

Reconciliation with the Church and Interior Penance: The Contribution of Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the *Res et Sacramentum* of Penance*

GILLES EMERY, OP
University of Fribourg
Fribourg, Switzerland

SACRAMENTAL PENANCE, which provides remission of sins, brings reconciliation with the Church and with God. Today, numerous theologians agree in recognizing more clearly that reconciliation with the Church constitutes the “first effect” of the sacrament of penance or its “proper effect,” which brings reconciliation with God (second effect) to the Christian sinner. Grounded in the study of the history of penance (the patristic theme of “peace with the Church”), this thesis constitutes one focus of contemporary reflection on this sacrament.¹ Having arrived at maturity in the movement for the rediscovery of the ecclesial

* Translation by Robert E. Williams, SSI, of “La réconciliation avec l’Église et la pénitence intérieure: l’apport de Thomas d’Aquin sur la question du *res et sacramentum* de la pénitence,” in *Praedicando et docendo*, Mélanges offerts à Liam Walsh OP, ed. Barbara Hallensleben and Guido Vergauwen (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1998), 31–47.

¹ Colman E. O’Neill, “Les Sacrements,” in *Bilan de la théologie du XXe siècle*, ed. Robert Vander Gucht and Herbert Vorgrimler, vol. 2 (Tournai, Paris: Casterman, 1971), 457–500, cf. 493–98; Herbert Vorgrimler, *Busse und Krankensalbung*, “Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte IV/3” (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1978), 195–96; Reinhard Messner, *Feiern der Umkehr und Versöhnung*, “Gottesdienst der Kirche, Handbuch der Liturgiewissenschaft 7/2, Sakramentliche Feiern 1/2,” (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1992), 185–86. Already Karl Rahner was able to produce a substantial list of theologians who accepted this determination of the *res et sacramentum* (*Theologische Schriften*, vol. 8 [Einsiedeln, Zürich, Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1967], 449–50): H. de Lubac, M. Schmaus, E. Schillebeeckx, J. Ratzinger, Y. Congar, and many others.

dimension of the sacraments, which Vatican II sanctioned, today this thesis is one key to understanding the sacrament in its ecclesial dimension. It may be expressed thus: “reconciliation with God by means of reconciliation with the Church.”²

From the very beginnings of this approach, it was integrated into the Scholastic analysis of the sacrament’s structure; reconciliation with the Church, therefore, was defined as the “*res et sacramentum* of penance.”³ We find this to be the case with most of the theologians who hold to the sacraments’ symbolic causality along with its three elements: the sacramental sign itself (*sacramentum tantum*); the intermediate effect in the order of signification-causality, which is already a reality brought about by the sacrament (*res et sacramentum*); and finally, the ultimate effect, that is, sacramental grace or the “fruit” of the sacrament (*res tantum*). From this standpoint then reconciliation with the Church replaces the “inner penance” that for Thomas Aquinas and many medieval theologians constituted this *res et sacramentum* of penance. The present study is limited to an examination of reconciliation with the Church under the aspect of *res et sacramentum*. It aims at making a comparison of these two approaches to the intermediate sign-effect of penance in hopes of establishing that the Thomistic doctrine of “inner penance” offers a theological framework for a better understanding of the relation between “reconciliation with God” and “reconciliation with the Church.”

Reconciliation with the Church

It was Bartomeu M. Xiberta, a Spanish Carmelite, who first presented a systematic treatment of the statement: “Reconciliation with the Church is the *res et sacramentum* of penance . . . the proper and immediate effect

² Bernard Rey, *Pour des célébrations pénitentielles dans l’esprit de Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 177; in particular, the author endeavors to position the ecclesial community (“Church of sinners”) as the subject of the collective action of reconciliation (cf. especially 163–65).

³ So, for example, Jean-Hervé Nicolas, *Synthèse dogmatique, De la Trinité à la Trinité* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1985), 1050–52. Without prejudice to the sacrament’s other names, in this paper we will keep using the term “penance,” which joins together the virtue and the sacrament. Let us remember that the word “penance” (*paenitentia*) does not come from the idea of pain (*poena*). It was used very early on by Christians: To do penance (*paenitentiam agere*) translates *metanoia*, the deep down conversion of which the Gospel speaks and from which the sacrament gets this name; Pierre-Marie Gy, “La documentation sacramentaire de Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 80 (1996): 425–31; cf. 428 for the *res et sacramentum* of penance (Thomas and Rahner).

of sacramental absolution.” This thesis forms the subject of his doctoral dissertation defended in 1921 at the Gregorianum in Rome.⁴ In a rather traditional manner, his argument is built upon the witness of Scripture and Tradition, and then confirmed by a study of the Scholastic doctors.⁵ The proposition, or rather the demonstration, of Xiberta is not put forward as a criticism of Thomas Aquinas, since the author appeals to him, along with other Scholastics (Bonaventure in particular), in support of his thesis.⁶ At the most, Xiberta observes, the radical distinction between the individual forum and the social forum, on which his opponents base themselves by invoking St. Thomas, is not decisive. As regards the scope of his thesis, in his preface, as at the end of his study, Xiberta underlines its apologetical dimension: to hold in a historically sound way that reconciliation with the Church is the *res et sacramentum* of penance is to possess the means that allows us to establish the *sacramental* dignity of the penance practiced in the Church (relationship between the “divine element” and the “human element”) against those who only see in it an ecclesiastical institution.⁷ If Xiberta deserves the honor of this first historico-doctrinal study, we must nevertheless grant the initiative to the Jesuit theologian Maurice de la Taille, director of Xiberta’s thesis, who taught that the *res et sacramentum* of penance consists in “the extinction of [the sinner’s] debt to the Church” (*extinctio debiti erga Ecclesiam*). For Father de la Taille, sacramental absolution is first of all (*per prius*) the Church’s acceptance of the satisfaction the penitent offers after having confessed his sins (satisfaction performed or which he intends to perform): This relieving of the debt owed to the Church signifies the

⁴ Bartomeu M. Xiberta, *Clavis Ecclesiae. De ordine absolutionis sacramentalis ad reconciliationem cum Ecclesia* (Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1922). We are using the reproduction of the 1922 text by J. Perarnau in *Miscellanea Bartomeu M. Xiberta*, “Analecta sacra Tarraconensia 45/2” (Barcelona: Biblioteca Balmes, 1972 [1973]), 241*–341* (with the original paging indicated by brackets).

