

## CONTRITION: ON THE THRESHOLD OF GENUINE REPENTANCE

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### ABSTRACT

Every Christian vocation is marked with an invitation to deeper relationship with God. But union with God cannot be attained without repentance from sin. In preparation for the hearts of men for the coming of the kingdom of God, John the Baptist resounded it once more by preaching “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk. 1:4). However, Jesus did not just launch his public ministry by exhorting men to repent and turn wholeheartedly to God but he reconciled them to God. Repentance therefore, is linked with the promise of God’s mercy and forgiveness of sins. Just as sin itself, repentance holds a central place in the biblical narration of the history of salvation. Redemption from sin both from the Old and New Testaments requires from sinners both penance and repentance. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root *sub* expresses repentant return to God who offers forgiveness. That is why in the Roman Catholic Church, the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation have played an important role in the continual penance and the need to reconcile one’s life with God. This repentance is one that demands a radical change, a *metanoia*, which begins with an interior sorrow for one’s sins called contrition. This article investigates the nature of contrition, presents its biblical foundation, its distinction and origin with the aim of presenting it as an essential aspect of repentance in its genuineness.

**Keywords:** *Contrition, Threshold, Genuine Repentance*

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It would be pertinent to begin this work by surveying the terms “repentance” and “contrition”. Etymologically from the Latin *Contritio*, denotes “a breaking of something hardened”<sup>2</sup>. It can also imply “rubbing together, grinding so as to pulverize”<sup>3</sup>. The Greek term *Metanoia* most often translated as conversion, also implies contrition in the sense that it is an interior aspect of repentance. From the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, repentance is defined as “the act of expressing contrition and penitence for sin”<sup>4</sup>. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines it as “the acknowledgement and condemnation of one’s own sins, coupled with a turning to God”<sup>5</sup>. *The Oxford Guide to the Bible* writes that repentance is a “sincere contrition, involving acknowledgement of wrongdoing in the sense of both admitting guilt and feeling guilty”<sup>6</sup>.

From the foregoing, one would notice that it would be practically difficult to speak about repentance without a mention of contrition as if both are synonymous. That’s why the Latin root for repentance (*penitentia*), focuses more on contrition, acknowledgment and condemnation; consequently, Latin teaching over the centuries has emphasized penitence<sup>7</sup>. In all of the aforementioned definitions with regard to repentance and contrition, the full meaning of the Hebrew *teshuva* and the Greek *metanoia* are rendered as secondary. This would portray that the physicality of returning to original goodness,

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<sup>2</sup> Hanna, Edward. “Contrition”. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 9 April, 2022  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04337a.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Donald K. McKim. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996, 237.

<sup>5</sup> F.L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition, New York: Oxford University, 1997, 1384.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, *The Oxford Guide to the Bible*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 646.

<sup>7</sup> Cross and Livingstone, 1384. The Greek word *metanoia* focuses more heavily on turning to God.

turning around, returning from exile, or being reborn is pushed to the side; contrition for sin is in the foreground.

Notwithstanding that from different perspectives, repentance and contrition may seem to be synonyms or practically mean the same, but that would not be proper because Contrition is not just the whole of repentance but a process in repentance. *The Encyclopedia of Theology* states it as “an element or aspect in that process of individual salvation which is usually called *metanoia*, conversion (in the sense of change of heart and life), repentance, justification. It can therefore only be correctly understood and judged in that context”<sup>8</sup>. This shows that contrition is not the whole of repentance but an aspect or part of it which tends to a realization or completion of repentance. This idea therefore, becomes the basis for this write-up in which contrition is portrayed as the most important aspect of genuine repentance which characterizes its threshold following the examination of one’s conscience and proceeding to the actual confession of one’s sins to a Catholic priest who has the faculty to absolve sins.

## **2.0 BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR REPENTANCE**

Like the call to conversion, repentance is one of the central themes found in both the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament idea of repentance is embedded in the Hebrew word *sub* which expresses the repentant return to God, as in the collective repentance of Israel returning to Yahweh after repeated instances of infidelities (cf. 1 Kgs. 12:10). The example of David (2 Kgs. 12) is typical of repentance. The prayers of repentance in the seven psalms known as “penitential psalms” are paradigmatic (cf. Ps. 6, 31, 37, 51, 101, 129 and 142). The exhortations and the clarion summons of the prophets for penance are inclusive (cf. Ez. 18:31; Jer. 3:14, 4:1-2, 15:19).

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Mumbai: Rekha Printers, 1975, 288.

