

## THE SACRAMENTAL GRACE OF PENANCE

### *Introduction*

The sacraments were instituted by Our Lord, writes St. Thomas, for two ends: to perfect man in things pertaining to divine worship according to the religion of the Christian life and to provide him with a remedy against the devastating effects of sin. In the broadest meaning of the term all these effects gratuitously bestowed by God upon the recipients of the sacraments may be called sacramental graces. These would include sanctifying grace; the special grace which is an effect proper to each sacrament; and lastly, the character. According to common usage, however, sacramental grace is distinguished from the character and refers to the primary sacramental effect, sanctifying grace as including the grace ordained to the special effects of the individual sacraments.

There is no question concerning the fact that sanctifying grace is conferred by all the sacraments of the New Law. It is the express teaching of the Council of Trent that the sacraments both contain and confer the grace which they signify.<sup>1</sup> Moreover it is theologically certain that each of the sacraments has a special effect.<sup>2</sup> In the evolution of sacramental dogma theologians, following both revelation and tradition as expressed in the Fathers, came to consider these special effects in a generic concept in some way different from sanctifying grace in general and for this concept they reserved the name of "sacramental grace." St. Thomas writes of the use of sacramental grace in this restricted sense in the *Sentences*: "Whence this effect does not have a special name but retains the name of its cause, and is said to be sacramental grace."<sup>3</sup>

Our purpose within the limited scope of this paper is to determine the nature of the sacramental grace or special effect of the sacrament of Penance. This will involve three steps: (1) a brief explanation of why the intrinsic modality which is constitutive of

<sup>1</sup> Council of Trent, Sess. 7, Can. 6; Denziger 849.

<sup>2</sup> Council of Florence, *Decretum pro Armenis*; Denziger 695.

<sup>3</sup> IV *Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 4, qu. 5.

the sacramental grace of any sacrament is necessarily signified by the *sacramentum tantum* of that particular sacrament; (2) a determination of the *sacramentum tantum* of the sacrament of Penance; and (3) an explanation of both the positive and negative effects of the sacramental grace or *res significata* proper to this sacrament.

I. *The Signification of the Sacramental Grace by the Sacramentum tantum.*

Supernatural effects produced by God through the use of corporeal instruments do not necessarily leave in the effects which result from their instrumentality any mode commensurate to their natural forms. The only proportion that is required between the corporeal instruments which God employs and the effect to be attained is the existence of the instrument. The natural form of corporeal elements in the sacraments cannot therefore limit or modify the divine power passing through them except as to the manner of operation. Consequently, if the sacraments do produce a new mode, a specific sacramental grace, in the sanctifying grace received through their instrumentality they must in some way exercise a determining causality upon the divine power, so that there consequently results in the effect produced a commensuration to the proper instrumental form, the *sacramentum tantum*.

It is the common Thomistic doctrine that the sacraments are true efficient causes in the production of sanctifying grace. When such instrumentality is joined to a practical sign of a supernatural effect, however, as is the case with the sacraments, the causality of the sign is not limited merely to the order of extrinsic formal or final cause, i.e., to the order of signification, but, by reason of their conjunction in the sacramental artefact, the signification is the proper form of the sacramental instrument and exercises a determining causality in the order of efficiency. Since such an instrumental form, in limiting the efficiency of the principal agent, produces a new mode in the effect, the sacramental instrument likewise produces a new mode in sanctifying grace by reason of its proper form, the signification, or *sacramentum tantum*. In order to validate

this conclusion let us very briefly consider the relation of signification and causality in the sacramental instrument.

Does the causality of sign act efficiently or merely specify extrinsically? St. Thomas answers this question briefly: "The efficient principle of knowledge is not signs, but reason proceeding from principles to conclusions."<sup>4</sup> An object as such remains in the order of extrinsic formal causality and any other type of causality is merely accidental to it. Signs possess the same type of causality as the object, insofar as they stand in the place of the principal object signified. Signs are called instrumental not because they are efficient causes but as they are instrumental in the order of formal cause, i.e., as extrinsically representing an object. It can be said that causality other than extrinsic formal causality is accidental even to a practical sign. Although the practical sign manifests the thing signified as something to be accomplished, the failure to heed the sign does not render the sign any less practical. The traffic light does not cease to be a practical sign merely because certain motorists ignore it.

A sacrament is a practical sign, "a sign of a sacred thing insofar as it sanctifies men."<sup>5</sup> In the institution of the sacraments God did not merely intend the representation of something sacred, which we would call a sacramental, but ordained that through their use the sanctification would actually be bestowed upon the recipient. Hence the sacraments possess the causality proper to practical signs, extrinsic formal causality, plus the moral instrumentality resulting from the divine decree to grant the grace signified by their use. Consequently, the relation which exists between the sign which is the sacrament and the effect signified is solely from their institution by God and as such is formally a relation of reason.

The sacraments of the New Law are efficient instruments as well as practical signs. As we have seen, it is accidental to the order of signification whether the sign be a cause of the thing signified. It is likewise accidental to the order of efficiency whether the causality be exteriorly signified. Signification and efficiency have no essential co-relation; they are in disparate orders. In the sacra-

<sup>4</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 60, a. 2.

ments, signification and efficiency are at least physically related by their accidental conjunction in a common subject: both are supernatural uses of a sensible reality.<sup>6</sup> The signification is the imposition of a relation of reason on the sensible reality; the efficient instrumentality draws the sensible reality into a real relation with the effect produced. Considering the sacraments precisely as they were instituted by Christ not only to signify but to cause grace, they do have an essential relation. To cause grace *sacramentally*, i.e., as sensibly manifest by the signification and subordinate to it, nevertheless pertains essentially to the sacraments of the New Law by reason of their institution by Christ.

Although the sacraments are causes by reason of their material elements, the natural form of this element is not the proper form of the sacramental instrument. The proper operation of water in Baptism, i.e., the pouring of the water, while required for the sacramental instrumentality is not the proper form of the sacrament but only of the material element of the sacrament. The proper form of the instrument is therefore derived from the signification, the *sacramentum tantum*. Since the action of an instrument is diversified by the operation of its proper form, the signification diversifies the instrumental activity and constitutes the sacraments as diverse instruments.

Because created agents are necessarily limited by the proper operation of the instrumental form, such agents are guided in their choice of instruments by the proportion of the instrumental form to the end to be attained. God's power knows no such limitation by natural forms. This is especially true in reference to supernatural effects, since natural forms have no positive proportion to such effects. In confecting the sacramental artefact, however, God has given this unique instrument, not a natural form, but a supernatural one, and it thus bears a true proportion to the effect produced through its instrumentality. Consequently, the divine power in employing the diverse sacraments to sanctify men is limited by their divine signification. As the natural form of the created instrument limits the efficiency of the finite agent, so the supernatural signification of the sacramental instrument, by the design of Christ,

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 61, a. 1, ad 1.

limits the efficiency of the infinite Agent and produces a corresponding mode in sanctifying grace. It is for this reason that when we seek to explain the precise nature of the special effect of each sacrament, the mode which constitutes the sacramental grace of that sacrament, we must first determine as precisely as possible the sacramental signification, the *sacramentum tantum* of the sacrament.

## II. *The Sacramentum Tantum of the Sacrament of Penance.*

The terms "*sacramentum tantum*," "*res sacramenti*," and "*res et sacramentum*" had their origin with St. Augustine and were perfected by Peter Lombard and other medieval theologians. *Sacramentum tantum* refers to that part of the sacrament which is solely significative and in no wise signified; i.e., the external sign of the sacrament. The *res sacramenti* or *res tantum* is that which is signified but does not itself signify and is the principal and final effect of the sacrament. In any sacrament this is, of course, the grace produced by the sacrament and signified by the external rite. Finally, the *res et sacramentum* is that which is signified by the external rite and has in itself the further signification of the ultimate internal effect.<sup>7</sup>

One of the first objections which St. Thomas raises in the *Summa* to the existence of the sacrament of Penance is that this sacrament does not possess these three qualities. It is in response to this objection that St. Thomas sets forth explicitly his doctrine concerning the *sacramentum tantum* of Penance.

