* Ruined

By

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Polluted Temples

WHEN sin comes into our lives our own souls thereby become polluted, dishonored, rendered contemptible in the eyes of God, of His Saints and even of ourselves.

To understand this we must know what our souls were like when they came from the baptismal font? St. Paul says: "Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy; which you are (1 Cor. iii, 16, 17). That we are temples of the Holy Ghost in no metaphorical sense, but really and truly, is the universal teaching of theologians. The Holy Ghost personally and in a special manner dwells in the soul that is in the state of grace. So that through that indwelling we become "partakers of the Divine nature" as St. Peter says. St. Cyril of Alexandria explains it by the illustration of indwelling of fire in a material body. In many places of Scripture, the Holy Ghost is said to be sent to us, poured into our soul; the just are said to receive Him, to have Him, to carry Him, to be full of the Holy Ghost. These phrases theologians tell us are not to be explained by saying that He is present by His gifts or by His special works. He Himself is said to be a gift. The fact therefore of the substantial indwelling of the Holy Ghost in our souls as in temples is as certain as the indwelling of the sacred Humanity of Christ in the chapel. The manner of that indwelling, the mode of His union with us may be open to discussion; but the fact of His presence cannot be denied. It is certain that the union of the Holy Ghost with a just man is more than omnipresence or presence by special operation, or by participation of gifts or by knowledge and love; while on the other hand it is not a substantial and hypostatic union such as the union of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity with the sacred humanity, resulting in one personality. After our union with the Holy Ghost, our personality still remains. It is nevertheless an approach to or an image of that sacred union. For as by the union of the Second Person with the sacred Humanity, the Son of Man became the natural Son of God and true God; so by the union of the Holy Ghost with us we become adopted sons of God, partakers or share! of the Divine nature.

Temples of God

It is certain consequently that we were created to be the temples of the Holy Ghost; that every sin is not only a degradation of our nature, a violation of God's command, but a defilement, a desecration of the temple of the Holy Ghost; that our bodies are vessels of the Holy Ghost, and that by sin we defile those vessels as truly as uncleanness would defile the vessels in which the Sacred Host is kept. What respect and reverence we have for the material temples wherein we know that the sacred Humanity of Christ is kept! Do we think any cleanliness, beauty or richness to much for it; or any chalice too costly to hold the Sacred Blood; or richest jewels and precious stones and gold wasted on decorating the ostensoriums and ciborium that hold the Sacred Host? Would we for a moment allow any defilement to come in contact with the sacred vessels? But we are temples of the Holy Ghost; our souls and bodies are vessels of the Holy Ghost. Is there any possible cleanliness too great for them, any assemblage of virtues too rich for them? When we come to think of the common truths of our religion, the sanctity of our souls and of the receptacle of clay that is meant to be an instrument of their perfection, all this gives them a sacred character, which almost makes a sin a sacrilege.

Perhaps the vision Ezechiel (viii, 3) had of the abominations in the temple at Jerusalem will be type of the conditions of our souls when stained with sin:

The spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven . . . and he brought me in the vision of God into Jerusalem . . . and he said to me: "Son of man, dost thou see, thinkest thou . . . the abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should depart from out my sanctuary." . . . And he brought me into the door of the court; and I saw and behold a hole in the wall. And he said to me: "Son of man, dig in the wall." And when I digged in the wall, behold a door. And he said to me: "Go in and see the wicked abominations which they commit here." And I went in and saw, and behold every form of creeping things and of living creatures—the abominations and idols of the house of Israel—were painted on the walls all about . . . and the ancients of the house of Israel stood before the pictures, and every one had a censer in his hand. And a cloud of smoke went up from the incense. And he said to me: "Surely thou seest . . . what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark; for they say the Lord seeth us not."

The spirit of God lifts us up these days between the earth and the Heavens and asks to dig an opening in our hearts—the temple of the Holy Ghost—and see what abominations are there committed for that inner chamber of the temple of the Holy Ghost is our heart. We perform the outward services of the temple, perfunctorily perhaps but exteriorly at least, as did these perverse priests, while we offer clouds of incense to the painted pictures of creatures in the inner sanctuary of our heart thinking that God seeth not. What are these painted pictures? Self—in various shapes of creatures—comfort, ease, self-will, our own judgment, pride, vanity, etc. Offering incense to ourselves all day long; often looking on our defects as virtues, our pride and self-will as strength of character and spirit, our rash judgments and carping criticisms as shrewd wisdom and knowledge of human character, our inordinate nicety about food and clothing as judicious care of health and required refinement; and so through the catalogue of painted pictures on the walls of our hearts, all round about offering incense, without ceasing, to the abominations and idols of the house of Israel. How profoundly wise the cry of the Royal Prophet: “Who can understand sins? From my secret sins, cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare Thy servant. If they have no dominion over me, then shall I be without spot” (Ps. xviii, 13, 14).

