

THIRD PART, QUESTION 84

Of the Sacrament of Penance

(In Ten Articles)

We must now consider the Sacrament of Penance. We shall consider (1) Penance itself; (2) Its effect; (3) Its Parts; (4) The recipients of this sacrament; (5) The power of the ministers, which pertains to the keys; (6) The solemnization of this sacrament.

The first of these considerations will be two fold: (1) Penance as a sacrament; (2) Penance as a virtue.

Under the first head there are ten points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether Penance is a sacrament?
- (2) Of its proper matter;
- (3) Of its form;
- (4) Whether imposition of hands is necessary for this sacrament?
- (5) Whether this sacrament is necessary for salvation?
- (6) Of its relation to the other sacraments;
- (7) Of its institution;
- (8) Of its duration;
- (9) Of its continuance;
- (10) Whether it can be repeated?

Whether Penance is a sacrament?

IIIa q. 84 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that Penance is not a sacrament. For Gregory* says: “The sacraments are Baptism, Chrism, and the Body and Blood of Christ; which are called sacraments because under the veil of corporeal things the Divine power works out salvation in a hidden manner.” But this does not happen in Penance, because therein corporeal things are not employed that, under them, the power of God may work our salvation. Therefore Penance is not a sacrament.

Objection 2. Further, the sacraments of the Church are shown forth by the ministers of Christ, according to 1 Cor. 4:1: “Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.” But Penance is not conferred by the ministers of Christ, but is inspired inwardly into man by God, according to Jer. 31:19: “After Thou didst convert me, I did penance.” Therefore it seems that Penance is not a sacrament.

Objection 3. Further, in the sacraments of which we have already spoken above, there is something that is sacrament only, something that is both reality and sacrament, and something that is reality only, as is clear from what has been stated (q. 66, a. 1). But this does not apply to Penance. Therefore Penance is not a sacrament.

On the contrary, As Baptism is conferred that we may be cleansed from sin, so also is Penance: wherefore Peter said to Simon Magus (Acts 8:22): “Do penance... from this thy wickedness.” But Baptism is a sacrament as stated above (q. 66, a. 1). Therefore for the same reason Penance is also a sacrament.

I answer that, As Gregory says[†], “a sacrament consists in a solemn act, whereby something is so done that we understand it to signify the holiness which it con-

fers.” Now it is evident that in Penance something is done so that something holy is signified both on the part of the penitent sinner, and on the part of the priest absolving, because the penitent sinner, by deed and word, shows his heart to have renounced sin, and in like manner the priest, by his deed and word with regard to the penitent, signifies the work of God Who forgives his sins. Therefore it is evident that Penance, as practiced in the Church, is a sacrament.

Reply to Objection 1. By corporeal things taken in a wide sense we may understand also external sensible actions, which are to this sacrament what water is to Baptism, or chrism to Confirmation. But it is to be observed that in those sacraments, whereby an exceptional grace surpassing altogether the proportion of a human act, is conferred, some corporeal matter is employed externally, e.g. in Baptism, which confers full remission of all sins, both as to guilt and as to punishment, and in Confirmation, wherein the fulness of the Holy Ghost is bestowed, and in Extreme Unction, which confers perfect spiritual health derived from the virtue of Christ as from an extrinsic principle. Wherefore, such human acts as are in these sacraments, are not the essential matter of the sacrament, but are dispositions thereto. On the other hand, in those sacraments whose effect corresponds to that of some human act, the sensible human act itself takes the place of matter, as in the case of Penance and Matrimony, even as in bodily medicines, some are applied externally, such as plasters and drugs, while others are acts of the person who seeks to be cured, such as certain exercises.

Reply to Objection 2. In those sacraments which have a corporeal matter, this matter needs to be applied

* Cf. Isidore, Etym. vi, ch. 19 † Isidore, Etym. vi, ch. 19

by a minister of the Church, who stands in the place of Christ, which denotes that the excellence of the power which operates in the sacraments is from Christ. But in the sacrament of Penance, as stated above (ad 1), human actions take the place of matter, and these actions proceed from internal inspiration, wherefore the matter is not applied by the minister, but by God working inwardly; while the minister furnishes the complement of the sacrament, when he absolves the penitent.

Reply to Objection 3. In Penance also, there is something which is sacrament only, viz. the acts performed outwardly both by the repentant sinner, and by the priest in giving absolution; that which is reality and sacrament is the sinner's inward repentance; while that which is reality, and not sacrament, is the forgiveness of sin. The first of these taken altogether is the cause of the second; and the first and second together are the cause of the third.

Whether sins are the proper matter of this sacrament?

IIIa q. 84 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that sins are not the proper matter of this sacrament. Because, in the other sacraments, the matter is hallowed by the utterance of certain words, and being thus hallowed produces the sacramental effect. Now sins cannot be hallowed, for they are opposed to the effect of the sacrament, viz. grace which blots out sin. Therefore sins are not the proper matter of this sacrament.

Objection 2. Further, Augustine says in his book *De Poenitentia* [Cf. *Serm. cccli*]: "No one can begin a new life, unless he repent of the old." Now not only sins but also the penalties of the present life belong to the old life. Therefore sins are not the proper matter of Penance.

Objection 3. Further, sin is either original, mortal or venial. Now the sacrament of Penance is not ordained against original sin, for this is taken away by Baptism, [nor against mortal sin, for this is taken away by the sinner's confession]*, nor against venial sin, which is taken away by the beating of the breast and the sprinkling of holy water and the like. Therefore sins are not the proper matter of Penance. .

