

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REPENTANCE, CONFESSION, AND PENANCE IN THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AT STASI SANTO THOMAS ONAN RIHIT

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Abstract

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, central to Catholic doctrine, facilitates the restoration of relationships between the penitent, the community, and the divine. This study examines the implementation and experiences of the sacrament through the essential acts of repentance, confession, and penance, highlighting their roles in spiritual and moral transformations. Employing a qualitative approach, the research gathered data through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation at Stasi Santo Thomas Rasul Onan Rihit. The findings reveal that repentance initiates spiritual renewal while confession promotes transparency and humility, thereby strengthening communal bonds. Penance, tailored to individual transgressions, not only addresses past wrongs but also fosters spiritual growth and community harmony. Challenges remain in fully engaging penitents with the sacrament, pointing to the need for enhanced pastoral support and theological education. This study underscores the sacrament's enduring relevance and its capacity to facilitate profound spiritual life within the contemporary Catholic context.

Keywords: *Sacrament, Catholic Church, Spiritual Transformation*

Abstrak

Sakramen Rekonsiliasi, yang merupakan inti dari doktrin Katolik, memfasilitasi pemulihan hubungan antara peniten, komunitas, dan ilahi. Studi ini meneliti implementasi dan pengalaman sakramen melalui tindakan esensial bertobat, pengakuan, dan penebusan, menyoroti peran mereka dalam transformasi spiritual dan moral. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian mengumpulkan data melalui pengamatan, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi di Stasi Santo Thomas Rasul Onan Rihit. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pertobatan memulai pembaruan spiritual sementara pengakuan meningkatkan transparansi dan kerendahan hati, sehingga memperkuat ikatan komunal. Penebusan, yang disesuaikan dengan pelanggaran individu, tidak hanya mengatasi kesalahan masa lalu tetapi juga mendorong pertumbuhan spiritual dan harmoni komunitas. Tantangan tetap ada dalam sepenuhnya melibatkan peniten dengan sakramen, menunjuk pada kebutuhan untuk dukungan pastoral yang ditingkatkan dan pendidikan teologi. Studi ini menekankan relevansi berkelanjutan sakramen dan kapasitasnya untuk memfasilitasi kehidupan spiritual yang mendalam dalam konteks Katolik kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Sakramen, Gereja Katolik, Transformasi Spiritual*

A. Introduction

Sin, in Christian doctrine, is understood as an action contrary to divine law, damaging relationships both between humans and God and among individuals (Addai-Mensah, 2020; Ashfield, 2021). The Catholic Church, recognising the grave impact of sin, offers the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a means to restore these disrupted relationships. This sacrament comprises three essential acts by the penitent: repentance, confession of sins, and acceptance of absolution (Cauchi, 2012; Suski, 2023). In Catholic practice, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is administered with specific nuances to facilitate personal confession and penance. Penitents, or those who have sinned, are expected to engage in those three essential actions as steps towards spiritual restoration (Ga I, 2019).

Repentance, in this context, is profound sorrow for sins committed, coupled with a strong commitment to avoiding similar errors in the future. The confession of sins involves an open dialogue between the penitent and a priest, wherein sins are openly and honestly acknowledged, facilitating restoration. Absolution, granted by the priest, marks the sacrament's final stage, symbolising divine forgiveness, alleviating the burden of sin, and healing spiritual relationships.

Etymologically, the term 'sacrament' stems from the Latin *sacramentum*, initially describing a sanctifying act (Hargrove, 2018; Johnson, 2023). In ecclesiastical usage, it refers to the transformation of an ordinary object or action into something sacred, imbued with spiritual healing power. The concept's evolution is often linked to the theology of mystery, referring to a transcendental experience that cannot be fully expressed through words. This concept has deep roots in early Christian tradition and has been theologically developed throughout church history (Martasudjita, 2018). The Sacrament of Reconciliation not only strengthens individuals but also the community, emphasising the importance of sincere repentance and genuine confession of sins as prerequisites for spiritual peace and communal harmony (McMahon, 2004; Schliesser, 2022).