In penance also there is a *sacramentum tantum*, namely the acts performed both by the penitent sinner as well as by the priest who absolves. But the *res et sacramentum* is the interior penance of the sinner. The *res tantum et non sacramentum*, however, is the remission of sin. The first of these [the acts performed both by the penitent sinner as well as by the priest] taken collectively is the cause of the second; but the first and second are the cause of the third.<sup>8</sup>

In this sacrament there exists the peculiar situation where the acts of the one being sanctified enter into the very essence of the

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 66, a. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 84, a. 1, ad 3.

sacrament, namely, the acts of contrition, satisfaction, and confession. The Angelic Doctor explains in response to the first objection of this article this feature which is peculiar to penance and matrimony from the fact that in those sacraments where the effect corresponds to the human acts of the recipient, these sensible human acts take the place of the matter. It must be noted, however, that, as the Council of Trent states, these acts of the penitents do not constitute the matter of a sacrament simply speaking but are called the quasi-matter because the matter of the sacraments is that of an artefact and not of a physical essence as such.<sup>9</sup>

This doctrine of St. Thomas concerning the matter of the sacrament is confirmed in the second article of Q. 84 where he distinguishes the acts of the penitent against the sins confessed as the proximate matter in relation to the remote matter.<sup>10</sup>

The first problem which must be answered is whether the acts of the penitent which St. Thomas asserts are the matter of this sacrament truly pertain to the essence of the sacrament. As the Council of Trent indicates, the essence of the sacraments is constituted by the matter and form of the sacrament.<sup>11</sup> Hence the question is really stated: Are the acts of the penitent the matter of this sacrament? Two other possibilities are that the matter of the sacrament is the sins themselves or the absolution itself insofar as it is considered as external ceremony. The first possibility must be excluded because the matter of the sacrament must be external whereas the sins are internal. Nor can the absolution as a ceremony be other than one element and that of a formal one in this sacrament. This opinion is likewise confirmed from the very penitential and judicial nature of the sacrament. The form of the sacrament as such is judicial<sup>12</sup> and hence requires certain acts on the part of the one being judged. The doctrine of the IV Lateran Council

<sup>9</sup> "Sunt autem quasi materia hujus sacramenti ipsius poenitentis actus: nempe contritio, confessio et satisfacio." Sess. 14, cap. 3.

<sup>10</sup> "Unde oportet quod ea quae sunt ex parte poenitentis, sive sint verba sive facta, sint quaedam materia hujus sacramenti: ea quae sunt ex parte sacerdotis, se habent per modum formae." Also in q. 84, a. 1, ad 1; q. 86, a. 6; q. 90, a. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Sess. 14, cap. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Concilium Later. IV, "Poenitentiale iudicium."*

points out that the peculiar judicial form of this sacrament is not simply to remit sin nor to vindicate divine justice but is likewise to reconcile the sinner to God and to make amends for offense. This doctrine has, of course, been canonized by the Councils of Florence and Trent.<sup>13</sup>

As we indicated in establishing our basic principle for the determination of the sacramental grace of any sacrament, the external sign is the formal signification of the sacrament and hence exercises a determining causality upon the effect which is sacramentally produced. If the acts of the penitent pertain to the essence of this external sign we must attribute to them a true efficient instrumentality in the bestowal of the grace of penance. This conclusion would first of all seem to be opposed to the doctrine of St. Thomas himself in the *Sentences* where he states that it pertains to the external sign to be in some way the cause of grace but that the exterior penance which is the sacramental sign of this sacrament represents the co-operation of the recipient and not the actual influence of the extrinsic agent.<sup>14</sup> Hence the acts of the penitent do not possess the power to cause the sacramental grace of this sacrament. To this one must reply that the form of the material elements of an artefact as such do not exercise a determining causality in relation to the ultimate term of the effect produced, but do so insofar as they are united by the form of the artefact. In considering this response of St. Thomas, it is evident that he is considering the form of the material elements as such when he speaks of them here and not formally as joined to the form of the sacrament. He does not exclude them from having a real sacramental efficacy and hence from pertaining to the essence of the sacrament.<sup>15</sup>

In the very next question of the *Sentences* light is thrown upon

<sup>13</sup> "Quartum sacramentum est poenitentia, cuius quasi materia sunt actus poenitentis, qui in tres distinguuntur partes . . . contritio . . . confessio . . . satisfactio." Conc. Florentinum, *Decretum pro Armenis*, Denz. 699; Conc. Trid., *loc. cit.*, in footnote 9.

<sup>14</sup> IV *Sent.*, d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, qu. 1, ad 2.

<sup>15</sup> "Quia tamen [actus poenitentis] subsunt alii considerationi, nempe ut submittitur virtuti clavium, et Deo medio Sacramento principaliter agenti, sub hac consideratione possunt, imo de facto influunt in gratiam, licet minus principaliter, quam forma." Salmanticenses, *Cursus Theol.*, XIX, Disp. 1, dub. 2, n. 87, p. 43.

the twofold relation of the acts of the penitent, namely, that of sign and that of cause:

The *res* [effect] of any sacrament is proportionate to the sacrament of which it is the effect. But the exterior penance which is the *sacramentum tantum* in penance is the sacrament as a sign alone on the part of the act of the penitent, but as both sign and cause is the act of the penitent is taken with the act of the minister. [*Ibid.*, qu. 3.] And therefore the interior penance is the *res* of the exterior penance; but as only signified through the acts of the penitent; as signified and caused however through the same acts joined to the absolution of the minister. . . . Hence these two taken together are sign and cause.<sup>16</sup>

When it is said that the acts of the penitent pertain to the essence of the sacraments, the acts are not considered precisely as they are an act of the virtue of penance and as caused by the interior act of penance but precisely under their sacramental formality, namely, as they act to signify and cause the removal of the sin. In this consideration the exterior acts have a true causality on the interior acts and act to remove sin and its effects. Although the interior acts precede the exterior acts in time, they contain the sacramental acts *in voto*.<sup>17</sup>

Having determined that the acts of the penitent under their sacramental formality pertain to the essence of the sacrament and have a real sacramental efficacy, it must be determined how the matter and form of this sacrament are related in the sacramental signification. Since the sacrament is essentially a sign of grace and the remission of sin which is the principal effect of the sacrament flows from the sacramental absolution, it would seem that the principal efficacy of the sacrament pertains to the absolution. To this difficulty St. Thomas replies that in general the signification of the sacrament is principally the work of the matter of the sacrament whereas the efficacy follows upon the form. Since the acts of the

<sup>16</sup> *Loc. cit.*, qu. 2.

<sup>17</sup> "Non enim habet efficaciam operandi contra morbum peccati, nisi ex suppositione propositi exterioris poenitentiae et absolutionis desiderio; quamvis poenitentia interior contra morbum peccati operans praecedat tempore exteriori poenitentiam." *Ibid.*, qu. 3, ad 1.

penitent constitute the quasi-matter of this sacrament of penance, the formality of signification must be taken mainly from these acts whereas the efficacy principally pertains to the sacramental absolution.<sup>18</sup> One must not, of course, think that the *sacramentum tantum* signifies by the matter and causes by the form since they are united into a single artefact by the imposition of the sacramental form to which both formally belong. Nevertheless, the parts of this artefact have a diverse relation to this signification.<sup>19</sup> It is true that the remission of sin insofar as it is removed through the bestowal of grace has a direct relation with the sacramental absolution which confers the grace, which is the principal cause of the removal of the sin, but the sacramental formula of absolution as such does not determine the precise manner of the removal of sin. To make a precise determination we must consider the removal in relation to the acts of the penitent which in turn will guide us to the determination of the grace of the sacrament under their specifically penitential nature.

