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Ethics or Know Thyself

Prologue

In the study of morals we deal with the defects or qualities of the mind which dispose us to bad or good actions. Defects and qualities are not only mental, but also physical. There is bodily weakness; there is also the endurance which we call strength. There is sluggishness or speed; blindness or sight. When we now speak of defects, therefore, we pre-suppose defects of the mind, so as to distinguish them from the physical ones. The defects of the mind are opposed to the qualities; injustice to justice; cowardice to constancy; intemperance to temperance.
CHAPTER I

THE DEFECT OF MIND BEARING UPON CONDUCT

CERTAIN defects or merits of mind have no connection with morals. They do not make human life a matter of praise or blame. Such are dull wits or quick insight; a good or a bad memory; ignorance or knowledge. Each of these features is found in good and bad alike. They have nothing to do with the system of morals, nor with making life base or honourable. To exclude these we safeguarded above the phrase ‘defects of mind’ by adding ‘which dispose to bad actions,’ that is, those defects which incline the will to what least of all either should be done or should be left undone.

CHAPTER II

HOW DOES SIN DIFFER FROM A DISPOSITION TO EVIL?

DEFECT of this mental kind is not the same thing as sin. Sin, too, is not the same as a bad action. For example, to be irascible, that is, prone or easily roused to the agitation of anger is a defect and moves the mind to unpleasantly impetuous and irrational action. This defect, however, is in the mind so that the mind is liable to wrath, even when it is not actually roused to it. Similarly, lameness, by reason of which a man is said to be lame, is in the man himself even when he does not walk and reveal his lameness. For the defect is there though action be lacking. So, also, nature or constitution renders many liable to luxury. Yet they do not sin because they are like this, but from this very fact they have the material of a struggle whereby they may, in the virtue of temperance, triumph over themselves and win the crown.
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As Solomon says: 'Better a patient than a strong man; and the Lord of his soul than he that taketh a city.' (Prov. xvi, 32.) For religion does not think it degrading to be beaten by man, but it is degrading to be beaten by one's lower self. The former defeat has been the fate of good men. But, in the latter, we fall below ourselves. The Apostle commends victory of this sort; 'No one shall be crowned who has not truly striven.' (2 Tim. ii, 5.) This striving, I repeat, means standing less against men than against myself, so that defects may not lure me into base consent. Though men cease to oppose us, our defects do not cease. The fight with them is the more dangerous because of its repetition. And as it is the more difficult, so victory is the more glorious. Men, however much they prevail over us, do not force baseness upon us, unless by their practice of vice they turn us also to it and overcome us through our own wretched consent. They may dominate our body; but while our mind is free, there is no danger to true freedom. We run no risk of base servitude. Subservience to vice, not to man, is degradation. It is the overlordship of defects and not physical servitude which debasesthe soul.

CHAPTER III

DEFINITION OF 'DEFECTION' AND OF SIN

DEFECT, then, is that whereby we are disposed to sin. We are, that is, inclined to consent to what we ought not to do, or to leave undone what we ought to do. Consent of this kind we rightly call sin. Here is the reproach of the soul meriting damnation or being declared guilty by God. What is that consent but to despise God and to violate his laws? God cannot be set at enmity by injury, but by contempt. He is the highest power, and is not diminished by any injury, but He avenges contempt of Himself. Our sin, therefore, is contempt of the Creator. To sin is to despise the Creator; that is, not to do for Him what we believe we should do for Him, or, not to renounce what we think should be renounced on His behalf. We have defined sin negatively by saying that it means not doing or not renouncing what we ought to do or renounce. Clearly, then, we have shown that sin has no reality. It exists rather in not being than in being. Similarly we could define shadows by saying: The absence of light where light usually is.

Perhaps you object that sin is the desire or will to do an evil deed, and that this will or desire condemns us before God in the same way as the will to do a good deed justifies us. There is as much quality, you suggest, in the good will as there is sin in the evil will; and it is no less 'in being' in the latter than in the former. By willing to do what we believe to be pleasing to God we please Him. Equally, by willing to do what we believe to be displeasing to God, we displease Him and seem either to violate or despise His nature.

But diligent attention will show that we must think far otherwise of this point. We frequently err; and from no evil will at all. Indeed, the evil will itself, when restrained, though it may not be quenched, procures the palm-wreath for those who resist it. It provides, not merely the materials for combat, but also the crown of glory. It should be spoken of rather as a certain inevitable weakness than as sin. Take, for example, the case of an innocent servant whose harsh master is moved with fury against him. He pursues the servant, drawing his sword with intent to kill him. For a while the servant flies and avoids death as best he can. At last, forced all unwillingly to it, he kills his master so as not to be killed by him. Let anyone say what sort of evil will there was in this deed. His will was only to flee from death and preserve his own life. Was this an evil will? You reply: 'I do not think this was an evil will. But the will that he had to
kill the master who was pursuing him was evil.
Your answer would be admirable and acute if you
could show that the servant really willed what you
say that he did. But, as I insisted, he was unwillingly
forced to his deed. He protracted his master’s life as
long as he could, knowing that danger also threatened
his own life from such a crime. How, then was a
deed done voluntarily by which he incurred danger
to his own life?

Your reply may be that the action was voluntary
because the man’s will was to escape death even though
it may not have been to kill his master. This charge
might easily be preferred against him. I do not rebut
it. Nevertheless, as has been said, that will by which he
sought to evade death, as you urge, and not to kill his
master, cannot at all be condemned as bad. He did,
however, fail by consenting, though driven to it
through fear of death, to an unjust murder which he
ought rather to have endured than committed. Of his
own will, I mean, he took the sword. It was not
handed to him by authority. The Truth saith: ‘Every-
one that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword.’
(Matt. xxvi, 52.) By his rashness he risked the death
and damnation of his soul. The servant’s wish, then,
was not to kill his master, but to avoid death. Because
he consented, however, as he should not have done, to
murder, this wrongful consent preceding the crime
was sin.

Someone may interpose: ‘But you cannot conclude
that he wished to kill his master because, in order to
escape death, he was willing to kill his master. I might
say to a man; I am willing for you to have my cape
so that you may give me five shillings. Or, I am glad
for you to have it at this price. But I do not hand it
over because I desire you to have possession of it.’ No,
and if a man in prison desired under duress to put
his son there in his place that he might secure his own

ransom, should we therefore admit that he wished to
send his son to prison?

It was only with many a tear and groan that he
consented to such a course.

The fact is that this kind of will, existing with much
internal regret, is not, if I may so say, will, but a passive
submission of mind. It is so because the man wills one
thing on account of another. He puts up with this
because he really desires that. A patient is said to
submit to cautery or lancet that he may obtain health.
Martyrs endured that they might come to Christ;
and Christ, too, that we may be saved by his passion.

Yet we are not bound to admit simply that these
people therefore wish for this mental unease. Such
unease can only be where something occurs contrary
to wish. No man suffers so long as he fulfils his wish
and does what he likes to experience. The Apostle
says: ‘I desire to depart and to be with Christ’ (Phil.
1, 23), that is, to die so that I may attain to him.
Elsewhere this apostle says: ‘We desire not to be
despoiled of our garments, but to be clothed from
above, that our mortal part may be swallowed up
in life.’ This notion, Blessed Augustine reminds us, was
contained in the Lord’s address to Peter: ‘Thou shalt
extend thy hands and another shall gird thee, and lead
thee whither thou wilt not.’ (John xxi, 18.) The
Lord also spoke to the Father out of the weakness of
the human nature which he had taken upon himself: ‘If
it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless
not as I will, but as thou willest.’ (Matt. xxvi, 39.)
His spirit naturally trembled before the great terror
of death; and he could not speak of what he knew to
be punishment as a matter of his own will. When
elsewhere it is written of Him: ‘He was offered because
He himself willed it’ (Isaiah liii, 7), it must be under-
stood either of His divine nature, in whose will it was
that he should suffer as a man, or ‘He himself willed it’
must be taken according to the Psalmist’s phrase:
‘Whatsoever he willed, that he did.’ (Ps. cxiii, 3.)

\[^1\text{See note on medieval currency, in ch. xviii.}\]
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Sin, therefore, is sometimes committed without an evil will. Thus sin cannot be defined as 'will.' True, you will say, when we sin under constraint, but not when we sin willingly, for instance, when we will to do something which we know ought not to be done by us. There the evil will and sin seem to be the same thing. For example a man sees a woman; his concupiscence is aroused; his mind is enlisted by fleshly lust and stirred to base desire. This wish, this lascivious longing, what else can it be, you say, than sin?

I reply: What if that wish may be bridled by the power of temperance? What if its nature is never to be entirely extinguished but to persist in struggle and not fully fail even in defeat? For where is the battle if the antagonist is away? Whence the great reward without grave endurance? When the fight is over nothing remains but to reap the reward. Here we strive in contest in order elsewhere to obtain as victors a crown. Now, for a contest, an opponent is needed who will resist, not one who simply submits. This opponent is our evil will over which we triumph when we subjugate it to the divine will. But we do not entirely destroy it. For we need must ever expect to encounter our enemy. What achievement before God is it if we undergo nothing contrary to our own will, but merely practice what we please? Who will be grateful to us if in what we say we do for him we merely satisfy our own fancy?

You will say, what merit have we with God in acting willingly or unwillingly? Certainly none: I reply. He weighs the intention rather than the deed in his recompense. Nor does the deed, whether it proceed from a good or an evil will, add anything to the merit, as we shall show shortly. But when we set His will before our own so as to follow His and not ours, our merit with God is magnified, in accordance with that perfect word of Truth: 'I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me.' (John vi, 38.) To this end He exhorts us: 'If anyone comes to me, and does not hate father, and mother . . . yea his own soul also, he is not worthy of me.' (Luke xiv, 26.) That is to say, 'unless a man renounces his parents' influence and his own will and submits himself to my teaching, he is not worthy of me.' Thus we are hidden to hate our father, not to destroy him. Similarly with our own will. We must not be led by it; at the same time, we are not asked to root it out altogether.

When the Scripture says: 'Go not after your own desires' (Eccles. xviii, 30), and: 'Turn from your own will' (ibid.), it instructs us not to fulfill our desires. Yet it does not say that we are to be wholly without them. It is vicious to give in to our desires; but not to have any desires at all is impossible for our weak nature.

The sin, then, consists not in desiring a woman, but in consent to the desire, and not the wish for whoredom, but the consent to the wish is damnation.

Let us see how our conclusions about sexual intemperance apply to theft. A man crosses another's garden. At the sight of the delectable fruit his desire is aroused. He does not, however, give way to desire so as to take anything by theft or rapine, although his mind was moved to strong inclination by the thought of the delight of eating. Where there is desire, there, without doubt, will exists. The man desires the eating of that fruit wherein he doubts not that there will be delight. The weakness of nature in this man is compelled to desire the fruit which, without the master's permission, he has no right to take. He conquers the desire, but does not extinguish it. Since, however, he is not enticed into consent, he does not descend to sin.

What, then, of your objection? It should be clear from such instances, that the wish or desire itself of doing what is not seemly is never to be called sin, but rather, as we said, the consent is sin. We consent to what is not seemly when we do not draw ourselves
back from such a deed, and are prepared, should opportunity offer, to perform it completely. Whoever is discovered in this intention, though his guilt has yet to be completed in deed, is already guilty before God insofar as he strives with all his might to sin, and accomplishes within himself, as the blessed Augustine reminds us, as much as if he were actually taken in the act.

But while wish is not sin, and, as we have said, we sometimes commit sin unwillingly, there are nevertheless those who assert that every sin is voluntary. In this respect they discover a certain difference between sin and will. Will is one thing, they say, but a voluntary act is another. They mean that there is a distinction between will and what is done willingly. If, however, we call sin what we have already decided that it essentially is, namely, contempt of God or consent to that which we believe should not, for God’s sake, be done, how can we say that sin is voluntary? I mean, how can we say that we wish to despise God? What is sin but sinking below a standard, or becoming liable to damnation? For although we desire to do what we know deserves punishment, yet we do not desire to be punished. Thus plainly we are reprobate. We are willing to do wrong; but we are unwilling to bear the just punishment of wrong-doing. The punishment which is just displeases: the deed which is unjust pleases. Often we woo a married woman because of her charm. Our wish is not so much to commit adultery as a longing that she were unmarried. On the other hand, many covet the wives of influential men for the sake of their own fame, and not for the natural attractiveness of these ladies. Their wish is for adultery rather than sexual relationship, the major in preference to the minor excess. Some, too, are ashamed altogether of being betrayed into any consent to concupiscence or being guilty of voluntary lust.

How, then, a wish which we do not wish to have can be called voluntary, as it is according to those thinkers I have mentioned, so that all sin becomes a matter of voluntary action, I assuredly do not understand, unless by voluntary is meant that no action is determined, since a sin is never a predestined event. Or perhaps we are to take ‘voluntary’ to be that which proceeds from some kind of will. For although the man who slew his master had no will to perform the actual murder, nevertheless he did it from some sort of will, because he certainly wished to escape or defer death.

Some are intensely indignant when they hear us assert that the act of sinning adds nothing to guilt or damnation before God. Their contention is that in this act of sinning a certain delight supervenes, which increases the sin, as in sexual intercourse or indulgence in food which we referred to above. Their statement is absurd unless they can prove that physical delight of this kind is itself sin, and that such pleasure cannot be taken without a sin being thereby committed. If it be as they suppose, then no one is permitted to enjoy physical pleasure. The married do not escape sin when they employ their physical privilege; nor yet the man who eats with relish his own fruits.

