TWO CONCEPTS OF ATTRITION AND CONTRITION

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STUDENTS of penitential theology today are acquainted with the latest controversy between contritionists and attritionists.[1] The former, as H. Dondaine, O.P., P. De Vooght, O.S.B., and M. Flick, S.J.,[2] maintain the position of St. Thomas and of the *veteres* generally which holds that attrition is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins in the sacrament of penance on condition that at the moment of justification it gives way for contrition and so, according to the old adage, "vi clavium ex attrito fit contritus."[3] The attritionists, like P. Galtier, S.J., and J. de Blic, S.J.,[4] defend the conception of modern penitential theology: Attrition is a sufficient disposition for justification in the

[1] The terms attritionism and contritionism, when applied to the present day controversy, do not have exactly the same meaning as in the historical dispute of the seventeenth century which was concluded, or pacified, by the decree of the Holy Office of May 6, 1667 (*DB* 1146). Then contritionism meant the theory which requires in attrition, in order to make it sufficient for the fruitful reception of the sacrament, some act of love of God; attritionism, on the other hand, did not require such an act of love. These two theories have since then lived side by side in the Catholic schools, only reviving the differences now and again, as for example in 1927 with the publication of J. Perinelle, O.P., *L'Attrition d'après le Concile de Trente et d'après Saint Thomas* (Bibliothèque thomiste, 10). In the present day dispute the meaning of the respective positions is as explained in the text. Cf. H. Dondaine, O.P., *L'Attrition suffisante* (Bibl. thom., 25) Paris, 1943, p. 31, n. 1.

[2] H. Dondaine, *op. cit.*; P. de Vooght, O.S.B., "La Justification dans le sacrement de Pénitence," in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, V (1928), pp. 225–56; "A propos de la causalité du sacrement de Pénitence. Théologie thomiste et théologie tout court," *ibid.*, VII (1930), pp. 663–75; "La théologie de la Pénitence," *ibid.*, XXV (1949), pp. 77–82; M. Flick, S.J., *L'Attimo della giustificazione secondo S. Thomaso* (Analecta Gregoriana, 40), Rome, 1947.

[3] The adage has been understood in two meanings mainly: *fit contritus*, by completing and achieving his sorrow, attrition being essentially an imperfect sorrow leading up to a more perfect one; this is how St. Thomas and his contemporaries understood it. Or, by simple concomitance of the infused *habitus*, grace and charity, without affecting the sorrow intrinsically and leaving it what it was; that is, probably, the idea of Scotus, and in this sense it would also be accepted by modern attritionists. Cf. H. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[4] P. Galtier, S.J., "Amour de Dieu et attrition" (in connection with the book of J. Perinelle quoted above n. 1), in *Gregorianum*, IX (1928), pp. 373–416; review of J. de Blic's study, *ibid.*, XXVII (1946), pp. 468–70; "La Confession et le renouveau chrétien," in *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, XXV (1949), pp. 18–44, especially pp. 23–25; J. de Blic, S.J., "Sur l'attrition suffisante," in *Mélanges de Science religieuse*, II (1945), pp. 329–66 (a critical study of H. Dondaine's book).

sacrament and it need not make room for contrition at the infusion of sanctifying grace. For these, "vi clavium ex attrito non fit contritus." The two positions are different indeed; both schools agree to say so. The first emphatically states that our modern theology has deviated from the authentic teaching of St. Thomas and advocates a return to it. The latter acknowledges this deviation but sees in the called-for return to St. Thomas a regress made well nigh impossible by the teaching of Trent.[5]

One thing seems to become evident from the recent controversial studies. There are two different ideas of contrition and attrition, so different indeed that the same terms or concepts when used by authors of opposite schools do not cover exactly the same reality. The controversialists themselves on both sides are not unaware of this.[6]

If so, if contrition according to St. Thomas does not perfectly coincide with the contrition of the moderns, and if what St. Thomas meant by attrition is not exactly the same sorrow for sin which the moderns so term, should not then a way out of the confusion and an approach to mutual comprehension start from an accurate analysis of what each of the systems means by them? Strangely enough, except for some passing remarks which are left unexploited,[7] this precise outline of the *status quaestionis* seems to have been overlooked almost completely.

In the following pages we intend to determine as accurately as possible the ideas which the *veteres* on one hand and the *hodierni* on the

[5] Cf. P. de Vooght, *La Thèologie*, p. 77; H. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 46–60, ch. 4, "Retour à Saint Thomas"; J. de Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 337, 357–58. It may strike one how nearly all historical studies on the theology of penance tacitly assume that the history of the penitential doctrine goes in a uniformly progressive direction. Cf. for example the long and instructive study of A. Michel, "Pénitence," in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, XII, 748–1127. Yet one may well ask the question whether the deviation from St. Thomas' teaching in the theology of penance means a real progress. P. de Vooght, *op. cit.*, p. 77, is convinced that it is not. And he may well be right. That deviation set in at a time of low level scholasticism. This by itself is not a favourable sign.

[6] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 351; De Vooght, *La Théologie*, p. 81.

[7] Cf. De Blic, *loc. cit.*, n. 1. On p. 339, n. 3, he remarked that for St. Thomas it would be contradictory to speak of the attrition of a soul in a state of grace. Yet in pp. 358–61, he develops a long proof to show that attrition need not be *informis*. He obviously means here by attrition something different from what St. Thomas meant by it. Note also P. de Vooght, *La Justification*, pp. 255 f., on the practical requirements of Thomist contrition and of modern attrition.

other hold about contrition and attrition, thus to bring out the exact differences in their teaching and pave the way to an approach and synthesis. For that purpose we shall (1) briefly recall the history of the evolution from the old conceptions to the new; (2) state the two theological positions about contrition-attrition with their implications and root-causes in their respective theologies of justification and of the sacrament; and (3) sketch a possible synthesis of the two conceptions.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE NOTIONS ATTRITION-CONTRITION

1) The *explicit distinction* between contrition and attrition is not found in Catholic theology till well into the twelfth century. Pre-Scholastic and early Scholastic authors treat of only one sorrow for sin in connection with sacramental or ecclesiastical penance, and that is contrition, *contritio cordis*, the sorrow that is perfect enough to wipe out the sins before God even prior to confession to a priest.[8] From the end of the eleventh century on, in contrast to the immediately preceding conception of penance which laid the main stress on confession, contrition was commonly considered, under the influence of Abelard and Peter Lombard, as the most important of all the four elements that go to make penance, more important than confession and absolution.[9] Contrition is the properly forgiving act. And the history of the ideas concerning penance shows that justifying contrition is normally thought to precede absolution.[10] This appears, for instance, from the classical scripture examples used to illustrate the respective action of

[8] Cf. P. Schmoll, O. F. M., *Die Busslehre der Fruhscholastik*, Munich, 1909; A. Teetaert, O. F. M. Cap., *La Confession aux laiques dans l'Eglise latine depuis le VIIIe jusqu'au XIVe siècle*, Paris, 1926; A. Michel, *op. cit.*; J. Perinelle, *op. cit.*; A. Landgraf, "Grundlage fur ein Verstandniss der Busslehre der Fruh- und Hochscholastik," in *Zeitschrift fur katholische Theologie*, LI (1927), pp. 167–94; "Die Vorbereitung auf die Rechtfertigung und die Eingiessung der heiligmachenden Gnade in der Fruhscholastik," in *Scholastik*, VI (1931), pp. 42–62, 222–47, 354–80, 481–504; art. "Reue," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, VIII, 850. In the Fathers, indications of an equivalent distinction between attrition and contrition may be traced, as for example, in St. Gregory the Great (Cf. P. Galtier, *De Paenitentia*, 2 ed. (Paris, 1931) p. 36 n. 37. But the scholastic teaching on contrition does not seem to link up with this and rather be independent of it.

[9] Cf. Schmoll, *op. cit.*, p. 30 (Abelard); pp. 70 f. (P. Lombard); Teetaert, *op. cit*, pp. 85–101, especially pp. 98–101.

[10] Cf. Landgraf, *Grundlage*, pp. 166 f., for eighth to thirteenth century: "Grundlegend für den ganzen Zeitraum vom 8–13 Jahrhundert ist die überzeugung von der Nachlassung der Sünden durch die *conversio* oder *contritio*."

contrition and of confession-absolution. The lepers of the gospel narrative were cleansed before they showed themselves to the priests; Christ Himself resuscitated Lazarus and then bade His apostles untie his bandages.[11]

Yet it is also clear from the same history of penitential ideas that theologians were aware of the gradual preparation to this contrition, in which the consideration of motives—fear, for example—was believed to start the penitent on the road to repentance.[12] Without giving it the name which will later become a theological and dogmatic phrase, they know an inceptive and imperfect sorrow for sin which is yet insufficient for the forgiveness of sin in penance, because it does not reach the stage of contrition proper.

