

**Excerpts from Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé, OP,
De Eucharistia et Paenitentia (Marietti, 1948)**

De causalitate sacramentorum (q. 62)

| p. 3 | First, it is *de fide* that the sacraments of the new law produce grace *ex opere operato*,¹ namely, of themselves, not *ex opere operantis*.² In the case of sacraments whose matter is something bodily, the human acts involved [in their dispensing] are not of the *essence* of the sacrament, but merely stand *dispositively* to it.³ Nevertheless, whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver: he who draws closer to the source of light and heat is more illuminated and warmed.⁴ Even in the sacraments whose matter is human acts (i.e., in penance the act of the penitent, in matrimony the act of the ones joined together), the sacramental grace is not produced *ex opere operantis* (as when the just man, by an act of charity, merits an increase of that virtue), but *ex opera operato*, namely, by the very fact that a sacrament, through the union of its form and matter, has been established in being [*constituitur*] . . .

But granting that the sacraments of the new law produce sacramental grace *ex opere operato*, the question still arises whether they produce it in a solely ‘moral’ way, as a monetary note is that by which one obtains money, or rather in a ‘physical’ way, that is, in the manner of a physical instrument. This point continues to be disputed to this day. Scotus and the Scotists, along with Vasquez, Lugo, Tournely and many moderns, deny such physical causality, while Thomas and his school, one or another excepted, as well as many outside it, such as Bellarmine, Suarez, Valentia, Fonseca, affirm it. It should be observed that the Fathers of the Church speak of the causality of the sacraments with great realism. For instance, St. Leo in his fourth sermon for Christmas: “To every man who has been reborn, the water of baptism is the equal of the virginal womb [*instar uteri virginalis*], for the same Holy Spirit fills this font which filled the Virgin.” St. Augustine likewise: “Such power has the water, that it touches the body and washes the heart.” Again, St. John Chrysostom: “What the mother is to the embryo, that the water [of baptism] is to the faithful.”

St. Thomas openly teaches the physical instrumental causality of the sacraments in q. 62⁵ . . . | p. 4 | “In the sacraments is some power causative of grace” (a. 4), as in the pencil is a power causative of intelligible writing, or in the paintbrush of Raphael is a power of producing a most beautiful painting. Sacraments are, as it were, pencils and paintbrushes of God for writing and painting upon the Christian soul; He is writing there not by ink, but by sacramental grace. Again, in a. 5: the sacraments of the new law have this power “from the passion of Christ.” Thus the humanity

¹ “by the very work performed”. [References to the *Summa* are from Garrigou, all other comments in the footnotes are from Prof. Kwasniewski.]

² “by the working of the one who performs them”

³ cf. *ST* 3, q. 84, a. 1, ad 1. The entire article may be found at the end of this handout.

⁴ In other words, how much you benefit from a sacrament *does* depend on the dispositions you bring to it. However, the sacrament does not derive its efficacy from your dispositions. It *occurs* independently of them, but it *profits* you according to your receptivity.

⁵ cf. a. 1, body and ad 1, ad 2; a. 3; etc.

of Christ, with his glorious wounds and his living desire to sanctify us, is the *conjoined* instrument of the divinity, while the sacrament is the *separated* instrument. So too with the writer, the hand is an instrument conjoined to the artist, while the pencil is a separated instrument. . . . These texts of St. Thomas are clear and explicit; according to them, if the sacraments of the new law were solely moral or intentional causes in the manner of mere practical signs (as Cardinal Billot thinks), they would not be distinguished from sacraments of the old law, which were solely signs of grace, not truly causes of grace. This appears more clearly still if one compares the sacraments of the new law with the impetratory power of prayer. Petitionary prayer is a *moral* cause of the grace it obtains, and merit, too, is such a cause; but neither prayer nor a meritorious action *produces* grace, they only *obtain* it whether impetratorily or meritoriously.

. . . | p. 5 | The principal objection against the instrumental physical causality of the sacraments is this:

- A spiritual power cannot be received into a body.
- Yet an instrumental power directed toward the production of grace is spiritual.
- Therefore it cannot be received into a sensible sacrament, e.g., in water or chrism.