In the New Testament, the message of the kingdom of God is primarily a call to repentance. Jesus began his public ministry with these words: “The time has come and the reign of God is near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk. 1:15). *Metanoia* and *Epistrophe*, according to *The New Dictionary of Theology* “are the two Greek words used to denote repentance in the New Testament. They expressed the total interior conversion and radical turning around that was demanded by Jesus’ call to repentance”<sup>9</sup>. With the parables of the Prodigal Son (cf. Lk. 15:11-32) and of the Pharisee and the Publican (cf. Lk. 18:10-14), there is an illustration of the nature of repentance and its effects. The call to penance also appears in the preaching of the apostles (cf. Acts. 2:38; 3:19). In the Pauline epistles, one sees the message of mercy and repentance (cf. Rom. 2:4; 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 7:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:25).

### **3.0 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF CONTRITION AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY**

One cannot speak about contrition and repentance without situating it in the context of the sacrament of Penance. The Church teaches that the Sacrament of Penance: “ is a sacrament of the New Law instituted by Christ in which forgiveness of sins committed after baptism is granted through the priest’s absolution to those who with true sorrow confess their sins and promise to satisfy for the same”<sup>10</sup>. In this very definition, one sees that the penitent goes through a gradual process in order to gain pardon for sins committed after the reception of the sacrament of baptism. This gradual process is what the Church calls “Acts of the Penitent” (Acknowledgement of sins committed, Contrition for those sins, Confession and Satisfaction).

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Bangalore: Theological Publications, 2011, 876.

<sup>10</sup> Hanna, Edward. “The Sacrament of Penance”. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 9 April, 2022  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>

#### **4.0 CONTRITION AND ATTRITION**

Naturally, there is a distinction between a repentance that is so perfect as to effect its purpose of undoing the state of sin and an imperfect repentance constituting only a step toward achieving the purpose of undoing the state of sin. This distinction is what the Church calls “Perfect Contrition” (*contritio caritate perfecta*) and “Imperfect Contrition” (*contritio imperfecta*)<sup>11</sup>. The former is technically called “Contrition” while the latter is termed “Attrition”. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says this about perfect contrition: “when it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called “perfect” (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible”<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, “the contrition called imperfect (or “attrition) is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin’s ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear). Such a stirring of conscience can initiate an interior process which, under the prompting of grace, will be brought to completion by sacramental absolution. By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance”<sup>13</sup>.

#### **4.1 HISTORY OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CONTRITION AND ATTRITION**

The formulation in the technical terms of contrition and attrition did not gain ground in theology until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. No less explicit was the distinction in the Scriptures and in the teachings of the Fathers of the Church. In Scriptural passages, there is this picture of an imperfect and insufficient repentance which does not wholeheartedly turn to God (cf. Hos. 6:1-4). In the New Testament,

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<sup>11</sup> Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, 288.

<sup>12</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, New Delhi: Indira Printers, 1994, 1452.

<sup>13</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, New Delhi: Indira Printers, 1994, 1453.

the preaching of John the Baptist leads from fear to true repentance (cf. Mt. 3:7-12) and the prodigal son rises from self-pity to effective repentance (cf. Lk. 15:17-19). Among the Fathers, St. Augustine in his *Confessions* analyzed the division of the will in which one is so characteristic of imperfect repentance and that only grace can finally heal it. He describes the two wills as the old and the new, the carnal and the spiritual; while the spiritual will pleased and overcame his mind (*placebat et vincebat*), the carnal will still attracted and held the spirit bound (*libebat et vinciebat*), until he could rejoice in gratitude to God for the victory of divine love<sup>14</sup>. St. Gregory speaks of two kinds of compunction – one inspired by fear, another inspired by love<sup>15</sup>.

#### **4.2 ORIGIN OF THE DISTINCTION**

From the 8<sup>th</sup> to the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, Pre-scholastic and early scholastic authors, spoke of one kind of sorrow for sin called contrition (*contritio cordis*) in connection with sacramental or ecclesiastical penance. They considered this contrition as apt to wipe out sin even before confession and absolution. The preparatory stages leading to such a sorrow were not considered. These preparatory stages received explicit consideration toward the close of the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, however, when under the influence of Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard, there was a reaction against the view that confession and absolution were more important than contrition. Contrition was then held to be the properly forgiving act, normally preceding absolution. Generally, it was thought that a gradual preparation leads to such a contrition. Fear, for example, may start a penitent on the road to repentance (Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard). Alan of Lille made the first explicit mention of attrition and of its contrast with contrition. He

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<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine. *Confessions* 9.1, quoted in [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Migne J.P. ed., *Patrologia Latina, In Ezech. Hom. 2.10.30f*, quoted in [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

said that sin is either diminished (*dimittitur*) by attrition when a sinner is not perfectly repentant, or forgiven (*remittitur*) by contrition when he is completely converted from sin<sup>16</sup>. The reasons repentance might be incomplete may be various: lack of resolve to confess or do penance, lack of universality of the sorrow, self-centeredness of the sorrow instead of God-centeredness.