⁵ “*Reconciliatio cum Ecclesia est res et sacramentum sacramenti paenitentiae*” (*Clavis Ecclesiae*, [12]; cf. [96]; “*proprium et immediatum fructum absolutionis sacramentalis*” ([11]); “(. . .) *Ostendere conabor reconciliationem cum Ecclesia nedum abesse ab effectibus sacramenti, esse potius proprium et immediatum fructum. (. . .) Nos vere ostendere conabimur infusionem gratiae deletivae peccati esse finem sacramenti eiusque excellentissimum effectum, ordine tamen causalitatis intercedere alium effectum immediate significatum et causatum per sacramentum, videlicet reconciliationem cum Ecclesia*” ([11]–[12]).

⁶ *Clavis Ecclesiae*, [89] “*Iuxta Angelicum (. . .) reconciliationis vero per sacramentum proprium est reconciliare cum Ecclesia.*” We will take a look at the position of Thomas Aquinas later.

⁷ The author names Wycliff, Luther, and “most of the heretics” who follow them, as well as certain “Modernists” (*Clavis Ecclesiae*, [3]–[4]; cf. [94]–[95]).

relieving of the debt owed to Christ.⁸ Between Xiberta's apologetical dimension and the stress de la Taille puts on the "debt of sin," the theme of reconciliation with the Church is still rather far from the theological interpretation it will have later. On the other hand, it underlines quite clearly the Church's role as *mediator* in the signification and granting of forgiveness.

Among the works of major influence, we cannot overlook Henri de Lubac's *Catholicism*, which marks a decisive stage in the work of restoring value to the sacraments' social dimension within Catholic dogma. Already *Catholicism* offers the main elements of reflection: a close analogy between baptism and penance, identical nature of the "disciplinary institution" and the "means of inner purification," priority of reconciliation with the Church as the immediate effect of penance and "efficacious sign" of reconciliation with God. "There can be no return to the grace of God without a return to the communion of the Church."⁹ In De Lubac's quick summary, which provides a whole theological program for the sacrament of penance, there is however no mention of *res et sacramentum*, nor is there any need for it.

Later historical studies—those of B. Poschmann in particular—will only confirm Xiberta's thesis (which Poschmann explicitly took as his model)¹⁰ and there is no reason to dwell on them here. We should point out, however, that on the historical level, as on the theological level, Poschmann offers a radicalization of Xiberta's thought. Poschmann explains that on the historical level the penitential teaching of the early Church can only be understood in light of Xiberta's thesis.¹¹ For Poschmann, on the theological level, only the concept of reconciliation with the Church as the immediate effect of penance allows the sacrament to preserve its full meaning (necessity of the Church's sacramental intervention); it alone allows us to see penance as an authentic judicial process (an aspect to which Poschmann pays much attention).¹² Once

⁸ Maurice de la Taille, *Mysterium Fidei de Augustissimo Corporis et Sanguinis Christi Sacrificio atque Sacramento* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1921), 581. The Eucharistic context of de la Taille's teaching should be noted. For de la Taille's influence on Xiberta's thesis, cf. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Busse und Krankensalbung*, 195, no. 46.

⁹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), 37–38.

¹⁰ Bernhard Poschmann, *Paenitentia secunda*, Die kirliche Busse im ältesten Christentum bis Cyprian und Origenes. Eine dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1940), 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, footnote 1 ("nur von ihr aus"). This thesis of Xiberta is clearly formulated: "(...) dass 'die Rekonziliation mit der Kirche res et sacramentum des Bussakraments' sei" (*ibid.*).

¹² Bernhard Poschmann, "Die innere Struktur des Bussakraments," *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 1/3 (1950): 12–30, cf. 25 & 29.

the central place of *pax cum Ecclesia* in early penance has been well established (this is what the historical studies do), it still remains to be shown that it amounts to precisely the *res et sacramentum* of penance. For this we need, besides history, a speculative analysis of the sacrament. Poschmann provides its outline: reconciliation with the Church constitutes a *res*—that is, the thing signified and the immediate effect of the sacramental action—but it is also the *sign* of reconciliation with God. The Church gives her forgiveness to the converted sinner, and God has promised His forgiveness to whomever the Church forgives. Already that was precisely Xiberta's explanation. Furthermore, if we ask what efficacy reconciliation has in regard to sacramental grace (the *res tantum*), Poschmann's answer is: A certain "right" to receive God's grace. But we could also imagine that there is no reason to add a supplementary effect to reconciliation with the Church since this latter *includes* peace with God, forgiveness, and grace.¹³ Hence we may ask ourselves if the framework of *res et sacramentum* really allows us to take into account the historical thesis touted by Poschmann.

B. Poschmann comes across as more critical of Thomas Aquinas and the Middle Ages overall. As a matter of fact, it is the subsequent controversy about contrition and attrition that he thinks got off on the wrong track by misunderstanding *pax Ecclesiae* as the "first goal" and the "indispensable means" of reconciliation with God. Poschmann points out that if Thomas Aquinas had presented reconciliation with the Church, and not inner penance, as the *res et sacramentum*, the development of penitential doctrine would have taken a wholly different path. For in this case "the sacrament then keeps its irreplaceable importance, even with the most perfect contrition, and there would have been no need to have recourse to imperfect repentance to insure its right to exist."¹⁴ Perhaps such an observation applies to Duns Scotus or to those theologians denounced in Blaise Pascal's tenth *Provinciale*, but certainly not to the position of Thomas Aquinas, as we shall see later. Nowhere do we find that St. Thomas had to "raise the ante on the requirements for repentance, resulting in an extrasacramental justification,"¹⁵ for the good reason that Thomas's effort consists in tying together as closely as possible personal contrition and the sacramental dimension: The contrition Thomas speaks of is contrition at work in the Church's sacramental process.

¹³ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴ Bernhard Poschmann, *La pénitence et l'onction des malades*, "Histoire des dogmes IV/3" (Paris: Cerf, 1966), 180 (German ed., 1951, 111); cf. "Die innere Struktur," 25.

¹⁵ Bernhard Poschmann, *La pénitence et l'onction des malades*, 181.

