

QUESTION 84

Penance insofar as it is a Sacrament

Next we have to consider the sacrament of penance (question 84-*Supplement*, question 28). We have to consider, first, penance in itself (questions 84-85); second, the effect of penance (questions 86-89); third, the parts of penance (questions 90-*Supplement*, question 15); fourth, the recipients of this sacrament (*Supplement*, question 16); fifth, the power of the ministers of this sacrament (*Supplement*, questions 17-27); and, sixth, the solemn rite of this sacrament (*Supplement*, question 28).

On the first topic we have to consider, first, penance insofar as it is a sacrament (question 84), and, second, penance insofar as it is a virtue (question 85).

On the first topic there are ten questions: (1) Is penance a sacrament? (2) What is the proper matter of penance? (3) What is the form of penance? (4) Is the imposition of hands required for this sacrament? (5) Is this sacrament necessary for salvation? (6) What is the relation of this sacrament to the other sacraments? (7) What about the institution of this sacrament? (8) How long does penance last? (9) Is penance continuous? (10) Can penance be repeated?

Article 1

Is penance a sacrament?

It seems that penance is not a sacrament (*poenitentia non sit sacramentum*):

Objection 1: Gregory says, and this is contained in *Decretals* 1, q. 1, “The sacraments are baptism, chrism, the body and blood of Christ; these are called sacraments because the divine power secretly effects salvation under the cover of corporeal entities.” But this does not occur in penance, since in penance there are no corporeal entities used under which the divine power effects salvation. Therefore, penance is not a sacrament.

Objection 2: The sacraments of the Church are offered by the ministers of Christ—this according to 1 Corinthians 4:1 (“Let a man think of us as ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God”). But penance is not offered by the ministers of Christ; instead, it is inspired in men interiorly by God—this according to Jeremiah 31:19 (“After you converted me, I did penance”). Therefore, it seems that penance is not a sacrament.

Objection 3: In the sacraments that we have already talked about (qq. 66-83), there is something that is *the sacrament only* (*sacramentum tantum*), something that is *the reality and the sacrament* (*res et sacramentum*), and something that is *the reality only* (*res tantum*); this is clear from what was said above (q. 66, a. 1 and q. 73, a. 1, ad 1). But none of this is found in the case of penance. Therefore, penance is not a sacrament.

But contrary to this: Just as baptism is applied to purify us from sin, so, too, is penance; hence, in Acts 8:22 Peter said to Simon, “Repent of this wickedness of yours.” But as was explained above (q. 65, a. 1), baptism is a sacrament. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, so is penance.

I respond: As Gregory says in the place cited above, “A sacrament consists in a celebration wherein an action is done in such a way that we take it to signify something that is to be received in a holy manner.” But it is manifest that in penance an action is done that is signified as something holy, both on the part of the repentant sinner and on the part of the priest who absolves him. For the repentant sinner signifies, through what he says and does, that his heart has drawn back from sin, and, similarly, the priest signifies, through what he says and does, the work of God forgiving sin. Hence, it is clear that the penance which is done in the Church is a sacrament.

Reply to objection 1: The name ‘corporeal entities’ is being understood broadly here even for

exterior acts which can be sensed and which are related to this sacrament in the way that water is related to baptism and in the way that chrism is related to confirmation.

Notice, however, that in those sacraments in which what is conferred is a grace which is exceptional (*excellens*) and which surpasses the whole power of a human act, some exterior corporeal material is applied—as, for instance, in *baptism*, where the full remission of sins is given, both with respect to guilt and with respect to punishment, and in *confirmation*, where the fullness of the Holy Spirit is given, and in *extreme unction*, where what is conferred is complete spiritual health, which flows from the power of Christ as from a certain extrinsic principle. Hence, if there are any human acts in such sacraments, they are not of the essence of the matter of the sacraments, but instead behave dispositively with respect to the sacrament.

By contrast, in those sacraments that have an effect corresponding to human acts, it is human acts themselves which can be sensed that take the place of the matter, as happens in the case of *penance* and *matrimony*—just as, in the case of bodily medicines, some of them are applied externally, e.g., plasters and oral drugs, whereas others are acts of those who are to be cured, e.g., certain exercises.

Reply to objection 2: In the sacraments that have a corporeal matter, that matter has to be applied by a minister of the Church, who is acting in the person of Christ as a sign that the excellence of the power operating in the sacrament is from Christ. By contrast, as has been explained, in the sacrament of penance the matter consists of human acts that proceed from an interior inspiration. Hence, the matter is applied not by the minister, but by God operating interiorly, whereas the minister provides the completion of the sacrament when he absolves the penitent.

Reply to objection 3: In penance, too, there is something that is *the sacrament only* (*sacramentum tantum*), viz., the exercise of an act by the sinner, who repents, and also by the priest, who gives absolution. On the other hand, *the reality and sacrament* (*res et sacramentum*) is the sinner's interior repentance, whereas *the reality only* (*res tantum*) is the remission of sin. The first of these, taken as a whole, is the cause of the second, whereas the first and second are a cause of the third.

Article 2

Are sins the proper matter of this sacrament?

It seems that sins are not the proper matter of this sacrament (*peccata non sint propria materia huius sacramenti*):

Objection 1: In the other sacraments the matter is sanctified through certain words and this sanctified matter brings about the effect of the sacrament. But sins cannot be sanctified, because they are contrary to the sacrament's effect, which is grace that forgives sins. Therefore, sins are not the proper matter of this sacrament.

Objection 2: In *De Poenitentia* Augustine says, "No one can begin a new life unless he repents of his old life." But what pertains to one's old state of life are not only the sins but also the punishments of the present life. Therefore, sins are not the proper matter of penance.

Objection 3: Among the sins are original sin, mortal sin, and venial sin. But the sacrament of penance is not ordered against original sin, which is taken away through baptism, or* against* mortal* sin*, which* is* removed* through* the* sinner's* confession*, or against venial sin, which is removed through the beating of the breast, holy water, and other things of this sort. Therefore, sins are not the proper matter of this sacrament.