Invalids, too, who are treated to more delicate dishes to aid their recovery of strength would likewise be guilty, since they are not able to eat without a sense of delight and should this be lacking, the food does them no good. Finally, God, the Creator of nourishment and of the bodies which receive it, would not be without guilt for having instilled savours which necessarily involve in sin those who ignorantly use them. Yet how should He supply such things for our consumption, or permit them to be consumed, if it were impossible for us to eat them without sin?
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How, again, can it be said that there is sin in doing what is allowed? In regard to those matters which once were unlawful and forbidden, if they are later allowed and made lawful, they can be done entirely without sin. For instance, the eating of pork and many other things once out of bounds to the Jew are now free to us Christians. When, therefore, we see Jews turned Christian gladly eating food of this sort which the law had prohibited, how can we defend their rectitude except by affirming that this latitude has now been conceded to them by God?

Well, in what was formerly a food restriction and is now food freedom, the concession of freedom excludes sin and eliminates contempt of God. Who then shall say that a man sins in respect of a matter which the divine permission has made lawful for him? If the marriage-bed or the eating of even delicate food was permitted from the first day of our creation, when we lived in Paradise without sin, who can prove that we transgress in these enjoyments, so long as we do not pass the limits of the permission? Another objection is that matrimonial intercourse and the eating of tasty food are only allowed on condition of being taken without pleasure. But, if this is so, then they are allowed to be done in a way in which they never can be done. That concession is not reasonable which concedes that a thing shall be so done as it is certain that it cannot be done. By what reasoning did the law aforesaid enforce matrimony so that each might leave his seed to Israel? Or, how did the Apostle oblige wives to fulfil the mutual debt if these acts could not be done without sinning? How can he refer this debt when already it is of necessity sin? Or how should a man be compelled to do what he will grieve God by doing? Hence, I think that it is plain that no natural physical delight can be set down as sin, nor can it be called guilt for men to delight in what, when it is done, must involve the feeling of delight.

For example, if anyone obliged a monk, bound in chains, to lie among women, and the monk by the softness of the couch and by contact with his fair flatterers is allured into delight, though not into consent, who shall presume to designate guilt the delight which is naturally awakened?

You may urge, with some thinkers, that the carnal pleasure, even in lawful intercourse, involves sin. Thus David says: 'Behold in sin was I conceived.' (Ps. 51, 7.) And the Apostle, when he had said: 'Ye return to it again' (1 Cor. vii, 3), adds, nevertheless, 'This I say by way of concession, not of command.' (ibid., v. 6.) Yet authority rather than reason, seems to dictate the view that we should allow simple physical delight to be sin. For, assuredly, David was conceived not in fornication, but in matrimony; and concession, that is forgiveness, does not, as this standpoint avers, condone when there is no guilt to forgive. As for what David meant when he says that he had been conceived 'in iniquity' or 'in sin' and does not say 'whose' sin, he referred to the general curse of original sin, wherein from the guilt of our first parents each is subject to damnation, as it is elsewhere stated: 'None are pure of stain, not the infant a day old, if he has life on this earth.' As the blessed Jerome reminds us and as manifest reason teaches, the soul of a young child is without sin. If, then, it is pure of sin, how is it also impure by sinful corruption? We must understand the infant's purity from sin in reference to its personal guilt. But its contact with sinful corruption, its 'stain,' is in reference to penalty owed by mankind because of Adam's sin. He who has not yet perceived by reason what he ought to do cannot be guilty of contempt of God. Yet he is not free from the contamination of the sin of his first parents, from which he contracts the penalty, though not the guilt, and bears in penalty what they committed in guilt. When, therefore, David says that he was conceived in iniquity

'But see Introduction for this distinction between 'penalty' and 'guilt' of original sin.
or who was tempted by his neighbour's fruit, but who was not enticed into consent. There was evil consent without evil desire in the servant who unwillingly killed his master.

Certain acts which ought not to be done often are done, and without any sin, when, for instance, they are committed under force or ignorance. No one, I think, ignores this fact. A woman under constraint of violence, lies with another's husband. A man, taken by some trick, sleeps with one whom he supposed to be his wife, or kills a man, in the belief that he himself has the right to be both judge and executioner. Thus to desire the wife of another or actually to lie with her is not sin. But to consent to that desire or to that action is sin. This consent to covetousness the law calls covetousness in saying: 'Thou shalt not covet.' (Deut. v. 21.) Yet that which we cannot avoid ought not to be forbidden, nor that wherein, as we said, we do not sin. But we should be cautioned about the consent to covetousness. So, too, the saying of the Lord must be understood: 'Whosoever shall look upon a woman to desire her.' (Matt. v. 28.) That is, whosoever shall so look upon her as to slip into consent to covetousness, 'has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (Matt. v. 28), even though he may not have committed adultery in deed. He is guilty of sin, though there be no sequel to his intention.1

Careful account will reveal that wherever actions are restricted by some precept or prohibition, these refer rather to will and consent than to the deeds themselves. Otherwise nothing relative to a person's moral merit could be included under a precept. Indeed,

1For this section on intention, compare a phrase from Theophrastus' Characters, 29: ἐπιθυμεῖς εἰπτεῖν διανοήσεις οὐ καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐλάχιστον πρὸς τὴν ψυχήν κυριαρχεῖν. The lover of evil averts that only the social effect of a deed, and not the man's intention must be judged. The same notion is humorously illustrated in Voltaire's romance, L'Ingénue, where the heroine, to rescue her lover from prison, permits the advances of an influential official. Vous coupable, lui dit son amant: non, vous ne l'êtes pas; le crime ne peut être que dans le coeur; la vertu est à la vertu et à moi.
actions are so much the less worth prescribing as they are less in our power to do. At the same time, many things we are forbidden to do for which there exists in our will both the inclination and the consent.

The Lord God says: "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not bear false witness." (Deut. v, 17, 20.) If we accept these cautions as being only about actions, as the words suggest, then guilt is not forbidden, but simply the activity of guilt. For we have seen that actions may be carried out without sin, as that it is not sin to kill a man or to lie with another's wife. And even the man who desires to bear false testimony, and is willing to utter it, so long as he is silent for some reason and does not speak, is innocent before the law, that is, if the prohibition in this matter be accepted literally of the action. It is not said that we should not wish to give false witness, or that we should not consent in bearing it, but simply that we should not bear false witness.  

Similarly, when the law forbids us to marry our sisters, if this prohibition relates to deed rather than to intention, no one can keep the commandment, for a sister unless we recognize her, is just a woman. If a man, then, marries his sister in error, is he a transgressor for doing what the law forbade? He is not, you will reply, because, in acting ignorantly in what he did, he did not consent to a transgression. Thus a transgressor is not one who does what is prohibited. He is one who consents to what is prohibited. The prohibition is, therefore, not about action, but about consent. It is as though in saying: 'Do not do this or that,' we meant: 'Do not consent to do this or that,' or, 'Do not wittingly do this.'

1Cf. Augustine, Enchiridion, ch. xviii: Nost considertaris is quaestionis nescis quid dicere, sed sola intentione dicentes, melior sit, qui nesciens: falsum diert, quoniam id verum putat, quam qui mentiendi animam scient; nesciens verum esse quod dict. The intention of the speaker rather than his action must be considered, and the man who tells a lie thinking to be the truth is better than one who, wishing to tell a lie, tells the truth by mistake. Augustine here introduces a moral test which is not developed in his general doctrine.

Blessed Augustine, in his careful view of this question, reduces every sin or command to terms of charity and covetousness, and not to works. 'The law,' he says, 'inculcates nothing but charity, and forbids nothing but covetousness.' The Apostle, also, asserts: 'All the law is contained in one word: thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' (Rom. xiii, 8, 10), and again, 'Love is the fulfilling of the law.' (ibid.)

Whether you actually give alms to a needy person, or charity makes you ready to give, makes no difference to the merit of the deed. The will may be there when the opportunity is not. Nor does it rest entirely with you to deal with every case of need which you encounter. Actions which are right and actions which are not, from right are done by good and bad men alike. The intention alone separates the two classes of men.

Augustine reminds us that in the selfsame action we find God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and also Judas the betrayer. The betrayal of the Son was accomplished by God the Father, and by the Son, and by the betrayer. For 'the Father delivered up the Son, and the Son Himself' (Rom. viii, 32; Gal. ii, 20), as the Apostle says, and Judas delivered up his Master. The traitor, therefore, did the same thing as God Himself. But did Judas do anything well? No, Good certainly came of his act; but his act was not well done, nor was it destined to benefit him.

God considers not the action, but the spirit of the action. It is the intention, not the deed wherein the merit or praise of the doer consists. Often, indeed, the same action is done from different motives: for justice sake by one man, for an evil reason by another. Two men, for instance, hang a guilty person. The one does it out of zeal for justice; the other in resentment for an earlier enmity. The action of hanging is the same. Both men do what is good and what justice demands.

1Abailard cites the Fathers to buttress particular points without implying their full agreement with his main argument. In the Sic et Non he showed that the Fathers frequently contradicted themselves!
Yet the diversity of their intentions causes the same deed to be done from different motives, in the one case good, in the other bad.

Everyone knows that the devil himself does nothing without God’s permission, when he either punishes a wicked man according to his deserts, or is allowed to afflict a just man for moral cleansing or for an example of endurance. Since, however, in doing what God permits the devil moves at the spur of his own malice, the power which he has may be called good, or even just, while his will is for ever unjust. He receives, that is, the power from God, but his will is of himself.

Who, among the elect, can ever emulate the deeds of hypocrites? Who, for the love of God, ever endures or undertakes so much as they do from thirst for human praise? Who does not agree that sometimes what God forbids may rightly be done, while, contrary, He may counsel certain things which of all things are least convenient? We note how He forbade certain miracles, whereby He had healed infirmities, to be made public. He set an example of humility lest any man should claim glory for the grace bestowed on him. Nevertheless, the recipients of those benefits did not cease to broadcast them, to the praise of Him who had done such things, and yet had forbidden them to be revealed. Thus we read: ‘As much as He bade them not to speak, so much the more did they publish abroad, etc.’ Will you judge these men guilty of a fault who acted contrary to the command which they had received, and did so wittingly? Who can acquit them of wrong-doing, unless by finding that they did not act out of contempt for the One who commanded, but decided to do what was to His honour? How, then, did the matter stand? Did Christ command what ought not to have been commanded? Or, did the newly-healed men disobey when they should have obeyed? The command was a good thing; yet it was not good for it to be obeyed.

In the case of Abraham, also, you will accuse God for first enjoining the sacrifice of Abraham’s son, and then revoking the command. Has, then, God never wisely commanded anything which, if it had come about, would not have been good? If good, you will object, why was it afterwards forbidden? But conceive that it was good for the same thing to be prescribed and also to be prohibited. God, we know, permits nothing, and does not himself consent to achieve anything apart from rational cause. Thus it is the pure intention of the command, not the execution of the action which justifies God, in wisely commanding what would not in actual fact be good. God did not intend Abraham to sacrifice his son, or command this sacrifice to be put into effect. His aim was to test Abraham’s obedience, constancy of faith, and love towards Him, so that these qualities should be left to us as an example. This intention the Lord God plainly asserts afterwards in saying: ‘Now know I that thou fearest the Lord.’ (Gen. xxiii, 12.) It is as if he frankly said: ‘I commanded you; you showed yourself ready to obey Me. Both these things were done so that others might know what I had Myself known of you from the beginning.’ There was a right intention on God’s part; but it was not right for it to be put in practice. The prohibition, too, in the case of the miracles of healing was right. The object of this prohibition was not for it to be obeyed, but for an example to be given to our weak spirit in avoiding empty applause. God, in the one case enjoined an action which, if obeyed, would not have been good. In the other case, He forbade what was worth putting into fact, namely, a knowledge of Christ’s miracles. The intention excuses Him in the first matter, just as the intention excuses the men who, in the second instance, were healed and did not carry out his injunction. They knew that the precept was not given to be practised, but in order that the aforesaid example of moderation in a successful miracle might
be set. In keeping, then, the spirit of the command they showed, by actually disobeying, no contempt for Him with whose intention they knew that they were acting.

A scrutiny of the deed rather than of the intention will reveal, then, cases where men frequently not only wish to go against God's bidding, but carry their wish knowingly into effect, and do so without any guilt of sin. An action or a wish must not be called bad because it does not in actual fact fall in with God's command. It may well be that the doer's intention does not at all differ from the will of his divine superior. The intention exonerates Him who gave a practically unseemly command: the intention excuses the man who, out of kindness, disobeyed the command to conceal the miracle.

Briefly to summarize the above argument: Four things were postulated which must be carefully distinguished from one another.

1. Imperfection of soul, making us liable to sin.
2. Sin itself, which we decided is consent to evil or contempt of God.
3. The will or desire of evil.
4. The evil deed.

To wish is not the same thing as to fulfil a wish. Equally, to sin is not the same as to carry out a sin. In the first case, we sin by consent of the soul: the second is a matter of the external effect of an action, namely, when we fulfil in deed that whereunto we have previously consented. When, therefore, temptation is said to proceed through three stages, suggestion, delight, consent; it must be understood that, like our first parents, we are frequently led along these three paths to the commission of sin. The devil's persuasion comes first promising from the taste of the forbidden fruit immortality. Delight follows. When the woman sees the beautiful tree, and perceives that the fruit is good, her appetite is whetted by the anticipated pleasure of tasting. This desire she ought to have repressed, so as to obey God's command. But in consenting to it, she was drawn secondly into sin. By penitence she should have put right this fault, and obtained pardon. Instead, she thirdly consummated the sin by the deed. Eve thus passed through the three stages to the commission of sin.