Disordered Lives

(a) In three points especially may I recognize the unreasonable and disordered character of my conduct of life. I know that of myself and in myself I am infinitesimally unimportant; that the only real good I can do is to promote God's glory. Yet in my innermost heart, I cannot lose sight of how important is my comfort; what care should be taken of me; how careful I should be to have every convenience. Nay, if there is a conflict between duty, God's rights and my ease, God's rights have suffered. In all humility and frankness and without exaggeration may not each of us confess that we have at times exaggerated the inconveniences we suffer, the oppressive character of the duties assigned us, the importance of what we think and do? We may, of

course, in God's presence and in the sincerity of truth confess to ourselves that we have borne some crosses for the glory of God; but we cannot deny that self-importance like a creeping thing has crept into our hearts.

I know thy works [said the Lord to the saintly bishop of Ephesus], and thy labors and thy patience . . . and thou hast patience, and hast endured for My name and has not fainted. But I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful therefore from whence thou art fallen and do penance . . . or else I will come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou do penance (Apoc. ii, 2, 5).

If Christ could say this to St. Paul's dearest disciple, ask ourselves what He will say to us.

(b) The great St. Ignatius points out what a loathsome thing I am in body and soul, "like an ulcer and sore from which come forth so much sin and wickedness." And yet I esteem myself worthy of honor, of esteem, of praise. I look on the one who praises me as a clear-sighted friend and the one who calls my attention to my defects as a prejudiced enemy. (C/. Apoc. iii, 17, 19.)

(c) Again, I realize that I was worthy of all punishment of the hatred of all creatures animate and inanimate. Yet, I am always asking even in inordinate ways that these creatures subserve my pleasures, forgetting that in themselves they cannot satisfying the cravings of my immortal soul. (C/. Jer. ii, 12.)

Worldliness and Vanity

In the third place, we consider the spirit of worldliness and vanity that affects our lives. The world in the sense in which Christ and His Apostles reprobate it, is that vast assemblage of human activities, whose triune god is honor, pleasure, profit. To these three it subordinates everything; the pursuit of these it endeavors by clever sophistry to exalt and ennoble. It has at its back for this purpose the vast machinery of literature, business, commerce, government, which are constantly insinuating reverence for these three, are holding them up, as the objects of honorable desire, and are always lauding those who attain them. It judges all things by exterior position and success, by false maxims of

honor, by false ideas of the purpose of pleasure and false estimates of the value and dignity of wealth. Its spirit is all pervasive and subtle. It will percolate into our lives in many ways. It will be imbibed through our reading of newspapers and fiction; it is caught in conversation with worldly-minded people. It appeals to the lower part of our nature, investing itself with a false and materialistic refinement. "The bewitching of vanity obscureth good things, and the wandering of concupiscence overturneth the innocent mind" (Wis. iv, 12). Whatever is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life. That we have to an extent imbibed its poison, been inoculated by its virus, caught its contagion, our own self-examination abundantly proves. Pleasure, honor, profit have been painted only dimly perhaps and in outline yet quite traceably on the walls of our hearts, creeping things, abominations and idols of the house of Israel to which we have burned incense. (Cf. Ps. lxxvi, 6.)

Lesser Stains

Nature of Venial Sin

THEOLOGICALS tell us that the essential difference between mortal and venial sin consists in this that by mortal sin we turn our back on our last end, abandon and forsake and repudiate it; whereas he who commits venial sin still faces the goal of life, but underestimates or uses slothfully or without due relation to their purpose the means of attaining it. In one case the inordination affects the *end* itself and completely alienates us from it, in the other it affects the *means* that lead to the end, and consequently weakens without destroying our attachment to it. Hence he who commits mortal sin rejects the friendship of God who is our last end, condemns His authority, sets His enmity at naught; whereas he who commits venial sin does fear to incur the enmity of God, while he takes no account of His displeasure; does reverence His authority, while he cares nothing for any wish of His that is not mandatory; does still de-

sire to retain His friendship, while ready to strain it. One who commits venial sin is a child who does not hesitate, when his pleasure or comfort suggests it, to displease, or wound his father, though it does not go to the extent of disowning or killing him. He is a child who yet retains that measure of love for the author of his existence which would prevent him from utterly repudiating or destroying him, but would not inspire him with filial devotion.

