

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY



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Chapter 1

Sacraments: Introductory Observation

Sacramental theology is the systematic study of the sacraments based on reflection on the liturgical celebration of these rites throughout history and on the insights of theologians and other teachers in light of the *magisterium*. At given historical periods certain theological points came to be emphasized, sometimes for polemical reasons, and assertions of the *magisterium* clarified issues of conflict. The following overview is divided into historical periods. In each section attention is given to those aspects of the ritual enactment of the sacraments in that period that required particular theological reflection and to assertions of the *magisterium*, which assertions are best understood in their historical context. That the contemporary period is treated more fully reflects the disciplinary complexity and richness of sacramental theology today and the significant contributions made to the discipline since Vatican II. For more information on specific rites recourse should be made to articles on particular sacraments and to the historical evolution of the liturgy.

Sacramental Theology

The Church's *magisterium* has never given a definition of the term "sacrament." In its teaching at the Councils of Trent and Vatican II there is insistence on certain essential characteristics of "sacraments" but no authentic binding definition. Succinctly put, sacraments are visible signs chosen by Christ and celebrated ritually in the community of the Church to draw the Church into an experience of Christ's paschal mystery by means of liturgical actions enacted through the power of the Holy Spirit under the agency of the Church's ordained ministers. The word "sacrament" is the English equivalent of the Latin *sacramentum*, which, in turn, is one of the renderings of the Greek word for "mystery." Thus an understanding of "sacrament" demands some appreciation of the significance of "mystery," beginning with the Scriptures.

Definition of a Sacrament

The sacraments thus far considered were merely signs of sacred things. According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, accepted today by many Episcopalians, the sacraments of the Christian dispensation are not mere signs; they do not merely signify Divine grace, but in virtue of their Divine institution, they cause that grace in the souls of men. "*Signum sacro sanctum efficax gratiae*" - a sacrosanct sign producing grace, is a good, succinct definition of a sacrament of the New Law. Sacrament, in its broadest acceptance, may be defined as an external sign of something sacred. In the twelfth century Peter Lombard (d. 1164), known as the Master of the Sentences, author of the manual of systematized theology, gave an accurate definition of a sacrament of the New Law: A sacrament is in such a manner an outward sign of inward grace that it bears its image (i.e. signifies or represents it) and is its cause - "*Sacramentum proprie dicitur quod ita signum est gratiae Dei, ei invisibilis gratiae forma, ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat*" (IV Sent., d.I, n.2). This definition was adopted and perfected by the medieval Scholastics. From St. Thomas we have the short but very expressive definition: The sign of a sacred thing in so far as it sanctifies men - "*Signum rei sacrae in quantum est sanctificans homines*" (III.60.2).

All the creatures of the universe proclaim something sacred, namely, the wisdom and the goodness of God, as they are sacred in themselves, not as they are sacred things sanctifying men, hence they cannot be called sacraments in the sense in which we speak

of sacraments (III. 60.2, ad 1um). The Council of Trent includes the substance of these two definitions in the following: “*Symbolum rei sacrae, et invisibilis gratiae forma visibilis, sanctificandi vim habens*” - A symbol of something sacred, a visible form of invisible grace, having the power of sanctifying (Sess. XIII, cap.3). The “Catechism of the Council of Trent” gives a more complete definition: Something perceptible by the sense which by Divine institution has the power both to signify and to affect sanctity and justice (II, n.2). Catholic catechisms in English usually have the following: An outward sign of inward grace, a sacred and mysterious sign or ceremony, ordained by Christ, by which grace is conveyed to our souls. Anglican and Episcopalian theologies and catechisms give definitions which Catholics could accept.

In every sacrament three things are necessary: the outward sign; the inward grace; Divine institution. A sign stands for and represents something else, either naturally, as smoke represents fire, or by the choice of an intelligent being, as the Red Cross indicates an ambulance. Sacraments do not naturally signify grace; they do so because they have been chosen by God to signify mysterious effects. Yet they are not altogether arbitrary, because in some cases, if not in all, the ceremonies performed have a quasi-natural connection with the effect to be produced. Thus, pouring water on the head of a child readily brings to mind the interior purification of the soul. The word “sacrament” (*sacramentum*), even as used by profane Latin writers, signified something sacred, viz., the oath by which soldiers were bound, or the money deposited by litigants in a contest. In the writings of the Fathers of the Church the word was used to signify something sacred and mysterious, and where the Latins use *sacramentum* the Greeks use *mysterion* (mystery).

The sacred and mysterious thing signified is Divine grace, which is the formal cause of our justification, but with it we must associate the Passion of Christ (efficient and meritorious cause) and the end (final cause) of our sanctification, viz., eternal life. The significance of the sacraments according to theologians (e.g. *Summa Theologica* III.60.3) and the Roman Catechism (II, n. 13) extends to these three sacred things, of which one is past, one present, and one future. The three are aptly expressed in St. Thomas’s beautiful antiphon on the Eucharist: “*O sacrum convivium, in quo Christus sumitur,*

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recolitur memoria passionis ejus, mens impletur gratia, et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur - O sacred banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of the passion is recalled, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future life is given to us”.

Arguments of the Protestants

Protestants generally hold that the sacraments are signs of something sacred (grace and faith), but deny that they really cause Divine grace. Episcopalians, however, and Anglicans, especially the Ritualists, hold with Catholics that the sacraments are “effectual signs” of grace. In article XXV of the Westminster Confession we read: Sacraments ordained of God be not only badges or tokens of Christian men’s profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace and God’s good will towards us by which He doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken but strengthen and confirm our faith in Him (cf. art. XXVII).

“The Zwinglian theory”, writes Morgan Dix (op. cit., p. 73), “that sacraments are nothing but memorials of Christ and badges of Christian profession, is one that can be no possible jugglery with the English tongue be reconciled with the formularies of our church.” Mortimer adopts and explains the Catholic formula “*ex opere operato*” (loc. cit., p. 122). Luther and his early followers rejected this conception of the sacraments. They do not cause grace, but are merely “signs and testimonies of God’s good will towards us” (Augsburg Confessions); they excite faith, and faith (fiduciary) causes justification. Calvinists and Presbyterians hold substantially the same doctrine. Zwinglius lowered still further the dignity of the sacraments, making them signs not of God’s fidelity but of our fidelity. By receiving the sacraments we manifest faith in Christ: they are merely the badges of our profession and the pledges of our fidelity. Fundamentally all these arguments arise from Luther’s newly-invented theory of righteousness, i.e. the doctrine of justification by faith alone. If man is to be sanctified not by an interior renovation through grace which will blot out his sins, but by an extrinsic imputation through the merits of Christ, which will cover his soul as a cloak, there is no place for signs that cause grace, and those used can have no other purpose than to excite faith in the Savior. Luther’s convenient doctrine on justification was not adopted by all his followers and it is not baldly

and boldly proclaimed by all Protestants today; nevertheless they accept its consequences affecting the true notion of the sacraments.

Catholic Doctrine of Sacraments

Against all innovators the Council of Trent declared: “If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer grace on those who place no obstacle to the same, let him be anathema” (Sess. viii, can.vi). “If anyone say that grace is not conferred by the sacraments *ex opere operato* but that faith in God’s promises is alone sufficient for obtaining grace, let him be anathema” (ibid., can. viii; cf. can. iv, v, vii). The phrase “*ex opere operato*”, for which there is no equivalent in English, probably was used for the first time by Peter of Poitiers (d. 1205), and afterwards by Innocent III (d. 1216; *de myst. missae*, III, v), and by St. Thomas (d. 1274; IV Sent., dist. 1, Q.i, a.5). It was happily invented to express a truth that had always been taught and had been introduced without objection. It is not an elegant formula but, as St. Augustine remarks (*Enarration on Psalm 138*): It is better that grammarians should object than that the people should not understand. “*Ex opere operato*”, i.e. by virtue of the action, means that the efficacy of the action of the sacraments does not depend on anything human, but solely on the will of God as expressed by Christ’s institution and promise. “*Ex opere operantis*”, i.e. by reason of the agent, would mean that the action of the sacraments depended on the worthiness either of the minister or of the recipient (see Pourrat, “Theology of the Sacraments”, tr. St. Louis, 1910, 162 sqq.). Protestants cannot in good faith object to the phrase as if it meant that the mere outward ceremony, apart from God’s action, causes grace. It is well known that Catholics teach that the sacraments are only the instrumental, not the principal, causes of grace. Neither can it be claimed that the phrase adopted by the council does away with all dispositions necessary on the part of the recipient, the sacraments acting like infallible charms causing grace in those who are ill-disposed or in grievous sin. The fathers of the council were careful to note that there must be no obstacle to grace on the part of the recipients, who must receive them *rite*, i.e. rightly and worthily; and they declare it a calumny to assert that they require no previous dispositions (Sess. XIV, *de poenit.*, cap.4). Dispositions are required to prepare the subject, but they are a condition (*conditio sine qua*

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non), not the causes, of the grace conferred. In this case the sacraments differ from the sacramentals, which may cause grace *ex opere operantis*, i.e. by reason of the prayers of the Church or the good, pious sentiments of those who use them.

Proofs of the Catholic Doctrine

In examining proofs of the Catholic doctrine it must be borne in mind that our rule of faith is not simply Scripture, but Scripture and tradition.

(a) In Sacred Scripture we find expressions which clearly indicate that the sacraments are more than mere signs of grace and faith: “Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5); “He saved us, by the laver of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5); “Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:17); “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life... For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (John 6:55-56). These and similar expressions (see articles on each sacrament) are, to say the least, very much exaggerated if they do not mean that the sacramental ceremony is in some sense the cause of the grace conferred.

(b) Tradition clearly indicates the sense in which they have been interpreted in the Church. From the numerous expressions used by the Fathers we select the following: “The Holy Ghost comes down from heaven and hovers over the waters, sanctifying them of Himself, and thus they imbibe the power of sanctifying” (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 4). “Baptism is the expiration of sins, the remission of crimes, the cause of renovation and regeneration” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*). “Explain to me the manner of nativity in the flesh and I will explain to you there generation of the soul... Throughout, by Divine power and efficacy, it is incomprehensible; no reasoning, no art can explain it” (*On the Baptism of Christ*). “He that passes through the fountain [Baptism] shall not die but rises to new life” (St. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries* I.4). “Whence this great power of water”, exclaims St. Augustine, “that it touches the body and cleanses the soul?” (Tractate 80 on the Gospel of John). “Baptism”, writes the same Father, “consists not in the merits of those by whom it is administered, nor of those to whom it is administered, but in its

own sanctity and truth, on account of Him who instituted it” (Cont. Cres., IV). The doctrine solemnly defined by the Council of Trent had been announced in previous councils, notably at Constantinople (381; Symb. Fid.), at Mileve (416; can.ii) in the Second Council of Orange (529; can. xv); and in the Council of Florence (1439; Decr. pro. Armen., see Denzinger-Bannwart, nn. 86, 102, 200, 695). The early Anglican Church held fast to the true doctrine: “Baptism is not only a sign of profession and a mark of difference, whereby christened men are discerned from those that be not christened, but is also a sign of regeneration or New-Birth, whereby as by an instrument they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the church” (Art. XXVII).

(c) Theological argument. - The Westminster Confession adds: “The Baptism of children is in any wise to be retained in the church as most agreeable with the institution of Christ”. If Baptism does not confer grace *ex opere operato*, but simply excites faith, then we ask: (1) of what use would this be if the language used be not understood by the recipient, i.e. an infant or an adult that does not understand Latin? In such cases it might be more beneficial to the bystanders than to the one baptized. (2) In what does the Baptism of Christ surpass the Baptism of John, for the latter could excite faith? Why were those baptized by the Baptism of John re-baptized with the Baptism of Christ? (Acts 19). (3) How can it be said that Baptism is strictly necessary for salvation since faith can be excited and expressed in many other ways? Finally Episcopalians and Anglicans of today would not revert to the doctrine of grace *ex opere operato* unless they were convinced that the ancient faith was warranted by Scripture and Tradition.