Next to this accepted idea that only real *contritio cordis* is helpful for the remission of sin, we may, with P. de Blic,[13] point to another reason why no distinction is made between contrition and attrition, namely, the unsettled and uncertain theology about the proper efficiency of absolution. Few theologians before St. Thomas attributed to the priest's sentence more than a declarative or a forensic value.[14]

2) The *first explicit mention of attrition* and its contrast with contrition we find in Alanus of Lille (+ 1202).[15] His text reads as follows: "Malum quod est in homine, ut fornicatio vel aliud criminale peccatum, . . . aut attritione remittitur [that is, minuitur], ut quando aliquis dolet se hoc commisisse, cessans ab opere, quamvis non paeniteat perfecte; aut contritione dimittitur, quando plenarie de peccato convertitur. Sunt enim multi qui dolent se peccasse et corde atteruntur, non

[11] Cf. Teetaert, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–93; Schmoll, *op. cit.*, p. 16 (St. Anselm).

[12] Cf. Schmoll, *op. cit.*, p. 17 (S. Anselm), p. 24 (St. Bernard), p. 31 (Abelard), p. 49 (Hugh of St. Victor), p. 69 (P. Lombard).

[13] *Op. cit.*, p. 339.

[14] Cf. Teetaert, *op. cit.*, p. 102 (St. Anselm), p. 108 (Abelard), p. 125 (Hugh of St. Victor), p. 140 (P. Lombard); Schmoll, *op. cit.*, p. 17 (St. Anselm), pp. 32 f. (Abelard), p. 52 (Hugh of St. Victor), p. 70 (P. Lombard). Let it, however, be noted that this declarative value of the absolution is not the same as the Protestants would later conceive it; for the early Scholastics agree to consider confession-absolution as necessary; they only fail to synthesize this necessity with the justifying role of contrition.

[15] In the printed sources at any rate. Landgraf (*Grundlage*, p. 164) mentions a contemporary or earlier use of the term in the *Quaestiones* of the Cod. Paris. Mazarin lat. 1708 fol. 245v ascribed to Praepositinus of Cremona ("Aliud est contritio cordis et aliud attritio"), and in Simon of Tournai, *op. cit.*, p. 176. Cf. H. Weisweiler, S. J., "Die Busslehre Simons von Tournai," in *Zeitschr. f. kath. Theol.*, LXV (1932), pp. 190–230, esp. p. 193.

tamen plene conteruntur. Isti minus mali fiunt, sed non desinunt esse mali nisi perfecte conterantur."[16]

In this view, when a sinner is fully repentent, *plenarie conteritur*, his sorrow is forgiving contrition. When he is not perfectly sorry for his sin, he has only attrition which does not forgive but only diminishes his sin. It is to be noted that the discriminating factor between the two is not the motives but the perfection or completeness of the sorrow.

The same viewpoint prevails in early and high Scholasticism. Two considerations will be given to determine the perfection or imperfection of this sorrow.[17] Originally, the presence or absence of the resolve to confess and to make satisfaction for one's sins was the determining factor. Such is the idea of those who consider confession as necessary to prove that the contrition is genuine and sincere, as St. Anselm did.[18] Later, towards the end of early Scholasticism, the presence or absence of informing grace decides whether a sorrow for sin is contrition, *paenitentia formata*, or attrition *paentitentia informis*.

With William of Auvergne (+ 1248) the distinction and definition of attrition-contrition has become common in the School.[19] He holds that the *informatio charitatis* is the distinguishing element between the two. Consequently we find with him the classical formula, used also by Hugh of St. Cher,[20] that for the forgiveness of his sins an attrite penitent must needs become contrite, "ex attrito fit contritus." Does he hold that attrition is sufficient to receive the sacrament? In a way, yes. At any rate, if a penitent comes to penance with attrition only, he then through the power of the absolution becomes contrite.[21] This is necessary because only contrition, and not attrition, is the chief part of penance. Moreover, normally contrition will precede absolution. Such is the position accepted by the great doctors of high Scholas-

[16] *Regulae de sacra Theologia*, reg. 85, *PL* CCX, 665.

[17] Cf. Landgraf, *op. cit.*, pp. 177 and 187.

[18] Cf. Teetaert, *op. cit.*, p. 103, *PL* CLVIII, 662; Landgraf, *op. cit.*, p. 176 n. 2 for Simon of Tournai. St. Thomas still mentions this consideration (*In IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 5, sol. 2, ad 1): "contritio vera non fuerit nisi propositum confitendi habuisset annexum."

[19] Cf. Michel. *op. cit.*, 955; Teetaert, *op. cit.*, p. 258; Landgraf, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

[20] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Landgraf, *op. cit.*, p. 190: "datur gratia, qua de attritione fit contritio." According to Landgraf, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–90, Guido of Orchelles used the formula before him, but with regard to baptism.

[21] Cf. Michel, *loc. cit.*; Teetaert, *loc. cit.*

ticism, Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaventure, St. Albert the Great, Richard of Mediavilla, St. Thomas Aquinas.[22]

St. Thomas, as is well known, was the first to synthesize the dispersed elements of the sacrament of penance into a firm structure.[23] He conceived the sacrament as an *unum per se* in which the priestly absolution is the form and the penitent's acts constitute the matter. He thus attributes to all of them taken together one efficiency with regard to the forgiveness of sins. In this synthesis he conceives contrition and attrition as was commonly done in the thirteenth century. He distinguishes them according to their perfection or imperfection as sorrow and their consequent information or non-information by charity. Contrition alone is a constituent of the sacrament. Accordingly, when a penitent happens to come to the sacrament with attrition only (regularly he will come with contrition), he will in the very reception of the sacrament become contrite.[24]

The first Thomists are not slow to follow this teaching of the Angelic Doctor.[25] Even up to the Council of Trent, and after it, the Thomist school will in the main remain faithful to this doctrine,[26] though we shall have to note the influence of a different current of doctrine.

3) Scotus (+ 1308) was the first to depart from the common teaching. For him *attrition is a sufficient disposition* for the fruitful reception of the sacrament. He does not yet appeal to the motives of the sorrow as to the distinguishing factor of contrition and attrition. On this point

[22] Alexander Alensis, *Summa Theologiae*, P. IV, q. 14 (cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 956 f.; Teetaert, *op. cit.*, pp. 262 f.); St. Bonaventure, *In IV Sent.*, d. 22, a. 2, q. 2 (cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 956; Teetaert, *op. cit.*, pp. 262 f.); Richardus de Mediavilla (cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 1023–1024); St. Albert the Great, *In IV Sent.*, dd. 16, 18 (cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 958). For St. Thomas, cf., for example, Michel, *op. cit.*, 973–93, De Vooght, *La Justification*, Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 5–15.

[23] Cf. *Landgraf*, *op. cit.*, pp. 191–94.

[24] Michel (*op. cit.*, 980) is ambiguous when he says that attrition in the sacrament of penance suffices under the influence of the power of the keys to dispose a soul immediately for justification. Cf b.elow p. 17 and n. 58; Teetaert, *op. cit.*, pp. 266 ff.; Landgraf, *op. cit.*, p. 194: "Die *fides informis* und die *attritio* sind für die Rechtfertigung unzureichend, genugen aber als Vorbereitung auf die priesterliche Absolution. Die priesterliche Absolution spendet die *caritas*, durch welche die *fides informis* zur sündentilgenden *fides formata*, die *attritio* zur sündentilgenden *contritio* erhoben wird."

[25] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 25, n. 2.

[26] Cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 1021–22. His conclusion is perhaps insufficiently shaded; the Scotist influence was more extensive than he seems to insinuate. Cf. below n. 32.

he still holds to the common teaching of the time. But he knows two ways of justification which do not require on the part of the penitent the same disposition of repentance; one is perfect contrition which justifies outside the sacrament, the other is attrition which, in the sacrament, is sufficient for the forgiveness of sin "ex facto Dei assistentis."[27]

The reason Scotus gives to explain why attrition is sufficient in the sacrament is, that otherwise penance would no longer be the "secunda tabula post naufragium," since nothing would be left to be forgiven by it, contrition having already worked the remission of sins.[28] This is very nearly the reason modern theology will uphold.

With this goes naturally the insistence on the relative ease of attrition, sufficient for the sacrament, and on the corresponding difficulty of contrition.[29]

Scotus, true, still maintains the traditional saying that through the absolution an eventually attrite penitent becomes contrite. But he understands this in a new way, namely, in the sense that the penitent may be said to be *contritus* after the remission of his sins merely on account of the extrinsic assistance of the supernatural habitus of charity and grace infused in justification.[30] But his act of sorrow for sin remains the same. This makes Scotus the first attritionist in the modern sense of the term.

His influence would not be confined to the Franciscan school. Among the Thomists as well, before and at the time of Trent, there will be theologians who accept his twofold way of justification, as

[27] *In IV Sent.*, dist. 19, q. un., n. 23: "[docet] sacramentum paenitentiae posse digne recipi ab attrito . . . tanta attritione quae non sufficiat per modum meriti ad iustificationem percipiendam in termino attritionis"; d. 16, q. 1, n. 7: "Sufficit quod aliqua displicentia licet informis praecedat, et tunc ille capax est absolutionis sacramentalis." Cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 1029; Galtier, *De Paenitentia*, pp. 289–90. We must note Scotus' terminology: *attritio sufficiens* means contrition; cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 19, n. 2.