On the contrary, The Apostle says (2 Cor. 12:21): "(Who) have not done penance for the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness, that they have committed."

I answer that, Matter is twofold, viz. proximate and remote: thus the proximate matter of a statue is a metal, while the remote matter is water. Now it has been stated (a. 1, ad 1, ad 2), that the proximate matter

of this sacrament consists in the acts of the penitent, the matter of which acts are the sins over which he grieves, which he confesses, and for which he satisfies. Hence it follows that sins are the remote matter of Penance, as a matter, not for approval, but for detestation, and destruction.

Reply to Objection 1. This argument considers the proximate matter of a sacrament.

Reply to Objection 2. The old life that was subject to death is the object of Penance, not as regards the punishment, but as regards the guilt connected with it.

Reply to Objection 3. Penance regards every kind of sin in a way, but not each in the same way. Because Penance regards actual mortal sin properly and chiefly; properly, since, properly speaking, we are said to repent of what we have done of our own will; chiefly, since this sacrament was instituted chiefly for the blotting out of mortal sin. Penance regards venial sins, properly speaking indeed, in so far as they are committed of our own will, but this was not the chief purpose of its institution. But as to original sin, Penance regards it neither chiefly, since Baptism, and not Penance, is ordained against original sin, nor properly, because original sin is not done of our own will, except in so far as Adam's will is looked upon as ours, in which sense the Apostle says (Rom. 5:12): "In whom all have sinned." Nevertheless, Penance may be said to regard original sin, if we take it in a wide sense for any detestation of something past: in which sense Augustine uses the term in his book *De Poenitentia* (*Serm. cccli*).

Whether the form of this sacrament is: "I absolve thee"?

IIIa q. 84 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that the form of this sacrament is not: "I absolve thee." Because the forms of the sacraments are received from Christ's institution and the Church's custom. But we do not read that Christ instituted this form. Nor is it in common use; in fact in certain absolutions which are given publicly in church (e.g. at Prime and Compline and on Maundy Thursday), absolution is given not in the indicative form by saying: "I absolve thee," but in the deprecatory form, by saying: "May Almighty God have mercy on you,"

or: "May Almighty God grant you absolution and forgiveness." Therefore the form of this sacrament is not: "I absolve thee."

Objection 2. Further, Pope Leo says (Ep. cviii) that God's forgiveness cannot be obtained without the priestly supplications: and he is speaking there of God's forgiveness granted to the penitent. Therefore the form of this sacrament should be deprecatory.

Objection 3. Further, to absolve from sin is the same as to remit sin. But God alone remits sin, for

* The words in brackets are omitted in the Leonine edition

He alone cleanses man inwardly from sin, as Augustine says (*Contra Donatist.* v, 21). Therefore it seems that God alone absolves from sin. Therefore the priest should say not: "I absolve thee," as neither does he say: "I remit thy sins."

Objection 4. Further, just as our Lord gave His disciples the power to absolve from sins, so also did He give them the power "to heal infirmities," "to cast out devils," and "to cure diseases" (Mat. 10:1; Lk. 9:1). Now the apostles, in healing the sick, did not use the words: "I heal thee," but: "The Lord Jesus Christ heal [Vulg.: 'heals'] thee," as Peter said to the palsied man (Acts 9:34). Therefore since priests have the power which Christ gave His apostles, it seems that they should not use the form: "I absolve thee," but: "May Christ absolve thee."

Objection 5. Further, some explain this form by stating that when they say: "I absolve thee," they mean "I declare you to be absolved." But neither can this be done by a priest unless it be revealed to him by God, wherefore, as we read in Mat. 16:19 before it was said to Peter: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth," etc., it was said to him (Mat. 16:17): "Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, but My Father Who is in heaven." Therefore it seems presumptuous for a priest, who has received no revelation on the matter, to say: "I absolve thee," even if this be explained to mean: "I declare thee absolved."

On the contrary, As our Lord said to His disciples (Mat. 28:19): "Going . . . teach ye all nations, baptizing them," etc., so did He say to Peter (Mat. 16:19): "Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth," etc. Now the priest, relying on the authority of those words of Christ, says: "I baptize thee." Therefore on the same authority he should say in this sacrament: "I absolve thee."

I answer that, The perfection of a thing is ascribed to its form. Now it has been stated above (a. 1, ad 2) that this sacrament is perfected by that which is done by the priest. Wherefore the part taken by the penitent, whether it consist of words or deeds, must needs be the matter of this sacrament, while the part taken by the priest, takes the place of the form.

Now since the sacraments of the New Law accomplish what they signify, as stated above (q. 62, a. 1, ad 1), it behooves the sacramental form to signify the sacramental effect in a manner that is in keeping with the matter. Hence the form of Baptism is: "I baptize thee," and the form of Confirmation is: "I sign thee with the sign of the cross, and I confirm thee with the chrism of salvation," because these sacraments are perfected in the use of their matter: while in the sacrament of the Eucharist, which consists in the very consecration of the matter, the reality of the consecration is expressed in the words: "This is My Body."

Now this sacrament, namely the sacrament of Penance, consists not in the consecration of a matter, nor in the use of a hallowed matter, but rather in the

removal of a certain matter, viz. sin, in so far as sins are said to be the matter of Penance, as explained above (a. 2). This removal is expressed by the priest saying: "I absolve thee": because sins are fetters, according to Prov. 5:22. "His own iniquities catch the wicked, and he is fast bound with the ropes of his own sins." Wherefore it is evident that this is the most fitting form of this sacrament: "I absolve thee."