But contrary to this: In 2 Corinthians 12:21 the Apostle says, "... and they have not repented of the uncleanness and immorality and licentiousness that they practiced."

I respond: There are two sorts of matter, viz., *proximate* and *remote*, in the way that metal is the proximate matter of a statue, whereas water is a remote matter. Now it was explained above (a. 1 ad 1-2) that the proximate matter of this sacrament are acts of the one who repents; and the matter of these acts are his sins, which he sorrows over, and which he confesses, and for which he makes satisfaction. Hence, it follows that the remote matter of penance are the sins—not that they are to be approved* of*, but instead that they are to be detested and destroyed.

Reply to objection 1: This objection has to do with the *proximate* matter of the sacrament.

Reply to objection 2: The old and mortal life is the object of penance not by reason of [present] punishment, but by reason of [the present] guilt annexed to it.

Reply to objection 3: In a certain sense, penance has to do with every genus of sin, though not in the same way.

For penance has to do *properly* and *principally* with *actual* sin that is *mortal*—I say ‘properly’ because we are properly said to be penitent about those sins we have committed by our own will, whereas I say ‘principally’ because this sacrament was instituted to wipe away mortal sin.

On the other hand, penance does, to* be* sure*, have to do *properly* with venial sins insofar as they are committed by our own will, but the sacrament was *not principally* instituted against these sins.

As regards *original* sin, penance has to do with it *neither principally*—since this sacrament is not ordered against it, but instead baptism is—*nor properly*, since original sin is not effected by our will, unless perhaps Adam’s will is thought of as our will, in accord with the manner in which the Apostle speaks in Romans 5:12 (“... in whom [i.e., Adam] all have sinned”). Yet insofar as penance is taken broadly—in the way that Augustine takes it in *De Poenitentiae*—for any sort of detestation of a past reality (*pro quacumque detestatione rei praeteritae*), it can be said that penance has to do with original sin.

Article 3

Is “I absolve you” the form of this sacrament?

It seems that “I absolve you” is not the form of this sacrament (*haec non sit forma huius sacramenti, ego te absolvo*):

Objection 1: The forms of the sacrament are taken from Christ’s institution and from the use of the Church. But we do not read that Christ instituted this form. Nor, again, is it found in common use; at the very least, in certain absolutions which are done publicly in the Church, e.g., at Prime and Compline and in the celebration of the Supper of the Lord [on Holy Thursday], the one who does the absolution does not use an indicative form by saying, “I absolve you,” but instead he uses a prayer of pleading (*oratione deprecativa*) by saying, “May almighty God have mercy on you,” or “May almighty God grant you absolution.” Therefore, “I absolve you” is not the form of this sacrament.

Objection 2: Pope Leo says, “God’s forgiveness (*indulgentia*) can be obtained only by the supplications of priests.” But he says this of God’s forgiveness as offered to penitents. Therefore, the form of this sacrament should be something in the manner of a prayer of pleading.

Objection 3: Absolving someone of his sin is the same as remitting his sin. But as Augustine says in *Super Ioannem*, “It is God alone who remits (*remittit*) sin, and it is He alone who washes away sin interiorly.” Therefore, it seems that it is God alone who absolves someone of his sin. Therefore, the priest should not say, “I absolve you,” just as he should not say, “I remit your sins.”

Objection 4: Just as our Lord gave His disciples the power to absolve individuals of their sins, so He likewise gave them the power to cure infirmities—more specifically, as Matthew 10:1 and Luke 9:1

report, the power “to drive out demons and to cure illnesses.” But the apostles did not use the words, “I cure you,” in healing the infirm; instead, they used the words, “May the Lord Jesus Christ heal you” (Acts 9:34). Therefore, it seems that priests, who have this power handed down to the apostles from Christ, should not use the verbal form, “I absolve you,” but should instead say, “May Christ grant you absolution.”

Objection 5: Some who use this form explain it as follows: “I absolve you,” that is, “I disclose that you are absolved (*ostendo absolutum*).” But a priest cannot do this unless it is revealed to him by God. Hence, as we read in Matthew 16:19, before it was said to Peter, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound, etc.,” it was said to him (Matthew 16:17), “Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, because flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” Therefore, it seems presumptuous for a priest to whom no revelation has been made to say, “I absolve you,” that is, “I disclose that you are absolved.”

But contrary to this: Just as our Lord said to His disciples in Matthew 28:19, “Go and teach all nations, baptizing them ...”, so He said to Peter in Matthew 16:9, “Whatever you loose ...”. But a priest, relying on the authority of those words of Christ, says, “I baptize you.” Therefore, by that same authority he ought to say in this sacrament, “I absolve you.”

I respond: In the case of every reality, its completion (*perfectio*) is attributed to its form. But it was explained above (a. 1, ad 2) that this sacrament is brought to completion by what is done on the part of the priest. Hence, it must be the case that what is done on the part of the penitent, whether with words or deeds, is, as it were, the *matter* of this sacrament, whereas what is done on the part of the priest behaves in the manner of the *form*.

Now as was explained above (q. 62, a. 1, ad 1), when the sacraments of the New Law effect what they are figures of, the form of the sacrament has to signify what is being done in the sacrament in a way that is proportioned to the matter of the sacrament. Hence, the form of baptism is, “I baptize you,” and the form of confirmation is, “I sign you with the sign of the cross and confirm you with the chrism of salvation.” For sacraments of this sort are brought to completion in the *use* of the matter. On the other hand, in the case of the sacrament of the Eucharist, which consists in the very *consecration* of the matter, the reality of the consecration is expressed when it is said, “This is my body.”