By the same avenues we also arrive not at sin, but at the action of sin, namely, the doing of an unseemly deed through the suggestion or prompting of something within us. If we already know that such a deed will be pleasant, our imagination is held by anticipatory delight and we are tempted thereby in thought. So long as we give consent to such delight, we sin. Lastly, we pass to the third stage, and actually commit the sin.

It is agreed by some thinkers that carnal suggestion, even though the person causing the suggestion be not present, should be included under sinful suggestion. For example, a man having seen a woman falls into a sensual desire of her. But it seems that this kind of suggestion should simply be called delight. This delight, and other delights of the like kind, arise naturally and, as we said above, they are not sinful. The Apostle calls them 'human temptations.' No temptation has taken you yet which was not common to men. God is faithful, and will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will, with the temptation make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.' By temptation is meant, in general, any movement of the soul to do something unseemly, whether in wish or consent. We speak of human temptation without which it is hardly or never possible for human weakness to exist. Such are sexual desire, or the pleasures of the table. From these the Psalmist asks to be delivered when he says: 'Deliver me from my wants, O Lord' (Ps. xxiv, 17); that is, from the temptations of natural and necessary appetites that they may not influence him into sinful consent. Or,
he may mean: 'When this life is over, grant me to be without those temptations of which life has been full.'

When the Apostle says: 'No temptation has taken you but what is human,' his statement amounts to this: Even if the soul be stirred by that delight which is, as we said, human temptation, yet God would not lead the soul into that consent wherein sin consists. Someone may object: But by what power of our own are we able to resist those desires? We may reply: 'God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted,' as the Scripture says. In other words: We should rather trust him than rely upon ourselves. He promises help, and is true to his promises. He is faithful, so that we should have complete faith in him. Out of pity God diminishes the degree of human temptation, 'does not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able,' in order that it may not drive us to sin at a pace we cannot endure, when, that is, we strive to resist it. Then, too, God turns the temptation to our advantage: for He trains us thereby so that the recurrence of temptation causes us less care, and we fear less the onset of a foe over whom we have already triumphed, and whom we know how to meet.

Every encounter, not as yet undertaken, is for that reason, to us, a matter of more anxiety and dismay. But when such an encounter comes to those accustomed to victory, its force and terror alike vanish.

CHAPTER IV
DIABOLICAL SUGGESTION

There are suggestions of demons, as well as of men. Demons stimulate to sin not so much by words as by opportunities. Skilled in natural matters, both by subtlety of spirit and long experience,

1William of Thierry attacks this view. Introd., p. 17.

whence they are called 'daemones,' i.e., skilful, they know the inherent nature or force of things whereby human frailty can easily be led into lust and other impulses.

With God's permission they also often send men into a stupor and provide remedies for it when men ask their aid. When they cease to injure 'tis said, they begin to cure. In Egypt they were allowed, through magicians, to work wonderfully against Moses. Indeed, by their insight into the nature of things they must be named 'promoters' rather than creators of what they accomplish; just as the man who, in Virgil (Georg., Bk. IV, v, 310), made bees come out of the tanned hide of a bull, would be called not a creator of bees, so much as a fitter of nature's parts.

Demons, by this skill in the nature of things, bewitch us into lust or other passions, arousing them by some art we not of, bestirring them as we eat or lie a-bed; or somehow insinuating them from within or without. In herbs or seeds, or in the nature of trees and stones, are many powers apt to stimulate or mollify the mind. Diligent study of them brings facility in their use.

1 Cf. The Greek legendary figure, Daedalus, whose name with the same root, signifies 'cunning workman.' Abelard is medieval rather than modern in this chapter; but there is a scientific view in his notion of incitement through material objects.

CHAPTER V
CRIME AND INWARD GUILT: THEIR RESPECTIVE PUNISHMENTS

The sinful action is not strictly sin; it adds nothing to the sum of sin.' Our axiom, so enunciated, falls on dissentient ears. 'Why, then, it is asked 'give a more severe penance for sins of commission than for guilty thoughts?' But let them
reflect whether sometimes a grave penance be not imposed where no guilt called for pardon. Are there not times when we must punish those whom we know to be innocent?

A poor woman has a child at the breast. She lacks the clothing needful for herself and for the babe in the cradle. Prompted by pity, she lays the infant in her own bed so as to cherish him with her clothes. Nature, however, overcomes her, and, in sleep, she stifles the child whom she yet embraces with the greatest love. ‘Have love,’ says Augustine, ‘and do as thou wilt.’ Yet when she goes to the bishop for penance, a heavy penalty is pronounced upon her, not for the fault, but that she herself a second time, and other women, may be more careful in such a situation.

Again, a man may be accused by his enemies before the judge, and a charge made against him whereof the judge knows that the man is innocent. His enemies, however, persist and are importunate for a hearing. On the appointed day they begin the case and adduce false witnesses to get their man convicted. By no clear reasons can the judge take exception to these witnesses; and he is compelled by law to admit them. Their proof prevails. The judge has to punish an innocent man who ought not to be punished. The accused merited no penalty; but the judge, justly in the legal aspect, had to impose one. Plainly, therefore, a man may frequently be the subject of a justifiable sentence without the anterior fault. Is it any wonder, then, if there be preceding guilt, that the subsequent act of crime should increase the penalty required by men in this life, although the guilt and not the act of crime is what begets the penalty required by God in a future life? Men judge of visible, and not of invisible fact. They do not estimate the error, so much as the effect of an action. God alone considers the spirit in which a thing is done, rather than merely what is done. He weighs accurately the guilt in our intention, and assesses our fault by a true test. Hence he ‘proves the heart and reins’ (Jer. xx, 12), and ‘sees in secret.’ (Matt. vi, 4.) Where no man sees, there God sees. In punishing sin he regards not the work, but the will. We, contrarily, regard not the will, which we do not see, but the work which we do see. Frequently, therefore, by mistake, or, as we have said, under stress of law, we punish the innocent or acquit the guilty. ‘He tries the heart and reins.’ God discerns, that is to say, the intentions of whatever sort, which spring from the disposition or weakness of the soul, or from physical delight.

CHAPTER VI

SPIRITUAL AND CARNAL SINS

All sins are of the mind only, for there alone can be the crime and the contempt of God, where is the seat of the knowledge of Him, and where reason resides. Certain sins, nevertheless, are called spiritual, others carnal. The spiritual sins proceed from the imperfection of the mind, the carnal from the weakness of the flesh. Now it is impossible to lust after or desire anything except by an act of will. Although, therefore, desire belongs to the mind alone, will concerns both the flesh and also the spirit. ‘The flesh,’ says the Apostle, ‘lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.’ (Gal. v, 7.) Out of fleshly delight the soul desires certain things which, on the verdict of reason, it either recoils from or rebukes.
CHAPTER VII

WHY IS GOD CALLED ‘INSPECTOR CORDIS ET RENUM,’ I.E., SAID TO TRY THE HEART AND REINS?

These two desires of the flesh, and of the spirit are, then, distinguished. Now God has been called the ‘one who tries the heart and reins.’ He scrutinizes, that is to say, intentions and the consents which proceed from them. We on our part cannot discuss and decide these issues of intention, but address our censure to deeds. We punish facts rather than faults. Injury to the soul we do not regard as so much a matter for punishment as injury to others. Our object is to avoid public mischief, rather than to correct personal mistakes. The Lord said to Peter: ‘If thy brother sin against thee, correct him between thyself and him.’ (Matt. xviii, 15.) ‘Sin against thee.’ Is the meaning here that we ought to correct and punish injuries done to us and not those done to others, as though ‘against thee’ meant ‘not against another’? By no means. The phrase ‘if he sin against thee’ means that he acts publicly so as to corrupt you by his example. For if he sins against himself only, his sin, being hidden, involves in guilt merely the man himself. The sin does not, by the sinner’s bad example, induce others to indiscretion. Although the evil action has no imitators, or even none who recognize it as wrong, nevertheless, in so far as it is a public act it must, in human society, be chastised more than private guilt, because it can occasion greater mischief, and can be more destructive, by the example it sets, than the hidden failing. Everything which is likely to lead to common loss or to public harm must be punished by a greater requital. Where a sin involves more serious injury the penalty must therefore be heavier. The greater the social stumbling-block, the more stringent must be the social correction, even though the original guilt be relatively light.

Suppose, for example, that someone has, by evil intercourse, corrupted a woman in a church. The people hear of the incident. But they are not roused so much by the violation of a woman, the true temple of God, as by the desecration of the material temple, the church. This is the case even though, admittedly, a wall is of less consequence than a woman, and it is more grievous to harm a human being than a place. Again, the setting fire to houses we punish more severely than fornication. But with God the latter incurs a far greater sentence.

The punishment of public guilt is not so much a debt paid to justice as the exercise of economy. We consult the common interest, as has been said by checking social mischief. Frequently we punish minor misdeeds with major penalties. In doing so, we do not, in a spirit of pure justice ponder what guilt preceded; but, by shrewd foresight, we estimate the damage which may ensue if the deed be lightly dealt with. We reserve, therefore, sins of the soul for the divine judgment. But the effect of these sins, about which we have to determine, we follow up, by our own judgment, employing a certain economy, that is, the rule of prudence referred to above, rather than the precept of equity.

God assigns the penalty of each crime according to the measure of guilt. The degree of contempt displayed by men to God is afterwards proportionately punished, whatever be their condition or calling. Suppose that a monk and a lay-brother both fall into consent to an act of fornication. If the mind of the lay-brother be so inflamed that he would not abstain from shame out of reverence for God, even if he had been a monk, then the lay-brother deserves the same penalty as the monk.

The same notion applies where one man, sinning openly, offends many, and corrupts them by his example; while another man sins in secret, and injures only himself. For the secret sinner, if his intention
and his contempt of God are identical with those of the open sinner, rather by accident does not corrupt others. The man who does not restrain himself out of respect for God would hardly refrain, for the same reason from public crime. In God's sight, assuredly, he is committed on a similar charge to that of the open sinner. For, in the recompense of good or evil, God notes the soul alone, not its external effects and counts what comes from our guilt or good will. It is the soul in its scheme of intention, not in the outward result of its action, that God assesses. These are actions, as we said, common to sinners and saints, all of them in themselves indifferent and only to be called bad or good according to the intention of the agent. Such actions are so described not because it is good or bad for them to be done, but because they are done well, or ill; that is, they are performed with a seemly, or unseemly intention.

For, as Blessed Augustine reminds us, it is good for a man to be bad since God may use him for a good end, and may not allow him to be otherwise even though his condition be altogether evil.

When, therefore, we call the intention of a man good, and his deed good also, we distinguish two things, intention and deed. Nevertheless, there is only one goodness of intention. It is like speaking of a good man, and the son of a good man. We imagine two men, but not two goodesses. A man is called good because of his own goodness. But when the son of a good man is spoken of, it is clear that he cannot have good in him just because he is a good man's son. Similarly, everyone's intention is called good in itself. But the deed is not called good in itself, for it only proceeds from a good intention. Thus, there is one goodness, whence both intention and deed are designated good, just as there is one goodness from which a good man and the son of a good man are named; or one goodness by which a good man, and the will of a good man can each be explained.

The objection of some who say that the deed merits equal recompense with the intention, or even an additional recompense, may be proved nonsensical. 'There are two goods,' they exclaim, 'the good intention, and the carrying out of the good intention. Good added to good ought to be worth more than a single good.'

Our reply is: 'Granted that the whole is worth more than the separate parts, must we admit that it merits greater reward?' Not at all. There are many animate and inanimate things which, in large numbers, are useful for more purposes than any one of the number would be alone. Nevertheless, no additional reward is thought to be due to them on that account. For instance, an ox joined to another ox or a horse to a horse; or, again, wood added to wood or iron to iron; these things are good, and a number of them is worth more than each singly. Yet they are not more highly praised when it is seen that two of them put together can do more than one by itself.

True, you say, it is so; but only because these things could never deserve anything, being without reason. Well; but has our deed any reason, so as to be able to deserve praise or blame? None, you say; but our action is said to have merit because it imparts merit to us, making us worthy of reward, or, at any rate, of greater reward. Now it is this very statement which we have denied above. Consider why it is false, apart from what we have already said. Two men set about the same scheme of building poor-houses. One man completes the object to which he devotes himself. The other has the money which he put by stolen forcibly from him, and through no fault of his own—prevented simply by burglary—is not able to conclude what he intended to do. Can the external fact, that the alms-houses are unbuilt, lessen his merit with God, or shall the malice of another make the man who did what he could for God less acceptable to God?

Otherwise, the size of his purse could make a man
better and worthier, if property had any bearing upon moral merit or the increase of merit. The richer men were, the better they could be, since from their stock of wealth they would be able to augment their piety by their philanthropy. But it is the height of insanity to assume that wealth can confer true bliss or dignity of the soul, or detract from the merit of poor men. If property cannot make a soul better, then it cannot make the soul dearer to God, nor get any bliss of moral merit.

1 Two almshouses built by a very rich man would be of greater merit than one built by a well-off man, even though the piety of both, in their motive of serving God and man, was the same.

CHAPTER VIII
RECOMPENSE OF ACTIONS

We do not, however, deny that in this life some recompense should be made for good and bad deeds, so that by means of reward and punishment in the present we may be stirred to good actions or restrained from bad ones. People may also profit by the examples of others in this way. They can copy what is fit and agreeable, and avoid what is not.

