

THE THEOLOGY OF THE *RES ET*  
*SACRAMENTUM* WITH PARTICULAR  
EMPHASIS ON ITS APPLICATION  
TO PENANCE

SALVATION THROUGH THE COMMUNITY

Basic to Jewish-Christian tradition is the belief that man is saved in and through the community. The ancient Hebrew "could not make his unique answer to God as an isolated individual."<sup>1</sup> If he was to live at all, he had to be one with the community, one with the people of God. To be separated from the community was death. To be restored to the community was life. Similarly, the early Christian did not believe that he could have access to God apart from the community. But for him the community was the new people of God, the body of Christ which is the Church. "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). Separation from this body was death. Reconciliation to the body was life. For outside the body there is no salvation. Thus, in the early third century Origen has the sinner ask three questions, but they are really one: "How can I who have fallen be saved? . . . How can I have access to God? How can I return to the Church?"<sup>2</sup>

This idea of corporate salvation, of salvation in and through the Church, has always been foreign to Protestantism. More recently salvation has come to be regarded by many as the result of a personal encounter with God, an encounter which found its highest expression in the soul of Jesus, an encounter which is the exemplar and earnest of what can happen to all of us. We can all become Christs by sharing the experience of Jesus who became the Christ.

Although this individualism in religion is basically Protestant, something of its spirit has rubbed off on Catholics. Until recently, the impression was frequently given that "God is never faced with anything but an untold number of individuals, every one of them regulating on his own account the measure of his personal relation-

<sup>1</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body*, London, 1952, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Hom. 4, in Ps. 36* (PG, 12, 1353).

ship with God.”<sup>3</sup> True, Catholic theologians have always stressed the essential mediatorship of Christ and the secondary mediatorship of His Church, but all too frequently Christ and His Church have been regarded as catalytic agents, necessary to bring about the union of God and man, but somehow external to the unifying process.

Today, there is a growing awareness that salvation is not only mediated by Christ and His Church, but that the life of grace, which is produced and maintained by the sacraments is conferred in and through the Church. To quote Henri de Lubac, “grace does not set up a purely individual relationship between the soul and God or Christ; rather, each one receives grace in the measure in which he is joined socially to that unique organism in which there flows its own life-giving stream. . . . All the sacraments are essentially ‘sacraments in the Church’; in her alone they produce their full effect, for in her alone, ‘the society of the Spirit,’ is there, normally speaking, a sharing in the gift of the Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

This social or ecclesiological aspect of the sacraments, according to which the Christian is united to God and to Christ through his union with the community, is regarded by de Lubac as the “constant teaching of the Church, though it must be confessed that in practice it is too little known.”<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to explore a long neglected aspect of sacramental theology in order to make better known this social stamp which all the sacraments bear. I refer to the theology of the *res et sacramentum*, the symbolic reality which is both the immediate effect of the sacramental rite (*sacramentum tantum*) and the sign, pledge or disposition for the ultimate effect of the sacrament which is sacramental grace (*res tantum*). For it is in the *res et sacramentum* that a growing number of theologians today find a special bond or relationship with the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.

I say “today,” since it is only in comparatively recent years that theologians have stressed the ecclesiological significance of the

<sup>3</sup> E. Masure, *Semaine Sociale de Nice*, 1934, p. 230; cited by H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme*, Paris, 1947, ed. 4, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 57 f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

*res et sacramentum*. And yet early speculation on the nature of the *res et sacramentum* furnishes some basic ideas for a right understanding of the sense in which the Church is intimately involved in the sacramental economy of grace. For this reason it may not be amiss to trace quite briefly the history and development of the *res et sacramentum* and its earliest applications.

#### HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RES ET SACRAMENTUM

The expression *res et sacramentum* or, as it was originally phrased, *sacramentum et res*, resulted from Berengar's denial of Christ's true presence in the Eucharist. Augustine had distinguished between the sacrament of Christ's body and the reality or effect of the sacrament when received. According to Augustine, "a good man receives the sacrament and the reality of the sacrament, but a bad man receives only the sacrament and not the reality."<sup>6</sup> By reality or *res* Augustine had in mind the ultimate effect of the Eucharist which is the grace of union with Christ.<sup>7</sup> And this reality Berengar readily granted. For him the Eucharist was the sign of Christ's body, and yet the efficacious symbol of spiritual nourishment and union with Christ. Berengar denied, however, that Christ's true body was present in the Eucharist. For Berengar there were but two elements in the sacrament, the external sign or symbol, and the ultimate effect, the grace of spiritual nourishment and charity.<sup>8</sup>

Faced with this difficulty, it was necessary for the theologians of the day to find a third element in the Eucharist which would preserve the symbolism of the Eucharist and yet safeguard the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist. The search lasted for almost a century. Tentative replies were given by Lanfranc of Canterbury, Guitmund of Aversa and Durant of Troarn in the second half of the eleventh century, but the definitive reply was slowly evolved by Hugh of St. Victor and by Peter Lombard in the twelfth century, and given official approval by Pope Innocent III in the beginning of the 13th century.<sup>9</sup> A third element had to be considered

<sup>6</sup> *In Joan.*, tr. 26, 11 (PL, 35, 1612).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 17 (PL, 35, 1814).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. B. Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, Westminster, Md., 1956, pp. 252f.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Leeming, *op. cit.*, pp. 254 f.