Reply to Objection 1. This form is taken from Christ's very words which He addressed to Peter (Mat. 16:19): "Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth," etc., and such is the form employed by the Church in sacramental absolution. But such absolutions as are given in public are not sacramental, but are prayers for the remission of venial sins. Wherefore in giving sacramental absolution it would not suffice to say: "May Almighty God have mercy on thee," or: "May God grant thee absolution and forgiveness," because by such words the priest does not signify the giving of absolution, but prays that it may be given. Nevertheless the above prayer is said before the sacramental absolution is given, lest the sacramental effect be hindered on the part of the penitent, whose acts are as matter in this sacrament, but not in Baptism or Confirmation.

Reply to Objection 2. The words of Leo are to be understood of the prayer that precedes the absolution, and do not exclude the fact that the priest pronounces absolution.

Reply to Objection 3. God alone absolves from sin and forgives sins authoritatively; yet priests do both ministerially, because the words of the priest in this sacrament work as instruments of the Divine power, as in the other sacraments: because it is the Divine power that works inwardly in all the sacramental signs, be they things or words, as shown above (q. 62, a. 4; q. 64, Aa. 1,2). Wherefore our Lord expressed both: for He said to Peter (Mat. 16:19): "Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth," etc., and to His disciples (Jn. 20:23): "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." Yet the priest says: "I absolve thee," rather than: "I forgive thee thy sins," because it is more in keeping with the words of our Lord, by expressing the power of the keys whereby priests absolve. Nevertheless, since the priest absolves ministerially, something is suitably added in reference to the supreme authority of God, by the priest saying: "I absolve thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," or by the power of Christ's Passion, or by the authority of God. However, as this is not defined by the words of Christ, as it is for Baptism, this addition is left to the discretion of the priest.

Reply to Objection 4. Power was given to the apostles, not that they themselves might heal the sick, but that the sick might be healed at the prayer of the apostles: whereas power was given to them to work instrumentally or ministerially in the sacraments; wherefore they could express their own agency in the sacramental forms rather than in the healing of infirmities. Nev-

ertheless in the latter case they did not always use the deprecatory form, but sometimes employed the indicative or imperative: thus we read (Acts 3:6) that Peter said to the lame man: "What I have, I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk."

Reply to Objection 5. It is true in a sense that the words, "I absolve thee" mean "I declare thee absolved," but this explanation is incomplete. Because the sacraments of the New Law not only signify, but effect what they signify. Wherefore, just as the priest in baptizing anyone, declares by deed and word that the person is washed inwardly, and this not only significantly but also effectively, so also when he says: "I absolve thee," he declares the man to be absolved not only significantly but also effectively. And yet he does not speak as of something uncertain, because just as the other sacra-

ments of the New Law have, of themselves, a sure effect through the power of Christ's Passion, which effect, nevertheless, may be impeded on the part of the recipient, so is it with this sacrament. Hence Augustine says (*De Adult. Conjug. ii*): "There is nothing disgraceful or onerous in the reconciliation of husband and wife, when adultery committed has been washed away, since there is no doubt that remission of sins is granted through the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Consequently there is no need for a special revelation to be made to the priest, but the general revelation of faith suffices, through which sins are forgiven. Hence the revelation of faith is said to have been made to Peter.

It would be a more complete explanation to say that the words, "I absolve thee" mean: "I grant thee the sacrament of absolution."

Whether the imposition of the priest's hands is necessary for this sacrament?

IIIa q. 84 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem that the imposition of the priest's hands is necessary for this sacrament. For it is written (Mk. 16:18): "They shall lay hands upon the sick, and they shall recover." Now sinners are sick spiritually, and obtain recovery through this sacrament. Therefore an imposition of hands should be made in this sacrament.

Objection 2. Further, in this sacrament man regains the Holy Ghost Whom he had lost, wherefore it is said in the person of the penitent (Ps. 1:14): "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit." Now the Holy Ghost is given by the imposition of hands; for we read (Acts 8:17) that the apostles "laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost"; and (Mat. 19:13) that "little children were presented" to our Lord, "that He should impose hands upon them." Therefore an imposition of hands should be made in this sacrament.

Objection 3. Further, the priest's words are not more efficacious in this than in the other sacraments. But in the other sacraments the words of the minister do not suffice, unless he perform some action: thus, in Baptism, the priest while saying: "I baptize thee," has to perform a bodily washing. Therefore, also while saying: "I absolve thee," the priest should perform some action in regard to the penitent, by laying hands on him.

On the contrary, When our Lord said to Peter (Mat. 16:19): " whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth," etc., He made no mention of an imposition of hands; nor did He when He said to all the apostles (Jn. 20:13): "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." Therefore no imposition of hands is required for this sacrament.

I answer that, In the sacraments of the Church the imposition of hands is made, to signify some abundant effect of grace, through those on whom the hands are laid being, as it were, united to the ministers in whom grace should be plentiful. Wherefore an imposi-

tion of hands is made in the sacrament of Confirmation, wherein the fulness of the Holy Ghost is conferred; and in the sacrament of order, wherein is bestowed a certain excellence of power over the Divine mysteries; hence it is written (2 Tim. 1:6): "Stir up the grace of God which is in thee, by the imposition of my hands."

Now the sacrament of Penance is ordained, not that man may receive some abundance of grace, but that his sins may be taken away; and therefore no imposition of hands is required for this sacrament, as neither is there for Baptism, wherein nevertheless a fuller remission of sins is bestowed.