In response: a distinction has to be made in regard to the major premise: that a spiritual power cannot be *permanently* received into a body, such that it would be its property or abiding accident, I concede; that it cannot be received *passingly* [*transeunter*], I deny. For that which is received passingly in a some subject is not proportioned to *it*, but rather to the end that is to be produced and to the subject that is to be changed, namely in the matter under discussion, it is proportioned to the soul that is to be perfected. Similarly, a likeness of bodies passes through [*transit*] the air to produce sight in our eyes. So too, in the natural order, upon the sensible countenance, the light of intellect is conveyed [*transit*] through the eyes; for we say of some person, “He has intelligent eyes.” So too, in the tone of the voice is conveyed affections of the soul, such as love or anger.⁶

| p. 6 | In addition to this, God makes use of a body, such as water in baptism, not as properly it is *body*,⁷ but as a *created being* subject to Him, and from the obediencial potency of water He calls forth the aforesaid instrumental power. Finally, it is more the case that this instrumental power dynamically *contains* sacramental matter than that it is *contained* in it, just as it is more the case that the soul contains the body than the other way around.

⁶ [Garrigou could also have resumed his earlier example of the painter and paintbrush, or the writer and the writing instrument. The awesome perceptiveness of Dürer, the haunting vision of El Greco, the massive forms of Michelangelo, the penetrating psychology of Rembrandt, all these could never be contained in a paintbrush, but all had to *pass through* a paintbrush in order to be embodied in the painting on the canvas. The disproportion between agent, instrument, and ultimate effect is in some ways even more striking in literature—we get *King Lear* from the soul of Shakespeare via a feeble pen.—*Trans.*]

⁷ i.e., not in terms of its natural powers as a bodily thing

De caractere (q. 63)

| p. 6 | ‘Character’ is the other effect of certain sacraments, namely baptism, confirmation, and orders. It is, as the name indicates, a sort of seal [*sigillum*] impressed upon the soul. But this spiritual seal is ordered to carrying out validly certain religious actions. For this reason it is conceived of by theologians and especially by St. Thomas as a *spiritual power* to carry out such religious actions validly, provided that sacramental grace be joined to it for the licit and reverent carrying out of those actions. All these things are revealed and defined *de fide*. . . .

Thus the character of baptism is different from the character of confirmation, which is different, again, from the character of orders, for each is ordered to distinct actions.⁸ The baptismal character is a ‘passive power’, namely a power of *receiving* the other sacraments validly, but the characters of confirmation and of orders are ‘active powers’.⁹ These characters are properly characters *of Christ*, as of a leader [*ducis*], by which characters the faithful are configured to the priesthood of Christ.¹⁰ . . . Christ has grace, indeed the fullness of capital grace, but not sacramental character, for Christ Himself is the character of the Father.¹¹

De baptismo (qq. 66–71)

| p. 11 | Treating of baptism which is the gateway to the other sacraments, St. Thomas says much that pertains to the sacraments in common, just as in the Prima Pars treating of the angels, he says much that pertains to created being as such. . . .

Circumcision as a sacrament of the old law was a preparation for baptism, remitted original sin and conferred grace, inasmuch as it was a sign of faith in the future passion of Christ; thus, it did all these things *ex opere operato* not actively, but passively. It did not imprint a character, nor open the gates of heaven, because the price that could open heaven was not yet paid. The baptism of John was a still more proximate preparation for the baptism of Christ.

1. Baptism is the sacrament of maximal necessity inasmuch as it gives the beginning of supernatural life, the seed of glory. But it can be supplied for as regards grace (not as regards character) by a baptism of blood, as in the Holy Innocents, and by a baptism of desire, or through the act of charity, in which there is at least an implicit desire [*votum implicitum*] for the sacrament of baptism.¹² . . .

| p. 12 | 3. The effects of baptism (q. 69). It produces the grace by which man is justified and made an adopted son of God, and [it produces] the baptismal character, so that from then on, the other sacraments may be validly received.¹³ In baptism a fuller grace is given than was given in circumcision, for it has an illuminative and fertilizing power towards the doing of good works.

⁸ cf. q. 72, a. 5

⁹ cf. q. 63, a. 3

¹⁰ cf. *ibid.*

¹¹ i.e., Jesus is already perfectly conformed to the Father as Word or perfect image (cf. *ST* 1, q. 93), and obviously He need not be conformed to Himself as High Priest.