However, this sacrament, i.e., the sacrament of penance, consists neither in the consecration of any matter nor in the use of any sanctified matter; instead, it consists in the *removal* of a sort of matter, viz., of sin, to the extent that, as is clear from what was explained above (a. 2), sins are said to be the matter of penance. But this sort of removal is signified by the priest when he says, “I absolve you,” given that sins are certain fetters—this according to Proverbs 5:22 (“His own iniquities catch the wicked one, and he is tied up by the cords of his own sins”). Thus, it is clear that “I absolve you” is the most appropriate form of this sacrament.

Reply to objection 1: The form in question is taken from the very words of Christ by which He said to Peter, “... whatever you loose (*solveris*) on earth, etc.” And the Church makes use of a form like this in sacramental absolution (*in sacramentali absolutione*).

Now absolutions of this sort made in public are not sacramental, but are instead prayers ordered toward the remission of venial sins. Hence, in a case of sacramental absolution it would not be enough to say, “May almighty God have mercy on you” or “May God grant you absolution and remission,” since through these words the priest is not *signifying* that absolution *is being given*, but is instead *asking* that it *might be given*. Still, such a prayer is said beforehand in sacramental absolution, so as not to impede the effect of the sacrament on the part of the penitent, whose act behaves as the matter in this sacrament—though not in baptism or in confirmation.

Reply to objection 2: The words of Pope Leo should be understood as having to do with a prayer of pleading that *precedes* absolution, and it does not exclude the priest’s giving absolution.

Reply to objection 3: It is only God who absolves anyone from sin and remits sins by His own authority. But priests do both of these things through their ministry, viz., insofar as in this sacrament the priest's words operate instrumentally, just as they likewise do in the other sacraments. For as is clear from what was said above (q. 62, a. 1 and q. 64, a. 1), it is God's power that operates interiorly in all of the sacramental signs, regardless of whether they are things or words.

Hence, our Lord expressly says both things. For in Matthew 16:19 He says to Peter, "... whatever you loose on earth, etc.," and in John 20:23 He says to His disciples, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." And yet the reason why the priest says, "I absolve you" rather than "I forgive your sins" is that the former fits in better with what our Lord says, since it expresses the power of the keys through which priests give absolution.

However, since the priest absolves as a minister, it is fitting, as Dionysius explains in *Caelestia Hierarchia*, chap. 7, to add something that pertains to the primary authority of God, viz., by saying, "I absolve you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," or "I absolve you through the power of Christ's passion," or "I absolve you by the authority of God." However, since this has not been made determinate by Christ's words, as it has been in the case of baptism, such an addition is left to the discretion of the priest.

Reply to objection 4: The apostles were not given a power such that they themselves might heal the infirm (*non est data potestas ut ipsi sanarent infirmos*); instead, they were given a power such that the infirm would be healed at their prayer. By contrast, the power was granted them to work instrumentally, or ministerially, in the sacraments. And so they are more able to express their own agency (*actum suum*) in the sacramental forms than in the healing of infirmities.

Yet even in the latter cases they did not always make use of the mode of pleading, but sometimes they also used the indicative and imperative mode; for instance, in Acts 3:6 we read that Peter said to the lame man, "What I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ ... arise and walk."

Reply to objection 5: The interpretation of "I absolve you" as "I disclose that you are absolved" is true in some respect, but it is not complete. For the sacraments of the New Law not only *signify*, but also *effect* what they signify. Hence, just as it is not only by *signifying* it, but also by *effecting* it, that a priest, when baptizing someone, discloses through words and deeds that the man is washed interiorly, so, too, when he says, "I absolve you," he is displaying that the man is absolved not only by *signifying* it, but also by *effecting* it.

Nor is he talking about this reality as if it were uncertain. For just as the other sacraments of the New Law have in their own right an effect that is certain because of the power of Christ's passion, even though that effect can be impeded on the part of the recipient, so, too, with this sacrament. Hence, in *De Adulterinis Coniugiis* Augustine says, "There is nothing shameful or difficult in the reconciliation of the spouses after the adultery, having been committed, has then been purged; for there is no doubt that the remission of sins is effected through the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Hence, neither does the priest need a special revelation made to him; instead, the general revelation of faith is sufficient, since according to it sins are remitted. Hence, it is a revelation of faith that is said to have been made to Peter.

On the other hand, a more complete interpretation of "I absolve you" is this: "I grant to you the sacrament of absolution."

Article 4

Is the imposition of the priest's hands required for this sacrament?

It seems that the imposition of the priest's hands is required for this sacrament (*impositio manuum*

sacerdotis requiratur ad hoc sacramentum):

Objection 1: Mark 16:18 says, “They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” But the spiritually sick are sinners, who recover their good health through this sacrament. Therefore, the imposition of hands has to be done in this sacrament.

Objection 2: In the sacrament of penance a man regains the Holy Spirit, whom he had lost. Hence, Psalm 50:14 says in the person of the penitent, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and strengthen me with a strong spirit.” But the Holy Spirit is given through the imposition of hands; for we read in Acts 8:17 that the apostles “imposed their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit,” and Matthew 19:13 says, “Little children were presented” to our Lord, “in order that He might lay His hands upon them.” Therefore, an imposition of hands should be done in this sacrament.

Objection 3: The words of the priest in this sacrament are not more efficacious than in the other sacraments. But in other sacraments the minister’s words are not sufficient unless he exercises some act; for instance, in baptism what is required, along with the priest saying “I baptize you ...,” is a bodily washing. Therefore, likewise, along with the priest saying, “I absolve you,” he has to exercise an act with respect to the penitent, viz., by imposing his hands on him.

But contrary to this: Our Lord said to Peter, “Whatever you loose on earth will be, etc.,” without making any mention of an imposition of hands. Nor, again, did He mention an imposition of hands when He said to all the apostles together, “Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.” Therefore, it is not the case that an imposition of hands is required for this sacrament.