Reply to Objection 1. That imposition of hands is not sacramental, but is intended for the working of miracles, namely, that by the contact of a sanctified man's hand, even bodily infirmity might be removed; even as we read of our Lord (Mk. 6:5) that He cured the sick, "laying His hands upon them," and (Mat. 8:3) that He cleansed a leper by touching him.

Reply to Objection 2. It is not every reception of the Holy Ghost that requires an imposition of hands, since even in Baptism man receives the Holy Ghost, without any imposition of hands: it is at the reception of the fulness of the Holy Ghost which belongs to Confirmation that an imposition of hands is required.

Reply to Objection 3. In those sacraments which are perfected in the use of the matter, the minister has to perform some bodily action on the recipient of the sacrament, e.g. in Baptism, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction; whereas this sacrament does not consist in the use of matter employed outwardly, the matter being supplied by the part taken by the penitent: wherefore, just as in the Eucharist the priest perfects the sacrament by merely pronouncing the words over the matter, so the mere words which the priest while absolving pronounces over the penitent perfect the sacrament of absolution. If, indeed, any bodily act were necessary on the part of the priest, the sign of the cross, which is

employed in the Eucharist, would not be less becoming than the imposition of hands, in token that sins are forgiven through the blood of Christ crucified; and yet

this is not essential to this sacrament as neither is it to the Eucharist.

Whether this sacrament is necessary for salvation?

IIIa q. 84 a. 5

Objection 1. It would seem that this sacrament is not necessary for salvation. Because on Ps. 125:5, “They that sow in tears,” etc., the gloss says: “Be not sorrowful, if thou hast a good will, of which peace is the meed.” But sorrow is essential to Penance, according to 2 Cor. 7:10: “The sorrow that is according to God worketh penance steadfast unto salvation.” Therefore a good will without Penance suffices for salvation.

Objection 2. Further, it is written (Prov. 10:12): “Charity covereth all sins,” and further on (Prov. 15:27): “By mercy and faith sins are purged away.” But this sacrament is for nothing else but the purging of sins. Therefore if one has charity, faith, and mercy, one can obtain salvation, without the sacrament of Penance.

Objection 3. Further, the sacraments of the Church take their origin from the institution of Christ. But according to Jn. 8 Christ absolved the adulterous woman without Penance. Therefore it seems that Penance is not necessary for salvation.

On the contrary, our Lord said (Lk. 13:3): “Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.”

I answer that, A thing is necessary for salvation in two ways: first, absolutely; secondly, on a supposition. A thing is absolutely necessary for salvation, if no one can obtain salvation without it, as, for example, the grace of Christ, and the sacrament of Baptism, whereby a man is born again in Christ. The sacrament of Penance is necessary on a supposition, for it is necessary, not for all, but for those who are in sin. For it is written (2 Paral 37*), “Thou, Lord, God of the righteous, hast not appointed repentance to the righteous, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, nor to those who sinned not against Thee.” But “sin, when it is completed, begetteth death” (James 1:15). Consequently it is necessary for the sinner’s salvation that sin be taken away from him; which cannot be done without the sacrament of Penance, wherein the

power of Christ’s Passion operates through the priest’s absolution and the acts of the penitent, who co-operates with grace unto the destruction of his sin. For as Augustine says (Tract. lxxii in Joan.[†]), “He Who created thee without thee, will not justify thee without thee.” Therefore it is evident that after sin the sacrament of Penance is necessary for salvation, even as bodily medicine after man has contracted a dangerous disease.

Reply to Objection 1. This gloss should apparently be understood as referring to the man who has a good will unimpaired by sin, for such a man has no cause for sorrow: but as soon as the good will is forfeited through sin, it cannot be restored without that sorrow whereby a man sorrows for his past sin, and which belongs to Penance.

Reply to Objection 2. As soon as a man falls into sin, charity, faith, and mercy do not deliver him from sin, without Penance. Because charity demands that a man should grieve for the offense committed against his friend, and that he should be anxious to make satisfaction to his friend; faith requires that he should seek to be justified from his sins through the power of Christ’s Passion which operates in the sacraments of the Church; and well-ordered pity necessitates that man should succor himself by repenting of the pitiful condition into which sin has brought him, according to Prov. 14:34: “Sin maketh nations miserable”; wherefore it is written (Ecclus. 30:24): “Have pity on thy own soul, pleasing God.”

Reply to Objection 3. It was due to His power of “excellence,” which He alone had, as stated above (q. 64, a. 3), that Christ bestowed on the adulterous woman the effect of the sacrament of Penance, viz. the forgiveness of sins, without the sacrament of Penance, although not without internal repentance, which He operated in her by grace.

Whether Penance is a second plank after shipwreck?

IIIa q. 84 a. 6

Objection 1. It would seem that Penance is not a second plank after shipwreck. Because on Is. 3:9, “They have proclaimed abroad their sin as Sodom,” a gloss says: “The second plank after shipwreck is to hide one’s sins.” Now Penance does not hide sins, but reveals them. Therefore Penance is not a second plank.

Objection 2. Further, in a building the foundation takes the first, not the second place. Now in the spiritual edifice, Penance is the foundation, according to Heb. 6:1: “Not laying again the foundation of Penance

from dead works”; wherefore it precedes even Baptism, according to Acts 2:38: “Do penance, and be baptized every one of you.” Therefore Penance should not be called a second plank.

