

## QUESTION 63

### The Secondary Effect of the Sacraments [of the New Law], viz., the Character

Next we have to consider the other effect of the sacraments [of the New Law], which is the character (*character*). And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Is a character caused in the soul by the sacraments? (2) What is this character? (3) Of whom is it a character or mark? (4) What subject does it exist in? (5) Does a character exist indelibly? (6) Do all the sacraments imprint a character?

#### Article 1

##### Does a sacrament imprint a character on the soul?

It seems that a sacrament does not imprint any character on the soul (*sacramentum non imprimat aliquem characterem in anima*):

**Objection 1:** ‘Character’ seems to signify some sort of distinctive sign or mark or seal (*signum*). But the distinction between the members of Christ and other individuals is effected by an eternal predestination, which, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 32, a. 2), posits something not in the predestined individual, but only in the God who predestines him; for 2 Timothy 2:19 says, “The sure foundation of God stands firm, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows who are his’.” Therefore, the sacraments do not imprint a character on the soul.

**Objection 2:** A character is a distinguishing sign. But as Augustine explains in *De Doctrina Christiana* 2, a sign “is that which, besides the appearance that it carries into the senses, makes something else come into cognition.” But there is nothing in the soul that carries any appearance into the senses. Therefore, it seems that there is no character imprinted on the soul by the sacraments.

**Objection 3:** Just as a believer is distinguished from a non-believer by the sacraments of the New Law, so also by the sacraments of the Old Law. But the sacraments of the Old Law did not imprint any character [on the soul] and indeed are called “justices of the flesh (*iustitiae carnis*)” by the Apostle in Hebrews 9:10. Therefore, it seems that the sacraments of the New Law do not imprint any character, either.

**But contrary to this:** In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 the Apostle says, “... who has stamped us [with His seal] and given us the Spirit as a pledge in our hearts.” But ‘character’ means nothing other than a sort of seal or mark (*signatio*). Therefore, it seems that God imprints His own character or mark on us through the sacraments.

**I respond:** As is clear from what has been said above (q. 62, a. 5), the sacraments of the New Law are ordered toward two things: (a) a remedy for sins and (b) perfecting the soul in those things that pertain to the worship of God according to the rite of the Christian way of life. Now when an individual is deputed for something determinate, he normally receives some insignia for this. Hence, in ancient times soldiers who enlisted for military service used to be marked with bodily characters because they were being deputed for something corporeal. And so when, through the sacraments, men are deputed for something spiritual that pertains to the worship of God, it follows that these faithful ones are, through the sacraments, marked with some spiritual character. Hence, in *Contra Parmenianum* Augustine says, “If a fearful soldier, after avoiding a battle, dreads the mark (*character*) of military service on his body and seeks clemency from the emperor, and, with his prayer poured out and mercy granted, he has now begun to fight, is the mark engraved again, now that the man has been freed and disciplined? Or is it not rather acknowledged and approved? Are the Christian sacraments by any chance less long-lasting than this bodily mark?”

**Reply to objection 1:** Christ’s faithful ones are, to be sure, deputed for the reward of future glory by the seal of divine predestination. However, they are [also] deputed for acts that are fitting for the

Church at the present time by a sort of spiritual seal engraved on them, and this seal is called a character.

**Reply to objection 2:** A character imprinted on the soul has the nature of a sign insofar as it is imprinted by a sacrament that can be sensed. For an individual is known to be sealed with the baptismal character by the fact that he has been washed with water that can be sensed.

Still, everything that configures an individual to someone or distinguishes him from another can, by a certain likeness, be called a character or seal, even if it is not able to be sensed, in the way that Christ is called “the image (*figura*)” or “the character (*character*)” of the Father’s substance—this according to the Apostle in Hebrews 1:3.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (q. 62, a. 6), the sacraments of the Old Law did not have within themselves the spiritual power to work a spiritual effect. And so a spiritual character was not required in those sacraments; instead, what was sufficient was bodily circumcision, which the Apostle calls a seal (*signaculum*) in Romans 4:11.

