

~Other Speakers A-F: St. Augustine:

17. But among all these vices and crimes and manifold iniquities, there are also the sins that are committed by men who are, on the whole, making progress toward the good. When these are judged rightly and after the rule of perfection, the sins are censured but the men are to be commended because they show the hope of bearing fruit, like the green shoot of the growing corn. And there are some deeds that resemble vice and crime and yet are not sin because they offend neither thee, our Lord God, nor social custom. For example, when suitable reserves for hard times are provided, we cannot judge that this is done merely from a hoarding impulse. Or, again, when acts are punished by constituted authority for the sake of correction, we cannot judge that they are done merely out of a desire to inflict pain. Thus, many a deed which is disapproved in man's sight may be approved by thy testimony. And many a man who is praised by men is condemned--as thou art witness--because frequently the deed itself, the mind of the doer, and the hidden exigency of the situation all vary among themselves. But when, contrary to human expectation, thou commandest something unusual or unthought of--indeed, something thou mayest formerly have forbidden, about which thou mayest conceal the reason for thy command at that particular time; and even though it may be contrary to the ordinance of some society of men[78]--who doubts but that it should be done because only that society of men is righteous which obeys thee? But blessed are they who know what thou dost command. For all things done by those who obey thee either exhibit something necessary at that particular time or they foreshow things to come.