A deliberate venial sin is not therefore a light thing. It is called venial because, derived from the Latin word *venia*, God exercises forbearance towards it; and we must not be misled by the popular usage of the word, into looking upon it as trifling. Theologians tell us that nothing can justify the commission of a deliberate venial sin, that it is a greater evil than any possible temporal evil, and that no conceivable temporal good can outweigh the evil of its commission; that once committed no creature of himself could make reparation for it, that consequently it was expiated by the sufferings of Christ, and that we obtain pardon for it only through the merits of Christ.

Effects of Venial Sin

The effects of venial sin are the consequences of its nature; it is of its nature a weakening of the soul, "He that contemneth small things, shall fall little by little" (Eccli. xix, 1), says Holy Writ.

It is certain of course that no number of venial sins will deprive the soul of charity or the grace of Divine friendship. In fact theologians, with practical unanimity, following St. Thomas, teach that venial sins, however much their number be augmented, even though they should become habitual, can neither of themselves weaken the virtue of charity nor by their demerit deserve that God should diminish that measure of sanctifying grace by which our souls are united to Him in friendship and constituted co-heirs with Christ of heaven. Mortal and venial sin are essentially different; and the state of mortal sin or of loss of sanctifying grace cannot result, as a sum, from the addition of venial sins.

In what sense therefore are the words of the inspired

preacher true? Venial sin is neither effectively nor through demerit a cause of mortal sin, but it may become a direct and an indirect disposition to mortal sin.

We know to what a venial sin can lead as a matter of fact from the history of David. In a moment of curiosity he yielded to an imprudent look, which lighted the flames of passion. That passion impelled him to commit adultery with Bethsabee, the wife of Urias. Then in order to hide his crime from Urias he wrote to Joab, the general of his armies: "Set ye Urias in the front of the battle, where the fight is strongest; and leave ye him that he may be wounded and die" (II Kings xi, 15). From one passing glance of curiosity began adultery, treachery of the foulest kind and murder, and from many a similar venial sin has arisen since in the history of the Church the gross fall of those who like David were chosen servants of God. A venial sin, the seeking of a little warmth when his Lord was going through His Passion, was the first step in the series of sin that culminated for St. Peter in blasphemy and apostasy. St. Theresa tells us that the place in Hell was shown her which she was destined to occupy, if she had continued to indulge in the venial sins of her early religious life—an undue attachment to the conversations of seculars and to intercourse with them. If Cain had repressed the first movements of envy, he would not have become the first murderer. If Judas had overcome his first attachments to the goods of this world, the temptation to betray his Master would have found no congenial lodgment in his heart. Many who have lost their vocation and perhaps their souls, would have died among their brethren in the comfort and grace of the religious life, if some venial sin of pride, laziness or sensuality had not been allowed to grow into a habit, enfeebling the will and darkening the understanding.

Effect on Will and Intellect

Venial sin disposes to mortal sin first..by the *effect* it produces *on the will*.

Sin being of its nature a violation of order, the will that habituates itself to violate order in smaller matters comes by gradual steps to violate it in matter that is increas-

ingly more serious. Habits of self-restraint are weakened. It becomes more and more difficult to put forth the effort required to overcome torpidity in prayer, to observe rules, to dismiss suggestions of evil, to control desire. Communion with God becomes more and more strange and artificial, and creature comforts more and more attractive. Graces that once would have been efficacious become from day to day less and less so; temptations that once would have been easily and instantly rejected are now with difficulty resisted. Imprudences that once would have been impossible, are now almost habitual. The soul finally sinks into a state of contented debility, which is not death, but is a condition in which death could easily be inflicted.

Venial sin disposes to mortal sin also by the *effect* it produces *on the intellect*.