[28] *Report. IV*, dist. 14, q. 4, schol. 2: "Non oportet quod tunc habeat contritionem veram et formatam, quia tunc remitterentur peccata ante susceptionem, et per consequens non video quomodo sacramentum paenitentiae possit tunc salvari esse secunda tabula post naufragium, quia per contritionem praecedentem posset homo suficienter salvari." For the moderns, cf., for example, De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 338, Galtier, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

[29] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[30] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Compare (*ibid.*, p. 36, n. 1, b) the way attritionists of the Thomist school interpret the adage.

Francis de Vitoria.[31] They then hold attrition as sufficient for the sacrament, and understand the old adage, "ex attrito fit contritus," in the Scotist sense; explaining the raising of attrition to contrition by the information by grace without any new act. So, for example, Cano.[32]

4) Another innovation with regard to the traditional doctrine of penance is started with the nominalist idea of *the motives of the sorrow* for sin as constituting the discriminating factor of attrition and contrition. Durand of St. Pourçain, O.P. (+ 1334) seems to have been the first to propose the idea. "Quando voluntas hominis adhaerens peccato premitur timore poenae et ob hoc resilit a peccato, dicitur attrita; sed quando non solum timore poenae sed amore vitae aeternae totaliter resilit a peccato, plene detestando ipsum, dicitur contrita."[33] His text bears the marks of a transition. The motives, fear of the punishment and love of the eternal life, are characteristic of attrition and contrition respectively. At the same time we still hear that in attrition "homo resilit a peccato" (more or less fully), whilst in contrition "totaliter resilit a peccato, plene detestando ipsum." The traditional idea of the lesser or greater perfection of the hatred of sin characteristic of attrition and contrition, lingers on.

Biel distinguishes *attritio imperfecta* inspired by the love of self, and *contritio perfecta*, inspired by the love of God. Again, apparently, the motive of sorrow is the distinguishing element.[34] But he postulates contrition as the necessary disposition for justification in the sacrament. A rigorism in sharp contrast with Occam's laxism who admits that an absolution can be valid even without attrition.[35]

But the contribution of Nominalism to penitential theology, that is, the consideration of the motives as the differentiating sign between attrition and contrition makes its way in the School. Not that this consideration was a new thing. As noted above, even before the name

[31] Cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 1020, 1022; Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 32, n. 1.

[32] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 32, and the text there cited of R. Tapper: "Sic enim intelligimus ex attrito fieri contritum, gratiam et sanctificationem consequi virtute sacramenti, perinde ac si vere esset contritus; non autem quod incipiat actus aliquis qui est proprie contritus ex Dei super omnia dilecti amore procedens." For other Thomists who interpret in the Scotist sense, see Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 36, n. 1 (Nuno, Godoy, John of St. Thomas, Gonet, Salmanticenses, Gotti).

[33] *In IV Sent.*, dist. 17, q. 2, ad 1. Cf. A. Michel, *op. cit.*, 1033.

[34] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 24, n. 3.

[35] Cf. Michel, *op. cit.*, 1037; Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

"attrition" was known, theologians spoke of the motives of fear and love.[36] And at the time of high Scholasticism, with St. Thomas for example, these motives were also taken into account; though, in accordance with their general viewpoint, the great Scholastics will rather speak of fear and love as principles of sorrow than as its motives.[37] They did not, however, appeal to these motives to find the difference between attrition and contrition, whilst at the time of Trent, in most theological schools, the Thomist one not excepted, this is nearly commonly done.[38]

5) Hence we can visualize the different theological currents that cross at the *Council of Trent*, of which the decree on contrition-attrition bears the unmistakable marks.[39] Both theologians and fathers of the Council are divided on several points of doctrine or theory, and propose remarks of which the synthesis may seem difficult. So, for example, many insist on the necessity of contrition (which justifies by itself) in the sacrament, yet hold that the absolution itself effects the forgiveness of sins. All seem to agree that in the sacrament, when needed, "ex attrito fit contritus," but the ancient formula is clearly understood in different ways. Some see the difference between contrition and attrition in the perfection or incompleteness of the sorrow and its information or non-information by charity; but others point to the motives or principles of fear or love which originate the two kinds of repentance. Many seem to have considered justifying contrition as normally antecedent to confession and absolution; yet the decree will insinuate a different opinion.

[36] It is striking that in a text of Alcuin for example (*PL* CI, 620 f., cited by Landgraf [*op. cit.*, p. 168]) the motives enumerated for the *compunctio* which justifies do not mention love, but only "memoria praeteritorum facinorum, recordatio futurarum poenarum, consideratio peregrinationis suae in huius vitae miseria, desiderium supernae patriae." Of these it is said: "Quando ergo ista in corde hominis fiunt, sciendum est tunc esse Deum per gratiam suam cordi humano praesentem."

[37] Cf. for St. Thomas, Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9. They consider the objective source of the sorrow, rather than the subjective consideration of motives. As will be pointed out later, their standpoint is ontological, not psychological (primarily).

[38] For the Thomists the ideas of motivation and "information" seem to fuse; and not only for them. Cf. following note.

[39] Cf. F. Cavallera, "Le Décret du Concile de Trente sur la Pénitence et l'Extrême-onction," in *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique*, XXX (1932), pp. 114–40. It suffices to go through the remarks of the theologians and the fathers of the Council, collected by Cavallera, *op. cit.*, pp. 118–22, to notice the different tendencies.

In spite of these differences of views with regard to the theology of contrition and attrition, the fathers of the Council approve of a decree directed against Luther's rejection of the Catholic doctrine about the sacrament and about attrition. Here we find the distinction between contrition and attrition officially recognized by the Church. The discriminating factor is not clearly indicated. Contrition is said to be perfected by charity; and consequently attrition is not. Attrition is motivated by the consideration of the ugliness of sin or by the fear of the punishments of sin. This attrition is good and helpful in the sacrament. How and in what precise way it helps for justification in the sacrament is left unsaid.[40] The discussed formula "ex attrito fit contritus," which was of little use in affirming the Catholic doctrine against the Protestants, is left out.

6) *Post-Tridentine theology* will keep to its different views and positions of which Trent respected the freedom. The Tridentine decree however will have a definite effect on the Scholastic teachings about attrition-contrition. First, the discrimination of perfect and imperfect contrition from their motives, insinuated in Trent, which explicitly stated the ordinary motives of attrition, seems to become commonly accepted, either as an isolated criterion, or in combination with the formerly accepted distinctive marks—completeness or incompleteness of the sorrow and its information or non-information by charity. According to the interpretation given to the adage "ex attrito fit contritus," namely, when understood of a mere extrinsic raising of attrition through the habitus of charity, or of an intrinsic completing of the sorrow, the attrition which is sufficient and helpful for the fruitful reception of the sacrament will be required to have more or less high motives. And it is precisely this shift from the objective and ontological to the subjective and psychological discrimination of attrition

[40] It would seem altogether vain and open to merely subjective interpretation, to endeavour to discover which theological systems this decree favours. As is well known, the text of the chapter of Trent on contrition-attrition was made so as to exclude the Protesttant errors and to leave aside all theological discussions (Cf. H. Lennerz, S. J., "Das Konzil von Triente und theologische Schulmeinungen," in *Scholastik*, IV (1929), pp. 38–53. A concrete example as to how the study of the modifications and omissions to which the successive texts of the chapter were submitted leads to different conclusions we may find in the different interpretations given to the omission of the *ex attrito fit contritus*, by Cavallera, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–34, and Michel, *op. cit.*, 1095; cf. also Perinelle, *op. cit.*, pp. 65–68 whose interpretation has been rightly called tendentious.

and contrition which leads to the historical controversy of contritionism and attritionism.

The origin of the controversy lies in the pastoral theology of opponent schools.[41] And their respective positions are clearly indicated in the decree of the Holy Office which put an end to the heat of the controversy. Contritionists are they who require in the attrition sufficient for the sacrament an act of love besides the motives of fear. Attritionists are they who do not require this motive of love.[42] Do the former accept the Scholastic view that "ex attrito fit contritus," and the latter reject it? Their positions are perhaps not clear. To be logical, the first should accept it and the latter should not. But we must notice the level on which now both contritionists and attritionists move; it is different from the one on which the *veteres* viewed the change from an *attritus* to a *contritus*. They now view the psychological motives of attrition and contrition, fear or love; whilst the old Scholastics considered the objective information or non-information of a sorrow by charity. When contritionists require in attrition the motive of love of God, they do so in order to allow the change from attrition to contrition by the power of the sacrament. When the attritionists do not postulate this motive of love in attrition their reason is because the sacrament can work the justification of an attrite penitent without changing his subjective disposition of sorrow.