By the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the distinction had become common teaching. William of Auvergne, for instance, accepted and explained the difference between the two by the “formation” or “non-formation” by charity<sup>17</sup>. This implies that there is no forgiveness of sin unless a sinner, from being attrite, becomes contrite (*ex attritio fit contritus*)<sup>18</sup>. Such was also the position of St. Thomas Aquinas and of the Thomistic school in general: attrition is imperfect sorrow, unformed by charity, for sin; contrition is perfect sorrow formed by charity. If it happens, St. Thomas explained, that a penitent comes to confession attrite only, as is sometimes the case, then the sacrament itself will bring about the change from attrition to contrition<sup>19</sup>.

The common teaching in the 13<sup>th</sup> century distinguished contrition from attrition, not by the motives of fear and love, but by the completeness or incompleteness of the break with sin, and by its formation or non-formation by charity. It considered contrition as the only proper disposition for justification, whether in or outside the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When this disposition is absent from a penitent, as it may be in more or less exceptional cases, then

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<sup>16</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

the sacrament will bring it about before giving grace. This thought became the medieval “contritionism”<sup>20</sup>.

From this common teaching two successive deviations led to another concept and theology of contrition – attrition. Dun Scotus first put forward the idea that attrition is a sufficient disposition for justification in the Sacrament. Though he still said that an attrite penitent becomes contrite in the Sacrament, he understood this not in the sense that imperfect sorrow makes room for an act of perfect sorrow, but that the same act remaining, the penitent may be called contrite because of the infusion of grace. Another more decisive step lies in the nominalist idea of motive as the distinguishing factor between contrition and attrition (Durandus of St. Pourcain, Ockham, Gabriel Biel): contrition is motivated by love of God, attrition by fear of punishment<sup>21</sup>.

According to this radically new conception, contrition and attrition were no longer distinguished by the complete or incomplete renouncing of sin, marked by the objective formation or non-formation by charity, but by the psychological motives of love or fear. Nor was attrition essentially a step toward contrition. Since the varying motives of the two types of sorrow are not in organic continuity to each other. Even after justification, attrition retains its proper identity. This new theology, the “attritionism” of the Middle Ages, met with increasing success in the centuries of decadent scholasticism before the Council of Trent without, however, replacing the ancient common teaching altogether<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> [www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

### 4.3 CONTRITION: AS AN ESSENTIAL ACT OF PENANCE AND GENUINE REPENTANCE

Every sin is an offense against God which disrupts our relationship with Him. If really one should talk about repentance genuinely, then the most important and primary thing that should be ascertained is contrition. In the acts of the penitent, says *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "...contrition occupies first place"<sup>23</sup>. Its classical definition from the Council of Trent expresses it as: "sorrow of heart and detestation for sin committed, with the resolution not to sin again"<sup>24</sup>. Following the Church's doctrine, contrition remains a necessary condition in order to gain remission for sins committed. In his commentary on the *Master of Sentences*, St. Thomas Aquinas writes: "since it is requisite for the remission of sin that a man cast away entirely the liking for sin which implies a sort of continuity and solidity in his mind, the act which obtains forgiveness is termed by a figure of speech "contrition"<sup>25</sup>.

It is actually not the only aspect but an essential aspect which makes the penitent to fruitfully actualize other steps. That is why Pope Paul VI in his *Paenitemini* writes: "the ultimate purpose of penance is that we should love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him"<sup>26</sup>. This statement points to contrition because it is with such purpose that the penitent acknowledges God's love and mercy which enables him or her to embrace the way of penance and to return to the Father who "first loved us" (cf. Jn. 4:19), "to Christ who gave himself up for us" (cf. Eph. 5:2) and to the Holy Spirit "who has been poured out on us abundantly" (cf. Tit. 3:6).

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<sup>23</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, New Delhi: Indira Printers, 1994, 1451.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, 288.

<sup>25</sup> Hanna, Edward. "Contrition". *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 9 April, 2022  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04337a.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini*, February 17, 1966: AAS 58 (1966) 179; cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11: AAS 57 (1965) 15-16.