As we have indicated, the acts of the penitent can be considered under a twofold aspect, namely, materially in relation to the sacrament insofar as they proceed from the virtue of penance, and formally insofar as they pertain to the sacrament of penance, and are themselves causative of the interior acts of the virtue. To properly understand their relation to them, it will be necessary to consider them under this twofold aspect as well as the virtue of penance from which they flow.

#### *The Virtue of Penance*

The virtue of penance is traditionally defined as a supernatural habit infused by God whereby man readily inclines both to sorrow for sins committed inasmuch as they offend God and to a firm purpose of amendment.<sup>20</sup> Though there were some who denied that

<sup>18</sup> "In sacramentis in quibus est materia et forma, significatio est ex parte materiae principaliter, sed efficacia ex parte formae. Et ideo cum actus poenitentis in hoc sacramento sunt sicut materia, et absolutio sacerdotis sicut forma, principaliter hoc sacramentum quantum ad rationem significandi consistit in actu poenitentis; sed quantum ad efficaciam, in absolutione sacerdotis." *Ibid.*, a. 2, qu. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 60, a. 6, ad 1, and 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 85, a. 2.

penance was a virtue in the proper sense of the word,<sup>21</sup> this opinion is contrary to the more common opinion of theologians as well as to the Catechism of the Council of Trent.<sup>22</sup> The speculative reason for the affirmative position given is that to sorrow properly over past sin, the act of penance, is an act of election according to right reason and hence must proceed from virtue.<sup>23</sup> As to the existence of penance as a special virtue there has been considerable difference among the Commentators even though there seems to be little discussion upon this point among modern Thomists. The source of the difficulty over this point flows from the fact that the virtue of penance has a considerable similitude to the other virtues. Some identified it with charity because its object was to remove the contrary of the object of charity; others, such as Durandus and Suarez identified it with the virtue of justice; still others as Cajetan thought it to be the same as religion. The specific character of this virtue can be determined from the act of the virtue.<sup>24</sup> The act of penance is to work to destroy past sin as it is an offense against God.<sup>25</sup> Thus the Angelic Doctor notes that it is true that the material part of this act, mere displeasure for past sin, coincides with the object of charity, but if considered under its formal aspect, namely, the intention to work at the destruction of past sin, it differs from charity. He likewise declares that this virtue has not only a proper act but a proper matter, namely, sin inasmuch as it can be remedied by an act of man in co-operating with God for his justification. Both of these formalities will be of great importance in determining the nature of that sacramental grace which is signified by the external acts of this virtue.

In his classification of this virtue St. Thomas does assert that

<sup>21</sup> IV *Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qu. 2.

<sup>22</sup> "Quod autem intima haec poenitentia . . . ad *virtutem* pertineat, aperte ostendunt multa quae de poenitentia tradita sunt, praecepta." P. 2, c. 5, q. 6 sq.

<sup>23</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 85, a. 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 54, a. 2, 3; II-II, q. 58, a. 1.

<sup>25</sup> "Manifestum est autem quod in poenitentia invenitur specialis ratio actus laudabilis, scilicet operari ad destructionem peccati praeteriti in quantum est Dei offensa, quod non pertinet ad rationem alterius virtutis." *Ibid.*, III q. 85, a. 2.

this virtue is a potential part of justice.<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is likewise significant for our purpose since the classification of virtues as a potential part of one of the four cardinal virtues is made according to its proper matter or act, even though the potential part does not contain the whole nature or power of the principal virtue to which it is adjoined.<sup>27</sup> The whole of the first part of the 3rd article is *ad rem*:

As stated above [a. 1, ad 2], penance is a special virtue not merely because it sorrows for evil done (since charity would suffice for that), but also because the penitent grieves for the sin he has committed inasmuch as it is an offense against God, and purposes to amend. Now amendment for an offense committed against anyone is not made merely by ceasing to offend, but it is necessary to make some kind of compensation which obtains in offenses committed against another, just as retribution does, only that compensation is on the part of the offender, as when he makes satisfaction, whereas retribution is on the part of the person offended against. Each of these belongs to the matter of justice because each is a kind of commutation. Therefore it is evident that penance, as a virtue, is a part of justice.<sup>28</sup>

The failure of penance to be commutative justice is, of course, due to the fact that the penitent renders to God the debt as an inferior to a superior and hence not according to a strict equality.<sup>29</sup>

#### *The Acts of Penance*

Since external acts which constitute the integral parts of the sacrament of penance flow from the specific nature of the virtue, we are now in a position to consider the nature of these acts in particular.

Virtue as an operative habit will necessarily incline to act according to its proper formality. Although many acts may proceed from the same virtue, there will necessarily be a first act by reason of which the other acts of the virtue flow. It is by this first

<sup>26</sup> IV *Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qu. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 48, a. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, III, q. 85, a. 3.

<sup>29</sup> "Unde poenitens recurrit ad Deum, cum emendationis proposito, sicut servus ad dominum." *Ibid.*

act that the virtue is defined and named.<sup>30</sup> What is this primary act of the virtue of penance? Since penance is a virtue specifically distinct from other virtues by reason of sorrow for sin with the purpose of amendment, the primary act will necessarily be that which most perfectly fulfills these conditions. All these elements are contained in the definition of contrition given by the Council of Trent: <sup>31</sup> a sorrow and hatred for sin committed with the determination not to sin again. This definition is but a summary of teaching of both Sacred Scripture and Tradition with regard to the act of this virtue. Although, as the Catechism of the Council of Trent points out elsewhere <sup>32</sup> these three acts coalesce under a single formality to constitute the integral parts of this primary act of contrition, namely, sorrow, hatred and the intention of amending, sorrow alone constitutes the formal act of the virtue of penance. This sorrow is, of course, not to be indeterminately taken but sorrow willingly assumed from the intention of satisfying for the sins committed.

Since this primary act of the virtue will be ultimately specified by the formal object of the virtue, it is now necessary to determine the precise formality which specifies penance. This is naturally a point of interest only to those who concede that penance is a specific virtue and even among these there is considerable disagreement. Galtier, following Suarez, declares that the proper object of this virtue is probably the restoration of the divine right which has been injured by sin.<sup>33</sup> Others declare it to be the sin inasmuch as it demands compensation. The common Thomistic opinion <sup>34</sup> which is firmly grounded in the explicit doctrine of St. Thomas is that the formal object of penance is satisfaction, that is, sin precisely as it is capable of being expiated by the act of the penitent, i.e., sorrow. We must distinguish here between satisfaction as the formalizing

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 28, a. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Sess 14, c. 4.

<sup>32</sup> P. 2, c. 5, q. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *De Paenitentia*, thes. 2, n. 30, Parisiis, 1931, p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> Ioannes a S. Thoma, *Cursus Theol.*, Disp. 34, a. 1, n. 10 sq., Paris; Vives, 1885; Salmanticenses, *op. cit.*, Disp. 5, dub. 2, n. 34 sq.; Gonet, *Clypeus Theologiae Thomistae*, Disp. 2, a. 2, Paris: Vives, 1876.

aspect of the virtue of penance and the act of the virtue of penance. As Father Doronzo notes:

The concept of satisfaction is the very formal object of this virtue, and the intention of satisfying is the very vital principle from which this virtue is generated in the human will; for Penance is a virtue tending toward the compensation or satisfaction for the sin and from which intention Penance turns to the compensation for the penalty, first in the intention, secondly in the execution; confession also proceeds from the same intention but less explicitly and immediately. Whence satisfaction in its primary signification is not, strictly speaking, an act of this virtue, but the formalizing object of all its acts, or, if you wish, the very intention of the will which actualizes and vivifies the virtue itself. Indeed it is the formality of satisfaction which formalizes the very determined act of contrition which is the primary and specific act of Penance; whence the formality of satisfaction for punishment unifies and formalizes the various acts which are properly penal, which, by reason of imperfection and indetermination, lack a proper name and retain, as if proper (to them) the common name of satisfaction. However since the virtue of Penance enters into the essence of the sacrament, both manners of satisfaction, or both the act of contrition and satisfaction with their own proper qualities are drawn with it. Hence contrition, which is the particular sacramental satisfaction, is not ordinarily called by this name but by the proper name of contrition, while the other penal acts, which the penitent intends and executes, are called sacramental satisfaction.<sup>35</sup>

That it is the formality of satisfaction which specifies the virtue of penance is quite evident from what has already been said concerning the nature of penance as a specifically distinct virtue. The Catechism of the Council of Trent cites as its authority for declaring that penance is a special virtue which includes the concept of satisfaction the authority of "many Fathers."<sup>36</sup> It is undoubtedly the doctrine of St. Thomas. He repeatedly declares both in the *Sentences* as well as in the *Summa* when treating of this virtue that it is not sorrow as such which distinguishes and hence specifies this virtue but sorrow for past sin precisely as it involves the intention

<sup>35</sup> Doronzo, *De Poenitentia* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1952), Tom. III, Caput IV, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Loc. cit.*

of removing them,<sup>37</sup> and their effects, namely, the offense against God and the guilt of punishment. It is thus satisfaction which ultimately formalizes the sorrow for sin and the intention to amend.

