Grace and Sin at the Dawn of Moral Experience
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In a notorious article of the Prima Secundae, Aquinas claimed that the first moral decision of an unbaptized child could not result in a venial sin. If the decision was bad, the sin could only be mortal. On the other hand, if the decision was good, the same unbaptized child was freed from original sin. The common doctor’s argument for these claims wove together threads of psychology, moral theology, and eschatology, to fashion a controversial doctrine — elegant, but hard to defend, and in conflict with his own work on faith and justification. This paper will unravel the threads and propose a revised doctrine, less elegant but more plausible, and free of conflict.¹

The place to begin is the text of the notorious article itself, 2/1 ST 89, 6.²

Can Venial Sin Exist in Someone with Original Sin Alone.

We proceed to the sixth article. It seems that venial sin can exist in someone with original sin alone.

(1) After all, disposition precedes habit, but venial sin is a disposition to mortal sin, as was said above [q. 88, a. 3]. So venial sin is found sooner than mortal sin in non-believers to whom original sin has not been remitted. Therefore, non-believers sometimes have venial sin with original sin, without mortal sin.

(2) Also, venial sin has less connection and fit with mortal sin than one mortal sin has with another. But non-believers still in original sin can commit one mortal sin and not another. Hence, they can also commit a venial sin and not a mortal one.

(3) Furthermore, one can fix the time when a child is first able to commit an actual sin. When that time comes, the child can last a short while, at least, without sinning mortally, since this happens with even the worst criminals. In that space of time, be it ever so brief, the child can sin venially. Therefore, venial sin can exist in someone with original sin but not mortal sin.

Utrum peccatum veniale possit esse in aliquo cum solo originali.

Ad sextum sic proceditur. Videtur quod peccatum veniale possit esse in aliquo cum solo originali.

(1) Dispositio enim praecedit habitum. Sed veniale est dispositio ad mortale, ut supra dictum est. Ergo veniale in infidel, cui non remittitur originale se, invenitur ante mortale. Et sic quandoque infideles habent peccata venialia cum originali, sine mortalibus.

(2) Praeterea, minus habet de connexione et convenientia veniale cum mortali, quam mortale peccatum cum mortali. Sed infidelis subiectus originale peccato potest committere unum peccatum mortale et non aliud. Ergo etiam potest committere peccatum veniale, et non mortale.

(3) Praeterea, determinari potest tempus in quo puer primo potest esse actor peccati actualis. Ad quod tempus cum pervenerit, potest ad minus per aliquod breve spatiu stare, quin pecet mortaliter: quia hoc etiam in maximis sceleratis contingit. In illo autem spatio, quantumcumque brevi, potest peccare venialiter. Ergo peccatum veniale potest esse in aliquo cum originali peccato, absque mortali.

¹ My attention was drawn to this topic 30 years ago by Karl Rahner’s exploitation of it; the opportunity to produce a new solution came more recently, from the work of Maria Newton. Her senior thesis, “An Examination of the Claim of St. Thomas that Venial Sin Cannot Exist in a Person with Original Sin Alone” (Christendom College, 2006), collected the Latin texts presented below and confronted them with her own research in child psychology. Miss Newton is in no way to blame, however, for the revised theology which I propose.

² The text is from the Leonine edition; the translation is by Newton and retouched by me.
ON THE OTHER HAND, people are punished for original sin in the limbo of the children, where there is no punishment of the senses, as we shall discuss below. And people are not cast into hell for anything but mortal sin. So there will be no place of punishment for a person who has venial sin with just original sin.

I ANSWER: it is impossible for venial sin to exist in a person with original sin but without mortal sin. The reason for this is that, before the child reaches the years of discretion, the defect of age that prevents the use of reason excuses him from mortal sin: much more, then, does it excuse him from venial sin, if he does anything of a kind that would have been such. But when he begins to have the use of reason, he is not entirely excused from the guilt of venial and mortal sin. At that point, the first thing that comes up for a person to think through is deliberating about himself. If he directs himself to a due end, the remission of original sin will follow through grace. But if he does not direct himself to a due end with the discretion he is capable of at that age, he will sin mortally by not doing the best he can. And so venial sin will not be in him without mortal sin, unless all his sin is remitted afterwards through grace.

TO MEET THE OBJECTIONS — ad (1): venial sin is not a disposition that leads to mortal sin necessarily, but contingently, as hard labor sometimes leads to illness — not as [high enough] heat disposes to the form of fire.

ad (2): venial sin is not blocked from coexisting with original sin alone by its connection [with mortal sin], be it loose or tight, but by a defect of the use of reason, as I said.

ad (3): a child beginning to have the use of reason can abstain from other mortal sins for a while, but he is not free of the sin of omission I mentioned earlier, unless he turns himself to God as quickly as he can. For the first thing that comes up for one who has discretion is thinking about himself, to whom he may order other things as to their end; for an end is first in intention. And so this is the time when he is obliged by God’s affirmative precept, in which the Lord says, “Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you” [Zechariah 1:3].

SED CONTRA est quia pro peccato originali puniuntur homines in limbo puerrorum, ubi non est poena sensus, ut infra dicetur. In inferno autem detruidunt homines propter solum peccatum mortale. Ergo non erit locus in quo possit puniri ille qui habet peccatum veniale cum originali solo.

RESPONDEO dicendum quod impossibile est quod peccatum veniale sit in aliqouum cum originali peccato, absque mortali. Cuius ratio est quia antequam ad annos discretionis perveniat, defectus aetatis, prohibens usum rationis, excusat eum a peccato mortali: unde multo magis excusat eum a peccato veniali, si committat aliquid quod sit ex genere suo tale. Cum vero usum rationis habere inceperit, non omnino excusatur a culpa venialis et mortalis peccati. Sed primum quod tunc homini cogitandum occurrit, est deliberare de seipso. Et si quidem seipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem, per gratiam consequetur remissionem originalis peccati. Si vero non ordinet seipsum ad debitum finem, secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis, peccabit mortaliter, non faciens quod in se est. Et ex tunc non erit in eo peccatum veniale sine mortali, nisi postquam totum fuerit sibi per gratiam remissum.

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod veniale non est dispositio ex necessitate praecedens mortale, sed contingentem, sicut labor disponit quandoque ad febrem: non autem sicut calor disponit ad formam ignis.

Ad secundum dicendum quod non impeditur peccatum veniale esse simul cum solo originali propter distantiam eius vel convenientiam; sed propter defectum usus rationis, ut dictum est.

Ad tertium dicendum quod ab aliis peccatis mortalibus potest puer incipiens habere usum rationis, per aliquod tempus abstinerre: sed a peccato omissionis praedictae non liberatur, nisi quam citato potest, se convertat ad Deum. Primum enim quod occurrit homini discretionem habenti est quod de seipso cogitet, ad quem alia ordinet sicut ad finem: finis enim est prior in intentione. Et ideo hoc est tempus pro quo obligatur ex Dei praecepto affir-mativo, quo Dominus dicit: Convertimini ad me, et ego convertar ad vos.
To approach the content of this text, let us set down three easy points. (1) A child’s first morally significant decision marks the beginning of self-direction. (2) It matters that this begin on the right foot. (3) Every person living a self-directed life has objective duties set by divine law, including a duty to turn to God in personal conversion (no matter how little the person initially knows of God or His law). On these points, all theologians can and do agree. But beyond them, how much more was Aquinas asserting in this article? The answer turns on what to make of two conditional sentences:

Et si quidem se ipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem, per gratiam consequetur remissionem originalis peccati. Si vero non ordinet se ipsum ad debitum finem, secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis, peccabit mortaliter . . .

Notice the future tense of the verb in each consequent. How was it being used? Did it have temporal force, pointing to a time later than when the antecedent would come true? Or was it just part of the grammar for Latin conditionals, so that the consequent would come true at the same time as the antecedent?

We have the same ambiguity in English. As a sample of temporal force, take this: If you plant the seeds, flowers will grow. The flowers will not grow at the same time as the seeds are planted, but later. Understood this way, Aquinas’ two conditionals come into English as follows:

If he directs himself to a due end, the remission of original sin will follow [later] through grace. But if he does not direct himself to a due end with the discretion he is capable of at that age, he will sin mortally [eventually] . . .

If this is what Aquinas meant, he had a perfectly plausible doctrine. It contained the three easy points listed above, plus the following two more: (4) a morally good decision conduces to future cooperation with grace, and (5) a morally bad decision, however small the matter, leads to more serious wrong-doing.

As a sample of mere grammar, take this: If the penitent receives absolution, she will be forgiven. The penitent will not be forgiven at a time later than the absolution, but at the moment she receives it. Interpreted this way, Aquinas’ two conditionals are translated thus:

If he directs himself to a due end, the remission of original sin follows [then and there] through grace. But if he does not direct himself to a due end with the discretion he is capable of at that age, he sins mortally [by that very omission] . . .

It is virtually impossible, alas, to avoid the conclusion that this last is the sense Aquinas had in mind, because his argument falls apart without it. The argument had to show that venial sin could not arise in a person who had had original sin alone up until then. So it had to exclude such sin immediately, with a child’s first exercise of deliberating. If the remission of original sin were delayed even an hour after the deliberating concluded well, the hour would leave time for the child to commit a venial sin. (The small faults of children are quick things to commit.) Likewise, if a mortal sin were not committed until an hour after the deliberating ended badly, a gap of time would be left open for (another?) venial sin. To exclude this, Aquinas made it clear that he thought the failure to deliberate well was itself the mortal sin: “A child beginning to have the use of reason can abstain from other mortal sins for a while, but he is not free of the sin of omission I mentioned earlier, unless he turns himself to God as quickly as he can.”

However, there are difficulties with this reading as well. The remission of original sin is the same event as “justification” in the theology of St. Thomas. If this event does not occur in infant baptism, it requires prior free acts of cooperation with prevenient graces, including acts of faith. There is a place in the
In the eleventh article we ask: Is it necessary to believe something explicitly? It seems not.

(1) For we should not propose any claim from which an unsuitable conclusion follows. But if we claim that explicit belief is necessary for salvation, an unsuitable conclusion follows. Here is how. It is possible for a person to be brought up in a forest or among wolves, and such a person can have no explicit knowledge of any matter of faith. So there can be a person who will be damned inevitably. This is unsuitable. Hence, explicit belief in something does not seem necessary.

(2) Besides, we have no obligation to do what is not in our power. To believe something explicitly, we have to hear it from within or without, because “faith cometh by hearing,” as it says in Romans 10:17. But hearing is not in anyone’s power unless there is a speaker. Thus, to believe something explicitly is not necessary for salvation.

(5) Also, many Gentiles were saved before the coming of Christ, as Denis says in c. 9 of De caelesti hierarchia. But they could not have known anything about the Redeemer explicitly, since the prophets did not come to them. Thus explicit belief in the articles about the Redeemer does not seem necessary for salvation.

Reply: . . . On one needs to know that there is a point of faith which everyone is bound to believe explicitly in every age. Other points must be believed explicitly in every age but not by everyone. Still others everyone must believe explicitly, but not in every age. Last come points that need not be believed explicitly by everyone nor in every age.

That all in every age must believe something explicitly is evident from the fact that, vis-a-vis our further perfection, there is a parallel between our accepting the faith and a pupil’s accepting what

Undecimo quaeritur utrum sit necessarium aliquid explicite credere. Et videtur quod non.

(1) Illud enim non est ponendum, quo posito sequitur inconveniens. Sed si ponamus quod sit necessarium ad salutem quod aliquid explicite credatur, sequitur inconveniens. Possibile est enim aliquem nutrii in silvis, vel inter lupos; et talis non potest explicite aliquid de fide cognoscere. Et sic erit aliquis homo qui de necessitate damnabitur. Quod est inconveniens; et sic non videtur quod sit necessarium aliquid explicite credere.

(2) Praeterea, ad illud quod non est in potestate nostra, non tenemur. Sed ad hoc quod explicite aliquid credamus, indigemus auditu interiori vel exteriori: fides enim est ex auditu, ut dicitur Rom. x, 17: et audire non est in potestate alius, nisi sit qui loquitur. Et sic non est de necessitate salutis quod aliquid explicite credatur. . . .

(5) Praeterea, multi gentiles ante Christi adventum salvati sunt, ut dicit Dionysus, ix cap. Cael. Hierarch. Ipsi autem non poterant aliquid expliciitum de Redemptore cognoscere, cum ad eos prophetae non pervenerint. Ergo credere explicite articulos de Redemptore, non videtur necessarium ad salutem.

Respondeo: . . . Scendum est autem quod aliquid est in fide ad quod omnes et omni tempore explicite credendum tenetur; quaedam vero sunt in ea, quae omni tempore sunt explicite credenda, sed non ab omnibus; quaedam vero ab omnibus, sed non omni tempore; quaedam vero nec ab omnibus nec omni tempore.

Quod enim oporteat aliquid expliciitum credi ab omni fideli, ex hoc apparet, quod acceptio fidei se habet in nobis respectu ultimae perfectionis, sicut acceptio discipuli de his quae sibi primo a magistro

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3 The translation (retouched by me) is from James V. McGlynn (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), vol 2, p. 258.
his teacher first tells him, through which he is guided into preliminary matters. The pupil could not be guided unless he actually considered something. So the pupil must accept something for actual consideration; likewise, the faithful must explicitly believe something. And here are the two things which the Apostle tells us must be believed explicitly: “For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is the rewarder to them that love Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Therefore, everyone in every age is bound explicitly to believe that God exists and exercises providence over human affairs.

But in the age of grace, everybody, leaders and ordinary people, have to have explicit faith in the Trinity and in the Redeemer. But only the leaders are bound to believe explicitly all the points of faith concerning the Trinity and the Redeemer. The ordinary people must believe the general articles explicitly, such as that God is triune, that the Son of God was made flesh, died and rose from the dead, and other matters such as the Church commemorates in her feasts.

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ad (1) If one is bound to believe something explicitly, no unsuitable conclusion follows, even if one is brought up in a forest or among the beasts. For it pertains to divine providence to furnish everyone with what is necessary for salvation, provided there is no obstacle on his part. Thus, if someone so brought up followed the direction of natural reason in seeking good and avoiding evil, we must hold most firmly that God would either reveal to him through internal inspiration what he had to believe, or send a preacher of the faith to him, as he sent Peter to Cornelius (Acts 10:20).

ad (2) Although it is not within our power to know matters of faith by ourselves alone, still, if we do the best we can, that is, follow the guidance of natural reason, God will not withhold from us what we need.

ad (5) The gentiles were not established as teachers of divine faith. So no matter how well versed they were in secular wisdom, they should be counted as ordinary people. Thus it was enough for them to have a faith in the Redeemer that was implicit in their belief in prophets, or in their belief in divine providence itself.

traduntur, per quae in anteriora dirigitur. Non autem posset dirigiri nisi actu aliqua consideraret. Unde oportet quod discipulus aliquid actualiter considerandum accipiat; et similiter oportet quod fidelis quilibet aliquid explicite credat. Et haec sunt duo quae Apostolus dicit Hebr. xi, 6: Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere quia est et inquirentibus se remunerator sit. Unde quilibet tenet explicite credere, et omni tempore, Deum esse, et habere providentiam de rebus humanis....

Tempore vero gratiae omnes, maiores et minores, de Trinitate et de Redemptore tenentur explicitam fidem habere. Non tamen omnia credibilba circa Trinitatem vel Redemptorem minores explicite credere tenentur, sed soli maiores. Minores autem tenentur explicite credere generales articulos, ut Deum esse trinum et unum, Filium Dei esse incarnatum et mortuum, et resurrexisset; et alia huiusmodi, de quibus Ecclesia festa facit....

Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod non sequitur inconveniens posito quod quilibet teneatur aliquid explicite credere, si in silvis vel inter bruta animalia nutriatur: hoc enim ad divinam providentiam pertinet ut cuilibet provideat de necessariis ad salutem, dummodo ex parte eius non impediatur. Si enim aliquis taliter nutritus, ductum naturalis rationis sequetur in appetitu boni et fuga mali, certissime est tenendum, quod ei Deus vel per internam inspirationem revelaret ea quae sunt ad credendum necessaria, vel aliquem fidei predicatorem ad eum dirigeret, sicut misit Petrum ad Cornelium, Act. X.

Ad secundum dicendum, quod quamvis non sit in potestate nostra cognoscere ea quae sunt fidei, ex nobis ipsis; tamen, si nos fecerimus quod in nobis est, ut scilicet ductum naturalis rationis sequamur, Deus non deficiet nobis ab eo quod nobis est necessarium.

