

# THEOLOGICAL THESES CONCERNING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN PART ONE

## In which is explained the Doctrine of the Roman School

### THESIS I.

The Doctors of the Roman Church observe that venial sin is spoken of in three ways, either from the cause, or from the event, or from the very nature and essence of the sin itself. They call that sin venial from the cause, which is committed through ignorance or infirmity. This kind of sin is not called venial to distinguish it against any mortal sin whatsoever; but against mortal sin from malice. For although sins from ignorance or infirmity are often purely mortal, yet they are all called venials, because there is something in them that diminishes the wickedness of the fault, and by reason of which he who has sinned is nearer to pardon. Of this kind of sin the Apostle speaks when he says, "I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." 1 Tim. 1.

II. They call that sin venial from the event, which is any sin that is expiated through repentance, and actually obtains pardon from God, however grievous and atrocious it may otherwise be in itself. And so in this sense venial sins are not absolutely opposed to mortal sins, but only to those which are never actually remitted, and on this account lead to eternal death.

III. Finally, they call those sins venials from the nature and essence of the sin itself, which, as they judge, do not contend against the charity of our neighbor, and do not induce the guilt of eternal punishment. And this is the proper acceptation of venial sin among them. And understood in this sense, venial sins are considered to be simply and absolutely opposed to mortal sins; by which name they designate more grievous sins, which cannot consist with the love and charity of God, and render the person guilty before God's tribunal of eternal punishment.

IV. Therefore they believe that there are certain sins which can by no means be compatible with the love and charity of God, and into which man cannot fall without being altogether turned away from God, and becoming His enemy, and thus being totally deprived of spiritual life, which consists in our conjunction with God through His grace dwelling in us; and falling into new guilt of hell and eternal death, which he can by no means avoid if he be overtaken by death in that sin, and unless before death he rise again from that sin by a new grace of God, and be again reconciled unto God. So that if a just person commit such sins, he altogether falls from his justice, nor can he any longer be accounted just and holy: nor is there found in him that sanctification, "without which no man shall see the Lord." And these are what they call deadly sins, because they are as certain deadly wounds which bring death upon the soul, entirely

extinguishing the life of grace in it, and rendering the person guilty of hell, which in the Scriptures is called the second death.

V. But besides these sins, they teach that there are certain lighter sins, which indeed somewhat retard man's course towards God, and diminish the fervor of Divine love; yet they do not altogether turn man away from God, nor extinguish the love of God in him. And therefore through sins of this kind man does not become God's enemy, nor is he deprived of spiritual life, since they do not expel that grace which is the principle of that life. Nor do such sins bring upon him the guilt of eternal death, but only of some temporary punishment: so that by them a just man is neither stripped of his justice, nor loses that holiness which is necessary that one may see God. And hence, although death should overtake a man with sins of this kind upon him, yet he is not for this reason to be excluded forever from salvation, and adjudged to eternal torments in hell. Whence it is inferred, that sins of this kind are indeed wounds of the soul, but easily curable; not, however, diseases or deadly wounds: and therefore they are rightly called not deadly, but only venial sins.

VI. Moreover, they divide these venial sins again into two kinds; for they teach that some are venial from their kind, and others only from the imperfection of the work.

VII. They call those venial sins from their kind, which have indeed for their object something evil and inordinate; but which is not repugnant to the love of God and our neighbor: such as an idle word, immoderate laughter, and things of this kind. And they oppose to these mortal sins from their kind, as perjury, adultery, and the like; which openly contend against the love of God and our neighbor.

VIII. Those they call venial from the imperfection of the work, which, although they might be mortal from their kind, are yet rendered venial through the imperfection of the work; because, namely, the mere imperfection of the act causes them not to be judged repugnant to divine love and charity.

IX. And again, they divide venial sins from the imperfection of the work into two members: for some of them they call venial sins from subreption, others from the smallness of the matter. Those from subreption they call venial, which are not fully voluntary; such as sudden motions of anger, cupidity, envy, and other like emotions, which exist in the mind before reason could fully deliberate whether they should be admitted or not. Which are indeed sins, since they might have been prevented or immediately repelled if reason had been watchful: and yet they are venials, since they were without the full consent of the will. From the smallness of the matter they call those venials, which are committed in a small and light case; such as the theft of a penny, which neither notably injures one's neighbor, nor is a thing which among fair judges could dissolve friendship.

X. But although the Doctors of the Roman Church unanimously teach that there are certain lighter sins which can consist together with true justice and holiness, and do not dissolve man's friendship with God, nor involve him in the guilt of eternal punishment and death, and on this

account are called venial sins - while there are other more grievous sins, which immediately constitute man from just to unjust, and render him God's enemy, and therefore liable to eternal punishment and death, and on this account are called mortal sins - nevertheless, it is not settled and determined among them with absolute certainty, whether those lighter sins have this from their own nature, and are such in themselves, that it is repugnant to the Divine justice to impute them unto eternal death, and on account of them to reject man forever and altogether; since on account of their lightness they can justly deserve only temporary punishment and wrath: Or whether indeed they might justly be punished with perpetual exclusion from the kingdom of God, and with the everlasting fires and torments of hell; but that they are not imputed unto so great a punishment, but only unto a temporary one, is to be attributed to the will and clemency of God, who has appointed by His law the punishment of eternal death only for more grievous and atrocious sins, but threatens and actually inflicts on the lighter ones only certain temporal punishments, although if He should choose to use strict justice, He might deal far more severely and vehemently with man.

XI. For there are some among the Doctors of the Roman Church, and indeed of no mean repute, who teach that all sins may be justly punished by God with eternal death; but that the reason why some of them are imputed only to temporal punishment, and do not bring upon the sinner the guilt of eternal death, and are on this account distinguished from mortal sins, is to be attributed to the clemency and forbearance of God, who in this particular does not choose to use His full right against man. This is the opinion of that John Gerson, who was Chancellor of the University of Paris about two hundred and sixty years ago, and a most celebrated theologian among those of the Sorbonne, which he argues at length and maintains in a treatise entitled "On the Spiritual Life," in the first reading; where, treating of the essence and aggravation (as he terms it) of sins, he lays down this conclusion: "Every sin, inasmuch as it is an offense against God, and against His eternal law, is from its own condition and unworthiness deadly, according to the rigor of justice, and separative from the life of glory."

XII. And in the following he confirms this his opinion by many arguments: for he proves that every offense against God is in itself deadly, from the fact that it may be justly punished by God with the punishment of death, both temporal and eternal; yea, even with annihilation. And this because no such punishment is so evil, as any offense against God is evil. But that death and annihilation are not so evil as the very offense against God itself. Hence he deduces, that every death and annihilation would rather be to be endured, than that any, even the smallest offense, should be committed against God; because the opposite being granted, a case might be given in which an offense against God might be lawfully committed; namely, if death and annihilation could not be avoided otherwise.

XIII. Moreover, he says, every offense against God, unless it were remitted, would exclude forever from the glory of God, and be punished without end; otherwise the disgrace of the fault would remain without the honor of justice. But that the offense is diminished or remitted, is from the mere liberality of God remitting it, and no longer imputing it. Finally, an offense against God is not less to be shunned, than that good is to be chosen, in order to obtain which no offense against God ought on any account to be committed. But for an infinite good no offense against

God ought to be committed; and if any one possessed infinite good things, he might be justly despoiled of them all by God, if he fell into any offense against God.

XIV. After this, from the same conclusion he deduces several corollaries, the first of which is this: "No offense against God is venial from itself, but only by respect to the Divine mercy, which does not in fact choose to impute every offense unto death, when it most justly might." And so it is concluded, that mortal and venial sin are not distinguished in their essence intrinsically and essentially; but only by respect to the Divine grace, which imputes this sin to the punishment of death, and another not.

XV. But his third corollary is as follows: "We are obligated to make satisfaction to God, and to give thanks to Him from the fact that He does not impute our venial sins unto death, just as we are bound to do for the remission of mortal sins; since in each case alike the mercy of God concurs, not imputing sins otherwise than to a temporary punishment, which from their unworthiness are imputable to death, one by possibility, the other by the statute law. And perhaps it might be said the same even of all our justices, which as far as they are ours, are as a menstruous cloth, especially after sin, or in the absence of grace."

