

**THE SACRAMENTS:
A DOGMATIC
TREATISE; VOL. III**

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The sacraments: a dogmatic treatise; Vol. III by Joseph Pohle & Arthur Preuss

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JOSEPH POHLE & ARTHUR PREUSS

**THE SACRAMENTS:
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DOGOMATIC THEOLOGY

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THE SACRAMENTS

A DOGMATIC TREATISE

BY

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AND ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I. PENANCE AS A VIRTUE, OR REPENTANCE.—

Before the institution of the Sacrament of Penance the only means by which an adult sinner could become reconciled to God, was the virtue of penance (*virtus poenitentiae*), i. e. perfect contrition coupled with a firm purpose of amendment.¹ Even to-day this remains the only means of justification for those who live in good faith outside the true Church.

a) That penance, in the sense of penitence or repentance, is a distinct virtue is not admitted by all theologians. Alexander of Hales defines penance as the sum-total of all those virtues violated by sin. Durandus classes it as a part of distributive justice. Cardinal Cajetan subordinates it to the three virtues of charity, religion, and retributive justice. We hold that penitence is a distinct virtue for the reason that it has its own formal object. This formal object lies in the ugliness of sin as an offense against God, which is expiable by contrition and satisfaction.

The fact that penitence can be called forth by other virtues does not argue that it is not an independent virtue, any more than obedience, which all admit to be a virtue,

¹ Cfr. Ez. XVIII, 30; 2 Cor. VII, 9.

can be proved not to be one merely because it can be dictated by higher motives.

As a moral virtue, penitence is rooted in the will. Contrition and the resolve to avoid sin are acts of the will.

Penitence need not be accompanied by a sensible feeling of regret, because the human emotions are not absolutely subject to the will.

b) The material object of penance is as wide as the range of its formal object. Since the latter produces contrition and a purpose of amendment, the material object of penance comprises everything that falls within the range of these two acts of the will.

The virtue of penance is directed partly to the sins of the past, and partly to those of the future. In regard to the former the penitent sinner says: "I wish I had not committed them." This is contrition. In regard to the latter he says: "I will not commit them." This is the purpose of amendment. It is easy to see that there is a real connection between the two. They are related to each other as cause and effect. The purpose of amendment presupposes contrition for one's former sins, whereas contrition would not only undo the sins of the past, if it could, but likewise prevent the commission of new ones in the future. A change of life demands both a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem*. The *terminus a quo* in the case of penitence is sin; the *terminus ad quem* is amendment.²

It follows that one can do penance only for one's own sins. The angels could not do penance for the sins of men. Contrition can cover only personal sins. We may

² *Poenitentia* is derived from *μετανοείν*, i. e. to change one's *poenitere* (*poena*, *punire*); its mind, to repent. Greek equivalent *μετάνοια*, from

view with disfavor the misdeeds of others, but we cannot feel contrition or do penance for them. For a similar reason it is impossible to do penance for original sin, which is in no wise personal.³

2. RELATION OF PENANCE AS A VIRTUE TO THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.—The virtue of penance, far from becoming superfluous by the institution of the Sacrament of Penance, really is the very heart of that Sacrament. Christ, by adding the sacramental *opus operatum*, merely increased the efficacy of repentance.

The Sacrament of Penance is inconceivable without the virtue of repentance.

Penance is usually defined as "a Sacrament in which the priest, in the place of God, forgives sins, when the sinner is heartily sorry for them, sincerely confesses them, and is willing to perform the satisfaction imposed on him." This definition is based on the dogmatic teaching of the Council of Trent.⁴

The fact that the three acts required of the penitent, *viz.*: contrition, confession, and satisfaction, form essential elements of this definition, shows that the virtue of penance constitutes the essence of the Sacrament.

The definition we have given furnishes an excellent basis for a division of our treatise into three parts:

³ Cfr. Pohle-Preuss, *God the Author of Nature and the Supernatural*, 2nd ed., pp. 232 sqq., St. Louis 1915.—On the virtue of penance see St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.*, 3a, qu. 85; Palmieri, *De Poenitentia*,

thes. 1-7, Rome 1879; De Lugo, *De Poenitentiae Virtute* (a very exhaustive treatise).

⁴ *Conc. Trid.*, Sess. XIV, cap. 1-9; can. 1-15.