I respond: In the case of the sacraments of the Church, the imposition of hands is done in order to signify an abundant effect of grace by which those on whom the hands are imposed continue on by means of a certain similarity to the ministers, in whom grace should be abundant. And that is why the imposition of hands is done in the case of the sacrament of confirmation, in which the fullness of the Holy Spirit is conferred, and in the case of the sacrament of holy orders, in which a certain excellence of power in the divine ministries is conferred; hence, 2 Timothy 1:6 says, “Stir up the grace of God that is in you through the imposition of my hands.”

Now the sacrament of penance is ordered not toward the reception of any excellence of grace, but toward the remission of sins. And so the imposition of hands is not required, just as it is not required in the case of baptism, even though in baptism there is a more complete remission of sins.

Reply to objection 1: The imposition of hands in question is not sacramental, but is instead ordered toward performing miracles, viz., with the result that through contact with the hand of a holy man even a bodily infirmity is eliminated—in the same way that we read of our Lord in Mark 6:5, “He cured the sick by imposing His hands on them,” and in the same way that we read in Matthew 8:3 that He cleansed the leper by touching him.

Reply to objection 2: Not every sort of reception of the Holy Spirit requires the imposition of hands, since in the case of baptism a man receives the Holy Spirit and yet no imposition of hands is made in that case. Rather, it is the reception of the Holy Spirit with abundance that requires the imposition of hands, and this pertains to confirmation.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of those sacraments that are brought to completion in the use of the matter, the minister has to exercise some bodily act with respect to the individual who is receiving the sacrament, as in the case of baptism, confirmation, and extreme unction.

However, this sacrament does not consist in the use of any matter applied exteriorly; instead, the place of the matter is taken by those things that come from the part of the penitent. Hence, just as in the Eucharist the priest brings the sacrament to completion just by uttering words over the matter, so, too, it is just the words of the absolving priest said over the penitent that bring the sacrament of absolution to completion. And if there were some bodily act on the part of the priest, then making the sign of the cross, which is done in the case of the Eucharist, would be no less fitting than imposing his hands, since it

would be a sign that it is through the blood of the cross of Christ that sins are forgiven. And yet this is not necessary for this sacrament, just as it is not necessary in the case of the Eucharist.

Article 5

Is this sacrament necessary for salvation?

It seems that this sacrament is not necessary for salvation (*hoc sacramentum non sit de necessitate salutis*):

Objection 1: A Gloss on Psalm 125:5 (“They who sow in tears, etc.”) says, “Do not be sad if your will is good, for from it peace is reaped.” But sadness is part of the concept of penance—this according to 2 Corinthians 7:10 (“The sadness that is according to God produces repentance that surely tends toward salvation”). Therefore, a good will, without penance, is sufficient for salvation.

Objection 2: Proverbs 10:12 says, “Charity covers all sins,” and later Proverbs 15:27 says, “Sins are purged by mercy and faith.” But this sacrament is for nothing other than purging sins. Therefore, by having charity, faith, and mercy, an individual can attain salvation even without the sacrament of penance.

Objection 3: The sacraments of the Church have their beginning from Christ’s institution. But as we read in John 8:11, Christ absolved the adulterous woman without [the sacrament of] penance. Therefore, it seems that [the sacrament of] penance is not necessary for salvation.

But contrary to this: In Luke 13:5 our Lord says, “If you do not do penance, you will all likewise perish.”

I respond: There are two ways in which something is necessary for salvation: in one way, *absolutely speaking*, and in the other way, *on a supposition*.

What is necessary *absolutely speaking* is such that no one can attain salvation without it, e.g., the grace of Christ, along with the sacrament of baptism, through which an individual is born again in Christ.

By contrast, the sacrament of penance is necessary *on a supposition*, i.e., it is necessary not for everyone, but for those who are subject to sin; for 2 Paralipomenon 33:8 says, “You, Lord of the righteous, have not imposed penance on the righteous, on Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, on those who have not sinned against you.”

But as James 1:15 points out, sin, “once it has matured, begets death.” And so it is necessary for the salvation of a sinner that the sin be removed from him. This cannot be done without the sacrament of penance, in which the power of Christ’s passion operates along with the action of the of the penitent, who cooperates with grace for the destruction of the sin. For as Augustine puts it in *Super Ioannem*, “He who created you without you, will not justify you without you.” Hence, it is clear that the sacrament of penance is necessary for salvation after sin, just as bodily medication is necessary after a man has contracted a dangerous disease.

Reply to objection 1: This gloss, it seems, should be understood as having to do with an individual who has a good will without any interruption caused by sin; such individuals have no cause for sadness. But once the good will is lost through sin, it cannot be restored without the sorrow by which the individual is saddened by his past sin, and this sadness belongs to penance.

Reply to objection 2: On the supposition that an individual incurs sin, charity and faith and mercy do not free him from sin without penance. For charity requires a man to be saddened by an offense he commits against his friend and to be eager for reconciliation with his friend. Again, faith itself requires that an individual seek to be justified from his sins through the power of Christ’s passion, which operates in the sacraments of the Church. Again, well-ordered mercy requires that a man help himself by repenting

of the misery that he has incurred through sin—this according to Proverbs 14:34 (“Sin makes nations miserable”)—and that is why Ecclesiasticus 30:24 says, “Have pity on your own soul, thus pleasing God.”

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 64, a. 4, ad 1 and 3, and q. 72, a. 1, ad 1), it belongs to the power that Christ alone has that Christ conferred on the woman the effect of the sacrament of penance, which is the forgiveness of sins, without the sacrament of penance—though not without the interior penance which He caused in her through grace.

Article 6

Is penance “the second plank after a shipwreck”?

It seems that penance is not “the second plank after a shipwreck” (*poenitentia non sit secunda tabula post naufragium*):

Objection 1: A Gloss on Isaiah 3:9 (“They have proclaimed their sin abroad, just like Sodom”) says, “To hide one’s sins is the second plank after a shipwreck.” But penance does not hide sins; instead, it reveals them. Therefore, penance is not a second plank.