On the speculative level, C. Dumont tried to determine more precisely the proper structure of this *res et sacramentum*.¹⁶ He points out that in order for us to be able to consider reconciliation with the Church as the *res et sacramentum* of penance, we have to uncover more than a relation of extrinsic analogy or simple likeness between it and grace; we must also be able to establish a distinction. This observation leads us to exclude immediately an understanding of reconciliation only in its juridical nature, and to retain the penitent's *real participation* in the community in which he is reintegrated: The penitent becomes an "active member" in the Church once again. For Dumont, reconciliation with the Church and grace remain nevertheless distinct since grace designates a larger field of relations (the whole aspect of salvation), while integration into the Church "only introduces a necessary historical moment."¹⁷ With this analysis Dumont gains a technical explanation that allows him to give an account of the *res et sacramentum*, but with an important consequence: a separation between grace and the Church, which have neither the same intensity nor the same depth. (Along with other nuances in his understanding of the Church, J. H. Nicolas resolves this difficulty by explaining that the notion of sacrament is not univocal: Here the *res et sacramentum* is so closely bound up with the *res tantum* that it can hardly be separated from it.)¹⁸

As for the relationship of causality that reconciliation with the Church has with grace, Dumont explains it in terms of "disposing causality" (thus, by comparison with Hervaeus Natalis, coming up short of Thomas Aquinas's mature thought).¹⁹ Faced with this difficulty, he maintains the identity of the twofold affirmation: The penitent is received into the Church because God gives him back His grace, or, reciprocally, the penitent is taken back into ecclesiastical communion because the divine friendship has been given back to him. Consequently, extending the remarks of his predecessors, Dumont points out that this reconciliation with the Church allows us to show the *necessity of the sacramental avowal* made to the Church's minister (Council of Trent), since we have here a reconciliation *within* the Church and a resumption of responsibility by the reconciling Church. The thesis of reconciliation with the Church as the *res et sacramentum* of penance is promoted anew, not without relevance, in order to defend Catholic teaching on the sacrament.

¹⁶ C. Dumont, SJ, "La réconciliation avec l'Église et la nécessité de l'aveu sacramental," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 81 (1959): 577–97.

¹⁷ C. Dumont, "La réconciliation avec l'Église," 586.

¹⁸ Jean-Hervé Nicolas, *Synthèse dogmatique*, 1051. But then we are still faced with the problem of the distinction.

¹⁹ C. Dumont, "La réconciliation avec l'Église," 586–87 & no. 18.

It cannot be denied, however, that the most important attempt at a synthesis belongs to Karl Rahner. Rahner definitely accepts the thinking of Thomas Aquinas on several key points, particularly the place of the penitent's actions, with the priest's absolution, at the heart of the sacramental sign, as well as the instrumental efficient causality of the sacrament thus constituted.²⁰ Moreover, Rahner is unwilling to give up on finding a *res et sacramentum*, a "middle term" between the sign and the effect of penance: It is reconciliation with the Church, which respects both history (the patristic theme of *pax et communicatio cum Ecclesia*) and reality itself. Through his reconciliation with the Holy Community, the sinner, who has been reintegrated into the Church, acquires a new participation in the Spirit of the Church (*res et sacramentum*) that forgives and grants "peace with God" (*res tantum*).²¹ This explanation, which stresses the necessity of the priest's absolution for there to be a reconciliation with the Church, is based upon a close parallel with baptism. In a way analogous to the baptismal character (the stable integration into the Church of which the baptized person is made a member), the *res et sacramentum* of penance consists in the restoration of the living bond with the Church.²²

Rahner does not simply replace one theological explanation with another, but he fits the thinking of Thomas into his views. On the one hand, he shows that for Thomas (as for Bonaventure) the sacrament really produces reconciliation with the Church. On the other hand, he upholds "inner penance" as the effect produced or reinforced by the sacrament, while stressing that authentic "inner penance" (contrition) includes the desire to refer oneself to the ministry of the Church. True repentance includes the will to be reconciled with the Church in such a way that it bears the twofold aspect of reconciliation with God and with the Church. "The sacrament reconciles with the Church the sinner who approaches the Church with his 'inner penance' as the will to be reconciled with the Church. Through this, the sinner has a right to the 'infusio gratiae' that allows him to achieve fully this 'inner penance' by which he is able essentially to make his own the grace that is offered to him, in

²⁰ Karl Rahner, "Vergessene Wahrheiten über das Bussakrament," in *Theologische Schriften*, vol. 2 (Einsiedeln, Zürich, Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1964), 143–83, cf. 161–71. In particular, Rahner challenges the assimilation of the thought of Thomas Aquinas to that of Duns Scotus.

²¹ Karl Rahner, "Vergessene Wahrheiten," 180–81.

²² *Ibid.*, 180–82. See Karl Rahner, "Das Sakrament der Busse als Wiederversöhnung mit der Kirche," in *Theologische Schriften*, vol. 8 (Einsiedeln, Zürich, Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1967), 447–71, cf. 468.

such a way that it becomes proper to him in a sanctifying and justifying fashion and he is thereby freed from his personal sins.”²³ By designating reconciliation with the Church as the *res et sacramentum of penance*, Rahner takes inner penance with its existential fabric and orients it toward an immediate relationship with the Church in her visibility and her sanctifying dimension.

Rahner’s thesis is grounded more profoundly in the Church’s sacramentality (the Church as primordial sacrament, *Ursakrament*) and the understanding of the sacraments as “self-achievements” (*Selbstvollzüge*) of the Church. This approach clarifies first of all the “duality” that we see in every sacrament, as well as in the Church: the sign (*sacramentum*) and the reality of grace (*res*). From this point of view, every *res et sacramentum* consists essentially in an ecclesial reality. Since Rahner has recourse to the comparison with baptism and the Eucharist, which showcase the ecclesial aspect in a particularly clear manner,²⁴ it is fitting that we should consider the *res et sacramentum* in these two sacraments in particular.