Matter and form of the Sacraments

Scholastic writers of the thirteenth century introduced into their explanations of the sacraments terms which were derived from the philosophy of Aristotle. William of Auxerre (d. 1223) was the first to apply to them the words matter (*materia*) and form (*forma*). As in physical bodies, so also in the sacramental rite we find two elements, one undetermined, which is called the matter, the other determining, called the form. For instance, water may be used for drinking, or for cooling or cleansing the body, but the words pronounced by the minister when he pours water on the head of the child, with the intention of doing what the Church does, determines the meaning

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of the act, so that it signifies the purification of the soul by grace. The matter and form (the *res et verba*) make up the external rite, which has its special significance and efficacy from the institution of Christ. The words are the more important element in the composition, because men express their thoughts and intentions principally by words. “*Verba inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandi*” (St. Augustine, *Christian Doctrine* II.3; *Summa Theologiæ* III.60.6). It must not be supposed that the things used for the acts performed, for they are included in the *res*, remarks St. Thomas (*Summa Theologiæ* III.60.6, ad 2) have no significance. They too may be symbolical, e.g. anointing the body with oil relates to health; but their significance is clearly determined by the words. “In all the compounds of matter and form the determining element is the form: (*Summa Theologiæ* III.60.7).

The terminology was somewhat new, the doctrine was old; the same truth had been expressed in former times in different words. Sometimes the form of the sacrament meant the whole external rite (St. Augustine, *Of Sin and Merit* I.34; Council of Mileve, De bapt.). What we call the matter and form were referred to as “mystic symbols”; “the sign and the thing invisible”; the “word and the element” (St. Augustine, Tractate 80 on the Gospel of John). The new terminology immediately found favor. It was solemnly ratified by being used in the Decree for the Armenians, which was added to the Decrees of the Council of Florence, yet has not the value of a conciliar definition (see Denzinger-Bannwart, 695; Hurter, “Theol. dog. comp.”, I, 441; Pourrat, op. cit., p. 51). The Council of Trent used the words matter and form (Sess. XIV, cap. ii, iii, can. iv), but did not define that the sacramental rite was composed of these two elements. Leo XIII, in the “*Apostolicae Curae*” (13 Sept., 1896) made the scholastic theory the basis of his declaration, and pronounced ordinations performed according to the ancient Anglican rite invalid, owing to a defect in the form used and a lack of the necessary intention on the part of the ministers. The hylomorphistic theory furnishes a very apt comparison and sheds much light on our conception of the external ceremony. Nevertheless our knowledge of the sacraments is not dependent on this Scholastic terminology, and the comparison must not be carried too far. The attempt to verify the comparison (of sacraments to a body) in all details of the sacramental

rite will lead to confusing subtleties or to singular opinions, e.g., Melchior Cano's (De locis theol., VIII, v.3) opinion as to the minister of Matrimony (see MARRIAGE; cf. Pourrat, op. cit., ii).

Origin (cause) of the Sacraments

It might now be asked: in how far was it necessary that the matter and form of the sacraments should have been determined by Christ?

Power of God

The Council of Trent defined that the seven sacraments of the New Law were instituted by Christ (Sess. VII, can.i). This settles the question of fact for all Catholics. Reason tells us that all sacraments must come originally from God. Since they are the signs of sacred things in so far as by these sacred things men are sanctified (*Summa Theologiae* III:60:2); since the external rite (matter and form) of itself cannot give grace, it is evident that all sacraments properly so called must originate in Divine appointment. "Since the sanctification of man is in the power of God who sanctifies", writes St. Thomas (*Summa Theologiae* III:60:2), "it is not in the competency of man to choose the things by which he is to be sanctified, but this must be determined by Divine institution". Add to this that grace is, in some sense, a participation of the Divine nature and our doctrine becomes unassailable: God alone can decree that by exterior ceremonies men shall be partakers of His nature.

Power of Christ

God alone is the principal cause of the sacraments. He alone authoritatively and by innate power can give to external material rites the power to confer grace on men. Christ as God, equally with the Father, possessed this principal, authoritative, innate power. As man He had another power which St. Thomas calls "the power of the principal ministry" or "the power of excellence" (III: 64:3). "Christ produced the interior effects of the sacraments by meriting them and by affecting them... The passion of Christ is the cause of our justification meritoriously and effectively, not as the principal agent and authoritatively but as an instrument, inasmuch as His Humanity was the instrument of His Divinity" (III:64:3; cf. III:13:1, III:13:3). There is theological truth as well as piety in the old maxim: "From the side of Christ dying on the cross flowed the sacraments by which

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the Church was saved” (Gloss. Ord. in Rom. 5: *Summa Theologiæ* III: 62:5). The principal efficient cause of grace is God, to whom the Humanity of Christ is as a conjoined instrument, the sacraments being instruments not joined to the Divinity (by hypostatic union): therefore the saving power of the sacraments passes from the Divinity of Christ, through His Humanity into the sacraments (*Summa Theologiæ* III:62:5). One who weighs well all these words will understand why Catholics have great reverence for the sacraments. Christ’s power of excellence consists in four things: (1) Sacraments have their efficacy from His merits and sufferings; (2) they are sanctified and they sanctify in His name; (3) He could and He did institute the sacraments; (4) He could produce the effects of the sacraments without the external ceremony (*Summa Theologiæ* III:64:3). Christ could have communicated this power of excellence to men: this was not absolutely impossible (III: 64:4). But, (1) had He done so men could not have possessed it with the same perfection as Christ: “He would have remained the head of the Church principally, others secondarily” (III: 64:3). (2) Christ did not communicate this power, and this for the good of the faithful: (a) that they might place their hope in God and not in men; (b) that there might not be different sacraments, giving rise to divisions in the Church (III:64:1). This second reason is mentioned by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 1:12-13): “every one of you saith: I indeed am of Paul; and I am of Apollo; and I of Cephaz; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul then crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Immediate or Mediate Institution

The Council of Trent did not define explicitly and formally that all the sacraments were instituted immediately by Christ. Before the council great theologians, e.g. Peter Lombard (IV Sent., d. xxiii), Hugh of St. Victor (De sac. II, ii) Alexander of Hales (Summa, IV, Q. xxiv, 1) held that some sacraments were instituted by the Apostles, using power that had been given to them by Jesus Christ. Doubts were raised especially about Confirmation and Extreme Unction. St. Thomas rejects the opinion that Confirmation was instituted by the Apostles. It was instituted by Christ, he holds, when he promised to send the Paraclete, although it was never administered whilst He was on earth, because the fullness of the Holy Ghost was not to be given until after the Ascension: “*Christus instituit hoc sacramentum,*

non exhibendo, sed promittendo” (*Summa Theologiae* III.62.1, ad 1^{um}). The Council of Trent defined that the sacrament of Extreme Unction was instituted by Christ and promulgated by St. James (Sess. XIV, can.i). Some theologians, e.g. Becanus, Bellarmine, Vasquez, Gonet, etc. thought the words of the council (Sess. VII, can.i) were explicit enough to make the immediate institution of all the sacraments by Christ a matter of defined faith. They are opposed by Soto (a theologian of the council), Estius, Gotti, Tournély, Berti, and a host of others, so that now nearly all theologians unite in saying: it is theologically certain, but not defined (*de fide*) that Christ immediately instituted all the sacraments of the New Law. In the decree “*Lamentabili*”, 3 July, 1907, Pius X condemned twelve propositions of the Modernists, who would attribute the origin of the sacraments to some species of evolution or development. The first sweeping proposition is this: “The sacraments had their origin in this that the Apostles, persuaded and moved by circumstances and events, interpreted some idea and intention of Christ”, (Demzinger-Bannwart, 2040). Then follow eleven propositions relating to each of the sacraments in order (ibid., 2041-51). These propositions deny that Christ immediately instituted the sacraments and some seem to deny even their mediate institution by the Saviour.

What does Immediate Institution Imply? Power of the Church

Granting that Christ immediately instituted all the sacraments, it does not necessarily follow that personally He determined all the details of the sacred ceremony, prescribing minutely every iota relating to the matter and the form to be used. It is sufficient (even for immediate institution) to say: Christ determined what special graces were to be conferred by means of external rites: for some sacraments (e.g. Baptism, the Eucharist) He determined minutely (*in specie*) the matter and form: for others He determined only in a general way (*in genere*) that there should be an external ceremony, by which special graces were to be conferred, leaving to the Apostles or to the Church the power to determine whatever He had not determined, e.g. to prescribe the matter and form of the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Orders. The Council of Trent (Sess. XXI, cap. ii) declared that the Church had the power to change the “substance” of the sacraments. She would not be claiming power to alter the substance of the sacraments if she used her divinely given authority

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to determine more precisely the matter and form in so far as they had not been determined by Christ. This theory (which is not modern) had been adopted by theologians: by it we can solve historical difficulties relating, principally, to Confirmation and Holy Orders.

May we then say that Christ instituted some sacraments in an implicit state?

That Christ was satisfied to lay down the essential principles from which, after a more or less protracted development, would come forth the fully developed sacraments? This is an application of Newman's theory of development, according to Pourrat (op. cit., p. 300), who proposes two other formulae; Christ instituted all the sacraments immediately, but did not himself give them all to the Church fully constituted; or Jesus instituted immediately and explicitly Baptism and Holy Eucharist: He instituted immediately but implicitly the five other sacraments (loc. cit., p. 301). Pourrat himself thinks the latter formula too absolute. Theologians probably will consider it rather dangerous, and at least "*male sonans*". If it be taken to mean more than the old expression, Christ determined *in genere* only the matter and the form of some sacraments, it grants too much development. If it means nothing more than the expression hitherto in use, what is gained by admitting a formula which easily might be misunderstood?

Number of the Sacraments

Catholic Doctrine: Eastern and Western Churches

The Council of Trent solemnly defined that there are seven sacraments of the New Law, truly and properly so called, viz., Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, and Matrimony. The same enumeration had been made in the Decree for the Armenians by the Council of Florence (1439), in the Profession of Faith of Michael Palaeologus, offered to Gregory X in the Council of Lyons (1274) and in the council held at London, in 1237, under Otto, legate of the Holy See. According to some writers Otto of Bamberg (1139), the Apostle of Pomerania, was the first who clearly adopted the number seven. Most probably this honour belongs to Peter Lombard (d. 1164) who in his fourth Book of Sentences (d. i, n.2) defines a sacrament as a sacred sign which not only signifies but also causes grace, and then (d.ii, n.1) enumerates the seven sacraments. It is worthy of note that, although the great Scholastics

rejected many of his theological opinions (list given in app. to Migne edition, Paris, 1841), this definition and enumeration were at once universally accepted, proof positive that he did not introduce a new doctrine, but merely expressed in a convenient and precise formula what had always been held in the Church. Just as many doctrines were believed, but not always accurately expressed, until the condemnation of heresies or the development of religious knowledge called forth a neat and precise formula, so also the sacraments were accepted and used by the Church for centuries before Aristotelian philosophy, applied to the systematic explanation of Christian doctrine, furnished the accurate definition and enumeration of Peter Lombard. The earlier Christians were more concerned with the use of sacred rites than with scientific formulae, being like the pious author of the "Imitation of Christ", who wrote: "I had rather feel compunction than know its definition".

Thus time was required, not for the development of the sacraments- except in so far as the Church may have determined what was left under her control by Jesus Christ- but for the growth and knowledge of the sacraments. For many centuries all signs of sacred things were called sacraments, and the enumeration of these signs was somewhat arbitrary. Our seven sacraments were all mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, and we find them all mentioned here and there by the Fathers (see THEOLOGY; and articles on each sacrament). After the ninth century, writers began to draw a distinction between sacraments in a general sense and sacraments properly so called. The ill-fated Abelard ("Intro. ad Theol.", I, i, and in the "Sic et Non") and Hugh of St. Victor (De sacr., I, part 9, chap. viii; cf. Pourrat, op. cit., pp.34, 35) prepared the way for Peter Lombard, who proposed the precise formula which the Church accepted. Thenceforward until the time of the so-called Reformation the Eastern Church joined with the Latin Church in saying: by sacraments proper we understand efficacious sacred signs, i.e. ceremonies which by Divine ordinance signify, contain and confer grace; and they are seven in number. In the history of conferences and councils held to affect the reunion of the Greek with the Latin Church, we find no record of objections made to the doctrine of seven sacraments. On the contrary, about 1576, when the Reformers of Wittenberg, anxious to draw the Eastern Churches into their errors, sent a Greek translation of the Augsburg

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Confession to Jeremias, Patriarch of Constantinople, he replied: "The mysteries received in this same Catholic Church of orthodox Christians, and the sacred ceremonies, are seven in number - just seven and no more" (Pourrat, op. cit., p. 289). The consensus of the Greek and Latin Churches on this subject is clearly shown by Arcadius, "*De con. ecc. occident. et orient. in sept. sacr. administr.*" (1619); Goar in his "*Euchologion*" by Martene in his work "*De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus*", by Renaudot in his "*Perpetuite de la foi sur sacrements*" (1711), and this agreement of the two Churches furnishes recent writers (Episcopalians) with a strong argument in support of their appeal for the acceptance of seven sacraments.