From the nature of the relation between our will and intellect every disorder in the will induces a corresponding disorder in our judgment and ideas. We instinctively attempt to justify our inclinations before the tribunal of our reason, when we are about to act in accordance with them, or at least we attempt to excuse or palliate them. This self-deception by which we fashion our practical judgments to suit the inclinations of our corrupt nature begins at first in little things, but gradually enlarges its sphere until vanity, sensuality and attachment to our own comforts dim the light of reason and faith. We get into a habit of palliating by a thousand specious pleas the inordinate affections that grow stronger with every act of self-deception. The lights of grace that once were illuminating, now are unheeded or fail to pierce the mists that rise like exhalations from the passions of our lower nature and hang around our reason. Inordinate affections to worldly goods corrupts the moral judgment of men who have made avarice or ambition their end in life. Nothing is plainer than the obligation of not taking what belongs to another, and of making restitution when we have unjustly deprived our neighbor of his goods. And yet the commercial world around us shows us how avarice quenches all the lights natural and supernatural which demonstrate this obligation. Men become wealthy and revered and admired by the world by stealing according to legalized and business methods, which they have persuaded themselves are

lawful and even laudable. They do not make restitution and in numberless cases never will. They have willfully corrupted the very fountain of moral judgments, their own reason; and unless some miracle of grace intervenes, will go to meet the Creator and Judge with the false conviction that they have not done wrong. The same awful results are produced in political life through ambition; splendid powers of mind employed to make wrong appear right, to justify injustice, to ennoble crime; and a darkness as it were of Hell settles down on their reason, until right and wrong are measured by ambition, and the vision of righteousness is lost.

In the same way fervent people may incur the natural penalty of venial sin in weakness of the will and cloudiness of the mind. The consequences of venial sin may be disastrous. Fervor and courage to resist the assaults of passion may gradually be lost, an habitual insensibility of heart may be acquired, and a dullness of understanding and a distortion of reason will follow. Our enemy who is watching the condition of our souls takes the opportune moment to lead us into temptation—and we fall into mortal sin, and lose the vesture of sanctifying grace and the Holy Ghost leaves His temple, and our soul becomes an enemy of its Creator. The point where day ends is night.

Visibly Punished by God

Many examples given in the Old Testament.

Gen. xix.—Lot's wife contrary to the bidding of the Angels, looked back on the city of Sodom, yielding to some movement of fear or curiosity or commiseration for acquaintances or relatives who were consumed in the flames. It would be difficult to maintain that her action, even though deliberate, was more than a venial sin, and impossible to hold that the punishment inflicted by Heaven was out of proportion to the guilt.

Num. xii.—Mary, the sister of Moses, who had nursed him, when as a child he was saved from the reeds of the Nile, started a murmur and complaint against her brother, the appointed leader of the Hebrew people, and induced Aaron, her other brother, to join with her. Immediately

“the cloud that was over the tabernacle departed,” one-half of Mary’s flesh was consumed with leprosy, she was put out of camp and the journey of the people of Israel to the promised land was delayed for seven days, until through the prayer of Moses she was cured again. The thing worthy of note in this punishment is that murmuring against lawful authority and causing dissension brought not only the personal infliction of leprosy on the one guilty and segregation from the community, but affected the community itself by withdrawing the pillar of cloud and delaying its march. Do we realize that by our complaining against superiors and our sowing of discord between them and their subjects not only have we made our own souls leprous and introduced into the community a spiritual disease that is contagious, but we have caused God for the time being to withdraw His overshadowing grace, and have brought the work of the community to a standstill. Venial sins of this kind therefore are not only a curse to ourselves, they are a contagion that creeps through the community. (*Cf.* Gen. xxxvii; Num. xx; IV Kings ii.)

The Punishment of Venial Sin in Purgatory

Theologians hold generally that at the moment of the just soul’s separation from the body all guilt of venial sin is remitted by an act of contrition. The soul, this is to say, that dies in the state of grace, receives this special grace by which it is wholly converted to God and turned away from every venial sin. However that question may be settled, it is certain that the soul on its separation from the body, when in the state of sanctifying grace, turns wholly to God, whom it now knows as its last end and the source of all its happiness. It feels itself drawn to God with a craving and vehemence that inflames its whole nature. The force of gravity a thousandfold intensified, or the attractive power of some vast loadstone increased a hundredfold are necessarily defective illustrations of the attraction that God exercises over the soul in sanctifying grace when it has laid aside its body of clay; because that attraction is the attraction of infinite goodness for a spiritual substance which of its nature was created, fitted and destined for this only that it

should be united to infinite goodness. No power that we can conceive of will illustrate the intensity with which the soul is drawn to God—a desire so intense that it has absorbed the freedom of its will, that it possesses and overpowers every energy of its intellect, that it exhausts every activity of its being. There is nothing in the universe that the separated soul in grace desires but God and there is not a fiber of its nature that desires aught else.

