

## QUESTION 85

### Penance insofar as it is a Virtue

Next we have to consider penance insofar as it is a virtue. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Is penance a virtue? (2) Is it a specific virtue? (3) Which species of virtue is it contained under? (4) What is its subject? (5) What is its cause? (6) What is its relation to the other virtues?

#### Article 1

##### Is penance a virtue?

It seems that penance is not a virtue (*poenitentia non sit virtus*):

**Objection 1:** As is clear from what has been said above (q. 84, a. 1 and q. 65, a. 1), penance is a certain sacrament numbered among the other sacraments. But no other sacrament is a virtue. Therefore, penance is not a virtue, either.

**Objection 2:** According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 4, shame is not a virtue, both because it is a passion involving a bodily mutation, and also because it is not a disposition “belonging to someone perfect,” since it involves a shameful act, which has no place in a virtuous man. But penance is likewise a certain passion involving a bodily mutation, viz., weeping (*ploratus*), in the sense in which Gregory says, “To do penance is to bemoan one’s past sins.” And it likewise involves shameful deeds, viz., sins, which have no place in a virtuous man. Therefore, penance is not a virtue.

**Objection 3:** According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 4, “No one who lives in accord with virtue is foolish.” But it seems foolish to lament a sin that has already been committed, since it is impossible for the sin not to exist, and yet this is what penance does. Therefore, penance is not a virtue.

**But contrary to this:** The precepts of the law are given concerning the acts of the virtues, since, as *Ethics* 2 says, “The legislator intends to make the citizens virtuous.” But there is a precept of the divine law that concerns penance—this according to Matthew 3:2 (“Repent, etc.”). Therefore, penance is a virtue.

**I respond:** As is clear from what has been said (q. 84, a. 8 and a.10, ad 4), to do penance is to sorrow over something previously done by oneself. Now it was explained above (q. 84, a. 9, ad 2) that sorrow (*dolor*) or sadness (*tristitia*) is said in two ways:

In one way, insofar as it is a certain *passion of the sentient appetite*. And on this score penance is not a *virtue*, but is instead a *passion*.

In the second way, insofar as it *exists in the will*. And on this score penance is accompanied by a certain choice. If this choice is upright, then it has to be an act of virtue; for as *Ethics* 2 explains, a virtue is “a habit of choosing in accord with right reason.” But right reason involves an individual’s sorrowing over what should be sorrowed over. And this is indeed seen in the sort of penance that we are now talking about; for the penitent takes upon himself a moderated sorrow over his past sins, combined with the intention of removing those sins.

Hence, it is clear that penance of the sort we are now talking about is either a virtue or the act of a virtue.

**Reply to objection 1:** As has been explained (q. 84, a. 1, ad 1-2, and aa. 2 and 7), in the sacrament of penance it is human acts that behave as the matter—something that does not occur in baptism or confirmation. And so since a virtue is a principle of an act, it is penance, rather than baptism or confirmation, which is a virtue or accompanied by a virtue.

**Reply to objection 2:** As has been said, penance, insofar as it is a *passion*, is not a virtue, and it is as a passion that it is conjoined to a bodily mutation. By contrast, it is a *virtue* insofar as it involves an

upright choice on the part of the will.

Yet this can be said of *penance* and not of *shame*. For shame has to do with a shameful deed as something present, whereas penance has to do with a shameful deed as something past. But it is contrary to the perfection of virtue for an individual to have a shameful deed in the present that he has to be ashamed of. By contrast, it is not contrary to the perfection of virtue for an individual to have previously committed shameful deeds for which he has to repent; for a virtuous individual emerges from a wicked individual.

**Reply to objection 3:** It would indeed be foolish to be sorrowful about something previously done with the intention of trying to bring it about that what has been done never existed. But this is not what the penitent intends; instead, his sorrow is his displeasure at, or disapproval of, a past deed with the intention of removing *what followed from it*, viz., God's disfavor and the debt of punishment. And this is not foolish.