Objection 2: In an edifice, the foundation occupies the first, and not the second, place. But in the spiritual edifice, penance is the foundation—this according to Hebrews 6:1 (“... not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works”). Hence, it precedes even baptism itself—this according to Acts 2:38 (“Therefore, repent and be baptized, every one of you”). Hence, penance should not be called a second plank.

Objection 3: All of the sacraments are certain planks, i.e., remedies against sin. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 65, a. 2), penance is not in second place among the sacraments, but is instead in fourth place. Therefore, penance should not be called the second plank after a shipwreck.

But contrary to this: Jerome says that penance is the second plank after a shipwreck.

I respond: That which is such-and-such in its own right (*per se*) is prior to what is such-and-such incidentally (*per accidens*), in the way that *substance* is prior to *accident*. Now some sacraments are in their own right ordered toward man’s salvation, e.g., *baptism*, which is spiritual birth, and *confirmation*, which is spiritual growth, and *the Eucharist*, which is spiritual nourishment.

On the other hand, *penance* is ordered toward man’s salvation incidentally, as it were, once a supposition is made—more specifically, on the supposition of sin. For if a man does not commit an actual sin, then he does not need penance, whereas he does need baptism and confirmation and the Eucharist—in the same way that, in a man’s bodily life, he does need not medication unless he falls sick, whereas, in order to live, he does need birth, growth, and nutrition in their own right.

And that is why penance occupies the second place with respect to the state of integrity or wholeness (*status integritatis*), which is conferred and maintained by the sacraments mentioned above. Hence, penance is metaphorically called “the second plank after a shipwreck.” For the first remedy for those crossing the sea is be conserved in a ship that is intact, but the second remedy is, after the ship has broken up, that the individual should hold on to a plank. So, too, the first remedy on the sea of this life is that a man preserve his integrity, whereas the second remedy, if he loses his integrity through sin, is that he should return through penance.

Reply to objection 1: There are two possible ways to hide one’s sins:

In one way, *while the sins are being committed*. Now it is worse to sin in a public way than in a hidden way, both because a public sinner seems to sin with a greater degree of contempt, and also because he sins along with giving scandal to others. And so, in the case of sins, there is a sort of remedy

in an individual's sinning in a hidden way. And that is why the Gloss claims that the second plank after a shipwreck is to hide one's sins—not because the sin is thereby taken away, as it is through penance, but because a lesser sin is thereby being committed.

In the second way, an individual hides his *previously committed sin* by neglecting confession. And this is contrary to penance. Again, hiding sin in this way is not a second plank, but is instead the opposite of a plank; for Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who hides his crimes will not be set right."

Reply to objection 2: Penance cannot be the foundation of one's spiritual edifice absolutely speaking, i.e., in the first act of building. Instead, it is the foundation in the second act of re-building, which comes after the destruction wrought by sin; for penance comes first for those who are returning to God.

In the quoted passage, the Apostle is talking about the foundation of spiritual *doctrine*.

Again, the penance that precedes baptism is not the *sacrament* of penance.

Reply to objection 3: The three preceding sacraments, [i.e., baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist], belong to the intact ship, i.e., to the state of integrity, and it is with respect to this integrity that penance is called the second plank.

Article 7

Was this sacrament appropriately instituted in the New Law?

It seems that this sacrament was not appropriately instituted in the New Law (*hoc sacramentum non fuerit convenienter institutum in nova lege*):

Objection 1: Things that belong to the natural law (*quae sunt de iure naturali*) do not need to be instituted. But repenting of the evils that one has done belongs to the natural law; for an individual cannot love the good unless he is saddened by its contrary. Therefore, it was not appropriate for penance to be instituted in the New Law.

Objection 2: What existed under the Old Law did not have to be instituted. But penance existed in the Old Law as well; hence, in Jeremiah 8:6 the Lord complains, "No one is doing penance for his sins while asking, 'What have I done?'" Therefore, penance should not have been instituted in the New Law.

Objection 3: Penance is related to baptism as something that comes after it (*consequenter se habet*), since, as was explained above (a. 6), it is a second plank. But it seems that penance was instituted before baptism; for we read that at the beginning of His preaching our Lord said in Matthew 4:6, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Therefore, this sacrament was not appropriately instituted in the New Law.

Objection 4: As was explained above (q. 62, a. 5 and q. 64, a. 3), the sacraments of the New Law have their institution from Christ, by whose power they operate. But Christ does not seem to have instituted this sacrament, since He Himself did not make use of it, as He did with the other sacraments that He instituted. Therefore, this sacrament was not appropriately instituted in the New Law.

But contrary to this: In Luke 24:46-47 our Lord says, "It was necessary that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and that penance and the forgiveness of sins be preached in His name to all the nations."

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1, ad 1-2), in this sacrament the act of the penitent behaves as the *matter*, whereas what is from the part of the priest, who operates as Christ's minister, behaves as the *form* and brings the sacrament to completion.

Now in the case of the other sacraments, the *matter* preexists either *in nature*, e.g., water, or *by some art*, e.g., bread, but in order for such matter to be taken up into a sacrament, what is required is an

institution that makes this determination. On the other hand, the *form*, along with its power, comes *totally* from the institution of Christ, from whose passion the power of the sacraments proceeds.

So, then, the *matter* of* this* sacrament* preexists *in nature*, since it is by natural reason that a man is moved to repent of the evil things that he has done, whereas the fact that a man does penance in one way or another comes from *divine institution*. That is why our Lord, at the beginning of His preaching, indicated to men that they should not only repent (*non solum poeniterent*), but also do penance (*sed etiam poenitentiam agerent*), thereby signifying the determinate types of action that are required for this sacrament.

On the other hand, He determined what belongs to *the role of the ministers* when in Matthew 16:19 He said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, etc.” And it was after the resurrection that He made clear the efficacy of this sacrament and the source of its power, when in Luke 24:47 He said that it was written “that repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be preached in the name [of the Christ] to all the nations,” after He had spoken of His passion and resurrection; for it is by the power of the name of Jesus Christ, suffering and rising, that this sacrament has the effective power to forgive sins.