For Rahner, as we have said, baptism’s *res et sacramentum* consists of incorporation into the Church (*das Eingegliedertsein, die Gliedschaft*) in a stable and lasting way. Rahner excludes from this state the question of the “ontological status” of the baptismal character: whether it is thought of as simply a “bespeaking” (*Beanspruchtheit*) on the part of the Church, or if its fundamental aspect is an ontological grounding in the person (the quality or “spiritual power” that makes us apt for acts of worship and of Christian life, in the Thomistic tradition); all this is no longer of any importance to him.²⁵ Here, as in the case of penance, the proper grounding of the *res et sacramentum* in the process of sacramental justification is reinterpreted in order to adapt it to the ecclesial scheme of things. Rahner adds weight to his choice by a critique of the Scholastic position: Without this “bespeaking” by the Church, we can only give an artificial explanation to the role of sign that belongs to the character. Put another way: Only the social dimension of the *res et sacramentum* allows us to establish its role of *sacrament*, for a sign requires *visibility*.²⁶ The argument

²³ Karl Rahner, “Das Sakrament der Busse als Wiederversöhnung mit der Kirche,” 469.

²⁴ Karl Rahner, “Vergessene Wahrheiten,” 179–80.

²⁵ Karl Rahner, *Kirche und Sakramente*, “Quaestiones Disputatae, 10” (Freiburg: Herder, 1960), 78–79. This thesis claims to be a return to the origins of the concept of “character”; without which, according to Rahner, the theory of character would remain “arbitrary” (*ibid.*); cf. “Vergessene Wahrheiten,” 180, no. 1.

²⁶ Karl Rahner, *Kirche und Sakramente*, 78–80.

has weight (besides, it did not escape the Scholastics), but Rahner's objection cannot be the deciding factor. Thomas Aquinas put forward the following response: The character is a sign through reference to the sensible rite of the sacrament's celebration whereby it is imprinted²⁷ (likewise, inner penance will have to be understood in reference to outward penance). In other words, the nature of sign and the "visibility" do not belong to the character as if this made up an independent reality, but rather when character is taken *in the unity of the sacrament with its three moments (sacramentum, res et sacramentum, res)* by which it is referred to the visible sacramental sign. The social dimension (present at each level of the analysis of the sacrament) doubtlessly does not oblige us to follow Rahner in such a definite fashion.

The case of the Eucharist, which Rahner treats first in his *Kirche und Sakramente*, is still more interesting. Without questioning the truth of Christ's Body and Blood, Rahner nevertheless refuses to see in it the *res et sacramentum* of the Eucharist. For Rahner this consists in a "deeper integration into the unity of the Mystical Body," a renewed incorporation that is the first effect and the efficacious cause of the other effects of the Eucharist.²⁸ For whomever would continue to hold that the true Body and Blood of Christ (the "Real Presence") is the *res et sacramentum*, Rahner has the following objection: Even if we hold that the *verum Corpus* is the sign of its grace insofar as the Church possesses it as the sign of her own unity (which is necessary in this case), we would still have to be able to account for the *ordering* of the effects (*res*) of the Eucharist and the primary place (*vorgeordnete Wirkung*) that belongs here to the Church's unity.²⁹ Rahner's view is profound, and the stress he lays upon ecclesial unity is altogether fundamental. Still, one can say that the position of Thomas Aquinas (here Rahner mentions the Eucharist as "the sacrament of the Church's unity," which is found in Thomas) in fact goes further than Rahner's. Thomas firmly holds that the *verum Corpus* is the *res et sacramentum* of the Eucharist, but he does not consider the unity of the Church as one effect that procures other sacramental graces. There is not on one side an ecclesial effect of the sacrament, and on the other side a personal and individual effect. It is clearly the same reality of grace, incorporation into Christ given to the person, which is both the food of spiritual rebuilding and at the same time, by its very nature,

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, q. 63, a. 2, ad 4: "*Character habet rationem signi per comparationem ad sacramentum sensibile a quo imprimitur.*"

²⁸ Karl Rahner, *Kirche und Sakramente*, 74.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

the building up of the Church whose unity is strengthened and achieved through charity.³⁰

Reconciliation with the Church is a constituent of the ecclesial action of reconciliation with God. It is immediately obtained through the sacrament. The sinner receives forgiveness in his ecclesial reintegration. Grounded in Scripture and the practice of the early Church, this statement highlights very well the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament and meets the desires of contemporary thinking. From the start, it is also associated with the “defense” of several aspects of Catholic teaching (sacramentality, necessity of confession, necessity of absolution by a priest, etc.). However, its formulation in terms of *res et sacramentum* entails several difficulties: the distinction between the intermediate element and the *res* of the sacrament, the likening of the penitential framework to that of baptism, the nature of reconciliation with the Church in the person of the penitent, its “causality” in regard to sacramental grace (reconciliation with God), the modifications the very notion of *res et sacramentum* has undergone, as well as the articulation (Rahner) of this concept along the main lines of Thomas Aquinas’s treatment of penance. This is what we will now examine.

Inner Penance in Thomas Aquinas

Inner Penance

The framework of Thomas Aquinas’s thinking is summarized in the following statement. “Even in Penance there is something which is *sacramentum tantum*, i.e., the actions done by the penitent sinner as well as by the absolving priest. Now, the *res et sacramentum* is the inner penance of the sinner, while the *res tantum*, which is not the sacrament, is the remission of sin. The first of these, taken integrally, is the cause of the second; the first and the second are the cause of the third.”³¹

This framework of understanding calls for several observations. First, it puts an important stress on the “outward” acts performed personally by the penitent (confession, satisfaction, expressions of repentance), obviously in relation with the inward acts of conversion. Here penance is

³⁰ Cajetan has expressed this unity well: “When we hear that the fruit (*res tantum*) of the sacrament is grace, and that what is to be received is the unity of the Church or the Mystical Body of Christ, we do not understand by that that there are two diverse realities since all that is nothing else but God’s grace in His faithful” (Cajetan, *In Illam*, q. 73, a. 1; Leonine Ed., t. XII, 139). Cf. my study: “Le fruit ecclésial de l’Eucharistie chez S. Thomas d’Aquin,” *Nova et Vetera* 72/4 (1997): 25–40.