This study aims to delve deeper into the implementation and experiences of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Catholic Church. By focusing on the three essential acts—repentance, confession, and penance—this study assesses how penitents experience each stage and their impact on spiritual and moral transformations. Also, this study seeks to enhance understanding and practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation within the Catholic Church by examining how penitents comprehend and execute each stage, exploring the implications of this process on their spiritual and moral transformations. Furthermore, it aims to identify and discuss challenges faced by penitents in fully and effectively performing these three acts.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to deeply explore the subjective experiences and understandings of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This approach prioritizes exploring context, meaning, and individual experiences over quantifying

numerical data. Data were collected through three primary methods: direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation analysis, designed to uncover the complex and profound aspects of the phenomena under investigation.

Direct observations were conducted at Stasi Santo Thomas Rasul Onan Rihit, Kec. Harian, Kab. Samosir, from February 27, 2024, to April 20, 2024. This method allowed the researcher to witness the administration of the sacrament firsthand and observe the interactions and rituals taking place. These observations provide crucial insights into religious practices and emotional nuances that might not be fully revealed through other data collection techniques. In-depth interviews were conducted with penitents and priests involved in the sacrament to gain deeper insights into their experiences and spiritual transformations. These interviews were designed to delve into a broader understanding of the sacrament's impact on individuals, enriching the data gathered through observations with personal and introspective perspectives.

Data analysis was carried out using data reduction techniques, involving the processes of selection, focusing, and transformation of the collected data. This process aimed to sharpen, classify, and organize data, making the interpretations more relevant and valid. To strengthen the reliability and validity of the findings, triangulation techniques were applied, verifying the accuracy of the data by comparing results from observations, interviews, and document analysis. This technique is essential to ensuring that the conclusions drawn accurately reflect the reality under study, providing a robust basis for the research conclusions and recommendations.

C. Result and Discussion

In the administration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, three requisite acts are mandated for a penitent desiring to engage with the sacrament: repentance, confession of sins, and performance of penance. Concerning the first act, repentance, this entails the penitent experiencing genuine remorse for their transgressions or consciously and voluntarily renouncing the sins committed. Moreover, the penitent is expected to possess a resolve to amend their behavior and to eschew future transgressions. With respect to the second act, the confession of sins, a penitent who has achieved a state of remorse and possesses sincere intentions is required to admit their sins before an authorized ecclesiastical representative. This confession may occur within the framework of individual reconciliation with personal absolution or through a collective reconciliation process involving multiple penitents, each engaging in private confession and receiving personal absolution. At this juncture, the penitent is afforded spiritual counsel and assigned penance. Pertaining to the third act, the performance of penance, this involves the penitent fulfilling the penance prescribed during the second act as a tangible measure to redress their sins (Ga I, 2019).

1. Implementation of Repentance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The importance of sincere repentance, coupled with a commitment to atone, forms the core of the practice of the Sacrament of Penance in Christian tradition. The Greek

term "Metanoeo," referring to a profound change, directs individuals to turn entirely to God. Effective repentance involves aspects of mind, emotions, and will, acknowledging the sovereignty and mercy of God (Carter, 2012; Wilkin, 1989).

The Sacrament of Penance, often referred to as spiritual medicine, is a means provided by Christ to obtain grace and justification (McNamara, 1985; Myers, 2006). Through this sacrament, believers repair their relationship with God and the community, while initiating a process of self-renewal. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the Council of Trent emphasize the necessity of confessing sins and penitence in achieving divine forgiveness.

In undergoing the Sacrament of Penance, a person not only confesses their sins but also commits to a total change that encompasses all dimensions of personality—mind, emotions, and will—and strives to serve God. Research findings indicate that deep repentance is a prerequisite for authentic repentance, underscoring the need for comprehensive change in an individual's life that brings them closer to God.

Confession in the Sacrament of Penance must be performed with full repentance and humility, without ambiguity, reflecting an individual's awareness to acknowledge their transgressions before God through a priest. In the context of Christianity, a life obedient to God's laws and filled with love for others is a tangible response to the salvation plan offered by Christ.

Understanding Repentance

Repentance is a profound internal response to the act of sin, encompassing sorrow of soul and dislike for the sin committed. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines repentance as soul sorrow and hatred towards sin, along with a strong commitment not to repeat the act. It is a crucial initial step for the penitent in the sacramental reconciliation process (Johanes, 1993). External manifestations of repentance may include various actions such as making the sign of the cross, praying privately, or showing sadness through gestures and facial expressions, indicating genuine remorse (Ga I, 2019). In the context of Christian theology, repentance is interpreted as heart sorrow or distress felt due to sins committed, accompanied by a desire not to repeat them. This concept also involves a preference for God over sin and trust in the redemption offered by Christ on the cross. This repentance is a crucial requirement always necessary to obtain forgiveness for sins committed (Johanes, 1993).