CHAPTER IX
GOD AND MAN UNITED IN CHRIST IS NOT SOMETHING BETTER THAN GOD ALONE

Let us resume the argument (Ch. VII). When it is asserted that good added to good achieves something better than one of these goods by itself, beware of being led to say that Christ, that is, God and man united mutually in a person, is something better than the divinity of Christ or than the humanity of Christ, that is to say that this union is more than God united with man, or man's nature taken by God. It is agreed that, in Christ, man's nature was assumed, and that God, who assumed it, was good. Both substances, human and divine, can only be understood as good. Similarly in individual men, the body and the soul, the corporeal and the incorporeal, are alike good. The goodness of the body does not affect the honour or merit of the soul. But who will dare to prefer the whole which is called Christ, namely, God and man, or any group of things to God Himself, as though there could be anything better than Him, Who is the highest good, and from Whom all things receive whatever good they possess? For although some things seem to be so necessary to achieving action that God cannot, as it were, do without them, as being auxiliary or originative causes, yet let there be the largest assembly of things imaginable, nothing can possibly surpass God. Suppose that the number of good things be known, so that we have goodness in many particular cases, still it does not come about, for that reason, that the goodness itself is greater. The same is true of knowledge, which may exist in many minds; or the number of known things may increase, but on that account, knowledge itself does not necessarily grow and become greater than it was before. So, since God is good in Himself, and creates innumerable things, which would neither exist or be good apart from Him, goodness exists in many things through Him, and the number of good things may get greater, yet no goodness can be preferred to or equal His goodness. Goodness exists in man, and goodness exists in God. The substances or natures wherein goodness exists are different: and the goodness of a thing can never be preferred to or equal the divine goodness. For this reason, we cannot speak of anything as better, that is to say, a greater good than God, or of anything equally good.
CHAPTER X

A NUMBER OF GOOD THINGS IS NOT BETTER THAN ONE OF THESE GOOD THINGS

The number of actions is of no importance for their intention. For to speak of good intention and good action, that is action proceeding from good intention, is to refer merely to the goodness of the intention. We cannot retain the term good in the same sense and talk of many 'goods.'

When we say that a man is simple, and speech simple, we do not therefore allow that there exist many 'simples' just because this word 'simple' is employed in the first instance of a man, and in the second instance of speech. No one can then compel us to concede that when the good act is added to the good intention, good is added to good, as though there could be many goods in proportion to whose number recompense ought to be increased. As we have said, we cannot call those actions 'additional goods,' for the word 'good' does not properly apply to them.

CHAPTER XI

THE GOOD ACTION SPRINGS FROM THE GOOD INTENTION

We call the intention good which is right in itself, but the action is good, not because it contains within it some good, but because it issues from a good intention. The same act may be done by the same man at different times. According to the diversity of his intention, however, this act may be at one time good, at another bad. So goodness and badness vary. Compare the proposition: 'Socrates sits.' One conceives this statement either truly or falsely according as Socrates actually does sit, or stands. This alteration in truth and falsity, Aristotle affirms, comes about not from any change in the circumstances which compose the true or false situation, but because the subject-matter of the statement (that is, Socrates) moves in itself, I mean changes from sitting to standing or vice versa.¹

¹We may do the same action twice, just as we may say 'Socrates sits' twice. But just as the same statement will be true when Socrates sits and false when he stands, so the same action will be good when the intention is good, and bad when the intention is bad.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT ARE THE GROUNDS OF GOOD INTENTION?

GOOD or right intention is held by some to be when anyone believes that he acts well, and that what he does pleases God. An example is supplied by those who persecuted the martyrs. About them the Gospel Truth says: 'The hour comes when everyone who kills you will think that he is obedient to God.' (John xvi, 2.) In sympathy with the ignorance of such the Apostle exclaims: 'I bear this testimony on their behalf, that they are zealous for God but not according to knowledge.' That is to say, they are fervently eager to do what they believe pleases God. Since, however, in this desire or keenness of mind they are deceived, their intention is a mistake. The eye of the heart is not so simple as to be capable of seeing clearly and to guard itself from error. For this reason the Lord, when he distinguished works according to right and wrong intention, spoke of the eye of the mind, that is the intention, as either single, pure, as it were, from spot, so that it could see clearly, or, on the contrary, as clouded. 'If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.' This means that, provided the intention was right, all the acts proceed-
The question may be asked whether the persecutors of the martyrs or of Christ erred because they believed that they were pleasing God, or whether they could do without sin what they at heart thought should never be done, especially in view of the above analysis of sin as ‘contempt of God,’ or ‘consent to that whereunto consent ought not to be given.’ We cannot say that they did sin in this respect; nor can we say anyone’s ignorance or even the infidelity (having which no man may be saved) a sin. They who know not Christ, and reject the Christian faith because they believe that it is contrary to God, what contempt of God do they show in this act which is really done on behalf of God? On this latter account, indeed, they think to do well, particularly when the Apostle says: ‘If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence with God.’ (1 John iii, 2), as though he said: ‘when we do not violate our conscience, we have little fear of God holding us guilty of a fault.’ If ignorance must least of all be reckoned as sin, how, it may be urged, does the Lord Himself pray for those who crucify Him saying: ‘Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do.’—(Luke xxiii, 34) or, taught by this example, how can Stephen supplicate for the men who stone him: ‘Father, lay not this sin to their charge.’ (Acts vii, 59)? We must proceed to deal with this question. For, it will be insisted, where guilt does not go first there is no need, later, of pardon. And to be pardoned is simply to have the penalty remitted which the crime warranted. Moreover, Stephen clearly calls sin that which came about from ignorance.

CHAPTER XIV

VARIOUS USES OF THE WORD ‘SIN’

To reply more fully to these objections it must be understood that the term ‘sin’ can be taken in different ways, although, properly speaking, sin is the actual contempt of God, or consent to evil as we recalled just now. The young are immune from sin, so, too, are idiots. These two classes, lacking reason, cannot claim merit and nothing can be imputed to them for sin. They are saved only by the sacraments. Sin is spoken of with the meaning ‘a sacrifice for sin.’ The Apostle, for instance, says that our Lord Jesus Christ was made ‘sin.’ The ‘penalty of sin’ is called simply sin or ‘curse’ when we say sin is destroyed, that is the penalty remitted; and, again, when it is said that Jesus Christ bore our sins, that is, He endured the punishment of our sins or their possible punishment.

The statement that infants have original sin or that all, as the Apostle says, have sinned in Adam is the same as saying that from Adam’s sin arose the sense of our punishment or damnation for sin. Sinful deeds, provided we either do not rightly know them

1This Chapter bears closely upon the ‘Group Movement’ doctrine of the twentieth century. A sense of divine guidance must be grounded in a recognition of divine reason.

4i.e., ‘a sacrifice for sin.’
as such, or do not really wish to do them, are not all to be termed sins. For what is sinning against anyone but the putting into effect of the evil intention? It is not unusual, contrariwise, we refer, with Athanasius, to sins as if they were deeds. 'And they shall give an account,' he says, 'of their own deeds. They who have done good deeds shall go into eternal life; they who have done evil, into everlasting fire.'

What, then, is 'their own deeds'? Is judgment merely to be about what has been fulfilled in action, that a man may receive more in recompense in proportion as he offers more in effects? Is he who came short in effecting what he intended immune from damnation like the devil who designed cunningly, but failed in fact? Certainly not. In speaking of 'their own deeds' the scripture means what they consented to, what they determined to carry out, that is, about sins of intention, the things which, in God’s sight, they are considered to have actually done, since He punishes intentions as we punish deeds.

Stephen, however, speaks of the sin which the Jews, out of ignorance, committed against him. By this he means the punishment itself which he was enduring and which resulted from the sin of our first parent, just like other punishment issuing from the same source, or, in a word, the injustice of the action in stoning him. And when Stephen prayed that it might not be laid to their charge, he meant that they should not be physically punished for it. For not seldom God punishes some people physically when no fault of theirs warrants it. God does so not without reason, as when He sends affliction upon the just to purge or prove them; or again, when He permits some to be in distress that they may afterwards be freed and glorify God for the benefit obtained. We have, for instance, the case of the blind man about whom the Saviour says: 'Neither did this man sin, nor his parents that he was born blind, but that the works of God might become manifest in him.' (John ix,

You may notice, too, that innocent sons may be endangered or afflicted along with their evil parents and because of their parents' guilt, as was the case at Sodom, and as often occurs. The object is to inspire the wicked to greater terror as they see the punishment more widely extended. It was therefore this kind of sin, namely the punishment which he endured from the Jews and which they unjustly put into effect, which Blessed Stephen contemplated with patience. He prayed that it might not be laid to their charge. That is, that they should not suffer the physical punishment which God gives for peoples' well-being even though they have not sinned in intention.

Our Master also was of this mind in saying: 'Father, forgive them.' (Luke xxiii, 34.) He meant: 'Do not avenge their action against Me with a physical penalty.' This could reasonably have come about even had no guilt of theirs gone before. By such punishment other people, and those Jews themselves, would have realized that in their deed they had not done rightly. Well did the Lord by this example of His prayer exhort us to the power of patience and to an expression of the highest love. Thereby through His own example He showed to us in deed what He had taught in word, that we also should pray for our enemies. The saying, 'forgive,' did not refer to preceding guilt or contempt of God, but to God's reasonable right of inflicting punishment. A divine penalty might, as we said, ensue for which there could be good reason even though actual guilt had not preceded it. An instance occurs in the case of the prophet sent to speak against Samaria, who passed the time in eating, God having forbidden him to do this. He was tricked by another prophet, and could not be charged with contempt of God. He incurred death innocently, and more because he had done a deed than from real guilt. For Blessed Gregory reminds us: 'God sometimes alters his sentence, but never His plan.' God often withdraws from effect a lesson or threat which he had been
disposed to employ. His plan, however, remains firm. What He wills, in prescience, to accomplish never comes short of attainment. He did not abide, for instance, by His injunction to Abraham to immolate his son, nor by his threat against the Ninevites. He changed, as we said, his sentence. Similarly the afore-mentioned prophet, whom God had forbidden to eat on his journey, believed that God had altered his resolution. The prophet thought that he would be in the wrong if he gave no heed to the other prophet, who asserted that he had been sent by God for the very purpose of refreshing that prophet’s faintness with food. He acted without fault, therefore, in as much as he determined to avoid a fault. The sudden death did not harm him. It set him free from the cares of this life and was a salutary caution to many. For they might behold the punishment of a man, just and faultless, and the fulfilment of the saying: ‘Thou, O God, art just and disposest all things justly; him also who deserves no penalty thou dost condemn.’

1 ‘Thou condemnest,’ the scripture implies, ‘not to eternal, but to physical death.’ We may compare the fact that some are saved without merit of their own, as for instance, infants, and attain eternal life by grace alone. Equally, it is not fantastic that some should endure physical penalties which they have not merited. This is the case with infants deceased without the grace of baptism. They are damned, physically and eternally. Many innocent people are also afflicted. What wonder, therefore, if those who crucified the Lord should reasonably incur punishment, though not eternal, albeit their ignorance excuses them from real guilt? Thus was said: ‘forgive them,’ or ‘do not put into effect the punishment which they may, with good reason, incur from this insult.’

The actions which those men committed out of ignorance, or, if you will, ignorance itself is not properly called sin, that is contempt of God. Nor, also, is infidelity, under these circumstances, to be called sin, although of necessity it involves exclusion from eternal life for those who are rationally full-grown. Disbelief in the Gospel, not to recognize Christ, refusal of the Church sacraments, each of these, though they come less from malice than as a result of ignorance are reasons for damnation. The Truth speaks of such: ‘He who believes not is already judged.’ (John iii, 18.) The Apostle also: ‘He who does not know shall not be known.’ (1 Cor. xiv, 38.) But when we say that we sin ignorantly, that is, do what is not seemly, we take sin of this sort to be not in real contempt, but in action only. Philosophers call it a fault to express an idea in unfitting fashion, even though this mistake may not seem to do offence to God. Aristotle, for instance, speaks somewhere about the wrong description of relations. Unless the terms of a statement are properly placed a wrong notion will be the result. Thus a wing may be predicated as ‘of a bird,’ but it would be a fault to make a phrase ‘the bird of a wing.’

Now, if in this sort of fashion we can speak of sin, then everything which we do unsuitably or which we cling to contrary to our well-being—infidelity and ignorance of beliefs which are necessary to salvation—all this we can speak of as ‘sins,’ although no contempt of God appears in them. But I feel that, properly speaking, sin is that which can never come about without personal guilt. Not to know God, to have no belief in Him, to do wrongly under a misapprehension—such things can be found in many a life without there being real fault. A man, for example, may not believe in the Gospel or in Christ because he has heard no preacher. ‘How shall they believe who have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher?’ (Romans x, 14.) What blame is to be attributed to such a man for not believing? Cornelius did not believe.
in Christ until Peter came and gave him instruction. He had known and loved God before by natural law, and, by reason of this, deserved to be heard in his prayer and to find favour in his almsgiving. But if, prior to faith in Christ, he had perchance been untrue to the light of conscience, we should not dare to promise him life, however good his deeds, and we should have to count him not among the faithful, but rather, despite his zeal of salvation, among the unfaithful. Many of God’s decisions are a mystery. He draws to Himself those who hold back or are least concerned with their own salvation, but, in the profound wisdom of his plan he rejects the forward convert and the overwilling believer. Thus the zealous volunteer—‘Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest’—met with reproof. When another excused himself on the ground of solicitude for his father, the Saviour did not even for a moment admit this plea of filial regard. Again, in his onslaught on the obstinacy of certain cities the Lord says: ‘Woe to thee, Chorazin! woe to thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done among you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.’ (Matt. xi. 21.) He confronted these cities, Bethsaida and Chorazin, not only with his preaching, but also with his miracles, though he had anticipated that they would not receive them with respect. The other Gentile cities, Tyre and Sidon, as he knew, would easily have received the evangel. While he thought that a visit to them was unwarranted, he knew that certain people in these cities had been ready to accept the word of preaching. And yet these people perished with their cities. Who, then, can impute to their guilt the destruction which undoubtedly came about through no disregard of theirs? ¹ Nevertheless, we affirm that their infidelity, wherein they died, suffices for damnation, although the reason for this blindness in which the Lord left them remains less clear. One may, perhaps, set it down to their sin, which was a mistake but not a guilty mistake. For, is it not absurd for such persons to be damned if they have not done some kind of sinful deed?