## Article 2

### Is a character a spiritual power?

It seems that a character is not a spiritual power (*character non sit spiritualis potestas*):

**Objection 1:** A character seems to be the same thing as a figure or image (*figura*). Thus, in Hebrews 1:3, where it says, “image (*figura*) of His substance,” the Greek text has ‘*character*’ in the place of ‘*figura*’. But a figure (*figura*) is in the fourth species of *quality* and so it differs from a power (*potestas*), which is in the second species of *quality*. Therefore, a character is not a spiritual power.

**Objection 2:** In *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 2 Dionysius says, “The divine beatitude receives one who is drawing near [to beatitude] into a participation in itself, and it grants him this participation by a light proper to him as a sort of seal.” And so it seems that a character is a kind of light (*quoddam lumen*). But light belongs more to the third species of *quality*. Therefore, it is not the case that a character is a power, since a power seems to belong to the second species of *quality*.

**Objection 3:** Some define a character as follows: “A character is a holy sign of a communion of faith and of ordination, given by a hierarch.” But a sign is in the genus of *relation* and not in the genus of *power*. Therefore, a character is not a spiritual power.

**Objection 4:** As is clear from *Metaphysics* 5, a power has the nature of a cause and a principle. But *sign*, which is posited in the definition of a character, has more of the nature of an effect. Therefore, a character is not a spiritual power.

**But contrary to this:** In *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher says, “There are three things in the soul: power, habit, and passion.” But a character is not a passion, since a passion quickly passes, whereas a character, as will be explained below (a. 5), is indelible. Similarly, a character is not a habit, since there is no habit that is able to behave both well and badly, whereas a character behaves in both ways, since some use it well and others use it badly—something that does not happen in the case of habits, since no one makes bad use of a virtuous habit and no one make good use of a bad habit. Therefore, it follows that a character is a power.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), the sacraments of the New Law imprint a character insofar as we are deputed by them for the worship of God according to the rite of the Christian religion. Hence, in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 2, after Dionysius had claimed that God “by a sort of sign grants participation in Himself to the one approaching Him,” he adds, “a sign that perfects him as divine and as a sharer in divine things.”

Now divine worship consists in either (a) receiving divine things or (b) passing them on to others, and for both of these a certain power is required. For an active power is required in order to pass something on to others, and a passive power is required for receiving something. And so ‘character’ implies a certain spiritual power that is ordered toward those things that pertain to divine worship.

However, one should notice that this spiritual power is an *instrumental* power, in the same way that was explained above (q. 62, a. 4) in the case of the power that exists in the sacraments. For to have the character of a sacrament befits the ministers of God and, as the Philosopher explains in *Politics* 1, a minister behaves in the manner of an instrument. And so just as the power which exists in the sacraments is in a genus not in its own right (*non est in genere per se*), but by being traced back to that genus, because it is something passing and incomplete (*fluens et incompletum*), so, too, a character is not properly in a genus or species, but is instead traced back to the second species of *quality*.

**Reply to objection 1:** Being a figure (*figuratio*) is a certain determination of *quantity* (*terminatio quantitatis*). Hence, properly speaking, it exists only in corporeal things, whereas it is predicated metaphorically in the case of spiritual things. And so a character cannot belong to the fourth species of *quality*, even though some have made this claim.

**Reply to objection 2:** In the third species of *quality* there are only passions that can be felt or qualities that can be sensed. But a character is not a light that can be sensed. And so a character does not, as some have claimed, belong to the third species of *quality*.

**Reply to objection 3:** The relation that is implied in the name ‘sign’ has to be founded upon something. But the relation of a sign which is a character cannot be founded immediately upon the essence of the soul, since in that case it would belong to every soul by its nature. And so one must posit something in the soul upon which such a relation might be founded. And this thing is the essence of the character. Hence, it will not be necessary for a character to be in the genus of *relation*, as some have claimed.