³¹ *Summa Theologiae* (referred to as *ST*) III, q. 84, a. 1, ad 3.

taken in the Gospel sense of “to do penance” (*agere paenitentiam*), the sensible character of which permits identification with an authentic *sacramentum*.³² These acts make up the “matter of the sacrament,” while the priest’s action (absolution) constitutes its “form.” This anthropological grounding of the sacrament’s matter provides the starting point for a theological analysis of the sacrament: What the penitent does, in action and word, signifies a holy reality.³³ Thomas will go so far as to write that the *penitent in person* constitutes the “matter” of this sacrament.³⁴ In agreement with the Thomistic teaching on the *res et sacramentum*, the latter will be understood with immediate reference to this sacramental sign. This stress is all the more important because, unlike the theologians who went before him (and numerous theologians who followed), Thomas attributes a real instrumental efficiency to the sacramental sign, and hence to the personal activity of the penitent, as regards the giving of grace. It seems that no theologian held this before him, and Thomas himself, in his early writing on the *Sentences*, speaks only of a disposing instrumental causality.³⁵ In the *Summa*, however, it is no longer a question of a mere disposition to grace by the activity of the penitent and of the priest, but indeed of a real instrumental efficacy.³⁶ By virtue of Christ’s passion, which acts in it, the sign or sacrament works effectively, as instrument, to obtain grace.

Next we should note that the production of the *res et sacramentum* belongs to the first element, the sacramental sign *taken integrally*. In other words, the penitent’s acts of conversion do not have this efficacy except under the sway of their form, the priest’s sacramental absolution. Thus, Abelard’s thesis whereby the penitent’s contrition remits sins, and that of Hugh of Saint Victor, who held that the priest’s absolution remits them,

³² IV *Sent.* d. 22, q. 2, a. 3, q1a 3, ad 2; ST III, q. 90, a. 2, obj. 1, ad 1.

³³ ST, III, q. 84, a. 1, corpus.

³⁴ *De forma absolutionis*, chap. 4 (Leonine Ed., t. 40 C, 40): “*Ipse autem peccator confitens est sicut materia in hoc sacramento.*”

³⁵ Thomas was not the first to make the penitent’s actions the matter of the sacrament (that was already the opinion of Hugh of Saint-Cher and of Bonaventure), but nobody made them the *efficacious cause* of grace.

³⁶ IV *Sent.* d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 1, ad 2; cf. q1a 2. ST III, q. 86, a. 6; cf. q. 64, a. 1. See Bruno de Vaux Saint-Cyr, *Revenir à Dieu*. Pénitence, conversion, confession (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 151–78. For Thomas’s progress on instrumental causality, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, “La causalité salvifique de la résurrection du Christ selon saint Thomas,” *Revue Thomiste* 96 (1996): 179–208, cf. 186–92; Hyacinthe Dondaine, “A propos d’Avicenne et de saint Thomas. De la causalité dispositive à la causalité instrumentale,” *Revue Thomiste* 51 (1951): 441–53. For what follows I am indebted to Fr. Hyacinthe Dondaine’s unpublished course on penance given at Le Saulchoir.

are combined by Thomas into a more satisfactory position.³⁷ In giving its full value to the thesis of an authentic instrumental efficacy, Thomas's effort consists in showing the unity of the sacramental action and of personal conversion understood within the workings of the divine grace of forgiveness in the Church.

Therefore, the *sacramentum*, considered as a whole, produces the intermediate element, the *res et sacramentum*, defined as "inner penance." What are we dealing with? Inner penance designates contrition, which by its aim extends to all "parts" of penance since it overlaps equally confession (avowal of sins) and satisfaction, insofar as these are included virtually, or *in voto*, in full contrition.³⁸ We may define contrition, for its part, as sorrow or remorse for sins committed with, under the impulse of charity, the intention of removing the consequence of sin, which is the offense committed against God.³⁹ Thus understood, inner penance is at once *signified* and *obtained* by the actions of the penitent and the minister.⁴⁰ Inner penance may be considered under two aspects. On the one hand, in as much as it is an act of virtue it is the origin ("cause") of the outward penitential action, and is signified by it. On the other hand, in as much as it falls within a sacramental ecclesial gesture, inner penance *acts efficaciously* for the healing of sin; as such, it is obtained by the outward action.⁴¹

³⁷ Paul Anciaux, *La théologie du sacrement de pénitence au XIIe siècle* (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1949), 275–302; Pierre Adnès, "Le rapport de la contrition et de l'absolution chez saint Thomas et les théologiens médiévaux," in *S. Tommaso Teologo*, ed. Antonio Piolanti, "Studi Tomistici, 59" (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 301–9. In the judgment of K. Rahner, this understanding of the causality of the acts of the person and of absolution provides "the conceptual assimilation of an *authentic* tradition going back to the patristic age" ("Vergessene Wahrheiten," 165–66; cf. 162–64).

³⁸ *IV Sent.* d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 2, ad 3: "*Tres partes paenitentiae sunt et in paenitentia exteriori et in interiori; quia confessio et satisfactio quae videntur tantum ad exteriorem paenitentiam pertinere, inveniuntur in interiori paenitentia quantum ad propositum et praemeditationem eorum,*" *ST III*, q. 90, a. 2, ad 1: "[*contritio*] *virtualiter autem pertinet ad paenitentiam exteriorem, in quantum scilicet implicat propositum confitendi et satisfaciendi.*" But Thomas is not the first author to posit contrition or inner penance as *res et sacramentum*. That was already the position of Peter Lombard, of St. Bonaventure, and of many others. Rather, Thomas's originality lies in the efficacy he sees in this contrition and its place within the process of sacramental penance.

³⁹ *ST III*, q. 85, a. 1, ad 3; q. 85, aa. 5–6; cf. *IV Sent.* d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 1 (here in its relation to confession and satisfaction).

⁴⁰ *IV Sent.* d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, q1a 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ad 1.