The subsequent evolution of the two schools brought these logical implications to the light of day. When the controversy calmed down, leaving each school in peaceful possession of its opinion, it led to our present-day characteristic of the two positions; contritionists accept the adage, "virtute clavium ex attrito fit contritus"; attritionists deny it.[43]

[41] Cf. A. Janssen, "Contritionisme tegen Attritionisme Strijd tusschen de pastoors van Gent en de Jezuieten," in *Miscellanea in honorem Alberti De Meyer*, Louvain, 1946, pp. 1107–29; "Contritionisme tegen Attritionisme te Kortrijk," in *Miscellanea in honorem Leonis Van der Essen*, Brussels, 1947, pp. 837–42; L. Ceyssens, "L'Origine du decret du Saint-Office concernant l'attrition," in *Ephem. Theol. Lovan.* XXV (1949), pp. 83–91.

[42] Cf. *DB* 1146.

[43] An example for each. Contritionism holding that *vi clavium ex attrito fit contritus:* E. Hugon, O. P., *De Sacramentis*, ed. 6 (Paris, 1927) p. 589: "Attritio non potest fieri contritio licet virtute sacramenti paenitentiae homo fiat ex attrito contritus"; and the works of De Vooght and Dondaine. For attritionism, De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 332, appealing to the experience of confessors to refuse the "optimistic" thesis, *vi clavium fit paenitens ex attrito*

What since the time of Suarez had become the more common opinion, even though theologians and Suarez himself were aware of its relatively recent origin[44] (that, namely, attrition is sufficient in the sacrament of penance, understood in the sense of denying the traditional adage) is today the nearly common view of theology, except only for the Thomist school.[45] Modern theology has in the main abandoned the position of St. Thomas and the *veteres*, at any rate in the way of exposing the theology of attrition-contrition.

In the Thomist school, however, an endeavor was made time and again to reconcile the old and the new position. In view of this the contritionist position interpreted the act of love of God which it postulates in sufficient attrition as meaning an act of benevolence which is not charity, because it is not reciprocated by God. This reciprocation, precisely, would be the fact of the absolution which gives charity and sanctifying grace. So Billuart, and more recently Perinelle.[46] But historical studies on St. Thomas have shown that this midway position is not faithful to the Angelic Doctor's theology. And it is now commonly agreed by both followers and critics of St. Thomas' teaching on attrition-contrition that he requires for justification in the sacrament, though not necessarily *before* its reception, contrition in the strict meaning of the term, *formata caritate.*

Modern theology, on the other hand, determined to give up this historical Thomism as bypassed by the later developments of theological doctrines, considers attrition as a sufficient disposition for the forgiveness of sin in the sacrament. No need of its giving way for con-

contritus; also Galtier, *De Paenitentia,* thesis 24: "Ad effectum sacramenti percipiendum non requiritur contritio concepta ex amore Dei propter se dilecti, sed sufficit attritio etiam cognita ut talis"; and in *Gregorianum,* XXVII (1946): "L'absolution ne saurait modifier un acte psychologique pour en faire, à l'insu du sujet, un acte s'inspirant d'un tout autre motif" (p. 470). As we shall point out presently the opposition between these different opinions is more apparent than real, on account of the different meaning each of them gives to the notions of attrition-contrition.

[44] Suarez, *De Paenitentia,* disp. 20, sect. 1; cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.,* p. 35, n. 3, who still quotes Suarez, *op. cit.,* disp. 15, sect. 4, nn. 16–18.

[45] Cf. Hugon, quoted above n. 44.

[46] Perinelle, *op. cit.,* defends the "théorie moyenne de l'attrition d'amour" (p. 147). Billuart, *Tr. de Sacramento Paenitentiae,* diss. 4, a. 7: "Ad iustificationem cum sacramento paenitentiae consequendam non sufficit attritio ex metu concepta, etiam cum amore spei seu concupiscentiae, sed requiritur amor Dei benevolus." This was much the same as seventeenth century contritionism.

trition. This, it claims, is the irreversible outcome both of the centuries that separate us from St. Thomas and of the authoritative teaching of Trent.[47]

THE TWO CONCEPTIONS OF ATTRITION-CONTRITION

Against this historical background the two conceptions of attrition-contrition stand out neatly. To bring out their points of agreement and difference we must compare and contrast their respective answers to two chief questions: What does each of the two schools consider as the distinguishing factor between attrition and contrition? How does each of them conceive the role of attrition and contrition in the process of justification that takes place in the sacrament of Penance?

The Old Conception: St. Thomas and the Veteres

1) According to the old Scholastic conception brought to its perfection by St. Thomas Aquinas, attrition is a sorrow for sin in its imperfect stage, gradually leading up to the perfect moment when it achieves the renouncement and forgiveness of sin. As long as it falls short of this completeness which coincides with its formation by charity it remains attrition. Every sorrow for sin formed by charity is contrition. And so all repentance of one in a state of grace is contrition.[48]

The discriminating element between attrition and contrition is the completeness or incompleteness of the sorrow, that is, the entire or not entire renouncement of sin, which is objectively realized in the presence or absence of charity and sanctifying grace.[49] There is no middle way between a state of sin and a state of grace.

[47] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 357: "Nous ne pouvons aujord'hui revenir à des positions théologiques que le Concile de Trente a definitivement rejetées dans le passé."

[48] With De Vooght, *La Justification*, p. 248, and Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 6, n. 1, against Perinelle, *op. cit.*, p. 111, we take it that *contritio* is always understood by St. Thomas in the specific sense of a justifying or perfect contrition, and nowhere as a generic term, as the Tridentine decree does. For attrition, cf. De Vooght, *op. cit.* pp. 231 f.; Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–10; De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 339 f. and n. 3: "Parler de l'attrition d'une âme juste serait donc contradictoire." For contrition, cf. De Vooght, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 f.; Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 9; De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 340. When is a sorrow formed by charity? A different answer is given by the Thomist and the modern school according to their different ideas of charity; cf. below pp. 24 f. and n. 86.

[49] *In IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, sol. 3, obi. 1: "differt contritio ab attritione sicut formatum ab informi"; *ibid.*, sol. 2, ad 3: "attritio dicit accessum ad perfectam tritionem (text

The difference between the imperfect and perfect grief for sin is viewed here on the objective or ontological level of reality; its psychological revelation in the penitent's consciousness is only a secondary consideration, in so far as our human consciousness can reflect the ontological reality within our souls.[50] Do not then the motives of fear and love and the reasons which motivate the sorrow and detestation of sin constitute the differentiating factor of attrition and contrition? No, St. Thomas does not distinguish attrition and contrition (primarily, at any rate) from their respective motives.[51] This appears particularly from his study on the role of fear, *timor*, and its connection with charity.[52] His conclusions can be put briefly as follows.

First, a filial fear, that is, a fear of the guilt involved in sin and not of the punishment due, necessarily goes together with charity; nor can charity exist without it.[53]

Second, the servile fear is twofold. Either it is a fear of the penalty and not of the guilt. After St. Thomas this came to be called *timor serviliter servilis*; this cannot coexist with charity; it is sinful and in any case insufficient to motivate a salutary repentance.[54] Or it is primarily a fear of the punishment but also secondarily a fear of the guilt; what we now call *timor simpliciter servilis*; this can exist both together with charity or without it. Charity does not of its nature exclude this fear.[55]

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of Moos, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, vol. 4, Paris, 1947, p. 861).... Et ideo significat attritio in spiritualibus quamdam displicentiam de peccatis commissis, sed non perfectam; contritio autem perfectam." Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 7 ff.

[50] Cf. De Vooght, *op. cit.*, p. 231: "La raison profonde qui différencie l'attrition et la contrition et qui est la cause de toutes les autres, c'est qu'elle n'est pas un acte de la vertu infuse; elle n'est pas informée par la grace."

[51] Except only in a secondary way and as conjectural sign. It is true (cf. De Vooght, *op. cit.*, p. 231; Dondaine, *op. cit*, p. 9) that for St. Thomas also ordinarily the motive or better the principle of attrition is servile fear, whilst contrition proceeds from charity. Yet the presence or absence of the motive of fear is not the chief differentiating sign of attrition and contrition. Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 339 f., 350. For fear as principle of initial contrition (or attrition) cf. *In IV Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 1: "ut in pluribus ex timore paenitentia initium sumit."

[52] *Sum. Theol.*, II–II, q. 19, De dono timoris.

[53] *Loc. cit.*, a. 2 *et passim.*

[54] *Loc. cit.*, a. 4: "Timor servilis, in quantum servilis est, caritati contrariatur"; a. 6: "contrariatur caritati secundum quod aliquis refugit poenam contrariam bono suo naturali sicut principale malum contrarium bono quod diligitur ut finis."

[55] *Loc. cit.*, a. 6: "Timor inquantum servilis non manet cum caritate; sed substantia

Third, the initial fear, that is, the fear proper to the beginners in the spiritual life, is in the first place a fear of the guilt and subordinately a fear of the penalty. It cannot exist without charity.[56]

From this brief statement of St. Thomas's teaching on fear it immediately appears that the motive of fear of the punishment due for sin can be found with a sorrow that is contrition perfected by charity. It is therefore not a discriminating sign of attrition.[57] And so it is not in this field that St. Thomas looks for the specific difference between contrition and attrition.