¹² Cf. q. 66, a. 11; q. 69, a. 5, ad 1; q. 68, a. 2; q. 72, a. 6, ad 1; I-II, q. 89, a. 6

¹³ cf. q. 72, a. 6

Baptismal grace suffices (i.e., it is ‘sufficient grace’) to hold back entirely the concupiscence we inherit from Adam, and to gain merit; this is not the case with the grace that was conferred by circumcision.¹⁴ . . . In baptism a man participates totally in the power of the passion of Christ, so that if the baptized were to die immediately after receiving the sacrament, he would go straight to heaven, without any delay in purgatory. This is not achieved by the sacrament of penance, by which the guilt of sin is wiped out, but not necessarily the whole temporal punishment owing to sin.¹⁵ Through baptism into Christ’s death, a man dies, as it were, to sin and gets a new life.¹⁶ Baptism wipes out, as far as the recipient is concerned, all original sin and all actual or personal sin, but not the penalties inherent in the present life, which follow from original sin. The reason is that human nature is not yet perfectly regenerated, and so is subject to concupiscence, sorrow, death, and the active exercise of the virtues.¹⁷

De sacramento confirmationis (q. 72)

| p. 14 | 1. Confirmation is the sacrament by which is conferred the fullness of grace and of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of strength,¹⁸ that the Christian believer might become a true soldier of Christ, akin to the way the Apostles on the day of Pentecost were confirmed by the visible mission of the Holy Spirit, by which they were enlightened and strengthened for the purpose of vigorously proclaiming the faith even unto bearing martyrdom.

2. Confirmation simultaneously confers a character ordered to defending the faith, as well as the grace to make this defense not only firm, but also in concert with all the other virtues—with charity, with prudence, etc. Confirmation is a more noble sacrament than baptism, simply speaking, and in terms of its minister (a bishop) and the grace peculiar to it; yet as regards the remission of sins, it is the other way around. . . . [Through the sacrament] a man is given an increase of graces, virtues, and gifts, by which the just man is advanced in spiritual age as if to adulthood.¹⁹ It is not a sacrament of necessity for salvation, but it pertains to the well-being of the spiritual life. . . . It is given on the forehead with a view to unrestrainedly confessing the name of Christ and strongly defending the dignity so received. In this way, the confirmed is more conformed to Christ and patterned after Him through the sign of the cross.

| p. 15 | The imposition of hands is done in order to signify the copious effects of grace which are given for strengthening with a view to spiritual warfare [*pugnā spiritūalem*]. It is true that the Eucharist also strengthens, but not in the same way, for it strengthens a man *in himself* as re-

¹⁴ cf. q. 70, a. 4

¹⁵ cf. q. 86, a. 4, ad 3

¹⁶ cf. q. 68, a. 5

¹⁷ cf. q. 68, a. 1, ad 2; q. 69, a. 3. Human nature will be perfectly regenerated only in the resurrection at the end of time, when the bodies of the just will be raised up as glorified bodies obedient in every way to the soul, which for its part will be already fully ordered. Therefore, in such reintegrated saints there could be no concupiscence, sorrow, death, or exercise of such virtues as pertain to active life on earth.

¹⁸ Note the etymology of *confirmatio*: the verb *confirmo*, *confirmare* means to strengthen, develop, build up with troops, make secure or firm, reassure, assert, prove, encourage. The prefix *con-* always indicates something emphatic. Thus *confirmati* and *roborati* are nearly synonyms.

¹⁹ i.e., if the right dispositions are present in the recipient of the sacrament

gards progress in charity, whereas confirmation strengthens him *against others* in battle, for the defense of the faith.²⁰ In this way, confirmation perfects what baptism and penance have begun.²¹ The confirmed [on account of their specific sacramental character] have greater glory in heaven than the non-confirmed.

De matrimonio

| p. 418 | 1. The essence of marriage, i.e., as contract and as sacrament; 2. the origin or institution of marriage; 3. its indissolubility.²²

1. *The essence of marriage:* Marriage is essentially the association [*consociatio*] of man and woman, elevated by Christ to the dignity of a true sacrament. . . . Marriage may therefore be considered as a contract (as it was in the beginning), and as sacrament (as it is in the new law).

(1) *Marriage as a contract.* According to the [old] Code of Canon Law (1081.2), “matrimonial consent is that act of the will by which both partners hand over and receive perpetual and exclusive rights over the [other’s] body, with a view to the act which is *per se* suited [*aptos*] for the generation of offspring” and consequently to their education and to a fellowship of life in common. This is the definition of marriage as a contract. Therefore marriage is impossible between persons who are not capable [*aptae*] of generating. Whence, as it says in the Code (1013): “The primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of offspring; the secondary end is mutual help and a remedy for concupiscence. But the essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a particular firmness on account of the [union’s being a] sacrament.”²³

(2) *Marriage as a sacrament* may be defined: “A sacrament of the new law consisting in the very mutual consent of the contracting parties when such consent is lawfully given, | p. 419 | by which grace is conferred to those who are so joined, for the sake of carrying out well their marriage duties.” Whence marriage is invalidated by any adjoined condition contrary to its substance, e.g., “I will marry you if you avoid having children,” or “I will marry you until I find another spouse who is worthier in rank or talents.” . . .

