QUESTION 89

The Recovery of the Virtues through Penance

Next we have to consider the recovery of the virtues through penance (*de recuperatione virtutum per poenitentiam*). And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Are the virtues restored through penance? (2) Are they restored with equal quantity? (3) Is equal dignity restored to the penitent? (4) Are the works of virtue deadened by sin? (5) Do the works deadened by sin come to life again through penance? (6) Do dead works, i.e., works done in the absence of charity, come to life through penance?

Article 1

Are the virtues restored through penance?

It seems that the virtues are not restored through penance (*per poenitentiam virtutes non restituantur*):

Objection 1: Lost virtues could not be restored through penance unless penance were a cause of the virtues. But since penance is a virtue, it cannot be a cause of all the virtues—especially because, as was explained above (q. 85, a. 6), there are certain virtues that are naturally prior to penance. Therefore, the virtues are not restored through penance.

Objection 2: Penance consists in certain acts on the part of the penitent. But the infused virtues (*virtutes gratuitae*) are not caused by our acts; for Augustine explains in *De Libero Arbitrii* that [these] virtues are such that "God effects them in us without us." Therefore, it seems that the virtues are not restored through penance.

Objection 3: One who has virtue does the acts of the virtues with pleasure and without difficulty; hence, in *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says, "An individual is not just if he does not take joy in a just action." But many penitents still experience difficulty in doing the acts of the virtues. Therefore, the virtues are not restored through penance.

But contrary to this: In Luke 15:22 the father ordered his repentant son to be clothed with "the best robe (*prima stola*)," which, according to Ambrose, is "the mantle of wisdom" that all the virtues follow upon—this according to Wisdom 8:7 ("She teaches sobriety and justice, prudence and virtue, which are such that there is nothing more useful to men in life"). Therefore, all the virtues are restored through penance.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 86, aa. 1 and 6), sins are forgiven through penance. But there can be no remission of sins except through an infusion of grace. Hence, it follows that through penance grace is infused into a man. But as was established in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 110, a. 4), all the infused virtues (*virtutes gratuitae*) follow upon grace in the way that the all the powers of the soul flow from the soul's essence. Hence, it follows that all the virtues are restored through penance.

Reply to objection 1: As has already been explained, penance restores the virtues in the same way in which it is a cause of grace. Now penance is a *cause* of grace insofar as it is a *sacrament*; for insofar as it is a *virtue*, it is more an *effect* of grace. And so there is no need for penance, insofar as it is a virtue, to be a cause of all the other virtues; instead, what is necessary is for the habit of penance to be caused by the sacrament along with the habits of the other virtues.

Reply to objection 2: In the sacrament of penance the human acts behave as the *matter*, whereas the *formal* force of this sacrament depends on the power of the keys. And so the power of the keys serves as an efficient cause, though an *instrumental* efficient cause, of grace and the virtues.

On the other hand, the first act of the penitent, viz., contrition, behaves as the final disposition for receiving grace, whereas the other, subsequent, acts of penance then proceed from the grace and the virtues.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 86, a. 5), sometimes after the first act of penance, viz., contrition, certain remnants of the sins—more specifically, dispositions caused by prior sinful acts—remain, and these remnants present a difficulty for the penitent in performing the acts of the virtues. However, as far as the very inclination belonging to charity and the other virtues is concerned, the penitent performs the works of the virtues with pleasure and without difficulty. It is as if the virtuous penitent were experiencing difficulty incidentally in the execution of an act of virtue because of sleepiness or some other bodily disposition.

Article 2

Does a man rise up after penance to equal virtue?

It seems that a man rises up after penance to equal virtue (*post poenitentiam resurgat homo in aequali virtute*):

Objection 1: In Romans 8:28 the Apostle says, "For those who love God all things work together unto good," and a Gloss by Augustine says, "This is true to such an extent that if some of them go astray and deviate, God makes that very thing work for them unto good." But this would not be the case if a man rose up to lesser virtue.