The contention, however, which for some time we have kept in mind is that sin is simply guilty neglect. It cannot exist in anyone, young or old, without their deserving damnation thereby. I do not see how it can be ascribed to guilt if infants or those to whom the Gospel has not been announced do not believe in Christ. It is infidelity; but not guilt, any more than anything which occurs through invincible ignorance, and which we cannot foresee is guilt, e.g., when a man accidentally kills another in a forest with an arrow, not seeing the man and thinking to slay only birds or wild beasts. In such a case we say that he ‘sins’ from ignorance just as we may say that we ‘sin’ not only in consent, but in imagination. But we do not here mean sin to be the same as guilt. We use the term ‘sin’ widely for what little beseems us to do, whether it come about from a mistake, from neglect, or from some other remissness. This, then, is our definition of the sin of ignorance: to do without guilt what we should not do: to do or, if you like, sin in imagination, i.e., to wish for what is not fitting for us; or in speech, or in act, speaking or doing what we ought not; and to do such things out of ignorance and unwittingly. The persecutors of Christ and of their own kinsfolk whom they thought ought to be persecuted, may be said to have sinned in action only (per operationem). But they would have sinned really and more grievously, had they contrary to their conscience, permitted their victims to go free.

¹ The people of Tyre and Sidon sinned in not knowing Christ, but they did so in ignorance, and their sin has, therefore, not the guilt of the cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin, who sinned knowingly, since Christ had preached to them. See Introduction for S. Bernard’s attack on Abailard’s teaching on sins of ignorance.
It may be asked whether God forbids us altogether to sin. If so, then He appears to act unreasonably. This life of ours cannot be lived without at least venial sins. If God meant us to avoid all sins, which is impossible, He would then have promised us no easy yoke and placed on us no light burden, but one which exceeds our strength and which we should support feebly like that yoke of the law of which the apostle Peter spoke. For who can provide against the idle word so as ever without contumely to preserve that perfection whereof James says: 'If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man.' (James iii, 2.) The same writer, however, observes: 'In many things we have all offended.' And another apostle of great excellence says: 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.' (1 John i, 18.) All, I think, are aware how difficult and, indeed, impossible, it seems to our weak nature for us to remain entirely immune from sin. Thus, if we take the term 'sin' generally we shall affirm sin to be everything which we do unfittingly. On the other hand, if strictly speaking we understand by sin simply contempt of God, then it is truly possible for our life to be passed without sin, though this will involve the greatest difficulty. Sin, as we said, is not prohibited by God, but only consent to evil whereby we despise God: and this is forbidden even though it seems, in the practice of it, to give moral instruction. This has been explained above, where we have also shown that in no other way can we keep God's commandments.

Some sins are spoken of as venial or light, and others are called damnable or grave. Again of damnable sins some are called criminous, which can make a person infamous or criminous if they become known; while others are hardly of this sort at all. Venial sins are such as we consent to, knowing that we should not give consent. But the memory of what we know does not at the moment recur to our mind. For we can know many things even when asleep or when we are unconscious of knowing them. We do not lose our knowledge in sleep. If we did, we should become fools, or else develop wisdom by keeping awake. When, therefore, we give way to flippancy or excessive eating or drinking, we know that this ought not to be done. But at the time we are least aware of the restriction. Such consent, arising from absent-mindedness, is called venial or slight; and not needing correction by a grave penalty. For such sin we are not excluded from the Church, or put under the strain of severe self-denial. These peccadillos are remitted for the penitent by the words of daily confession wherein is no mention of the more grievous but only of small faults; and in daily prayer we are not to avow: 'I have sinned by perjury, homicide, adultery, and the like,' which are mortal and more serious sins. These latter, unlike the former, are not entered upon from shortsightedness. We commit that kind of crime with close attention and set purpose: and become anathema to God, as the Psalmist says: 'They have become abominable in their ways.' (Ps. xiii, 2.) He refers to men who were unholy and hateful inasmuch as they offended wittingly. Of this sort of sin some is called criminous which, being of known effect, demoralizes a man by the stain of great guilt. Such are conscious perjury, homicide or adultery, which chief of all are a scandal to the Church. If, however, we exceed sufficiency by over-eating at table, or adorn our person, out of vain glory, in extravagant attire, and are conscious of going to an excess in this way, our fault is not commonly reckoned

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1 Cf. Augustine: peccatis venalibus sine quis non potest vivere, Ench., 2.
2 See for a translation of the following passage: K. E. Kirk, Vision of God, p. 540, with a note on Abailard's view of mortal and venial sin.
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CHAPTER XVI
Slight and Serious Sins, of Which is Best to Beware?

The avoidance of venial in contrast to criminal sins is by some thinkers insisted on, because, as they hold, such is the more complete and the better method of conduct, and in its greater difficulty calls for a stricter effort. Our immediate reply to this argument is in a line of Cicero. The laborious is not therefore the glorious. But if they are right, then those who bore the heavy weight of the law had more worth before God than those who serve Him with the Gospel freedom. Fear has punishment which perfect love casteth out, and to be driven by fear makes men drudge more than they would if they acted spontaneously out of love. For this reason the heavy-laden are urged by the Lord to His easy yoke, and to take up a light burden. They are to leave the slavery of the law whereby they are weighed down, for the liberty of the Gospel; so that though beginning in fear they may end in love which, without difficulty, ‘beareth all things, endureth all things.’ Nothing is hard to one who loves. The love of God is spiritual, not carnal, and all the stronger because it is truer.

Who doubts that it is harder for us to guard against a flea than an enemy, or the injury of a little flint than of a large stone?

1Abailard suggests a new view of mortal sin. It is not merely the tabulated offences of patristic moralists, such as perjury, adultery, etc., but any deliberate attempt to God. Venial sins are those which, knowing them to be wrong, we commit in a moment of forgetfulness. Mortal sins are sins which we know to be wrong and yet commit with deliberate intent. See for a fuller discussion of this point, K. E. Kirk, Vision of God (Bampton Lectures), 1931, Appendix Note, p. 340 ff.

2This chapter discusses an orthodox contemporary point of moral theology. See K. E. Kirk, loc. cit.

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But as to that which gives us greater difficulty in guarding against it, do we consider it to be therefore the better and more sound achievement? We do not. And why not? Because what is more difficult to beware of is less likely to injure. Although, then, our view is that it is harder to be rid of venial than of criminal faults, yet it is the latter that should be avoided as compared with the former. We ought to steer clear of those sins by which we believe that God is most likely to be offended. These merit the greater condemnation and displease Him the more. As love brings us nearer to God we should be more carefully averse from giving Him an affront and from doing what He more plainly disapproves. The lover is anxious less on account of his own loss than for any injury or contempt of his friend. Thus the Apostle: ‘Love seeketh not her own.’ (1 Cor. xiii, 5); and again: ‘Let no one look to the things of himself, but to those of others.’ If it is our duty, then, to avoid faults not so much in view of our own loss, but of their offence to God, it is evident that those sins should be guarded against whereby God will be the more grievèd. We may listen to the line of the poet on moral honour:

From love of virtue good men hate to sin.

It is evident that certain things must give rise to particular disgust as being objectionable in themselves and causing hurt to other people.

Finally, in order to distinguish faults by a closer inspection, let us compare the venial and the criminous. Take, for instance, over-indulgence at the table and compare it with perjury and adultery. Let us ask, by which of these trespasses is the greater sin committed, or by which of them is God the more despised and affronted. ‘I know not,’ you may perhaps reply, ‘for some philosophers have thought all faults to be equal.’ But if you desire to follow this philosophy or rather avowed foolishness, then it is equally good to abstain either from criminous or venial faults, for to

1Hor., Epist., xvi, 57.
commit either the one or the other is alike bad. Why, too, should anyone aver that it is preferable to abstain from venial rather than from criminal faults? Should anyone ask how we can tell that the transgression of adultery displeases God more than excess of eating, it is, as I think, the divine law which instructs us.

For the punishment of over-eating there has been laid down no penalty, whereas adultery is to be avenged not by this or that punishment but by death. In proportion as love—which the Apostle calls 'fulfilling of the law'—is injured, by so much is the action contrary to love, and therefore the sin is the more grievous.

Even when we set particular sins of a venial and criminous kind side by side and compare them so as to satisfy every possibility I still hold to my point. Assume that a man uses every care to abstain from the venial and yet makes no attempt to avoid criminal faults. Now because he keeps clear of all light contamination there arises this question: who shall decide that he sins more lightly or is better for avoiding venial sin, but being liable to criminal? There is no 'worse' or 'better' in his case because he has left the light sins and given an opening for the grave ones. In fact, should we compare sins singly, as I said, or in general, the conclusion is that to avoid the venial rather than the criminal is not a superior way or the sign of greater perfection. Anyone, however, who by avoiding first the venial fault is strengthened to combat later the criminal has, in this respect, come towards perfection. But we must beware of regarding these later victories, which elicit the height of courage, as overtopping the earlier points of valour or meriting a great recompense. Often in the building of an edifice those do less who bring the job to a finish than the men who have toiled from the first. For they lay the coping and carry the work to its conclusion, so that the house is builded. But while the house was in building there was no need of their finishing touches.

To endeavour to know our faults so far as memory directs us is enough. Where we recognize a thing more closely we can be the more cautious over it. Knowledge of evil cannot be lacking to a just man: and there is no sense in avoiding sins which are not known.¹

¹ This somewhat hesitant argument should be compared with the Fragment of a second Book at the end of this treatise. There Abailard defines more clearly his idea of personal intention, and shows how the psychological 'content' of an individual can indicate his development and duties. It is this aspect of conduct to which the notion of intention points, rather than to meticulous regard to stated crimes and faults.

CHAPTER XVII

RECONCILIATION OF SINNERS²

We have indicated the ailment of the soul, let us now consider the method of cure, as Jerome observes: 'Doctor, you laid your finger on the springs of disease. Point now with equal skill to those of health!' When we offend God by our fault it remains to be asked by what means we may be reconciled to Him. There are three stages in the reconciliation of the sinner to God: compunction, confession, satisfaction.³

² This chapter opens the second part of the treatise in which the theory of intention having been now stated, certain conclusions are drawn about the treatment of sin by the Church, particularly in the system of confession. An important outcome of the argument is that Abailard rejects absolution as a sacrament.

³ This threefold division of penance had been made in patristic times and recognized ever since. J. G. Sikes, Peter Abailard, p. 190.

CHAPTER XVIII

PENITENCE EXPLAINED

The definition of penitence is: 'Grief of mind for what has been done amiss by one who is ashamed to have gone to some excess.' (Wisdom v, 2, 3.) This penitence arises in some cases from love of God, and is fruitful in good result. In other cases it is moved
by some penalty which we do not wish to incur. Such is the penitence of the damned about whom it was said: 'Seeing, they shall be confounded with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of unexpected salvation, speaking among themselves and showing repentence and groaning for the narrowness of the iniquity, saying: "These are they whom we formerly had in derision." (Wisdom v, 4.) We read also of Judas' repentance for betraying the Lord. He felt that he was condemned in everyone's judgment, and his penitence sprang from a feeling of being beneath notice, and was not on account of the guilt of sin. For when a man has betrayed another for money or for some other inducement, he is held in the greatest contempt, and no one trusts him less than the victim who has proved the fellow's baseness.

We can observe daily many who are to depart this life becoming penitent for their evil deeds. They groan in anxiety of conscience, not from love of God whom they have dishonoured or from hatred of the sin which they have done, as out of fear of the punishment which they feel is coming upon them. They continue to be evil, for it is not the evil of their guilt that displeases them but the due punishment of it. Their uneasiness is not so much for their evil deed as for the just decision of God. They tremble at the penalty and hate equity more than iniquity. Blinded, though often bidden to turn from their evil ways, the Divine justice at length so gives them over to a reprobate mind and casts them stricken in blind guilt from before His face, that they have no sense of sane penitence, or of how they may give satisfaction for guilt.

Do we not daily behold dying men who, in remorse, accuse themselves of usury, rapine, oppression of the poor, or other ill deeds, and consult a priest for the betterment of their condition? To these the first and proper advice is to sell all that they have and restore to those whom they have robbed. For Augustine says: 'If the goods of another are not given back when it is possible to do so, then penitence is not effectual but feigned.' But the emptiness of these hypocrites' penitence appears in their answer to such advice: 'How, they ask, is my household to live? What can I bequeath to my sons or my wife? What will they have to live on?' The Lord's word is an apt warning to such men: 'Thou fool, this night they require of thee thy soul: and what thou hast laid in store, whose shall they be?' (Luke xii, 20.) O wretched of wretched men, the most wretched and foremost of fools! Do you plan everything for others and nothing permanent for yourself?