Objection 3. Further, all the sacraments are planks, i.e. helps against sin. Now Penance holds, not the second but the fourth, place among the sacraments, as is clear from what has been said above (q. 65, Aa. 1,2). Therefore Penance should not be called a second plank after shipwreck.

* The prayer of Manasses, among the Apocrypha † Implicitly in the passage referred to, but explicitly Serm. xv de verb Apost.

On the contrary, Jerome says (Ep. cxxx) that “Penance is a second plank after shipwreck.”

I answer that, That which is of itself precedes naturally that which is accidental, as substance precedes accident. Now some sacraments are, of themselves, ordained to man’s salvation, e.g. Baptism, which is the spiritual birth, Confirmation which is the spiritual growth, the Eucharist which is the spiritual food; whereas Penance is ordained to man’s salvation accidentally as it were, and on something being supposed, viz. sin: for unless man were to sin actually, he would not stand in need of Penance and yet he would need Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist; even as in the life of the body, man would need no medical treatment, unless he were ill, and yet life, birth, growth, and food are, of themselves, necessary to man.

Consequently Penance holds the second place with regard to the state of integrity which is bestowed and safeguarded by the aforesaid sacraments, so that it is called metaphorically “a second plank after shipwreck.” For just as the first help for those who cross the sea is to be safeguarded in a whole ship, while the second help when the ship is wrecked, is to cling to a plank; so too the first help in this life’s ocean is that man safeguard his integrity, while the second help is, if he lose his integrity through sin, that he regain it by means of Penance.

Reply to Objection 1. To hide one’s sins may happen in two ways: first, in the very act of sinning. Now it is worse to sin in public than in private, both because a public sinner seems to sin more from contempt, and because by sinning he gives scandal to others. Consequently in sin it is a kind of remedy to sin secretly, and it is in this sense that the gloss says that “to hide one’s sins is a second plank after shipwreck”; not that it takes away sin, as Penance does, but because it makes the sin less grievous. Secondly, one hides one’s sin previously committed, by neglecting to confess it: this is opposed to Penance, and to hide one’s sins thus is not a second plank, but is the reverse, since it is written (Prov. 28:13): “He that hideth his sins shall not prosper.”

Reply to Objection 2. Penance cannot be called the foundation of the spiritual edifice simply, i.e. in the first building thereof; but it is the foundation in the second building which is accomplished by destroying sin, because man, on his return to God, needs Penance first. However, the Apostle is speaking there of the foundation of spiritual doctrine. Moreover, the penance which precedes Baptism is not the sacrament of Penance.

Reply to Objection 3. The three sacraments which precede Penance refer to the ship in its integrity, i.e. to man’s state of integrity, with regard to which Penance is called a second plank.

Whether this sacrament was suitably instituted in the New Law?

IIIa q. 84 a. 7

Objection 1. It would seem that this sacrament was unsuitably instituted in the New Law. Because those things which belong to the natural law need not to be instituted. Now it belongs to the natural law that one should repent of the evil one has done: for it is impossible to love good without grieving for its contrary. Therefore Penance was unsuitably instituted in the New Law.

Objection 2. Further, that which existed in the Old Law had not to be instituted in the New. Now there was Penance in the old Law wherefore the Lord complains (Jer. 8:6) saying: “There is none that doth penance for his sin, saying: What have I done?” Therefore Penance should not have been instituted in the New Law.

Objection 3. Further, Penance comes after Baptism, since it is a second plank, as stated above (a. 6). Now it seems that our Lord instituted Penance before Baptism, because we read that at the beginning of His preaching He said (Mat. 4:17): “Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Therefore this sacrament was not suitably instituted in the New Law.

Objection 4. Further, the sacraments of the New Law were instituted by Christ, by Whose power they work, as stated above (q. 62, a. 5; q. 64, a. 1). But Christ does not seem to have instituted this sacrament, since He made no use of it, as of the other sacraments which He instituted. Therefore this sacrament was unsuitably instituted in the New Law.

On the contrary, our Lord said (Lk. 24:46,47): “It behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead the third day: and that penance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all nations.”

I answer that, As stated above (a. 1, ad 1, ad 2), in this sacrament the acts of the penitent are as matter, while the part taken by the priest, who works as Christ’s minister, is the formal and completive element of the sacrament. Now in the other sacraments the matter pre-exists, being provided by nature, as water, or by art, as bread: but that such and such a matter be employed for a sacrament requires to be decided by the institution; while the sacrament derives its form and power entirely from the institution of Christ, from Whose Passion the power of the sacraments proceeds.

Accordingly the matter of this sacrament pre-exists, being provided by nature; since it is by a natural principle of reason that man is moved to repent of the evil he has done: yet it is due to Divine institution that man does penance in this or that way. Wherefore at the outset of His preaching, our Lord admonished men, not only to repent, but also to “do penance,” thus pointing to the particular manner of actions required for this sacrament. As to the part to be taken by the ministers, this was fixed by our Lord when He said to Peter (Mat. 16:19): “To thee will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” etc.; but it was after His resurrection that He made known the efficacy of this sacrament and the source of its power,

when He said (Lk. 24:47) that “penance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all nations,” after speaking of His Passion and resurrection. Because it is from the power of the name of Jesus Christ suffering and rising again that this sacrament is efficacious unto the remission of sins.

It is therefore evident that this sacrament was suitably instituted in the New Law.