Ad quintum dicendum, quod gentiles non ponebantur ut instructores divinae fidei. Unde, quantumcumque essent sapientes sapientia saeculari, inter minores computandi sunt: et ideo sufficiebat eis habere fidem de Redemptore implicite, vel in fide prophetarum, vel in ipsa divina providentia...
The important thing to notice here is that Aquinas was laying the obligation of explicit belief on the unevangelized, even those “brought up among wild beasts.” To make it possible for them to meet this obligation, God would either grant them an interior revelation, he asserted, or else send missionaries. In the body of the article, we see that the required explicit belief for ordinary people (among whom the answer ad 5 put the unevangelized) extends further in the age of grace than it did before the Redemption. It extends to the “general articles” about God and His Christ: the Trinity and the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection. So it is right belief, and not just a morally good orientation of one’s life, that is needed for the remission of original sin through justifying grace. To make St. Thomas maintain in the Summa that escape from original sin is an immediate consequence of mere morality is to make him contradict his own words, it seems, written earlier in De Veritate.

Other problems with this reading arise from the second conditional: “But if he does not direct himself to a proper end with the discretion he is capable of at that age, he sins mortally.” Questions arise first about the precept to which Aquinas was appealing — “Turn ye unto me,” etc. Does this precept really bind one so young and so totally uninformed? Does it really bind such a person under pain of mortal sin? Secondly, questions arise about the account of decision-making on which Aquinas was relying. Does a child making his first morally significant decision really “deliberate about himself”? Does he do so in the way portrayed? And what is “a” or “the” due end? If self-direction towards it is so crucial, the referent of ‘due end’ would seem to be a human person’s genuine “last end,” which is God — and not just any god, the True God. So an unbaptized seven or eight-year old, despite the fact that the child has never been evangelized, is supposed to understand enough to “direct himself” (se ordinare) to the True God, or sin mortally in the mere omission to do so?

These questions show that, on this conditional-grammar reading of his future tenses, Aquinas was asserting vastly more than the three easy points with which we started, and vastly more than the other two points that emerge from the later-time reading. He was asserting that

(6) the divine-law precept to convert becomes binding upon an unbaptized youth as soon as he or she is (a) capable of rational deliberation leading to free choice and (b) faces a decision that first prompts his or her exercise of such deliberation, and
(7) the precept is binding at that point under pain of mortal sin, and
(8) keeping this precept is justificatory for such a youth, and
(9) keeping the same precept is possible for him or her because what it demands emerges, somehow, in what it is natural for a young person to deliberate about first.

If the reader will now go back and re-read the text of 2/1 ST 89, 6, I think the reader will see that these further assertions are there, inescapably. But are they defensible?

We are motivated to ask, because there is a serious danger here. Assertions (6)–(9) pack a huge salvific significance into a child’s first free decision. It is hard to see how that much significance can be put into

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4 The historico-critical exegesis of Zechariah 1: 3 is neither here nor there. It was originally addressed to the Jews, of course; but patristic and medieval exegesis universalized it. Rightly so, given the New Testament’s appropriation of the Old. The medievals were fond of using Zechariah because its wording combined nicely with Jeremiah 31: 18, where the human person said to God, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned.” The two verses together captured the mysterious interplay of divine and human initiative.
this one decision without either

- embracing an unrealistic theory of what children can do (so that Catholic theology becomes ridiculous by demanding the impossible) or
- embracing a Rahnerian theory of what it takes to be saved (so that Catholic theology becomes ridiculous by making every nice kid outside the Church an “anonymous Christian”).

Let us now see how Aquinas’ best commentators saw these issues. Let us see whether any of the glaring problems were overcome by them. We turn first to Thomas de Vio (born 1468), known in later life as Cajetan, and famous for his article-by-article commentaries on the Summa Theologiae. To allow for interjections as we go along, I shall break up Cajetan’s text into paragraphs; the Latin, instead of being in a parallel column, will go into an appendix.⁵

Cajetan’s Commentary

In article six of question 89, two doubts arise about the words, “Much more, then, does it [defect of age] excuse him from venial sin, etc.” First, the author either meant simply “from venial sin” or only “from an act of a kind that would be venial [if it were imputed].” If the former, it is false that a defect in reason excusing from mortal excuses from venial sin. Take the first movements [towards a sexual act]: defect of ratio-nal deliberation excuses them from being mortal sin but not from being venial sin. If he only means “from the kind that would be venial,” he fails to get the conclusion he wanted (that original sin cannot be found with the [kind of act that would be] venial alone). After all, one may say that a boy in original sin, before he has the full use of free will, who is beginning a kind of half-use of it (like one who is still half-asleep), can sin by yearning after something enjoyable but wrong, like sex with a girl; but because of the imperfection of his indeliberate act, it will be [of the kind to be] venial.

At first sight, the commentary is starting with a nit-picking dubium. But two important points are prompting it. One is about youth itself, i.e. “defect of age.” The other is about the kind of act that would be a venial sin, if it were imputed as such. As for “defect of age,” the issue is whether it differs from “defect of reason” or “defect of deliberation” in how it provides a ground of excuse. The dubium assumes that it does not differ but works just the same. If this is right, then “defect of age” will do no more excusing than an occasional “defect of reason” will do in an older person who is too tired or too inebriated to think clearly. Hence the example of sexual “movement.” (Cajetan will maintain below that “defect of age” works quite differently.) As to an act that is “of a kind” to count as venial sin, if imputed, the issue is whether diminished deliberation itself puts acts into such a “kind.” The dubium assumes that it does and hence uses the example of sexual “yearning with diminished deliberation.” (Cajetan will deny this assumption below.)

Meanwhile, notice these examples. I have no acquaintances among the boys of Cajetan’s day in 15th Century Italy, but I doubt they would have been starting to misbehave sexually, or yearning to do so, at age seven or eight! So either these are very bad examples (not age appropriate), or else the dawn of moral responsibility used to be located years later — in early adolescence — not at the stage of childhood..

⁵ The text is again from the Leonine edition; the translation is by Newton with retouches by me.
which we nowadays call “the age of reason.” This could make a large difference in whether Aquinas’ portrait of childhood decision-making, in his talk of what comes up to “think through first,” is a plausible affair. Is this child supposed to be about seven, or about 13?

\textit{ii.} The second doubt is about what validates the phrase ‘much more’. For defect of age seems to excuse either equally (if one looks at the use of reason) or less (looking at the fact that less is required for doing something incomplete than complete). For it is agreed that mortal sin is complete sin and venial sin is incomplete, and it is agreed that not everything excusing from a greater sin excuses from a lesser one, as is clear in the case of non-believers, who are excused from the [very great] sin of unbelief, if they have heard nothing [of the Gospel message], but not from other [lesser] sins — ones they would have kept clear of, if they had been Christians.

\textit{iii.} To these doubts, my reply is that when St. Thomas explicitly says in the text that defect of age much more excuses the child from venial sin if he commits something which may be such of its kind, there is no doubt that he is speaking about acts venial \textit{in kind} in these words. And his point is that, for a child committing an act mortal in kind and one venial in kind, defect of age excuses him from venial sin also if it excuses him from mortal sin, and much more so. And that he is excused even from venial sin has a readily apparent reason. For both kinds of sin require freedom, and they are the same in the respect that each can come about deliberately or indeliberately. Thus one can deliberately say an idle word or have the first temptations toward saying it [so as to blurt out some of it] and then desist from it. Hence if an impeded liberty excuses from an act of mortal sin, because it puts the act outside of morality, it also excuses, by the same reason, from an act of venial sin, since again it puts the act outside the genus of morality.

To understand this answer, one needs to know that ‘outside the genus of morality’ meant outside the genus of things that get a moral classification. Strictly speaking, this genus of things is \textit{the human actions}. Outside of it are genera like \textit{the chemical elements} and \textit{the behaviors of bears}. Because items in these genera are not classified morally, it makes no sense to call potassium “wicked,” or to call Smokey’s act of wrecking your campsite “a sin.” Likewise outside “the genus of morality” are the doings of human beings \textit{just in case} those doings are not under the control of rational apprehension and choice. Thus legal experience has persuaded us not to classify bad doings as “crimes,” when they have been done by an insane person. In just the same way, defect of age persuades us not to give bad doings a “moral” evaluation, when they are done by a person too young to choose freely. We will say that the child has behavior problems, perhaps, but no “sins.” Thus lack or “defect” of age excuses on a different basis from lack or “defect” of deliberation in an older person. For in the older person’s case, freedom is radically there, and what varies is just how well or responsibly it is exercised. Cajetan continues.

That defect of age excuses “much more” from venial sin can be explained by the fact that the lesser is included in the greater. It is agreed that, other things being equal as regards the agent, the venial and the mortal in kind are like greater and lesser. On account of this, if there is sufficient impediment to liberty in an act committed by a child (an act so bad that it is obviously mortal in its kind) that sin is not imputed to him, \textit{a fortiori} this suffices for a less evil act not to be imputed to him. Thus, if someone fighting a war is not charged with homicide when he kills, then for the same reason he is
not charged with theft when he pillages.

iv. If somebody objects to our reply that it does not secure the intended conclusion universally of every venial sin, we respond that it does, and here is the reasoning. Sin that is venial from the imperfection of the act presupposes sufficient freedom to commit a mortal sin, because it presupposes that the act can be impeded by free use of reason. Hence a child who is excused for an act of a mortal kind by his lack of the liberty needed to foresee, stop, and control these motions, is also excused for any movement whatsoever in an act of a mortal or venial kind by his lack of liberty. The case would be similar to someone having a [wet] dream, if there has been no antecedent occasion of guilt, super-fluty of sleep, or occurrence of cogitation. These have no place in the case at hand, since the defect of age precluding liberty is entirely inculpable. Thus the author, in his discussion of complete moral acts of the mortal and venial kind, teaches enough for us to know about incomplete acts as well, as we have made clear.

In other words, a “kind” which makes an act “venial in kind” is independent of the completeness with which the doing of that act is deliberated. Actions get their basic “kind” from their object, that is, from what a person is choosing to do when he or she chooses to do such an action. This object-of-choice concerns grave matter or light matter. If the object concerns grave matter and choosing this object is morally wrong, then the action is “mortal in kind”; and then

- if the action is done with complete deliberation, etc., it is a mortal sin;
- if it is done with incomplete deliberation, it is a venial sin, and
- if it is done without the radical capacity for free deliberation, it is no sin at all but is just an act of a kind that would be mortal sin, if it were imputed as sin.

Likewise, if the object concerns light matter and choosing this object is morally wrong, then the action is “venial in kind”; and then

- if the action is done with complete deliberation, it is a venial sin;
- if it is done with incomplete deliberation, it is a lesser venial sin, and
- if it is done without the radical capacity for free deliberation, it is no sin at all but is just an act of a kind that would be venial sin, if it were imputed as sin.

Thus far, Cajetan’s reply to this dubium seems to me admirably correct and clear. But before we go on, I had better make another point. From the purely philosophical point of view, the objects of human actions are on a continuum from light to grave, so that no sharp division between “mortal” and “venial” sin emerges from a rational, natural-law morality. I shall argue below that the category of “venial sin” is a Christian category, having no application in the life of an unbaptized child. So if the discussion so far had been about “venial sin” properly so-called, and how far such children are excused from it, I should have

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6 On “kind from object” (genus ex objecto), see 2/1 ST 18,2; In II Sent. d. 40, a. 2. Discussion is furnished by W. H. Marshner, “Aquinas on the Evaluation of Human Actions,” The Thomist 59 (1995) 347f.
7 But it can be a mortal sin if the full deliberation contains some special malice: 2/1 ST 88, 2 and 5.
had to take exception to the whole business. But as it is, the discussion has side-stepped my objection. It has been about acts which occur in any life, and which are of such a kind that they would be venial sins, if they were committed by a Christian child old enough to have chosen them deliberately. With that point registered, I think it is safe to read on.

v. To the objections against [us in] the second doubt, I say that to sin venially requires less liberty in exercise than what it takes to sin mortally, since without deliberation one sins venially; but to sin venially does not require less freedom in one’s radical ability, for one does not sin venially apart from the free ability to control individual motions. This ability cannot exist without a plenitude of liberty. Also, the alleged ex-ception to the rule that “what excuses from a greater sin excuses from a lesser” is not a genuine counter-example. For this rule assumes that other things are equal. Well, they are not equal in the counter-example alleged, since the light of reason is present in non-believers, showing them the good morals they do not follow [but the light of faith is absent]. Hence those who are excused from the sin of unbelief (the greater sin) are also excused from the sin of not receiving the sacraments of faith (the lesser), because here other things are equal; neither is familiar to the non-believer, etc. But they are not excused from the sin of fornication, which is prohibited by natural reason.

This takes care of the seemingly nit-picking (but in fact deep) pair of doubts with which Cajetan opened this commentary. Now he heads into the matter central to our concern.

vi. In the same sixth article, two doubts arise over these words, “The first thing that comes up for a person to think through is deliberating about himself.” The first doubt is whether this is supposed to be what is the case, or what should be the case — that is, whether it is really true that this line of thought occurs to a person beginning to have the use of free will, or whether it should occur, since the person is obliged to do this thinking. If it is supposed to be the case in fact, then
  – (a) it makes a false assumption; for the first thing that comes up for a person to think about [in practical reasoning] is the good which is naturally sought.
  – (b) It is either said arbitrarily or because of the case made in the answer ad 3, to the effect that the person himself is the end to which he orders everything else, since the end is prior in intention. But this “case” does not support the conclusion. For one thing, it is false that the person himself is the end, since he exists for the sake of something else. For another thing, if he occurs to himself as the end, it does not follow that there is deliberation about himself [because deliberation is supposed to be about means, not ends].
  – (c) our introspection provides no evidence that this line of thought is the first thing to arise in us.

If, however, Aquinas’ words are supposed to mean that the deliberation should come up, this, too, would have to be proved. And if the proof offered is the case made in the text [in the answer ad 3], then there arises another doubt. Does Aquinas mean that the child himself comes up first as an end or as for an end?
  – If the former is meant, [the claim is false:] a person does not have to deliberate about himself; rather, it suffices that he not love himself more than God. And so no affirmative precept is obliging the child to direct himself [to God] right now; rather what is obliging him is a negative precept, not to love himself inordinately, and
keeping this precept is consistent with doing a venial sin, with wanting to study grammar, etc.

If St. Thomas means, however, that the child comes up as for an end, the words in the body of the article (that one naturally deliberates about oneself) make sense; but the case made in the answer ad 3 has no value. And since this is the only case offered, the whole business has no rational support.

Here we see the doubts which Cajetan encountered in his day about the kind of deliberation Aquinas had pictured as occurring first, and about the kind of precept Aquinas had said was binding upon that first deliberation. Some critics were saying that children reaching the age of reason do not deliberate first “about themselves.” Some were saying that, even if such children do deliberate about this first, they have no obligation to do so, because they are not under any precept about themselves except not to love themselves more than God — a negative precept which one can keep very easily, because it does not impose any particular sort of first deliberation. Now we shall learn what sort of answer Cajetan thought he could make to such critics.

vii. Responding to both these doubts at once, I say that the words of the text are to be understood not only of what should be the case but of what factually is the case, and that the person should be understood as an end in a certain way, and as for an end in another way. To see this, you need to realize that, when an “end” first comes up, we find two things — what is sought and for whom it is sought. The first is loved with desire-love, the second with friendship-love. And since “the good is indeed loveable, but what is loveable to each man is his own good,”9 and “what is friendly for others comes from what is friendly for oneself,”10 the [psychologically] first person for whom a good is sought is the seeker himself. And since what is loved with desire-love is ordered to the person who is loved with friendship-love, and not the other way about, the unqualifiedly first “end” that comes up is the one who is himself doing the seeking, who is the end of all the things desired, and to whom all the desirable things are naturally ordered. Since the end is prior in intention, and the child himself is the first end loved with friendship-love, for whose benefit desire first occurs in fact, it has to be the case that the first thing actually coming up for a child’s will is himself, to whom he orders other desirable things. When this natural event (in which the child naturally wants both the good and happiness for himself) is finished, it follows at once that the child is concerned about what he should seek for himself; for upon this depends what he should do, what he should worry about, what he should endure, and whatever else is within his power. And because the child is loved more as he is in his whole self than as he is in his parts or his partial aspects, it follows that the first thing to concern the child is to deliberate about what to seek for himself as a whole, not for himself in this or that respect. But this is to “deliberate about oneself” and “direct oneself to an end,” since what the child is to seek for his whole self (as mainly loved) is the end to which he directs himself. Thus, if someone seeking for himself chooses an upright good in a vague manner, as is customary at that age, he deliberates about himself well, allocating his end in true happiness, although imperfectly and as though just beginning — no more can be demanded from a child. If he does not choose this way, he is guilty of an omission, as the text says, in the

9 Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VIII, 2; 1155 b 24.
10 Ibid. IX, 4; 1166 a 1.
answer ad 3.

vii. But from these remarks comes the answer to the objections against our first statement, because one is convinced by the argument that a person does in fact come up as the end loved with friendship-love, when the good is the first item loved with desire-love. For everything that is loved with desire is loved for someone, and it is agreed that those things which are not for others are for oneself. Similarly it is proved that (as far as the real order of things goes) the person does in fact come up as subject to deliberation, since he is the one especially loved. And since the real order of things is not perverted by guilt at that point, it follows that the series of thoughts follows the order of nature, as far as their occurrence is concerned. Nevertheless it is true that the will does not necessarily embrace their occurrence; rather, one can fail to deliberate and thus omit, as the text says.