And thus it is clear that this sacrament was appropriately instituted in the New Law.

Reply to objection 1: What belongs to the natural law (*de iure naturali est*) is that an individual should behave as the Ninevites did (Jonah 3:4ff.), viz., by repenting of the evils that he has done insofar as he (a) feels sorry that he has done them, (b) seeks a remedy for this sorrow in some manner, and (c) shows signs of sorrow. Yet even in the case of the Ninevites there was something of faith added, which they had received from Jonah’s preaching, viz., that they did these things in the hope of receiving pardon from God—this according to what we read in Jonah 3:9 (“Who knows? God might yet relent and make allowance and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we will not perish?”)

Now in the same way that, as was explained in the Second Part (ST 1-2, q. 100, a. 11), other matters belonging to natural law received a more specific determination from the institution of divine law, so it was with penance.

Reply to objection 2: Those things that belong to the natural law receive specific determinations in different ways in the Old Law and the New Law, insofar as those determinations fit in with the imperfection of the Old Law and the perfection of the New Law.

Hence, in the Old Law penance had some determination (a) with respect to *sorrow*, viz., that it should exist more in the heart than in exterior signs—this according to Joel 2:13 (“Rend your hearts and not your garments”); and (b) with respect to *seeking a remedy for the sorrow*, viz., that sins were to be in some way confessed to God’s ministers, at least in general. That is why in Leviticus 5:17-18 the Lord says, “If anyone sins through ignorance ... he shall offer the priest a ram without blemish from his flocks, according to the measure and appraisal of the sin, and the priest shall pray for him, because he acted unknowingly, and he shall be forgiven.” And by the very fact that an individual would make an offering for his sin, he was in some sense confessing his sin to the priest. On this score Proverbs 28:13 says, “He who hides his crimes will not be set right, whereas he who has confessed them and left them behind will receive mercy.”

The power of the keys, which flows from Christ’s passion, had not yet been instituted. And, as a result, it had not yet been established that an individual should grieve over his sin with the intention of subjecting himself to the keys of the Church through confession and satisfaction, in the hope of receiving pardon by the power of Christ’s passion.

Reply to objection 3: If one rightly considers what our Lord said about the necessity for baptism in John 3:3ff., it temporally preceded what He said in Matthew 4 about the necessity for repentance. For what He said to Nicodemus about baptism came before the incarceration of John, about whom it is later added (John 3:23-24) that he was baptizing, whereas what He said about repentance in Matthew 4 came

after the incarceration of John (Matthew 4:12).

However, even if our Lord had introduced repentance before baptism, this would have been because a certain sort of repentance is required even before baptism—in the sense in which Peter proclaimed in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you.”

Reply to objection 4: Christ did not use the baptism that He Himself instituted, but, as was explained above (q. 39, a. 2), He was instead baptized with John’s baptism. Nor did He use His own ministry, since, as John 4:2 tells us, “He Himself did not baptize” ordinarily, “but instead His disciples did”—even though, as Augustine points out, one should believe, it seems, that He did baptize His disciples.

Now the use of this sacrament, as instituted by Him, was in no way fitting, either (a) as regards He Himself repenting, since there was no sin in Him, or (b) as regards His offering this sacrament to others, since, as was explained above (a. 5, ad 3), in order to show His mercy and power, He offered the effect of this sacrament without the sacrament.

By contrast, He Himself did consume, and did give to others, the sacrament of the Eucharist—both (a) in order to commend the excellence of this sacrament, and (b) because this sacrament is the memorial of His passion, insofar as Christ is both the priest and the victim.

Article 8

Should penance endure until the end of one’s life?

It seems that penance should not endure until the end of one’s life (*poenitentia non debeat iurare usque ad finem vitae*):

Objection 1: Penance is ordered toward wiping out sin. But the penitent receives the remission of his sins immediately—this according to Ezechiel 18:21 (“If the wicked individual repents of all the sins that he has committed, he shall live his life and shall not die”). Therefore, he does not have to stretch out repentance any further.

Objection 2: Doing penance belongs to the state of *beginners*. But a man ought to proceed from that state to the state of *proficients* and, further, to the state of *the perfect*. Therefore, a man ought not to do penance right up to the end of his life.

Objection 3: Just as, in the case of the other sacraments, a man should observe the statutes of the Church, so, too, it is with this sacrament. But according to the canons there are determinate lengths of time for doing penance—so that, more specifically, he who has committed such-and-such a sin has to do penance for a set number of years. Therefore, it seems that a penance should not be extended to the end of one’s life.

But contrary to this: In *De Poenitentia* Augustine asks, “What is left for us except to be sorrowful in this life? For where sorrow ends, penance is lacking. But if penance ends, what room is there for pardon?”

I respond: There are two sorts of penance, (a) *interior* and (b) *exterior*.

Interior penance is that by which one sorrows over a sin that has been committed. And this sort of penance ought to endure until the end of one’s life. For it should always displease a man that he has sinned, since if it pleased him that he has sinned, then he would incur a sin by that very fact and would lose the fruit of forgiveness. But it is the displeasure that causes sorrow in the one who is susceptible to sorrow, and such is a man who is in this life. But after this life the saints are not susceptible to sorrow. Hence, their past sins will displease them without any sadness—this according to Isaiah 65:16 (“The former anguish passes into oblivion”).

On the other hand, *exterior penance* is that by which an individual exhibits exterior signs of his sorrow, and on this score he confesses his sins to a priest who absolves him and makes satisfaction according to the priest's judgment. This sort of penance does not have to last until the end of one's life, but instead lasts for a determinate length of time in keeping with the magnitude of the sin (*secundum mensura peccati*).

Reply to objection 1: Genuine penance not only removes an individual's past sins but also preserves him from future sins. Therefore, even though a man receives remission of his past sins at the very first instance of genuine repentance, it is nonetheless necessary for penance to endure in the man, so that he does not fall back into sin.