2) In the sacrament of penance the penitent's grief and hatred for his sins has to be a real and effective renouncement of them; for this voluntary turning away from his faults constitutes a sinner's right disposition for the recovery of sanctifying grace. Without it no justification is possible, whether before or in the reception of the sacrament.[58] It is, however, not necessary that this disposition be found in a penitent before he receives the sacrament. Ordinarily, St. Thomas held

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timoris servilis cum caritate manere potest, sicut amor sui manere potest cum caritate"; cf. *ibid.*, a. 8, ad 2. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 9, seems to identify this remaining servile fear with filial or initial fear: "ce sera la crainte filiale au moins initiale." Yet, "timor servilis secundum substantiam differt specie a timore filiali" (*loc. cit.*, 2, 5), while the "timor initialis non differt secundum essentiam a timore filiali" (*ibid.*, a. 8).

[56] *Loc. cit.*, a. 8. We do not consider here the *timor mundanus* (*loc. cit.*, a. 3) which does not principiate a return to God but turning away from Him.

[57] When this servile fear coexists with the charity that perfects a contrition, it is evidently only a subordinate motive of this contrition; yet it is not merely an extrinsic concomitant of contrition without any influence on it. This appears, for example, in *In IV Sent.*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 4, sol. 1, ad 1; only the *servilitas* as such has nothing to do with contrition. This is not contradicted by d. 14, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 1, ad 4: "Timor servilis non est causa esse ipsius paenitentiae sed quasi generationis eius" (cf. De Vooght, *op. cit.*, p. 231). The cause which originates the act of repentance may coexist with it (though it need not, as stated in the text: "Nec *oportet* quod timor servilis et paenitentia sint simul"; it is not a *causa essendi* but *fiendi* of contrition); and it may then psychologically appear as one of its motives or sources. Cf. also in what sense De Vooght, *op. cit.*, 254 f., understands the different motives of attrition and contrition, against Gottler, *Der heilige Thomas und die vortridentinischen Thomisten über die Wirkungen des Bussakramentes* (Freiburg, 1904), who said that St. Thomas had never distinguished attrition and contrition from their motives. As said above, he did distinguish them from their motives, but not as the primary (and still less the only) specifying element. Cf. above n. 50.

[58] Cf. De Vooght, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–33; Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 f.; De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 341, and p. 344: "Il n'y a pas de doute que Saint Thomas ait requis la contrition parfaite et non pas seulement l'attrition, pour la reception fructueuse (pour un adulte) du baptême et de la pénitence: position commune en son temps."

with all his contemporaries (though today perhaps many of his followers would hesitate before his optimism) that a penitent who comes to confession will actually have contrition.[59] But even when he has not, he will at the moment of receiving absolution be given the necessary contrition, "ex attrito fit contritus virtute clavium."[60] Without this switch over to contrition he could not be justified.

Will the penitent notice this change? Not necessarily. Rather, *per se* he will not,[61] because the infusion of sanctifying grace and charity does not occur on the level of his consciousness but in the depths of his soul. There, on the ontological level, to an act of attrition succeeds in virtue of power of the keys an act of contrition formed by charity. In his psychological awareness his sorrow and detestation for sin, whether including in its motivation a reason of fear or not, may and ordinarily does remain after the absolution what it was before. Only when his repentance would in no way show the signs of contrition would a psychological change be necessary. There is a possible discrepancy between these two levels of reality, the ontological plane and its psychological unfolding in the consciousness. St. Thomas states this in unambiguous terms.[62]

The Modern Conception of Attrition-Contrition

1) The modern conception calls attrition a sorrow and detestation for sin motivated by imperfect or interested reasons, for example, by

[59] *Quodl.*, 4, a. 10: "ut plurimum contritio praecedit tempore." Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 342.

[60] The phrase itself does not seem to be found in St. Thomas; he says, *loc. cit.*, "Quandoque contingit . . . quod aliqui, non perfecte contriti, virtute clavium gratiam contritionis consequuntur." Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 348 f.; Dondaine, *op. cit.* pp. 12 f.; De Vooght, *op. cit.*, pp. 244 f.: "Aussi longtemps donc qu'il n'y a pas d'acte de contrition, il n'y a pas de pardon" (244). "Mais dans l'économie normale de la grace, un instrument sensible, ecclésiastique, le produit instrumentalement: le sacrement de pénitence" (245).

[61] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 349 f.: "sans que psychologiquement aucune modification consciente soit intervenue."

[62] Cf., for example, *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 10, ad 1: "Actus ille dilectionis quem in nobis percipimus secundum id quod est de se perceptibile, non est sufficiens signum caritatis propter similitudinem naturalis dilectionis ad gratiam." Cf. below n. 92 about the *signa contritionis* in one who has attrition only. There is no need here to determine exactly to what extent this discrepancy between the psychological and the ontological level can exist. For our purpose it suffices to note that they need not and often do not coincide, in such manner as not to allow a transposition of a statement about one to the other without further check. This partial divergence between the two levels of reality explains why different viewpoints lead to partially dissimilar conceptions of attrition-contrition.

fear of punishment or of the loss of a reward. It calls contrition the repentance which is motivated by perfect charity or disinterested love of God.[63] The two kinds of sorrow for sin are specifically distinct by their motives; and they are not in a line of continuity to each other; attrition does not of its nature lead up to contrition; both are final attitudes, each in its own line.[64] Hence attrition can be found in a man who is in a state of grace, because the motives of his repentance can be imperfect or interested.[65]

Contrition naturally is less easy to attain than attrition. It requires a disinterested love of God which leaves out of consideration a man's own advantage, even spiritual.[66] It is true that an interested love of God can and regularly does coexist with the love of charity; for hope is not set aside by charity. But by itself this imperfect love does not motivate a contrition.[67] Fear, at any rate a servile fear which is based on the love of self, cannot in any way motivate a contrition.[68] And when contrition is perfect, motivated by pure love of God, it evidently justifies, even outside the sacrament.

2) But in the sacrament of penance contrition is not necessary, neither before nor at the moment of absolution. Attrition, that is, the sorrow for sin springing from imperfect motives, is sufficient for the fruitful reception of the sacrament, provided only it fulfils the two conditions laid down by Trent, namely, that it excludes the will to sin and goes together with hope of pardon. But these conditions can be realized in a sorrow whose motives are imperfect or interested.[69]

Accordingly, it is not required that an attrite penitent should become contrite at the moment and in virtue of the absolution. Nor is this ordinarily a fact. Experience of confessors shows that the motives of a penitent's sorrow are not, by the fact of the absolution, changed from imperfect and interested to perfect and disinterested. It *cannot* be said that "virtute clavium ex attrito fit contritus."[70]

[63] Cf. P. Galtier, *De Paenitentia*, p. 38, thesis 5; De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

[64] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 350 f., 358 f.

[65] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 358 ff., proving extensively that attrition or its principle servile fear is in no way incompatible with charity.

[66] Cf. P. Galtier, *op. cit.*, p. 48, n. 73.

[67] Cf. below pp. 24 f., on the two conceptions of charity.

[68] Cf. Galtier, *loc. cit.*, and p. 64, thesis 8, *de attritione ex metu.*

[69] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 338: "contrition imparfaite . . . suffisante comme disposition prochaine dans la pénitence sacramentalle."

[70] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 332: "l'expérience du confessional . . . montre positivement le

Comparison of the two conceptions

If now we compare these two conceptions three main points of difference appear in the ideas of attrition-contrition.

1) In the first conception attrition is every sorrow for sins objectively formed by charity, whatever be its motives; contrition is the grief perfected by charity, whatever be its motives (whether interested or disinterested).[71] In the modern conception attrition is a repentance based on imperfect or interested motives, whether going together with charity or not; contrition is the sorrow motivated by pure or disinterested love of God which then is of necessity perfected by charity.

2) For St. Thomas attrition is essentially a preparatory stage for contrition, meant to be bypassed and to lead up to contrition which is the real and effective repentance.[72] For the moderns attrition and contrition are two parallel kinds of repentance without any connatural nexus of continuity between them.

3) In the sacrament of penance attrition according to St. Thomas is not a sufficient ultimate disposition for the infusion of sanctifying grace; contrition alone is this; and an attrite penitent cannot be justified in the sacrament whilst remaining attrite; but attrition is a sufficient preparation for a penitent to come to the sacrament and enable him to become contrite, through the power of the keys, and thus be justified.[73] According to the moderns attrition is a sufficient disposition for the reception of sanctifying grace in the sacrament, because the sacrament supplies or makes up for the imperfection of a penitent's dispositions. It need not give way for a more perfect disposition or contrition.

Where do these differences flow from? Besides the distinction in the viewpoints or in the levels of reality on which the two schools consider

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contraire," and Galtier, in a recension of De Blic, in *Gregorianum*, XXVII (1946), p. 470: "L'absolution ne saurait modifier un acte psychologique pour en faire, à l'insu du sujet, un acte s'inspirant d'un tout autre motif."

[71] The psychological motives, *as such*, do not differentiate attrition and contrition. But in so far as they are signs of the presence or absence of charity they are a secondary discriminating factor and a conjectural sign. A sinful motive, for example, excludes charity; a motive of love indicates with some probability the presence of charity, not, however, with certainty; cf. above n. 62.

[72] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 351 f.