Hence there is no problem about the fact that the good or happiness “comes up first,” since they both come up as objects of desire-love. And it is not a problem that the child himself comes up first “as the end.” On the contrary, this provides the reason our claim is not put forward arbitrarily, since what is especially loved is the end, and concern about it follows first. So the fact that the child himself is the first topic of deliberation follows upon the fact that he is the end loved with friendship-love; for he is an end that can be for another end. On that account, it is not false that the child himself is the end, nor is it superfluous to the intended conclusion. And from this comes the solution to the rest of the objections.

We have now seen the central section of Cajetan’s commentary. Its job was to make plausible — psychologically and philosophically plausible — what Aquinas had said about the dawn of practical reasoning and free choice in a young person. And it has certainly succeeded in part. Let us list its strengths.

First of all, Cajetan’s account has disambiguated the talk of an “end.” That which attracts the will as an end is not just a benefit to be had (a finis quod); it can also be a beneficiary to have it (a finis cui). In fact, the latter has priority in the order of what-is-for-the-sake-of-what — the benefit is for the sake of the beneficiary. And among beneficiaries, there is one who has psychological priority: the agent himself. One first acts for one’s own benefit (i.e. with oneself as the intended beneficiary), and it is thereby that one learns how to act for another’s benefit. “What is friendly for other people” is learned “from what is friendly for oneself,” as Aristotle was quoted as saying.

Secondly, Cajetan has disambiguated the talk of desire. The will’s posture towards the end which attracts it is one of “desire” or “love” for the end. But since there are two kinds of end, there are also two kinds of love for the end: desire-love (concupiscientia) for the benefit and friendship-love (amicitia) for the beneficiary. And each has an exercise which is natural. For just as a child naturally loves certain goods with desire-love, i.e., the goods to which human beings naturally incline (such as food, rest, company, having fun, learning things, etc.), so also a child naturally loves himself with friendship-love.11

Thirdly, with these topics disambiguated, Cajetan has been able to give us a plausible account of an early and important deliberation. Childhood starts with the self-centered pursuit of naturally attractive goods. This we all know, and modern developmental psychology agrees.12 As the child’s abilities grow in

11 On the human will’s natural operation and its natural objects, see 2/1 ST 10.
subsequent years, he or she advances towards maturity in several dimensions. In one, he or she is better able to foresee, plan, control impulses, and carry out projects. In another dimension, he or she is able to understand more subtle goods as possible benefits (such as honesty, temperance, and the other virtues). In a third dimension, the child is better able to act for others and to conceive of a “common good” with others. In the same three dimensions, however, the child over time is always able to refuse maturity, by clinging to impulsiveness, by resenting the virtues as “no fun,” by resisting the interests of others as “no fair,” etc. It seems correct to say that these two directions, towards maturity of character and away from it, compete in the life of every child, each holding momentary attraction and advantage, neither eliminating the other. And therefore it seems inevitable that, at some point, the child will face an issue that brings the competition to a sharp focus, with enough rational thought in play, and enough freedom in play, to make the choice of direction a serious choice about the child as a self, about the character he or she wants to acquire. Facing this issue forces the child into deliberation, because the competing directions each have some attraction. And the eventuating choice (of some good to be had in the forward direction, or of some apparent good to be had in the other direction) is reasonably described as a choice of the child about himself or herself “as a whole.” So it seems right to accept this much of Cajetan’s account. It seems right to admit that this much of it portrays a real event in the youth of any normal person. And for future convenience, I am going to give this event a handy name. I am going to call it “the first character crisis.”

Fourthly, Cajetan has brought God into this crisis in only an indirect way, so that language about God, conversion, or any other religious topic, need not play a role in the child’s thinking. Cajetan’s account allows God to remain below the horizon of the child’s thought, unseen but implicated in one or more of the “upright goods” within the child’s horizon, as the sun is implicated in the first streaks of dawn. Thanks to these four strengths, a Thomism that follows Cajetan will not lead moral philosophy into a ridiculous claim, to the effect that children deliberate first about their “last end” (finis ultimus quod) under some philosophically deep or theistically accurate description, and it will not lead Catholic theology into a ridiculous demand, namely, that unbaptized children consciously keep a precept they never heard of, or turn consciously to a God they never heard of.

But what about the opposite danger? Doesn’t Cajetan’s position turn every good kid and subsequent citations of psychologists from Miss Newton’s thesis. These citations do not imply any endorsement of the wider theories of these authors.

Admittedly, my paraphrase of Cajetan takes his remarks in a particular direction. It is the one imposed, I think, by taking the verb ‘deliberate’ seriously. One can only “deliberate” about something one has consciously in mind as a topic. So, when Cajetan defends Aquinas’ words ‘deliberare de seipso’, I take him to mean that the child thinks quite consciously about him or her “self,” seeking to decide “What shall I be?”, “What should I make of myself?” , or the like, in the context of options like “honest” vs. “tricky,” “nice” vs. “tough,” etc. The reason this footnote matters will emerge below.

As the sun is the source of the dawn, God is both the source and the “end” of the upright goods. For readers unfamiliar with the term, the “upright goods” are those aspects of human flourishing which are willable for their own sake (1 ST 5, 5), such as life, knowledge, integrity, and the virtues. The form of life called “human life” is rationally self-directed life, having the upright goods as the parameters of the mature fulfillment at which it aims. By creating human beings, God became the author of this form of life. He is also its natural “end,” in the sense that human maturity is a finite copy of God’s own perfection; to aim at the copy is to aim at the Original, consciously or otherwise (1 ST 6, 1). This is how God is “implicated” in the goods of character, and these goods are ones which any child old enough to use reason can begin, at least, to understand.
outside the Church into an “anonymous Christian”? Alas, yes, it does. At least briefly. Between the time when the child turns to a good in his or her first character crisis and the time when the same child commits a mortal sin — which could be a short time — the child enjoys the main benefits of Christian baptism. Freed from original sin, he or she must be in possession of sanctifying grace. So he or she is going to Heaven, if death intervenes during that interval. Many will find this position consoling. I find it unbelievable, for reasons which will emerge below.

Meanwhile, let us return to Cajetan’s text, where he is about to handle some further questions about the first character crisis.

ix. In the same article 6 of question 89, one doubt is left about the answer ad 3. Deliberation about oneself takes time, since deliberation happens in time. During the time the child is deliberating, he can sin venially — e.g. he curiously watches a passing horse, during his deliberation about an end. And so, since the child is not obliged to choose a due end before he finishes his deliberation, it follows that he can sin venially before committing a mortal sin, and yet he goes about the work of deliberating about himself as quickly as he can.

To this I say that one who lets himself be distracted to something else during deliberation is not deliberating as quickly as he can. For when strength is united, it is greater than when it is dispersed, and things come about more quickly through greater strength than through lesser, other things being equal. It follows that one who is not distracted deliberates more quickly than one who is distracted. Hence, one who pointlessly considers other things cannot deliberate as quickly, and he freely diminishes his own power. And so he is guilty of omission of the precept by the fact that he let himself be distracted, and could not deliberate as quickly as possible. And although he is not bound before the completion of deliberation to choose, he is nevertheless bound before the end to place no impediment to charity. And by putting such an impediment in place, he sins mortally before the end. The person not doing the work of deliberation before the time that deliberation would have ended sins by omission.

This last is puzzling. How did the topic of charity come up in the discussion of an unbaptised child? If that infused virtue were present in the child’s soul already, in the very process of first deliberating, one could speak of its being impeded. But prior to the good outcome of the deliberation, charity is not present. So what could Cajetan mean? The only explanation I can see is that he is using ‘impede’ to mean ‘delay the presence of’. He must think that the precept to “turn to God” as quickly as possible includes a precept to “have charity in your soul” as quickly as possible. Then anything that delays the arrival of this infused virtue is a sinful omission to keep the precept. Is this a plausible explanation?

Yes, it is. It fits perfectly with the rest of what Cajetan is saying. For as soon as one concedes that the remission of original sin is on offer at the happy outcome of the child’s first character crisis, one concedes that sanctifying grace is on offer at the same moment, and the arrival of infused charity is inseparable from the arrival of that grace. If the one should not be postponed, neither should the other.

Nevertheless, the mention of charity brings to light a very serious problem. Aquinas was explicit elsewhere that charity is importantly different from any natural love of God.15 A natural love goes out to

15 2/1 ST 109, 3 ad 1: charitas diliguit Deum super omnia eminentius quam natura. Natura enim diliguit Deum
God as an ultimate “common good,” the Source of created benefits for all beings, and so a natural love of God can be implicit in the love of an upright good, as Cajetan wanted. But charity is different. Charity is love of God as the object of blessedness and as the one who offers us a supernatural companionship (societas) with Himself. In short, charity is love of God as a personal Being who rewards those who seek Him—rewards them with a good beyond the parameters of their natural maturity. It is impossible to see, therefore, how charity can be present in a conscious person who does not embrace the truth of at least the prima credibilia (that God exists and rewards those who seek Him). But God as this Rewarder is not implicit in natural goods. His companionship with the saints in Glory is not implicated by anything in the natural order. It needs to be revealed. So either the child is getting divine Revelation during his first character crisis, or he cannot finish that crisis in possession of charity! We shall return to this difficulty below.

In the meantime, let us finish Cajetan’s commentary.

x. Concerning the same sixth article of q. 89, two questions arise from the text. The first is whether what it says about an unbaptized child will also apply to a baptized child: is he obliged, at the very beginning of his use of discretion, to convert to God?

The second is whether, if a baptized child is obliged, any baptized person is in doubt as to whether he or she kept this precept; and is he or she consequently bound to confess it like a doubt?

xi. In response to the first question, I say that, since the precept is based on a natural process, and grace completes nature through a mode of nature, there is no doubt but that the [baptised] child is bound to deliberate about himself in the beginning of his use of discretion for one reason, that is, in order to satisfy the precept. But for the unbaptized child, there are two reasons: to satisfy the precept, and to destroy original sin in himself.

xii. But in response to the second question, I’d rather be hearing an answer than giving one. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, since the love of God is never idle, the love infused in a baptized infant proceeds into act in the course of the first natural act, as was said of angels created in grace. And once it occurs to the child to deliberate about himself, infused faith encourages concern about the deliberation, cooperating towards the upright good presented, and inclining his intellect to this; and consequently charity inclines the appetite to the upright good the child ought to pursue. And so he constitutes for himself a true ultimate end, albeit in vague terms. And while this seems true for many, it still does not have to apply to all, not only on account of freedom, but also because of bad temperament and evil habits present before the age of discretion. Thanks to these, the sensual part of the child may move him more readily to accustomed evil pleasures than faith and love move him to the upright good. On account of this, it is very important to accustom the child to hear spiritual and upright things, for the infused habit of faith is focused by what he is exposed to and by way of hearing, and charity follows.

On the need for confession, it is clear what must be said. One should confess and expunge it like other uncertain things, unless perhaps something less suffices for the confession of this sin, namely, a general confession of all hidden sins, since this incertitude is common to the whole human race, thanks to the fact that man knoweth not super omnia prout est principium et finis naturalis boni; charitas autem secundum quod est objectum beatitudinis et secundum quod homo habet quandom societatem spiritualem cum Deo.
whether he be worthy of love or hatred [Ecclesiastes 9:1 Vulgate].

Now we have seen the whole of Cajetan’s commentary, and we can ask where it has left us. The answer, I fear, is that it has left us with two large difficulties.

First, granting that every normal child has a “first character crisis,” as I have called it, why does it have to occur at the dawn of the life of reason? Why does it have to be the child’s first morally responsible use of his or her freedom? The alleged answer is: because “the end” comes first in deliberation, and this character crisis is when the child first faces the issue of “himself as an end” and “himself as for an end.”

I answer: an end is first in any deliberation, but any end will do. As soon as the child has the rationality to grasp any end and the freedom to choose among the means, the child has reached the age of reason; and as soon as a case arises in which one of the relevant means is forbidden by any moral rule the child understands, and another means is permitted, the child faces a decision in which morality is engaged. The end can be as simple as not feeling hungry any longer, and the means can be as simple as begging a snack or stealing one. Why can’t the child’s life as a moral agent begin with that sort of decision?

Don’t say: even that sort of decision triggers the character crisis, because the child who chooses to beg for the snack wills “to be fed and honest.” In other words, the child’s choice not only embraces its object (to beg for food) but also shapes the child’s character (Veritatis splendor no. 65). No doubt, every choice shapes the character of its maker. But not every choice issues out of a deliberation about its maker. The child’s thought may have focused entirely upon the snack and the riskiness of trying to steal it, omitting any deliberation “about himself” as “for an end.”

Don’t say: the child is not a genuine moral agent until he grasps the moral rule in its true depth, addressing his whole self and character. For this understanding of morality is too deep for many adults. People begin their moral lives by understanding that the moral “dos and don’ts” carry special weight, but they think of this weight as the fact that moral infraction brings disgrace, wrath, punishment. Many people never get beyond this. They never come to understand that the sorriest consequence of moral wrongdoing is their own failure as whole human beings.

Don’t say: the end in the example is not a “last end.” Any desired end is one’s “last end,” provided only that one is not thinking (actually or habitually) of any end beyond it, to motivate one’s action.

And don’t say: no, the “last end” has to be complete good. For while this is true, the agent’s complete good is just “all he wants” at the time (or habitually), “all the good he is thinking of” at the time (or habitually). Children are notoriously adept at holding narrow and changing views of “all they want.”

Don’t say: these answers can’t be right, because they trivialize the Thomistic account of the last end. They do not. They simply distinguish the psychological part of that account from the ethical part. In the psychology of volition, one chooses to act in a certain way because some prospect is motivating one to do so; one acts “for the sake of” the motivator; and if that motivator is attractive because of a further prospect, one is acting for a string of motivators. Psychologically speaking, one’s last end is whatever just

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16 This text was used as a proof that people do not know for sure if they are in God’s grace or out of it.
17 The reader can now see the significance of my footnote 13, above.
18 This is one of the (few) points on which Kohlberg seems to be right. F. Clark Power, Ann Higgins, and Lawrence Kohlberg, Lawrence Kohlberg’s Approach to Moral Education (New York: Columbia, 1989), p. 8.
terminates the string of one’s motivators by offering “complete good” as one is currently thinking of it. Ethically, however, one’s last end is what ought to terminate the string of motivators, because it offers “complete good” as one ought to think of it (at least habitually). As St. Thomas himself stresses, many people do fix upon incomplete goods as their last end — things like pleasure, wealth, or fame — but they ought not (2/1 ST 1, 7). So, let it be the case that an end \( E \) (\( E = \) integral human fulfillment, or \( E = \) God, where one finds such fulfillment) is the “last end” in good moral or theological reasoning; this does not make it the case that \( E \) is the “last end” in this man’s psyche, motivating action in this man’s volition.

Similarly with the other type of end: let it be the case that loving \( B \) (\( B = \) oneself as beneficiary) is presupposed for one’s first deliberation, with the result that \( B \) ought to come up thematically in that deliberation (’ought to’ as a matter of good order in practical reasoning). It does not follow that \( B \) does come up thematically. A typical child can take herself for granted as the beneficiary, not think about herself, focus entirely on a benefit to be achieved, and yet understand that benefit clearly “as an end” towards which these and those means would advance her; and she can deliberate freely as between those means, one of which she knows to be wrong. In Piaget’s phase, the child’s thought is “concrete-operational.”