Objection 2: Ambrose says, "Penance is the best of things, and it restores all defects to perfection." But this would not be true if the virtues were not regained with equal quantity. Therefore, through penance equal virtue is always recovered.

Objection 3: A Gloss on Genesis 1:5 ("There was evening and there was morning, one day") says, "The evening light was that from which he fell, the morning light that is that to which he rises up." But morning light is greater than evening light. Therefore, an individual rises up to greater grace or charity than he had before. This is likewise seen from what the Apostle says in Romans 5:20: "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound."

But contrary to this: The charity of one who is *making progress* (*caritas proficiens*) or of one who is *perfect* (*caritas perfecta*) is greater than the charity of one who *is beginning* (*caritas incipiens*). But it sometimes happens that an individual falls from the charity of one who is making progress and rises up to the charity of one who is beginning. Therefore, it is always the case that a man rises up to a lesser virtue.

I respond: The justification of a sinner is the *final* disposition toward grace; hence, as was established in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 113, a. 8), there is an infusion of grace at the same instant as the aforementioned movement of free choice, which, as has been explained (q. 86, a. 6, ad 1), includes an act of penance.

Now as was established in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 52, aa. 1-2), it is clear that forms that can admit of *more* and *less* are intensified and remitted in accord with the different dispositions of the subject. And to the extent that the movement of free choice in penance is more or less intense, the penitent receives more or less grace. But it happens that the intensity of the movement of the penitent is (a) sometimes proportionate to a *greater* grace than the grace he fell from because of his sin, (b) sometimes proportionate to an *equal* grace, and (c) sometimes proportionate to a *lesser* grace. And so the penitent

rises up sometimes to a greater grace than he had before, sometimes to an equal grace, and sometimes to a lesser grace. And the same argument holds for the virtues that result from the grace.

Reply to objection 1: It is not the case that the very fact that they fall from the love of God through sin works unto good for *everyone* who loves God; this is clear from the case of those who fall and never rise up, or from the case of those who rise up and are going to fall again. Instead, a fall from the love of God works unto good for "those who, according to His purpose, are saints through His call" (Romans 8:28), viz., for those who have been predestined and who are such that no matter how often they fall, they will nonetheless rise up. Therefore, it is for these individuals that the fact that they fall yields good for them, not because they always rise up to *greater* grace, but because they rise up to a *more permanent* grace—not, to be sure, on the part of the *grace*, as if the greater the grace is, the more permanent it is in its own right, but instead on the part of the *man*, who remains more stable in grace to the extent that he becomes more circumspect and more humble. Hence, a Gloss on the same passage adds that the fact that they fall works for them unto good "because they return more humble and because they become more experienced."

Reply to objection 2: Penance, taken in its own right, has the power to bring all defects back to wholeness (*ad perfectum*) and also to move an individual toward a more perfect state (*in uteriorm statum*). However, this is sometimes impeded on the part of the man, who moves in too remiss a way toward God and toward hating sin—just as, in the case of baptism, some adults receive greater or lesser grace, depending on the different ways in which they dispose themselves.

Reply to objection 3: This comparison of the two instances of grace to evening light and morning light is made because of a *similarity in the order*—for the darkness of night follows upon evening light, whereas the light of day follows upon morning light—and *not* because of a *similarity with respect to greater or lesser quantity*.

Again, the passage from the Apostle (Romans 5:20) is talking about a grace that outstrips all the abundance of human sins. But it is not true in all cases that the more abundantly an individual sins, the more abundant the grace he receives, if it is the quantity of habitual grace that is being measured—though sometimes, as is clear in the case of [Mary] Magdalene, those who sin abundantly are abundantly sorry and so receive a more abundant habit of grace and virtue.

Reply to the argument to the contrary: In one and the same individual, the grace he has when he is making progress is greater than the grace he began with. But this is not necessarily the case across different individuals. For one individual may begin with a greater grace than another individual has in the state of making progress. As Gregory puts it in *Dialogi* 2, "Let all, both now and hereafter, realize how great a perfection of conversion the boy Benedict began the life of grace with."