Since the formal aspect of the virtue of penance and its primary act will be found in all the other acts elicited by the virtue, we are now able to determine the precise penal nature of the acts of confession and satisfaction. The nominal definition of confession implies the manifestation of something hidden. In this sense it can of course pertain to many virtues, as for example, the confession of one's faith. As it pertains to the virtue of penance, however, it must contain the formality proper to that virtue. Hence St. Thomas proposes the definition of penitential confession that given by St. Augustine:<sup>38</sup> confession is the manifestation of a hidden illness with the hope of pardon. This definition, the Angelic Doctor declares, manifests the genus of the definition, the manifestation; the proper matter of the act, sin; and its formal motive, the hope of pardon.<sup>39</sup> It is this latter aspect which enables us to classify the act of confession as properly elicited by the virtue of penance for it is this aspect which implies the formality of satisfaction, i.e., the removal of the fault. The definition of sacramental confession likewise must be declared an act of the virtue of penance since it contains all the elements necessary for a true act of confession, namely, the accusation or manifestation, the genus of the definition; "of one's sins," the matter; and finally its proper penitential aspect, to a priest to obtain absolution. As St. Thomas notes, this act may be imperated by many virtues but properly pertains to the virtue of penance inasmuch as it is ordered to obtain the removal of sin.<sup>40</sup>

As regards the third act of the penitent, satisfaction, we have already distinguished between the formality of satisfaction as it specifies the primary act of the virtue, contrition, and as it is a special act of the virtue. This latter act must in itself be noted is twofold, namely, the act of virtue insofar as it pertains to the es-

<sup>37</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 85, a. 1, 2 (cf. footnote 25), 3.

<sup>38</sup> *In Psalm.*, 31, enarr. 2, n. 12; Serm. 254.

<sup>39</sup> *Summa Theol.*, Supp., q. 7, a. 1.

<sup>40</sup> "Et ita etiam confessio peccatorum ad remissionem eorum consequendam, non pertinet elicitive ad virtutem veritatis, ut quidam dicunt, sed ad virtutem poenitentiae. Imperative autem ad multas virtutes pertinere potest." *Ibid.*, a. 3.

sence of the sacrament, the firm purpose of amendment, and the act of satisfaction which executes this purpose. Both are elicited acts of the virtue of penance. Our purpose now is to determine the precise nature of these acts. Since the acts of a virtue are specified by their objects, we must therefore determine the proper objects of these acts as they pertain to the sacrament of penance.

As St. Thomas notes, the very name satisfaction implies an equation between thing and thing according to a certain proportion.<sup>41</sup> The proportion or equalization at which satisfaction aims presupposes an inequality of actions. Since such an inequality can only be established by an offense of one against the other, satisfaction necessarily seeks to restore the equality which occurred as a result of the offense. Hence satisfaction is compensation for an inflicted injury.<sup>42</sup> This twofold aspect of satisfaction is commented upon by St. Thomas when he considers the definition of satisfaction which he and other medieval theologians erroneously attributed to St. Augustine. This definition, "Satisfaction is to uproot the causes of sins, and to give no opening to the suggestions thereof,"<sup>43</sup> is that of a certain Gennadius. In considering the definition St. Thomas points out that satisfaction has a twofold object, that which is formal, namely, the compensation for past sin, and a material element through which the restored equality is firmly established, namely, the removal of the causes of sin. The definition of Gennadius emphasizes rather the medicinal aspect of the satisfaction.

In the evolution of the definition of satisfaction as it pertains to the present consideration we find that it was generally limited by medieval theologians to a particular portion of the complete object, namely, to that portion of the penalty of sin which we call temporal. The definition of satisfaction in its complete extension includes, of course, the very act of contrition itself because this act is directed against the eternal punishment of sin. Whether we consider the act of satisfaction in its complete extension or in its re-

<sup>41</sup> "Unde, cum talem adaequationem ipsum nomen *satis-factionis* importet, quia hoc adverbium *satis* aequalitatem proportionis designat, constat quod satisfactio formaliter iustitiae actus est." *Ibid.*, q. 12, a. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3, obj. 1.

stricted sense as applying to the sacrament of confession, it is quite clear that it properly pertains to the virtue of penance to elicit satisfactory acts. The proper formality of this virtue is the very aspect of satisfaction and hence every act which is ultimately terminated by this formality will be properly elicited by this virtue. Therefore, not only contrition which is directed against the guilt of sin but all the acts directed against the consequent punishment constitute elicited acts of this virtue.

*Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction as Integral Parts of the  
Sacrament of Penance*

One question remains before arriving at the complete determination of the *sacramentum tantum* of Penance, namely, why is it that it properly pertains to this sacrament to have these three acts of the penitent, which materially pertain to the virtue of penance, as integral parts of the Sacrament itself? It is precisely because there is a plurality of the matter of this sacrament and hence where there is a plurality of parts in the matter which constitutes the sacrament, those parts will necessarily constitute integral parts of the whole sacrament.<sup>44</sup> The question immediately turns to the reason for these particular acts of the virtue of penance as constituting the matter of this sacrament. To this St. Thomas replies:

An offense is atoned otherwise in Penance than in vindictive justice. Because, in vindictive justice the atonement is made according to the judge's decision, and not according to the discretion of the offender or of the person offended; whereas, in Penance, the offense is atoned according to the will of the sinner, and the judgment of God against whom the sin was committed, because in the latter case we seek not only the restoration of the equality of justice, as in vindictive justice, but also and still more the reconciliation of friendship, which is accomplished by the offender making atonement according to the will of the

<sup>44</sup> "Ubi cumque igitur ex parte materiae invenitur aliqua pluralitas, ibi est invenire partium rationem . . . cum plures actus humani requirantur ad perfectionem poenitentiae . . . sacramentum poenitentiae habeat partes." *Ibid.*, III, q. 90, a. 1.

person offended. Accordingly the first requisite on the part of the penitent is the will to atone, and this is done by contrition; the second is that he submit to the judgment of the priest standing in God's place, and this done in confession; and the third is that he atone according to the decision of God's minister, and this is done in satisfaction: and so contrition, confession, and satisfaction are assigned as parts of Penance.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to realize that not only do these acts possess the formality proper to the virtue of penance but that the quality proper to each of the acts does not lose its individuality as it is constitutive of the matter of penance. It is rather precisely because each of the acts constitute an integral part of the matter that each part has a role to play in the signification of the sacrament.

Why is it that the acts which constitute the matter of this sacrament do not coalesce under a single formality when they enter into the sacramental artefact? As we have pointed out in the consideration of the relation of the external sign to the effect, the natural forms of created instruments cannot have any limiting effect upon supernatural effect precisely because they lack any proportion to the effects produced. Consequently, when the matter of the other sacraments is elevated to become a sacramental sign it must first be elevated to the supernatural order.<sup>46</sup> Not so with the acts which constitute the matter of this sacrament. Since they proceed from the infused virtue of Penance they are essentially supernatural acts. It is for this reason that St. Thomas declares that "in those sacraments whose effect corresponds to that of some human act, the sensible human act itself takes the place of the matter."<sup>47</sup> While they do not possess the true sacramental signification unless joined to the form of absolution here we have the case where the signification is in the very acts themselves and not superimposed but rather formalized by their institution as a sacrament.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Concerning the special problem of the *sacramentum tantum* of Matrimony, cf. James M. Egan, O.P., "The Sacramental Grace of Matrimony," in *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, Cleveland, 1956, pp. 45-70.