Reply to objection 2: To do interior and exterior penance together belongs to the state of *beginners*, i.e., those who are returning anew from sin. However, interior penance has a place even in *proficients* and in the *perfect*—this according to Psalm 83:6-7 (“In his heart he has inclined to ascend by steps ... in the valley of tears”). Hence, Paul himself said in 1 Corinthians 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 predetermined for penitents with respect to the action of doing exterior penance.

Article 9

Can penance be continuous?

It seems that penance cannot be continuous (*poenitentia non possit esse continua*):

Objection 1: Jeremiah 31:16 says, “Let your voice be free of lamenting and your eyes of tears.” But this could not be the case if penance, which consists in lamenting and tears, were continuous. Therefore, penance cannot be continuous.

Objection 2: A man ought to rejoice over every good work—this according to Psalm 99:2 (“Serve the Lord with gladness”). But to do penance is a good work. Therefore, a man ought to rejoice over this very work. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 9, “No man can simultaneously be sad and rejoice.” Therefore, it cannot be the case that one who is doing penance can simultaneously be saddened by his past sins, and yet this belongs to the nature of doing penance.

Objection 3: In 2 Corinthians 2:7 the Apostle says, “... you should comfort him”—viz. the penitent—“lest perchance someone of his sort should be overwhelmed by too much sorrow.” But comforting an individual dispels his sorrow, and sorrow belongs to the nature of repentance. Therefore, penance cannot be continuous.

But contrary to this: In *De Poenitentia* Augustine says, “In doing penance sorrow should be preserved continually.”

I respond: *Doing penance* can be said in two ways, viz., with respect to the *act* of doing penance, and with respect to the *habit* of doing penance.

To be sure, it is impossible for a man to continually perform the *act* of doing penance, since it is necessary for the act of one who is doing penance to be interrupted, at least by sleep and other things that pertain to bodily necessities.

In the second way, one is said to have the habit of doing penance (*dicitur poenitere secundum habitum*). And in this sense it is necessary for a man to do penance continually, both (a) with respect to his never doing anything contrary to penance by which the habitual disposition toward penance would be destroyed, and also (b) with respect to his being obligated to resolve that his past sins will always be displeasing to him.

Reply to objection 1: Lamenting and tears belong to the act of *exterior* penance, which, as has been explained, not only does not have to be continuous, but also does not need to endure until the end of one's life. Hence, it is significant that in the place cited it is added, "There is a reward for your work." Now the reward of the work of one who does penance is the full remission of his sin—both with respect to guilt and with respect to punishment—after the attainment of which there is no need for a man to do any further exterior penance.

However, continuity of penance of the sort that has been explained, [i.e., the continuity of having the habit of doing penance], is not thereby excluded.

Reply to objection 2: There are two ways in which we can speak of sorrow (*dolor*) and joy (*gaudium*):

In one way, insofar as they are *passions of the sentient appetite*. And on this score there is no way in which they can exist simultaneously, because they are altogether contrary to one another, either on the part of the *object*, i.e., when they have to do with the same thing, or at least on the part of the *movement of the heart*, since joy is accompanied by a dilation of the heart, whereas sorrow (*tristitia*) is accompanied by a constriction of the heart. And it is in this way that the Philosopher is talking in *Ethics* 9.

In the second way, we can speak of joy and sorrow (*tristitia*) insofar as they exist in a *simple act of the will*, to which something is pleasing or displeasing. And on this score, they can have contrariety only on the part of the *object*, i.e., when they are about the same thing and in the same respect. And in this sense they cannot be simultaneous, since the same thing in the same respect cannot be both pleasing and displeasing. However, if joy and sorrow so taken are not about the same thing in the same respect, but instead are either about different things or about the same thing in different respects, then there is no contrariety between rejoicing and being saddened; for instance, if we see a just individual being afflicted, his righteousness pleases us at the same time that his being afflicted displeases us. And it is in this way that it can (a) be displeasing to an individual that he has sinned and (b) be pleasing to him that this sin displeases him even while he has hope for forgiveness, so that his sorrow is itself a matter for joy. Hence, in *De Poenitentia* Augustine says, "Let the penitent always sorrow and rejoice over his sorrow."

However, even if sorrow were in no way compatible with joy, the continuity of penance as a *habit* would not thereby be undermined, but only its continuity as an *act*.

Reply to objection 3: According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, virtue involves holding to the mean among the passions. Now the sorrow (*tristitia*) that follows in the sentient appetite of the penitent upon the displeasure of his will is a certain passion. Hence, this sorrow has to be moderated in accord with virtue, and its overabundance is vicious, since this overabundance leads him to despair. The Apostle signifies this in the same place when he says, "... lest someone of his sort should be overwhelmed by too much sorrow." And so the consolation that the Apostle is talking about moderates sorrow without totally doing away with it.

Article 10

Should the sacrament of penance be repeated?

It seems that the sacrament of penance should not be repeated (*sacramentum poenitentiae non debeat iterari*):

Objection 1: In Hebrews 6:4ff. the Apostle says, "It is impossible for those who have once been illuminated, who have both tasted the heavenly gift and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit ... and who have then fallen away, to be restored again to repentance." But everyone who has repented has been

illuminated and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if anyone sins after having repented, he cannot again repent.

Objection 2: In *De Poenitentia* Ambrose says, “Some are to be found who think that penance is to be done more often, who take liberties with Christ. For if they were truly doing penance, they would not think that it should be done again afterwards. For just as there is one baptism, so there is one penance.” But baptism is not repeated. Therefore, neither is penance.

Objection 3: The miracles by which our Lord cured bodily infirmities signify the healing of spiritual infirmities by which men are liberated from their sins. But we do not read that our Lord gave sight twice to anyone who was blind, or that he cleansed any leper twice, or that he raised anyone who was dead twice. Therefore, it seems that neither is any sinner given forgiveness twice through penance.