## Article 2

### Is penance a specific virtue?

It seems that penance is not a specific virtue (*poenitentia non sit specialis virtus*):

**Objection 1:** Rejoicing over good things that have been previously done and sorrowing over evils that have been perpetrated seem to be the same sort of thing (*eiusdem rationis videtur esse*). But rejoicing over a good thing previously done is not a specific virtue; instead, as is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 14, it is "a certain praiseworthy affection that proceeds from charity." Hence, in 1 Corinthians 13:6 the Apostle says, "Charity does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth." Therefore, by parity of reasoning, penance, which is sorrow over past sins, is not a specific virtue; instead, it is a certain affection that proceeds from charity.

**Objection 2:** Every specific virtue has a specific subject-matter (*materiam specialem*); for habits are distinguished by their acts, and acts by their objects. But penance does not have a specific subject-matter, since its subject-matter consists in past sins with any kind of subject-matter at all. Therefore, penance is not a specific virtue.

**Objection 3:** Nothing is expelled except by its contrary. But penance expels *all* sins. Therefore, it is contrary to *all* sins. Therefore, it is not a specific virtue.

**But contrary to this:** As was established above (a. 1, *sed contra*), a specific precept of the law is given about penance.

**I respond:** As was established in the Second Part (ST 1-2, q. 54, aa. 2-3, and ST 2-2, q. 58, a. 1), the species of habits are made distinct by the species of their acts, and so whenever a specific praiseworthy act occurs, one has to posit a specific habit of virtue. But it is obvious that in the case of penance one finds a specific type of praiseworthy act, viz., *working toward the destruction of past sin insofar as it is displeasing to God*—something that does not belong to the nature of any other virtue. Therefore, one must claim that penance is a specific virtue.

**Reply to objection 1:** There are two ways in which an act flows from charity:

In one way, as *elicited* by charity. And this sort of virtuous act does not require any other virtue beyond charity, e.g., to love the good and rejoice over it, and to be saddened by its opposite.

In the second way, an act proceeds from charity in the sense of being *commanded* by charity. And on this score, since charity itself commands all the virtues, in the sense of ordering them toward its own end, an act that proceeds from charity can also belong to another, specific, virtue.

Therefore, if, in the penitent's act, we consider only his being displeased with his past sin, then this

belongs immediately to charity, in the way that rejoicing over past goods does. On the other hand, the intention to work toward the destruction of past sin requires a specific virtue subordinated to charity (*requirit specialem virtutem sub caritate*).

**Reply to objection 2:** Penance does, to be sure, have a general subject-matter in reality, insofar as it is related to *all* sins; yet it is related to all sins *in a specific respect* (*sub ratione speciali*), viz., insofar as those sins are correctable by the act of a man who is cooperating with God for his own justification.

**Reply to objection 3:** Every specific virtue expels the habit of a vice opposed to it, in the way that whiteness expels blackness from the same subject. But penance expels every sin *as an efficient cause* (*effective*) by working toward the destruction of the sin, inasmuch as the sin can be pardoned by God's grace along with the man's cooperation (*est remissibile ex divina gratia homine cooperante*). Hence, it does not follow that penance is a general virtue.

### Article 3

#### Is the virtue of penance a species of [the virtue of] justice?

It seems that the virtue of penance is not a species of [the virtue of] justice (*virtus poenitentiae non sit species iustitiae*):

**Objection 1:** As is clear from the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q.59, a. 5 and q. 62, aa. 2-3), justice is a moral virtue and not a theological virtue. But penance seems to be a theological virtue, since it has God as its object; for it makes satisfaction to God, with whom it also reconciles the sinner. Therefore, it seems that penance is not a part of justice.

**Objection 2:** Since justice is a moral virtue, it consists in a mean. But penance does not consist in a mean; instead, it consists in a sort of excess—this according to Jeremiah 6:26 (“Make mourning as for an only son, a bitter lamentation”). Therefore, it seems that penance is not a species of justice.