XVI. John, Bishop of Rochester in England, in his refutation of the thirty-second Article of Luther's Assertion, teaches things agreeable to these, where, after having quoted Luther as saying, "A venial sin is such, not from its own nature, but from the mercy of God;" he subjoins, "That a venial sin is such only from the mercy of God, in this I agree with you: but since we also believe that even a mortal sin may through the mercy of God become venial, I would have you explain to us more openly, what distinction you think ought to be established between mortal and venial sin." And he afterward states this distinction, that mortal sin immediately expels grace from the soul, and brings the sinner himself into a state of hatred to God; but venial sin does not do this. And a little after, he grants that venial sin is damnable, if judged with strictness. Yet he afterwards denies that it follows that venial sin is mortal; "For," says he, "mortal sin expels grace from us, wherefore also it must deservedly come under damnation; but venial sin does not in like manner do this. This difference is sufficiently ample, that venial sin cannot be called mortal."

XVII. But when towards the end of the last century, this opinion was held and publicly affirmed by some theologians in Belgium, it was, together with many other of their assertions, specially condemned by the Popes Pius V. and Gregory XIII. in a certain Bull as erroneous. In which Bull, among many other articles, they condemn this one also: "No sin is venial from its own nature, but every sin deserves eternal punishment;" as Bellarmine relates, Book I. "On the Loss of Grace and the State of Sin," Chap. 10, par. "Confirmatur."

XVIII. Whence it is that the Roman School does at this day, by common consent, establish the contrary, namely, that certain sins are venial from their own nature, and not merely from the mercy and indulgence of God; although this has not yet become with them an article of faith, and a thing altogether certain and determined.

XIX. Moreover, although it is the common doctrine of the Roman School, that venial sin does not from its nature deserve eternal death, yet it teaches nevertheless that venial sin is punished with eternal punishment, in those who depart this life with mortal sin, and are adjudged to hell. And this, after Thomas Aquinas, who asserts that eternal punishment is due to venial sin, if it be found in any one of the damned together with mortal sin, because in hell there can be no remission. 1, 2, quaest. 87, art. 5, in the 3d argument.

XX. Scotus indeed thought differently: for on the Fourth Book of Sentences, dist. xxi. quaest. 1, parag. "In ista quaestione," he teaches that to a venial sin, which remains in conjunction with a mortal sin, eternal punishment is not due in another life; but that at length the punishment of it in hell comes to an end, the punishment alone which is due to mortal sins continuing forever.

XXI. But the common opinion of the Roman School maintains the contrary, namely, that the punishment of venial sin in the damned will be perpetual. And this because every sin, however light, renders the person deserving of torment and punishment, as long as it remains in him, and is not retracted and expiated by some repentance. But in the damned there is given no repentance, and no expiation of sin; and therefore in them the stains contracted even from venial sins remain forever. For they cannot retract or expiate any sin whatever by any act of love or contrition; since these things have no place in hell. And thus, since the stain and pravity of venial sin eternally perseveres in them, they also remain eternally deserving of torment and punishment on account of it.

XXII. Yet they deny that it follows from this, that venial sin is not venial from its own nature, and deserves eternal punishment in itself. Because those who are not in mortal sin, if they sin venially, are not on this account deprived of grace, charity, and spiritual life: and therefore in them this sin may be easily removed and obliterated, by some act of love and contrition. Which being posited, even if God should will to remit nothing from that punishment which is due for this sin, they would remain obligated not to eternal, but only to temporary punishment. But that in the damned this sin can neither be removed as to its guilt, nor even remitted as to its punishment, is something accidental, and because in them it is found in conjunction with mortal sins, on account of which they are forever deprived of the grace of God and spiritual life.

XXIII. Hence they gather that venial sin differs from mortal sin in its nature and essence in two ways: First, in that mortal sin, since it extinguishes the life of the soul, and expels the grace of God from the soul, leaves no principle remaining in man by whose power it can be removed and obliterated: but for this it is necessary that, as it were, God should raise man anew from the dead. Whereas the case is otherwise in venial sin, as has been already said. Secondly, in this, that if we conceive mortal sin to have been retracted through some act of contrition and love, and so to have been removed from the soul as to its pravity and stain thence left; yet if, nevertheless, God wills to remit nothing to man from His own right and the punishment which He might exact, he who has committed such a sin remains obligated to eternal punishment, on account of the Divine law having been once violated by it. Whereas, the guilt of venial sin being removed, no debt of eternal punishment can remain upon man, but only a debt of some

temporary punishment. Which is the doctrine of Bellarmine, On the Loss of Grace, Book I. Chap. 14, Answer to the 3rd Objection.

XXIV. But here the Theologians of the Roman Church inquire, Whether venial sin is against the law of God, or only beside the law of God. And indeed there are many among them who think that venial sin is not so much against the law, as beside the law; and in this they constitute the difference between mortal and venial sin, that mortal sin is against the law, venial only beside the law. Which is the opinion of Bellarmine, Book I. On the Loss of Grace and the State of Sin, Chap. 11, in the Explanation of the fifth Argument. But others judge that both venial and mortal sin are against the law of God; which opinion Vasquez maintains, Tom. I. on the 1, 2, Disp. 143, Cap. 3.

XXV. But they who think that venial sin is to be affirmed not so much against as beside the law, observe many things by which they explain and soften this their opinion. And first, they say that they do not mean to deny that there is some law which prohibits venial sin; and therefore, that venial sin is against the law viewed materially, that is according to the thing commanded or prohibited. But their meaning is, that venial sin is not against the law formally considered, that is in reference to the end of the law, which is charity, because such a sin does not take away charity. As may be seen in Eustachius à S. Paulo, in the 2nd part of the Summa Theologica, Tract 5, Disp. 7, Quaest. 1, towards the end.

XXVI. Others note that venial sin is not said simply to be against the law of God, because by the law of God are commonly understood those precepts which bind under mortal sin, and the observance of which is necessary unto salvation; according to that saying, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Yet they concede that in a certain sense it is true that venial sin is against the law, because, generally, every sin is a transgression of the law; and moreover, because it cannot be doubted that venial sin is repugnant to right reason, which is a certain impression of the Divine law in us. These things are from Peter à S. Joseph, in his Idea of Moral Theology, Book 2, Chap. 3, Resolution 5.

XXVII. But Bellarmine maintains that it is rightly said that venial sins, of whatever kind they may be, are not against the law, but beside the law: because if they are against any precept of the law properly so called, as those venial sins which are said to be from subreption; such as the desire of an unlawful thing not fully deliberated, they are not perfectly voluntary: and for this very reason they are not perfectly against the law, except materially, because the law is properly set for our will alone. Or if they are perfectly voluntary, the precept which they transgress is not perfectly and in strictness a law. For, says he, since the end of the precept is charity, and precepts are to be measured from their end, if any precept be established concerning a matter which pertains very little to that end, as if it were prohibited by a special precept that no one should utter an idle word, that precept could not be perfectly and strictly, and as others speak, by way of eminence a law. On the Loss of Grace and the State of Sin, Book I. Chap. 11, towards the end.

XXVIII. But they who teach that venial sin is against the law, and some precept, and not merely beside the law; distinguish between precepts necessary for the preserving of charity and obtaining of salvation: and precepts which are indeed useful for this, but not necessary; and the violation of which does not hinder salvation. And they say that venial sin is not, like mortal sin, against some precept necessary for obtaining salvation and preserving charity; but beside it. Yet they deny that it should therefore be denied that venial sin is against some precept which is simply a precept, although it be not one of the principal precepts necessary unto salvation. As may be seen in Gabriel Vasquez in the disputation just cited, Chaps. 3 and 4.

XXIX. Consonant to these things are the teachings of Becanus the Jesuit in his Scholastic Summary of Theology, Tom. 2, Tract 2, Chap. 2, Quest. 7, where his first conclusion is this: No venial sin is properly against the end of the law. But his second is, Although no venial sin is against the end of the law, yet every venial sin is in some way against the law, whether perfectly or imperfectly.