By what arrogance do you affront the Divine Being in the face of whose dire judgment you rob so that your family may thrive on a legacy of theft from the poor? All must laugh, as they hear you hope that others will be kinder to you than you have been to yourself. You trust to the aims of your family. You believe that they are your heirs. But they succeed you, too, in crime, coming as they do into your theft-won wealth. You take away life from the poor, by depriving them of what is their own, and whereby they are supported. Thus you manage to kill Christ once more in accordance with the Scripture: 'What ye have done to the least of these that are mine, ye have done unto me.' (Matt. xxv, 40.) Impious to your own family; without proper feeling either for yourself or for God, what can you expect from the just Judge towards whose judgment-seat, whether you will or not, you are hastening? For He asks your answer not only for robbery, but for every idle word. The punishment of former men makes plain how firmly he avenges. Once Adam sinned: and, in comparison with our sins, as Blessed Jerome says, his sin was of the slightest. The fault of Adam was not to have crushed anyone by force or rifled their belongings, but the tasting only once of fruit which could be restored to Eve the owner of it.
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But by this petty mistake, which has been transmitted through its penalty to the whole of posterity, the Lord God determined to make evident what would be his verdict upon greater sins. The rich man in the Lord's parable, found his place in Hades not because he had stolen the property of others, but because he did not share with poor Lazarus, his own property, which he had every right to enjoy. The obvious lesson concerns the sentence which will be passed upon those who ravage other people's goods seeing that the rich man was damned and cast into Hell for not distributing his own. Your memory, foolish fellow, goes into the grave with you. The eyes which mourned are quickly dry. 'Nothing evaporates more swiftly,' says Apollonius 'than a tear.' Soon your consort adorns herself for a fresh union, ready to serve the pleasure of a new husband from the plunder which you have left her. Beside your very body she cherishes the couch for another companion who, while you are in misery, amid the flames of Gehenna, will enjoy your former delights. And your sons may be expected to do likewise.

The question may be asked why your friends do not show their good feeling and respect your memory. But they seem to have many excuses. They can reply: 'Since he was unwilling to respect himself, how absurd to expect others to respect him, and to commit to others the safety of his soul for which he himself ought to have taken care? Who can he think will treat him better than he could treat himself? Whose pity shall the man trust in, who has been merciless to himself?' They may also offer a reason for their avarice and say: 'We are aware that what he has bequeathed to us is not the sort of wealth to be expended upon masses for the dead.' All who hear this will laugh, and may well laugh. But that wretch, who once forced the poor whom he despoiled to weep for a while, will himself weep in hell for ever. To conceal their omission from men though not from God, and to excuse their own excuses some people say that the number of those whom they have robbed is so great that they cannot know or find them. This lack of care can only incur the Apostle's censure: 'He who does not know will not be known.' (1 Cor. xiv, 38.)

They do not find because they do not seek. But the right hand of God whom they have despised will find them. For the scripture saith: 'Thy right hand shall search out them that hate thee.' (Ps. xx, 9.) The same prophet who thus speaks writes also elsewhere when, in great fear, he finds no way of escape: 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy face? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art there also.' (Ps. cxxxviii, 5.)

And because the avarice of the priest is often as strong as that of the people (for the Prophet says: 'Like as the people, so are the priests,' Hosea iv, 9), the greed of priests who promise a valueless security leads astray many of the dying. They are told to offer their store of money to purchase the masses which would never be freely given them. It is well-known that there is a fixed tariff among clerics for this trade. The price for a mass is a penny, and if annual the charge is forty pence.1 They do not advise the dying to give back their gains, but to dispose of these things in an offering to the Church. But the scripture contradicts them: 'He who offers of the substance of the poor, is as one who slays a son in the presence of his father.' (Eccles. xxxiv, 24.) For the murder of his son before his eyes wounds the father more than if he had not seen it. It is like a son killed on the altar when the possessions of the poor in which their life consisted are yielded up in sacrifice. The Truth where He speaks of preferring mercy to sacrifice saith: 'Go ye, and learn this saying: "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."' (Matt. ix, 13.) It is worse to retain the gains

1 The denarius ('penny') in Roman imperial times was a silver coin worth about 9d. Smith: Dictionary of Classical Antiquities. The medieval French denarius was a silver coin, forty of which made a 'solidus.' Ducange, Glossarium.
of larceny than not to expend pity. We do worse to deprive the poor man of what is his own than if, as the parable of the rich man damned reminds us, we make no effort to extend to him our aid.

CHAPTER XIX
PENITENCE THAT BEARS FRUIT

We have spoken of a penitence that is fruitless. Let us now look at the fruitful kind of penitence and inspect with greater care that which can give a healthier condition. The Apostle exhorts to penitence of this order a certain man who is insensate, not fearing the terrible verdict of God. 'Do you despise,' he says, 'the riches of his goodness and patience, and long-suffering? Are you unaware that the kindness of God inclines you to penitence?' (Rom. ii, 4.) In those words the apostle plainly declares what healthy penitence is. It arises not out of fear but from love of God, and is our grief for offending or despising Him, in view rather of His goodness than of His justice. We set Him at nought since we do not believe that He instantly avenges contempt as on the contrary, our present-day princes do, sparing none when they are affronted and avenging injury without delay. Yet the longer we neglect Him the more justly can He impose a more onerous penalty for this contempt. And the severity of His vengeance is in proportion to the extent of his long-suffering. Thus our Apostle observes: 'According to your hardness and the impenitence of your heart, you accumulate anger upon yourself in the day of wrath.' (Rom. v.) Then will be the day of anger though now it is one of kindness; then will come the moment of vengeance though now it is a time of divine patience. Then with justice will God recompense contempt the more severely inasmuch as He who deserved it the least suffered it with greater patience.

We fear to offend men. If we do not avoid giving offence because of fear, we do so out of shame. The shades cover our vile deeds and the presence of any onlooker to observe our fornication is abhorrent. Yet we know that God, whom nothing can hide, is present. We do not blush to be seen by Him and the whole council of heaven in this act of baseness, while we are confused at the sight of the meanest human being. How greatly we tremble to commit anything before an earthly judge from whom we expect only an earthly, and not an eternal, sentence! Our bodily sense compels us to endure and carry out many distasteful acts, but our spiritual sense achieves but few. Would that we might do and tolerate as much for God, to whom we owe everything, as we do for wife, sons, or mistress!

What shall be the penalty for preferring a mistress to Him? Through the prophet God complains that love is not offered to Him as to a Father, nor fear as to a Master: 'The son honours his father; the slave fears his master. I am a Father, but where is my honour. And I am a Master but where is fear of me?' (Malach. i, 6.) His complaint is that father or master are preferred to Him; that for a mistress God is disdained! His patient goodness, for which he sought the more to be loved, becomes the cause of His dishonour. It is this goodness and long-suffering patience which the genuinely penitent can count upon, and they are moved to remorse less by fear than through love of Him. Of this healthy penitence the Apostle gives a clear notion: The riches of his goodness, that is God's rich and full kindness, His abundant long-suffering wherewith He bears with you, do you despise? because He does not immediately punish; and are you unaware that his kindness inclines you to penitence? That is, by contemplating God's goodness you ought to be turned to repentance seeing that you have despised One so
kindly. This indeed is fruitful repentance, the grief and contrition of heart springing from love of God for His kindness and not from fear of punishment.

Sin does not persist along with this heartfelt contrition which we call true penitence. Sin is contempt of God or consent to evil; and the love of God which calls forth our grief, allows no vice.² By our lament we at once are reconciled to God. We get pardon for former faults. Thus the prophet exclaims: 'In whatsoever hour the sinner bemoans his sin he shall be saved' (Ezek. xxxiii, 14), that is, he shall become worthy of salvation. He does not say: 'In whatsoever year, or month, or week, or day, but in whatsoever hour,' so as to show that without any delay the sinner is accounted worthy of remission, and is acquitted from eternal punishment, the destiny of sin. The repentant person may be hindered by circumstances from coming to confession, or making the amends of satisfaction for his fault. Yet he runs no risk of hell, should he leave this life with contrition on his lips.³ The forgiving of a sin by God means that a man no longer merits eternal retribution as he did formerly in view of his sin. In forgiving the repentant God does not remit every penalty. But he frees them from eternal damnation. Not a few who sorrow for sin have been overtaken by death without being able to offer penitent satisfaction in this life. They will be reserved for future bliss by the pain not of damnation but of purgatory. As for the last day of judgment when many of the faithful must have punishment quickly inflicted, it is a matter of uncertainty how long it will involve, although the resurrection may come 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' (1 Cor. xv, 52.) There will have to be time for men to give satisfaction.

¹Cf. Augustine quoted in Epistle XV of Roscellinus Migne, 178, cols. 3706.

²'Amicus autem justitiae esset, si amore justitiae non peccaret. Qui gehennam metuit non metuit peccare, sed ardere. Ille autem peccare metuit qui peccatum sicut gehennam odiit.'

³See Introduction for Abailard's standpoint towards the contemporary debate on penance and confession.

as God decides, for sins of which they have delayed the satisfaction or not been allowed to discharge it.

CHAPTER XX

CAN WE REPENT OF ONE THING AND NOT OF ANOTHER?

The question is sometimes put as to whether we can repent of one sin and not of another (e.g.), a man who is penitent for homicide but persists in fornication. But if we take genuine penitence to be what is inspired by love of God, or as Gregory describes it: Penitence means lamenting what has been committed and not committing what will have to be lamented; then it is unreasonable to speak of penitence being that to which the love of God constrains us so long as one contemptuous attitude to God is retained. If the love of God, as it ought, leads me and inclines my mind to grieve for one evil consent simply because therein I have offended God, I do not see why the same love of God in regard to another act of contempt towards Him should not for the same reason compel me to penitence. That is, I shall be brought to such a frame of mind that, whatever be the excess of which my memory is aware, I admit my unvarying remorse for it and am ready to offer amends. Where true penitence exists, therefore, proceeding from the love of God alone, no contempt of God remains. The Truth testifies to this: 'If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him.' (John xiv, 23.) They who abide in the love of God must be saved. Yet this salvation would not be if one sin, that is one contempt of God, should continue. When God detects no sin in the penitent He also finds no cause for damnation. Inevitably the cessation of sin is the end of damnation,
that is, the verdict of eternal destruction. God remits the everlasting punishment which, as we said, was merited by former sin. In the penitent, God may not see any cause for eternal punishment. Nevertheless, He can be said to remit the penalty of preceding sin by making the sinner, whom He has inspired with grief for his fault, worthy of indulgent treatment. That is to say, the sinner becomes one who has no debt of eternal damnation to settle. And, should he leave this life in that condition he will, of necessity, be saved. On the other hand, the sinner may relapse into the same contempt of God. Thereby he returns both to sin and to the penalty of it. So may one whose former penitence exonerated him run once more the risk of punishment.

It may be objected: That sin is forgiven by God is the same as to say that God wills never to condemn man for what he has committed; or, that God has already privately decided not to condemn him for his crime. Even before the penitent had sinned, God it would seem, must be supposed to have pardoned the sin. He has decided, that is, not to condemn the man on that account. For God determines or disposes nothing at short notice, but his plans stand from eternity in predestination and providence, whether they concern the forgiveness of a certain sin, or any other matter. It appears, therefore, to us to be better to understand God’s remission of sin as follows: By inspiring the penitent sigh He renders a man worthy of divine forbearance, i.e., the man becomes one against whom damnation has no count, and will have none, so long as he remains repentant. God forgives sin in this way. The penalty for sin is due to Him. But He Himself inspires the penitence which excludes punishment.

YOU may ask: Is the penitent no longer liable to damnation, now worthy of eternal life? We may agree. But it will be objected that the man also who relapsed after being repentant was, while in a state of penitence, deserving of everlasting life. It may thus be urged that God was wrong in not giving the man, at the time, the reward of which he was worthy and thereby insuring him against damnation. If the man could die in a condition of penitence and, being worthy of eternal life, be received into salvation, surely, even if he afterwards fell back, he could still have, as a pledge of salvation, his former penitent frame of mind. My answer is that there are instances of men who have merited damnation and who yet have not died in their wickedness so as to meet, from God, with the damnation which they deserve. Now it can no more be attributed to God’s injustice that He does not inflict the penalty which the guilty merit than it can be in the case of those who deserve reward and are not given it. And this is so despite what the scripture promises to the persevering: ‘He who perseveres unto the end, the same shall be saved.’ (Matt. x, 22.) We are not obliged, therefore, to allow that because a man merits reward or punishment it is right for God to assign to him one or the other. God has another and better course. He makes good use of the bad and disposes the worst for the best. You may urge that one who loved God only for a short time, and so repented without persisting in his penitence was therefore not worthy of the reward of life. But you agree that in his penitent period he did not deserve damnation. It seems, then, that such a man ends by being neither entirely just nor entirely a sinner.
EVERY sin, as we said, may immediately, through penitence, be forgiven. But the question arises why the Truth should speak of a certain unforgivable sin, which can never have this remission or pardon. What is that sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of which Matthew\(^1\) records that the Lord said: ‘All sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy of the spirit shall not be forgiven.’ (Luke xii, 31); and: ‘Whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him. But he who speaks against the Holy Spirit shall neither be forgiven in this nor in a future age?’ (ibid., xxxii, 12, 10.) Mark explains this, saying: ‘Because they said: He hath an unclean spirit.’ (Mark iii, 30.) Some define this sin as ‘despair of forgiveness.’ On account of his many sins a person may completely distrust the goodness of God, which is made known through the Holy Spirit. He may feel that neither penitence nor any other satisfaction can get forgiveness for him. But if this be sin or blasphemy against the Spirit, what shall we call sin against the Son of Man? I think that sin or blasphemy against the Son of Man in this context means belittling the quality of Christ’s human nature. It is as though we were to deny that His humanity was sinlessly conceived, or that it was taken up by God because of the weakness of our flesh. These truths cannot be compassed by any human reason, but we are to believe them from their revelation by God alone. The saying, then, that all sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but that blasphemy of the Spirit shall not be forgiven will mean: About no other blasphemy is it divinely affirmed that it will not be forgiven except about the blasphemy against the Spirit. Even the one who speaks against the Son of Man shall be forgiven. That is to say, no one who disparages the dignity of the Son’s human nature shall on that account be condemned, provided that no other causes of condemnation exist. No one is guilty of contempt of God if he contradicts the truth by mistake, nor, by so doing, does he go against his conscience, especially as this particular matter cannot be investigated by human reason but rather seems contrary to reason. But to blaspheme against the Spirit is to defame the manifest goodness of God. In this insanity a belief in the Spirit’s activity or divine kindness is twisted into an assertion of diabolic agency. The divine Spirit is spoken of as evil, and God becomes the Devil. Whoever, then, have committed sin against Christ in this way, by the statement, contrary to their own conscience, that He casts out evil spirits in the name of Beelzebub, prince of the devils, are henceforth excluded from the Kingdom of God. They are completely cut away from His grace, and to none of them can indulgence be displayed on account of their penitence. We do not deny that they could be saved, provided that they repented. But we say that such people are not likely to make any acts of penitence.