Article 3

Is a man restored to his former dignity through penance?

It seems that a man is not restored to his former dignity through penance (*per poenitentiam non restituatur homo in pristinam dignitatem*):

Objection 1: A Gloss on Amos 5:1-2 ("The virgin Israel is fallen") says, "He denies not that she will rise, but that she *is able to* rise. For once a sheep strays, then even if it is carried back on the shoulders of the shepherd, it does not have as much glory as a sheep who has never gone astray." Therefore, a man does not recover his former dignity through penance.

Objection 2: Jerome says, "Anyone who does not safeguard the dignity of the divine grade has to be content with saving his soul; for it is difficult to return to the former grade." And Pope Innocent says, "The canons instituted at Nicea exclude penitents from even the lowest offices among clerics." Therefore, it is not the case that a man recovers his former dignity through penance.

Objection 3: Before an individual's sin he is able to ascend to a higher grade. But this is not granted to a penitent after his sin; for Ezechiel 44:10-13 says, "The Levites who withdrew from me ... will not approach me to exercise the priesthood." And as contained in the *Decretals* (dist. 1, chap. 52), we read in the Council of Lerida, "If those who serve at the holy altar suddenly fall into some deplorable weakness of the flesh and by God's mercy have repented, let them resume their offices, but they cannot be promoted any further to higher offices." Therefore, it is not the case that penance restores a man to his former dignity.

But contrary to this: As we read in the same distinction, Gregory, writing to Secundinus, said, "After a worthy act of making satisfaction, we believe that a man is able to return to his [position of] honor." And in the Council of Adge we read, "Contumacious clerics, insofar as their order of dignity allows, should be corrected by their bishops, so that when penance has reformed them, they may get back their grade and their dignity."

I respond: By sin a man loses two sorts of dignity, one as regards God and the other as regards the Church.

As regards *God*, he loses two sorts of dignity:

One is his *principal* dignity, by which he had been counted among the children of God through grace. And this dignity he recovers through penance. This is signified in Luke 15:22 in the case of the prodigal son, whose father ordered his repentant son to be clothed once again with "the best robe and ring and shoes."

The other is his *secondary* dignity, viz., innocence—about which, as we read in the same place, the older son was boasting when he said, "Behold, these many years I have been serving you and have never transgressed your commands." And this sort of dignity a penitent cannot recover. Still, he sometimes recovers something greater. For as Gregory says in a homily on the hundred sheep, "Those who acknowledge that they have strayed from God make up for their prior loss with subsequent gains. Thus, there is more rejoicing in heaven on their account—even as in a battle the commanding officer has more love for a soldier who, after running away, returns and bravely attacks the enemy, than for another soldier who has never turned his back and has never done anything courageous."

As regards *ecclesiastical* dignity, a man loses it through sin by rendering himself unworthy of the things belonging to the exercise of his ecclesiastical office (*ad ea quae competunt dignitati exercenda*).

He is barred from recovering this dignity if, in the first place, he is unrepentant. Hence, as we read in the same distinction [cited in Objection 3], chap. *Domino*, Isidore writes to the bishop Masso, "The canons prescribe that those individuals who by their repentance have made satisfaction for their sins, or who have made a suitable confession of those sins, should return to their former grades. By contrast, those who do not mend their vice of corruption are not to receive either their grade of honor or the grace of communion."

The man is barred from recovering this dignity if, in the second place, he carries out his penance in a negligent manner. Hence, the same distinction, chap. *Si quis diaconus*, says, "When in the case of certain individuals there appears to be no compunction of humility or constancy in prayer, and when we do not see them making time for either fasting or reading, we can see how much negligence would remain if they returned to their former offices."

The man is barred from recovering this dignity, in the third place, if he has committed a sin that

involves some sort of irregularity. Hence, in the same distinction, from the Council of Pope Martin, we read, "If an individual marries a widow or a woman abandoned by someone else, he should not be admitted to the ranks of the clergy. And if he has somehow crept in [to those ranks], he should be thrown out. The same thing applies if, after baptism, he is involved in a homicide, whether by deed or by command or by counsel or in self-defense." However, this is by reason of *irregularity* and not by reason of any *sin*.