Protestant Arguments on the Number of Sacraments

Luther's capital stand points, viz. private interpretation of the Scriptures, and justification by faith alone, logically led to a rejection of the Catholic doctrine on the sacraments. Gladly would he have swept them all away, but the words of Scripture were too convincing and the Augsburg Confession retained three as "having the command of God and the promise of the grace of the New Testament". These three, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Penance were admitted by Luther and also by Cranmer in his "Catechism" (see Dix, "op. cit.", p. 79). Henry VIII protested against Luther's innovations and received the title "Defender of the Faith" as a reward for publishing the "*Assertio septem sacramentorum*" (re-edited by Rev. Louis O'Donovan, New York, 1908). Followers of Luther's principles surpassed their leader in opposition to the sacraments. Once granted that they were merely "signs and testimonies of God's good will towards us", the reason for great reverence was gone. Some rejected all sacraments, since God's good will could be manifested without these external signs. Confession (Penance) was soon dropped from the list of those retained. The Anabaptists rejected infant Baptism, since the ceremony could not excite faith in children. Protestants generally retained two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the latter being reduced by the denial of the Real Presence to a mere commemorative service. After the first fervor of destruction there was a reaction. Lutherans retained a ceremony of Confirmation and ordination. Cranmer retained three sacraments, yet we find in the Westminster Confession: "There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ Our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper

of the Lord. Those five commonly called sacraments, that is to say Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures but yet have not like nature of sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible signs or ceremony ordained by God (art. XXV). The Wittenberg theologians, by way of compromise, had shown a willingness to make such a distinction, in a second letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople, but the Greeks would have no compromise (Pourrat, loc. cit., 290).

For more than two centuries the Church of England theoretically recognized only two "sacraments of the Gospel" yet permitted, or tolerated other five rites. In practice these five "lesser sacraments" were neglected, especially Penance and Extreme Unction. Anglicans of the nineteenth century would have gladly altered or abolished the twenty-fifth article. There has been a strong desire, dating chiefly from the Tractarian Movement, and the days of Pusey, Newman, Lyddon, etc. to reintroduce all of the sacraments. Many Episcopalians and Anglicans today make heroic efforts to show that the twenty-fifth article repudiated the lesser sacraments only in so far as they had "grown of the corrupt following of the Apostles, and were administered 'more Romamensium'", after the Roman fashion. Thus Morgan Dix reminded his contemporaries that the first book of Edward VI allowed "auricular and secret confession to the priest", who could give absolution as well as "ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort", but did not make the practice obligatory: therefore the sacrament of Absolution is not to be "obtruded upon men's consciences as a matter necessary to salvation" (op. cit., pp.99, 101, 102, 103). He cites authorities who state that "one cannot doubt that a sacramental use of anointing the sick has been from the beginning", and adds, "There are not wanting, among the bishops of the American Church, some who concur in deploring the loss of this primitive ordinance and predicting its restoration among us at some propitious time" (ibid., p. 105). At a convention of Episcopalians held at Cincinnati, in 1910, unsuccessful effort was made to obtain approbation for the practice of anointing the sick. High Church pastors and curates, especially in England, frequently are in conflict with their bishops because the former use all the ancient rites. Add to this the assertion made by

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Mortimer (op. cit., I, 122) that all the sacraments cause grace *ex opere operato*, and we see that “advanced” Anglicans are returning to the doctrine and the practices of the Old Church. Whether and in how far their position can be reconciled with the twenty-fifth article, is a question which they must settle. Assuredly their wanderings and gropings after the truth prove the necessity of having on earth an infallible interpreter of God’s word.

Division and Comparison of the Sacraments

(a) All sacraments were instituted for the spiritual good of the recipients; but five, viz. Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, the Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, primarily benefit the individual in his private character, whilst the other two, Orders and Matrimony, primarily affect man as a social being, and sanctify him in the fulfillment of his duties towards the Church and society. By Baptism we are born again, Confirmation makes us strong, perfect Christians and soldiers. The Eucharist furnishes our daily spiritual food. Penance heals the soul wounded by sin. Extreme Unction removes the last remnant of human frailty, and prepares the soul for eternal life, Orders supplies ministers to the Church of God. Matrimony gives the graces necessary for those who are to rear children in the love and fear of God, members of the Church militant, future citizens of heaven. This is St. Thomas’s explanation of the fitness of the number seven (III:55:1). He gives other explanations offered by the Schoolmen, but does not bind himself to any of them. In fact the only sufficient reason for the existence of seven sacraments, and no more, is the will of Christ: there are seven because He instituted seven. The explanations and adaptations of theologians serve only to excite our admiration and gratitude, by showing how wisely and beneficently God has provided for our spiritual needs in these seven efficacious signs of grace.

(b) Baptism and Penance are called “sacraments of the dead”, because they give life, through sanctifying grace then called “first grace”, to those who are spiritually dead by reason of original or actual sin. The other five are “sacraments of the living”, because their reception presupposes, at least ordinarily, that the recipient is in the state of grace, and they give “second grace”, i.e. increase of sanctifying grace. Nevertheless, since the sacraments always give some grace when there is no obstacle in the recipient, it may happen in cases explained by theologians that “second grace” is conferred

by a sacrament of the dead, e.g. when one has only venial sins to confess receives absolution and that “first grace” is conferred by a sacrament of the living (see *Summa Theologiae* III:72:7 ad 2; III:79:3). Concerning Extreme Unction St. James explicitly states that through it the recipient may be freed from his sins: “If he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:15).

(c) *Comparison in dignity and necessity.* The Council of Trent declared that the sacraments are not all equal in dignity; also that none are superfluous, although all are not necessary for each individual (Sess. VII, can.3, 4). The Eucharist is the first in dignity, because it contains Christ in person, whilst in the other sacraments grace is conferred by an instrumental virtue derived from Christ (*Summa Theologiae* III.56.3) To this reason St. Thomas adds another, namely, that the Eucharist is as the end to which the other sacraments tend, a centre around which they revolve (*Summa Theologiae* III:56:3). Baptism is always first in necessity; Holy Orders come next after the Eucharist in the order of dignity, Confirmation being between these two. Penance and Extreme Unction could not have a first place because they presuppose defects (sins). Of the two Pences is the first in necessity: Extreme Unction completes the work of Penance and prepares souls for heaven. Matrimony has not such an important social work as Orders (*Summa Theologiae* III:56:3, ad 1). If we consider necessity alone - the Eucharist being left out as our daily bread, and God’s greatest gift - three are simply and strictly necessary, Baptism for all, Penance for those who fall into mortal sin after receiving Baptism, Orders for the Church. The others are not so strictly necessary. Confirmation completes the work of Baptism; Extreme Unction completes the work of Penance; Matrimony sanctifies the procreation and education of children, which is not so important nor so necessary as the sanctification of ministers of the Church (*Summa Theologiae* III:56:3, ad 4).

(d) Episcopalians and Anglicans distinguish two great sacraments and five lesser sacraments because the latter “have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained by God” (art. XXXV). Then they should be classed among the sacramentals since God alone can be the author of a sacrament (see above III). On this point the language of the twenty-fifth article (“commonly called sacraments”) is more logical and straightforward than the terminology of recent Anglican writers.

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The Anglican Catechism calls Baptism and Eucharist sacraments “generally (i.e. universally) necessary for salvation”. Mortimer justly remarks that this expression is not “entirely accurate”, because the Eucharist is not generally necessary to salvation in the same way as Baptism (*op. cit.*, I, 127). The other five he adds are placed in a lower class because, “they are not necessary to salvation in the same sense as the two other sacraments, since they are not necessary for everyone” (*loc. cit.*, 128). Verily this is interpretation extraordinary; yet we should be grateful since it is more respectful than saying that those five are “such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures” (art. XXV). Confusion and uncertainty will be avoided by accepting the declaration of the Council of Trent (above).

Biblical Foundations of the Seven Sacraments

The Greek word *mysterion* (something “secret” or “hidden”; used 28 times in the NT) was translated into Latin by several different words, mostly *mysterium* (19 times in the Vulgate NT: Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph 3:4; 6:19; Col 1:26; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess 2:7; 1 Tim 3:9; Rev 10:7; 17:5) and *sacramentum* (8 times: Eph 1:9; 3:3, 9; 5:32; Col 1:27; 1 Tim 3:16; Rev 1:20; 17:7; once also *testimonium*: 1 Cor 2:1). While all of these words can be translated “mystery,” the Latin *mysterium* often refers more to the invisible or hidden dimensions, while *sacramentum* seems to refer more to the visible or symbolic aspects of a spiritual or divine mystery.

In a sense, Jesus Christ can be called the “mystery of salvation” or the “sacrament of God,” since he, through his incarnation, made visible to us the mystery of the invisible God. Similarly, the Church as a whole is sometimes called the “sacrament of salvation,” since it is “the sign and the instrument of the communion of

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God and men” (CCC, §780; cf. §§774-776). Usually, however, the word “sacrament” refers to seven particular rites or rituals performed in and by the Church.

- Many older Catholics will still remember the very brief definition from the *Baltimore Catechism* (1941): “A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.” (§304).
- The current official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994; 2nd edition 1997), gives a slightly more complete definition: “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.” (CCC, §1131; see also “Sacrament” in the CCC’s Glossary).
- These sacraments are considered “Sacraments of Christ,” “Sacraments of the Church,” “Sacraments of Faith,” “Sacraments of Salvation,” and “Sacraments of Eternal Life” (§§1113-1130).
- The seven sacraments can be subdivided, with *three* “*Sacraments of Christian Initiation*” (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist); *two* “*Sacraments of Healing*” (Penance/Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick); and *two* “*Sacraments of Vocation*” (Holy Orders/Ordination and Matrimony/Marriage; also referred to as “Sacraments at the Service of Communion”)

The *adjective* “sacramental” might refer to something related to the seven official rites: “sacramental preparation,” “sacramental action,” etc. Yet it can also be used more broadly: for example, the “sacramental imagination” or “sacramental principle” refers to the Catholic Christian conviction in general that invisible spiritual realities can be disclosed or made visible in and through created realities that function as symbols (see Rausch, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, p. 85). These can be considered “real symbols,” in that they truly manifest and convey the divine graces that they symbolize, rather than “mere symbols,” which simply point to divine realities outside themselves. Religious symbols are not merely intellectual, but also speak to us affectively and intuitively; they can “raise our minds and hearts to God” (ibid.).

The adjective “sacramental” should not be confused with the more rarely used *noun* “sacramental.” A sacramental can be a simple ritual action, religious symbol, devotional object, or short blessing or prayer (for example, making the sign of the cross, sprinkling something with holy water, receiving ashes on the forehead on Ash Wednesday, lighting candles, going on a religious pilgrimage, wearing religious clothing, using a statue or icon or other artwork for devotional purposes, etc.). Such “sacramentals” can make us aware of divine realities (or, vice-versa, make divine realities present to us), although they can also be abused or become superstitious. The noun “sacramentality” is the overall concept, the idea or conviction that God can be encountered in symbolic/sacramental ways. (Compare other words ending in “-ty”, such as “reality” or “sexuality,” which are overall concepts for anything having to do with the “real” or “sexual” dimensions of life, respectively).