XXX. And indeed he says that venial sins, from their kind, are perfectly against the law; as immoderate laughter, an idle word; and also venials from the smallness of the matter, as the theft of a thing of little moment; if such sins be committed deliberately. But those sins which are venial from the defect of perfect deliberation, such as the sudden and indeliberate motions of anger, hatred, envy, pride, lust, etc. are imperfectly against the law. As for example, an indeliberate motion of concupiscence is imperfectly against that law of the Decalogue, "Thou shalt not covet."

XXXI. Hence he gathers that venial and mortal sin are not against the law in the same way. First, because mortal sin is so against the law, as to be also against the end of the law; which venial sin is not. Secondly, because every mortal sin is perfectly against the law, but many venials imperfectly. Thirdly, because all mortal sins are against some law which is simply necessary unto salvation, but not so deliberate venials.

## THEOLOGICAL THESES CONCERNING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN LATTER PART

In which the Doctrine of the Protestants is set forth and confirmed,  
and the State of the Controversy is examined

## THESIS I

The Protestant Theologians, first of all, with one consent establish that every sin, by its own nature, deserves eternal death, and the hatred and wrath of God; and that there is no sin, however light it may seem in the judgment of men, which cannot be punished by God with everlasting punishment, and exclude man from the love of God, if God should deal rigorously with man. According to that of the Mosaic law, "Cursed is every one who does not abide by all things which are written in the book of this law."

II. Nay more, they teach that in the reprobate and impenitent, any sins whatever, even the smallest, such as an idle word, shall sometime be actually punished with eternal punishment. According to that saying of Christ in the Gospel, "But I say unto you, that for every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." For according to the common doctrine of the Christian Schools, after the day of judgment no other punishments than eternal ones shall have place.

III. But on the other hand, they teach that there is no sin so grievous and atrocious, which cannot obtain pardon from the mercy of God, through the faith and repentance of the sinner: Except only that sin which they call the sin against the Holy Ghost. By which name they understand the total, voluntary, and deliberate rejection from determined malice of the Divine truth once known and tasted. Which sin is remitted neither in this nor in the future world; because it is impossible (according to the doctrine of the Apostle, Heb. 6) that those who have fallen into such a sin should be renewed unto repentance.

IV. Nay rather they teach that in the elect all sins, however atrocious, are remitted and pardoned gratuitously; nor are punished with any punishment, properly and strictly so called. And this because, being moved and excited by the grace of God, before the end of life they are sincerely converted, and renounce sin, and by faith take refuge in the merit and righteousness of Christ; and on account of this they obtain from God remission of their sins.

V. Yet although they maintain that any sin whatever deserves of itself eternal death, and rejection from the love and favor of God, they are far from holding with the Stoics that all sins are equal and alike. For they confess that there is found a great difference between sin and sin, and that one is by far more grievous and atrocious than another; and therefore, although some eternal punishment corresponds to every sin, yet there are various degrees among the punishments of sins, and one should be punished by far more mildly than another. As the Gospel teaches that that servant who knew his lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with more and severer stripes than he who violated it in ignorance, although this last shall not pass with impunity.

VI. On this point the Later Helvetic Confession, which is found in the Harmony or Collection of Confessions, and which was confirmed by the subscriptions not only of the neighboring Churches of the Zurichers and Bernese, and others whose confession it is, but also of the more remote Hungarian, Polish, Scotch, French, and other Reformed Churches, speaks distinctly. For



in that Confession these words are read verbatim: "We confess that not all sins are equal, although they flow from the same fountain of corruption and unbelief; but some are more grievous than others, as the Lord said, 'It shall be more tolerable for Sodom than for the city that rejects the Word of the Gospel. "We therefore condemn all who have taught things contrary to this, especially Pelagius together with all Pelagians, as also the Jovinians, who make all sins equal with the Stoics."

VII. Moreover, from this disparity and inequality of sins, and the lighter or more grievous nature of some compared with others, it comes to pass that God, dealing graciously with His sons whom He has adopted in Christ and regenerated by His Spirit, according to the gracious covenant of the Gospel, in so far pardons certain lighter sins in them, that even though they are not without sins of this kind, into which they daily fall, and should die in some one of them, yet He does not on that account declare them unworthy to be admitted into heaven, and made partakers of eternal glory and felicity. And therefore sins of this kind may consist with a good conscience, and purity of heart, and that measure of sanctification which God requires of us in this life, that in the other we may enjoy and see Him. Nor do sins of this kind expel peace of conscience and spiritual joy, and hope and confidence of the remission of sins and eternal salvation, from the believing and godly man. Of this kind of sins are, for example, an idle word, immoderate laughter, a vain thought, and the flaws and defects cleaving to the good works even of the pious, in which they ever come short of the perfect standard of the law.

VIII. But there are other more grievous sins, which cannot consist at the same time with a good conscience, and with that righteousness and holiness without which no one shall see the Lord, and to which all who are truly pious and believing are renewed in this life through the grace of Christ. Whence it is that the Gospel itself absolutely declares that those whose ordinary course is to commit sins of this kind, and who are overtaken by death in any one of them, shall be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. And therefore they who fall into sins of this kind, and for some time persevere in them, are bound with the guilt of eternal death, and lose (so to speak) their present fitness for entering into the kingdom of heaven; nor for that time can they retain peace of conscience, confidence of salvation, and the joy which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and the companion of sincere piety and probity. Nor is there good ground to hope for the salvation of him whom sudden death overtakes while committing any grievous crime of this kind; such, for example, as adultery, idolatry, and deliberate homicide.

IX. And indeed these things are evidently gathered from the Sacred Scriptures: for the Sacred Scripture teaches in many places that no one lives without sin; as when it says (James 3), "In many things we all offend;" and Solomon in Ecclesiastes, "There is no just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not;" and John in like manner, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Whence it necessarily follows, since no believers, however pious and studious of righteousness, live without sins in this life, that there are some sins which may consist together with true righteousness and holiness, and along with which a good conscience may be preserved, and those gifts and fruits of the Spirit, which the Scripture declares to be the properties of the pious in this life. James 3, Eccles. 7, 1 John 1.

X. But this same Scripture no less clearly and frequently inculcates that those more grievous sins, which it calls the "works of the flesh," exclude man from the kingdom of heaven; nor can he who commits sins of this kind please God, and become an heir of His kingdom. "Be not deceived," says Paul, "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Also, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Whence it appears no less evidently that those who are accustomed to commit flagitious sins of this kind, and whom death overtakes while engaged in any one of them, cannot be partakers of eternal salvation; and therefore all sins of this kind are altogether inconsistent with that holiness to which life and eternal glory are promised; nor along with them can a good conscience be retained, nor legitimate confidence of eternal salvation: but as long as any one remains involved in any one of sins of this kind, so long is he held bound by the guilt of eternal death and perdition, not only according to the rigor of the law, but also according to the very equity of the Gospel. 1 Cor. 6, Gal. 5.

XI. The Theologians of Great Britain clearly deliver this doctrine, in their Judgment concerning the Fifth Article of the Remonstrants, which is inserted in the Acts of the Synod of Dort: for there, in the chapter concerning Perseverance, as it respects the elect themselves, and the certainty of it as to the thing, this is their second Thesis: "Although the elect, being placed in this state" (namely, of adoption and salvation), "by reason of the remains of concupiscence, in every good work omit something, and daily commit lighter sins of subreption, negligence, and inadvertence, yet neither is the state of their justification shaken thereby, nor the use of their hereditary right to the heavenly kingdom intercepted."

XII. To which Thesis they immediately subjoin this declaration and confirmation: "According indeed to the rigor of the law, every sin, even the lightest, is deadly, and excludes the sinner from the favor of God and the kingdom of heaven. But with those His sons already adopted and justified in Christ, God never deals according to strict law. There are indeed some sins, on account of which God denounces anger and indignation against these His sons - nay, threatens them with exclusion from heaven and eternal death, Which sins may be seen enumerated 1 Cor. 6:10, Gal. 5:19, 21, Col. 3:6 concerning which mention shall be made in the following Theses. But there are also certain other sins, on account of which the merciful God is not wont either for a time to deprive His sons of the light of His countenance, or to strike them with the fear of condemnation or death. Sins of this kind are the rebellious motions of concupiscence, concerning which the Apostle complains, Rom. 7; also the defects and flaws which cleave even to the best works of the regenerate. Finally, the daily lapses of human infirmity, which are committed without any set purpose of committing them, and are remitted by daily asking pardon. Concerning which it is said, James 3:2, 'In many things we all offend;' and 1 John 1:8, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.' Notwithstanding these sins, any one of the faithful may rightly say, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' Nay, in the midst of these infirmities, God says to every justified person, as He said to the Apostle, 'My grace is

sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' They do not fall from the state of justification through their infirmities, by whose infirmity the power of God is perfected, and who can meanwhile glory that the power of Christ dwelleth in them, as is declared in the same place."