**Reply to objection 4:** A character has the nature of a sign by comparison to the sacrament by which it is imprinted and which can be sensed. But considered in itself, a character has the nature of an [instrumental] principle in the way that has already been explained.

### Article 3

#### Is a sacramental character a character or mark of Christ?

It seems that a sacramental character is not a character or mark of Christ (*character sacramentalis non sit character Christi*):

**Objection 1:** Ephesians 4:30 says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed.” But being sealed is implied by the nature of a character. Therefore, a sacramental character should be ascribed to the Holy Spirit rather than to Christ.

**Objection 2:** A character has the nature of a sign, and it is a sign of the grace that is conferred by the sacrament. But grace is poured into the soul by the whole Trinity; hence, Psalm 83:12 says, “The Lord will give grace and glory.” Therefore, it seems that a sacramental character should not be ascribed specifically to Christ.

**Objection 3:** An individual receives a character in order that he might be distinguished from others. But the distinction of the saints from others is effected by charity, which “alone distinguishes the children of the king from the children of perdition,” as Augustine puts it in *De Trinitate* 15; hence, the children of perdition are said to have “the mark of the beast (*characterem bestiae*),” as is clear from

Apocalypse 13:16-17. Yet charity is ascribed not to Christ, but instead to the Holy Spirit—this according to Romans 5:5 (“The charity of God is diffused in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”)—or even to the Father—this according to 2 Corinthians 13:13 (“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the charity of God ...”). Therefore, it seems that a sacramental character should not be ascribed to Christ.

**But contrary to this:** Some define a [sacramental] character as follows: “A [sacramental] character is a distinguishing mark (*distinctio*) imprinted by the eternal Character on a rational soul, consigning a created trinity by an image to the creating and re-creating Trinity and distinguishing that soul from those that are not so configured, according to their state of faith.” But the “eternal Character” is Christ Himself—this according to Hebrews 1:3 (“... who, being the brightness of His glory and the image”—that is, character—“of His substance”). Therefore, it seems that a [sacramental] character should properly be ascribed to Christ.

**I respond:** As is clear from what has been said above (a. 1), a character is a sort of seal by which something is marked as ordered toward some end, in the way that a denarius is marked with a character for use in buying and selling, and in the way that soldiers are marked with a character as being deputed for military service.

Now the faithful are deputed for two ends:

First and, to be sure, most importantly, they are deputed for the enjoyment of glory. And to this end they are marked with the seal of grace—this according to Ezechiel 9:4 (“Mark a *tav* on the foreheads of the men who are sighing and mourning ...”), and according to Apocalypse 7:3 (“Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads”).

Second, each of the faithful is deputed for receiving or handing on to others those things that pertain to the worship of God. And this is what the sacramental character is properly dedicated to. But the whole rite of the Christian religion is derived from Christ’s priesthood. And so it is clear that the sacramental character is the character of Christ, whose priesthood the faithful are made figures of by their sacramental characters, which are nothing other than instances of participation in Christ’s priesthood and which are derived from Christ Himself.

**Reply to objection 1:** In this passage the Apostle is talking about the configuration by which an individual is deputed for future glory and which is effected by grace. Now grace is ascribed to the Holy Spirit insofar as it is through love that God gives us something for free (*aliquid gratis*), which belongs to the very nature of grace, and the Holy Spirit is love. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 12:4 the Apostle says, “There are a variety of graces, but the same Spirit.”

**Reply to objection 2:** A sacramental character is a *reality (res)* in relation to the exterior *sacrament (sacramentum)*, and it is a *sacrament* in relation to the ultimate *effect*. And so there are two ways in which something can be ascribed to a character:

(a) In one way, according to the nature of the *sacrament (secundum rationem sacramenti)*. And on this score the character is an invisible sign of the grace that is conferred in the sacrament.

(b) In the second way, according to the nature of a *character (secundum characteris rationem)*. And on this score a character is a sign that configures one to some principal individual, in the way that soldiers who are being deputed for a battle are marked with their general’s sign, by which they are in some sense configured to him. And this is the way in which those who are deputed for Christian worship, whose author is Christ, receive a character by which they are configured to Christ. Hence, it is properly speaking a character or mark of Christ.