While many Protestant Churches regard only Baptism/Initiation and Eucharist/Communion as the two core Sacraments (directly instituted by Christ), Catholic Church (and most Orthodox Churches) officially recognizes the following seven sacraments (CCC, §§ 1113, 1210-1666), listed below with brief comments about their understanding in CCC with their biblical foundations:

Baptism

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1213) defines baptism thus: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration by water in the word (*per aquam in verbo*). St. Thomas (III: 66:1) gives this definition: “Baptism is the external ablution of the body, performed with the prescribed form of words.” Later theologians generally distinguish formally between the physical and the metaphysical defining of this sacrament. By the former they understand the formula expressing the action of ablution and the utterance of the invocation of the Trinity; by the latter, the definition: “Sacrament of regeneration” or that institution of Christ by which we are reborn to spiritual life. The term “regeneration” distinguishes baptism from every other sacrament, for although penance revivifies men spiritually, yet this is rather resuscitation, a bringing back from the dead, than a rebirth. Penance does not make us Christians; on the contrary, it presupposes that we have already been born of water and the Holy Spirit to the life of grace, while baptism on the other hand was instituted to confer upon

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men the very beginnings of the spiritual life, to transfer them from the state of enemies of God to the state of adoption, as sons of God. The definition of the Roman Catechism combines the physical and metaphysical definitions of baptism. “The sacrament of regeneration” is the metaphysical essence of the sacrament, while the physical essence is expressed by the second part of the definition, i.e. the washing with water (matter), accompanied by the invocation of the Holy Trinity (form). Baptism is, therefore, the sacrament by which we are born again of water and the Holy Spirit, that is, by which we receive in a new and spiritual life, the dignity of adoption as sons of God and heirs of God’s kingdom.

Baptism in Holy Scripture

- Mt. 3:1-17: Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.... And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” See also Mk 1:1-11;
- Mt. 28:16-20: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”
- Mk. 16:14-17: “Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.
- Lk. 3:16-22: ... “I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire...
- Jn. 1:19-34: ... I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” And John bore witness, “I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

- Jn. 3:1-24: ... Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ..., ‘You must be born anew.’ ... After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized.
- Acts 1:1-10 ... for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”
- Acts 2:1-41, when the day of Pentecost had come ... when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts: 8:26-40: ... Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.
- Acts 9:1-19: .. So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened.
- Acts 10:1-48: ... While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.
- Acts 19:1-7: And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized

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with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.

Confirmation

Confirmation in the Economy of Salvation from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for Messiah for his saving mission. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at his baptism by John was the sign that this was he who was to come, the Messiah, the Son of God. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit; his whole life and his whole mission are carried out in total communion with the Holy Spirit whom the Father gives him “without measure.”

This fullness of the Spirit was not to remain uniquely the Messiah’s, but was to be communicated to the whole messianic people. On several occasions Christ promised this outpouring of the Spirit, a promise which he fulfilled first on Easter Sunday and then more strikingly at Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles began to proclaim “the mighty works of God,” and Peter declared this outpouring of the Spirit to be the sign of the messianic age. Those who believed in the apostolic preaching and were baptized received the gift of the Holy Spirit in their turn.

“From that time on the apostles, in fulfillment of Christ’s will, imparted to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands the gift of the Spirit that completes the grace of Baptism. For this reason in the Letter to the Hebrews the doctrine concerning Baptism and the laying on of hands is listed among the first elements of Christian instruction. The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.”

Very early, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil (chrism) was added to the laying on of hands. This anointing highlights the name “Christian,” which means

“anointed” and derives from that of Christ himself whom God “anointed with the Holy Spirit.” This rite of anointing has continued ever since, in both East and West. For this reason the Eastern Churches call this sacrament Chrismation, anointing with chrism, or Myron which means “chrism.” In the West, the term Confirmation suggests that this sacrament both confirms and strengthens baptismal grace.

Confirmation in Holy Scripture

- ❖ Jn. 14:14-31: if you ask anything in my name, I will do it. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. ..
- ❖ Jn. 15:26-27: But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning.
- ❖ Acts 1:1-5: In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen... he said, “you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”
- ❖ Acts 2:1-4: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
- ❖ Acts 8:14-17: Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

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- ❖ Acts 9:1-19: So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
- ❖ Acts 19:1-7: While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all.

Holy Eucharist

The Sacrament of the Eucharist from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord’s own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.

“At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.’”

The Eucharist - Source and Summit of Christian Ecclesial Life

The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are

oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”

“The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.”

Finally, by the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all.

In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: “Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.”

Holy Eucharist in Holy Scripture

- ❖ Jn. 6:22-71: ... I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” ... “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.
- ❖ Mt 26:26-29: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”
- ❖ Mk. 14:22-25: And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to

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you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

- ❖ Lk. 24:13-35: ... When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?”
- ❖ 1 Cor. 10:14-22: The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ... You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.
- ❖ 1 Cor. 11:17-34: ...For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon him. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

It is called the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the sacrament of Penance, since it consecrates the Christian sinner’s personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

It is called the sacrament of confession, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a “confession” - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man. It is called the sacrament of forgiveness, since by the priest’s sacramental absolution God grants the penitent “pardon and peace.” It is called the sacrament of Reconciliation, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: “Be reconciled to God.” He who lives by God’s merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord’s call: “Go; first be reconciled to your brother.”

Why a Sacrament of Reconciliation after Baptism? “You were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” One must appreciate the magnitude of the gift God has given us in the sacraments of Christian initiation in order to grasp the degree to which sin is excluded for him who has “put on Christ.” But the apostle John also says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” And the Lord himself taught us to pray: “Forgive us our trespasses,” linking our forgiveness of one another’s offenses to the forgiveness of our sins that God will grant us.

Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us “holy and without blemish,” just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is “holy and without blemish.” Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls concupiscence, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.

Reconciliation in Holy Scripture

In confessing their sins and receiving absolution through the ministry of a priest, Catholics are following the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles, both in the Bible and in the Sacred Tradition of the Church. Jesus empowered His apostles to forgive men’s sin, sending them to be ministers of reconciliation in His name, as His Heavenly Father first sent Him (Jn. 20:21-23).

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Through the Sacrament of Baptism, a person is cleansed of original sin and receives the grace of a new birth in God the Father, through His Son, in the Holy Spirit (St. Irenaeus as cited in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 683). Through this regeneration in water and the Spirit, a person becomes a Christian, born again as a son or daughter of God (Jn. 3:3-6; Rom. 8:14-17). After becoming a child of God, one may freely damage or break off his relationship with God through sin. Whereas venial sin damages our relationship with God, mortal sin actually severs the relationship through the loss of God's supernatural life of grace within us (cf. 1 Jn. 5:16-17; Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1854-64). When a person chooses to kill that life of grace through mortal sin, God, who is full of mercy, seeks to reconcile His prodigal son or daughter to Himself (cf. Lk. 15:11-32). God alone can forgive sins (Catechism, no. 1441), yet he empowered the Apostles and their successors (bishops and priests) to carry out His ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-21).

St. John writes: Jesus said, As the Father has sent me with all authority, Mt. 28:18, even so I send you. And with this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (Jn. 20:21-23; cf. Lk. 10:16; Mt. 16:19, 28:18-20). The Church's power to bind and loose (Mt. 16:19, 18:18) provides further scriptural evidence for this sacrament. As the Church has taught for 2,000 years, the priest exercises his ministry in persona Christi (that is, in the person of Christ). This means that in confessing one's sins to a priest, one truly confesses one's sins to Christ Himself and receives pardon from God. Because the priest acts in persona Christi, he is the spiritual head or father of the community (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14-15). Thus, Confession reconciles us with Christ and His Body, the Church, whom we have wounded by sin. Sin is never a private matter, since it always disrupts the order of creation and the whole community (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-6).

Through Christ, the priest forgives the sinner in the name of the whole community, the Body of Christ. Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God (Catechism, no. 1445). In his New Testament Epistle, St. James exhorts us, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed (Jas. 5:16). Though venial sins are remitted through the reception of

Holy Communion (Catechism, no. 1394), the Church recommends that all the faithful, even those who are not conscious of having committed a mortal sin, make frequent Confession (Catechism, no. 1458). The Sacrament of Confession is one of healing. It makes us aware of our sinfulness and our dependence on God; therefore it is vital to receive the sacrament frequently in order to advance in holiness. One of the precepts of the Church is that all the faithful are bound by obligation to confess grave sins at least once a year.¹ It is also very important to note that those who are conscious of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion without having first received absolution in Confession, unless [there is] a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possible way of going to Confession (Catechism, no. 1457). Again, sin is not a solitary matter, nor does any Christian have a God-and-me-alone relationship with the Father (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Confessing our sins within the Body of Christ allows us to reconcile with God and strengthen the Church, providing a witness so that all may turn and repent (2 Pet. 3:9). Other obvious biblical references are the following,

- Mt. 3:1-6 And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.
- Mt. 4:17: From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”
- Mt. 16:13-19: ...I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
- Mk. 1:1- 15: John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- Lk. 10:13-16: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.
- Jn. 20:19-23: ... And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death.

Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

The sick person before God: The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing. Illness becomes a way to conversion; God's forgiveness initiates the healing. It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: "For I am the Lord, your healer." The prophet intuits that suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others. Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offense and heal every illness.

Christ the physician: Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity is a resplendent sign that "God has visited his people" and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have needed of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me." His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.

Often Jesus asks the sick to believe. He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands, mud and washing. The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all."

And so in the sacraments Christ continues to “touch” us in order to heal us.

Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the “sin of the world,” of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.

Anointing in Holy Scripture

Mk. 6:7-13: And he went about among the villages teaching. And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ... So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.

Jas. 5:13-16: Is any one among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.

Sacrament of Holy Orders

The priesthood of the Old Covenant: The chosen people were constituted by God as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” But within the people of Israel, God chose one of the twelve tribes, that of Levi, and set it apart for liturgical service; God himself is its inheritance. A special rite consecrated the beginnings of the priesthood of the Old Covenant. The priests are “appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

Instituted to proclaim the Word of God and to restore communion with God by sacrifices and prayer, this priesthood nevertheless remains

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powerless to bring about salvation, needing to repeat its sacrifices ceaselessly and being unable to achieve a definitive sanctification, which only the sacrifice of Christ would accomplish.

The liturgy of the Church, however, sees in the priesthood of Aaron and the service of the Levites, as in the institution of the seventy elders, a prefiguring of the ordained ministry of the New Covenant. Thus in the Latin Rite the Church prays in the consecratory preface of the ordination of bishops: God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,... by your gracious word you have established the plan of your Church. From the beginning, you chose the descendants of Abraham to be your holy nation. You established rulers and priests and did not leave your sanctuary without ministers to serve you....

At the ordination of priests, the Church prays: Lord, holy Father,... when you had appointed high priests to rule your people, you chose other men next to them in rank and dignity to be with them and to help them in their task... You extended the spirit of Moses to seventy wise men.... You shared among the sons of Aaron the fullness of their father's power.

In the consecratory prayer for ordination of deacons, the Church confesses: "Almighty God..., you make the Church, Christ's body, grow to its full stature as a new and greater temple. You enrich it with every kind of grace and perfect it with a diversity of members to serve the whole body in a wonderful pattern of unity. You established a threefold ministry of worship and service, for the glory of your name. As ministers of your tabernacle you chose the sons of Levi and gave them your blessing as their everlasting inheritance."

Holy Orders from Holy Scripture

- ❖ Dt. 23:21-23: "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you. But if you refrain from vowing, it shall be no sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.
- ❖ Ecc. 5:4-7: When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not

your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase, empty words grow many: but do you fear God.

- ❖ Mt. 16:13-19: Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
- ❖ Mt. 28:16-20: Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”
- ❖ Mk. 16:14-20: Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they sat at table; and he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, “Go into the entire world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.” So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the

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Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.

- ❖ Lk. 22:19-30: And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But behold the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” And they began to question one another, which of them it was that would do this. A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves. “You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.
- ❖ Jn. 17:1-26: When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him... O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”
- ❖ Jn. 20:19.23: On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he

breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

- ❖ Jn. 21:14-19: ... When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ...
- ❖ 1 Cor. 7:7: I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.
- ❖ 1 Cor. 7:32-35: I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.
- ❖ Heb. 5:1.11: For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.... In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. About this we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

Matrimony

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”

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Marriage in God's Plan: Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding-feast of the Lamb." Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its "mystery," its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin and its end, its various realizations throughout the history of salvation, the difficulties arising from sin and its renewal "in the Lord" in the New Covenant of Christ and the Church.

Matrimony in Holy Scripture

- ❖ Dt. 23:21-23: "When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you. But if you refrain from vowing, it shall be no sin in you. You shall be careful to perform what has passed your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.
- ❖ Ecc. 5:4-7: When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? For when dreams increase, empty words grow many: but do you fear God.
- ❖ Gen. 1:26-31: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ...
- ❖ Gen. 2:8-25: ... Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." ... LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

- ❖ Prov. 5:15-23: Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe. Let her affection fill you at all times with delight, be infatuated always with her love. Why should you be infatuated, my son, with a loose woman and embrace the bosom of an adventuress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he watches all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is caught in the toils of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is lost.
- ❖ Song of Songs: 1:1-16; 2:1-17; 3:1-11; 4:1-16; 5:1-16;
- ❖ Mt 19:1-9: He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery."
- ❖ Mk. 10:1-12: ... 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.' So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."
- ❖ 1 Cor. 7:1-40: ... The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any

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woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace. ... A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I have the Spirit of God.