The man is barred from recovering his dignity, in the fourth place, because of scandal. Hence, as we read in the same distinction, chap. *De his vero*, Rabanus says, "Those who have been publicly caught in, or convicted of, acts of perjury or theft or fornication or other crimes should, according to what is prescribed by the sacred canons, fall from their proper grade; for it is scandalous to God's people that such persons should be placed in charge of them. On the other hand, those who confess such sins to a priest as committed by themselves in a hidden way—and provided that they have purged themselves through fasts and almsgiving and vigils and sacred prayers—are to be promised hope of forgiveness by God's mercy with their proper grade preserved." Likewise, the following is found in *Extra*, *De qualitate ordinandorum*, chap. *Quaesitum*, "If the crimes in question have not been proved by a judicial process or otherwise been made widely known, then after the individuals have done penance, they* cannot* be* prevented* from exercising the orders they have already received, or from receiving further orders—except in cases involving homicide."

Reply to objection 1: The same line of reasoning holds for the recovery of virginity as for the recovery of innocence, which belongs to a man's *secondary* dignity in the sight of God.

Reply to objection 2: In this passage Jerome says not that it is *impossible*, but that it is *difficult*, for a man to recover his former grade after penance, since as has been explained, this is given only to one who is *perfectly repentant* (*non nisi perfecte poenitenti*).

Now Augustine replies to the statutes of the canons that seem to prohibit this when he writes to Boniface, "If it was decided in the Church that no one, after doing penance for a crime, was to become a cleric or to return to the clerical state or to remain in the clerical state, then this was done not out of despair concerning mercy, but for the sake of firmness regarding discipline. Otherwise, one would be arguing against the keys given to the Church, of which it was said, 'Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven'." And later he adds, "For holy David did penance for his crimes, and he persisted in his honor [of being king]. Likewise, when blessed Peter shed bitter tears, he repented of having denied our Lord, and yet he remained an apostle. Still, the zeal of later [church leaders] should not be deemed needless. For along with doing nothing to make *salvation* more difficult, they added something to humility, having had experience, I believe, of the fake penance of some individuals who were lusting after the power that accompanies high honors."

Reply to objection 3: The statute in question is to be understood as concerning those who are doing public penance and who afterwards cannot be promoted to a higher grade. For as is clear from John 15ff., it was after his denial that Peter was made shepherd of the sheep of Christ. Commenting on this, Chrysostom says, "After his denial and repentance Peter shows that he has greater self-confidence with respect to Christ. For he who at the supper did not dare to ask Christ but instead deputed the questioning to John, was afterwards entrusted with leading his brothers, and not only did he not depute to another the asking of questions that had to do with himself, but from then on it was he himself, instead of John, who questioned the master."

Article 4

Can works of the virtues done in charity be deadened?

It seems that works of the virtues done in charity cannot be deadened (*opera virtutum in caritate facta mortificari non possunt*):

Objection 1: What does not exist cannot be changed. But deadening is a change from life to death. Therefore, since works of the virtues, after they have been performed, no longer exist, it seems that they cannot be further deadened.

Objection 2: Through works of virtue done in charity a man merits eternal life. But to take merit away from the one who merits is an injustice—something that is not ascribed to God. Therefore, it cannot be the case that works of the virtues done in charity are deadened by a subsequent sin.

Objection 3: What is stronger is not corrupted by what is weaker. But works that belong to charity are stronger than any sins; for as Proverbs 10:12 puts it, "Charity covers all sins." Therefore, it seems that works done in charity cannot be deadened by a subsequent mortal sin.

But contrary to this: Ezechiel 18:24 says, "If the just man turns away from his justice, all the just deeds he had done will not be remembered."

I respond: Through death a living entity loses the operation of life, and so through a certain similarity entities are said to be deadened when they are held back from their proper effect or operation. Now the effect of virtuous works that are done in charity is to carry one through to eternal life. But this is impeded by a subsequent mortal sin, which takes away grace. And this is the sense in which works done in charity are said to be deadened through a subsequent mortal sin.