I am inclined to conclude, therefore, that what was for Aquinas the all-important identity,

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\text{first moral decision} = \text{first character crisis},
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is not well established. The line of proof sketched by Aquinas and filled in by Cajetan does not succeed in establishing it. Their proof succeeds rather (I think) in showing that the first character crisis cannot be failed without serious sin, which is an important point, but a different one.

The second large difficulty is the theological one I have mentioned. God as implicated in an upright good is not God as the rewarder of them that seek Him. God as the former is “nature’s God,” the Source and End of the natural order; God as the latter is “our saving God,” the Friend and End of rational creatures in the supernatural order. And however intimately the latter order builds upon the former, in the mode of a new and higher nature, the fact remains that supernatural things are outside the natural order, added to it as a pure gift, in no way implicit within natural things, in no way predictable from them or necessitated by them. Granting, then, that every normal child has a “first character crisis,” and granting further that this crisis matters morally, so that it is mortal sin (in kind) if it turns out badly, and granting still further that this crisis involves God implicitly, so that it is an implicit conversion to “nature’s God” if it turns out well, I still do not see why it has to involve the supernatural in such a way as to put justification at stake. Why can’t it be merely the child’s most significant cooperation so far with actual grace? Why can’t many more such cooperations be needed, before the child or youth is freed from original sin? Why should God settle for anything less than a consciously religious conversion?

Don’t say: because “to those who do the best they can in the order of nature, God does not deny grace.” For even if this claim is true, it only means that God offers actual graces to children who are doing well in their first character crisis. It does not mean that he offers sanctifying grace.

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20 The maxim, ‘facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam’, was used by the older scholastic doctors to
And don’t say: because God has just willed it so — i.e., has just willed to intervene as the Savior in heathen children’s first character crises. For what God has “just willed” to do as our Savior is known only from Revelation; and where, pray tell, is this precise time of intervention revealed?

Don’t say: in the precept, “Turn ye unto me, and I will turn unto you.” For the point at which this precept becomes obligatory is precisely what is in debate. Nothing in Scripture or Tradition says it obliges at the dawn of moral responsibility. So even if the first character crisis is that dawn, which I have given a reason to doubt, nothing proves that the precept obliges at that dawn, or at the time of that crisis.

It seems very reasonable, after all, to propose a different time. I propose that the precept to convert becomes binding when, and only when, a person is conscious of conversion as an option. When the child becomes conscious of God’s claims to exist and be the rewarder of them that seek Him, the child becomes conscious for the first time of an option: to turn to God in a step of faith, or to ignore Him. This, and this alone, deserves to be called “a moment for conversion.”

The upshot of my two large difficulties can be put this way. It looks very much as though Aquinas and Cajetan have blurred together (and homogenized) three distinct events:

1. the child’s first decision as a moral agent,
2. the child’s first character crisis, and
3. the child’s first moment for conversion.

I may concede that occasionally, among precocious and introverted children, event (1) is also a case of event (2). I may concede that often, among baptised children brought up in devout homes, event (2) is also a case of event (3). But I deny that all three regularly or commonly coincide in any class of children. It is possible, I guess, for all three to coincide, if one picks a sufficiently unusual child, such as a prodigy (with an IQ off the charts) raised piously by devout parents. Who knows what goes on at the “moral awakening” of a very young genius? What we do know is that the experiences of the “exceptionally gifted” cannot be extrapolated to the general population.

If these difficulties are clear, we need to see what later Thomistic tradition did to overcome them. After Cajetan’s time, the next important and widely influential commentary on this article was written by a group of Carmelite theologians at Salamanca, known jointly as the Salmanticenses. Their remarks are too long to reproduce here, but we have a later work which will serve instead, because it summarizes theirs. I refer to Charles René Billuart’s *Summa Sancti Thomae hodiernis academiorum moribus accommodata*, first published in 1746. Let us read him on the relevant article, as we read Cajetan. I shall be making interjections again as we go along, and the Latin will appear in a second appendix.

Billuart’s Commentary

mean that God will not deny sanctifying grace to those who cooperate as best they can with His prevenient actual graces. Cf. 2/1 ST 109, 6, with Cajetan’s commentary. Molina was the first to use this maxim to mean that God offers actual grace to those who do the best they can with their natural human energies.

21 That it obliges at this precise time is just a theory; the fact that St. Thomas held it — well, that gives the theory importance but does not give it any more support than he provided in 2/1 ST 89, 6.

22 It is possible, I guess, for all three to coincide, if one picks a sufficiently unusual child, such as a prodigy (with an IQ off the charts) raised piously by devout parents. Who knows what goes on at the “moral awakening” of a very young genius? What we do know is that the experiences of the “exceptionally gifted” cannot be extrapolated to the general population.

23 The text is from the Palmé edition of Billuart’s work (Brussels, 1900), II, pp. 567-571.
Whether man in the first moral instant of his use of reason is obliged to turn himself to God, and whether venial sin can exist alone with original sin.

The first problem is brought up by the second. In the final article of question 89, Saint Thomas concludes that venial sin cannot co-exist with original sin alone, and supports it on the ground that man is bound in the first instant of his use of reason to turn himself to God; if he does, he is justified from original sin; if he does not, he sins mortally. It is asked, therefore [as a first problem], whether there really is a precept that one turn oneself to God in the first instant of one’s use of reason; and [second problem:] given that there is, whether venial sin really cannot co-exist with original sin alone.

§ I. First problem solved.

By the phrase ‘use of reason’ we do not understand here just any kind of “use of reason,” but the use which is full and perfect, which is sufficient for the deliberation of serious matters, for choosing the moral good or bad, for directing oneself to an ultimate purpose of life, and similar things. This perfect use of reason is not acquired all at once and at a stroke, but gradually and successively. For reason is at first totally immersed in the flesh and the senses, but gradually it emerges and develops, as experience shows. How long this takes, whether a week, or a month, or a year, or more, cannot be defined for certain. You will see children five or six years old who have some reason, but whether they have the complete use of reason you will rightly doubt before their seventh or eighth year. It arrives more quickly for those whose organs are well-disposed and in whom the acquired sense-images are well-ordered through careful education.

As an opener, this paragraph of Billuart’s is not reassuring. On the one hand, we have the admission that “use of reason” comes in degrees and arrives gradually. Its arrival is a developmental process favored by good genes and good nurture. All very true. On the other hand, we have this development packed into the years between five and eight, so that what Billuart means by the “perfect” or “complete” use of reason is supposed to be present, normally, in an eight-year old! This is dubious, to say the least. Eight is old enough for a normal child to deliberate some serious matters, I admit, and to make choices in which moral good and bad are recognized. So by age eight, one is old enough for one’s first decision as a moral agent. But is being eight also old enough for a normal child to “direct himself to an ultimate purpose of life”? I doubt it, on empirical, psychological grounds24 — and I doubt it all the more, if ‘direct himself’ is supposed to mean that an unbaptized eight-year old is normally old enough to have a moment for conversion. Again, we see distinct events being blurred together. But let us read on.

Given what we mean, then, by ‘use of reason’, the Angelic Doctor’s doctrine of loving God and turning oneself to Him in the first instant of one’s use of reason, should not seem astonishing or harsh to anyone. For what is astonishing or harsh about the idea that a child — not as soon as he attains some use of reason, but at a later time — after he has used imperfect reason long enough to be able imperfectly to know God or the good of

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24 A young child has a rudimentary self-concept, used in saying, for example, “I want to be a fireman when I grow up.” But “self-direction to an ultimate purpose” seems to require a more mature kind of self-concept, presupposing a higher degree of both foresight and abstractive ability than one typically finds in 8-year olds. Ginsburg and Opper, Piaget’s Theory, p. 220. Similarly Elliot Turiel, The Development of Social Knowledge: Morality and Convention (New York: Cambridge U. Press, 1983), p. 68.
virtue, finally arrives at the full use of reason, where he is obliged to love this and have it for his ultimate end?

I said “know God or the good of virtue,” because conversion to God is distinguished into two. On one hand, there is the explicit and formal conversion to God by distinct and explicit knowledge, either through faith or natural light. On the other hand, there is the virtual and implicit way, by which one proposes to live according to reason, or love the upright good, in which God is implicitly included as the Author and End of this good. The “instant” in which a child reaching the perfect use of reason deliberates about the ultimate end he will fix for himself is not a physical instant but a moral one, extending over several physical instants. But because it takes place in a very short time, it is called an instant.

I say: a human being in his first moral instant of perfect reason is obliged under the pain of mortal sin to turn himself to God, either explicitly or implicitly, in the way of which he is capable and in the way in which he knows Him, or, as the Author says, with as much discretion as he is capable of in the state he is in. Here all Thomists agree, as do many others.

Well, here is the thesis we saw before in Aquinas and Cajetan, laid out in full. The only thing new is an explicit distinction in what the precept, “Turn ye unto me,” etc., requires. It obliges one at the dawn of moral agency to either have one’s first character crisis or else have one’s first moment for conversion, depending on how much one knows. By this move, two distinct events, having, as I have argued, distinct theological consequences, have been turned into two forms of one event, having the same theological consequence in either form.

With his thesis on the table, Billuart turns next to his arguments supporting it. He will have three of them.

Proof 1: [Antecedent:] The first thing that occurs to a person arriving at the use of perfect reason is to think and deliberate about himself, i.e. to what end he and his actions will be ordered. [Inference:] Therefore he is obliged at that time to constitute as his end God, if he knows Him explicitly, or a good fitting to his nature, i.e. an upright good harmonious with reason, in which God is implicitly contained [if he does not know Him explicitly]. — Support for the antecedent. A person is the one for whom all the desirable things are sought. (For as is commonly said, “the good is indeed lovable, but his own to each person,” and “what is friendly for others comes from what is friendly for oneself.” But in regard to God, the friendship good is a means.) However, the end is prior in intention. Therefore what first occurs to a man arriving at the perfect use of reason is to think and deliberate about himself, what he should be seeking for himself and to what end he will order his actions. See Cajetan on this topic.

Well, we have seen Cajetan on this topic, and we are unconvinced because of the difficulties I laid out above. Formally speaking, I distinguish Billuart’s antecedent and counter-distinguish his inference. At the time of the first moral decision, a child is “obliged” to obey whatever moral precepts he or she understands. At the time of the first character crisis, a child is obliged to “constitute as his end” an upright good, etc. At the time of the first moment for conversion, a child is obliged to “constitute as his end” God as best he knows Him. But these times need not be the same, and typically are not.

Proof 2: [major:] It is a natural precept to turn oneself to God as the ultimate
end and to love Him above all things — which, since it is affirmative, does not always obligate but only at a determined time. [Minor:] However, there is no time more fitting and at which it more obliges than the first instant of the perfect use of reason. Therefore if it is not fulfilled, one sins mortally by a sin of omission. — The minor is supported on many grounds. First, there is the reason already put forth, that the first thing which occurs to a person in this instant is to deliberate about himself and order himself to an end. Second, when man first arrives at the use of reason, he enters the world as a moral agent, and begins the path of a life of reason; therefore at that time he is most obliged to fasten himself to a legitimate end, which is of course God or an upright good, to which he directs all his actions; otherwise, he is exposed to continual danger by deviating and losing his salvation. Similarly, one who prudently begins an important journey should set before himself the destination toward which he tends. Third, the other times assigned by theologians for the completion of this precept are not as suitable — not the end of life, not a feast day, not all of life indeterminately, not the reception of a sacrament, not the death of a martyr, and not a forceful temptation. Although the obligation of this precept is pressing at these times, it is just accidentally so in some of them, and in others is no more suitably so than in the first instant of the moral life.  

From these remarks you can see that this is not a novel precept, nor one contrived by Saint Thomas (as indeed some have complained); rather, it is the first and great commandment of loving God and the ultimate end above all things, to which the Angelic Doctor has suitably assigned the time it becomes obligatory.  

Here the crucial thing to do is sort out Billuart’s major premise, because it glosses over the difference between a “natural precept” and a revealed, supernatural one.  

— A “natural precept” is nothing but a universal judgement of practical reason. One is “obliged” by it because of its rationality, and one becomes conscious of being “obliged by it” when one understands its rationality or (in default of that) when one accepts it on the authority of trusted persons. By either route, it enters into the formation of one’s conscience. As Aquinas made clear, the natural love of God is not an inter-personal affair but a devotion to the widest common good (2/1 ST 109, 3), and one does indeed ex-ercise this devotion by turning oneself to an upright good. So the “natural precept” to turn to God, etc., is just a judgement of practical reason to the effect that one should acquire such a character as to be a benefit to everybody. That this judgement is what a child should understand (to some extent) in his or her first character crisis and should follow (as best he or she understands it) in that crisis, is plausible enough. Indeed, I think it is obviously true.  

— The revealed, salvific precept to “turn to God” is quite another affair. It is not a discovery of human practical reasoning but a communication from God. One becomes “obliged” by it in the same way as one acquires it — by “hearing” God saying it (if not outwardly through a preacher, then inwardly). It obliges one to turn to God as a personal Rewarder. This communication is what a child should believe (with whatever clarity God provides) and should follow (with the same clarity) at his or her first moment for conversion.  

With Billuart’s major thus distinguished, it is obvious how to distinguish his minor and his support

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25 What a sterile debate this must have been! Every option considered by Billuart was a time fixed on some extrinsic basis; none looked to the child’s internal, cognitive development.  
26 2/1 ST 90, 1 ad 2.
for it. His argument for when the “natural precept” becomes obligatory is just irrelevant to the issue of when the salvific precept becomes obligatory, because they are not the same precept.

Proof 3: [Antecedent:] To arrive at the perfect use of reason is to discern the morally good from the morally bad; [1st inference:] so in that instant there is intimated, through conscience, the natural law dictating that the upright good is to be done and evil avoided; [2nd inference:] therefore the person is bound at that time to accept that law and to subject himself to it, intending to act according to it. This is similar to the situation in which a person, after the law of the Gospel has been sufficiently promulgated to him, is obligated to accept it at once and is obligated to subject himself to it, intending to live and act according to it.

Billuart’s “Proof 3” is acceptable throughout, because it says nothing about a child’s moment for conversion. The antecedent defines “perfect use of reason” suitably for purposes of a child’s first moral decision or for the first character crisis. The two inferences are suitable for the same two events. In either case, the similarity with a person’s being obliged to accept the “law of the Gospel” upon hearing it is genuine — except in one respect. One cannot hear the law of the Gospel without realizing that its message contains a Lawgiver calling out for obedience; but one can easily grasp a moral precept without thinking of a Natural Lawgiver. Did Billuart think otherwise? Did he think a child could not experience his or her conscience without thinking its “message” was a Voice from Above? Whatever the answer, Billuart now appends a question.

You ask: isn’t a person also bound in the first instant of his use of reason to turn himself to God as the supernatural Author? Response — if this person has been elevated to the supernatural order, he is indeed bound, but by chance many are excused from this precept by reason of invincible ignorance of God as the supernatural Author.

This “you ask” poses a question about the moment for conversion, and in his “response” Billuart makes a serious mistake. A person “elevated to the supernatural order” is a baptized person, and such a person’s “turning himself to God as the supernatural Author” is what Catholic theology calls a conversio morum, that is, the sort of change people make in the direction of their lives when (by God’s grace) they start to take their religion seriously, start to deplore their sins, start to love God seriously, start wanting to serve Jesus, etc. It may be true that a baptized child’s first character crisis should also be a first conversio morum, but let that pass. Billuart’s mistake lies in what he says about the unbaptized, the invincibly ignorant. When the unbaptized child’s first moment for conversion comes, his invincible ignorance of the Gospel excuses him from turning to God as the Church preaches God, no doubt, but not from turning to God as the Rewarder of those who seek Him, and God as that is already the “supernatural Author.” For any call to rational creatures to seek Him (as opposed to just venerating Him), and any suggestion that He rewards those who seek Him (beyond what His general providence secures for everything), is supernatural. This is why the unbaptized child’s decision to believe the prima credibilia and live by them

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27 In Aquinas’ account of the natural virtue of religion (2/2ST 81), religion is about giving due honor and reverentia to God; it is not about seeking Him in hope of His personal reward.

28 In God’s general providence, natural kinds are brought to their natural ends. Man is brought to his natural
really counts as a conscious religious conversion and really is (with God’s grace) a salvific event. With his three supporting arguments presented, Billuart turns to face objections.

Objection 1: It seems too harsh to place so great a burden on a child of that age in which so many do not yet know God; therefore [there is no such precept, or it applies later].