**Objection 3:** As *Ethics* 5 explains, there are two species of justice, viz., distributive justice and commutative justice. But penance does not seem to be contained under either of these species. Therefore, it seems that penance is not a species of justice.

**Objection 4:** A Gloss on Luke 6:21 (“Blessed are they who mourn ...”) says, “Behold prudence, which shows us how unhappy are these earthly things and how blessed are heavenly things.” But to mourn is an act of penance. Therefore, penance belongs to prudence rather than to justice.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Poenitentia* Augustine says, “Penance is a sort of vengeance on the mourner, always punishing in him what he is sorry for having done.” But taking vengeance belongs to justice; hence, in his *Rhetorica* Tully posits the vindictive species as one of the species of justice. Therefore, it seems that penance is a species of justice.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 2), penance has the status of being a specific virtue not merely from the fact that it sorrows over an evil that has been perpetrated, since charity would be sufficient for this, but from the fact that the penitent sorrows over a committed sin insofar as it is displeasing to God (*est offensa Dei*), and he does this with the intention of making amends. Now making amends for an offence committed against someone is not accomplished just by the cessation of the offence; instead, what is required further is *compensation* (*recompensatio*), which has a place in the case of offenses committed against another in the same way that *retribution* (*retributio*) does. The difference between them is that *compensation* comes from the part of the one who commits an offense, as, for instance, when he makes satisfaction, whereas *retribution* comes from the part of the one against whom an offense is committed. Now both of these belong to the subject-matter of justice, since each of them is a certain sort of exchange (*utrumque est commutatio quaedam*). Hence, it is clear that penance, insofar as

it is a virtue, is a part of justice.

Notice, however, that according to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 5, there are two ways in which something is called just, viz., *absolutely speaking (simpliciter)* and *in a certain respect (secundum quid)*:

What is just *absolutely speaking* occurs between equals, because justice is a certain sort of equality. This he calls the *political* just or the *civil* just, because all the citizens are equal with respect to existing immediately under the ruler as free individuals.

On the other hand, what is called just *in a certain respect* is between two individuals, one of whom exists under the power of another, like a servant under his master, or a son under his father, or a wife under her husband. And it is this sort of ‘just’ that is being considered in the case of penance. Hence, the penitent returns to God with the intention of making amends, like a servant to his master, this according to Psalm 122:2 (“As the eyes of the servants are on the hands of their masters, so are our eyes on the Lord our God, until he has mercy on us”)—and like a son to his father, this according to Luke 15:18 (“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you”)—and like a wife to her husband, this according to Jeremiah 3:1 (“You have committed fornication with your many lovers, but return to me, says the Lord”).

**Reply to objection 1:** As *Ethics* 5 explains, justice had to do “with the other.” However, it is not the one with respect to whom justice exists that is called the subject-matter of justice; instead, the subject-matter of justice consists in the goods that are distributed or exchanged. Hence, the subject-matter of penance is not God, but the human acts by which God is either offended or placated. God, on the other hand, plays the role of the one with respect to whom there is justice. From this it is clear that penance is not a theological virtue, since it does not have God for its subject-matter or object.

**Reply to objection 2:** As *Ethics* 5 says, the mean of justice is an equality that is established between those who are such that justice exists between them. But as the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 8, in some cases a perfect equality cannot be established because of the excellence of one of them, as between a father and his son, or between a man and God. Hence, in such cases the one who falls short should do whatever he can—and yet this will not be sufficient except because the superior is willing to accept it (*sed solum secundum acceptationem superioris*). And this is what is signified by the ‘excess’ that is attributed to penance.