[73] Cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 ff.

attrition-contrition (namely, the objective and ontological level of the *veteres*, and the subjective and psychological level of the *hodierni*),[74] there are also at the root of these dissimilar teachings two different theologies of justification and of the sacrament.

1) For St. Thomas, there is only one way of justification for a sinner; in it the same ultimate disposition for the acceptance of sanctifying grace is an inescapable condition, and that disposition is contrition. It makes no difference whether the sacrament of penance be received actually or only *in voto*. In every justification of a baptized sinner contrition is worked by the power of the keys whether actually operating in the reception of the sacrament or active in the desire of it only. Contrition can exist before absolution is actually dispensed, and then it includes the *votum* of it, or it can arise at the moment of absolution. But it must exist for any justification, in the sacrament as well.[75] For the moderns, there are two different and distinct ways of justification for a Christian sinner which do not require the same dispositions of repentance on his part: the extra-sacramental one which supposes more perfect subjective dispositions, namely, perfect contrition; and the sacramental way where with attrition the sacrament produces the remission of sins.[76] In the latter, attrition need not be replaced by contrition; it suffices as a penitent's disposition for justification.[77] In the former the power of the keys cannot be said to be operating in the *votum* of the sacrament; the *votum* is required only as a *conditio sine qua non* for the forgiveness of sin, on account of the institution of the sacrament of penance as the only means of remission of postbaptismal grievous sins.[78]

[74] This difference is pointed out by G. Philips, in a review of Flick, "L'Attimo," in *Ephem. Theol. Lovan.* XXV (1949), pp. 156–57: "Inutile de dire que saint Thomas ne se preoccupe pas des verifications psychologiques. Le point de vue scolastique est tout autre." As said already more than once, the viewpoint of the *veteres* is primarily ontological and secondarily only also psychological, while the moderns take the opposite standpoint.

[75] Cf. De Vooght, *La Justification*, pp. 238–40: "La justification demeure identique, qu'elle soit opérée par Dieu seul ou par Dieu se servant de l'intermédiaire sacramental" (240); *La Causalité*, p. 665: "Pour tout résumer. La seule contrition justifie. Dieu l'opère ou seul ou par l'intermédiaire du sacrement." And more recently, *La Théologie*, p. 78: "Le point le plus saillant en est que saint Thomas n'admet pas deux genres de conversion differents, l'un sacramental, l'autre extra-sacramental."

[76] Cf. De Vooght, *La Justification*, p. 240; De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 338 f.; Galtier, *De Paenitentia*, p. 287, thesis 24.

[77] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, pp. 332 f.; Galtier, *loc. cit.*

[78] Cf. Galtier, *op. cit.*, pp. 40 f., n. 63, *De influxu voti.*

2) The sacrament of penance, according to St. Thomas, is the means instituted by Christ to restore grace to repentant Christian sinners; but it supposes in them the necessary disposition for justification, namely contrition. It does not dispense with this disposition, nor does it make up for the lack of it. If necessary, it produces this disposition that it may then (sequence of nature, not of time) give the grace. The function of the sacrament is properly to transmit the grace, not to replace the subjective dispositions of the penitent.[79] According to the moderns, the sacrament makes up for the imperfect dispositions of the penitent. Its proper function is to make the recovery of sanctifying grace easier by demanding from the penitent a less perfect disposition for it. Else, they argue, if one requires for justification in the sacrament the same perfect contrition which justifies a sinner by itself, what then is left to the proper efficiency of the sacrament?[80]

Content and extension of the notions Attrition-Contrition in each of these schools.

We no doubt are faced here with two disparate theories. Yet under this difference in conceiving and expressing the process of justification in the sacrament of penance both theories agree to a large extent in the reality they endeavor to express, on account of the diverse content and extension each of them gives to the notions of attrition-contrition.

Some attrition of the moderns, that is, a sorrow for sin motivated by interested reasons, is in fact identical with contrition in the sense of St. Thomas, namely, with the contrition objectively or ontologically

[79] Cf. De Vooght, *La Causalité*, p. 665: "Le sacrement n'a qu'une fonction transmettrice," Dondaine, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[80] Cf. Galtier, *op. cit.*, p. 291: "Sacramentum non posset umquam producere effectum ad quem per se institutum est." Is it necessary to say that this argument is beside the point? In St. Thomas' conception contrition itself justifies only *ex voto clavium*; as a part of the sacrament it works together with the absolution. Absolution is not the whole sacrament and its proper role is to "inform" or "sacramentalize" the matter, namely the acts of the penitent. Its efficiency is not opposed to that of contrition but joined to it. Contrition itself works only in so far as the power of the keys is active in it—*per votum*. The forgiveness of sins is the effect of the sacrament as one cause acting *per modum unius*, not of the absolution only. The other objection, that in the Thomist position penance would no longer be a "*sacramentum mortuorum*," because it would always presuppose the state of grace (cf. Galtier, *loc. cit.*) also rests on an *ignorantia elenchi*. The penitent was not in a state of grace when the sacrament exerted its efficiency in the very contrition.

formed by charity but motivated at the same time by fear, that is, by the fear *simpliciter servilis* which actually coexists with charity.[81]

When a penitent comes to confession with this repentance, the moderns will say of him (and rightly, according to their concept of attrition) that he is justified in the sacrament whilst remaining attrite. St. Thomas, on the other hand, would say of the same penitent that he is contrite already when approaching the sacrament, because his sorrow is actually formed by charity; but if it happened, as it may in rare cases, that his sorrow were not yet commanded by charity, then he would be made contrite when receiving absolution (his sorrow then becomes formed by charity, though its motives remain unchanged). At that moment he has contrition, in the Thomist sense, whilst the moderns continue to call his repentance attrition only. The apparently opposed statements about these latter cases, "vi clavium ex attrito non fit contritus," of the moderns, and "vi clavium ex attrito fit contritus," of St. Thomas, do not in fact contradict each other. Both are correct and true on their respective levels and according to their respective ideas of attrition-contrition. The moderns by saying *ex attrito non fit contritus*, merely state that the imperfect and interested motives of a penitent's sorrow are not, through absolution, changed into perfect and disinterested ones.[82] That is, there is no psychologically perceptible change in the penitent's conciousness; and this is altogether correct. The *veteres* when maintaining, "ex attrito fit contritus," mean to say that a penitent's sorrow for sin, when it has not reached the perfection of contrition before he receives absolution, becomes contrition in virtue of the absolution by being formed or perfected by charity at the moment of its infusion in the soul; a happening which takes place on the ontological level of the soul and which does not *per se* reveal itself in the consciousness.[83] This again, according to St. Thomas's theology of justification, is correct and true; and it does not contradict, nor can it

[81] Cf. above p. 17 and n. 55.

[82] Cf. Galtier and De Blic, quoted above, n. 70.

[83] Cf. above n. 74. *Per accidens* it may and must entail a psychological change, then, namely, when the psychological disposition of a penitent does not come up to the mark of contrition (in the Thomist sense) or of the perfection of attrition demanded by the moderns. What this degree of perfection required for justification in the sacrament amounts to, according to St. Thomas and according to the moderns (for they express it in different ways according to their respective viewpoints) we shall point out below, pp. 25–26.

be contradicted by, any fact of experience. Nor does it conflict with the aforementioned statement of the moderns: it agrees with it in holding that no psychological change in the motives of a repentance is here involved.

On the other hand, some contrition in the sense of St. Thomas is considered to be attrition only by the moderns, namely, the repentance of which the motives appear to be imperfect or interested, but which is yet objectively, according to St. Thomas at any rate, formed or perfected by charity. Here lies a serious, and actually unbridgeable, difference between the two conceptions. The moderns do not grant that a sorrow motivated by imperfect or interested reasons can be perfected by charity; it cannot, according to them, be justifying contrition which demands, they say, the disinterested motive of pure love of God; without this, charity cannot perfect a repentance.[84] With this view, St. Thomas does not agree. A grief for sin can be justifying contrition, even when based on interested motives: then namely when these imperfect motives, concretely, the love of desire of God, imply a disinterested motive as well which may remain unexpressed. The Thomist idea of contrition, therefore, is broader in extension than the modern conception.[85] It puts the conditions for a justifying contrition less high than the moderns do. True, both schools postulate that contrition be perfected by charity in order to be perfect or justifying. But St. Thomas holds that charity actually perfects repentance in more cases than the moderns say: not only when the disinterested motive of love for God is actually expressed but also when it does not appear in the consciousness and remains hidden under interested reasons. The moderns, on the other hand, consider that charity does not perfect a sorrow for sin as long as this sorrow is motivated by interested or imperfect love only.

The root cause of this difference lies in a twofold conception of charity itself.[86] According to the Thomist idea of charity, which was

[84] Cf. Galtier, who (*op. cit.*, p. 48) excludes from contrition the "motivum amoris Dei qui dicitur concupiscentiae seu utilitarii . . . ," which (*ibid.*, p. 66) is said to be "de ratione attritionis"; also *La Confession et le renouveau*, pp. 24–25: (Attrition) "implique un amour de Dieu qui, pour n'être pas désintéressé n'en est pas moins souverain et de tout coeur. When love is disinterested, then, and then only, it forms contrition.