The penitent (the follower of Christ) who has sinned and moved by the Holy Spirit to come to the sacrament of penance should above all, as stated by the *Rite of Penance* “be converted to God with his whole heart”<sup>27</sup>. It goes further to say that: “This inner conversion of heart embraces sorrow for sin and the intent to lead a new life. It is expressed through confession made to the Church, due satisfaction, and amendment of life”<sup>28</sup>. This means that for the penitent to actually accomplish other aspects of penance, he or she must first of all be contrite of heart. Little wonder did the Psalmist say: “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

Actually, the Bible is clear with regard to both genuine and false repentance. Twice did Pharaoh tell Moses that he has sinned but he did not repent (cf. Ex. 9:27; 10:16). Esau wept over giving away his birth right and wept, but he did not truly repent (cf. Heb. 12:17). Judas after betraying his Lord and Master felt remorse and acknowledged that he has sinned but his repentance was not a sincere and genuine one (cf. Matt. 27:4). It is therefore, contrition that primarily makes evident the genuineness of repentance. To this, the *Rite of Penance* states: “The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition. For conversion should affect a person from within so that it may progressively enlighten him and render him continually more like Christ”<sup>29</sup>. A true contrition therefore, in accord with Catholic tradition whether it is perfect or imperfect, would have to be “inward, supernatural, universal and profound”<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship, *Rite of Penance*, Washington D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1975, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship, *Rite of Penance*, Washington D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1975, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Congregation for Divine Worship, *Rite of Penance*, Washington D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1975, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Canon Francis Ripley. *This is the Faith: A Complete Explanation of the Catholic Faith*, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, INC., 2002, 288-289.

### 4.3.1 INWARD

Contrition must be real and sincere sorrow of heart, and not merely an external manifestation of repentance<sup>31</sup>. That is why the Old Testament Prophets laid emphasis on this wholehearted repentance just like the Prophet Joel who called out to the Israelites saying: “Be converted to me with all your heart...and rend your hearts and not your garments” (Joel. 2:12-13). This call expresses an interior repentance not based on the lips, but coming from the heart. Christ and his apostles as well judged a sincere contrition not based on formality but an expression of a sorrowful soul (cf. Lk. 14:11-32; 18:13). The grief of the woman in the house of the Pharisee merited forgiveness because she loved much (cf. Lk. 7:47).

### 4.3.2 SUPERNATURAL

In the Catholic doctrine, “contrition derives from God’s initiative and must therefore realize that it is a response”<sup>32</sup>. It is prompted by God’s grace and aroused by motives which spring from faith as opposed to mere natural motives like; fortune, honour, fear, etc. In the Old Testament, it is God that creates a “new heart” and “puts a new spirit” into the children of Israel (cf. Ez. 36:25-29; Ps. 51:10). In the New Testament, after the resurrection, Peter while preaching to his audience made it clear that God the Father had raised up Christ “to give repentance to Israel” (Acts. 5:30). In exhorting Timothy, Paul insists on dealing kindly and gently with those who resist the truth that “God may give them full repentance”. During the Pelagian heresy, St. Augustine insisted on the supernaturalness of contrition when he writes: “That we turn away from God is our doing, and this is bad will; but to turn back to God we are unable unless he arouse and help us, and this is the goodwill”<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Canon Francis Ripley. *This is the Faith: A Complete Explanation of the Catholic Faith*, 288.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, 289.

<sup>33</sup> Hanna, Edward. “Contrition”. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 9 April, 2022  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04337a.htm>

### 4.3.3 UNIVERSAL

A true contrition should include also a firm purpose of amendment to commit sin no more. As a firm purpose of amendment says Ripley, it is “a resolution not to commit sin again and to avoid as far as possible the proximate or near occasions of it”<sup>34</sup>. It is not just a mere wish or desire not to sin again but a determination. This clearly shows that the sinner should repent from sin totally. The call of Prophet Joel still remains paradigmatic in which he urged men to turn to God wholeheartedly (cf. Joel. 12). The Prophet Ezekiel insists that for the evil man to live, he must turn from his wicked ways (cf. Ez. 18:34). Christ tells the doctor of the Law that we must love God with our whole heart and mind and strength (cf. Lk. 10:27).

### 4.3.4 PROFOUND

The chorus of the beautiful Lenten hymn *God of Mercy and Compassion* captures fittingly the sovereignty of contrition. It reads: “Jesus Lord, I ask for mercy, let me not implore in vain; all my sins I now detest them, never will I sin again”. True contrition as well should include a firm will never to sin again, so that sin is hated above every other evil just like Christ asked: “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?” (cf. Mk. 8:36).