<sup>47</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 84, a. 1, ad 1.

III. *The Sacramental Grace of Penance*

## The Sacramental Modality in General

Since the sacramental grace of any sacrament is not an essential species of sanctifying grace but an intrinsic mode of sanctifying grace, each of these modes will correspond to some perfection of the grace of Christ.<sup>48</sup> In Christ there is a twofold plenitude of grace. The first plenitude results from having grace in the highest degree in which it can be possessed and in its maximum extension to all the effects it is capable of producing. This plenitude of grace is proper to Christ alone.<sup>49</sup> St. Thomas established this intensive plenitude of grace proper to Christ upon the principle: *quanto aliquid receptivus propinquius est causae influenti, abundantius recipit* (the nearer a recipient is to the cause, the more it receives).<sup>50</sup> By reason of the hypostatic union the soul of Christ was united in the most intimate possible manner to the principal source of grace, and through Him grace was to overflow into all others who were to possess grace. Consequently, the grace of Christ is said to be in Him after the manner of a natural property. The reason for the extensive plenitude of His grace is that this grace was given to Him as to the "universal principle of all those having grace."<sup>51</sup> Since the first principle of any genus should extend to all the effects of that genus, Christ possessed His grace in the fullness of extensive plenitude.

In considering the grace of Christ as head of the Church, St. Thomas draws a threefold comparison to corporal headship. The natural head of the body can be considered according to order,

<sup>48</sup> "Et si inquiras, in quo consistit iste modus et formalitas, respondetur consistere in quadam derivatione et imitatione gratiae Christi, seu perfectionis, quae est in Christo, in quantum sumus membra ejus." Ioannes a S. Thoma, *Cursus Theologicus* (Paris: Vives, 1885), t. IX, *De Sacramentis*, d. 24, a. 2, n. 20.

<sup>49</sup> "Ex parte quidem ipsius gratiae dicitur esse plenitudo gratiae ex eo quod aliquis pertinet ad summum gratiae et quantum ad essentiam, et quantum ad virtutem . . . et talis gratiae plenitudo est propria Christo." *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 7, a. 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

perfection, and power.<sup>52</sup> Thus Christ can be considered as the head of the Church since all have received grace through Him. His grace is "*altior et prior*" according to the order of exemplary causality.<sup>53</sup> According to the perfection of the head He has that plenitude of all graces proper to the first principle of the genus. Finally, as to power, there is an influx of His grace into all the members of the Church: "of His plenitude we have all received."<sup>54</sup>

Graces produced sacramentally and extra-sacramentally will be the grace of Christ. Yet insofar as they are produced by a sacramental conjunction to the principal efficient instrument, the sacred humanity, in different ways, they will participate in the perfection of His grace in a diverse manner, which participation will constitute the special mode of existing in the grace produced.<sup>55</sup> The grace received through the instrumentality of the sacraments is received through a special conjunction with the head of the Mystical Body. This grace in Christ is there as a natural property by reason of the hypostatic union and also as the universal principle of all the effects of grace. Grace produced sacramentally will possess a mode of participation in this natural property and universal principle. This will not, of course, be a perfect participation but rather an imperfect participation and an imitation of this perfection of the Head.<sup>56</sup>

Those who have become members of Christ by the sacramental reception of grace possess their grace after the mode of a quasi-

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>53</sup> "Scito tertio, quod gratia Christi dicitur prima, quia *altior et prior*: hoc est secundum ordinem causae formalis, et exemplariter. Nam ex eo quod *altior*, est *prior* secundum ordinem causae formalis, in quo, quanto quid est intensive altius, tanto formalius. Ex eo autem quod ad conformitatem ipsius alii gratia datur, est *prior* tanquam exemplar reliquarum gratiarum." Cajetan, *Commentarium in Tertiam Partem* (Rome: Editio Leonina, typ. Poly. Vat., 1889), IIIa, q. 8, a. 1.

<sup>54</sup> John 1:16.

<sup>55</sup> "Sic gratia derivata per Christum alium modum et perfectionem habet (participare ad tollendos defectus peccati, et specialiter operandos effectus gratiae) quam gratia quae non venit per Christum secundum realem influxum." Ioannes a S. Thoma, *loc. cit.*, n. 22.

<sup>56</sup> "Qualitas quae est in agente secundum rationem propriae passionis, aut naturalis potentiae, non potest communicari alteri subjecto secundum eundem modum univoce et perfecte; bene tamen imitative, et imperfecte, et non solum instrumentaliter." *Ibid.*, n. 40.

natural property. Though this grace is not the universal principle of all the effects of grace, each of the various sacraments is ordained to a certain number of these special effects, according to the intention of Christ in the institution of these sacraments. It should be noted that the grace of Christ is not something specifically distinct from our grace but it is a formality and mode of possession which differs from our manner of having it. It is this mode of perfection, which is in Christ in its fullness for the accomplishments of all the effects of grace which is derived through the sacraments to certain determined perfections by which it produces the special effects of the various sacraments.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, it seems that the grace of Christ might be likened to a potestative whole whose complete nature is found in each of the parts but not all of the power. Thus all the parts or sacramental modes share in the essential nature of the grace of Christ but not in equal degree as to its perfection and power.<sup>58</sup> The very multiplicity of potestative powers results from the eminence of the essence. Such eminence is surely found in the grace of Christ which possess the fullness of grace both intensively and extensively.

*The Penitential Modality as Ordained to Christian Worship*

As we indicated in the introduction to this paper the sacramental grace of each sacrament has a twofold effect: to perfect man in things pertaining to divine worship and to provide him with a remedy against the effects of sin. Hence we shall consider these effects separately. How does the sacramental grace of Penance perfect man in Christian worship? Primarily, of course, it restores him to divine friendship making him capable of fruitful worship. But it does so in a manner peculiar to Penance. The primary signification of this sacrament is taken from the matter of the sacrament since it is the matter which determines the precise

<sup>57</sup> "Per sacramenta enim communicamus ei, et passioni ac gratiae ejus, (tamquam membra viventia in spiritu Christi). . . . Hic igitur modus et perfectio, quae in Christo est secundum plenitudinem (ad omnes modos et effectus gratiae) per sacramenta derivantur ad determinatos quosdam modos (et perfectiones, quibus speciales effectus gratiae producit). *Ibid.*, n. 20.

<sup>58</sup> Concerning the nature of a potestative whole, cf. *I Sent.*, d. 3, a. 4, a. 2, ad 1; *Quodl.* 10, q. 3, a. 5.

formality of grace as it flows through the sacramental instrument. In the case of this sacrament we have seen that it possesses the unique quality of having a threefold matter, namely, the three acts of the penitent. Moreover, these acts are of themselves supernatural and hence have a direct proportion to the effect or grace produced. Since all three acts pertain to the virtue of penance, they all possess the formality of satisfaction or the paying of the debt of sin. Hence the grace of Christ produced through their instrumentality will possess a modality which makes the penitent a quasi-conatural principle in the satisfying for the debt of sin due to God as well as granting him a share in that portion of the satisfactory power of Christ's passion necessary to remit the debt of punishment due to his sins.