- ❖ Eph. 5:21-33: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.
- ❖ Col. 3:18-21: Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them... Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.
- ❖ 1 Tim. 5:8: If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

- ❖ Tit 2:4: and so train the young women to love their husbands and children...
- ❖ Heb. 13:4: Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous.
- ❖ 1 Pet 3:1-7: Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you. Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered.

To summarize, in the following diagram we will present the seven sacraments with their biblical backgrounds, the words and actions involved, their effects, and who can administer each of them:

SACRAMENT	Biblical Basis	Central Words	Central Actions	Effects	Ministers
	BAPTISM	<p>Matt 28:19 - Jesus commissions the apostles: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; John 3:22; 4:1-2 - Jesus’ first disciples baptize other disciples; Acts 2:38-41; 10:47-48 - new believers are baptized “in the name of Jesus” by Peter & others; (<i>not just Jesus’ own baptism: Mark 1:9-11 & par.</i>)</p>	<p>“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (the “<i>Trinitarian Formula</i>,” from Matt 28:19)</p>	<p>The candidate is immersed in water, or water is poured over the candidate’s head.</p>	<p>Becoming a member of the Church of Christ (Christian Initiation); also being forgiven of one’s sins.</p>

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EUCCHARIST	<p>Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-30; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor 11:23-25 - Jesus' "Last Supper" with his disciples; John 6:48-58 - the end of the Bread of Life discourse: "eat my flesh; drink my blood"; Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42 - Christians gather for the "Breaking of the Bread"</p>	<p>"This is my body... This is my blood..." (the "<i>Words of Institution</i>" from the Last Supper)</p>	<p>The bread and wine are blessed/ consecrated by the minister and received/ shared by the communicants.</p>	<p>Being spiritually nourished by Christ's body and blood; being united ("in communion") with Christ and other believers.</p>	<p>Bishops or Priests</p>
CONFIRMATION	<p>John 20:22 - "(Jesus) breathed on them (the disciples) and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'"; Acts 8:17; 19:6 - believers receive the Spirit, esp. through laying on of the apostle's hands Acts 10:44-48 - the coming of the Spirit is closely associated with the Baptism</p>	<p>"(Name), be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."</p>	<p>Laying on of hands (the bishop lays his hands on the head of the confirmand).</p>	<p>Being strengthened by the Holy Spirit; being "confirmed" in the fullness of the Christian faith.</p>	<p>Bishops; in some cases also Priests</p>
RECONCILIATION	<p>John 20:23 - "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"; Matt 16:19; 18:18 - more sayings on "binding and loosing"; James 5:16 - "confess your sins to one another"</p>	<p>"I forgive you of all of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (the "<i>Words of Absolution</i>")</p>	<p>The penitent confesses his sins, expresses contrition, and proposes amendment; the confessor suggests a penance and speaks the words of absolution.</p>	<p>Begin forgiven of one's sins; being reconciled to God the Church, and other people.</p>	<p>Bishops or Priests</p>

ANOIDING OF THE SICK	<p>Mark 6:7-13 - Jesus' disciples "anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them"; James 5:14-16 - "call for the elders of the church and have them pray over (the sick), anointing them with oil in the names of the Lord."</p>	<p>"Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up."</p>	<p>The minister anointing the sick persons forehead and hands with blessed oil</p>	<p>Being strengthened in time of illness.</p>	<p>Bishops or Priests</p>
	<p>Gen 2:24 - "a man leaves his parents and clings to his wife and they become one flesh"; Mark 10:2-12; Matt 19:1-9 - Jesus teaches against divorce; "What God has joined together, let no one separate"; Eph 5:22-33; 1Cor 7:10-16 - Paul stresses the unity of husbands and wives; (<i>not simply</i> Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana, John 2:1-11)</p>	<p>"I, (name), take you, (name), to be my husband/ wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life."</p>	<p>The husband and wife make these promises to each other publicly. (Rings are exchanged as a visible sign of this verbal commitment.)</p>	<p>Being united ("one flesh") in God's eyes; becoming a publicly and legally recognized couple.</p>	<p>The couple themselves! (clergy are just the official witnesses)</p>
MATRIMONY	<p>Mark 3:13-19 & par. - Jesus "calls" and "appoints" the 12 apostles; Acts 6:6; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6 - "laying on of hands" as the "ordaining" or commissioning rite of local Christian leaders</p>	<p>A long "Prayer of Consecration"</p>	<p>The bishop lays his hands on the ordinand's head; he also anoints his hands and performs several other symbolic gestures</p>	<p>Becoming a member of the "ordained" clergy, the church's official leadership "orders"</p>	<p>Bishops only</p>
	<p>Biblical Basis</p>	<p>Central Words</p>	<p>Central Actions</p>	<p>Effects</p>	<p>Ministers</p>
HOLY ORDERS					

Chapter 3

Necessity and Nature of Sacraments

Almighty God can and does give grace to men in answer to their internal aspirations and prayers without the use of any external sign or ceremony. This will always be possible, because God, grace, and the soul are spiritual beings. God is not restricted to the use of material, visible symbols in dealing with men; the sacraments are not necessary in the sense that they could not have been dispensed with. But, if it is known that God has appointed external, visible ceremonies as the means by which certain graces are to be conferred on men, then in order to obtain those graces it will be necessary for men to make use of those Divinely appointed means. This truth theologians express by saying that the sacraments are necessary, not absolutely but only hypothetically, i.e., in the supposition that if we wish to obtain a certain supernatural end we must use the supernatural means appointed for obtaining that end. In this sense the Council of Trent (Sess. VII, can. 4) declared heretical those who assert that the sacraments

of the New Law are superfluous and not necessary, although all are not necessary for each individual. It is the teaching of the Catholic Church and of Christians in general that, whilst God was nowise bound to make use of external ceremonies as symbols of things spiritual and sacred, it has pleased Him to do so, and this is the ordinary and most suitable manner of dealing with men. Writers on the sacraments refer to this as the *necessitas convenientiae*, the necessity of suitability. It is not really a necessity, but the most appropriate manner of dealing with creatures that are at the same time spiritual and corporeal. In this assertion all Christians are united: it is only when we come to consider the nature of the sacramental signs that Protestants (except some Anglicans) differ from Catholics. "To sacraments considered merely as outward forms, pictorial representations or symbolic acts, there is generally no objection", wrote Dr. Morgan Dix ("The sacramental system", New York, 1902, p. 16). "Of sacramental doctrine this may be said, that it is co-extensive with historic Christianity. Of this there is no reasonable doubt, as regards the very ancient days, of which St. Chrysostom's treatise on the priesthood and St. Cyril's catechetical lectures may be taken as characteristic documents. Nor was it otherwise with the more conservative of the reformed bodies of the sixteenth century. Martin Luther's Catechism, the Augsburg, and later the Westminster, Confessions are strongly sacramental in their tone, putting to shame the degenerate followers of those who compiled them" (ibid., p. 7, 8)

Why the Sacramental System is most Appropriate

The reasons underlying a sacramental system are as follows: Taking the word "sacrament" in its broadest sense, as the sign of something sacred and hidden (the Greek word is "mystery"), we can say that the whole world is a vast sacramental system, in that material things are unto men the signs of things spiritual and sacred, even of the Divinity. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declare the work of his hands" (Psalm 18:2). The invisible things of him [i.e. God], from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; his eternal power also, and divinity" (Romans 1:20).

The redemption of man was not accomplished in an invisible manner. God renewed, through the Patriarchs and the Prophets, the

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promise of salvation made to the first man; external symbols were used to express faith in the promised Redeemer: “all these things happened to them [the Israelites] in figure” (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 10:1). “So we also, when we were children, were serving under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman” (Galatians 4:3-4). The Incarnation took place because God dealt with men in the manner that was best suited to their nature.

The Church established by the Saviour was to be a visible organization: consequently it should have external ceremonies and symbols of things sacred.

The principal reason for a sacramental system is found in man. It is the nature of man, writes St. Thomas (III:61:1), to be led by things corporeal and sense-perceptible to things spiritual and intelligible; now Divine Providence provides for everything in accordance with its nature (*secundum modum suae conditionis*); therefore it is fitting that Divine Wisdom should provide means of salvation for men in the form of certain corporeal and sensible signs which are called sacraments. (For other reasons see Catech. Conc. Trid., II, n.14.)

Existence of Sacred Symbols

(a) *No sacraments in the state of innocence.* According to St. Thomas (III: 61:2) and theologians generally there were no sacraments before Adam sinned, i.e., in the state of original justice. Man’s dignity was so great that he was raised above the natural condition of human nature. His mind was subject to God; his lower faculties were subject to the higher part of his mind; his body was subject to his soul; it would have been against the dignity of that state had he been dependent, for the acquisition of knowledge or of Divine grace, on anything beneath him, i.e., corporeal things. For this reason the majority of theologians hold that no sacraments would have been instituted even if that state had lasted for a long time.

(b) *Sacraments of the law of nature.* Apart from what was or might have been in that extraordinary state, the use of sacred symbols is universal. St. Augustine says that every religion, true or false, has its visible signs or sacraments. “*In nullum nomen religionis, seu verum seu falsum, coadunari homines possunt, nisi aliquo signaculorum seu sacramentorum visibilibus consortio colligantur*” (*Reply to*

*Faustus*XIX.11). Commentators on the Scriptures and theologians almost unanimously assert that there were sacraments under the law of nature and under the Mosaic Law, as there are sacraments of greater dignity under the Law of Christ. Under the law of nature - so called not to exclude supernatural revelation but because at that time there existed no written supernatural law - salvation was granted through faith in the promised Redeemer, and men expressed that faith by some external signs. What those signs should be God did not determine, leaving this for the people, most probably to the leaders or heads of families, who were guided in their choice by an interior inspiration of the Holy Ghost. This is the conception of St. Thomas, who says that, as under the law of nature (when there was no written law), men were guided by interior inspiration in worshiping God, so also they determined what signs should be used in the external acts of worship (III:60:5, ad 3). Afterwards, however, as it was necessary to give a written law: (a) because the law of nature had been obscured by sin, and (b) because it was time to give a more explicit knowledge of the grace of Christ, then also it became necessary to determine what external signs should be used as sacraments (III:60:5, ad 3; III:61:3, ad 2) This was not necessary immediately after the Fall, by reason of the fullness of faith and knowledge imparted to Adam. But about the time of Abraham, when faith had been weakened, many had fallen into idolatry, and the light of reason had been obscured by indulgence of the passions, even unto the commission of sins against nature, God intervened and appointed as a sign of faith the rite of circumcision (Genesis 17; *Summa Theologiae* III:70:2, ad 1; see CIRCUMCISION).

The vast majority of theologians teach that this ceremony was a sacrament and that it was instituted as a remedy for original sin; consequently that it conferred grace, not indeed of itself (*ex opere operato*), but by reason of the faith in Christ which it expressed. “*In circumcissione conferebatur gratia, non ex virtute circumcissionis, sed ex virtute fidei passionis Christi futurae, cujus signum erat circumcisio - quia scilicet justitia erat ex fide significata, non ex circumcissione significante*” (*Summa Theologiae*III: 70:4). Certainly it was at least a sign of something sacred, and it was appointed and determined by God himself as a sign of faith and as a mark by which the faithful were distinguished from unbelievers. It was not, however,

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the only sign of faith used under the law of nature. It is incredible, writes St. Augustine, that before circumcision there was no sacrament for the relief (justification) of children, although for some good reason the Scriptures do not tell us what that sacrament was (*Against Julian* III.11). The sacrifice of Melchisedech, the sacrifice of the friends of Job, the various tithes and oblations for the service of God are mentioned by St. Thomas (III:61:3, ad 3; III:65:1, ad 7) as external observances which may be considered as the sacred signs of that time, prefiguring future sacred institutions: hence, he adds, they may be called sacraments of the law of nature.