[85] Compare De Vooght, *La Justification*, p. 256: "Nous ne croyons pas non plus que cet amour doive etre désintéressé."

[86] Cf. "Perfect Contrition and Perfect Charity," in THEOLOGICAL STUDIES, VII (1946), pp. 507–24, esp. pp. 511 f., and De Guibert, *Etudes de théologie mystique* (Toulouse, 1930) pp. 241–53, "Deux conceptions de la charité."

the traditional one up to Scotus and for a time after him, charity involves both love of benevolence and love of desire for God, that is, both disinterested and interested love of God. These two acts are inseparable, because the volition of the last end which is the essence of charity is both and inseparably surrender to God and possession of Him. Each of these two acts of love must needs imply the other. When an interested love of God is theological (for it could not but be so),[87] it cannot exist without an implicit disinterested love of Him. Accordingly, as soon as a repentance is moved by this interested love of God, it is perfected by charity and it is contrition. But for the modern theology, which mainly follows the Scotist-Suarezian conception of charity, the love of desire for God is not charity but hope. Charity is solely the love of benevolence. Hence interested and disinterested love of God are separable; the first can exist isolated from the second. Hope can exist without charity (though the reverse is not true). When a repentance is motivated by an interested love of God, it is perfected by hope but not by charity; it is attrition and not justifying contrition. We butt here against a difference in teaching which is more than a verbal disagreement.

But what about the repentance which is necessary and sufficient for justification in the sacrament of penance? The moderns call it attrition, both before and after the absolution. St. Thomas says it can be attrition before the absolution but it certainly is contrition after it. Does the different way of expressing the thing cover the same reality or do they require a different standard of perfection in the sorrow for sin that is helpful for justification in the sacrament?

Both conceptions agree to say that not any attrition is sufficient for justification in the sacrament: it must attain a certain degree of perfection. For St. Thomas an attrition will be sufficient when it allows the change he postulates as necessary at the moment of justification, *ex attrito fit contritus*, and allows this change without necessitating a psychological change, for example, in the motives of the repentance.[88]

[87] That is, when its motive or formal object is God, and not man himself. If this theological character is absent from an interested love of God, it cannot be an act of any of the theological virtues, whether hope or charity. It is also necessary for the imperfect love of hope which, according to the moderns, is required for sufficient attrition.

[88] Cf. above n. 61. Compare De Vooght, *La Justification*, pp. 242 f. For a further explanation of what happens on the ontological level without revealing itself in a corresponding modification of the conscious motives, cf. below pp. 29–30.

For the moderns attrition is sufficient for justification in the sacrament when, according to the teaching of Trent, it excludes the will to sin and goes together with hope of pardon. These requirements of Trent are explained, for example by P. Galtier,[89] to mean that fruitful attrition demands faith, hope, love of desire for God, love of justice, and even the desire of charity. Do these two descriptions of sufficient attrition differ or do they coincide?

The least that can safely be said here is that the sufficient attrition of the moderns (if it is not already contrition in the Thomist sense, for it probably is), will certainly suffice to allow the change over from attrition to contrition which the Thomist theology of justification in the sacrament of Penance demands. It would, therefore, not really differ from the contrition which St. Thomas requires either before or at the moment of the absolution.[90] One and the same reality of repentance is merely viewed and described from different angles; the names attrition and contrition do not express here any objective difference.

SCHEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF THE TWO CONCEPTIONS

It should be clear now what are the real differences between the two conceptions and what are only apparent differences. We may then attempt a synthesis of both theories in all their elements where the differences are only apparent.

A prerequisite to a possible synthesis is evidently that we should be aware of the different levels of reality on which the two conceptions move, ontological and psychological respectively,[91] and of the different

[89] *De Paenitentia*, p. 48.

[90] Cf. the suggestion made by De Vooght, *La Théologie*, p. 81: "on serait ainsi d'accord pour voir dans l'attrition d'amour la contrition de la théologie thomiste." Already in *La Justification*, p. 674, he had said: "Les qualités tres hautes que les attritionistes exigent de l'attrition suffisante permettent, semble-t-il, de l'assimiler a la disposition unique dont parle saint Thomas."

[91] This difference is not always stated explicitly by De Vooght. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53, clearly implies it. When De Vooght, *La Causalité*, pp. 668 f., says: "un renouvellement psychologique. . . . Cet acte est un fait psychologique par ce que tout acte humain en est un," he may seem to say that a change, perceptible in the consciousness, is of necessity implied in the change over from *attrito* to *contritus*. But only apparently so. Contrition, or the effective renouncement of sin, is a psychological and human act. A sinner cannot give up his sin except knowingly and freely. And hence no conversion is possible without a psychological awareness of it. But the manifestation in the consciousness of this turning

contents and extension they consequently give to the same notions of attrition-contrition. Only then are we able to see how apparently opposite statements can in point of fact express one identical reality viewed under different aspects. It needs no further proof that psychological phenomena do not completely reveal the objective reality of the soul's dispositions and its deep activity.[92] Will it then surprise any one that observations and statements made about the former do not run parallel to theological dicta about the latter? When, as just shown, attrition and contrition, in spite of an identical name, mean different things, according to the understanding of different schools, who then will wonder that sayings worded in opposite terms may yet be equivalent in the reality they convey?

We can synthesize the two theoreies around the twofold consideration mentioned already; the discriminating factor between attrition and contrition, and the role of attrition-contrition in the operation of the sacrament of Penance.

1) *Attrition and contrition differ* from each other because the former is not formed or perfected and motivated by charity, the third theological virtue, whilst the latter is.

Both theories agree; but each of them considers the difference in its own way. On the ontological plane this difference means the absence or presence of the habitus of charity. When this is present in a soul it forms or perfects the act of repentance through either actual or at least virtual influence; it makes of it an act of contrition.[93] When the habitus

away from sin is not perfectly parallel with the ontological reality it supposes. As will be shown further, the border line between attrition and contrition, neat and clear on the ontological level, is often blurred and woolly in the consciousness. An attrition coming up to the standard of perfection required for justification in the sacrament, and a contrition which just attains the minimum perfection necessary for it to be justifying, are not, on the psychological level, neatly distinct. In this case the passage from attrition to contrition *per se* passes unnoticed. Cf. also below n. 101.

[92] One text only, *Sum. Theol.*, III, q. 80, a. 4, ad 3: "per certitudinem scire non potest utrum sit vere contritus. Sufficit enim si in se *signa contritionis* inveniat, puta si doleat de praeteritis et proponat de futuris." The signs of contrition can go together with contrition or with attrition; cf. Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53, and the texts quoted there.

[93] According to the Thomist conception charity and sanctifying grace cannot, as is well known, be infused into the soul of a repentant sinner without commanding or "forming" and perfecting his repentance; that is, a purely extrinsic assistance of the *habitus* without any effect on the act of repentance (in the sense of the Scotist conception; cf. above, pp. 8–9 and n. 27) is not possible.

of charity is absent from a soul, no contrition is possible, but only attrition; just as, when it is present, it always forms the repentance, no attrition is possible then. This is the Thomist viewpoint. On the psychological level, the main viewpoint of the moderns, the objective difference resulting from the presence or absence of charity will necessarily appear somehow, though not perfectly.[94] Both theories still agree to say that charity involves a disinterested love of God, but they differ in two points. The Thomist conception holds that this love of benevolence, though necessary for charity and contrition, need not always be expressed as a conscious act of disinterested love; it can remain implicit in an act of interested love;[95] whilst the moderns require for charity and for contrition an explicit act of perfect or pure or disinterested love. Secondly, the Thomist idea of charity implies that the love of benevolence required for charity will necessarily be present in any effective love of desire for God that is theological or has God for its motive and formal object, and this implicit presence is enough to make of a repentance commanded by this love a justifying contrition;[96] for the moderns, love of desire or interested love of God need not involve and hide a disinterested love of Him, and by itself it does not motivate contrition but attrition only.

It is, of course, immaterial whether a sorrow for sin be *called* attrition or contrition. What matters is the objective perfection of a sorrow demanded for a justifying contrition. And here, I think, we face an irreducible difference between the two conceptions. A choice between two really different ideas of charity commands the conception one holds of justifying contrition.[97] He who holds for charity as involving insepa-

[94] Charity will reveal itself in the *signa contritionis* of which St. Thomas speaks (cf. also *Opusc. de forma absolutionis*, c. 2 ad 7). But as noted already, these signs are not a certain distinguishing mark of contrition, since they can be found with attrition; cf. above n. 92; Dondaine, *op. cit.*, pp. 52–53.

[95] Compare De Vooght, *La Justification*, p. 256, and above n. 85.

[96] For a more detailed proof that disinterested love is implicated in an interested love of God (when it is theological), cf. the article quoted above n. 86.