XIII. After this their third Thesis is as follows: "The same persons, being regenerated and justified, do sometimes through their own fault fall into grievous sins, and by these incur paternal indignation from God, contract damning guilt, lose their present fitness for entering into the kingdom of heaven."

XIV. Which Thesis they thus confirm in what follows: "By the examples of David and Peter, it appears that the regenerate may precipitate themselves into most grievous sins, God sometimes permitting this, that they may learn to acknowledge with humility that they were saved from eternal death, and endowed with eternal life, not by their own powers or merits, but by the mere mercy of God alone. While they continue in sins of this kind, and securely acquiesce in them, the paternal indignation of God arises against them: 'If they profane my statutes, and keep not my commandments, I will visit their iniquity with stripes, and their sin with blows.' 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.' Nay more, they contract damning guilt, so that while they persist impenitent in that state, they neither ought nor can persuade themselves otherwise than that they are liable to death: 'If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.' For they are bound by a capital crime, by the desert of which, according to the Divine ordination, they are subject to death; although they are not yet consigned to death, nor are to be consigned, if we regard the paternal love of God, but are first to be delivered from this sin, that so they may be delivered from the guilt of death. Finally, in their present condition, they lose their fitness for entering into the kingdom of heaven; because into that kingdom shall not enter anything that defileth, or worketh abomination. For the heavenly crown is not bestowed except on those who have fought the good fight, and finished their course in faith and holiness. Unfit, therefore, to attain to this crown, is whosoever still cleaveth to works of impiety." Psalm 89:31, 32, Rom. 2:9, and 8:13, Rev. 21:27, 2 Tim. 4:8.

XV. But their fourth Thesis is as follows: "The immovable ordination of God requires that the believer thus wandering should first return into the way through the renewed act of faith and repentance, before he can be brought to the goal of the way, that is, the heavenly kingdom."

XVI. And to this Thesis is subjoined the following explanation: "By the decree of election the faithful are so predestinated to the end, that they are brought to that same end not otherwise than through the means instituted by God, as by a certain royal way. Nor are the decrees of God concerning the means, the mode and order of events, less firm and certain, than concerning the end itself, and the events themselves. If any one therefore enter upon a way contrary to the Divine ordination, that broad way, for instance, of impurity and impenitence, which leads directly to hell, he can never in that manner arrive in heaven. Nay, if death should overtake him while wandering in that devious path, he cannot but fall into everlasting death. This is the constant and clear voice of the Scriptures: 'Except ye repent, ye shall in like manner perish.' 'Be not deceived, neither idolaters,' etc. 'shall inherit the kingdom of God.' In vain, therefore, are they

who think that an elect person wallowing in such flagitious courses, and dying in them, shall nevertheless necessarily be saved by virtue of his election. For God indeed appointing, the salvation of the elect is fixed and firm: but God decreeing also, it is fixed and firm only through the way of faith, repentance, and holiness. 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' As, therefore, it was fixed from the decree and promise of God that all who were with Paul in the same ship should come safe to land out of the shipwreck; and yet that saying of Paul's was equally certain, 'Except ye abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved:' so it was fixed that the elect servants of God, David and Peter, should arrive at the kingdom of heaven; and yet it was no less fixed, that if the former had continued impenitent in adultery and murder, and the latter in denial and perjury, neither of them could have been saved." Luke 13:5, 1 Cor. 6:9, Heb. 12:14, Acts 27:31.

XVII. Finally, after interposing some things to this purpose, they add a fifth Thesis in these words: "In that interval which is between the contracting of guilt from grievous sin, and the renewed act of faith and repentance, such a sinner stands condemned by his own desert, to be absolved by the merit of Christ and the firm purpose of God; not however actually absolved, until by renewed faith and repentance he has obtained pardon."

XVIII. Moreover, it is not difficult to show that the other Reformed hold the same thing as to the matter itself with these British Theologians: for in those same Acts of the Synod of Dort, the Theologians of Bremen, in their Judgment on the same Article, in their eleventh Thesis, teach that "The regenerate, when they fall into any grievous sins, lose a good conscience, purity of heart, and spiritual joy; which does not happen to them when they fall into lighter sins daily."

XIX. With whom Paraeus agrees, in his work against Bellarmine on the Loss of Grace, Book I. Chap. 7, where he confesses that a believer, when he falls into grievous sins (as David did), loses purity of heart, uprightness and newness of spirit, joy of salvation, consolation of grace, goodness of conscience, etc. And afterwards he teaches that in a believer who has thus fallen, the justifying act of faith does not exercise itself. "Faith," says he, "is then said to justify, when it can and does exercise its proper act of receiving the remission of sins. But this act a sick, wounded faith, oppressed with the filth of the flesh, and bound as it were with the fetters of sin, cannot exercise, nor has it power to exercise it." And below, "But to those justified persons who have fallen, God does not impute their sins, namely, if they repent; but before repentance He certainly imputes them, so as to inflict temporal punishments, and would even inflict eternal punishments, unless they repented." And at length he thus concludes: "Then, therefore, faith which remains in the fallen only in a habitual manner, cannot properly be said to justify, nor to justify them."

XX. But the Theologians of Poland, in their declaration of their opinion presented in the Conference at Thorn, expressly teach that the regenerate, as often as they fall into sins against conscience, and for some time persevere in them, do not, during that time, retain justifying grace, nor the Holy Spirit; but incur new guilt of wrath and eternal death; whereas the case is otherwise, when they sin not against conscience, but from infirmity and inadvertence. For these are their words: "We are falsely accused, as if we affirm that those once justified cannot lose the

grace of God, nor the assurance of it, nor the Holy Spirit itself, although they wallow in sins at their pleasure. Whereas, on the contrary, we rather teach that the regenerate themselves, as often as they fall into sins against conscience, and for some time persevere in them, do not retain true faith, nor justifying grace, much less the assurance of it, or the Holy Spirit during that time, but incur new guilt of wrath and eternal death: and therefore, unless by the special grace of God exciting them (which we doubt not is done in the case of the elect), they are again renewed to repentance, they would in reality be damned." On the Title concerning Grace, Sect. 2, No. 11.

XXI. To this pertains the distinction of sin in use in the Reformed Schools, according to which sin is distinguished into that which wastes the conscience, and that which does not waste the conscience. Which distinction is found in William Amesius and Lewis Crocins. For by that sin which wastes the conscience is meant that which cannot consist with true piety and a good conscience: but by that sin which does not waste the conscience is meant that which, being committed through infirmity and negligence, may be found in one who is truly pious, and has a good conscience towards God. Amesius in the Marrow of Theology, Book I. Chap. 14, No. 11; Lewis Crocins in his Compendium of Sacred Theology, Book III. Chap. 38, Nos. 23 and 24.

XXII. But the distinction of sin into reigning and not reigning, as Ursinus delivers and explains it in his Catechetical Expositions revised by the labor of David Paraeus, comes to the same thing. "A reigning sin," says he, "is one against which the sinner does not strive through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and therefore becomes obnoxious to eternal death, unless he repent and obtain pardon through Christ. Or it is every sin which is not lamented, and against which resistance is not made by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and on account of which, not only by the ordination of the Divine justice, but in reality, he who has it is guilty of eternal punishments. Such are all the sins of the unregenerate: also some sins in the regenerate, as error in the foundation of faith, and a lapse against conscience; with which the confidence of the remission of sins and the consolation of life cannot consist, until they recover themselves. For that even the regenerate may fall into a reigning sin, is sufficiently shown by the most grievous lapses of most holy men, as of Aaron, David, etc. A sin not reigning is that against which the sinner strives through the grace of the Holy Spirit: and therefore he is not obnoxious to eternal death, because he repents and obtains pardon through Christ. Sins of this kind are all the defects, inclinations, depraved lusts, and many sins of ignorance, omission and infirmity, that remain in the saints as long as they are in this life: which however they acknowledge, lament and hate, and against which they strive, and for the remission of which to themselves they continually pray on account of Christ the Mediator, saying, 'Forgive us our debts.' And therefore in these they retain faith and consolation." Part I. on Actual Sin.