(c) *Sacraments of the Mosaic Law.* As the time for Christ's coming drew nearer, in order that the Israelites might be better instructed God spoke to Moses, revealing to him in detail the sacred signs and ceremonies by which they were to manifest more explicitly their faith in the future Redeemer. Those signs and ceremonies were the sacraments of the Mosaic Law, "which are compared to the sacraments which were before the law as something determined to something undetermined, because before the law it had not been determined what signs men should use" (*Summa Theologiæ* III:61:3, ad 2). With the Angelic Doctor (I-II:102:5) theologians usually divide the sacraments of this period into three classes:

The ceremonies by which men were made and signed as worshippers or ministers of God. Thus we have (a) circumcision, instituted in the time of Abraham (Genesis 17), renewed in the time of Moses (Leviticus 12:3) for all people; and (b) the sacred rites by which the Levitical priests were consecrated.

The ceremonies which consisted in the use of things pertaining to the service of God, i.e. (a) the paschal lamb for all the people, and (b) the loaves of proposition for the ministers.

The ceremonies of purification from legal contamination, i.e. (a) for the people, various expiations, (b) for the priests, the washing of hands and feet, the shaving of the head, etc. St. Augustine says the sacraments of the Old Law were abolished because they had been fulfilled (cf. Matthew 5:17), and others have been instituted which are more efficacious, more useful, easier to administer and to receive, fewer in number ("*virtute majora, utilitate meliora, actu faciliora, numero pauciora*", *Reply to Faustus* XIX.13). The Council of Trent

condemns those who say that there is no difference except in the outward rite between the sacraments of the Old Law and those of the New Law (Sess. VII, can. ii). The Decree for the Armenians, published by order of the Council of Florence, says that the sacraments of the Old Law did not confer grace, but only prefigured the grace which was to be given by the Passion of Christ. This means that they did not give grace themselves (i.e. *ex opere operato*) but only by reason of the faith in Christ which they represented - "*ex fide significata, non ex circumcissione significante*" (*Summa Theologiae* I-II: 102:5)

Effects of the Sacraments

Catholic Doctrine

(a) The principal effect of the sacrament is a two-fold grace: (1) the grace of the sacrament which is "first grace", produced by the sacraments of the dead, or "second grace", produced by the sacraments of the living (supra, IV, 3, b); (2) The sacramental grace, i.e., the special grace needed to attain the end of each sacrament. Most probably it is not a new habitual gift, but a special vigour or efficacy in the sanctifying grace conferred, including on the part of God, a promise, and on the part of man a permanent right to the assistance needed in order to act in accordance with the obligations incurred, e.g., to live as a good Christian, a good priest, a good husband or wife (cf. *Summa Theologiae* III:62:2).

(b) Three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and Orders, besides grace, produce in the soul a character, i.e., an indelible spiritual mark by which some are consecrated as servants of God, some as soldiers, some as ministers. Since it is an indelible mark, the sacraments which impress a character cannot be received more than once.

How the Sacraments cause grace: Theological Controversies

Few questions have been so hotly controverted as this one relative to the manner in which the sacraments cause grace (ST IV, Sent., d.1, Q.4, a.1.).

(a) All admit that the sacraments of the New Law cause grace *ex opere operato*, *notex opere operantis* (above, II, 2, 3).

(b) All admit that God alone can be the principal cause of grace (above 3, 1).

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(c) All admit that Christ as man, had a special power over the sacraments (above, 3, 2).

(d) All admit that the sacraments are, in some sense, the instrumental causes either of grace itself or of something else which will be a “title exigent of grace” (*infra e*). The principal cause is one which produces an effect by a power which it has by reason of its own nature or by an inherent faculty. An instrumental cause produces an effect, not by its own power, but by a power which it receives from the principal agent. When a carpenter makes a table, he is the principal cause, his tools are the instrumental causes. God alone can cause grace as the principal cause; sacraments can be no more than his instruments “for they are applied to men by Divine ordinance to cause grace in them” (*Summa Theologiæ* III:62:1). No theologian today defends Occasionalism i.e. the system which taught that the sacraments caused grace by a kind of concomitance, they being not real causes but the *causae sine quibus non*: their reception being merely the occasion of conferring grace. This opinion, according to Pourrat (op. cit., 167), was defended by St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Durandus, Occam, and all the Nominalists, and “enjoyed a real success until the time of the Council of Trent, when it was transformed into the modern system of moral causality”. St. Thomas (III: 62:1, III: 62:4; and “*Quodlibeta*”, 12, a, 14), and others rejected it on the ground that it reduced the sacraments to the condition of mere signs.

(e) In solving the problem the next step was the introduction of the system of dispositive instrumental causality, explained by Alexander of Hales (*Summa theol.*, IV, Q. v, membr. 4), adopted and perfected by St. Thomas (IV Sent., d. 1, Q. i, a. 4), defended by many theologians down to the sixteenth century, and revived later by Father Billot, S.J. (“*De eccl. sacram.*”, I, Rome, 1900). According to this theory the sacraments do not efficiently and immediately cause grace itself, but they cause *ex opere operato* and instrumentally, a something else - the character (in some cases) or a spiritual ornament or form - which will be a “disposition” entitling the soul to grace (“*dispositio exigitiva gratiæ*”; “*titulus exigitivus gratiæ*”, Billot, loc. cit.). It must be admitted that this theory would be most convenient in explaining “reviviscence” of the sacraments (*infra*, VII, c). Against it the following objections are made:

From the time of the Council of Trent down to recent times little was heard of this system.

The “ornament”, or “disposition”, entitling the soul to grace is not well explained, hence explains very little.

Since this “disposition” must be something spiritual and of the supernatural order, and the sacraments can cause it, why can they not cause the grace itself?

In his “Summa theologica” St. Thomas does not mention this dispositive causality: hence we may reasonably believe that he abandoned it.

(f) Since the time of the Council of Trent theologians almost unanimously have taught that the sacraments are the efficient instrumental cause of grace itself. The definition of the Council of Trent, that the sacraments “contain the grace which they signify”, that they “*confer grace ex opere operato*” (Sess. VII, can.6, 8), seemed to justify the assertion, which was not contested until quite recently. Yet the end of the controversy had not come. What was the nature of that causality? Did it belong to the physical or to the moral order? A physical cause really and immediately produces its effects, either as the principal agent or as the instrument used, as when a sculptor uses a chisel to carve a statue. A moral cause is one which moves or entreats a physical cause to act. It also can be principal or instrumental, e.g., a bishop who in person successfully pleads for the liberation of a prisoner is the principal moral cause, a letter sent by him would be the instrumental moral cause, of the freedom granted. The expressions used by St. Thomas seem clearly to indicate that the sacraments act after the manner of physical causes. He says that there is in the sacraments a virtue productive of grace (III:62:4) and he answers objections against attributing such power to a corporeal instrument by simply stating that such power is not inherent in them and does not reside in them permanently, but is in them only so far and so long as they are instruments in the hands of Almighty God (loc. cit., ad um and 3 um). Cajetan, Francisco Suárez, and a host of other great theologians defend this system, which is usually termed Thomistic. The language of the Scripture, the expressions of the Fathers, the Decrees of the councils, they say, are so strong that nothing short of an impossibility will justify a denial of this dignity to the sacraments of the New Law. Many facts must be admitted which we cannot fully explain. The body of man acts on his spiritual soul; fire acts, in some way, on souls and on angels. The strings of a harp,

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remarks Cajetan (In III, Q. lxii) touched by an unskilled hand, produce nothing but sounds: touched by the hands of a skilful musician they give forth beautiful melodies. Why cannot the sacraments, as instruments in the hands of God, produce grace?

Many grave theologians were not convinced by these arguments, and another school, improperly called the Scotistic, headed by Melchior Cano, De Lugo, and Vasquez, embracing later Henno, Tournély, Franzelin, and others, adopted the system of instrumental moral causality. The principal moral cause of grace is the Passion of Christ. The sacraments are instruments which move or entreat God effectively and infallibly to give his grace to those who receive them with proper dispositions, because, says Melchior Cano, “the price of the blood of Jesus Christ is communicated to them” (see Pourrat, *op. cit.*, 192, 193). This system was further developed by Franzelin, who looks upon the sacraments as being morally an act of Christ (*loc. cit.*, p. 194). The Thomists and Francisco Suárez object to this system:

Since the sacraments (i.e. the external rites) have no intrinsic value, they do not, according to this explanation, exert any genuine causality; they do not really cause grace, God alone causes the grace: the sacrament do not operate to produce it; they are only signs or occasions of conferring it.

The Fathers saw something mysterious and inexplicable in the sacraments. In this system wonders cease or are, at least, so much reduced that the expressions used by the Fathers seem altogether out of place.

This theory does not sufficiently distinguish, in efficacy, the sacraments of the Gospel from the sacraments of the Old Law. Nevertheless, because it avoids certain difficulties and obscurities of the physical causality theory, the system of moral causality has found many defenders, and today if we consider numbers alone, it has authority in its favour.

Recently both of these systems have been vigorously attacked by Father Billot (*op. cit.*, 107 sq.), who proposes a new explanation. He revives the old theory that the sacraments do not immediately cause grace itself, but a disposition or title to grace (above e). This disposition is produced by the sacraments, neither physically nor morally, but imperatively. Sacraments are practical signs of an

intentional order: they manifest God's intention to give spiritual benefits; this manifestation of the Divine intention is a title exigent of grace (op. cit., 59 sq., 123 sq.; Pourrat, op. cit., 194; Cronin in reviews, *sup. cit.*). Father Billot defends his opinions with remarkable acumen. Patrons of the physical causality gratefully note his attack against the moral causality, but object to the new explanation, that the imperative or the intentional causality, as distinct from the action of signs, occasions, moral or physical instruments (a) is conceived with difficulty and (b) does not make the sacraments (i.e. the external, Divinely appointed ceremonies) the real cause of grace. Theologians are perfectly free to dispute and differ as to the manner of instrumental causality. *Lis est adhuc sub iudice.*

Minister of the Sacraments

Men, not Angels

It was altogether fitting that the ministration of the sacraments be given, not to the angels, but to men. The efficacy of the sacraments comes from the Passion of Christ, hence from Christ as a man; men, not angels, are like unto Christ in His human nature. Miraculously God might send a good angel to administer a sacrament (*Summa Theologiæ* III:64:7).

Ordination Requirements for the Ministers of Particular Sacraments

For administering Baptism validly no special ordination is required. Anyone, even apagan, can baptize, provided that he use the proper matter and pronounce the words of the essential form, with the intention of doing what the Church does (Decr. pro Armen., Denzinger-Bannwart, 696). Only bishops, priests, and in some cases, deacons may confer Baptism solemnly (see BAPTISM). It is now held as certain that in Matrimony the contracting parties are the ministers of the sacrament, because they make the contract and the sacrament is a contract raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical "Arcanum", 10 Febr., 1880; see MATRIMONY). For the validity of the other five sacraments the minister must be duly ordained. The Council of Trent anathematized those who said that all Christians could administer all the sacraments (Sess. VII, can.10). Only bishops can confer Sacred Orders (Council of Trent, sess. XXIII, can.7). Ordinarily only a bishop can give Confirmation (see CONFIRMATION). The priestly

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Order is required for the valid administration of Penance and Extreme Unction (Conc. Trid., sess. XIV, can.10, can.4). As to the Eucharist, those only who have priestly Orders can consecrate, i.e. change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Consecration presupposed, anyone can distribute the Eucharistic species but, outside of very extraordinary circumstances this can be lawfully done only by bishops, priests, or (in some cases) deacons.

Heretical or Schismatic Ministers

The care of all those sacred rites has been given to the Church of Christ. Heretical or schismatical ministers can administer the sacraments validly if they have valid Orders, but their ministrations are sinful (see Billot, *op. cit.*, thesis 16). Good faith would excuse the recipients from sin, and in cases of necessity the Church grants jurisdiction necessary for Penance and Extreme Unction (see EXCOMMUNICATION: V, *Effects of Excommunication*).