The framework of the *res et sacramentum* appears here in broad daylight: Inner penance is *res* (effect) in relation to the penitent's outward acts, which *signify* it; it remains somehow "proportionated" to them. It is likewise a *sign* in relation to the forgiveness of sins, in reference to the outward action with which it forms a whole. Lastly, it is the efficacious cause of the forgiveness of sins, *together with* the penitent's personal action and the priest's absolution, taken once again as an organic whole.⁴²

What is at stake in this conception is clear. For Thomas, there can be no forgiveness of sins without an authentic inner conversion of the heart.⁴³ We are miles away from a forgiveness obtained *ex opere operato* without the deep down participation of the penitent (here Thomas returns to the early doctrine). At the same time, this inner penance obtains forgiveness within the ecclesial action since it obtains its effect with penitential acts and absolution.⁴⁴ Even outside the sacramental *celebration*, contrition includes the intention of confessing and desiring absolution (intention to "submit oneself to the keys of the Church"). This is the reason we would not willingly speak of the forgiveness of sins through a contrition that is "extrasacramental" (Poschmann). Such is the motive why Thomas has no difficulty holding that confession to a layman under such conditions is "somehow sacramental."⁴⁵ Lastly, the framework of the sacrament does not in itself require a temporal simultaneity of its components. Certainly contrition may be given at the moment of the sacrament's celebration, but it may just as well precede it (Thomas deems this case the most common), or even follow it. Here, obviously, the doctrine matches Christian experience, which bears witness to the

⁴² Faced with the difficulty of conceiving the kind of causality of sacramental grace that belongs to inner penance, some Thomists and other theologians have been led to posit an "ornament of the soul" (*ornatus animae*) as *res et sacramentum*, a mysterious counterpart to the baptismal character. "*Magna videtur altercatio de ornatu*," Cajetan too observes (*In Illam*, q. 84, a. 1–2; Leonine Ed., t. XII, 288). We must however point out that inner penance or contrition is not the cause of charity; it is the cause of the *remission of sins*, which is the effect of the sacrament.

⁴³ *ST III*, q. 86, a. 2; cf. q. 84, a. 5, ad 3. As a virtue, inner penance constitutes a fundamental disposition of Christian life, which is not limited to the celebration of the sacrament: q. 84, a. 8. As "contrition of the heart" for sin committed, inner penance is required for the fruitful reception of baptism: Thomas, *ST III*, q. 68, a. 6, ad 3; *Super Ad Romanos* 11,29 (Marietti Ed., #927).

⁴⁴ *ST III*, q. 84, a. 1, ad 3 ("*primum autem et secundum sunt causa tertii*"); *IV Sent.* d. 22, q. 2, a. 1, q. 2. It is in this sense that inner penance constitutes the "immediate cause" of the remission of sins (*ibid.*, *sed contra* 2).

⁴⁵ *IV Sent.* d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, q. 2, ad 1.

complexity of the undertaking and to its character that may vary according to personal dispositions. To show this, Thomas does not hesitate to assert an anticipated causality of the complete sacrament (absolution already acts in the contrite sinner under the sway of charity).⁴⁶

More profoundly, this analysis of penance places the conversion experience at the heart of the process of justification. Cooperating with the divine action, to which all initiative belongs, the virtuous act of penance engages faith, hope, charity, and filial fear.⁴⁷ Thomas makes the scheme of Christian justification and sacramental forgiveness coincide. When all is said and done, he knows only *one Christian penance*: a virtuous labor undertaken in a sacramental action where grace is at work.⁴⁸

As for the *res* of the Sacrament, obtained by means of the *res et sacramentum*, Thomas designates it as “the remission of sins.” Such is the proper effect of the sacrament of penance, expressed by the words of absolution (the sacrament effects exactly what it signifies, and Thomas follows this signification closely). This forgiveness of sins obtains the “reconciliation of friendship” (*reconciliatio amicitiae*) that best characterizes (better, in fact, than the category of strict justice, in Thomas’s judgment) the underlying *intention* of penance.⁴⁹

The sacrament is shown here fundamentally as the “means” to rid the offense that thwarts the friendship God wishes to establish with His children. It is also with this theme of restored friendship that Thomas develops the pneumatological character of penance. The fruit of the sacrament, obtained through the power of Christ’s passion (passion “for the remission

⁴⁶ *Quodlibet* IV, q. 7, a. 1 (Leonine Ed., t. 25/2, 330). See Daniel Ols, “Saint Thomas a-t-il soutenu l’existence d’une causalité efficiente anticipée dans l’économie sacramentelle?”, in *S. Tommaso Teologo*, ed. Antonio Piolanti, “Studi Tomistici, 59” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 285–297. In my opinion, this concept allows us to explain in a coherent way why the remission of sins through the ministry of the priest is required even when contrition has already erased the guilt (IV *Sent.* d. 17, q. 2, a. 5 q1a 1, ad 3, in the context of admission to the Eucharist). In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Thomas distinguishes between the disposing action of contrition as a virtue and the *instrumental* action of contrition as part of the sacrament (*ibid.*, sol.). In the *Summa* he stresses more strongly the relationship of all contrition with the ministry of the Church (“keys of the Church”) by which the virtue of penance is ordered to the Passion of Christ that remits sins (*ST* III, q. 86, a. 6, ad. 3; cf. sol.).

⁴⁷ *ST* III, q. 85, a. 5; q. 86, a. 6, ad 2.

⁴⁸ Hyacinthe F. Dondaine, *La pénitence*, type-written course (Le Saulchoir), 81.

⁴⁹ *ST* III, q. 90, a. 2. This remark is important because for Thomas the virtue of penance is a species of justice. But here the theological virtues enrich and elevate justice (q. 85, a. 3, ad 4).

of sins”),⁵⁰ is due to the Holy Spirit, since He is Love in person and Communion in the bosom of the Trinity, the underlying reason for the entire economy of salvation and mercy: “Since it is through the Holy Spirit that we are made friends of God, it is therefore through Him that God remits our sins.”⁵¹

Reconciliation with God and Reconciliation with the Church

For Thomas the term “reconciliation” (*reconciliatio*) designates the restoration of friendship after the hindrance to friendship has been done away with. Thus reconciliation appears as the sinner’s return in grace into the heart of God. Penance, whose *object* is the sin that the penitent wants to work on eliminating, is wholly oriented toward reconciliation with God, which is its *end*.⁵² We are far removed from any reduction of reconciliation to the juridical: at its root reconciliation pertains to the love of charity.⁵³ Reconciliation is closely associated with the theme of *satisfaction* (a part of penance) since it aims precisely at the reconciliation of the offended friend’s heart: reconciliation with God and reconciliation with our neighbor.⁵⁴ Along with contrition and confession, satisfaction works for the total remission of the punishment due to sin, as well as for “reconciliation with the members of the Church.”⁵⁵ Thus reconciliation is at the terminus of the penitential exercise of conversion, just as it is first in God’s saving plan.⁵⁶

What place does Thomas give to reconciliation with the Church? If we look at the instances where the terms *reconciliatio* and *reconciliare* occur

⁵⁰ Even more: the effect of penance is obtained “in so far as we are united to Christ suffering for our sins” (*Summa contra Gentiles*, Book IV, chap. 72; Marietti Ed., #4071).