in the Eucharist. It was not enough to speak of the *sacramentum tantum* and the *res tantum*, as Berengar insisted; account had to be taken of an element which is both sacrament and reality, *sacramentum et res*. To quote Innocent III:

A careful distinction must be made between three different elements in this sacrament, namely the visible form, the truth of the body and the spiritual power. The form is of bread and wine, the truth is of the body and blood, the power is of unity and charity. The first is a sacrament and not a reality. The second is both a sacrament and a reality. The third is a reality and not a sacrament. But the first is a sacrament or sign of a double thing. The second is the sacrament of one thing and the reality of another. The third is the reality of a double sacrament.<sup>10</sup>

When Innocent speaks of the *sacramentum tantum* of the Eucharist he has in mind the permanent sacrament and not the words of consecration spoken over bread and wine. In the course of time, however, when application had to be made to the other sacraments which do not visibly remain, the expression *sacramentum tantum* was applied to the sacramental rite which has for its immediate effect the *res et sacramentum* and for its ultimate effect the *res tantum* or sacramental grace. The application of the *res et sacramentum* to the other sacraments, however, was not easy. It was easy enough to see the sacramental character of three sacraments, a reality which is prior to grace and in some sense dispositive for grace. But in what sense could this invisible reality be called a sacrament or sign?

William of Auxerre, d. 1231, crystallized the difficulty in speaking of the sacrament of baptism: "a sacrament is a visible form of invisible grace; but the character is not visible, since it is only in the soul, and hence it is not a sacrament, and so it is not baptism."<sup>11</sup> And yet some answer had to be found since Augustine time and again had referred to the character as a sacrament or sign which distinguishes the Christian from the unbeliever, which identifies the sheep which are members of Christ's flock, and the

<sup>10</sup> *Cum Martha circa*, 29 Nov., 1202, (DB, 415).

<sup>11</sup> Cited by Leeming. *op. cit.*, p. 245.

soldiers, who are enrolled in His service, even though they be deserters.<sup>12</sup> Peter of Potier, d. 1205, had given the rather despairing answer that the character is visible to God and to angels. A much better solution was given by William of Auxerre himself. The character is not a sensible sign but an intelligible sign—*signum non sensibile sed intelligibile*.<sup>13</sup> St. Thomas accepts and elaborates this distinction, when he states: "The character imprinted on the soul is a kind of sign in so far as it is imprinted by a visible sacrament: since we know that a certain one has received the baptismal character through his being cleansed by the sensible water."<sup>14</sup> In other words, the existence of the character can be proved by establishing the fact of a valid baptism. Thus, the character is an intelligible sign, in the sense that it can be known, even though it is not a sensible sign, in the sense that it can be seen.

Having established the propriety of referring to the character as a *res et sacramentum*, theologians began to discuss the nature of this third element in the sacraments which is both reality and sign. At first their discussion centered on the sacraments which imprint a character, baptism, confirmation and orders. And it is principally from their discussion of the sacramental character, which is materially identified with the *res et sacramentum*, that a theology of the *res et sacramentum* develops.

Since Augustine had likened the permanent effect of baptism to a brand or mark burned on animals or tattooed on soldiers, it is understandable why William of Auvergne, d. 1245, should see in the character a sign of ownership, a sign of consecration, not unlike the consecration given to churches and sacred vessels, a consecration which implies an objective holiness which is distinct from grace or charity. Through the character the baptized becomes in a special way God's property. In view of the character, God considers the baptized as his own and fills him with His grace. Accordingly the character is at once a reality, since it establishes an objective bond between God and the soul, and at the same time a sign or earnest

<sup>12</sup> *De Baptismo contra Donat.*, 1, 4, 5 (PL, 43, 112) and *passim*; *Contra Cresconium Donat.*, 1, 30, 35 (PL, 43, 464).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Leeming, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>14</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 1, ad 2.

of God's grace since it is the ultimate disposition for grace.<sup>15</sup> What William of Auvergne failed to see or, at least, to express, although it is quite explicit in the teaching of Augustine, is that the character unites the baptized more directly with Christ, since the character is actually the character of Christ, the image of Christ, marking the baptized as one who belongs to Christ, identifying him as a member of His flock, and a soldier in His company.

William of Auvergne's teaching on the character as a disposition or prelude to grace was accepted by all the great scholastic doctors, including St. Thomas. In fact, it is this aspect of the *res et sacramentum* as a disposition for grace which explains the all but general acceptance of the theory of dispositive causality of the sacraments. St. Thomas, however, went further than William of Auvergne and his contemporaries in explaining the nature of the character. Without denying that the character is prior to grace and a disposition for grace,<sup>16</sup> Thomas added an altogether new dimension to the character by considering all three characters as orientated toward Christian worship. Admittedly the character configures or likens the soul to the whole Trinity, as the magistral definition of the day insisted, but in the mind of Thomas the character assimilated or likened the soul more directly to Christ, and more specifically to Christ in His role as Priest. Finally, this assimilation or likeness is not static but dynamic, since through the character the Christian is deputed to Christian worship, and through participation in the priesthood of Christ, he is given the power, active in confirmation and in orders, passive in baptism, to participate in Christian worship.<sup>17</sup>

From this rather brief and necessarily inadequate presentation

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Galot, *La Nature du Caractère Sacramental*, Mechlin, 1956, p. 226.