State of soul of the minister

Due reverence for the sacraments requires the minister to be in a state of grace: one who solemnly and officially administers a sacrament, being himself in a state of mortal sin, would certainly be guilty of a sacrilege (cf. *Summa Theologiae* III.64.6). Some hold that this sacrilege is committed even when the minister does not act officially or confer the sacrament solemnly. But from the controversy between St. Augustine and the Donatists in the fourth century and especially from the controversy between St. Stephen and St. Cyprian in the third century, we know that personal holiness or the state of grace in the minister is not a prerequisite for the valid administration of the sacrament. This has been solemnly defined in several general councils including the Council of Trent (Sess VII, can.12, *ibid.*, de bapt., can. 4). The reason is that the sacraments have their efficacy by Divine institution and through the merits of Christ. Unworthy ministers, validly conferring the sacraments, cannot impede the efficacy of signs ordained by Christ to produce grace *ex opere operato* (cf. St. Thomas, III:64:5, III:64:9). The knowledge of this truth, which follows logically from the true conception of a sacrament, gives comfort to the faithful, and it should increase, rather than diminish, reverence for those sacred rites and confidence in their efficacy. No one can give, in his own name, that

which he does not possess; but a bank cashier, not possessing 2000 dollars in his own name, could write a draft worth 2,000,000 dollars by reason of the wealth of the bank which he is authorized to represent. Christ left to His Church a vast treasure purchased by His merits and sufferings: the sacraments are as credentials entitling their holders to a share in this treasure. On this subject, the Anglican Church has retained the true doctrine, which is neatly proved in article XXVI of the Westminster Confession: “Although in the visible church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil hath the chief authority in the ministration of the Word and Sacraments, yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ’s, and do minister by His commission and authority, we may use their ministry both in hearing the Word of God and in receiving the Sacraments. Neither is the effect of Christ’s ordinance taken away by their wickedness nor the grace of God’s gifts from such as by faith, and rightly, do receive the sacraments ministered unto them; which be effectual, because of Christ’s institution and promise, although they be administered by evil men” (cf. Billuart, *de sacram.*, d. 5, a. 3, sol. obj.)

Intention of the Minister

(a) To be a minister of the sacraments under and with Christ, a man must act as a man, i.e. as a rational being; hence it is absolutely necessary that he have the intention of doing what the Church does. This was declared by Eugene IV in 1439 (Denzinger- Bannwart, 695) and was solemnly defined in the Council of Trent (Sess.VII, can.II). The anathema of Trent was aimed at the innovators of the sixteenth century. From their fundamental error that the sacraments were signs of faith, or signs that excited faith, it followed logically that their effect in no wise depended on the intention of the minister. Men are to be “ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1), and this they would not be without the intention, for it is by the intention, says St. Thomas (III:64:8, ad 1) that a man subjects and unites himself to the principal agent (Christ). Moreover, by rationally pronouncing the words of the form, the minister must determine what is not sufficiently determined or expressed by the matter applied, e.g. the significance of pouring water on the head of the child (*Summa Theologiae* III.64.8). One who is demented, drunk, asleep, or in a stupor that prevents a rational act, one who

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goes through the external ceremony in mockery, mimicry, or in a play, does not act as a rational minister, hence cannot administer a sacrament.

(b) The necessary object and qualities of the intention required in the minister of the sacrament are explained in the article INTENTION. Pourrat (op. cit., ch. 7) gives a history of all controversies on this subject. Whatever may be said speculatively about the opinion of Ambrosius Catherinus who advocated the sufficiency of an external intention in the minister, it may not be followed in practice, because, outside of cases of necessity, no one may follow a probable opinion against one that is safer, when there is question of something required for the validity of a sacrament (Innocent XI, 1679; Denzinger-Bannwart, 1151).

Attention in the Minister

Attention is an act of the intellect, viz. the application of the mind to what is being done. Voluntary distraction in one administering a sacrament would be sinful. The sin would however not be grave, unless (a) there be danger of making a serious mistake, or (b) according to the common opinion, the distraction be admitted in consecrating the Eucharistic species. Attention on the part of the minister is not necessary for the valid administration of a sacrament, because in virtue of the intention, which is presupposed, he can act in a rational manner, notwithstanding the distraction.

Recipient of the Sacraments

When all conditions required by Divine and ecclesiastical law are complied with, the sacrament is received validly and licitly. If all conditions required for the essential rite are observed, on the part of the minister, the recipient, the matter and form, but some non-essential condition is not complied with by the recipient, the sacrament is received validly but not licitly; and if the condition willfully neglected be grave, grace is not then conferred by the ceremony. Thus baptized persons contracting Matrimony whilst they are in the state of mortal sin would be validly (i.e. really) married, but would not then receive sanctifying grace.

Conditions for Valid Reception

(a) The previous reception of Baptism (by water) is an essential condition for the valid reception of any other sacrament. Only citizens

and members of the Church can come under her influence as such; Baptism is the door by which we enter the Church and thereby become members of a mystical body united to Christ our head (Catech. Trid., de bapt., nn. 5, 52).

(b) In adults, for the valid reception of any sacrament except the Eucharist, it is necessary that they have the intention of receiving it. The sacraments impose obligations and confer grace: Christ does not wish to impose those obligations or confer grace without the consent of man. The Eucharist is excepted because, in whatever state the recipient may be, it is always the body and blood of Christ (see INTENTION; cf. Pourrat, op. cit., 392).

(c) For attention, see above, VI, 6. By the intention man submits himself to the operation of the sacraments which produce their effects *ex opere operato*, hence attention is not necessary for the valid reception of the sacraments. One who might be distracted, even voluntarily, during the conferring, e.g. of Baptism, would receive the sacrament validly. It must be carefully noted, however, that in the case of Matrimony the contracting parties are the ministers as well as the recipients of the sacraments; and in the sacrament of Penance, the acts of the penitent, contrition, confession, and willingness to accept a Penance in satisfaction, constitute the proximate matter of the sacraments, according to the commonly received opinion. Hence in those cases such attention is required as is necessary for the valid application of the matter and form.

Conditions for the Licit Reception

(a) For the licit reception, besides the intention and the attention, in adults there is required:

For the sacraments of the dead, supernatural attrition, which presupposes acts of faith, hope, and repentance;

for the sacraments of the living the state of grace. Knowingly to receive a sacrament of the living whilst one is in the state of mortal sin would be a sacrilege.

(b) For the licit reception it is also necessary to observe all that is prescribed by Divine or ecclesiastical law, e.g. as to time, place, the minister, etc. As the Church alone has the care of the sacraments and generally her duly appointed agents alone have the right to

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administer them, except Baptism in some cases, and Matrimony (supra VI, 2), it is a general law that application for the sacraments should be made to worthy and duly appointed ministers.

Reviviscence of the Sacraments

Much attention has been given by theologians to the revival of effects which were impeded at the time when a sacrament was received. The question arises whenever a sacrament is received validly but unworthily, i.e. with an obstacle which prevents the infusion of Divine grace. The obstacle (mortal sin) is positive, when it is known and voluntary, or negative, when it is involuntary by reason of ignorance or good faith. One who thus receives a sacrament is said to receive it feignedly, or falsely (*ficte*), because by the very act of receiving it he pretends to be properly disposed; and the sacrament is said to be *validum sed informe* - valid, but lacking its proper form, i.e. grace or charity (see LOVE). Can such a person recover or receive the effects of the sacraments? The term reviviscence (*reviviscentia*) is not used by St. Thomas in reference to the sacraments and it is not strictly correct because the effects in question being impeded by the obstacle, were not once "living" (cf. Billot, op. cit., 98, note). The expression which he uses (III: 69:10), viz., obtaining the effects after the obstacle has been removed, is more accurate, though not so convenient as the newer term.

(a) Theologians generally hold that the question does not apply to Penance and the Holy Eucharist. If the penitent be not sufficiently disposed to receive grace at the time he confesses his sins the sacrament is not validly received because the acts of the penitent are a necessary part of the matter of this sacrament, or a necessary condition for its reception. One who unworthily receives the Eucharist can derive no benefit from that sacrament unless, perhaps, he repents of his sins and sacrilege before the sacred species have been destroyed. Cases that may occur relate to the five other sacraments.

(b) It is certain and admitted by all, that if Baptism be received by an adult who is in the state of mortal sin, he can afterwards receive the graces of the sacrament, viz. when the obstacle is removed by contrition or by the sacrament of Penance. On the one hand the sacraments always produce grace unless there be an obstacle;

on the other hand those graces are necessary, and yet the sacrament cannot be repeated. St. Thomas (III: 69:10) and theologians find a special reason for the conferring of the effects of Baptism (when the “fiction” has been removed) in the permanent character which is impressed by the sacrament validly administered. Reasoning from analogy they hold the same with regard to Confirmation and Holy Orders, noting however that the graces to be received are not so necessary as those conferred by Baptism.

(c) The doctrine is not so certain when applied to Matrimony and Extreme Unction. But since the graces impeded are very important though not strictly necessary, and since Matrimony cannot be received again whilst both contracting parties are living, and Extreme Unction cannot be repeated whilst the same danger of death lasts, theologians adopt as more probable the opinion which holds that God will grant the graces of those sacraments when the obstacle is removed. The “reviviscence” of the effects of sacraments received validly but with an obstacle to grace at the time of their reception, is urged as a strong argument against the system of the physical causality of grace (*supra*, V, 2), especially by Billot (*op. cit.*, thesis, VII, 116, 126). For his own system he claims the merit of establishing an invariable mode of causality, namely, that in every case by the sacrament validly received there is conferred a “title exigent of grace”. If there be no obstacle the grace is conferred then and there: if there be an obstacle the “title” remains calling for the grace which will be conferred as soon as the obstacle is removed (*op. cit.*, th. VI, VII). To this his opponents reply that exceptional cases might well call for an exceptional mode of causality. In the case of three sacraments the character sufficiently explains the revival of effects (cf. ST III: 66:1, III:69:9, III:69:10). The doctrine as applied to Extreme Unction and Matrimony is not certain enough to furnish a strong argument for or against any system. Future efforts of theologians may dispel the obscurity and uncertainty now prevailing in this interesting chapter.

Chapter 4

Sacraments as Mysteries

The word “Mystery” (Sacrament) means a hidden and silent Truth, which is revealed through Divine Revelation. This term was introduced into Theological and Liturgical terminology signifying those God-instituted Rites, which comprise the visible aspects of Divine Grace, not merely symbolizing it but invisibly and with Supernatural Creative Action transmitting it. Having been instituted by Christ Himself, they have value and Power, being the active means of Divine Grace whereby the old nature corrupted by sin is removed from those who are worthy. They raise the New Creation in Christ by transmitting the Newness of Life in Christ. Thus the Holy Mysteries have invisible Supernatural Powers that inscribe the inexhaustible saving results in the inner man, Regenerating and causing all those who faithfully, sincerely and honestly approach and participate in them to progress in the New Life.

1. The Meaning of the Term “Mystery”

The first meaning of the term “Mystery” is derived from the Greek verb (meaning “...to close the eyes or the mouth as instruments of transmitting or seeing the hidden things...”) according to which it is “a hidden and Mystic Thing.” During the Roman period the term signified the Militant Oath that soldiers vowed at their Enlistment in the Roman Army and which was generally referred to as the “*Sacramentum*.” In Roman law the term “*Sacramentum*” means the Covenant that was placed in the temples by those who disputed it.

In Holy Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments, the term is used 45 times. It means the secret Will of God that is related to the Salvation of mankind “...according to the Revelation of the Mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest by the Prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the Commandment of the Everlasting God.” In other cases it refers to a hidden and symbolic institution, such as that of Marriage symbolizing the Union of Christ with the Church or some kind of narration, such as in the case of King Nabuchodonosor or a certain symbolic name, such as the Mystery of the Seven Stars mentioned in the Book of Revelation, or even the Mystery of the name of the great city of Babylon. In any case, nowhere in Holy Scripture is the term “Mystery” used, meaning a Sacred Rite by means of which Supernatural Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit is transmitted through Material symbols.

Even up to 4th century Christian writings, the term preserved its classical meaning, signifying something secret, hidden and Sacred. St Ignatius of Antioch proclaimed that the Death of our Lord Jesus Christ is “the Mystery” of our Salvation because “...through Him and His Death (which some deny), the Mystery through which we came to believe, and because of which we patiently endure, we might be found to be Disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Teacher.” Also in his letter to the Ephesians he wrote: “...now the Virginity of Mary and her giving Birth were hidden from the ruler of this age, as was also the Death of the Lord - three Mysteries to be loudly proclaimed, yet which were accomplished in the Silence of God.”