Any impediment to its union with God, any obstacle that prevents this desire from being realized afflicts it with an inconceivable pain,—“a torment so extreme,” says St. Catherine of Genoa, “that no tongue could describe it, no intellect could form the least idea of it.” But at the moment the soul has put off its body, it realizes that the rust of venial sin is such an obstacle, and recognizes then the awful character of that sin which in the days of its dwelling in the flesh it thought light of.

It sees on the one hand that until that rust is gradually consumed away by the fire of Purgatory it cannot enter into the presence of that Infinite Purity before whom nothing defiled may appear. St. Catherine says: “I see that so far as God is concerned, Paradise has no gates, but he who wills may enter. For God is all mercy and His open arms are ever extended to receive us into glory. But I see that the Divine Essence is so pure, that the soul finding in itself the slightest stain would rather cast itself into Hell than so stained appear in the presence of the Divine Majesty.” If a beautiful maiden destined to be the wife of a powerful and a glorious king should on her way to the nuptial service be attacked by a loathsome disease disfiguring her features, would she not suffer anguish and torturing humiliation if compelled to stand at the altar surrounded by the dignitaries, the brilliant nobles, the youth and beauty of the kingdom. After all, this is only a trivial illustration of the misery of a soul finding itself in the society of Saints and Angels and in the presence of Infinite Purity, not vested in the spotless white garment of holiness. Such a soul would find no one like itself. It would see on all sides marks of God’s holiness; it would feel itself always in God’s presence and shudder at its nakedness. It would know that the eternal eye of holiness was ever on it; and that eye which is life and joy

to holy creatures would seem to it an eye of displeasure and punishment. Lonely and forlorn, shamefaced and abashed, wretched and miserable, it would wander through the courts of the Blessed a stranger and an alien, and a prisoner in torture in the home of its Heavenly Father whom with its whole being it loves and desires to live with.

On the other hand therefore its desire is so intense to be united to its God that if there were no purging fires through which it could be cleansed, it would forthwith beget within itself a hell. When the soul leaves the body and finds itself covered with the stain of sin, and sees that they can be removed only by the fires of Purgatory, it plunges into them, thanking God for His goodness in having provided them, and ready to stay there until the last farthing is paid.

Ruined Temples

THIS mediation is the culminating argument on the malice of sin, sin which could force a God of infinite mercy, who so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son for its redemption, to condemn His own creatures, whom He created in love, to sufferings whose intensity we can only gropingly apprehend. The spirit of the world finds it impossible to conceive the existence of Hell; but the spirit of the world does not know what sin is which has kindled the fires of Hell. The spirit of the world does not know what the infinite purity of God is and consequently, cannot know the only evil of the universe. But we know from the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ that if we die in mortal sin, we shall depart wholly from out the shadow of His love into the exterior darkness of His wrath.

Let us then endeavor to see with the eyes of imagination the pool of fire burning with brimstone, which was prepared for the devil and his angels; to see the depth of the prison-house of the damned, the width and breadth of the inextinguishable flames that burn forever and never consume. "For Topeth is prepared from yesterday, prepared by the King deep and wide. The nourishment is fire . . . the breath of the Lord as a torrent of brimstone kindling it" (Isaias xxxiii). Our feeble imaginations are unequal to the task of

picturing in all its horror and dread reality the eternal abode of a soul that is lost. The human eye can take in only a certain amount of light; it cannot look on the sun. The human imagination can picture only a certain amount of horror; for the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, nor has it entered into the mind of man to conceive the punishment due to one who dies hating God.

The Pain of Sense

The suffering of Hell is twofold: the pain of sense and the pain of loss, corresponding to the twofold character of a mortal sin. First, as it is a conversion, a turning to creatures, or an attempt to find in created things our last end; and secondly, as it is an aversion from God, the only Being in whom we may find our last end. The pain of sense therefore comprises all physical sufferings of body and soul and arises from creatures in which the unhappy soul had sought its happiness; and the pain of loss arises from that absolute emptiness of the soul craving blindly for union with its last end and eternally deprived of it. The pain of sense is denounced against the wicked in the words of Our Lord: "Depart from me . . . into everlasting fire," and will consist in this, that our whole nature, body and soul and all their faculties, shall suffer indescribable torments.

