

University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
September 30, 1933

Temptation and Sin.

A prolonged, violent storm of suggestive thoughts, or images in the senses, imagination, or memory. Some pleasure. Some resistance. Have I sinned? Does pleasure, or frequency, or persistence of temptations unfailingly indicate sin? If not, what is the criterion by which I can judge when temptation changes into sin?

Pleasure -- involuntary pleasure -- on the part of the lower faculties -- the senses, imagination, or memory -- is often necessary, spontaneous, when a certain image is present, just as pleasant taste spontaneously, necessarily (for most people, at least) accompanies a sip of rare wine. Involuntary pleasure accompanying the image doesn't make sin. It constitutes the temptation, the allurement to sin.

Frequency and violence of temptations depend upon temperament and character, upon education and past and present environment, sometimes even upon the providential designs of God, as well as upon our own fault.* They cannot, therefore, be an unerring criterion of guilt.

Sin, mortal or venial, cannot happen unless the intellect recognizes the presence of the evil thought or image and there is at least some consent of the will. Once you are aware that the pleasure is sinful, you have poison in your rare wine. Swallow, and you swallow death.

Since, then, consent of the will is the factor necessary for sin, what signs are there by which I can judge whether, or the degree in which, my will yielded to a temptation?

There is no consent, hence no sin, if a feeling of disgust with the temptation has been present, or if you turn to prayer, or to any other legitimate and attractive thought (such as a football game) to distract the intellect and will.

There is some consent, hence venial sin

If before repelling the temptation you momentarily hesitate, not wanting to offend God, yet wishing to relish the forbidden pleasure;

If resistance is real but feeble, indolent. Half-resistance is half-consent and venial sin.

Consent is full and gravely sinful when, despite the protests of conscience which recognizes the gravity of the evil, the will acquiesces in the pleasure presented to it in the temptation.

If, in spite of this knowledge of the distinction between sin and temptation, you still have difficulty in a particular case, consult your confessor. If your conscience is lax the presumption is against you; if you have a delicate conscience, not in the habit of yielding consent, you are most probably free, at least from serious sin.

*Sometimes there is culpability in causing the temptation. In the words of St. Francis de Sales, "If I know that some certain conversation leads me to temptation and to a fall, and I do voluntarily engage therein, I am, doubtless, culpable for all the temptations that shall arise."

October Devotions.

They begin Sunday night with services at 7:00 and 7:30 in Sacred Heart church. On week days throughout the month they will be held in the Basement Chapel at 5:00 p.m. Be sure to give Father O'Donnell a big share of your October prayers.