We have given a response to this in our treatise De Deo, where (with the majority opinion) we say that no one has invincible ignorance of the existence of God in any time of perfect reason. But if some do have such ignorance at the first instant of reason, our conclusion does not demand that one be converted to God explicitly, but either explicitly or implicitly in an upright good, insofar as the person knows it. In addition, it is easier to turn oneself to God when no passion as yet confuses reason and attracts the will, than when the movements of the passions veil reason and impede the will, as they do at a more grown-up age.

The objection is correct, of course. Trying to make the moment for conversion fit into a young child’s first moral decision is trying to insert that moment too early. Trying to make the same moment fit into a seven or eight-year-old’s first character crisis is more plausible, but only for baptized, catechized children. As for the unbaptized, Billuart’s response to the objection begins with an irrelevancy and moves into a confusion. To be “excused” from converting to God explicitly, a child does not need to be invincibly ignorant. Being plain ignorant will do, so long as the ignorance is not willful. And whatever may have been the case in Billuart’s Belgium, there are plenty of children today who just do not know that there is a God. As I proposed above, the genuinely salvific precept to convert does not oblige a child until he or she entertains conversion as an option. To entertain it as an option is to see conversion as a possibility with something to recommend it. Until a child believes that God exists, or at least sees the attractiveness of believing that He exists, the child cannot even begin to entertain conversion as an option. Billuart misses this obvious point, because he confuses the salvific precept with an allegedly parallel natural-law “precept,” as I pointed out above. The rest of Billuart’s response, beginning at “In addition,” is very true but does not support his case. He now turns to face a sub-objection.

You object: At least a child can be invincibly ignorant of this precept in that instant, since in fact many learned teachers now deny it, or don’t know of it; therefore at least by reason of invincible ignorance a child will be excused from it.

I answer by denying your antecedent: To arrive at the use of reason, as I said, is to discern the morally good from the morally bad, and therefore the natural law about choosing the upright good one must practice, mediated through the inner voice of conscience, is so clearly exhibited that one cannot be invincibly ignorant [of this precept]. But once this practical proposition of the natural law has been put across by the Author of nature through the voice of conscience, it then becomes incumbent [upon the child] to use reasoning and discourse to acquire new knowledge of Him. This is often clouded either from the passions or from reasons for doubting rising up from elsewhere. This may also end, maturity in being a rational animal, by pursuing the upright goods, but there is no “reward” in that, beyond natural good character and whatever peace of mind goes with it. In other words, “virtue is its own reward;” and apart from grace, in the natural order alone, there is nothing more to be said (except for some sociological generalities about the likely inter-personal benefits of honesty, the likely economic benefits of temperance, etc.)
be how teachers themselves can fail to know a precept which a child does not fail to
know — a child to whom it is put across in a practical way, as I said.

Again the objection is correct; and in his attempt to answer it, Billuart is simply paying the price
of confusing the natural-law “precept” (that you should devote yourself to a good that will make you a
benefit to everyone) with the salvific precept (that you should turn to God by seeking His will and hoping
for His reward). If a child facing his first character crisis cannot be invincibly ignorant of the former, it
hardly follows that he cannot be ignorant of the latter. And if it is incumbent upon a child who converts (at
the right moment for it) to use his mind to learn more about the God he is now resolved to seek, it hardly
follows that this is incumbent upon a child who turns to an upright good (at the right moment for that).

Objection 2: There is hardly anyone even among the most insightful and scru-
pulous people who are uneasy about whether they have observed this precept, or who
accuse themselves of this omission, therefore [the precept does not really exist].
I respond: Many follow the contrary opinion as more probable to them. As for
the others, it suffices if they accuse themselves in a general confession of all hidden
things.

The objection has a point – if this alleged event was so decisive, why has it left so little impression
on anyone? – but it is not strong, and Billuart’s response is worthless. A better response would say that
childhood events are typically pushed out of consciousness by the weight of later experiences.

Objection 3: [antecedent:] A person who has fallen into mortal sin i
s not bound
under the pain of mortal sin to turn himself at once to God, as St. Thomas teaches.
[Inference:] Therefore neither is the person bound in the first instant of reason.
I answer by denying the inference: As is clear from the proofs of the conclusion,
the two cases do not have the same time urgency, i.e., the person who deliberates about
ordering his life and whether he will live according to reason, has a higher time urgency
than a person who has already accomplished this decision and afterwards falls into sin.

St. Thomas taught very sensibly that an adult in mortal sin does not commit another mortal sin
simply by skipping a chance to repent. The situation of a child at his or her first moment for conversion is
different, but Billuart has not succeeded (I think) in putting his finger on the difference. It lies in this:
persisting in an aversion from God is one thing, and consciously rejecting conversion is another.

You infer — From this opinion it follows that just about all baptized children
lose the grace of baptism when they arrive at the use of reason, since there is scarcely a
one who fulfills this precept.
I answer by denying your assumption and the support for it — There are many
faithful children educated as Christians and instructed in good morals who do fulfill this
precept; and towards this the habit of charity which is received in Baptism helps many, as
Cajetan says. He says the love of God is not idle, but inclines the will of the child in his
first moral act to the upright good, unless, on account of bad society or evil habits, he is
corrupted before the years of discretion: so it is very important to instruct children from
their tender years in the things of faith and religion, often speaking of God and the virtues
with them. Parents, teachers and tutors should attend to this.
Here it is clear, I think, that the objection and the answer are at cross-purposes. The objection holds true for the first moral decision; the answer holds true for the first character crisis. In other words, if baptized seven year-olds were obliged, under pain of mortal sin, to make their first conversion in their first moral decision, when they are just keeping or breaking a moral rule freely for the first time, then almost all of them would “lose the grace of baptism when they arrive at the use of reason,” as the objection said. Why? Because they would keep or break the rule without having a life-orienting character crisis. By contrast, if baptized children were obliged, under pain of mortal sin, to make their first conversion in their first character crisis, when they are reflecting on what sort of person they want to be, then many well-instructed children would succeed and would keep their grace of baptism, as Billuart’s answer said.

Objection 4: [Major:] A child in his first instant of reason cannot turn himself to God without sufficient help; but [minor:] not everyone has this, therefore [not everyone is obliged]. — Support for the minor: this help would be either natural or supernatural; it would not be natural, otherwise it would follow that a person can dispose himself to justification by his natural strength, which is Pelagian; it would not be supernatural, since the first supernatural help is the illumination of the faith, and [if everyone got this] there would be no negative infidels, which is false; therefore [not everyone has sufficient help].

This is a very important objection; so before seeing Billuart’s answer, let us be sure that we understand it. The objection is making an assumption and then posing a dilemma. The assumption starts this way: keeping the precept to convert, as St. Thomas understood it, must be a supernatural affair; otherwise, keeping it would not result in justification, which is a supernatural outcome. But, the assumption continues, supernatural outcomes differ from natural ones (inter alia) in this: whereas people can do for themselves what it takes to yield a natural outcome in their lives, no one can do what it takes to yield a supernatural outcome without special help from God. So keeping the precept to convert requires this divine help (and enough of it). This assumption is entirely correct, from start to finish. So now comes the dilemma. Before looking at it, we need to understand the term ‘negative infidel’.

‘Infidel’ was the general word for a non-believer in Christianity. Infidels were divided into the positive ones and the negative ones. Positive infidels were those who believed that Christianity was false. They were called positive because each one verified a positive sentence of the form

I believe that ‘S’ is false,

where ‘S’ states a distinctive doctrine of the Christian religion. The reader will note that, for any person to verify such a sentence, he or she must have learned at least one claim which Christianity makes in fact and makes distinctively. Negative infidels, by contrast, were those who held no belief against Christianity, having never been exposed to its tenets. They were called negative because each one verified a negative sentence of the form

He or she does not believe that ‘S’ is true, nor does he or she believe that ‘S’ is false, (where ‘S’ again states a distinctive doctrine of the Christian religion).

With that much clear, we can turn to the objector’s dilemma. Help from God (or from any other source, for that matter) is either an affair of the natural order or else an affair of the supernatural order.
(there is no third possibility). So the help which an unbaptized child gets to keep the precept to convert is either natural help or else supernatural.

- It cannot be natural without making Pelagianism true, because Pelagius said that people do not need any internal help to get saved, beyond natural things like their own intellects, which can understand what God is asking of them, and their own will-power.

- And it cannot be supernatural without giving every such child enough “illumination of the faith” to make justification possible (in keeping with Aquinas’ own teaching in *De Veritate* q. 14, a. 11); but that much “illumination” in every unbaptized child will make them all believers at the time of their first deliberation, if they accept it, or positive infidels if they do not (and as soon as they do not). So the class of negative infidels is abolished, contrary to the missiological theology of the Church.

If the whole objection is now clear, let us see how Billuart answers.

I answer by denying the minor and its support: One can say either that the help is natural or that it is supernatural. (1) One can say that the help is entitatively natural, but supernatural as to its mode, in that it is conferred from the merits of Christ and is not owed to fallen nature. Therefore it does not follow that a person can dispose himself to grace through the movement of his free will alone, independent of any grace of Christ, as Pelagius wanted. (2) One can also say that it is entitatively supernatural: nevertheless it does not thereby follow that there would be no negative infidels, since that first help is not a faith which is explicit or strictly so-called, but a certain illumination concerning the *prima credibilis*, which does not impede negative unbelief in other matters. Look for a fuller explanation of this solution in the treatise *De Deo* . . .

Billuart says he faces no dilemma, because he can embrace either horn of the alleged dilemma. As for the horn which says the help is natural, I think he is wrong. The idea that a supernatural outcome may result from entitatively natural gifts has no place in Thomism. It was invented by Vasquez and should be ejected from Catholic theology as a whole, because it vindicates Pelagius (though on a ground that the heresiarch himself did not anticipate). But this is not the place to argue the point. Rather, let us turn to the supernatural horn. Here Billuart is on better ground. A divine revelation securing faith in just the *prima credibilis* will indeed preserve “negative infidel” status in other respects. I shall be taking advantage of this for my own theory shortly. But would Aquinas agree that belief in so limited a revelation suffices for justification, in the current era of grace? The *De Veritate* text exhibited above gives a negative answer; but Billuart will show us a path of evasion, when that text is mentioned again, below.

Billuart has now finished the first section of his commentary, devoted to the “precept” to convert and when it becomes obligatory to obey it. He turns to his second section, devoted to the topic of venial sin.

§ II. Second Problem Solved.

I say: it is probable that venial sin cannot exist in someone with original sin alone.

Proof 1. If venial sin could be found with original sin alone, it would happen

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29 For an exposition of Vasquez’ opinion, see J. van der Meersch, “Grâce,” in Vacant *et al.*, edd., *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* VI (Paris: 1925), col. 1581-1582
either before the first instant of reason, or in the instant itself, or immediately after. (1) It would not happen before the first instant of reason, since a person at that point lacks the use of reason and liberty, and so he is incapable of venial sin. (2) It won’t happen in that first instant of the use of reason itself, since he either turns to God and is justified from original sin, or does not convert, and so sins mortally, as the preceding section said. (3) Consequently venial sin cannot exist with original sin alone immediately after the first instant of the use of reason either [because then it coexists either with sanctifying grace or with a previous mortal sin]. This argument is more fully elucidated from the solution of the arguments proposed against it.

Pay attention first to Billuart’s language in stating his thesis. He does not say that it is de fide, or anything of the kind. He says it is probable. In Latin theological usage, calling a proposition “probabilis” meant that it was a candidate for proof. It had one or more good theological arguments in its support, so that, relative to them, it was “provable,” but there also may have been good arguments against it, with rejoinders and sur-rejoinders on both sides, and the whole debate not yet closed by higher authority. Thus a proposition called probabilis was what we call in today’s English “tenable,” and nothing more.

As to what the support amounts to, Billuart’s first “proof” gives us the line of argument that Aquinas advanced in the corpus of 2/1 ST 89, 6 and in its answer ad (3). It is the line of argument which I have already criticized as blurring together three distinct events. It is precisely the blurring into one that makes the room for venial sin disappear.

It might seem, therefore, that by prying these events apart again, one restores the room for venial sin to coexist with original sin alone. But this is not the case. To see why not, one needs to examine the concept of venial sin more closely.

In Catholic theology, and especially in St. Thomas, the distinction between mortal sin and venial sin is defined in terms of our relation to God as our last end: a “mortal” sin is one which turns us away from having this relation to God, and a “venial” sin is one which does not. This relation, vulnerable to being lost through sin, needs to be distinguished from other, similar relations to God which are not thus vulnerable. Metaphysically, for example, God is the “last end” of every creature, man included, because any perfection sought by any creature as its “complete good” is present in God in a higher manner (1 ST 4, 2); as a result, any yearning which our own “complete good” can satisfy, He can satisfy (1 ST 6, 1). This metaphysical relation is one which created yearning — any created yearning — bears to what-God-is, and so it cannot be lost through our sins. It is necessarily there, in the natures of things. On another level, God is the “last end” of every human being by dint of the fact that all of us are “called.” With His antecedent will, “He wills all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4; cf. 1 ST 19, 6). Since God continues to call sinners until their dying day, this relation, too, is invulnerable to being lost through sin. What, then, is the relation to God as “last end” which we lose through mortal sin? The answer comes straight from Aquinas: it is the relation we have to God by intending Him as our last end — by intending to value Him above all things, by intending to persevere in His grace, by intending to reach Heaven, etc. A mortal sin turns us away from having this relation because it is an abandonment of that intention. (We may want it to be a temporary abandonment, but it is an abandonment.)

I have repeated the familiar doctrine because it carries an unfamiliar corollary. The distinction

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30 2/1 ST 72, 5; 88,1; 2/2 ST 24, 12.
between mortal sin and venial sin, precisely as a distinction between sins, is defined as a distinction within the Christian life. This is the one and only life in which faith, hope, and charity combine to give human persons an habitually effective intention to do the things just mentioned — to value God the most, to persevere, to reach Heaven. This is the one and only life, therefore, in which some choices represent an abandonment of that intention, while others represent a deviation from it but not an abandonment.

The same point can be made, and can be made all the more effectively, by speaking the language of the Bible. A mortal sin is a “sin unto death,” and a venial sin is “not unto death,” in the language of 1 John 5:16. A sin “not onto death” can only occur in one who is alive, and there is no “sin unto death” in a man already dead. So the two kinds are applicable only to a man who is spiritually alive. But until a man is “born again of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5) he is not spiritually alive. He is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). So the unto-death/not-onto-death distinction applies only inside the Christian life.

How should one speak, therefore, of the deliberate acts of those who are outside, or not yet clearly inside, the Christian life? Certainly, we are not going to say that their deliberate acts are all morally good or neutral. Many of their acts are morally wrong. And certainly we are not going to say that they “have no sin.” As soon as they are of age, their morally wrong acts are imputed to them as sins. But can their sins be classified as mortal and venial? That is the question. Here are my answers.

— (a) The mortal/venial distinction can and should be maintained in a life dominated by the habitually effective intention to seek God under the descriptions provided by the prima credibilia. For this is a Christian life in voto. In this sort of life, there has been an implicit “baptism of desire,” after which things go much as they do in the Christian life in re, but with vastly less help. The explicit Christian doctrines are not there to focus the mind; the sacraments and their graces are not there to sustain the will; the Church is not there for guidance, and her fellowship is not there for encouragement. But sins and temptations are there, alas, some mortal and some venial. Into this form of life I put the unevangelized children who have reached a moment for conversion and have made one. Since these young converts are free of original sin, their venial sins do not co-exist with it.

— (b) The distinction must be abandoned (though it might be said to have an analog) in a non-Christian life dominated by the habitually effective intention to do and pursue upright goods. There is something of an analog, because at least one can say that moral failures contradict and belie such an intention, or that serious moral failures do this, while lesser failures just “detract” from such an intention. But between the serious and the lesser, there is no clear, sharp, and objective division. Unless the person takes a new resolve, “Oh, bugger virtue; from now on I intend to party,” natural-law morality provides no bright line between abandoning the effort to have a good character and continuing that effort fecklessly. There are only shades of grey. Into this form of life I put the unbaptized children who have passed their first character test but have not yet reached their moment for conversion. These children have begun to form a humanly acceptable character, but they are not yet “alive” supernaturally. So, in the interval between their first character crisis and their conversion, can these unbaptized children sin venially? No, their sin cannot be classified that way. Can they sin mortally? No, for the same reason. Can they sin? Yes. And since they are still “dead” in original sin, the personal sins they commit are just personal ratifications of that death. Now: can one or more of these ratifications be sins “of such a kind” that they would be venial sins if they were being committed by a baptized child? Yes, of course. Everything we know about the conduct of humanly good
children assures us that acts “of this kind” are frequent and ordinary. But now one last question: when this unbaptized child of good character but, in the ordinary way, no “little saint,” comes to his moment for conversion, can his omission to convert (by outright rejection or avoidance of the issue) be an act “of such as kind” that it would be venial, if …? No. The omission is “of the kind” to be mortal, and for essentially the reason Aquinas gave. The moment for conversion is when God’s precept obliges.