That torture is called fire in Scripture, and it is a fire, but a fire of which the fire we know, since it can reach only the accidents of being, is only an analogue, a painted picture; the fire of Hell is a fire that shall burn not matter only, but spirit as well, that shall run through every fiber of our being. We read sometimes of human beings burned alive by fellow human beings at the stake, of those who in a railroad accident were pinned beneath the wreckage and compelled to wait and see themselves gradually approached by the devouring element, to feel it consuming their body until its attack on some vital part or intense pain brought on blessed unconsciousness. But in Hell the lost soul is merged in the depth of a sea, an ocean of fire; it is encased in fire, as St. Thomas says, it is united to fire as to its body. Fire penetrates to the marrow of its being, courses through its veins, floods through the valves of the heart, fills its en-

trails, is the air that fills its lungs, throbs in its temples, makes its eyeballs molten fires, seethes in its brains, is the impression made by every object on each specific sense. The soul is immersed in and penetrated by fire; in fire it lives and breathes and has its being. Fire becomes a part of its being, its body of death.

In this world, creatures are capable of giving some faculty of our body or soul a specific pleasure, because they are in some way a participation of the excellence or beauty of the Creator. What we like or love in creatures is the perfection of the Divine Nature shadowed forth in them, and dimly shining through them. But in that other world of damnation, the soul shall be separated from its Creator; it shall be alienated from its last end, obsessed by a hatred of its God. The presence of God will be a torture and a burning fire to it; and as a consequence every creature that in any way shares of God's infinite perfection, and in proportion as it shares of them, shall be a torture to it. If a lost soul could enter Heaven and find itself in the presence of Infinite Purity, whose beauty is the blessedness of the just, that all-holy presence would burn him more fiercely than ten thousand Hells. If a sinner should die tonight, he would go to Hell gladly, looking on the permission to do so as a mercy, rather than stand with his loathsome soul in the presence of infinite Holiness. Every creature of God that even naturally reveals some admiration of God's attributes is a pain to the soul of the damned. When Dives asked that Lazarus might be permitted to put one drop of water on his tongue, fevered by the fire of Hell, he knew not what he asked, for even that creature of God would increase his sufferings and could only decrease it, if Dives was united to the source of all goodness. No; Dives turned to creatures as to his god in this life, lost his God forever, and lost consequently the capacity of ever finding pleasure in any creature of God.

So every sense and faculty of the lost soul will have its individual torture. The eyes aflame with the fires of Hell shall contemplate in horror the sights of demons and other souls hideous in the repulsiveness of their naked damnation; the ears unfit forever more for pleasant sounds, shall ring with the coarse, maddened cries of despair and hatred, with the howlings and shrieks of demons; the sense of taste and

smell and touch, each in the fever of damnation, will suffer appropriate pains. It would be easy to conjure up a description of some torturing, foul, disgusting and revolting situation, and putting ourselves in it, ask ourselves which of us for the pleasure of satisfaction of one mortal sin would be willing to endure it forever. Who would be willing for one day to put even his hand in the fire, to be cast into a cess-pool of sewage, to bear the odor and the taste and the loathsome contact of it for a day for the sake of gratifying a momentary passion? Select any suffering, prolong it forever, without hope of surcease or mitigation—the sick man tossing at night, sleepless on his bed of fever, looking for the dawn that shall never come, hoping for the sleep that shall ever fly from his fevered eyelids—who would choose for the transient pleasure of sin such a fate? Thomas à Kempis says (Bk. I, ch. 24) that through whatever faculty or sense a man sins most grievously, through the same he shall be punished most grievously.

But not only the bodily senses, the faculties of the soul as well and in a higher degree shall suffer what theologians call the pain of sense. (See Judith xvi, 21; *Ecclus.* viii, 18; *Isaias* lxi, 24.) Three times in *St. Mark* ix, 42, 43, Our Lord describes Hell as “an unquenchable fire, where their worm dieth not.” *St. Thomas* (*Supplement* qu. 97, art. 2) tells us that the worm here spoken of is not corporeal but spiritual, the worm namely of conscience, which is so called because it arises from the putrefaction of sin and afflicts the soul, just as a corporeal worm arises from putrefaction of the flesh and afflicts the body—a worm that is generated in the corruption of conscience brought on by sin. *Lessius* (*De Div. Perf.*, lib. 13, cap. 29) says that this pain of conscience consists in two ever present thoughts which like worms cling inseparably and unendingly to the mind of the damned, feed on it and torture it. First, the consciousness that by his own fault he has lost eternal happiness which he now sees he could easily have acquired. Second, the consciousness that Hell could easily have been avoided, and that he is there wholly through his own folly. From this double consciousness springs a twofold sadness, whose bitterness and despondency gnaw at the heart like a viper; the inconsolable and despairing regret that through his own stu-