XXIII. From all which it evidently appears that, as we have said, the Doctors of the Reformed School acknowledge two kinds of sins. One of lighter sins, which may consist at the same time with a good conscience, and that purity of heart without which no one shall see the Lord; and which therefore do not actually render the believing person in whom they are found, obnoxious to eternal damnation, and unfit to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, even if he should be overtaken by death in any one of sins of this kind. The other, of more grievous sins, into which if

any one fall, and before he rise again from them by repentance, he cannot preserve a good conscience, and that purity of heart necessary to see God: but by them he becomes in reality guilty of eternal death, and obnoxious to it, and unfit to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven; so that if death should oppress him in that state, he would be to be condemned forever, and excluded from celestial glory.

XXIV. Moreover, from what has been said, it appears that the Reformed do not approve the distinction of sin into mortal and venial, as it is commonly expounded in the Roman School. Since they believe that every sin deserves of itself, and by its own nature, punishment and eternal death, they cannot admit that there are certain sins which are not of themselves deadly, but venial. Nevertheless, they do not altogether reject this distinction, but confess that it may be used in a convenient sense.

XXV. And first indeed, they allow sins to be called venials, which do actually obtain pardon, on account of the faith and repentance of the sinner, however grievous they may be in themselves: but in a peculiar sense they call mortals those which do in reality bring death and eternal perdition upon sinners, on account of their unbelief and impenitence. Which is what the Roman School calls mortal and venial from the event, as was before observed.

XXVI. In like manner they acknowledge that sins may in a certain sense be called venials, which have this from their cause, that they the more easily obtain pardon; because they are not done from determined malice, but from infirmity and ignorance. As the Apostle says that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious, but obtained mercy, because he did it ignorantly. Which in the Schools is called venial from the cause. For those sins of Paul's, although they doubtless deserved eternal death, yet obtained mercy and pardon, because he had sinned through ignorance. Whence the Father of mercies was more easily moved to grant pardon to him who had not sinned from malice. And in this sense venial sins are opposed to those which, because they are committed from determined malice, more rarely and with more difficulty obtain mercy and pardon, and are more frequently punished with eternal death. Which distinction John Rainolds, an Englishman, relates and approves in his treatise on the Apocryphal Books, Reading 164.

XXVII. Moreover, some Reformed Doctors sometimes call venial all sins which may, by means of repentance, obtain remission and pardon: but mortal, that which cannot be remitted, but necessarily brings eternal death. In which sense the mortal sin is only the sin against the Holy Ghost, while all other sins are venials. So that this distinction is the same with that of John, in the fifth chapter of his First Epistle, where he distinguishes a sin unto death, and a sin not unto death: and with that by which the Schools commonly distinguish sin into remissible and irremissible. In this sense Gomarus, in his Syntagma of the Leyden Disputations, Disp. 13, Thesis 19, and Piscator, in the First Volume of his Theological Theses, loco 7, Disp. 2, Thesis 64, distinguish sin into mortal and venial.

XXVIII. But there are some also who take the distinction of sin into mortal and venial in another sense. For Zacharias Ursinus in his Catechetical Expositions, and David Paraeus, who revised

them, say that a reigning sin may, in a peculiar sense, be called mortal, but a sin not reigning may, in a peculiar sense, be called venial. And thus a mortal sin is that against which the sinner does not strive through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and on account of which he becomes actually and really obnoxious to eternal death. Sins of this kind in the regenerate themselves are lapses against conscience, along with which the confidence of the remission of sins and true consolation cannot consist, until they repent. But a venial sin is that against which the sinner strives through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and on account of which, God being merciful, he does not become actually obnoxious to eternal death. Sins of this kind are all the inclinations and depraved lusts, and many sins of ignorance, omission and infirmity, that remain in the saints as long as they are in this life, which however they acknowledge, lament and hate, and against which they strive, and for the remission of which to themselves they continually pray on account of Christ the Mediator, saying, "Forgive us our debts." And in these also they retain faith and consolation, as that place from Ursinus, just cited, on Actual Sin, declares.

XXIX. In like manner John Davenant, Bishop of Salisbury, seems to explain the distinction of sin into mortal and venial. For he calls, in a peculiar sense, mortal, those more grievous sins which waste the conscience, and bind the believers themselves who fall into them with new guilt of eternal death, and which, as long as they do not rise again from them, render them unfit to enter into the kingdom of heaven. But to this kind of sins he teaches that the defects which cleave to and are intermingled with their good works, although they have the nature of sin, and deserve death according to the utmost rigor of the law, do not pertain. Whence he concludes that defects of this kind ought not to be called mortal sins in an appropriate sense. As may be seen in his work, On Actual Righteousness, Chap. 35.

XXX. "It is to be noted," says he, "that sin may be called mortal, or deadly, in three ways. First, that which brings with it the absolute, certain and irrevocable desert of eternal death. In this sense the sin against the Holy Ghost alone is accounted mortal. Secondly, that sin is commonly called mortal which involves the sinner in the guilt of death, but in such a way as to be remissible; and which does not suffer him to have any part in the kingdom of God, until he revive, and return into the narrow way. Sins of this kind are all those which are recounted by the Apostle, 1 Cor. 6: 'Be not deceived, neither fornicators,' etc. 'shall inherit the kingdom of God.' The same doctrine is repeated, Gal. 5: 'The works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication,' etc. 'They who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.'"

XXXI. "In this class are to be placed, not only those which are expressly enumerated by the Apostle, but all others also, whether external or internal, which are of the same nature, as the Apostle plainly indicated in the latter of these places, in which he said that 'they who do these and similar things shall be excluded from the kingdom of God.' But similar things are all those in which obedience is yielded to the flesh lusting against the spirit, even to the perpetration of an impious deed. For all these are commonly called mortal, because they bring the sinner under new guilt of death, and into the very way to hell, until by repentance he desist from sins of this kind: according to that saying of the Apostle, Rom. 8: 'If ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.'"

XXXII. "Thirdly, any sin whatever is called mortal by some of our Theologians, which would involve him who has it, or who commits it, in death, according to the rigor of the law, if the person were judged without the mercy of God in Christ: although now to him who is ingrafted into Christ it is not imputed unto death, but is remitted to him although he is still involved in it. In this class we place the remains of original sin which adhere to the regenerate, the defects of perfect love which are mingled with their good works; also the vicious lusts and motions against which they strive, and which by holy motions they overcome and mortify, and do not suffer to have dominion in this mortal body. All these, if you regard the nature of the thing, and the law of God, are sins, and therefore mortals, that is, deserving of death. 'For the soul that sinneth, it shall die.' 'The wages of sin is death.' But if you regard the mercy of God, and the state of the person, they are not deadly, but pardoned: the guilt of which is renewed from those who are ingrafted into Christ, and do not suffer this old man to reign in them. 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,' Rom. 8:1. The Apostle did not say, There is nothing in its own nature damnable, or deserving death, in the regenerate; but, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' Nor did he simply say, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;' but with this addition, 'who walk not after the flesh.' For as often as the regenerate, giving loose reins to the flesh, and obeying its lusts, fall into fornication, murder, or similar sins, they are involved in deadly guilt, nor can they ever enjoy eternal life, unless they be delivered from the same by a renewed act of repentance and faith."