Objection 4: In a homily for Quadragesima Sunday Gregory says, “Repentance is lamenting past sins and not committing again those we have lamented.” And *De Summo Bono* Isidore says, “He is a joker and no penitent who is still doing what he is repenting of.” Therefore, if someone is truly repentant, he will not sin again. Therefore, it is impossible for penance to be repeated.

Objection 5: Just as baptism has its efficacy from Christ’s passion, so too with penance. But baptism is not repeated, and this because of the unity of Christ’s passion and death. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, penance is not repeated, either.

Objection 6: Gregory says, “The ease of pardon gives an incentive to those who are delinquent.” Therefore, if God were to frequently give pardon because of repentance, it seems that He would be giving men an incentive for being delinquent, and so He would seem to delight in their sins. But this does not befit His goodness. Therefore, penance cannot be repeated.

But contrary to this: A man is led to mercy by the example of divine mercy—this according to Luke 6:36 (“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”). But our Lord imposed the following mercy on His disciples: that they should forgive their brother as often as he sins against them. Hence, Matthew 18:21-22 reports that when Peter asked, “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”, Jesus responded, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times.” Therefore, God likewise offers pardon to sinners as often as they repent—especially in light of the fact that He teaches us to ask, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

I respond: Some have made a mistake concerning penance, claiming that it is not possible for a man to receive pardon through penance for a second time.

Of these, some, viz., the Novatians, extended this to such a length that they claimed that after the first penance, which is done in baptism, sinners cannot be restored again through penance. On the other hand, as Augustine explains in *De Poenitentia*, there were other heretics who used to claim that, after baptism, penance can be used only once, and not many times.

Now their errors seem to have proceeded from two sources:

First of all, from the fact that they were mistaken about the nature of genuine penance. For since what is required for genuine penance is charity, without which sins are not taken away, they believed that charity, once possessed, could never be lost and that, as a consequence, penance, if it is genuine, is never removed through sin in such a way that it would be necessary for it to be repeated. But this was disproved in the Second Part (*ST* 2-2, q. 24, a. 11), where it was shown that charity, once had, can be lost because of free choice and, as a result, even after genuine penance an individual can commit a mortal sin.

Second, from the fact that they were mistaken in their estimation of the seriousness of sin. For they thought that a sin which an individual commits after gaining pardon is so serious that it cannot possibly be forgiven. In this they were mistaken on the part of the *sin*, which, even after forgiveness has been received, can be either more serious or less serious than the very first sin that had been forgiven, and they were much more mistaken in a way that is opposed to the *infinity of God’s mercy*, which surpasses both the number and magnitude of the relevant sins—this according to Psalm 50:3 (“Have mercy on me, O

God, according to your great mercy; and according to the multitude of your tender mercies, wipe out my offense”). Thus is disproved the word spoken by Cain in Genesis 4:13, “My sin is greater than what I might deserve pardon for.” And so God’s mercy offers forgiveness without any limit in the presence of penance. Hence, 2 Paralipomenon 33 [Prayer of Manasses] says, “Your merciful promise is immeasurable and unsearchable ... [and you repent] of the evil brought upon man.”

Hence, it is clear that penance is repeatable many times.

Reply to objection 1: Since among the Jews there were, according to the Law, certain places for washing set up (*quaedam lavraca instituta*) where they used to purge themselves of impurities many times, some Jews believed that an individual could likewise be purified many times by the washing of baptism.

To exclude this, the Apostle writes to the Hebrews that it is impossible “for those who have once been illuminated,” viz., through baptism, “to be restored again to repentance,” viz., through baptism, which is, as Titus 3:5 puts it, “a bath of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” And the reason he gives is that by baptism a man dies with Christ, and hence it follows that they would be “crucifying the Son of God again within themselves” (Hebrews 6:6).

Reply to objection 2: Ambrose is talking here about solemn penance, which, as will be explained below (*Supplement*, q. 28, a. 2), is not repeated in the Church.

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in *De Poenitentia*, “Our Lord gave sight to many blind people at different times, and He gave strength to many who were infirm, showing in these different people that the same sins are repeatedly forgiven—just as someone whom He had previously cured as a leper, He gives sight to as a blind man at another time. For the reason why He healed so many blind people, so many lame and paralyzed people, was in order that the sinner might not despair *of *himself. And the reason why He is described as healing a given individual only once is that each individual might fear that he is joined to his sin.

“He calls himself a physician, useful not to the healthy but to those who are doing badly. But what sort of physician is it who does not know how to cure a recurring malady? For it belongs to a physician to cure a hundred times someone who is ill a hundred times. And he would be a lesser physician than the rest if he were ignorant of what is possible for another.”

Reply to objection 4: To repent is to lament past sins and not to commit them again *while one is still lamenting them*, whether actually lamenting them or having the intention to lament them. For the individual who is a joker and no penitent is the one who, *while he is doing penance*, does what he is repenting of; for he is intending to do again what he did before, either by committing actual sins of the same sort or by committing actual sins of some other genus.

By contrast, the mere fact that an individual sins later on, either in act or in intention, does not rule out the genuineness of his prior repentance. Indeed, it is never the case that the genuineness of a prior act is ruled out by a subsequent contrary act. For just as an individual is genuinely running even if he afterwards sits down, so an individual is genuinely repenting even if he afterwards sins.

Reply to objection 5: From Christ’s passion baptism has the power to be a spiritual *regeneration*, along with the spiritual death of one’s previous life. But “it has been appointed unto men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27) and to be born once. And that is why a man should be baptized only once.

By contrast, from Christ’s passion penance has the power to be a spiritual *medicine*, which can be repeated frequently.

Reply to objection 6: In *De Poenitentia* Augustine says, “It is clear that sins displease God very much, and that He is always ready to destroy them, in order that what He has created should not perish and in order that what He has loved should not be corrupted,” viz., by despair.