**Reply to objection 3:** Just as there is a sort of exchange in the case of *benefits* when an individual pays back for a benefit received with a favor, so, too, there is an exchange in the case of *offenses* when (a) an individual is punished against his will for an offense committed against another, and this belongs to retributive justice (*pertinet ad vindicativam iustitiam*), or when (b) an individual voluntarily makes amends (*voluntarie recompensat emendam*), and this is related to the person of the sinner in the way that retributive justice is related to the person of the judge. Hence, it is clear that both of these exchanges are contained under commutative justice.

**Reply to objection 4:** Even though penance is directly a species of justice, it nonetheless includes in some way things that belong to all the virtues.

For insofar as there is a sort of justice on the part of a man with respect to God, this justice has to participate in things which belong to the theological virtues, which have God as their object. Hence, penance exists (a) with *faith* in Christ’s passion, through which we are justified from our sins, and (b) with *hope* for pardon, and (c) with the hatred of vices, which belongs to *charity*.

On the other hand, insofar as penance is a moral virtue, it has some participation in *prudence*, which directs all the moral virtues. What’s more, from the very notion of justice, penance has not only what belongs to *justice*, but also what belongs to *temperance* and *fortitude*, viz., insofar as the things that cause pleasure, which pertains to temperance, or that strike terror, which is moderated by fortitude, enter

into the exchanges that belong to justice. And on this score it pertains to justice both (a) to abstain from pleasurable things, and this pertains to temperance, and (b) to sustain hardships, and this pertains to fortitude.

#### Article 4

##### Does penance exist, properly speaking, in the will as in a subject?

It seems that penance does not, properly speaking, exist in the will as in a subject (*subiectum poenitentiae non sit proprie voluntas*):

**Objection 1:** Penance is a species of sadness (*tristitia*). But sadness exists in the concupiscible [appetite], just as joy (*gaudium*) does. Therefore, penance exists in the concupiscible [appetite].

**Objection 2:** As Augustine puts it in *De Poenitentia*, penance is “a sort of vengeance (*vindicta quaedam*).” But vengeance seems to belong to the irascible [appetite], since anger (*ira*) is a desire for vengeance. Therefore, it seems that penance exists in the irascible [appetite].

**Objection 3:** According to the Philosopher in *De Memoria*, the past is the proper object of memory. But as has been explained (a. 1, ad 2-3), penance has to do with the past. Therefore, penance exists in the memory as in a subject.

**Objection 4:** Nothing acts in a place where it does not exist (*nihil agit ubi non est*). But penance removes (*excludit*) sins from all the powers of the soul. Therefore, penance exists in every power of the soul, and not just in the will.

**But contrary to this:** Penance is a certain sort of sacrifice—this according to Psalm 50:19 (“[My] sacrifice to God is a broken spirit”). But to offer a sacrifice is an act of the will—this according to Psalm 53:8 (“It is by my own will that I will offer a sacrifice to you”). Therefore, penance exists in the will.

**I respond:** There are two ways in which we can talk about penance:

In one way, insofar as it is a certain *passion*. And on this score, since penance is a species of sadness (*species tristitiae*), it exists in the concupiscible [appetite] as in a subject.

In the second way, insofar as it is a *virtue*. And on this score, as has been explained (a. 3), it is a species of justice (*species iustitiae*). But as was explained in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 56, a. 6 and *ST* 1-2, q. 58, a. 4), justice has for its subject the rational appetite (*appetitum rationis*), i.e., the will. Hence, it is clear that insofar as it is a virtue, penance exists in the will as in a subject. And its proper act is to intend to make amends to God for what has been committed against Him (*proprius eius actus est propositum emendandi Deo quod contra eum commissum est*).

**Reply to objection 1:** This argument goes through for penance insofar as it is a passion.

**Reply to objection 2:** To seek vengeance on another *out of passion* (*ex passione*) belongs to the irascible [appetite]. But to seek, or to take, vengeance, whether on oneself or on another, *in a reasoned manner* (*ex ratione*) belongs to the will.