pidity he lost what was in his hands—the boundless happiness of the beatific vision and that he freely and of his own accord leaped into the abyss of Hell. This is further intensified by the knowledge that these two haunting thoughts will abide with him forever, and forever eat at his heart; and by the conviction that much as he hates God, he is compelled to acknowledge that he has been treated with mercy and justice. If a “sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happier things,” what will be the sorrow of a Catholic who has lost his soul, while he dwells forever in the thought of his fellows who joyously saved theirs, of the ease with which he might have saved his soul, of the unsubstantial bauble for which he bartered it,—of the secret contempt or dislike with which he witnessed their loyalty to God’s law? (*Cf.* *Wis.* v, 3-6).

What has life profited me? Like the remembrance of a quest of one day, it has passed away. I was born and forthwith ceased to be, and am consumed in my wickedness. “Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it is said: A man-child is born. Why did I not die in the womb or as they that being conceived have not seen the light?” (*Job* iii, 3.)

What thoughts will occupy the Catholic throughout the days of eternity when he shall be in the “land that is dark and covered with the mist of death; a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death, and no order but everlasting horror dwelleth?” (*Job* x, 21.) The thought of the graces of vocation and Sacraments abused, the special facility of acquiring the Beatific Vision, and the vanished pleasure for which he sacrificed It—these will abide with him like a viper in his heart forever.

Pain of Loss

This is the essential and therefore the great pain of Hell, though the most difficult to realize. We know that the soul was created for blessedness and the happiness consequent thereupon, and has toward blessedness and happiness an impulse as ineradicable as its nature. It is this impulse that is the occasion of its sin, as is intended to be, when rightly directed, the means of carrying it into the bosom of its God. This impulse is partially and temporarily in vary-

ing degrees satisfied in this world by creatures, but never wholly sated. It can only be put absolutely at rest by union with its God. The human soul with its faculties of intellect and will were as truly made for God as the eye for light or the ear for sound. God is the complement of the soul. Until it possesses God it is empty and void. This emptiness is partially filled in this world by creatures which share some of God's goodness, beauty or perfection. In the world of damnation, the emptiness of the soul will be absolute. This is the essential and the awful pain of loss, that the soul will feel the cravings of its nature towards union with an object capable of giving the essential rest of nature, and nowhere will it find in the universe anything to which it can cling, anything that it can love. The instinct of love, strong, ineradicable, imbedded in its very substance, it shall unceasingly and imperiously feel, but the only object that can satisfy it, the Infinite God of holiness and beauty and purity, will be to it an object of horror and hatred.

TO BE LOST!

Hence we say that the soul will be lost. To lose our soul—what does it mean? We can understand the pain of losing some partial good. We can understand how the outlook of life narrows and its joy grows lean to him who has permanently lost health and soundness of body; and the sense of imprisonment that comes to him when he first fully realizes that he is cut off forever by ailment or infirmity from the normal enjoyment of physical freedom. We can fancy the grey desolation of him who has suddenly lost wealth and social position; the soul-chill he experiences when awakening the first morning after the catastrophe he feels the absence of the worldly wrapping with which he had hitherto kept warmth in his poor soul. We can imagine the phantom-like character that life assumes for him who has lost in a moment reputation, fame, honor and all prospect of ever recovering them, who finds himself an outcast among his fellowmen, who recognizes that he is one of them, but denuded of those social lineaments that entitle him to their fellowship. We can imagine the void, the vacancy, the dreariness of that man's life who has lost friends and rela-

tives, wife and children, the companions of his mind and heart, who faces the prospect of going through life in loneliness, accompanied always by the ghosts of the past. We may have tried to realize the thoughts and emotions of the criminal who, standing on the scaffold and about to lose his life, sees summed up in the horror of the present moment, while he gazes for the last time on human faces and on the beauty of earth and sky, the folly of the unsubstantial past, and the heritage of ignominy that he leaves as a memory to those that are dear to him. We can understand the pain of losing health and fortune, and honor and friends and life. We can measure the pain of loss by the value and happiness of possession. But can we, except through faith, estimate the joy of the Beatific Vision?