**Reply to objection 3:** An individual is distinguished from others by a character or mark in comparison to some end toward which the one who receives the character is ordered—just as it was explained above (a. 1) about a military character, by which, in relation to a battle, a soldier of the king is

distinguished from a soldier of the enemy. And, similarly, a character or mark belonging to the faithful is that by which the faithful of Christ are distinguished from the servants of the devil either (a) in relation to eternal life or (b) in relation to the worship of the Church in the present time. The first of these is effected through charity and grace, as the objection shows, but the second is effected by a sacramental character. Hence, the mark of the beast (*character bestiae*) can be understood, conversely, either (a) as obstinate malice, by which some are deputed for eternal punishment, or (b) as a profession of illicit worship.

#### Article 4

##### Does a character exist in the powers of the soul as in a subject?

It seems that a character does not exist in the powers of the soul as in a subject (*character non sit in potentiis animae sicut in subiecto*):

**Objection 1:** A character is said to be a disposition for grace. But as was explained in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 110, a.4), grace exists in the essence of the soul as in a subject. Therefore, it seems that a character exists in the essence of the soul and not in its powers.

**Objection 2:** A power of the soul does not seem to be the subject of anything except a habit or a disposition. But as was explained above (a. 2), a character is not a habit or a disposition but is instead a power, the subject of which is nothing other than the essence of the soul. Therefore, it seems that a character does not exist in a power of soul as in a subject, but exists instead in the essence of the soul.

**Objection 3:** The powers of a rational soul are divided into cognitive powers and appetitive powers. But it cannot be claimed that a character is only a cognitive power or, again, that it is only an appetitive power, since it is not ordered either just to knowing or just to desiring. Similarly, neither can one claim that it exists in both sorts of power, since it is not the case that the same accident can exist in diverse powers. Therefore, it seems that a character does not exist in a power of the soul as in a subject, but exists instead in the essence of the soul.

**But contrary to this:** As is contained in the aforementioned definition of a character (a. 3, *sed contra*), a character is imprinted on the rational soul “by an image.” But an image of the Trinity in the soul is seen in its powers. Therefore, a character exists in the powers of the soul.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 3), a character is a sort of seal by which the soul is marked to receive or to pass on to others those things that pertain to the worship of God. But divine worship consists in certain acts, and it is to acts that the powers of the soul are properly ordered, just as an essence is ordered toward *esse*. And so the character exists not in the essence of the soul as in a subject, but in a power of the soul.

**Reply to objection 1:** A subject is attributed to an accident according to the nature of that toward which the accident *proximately* disposes it, and not according to that toward which it *remotely* or *indirectly* disposes it. But a character directly and proximately disposes the soul toward those things belonging to divine worship that have to be executed, and since those things are not done properly without the assistance of grace—for as John 4:24 says, “It is necessary for those who worship God to worship Him in spirit and in truth”—it follows that God’s generosity bestows on those receiving a character the grace through which they might worthily fulfill those things for which they are being deputed. And so one should attribute a subject to the character with respect to the nature of the acts belonging to divine worship rather than with respect to the nature of the grace.

**Reply to objection 2:** The essence of the soul is the subject of a natural power that proceeds from the principles of the nature. But a character is not that sort of power; instead, it is a spiritual power that comes from the outside. Hence, just as the soul's essence, through which it is the natural life of a man, is perfected through grace, by which it lives spiritually, so the soul's natural power is perfected by a spiritual power which is a character. For habits and dispositions belong to the powers of a soul because they are ordered toward the acts of which the powers are the principles. And, for the same reason, everything that is ordered toward the act is to be attributed to the power.

**Reply to objection 3:** As has been explained, a character is ordered toward those things that belong to divine worship, which is a sort of profession of faith through exterior signs. And so the character has to exist in the cognitive power of the soul, wherein faith resides.