**Reply to objection 3:** Memory is a power that apprehends the past (*est apprehensiva praeteriti*). However, penance belongs not to an apprehensive power, but to an appetitive power that presupposes the act of an apprehensive power. Hence, penance does not exist in the memory, but instead presupposes the memory.

**Reply to objection 4:** As was established in the First Part (q. 72, a. 4, and cf. *ST* 2-2, q. 9, a. 1), the will moves all the other powers of the soul. And so there is no problem if penance, while existing in the will, does something in each of the powers of the soul.

## Article 5

### Does penance takes its beginnings from fear?

It seems that penance does not take its beginnings from fear (*principium poenitentiae non sit ex timore*):

**Objection 1:** Penance begins in displeasure with one's sins. But as was noted above (aa. 2-3), this displeasure belongs to charity. Therefore, penance arises from love rather than from fear.

**Objection 2:** Men are moved toward penance by their expectation of the kingdom of heaven—this according to Matthew 4:17 (“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”). But the kingdom of heaven is the object of hope. Therefore, penance proceeds from hope rather than from fear.

**Objection 3:** Fear is an interior act of a man. But penance seems to come not from a work of man, but from a work of God—this according to Jeremiah 31:19 (“After you have turned to me, do penance”). Therefore, penance does not proceed from fear.

**But contrary to this** is what Isaiah 26:17 says, “As a woman who has conceived, when she draws near to the time of birth, suffers and cries out in her pains, so have we become,” i.e., so have we become through penance. And later he adds, according to the alternative version, “Through fear of you, O Lord, we have conceived and been in labor and have brought forth the spirit of salvation,” i.e., the spirit of salvific penance, as is clear from what went before in Isaiah 26.

**I respond:** There are two ways in which we can speak about penance:

In one way, with respect to *the habit* [of penance]. And on this score, penance is immediately infused by God, without our operating as principal causes—and yet not without our cooperating by disposing ourselves through certain acts (*non tamen sine nobis dispositive cooperantibus per aliquos actus*).

In the second way, we can speak about penance with respect to *the acts* by which we cooperate with God's operation in the case of penance (*quantum ad actus quibus Deo operanti in poenitentia cooperamur*). The first principle of these acts is God's operation converting our heart—this according to Lamentations 5:21 (“Turn us, O Lord, to yourself, and we shall be converted”). The second act is the movement of *faith*. The third act is the movement of *servile fear*, by which an individual is drawn back from his sins by the fear of punishment. The fourth act is the movement of *hope*, by which the individual, in the hope of obtaining forgiveness, adopts the intention of making amends. The fifth act is the movement of *charity*, by which the sin is displeasing to the individual in itself (*secundum seipsum*) and no longer because of any punishment. The sixth act is the movement of *filial fear*, by which, because of his reverence for God, the individual offers his amends to God voluntarily. So, then, it is clear that the act of penance proceeds from *servile fear* as from the *first affective movement* ordering the individual toward this, whereas it proceeds from *filial fear* as from its *immediate and proximate principle*.

**Reply to objection 1:** A sin first begins to displease a man, especially a sinner, because of punishment, and this has to do with *servile fear*, before it displeases him because of the offense against God or because of the shamefulness of the sin, and this has to do with *charity*.

**Reply to objection 2:** When the kingdom of heaven is said to be at hand, we are to understand that the king is coming not only to reward but also to punish. Thus, in Matthew 3:7 John the Baptist said, “Brood of vipers! Who has shown you how to flee from the wrath to come?”

**Reply to objection 3:** The very movement of fear proceeds from God's act of converting the heart. Hence, Deuteronomy 5:29 says, “Who is to give them a mind such that they fear me?” And so the fact that penance proceeds from fear does not rule out its proceeding from God's act of converting the heart.

## Article 6

## Is penance the first among the virtues?

It seems that penance is the first among the virtues (*poenitentia sit prima virtutum*):

**Objection 1:** A Gloss on Matthew 3:2 (“Repent ...”) says, “The first virtue is to punish the old man through penance and to hate the vices.”