<sup>16</sup> "Dicendum quod character est dispositio ad gratiam per quamdam congruitatis dignitatem. Ex hoc enim ipso quod homo mancipatus est divinis actionibus et inter membra Christi connumeratus, fit ei quaedam congruitas ad gratiam suscipiendam, quia Deus perfecte in sacramentis homini praevidet. Unde simul cum caractere quod datur homini ut possit exercere spirituales actiones fidelium vel passiones seu receptiones, datur gratia qua hoc bene possit" (*Sent.* IV, d. 4, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 5).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 63, a. 3.



of scholastic teaching on the theology of the sacramental character the following conclusions may be derived relative to the theology of the *res et sacramentum*: (1) The *res et sacramentum* is an effect which is prior to grace and yet dispositive to grace; (2) In the case of the sacraments which produce a character, the *res et sacramentum* establishes a bond or relationship with God, with the Holy Trinity, or more particularly with Christ; (3) This relationship is both a consecration and a dedication; a consecration in so far as the Christian becomes the property of God, the Trinity or Christ, and in this sense objectively holy; a dedication in so far as the Christian assumes new obligations to continue Christ's office as priest, obligations which will be fulfilled with the aid of the sacramental grace which is peculiar to each sacrament. Thus, early speculation on the nature of the character reveals both a Trinitarian and a Christological stamp. It does not, however, reveal what I have already referred to as an ecclesiological stamp. Except for the Eucharist, in which the *res et sacramentum* is both the real body of Christ and yet the sign of Christ's mystical body which is the Church, there is little stress on the social significance of the *res et sacramentum*.<sup>18</sup> This is particularly true of the sacraments which do not imprint a character. In these sacraments the *res et sacramentum* is quite personal, an adornment or embellishment of the soul, the *ornatus animae*. Thus, the *res et sacramentum* of penance is internal repentance, *poenitentia interior*, the effect of the external sacrament and the ultimate disposition for the forgiveness of sin; the *res et sacramentum* of extreme unction is the spiritual anointing which is symbolized by the external anointing, and which effects in turn the final remission of venial sins or the remains of sin, thus preparing the soul for immediate entrance into glory.

It would be ungracious to criticize the early scholastics for failing to define more clearly what they called the *ornatus animae* or embellishment of the soul which is the immediate effect of those sacraments which do not produce a character. If criticism is in

<sup>18</sup> The question is one of stress. St. Thomas in the passage just cited from the *Sentences* (note 16) indicates that the Christian is entitled to grace in as much as he is numbered among the members of Christ. Accordingly, the Christological aspect of the sacramental character would seem to include the ecclesiological aspect.

order, and I am not so sure that it is, it would be more proper to criticize the failure of subsequent theologians to continue the development of the theology of the *res et sacramentum*, which was brought to a rather abrupt close at the time of the Protestant Reformation. And yet even they are to be excused. The climate of the times was not favorable for Catholic theologians to stress a sacramental effect which is prior to grace, a concept which is basic to the theology of the *res et sacramentum*. The theory of dispositive causality, which was universally accepted by all the great scholastic doctors, could easily be misconstrued as meaning that the sacraments did not produce grace *ex opere operato*, but some disposition which is prior to grace. Protestants at the time were insisting that this disposition for grace or, better, the remission of sins, was faith, and, if they were sufficiently informed, they could have appealed to William of Auxerre and St. Albert the Great who held that the *res et sacramentum* or *ornatus animae* implied an illumination of faith which disposes the recipient for the reception of grace.<sup>19</sup> Whether Cajetan, the greatest of the Dominican doctors at the time of the Reformation, sensed this fear of playing into the hands of the reformers, I am not prepared to say. However, Cajetan rejected the theory of dispositive causality in favor of a theory of perfective causality and even argued that St. Thomas in his later writings had done the same.<sup>20</sup>

In any event, from the time of Cajetan and due to his influence, theologians generally have held that the sacraments produce grace immediately, some interpreting the causality as physical, as most Dominicans, and some as moral, as most Jesuits. In such a climate it is understandable why the theology of the *res et sacramentum* failed to develop and why it ultimately languished until revived by Cardinal Billot. Writing in the early years of the present century, Billot complains: "Modern authors have very little indeed to say about the *res et sacramentum*. And yet you will scarcely find anything in the present matter which is of greater importance

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Galot, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 f.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. H. Lennerz, *De Sacramentis Novae Legis in Genere*, ed. 2., Romae, 1939 (nn. 412, 413, 417); B. Leeming, *op. cit.*, pp. 324 ff.



and which throws more essential light on the many obscurities which repeatedly occur."<sup>21</sup>

The chief obscurity in sacramental theology is the manner in which the sacraments cause grace, and Billot believed that renewed study of the *res et sacramentum* would throw essential light on that problem. Like the earlier scholastics, Billot regarded the *res et sacramentum* as a disposition for grace, but, unlike his predecessors, who had regarded the *ornatus animae* as an entity in the physical order, Billot insisted that the *res et sacramentum* was a title to grace in the juridical or intentional order. True, Billot admitted the ontological or physical reality of the character, but even in the case of those sacraments which imprint a character, it is the accompanying title to grace and not the character itself which sets up the exigency for grace.<sup>22</sup>

Another defect in Billot's system, at least from the point of view of this paper, is that it too fails to stress the sociological or ecclesiological stamp of the sacraments. The sacraments produce a title to grace, but the title itself is not founded in any new relationship of the individual with the Mystical Body of Christ.

#### THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL STAMP OF THE RES ET SACRAMENTUM

The first theologian, to my knowledge, to stress the ecclesiological character of all seven sacraments was Matthias Scheeben writing in the closing decades of the last century. However, it has only been in more recent years, with the translation of his great classic, *Die Mysterien des Christentums*, that theologians more generally have become aware of Scheeben's contribution to the theology of the *res et sacramentum*.

Returning to the original use of the term *res et sacramentum* as applied to the Eucharist, Scheeben concludes that "It is only through the body of Christ and our union with it in one mystical body that its fullness of grace is communicated to us, and we share

<sup>21</sup> *De Ecclesiae Sacramentis*, ed. 7, Romae, 1931, I, 112.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 143, continuation of note; and cf. pp. 159 f. for Billot's insistence that the power associated with the character is juridical and not physical.

in the divine life coursing in it." <sup>23</sup> And it is this idea of a "special union with the God-man as head of His mystical body," which dominates Scheeben's teaching on the significance of the *res et sacramentum*. In the sacraments which imprint a character, Scheeben, like William of Auvergne, sees a special consecration, an objective holiness, which, with a stroke of theological genius, he likens to the objective holiness or substantial sanctity of the humanity of Christ. For Scheeben the character has its archetype or exemplar in the grace of the hypostatic union, by which the humanity of Christ is united through the Word to the whole Trinity, thus setting up an exigency for habitual grace in His soul.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, it is through the character or the *res et sacramentum* of the other sacraments that we are united to Christ in and through His Mystical Body, thus setting up an exigency for the special sacramental graces which flow from the Head to the various members. Scheeben, like Billot, refers to the *re et sacramentum* as a title to grace, but the title is not an entity in the juridical or moral order alone. We are entitled to grace because we are united in a special manner to the God-man as Head of His Mystical Body. Speaking of the *res et sacramentum* of the sacraments other than the Eucharist, Scheeben concludes that the *res et sacramentum* "consists in a special union with the God-man as head of His mystical body, by which participation in the spirit, that is, in the divinity and the divine life of the God-man, is granted to us on the basis of a special supernatural title, and for a special supernatural end."<sup>25</sup>

It is not the purpose of this paper to determine the special bond or relationship with Christ and His Church which results from the various sacraments. In the case of the sacraments which imprint a character, the determination is not too difficult. In these sacraments the character itself guarantees the ontological reality of the bond. In each of these sacraments we can discern a special configuration to Christ as priest, prophet and king, and a resultant title to the graces necessary to continue Christ's office in the Church.

But in the sacraments which do not produce a character, it is

<sup>23</sup> *The Mysteries of Christianity*, tr. by C. Vollert, S.J., St. Louis, 1947, p. 575.

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 584 f.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 575.

not only difficult to establish a new relationship to the Church, but it is even more difficult to describe the specific manner in which the Christian is likened or configured to Christ, a configuration which would further determine the sacramental grace of each sacrament. The sacrament of extreme unction is a case in point. It was suggested by the members of our board of directors that I should consult, among recent writers, the thesis which states that "the immediate effect of the sacramental rite is a state of relationship to the Mystical Body of Christ, e.g., the immediate effect of extreme unction is a relationship to Christ in His suffering and dying."

Now this concept of extreme unction as an incorporation to Christ in His suffering and death has been attractively presented by Michael Schmaus in his *Katholische Dogmatik*. In fact, for Schmaus, extreme unction is basically the sacramental consecration of death.<sup>26</sup> To establish his point, Schmaus quotes liberally from the commendation of a departing soul, but fails to cite the liturgy of extreme unction itself, which has no reference to death but which asks instead for the recovery of perfect health, of soul, of mind and body. Actually, if we may judge from the liturgy, the sacrament which consecrates the Christian's death is not extreme unction, since it can be given only to those who are in danger of death from sickness, but viaticum, which can be given to all who are faced with death.<sup>27</sup>

A number of popular writers have gone beyond Schmaus in their understanding of the sacrament of unction of the sick. Not only is the anointing an anointing for death, but an anointing for glory. It configures the soul of the Christian not only to Christ in His suffering and dying but in His resurrection and glory.<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, this idea of unction as an anointing for glory is well founded in the teaching of the early scholastics who regarded the purpose of unc-

<sup>26</sup> *Katholische Dogmatik*, IV, 1, München, 1957, 614-635.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. C. Davis, "This Sacrament of the Sick" *The Clergy Review*, 43 (December, 1958) 734.

<sup>28</sup> Thus, C. Howell, S.J., in *Of Sacraments and Sacrifice*, Collegeville, Minn., 1952, p. 75; H. A. Reinhold, "Anointing for Glory," in *The American Parish and the Roman Liturgy*, New York, 1958. The same theme is developed by P. Anciaux, by no means a popularizer, in "L'Onction des Malades," in *Colleganea Mechliniensia*, 44 (Jan. 1959) 18 f.

tion as the immediate preparation of the soul for the beatific vision. In fact, St. Albert the Great who regards all the sacraments as a configuration to Christ either in His suffering or in His resurrection, concludes that "by extreme unction we are configured to Christ in His resurrection; it is a sacrament given to the Christian about to leave this world, as a prefiguration of the anointing that is the glory to come when the elect will be delivered from all mortality."<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, when it was suggested that the immediate effect or *res et sacramentum* of unction was a relationship to Christ in His suffering and dying, I had just completed an article in which I attempted to prove that the purpose of extreme unction is not so much to prepare the Christian for death but to comfort and to strengthen him and to restore him to the Church.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, if I were to determine the *res et sacramentum* of extreme unction I would establish a special bond with the Church as comforter and healer, in so far as the Church continues Christ's ministry of comforting and healing the sick. And if I were pressed to liken or configure the soul of the anointed Christian to Christ, I would suggest that he is likened not so much to Christ in His death and resurrection but rather to Christ in His agony, when He was comforted by a visitation of an angel. In other words I would relate the sacrament of unction more closely to the sacrament of confirmation or strengthening than to the sacrament of baptism, which symbolizes death and resurrection in Christ.