XXXIII. Having observed these things, he proves that the culpable defects which cleave to the good works of the regenerate, although they are truly sins, and according to the strict rigor of the law deserve death, and are therefore sometimes by our writers called mortal sins, are not, meanwhile, to be called mortal sins in the peculiar and appropriate sense, secondly above explained. This he demonstrates by the following argument among others: "That sin is called mortal in an appropriate sense, which induces a new deadly guilt, until it be washed away by a new act of repentance. But the sin which cleaves to the good works of the regenerate, although according to the rigor of the Law it might condemn man out of Christ, yet does not so condemn the regenerate man ingrafted into Christ; nor even involve him in any new guilt. For since every regenerate person has, as it were, two men in himself, the new and the old man, whatever the old man raise a tumult, and rebel against the law, it is not imputed to the regenerate man and new man, following, in so far as in him lies, the rule of the law, and abhorring and refraining, so far as he can, the rebellion of concupiscence."

XXXIV. Similar to these are the things which Robert Baron, formerly Professor of Theology in the University of Aberdeen among the Scots, teaches at length and accurately concerning the true distinction between mortal and venial sin, in his Theological Disputation on that subject. For there, in accordance with the other Reformed, he asserts that every sin is of itself mortal, nor is any sin venial except by accident: and moreover that all the sins of the reprobate are and ought to be called mortal sins; both because by their own nature they deserve eternal death, and because in them they are actually punished with eternal death. But yet he maintains that in believers and the regenerate, some sins are with the highest reason called mortal, and others venial: and indeed, mortal sins, the more grievous and atrocious ones into which believers themselves sometimes fall; but venial, the lighter sins into which they daily run: because for



those God denounces anger and indignation against them, nay, threatens them with exclusion from heaven and eternal death; but for these He strikes them with no fear of condemnation or eternal death, nor deprives them of the sense of His favor, or confidence of remission of sins.

XXXV. For in that Disputation, Part First, Section Second, this is his first assertion: "Every sin is of itself mortal, nor is any venial except by accident." 2. "All the sins of the reprobate are mortal sins: and therefore not only from demerit, but also from the event." 3. "And if all the sins of the reprobate are mortal, it is not on the contrary to be said that all the sins of the elect are venials. For," says he, "their atrocious sins, wasting the conscience, not only deserve exclusion from the favor of God, and from the heavenly kingdom; but also actually exclude them from that degree of favor with which they were before beloved of God, and if they should persevere in them, would exclude them forever from the heavenly kingdom. Concerning which sins the Scripture positively teaches that whosoever commits them cannot be made partaker of the heavenly kingdom and eternal life, 1 Cor. 6, and elsewhere; and that God hates and abominates those who do such things, Prov. 6 and 22."

XXXVI. But his fourth assertion is this: "Some sins of the regenerate are rightly called venials; because according to the gracious covenant of God, and paternal clemency, they do not exclude them from the hope of the heavenly kingdom, nor from that degree of favor with which they were before beloved of God." Sins of this kind he says are the rebellious and involuntary motions of concupiscence. Also the defects and flaws which adhere to the good works of the regenerate. Finally, those which from the smallness of the matter are called venials; because, namely, they are committed in a light matter, or one of little moment. Concerning which sins he thinks the Scripture speaks, James 3: "In many things we all offend;" and 1 John 1: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us;" and Ecclesiastes 7: "There is no just man upon the earth, who doeth good and sinneth not."

XXXVII. After this he enunciates his fifth and sixth assertions in these words: "That sins of this kind in the regenerate do not exclude them from the favor of God, and the hope of the heavenly kingdom, they have simply and absolutely, not from their own nature, but from the mercy of God. But truly if the lighter sins of the regenerate be considered comparatively" (that is, if they be compared with their more grievous sins), "and the question be asked, Why those rather than these are venials, and do not exclude from the favor of God? it is to be said that they have this from themselves and their own nature." "For," says he, "although, speaking absolutely, these sins are grievous, yet comparatively they are light: and this their comparative lightness, which is founded in their very nature, is doubtless the reason why God willed to punish them more clemently under the covenant of grace, than atrocious sins wasting the conscience."

XXXVIII. But in what follows he recounts at length the various discriminations between that sin which he calls mortal, and that which he calls venial. And first indeed, he says that mortal and venial sins differ in respect to avoidability, that is, in respect to the power which we have through the grace of God to avoid them. For, says he, a regenerate man can, by the power and help of grace, partly internal or inherent, which is called habitual, partly external or assisting, which they call special assisting grace, avoid those manifest works of the flesh, those atrocious sins which

are recounted, 1 Cor. 6:9, 10, Gal. 5:19, 20, 21. But those lighter sins, which are called venials, no saint can for any long time avoid, much less during the whole period of his life, through that measure of grace which God is wont to mete out to them in this life.

XXXIX. Secondly, he says these sins differ in respect to the obligation by which we are bound to avoid them. For the understanding of which thing, he notes, first, that the covenant of works, or the law precisely considered, binds to the perfect observance of each and every precept of the law, and that in all its particulars, conditions, and circumstances of exact obedience; and therefore to the avoidance of all sins, even the lightest; and that strictly and precisely, under the peril and penalty of eternal damnation. Secondly, that the covenant of grace does not simply remove the obligation of the law by which it binds us to all degrees, conditions, and circumstances of perfect obedience, and consequently to the avoiding of all sins, even the lightest. Since we are still bound to strive and aspire after that perfection, so far as in us lies, and to grieve seriously that we fall short of it, and daily to implore pardon from God for that defect.

XL. Thirdly, the covenant of grace, although it does not simply and altogether remove this obligation, yet takes away the rigor, or severity and terribleness of this obligation. For although, says he, it sets before us the entire perfection of righteousness as a thing to be sought after, and, as far as possible, attained, yet it does not require it strictly and precisely under the peril and penalty of eternal damnation. For to a certain measure of obedience indeed, which is possible through ordinary grace, it binds strictly and precisely, that is, under the peril of eternal damnation, requiring that we should actually have it. But to a farther measure, which we cannot attain by the power of ordinary grace, it binds less strictly, namely, requiring that we should have it at least in wish and endeavor. For example, to perfection by parts, as they call it, it binds precisely. For it promises eternal life on no other condition than that we should actually have it. But to that perfection which is called of degrees, it does not bind so strictly and precisely; but only requires that we should strive and endeavor to attain to it, so far as the grace afforded us will permit.

XLI. Hence he gathers that believers, even according to the Evangelical covenant, are strictly and precisely, under the peril of eternal death, bound to live without those sins which are called mortal. Because the perfection of parts pertains to this, that we should not only repent of those more grievous sins, but also abstain altogether from them, that is, that we should no more commit them for the future; according to that of Christ, "Thou art made whole, sin no more." But that they are not bound in like manner to live, for the future, without every sin, even the lightest. Because to live without those lighter sins which are called venials, pertains to the perfection of degrees, which excludes all flaws and defects of human obedience.

XLII. Thirdly, he says that mortal and venial sin differ in respect to the very acts themselves: because the foulness or deformity which is found in venial sins is much less than that which exists in mortal sins: for this reason, that in every venial sin there is something which extenuates the offense committed by it, and in a certain way excuses it with a gracious judge. Which he afterwards proves by going through those three species of venial sin which are commonly

distinguished by the Scholastics. For as to the first of them, that is, venial sin from its kind, with God judging graciously, and according to the multitude of His tender mercies, the lightness of the offense (comparative, that is, since no sin is absolutely light) which it has from the very specific nature of the act considered in itself, without respect to the mode of acting, or the particular matter in which it is committed, excuses it, as is evident, for instance, in an idle word, immoderate laughter, etc. But the second species of venial sin, that is, sin from subreption, is excused by the lightness of the offense which it has, not from the specific nature of the act considered in itself, but from the mode in which that act proceeds from the agent; because, namely, the agent did not fully and sufficiently deliberate: as, for example, in a sudden appetite of revenge, or lust. Because the appetite of revenge is not from its specific nature a light sin; but accidentally light, because it takes place from indeliberation. But the third species, that is, venial sin from the smallness of the matter, is excused by the lightness of the offense which it has, not from the proper nature of such an act, but from the limitation of it to a particular matter; as in the theft of a penny. For theft is not from its specific nature a light sin, but accidentally light, because it is committed in a matter of little moment.