The form of this sacrament is not the nuptial blessing, but is solely the consent expressed, which is regularly done by the words of those who are present, but can also be done through [other] signs. The matter of the sacrament of marriage is also the very consent, in so far as it expresses the reciprocal handing-over of the spouses’ bodies to one another. The ministers of this sacrament are the very ones contracting it. . . . The effect of this sacrament is grace sanctifying the marital union itself. For the procreation and education of offspring the spouses are joined by an indissoluble bond; their obligations are so serious that they not infrequently require not common but heroic virtue, and for this latter, grace is necessary.

²⁰ cf. q. 72, a. 9, ad 2

²¹ cf. q. 72, a. 7, ad 2

²² I have not translated the portion on indissolubility, for it contains nothing that would not be already familiar to the reader.

²³ Cf. St. Thomas, I-II, q. 102, a. 5, ad 3; II-II, q. 154, a. 2: marriage is already indissoluble according to natural law.

2. *The origin of marriage.* Marriage as a contract was instituted as a natural duty for the propagating of the human race, as well as by the positive will of God expressed in Gen. 1:27: “Male and female the Lord created them. And He blessed them and said: Increase and multiply and fill the earth.” Again, we read at Gen. 2:18: “The Lord God said: It is not good for man to be alone. Let us make him a helper like himself. . . . And Adam said: This, now, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh On account of which a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.”

Marriage as a sacrament, however, was instituted by Jesus Christ, and confers grace, as is declared and explained by the Council of Trent. The Council cites the words of the Lord, Mt. 19:4–9, when He responds to the Pharisees. [The quotation follows.] | p. 420 | The Council of Trent in the same place cites also the words of St. Paul: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and handed Himself over for her. . . . This is a great sacrament: I am speaking now in Christ and in the Church” (Eph. 5:25–33).

. . . In [all] this becomes apparent the loftiness of Christian marriage. . . . On Eph. 5:25, St. Thomas comments: “For certainly it is from the love the husband has for his wife that he will live more chastely and both of them will enjoy a peaceful relationship,” in this way: they love each other on account of God, and mutually aid each other in time so that they may attain to eternal blessedness.

APPENDIX

Whether Penance is a sacrament?

(Summa theologiae 3, q. 84, a. 1)

OBJ 1: It would seem that Penance is not a sacrament. For Gregory [*Cf. Isidore, Etym. vi, ch. 19] says: “The sacraments are Baptism, Chrism, and the Body and Blood of Christ; which are called sacraments because under the veil of corporeal things the Divine power works out salvation in a hidden manner.” But this does not happen in Penance, because therein corporeal things are not employed that, under them, the power of God may work our salvation. Therefore Penance is not a sacrament.

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

OBJ 3: Further, in the sacraments of which we have already spoken above, there is something that is sacrament only, something that is both reality and sacrament, and something that is reality only, as is clear from what has been stated (Q66, A1). But this does not apply to Penance. Therefore Penance is not a sacrament.

On the contrary, As Baptism is conferred that we may be cleansed from sin, so also is Penance: wherefore Peter said to Simon Magus (Acts 8:22): “Do penance . . . from this thy wickedness.”

But Baptism is a sacrament as stated above (Q66, A1). Therefore for the same reason Penance is also a sacrament.

I answer that, As Gregory says [*Isidore, Etym. vi, ch. 19], “a sacrament consists in a solemn act, whereby something is so done that we understand it to signify the holiness which it confers.” Now it is evident that in Penance something is done so that something holy is signified both on the part of the penitent sinner, and on the part of the priest absolving, because the penitent sinner, by deed and word, shows his heart to have renounced sin, and in like manner the priest, by his deed and word with regard to the penitent, signifies the work of God Who forgives his sins. Therefore it is evident that Penance, as practiced in the Church, is a sacrament.

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

Reply OBJ 2: In those sacraments which have a corporeal matter, this matter needs to be applied by a minister of the Church, who stands in the place of Christ, which denotes that the excellence of the power which operates in the sacraments is from Christ. But in the sacrament of Penance, as stated above (ad 1), human actions take the place of matter, and these actions proceed from internal inspiration, wherefore the matter is not applied by the minister, but by God working inwardly; while the minister furnishes the complement of the sacrament, when he absolves the penitent.

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