I mention all this only to point up the problem of determining the special bond of relationship with the Church and the special configuration to Christ which each of the sacraments suggests. Much will depend on determining the purpose of each individual sacrament, and even after this purpose has been determined, much will depend on the genius with which the individual theologian is gifted in explaining his position.

#### APPLICATION OF THE RES ET SACRAMENTUM TO PENANCE

Fortunately, for my purposes, the sacrament of penance has re-

<sup>29</sup> Cited without reference by J. Robilliard, O.P., in *Initiation Théologique* Paris, 1954, 4, 687.

<sup>30</sup> "The Purpose of Anointing the Sick: A Reappraisal," in *Theological Studies*, 19 (Sept., 1958) 309-344.

ceived sufficient development in Sacred Scripture and in the early tradition of the Church to enable us to determine more precisely the *res et sacramentum* of this sacrament. More important, the sacrament of penance is today a test case in justifying recent teaching on the ecclesiological character of the sacraments.

The case was first presented some thirty-five years ago by Father Bartholomew Xiberta in a doctoral thesis which has since become famous.<sup>31</sup> From the time of the Reformation, and for reasons already explained, few theologians even mentioned the *res et sacramentum*, and, the few who did, merely stated without further elucidation the opinion of St. Thomas that the *res et sacramentum* of penance was *poenitentia interior*, an effect which is caused by the external acts of the penitent and by the act of the absolving priest.<sup>32</sup> Father Xiberta, however, attempted to prove from Sacred Scripture and the writings of the Fathers that the immediate effect of the priest's absolution is reconciliation with the Church.

The thesis itself was daring since it seemed to play into the hands of non-Catholic historians of penance who had argued that the early penitential discipline of the Church was introduced for the purpose of reconciling the sinner to the Church as an external society, leaving untouched the sinner's relationship with God. Reconciliation with the Church, they argued; hence not reconciliation with God. Xiberta's thesis was also novel, since at the time most theologians were persuaded that the bishop's reconciliation following the performance of the canonical penance was not the sacrament of penance but either the lifting of an excommunication in the external forum or the grant of an indulgence.<sup>33</sup>

Today, all Catholic historians are agreed that the final reconciliation of penitents by the bishop was actually sacramental. In fact, there is no certain evidence, apart from emergency cases, that sacramental absolution followed immediately upon confession, in the Church of the first nine centuries. Again, as Father de la Taille,

<sup>31</sup> *Clavis Ecclesiae*, Romae, 1922.

<sup>32</sup> *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 84, a. 1, ad 3.

<sup>33</sup> A. Pérez Goyena, S.J., appeals to Collet, Palmieri, Pesch, De San, Hurter and H. Mazella to prove against Xiberta that reconciliation granted by the bishop in the early Church at the close of the public penance was not the sacrament of penance (*Razon y Fe*, 65 [1923] 379-381).



one of the few theologians of the day who looked kindly upon Xiberta's thesis, expressed it: Reconciliation with the Church, therefore reconciliation with God. For de la Taille saw that reconciliation with the Church is the pledge and sacramental sign of divine pardon, that reconciliation with the Church, as Xiberta concludes, is the *res et sacramentum* of the sacrament of penance.<sup>34</sup>

Space does not permit us to do justice to the arguments which Xiberta adduces to substantiate his thesis. They begin with the formulas which Christ used in promising and in conferring the apostolic ministry of forgiveness: "Whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18, 18) and "Whosoever sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them" (John 20, 23). In both instances the action of the Church in loosing or forgiving is prior to God's action of forgiving the sinner. In other words, whom the Church reconciles to herself God reconciles to Himself. Obviously, God's confirmation of this action of the Church will depend on the penitence of the sinner. But, granted this condition, it appears quite clear that God's reconciliation of the sinner awaits the action of His ministers, who act, however, in the name of the Church. Father Xiberta marshals a number of passages from the early Fathers of the Church which stress the priority of ecclesiastical pardon in the drama of divine forgiveness. One passage which he does not cite, and which I had the good fortune to stumble upon, expresses quite eloquently the initiative of the Church in the final act of divine reconciliation.

The passage is from St. Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth century doctor of the universal Church. Commenting on Christ's commission to forgive and to retain sins, Ephrem has Christ say: "Receive a power which will neither leave you nor fail, because your word is guaranteed. Your words I shall not gainsay. If you shall be angry, I too shall be angry; if you shall be reconciled [to the sinner] I too shall be reconciled. Behold I hang at your sides the keys of the kingdom. Open and close it with fairness until I shall come in glory."<sup>35</sup>

This idea of reconciliation with the Church as a pledge or earnest

<sup>34</sup> *Gregorianum* (1923) 591 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Cited by P. Palmer, S.J. in *Sacraments and Forgiveness*, vol. 2 of *Sources of Christian Theology*, Westminster, Md., 1959, 82.