CHAPTER XXIII

DO THE PENITENT STILL GRIEVE IN HEAVEN?

SOMEONE may ask whether the repentant who leave this light of day in grief and contrition take these virtues of penitence with them to be offered in heaven as a true sacrifice to God. ‘The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit.’ (Ps. l, 19.) Do the penitent, in that heavenly abode, bemoan their faults where ‘grief and sighing’ and sadness ‘flee away?’ (Isaiah xxxv, 10.) God and the angels view our sin with a displeasure in which no pain of sorrow is involved.

\(^1\) Abailard’s error: the quotation comes from Luke.
They merely disapprove what they discern to be evil. Similarly, too, in heaven, shall we ourselves contemplate our earthly slackness. It is another question, however, whether we have a desire to achieve what we know has been duly ordained for us by God. For that things co-operate for our good is a truth spoken by the Apostle: “We know that all things work together for good for them that love God.” (Rom. viii, 28.) According to my ability I have dealt with this matter in my third book of Theology.

CHAPTER XXIV
CONFESSON

We must now treat of the confession of sins. The Apostle James exhorts us in these words: “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for each other that you may be saved. The earnest prayer of a just man availeth much.” (James v, 16.) It is maintained by some that confession should be made to God alone, a practice which the Greeks are said to follow.

But what is the good of confession to God who knows all? I cannot see what indulgence the tongue can implore for us albeit the Psalmist cries: “I have made known to Thee my sin, and my iniquity have I not hid.” (Ps. xxxi, 5.) For many reasons the faithful confess their sins in the manner referred to by the Apostle. There is the notion that the prayers of those to whom we confess aid us all the more. Again, in the humility of confession a great part of the penance is enacted. In the casing of the mind in penitence we meet with an increase of indulgence. When David was accused by Nathan the prophet, he replied: “I have sinned.” (2 Kings xii, 13.) Straightway the prophet said: “The Lord hath taken away thy sin.” (ibid.) God ac-

cepted immediately this act of pious abasement by so exalted a monarch. Priests who have the souls of the faithful entrusted to them¹ are able to impose penance upon them. People who have used their will proudly and ill, by contempt of God, can be corrected by the will of another authority. Their penitence is the more sure because they follow the will of their priests, in obedience to them, and not their own will. If the priest counsels wrongly, and the penitent has obeyed, the blame lies rather upon the penitent than upon the priest.² “We must not leave out of account,” says the Apostle, “the wiles of Satan.” (2 Cor. ii, 11.) Nor must we overlook how the devil manoeuvres to incite us to sin and deter us from confession. He stimulates us by removing fear and shame so that nothing is left to prevent us from offence. There are many deeds which, out of fear of penalty, we do not dare to commit; many which we shrink from, not because they would be punished, but because we are ashamed to lose our reputation in that way. When, however, a man is rid of these two deterrents, as of a net, he is free and ready for any wickedness. Thereupon the devil, having first taken away fear and shame in order to facilitate sin, now replaces them to frustrate confession. The man fears or is ashamed to confess what, despite his conscience, he had no fear or shame to commit. He had no fear of being punished by God, and yet he is afraid to confess and risk punishment from men. He is ashamed for men to know what he was not ashamed to do in the presence of God. If anyone requires a remedy for his disease he must reveal it, however vile or offensive, to a doctor for the right cure to be given. The priest holds the place of a doctor, and by him, as we said, penance is to be imposed.

¹ This may refer to all priests, or, as now, to priests with a bishop’s licence to hear confessions.
² The priest gives wrong advice presumably because the whole case has not been revealed to him. Cf. the next paragraph. Fear has cramped the confession.
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CHAPTER XXV

CONFESION NOT ALWAYS NEEDED

LET us notice that a healthy attitude of regret may render confession unnecessary. We feel that this was the case with Peter. His tears testify to us of his denial of the Lord. But we read of no other confession or penance. In his comment on this passage about Peter's denial, in Luke, Ambrose remarks: 'I do not discover any word spoken, but simply that the disciple wept; tears, I read of, not penance uttered.

* These tears remove the sin which the voice is ashamed to acknowledge. They suggest remission and shame. Tears without any shrinking tell the fault, and confess the guilt without offence. Tears do not demand forgiveness: they deserve it.'

I believe that Peter kept silent as not, by a sudden request for pardon, to seem more insolent. We need to observe this kind of confession, through reverence or regret, whereby Peter gave satisfaction rather by bemoaning than by owning his guilt. Had he been ashamed to make a confession because, with his sin publicly known, he would have been in less esteem, he would have been guilty of pride. This course would have meant consulting his personal status more than the safety of his soul. On the other hand, if compunction for the Church, and not for himself held him back, his action may be commended. Probably he foresaw that he was to be made by the Lord prince of the Lord's people. He was afraid, therefore, for his triple denial to become public by confession and for the Church thereby to be gravely injured. He was distracted with shame that one so weak-kneed and prone to denial should be put by the Lord in charge of His Church. If we grant that Peter

* 1 This chapter is significant for the novel interpretation which the author puts upon the issue of confession and penance and absolution, as it was discussed in the twelfth century, just before the imposition of the rule of annual confession by the Sixth Lateran Council (1215).

was in this dilemma between keeping his reputation and not degrading the Church, then, so far, he was not acting with arrogance. But there arose, too, a reasonable qualm for the security of the Church which outweighed his own loss of honour. He understood the Church had been specially entrusted to him by the Lord in the words: 'You, when you are converted, strengthen your brethren.' (Luke xxii, 32.) If by Peter's own confession his terrible lapse had reached the ears of the Church, who would not lightly have exclaimed: 'We will not have this fellow to reign over us.' (Luke xix, 14)? Would it have been easy for the man who had been the first to fall to fulfil the Lord's injunction to strengthen the brethren?

This sort of foresight can permit many to defer confession or to omit it altogether should they feel that it will do more harm than good. We do not offend God by a fault which shows no contempt of Him. Peter's hesitation to admit his denial was due to the fragile faith of the Church, which remained weak until the power of Peter himself was known by his preaching and miracles. When this was established Peter could, without any danger to the Church, make his confession. This could then be handed down in writing, as an encouragement to sinners, by the evangelists.

The opinion may be put forward that Peter, who was foremost of all and without a superior to whom his soul could be entrusted, would not need to confess his sin to any man. For this person must impose a penance, and Peter would have to obey him as spiritual overlord. But while Peter need not have confessed in order to be given penance, he could very properly do so for the benefit of receiving prayers of intercession. 'Confess your sins one to another,' we are told. And further: 'Pray for one another that ye may be saved.' (James v, 16.)

There is nothing to prevent the priest from choosing to make a confession to one who, in rank, is his
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in inferior. He may even receive a penance from such an one, since the humbler the action the more acceptable it will be to God. What objection is there to a man selecting a person who is more devout or discreet than himself and making him the recipient of his act of penance? May he not be greatly aided by this person’s prayer? The text ‘Pray for one another that you may be saved,’ is followed immediately by, ‘the earnest prayer of a righteous man availeth much.’ There exist many inexperienced doctors to whose care it is dangerous or useless to entrust cases of illness. Similarly many priests of the Church may be found, without faith or discretion, who will easily reveal sins confessed to them. Confession to these fellows may be not merely useless but a real danger. Such men do not pray with purpose and are not worthy to be heard in their petitions.¹

They do not know the canon law and have no moderation² in prescribing penance. They often promise, as a result of penances, a security which is groundless. The hopes which they instil are disappointed. In the words of Scripture they are ‘blind leading the blind.’ ‘If the blind lead the blind they both fall into the ditch.’ (Matt. xv, 14.) Further, as we said, by turning matters of confidence into tittle-tattle they stir the indignation of their penitents. Instead of healing sin they cause it to break out afresh, and those who hear their gossip are minded to keep away from confession.³ Their betrayal of avowals in

¹ This state of things is implied by the ‘seal’ which was part of the legislation of the Council of 1216, on the system of confession.

² The origin of La Pénitence tarifée in England is ascribed to Egbert of York, c. 785 A.D. Fixed penalties were assigned in his Penitential to an infinite variety of sins, and there were many subsequent codes. They reflected the ‘external’ morality which Abaillard attacks.

³ This onslaught on the indiscretion and incompetence of the priesthood accords with the report of Salimbene in his Chronicle on the condition of the clergy in the twelfth century. It gives also an intelligible setting to the legislation of 1216 A.D. at the Lateran Council when the seal of the confessional was established and the whole system put on a proper footing, every faithful member of the Church being ordered to confess at least once a year. Abaillard clearly does not consider absolution as a sacrament. ‘In the eleventh century the conception and number of the sacraments was vague and undefined.’—P. F. Schmoll, Die Baukunst der Frühgeschichte, p. 10.

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their anger or levity is a serious offence to the Church. It also causes grave danger to those who make the confessions. Certain of these have, therefore, decided, on account of such risks, to go to others whom they deem better suited to deal with their case. This is no blameworthy expedient. There is every reason for approving their recourse to the abler physician. And if they can get the assent of their own priests to this alternative their action is even more commendable. For they make the change in a spirit of humble obedience. On the other hand arrogant priests may forbid this course. They feel it to be an insult to their own competence, if better physicians are called for. But let the sick man who cares for his health demand, with all the more insistence, the cordial which he believes to be the best, and let him take the wiser counsel. Anyone who has been assigned a guide who turns out to be blind is not bound to follow him into the ditch. It is far better to choose one who can see. For then a man completes his journey instead of being misled into catastrophe by a fraud. The fact is that the person who passed off this ostensible guide upon our traveller did so either knowingly by a trick or innocently and in error. If he did this by trickery we must see that his wickedness is scotched; if he did it by mistake, then we shall not go against his real wishes if we do not follow into disaster the guide whom he has allotted to us. It is advisable for us to consult those in charge of our souls first of all. When we have heard their counsel and found it a better remedy than we had expected, we should not set it aside. But if we think that these priests do not know the law and that they are not only careless of what their penitents do but also have no sense of their difficulties, then these must be held in less esteem. ‘The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: whatsoever they tell you abide by and do: but do not according to their works.’ (Matt. xxiii, 2.) The meaning is that a certain type of men, whose deeds are evil, and therefore abhorrent, reach authority.
Nevertheless, the words of God, which they utter from the seat of Moses, that is with the authority of the Church, are to be attended to. But their own works we must reject while we retain the words of God. The teaching of such should not be scorned, though their preaching be good and their life bad; though they train by language but do not build by example. They show a way which they are themselves averse from following. But they do this less out of blind ignorance than culpable neglect. Such priests, however, can be of no avail in pointing the road to those who should be subject to their guidance and require direction which they cannot give. But the penitent need not despair of the divine pity if, in readiness for penance, he delivers himself to his priests, though they be blind. The priest may instruct in error, and the penitent may obey him in all diligence. The error of the prelate does not condemn the penitents: and his vicious life involves no charge against them. And penitents do not need to die in guilt provided, as we said, that repentance towards God has preceded confession or their receiving of a penance. If less penance is imposed than the sin warrants, God will keep a proportion between fault and penalty. He permits no sin to go unpunished and deals with each according to its due. The penitent are not consigned to eternal punishment, but put to purgatory in this or a future life. That is so if we have been neglectful in our penance. The Apostle says: 'If we discerned ourselves we should not be judged.' (1 Cor. xi, 31); and implies thereby that in punishing or correcting our own faults we save ourselves from graver recompense before God. How great the mercy of God! He acquits us through our own tribunal to spare us His stricter verdict. By undergoing present punishment we give satisfaction for sins. We fast, pray, watch, deny the flesh in different ways, or restrict ourselves so as to supply the needy. This method we call penance. We know it by the Gospel name of the fruits of repentance. 'Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.' (Matt. iii, 8.) The notion can be expressed as follows: Amend any blemish which needs penance. Thus be reconciled to God and have nothing for Him to punish. Avert the graver by the lesser endurance. Blessed Augustine affirms: 'The punishments of the future life, even though purgatorial, are more severe than any of the present life.' Great care must, therefore, be given, and every endeavour exercised to carry out penance with due regard to the decrees of the holy Fathers. Nothing must remain for purgatory. Imprudent priests, ignorant of these decrees, would impose less satisfaction than was necessary. The plight of their penitents is obvious, for they must later be assailed with a more grievous pain for what they might here have erased by a lighter.