**Objection 2:** To recede from the terminus [*a quo*] seems to precede approaching the terminus [*ad quem*]. But all the other virtues seem to involve approaching the terminus [*ad quem*], since it is through them that a man is ordered toward doing good. By contrast, penance seems to be ordered toward receding from evil. Therefore, penance seems to be prior to all the other virtues.

**Objection 3:** Prior to penance, there is sin in the soul. But no virtue exists in the soul along with sin. Therefore, no virtue comes before penance, but instead penance itself seems to be the first virtue, which opens the path to the other virtues by excluding sin.

**But contrary to this:** As has already been explained (a. 5), penance proceeds from faith, hope, and charity. Therefore, penance is not the first among the virtues.

**I respond:** In the case of the virtues one does not pay attention to *temporal* ordering (*ordo temporis*) as regards the habits (*non attenditur ordo temporis quantum ad habitus*). For since, as was established in the Second Part (ST 1-2, q. 65, a. 3), the virtues are connected, all of them begin to exist in the soul at the same time. Instead, one of them is said to be prior to another by their *natural* ordering, which is taken from the ordering among their acts—more specifically, insofar as the act of one virtue presupposes the act of another virtue.

Therefore, given this, one should reply that certain praiseworthy acts—for instance, acts of unformed *faith* and *hope*, and the act of *servile fear*—can *precede*, even temporally, the act and the habit of penance. On the other hand, the act and habit of *charity* are temporally *simultaneous* with the act and habit of penance and with the habits of the other virtues; for as was established in the Second Part (ST 1-2, q. 113, a. 7-8), in the justification of a sinner the movement of free choice toward God, which is an act of faith formed by charity, is simultaneous with the movement of free choice with respect to sin, which is an act of penance. However of these two acts, the first is *naturally prior* to the second, since the act of the virtue of penance is contrary to sin out of love for God (*ex amore Dei*), and so the first act is a reason for, and cause of, the second act.

So, then, penance is not, absolutely speaking, first among the virtues, either in the ordering of time or in the ordering of nature, since in the ordering of nature the *theological virtues* precede it absolutely speaking. On the other hand, in a certain respect penance is first among the remaining virtues in the ordering of *time*, viz., with respect to the act of penance that occurs first in the justification of a sinner. However, in the ordering of *nature* there seem to be other virtues that are prior [to penance], in the way that what is such-and-such in its own right (*per se*) is prior to what is such-and-such incidentally (*per accidens*). For other virtues seem to be necessary in their own right for the good of a man, whereas penance is necessary once something is presupposed, viz., preexistent sin—just as has likewise been explained (q. 65, a. 4) concerning the ordering of the sacrament of penance to the other sacraments discussed above.

**Reply to objection 1:** This Gloss is talking about the fact that the act of penance is temporally the first among the acts of the other virtues.

**Reply to objection 2:** In the case of successive movements, receding from the terminus [*a quo*] is temporally prior to arriving at the terminus [*ad quem*], and also prior on the part of the subject, i.e. in the order of *material* causes.

By contrast, in the order of *agent* causes and *final* causes, arriving at the terminus [*ad quem*] is

prior, since that is what the agent is first tending toward or intending (*hoc enim est quod primo agens intendit*). And as *Physics* 2 explains, it is this order that one mainly pays attention to in the case of acts of the soul.

**Reply to objection 3:** It is through the power of *faith* and *charity*, which are prior to penance, that penance opens the path to the virtues by expelling sin. Yet it opens the path to those virtues in such a way that they themselves enter simultaneously with it. For as was established in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 65, aa. 3 and 5), in the justification of a sinner, the movement of free choice with respect to God and sin is simultaneous with the remission of sin and the infusion of grace, by which all the virtues are simultaneously infused.