## Article 5

### Does a character exist in the soul indelibly?

It seems that a character does not exist in the soul indelibly (*character non insit animae indelebiliter*):

**Objection 1:** To the extent that an accident is more perfect, it inheres more firmly. But grace is more perfect than a character, since a character is ordered toward grace as an ulterior end, and grace is lost through sin. Therefore, *a fortiori*, so is a character.

**Objection 2:** As has been explained (a. 4), through a character one is deputed for divine worship. But some individuals pass from divine worship to a contrary worship through apostasy from the Faith. Therefore, it seems that such individuals lose their sacramental character.

**Objection 3:** When the end ceases, what is ordered toward the end should cease as well; otherwise, it would remain in vain, in the way that after the resurrection there will be no matrimony, since [human] generation, toward which matrimony is ordered, will cease. But exterior worship, toward which a character is ordered, will not remain in heaven, in which nothing will be done in a figurative way, but the whole will be done in unveiled truth (*sed totum in nuda veritate*). Therefore, a sacramental character will not remain in the soul in perpetuity. And so a character does not exist in the soul indelibly.

**But contrary to this:** In *Contra Parmenianum 2* Augustine says, "The Christian sacraments are not less long-lasting than the bodily mark of military service." Yet a military character is not re-engraved, but is "acknowledged and approved," in the case of an individual who merits leniency from the emperor after committing an offense. Therefore, neither can a sacramental character be deleted.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 3), a sacramental character is a certain participation in Christ's priesthood that exists in His faithful ones—so that, more specifically, just as Christ has the full power of spiritual priesthood, so His faithful ones are configured to Him in participating in a spiritual power with respect to the sacraments and with respect to those things that belong to divine worship. And because of this, it is not fitting for Christ to *have* a character; instead, His power of priesthood is compared to a character in the way that what is full and perfect is compared to what has some degree of participation in it.

Now Christ's priesthood is eternal—this according to Psalm 109:4 ("You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech"). And so it is that every sanctification that is effected by His priesthood is perpetual while the consecrated thing remains. This is clear in the case of inanimate objects; for instance, the consecration of a church or of an altar always remains unless the church or the altar is destroyed. Therefore, since, as has been explained (a. 4, ad 3), the soul is the subject of a

character as regards its intellectual part, where faith resides, it is clear that just as the intellect is everlasting and incorruptible, so a character remains indelibly in the soul.

**Reply to objection 1:** In the soul grace exists in one way and a character in a different way. For grace exists in the soul as a form that has complete *esse* in the soul, whereas a character, as was explained above (a. 2), exists in the soul as an instrumental power. Now a complete form exists in a subject according to the condition of the subject. And since a soul is changeable because of free choice as long as it is in the state of the present life, it follows that [grace] exists in the soul in a mutable way. By contrast, an instrumental power has more to do with the condition of the principal agent. And so a character exists indelibly in the soul not because of its own perfection, but because of the perfection of Christ's priesthood, from which the character flows as a sort of instrumental power.

**Reply to objection 2:** In the same place Augustine says, "We see that not even apostates lose their baptism; for when they return through repentance, they do not receive baptism again, and so one concludes that it was not possible for it to have been lost." And, as has been explained, the reason for this is that the character is an instrumental power. But the nature of an instrument consists in its being moved by another and not in its moving itself in the way that the will does. And so no matter how much the will might move toward the contrary, the character is not removed, and this because of the unchangeableness of its moving principle.

**Reply to objection 3:** Even though exterior worship does not remain after this life, the final end of that worship does nonetheless remain. And so the character remains after this life, both in good individuals to their glory and in bad individuals to their disgrace—just as the military mark (*character*) remains in the soldiers after victory has been achieved, both in the conquerors to their glory and in the conquered to their torment.

## Article 6

### Is a character imprinted by every sacrament of the New Law?

It seems that a character is imprinted by every sacrament of the New Law (*per omnia sacramenta novae legis imprimatur character*):

**Objection 1:** By every sacrament of the New Law an individual is made a participant in Christ's priesthood. But a sacramental character is nothing other than a participation in Christ's priesthood. Therefore, it seems that a character is imprinted by every sacrament of the New Law.