⁵¹ *Summa contra Gentiles*, Book IV, chap. 21 (Marietti Ed., #3582), in reference to Proverbs 10:12, John 20:22, and Matthew 13:21.

⁵² *IV Sent.* d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, q1a 4, ad 2; This distinction between the object and the end allows Thomas to explain the difference between penance and the theological virtues. Thomas fully accepts that “penance reconciles with God,” but only the theological virtues have God as their “object.”

⁵³ *IV Sent.* d. 15, q. 1, a. 5, q1a 2, sol.: “*reconciliatio autem nihil aliud est quam amicitiae reparatio;*” cf. a. 1, q1a 2, obj. 1: “*reconciliatio, cum sit amoris, ad caritatem pertinet.*”

⁵⁴ *IV Sent.* d. 15, q. 1, a. 1, q1a 2, obj. 1 and ad 1; d. 15, q. 1, a. 5, q1a 2; d. 15, q. 4, a. 7, q1a 1, obj. 3 and ad 3; d. 16, q. 1, a. 1, q1a 2; *ST III*, q. 85, a. 3, obj. 1. Let us recall that for Thomas works done without charity cannot count as satisfaction since then the motive for their acceptance by God would be wanting (*IV Sent.* d. 15, q. 1, a. 3, q1a 2). It is charity (friendship) that accounts for the worth of satisfaction.

⁵⁵ *Super I Ad Cor.* 11:27 (Marietti Ed., #690), in the context of participation in the Eucharist.

⁵⁶ *IV Sent.* d. 18, q. 1, a. 2, q1a 3.

in the treatise on the sacraments in the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *Summa theologiae*, first we must say that this vocabulary shows up quite often in an ecclesial context. Here Thomas is drawing on the heritage of the patristic vocabulary, passed on by Augustine in particular, and by the texts cited in Gratian's *Decretals*. This reconciliation, which finds its place at the end of the process of penance,⁵⁷ is attached especially to admission to the Church's sacraments ("reconciliation with the Church") and above all to Eucharistic communion, which requires "peace with the Church."⁵⁸ The texts pay special attention here to the reconciliation of the dying, of persons engaged in an activity incompatible with the dignity of baptized persons, of apostates, heretics, priests degraded from their order, all with a heavy ecclesial content.⁵⁹ In this context, "reconciliation with the Church" is closely tied with the activity of the ministers.⁶⁰ Here we must highlight two aspects.

In a way similar to what we have been able to observe in the contemporary rediscovery of the theme of reconciliation with the Church, Thomas here brings out the necessity of the activity of the Church's ministers: "Through the sacraments man is not only reconciled to God, but he must also be reconciled to the Church. Now, he can only be reconciled to the Church if the Church's sanctification reaches him. . . . But in penance the sanctification of the Church does not reach a man except through the minister. . . . He is not yet reconciled to the Church in such a way that he can be admitted to the sacraments of the Church unless he has first been absolved by a priest."⁶¹ Reconciliation with the Church is understood

⁵⁷ IV *Sent.* d. 14, q. 1, a.5, q1a 3; ST III, q. 80, a. 6

⁵⁸ IV *Sent.* d. 9, q. 1, a.5, q1a 3, sed contra 2 and sol.; d. 14, q.1, a. 5, q1a 3; d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, q1a 2, ad 3; d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, q1a 3; ST III, q. 80, a. 6.

⁵⁹ IV *Sent.* d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, sed contra 1; ST III, q. 80, a. 6; q. 82, a. 8, sed contra.

⁶⁰ IV *Sent.* d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, q1a 2; d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, q1a 2, ad 3. Just as Thomas interprets the canonical penance of the ancient Church in light of the public or solemn penance of the Middle Ages (IV *Sent.* d. 14, q. 1, a. 5, q1a 3), just so he is incapable of giving a correct account of the role that the early practice reserved to the bishop in reconciliation (IV *Sent.* d. 20, div. text. and exp. text.). We should point out that he finds himself in the same difficulty when it comes to the ancient doctrine of the non-repeatability of penance (ST III, q. 84, a. 10). Indeed, his reflection starts from a very concrete point: the sacramental practice he knows, "penance as it is practiced in the Church" (ST III, q. 84, a. 1).

⁶¹ IV *Sent.* d. 17, q. 3, a. 3, q1a 2, ad 3: "*Per sacramenta homo non solum Deo, sed etiam Ecclesiae oportet quod reconciliatur. Ecclesiae autem reconciliari non potest nisi sanctificatio Ecclesiae ad eum perveniat (. . .) Sed in paenitentia Ecclesiae sanctificatio non pervenit ad hominem nisi per ministrum. (. . .) Non tamen adhuc Ecclesiae reconciliatus est, ut ad sacramenta Ecclesiae admitti debeat, nisi prius a sacerdote absolvatur;*" cf. IV *Sent.* d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, q1a 2.

essentially in reference to the Church's sanctifying function and the grace of communion that constitutes it (in relation to the Eucharist especially). Here we are approaching the theme of the Church as sacrament developed by Rahner in this context.⁶² It is not surprising, then, to learn that it is in connection with the Eucharist that Thomas prefers to treat the ecclesial dimension of penance. "Whoever receives this sacrament (the Eucharist) shows thereby that he is united to Christ and incorporated in His members, which is achieved through faith informed [by charity], and nobody can have that together with mortal sin."⁶³ Thomas considers this incompatibility between the state of mortal sin and the fruitful reception of the Eucharist explicitly in the light of the "Mystical Body of Christ, which is a society of saints."⁶⁴ The Eucharist nourishes the communion of the Church in its two dimensions of relationship with Christ and fraternal unity of the members. The absence of this communion, if it occurs, wounds the *signification* of the sacrament and the *reality* of its effect. The sacrament of penance is as a matter of fact ordered to true and full participation in the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity and of the Church's unity. Here we find reconciliation with God achieved at the very heart of the ecclesial communion. In Thomas, it is around the divine friendship which is charity (faith formed by charity) that the themes of the Church, of contrition, of the sacrament of penance, and of the Eucharist are bound together. At this level, it is quite difficult to assign priority to reconciliation with the Church or to reconciliation with God; in reality, the two coincide.⁶⁵

However, Thomas endeavors vigorously to show that the proper virtue of the sacrament does not extend only to reconciliation with the Church, but indeed reaches to reconciliation with God. On this point he disagrees with Bonaventure. As already seen, the Franciscan Doctor, also, holds that contrition or inner penance is the *res et sacramentum* of penance. He likewise states that the sacrament reconciles with God and

⁶² For this relationship between Eucharist, ecclesial mediation, and reconciliation, cf. IV *Sent.* d. 13, q. 1, a. 3, q1a. 2.