Can we realize what it is to lose our souls, to lose more than life and the gifts of life, to lose our very souls? To be lost means to know not where we are, to be without bearings, to be in surroundings that are unfamiliar, alien and distressing, to be hopeless, and without resources and prospect of relief. To lose our souls! Can we put in words the meaning of the phrase? We can say that a lost soul reaches out to the universe of things with strong magnetic drawings, trying to locate itself and finds the necessary satisfaction of its being nowhere; that it seeks blessedness and the essential perfection of its nature, and finds God everywhere a source of unutterable pain; that it becomes a stranger suffering the torture of solitary confinement in the house of its Father; that it becomes in lonely isolation a solitary atom of being to whom the universe has become a prison-house of emptiness and a furnace of agonizing fire; that although it retains its physical substance and existence, it has lost its nature and its moral existence, that is, its substance has ceased to be a con-natural principle of operation. All its operations are reversed. The intellect can act, but what the normal intellect recognizes as true, the intellect of the damned thinks false. Its will hates what it ought to love and loves what it ought to hate—or rather is incapable of loving anything but its hatred of everything. It is no longer *sui juris*; it has no rights; it does not possess itself; it is the slave, the chattel of “the enemy of human nature.”

But any attempt to bring home to ourselves through

thought the awful reality, must necessarily fail. Perhaps if we could realize what a lost soul is, the apprehension would unbalance our reason. We can know it in itself only through experience, and it can be experienced but once, and once experienced, its tenure is everlasting—out of the bottomless pit there is no regress. Let us pray to realize Hell—for realization of it is a great grace.

The Eternity of Hell

The duration of the suffering of the damned will be measured first by the duration of the soul and the body. The soul in substance is immortal, and though the body is corruptible, yet after the passing of the sentence at the general judgment, the souls of the just and the damned alike shall reenter their bodies never again to be separated from them. These bodies shall be perfectly fitted to the souls; glorious bodies, therefore, for the just, whose blessedness shall receive an accidental increase from their reunion; loathsome bodies for the damned, the repulsiveness of which shall be adjusted to the grade of the soul's iniquity. At the sight of those tenements of sin they shall cry out in horror, "Woe is me, wretch that I am, for the Lord hath added sorrow to my sorrow" (Jer. xlv, 3). And they shall say to the mountains and the rocks: "Fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Apoc. vi, 16). The anger of the Lamb shall be a terror to them. "And they shall seek death, and shall not find it, and they shall desire to die and death shall fly from them" (Apoc. ix, 6). If they could only get rid of their bodies, Hell would be less intolerable. But the immortal soul shall forever inform the hideous clay, the foul slime of the earth, through which it sinned.

Again God's decree on judgment day is final, immutable and irrevocable. Probation is at an end; Hell and death are cast into the pool of fire; the former things are passed away, and He that sat on the throne said: "Behold I make all things new . . . and it is done" (Apoc. xx, 5, 6). The lost souls, men, women, children, laymen and religious and priest, each have heard the judgment of doom and reentered his loathsome body of death "goes into the house of his eternity"

leaving hope behind, hope of pardon, reprieve or mitigation and facing an unchangeable and interminable damnation.

To realize what is the eternity of Hell, ascetical writers have suggested the computation of numbers. Two digits tell us the normal life of man in years; four for the as yet certainly ascertained duration of the human race; eight the distance from the earth to the sun in miles. But 90,000,000 is a number that simply transcends our imaginative comprehension, we can signify it by a numerical symbol, but cannot form any real notion of it. Yet if those 90,000,000 miles were reduced to years and a damned soul were told by an Angel from the court of Heaven that, when as many years had elapsed as this vast number indicated, the term of suffering in Hell should end for him, the torments of his prison-house would by that remote ray of hope become bearable. Or if he were told that Hell would be no more for him after he had numbered the particles of sand in the desert or the drops of water in the oceans and seas and streams of the world, then hope would alleviate his tortures and give him patience to endure. Or if he were told that, after as many years had elapsed as there were atoms of matter in the whole universe of solar systems, planets, stars and constellations, he would then be permitted to leave Hell, and do penance through a million years for his crime and to choose at the end of that period repentance or obduracy, Hell for that soul would cease to be Hell. But it will not be. At the end of these unimaginable periods of time, eternity shall be as though it were beginning, because, without other boundary than a beginning and without bearings of any kind, the reprobates have lost their souls in the illimitable reaches of an everlasting Hell. Supposing the earth were a great mass of the finest sand, and that a single grain of this sand should be annihilated every 1,000 years; supposing then that you had it in your choice to be happy all the while this prodigious mass of sand was being consumed by this slow method, until there was not a grain left, on condition you were to be miserable forever after; or supposing you might be happy ever after on condition you would be miserable until the whole mass of sand were thus annihilated—which of the two cases would you choose?

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