Reply to Objection 1. It is a natural law that one should repent of the evil one has done, by grieving for having done it, and by seeking a remedy for one’s grief in some way or other, and also that one should show some signs of grief, even as the Ninevites did, as we read in Jn. 3. And yet even in their case there was also something of faith which they had received through Jonas’ preaching, inasmuch as they did these things in the hope that they would receive pardon from God, according as we read (Jn. 3:9): “Who can tell if God will turn and forgive, and will turn away from His fierce anger, and we shall not perish?” But just as other matters which are of the natural law were fixed in detail by the institution of the Divine law, as we have stated in the Ia IIae, q. 91, a. 4; Ia IIae, q. 95, a. 2; Ia IIae, q. 99, so was it with Penance.

Reply to Objection 2. Things which are of the natural law were determined in various ways in the old and in the New Law, in keeping with the imperfection of the old, and the perfection of the New. Wherefore Penance was fixed in a certain way in the Old Law—with regard to sorrow, that it should be in the heart rather than in external signs, according to Joel 2:13: “Rend your hearts and not your garments”; and with regard to seeking a remedy for sorrow, that they should in some way confess their sins, at least in general, to God’s ministers. Wherefore the Lord said (Lev. 5:17,18): “If anyone sin through ignorance. . . he shall offer of the flocks a ram without blemish to the priest, according to the measure and estimation of the sin, and the priest shall pray for him, because he did it ignorantly, and it shall be forgiven him”; since by the very fact of making an offering for his sin, a man, in a fashion, confessed his sin to the priest. And accordingly it is written (Prov. 28:13): “He

that hideth his sins, shall not prosper: but he that shall confess, and forsake them, shall obtain mercy.” Not yet, however, was the power of the keys instituted, which is derived from Christ’s Passion, and consequently it was not yet ordained that a man should grieve for his sin, with the purpose of submitting himself by confession and satisfaction to the keys of the Church, in the hope of receiving forgiveness through the power of Christ’s Passion.

Reply to Objection 3. If we note carefully what our Lord said about the necessity of Baptism (Jn. 3:3, seqq.), we shall see that this was said before His words about the necessity of Penance (Mat. 4:17); because He spoke to Nicodemus about Baptism before the imprisonment of John, of whom it is related afterwards (Jn. 3:23, 24) that he baptized, whereas His words about Penance were said after John was cast into prison.

If, however, He had admonished men to do penance before admonishing them to be baptized, this would be because also before Baptism some kind of penance is required, according to the words of Peter (Acts 2:38): “Do penance, and be baptized, every one of you.”

Reply to Objection 4. Christ did not use the Baptism which He instituted, but was baptized with the baptism of John, as stated above (q. 39, Aa. 1,2). Nor did He use it actively by administering it Himself, because He “did not baptize” as a rule, “but His disciples” did, as related in Jn. 4:2, although it is to be believed that He baptized His disciples, as Augustine asserts (Ep. cclxv, ad Seleuc.). But with regard to His institution of this sacrament it was nowise fitting that He should use it, neither by repenting Himself, in Whom there was no sin, nor by administering the sacrament to others, since, in order to show His mercy and power, He was wont to confer the effect of this sacrament without the sacrament itself, as stated above (a. 5, ad 3). On the other hand, He both received and gave to others the sacrament of the Eucharist, both in order to commend the excellence of that sacrament, and because that sacrament is a memorial of His Passion, in which Christ is both priest and victim.

Whether Penance should last till the end of life?

IIIa q. 84 a. 8

Objection 1. It would seem that Penance should not last till the end of life. Because Penance is ordained for the blotting out of sin. Now the penitent receives forgiveness of his sins at once, according to Ezech. 18:21: “If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed. . . he shall live and shall not die.” Therefore there is no need for Penance to be further prolonged.

Objection 2. Further, Penance belongs to the state of beginners. But man ought to advance from that state to the state of the proficient, and, from this, on to the state of the perfect. Therefore man need not do Penance

till the end of his life.

Objection 3. Further, man is bound to observe the laws of the Church in this as in the other sacraments. But the duration of repentance is fixed by the canons, so that, to wit, for such and such a sin one is bound to do penance for so many years. Therefore it seems that Penance should not be prolonged till the end of life.

On the contrary, Augustine says in his book, *De Poenitentia**: “What remains for us to do, save to sorrow ever in this life? For when sorrow ceases, repentance fails; and if repentance fails, what becomes of

* *De vera et falsa Poenitentia*, the authorship of which is unknown

pardon?”

I answer that, Penance is twofold, internal and external. Internal penance is that whereby one grieves for a sin one has committed, and this penance should last until the end of life. Because man should always be displeased at having sinned, for if he were to be pleased thereat, he would for this very reason fall into sin and lose the fruit of pardon. Now displeasure causes sorrow in one who is susceptible to sorrow, as man is in this life; but after this life the saints are not susceptible to sorrow, wherefore they will be displeased at, without sorrowing for, their past sins, according to Is. 65:16. “The former distresses are forgotten.”

External penance is that whereby a man shows external signs of sorrow, confesses his sins verbally to the priest who absolves him, and makes satisfaction for his sins according to the judgment of the priest. Such penance need not last until the end of life, but only for a fixed time according to the measure of the sin.

Reply to Objection 1. True penance not only removes past sins, but also preserves man from future sins. Consequently, although a man receives forgiveness of past sins in the first instant of his true penance, nevertheless he must persevere in his penance, lest he fall again into sin.