⁶³ ST III, q. 80, a. 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid. For Thomas, all the sacraments are ordered to the Eucharist, which bestows its underlying unity on the sacramental organism (ST III, q. 65, a. 3). Now the Eucharist is a major source of Thomas's ecclesiological thinking.

⁶⁵ In Thomas's view of the Church, which is at once moral, sacramental (Eucharistic), pneumatological, and theocentric, first place belongs to the grace of the Holy Spirit that incorporates into Christ (cf. especially ST I–II, q. 106, a. 1; ST III, q. 8, a. 3). See Yves Congar, "L'idée de l'Église chez saint Thomas d'Aquin," in *Esquisse du mystère de l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1941), 59–91. The theme of contrition as *res et sacramentum* finds its full meaning within this vision of the Church as a body of faith and charity whose soul is the Holy Spirit.

the Church. But he distinguishes more sharply these two aspects of penance: (1) sacrament that reconciles with God; and (2) sacrament of the Church.⁶⁶ This distinction crystallizes in the question of the scope of the “power of the keys” exercised by the Church’s ministers. In his function of “descending mediation,” the priest has the power to grant reconciliation with the Church; such is the goal that is proportionate to his status as human minister. But in his function of “ascending mediation” (reconciliation with God), the priest can only *ask for* the grace on behalf of the sinner. This is how Bonaventure explains the alternation of words that beseech and words that indicate a fact in the rite of absolution. Thus, Bonaventure goes on, if we wish to speak properly, we must say that the power of the keys confided to the Church *does not go so far as the suppression of the fault* since it only reaches this by way of prayer and petition (*per modum deprecantis*), while it actually extends to reconciliation with the Church, in regard to which it is in the position of being able to share (*per modum impertientis*). Consequently, if a priest absolves a penitent, it is because he judges that God has first of all absolved him of his fault; only God can absolve. The priest’s absolution *presupposes* divine forgiveness.⁶⁷

As we have seen, Thomas’s position veers in another direction. Thanks to his notion of instrumental causality, he can assign a “divine effect” to the action of the penitent and the priest without undermining God’s prerogatives (“principal cause”). Through the personal cooperation of the penitent and by the action of Christ working through the minister, the fault that attacked the divine friendship is forgiven. He therefore gives full weight to the personal action of the penitent and to the Church’s mediation: The sacramental sign (the penitent’s acts and the priest’s absolution), with inner penance, are *the (instrumental) cause* of the remission of sins.⁶⁸ Given this fact, he no longer has to distinguish between the realm of reconciliation with the Church and that of reconciliation with God in the remission of fault (*culpa*). In the same sense he will hold firmly to the indicative formula of absolution, since the sacrament *effects what it signifies*: “I forgive you of your sins.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Bonaventure, IV *Sent.* d. 22, a. 2, q. 2: the three elements of the sacrament’s make-up (*sacramentum, res et sacramentum, res*) are distributed successively under these two aspects.

⁶⁷ Bonaventure, IV *Sent.* d. 18, 1, a. 2, q. 1; cf. ad 3: the priest can obtain grace for the sinner, but *he does not give it*: absolution from guilt belongs only to God. This concept will persist in the Scotist theory of the divine “pact.”

⁶⁸ *De forma absolutionis*, chap. 2, no. 11 (Leonine Ed., t. 40 C, 37); ST III, q. 84, a. 1, ad 3; cf. q. 62, a. 1.

⁶⁹ ST III, q. 84, a. 3; or more explicitly (*perfectior expositio*): “Ego te absolvo, idest, sacramentum absolutionis tibi impendo” (*ibid.*, ad 5).

The thought of Thomas is therefore distinguished by his taking into account the personal action of the penitent in all its depth, together with the minister's action, to obtain efficaciously the remission of sins and, through this, a return to divine friendship in the bosom of the Church. Of this unique Christian penance, contrition, called forth by charity, is the heart: Penance is a conversion of love, an inner transformation, and reconciliation is a *gift of love*. Hence, in the sacramental action, the penitent's person and ecclesial mediation converge in a profound unity. For Thomas Aquinas, this is what is at stake in inner penance as *res et sacramentum*.

According to Thomas Aquinas—and this is another benefit of his thought—inner penance or contrition entails an internal relationship with the ministry of the Church and with Eucharistic communion, that is, the communion of the Church. We have seen that Rahner, while making reconciliation with the Church the *res et sacramentum* of penance, sought to maintain the merits of the Thomistic doctrine of contrition. We can now see how this doctrine of contrition is entirely capable of taking on the ecclesial dimension of the *res et sacramentum* of penance, which historical studies have restored to value. Thomas himself points us in the direction of understanding contrition, at the heart of the sacrament, as a *personal engagement* grasped in the ecclesial action and *recognized or ratified by the Church*: Such is the *res et sacramentum* of penance.⁷⁰ In other words, reconciliation with the Church is the Church's recognition of the penitent's inner conversion under the sway of divine grace (justification), which operates in the sacrament through the ministry of the Church. We have seen that this understanding has the advantage of respecting the proper framework of the *res et sacramentum*. But, no matter if we keep this framework in all its details, it especially allows us to understand reconciliation with the Church as part of the renewal of life to which the Gospel calls the disciples of Christ and which marks the concrete participation in the communion of grace that the Church is. The Thomistic doctrine of contrition and the understanding of the *res et sacramentum* of penance truly aims at this depth of divine friendship of which the Church is the sacrament. N-V

⁷⁰ C. E. O'Neill, "Les Sacrements," 497; The author points out further—but that goes beyond our subject—that such an understanding can provide an interpretation suggestive of "devotional confession" and also clarifies the doctrine of indulgences ("contrition granted ecclesial aid").