(c) The distinction must also be abandoned (and it has no analog) in non-Christian lives dominated by the pursuit of non-upright goods, such as pleasure, power, wealth, or fame. These are humanly unacceptable forms of natural life, however young the ones living them, and they are forms of supernatural death. The personal sins committed in these forms of life— including the personal sin of embracing such a life in the first place— are again just personal ratifications of the death these people have died already in Adam. Here I put the unbaptized children who have failed their first character test. Was that failure itself a mortal sin? No, because of the classification problem. Was it a sin “of such a kind” that it would have been mortal if it had occurred in the life of a baptized child? Yes.

(d) A fortiori, the distinction must be abandoned in a life lacking (as yet) any dominant pursuit at all. Where no self-orientation to a virtuous character is yet in place, there is no set intention for a bad act to “detract from” and none for it to “belie” or “abandon.” Here, of course, I put the unbaptized children who are just making their first moral decision and for whom that decision is not a “character crisis” as I defined that term above. So, in that first decision, can these unbaptized children sin venially? No (so I conclude as Aquinas did, but for quite a different reason). Can they sin mortally? No. Can they sin at all? Of course; by freely and deliberately doing wrong, they ratify their death in Adam; they prolong their original sin into personal sin for the first time. Now, lastly: can this first ratification be a sin “of such a kind” that it would be a venial sin if it were the first morally significant decision of a baptized child? Yes. Of course it can. In fact, the object of the act is far more likely to concern “light matter” than not.

With these points on the table, the reader can see first that I am putting the distinction between “venial sin” and “act of a kind that would be venial sin” to a different use than Aquinas and Cajetan did. They used it to talk about the acts of children too young to have their deeds imputed to them “as sins.” I am using it to talk about the acts of those old enough to have sins but whose sins cannot be classified in this way.

The reader can see second that I am denying four points which I listed above as asserted in 2/1 ST 89, 6, namely:

(6) the divine-law precept to convert becomes binding upon an unbaptized youth as soon as he or she is (a) capable of rational deliberation leading to free choice and (b) faces a decision that first prompts his or her exercise of such deliberation, and
(7) the precept is binding at that point under pain of mortal sin, and
(8) keeping this precept is justificatory for such a youth, and
(9) keeping the same precept is possible for him or her because what it demands emerges, somehow, in what it is natural for a young person to deliberate about first.

I am replacing them with
(6’) the divine-law precept to convert becomes binding upon an unbaptized youth as soon as he
or she is conscious of conversion as an option.

(7') the precept is binding at that point under pain of mortal sin (in kind), and

(8') keeping this precept is justificatory for such a youth, and

(9') a natural analog to conversion is possible for an unbaptized child at the time of his or her first character crisis, because an upright good in which God is implicated emerges as an option in that crisis; turning to such a good has the obligatoriness of natural law for the child at that time but is not justificatory.

These changes come at a price. My scheme is less elegant than Aquinas’. His view was succinct enough to go into a pair of sentences. Mine will barely fit on two pages. But the prolixity of my scheme has all the defense it needs in the fact that it keeps distinct what is distinct. It blurs nothing.

The reader can see thirdly that my scheme leaves open an eschatological problem which Aquinas avoided. Suppose I am right that an unbaptized child making his or her first moral decision is not yet obliged by the divine-law precept to convert, and the first moral decision of this child happens to be a bad one of “such a kind” that it would be a venial sin if this were a baptized child. Where now does this child belong in the next life? Where will he or she go if death strikes immediately? To this topic Billuart, as it happens, is about to turn.

Proof 2 is from inconvenience. If venial sin could be found in someone with original sin alone, there would be no place in which that person could be punished — not the limbo of the fathers, since that is not a place of punishment; not the limbo of the children, since the only ones punished there are those who die with original sin alone; plus there is no pain of the senses there, which pain is owed for venial sin; not purgatory, since only those who die in grace descend there; finally, not hell, since the only ones cast down there are those who have actual mortal sin.

And don’t say that it is the job of Providence to guarantee that a person does not die having only venial sin with original sin on his soul. For even if this is the case, the situation remains inconvenient, for obviously the person is a sinner in this life for whom there is no corresponding place of punishment in the next life. Hence, although a case must not be admitted in which a predestined person dies in mortal sin, nevertheless, while he is in mortal sin, hell is the corresponding place of punishment for him in the next life.

This is the eschatological problem which first appeared in the Sed Contra of 2/1 ST 89, 6. Billuart has given it a fuller statement and headed off a line of evasion. He has also labeled the problem as one of inconvenientia — a sort of “awkwardness” which one’s theology should avoid. In this case, I think the awkwardness is imaginary. Let me explain by revisiting the discussion of mortal sin.

I maintained above that the classification of sins into venial and mortal is a classification which has its proper sense only inside the Christian life (in re or in voto). But it has never been the Church’s doctrine that only Christians commit sins; so the evaluation of acts as sins must be applicable where that classification is not. And it has never been the Church’s doctrine that only Christians can go to Hell. So the sins in other people’s lives must make them “fit” for that final destination also. But beyond original sin, the other people’s sins are all just “personal sins,” among which the supernatural life of grace, by failing to be present, introduces no dichotomy. So these personal sins are all on the same level in one crucial respect: they are all deliberate violations of the “integral human flourishing” which God loves. (After all,
the reason God hates sin is not because it hurts Him but because it hurts us). So, where grace does not introduce the happy and merciful dichotomy between mortal and venial, all personal sins are deliberate violations (not just of a rational ideal, but) of that which God loves. Let it be the case, then, that these personal sins are on different levels of gravity in other respects — some being crimes in most societies, others not; some damaging public trust, others shattering private intimacy. Let it be the case that they lie along ever so many continua, for this world’s purposes, from bad to worse. For God’s purpose, they are all bad enough. Anyone who does any of them violates what God loves, and he who violates what God loves does not love what God loves, and he who does not love what God loves is not fit for God’s company.

Why not simply admit, then, that everyone who dies in original sin with personal sin is damned?

To many people, it seems unfair to assign the pains of Hell to young persons whose sins have only been “of such a kind” that they would have been venial, if a Christian kid had committed them. Those who feel this way are making one or both of two mistakes. The first is to focus too much on the word ‘pains’. The whole point of the limbo theory was to distinguish being damned from being in pain. The limbo puerorum was a part of Hell free from pain (at least physical pain, and Aquinas thought it was also free of psychological pain, like disappointment). Limbo is theologically unfashionable these days, but it is still a tenable theory, and nothing prevents theologians from positing an annex to it, in which the pains are slight.

The other mistake is to forget that being Christian confers advantages in the real, and should do so. The advantages conferred by baptism are very real, and they should not be minimized in some misguided quest for “fairness.” After all, a religion that gives its adherents nothing better than a level playing field with its non-adherents does not deserve to have any adherents.

At the end of his commentary, Billuart reviews three lines of objection, two of which we have met already in reading Cajetan, the third of which is new. Here are the first two.

Against St. Thomas’ fundamental contention there are three lines of opposition. First, a child arrives at the use of imperfect reason earlier than he arrives at the use of perfect reason, as we said in the preceding section; however, the imperfect use of reason suffices for committing venial sins, as is clearly the case in secondary first movements, in the state of being half-asleep, and in the state of being half-drunken. Therefore, before a child arrives at the perfect use of reason, where the precept is urgent that he turn himself to God, he can sin venially.

Second, the first instant of perfect use of reason, in which a person deliberates about his ultimate end, is not a physical instant but a moral one, as we said in the preceding section; hence, many physical instants can be contained within this moral instant. Therefore, nothing prevents a child, before he decides about his ultimate end, from saying an idle word in some prior instant, or from turning his mind to some vain thought.

As I said, these are issues we met before, and I am going to skip Billuart’s answers to them, because they contain nothing of importance beyond what we found in Cajetan and explained above. The interested reader can find the Latin of them in Appendix II. Look now, rather, at this third objection.

31 Aquinas, Summa contra gentiles III, c. 122.
32 De malo, q. 5, a. 3.
Third, supposing that the child turns himself to God implicitly in an upright good, he is not therefore suddenly justified from original sin, since the more probable opinion about justification is that it necessarily requires explicit faith in the Trinity and Incarnation, which the child does not have at that point. Hence Saint Thomas, in De Veritate q. 14, a.11 ad 1, says that in such a case God does one of two things: (1) through internal inspiration, He reveals to this child those things which are necessary for belief; or (2) He leads someone to preach the faith to the child, as He sent Peter to Cor-nelius (Acts 10).

Within the Thomist school itself, this is the crucial objection against identifying the unbaptized child’s first moral decision (or first character crisis) with his or her moment for conversion; and as the objector says, it is posed by Aquinas’ own text in De Veritate. Moreover, Cajetan’s commentary did not deal with this objection. Cajetan did not quote the De Veritate, and he never mentioned the requirements for justification set down therein. So in seeing Billuart’s reply, we shall be seeing post-Reformation Thomism making its own way, without help or guidance from a pre-Reformation master like Cajetan. Without further ado, then, here is Billuart’s reply, which is also the closing paragraph of his commentary.

Against the third objection, I respond that God Himself will act directly to illuminate this child concerning the mysteries necessary to be believed for justification, immediately, in an interior way. Saint Thomas signifies as much in the body of the article, and thus the child is justified at once. Nor is it an obstacle that the holy Doctor in De Veritate says that this child will be provided for through a person who preaches the faith, who cannot be sent in an instant. Saint Thomas did not say this definitely but disjunctively, for the child is either provided for through an immediate and interior revelation from God or through the preaching of the faith. In addition, the mention of instruction “through preaching” can be taken to apply to the points necessary to know for justification by necessity of precept, while the earlier mention of “interior revelation” can be taken to apply to points necessary for justification by necessity of means. But in case one is instructed even about the latter through the preaching of the faith, I respond that it pertains to the providential mercy of God to preserve this child from venial sin. I do not say this for nothing: (1) avoidance of the inconvenient requires it, as discussed in my second proof; (2) it is fitting that God finish the work He began through His grace, and that He give to a person already doing his best with the help of grace the further grace he needs.

There you have it. There is Billuart’s final attempt to reconcile the Summa article with the De Veritate article. Does it succeed? Well, it narrows the gap. It puts to work the distinction between necessity of precept and necessity of means, and to good effect. The credal points about Christ and the Trinity have to be believed with necessity of precept (which means that God’s command has made them necessary but implies that God could have arranged for people to be justified without believing them), whereas the prima credibilia must be believed not only by precept but also by necessity of means (which is to say that believing them is the only means to God’s end, hence absolutely indispensable). This opens up the possibility that an unbaptized child does not get enough interior revelation to know about everything he must believe (eventually) but only enough to grasp the prima credibilia. Good. I am happy to adopt the same point in my account of the “moment for conversion.” But is Billuart’s move enough to solve the problem for Thomists like himself, who refuse to distinguish that moment from a child’s first moral
decision or first character crisis? If the *Summa* text and the *De Veritate* text are to be about the same event, is the gap between the two texts now closed?

One cannot answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. One has to answer ‘yes, if . . . ’ and ‘no, if . . . ’ Here is what I mean. The answer is *yes, if* Billuart had thrown out Cajetan’s commentary. The answer is *no, if* Billuart did what he did — retain Cajetan as the right explanation of the *Summa* article. Here is why.

The *Summa* article required an unbaptized child to “turn to God” in an early psychological event. Cajetan provided a plausible portrait of such an event, which I have called the “first character crisis.” (He blurred it together with the first moral decision, to suit Aquinas’ timing, but let that pass.) What made the portrait plausible was the fact that Cajetan made the “turn to God” entirely implicit. The child was supposed to understand, in vague terms, an upright good; and by turning to that good, the child was implicitly turning to God. Such an event could occur in the life of any child, even one raised in a strictly secular household. This central and agreeable feature of Cajetan’s portrait cannot survive, however, if the event is further described in such a way that the child, in making the same turn, is receiving from God an interior illumination amounting to a revelation of God’s existing and rewarding those who seek Him. For even so limited a revelation brings God out of implicitness, into the status of a conscious topic, to be responded to with faith. Which is precisely what *De Veritate* requires for justification: a small step of explicit faith.

This further description was the handiwork of the Salmanticenses, repeated by Billuart. It was his (and their) attempt to square the constraints set by the *Summa* article with the faith-requirement set by *De Veritate*. The attempt cannot succeed, so long as Cajetan is in the way. For if the *Summa’s* constraints are satisfied in Cajetan’s way, the *De Veritate* requirement of explicit faith cannot be met. Why not? Because one and the same “conversion” to God cannot be to God consciously and to God unconsciously. The account of that “conversion” cannot involve an act of faith and at the same time bypass acts of faith by keeping God implicit.

- Don’t say: the conversion can be to God “consciously” in one way and “unconsciously” in another. For the issue is not how much the child consciously knows or thinks about God, when making his decision, but whether the child is conscious of God at all in that decision.
- And don’t say: the child’s conversion can bypass faith as an explicit act yet contain it as an implicit act (implicit in valuing an upright good). For *De Veritate* sets a minimum propositional object, *p*, such that no one is justified unless he explicitly believes that *p*.
- Don’t say: yes but *p* can be a proposition like ‘This upright good is to be pursued’. No. This is not a point believed; it is what is intended. Nothing but comedy results from turning intentions into beliefs, or beliefs into intentions. Try it: I intend that God exist and reward me!
- And don’t say: the proposition that has to be believed can just be a point like ‘Virtue is rewarded’, which is affirmed as an accompaniment to the intention to pursue an upright good, and inevitably so, because no one can intend virtue seriously without believing that he will be rewarded for it. No. There is nothing inevitable about this belief, and nothing relevant about it either, unless the rewarder is God. As to the alleged inevitability, do not confuse ‘reward’ with ‘benefit’. What a person inevitably believes in intending to pursue a virtue is that he or she will be benefited by it, not rewarded for it. Think of the people who suffer in this life without the consolation of religious belief, clinging to virtue for the sake of their own integrity, with no hope of a “reward” here or hereafter. Are children, though,
incapable of this bleak attitude? Do children, at least, believe inevitably that their virtue will be re-
warded? Perhaps; in fact, I hope so. But many children believe that their family will reward them, or
their society, or the world at large, not God. So their sanguine belief is not always relevant to their
justification.

Don’t say: God can make it relevant by a timely revelation that He is the rewarder. No doubt, He can;
but then the turn to Him is no longer implicit.

This is the central incoherence of the post-Reformation Thomists. They did not see that they had to throw
out Cajetan or else throw out the De Veritate text. They tried to do neither. They tried to keep both on the
table.

What should our own approach be? Suppose we broaden the search for acceptable fixes, clinging
to 2/1 ST 89, 6 but allowing one or another of the other texts to go off the table.

Well, a Thomist will get no relief by abandoning the article in De Veritate, thinking that perhaps
Aquinas changed his mind between that earlier work and the Prima Secundae — that perhaps he decided to
make nothing more than “implicit faith” necessary for justification. This will be the route of Melchior
Cano, Dominic Bañez, and (ultimately) Karl Rahner. But they have no chance of being right. Aquinas
retained his De Veritate doctrine and propounded it again in the Secunda Secundae, q. 2, aa. 5-8. If he did
not repeat exactly the same words, he certainly kept the same substance. An explicit belief is necessary,
and an explicit belief has to be belief in something, and Hebrews 11:6 determines in what.

So the only hope is to take Cajetan off the table, and it is not easy to do that. It was not Cajetan in
his commentary, after all, but Aquinas in his Summa who said that a child’s first exercise of practical rea
son is deliberare de seipso, ad quem alia ordinet sicut ad finem, and that the child “converts” and gets jus
tified in deliberating de seipso in case he directs himself ad debitum finem secundum quod in illa aetate est
capax discretionis. If this debitum finem is not an upright good, what is it? Let it be something else – call
it X – in which God is implicit. So long as God is implicit in X, He is not being believed in explicitly, and
the gap with De Veritate is not closed. So suppose God is not implicit in anything the child considers in
this deliberation. Then He must be explicit in something. Well, God cannot be “explicit” in anything but
the topic of God. So if this article is to be retained but is to be construed in a non-Cajetanian way, the topic
of God must come up when the child first deliberates about himself. What brings it up?