Reply to Objection 2. To do penance both internal and external belongs to the state of beginners, of those, to wit, who are making a fresh start from the state of sin. But there is room for internal penance even in the proficient and the perfect, according to Ps. 83:7: “In his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps, in the vale of tears.” Wherefore Paul says (1 Cor. 15:9): “I . . . am not worthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God.”

Reply to Objection 3. These durations of time are fixed for penitents as regards the exercise of external penance.

Whether Penance can be continuous?

IIIa q. 84 a. 9

Objection 1. It would seem that penance cannot be continuous. For it is written (Jer. 31:16): “Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thy eyes from tears.” But this would be impossible if penance were continuous, for it consists in weeping and tears. Therefore penance cannot be continuous.

Objection 2. Further, man ought to rejoice at every good work, according to Ps. 99:1: “Serve ye the Lord with gladness.” Now to do penance is a good work. Therefore man should rejoice at it. But man cannot rejoice and grieve at the same time, as the Philosopher declares (Ethic. ix, 4). Therefore a penitent cannot grieve continually for his past sins, which is essential to penance. Therefore penance cannot be continuous.

Objection 3. Further, the Apostle says (2 Cor. 2:7): “Comfort him,” viz. the penitent, “lest perhaps such an one be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” But comfort dispels grief, which is essential to penance. Therefore penance need not be continuous.

On the contrary, Augustine says in his book on Penance*: “In doing penance grief should be continual.”

I answer that, One is said to repent in two ways, actually and habitually. It is impossible for a man continually to repent actually. For the acts, whether internal or external, of a penitent must needs be interrupted by sleep and other things which the body needs. Secondly, a man is said to repent habitually. and thus he should repent continually, both by never doing anything contrary to penance, so as to destroy the habitual disposition of the penitent, and by being resolved that his past sins should always be displeasing to him.

Reply to Objection 1. Weeping and tears belong to the act of external penance, and this act needs neither to

be continuous, nor to last until the end of life, as stated above (a. 8): wherefore it is significantly added: “For there is a reward for thy work.” Now the reward of the penitent’s work is the full remission of sin both as to guilt and as to punishment; and after receiving this reward there is no need for man to proceed to acts of external penance. This, however, does not prevent penance being continual, as explained above.

Reply to Objection 2. Of sorrow and joy we may speak in two ways: first, as being passions of the sensitive appetite; and thus they can no. wise be together, since they are altogether contrary to one another, either on the part of the object (as when they have the same object), or at least on the part of the movement, for joy is with expansion[†] of the heart, whereas sorrow is with contraction; and it is in this sense that the Philosopher speaks in Ethic. ix. Secondly, we may speak of joy and sorrow as being simple acts of the will, to which something is pleasing or displeasing. Accordingly, they cannot be contrary to one another, except on the part of the object, as when they concern the same object in the same respect, in which way joy and sorrow cannot be simultaneous, because the same thing in the same respect cannot be pleasing and displeasing. If, on the other hand, joy and sorrow, understood thus, be not of the same object in the same respect, but either of different objects, or of the same object in different respects, in that case joy and sorrow are not contrary to one another, so that nothing hinders a man from being joyful and sorrowful at the same time—for instance, if we see a good man suffer, we both rejoice at his goodness and at the same time grieve for his suffering. In this way a man may be displeased at having sinned, and be pleased at his displeasure together with his hope for pardon, so

* De vera et falsa Poenitentia, the authorship of which is unknown

† Cf. Ia IIae, q. 33, a. 1

that his very sorrow is a matter of joy. Hence Augustine says[‡]: “The penitent should ever grieve and rejoice at his grief.”

If, however, sorrow were altogether incompatible with joy, this would prevent the continuance, not of habitual penance, but only of actual penance.

Reply to Objection 3. According to the Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 3,6,7,9) it belongs to virtue to establish the mean in the passions. Now the sorrow which, in the

sensitive appetite of the penitent, arises from the displeasure of his will, is a passion; wherefore it should be moderated according to virtue, and if it be excessive it is sinful, because it leads to despair, as the Apostle teaches (2 Cor. 2:7), saying: “Lest such an one be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” Accordingly comfort, of which the Apostle speaks, moderates sorrow but does not destroy it altogether.

Whether the sacrament of Penance may be repeated?

IIIa q. 84 a. 10

Objection 1. It would seem that the sacrament of Penance should not be repeated. For the Apostle says (Heb. 6:4, seqq.): “It is impossible for those, who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. . . and are fallen away, to be renewed again to penance.” Now whosoever have done penance, have been illuminated, and have received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Therefore whosoever sin after doing penance, cannot do penance again.

Objection 2. Further, Ambrose says (De Poenit. ii): “Some are to be found who think they ought often to do penance, who take liberties with Christ: for if they were truly penitent, they would not think of doing penance over again, since there is but one Penance even as there is but one Baptism.” Now Baptism is not repeated. Neither, therefore, is Penance to be repeated.

Objection 3. Further, the miracles whereby our Lord healed bodily diseases, signify the healing of spiritual diseases, whereby men are delivered from sins. Now we do not read that our Lord restored the sight to any blind man twice, or that He cleansed any leper twice, or twice raised any dead man to life. Therefore it seems that He does not twice grant pardon to any sinner.

Objection 4. Further, Gregory says (Hom. xxxiv in Evang.): “Penance consists in deploring past sins, and in not committing again those we have deplored”: and Isidore says (De Summo Bono ii): “He is a mocker and no penitent who still does what he has repented of.” If, therefore, a man is truly penitent, he will not sin again. Therefore Penance cannot be repeated.