[97] It is this choice between two conceptions of charity which in the last instance commands the option between the Thomist and the modern theology of penance, of which De Blic speaks (*op. cit.*, p. 358). The difference of the standpoints, psychological and ontological, is itself at the root of this two-fold conception of charity, as noted by J. de Guibert, *op. cit.*, pp. 249 f.

rably both love of benevolence and love of desire will say that repentance is contrition as soon as it is commanded by either love. So St. Thomas said, and so do those who follow his teaching on charity. But he who disconnects the love of desire for God from charity and sees in it only hope must needs require for the contrition that is justifying an explicit disinterested love; without this, repentance would be attrition. No synthesis of the two theories seems possible on this point.[98]

2) A closer approach between the two conceptions can be made in their teaching on the *role of attrition-contrition in the sinner's justification through the sacrament* of penance. Each of the theories expresses a true aspect of the happening which is the process of justification. And they complete each other in a real way.

It is true to say, with St. Thomas, that on the deeper ontological level contrition perfected by charity is always the last disposition for the reception of sanctifying grace by a sinner, and that, when this contrition does not exist already, the absolution produces it, "vi clavium ex attrito fit contritus." But it is also true to say, with the moderns, that the absolution does not *per se* produce a change in the psychological dispositions of the penitent, particularly in the motives of his sorrow as he is conscious of them; the imperfect motives which characterize attrition are not through the absolution changed into the perfect motives of contrition, "ex attrito *non* fit contritus." Considered on these different levels, these opposite statements do not in fact contradict each other.

We must, however, note at once that the deeper and fundamental difference between the two conceptions of the sacrament and of justification, pointed out above, remains. What can be accepted of the modern position and synthesized with St. Thomas's principle, "ex attrito fit contritus," is the view that the change over from attrition to contrition in virtue of the absolution (when it is needed) does not necessarily, and *per se* does not, mean a change in the consciousness, par-

[98] Yet, as will be shown presently, this opposition does not prevent a real agreement between the two schools as to the repentance required for the sacrament. A real and serious difference, however, remains, in the idea of justifying contrition (without actual reception of the sacrament). For this the moderns set the required dispositions higher than St. Thomas did (compare De Vooght, *La Causalité*, p. 674). The same author suggests (*La Théologie*, p. 80) that Jansenist influence may not be foreign to the tendency which inclines to make perfect contrition difficult.

ticularly of the conscious motives. In so far as the moderns mean only to say this in their statement, "ex attrito non fit contritus," as De Blic and Galtier seem to say, their position is not opposed to St. Thomas'. But if they imply more (and they probably do), and if they mean to say that the deeper structure of the penitent's dispositions remains unchanged in such way that his ultimate disposition for the reception of sanctifying grace through the absolution remains imperfect, below the level of contrition in the Thomist sense or below the level of the perfection required of contrition by St. Thomas to justify outside the sacrament; and if they mean to imply that then the sacrament makes up for this imperfect disposition; then their theology of justification in the sacrament cannot be made to agree with the position of St. Thomas. But even then there is still a large field of agreement between the two theories, because what moderns here call attrition St. Thomas considers as contrition; so that in fact when moderns say attrition is the last disposition for justification in the sacrament they understand by it the same perfection of sorrow St. Thomas means by contrition (in its minimum degree at any rate). And so under formally opposed expressions which are inspired and commanded by really different and irreducible theologies of justification and of the sacrament, they yet *materialiter* and in fact require the same repentance for justification in the sacrament.

Both viewpoints will get their due when we formulate the attrition that is required for justification in the sacrament of penance as follows: The repentance which is necessary and sufficient for the fruitful reception of the sacrament must be such that its psychological expression in the penitent's consciousness can be the result both of attrition and contrition in the Thomist sense.[99] Why? Because then, and only then can the ontological change postulated by St. Thomas for the process of justification (when change is still needed) take place in the reception of the absolution, whilst at the same time the psychological change excluded by the moderns need not happen. St. Thomas formulates this conception when saying that a penitent must bring to confession the signs of contrition (*signa contritionis*), even though actually he may

[99] Is that possible? Yes, it is, because there is hardly ever a perfect parallelism between the psychological awareness of what is in us, and the ontological reality of our spiritual dispositions.

happen to be only attrite; else a confessor should not give him absolution.[100] That is, the penitent must show such a psychological disposition which either is, or if it actually coexists with attrition, *can* yet be, the manifestation of contrition. The moderns express the same thing (though they will continue to call this repentance attrition and not contrition, even after the absolution), when they set for attrition such a standard of perfection as is in fact sufficient for contrition in the Thomist sense.[101]

Can we further determine this repentance? Negatively first: It need not be contrition whether in the modern or in the Thomist sense of the word. Its motives ought to be such that they can be the psychological revelation either of charity or of its privation. This is possible because these motives as such are partly revealing and partly hiding the objective reality of the soul. According to St. Thomas they need not exclude fear. When they include the love of desire for God they can already cover a real contrition. Not necessarily, however, as long as this love lacks its full effectiveness with regard to sin. This effectiveness is given only with charity and sanctifying grace.[102] We can then

[100] Cf. above n. 94.

[101] Cf. Galtier, *De Paenitentia*, p. 66, n. 97. As noted already, the equivalence of this "attrition d'amour" with Thomist contrition was pointed out by De Vooght (*La Causalité*, p. 674, and again in 1949, *La Théologie*, p. 81). We may recall however, as noted above (n. 59) that widely different conviction separates St. Thomas from the moderns as to the frequency of attrition and contrition. For St. Thomas, it is only in exceptional, or at any rate much less frequent, cases that penitents come to confession being attrite only; and so the change over from attrition to contrition produced by the absolution is for him of exceptional or infrequent occurrence. The moderns, on the other hand, hold just the opposite conviction; they believe that only exceptionally or less frequently perfect contrition precedes absolution; normally, according to them, the absolution actually received works the forgiveness of sins; and then, if we keep to the Thomist conception, the switchover from attrition to contrition through the absolution would be the nearly regular happening. This would, however, make no difficulty in the conception of the unique way of justification. And we may note still that the attrition of the moderns will in fact be already contrition in the Thomist sense so that, actually, no changeover would be needed in all those cases. The two beliefs are evidently commanded to a great extent by the standard of perfection they set for contrition; this is much easier to attain for St. Thomas than for the moderns.

[102] Must we recall here the pseudo-objection, that in this conception perfect contrition presupposes the sanctifying grace which it is supposed to produce? All those who are at all familiar with St. Thomas' theology will see the answer in his oft recurring principle of the reciprocal causality and priority that plays between co-principles of one simultaneous effection.

describe the repentance necessary and sufficient for the sacrament in a formula acceptable to both schools by saying: Attrition sufficient for justification in the sacrament is the repentance by which a sinner is sorry for his sins and detests them *as much as he can* with the help of grace that is given him, inspiring his will of repentance with any motives whose consideration helps him, the more perfect the motives the better. This amounts to the desire of contrition. And this psychological disposition can remain the same before and after the absolution, that is, before and after he receives the habitus of charity and of sanctifying grace. Both when his sorrow is still attrition not perfected by charity and when it is contrition formed by charity, a penitent can and need not do anything more than hate his sins as much as he can. But this same psychological state or activity covers two deeply different realities before and after justification, namely, ineffective and incomplete renouncement of sin without charity in attrition, or effective and complete turning away from sin with charity in contrition.

Let it be noted at once that this sufficient attrition is certainly found where the conditions postulated by moderns for the repentance that will suffice in the sacrament are fulfilled.[103] And the practical way of the common pastoral theology, as shown, for example, in the acts of contrition which our catechisms and our prayerbooks propose to the faithful, exactly formulates the expression of sorrow for sin in such manner as to teach them to be sorry for their sins as much as they can.

From a practical viewpoint, then, this attempt at synthesizing the teachings of both the old and the new theology on attrition-contrition means nothing new. From a doctrinal point of view it endeavours to remain faithful to the firm and in no way antiquated penitential theology of St. Thomas, and at the same time to take into account the new suggestions of the moderns. The modern theology on penance may mean a progress in certain regards. By stressing the psychological side of repentance and insisting on its motivation so as to offer practical ways of arousing true sorrow, it brings out the human element and cooperation needed in the process of a sinner's return to God. And in this free cooperation with grace, as for any other human activity, motivation plays an important role. It may also be granted that the *veteres*

[103] Cf. De Blic, *op. cit.*, p. 341; Galtier, quoted above n. 101, and also, *La Confession*, pp. 24–25.

generally paid less attention to this human psychology than modern people require.[104] Yet it should be remembered that the happenings on the psychological level do not fully reveal the spiritual realities of grace, and that a theology of penance, of justification and of remission of sins, must delve deeper than the conscious level in man if it is to be more than a descriptive psychology of conversion. This deeper study of the metaphysics of conversion is precisely the viewpoint of the old scholastic and particularly the Thomist theology of penance. In this regard it may be doubted whether the modern penitential theology means a real progress compared with St. Thomas. The synthesis of both would seem to point to the direction of a deeper and more fruitful understanding of the sacrament of mercy.

[104] It would however be wrong to see "a lack of psychology" in the old scholastic theology. Their standpoint, and in particular the one of St. Thomas, is different of set purpose. Moreover, is not the psychological insight revealed in the *Sum. Theol.*, II–II a well known fact that was often pointed out?