XLIII. Fourthly, he says that mortal and venial sins differ in respect to the repentance required for the remission of them. First, because the ordinary and daily exercise of repentance is graciously accepted by God, and deemed sufficient for the expiation of venial sins. But as those mortal sins themselves are grievous, horrid, and rare and extraordinary in the course of a Christian life; so the repentance which is necessarily required for the expiation of them ought to be singular, more accurate, and extraordinary; such as was that of David after his adultery and murder, and of Peter after his denial of Christ.

XLIV. Then, because for the expiation of the guilt of mortal sins a special acknowledgment and confession of them, and a special grief and contrition, are required. But for taking away venial sins, for the most part that general, but humble, serious, and sorrowful acknowledgment of our corruption, joined with that general deprecation, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults," is accepted. Because those lighter and daily incurred faults for the most part escape our knowledge. Although those of this kind which are observed by us ought also to be specially acknowledged and deplored.

XLV. Thirdly, in fine, because the repentance necessary to the remission of mortal sins, and the salvation of those who commit them, ought to be perfectly practical, that is, to go forth into an actual and real cessation from all sins of this kind, as is seen from Prov. 28:13, John 5:14. For if any one, leaving some one or two mortal sins, should afterwards fall into others, he can obtain neither grace in this life, nor glory in the future, as the Apostle teaches, 1 Cor. 6:9, 10, Gal. 5:21. But on the other hand, the repentance required for the remission of venial sins is not, nor can it be, perfectly practical, as it respects sins of this kind. For as all confess, no one can live without sins of this kind: and consequently the salvation of the pious is not endangered, although before the end of life they cannot escape this kind of sin.

XLVI. Fifthly, he affirms that mortal and venial sins differ in respect to the effects which follow the acts of sin, that is, the detriment which they bring upon sinners; because the calamities and

losses which from mortal sins befall believers, are much more grievous and sad than those which follow the lighter sins, or venials. He then proceeds to expound severally the three evils or detriments which follow the mortal sins of the regenerate; which nevertheless, according to the dispensation of Divine Providence under the covenant of grace, do not follow the lighter sins committed by them.

XLVII. The first evil or detriment is the exclusion of the sinner from that degree of Divine favor with which he was before beloved of God. For although, when a regenerate and elect person falls into any grievous sin, and for some time perseveres in it, God does not on that account revoke His eternal purpose of saving and glorifying him, according to which it shall come to pass that God will give him grace to rise again from that fall, and so to arrive at the destined end; yet during that time in which he remains involved in that sin, he no longer pleases God as before, but incurs the hatred and displeasure of God, according to those general declarations of Scripture, by which He declares that He hates all workers of iniquity, and does not delight in those who withdraw themselves.

XLVIII. Moreover, during this state not only are the sins committed by the regenerate displeasing to God; but also their obedience, prayers, and thanksgivings. Nay, nothing can proceed from them which for that time can be acceptable and well-pleasing to God. But that favor and complacency in which they are acceptable and well-pleasing to God, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, the faithful do not lose on account of their lighter sins into which they daily fall. And although these in themselves not only displease God, but also might justly cause that our whole obedience should be foul in the eyes of the Lord, and altogether displeasing to Him, yet God, notwithstanding these, accepts our imperfect obedience in Christ, and as it were turning His eyes from the blemishes which adhere to it, graciously regards the sincerity and humility of the same, and from these takes complacency and delight.

XLIX. Then when the regenerate by their own fault fall into atrocious sins, the Divine benevolence towards them is so bound and hindered, by the obstacle which their sins place in its way, that during this state He cannot confer upon them remission of sins, peace of conscience, spiritual joy, and similar gifts of the Holy Spirit. But no such thing follows from the lighter and daily sins of believers, which do not prevent God from remaining ever prompt and ready to confer upon them the wonted and ordinary effects and evidences of His saving grace, namely, confidence of the remission of sins, peace of conscience, and spiritual joy: although the lightest sins also, from themselves and their own nature, render us incapable and unworthy of the gifts of Divine grace.

L. But the reason of this difference between sins of the two kinds, he says, is, that the regenerate when fallen into those atrocious and conscience-wasting sins, cease to render that obedience which the covenant of grace requires from us, as necessary to the obtaining of further gifts of grace in this life, and the beatific vision of God in the life to come. And therefore as long as believers and regenerate persons remain involved in those grievous and atrocious sins, they are incapable of these benefits, not only from their own demerit, but also according to the sentence of the covenant of grace, until by special, extraordinary, and perfectly practical

repentance they return unto God, and take away all this malignity of their actings from before His eyes. But when the elect and justified commit those lighter sins, from inadvertence, or infirmity, they do not cease to render that obedience which the covenant of grace exacts, as precisely necessary to salvation. And notwithstanding these, they are said to walk according to the Spirit; nay, and to follow the Lord with their whole heart, and walk blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.

LI. The second effect of a more grievous sin, which he calls mortal, and in which he says it differs from lighter sins, which are called venials, is a manifold diminution of grace inherent in us through the Holy Spirit. For although, according to him, by even the more grievous sins the habits of faith, hope and love are not altogether done away and removed, yet they are much diminished and weakened by them, and that not only extrinsically as to the fervor and facility, or promptitude, of using these habits; but also intrinsically, as to their very entity. For, says he, these habits have a certain latitude of degrees, within which, as they are in fact increased, so also they may be diminished by acts contrary to them.

LII. And moreover, although he teaches that the remains of these habits persist even in those who sin most grievously, yet he warns that their principal acts and operations cease and are interrupted in them. For in that state they cannot exercise the acts of justifying faith, and confidence and hope concerning their own salvation and remission of their sins, nor retain spiritual consolation and peace. But nothing of this kind befalls the regenerate when they fall into lighter sins through infirmity: For sins of this kind do not prevent faith and hope, and that holy confidence which the Holy Spirit begets in us, from putting forth their wonted acts in them: but along with sins of that kind there remain in them confidence in the Divine mercy, and certain hope of salvation, and a sense and persuasion of the remission of their sins.

LIII. Finally, he teaches that the third effect of mortal sin is that a justified man, when he contracts the guilt of it, loses his present fitness for entering into the kingdom of heaven: because into that kingdom shall not enter anything that defiles, or works abomination: and the heavenly crown is placed only on those who have fought the good fight, and finished their course in faith and holiness; and therefore whosoever still cleaves to works of impiety is unfit to attain to this crown. Although, however, all sins, however light, deserve exclusion from the heavenly kingdom according to the rigor of justice, yet according to the administration of Divine Providence under the covenant of grace, sins of this kind do not take away present fitness for entering into that heavenly kingdom: But if death should overtake a man only in sins of this kind, he is not on this account excluded from heaven, nor deprived of eternal glory and blessedness.

LIV. As respects the Theologians of the Augsburg Confession, in this too they all agree that all sins are by their own nature mortal; and therefore in the unregenerate there is no venial sin. But in the regenerate some sins may be called mortal, or rather deadly, because they involve them in new guilt of eternal death, and extinguish spiritual life in them: but others venial, or rather not deadly, because they are not imputed to them unto death, but are graciously pardoned on account of Christ. Of the former kind, according to them, is every sin against conscience, and proceeding from malice; but of the latter, sins of infirmity, depraved concupiscence, and similar

human lapses. But with this distinction they wish that other distinction to coincide, by which sin is distinguished into reigning and not reigning. And by reigning sin, or mortal, they teach that the regenerate cast out faith and the Holy Spirit, and lose grace and eternal life: but by no means incur these evils through sins which are called venials.

LV. On this whole subject John Gerhard treats at length in his *Loci Theologici*, where concerning this distinction he explains his mind in these words: "That some sins are called venials, others only mortals, does not arise from the nature of the sins, but from the mercy of the Father, the merit of the Son, and the sanctification of the Spirit; and this division respects not all men in general, but only the regenerate; nor is it to be taken from the law, which accuses and condemns all sins whatsoever and howsoever small; but from the Gospel, which shows that to believers in Christ, sins of infirmity, ignorance, and depraved lusts are not imputed, if they resist them, that is, if being regenerate, 1. They acknowledge these evils dwelling in the heart: 2. Grieve seriously for them: 3. Seek and believe to be covered by the merit of the Mediator as by a veil: 4. By no means give loose reins to them, but resist them by the Spirit, crucifying the flesh with its affections. From all which it appears, 1. That in the unregenerate there are no venial sins, but all are mortals: 2. That venial sins are not such from the nature of the act itself, but from the condition of the sinning person, which if it be in Christ through faith, sins of infirmity are covered: 3. That the name mortal sin is not very suitable, it should rather have been called deadly and reigning: 4. Nor is the name venial sin very suitable, they should rather have been called sins of infirmity, human lapses, depraved lusts, etc. For they are not therefore called venials because they are in themselves and of themselves deserving of pardon, but because God pardons and deigns to pardon them to believers." Tom. 2, Tract 13, On Actual Sins, Chap. 19, No. 92.