Avarice, rather than ignorance, induces some priests to deceive their people. For a donation they pardon or remit part of the punishment of a penance. They have an eye less to God's will than to the weight of a coin. The Lord, by the mouth of the prophet, complains of such: 'My priests have not said: 'Where is the Lord?' (Jer. ii, 6.) No! he means, but they have asked: 'Where is the money?' We have known not only priests but even bishops, the princes of priests, to be inflamed with this kind of avarice. When they dedicate a church or consecrate an altar, or give their blessing over a cemetery or otherwise officiate and have a popular crowd from which a good offerory is forthcoming they are prodigal in relaxing penance.

Under pretence of charity they give indulgence of a third or a fourth of penance to all and sundry. But their true motive is avarice. They boast of their power

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1 Here is interesting evidence, in the twelfth century, of the vices which in a large measure, brought about the Reformation, cf. Erasmus' Epistle on Vitruvius and Colet: P. S. Allen, Selections from Erasmus, p. 94; damnabat stilum eorum fiduciam qui nummo in scrinium concepero putarent sese liberos a peccatis. Written June 14, 1521.

2 indulgentes: an early use of the term with a shade of that sinister sense which it came to have a few centuries later.
which they claim through Peter or the apostles who were told by the Lord: ‘Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.’ (John xx, 23.) And in lavishing this benevolence upon penitents they vauntingly aver that it is their privilege. Would that, at any rate, they did act for themselves, and not for money! It would then appear as kindness rather than cupidity. But if the remission of a third or a quarter of the penance is to be credited as kindness, their piety would be even more evident if they cancelled a half or the whole. They claim the right to do this. It has been conceded to them, they say, by the Lord. The heavens have, in fact, been given into their keeping according to the above sanctions for the remission or absolution of sin.

At the same time these prelates seem guilty of grave impiety for not absolving penitents from all their sins. They ought to allow none of them to be damned, if indeed, there has been made over to them power to remit or retain whatever sins they wish, and to open or shut heaven to whomsoever they choose. Truly these men must be most blessed! They could let themselves into heaven at will. And if they cannot or know not how to do this, then a certain line of verse may describe their case:

The teacher cannot profit from the knowledge which suffices for ordinary men.

Let it be for such as will, but not for me, to cover the ability to profit others more than themselves. They are welcome to their power of saving other souls rather than their own. We shall be wise to let them keep this excellent privilege.¹

¹There is an incisive wit and exquisite aggressiveness in the above lines penned by a medieval thinker when the system of confession had not as yet become law, and four hundred years before the Reformation when the defects to which the system gave rise led to the profoundest division of Christendom and were stringently corrected by the Roman Church itself. Abaillard’s rejection of the right of clerical absolution was one of the counts brought against him by St. Bernard. Vide Introduction, and chapter XXVI below.

Does the right to bind and loose belong to all prelates without distinction?

This question of an authority, the ‘keys of the Kingdom of heaven,’ which the Lord gave to the apostles, and is said equally to have entrusted to their deputies, that is, to bishops, appears to be an important matter. There are many bishops who have episcopal authority but neither faith nor discretion. How can it be said to them, as it was to the apostles: ‘Whosoever sins ye shall remit they shall be remitted, and whosoever ye retain they are retained?’ (John xx, 23.) A bishop may wish to increase or relax the punishment of a fault with no regard to discretion or moderation. Has he power to do this? Shall God dispose punishment according to a man’s will, demanding a major penalty for what requires a minor chastisement? Surely God must think in equity of the guilty party and disregard any human desires. Again, out of anger or hatred for someone, a bishop may make him do penance as for a graver sin when he has confessed to a petty wrong-doing. The bishop may also extend his punishment indefinitely, or never abate it so long as the man is in penance. Will God approve such justice?

The fact is that when the Lord says to the apostles: ‘Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted, etc.,’ he means to address these particular persons, the Apostles, and not all bishops indiscriminately. It is the same when he says elsewhere: ‘Ye are the light of the world: ye are the salt of the earth.’ (Matt. v, 13.)

Many another text has to be taken to refer specially to the Apostles themselves. The Lord has not granted alike to all their successors either the discretion or the sanctity which he gave to the apostles. He did not say to everyone: ‘Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see’ (Luke x, 23); and again: ‘I have
called you my friends because whatever I have heard from my father he has made known to you' (John xv, 15); and yet again: 'But when the Spirit of truth has come He will teach you all truth.' (John xvi, 13.)

"But when these words were uttered Judas was one of the apostles." This objection is true. But the Lord knew for whom his words were intended. He said on another occasion: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' (Luke xxiii, 34.) This prayer must not be thought to apply to every persecutor of the Lord. The words them or you are demonstrative pronouns. According to the intention of the speaker they refer to all alike who are present or to some of those present whom the speaker intends to address. Thus the above statements apply not to all the apostles but to chosen members of their company.

A like explanation seems implied for the text: 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven.' (Matt. xvi, 19.) This point is dealt with closely by the Blessed Jerome in his comment on this text in Matthew where the Lord says to Peter: 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth.' Bishops and priests, says Jerome, assume a Pharisaic pride from not understanding this passage. They think that it allows them to condemn the innocent or release the guilty at will. Whereas God has in view not the verdict of priests but a decision about the condition of life of sinners. We read in Leviticus of lepers being bidden to show themselves to the priests. If they have leprosy they are declared unclean by the priest. It is not a matter of the priest making the lepers clean or unclean. But the priests are held to have knowledge as to lepers and non-lepers. They can distinguish the clean and the unclean. Now just as the priest of Leviticus 'made' a leper unclean, so a bishop or a priest 'binds and looses.' These do not bind and loose the guilty or the innocent, but in the course of their duty hear the various kinds of sin and are able to tell who is liable to be bound and who is fit to be loosed.

These words of Jerome, I think, make it clear that the injunction to Peter, or to the rest of the apostles as well, on binding and loosing the chains of sin must be understood in reference to these particular apostles and not to all bishops in general. We may, however, take the binding or releasing, as Jerome does, to mean the ability to distinguish guilt and innocence assigned alike to all priests. Priests, that is, have the power to decide who deserve to be bound by God and who can be released. They can discriminate between clean and unclean. Origen, in treating this text, distinguishes between elect bishops who merit the privilege given to Peter and other bishops. 'Whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth.' This text, says Origen, is quoted in defence of episcopacy. It is applied to Peter. He is said to have received from Christ the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven. Those who are bound with these Keys are bound in heaven. Those who are loosed by them, that is to say, obtain forgiveness, are loosed in heaven. This contention is good provided that the bishops in practice justify the commendation with which Peter was given this authority: 'Thou art Peter.' The bishops must be men on whom the Church of Christ may be built without the gates of hell prevailing against them. Otherwise it is ridiculous to maintain that a man who is bound by the chain of his own sins and who drags his sins behind him, like a long rope, and bears his guilt as heifers carry the yoke, should, simply because he is called a bishop, wield the right of having those who are loosed by him on earth loosed also in heaven or of having those bound by him on earth bound in heaven. Let the bishop who would bind or loose another, be himself without reproach. Let him be worthy to bind or loose in heaven; the husband of one wife, sober, pure, dignified, hospitable, apt to teach, no wine-bibber, not given to violence; moderate, reasonable, not avaricious, keeping his house wisely, and having his sons in chaste submission. Such a man
can justly bind on earth and will loose with equity. Whatever a bishop, with these qualities, looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. Whatever he binds on earth will be bound in heaven. If anyone is, so to speak, a “Peter” and does not possess the character which is attributed to Peter in this passage, and yet thinks that he has authority to bind as it is bound in heaven, and to loose as it is loosed in heaven, he deceives himself. He does not grasp the meaning of Scripture and must, in his conceit, meet with the devil’s sentence.

Origen’s meaning is plain and based in sound reason. In the passage referred to the authority is given to Peter but not at all to every bishop. It may be claimed by such as imitate Peter not in exalted position, but in high moral purpose. Men who take their own course and turn away from the will of God go against divine justice and can achieve nothing. By acting unjustly men cannot bend God to injustice and make Him like themselves. God Himself denounces such scoundrelism with a grave warning: ‘You thought wickedly that I am even as you are, but I will reprove you and set your deeds before your face. Understand this, you who forget God.’ (Ps. 1, 21.) Who can be said to forget God and to have fallen into a reprobate mind more than the man who arrogantly assumes the right to consider the divine will subject to his own in the matter of binding and loosing at will those who confess to him? The justice of God, he thinks, is to be perverted to serve his own unjust presumption, and give him the power to make innocent or guilty whom he will. Against such presumption Augustine, the great Doctor of the Church and foremost among bishops, utters a warning in his sixteenth sermon on the words of the Lord: ‘Thou dost begin to consider thy brother as a tax-gatherer. Thou bindest him on earth. But see that thou bind justly. Justice breaks bonds which are unjust.’ Blessed Gregory openly declares and proves by examples of the Lord that the authority of the Church to bind and loose is useless if it deviates from equity and does not accord with the divine ruling. Listen to his remarks in Sermon 25: ‘It often occurs that a man holds the office of a judge while his life agrees little with the duties of it. He may condemn the innocent or acquit men of crimes which he himself commits. Frequently he will follow the prompting of his own desire, in a sentence or discharge, more than the merits of the case. By this exercise of his own whim and not of his sense of detecting character he deprives himself of this very power of binding and loosing. A pastor may be influenced by hatred or favour towards a certain person. But it is impossible to decide aright in the cases submitted if we are moved by our own or another’s advantage. Thus the prophet cries: ‘They shall quench souls which die not and quicken those which do not live.’ (Ezek. xiii, 19.) To condemn a just man is to kill one who does not die; and the attempt to absolve a guilty man from punishment is the same as trying to give life to one who is not alive. Cases must be weighed first, and the authority to bind and loose must be exercised after. See what the fault is and what repentance has followed it. The verdict of the pastor may absolve according to the measure wherein the Almighty visits His own with the grace of contrition. It will be, indeed, a true absolution if it follows the line indicated by the supreme judge to his representative. The raising of the one who had been dead for fourteen days proves this point. The Lord, first of all, called to the dead man and gave him life, saying: ‘Lazarus, come forth!’ Then when he had come out alive he was set loose from his bands by the disciples.

In this sermon Gregory also says: ‘The disciples loose the man raised by their Master from the dead. If the disciples had loosed Lazarus when he was dead they would have set free an odour rather than a virtue. This leads us to see that we should release by pastoral authority those whom we know are alive
by the grace of renewal. The confession of sins tells us, before we correct the sinner, how much life he possesses. The words addressed to the dead man are not: "Become alive again," but "Come forth." Similarly the open exhortation to one dead in sin: Come forth by the way of confession thou who hidest idly thy sin. Let him come forth. Let the sinner confess his sin. The disciples unbound the man who came from the tomb; so do the pastors of the Church release the sinner who is not ashamed to admit his fault." And again we read in this sermon: 'Whether the Pastor binds with justice or not, his people must respect the pastor's decision. Otherwise a penitent who has received an unjust sentence and does not think it worth obeying may deserve that very sentence for some other act of mischief.' Another point Gregory refers to: 'Let the person who is subject to a pastor fear his judgment, whether it be just or unjust. Let him not rashly criticise his pastor's sentence. For if he do so the very pride which prompts him to find fault may cause a fault to arise in himself.'

From these words of Gregory and from instances which bear divine authority it is evident that, unless the verdict of bishops accords with divine justice, it can have no validity. They would otherwise resemble the prophet's example of men desiring to offer life or death to those who cannot take these gifts. Such bishops are denied the right to be communicated by their fellow bishops for presuming unjustly to exclude their people from communion. The 210th decree of the African Council reads as follows: 'A bishop shall not without due warrant exclude anyone from communion: and, for so long as a bishop so refuses communion to an excommunicate, for such a time let that bishop not be communicated by the other bishops. A bishop must accordingly refrain from making a charge against anyone which he cannot substantiate with other proof.'

FRAGMENT OF A SECOND BOOK

We dealt in the earlier part of our treatise with the method of deciding what are sins and of correcting them. We drew a distinction between sin and the proclivity to evil. This tendency to evil is the opposite of the tendency towards good. 'Cease from evil and do good,' says the Psalmist, and we have now to leave the subject of the control of evil tendencies and turn to that of positive right action.

We distinguish good and bad by means of prudence which is not so much a virtue as the mother of all virtues. Through prudence we have general discretion to deal with the particular circumstances of time and place, and to adapt ourselves to the condition of persons. We have already said that there is a difference between weaknesses and sins. There is a similar statement to be made about good tendencies which are the opposite of evil proclivities. I mean that a distinction must be made between mere tendencies towards goodness and good actions. For good actions we are promised blessedness, and the characteristic feature of a good action is obedient goodness. Just as good tendencies are opposed to evil ones, so sin, which we have declared to be contempt of God, seems to be the direct opposite of obedient goodness. Contempt of God is the contrary of a will prepared to obey God. You can see, for instance, that many Christians are not able to show that constancy of endurance which marks the suffering of a martyr. Many may not have the power of sustained courage in adversity. Now God understands their infirmity, and the naturally timid or faint-hearted are not tried above their strength or put to too great a trial. Yet such people can exhibit humility. In fact, humility is the moral equivalent of

2Ps. xxxvi, 35.
their frailty. Thus a constant and avowed gratitude for the favour of God towards them is a sign of their obedient goodness, and ensures them a share in divine love. They may not suffer a martyr's death or display conspicuous endurance. But their action is good because they put into effect the particular form of conduct which they see that they can practise.

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