Since Aquinas does not say, one can only make a guess, and here is mine. Perhaps Aquinas
thought that deliberating about oneself, since it brought up the psychologically first beneficiary, forced the
child to raise the question of whether he himself should continue to be the primary beneficiary of his ac-
tions, or whether his works and sufferings should have a larger beneficiary. At that point, a timely reve
lation could present God as rewarding those who make Him the beneficiary of their actions, with the result
that making God one’s beneficiary becomes an attractive option — attractive enough to throw the child into
a state of deliberation: should I act for myself, or should I act for God? Who should be the center of my
life? Should I be the center, or should God? The reader who knows Augustine will recognize the theme.33
And with that theme playing in the child’s head, his “turn to God” becomes a real conversion (not yet to
Catholicism, of course, but to a religion of explicit theism), while his turn to himself, even to enjoy a

33 It is from Augustine’s City of God, book XIV, c. 23; cf. Enarr. In Ps. 64.
momentary distraction, becomes a real aversion (the first and deepest of the sins mortal in kind).

Is my guess a plausible suggestion as to what Aquinas may have meant, if Cajetan was wrong? Yes, I think so. Does it solve the problem of reconciling 2/1 ST 89, 6 with De Veritate q. 14, a. 11? Yes, it does.

Should a contemporary Thomist, therefore, adopt this construal of the Summa article as good theology? Well, others must make their own decisions. Personally I think not. Those who adopt this construal are still trying to keep both texts — the Summa article and De Veritate — as descriptions of the same event, and this is precisely what I think should not be done. Good theology today should be consistent with the data of empirical psychology, and the developmental psychology of children is against the Summa article. Where is the evidence that every child, in making his or her first moral decision, deliberates thematically about himself or herself? There is none. Eventually, yes, a normal child faces this topic; eventually, there is what I have called a “character crisis.” But where is the evidence that unbaptized, unevangelized children, when having this crisis, hear the Augustinian theme playing in their heads? There is no such evidence. And the child must hear it explicitly, mind you, or else the accord with De Veritate is broken.34

In a case like this, correct theological method dictates the following: leave De Veritate, where Aquinas is repeating standard Patristic doctrine, on the table, and take the Summa article, where he is just advancing a personal theory, off the table. That theory needs substantial revision. Let its main conclusion stand — no venial sin for a child still in original sin — but on a ground that does not make the precept to convert oblige the child prematurely. Let the child’s first moral deliberation be set aside as irrelevant. Let the child’s first deliberation de seipso be retained as a revelant character crisis, which is why Cajetan’s commentary should not be forgotten. But let the character crisis and the moment for conversion (upon which the De Veritate sets the faith requirement) be seen as typically distinct events. Then there are no contradictions to be overcome, and no psychological implausibilities (and no room for Rahnerian mischief). There are just points to be salvaged from these texts, and points to be abandoned.

As for loyalty to St. Thomas, it becomes better by ceasing to be blind. For as Nietzsche said somewhere, the pupil pays the teacher a poor compliment, if he remains nothing but a pupil.

Appendix I
Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani: Prima Secundae q. 89, a.6

In articulo sexto eiusdem octogesimaenonae quaestionis, dubium duplex occurrit circa illa verba: Multo magis excusat eum a peccato veniali, etc. Primum, quia aut Auctor intendit simpliciter de veniali: aut tantum de veniali ex genere. Si simpliciter, falsum est quod defectus rationis excusans a mortali, excuset a veniali: ut patet in primis motibus, quos defectus rationis deliberantis excusat a mortali, et non a veniali. — Si de veniali ex genere tantum, non infert intentum, quod originale cum veniali solo non inveniri possit. Dicet enim quipsiam quod puer in originali existens, ante plenum usum liberih arbitrii, incipiens aliqualiter semiuti libero arbitrio, ut contingit in somnolentis, peccare potest appetendo aliquod delectabile

34 This is why there is no profit in replacing Cajetan’s account with one in which God is implicit in something else, such as the very idea of a larger beneficiary. For God as implicit in that idea is God as the widest “common good,” which is God as He is “loved” in the order of nature, not God as He is believed in for salvation, not God as He rewards those who seek Him supernaturally.
illicitum, puta concubitum puellae, quod propter imperfectionem actus indeliberati erit veniale.

ii. Secundum dubium est, unde valet ly multo magis. Videtur enim aut aequale, attendendo ad usum rationis: aut minus, attendendo quod minus requiritur ad faciendum aliquid imperfectum quam perfectum. Peccatum enim mortale constat esse perfectum, et veniale imperfectum: et quod non omne excusans a maiore, excusat a minore, ut patet in infidelibus, qui excussuntur ab infidelitis peccato, si nihil audierunt, et non ab aliis, a quibus caverent, si essent Christiani.

iii. Ad haec dubia dicitur quod, cum in littera explicite dicatur: Multo magis excusat a veniali, si committat aliquid quod sit ex genere suo tale, dubium non est quod de veniali ex genere in illis verbis loquitur. Et intendit quod, puero committente aliquid mortale ex genere, et aliquid veniale ex genere, si defectus aetatis excusat eum a mortali, excusat etiam a veniali, et multo magis. Et quod excuset etiam a veniali, in promptu est ratio. Quia utrumque libertatem exigit, et conve

iv. Et cum contra hanc responsionem obiicitur, quia non habetur intentum universaliter de omni peccato veniali: respondetur quod ex hoc habetur intentum universaliter. Quia peccatum veniale ex imperfectione actus, praesupponit libertatem sufficientem ad peccatum mortale: quia praesupponit quod possit a libera ratione impediri. Unde puero qui a commissio actu mortali excusatur propter defectum libertatis exactae ad praeveniendum, impediri et dominandum his motibus. Et simile esset de somnolento, si nulla praecessisset culpabilis occasio vel superfluitatis somni, vel occurritis cogitationis. Quae in proposito non habent locum: quia defectus aetatis prohibent libertatem, inculpabilis omnino est. Sufficienter itur Auctor docuit, de perfectis actibus moralibus in genere mortalis et venialis tractans, ut ex illis imperfectos etiam sciremus, ut declaratum est.

v. Ad obiections autem contra secundum dubium, dicitur quod, licet ad peccandum venialiter minus libertatis sufficiat in exercitio quam in mortali, quia absque deliberatione peccatur venialiter; non tamen minus sufficit in facultate. Quia non peccatur venialiter absque libera facultate dominandi super singulos motus, quae facultas absque plena libertate non est. — Nec recte instatur contra illam regulam, Excusans a maiore, excusat a minore. Quoniam intelligentur, ceteris paribus. Constat autem quod non sunt cetera paria in instantia: quia lumen rationis est in infidelibus ostendens illis bona moralia, quae non sequuntur. Unde illi qui excusantur a peccato infidelitatis, quod est maius, excusantur quoque a peccato omissionis sacra-menta fidei non recipiendo, quod est minus, quia hic cetera sunt paria, neutrum enim est alias cognitum, etc.: et non a peccato fornicationis, quod est ratione naturali prohibitum.

vi. In eodem sexto articulo quaestionis octogesimaeaenaeae, circa illa verba: Primum quod tunc homini cogitandum occurrit, est deliberare de seipso, dubia duo occurrent. Primum est, an hoc intelligatur de facto, an de debito: idest, an ita sit quod homini incipienti habere usum liberi arbitrii, occurrat de facto haec cogitatio; an occurrere debeat, quia scilicet tenetur ad hoc cogitandum. Si enim intelligitur quod de facto ita est, in primis falsum assumitur: nam primum occurrere est bonum, quod naturaliter appetitur. — Deinde hoc aut voluntarie dicitur: aut propter rationem in responsione ad tertium allatum, quia scilicet finis est prior in intentione, ipse autem est finis, ad quem alia ordinat. Sed haec responsio non concludit illud. Tum quia falsum est quod ipsemet sit finis: cum sit propter alium. Tum quia ex hoc quod ipsemet occurrit ut finis, non sequitur quod de ipso sit deliberatio. — Denumquia non experimur in nobis quod nobis primo haec cogitatio occurrat.
Si autem intelligitur de debito, probandum esset hoc. Et si ratio in littera posita affertur, tunc insurigit secundum dubium. Quia aut intendit quod ipsemet primo occurrit ut finis: aut ut ad finem. Si ut finis, non oportet quod deliberet de seipsio: sed sufficit quod non amet se plus quam Deum. Et sic nullo praeccepto affirmativo tenebitur pro tunc ad ordinandum se, sed negativo, scilicet deliberare de seipso: sed ratio allata in littera, in responsione ad tertium, nil valet. Et cum sola sit allata, omnia sine rationis fundamento restant.

vii. Ad has dubitationes simul respondendo, dicitur quod verba litterae intelliguntur non solum de debito, sed de facto: et de seipsio quodammodo ut fine, et quodammodo ut ad finem. Ad cuius evidentiam, advertendum est quod in occurrente primo fine inveniuntur duo: scilicet quod appetitur, et cui appetitur. Primum est amatum amore concupiscentiae: secundum, amore amicitiae. Et quia amabile quidem bonum, unicuique aut proprium, et amicabilia quae sunt ad alios, veniunt ex amicabili ad se; primum cui appetitur, est ipsemet appetens. Et quia concupiscitur amicitia, et non e converso; ideo primus simpliciter finis occurrunt appetenti est ipsemet, qui est finis omnium concupiscibilium, ad quem omnia concupiscibilia naturaliter ordinatur. Quia ergo finis est prior in intentione; et ipsemet puer est finis primo amatus amicitia, cui primo concupiscitur de facto; oportet quod primum de facto occurreret puere voluntati sit ipsemet, ad quem alia concupiscibilia ordinet.

Completo autem hoc naturali occurru, quo puer vult naturaliter sibi bonum ac beatitudinem, consequens est ut statim de praecipue amato, quod iam occurrit, idest de seipsio, sollicitus sit quid ei appetendum sit: ex hoc enim pentet quid operandum, quid sollicitandum, quid patiendum, et quidquid aliud subest eius potestati. Et quoniam ipse secundum seipsium est magis amatus quam ipsemet secundum partes, seu partiales rationes suas; consequens est quod primum sollicitans puerum est deliberare quid sibi secundum seipsium totum, non secundum hunc vel illum respectum, appetendum est. Hoc autem est deliberare de seipsio, et ordine se ad finem: quia id quod sibi ipsi praecipue amato secundum se totum, est appetendum, est finis ad quem ipse ordinatur. Unde si sibi appetendum censuerit bonum honestum in confuso, ut aetas illa consuevit, bene deliberavit de seipsio, finem suum in vero beatitudine collocans, quamvis imperfecte et inchoative: non plus enim exigitur a puer. Si non, omissionis reus erit, ut in littera dicitur, in responsione ad tertium.

viii. Ex his autem dicitur ad obiecta contra primum, quod de facto occurrere seipsum ut finem amatam amicitia, dum primo concupiscitur aliqui concupiscitur: et cum constet quod non alteri, ergo sibi. — Similiter quod de facto occurrit ipsemet ut deliberabilis, quantum est ex rerum ordine, probatum est: quia est praecipue amatus. Et quia rerum ordo nulla tunc culpa perversus est, ideo naturae ordinem facti series, quantum ad occursum, sequitur. Verum tamen est quod occursum illum non necessario voluntas amplectitur, sed potest non cogitare et omittere, ut in littera dicitur.

Unde nihil obstat quod bonum aut beatitudo primo occurrat: quia ut concupiscibile utrumque occurrit. — Nec quod ipse primo occurrit ut finis. Immo ex hoc habetur ratio quod non voluntarie dicetur: quia finis est praecipue amatus, et de ipso primo sollicitudo sequitur; et sic esse finem amatam amicitia, sequitur ipsum esse primum deliberabile; est enim sic finis, quod potest esse ad alium finem. Et propterea non est falsum ipsum esse finem: nec impertinentia intentae conclusioni. — Et per hoc patet solutio reliquarum obiectionum.

ix. In eodem sexto articulo questionis octogesimaeonae, dubium adhuc superest in tertii argumenti responsione. Quia cum deliberatio de seipso fiat in tempore, quia deliberare in tempore fit; intra tempus deliberationem mensurans, potest puer peccare venialiter, puta curioso videndo transeunte equum, inter deliberandum de fine. Et sic, cum non teneatur ad elidendum finem debitis ante terminatam deliberationem, sequitur quod poterit peccare venialiter ante peccatum mortale, et tamen quam cito potest, dat operam deliberationi de seipsio.

Ad hoc dicitur quod non quam citius potest deliberat, qui inter deliberandum ad aliud divertit. Cum enim virtus unita sit maiore seipsa dispersa; et a maiori virtute citius fiat aliquid quam a minore, ceteris
partibus; consequens est ut citius deliberet non divertens quam divertens. Ac per hoc, qui ad aliiu aspicit vane, non quam cito potest deliberat, libere vim suam minuens. Et sic reus est omissionis praecepti, divertendo, non quam cito potest deliberando. Et quamvis non teneatur ante terminum deliberationis eligere, tenetur tamen ante terminum nullum impedimentum apponere caritati. Et propter ea apponendo peccat mortaliter, ante terminum: sicut deliberationi operam non dans ante instans quod terminasset deliberationem, peccat omissione.

x. Circa eundem articulum sextum quaestionis octogesimaenae, duplex quaestio ex dictis insurget. Prima est an infans baptizatus teneatur in principio suae discretionis ad conversionem in Deum, sicut de non baptizato dictum est.

Secunda est, quod si teneatur, an quilibet baptizatus sit de hac praecepti observatione dubius; et teneatur consequenter confiteri tamquam de dubio.

xi. Ad primam quaestionem dicendum est quod, cum praeceptum illud fundetur super processu naturae; et gratia perficiat naturam per modum naturae: absque dubio tenetur puer baptizatus ad deliberandum de seipso in principio suae discretionis, una ratione, scilicet propter impletionem praecepti. Non baptizatus vero, duabus rationibus: scilicet propter praeceptum praeceptuum, et propter delendum peccatum originale.

xii. Ad secundam vero libentius audirem quid dicendum, quam dicerem. Videtur tamen mihi quod, quia nunquam est amor Dei otiosus, caritas infusa baptizato infantii exit in actum in primo actu naturali: sicut de angelis, creatis in gratia, dictum fuit. Et quod statim occurrit seipso ut deliberabili, infusa fides deliberandi sollicitudinem foveat, ad bonum honestum praesentandum cooperando, inclinando ad hoc intellectum; et consequenter caritas inclinet appetitum ad honestum praenuntiandum. Et sic constituet sibi verum ultimum finem, quamvis confesse. — Et licet hoc videatur verum ut in pluribus, non oportet tamen in omnibus sic esse: non solum propter libertatem; sed propter complexionem, et malam asseantur in intellectum, unde fit quod pars sensitiva magis moveat ad assuetudinem alicuius, quam fides et caritas ad honestum. Propter quod non parvi refert ut assuescat puer ad audiendum spiritualia et honesta: determinatur enim habitus fidei infusus ex propositis ex auditu, et caritas illam sequitur.

De confessionis autem necessitate patet quid dicendum. Debet enim conteri et confiteri quis sicut de aliis incertis. Nisi quod aliquod minus ad confessionem huic sufficere videtur, scilicet in communi confiteri de occultis, intendendo de omnibus: quia incertitudo ista communis est toti generi humano, propter quod nemo scit utrum odio vel amore dignus sit.

Appendix II

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Utrum Homo in Primo Instanti Morali Usus Rationis Teneatur Se Convertere ad Deum, Possitque Esse Peccatum Veniale Cum Solo Originali?

Prima difficultas movetur occasione secundae. S. Thomas enim resolvens art. ult. hujus q. 89, peccatum veniale non posse esse cum solo originali, id probat; quia homo tenetur in primo instanti usus rationis se convertere ad Deum; quod si faciat, justificantur a peccato originali, sin non faciat, peccat mortaliter. Quaeritur itaque an revera detur praeceptum se convertendi ad Deum in primo instanti usus rationis? Et hoc dato, an peccatum veniale non possit esse cum solo originali?

1. Prima Difficultas Resolvitur: Nomine usus rationis non intelligimus hic qualcumque usum rationis, sed plenum et perfectum, qui sufficiat ad deliberandum de rebus gravibus, de eligendo bono vel malo morali, de constituto sibi ultimo fine vitae, et similium. Hic autem usus rationis perfectus non simul et semel acquiritur, sed paulatim et successive. Ratio enim primum carnii et sensibii tota immensa,
paulatim emergit et sensim se evolvit, ut experientia constat: quantum autem temporis ad id requiratur, an hebdomada, an mensis, an annus aut amplius, certo definiri non potest: videbis enim pueros quinquennes aut sexcennes habere aliquid rationis, sed an usum perfectum habeant, merito dubitabis ante septennium vel octennium. Citius advenit iis quorum organa sunt bene disposita et in quibus species sensibiles acquisitae per accuratam educationem bene ordinatur.