**Objection 2:** A character is related to the soul in which it exists as an act of consecrating (*consecratio*) is related to the consecrated realities (*ad res consecratas*). But as was explained above (q. 62, a. 1), through every sacrament of the New Law a man receives sanctifying grace. Therefore, it seems that a character is imprinted by every sacrament of the New Law.

**Objection 3:** A character is both a *reality* and a *sacrament* (*res et sacramentum*). But in every sacrament of the New Law there is something that is just a *reality* (*res tantum*), and something that is just a *sacrament* (*sacramentum tantum*), and something that is both a *reality and sacrament* (*res et sacramentum*). Therefore, a character is imprinted by every sacrament of the New Law.

**But contrary to this:** The sacraments in which a character is imprinted are not repeated, because, as has been explained (a. 5), a character is indelible. But some sacraments are repeated, as is clear in the case of penance and matrimony. Therefore, not every sacrament imprints a character.

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 62, aa. 1 and 5), the sacraments of the New Law are ordered toward two things, viz., toward a remedy for sin and toward divine worship. Now it is common

to all the sacraments that some remedy for sin is conveyed through them by the fact that they confer grace. However, not all the sacraments are directly ordered toward divine worship. For instance, this is clear in the case of penance, through which a man is liberated from sin, and yet the man does not through this sacrament receive for the first time (*de novo*) anything that pertains to divine worship; instead, he has been restored to his previous state.

Now there are three ways in which a sacrament pertains to divine worship: (a) by way of the *action itself*; (b) by way of the *agent*; and (c) by way of the *recipient*.

The Eucharist, in which divine worship mainly consists insofar as it is the Church's sacrifice, pertains to divine worship by way of the *action itself*. And a character is not imprinted on a man by this sacrament, since a man is not ordered by this sacrament toward doing or receiving anything else beyond himself in the sacraments; for as Dionysius says in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 3, the Eucharist is rather "the final end and consummation of all the sacraments." Instead, this sacrament contains within itself Christ, in whom there exists no character but instead the entire fullness of the priesthood.

By contrast, the sacrament of holy orders (*sacramentum ordinis*) pertains to the *agents* in the sacraments, because by this sacrament men are deputed to hand on the other sacraments.

On the other hand, the sacrament of baptism, through which a man takes on the power to receive the other sacraments of the Church, pertains to the *recipients*. Hence, baptism is called the gateway to the sacraments (*ianua sacramentorum*). And, as will be explained in its own place below (q. 65, a. 3), in some sense the sacrament of confirmation is likewise ordered toward the same thing.

And so a character is imprinted by these last three sacraments, viz., baptism, confirmation, and holy orders.

**Reply to objection 1:** Through every sacrament a man becomes a participant in Christ's priesthood in the sense of receiving some effect of it, and yet it is not the case that through every sacrament an individual is deputed to do or to receive something which pertains to the worship that belongs to Christ's priesthood—which is what is required in order for a sacrament to imprint a character.

**Reply to objection 2:** Through every sacrament a man is sanctified or made holy, because sanctity or holiness implies being cleansed of sin, and this cleansing is effected by grace. But it is specifically through certain sacraments, viz., the ones that imprint a character, that a man is sanctified or made holy by way of being consecrated, in the sense of being deputed for divine worship—in the same way that inanimate objects are likewise said to be made holy insofar as they are deputed for divine worship.

**Reply to objection 3:** Even though a character is both a *reality* and *sacrament* (*res et sacramentum*), it is nonetheless not necessary for whatever is both a *reality and sacrament* to be a character. It will be explained below (q. 73, a. 1, ad 3 and q. 84, a. 1, ad 3, and *Supplement*, q. 30, a. 3, ad 3 and q. 42, a. 1, ad 5) what is both a sacrament and a reality in the case of the other sacraments.