Reply to objection 1: Just as works of sin pass away in actuality and remain in their debt of punishment (*transeunt actu et manent reatu*), so works done in charity, after they pass away in actuality, remain in merit insofar as God accepts them (*manet merito in Dei acceptatione*). And on this score they are 'deadened' insofar as a man is kept from receiving the reward.

Reply to objection 2: The reward for one who merits can be taken away when he has rendered himself unworthy of the reward by subsequent sin (*per culpam sequentem*). For things that a man has already received are such that he sometimes loses them justly because of some fault.

Reply to objection 3: It is not because of the strength of works of sin that works previously done in charity are deadened; instead it because of the freedom of the will, which can be diverted from what is good to what is evil.

Article 5

Do works deadened through sin come back to life through penance?

It seems that works deadened through sin do not come back to life through penance (*opera mortificata per peccatum per poenitentiam non reviviscant*):

Objection 1: Just as past sins are remitted through subsequent penance, so, too, works previously done in charity are deadened through subsequent sin. But as was explained above (q. 88, a. 1), sins forgiven through penance do not return. Therefore, it seems that deadened works do not come back to life through charity.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 4), works are said to be deadened by way of a similarity

to animals that die. But a dead animal cannot be brought back to life again. Therefore, neither can deadened works come back to life again through penance.

Objection 3: Works done in charity merit glory according to the quantity of grace or charity. But sometimes through penance a man rises up to a lesser grace or charity. Therefore, he will not receive glory in accord with the merits of his previous works. And so it seems that works deadened through sin do not come back to life through penance.

But contrary to this: A Gloss on Joel 2:25 ("I will restore to you the years which the locust has eaten") says, "I will not allow the abundance you lost when your soul was disturbed to disappear." But that abundance is the merit of good works that was lost through sin. Therefore, previously performed meritorious works come back to life through penance.

I respond: Some have claimed that meritorious works which have been deadened by subsequent sin do not come back to life through subsequent penance, reasoning that the works themselves do not remain in such a way that they could be brought to life again.

However, this cannot keep them from being brought to life. For they have the ability to lead one to eternal life—something that belongs to their life—not only insofar as they exist in actuality, but, even after they cease to exist in actuality, *insofar as they remain acceptable to God* (*secundum quod remanent in acceptatione divina*). And they remain so, as far as they themselves are concerned, even after they are deadened by sin; for God will always accept those works, once they have been performed, and the saints will rejoice over them—this according to Apocalypse 3:11 ("Hold fast to what you have, lest anyone else receive your crown").

To the contrary, the fact that these works are not efficacious for leading an individual who has performed them to eternal life stems from *the impediment of an intervening sin*, through which the individual in question is rendered unworthy of eternal life. However, this impediment is removed through penance, insofar as the sins are remitted through the penance.

Hence, what remains is that, through penance, previously deadened works recover their efficacy for leading the individual who performed them to eternal life—and this is what it is for them to come back to life. And so it is clear that deadened works come back to life through penance.

Reply to objection 1: Works of sin are wiped away in their own right by penance, so that, because of God's indulgence, no further stain or debt of punishment is incurred because of them.

By contrast, works done out of charity are not wiped away by God and remain acceptable to Him, but they receive an impediment on the part of the man who performed them. And so when that impediment, which is on the man's part, is removed, God brings to fulfillment on His part what the works merited.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, works done in charity are deadened not in their own right (*non secundum se*), but only through a supervening impediment on the part of the one who performed them. By contrast, animals die in their own right insofar as they are deprived of the principle of life. And so the two cases are not similar.

Reply to objection 3: An individual who rises up in a lesser charity will, to be sure, receive his *essential reward* according to the quantity of the charity in which he exists, but he will have greater joy over the works done in his 'first' charity than over the works which he did in his 'second' charity—something that pertains to his reward *incidentally*.