All the sacraments of the New Law are signs of the passion of Christ. Indeed, St. Thomas insisted that even the sacraments of the Old Law signified the passion insofar as they were protestations of faith,<sup>59</sup> although they did not signify as distinctly as those of the New Law "which flow from Christ Himself and have a certain likeness to Him."<sup>60</sup> The passion of Christ operates to accomplish our salvation by way of merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, and redemption. Each of the sacraments bestows on the recipient some effect of the Passion of Christ. The multiplicity of effects explains the convenience of a diversity of sacraments to apply the effects of that redemptive act. As Father Egan declared in his introduction to the nature of the sacramental grace of Matrimony, "The wisdom of God has implanted the principle of diversity in the supernatural order as well as in the natural, for it is the wisdom of God, which is reflected in the orderly distinction of things both natural and supernatural."<sup>61</sup> While the supernatural effect of the sacrament is hidden from us, it is precisely to manifest this effect that the external signs were established.<sup>62</sup> Hence it does not serve the real purpose of a sacrament to declare that it indistinctly signifies the Passion of Christ, but one must determine from the external sign of each sacrament that effect of the Passion which it most properly

<sup>59</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 62, a. 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 60, a. 6, ad 3.

<sup>61</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>62</sup> *IV Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1, a. 1, qu. 4, ad 1.

signifies. Since the *sacramentum tantum* of the sacrament of Penance signifies the bestowal of grace primarily as it satisfies for sin, the sacramental mode of the grace of Penance will apply to us the satisfactory effects of the Passion of Christ and will give us a participation in the satisfactory power of Christ's grace. The sacramental grace of Penance is then formally *gratia satisfactoria*.

As we have indicated in treating of the nature of satisfaction, it aims at restoring the equality or proportion which has been destroyed by an offense. In order that this debt be fully paid, it is necessary that the satisfaction offered equal or surpass the offense which was committed. It was precisely because the Passion of Christ tendered such an all-surpassing satisfaction by reason of the charity which motivated his act of satisfaction that Christ accomplished the satisfaction for the sins of all men.<sup>63</sup> The act of Christ's satisfaction was truly an act of commutative justice because there was an equality existing between the one offended and the person of the one rendering satisfaction. Our satisfaction, even though supernatural, lacks this strict proportion and, though resembling the act of commutative justice, must nevertheless be classified as an act of a potential part of justice. Once grace is modified by the sacramental efficacy of Penance, though it is not essentially changed, it takes on a conaturality to that formality of Christ's grace which extended to the satisfaction for sin. In the same way as one who rises from the Eucharistic table can say with St. Paul, "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me,"<sup>64</sup> so he who receives sacramental absolution can say, "It is now no longer I that satisfies, but Christ satisfies in me."

Grace, being an entitative quality of the soul, is not immediately operative but operates through the infused virtues and gifts as the human soul operates through its faculties. Thus this modality of the sacramental grace of Penance which brings a conaturality to the grace of Christ under the aspect of satisfaction, in turn modifies all the infused virtues, both theological and moral. Although it does not change their essential nature, every virtuous act of the Christian life takes on a satisfactory aspect. Just as truly as

<sup>63</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 48, a. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Gal. 2:20.

every act of Christ's life whether specifically penitential in character or not made of Him a victim for sin, so the entire life of the Christian by reason of the grace of penance takes on a satisfactory quality. Such modification of the virtues furnishes a dogmatic foundation for the injunction which the priest makes to the penitent immediately following the sacramental absolution, "Whatever good you do, whatever evil you bear shall be profitable to you for the remission of sins, for the increase of grace, and the reward of eternal life." St. Thomas explicitly declares that by the efficacy of the sacrament such satisfaction becomes sacramental and a means of expiating for past sin.<sup>65</sup>

Nor are these satisfactory qualities merely for the debt of one's own sins. One man can satisfy for another, provided he be in a state of charity so that his acts may be meritorious.<sup>66</sup> Thus when St. Paul says: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body which is the Church,"<sup>67</sup> he is not speaking in a mere moral sense. In the very grace of Penance which animates the soul of the penitent there is an ontological foundation rendering the Christian capable of such vicarious suffering. This does not derogate from the universal causality of Christ's Passion, but rather indicates that the effects need to be applied, which is the very purpose of Baptism and Penance.<sup>68</sup> As the Angelic Doctor notes this is accomplished differently in these two sacraments:

In order to secure the effects of Christ's Passion, we must be likened to him. Now we are likened unto him sacramentally in Baptism, according to Romans 6:4: For we are buried together with him by Baptism unto death. Hence no punishment of satisfaction is imposed upon men at their Baptism, since they are fully delivered by Christ's satisfaction. But because it is written (I Peter 3:18), Christ died but once for our sins, therefore a man cannot a second time be likened unto Christ's death

<sup>65</sup> "Talis satisfactio est sacramentalis, in quantum virtute clavium est culpa commissae expiatiua." *Quodl.*, 3, q. 13, a. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Summa Theol.*, Supp., q. 13, a. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Col. 1:24.

<sup>68</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 49, a. 1, ad 4.

by the sacrament of Baptism. Hence it is necessary for those who sin after Baptism to be likened to Christ's suffering by some form of punishment or suffering which they endure in their own person; yet, by the co-operation of Christ's satisfaction, much lighter penalty suffices than one that is proportionate to the sin.<sup>69</sup>

It seems that we have long neglected to emphasize this great positive reality of the sacramental grace of Penance and it is one which especially needs to be preached in these days when a great many of confessions are termed devotional, i.e., not primarily ordered to remove mortal sin. Venial sin, of course, while sufficient matter, does not constitute the primary remote matter of the sacrament. This doctrine likewise manifests the way in which Penance fulfills the first requirement of the grace of every sacrament, namely, that it be ordered to perfect man in things pertaining to divine worship. It is in this sense that we can appreciate fully the words of Pius XII concerning the sacraments as sources of grace:

They have the power to raise man above himself and the whole natural order, into the sphere of the divine, to infuse in him a new life, that he may truly live of God, and not only to infuse it into him, but to conserve and increase it, so that man in a true and real sense is a brother and co-heir of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

From this doctrine one can see the intimate connection of Penance with the liturgical life of the Christian. Too often we have stressed the relation of Confession to Holy Communion to the neglect of its order to the Mass. The Mass is indeed a repetition of Calvary, an act of satisfaction for sin. He who assists at Mass with penitential grace becomes a more intimate sharer in the priesthood of Christ in offering his sacrifice, and in turn shares to a greater degree in its satisfactory effects.

Nor should we neglect the actual graces to which this sacrament entitles the recipient. This special title is radicated in the modification of sacramental grace but proximately pertains to the modified virtues which are the principles of operation. Such actual

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 2.

<sup>70</sup> AAS, XXXVII (1945), 33-34; English translation in *American Eccl. Review*, CXIII (N. 6, Dec., 1945), p. 465.

graces will be most properly for the modified virtues of Penance enabling the penitent to perform not only those acts which satisfy for the temporal punishment due to sin but likewise, as we shall see, to those acts necessary to firmly establish the restored equality, namely, to remove the dispositions to sin which remain in the faculties. Since every virtue is modified the actual graces which place them in operation will necessarily be proportioned to these modified principles of action which they reduce to second act.

*The Sacramental Modality of Penance as a Remedy for Sin*

Within the limits of this paper it would be impossible to give adequate treatment to all the remedial effects of penance, namely the remission of mortal and venial sin, as well as the eternal and temporal punishment due to them. We shall rather concern ourselves, as was suggested in the assignment of this paper, with the curative effects of the sacrament insofar as they affect the "*reliquiae peccati*," the remnants or dispositions left in the sinner as a result of previous actual sins.