of reconciliation with God is confirmed, I believe, by the very terms which the early Church used to express the immediate effect of her ministry of forgiveness. The effect is described as *communio* or fellowship of the Church, as the fellowship of peace (*communio pacis*), as the peace of the Church (*pax Ecclesiae*) and finally as reconciliation with the Church. It is only when this peace or reconciliation with the Church has been established that there can be question of the forgiveness of sins. Thus, St. Cyprian in his exegesis of the power of the keys interprets the words "to loose" as meaning to restore "to peace and fellowship," with the result that "in the peace which has been given [sinners] receive the pledge of life," and "in the peace which has been received they receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>36</sup>

This same idea of peace with the Church as the pledge of the Spirit by whom sins are forgiven is basic to the teaching of St. Augustine: "The peace of the Church forgives sins and estrangement from the Church's peace retains sins."<sup>37</sup> And the reason is always the same: "The remission of sins, since it cannot be granted except in the Holy Spirit, is granted only in that Church which has the Holy Spirit." For "outside this body the Holy Spirit vivifies no one." Accordingly, "the charity of the Church which is poured out into our hearts forgives the sins of those who are members of the Church, but it retains the sins of those who are not her members."<sup>38</sup> Texts could be multiplied to show that for Augustine the forgiveness of sins, whether through baptism or penance, is had only through the Spirit who is poured out on those who are united to the Church. Even Father Galtier, who severely censures Xiberta's thesis, unwittingly, I believe, subscribes to Xiberta's basic premise, when he states:

This effusion of charity or the Holy Spirit into the heart does not take place except where "peace" or "reconciliation" is received from the Church herself. This is the firmly founded (*firmissima*) teaching of St. Augustine and from it he deduces the conclusion that there can be no remission of sin except in and through the Church.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Epist.* 57, 1; 55, 13, 57, 4.

<sup>37</sup> *De Baptismo contra Donat.*, 3, 18, 23.

<sup>38</sup> *Sermo* 71, 20, 33; *Epist.* 185, 50; *In Joan.*, tr. 121, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *De Paenitentia, Tractatus Dogmatico-Historicus*, ed. nova, Romae, 1950,

Today's Xiberta's thesis is accepted by most Catholic scholars in the field of penance and sacramental theology, including such names as Poschmann, Karl Rahner, Amann, Schmaus, de Lubac and Leeming.<sup>40</sup> D'Alès and Galtier are notable exceptions.<sup>41</sup> Both critics question the general relevance of the *res et sacramentum*, since it is based on what they regard as the antiquated and discredited theory of dispositive causality. And they question more particularly the propriety of referring to reconciliation with the Church as the *res et sacramentum* of penance.

In the first part of this paper we attempted to show that the theology of the *res et sacramentum* has received a remarkable revival and that it is far from discredited. We shall attempt to show now the propriety of referring to reconciliation with the Church as the *res et sacramentum* of penance. To do this we shall explain first, the sense in which reconciliation with the Church is a permanent effect and a reality in the physical order, secondly, the sense in which such reconciliation can be called a sign or sacrament, and thirdly, the sense in which the sign is both a disposition for grace and a configuration of the penitent to Christ.

#### AN ANALYSIS OF THE RES ET SACRAMENTUM OF PENANCE

To explain the permanent character of reconciliation with the Church it is necessary to distinguish between the act of reconciling and the state of reconciliation which results, between what might be called reconciliation *in fieri* and the reconciliation *in facto esse*. Reconciliation *in fieri* is the sacramental sign, and it is identified

p. 132. For Galtier's adverse criticism of Xiberta's thesis cf. the same edition, p. 341.

<sup>40</sup> B. Poschmann in *Paenitentia Secunda*, Bonn, 1940, pp. 11 ff. and in "Die innere Struktur des Buss sakramentes," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift*, 1, 3 (1950) 12-30; Karl Rahner, S.J., in *De Paenitentia Tractatus Historico-Dogmaticus*, ed. 3, Oeniponte, 1955, vol. 2, pp. 682-709, and in "Vergessene Wahrheiten über das Buss sakrament," *Geist und Leben*, 26 (1953) 339-364; É. Amann in "Pénitence," *D.T.C.*, 14, 787-9; M. Schmaus in *Katholische Dogmatik*, 4, 1, München, 1951, 525 ff. and in "Reich Gottes und Buss sakrament," *Münch. Theol. Zeit.*, 1, 1 (1950) 20-36; H. de Lubac, S.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 55 ff.; B. Leeming, S.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 361 ff.

<sup>41</sup> A. l'Alès, S.J. in "La Pénitence," *Rescherches de Science Religieuse*, 12 (1922) 372 ff.; P. Galtier, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 341.

principally with the absolving action of the priest. Reconciliation *in facto esse* is the *res et sacramentum*, and it implies a bond of restored friendship with the Church, a relationship which remains so long as serious sin does not sever the bond or venial sin does not strain the relationship. Since this bond or relationship is the effect of the sacramental rite in which the Holy Spirit is operative, we should regard the bond itself as having the same ontological reality as the sacramental character. Incorporation into the Church and restoration to the Church are both the effect of the Spirit, not as yet indwelling, but as forging the bond or relationship with the Church in which the Spirit dwells and in which the charity of the Spirit is poured out on those who are her members.