The process of confessing sins is also vital, where individuals open themselves to responsibility for their sins, turn to God, and obtain peace with the Church. This confession is made honestly before a priest, conveying all identified sins after deep introspection. The Church also recommends confessing venial sins to help build moral awareness and combat tendencies to do evil. Biblical verses underscore the importance of repentance and confession of sins as initial steps toward forgiveness and salvation. Therefore, repentance and confession of sins become integral elements in the spiritual journey of humanity to achieve peace with God and others (LAI, 2017). Repentance not only has an internal dimension but is also expressed through spiritual practices like

approaching the confessional, kneeling, making the sign of the cross, and praying earnestly before religious symbols. These actions demonstrate the seriousness of repentance and the individual's commitment to spiritual and moral transformation.

Perfect Repentance

Perfect repentance is a form of repentance driven by perfect love for God. This expression arises when an individual detests sin out of love for God, determined not to repeat the sin, and feels remorseful for all sins committed (Kettler, 1985; Schmidt, 2024). This repentance, also known as contrition or repentance out of love, results from faith and love for God, different from imperfect repentance which may be based on fear of punishment or other moral influences. The primary motivation in perfect repentance is to appreciate God's goodness and not merely His mercy towards the sinner. Although it is difficult to ascertain whether someone has achieved perfect repentance, the moral certainty of sincere intent indicates a willingness to reconcile with God and repair the relationship damaged by sin. This type of repentance can even remit grave sins and their punishments before receiving sacramental absolution, provided there is a strong intent to confess sacramentally as soon as possible. In emergency situations, a sincere desire to confess as soon as possible can also remit sin and its punishment. The earnestness in perfect repentance reflects an individual's willingness to mend their relationship with God profoundly.

Imperfect Repentance (Attrition)

Imperfect repentance arises from less perfect love for God, or from the negative consequences of sin, such as fear of punishment. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that this repentance is not sufficient to obtain forgiveness for grave sins. Although it is an important step in repentance, imperfect repentance is often triggered by external factors such as fear or shame, and may not reach the same depth of repentance as perfect repentance. Someone experiencing imperfect repentance is encouraged to direct their repentance towards deeper and more sincere repentance as part of their spiritual process to strengthen their relationship with God.

2. Implementation of Penance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Understanding Penance

Penance, also known as the act of atonement for sins, is a crucial element in the repentance process of an individual who has sinned. This process is not limited to the confession of sins but involves concrete actions to redeem these wrongdoings (Crisp, 2011; Labooy & Wisse, 2022). Penance demands a strong intention not to repeat the mistakes in the future. From interview data with congregants, penance is regarded as a substantive effort in amending the consequences of committed errors. This action includes efforts such as compensating or rectifying the negative impacts caused by the sin, for example, returning stolen goods or restoring the reputation of someone who has been slandered. Behavioral changes and improved quality of life after receiving the

Sacrament of Reconciliation indicate that penance is effective in amending interpersonal relations and with God.

Penance is generally given by a priest who includes advice or motivation supporting the repentance process, emphasizing the personal responsibility of the penitent in undertaking this action. Congregants who have performed penance demonstrate positive changes in their daily lives, including enhanced peace and better interpersonal relationships. Thus, penance is not merely an effort to evade punishment or formal error but is a manifestation of a deep commitment to self-improvement and strengthening relationships with God and others. Penance becomes a vital aspect of the repentance process, providing spiritual and moral benefits for both individuals and communities.

The Nature of Penance

Priests officiating in the confession sacrament are required to provide penance to penitents who have confessed their sins. This penance must be carried out personally by the penitent and cannot be delegated to another (Ga I, 2019).