Sin involves both a formal and a material element, a turning away from God which involves eternal punishment, and an inordinate turning of creatures with its temporal punishment. When mortal sin is forgiven through the sanctifying grace of penance, the soul of the sinner ceases to be turned away from God and the debt of eternal punishment is removed at the same time.<sup>71</sup> This is accomplished because both of these elements pertain to the formal part of sin. What of the material element of the sin which St. Thomas describes as the "remnants of sin"? He writes:

Mortal sin, insofar as it turns inordinately to a mutable good, produces in the soul a certain disposition, or even a habit, if the acts be repeated frequently. Now it has been said above that the guilt of mortal sin is pardoned through grace removing the aversion of the mind from God. Nevertheless when that which is on the part of the aversion has been taken away by grace, that which is on the part of the inordinate turning to a mutable good can remain, since this may happen to be without the other, as stated above. Consequently, there is no reason

<sup>71</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 86, a. 4.

why, after the guilt has been forgiven, the dispositions caused by the preceding acts should not remain, which are called the remnants of sin.<sup>72</sup>

The "*reliquiae peccati*" about which we are presently concerned is then nothing other than the inclinations to sin, or a vice if the acts of sin have been sufficiently repeated, and they pertain to the material aspect of sin, which remain after the soul has been restored to grace. Thus they can exist in the faculties of man even after the formal aspects of sin have been removed.

Not only do these remnants of actual sin remain but St. Thomas writes that they aggravate the *fomes peccati* which are the remnants of original sin.<sup>73</sup> As a result of this primal sin of Adam not only was sanctifying grace and the preternatural gifts lost, but the very natural inclination of his powers to virtue was weakened. Hence reason is subject to ignorance and experiences difficulty in attaining its proper object, truth; the will is deprived of its order to good by malice and its prone to evil; the irascible appetite is subject to weakness and shrinks in the face of an arduous task; by concupiscence the appetite for pleasure is inordinately inclined to the sensible good. Sinful acts of the appetite would necessarily deepen these wounds of nature even as an infection would impede a member of the body already suffering from injury. This aggravation of the *fomes* which affect the physical powers of man, the remote cause of sin, are never completely removed in this life, unless by a miraculous gift. Such a gift was granted to St. Thomas himself who, after his encounter with the temptress while imprisoned, never again felt the sting of inordinate concupiscence.

The remnants of actual sin which are the proximate occasion of sin are rather the evil dispositions or habits which result from repeated actual sins. Does the sanctifying grace which is infused into the soul heal these remnants directly? As already indicated, since they can remain after the forgiveness of sin, the answer is obviously in the negative. St. Thomas explains that the defects

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 5.

<sup>73</sup> "Sed quia inclinatio ad bonum virtutis in unoquoque diminuitur per peccatum actuale, ut ex dictis patet, et ista sunt quatuor vulnera ex aliis peccatis consequentia." *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3.

which follow upon sins are in the faculties of the soul and not in its essence. Since grace perfects the soul in its essence it is not directly ordered to the removal of defects in the powers of the soul. Hence the inordinate inclinations which result from actual sin may remain in the faculties of one who has received the grace of penance.<sup>74</sup>

Do these remnants of sin, however, remain the same after the reception of the sacrament of Penance? St. Thomas replies in the negative: "They remain weakened and diminished, so as not to dominate over man, and they are there after the manner of dispositions rather than of habits, like the *fomes* which remains after Baptism."<sup>75</sup> What is the cause of this diminution? Indirectly it is caused by the granting of the infused virtues. Answering an objection to the existence of specifically distinct infused moral virtues the Angelic Doctor says:

The passions inclining to evil are not totally destroyed through the acquired virtue or the infused virtue, unless perchance miraculously; because there always remains a struggling of the flesh against the spirit even after moral virtue. . . . But both through the acquired virtue as well as the infused this kind of passion is modified so that man is not immoderately moved by them. But the acquired virtue accomplishes this under one aspect and the infused virtue under another. For the acquired virtue accomplishes this that the rebellion is experienced to a lesser degree. And this follows from its cause: as man becomes more accustomed to virtue through frequent acts, man is already disinclined to obey such passions, since he is used to resisting; from which it follows that he experiences their disturbances less. But infused virtues bring it about that this kind of passion even if felt, nevertheless in no wise rules. For the infused virtue has for its effect that the concupiscences of sin are in no way obeyed; and it does this infallibly as long as it remains. The acquired virtue is however deficient in this aspect, even though in the lesser number (of those possessing it), just as other natural inclinations defect in some small part.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *IV Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 1, qu. 3, ad 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 86, a. 5.

<sup>76</sup> *De Virtutibus in Communi*, q. 1, a. 10, ad 14.

St. Thomas does not mean to say, of course, that the infused virtue gives a despotic control over the inordinate passions but rather that once the faculty is oriented to its proper ultimate end supernaturally, it is impossible that the natural vice opposed to it can remain in a perfect state. Once the faculty has turned to its ultimate end, the opposed natural vice as to its formal element, the inordinate conversion to a created good, must be destroyed. If it returns, the infused virtue is lost. Acquired virtue can remain, however, even though it might happen that in some who possess this virtue the strength of the temptation might overcome them.

How is this political control over the inordinate dispositions intensified? Not indeed by a single act of the penitent, unless miraculously as in the case of Mary Magdalene. Penance is compared to the natural healing process which takes place gradually and, as the remains of a sickness hang on until the sick person is completely healed, the healing of the wounds of sin is also accomplished successively. This is accomplished, writes St. Thomas, when penance is completely perfected, that is, when all the parts of penance have been perfected.<sup>77</sup>

How does the satisfactory modality of penance hasten the complete healing of the remnants of sin? In treating of satisfaction as an act of the virtue of penance, it was indicated that satisfaction has a twofold object, one, the compensation for the past sin; the other, the removal of the causes of sin.<sup>78</sup> To this latter the act of the penitent which is called satisfaction has a special relation. In questioning whether the external acts of the penitent have any connection to the effect of the sacrament, St. Thomas places the objection that satisfaction does not seem to have any relation to the effect, the remission of sin. In reply he writes:

The remission of sins does have some similarity to the acts which are performed in penance; because the infusion of grace which causes the remission of sin, is signified through the absolution of the priest; the preparation for grace as to the move-

<sup>77</sup> "Poenitentia jam perfecta quantum ad omnes sui partes, reliquiae etiam tolluntur peccati actualis." IV *Sent.*, d. 14, q. 2, a. 1, qu. 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Summa Theol.*, Supp., q. 12, a. 3.

ment of the will to God, through confession; by which one submits himself to God to be cleansed; but the cure of the remnants of sin is both signified and accomplished through satisfaction.<sup>79</sup>

Since the sacramental grace of penance is *gratia satisfactoria*, the grace of this sacrament will be directed not only to the compensation for the fault but likewise to providing a definite remedy for those dispositions which are the proximate cause of sin. The greatest satisfactory element in this regard will of course come from the act of satisfaction which the sinner performs as the act of sacramental penance. Thus, the same act of virtue performed by one justified extra-sacramentally and one justified by penance will have a greater satisfactory value and hence be of greater effect in removing the inordinate tendencies remaining from past actual sins. One act of natural virtue does not, of course, remove all the remnants of sin, but, says St. Thomas, "God's grace does this much more effectively, whether by one or by several acts."<sup>80</sup>

Christ's Passion, the Angelic Doctor notes, is more than sufficient to remove all the guilt of sin, both formal and material, and that man is released from this debt according to his share in the Power of Christ's Passion. The unusual feature of the sacramental grace of this sacrament is that the very acts of the penitent constitute the matter of the sacrament and "man shares in the power of Christ's Passion according to the measure of his own acts . . . wherefore the entire debt of punishment is not remitted at once after the first act of Penance, by which act guilt is remitted, but only when all the acts of Penance have been completed."<sup>81</sup> The guilt of sin is pardoned by operating grace but these acts of the penitent which follow the actual sacramental reception and are directed against the material element of sin are performed with co-operating grace.<sup>82</sup> Thus the penitent has a title to all those actual graces necessary to perform the virtuous acts which will completely remove these remnants of sin and the healing effects

<sup>79</sup> IV *Sent.*, d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, q. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 86, a. 5, ad 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 4, ad 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 4, ad 2.

of the satisfactory modality of penance will greatly accelerate their removal.