Granted that reconciliation with the Church is a reality in the physical order, in what sense is it also a sacrament or sign? As already noted, William of Auxerre and St. Thomas defended the propriety of referring to the sacramental character as a sacrament on the grounds that the character could be known even though not seen. In other words the character is a *signum intelligibile* and not a *signum visibile*.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, reconciliation with the Church can be known by establishing the fact that the penitent has been absolved by a duly authorized minister of the Church, a fact which was more easily established in the early Church when reconciliation was public. Furthermore, since the reconciled penitent enjoys the privilege of approaching the Eucharist, the sacrament of Christian unity, we can say that in the penitent's reception of the Eucharist the bond of friendship with the Church is manifested visibly.

Granted that reconciliation with the Church is both a reality and a sign, in what sense is it a disposition for grace or a *signum dispositivum*? Father D'Alès, one of Xiberta's earliest and severest critics, insists that reconciliation with the Church in the internal forum can only mean an effective and vital union with the Mystical Body, a union which is itself the effect of grace and not the preparation or prelude to grace.<sup>43</sup> Father Galtier says the same but even more pointedly: "The sinner is not understood to be justified simply because he is reinserted into the Mystical Body of Christ. . . . On

<sup>42</sup> See above, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Art. cit.*, p. 374.

the contrary, he is understood to be restored to that body and privileged to partake once more of its benefits, because he has already been justified by absolution."<sup>44</sup>

Now this objection of D'Alès and Galtier has particular relevance to the sacrament of penance. All will admit that the sacramental character or the *res et sacramentum* of baptism, confirmation and orders is prior to grace not only in nature, but, occasionally, even in time. Thus, one who receives the sacrament of baptism validly, but unworthily, is incorporated into the Church, but he does not receive the grace of justification. But unless we extend the principle of reviviscence to the sacrament of penance, and not all authors do, it is difficult to see how reconciliation with the Church is in any sense prior to grace. In fact, how can we speak of a bond of restored friendship with the Church unless the bond itself is the effect of the grace of charity? And yet the New Testament formulas for the forgiveness of sins and the passages which we have cited from Ephrem, Cyprian and Augustine seem to suggest, if not to express quite definitely, that peace with the Church is in some sense prior to God's act of justifying the sinner. To quote Cyprian again, "In the peace which has been given [sinners] receive the pledge of life," and "in the peace which has been received, they receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>45</sup> And to add to the citations from Augustine, "The city of God by receiving [sinners] makes them innocent."<sup>46</sup>

Both Galtier and D'Alès would lead one to believe that the sinner is first reconciled to God and then restored to the Church. The teaching of Augustine is quite the other way round. To quote Galtier's own appraisal of Augustine's teaching: "there can be no remission of sin except in and through the Church."<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, reconciliation with the Church must be prior at least in some sense to reconciliation with God. But how explain this priority?

Two explanations suggest themselves. The first is implicit in what we have already said of the action of the Spirit in reconciling

<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 341.

<sup>45</sup> See above, p. 17

<sup>46</sup> *Contra Cresconium Donat.*, 11, 12, 16.

<sup>47</sup> See above, p. 18.



the penitent with the Church, an action which is distinct from the operation of the indwelling Spirit through whom we are justified, but an action which prepares for justification. Thus, reconciliation with the Church is by nature prior to grace since it is the ultimate disposition for the grace of the indwelling Spirit.

A second explanation is prompted by St. Thomas's theory of reciprocal priority and posteriority in the conversion of the sinner. According to St. Thomas, interior penance or contrition is the ultimate disposition for the grace of forgiveness, but interior penance by which the sinner turns from sins and turns to God must be informed by charity. Thus, in the order of dispositive causality contrition is prior to grace, but in the order of efficient and formal causality contrition is the effect of grace.<sup>48a</sup> Although we do not personally find this theory of St. Thomas congenial, it will appeal to most Thomists and may be applied to reconciliation with the Church as the *res et sacramentum* of penance. Accordingly, reconciliation with the Church is the ultimate disposition for the grace of charity, and yet it is the effect of the grace of charity. In the order of dispositive causality, reconciliation is prior to grace; in the order of efficient and formal causality, reconciliation is posterior to grace.

Granted, then, that there is some propriety in referring to reconciliation with the Church as a *signum dispositivum* or disposition for grace, we can now inquire into the manner in which such reconciliation is a *signum configurativum* or an assimilation of the penitent to Christ. Now it would seem that St. Thomas limits the notion of configuration and consecration to those sacraments which imprint a character, to those sacraments which are strictly consecratory and which demand a special power or potency, either active or passive, to confer or to receive the other sacraments, and thus to participate in Christian worship. Accordingly, St. Thomas does not associate *paenitentia interior* with any special consecration or con-

<sup>48a</sup> "Dicendum quod dispositio subjecti praecedit susceptionem formae ordine naturae; sequitur tamen actionem agentis, per quam etiam ipsum subiectum disponitur. Et ideo motus liberi arbitrii naturae ordine praecedit consecutionem gratiae, sequitur autem infusionem gratiae" (*Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 113, a. 8, ad 2). Cf. *ibid.*, a. 6, and *Contra Gent.*, 4, 72.

figuration to Christ.<sup>48b</sup> However, St. Albert the Great believed that all seven sacraments "configure us to Christ our head." According to Albert, penance configures the soul to the suffering Christ, whereas Extreme Unction configures the soul to Christ in His Resurrection.<sup>49</sup>