Et hinc jam apparet nemini debere videri miram aut duram doctrinam Doctoris Angelici de obligatione diligendi Deum, et se ad illum convertendi in primo instanti usus rationis. Quid enim mirum aut durum quod puer, non mox ut aliquem usum rationis attigisset, sed tunc demum cum post usum rationis imperfectum forte satis diuturnum quo potuit imperfecte cognoscere Deum aut bonum virtutis, tandem perveniasset ad plenum usum in quo illum diligere et habere pro fine ultimo teneatur.

Dixi illum aut illud, quia duplex distinguitur conversio ad Deum, una explicita et formalis ad Deum distincte et explicite cognitum, sive per fidem, sive per lumen naturale: altera virtualis et implicita qua quis proponit vivere secundum rationem, aut amat bonum honestum in quo Deus ut hujus boni auctor et finis implicite continetur. Instans quo puer, qui pervenisset ad perfectum usum rationis, deliberaret de ultimo fine sibi praefigendo, non est physicum, sed morale plura instantia physica completae, quia tamen id fit brevissimo tempore dicitur instans.

Dico: Homo in primo instanti morali usus perfecti rationis tenetur sub mortali se convertere ad Deum, vel explicite, vel implicite, eo modo quo potest et eum cognoscat, seu, ut dicit auctor, secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis. Ita omnes Thomistae quibus subscribunt plures extranei.

Prob. 1. Id quod primum occurrit homini ad usum perfectum rationis pervenienti est cogitare et deliberare de seipso, ad quem scilicet finem se suasque actiones sit ordinaturas: ergo tenetur tunc sibi constituere Deum pro fine, si illum explicite cognoscat, aut bonum suae naturae conveniens, nempe bonum honestum et rationis consonum in quo Deus implicite continetur. Prob. ant.: homo est finis cui omnium concupiscibilium; quia, ut dicitur, “amicabilia quae sunt ad alios, veniunt ex amicabilibus ad se”: respectu autem Dei est medium: atque finis est prior in intentione: ergo quod primum occurrit homini pervenienti ad perfectum usum rationis est cogitare et deliberare de seipso, quid sibi appetendum et ad quem finem sit se suasque actiones ordinaturas. Vide Cajetan in hunc locum.

Prob. 2. Est praeceptum naturale se convertendi ad Deum ut ultimum finem et ipsum super omnia diligendi, quod cum sit affirmativum, non obligat pro semper, sed determinato tempore: atqui nullum est tempus quod sit magis conveniens et in quo magis obliget quam primum insans perfecti usus rationis: ergo si tunc non impleatur, peccetur mortaliter peccato omissionis. Prob. min. multipliciter: 1 ex ratione jam facta quod primum quod occurrit homini in hoc instanti sit deliberare de seipso in ordine ad finem; 2 dum homo primum pervenisset ad usum rationis, mundum tanquam agens morale ingreditur et viam vitae rationis incipit: ergo tunc maxime tenetur sibi praefigere finem legitimum, nempe Deum, vel bonum honestum, ad quem omnes suas actiones dirigat, alioquin exponi intemperis periculo devianti et perpendi salutem; sicut qui prudenter inchoat magnum iter, debet sibi praefigere terminum in quem tendat. 3 Quia alia tempora assignata a theologis ad impletionem hujus praecepti, non ita sunt convenientia; non finis vitae, non dies festivi, non tota vita indeterminate, non susceptio alicuius sacramenti, non casus martyrii, non urgent tentatio: quia, dato in his temporibus urget obligatio hujus praecepti, in quibusdam est per accidens, in alii non magis nec ita conveniunt sicut in primo instanti vita moralis.

Ex his colliges hoc praeceptum non esse novum, nec a S. Th. excogitatum, ut quidam dicitant, sed esse primum et magnum mandatum dilectionis Dei et ultimo finis super omnia, cujus obligationis tempus congrue assignavit Doctor Anglicus.

Prob. 3. Pervenire ad usum perfectum rationis est discernere inter bonum et malum morale, sicque pro eo instanti intimatur per synderesim lex naturalis dictans bonum honestum esse faciendum et malum fugiendum: ergo tenetur tunc homo illam legem acceptare et ei se subjicere proponendo agere secundum illam; sicut dum lex evangelica est aliqui sufficienter promulgata, tenetur statim eam acceptare, seque illi subjicere proponendo vivere et agere secundum illam.
Petes utrum etiam non teneatur homo in primo instanti usus rationis se convertere ad Deum ut Auctorem supernaturalem? Resp. supposita elevatione illius ad ordinem supernaturalem per se quidem teneri, sed multis per accidentis ab hujus praecpti obligatione excusari ratione ignorantiae invincibilis Dei ut Auctoris supernaturalis.

Obj. 1: Durum nimis videtur imponere tantum onus pueris in ea aetate in qua ut plurimum nondum Deum cognoscunt: ergo.

Resp. 1 nos in tract. de Deo, cum communiori sententia, nullum pro ullo tempore rationis perfecte agnovisse ignorantiam invincibilem de Dei existentia. Sed dato dari pro illo primo instanti rationis, conclusio non exigit quod ad Deum explicite cognitum convertatur, sed vel explicite vel implicite in bono honesto, prout eum cognoscit. Insuoper facilius est tunc se convertere ad Deum quando nulla adhuc passio rationem turbat, et voluntatem allicit, quam cum motibus passionum in provectioni aetate ratio obnubilatur et voluntas impetitur.

Inst. 4: Saltem puer in inso instanti potest ignorare invincibiliter hoc praecptum, siquidem nunc multi doctores illud negent et ignorent: ergo saltem ratione ignorantiae invincibilis ab illo excusabitur.

Resp. neg. ant. Quia pervenire ad usum rationis, ut dixi, est discernere inter bonum et malum morale, ideoque tunc mediante dictamine syndereseos lex naturalis de eligendo bono honesto se practice et tam clare exhibit, ut non possit invincibilem ignorari: transacta autem hac legis naturalis practica propositione facta ab Auctore naturae mediante dictamine synderesis, opus est ad novam ejus cognitionem acquirendum uti ratiocinio et discursu, qui vel a passionibus vel rationibus dubitandi aliunde insurgentibus saepe obnubilatur: unde fit quod modo etiam ipsi doctores possunt istud praecptum ignorare, quod non ignorat puer cui practice intimatur, ut dictum est.

Inst. 2: Vix ullus est etiam inter doctos et timoratos qui anxius sit an observaverit istud praecptum, aut de ejus omissione se accuset: ergo.

Resp. plures sequi opinionem contrariam ut sibi probabiliorem. Quantum ad alios, sufficit si se accusent in commun de omnibus occultiis.

Inst. 3: Homo lapsus in peccatum mortale non tenetur sub mortali se statim convertere ad Deum, ut docet S. Th. Ergo nec in primo instanti rationis.

Resp. neg. conseq. Quia, ut patet ex probationibus conclusionis, non est eadem ratio prioris temporis illius quo quis deliberat de vita instituenda et an sit vivendum secundum rationem, et illius, quo hoc semel posito, deinceps labitur in peccatum.

Infere: Ex hac sententia sequitur omnes ferme pueros baptismalem cum perveniunt ad usum rationis, quia vix est unus qui hoc praecptum impleat.

Resp. neg. ant. et ejus probationem. Sunt enim multi pueri fidelium christiane educati et probis moribus instructi qui hoc praecptum adimplent; et ad hoc multum juvat, ait Cajetan, habitus charitatis quem reciperunt in baptismo: quia, inquit, amor Dei non est otiosus et inclinat voluntatem pueri in primo actu moralis ad bonum honestum, nisi propter malum complexionem, aut malam assuetudinem ante annos discretionis impediat: unde multum interest imbuerre pueros a teneris annis rebus fidei et religionis, saepe de Deo et virtutibus cum ipsis loqui. Ad haec attendant parentes, magistri et tutores.

Obj 2: Puer in primo instanti rationis non potest se convertere ad Deum sine auxilio sufficienti: atqui non omnes illud habent: ergo. Prob. min.: vel istud auxilium foret naturale vel supernaturale; non naturale, aliqquin sequetur quod homo posset viribus naturae se disponere ad justificationem, quod Pelagianum est; non supernaturale, quia primum auxilium supernaturale est illuminatio fidei, sicque nulli forent infideles negative, quod est falsum: ergo.

Resp. neg. min. et ejus probationem: nam utrumque potest dici, nimirum hoc auxilium esse naturale vel supernaturale. 1) Dici potest quod sit naturale entitative quidem, sed supernaturale quod modum, quatenus collatum ex meritis Christi et indebitum naturae lapsae: et sic non sequitur quod homo possit se disponere ad gratiam per solum motum liberis arbitrii independenter a quavis gratia Christi, ut volebat Pelagius. Potest etiam dici quod sit supernaturale entitative: nec tamen inde sequitur non dari infideles negative; quia istud primum auxilium non est fidei explicitae et strictae dictae, sed quaedam
illuminatio circa prima credibilium, quae non impediat infidelitatem negativam circa alia. Hanc solutionem fusius explicatam require in tract. de Deo dissert. 7. a. 8. sectio 2 obj. 5 inst. 2.

II. Secunda Difficultas Resolvitur: Dico: Probabile est peccatum veniale non posse esse in aliquo cum solo originali.

Prob. 1. Si posset in homine reperiri veniale cum solo originali, id contingeret vel ante primum instans rationis, vel in ipso instanti, vel immediate post: non ante primum instans rationis, quia tunc homo caret usu rationis et libertate, sicque est incapax peccati venialis: non in ipso instanti usus rationis, quia vel convertitur ad Deum et justificatur a peccato originali, vel non convertitur, et sic peccat mortaliter, ut dictum est ¶ praecedentem; consequenter nec immediate post primum instans potest esse veniale cum solo originali. Haec ratio magis elucidatur ex solutione argumentorum quae contra illum proponuntur.

Prob. 2 ab inconvenienti. Si veniale repeririur in aliquo cum solo originali, non esset locus in quo iste homo posset puniri: non lymbus patrum, quia non est locus puniti; non lymbus puerorum, quia ibi solum punitur qui decedunt cum solo originali, nec ibi est poena sensus quae debetur peccato veniali; non purgatorium, quia in illud descendunt hi soli qui moriuntur in gratia; non tandem infernum, quia ad illum solum detruduntur qui habent peccatum mortale actualis.

Neque dicas ad Providentiam pertinere ut non moriatur homo habens solum veniale cum originali: nam hoc dato remanet inconveniens, scilicet esse hominem peccatorem in hac vita, cujus statui non responseat locus puneionis in altera vita. Unde quamvis non sit admittendum casus in quo praedestinationis moriatur in peccato mortali, dum tamen est in peccato mortali, respondet ei infernum pro loco puneionis in altera vita.

Contra rationem fundamentalem S. Th. tria opponuntur: primum, puer prius pervenit ad usum rationis imperfectum quam ad perfectum, ut diximus in praenotaminibus ¶ praecedentem: atqui imperfectus usus rationis sufficit ad peccandum venialiter, ut patet in motibus secundoprimis, in semi-dormientibus et semi-ebriis: ergo antequam puer perveniat ad usum perfectum rationis in quo urget praeceptum se convertendi ad Deum, potest peccare venialiter.

Secundum, instans primum perfect usus rationis in quo deliberat homo de ultimo fine, non est instans physicum sed morale, ut etiam diximus ¶ praecedentem: proinde complectitur plura instantia physica, nihil ergo impediat quominus puer antequam ultimate statuat de fine, dicat in aliquo priori instanti verbum otiosum, aut divertat mentem ad aliquam vanam cogitationem.

Tertium, supposito quod puer se convertat ad Deum implicito in bono honesto, non ideo statim justificabitur a peccato originali: quia ad justificationem juxta probabiliorem sententiam, necessario requiritur fides explicata Trinitatis et Incarnationis quam tune non habet. Unde S. Th. q. 14 de Veritate a. 11. ad 1, dicit quod in tali casu Deus huic pueru “vel per internam inspirationem revelaret ea quae sunt ad credendum necessaria, vel aliquem fidei praedicatorem ad eum dirigeret, sicut misit Petrum ad Cornelium, Act. 10.”

Non diffiteor haec argumenta primo aspectu videri difficilia: nihilominus.

Resp. ad primum: Imaginis sit quaeus de peccato veniali ex genere, seu ex levitate materiae, videtur certum non posse dari usum rationis qui sufficiat ad tale peccatum veniale et non sufficiat ad mortale; quia facilis cognoscurt grave malum quam leve: sic qui cognoscit verbum otiosum, mendacium jocosum, furtum unius assis esse malum, a fortiori cognoscit perjuria, homicidium, furtum centum aureorum esse malum: unde non potest esse difficultas nisi de peccato veniali ex subreptione et imperfecta deliberacione. Ad quod pariter dicimus puerum non acquirere usum rationis imperfectum sufficientem ad peccandum venialiter ex subreptione et indeliberatione, qui non sit sufficiens ad peccandum mortaliter: quia ad peccandum venialiter ex subreptione et indeliberatione non sufficit quod agens non deliberet perfecte actu, sed requiritur quod habeat facultatem perfecte deliberandi et dominandi supra singulos suos actos, licet non super omnes; puer autem ante usum perfectum rationis qui requiritur ad mortale, non habet hanc facultatem; eam autem habet semi-dormiens et semi-ebrius, et quicumque qui post perfectum usum rationis adeptum peccat venialiter et imperfecte actus.
possit perfecte deliberare, jam non peccaret tantum venialiter, sed etiam mortaliter.

Resp. dist. sequelam: si posset perfecte deliberare potestia expedita, conc.; potestia impedita, neg. Spectando ergo praecise facultatem rationis, isti sunt in statu perfecte deliberandi et dominandi supra singulos suos actus, sed cum in his soleat fortius operari phantasia, et appetitus sensitivus vehementius moveri, occurrantque variae cogitationes quibus facile distrahantur, hinc contingit quod aut inculpabiliter, aut absque gravi culpa non perfecte actu deliberent.

Sunt haesolutiones communes Thomistarum post Cajetanum, quibus addunt Salmantic. apud Gonetum, dato esse aliquam imperfectam libertatem in puero ante perfectum usum rationis; haec tamen non est ad agendum indifferenteret moraliter, sed physicum tantum; quia ad agendum indifferenteret et libere moraliter, debet adesse notitia consonantiae vel dissonantiae actus ad regulas morum, quae non habetur nisi per perfectum usum rationis.

Ad secundum, resp. cum eodem Cajetano quod toto illo brevi intervallo quo puer deliberat de ultimo fine, non possit voluntarie divertere mentem ad verbum otioso, aut ad aliquid simile absque culpa mortali, quia lege intimata et urgente obligationem praecipui mediante dictamine speciali syndereseos ab Auctore naturae impresso, si mentem alio voluntarie divertat, retardat et omissit adimpletionem praecipui hic et nunc urgentis, sicut si omitteret in fine deliberationis. Unde dicit auctor: “A peccato omissionis praedictae non liberatur nisi quam cito potest se convertat ad Deum.”

Ad tertium, resp. quod Deus hunc puerum per seipsum immediate illuminabit interius circa mysteria necessario credenda ad justificationem, ut significat hic S. Th. in corpore articuli, sicque statim justificabitur. Neque obstat quod S. Doctor q. cit. de Veritate dicat hunc puerum fore instruendum per praedicatorum fidei, qui non potest mitti in instanti; hoc enim non dixit determinate S. Th., sed disjunctive, nempe vel instruendum per immediatum et interiorem a Deo revelationem, vel praedicatorum fidei. Insuper potest intelligi de instructione per praedicatorum, quoad ea quae sunt scitu necessaria necessitate preceptui, prius interius revelatis quae sunt scitu necessaria necessitate medii ad justificationem. Sed dato quod sit de his instruendus per praedictorem fidei, resp. ad misericordem Dei providentiam pertinere ut praeservet hunc puerum a peccato veniali. Neque id gratis dico: 1) id exigit inconvenientis vitandum, de quo in secunda probatione; 2) decet ut qui opus per suam gratiam incepit, perficiat, et facienti quod in se est ex auxilio gratiae, ubiorem gratiam necessarium largiatur.