LVI. But afterwards, in answering some passages objected by Bellarmine, he says: "This at least may be proved from those and similar sayings, that there is a certain difference of sins; so that some are committed by the regenerate, and yet do not actually exclude them from the kingdom of heaven, while others, if committed by the regenerate, cast out faith and the Holy Spirit, which we do not deny." In the chapter just cited, No. 100. Then in the following number he subjoins: "But often in the very lightest sins, and sometimes through inadvertence, sin creeps upon the regenerate, through which they do not cease to be just." And some things being interposed, he says: "Where there is true faith in Christ, efficacious through love, there man lives spiritually, this spiritual life he does not lose through any sins of ignorance and infirmity, provided he acknowledge them, deplore them, and cleaving to Christ, mortify the lusts of the flesh by the Spirit; but through sins committed against conscience, by which the Holy Spirit is cast out, faith and spiritual life are lost."

LVII. Moreover, from what has been expounded in these and the preceding Theses, it appears that by far the greatest part of the Doctors of the Roman School establish by common consent, that there are certain sins which of themselves and by their own nature are not mortal, but venial; because of themselves they do not induce the guilt of eternal death; nor do they extinguish the spiritual life of the soul, which consists in the love and grace of God: Nevertheless this is not yet held by them for an article of faith, and a thing altogether certain and

settled: because in the Roman School there are some Theologians, and indeed of the most celebrated, who hold the contrary, and who think that all sins are of themselves and by their own nature mortal, nor do they judge that any are venial except through the clemency and mercy of God.

LVIII. Hence also it is manifest that the same Doctors of the Roman School do not deny that all sins, and even those themselves which are called venials, may be punished in those who finish life without the grace of God with eternal punishments, and are in fact so punished, and that most justly, and according to the judgment of God, which is according to truth.

LIX. On the other hand, it is clear from what we have said, that the Theologians of the Reformed School freely confess and teach that there are various degrees of malignity among sins, and that all sins are not equal; nor are all punished by God with equal punishments; but some will be punished in the judgment of God much more mildly, and others much more severely.

LX. Besides, we have taught that the Reformed acknowledge that there are certain grievous and atrocious sins which waste the conscience: so that as long as a man perseveres in them, and does not actually and really depart from them, he cannot be accounted pious and holy, and in that state preserve a good conscience, and retain spiritual joy, and confidence of salvation: But that there are other lighter sins, which do not prevent the believer, although he daily falls into them, from preserving a good conscience, and that measure of righteousness and holiness which in this life is necessary that any one may see God in the future life; and therefore which do not take from man inward peace, and legitimate confidence of salvation and remission of sins.

LXI. Nay, we have shown that most of the Reformed openly teach that there are certain sins, into which if the believer fall he is actually involved in new guilt of eternal death, and rendered unfit to enter into the kingdom of heaven, until by repentance he has renounced them, and has actually and altogether abstained from them: so that if death should overtake him in sins of this kind, as for example robbing and committing adultery, and lying in wait for his neighbor's life, he could by no means be saved, and become a partaker of celestial life and glory: but that there are other sins which do not induce new guilt of eternal death, nor render a man unfit to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, although death should overtake him in any one sin of this kind. Sins of this kind are, in their opinion, certain lighter sins, as a frivolous thought, immoderate laughter, an idle word, and the defects cleaving to the good works of believers, and by reason of which they come short of that highest perfection which the rigor of the law exacts.

LXII. Moreover, it appears from what has been said that most of the Protestants, namely, all the Theologians of the Augsburg Confession, and some even of the Reformed themselves, admit the distinction of sin into mortal and venial, taken in a sound sense, and call in a peculiar sense mortal sins those more grievous and atrocious sins which waste the conscience, and actually involve the regenerate and justified themselves in new guilt of eternal death, when they fall into them: but venial sins those lighter sins, which may consist with a good conscience and sense of remission of sins, and through which a believing person is not bound with new guilt of eternal

death; nor rendered unfit to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, although he should die in some sin of that kind.

LXIII. Therefore that alone remains in controversy between the Roman School and the Protestant Theologians, Whether there are certain sins which by their own nature do not exclude the grace of God, nor deserve eternal death, and for which alone God could not justly reject man, and forever and altogether repel him from His friendship, if He should deal rigorously with him? Which the Doctors of the Roman Church commonly affirm; but the Protestants deny.

LXIV. But the principal reasons on which they rely are these: And first indeed they prove that all sins are of themselves and by their own nature mortal, from the fact that even the lightest sins, the mercy and gracious pardon of God being set aside, forever exclude the sinner from the heavenly kingdom, and consequently give him over to eternal punishment. For that which belongs to sin, the mercy of God being excluded, beyond doubt belongs to it by its own nature and of itself. But now that every sin, however light it may seem, forever excludes from the heavenly kingdom, the mercy of God being excluded, is manifest from this, that every sin, however light, stains and defiles the sinner. But nothing that defiles shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. And therefore even he who has sinned most lightly cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, unless God first mercifully cleanse him, and graciously pardon his sin.

LXV. Moreover, any sins whatever, however light they may appear to us, will after the day of judgment be punished in the impenitent with eternal punishment; according to that saying of Christ in Matthew: "But I say unto you, that for every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." For after the day of judgment there will be no place for temporal punishments. But if any sins whatever may be punished with eternal punishment, and shall in fact be so punished in the impenitent, they are beyond doubt deserving of such punishment, and deserve eternal punishment; otherwise God would act unjustly in punishing sin with a heavier punishment than is due to it: whereas it is the common opinion of Theologians that God punishes sinners beneath what is condign. But every sin which is deserving of eternal punishment may be called and accounted mortal.

LXVI. Thirdly, that the sins which are called venials deserve of themselves eternal punishment, is thus proved: That which can never be remitted, can be punished forever, and that justly. But any sins whatever, even the very lightest, in whatever person they may be found, absolutely speaking, might never be remitted: because whenever any sin is remitted by God, it is remitted of mercy and grace; which the very name of remission imports. But whatever God does of grace and mercy, that, absolutely and simply speaking, He might not do: and therefore to the very just, simply and absolutely speaking, and without respect to the promises gratuitously made in the Gospel, God might not remit even the lightest sins, and so might punish them forever.

LXVII. Moreover, when God entered into the legal covenant with man in his integrity, He required of him obedience altogether perfect, and complete in all its parts, as a condition without which he could not attain unto eternal and blessed life, and escape the Divine malediction. Now



that perfection which the law in its rigor, and as it was first given to man, demands, excludes every sin, even the very lightest. And therefore by any sin whatever, even the lightest, man in his integrity might fall from eternal life, and incur the Divine malediction. Whence it manifestly follows that every sin, however light, is by its own nature mortal, not venial. But that under the legal covenant, man in his integrity would by any sin whatever have fallen from the promise of eternal life, is evident from this, that under that covenant there was no place for pardon and remission, the promises of which are peculiar to the Evangelical covenant. Nor did the law precisely considered, and as opposed to the Gospel and grace, give place to repentance, without which every sin excludes forever from the heavenly life.

LXVIII. Finally, every sin, even that which is called venial, offends the infinite Majesty of God, and therefore has a sort of infinite malignity, namely, objectively. And also the stain contracted from any sin whatever, of itself and the mercy of God being excluded, endures forever. Whence it follows that to every sin is due an objectively infinite punishment, which deprives of an infinite good; and moreover which is infinite extensively, that is, which endures forever, that so the punishment may have proportion with the fault. And thus every sin ought to be called mortal by its own nature, as being to be punished from justice with eternal punishment.