Effectiveness

Effective penance is performed earnestly by the penitent, aiming to support their efforts in self-improvement. Penance designed by priests should help penitents overcome selfishness and strengthen their desire to draw closer to Jesus, fostering love and compassion towards Him and others. Based on observations and interviews, it has been proven that penance provides tangible benefits in helping penitents correct mistakes and restore relationships damaged with others and God. Penance is not merely accepted as a formal part of the sacrament but involves concrete actions that display genuine remorse and a willingness to change. Effective penance reflects the seriousness and sincerity of the repentance process, not just a ritual devoid of deep meaning. Therefore, beneficial penance not only improves the penitent's self but also brings them closer to God and strengthens relationships with others, becoming an integral part of the repentance process that has significant spiritual and moral benefits for individuals and communities.

Appropriateness

The given penance should consider appropriateness, meaning it should be tailored to the severity or lightness of the sin committed by the penitent. This suitability is essential so that the penitent can more accurately restore what has been damaged by their sin. Tailored penance is a key element in the sacrament of repentance, providing an opportunity for the penitent to confront and personally absorb their mistakes, as well as offering concrete steps for self-improvement. Thus, penance that considers the aspect of appropriateness plays a vital role in strengthening an individual's repentance process and their relationships with God and fellow humans.

Stages of Penance

The confession of sins offers forgiveness through the Holy Spirit and supports life renewal. In this context, the Holy Spirit not only forgives sins but also empowers the repenting individual to perform life renewal. This renewal aims for a person to become more like Jesus Christ in aspects of life, teachings, and works. Resembling Christ means

partaking in fellowship with His life, death, and resurrection, where the Holy Spirit provides strength to build a new life increasingly resembling Christ from day to day.

The process of confessing sins is crucial for deepening the relationship with Jesus Christ and building a stronger bond with Him. Life renewal is reflected through acts of forgiveness, spreading the good news, praying, doing good to others, and giving thanks to God. This shows that confessing sins is not just acknowledging mistakes but also represents the initial step towards a deeper spiritual transformation.

Forms of Penance

- Prayer

Prayer as a form of penance emphasizes the relationship between the individual and God, functioning as a channel for spiritual requests and personal reflection. Besides being an expression of petition, prayer in the context of penance acknowledges shortcomings and seeks forgiveness.

- Almsgiving

Almsgiving as a form of penance shows tangible love manifested through social action. In Catholicism, almsgiving involves not only providing material assistance but also personal sacrifice reflecting love for God and others. For example, Catholics often support the less fortunate, such as through food donations, financial support, or clothing. This action is not just about giving but also about building closer relationships within the community and demonstrating love in action.

- Charitable

Works Charitable work in the Catholic context involves two aspects: social and ecclesiastical-spiritual. In the social aspect, Catholics engage in various community activities supporting cleanliness, health, and social welfare, like cleaning the environment and providing food for the needy. This shows the practical application of religious teachings in daily life. In the ecclesiastical-spiritual aspect, Catholics also participate in beautifying and maintaining places of worship and engaging in fasting activities that strengthen their spiritual discipline.

- Fasting and Abstinence

Fasting and abstinence as penance practices play a significant role in the spiritual life of Catholics, especially during Lent. These practices help sharpen spiritual awareness and develop adherence to religious teachings.

- Sacrifice

The practice of sacrifice encompasses a broader dimension than just fasting and abstinence. It includes personal sacrifices in the form of time, energy, or finances to help others.

D. Conclusion

This study has elucidated the profound significance and transformative potential of the Sacrament of Reconciliation within the Catholic Church. Through meticulous exploration of the three essential acts—repentance, confession, and penance—it has been demonstrated that each stage plays a crucial role in facilitating the spiritual and moral rehabilitation of the penitent. Repentance, marked by genuine sorrow and a committed resolve to forsake sin, initiates the process of spiritual renewal, while confession fosters transparency and humility, reinforcing the penitent's relationship with God and the ecclesiastical community. The act of penance, tailored to the nature and gravity of the sins confessed, not only exemplifies a tangible commitment to amend past wrongs but also promotes spiritual growth and communal harmony. The findings underscore the sacrament's capacity to restore relationships between individuals and the divine, thus enriching the spiritual life of the community. Additionally, the study highlights the challenges penitents face in fully engaging with the sacrament, suggesting areas for further pastoral support and theological education to enhance the efficacy of this profound sacramental practice. This research contributes significantly to the understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, advocating for its continued relevance and vital role in contemporary spiritual practices within the Catholic Church.

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