Although we have suggested a different type of configuration for the *res et sacramentum* of extreme unction, we feel that Albert the Great is correct in likening the penitent to Christ in His expiatory suffering. True, all the faithful have the obligation "to fill up what is wanting of the sufferings of Christ . . . for his body which is the Church" (Col. 1, 24). Since, however, the reconciled penitent differs from one who has never severed or strained the bond of charity which unites the members of Christ's Mystical Body, it is understandable why the reconciled penitent is deputed in a special way to atone for the injury which he has done to that Body. And it is precisely in submitting to the penances imposed by the Church through the ministry of her priests that we are, as the Council of Trent asserts, "made like to Christ Jesus who satisfied for our sins—*dum satisfaciendo patimur pro peccatis, Christo Jesu, qui pro peccatis nostris satisfecit . . . conformes efficitur.*"<sup>50</sup>

Last year, Father Reginald Masterson, O.P., presented a doctoral thesis which states that the sacramental grace of penance is *gratia satisfactoria*. To quote Father Masterson directly, "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."<sup>51</sup> Father Masterson arrived at this conclusion from an analysis of the acts of the penitent, "since it is the matter which determines the precise formality of grace as it flows through the sacramental instrument."<sup>52</sup>

Without denying that the matter of the sacrament plays a part in determining the nature of sacramental grace, we believe

<sup>48b</sup> *Sent.* IV, d. 4, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2. Cf. Galot, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>49</sup> See above, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Sess. 14, cap. 8* (DB, 904).

<sup>51</sup> "The Sacramental Grace of Penance," *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, St. Paul, Minn., 1958, p. 47.

<sup>52</sup> *Art. cit.*, pp. 36 f.

that the symbolism of the sacrament derives more from the sacramental form and from the *res et sacramentum* or symbolic reality which results.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly we would regard the sacramental grace of penance basically as a grace of reconciliation,<sup>54</sup> a *gratia restaurata*, a special modality of sanctifying grace, implying the infusion of the special virtue of penance, by which the sinner is moved to make reparation for his sins. All this is symbolized quite adequately by reconciliation with the Church as the sign of reconciliation with God. However, if the virtue of penance is to become operative in works of satisfaction the sinner needs a special actual grace, a grace which Father Masterson happily refers to as *gratia satisfactoria*. But here again, I would suggest, at least by way of complement to his own arguments, that this grace is symbolized and pledged by the penitent's configuration to Christ in His expiatory suffering and death. For it is a known principle in theology and recurrent in the teaching of St. Thomas that no one is deputed to an office without receiving those special graces which are necessary to fulfill that office.

<sup>53</sup> Father Masterson appeals to a principle enunciated by St. Thomas in the *Sentences*: "In sacramentis in quibus est materia et forma, significatio est ex parte materiae principaliter, sed efficacia ex parte formae" (*Sent.* IV, d. 22, q. 2, a. 2, qu. 2). In the *Summa*, however, St. Thomas seems to ascribe perfect signification to the words or form of the sacrament: "Et ideo ad perfectionem significationis sacramentalis necesse fuit ut significatio rerum sensibilibus per aliqua verba determinaretur. Aqua enim significare potest et ablutionem propter suam humiditatem, et refrigerium propter suam frigiditatem; sed cum dicitur: *Ego te baptizo*, manifestatur quod aqua utitur in baptismo ad significandam emundationem spiritualem" (*Summa Theol.*, III, q. 60, a. 6). Again, even in the context of the passage from the *Sentences*, St. Thomas states that "the infusion of grace which causes the remission of sin is signified through the absolution of the priest . . . but the cure of the remnants of sin is both signified and accomplished through satisfaction" (*Sent.* IV, d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, qu. 3; cited by Masterson, pp. 44 f.). From this passage, it would seem that the principal effect of the sacrament of penance, namely the forgiveness of sins, is signified by the priest's absolution, whereas the secondary effect, namely the cure of the remnants of sin, is signified by the acts of the penitent.

<sup>54</sup> In discussing the *res et effectus* of penance, the Council of Trent mentions in the first place *reconciliatio cum Deo* (Sess. XIV, DB, 896). Accordingly, the grace of reconciliation should be stressed, it would seem, in discussing the sacramental grace of this sacrament.

CONCLUSION

We introduced this paper on the theology of the *res et sacramentum* with a quotation from de Lubac which stresses the social or ecclesiological stamp of the grace of the sacraments. With that rare insight which distinguishes the theologian who is well versed in the Church's long tradition, de Lubac concludes that it is only through union with the community that the Christian is united to God and to Christ. De Lubac applies this master principle to baptism, penance and the Eucharist. The parallel he draws between baptism and penance will serve as an excellent summary of this paper.

The first effect of baptism, for example, is none other than this incorporation in the visible Church. To be baptized is to enter the Church. And this is essentially a social event. . . . The efficacy of penance is explained like that of baptism, for in the case of penance, the relationship between sacramental forgiveness and the social reintegration of the sinner is just as clear. . . . The Church's primitive discipline portrayed this relationship in a more striking manner. The whole apparatus of public penance and pardon made it clear that the reconciliation of the sinner is in the first place a reconciliation with the Church, this latter constituting an efficacious sign of reconciliation with God. . . . It is precisely because there can be no return to the grace of God without a return to the communion of the Church that the intervention of a minister of that Church is normally required. "Only the whole Christ," said Isaac de Stella in the twelfth century, "the Head upon His Body, Christ with the Church, can remit sins."<sup>55</sup>

It is the privilege of genius, as exemplified in this passage from de Lubac, to leave to others the speculative justification of its profound insights. This more prosaic task we have attempted in the present paper.

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<sup>55</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 62.