Several practical admonitions for the confessor immediately follow. First, since the curative effects of the sacrament are dependent upon the acts of the penitent, co-operating with God's grace, we see the dogmatic reason for the Council of Trent's recommendation that the penance imposed be proportioned both to the quantity and *quality* of the crimes committed.<sup>83</sup> Since the inordinate tendencies will be more quickly cured by acts of the contrary virtue, failure to prescribe such acts as a sacramental penance, can impede the operation of the curative effects of the sacrament. Second, overemphasis on the *ex opere operato* effects of the sacraments could lead the penitent to believe that the sacramental effects are fully accomplished by performance of the sacramental penance. If any emphasis is placed on post-sacramental acts, the aspect of temporal punishment is usually stressed and the penitent may feel that the gaining of a plenary indulgence fully accomplishes the removal of all the remains of past sin. While temporal punishment due to sin can be so removed, there can still remain the inordinate dispositions remaining from previous habits of sin. Failure to perform acts ordained to the removal of these tendencies may lead one even to question the efficacy of the sacrament as to its curative effects. Just as truly as the healing effects of a medicine for the body can be impeded by failure of the patient to adhere to a diet, so the remedial power of the satisfactory modality of the grace of Penance can be diminished by failure of the penitent to have the proper program of virtuous living.

#### CONCLUSION

Our purpose has been to determine as precisely as possible the sacramental grace of Penance, i.e., the precise special effects which are provided by the modality which is constitutive of the grace peculiar to this sacrament. Since these special effects are signified by the acts of the penitent, it was first necessary to determine the formal aspect from which each of these acts flow and their relation-

<sup>83</sup> Sess. 14, cap. 8.

ship to the sacrament itself. It was ascertained that the peculiar formality which characterized each of these acts was necessarily that of the virtue of penance, namely, satisfaction. Since each of the sacraments is intended to apply to the recipient not only the essential nature of the grace of Christ but certain special effects of the Passion of Christ, the modality proper to this sacrament gives the penitent a *gratia satisfactoria* making of him a more perfect sharer in the satisfactory power of Christ's Passion. Thus he is enabled through his acts of penance, both for his own sins and vicariously for the sins of others, to have a greater satisfactory efficacy by reason of his share in the satisfactory power of Christ's grace. Nor is this modality limited to the formal element of sin, the guilt of sin with its consequent eternal punishment. It likewise gives him greater power as regards the material element of sin, the temporal punishment and the inordinate dispositions which remain after the formal element has been removed. This greater curative power extends both to the act of sacramental penance as well as to all the virtuous acts of his life since all the infused virtues are modified in accordance with his sacramental grace, though the power can be impeded by failure of the penitent to perform such acts. Finally, the penitent has a title radicated in this modality to those graces necessary to perform the acts of satisfaction necessary to "fill up the sufferings of Christ," to overcome the temptations arising from past sins, to perform those acts of virtue necessary to heal the inordinate dispositions which remain as the result of past sins.

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**Digest of the Discussion:**

*Father Juniper Cummings, O.F.M.Conv.,* of Assumption Seminary, Chaska, Minn., opened the discussion period by asking Father Masterson to what extent his conclusion depended on the premise that the acts of the penitent constitute the matter of the sacrament of Penance. This would be an important consideration for those who would hold a different view on the matter of this sacrament.

*Father Masterson* replied that his conclusion would have to be based

on this premise as he presented it. In the development of the "minor" of his argument he had established the reasons why the acts of the penitent would constitute the sacramental matter. He pointed out that it might be possible to arrive at the same conclusions by using some other approach, but this at least would his way of doing it.

*Monsignor George Shea*, of Darlington Seminary, then asked Father Masterson what theory he would hold on the efficacy of the prayer *Passio*, etc., that follows the sacramental absolution. Does the prayer *Passio* elevate subsequent good acts and render them satisfactory, or is the *Passio* merely an expression or declaration of an elevation already achieved by the absolution itself?

In reply, *Father Masterson* said that he would be inclined to accept the majority view that this prayer is not itself deprecatory but rather a statement to emphasize that subsequent good acts now have a satisfactory value. This would better accord with the statement of St. Thomas that all acts subsequent to Penance have a satisfactory character, granted that the Angelic Doctor had no specific theory on the efficacy of this prayer as such. But his teaching on the satisfactory modality of the grace of Penance would provide an ontological and dogmatic explanation of why the *Passio* is not deprecatory but explanatory and declarative.

*Father Gerald Van Ackeren, S.J.*, of St. Mary's, Kansas, then asked for further clarification of the sense in which the grace of Penance is satisfactory. Does it merely elevate future acts? Or is the grace satisfactory in itself?

*Father Masterson* replied that there is no question that the penitent becomes a co-sufferer with Christ as a result of the reception of the sacrament of Penance and its sacramental grace. He acquires for his acts a satisfactory value that they would not otherwise have. They become more acceptable to God, not by reason of the person of the penitent, but by the "personality" of his grace which is conformed to Christ. It is also true, however, that the penance imposed in the sacrament is of great value with regard to temporal punishment and the curative effects generally. Then there is also a title to satisfactory value to other future acts. Thus the grace of Penance is both presently satisfactory itself and also with regard to future acts.

*Father Van Ackeren* raised another problem. Is the sacramental grace an effect of the *sacramentum tantum*? Insofar as it concerns the acts of the penitent, it would seem to be part of the *sacramentum tantum* and not only an effect.

*Father Masterson* remarked that St. Thomas had the same difficulty. On the one hand the acts of the penitent considered as sacramental matter have a part to play as cause, on the other hand their elevation is an

effect of the sacrament. Briefly, Father said, the following distinction could help solve the difficulty: as conjoined to the efficacy of the absolution the acts of the penitent not only signify but cause; considered as distinct from the sacramental absolution they signify only.

Father Leonard McCann, C.S.S.R., of Windsor, Ontario, next asked about an analogy used by Father Masterson in his paper; the comparison, namely, of a penitent who does not reform with a patient who fails to live up to a diet prescribed by his physician. How, then, is the grace satisfactory, Father McCann asked. What application would the distinction between sufficient and efficacious grace have to the satisfactory grace of Penance?

After expressing reluctance to get involved in the complex controversies concerning this distinction, Father Masterson explained that in the grace of Penance the satisfactory modality that cures sin is given *ex opere operato*. The penitent has the bottle of medicine, so to speak. But will he use it? Is it true that the effects of the grace can be impeded by the penitent. Whatever satisfactory acts he performs after receiving the sacrament are performed by co-operating grace; the question is whether this grace is sufficient or efficacious. Certainly the grace is at least sufficient to perform acts of satisfaction and the sacrament does entitle the penitent to all the sufficient grace that is necessary. But it is also true that not all the actual graces are efficacious. Otherwise penitents would never have to return to the sacrament.

Father Francis Costa, S.S.S., of Cleveland then turned the discussion to consider the efficacy of absolution in the cases where justification takes place prior to the reception of the sacrament. In an act of perfect contrition a desire for the sacrament of Penance is there. Does the remission come, then, through the desire of the sacrament?

Father Masterson based his reply on the teaching of St. Thomas that the perfection of this act *in voto* is equivalent to the power of the keys. If this act is equal to the power of the keys, then all other aspects of the act would operate in the same way.

Monsignor Shea of Darlington asked Father Masterson how this view would apply to the penitential discipline of the early Church when public sinners had to carry out their penance before being given absolution. Would the same reason operate here, i.e., the perfection of the act *in voto*? Father Masterson thought that it would, since the acts proper to confession, even *in voto*, contain the grace. This would presume, Monsignor Shea and Father Masterson agreed, that these penitents were first justified *ex opere operantis*.

Monsignor Shea had a final question: would the sacramental grace of Penance return if sanctifying grace itself were lost and then regained? Father Masterson replied that it would not. Once sanctifying grace is

lost, its modality is lost and so the grace of the sacrament of Penance is lost. In a sacrament like matrimony the situation is different since there is a permanent modification of the sacramental character. In this case there would be some basis for a return of the sacramental grace. At this point some rather energetic signals from the Reverend Secretary of the Society led the Chairman to bring the discussion to a close in order to make time for some administrative announcements.

*Recorded by:* BROTHER C. LUKE SALM, F.S.C.  
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