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

From the study so far, one can arrive at few conclusions. The relationship God has with his creatures is severed by sin. Sin is trenchantly seen “as a turning away from God and seeking, instead, attachment to creatures (*aversio a Deo et conversio ad creaturas*)”<sup>35</sup>. When this turning away happens, the sinner makes himself or herself the centre of his or her life. Frankly speaking, the sinner prefers the creature to the Creator. For such an injustice and ingratitude to be repaired, it should be through sorrow for one’s sin

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<sup>34</sup> Canon Francis Ripley. *This is the Faith: A Complete Explanation of the Catholic Faith*, 289.

<sup>35</sup> M.M. Philippon, O.P., *The Sacraments in the Christian Life*, trans. by Rev. John A. Otto, Glasgow: Sands & Co Publishers, Ltd., 1954, 203.

and coming back to the Creator through the Sacrament of Penance<sup>36</sup>. Hence, there is a need for the sinner to elicit repentance and a genuine one not just by turning back to God but with a deep sorrow for the offense committed against Him. That's why the conversion of the soul, the confession of one's sins, and the exterior works of satisfaction all spring from the contrition in the heart.

Practically speaking, there is that tendency today of seeing repentance as psychologically complex. To this, Rahner says: "The repudiation of a past free action which is accomplished by contrition (*dolor et detestatio*) must be carefully interpreted for it to be intelligible to people today...it has nothing to do with a psychological, emotional shock"<sup>37</sup>. Actually, on one hand, the penitent remembers past sinful acts and he or she is aware of the present state of sin. On the other hand, there is that will to feel sorrow at the presence of the evil of sin and detesting it with the resolution for amendment. As a matter of fact, "The nature and purpose of repentance, or its metaphysics, is to undo the evil of sin – not to suppress past acts, since this is impossible, but to remove the state of sin"<sup>38</sup>. This would be realized if the penitent has a sense of sin.

Today we live in a world of glib repentance and there seems to be a cosmological conspiracy in which certain things envisaged as sin and immoral are ascertained morally good or indifferent. For instance, the craze among the youths for money has landed many into a cyber crime termed "Yahoo". How actually do they see it? Is it sinful for them or not to defraud and steal from other people? Is it simply for some a sharp hustle? The same goes for such other trendy but immoral lifestyle; Gayism, Prostitution, etc. No matter the vocabulary invented to colour these acts as not sinful, the truth remains that they are. It is only a mind which still has a sense of sin,

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<sup>36</sup> M.M. Philipon, O.P., *The Sacraments in the Christian Life*, 204.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, 289.

<sup>38</sup> [www. Encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition](http://www.Encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/contrition). 9 April, 2022.

conceives sin as a rupture of our personal relationship with God would be willing to repent sincerely. That is why in his keynote address to the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria in The Holy Year and Reconciliation, Obiefuna says: “Only when sin is seen and understood as a break of our alliance with God, a covenant fully entered into on the day of our baptism, only then, can we as sinners understand sorrow as a return to God, the God of mercy who freely, willingly and generously welcomes us into alliance with him through no merits of ours”<sup>39</sup>. This sorrow as noted by the document is “a personal reality” and not “fear of hell or punishment”<sup>40</sup>. Obiefuna made it clear that it would be necessary to understand this especially in our African context where every kind of sorrow is hinged on supernaturalism or phobia for one spirit or the other<sup>41</sup>. The Papal Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* teaches us of God’s infinite love and mercy. It would be appropriate and essential to teach this sorrow perfected by charity to people today and that this true sorrow can help penitents to persevere in their resolutions to avoid sin in the future. This attitude hence, of feeling sorrow for sin committed, detesting it and firmly resolving not to do it again is already embedded in the prayer called “Act of Contrition”<sup>42</sup> for the penitent. A rediscovery of this prayer not as a “mechanical recitation” but really as a “resolved action” would be placing the penitent on the threshold of a genuine repentance.

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<sup>39</sup> Albert K. Obiefuna. *The Holy Year and Reconciliation*, London: Catholic Truth Society, 1984, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Albert K. Obiefuna. *The Holy Year and Reconciliation*, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Albert K. Obiefuna. *The Holy Year and Reconciliation*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> It is a prayer that expresses sorrow for sin which reads: “My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do what is good, I have sinned against You whom I should love above all things, I firmly intend, with Your help, to do Penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.