Article 6

Are even dead works, viz., those that were not done in charity, brought to life through subsequent penance?

It seems that even dead works, viz., those that were not done in charity, are brought to life through subsequent penance (*per poenitentiam subsequentem etiam opera mortua, quae scilicet non sunt in caritate facta, vivificentur*):

Objection 1: It seems more difficult for what was has died to come to life—something that never happens naturally (*secundum naturam*)—than for what has never been alive to come to life, since certain living things are naturally generated from what is non-living. But as has been explained (a. 5), deadened works come to live through penance. Therefore, *a fortiori*, dead works are brought to life.

Objection 2: When a cause is removed, the effect is removed. But the reason why works that were good by their genus and done without charity were not alive was the lack of charity and grace. But this defect is removed through penance. Therefore, through penance dead works are brought to life.

Objection 3: Jerome says, "If you sometimes see a sinner doing, among his many evil deeds, deeds that are just, God is not so unjust as to forget about the few good deeds because of his many evil deeds." But this seems especially so when his past evils have been taken away through penance. Therefore, it seems that after penance God would reward the previous good deeds done in the state of sin—and this is what it is for them to be brought to life.

But contrary to this: 1 Corinthians 13:3 says, "If I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body up to be burned, but do not have charity, it profits me nothing." But this would not be the case if these good works were brought to life anyway by subsequent penance. Therefore, it is not the case that penance brings previous dead works to life.

I respond: There are two ways in which a work is called 'dead':

(a) in one way, as an *efficient cause* (*effective*), i.e., because it is a cause of death. And on this score *works of sin* are called dead works—this according to Hebrews 9:14 ("The blood of Christ will cleanse our consciences of dead works"). Through penance dead works of this sort are not brought to life, but are instead wiped away—this according to Hebrews 6:1 ("... not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works").

(b) in the second way, works are called dead by way of a *privation* (*privative*), viz., because they lack *spiritual life*, which comes from charity, and it is through charity that the soul is joined to God, because of whom the soul lives [spiritually] in the way that the body lives through the soul. And it is in this sense in which faith that exists without charity is likewise called dead—this according to James 2:20 ("Faith without works is dead"). And this is the way in which all *works that are good by their genus* are, if done without charity, called dead, viz., insofar as they do not proceed from a principle of life—just as we might call the sound of the harp a 'dead voice'.

So, then, the difference between life and death in the case of works has to do with the principle from which they proceed. But works cannot proceed from their principle a second time, because they pass away (*quia transeunt*) and cannot be taken to be numerically the same the second time. Hence, it is impossible for dead works to come to life again.

Reply to objection 1: Among natural entities, both dead entities and deadened entities lack a principle of life. But works are said to be 'deadened' (*mortificata*) not because of the principle from which they proceed, but because of an extrinsic impediment, whereas works are said to be 'dead' (*mortua*) because of their principle. Hence, the lines of reasoning are not similar.

Reply to objection 2: Works that were good by their genus and done without charity are called 'dead' because of the absence of charity and grace as their principle. But it is not granted to them through subsequent penance that they should proceed from such a principle. Hence, the argument does not go through.

Reply to objection 3: God remembers the good works that an individual does in the state of sin, but not in order to reward such works in eternal life—something that is fitting only in the case of living works, i.e., works done out of charity; instead, He rewards such works with some sort of temporal remuneration. Hence, in a homily on the rich man and Lazarus Gregory says, "If that rich man had not done something good and received a reward for it in this life, Abraham would certainly not have said to him, 'You received good things in your lifetime'."

Or one could also claim that such an individual receives a more tolerable judgment. Hence, in *De Patientia* Augustine says, "We cannot claim that it would have been better for the schismatic if he had denied Christ and not suffered any of those things he suffered by confessing Him. For what the Apostle says—viz., 'If I were to hand my body over to be burned, but did not have charity, it would profit me nothing' (1 Corinthians 13:3)—should be understood as having to do with one's obtaining the kingdom of heaven and not with one's receiving a more tolerable sentence at the last judgment."