Objection 5. Further, just as Baptism derives its efficacy from the Passion of Christ, so does Penance. Now Baptism is not repeated, on account of the unity of Christ’s Passion and death. Therefore in like manner Penance is not repeated.

Objection 6. Further, Ambrose says on Ps. 118:58, “I entreated Thy face,” etc., that “facility of obtaining pardon is an incentive to sin.” If, therefore, God frequently grants pardon through Penance, it seems that He affords man an incentive to sin, and thus He seems to take pleasure in sin, which is contrary to His goodness. Therefore Penance cannot be repeated.

On the contrary, Man is induced to be merciful by the example of Divine mercy, according to Lk. 6:36:

“Be ye. . . merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” Now our Lord commanded His disciples to be merciful by frequently pardoning their brethren who had sinned against them; wherefore, as related in Mat. 18:21, when Peter asked: “How often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” Jesus answered: “I say not to thee, till seven times, but till seventy times seven times.” Therefore also God over and over again, through Penance, grants pardon to sinners, especially as He teaches us to pray (Mat. 6:12): “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”

I answer that, As regards Penance, some have erred, saying that a man cannot obtain pardon of his sins through Penance a second time. Some of these, viz. the Novatians, went so far as to say that he who sins after the first Penance which is done in Baptism, cannot be restored again through Penance. There were also other heretics who, as Augustine relates in De Poenitentia*, said that, after Baptism, Penance is useful, not many times, but only once.

These errors seem to have arisen from a twofold source: first from not knowing the nature of true Penance. For since true Penance requires charity, without which sins are not taken away, they thought that charity once possessed could not be lost, and that, consequently, Penance, if true, could never be removed by sin, so that it should be necessary to repeat it. But this was refuted in the IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 11, where it was shown that on account of free-will charity, once possessed, can be lost, and that, consequently, after true Penance, a man can sin mortally. Secondly, they erred in their estimation of the gravity of sin. For they deemed a sin committed by a man after he had received pardon, to be so grave that it could not be forgiven. In this they erred not only with regard to sin which, even after a sin has been forgiven, can be either more or less grievous than the first, which was forgiven, but much more did they err against the infinity of Divine mercy, which surpasses any number and magnitude of sins, according to Ps. 50:1,2: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy: and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my iniquity.” Wherefore the words of Cain were reprehensible, when he said (Gn.

[‡] De vera et falsa Poenitentia, the authorship of which is unknown

* De vera et falsa Poenitentia, the authorship of which is unknown

4:13): “My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.” And so God’s mercy, through Penance, grants pardon to sinners without any end, wherefore it is written (2 Paral 37[†]): “Thy merciful promise is unmeasurable and unsearchable... (and Thou repentest) for the evil brought upon man.” It is therefore evident that Penance can be repeated many times.

Reply to Objection 1. Some of the Jews thought that a man could be washed several times in the laver of Baptism, because among them the Law prescribed certain washing-places where they were wont to cleanse themselves repeatedly from their uncleanness. In order to disprove this the Apostle wrote to the Hebrews that “it is impossible for those who were once illuminated,” viz. through Baptism, “to be renewed again to penance,” viz. through Baptism, which is “the laver of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost,” as stated in Titus 3:5: and he declares the reason to be that by Baptism man dies with Christ, wherefore he adds (Heb. 6:6): “Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God.”

Reply to Objection 2. Ambrose is speaking of solemn Penance, which is not repeated in the Church, as we shall state further on (Suppl., q. 28, a. 2).

Reply to Objection 3. As Augustine says*, “Our Lord gave sight to many blind men at various times, and strength to many infirm, thereby showing, in these different men, that the same sins are repeatedly forgiven, at one time healing a man from leprosy and afterwards from blindness. For this reason He healed so many stricken with fever, so many feeble in body, so many lame, blind, and withered, that the sinner might not despair; for this reason He is not described as healing anyone but once, that every one might fear to link

himself with sin; for this reason He declares Himself to be the physician welcomed not of the hale, but of the unhealthy. What sort of a physician is he who knows not how to heal a recurring disease? For if a man ail a hundred times it is for the physician to heal him a hundred times: and if he failed where others succeed, he would be a poor physician in comparison with them.”

Reply to Objection 4. Penance is to deplore past sins, and, “while deploring them,” not to commit again, either by act or by intention, those which we have to deplore. Because a man is a mocker and not a penitent, who, “while doing penance,” does what he repents having done, or intends to do again what he did before, or even commits actually the same or another kind of sin. But if a man sin afterwards either by act or intention, this does not destroy the fact that his former penance was real, because the reality of a former act is never destroyed by a subsequent contrary act: for even as he truly ran who afterwards sits, so he truly repented who subsequently sins.

Reply to Objection 5. Baptism derives its power from Christ’s Passion, as a spiritual regeneration, with a spiritual death, of a previous life. Now “it is appointed unto man once to die” (Heb. 9:27), and to be born once, wherefore man should be baptized but once. On the other hand, Penance derives its power from Christ’s Passion, as a spiritual medicine, which can be repeated frequently.

Reply to Objection 6. According to Augustine (*De vera et falsa Poenitentia*, the authorship of which is unknown), “it is evident that sins displease God exceedingly, for He is always ready to destroy them, lest what He created should perish, and what He loved be lost,” viz. by despair.

[†] Prayer of Manasses, among the Apocrypha. St. Thomas is evidently quoting from memory, and omits the words in brackets. * *De vera et falsa Poenitentia* the authorship of which is unknown