Tertullian also used the term generally, referring to Christian Teaching as a “Mystery,” especially the Teaching concerning the Holy Trinity as well as the whole Christian Faith and the entire Work of

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Salvation. (“*Sacramentun Oikonomia*”) Furthermore he spoke of Holy Baptism and Eucharist as Mysteries, commenting that “...the body is Washed in order to Clean the soul; the body is Anointed in order to Sanctify the soul; the body is Sealed in order to Strengthen the soul; the body is covered by the laying on of the hands in order to Enlighten the soul by the Holy Spirit; the body eats the Flesh and Blood of Christ, in order that the soul would be fed by God.”

St. Cyprian used the term “Mystery” (“*Sacramentum*”) in a general meaning, to manifest the different institutions of Christianity, especially those of Baptism, Chrismation, Divine Eucharist, Repentance-Confession and Ordination.

2. The External and Internal Aspect of Mysteries Although the Mystery has an external and perceptible aspect, simultaneously it includes an internal and Supernatural Reality, which is not conceivable or understandable to our physical senses as only through Faith is it accepted. The Mystery is the visible Sign of the invisible Grace of God, which is outpoured upon the Faithful having been instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ whereby each Faithful receives Divine Grace. It consists of the natural and the Supernatural. It is the material symbol that upholds the immaterial Grace of God, which works towards the Salvation of man. Holy Mystery is not restricted to special Ceremonies alone but extends to all Divine Truths of Christian Faith.

St. John Chrysostom explained that Divine Mystery is those things that are normally unseen but which, through Faith “...we see differently and we believe differently. This is our Faith about the Mysteries.” And concerning the Truths of Faith, he observed, “...I hear that Christ was crucified and I admire the Philanthropia; the unbeliever hears and he thinks about the weakness. I hear that He became a servant and I admire the Dominion. He (the unfaithful) hears and thinks about the dishonour. I hear that He died and I am astonished, that He came under Death and was not held but dissolved Death; he (the unfaithful) hears and suspects weakness. Differently are I and the unbeliever disposed about these.” Particularly with regard to Sacred Rites that are the ways of the Grace, St John Chrysostom noted that “...the unbeliever hears of the Bath (Baptism) and he thinks simply of water; I do not see only what is seen but the Cleanliness of the soul through the Holy Spirit. He (the unbeliever) thinks only of the bath of the

body; I believe that the soul becomes clean and holy ... For I do not judge the events only by their appearance but through the eyes of the mind.”

St. Augustine in a similar manner expressed his opinion by referring to the Mysteries as “*Sacramentalia*.” He distinguished the internal aspect of the Mysteries from their external aspect, observing that the Mystery itself is different to that of the Power of the Mystery. Thus the Bread and the Cup of Divine Eucharist are called Mysteries because in them we see other aspects that are contemplated at the time, the Fruit of which is spiritual. Similarly concerning the Water of Baptism, which is visible. It washes away the contamination of sin from the body and this Bath signifies whatever is acting within the soul. Consequently, the external event is different to that of the context of the Mysteries. Some aspects are seen while others are thought. Whatever is seen has a physical aspect whereas whatever is thought bears special Fruit.

This combination of sensual and material with invisible and spiritual aspects within the Mysteries correspond completely to the fact that man consists of both matter and spirit. And as he consists of two elements, body and soul, he receives double Purification: the spiritual through the invisible aspects and the physical through the body. God wanted to grant His Grace not only invisibly - although this was not impossible for Him to do because for anything He Wills He does – but through some visible Signs as well, thereby assuring His Promises to His Elect. Because mankind consists of two elements, God granted two methods of transmitting His Divine Grace - through matter and through the Holy Spirit.

St Gregory of Nyssa observed that in Baptism “... sensible Water is offered to the body...” whereas “...upon the soul the invisible Spirit is called to descend in an indescribable manner...” “...and the Water cleans the body, whereas the Spirit Seals the soul in order that, through the sprinkling of the heart and the Bathing of the body, we approach God.” Similarly at the Anointing “...the visible myrrh Anoints the body, whereas the Holy and Life-giving Spirit Sanctifies the soul.”

3. Holy Mysteries as Symbols and Bestowers of Divine Grace Thus the Mysteries are Signs and Ways, Symbols and Bestowers of Divine Grace. In these spiritual and Supernatural nature rule over the

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perceptible and material. The Mysteries are perceptible Signs that symbolize the invisible Divine Grace, which is transmitted to the Faithful and which stimulate their Faith assuring the Truthfulness of Divine Promises. Hence the "...Bath through Water..." can be characterized as being symbolic "... of the Washing of the soul, which cleans every stain of evil." Furthermore, in Baptism we symbolically "... insinuate the three day Burial of Christ..." and being Baptized "...we do not die in reality, nor we are buried, nor we are really raised having been crucified, but the imitation is in image." It can be said of the transmission of the Body and Blood of our Lord in the Divine Eucharist that "...in the type of the bread the Body is offered to you and in the type of the wine is the Blood of Christ is given to you..." "...in order that in the different elements you partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, becoming of the same Body and the same Blood with Him."

Considering that the elements that are used in the Holy Mysteries remain unchanged in their nature, even after the Blessing and Perfection of Divine Mystery, we must not be surprised when the bread used in the Divine Eucharist is referred to, especially before its Consecration, as the "...Image of the Body of the Only Begotten..." and be assured that indeed "...this Bread is the Image of the Holy Body..." or that the elements used for the Consecration are called "...antitypes of the Body and Blood of Christ." However, even after the Consecration we hear some Holy Fathers stating that "...we are Commanded to eat not bread and wine but the antitype of the Body and Blood of Christ..." and they generally speak of "...antitypes of the precious Body and Blood."

The Mysteries are real ways, active bestowers and channels of Divine Grace, through which and by which it is transmitted to those who partake of it. They are the Mysterious Energies and Actions of God within the Church for the Salvation of the world.

St. John Chrysostom proclaimed that "...Christ did not deliver us anything material but through material things, He gave us the spiritual." Referring specifically to Holy Baptism he observed that "...through perceptible thing the Gift is offered, but the content is spiritual, the Birth and the Rebirth, in other words the Regeneration." Emphasizing the necessity by which the spiritual was combined with the perceptible, he added "...if you were bodiless, they would have been delivered to

you naked; but, because the soul is engaged with the body, the spiritual are delivered to you through perceptible things.”

The previously mentioned Holy Fathers used the terms “type” and “antitype” to clarify their opinions and exalt, especially the internal aspect and Supernatural Attributes of the Holy Mysteries. Thus, St Cyril of Jerusalem, concerning the bread and wine used in Divine Eucharist, stressed that it is prohibited for anyone to comment on the flavour or quality of the bread and wine because they “...are the Body and Blood of Christ according to the Despotic Decision...” by which we become of “...the same Body and the same Blood...” of Christ. We should never judge by “... the taste ...” but the Faith must inform us “...without any hesitation...” that we are deeply honoured to received “...the Body and Blood of Christ.” In addition, he literally and clearly proclaimed that the Water of Holy Baptism, “...the simple water, receives the Power of Sanctification by the Invocation of the Holy Spirit and Christ.” Therefore he urged all who would be Baptized to be careful “...when they descend into the Water...” not to pay attention “...to the simple water but to the Action of the Holy Spirit...” from which they receive their Salvation, “...for without both it is impossible to be Perfected.” With regard to the Anointing of Holy Chrismation, he observed that “...as the Bread of Eucharist after the Invocation of the Holy Spirit is no longer simply bread but the Body of Christ...” “...likewise the Holy Myrrh is not simply myrrh, neither should anyone consider it as something common with invocation, but a Charisma of Christ...” that through the Presence “...of the Holy Spirit becomes energetic.”

St Serapion speaking of the “...likeness of the Body of the only Begotten...” during the consecration at the time of the invocation, requested “...the bread to become the Body of the Word...” and “...the cup the Blood of the Truth...”, so that “...all those who have communion to receive the medicine of life.”

St. Gregory of Nyssa concerning the changes that take place in the Holy Mysteries and the rest of the ecclesiastic ceremonies through the Action of the Holy Spirit observed that in Baptism “...the water does not grant the benefit, but the command of God and the invocation of the Spirit.” “For this reason do not disregard the Divine bath, neither consider it as something common because of the use of the water.”

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Referring to the rest of the Holy Mysteries he stressed that “the Bread” of the Eucharist before it is sanctified “is previously common bread, but when he celebrates this Mystery it is said to have become the Body of Christ.” The same refers for the “Mystical Oil” and for “the wine.” “Being small in value before the blessing, after the sanctification by the Spirit each one acts invisibly.” He emphasized the same regarding Ordination. The “...one who was yesterday alone becomes leader of many, president, teacher of piety, celebrant of Mysteries...” “...according to the appearance he exists as he was...” but “...through some kind of invisible power and Grace his soul is transfigured to the better.”

4. The internal side of the Holy Mysteries. The Roman Catholics distinguished the external side of the Mysteries into two parts, that of “matter” and “form”. These terms were unknown in the ancient and united Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church regards these scholastic terms as unnecessary and prefers to uphold the terms “visible” or “external” or “natural”. The Mysteries include spiritual acts and conditions, as well as essential words of consecration that instituted the Mysteries.

Concerning the internal and invisible side of the Mystery it must be noted, that all the Holy Mysteries offer to those who partake of them the sanctifying Grace of the Holy Spirit, which either regenerates them and strengthens them in the new life in Christ (Baptism, Chrismation), either nourishes and gives life to them through their union with Christ (Divine Eucharist), either offers to them the healing of the wounds of their souls and bodies (Repentance, Unction), either making them capable and strengthening them to serve in the various diakonia of the Church (Priesthood), or exalting and sanctifying their union in life (Marriage). According to Androutsos, the Mysteries “...are not of the same value, neither of equal necessity.” Thus “...the Eucharist surpasses all the rest and in value and according to its benefits, and together with Baptism is the main of the Mysteries.”

Mogilas spoke of the Eucharist that “...this Mystery surpasses all the others and benefits more than the others to our salvation.” Kritopoulos characterized the three Mysteries, Baptism, Eucharist and Repentance that they are “...in type of the Holy Trinity.” He distinguished these from the other four which are “...mystical ceremonies, which are called by the Church Mysteries, because they

incorporate some kind of mystical and spiritual Grace.” The Holy Mysteries have their Supernatural Attributes not because of the worthiness of those who officiate them or of those who partake of them. Their holiness and truth derives from Christ who instituted them. Receiving their Supernatural Attribute from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they have the Divine Grace that characterizes or symbolizes each one separately and transmits Divine Grace to those who do not resist or oppose to them.

When we say, that the Holy Mysteries contain Divine Grace, we do not mean that this Divine Grace is contained within them as the water in a container but rather that they are contained within them in power as the result of their cause. Except the Holy Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, in which the change of the used elements – bread and wine- takes place in reality. The Mysteries are instruments which transmit the Divine Grace of God to those who partake of them, as this is manifested by Holy Scriptures by the use of the terms “of” and “through”. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, taught us saying: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” St Paul emphasised “... not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” and he added “...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.” Elsewhere it is assured “...that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given...” to those who were Baptised and transmit “...the gift of God...” – the charisma of the Diakonia - to St Timothy “...through the laying on of, the hands...” of St Paul. The Mysteries are the instruments and channels through which the Divine Grace of God is granted and transmitted to the faithful. St. John Chrysostom concerning Baptism observed that in Baptism “...the water becomes the childbirth to him who is being born. As the womb is to the embryo, likewise the water to the faithful; for in the water he is fashioned and formed.”

St. Cyril of Alexandria spoke of the water in Baptism that “...as the water which is poured into the boiler through the flames of the fire reveals its power, likewise through the energy of the Spirit the perceptible water is changed to some kind of Divine and unspeakable power, and sanctifies those who enter in it.”

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St. Cyril of Jerusalem assured that the Myrrh of Holy Chrismation "...as the bread of the Eucharist after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, it is not anymore simply bread, but the body of Christ, likewise and this holy myrrh is not anymore simple, neither should anyone say that it is something common with invocation; but that it is Christ's gift, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, who becomes active." In relation to the way of the dwelling and transmission of the Divine Grace in the Divine Mysteries one must never forget the image, which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ used concerning the action of the Holy Spirit saying: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." In other words "...as the wind cannot be seen, although it gives a sound..." likewise and "...even more the action of the Spirit cannot fall under the laws of nature, nor to the rules of bodily birth, nor to any of such things."

Consequently, the ways by which the Divine Grace is transmitted within the Divine Mysteries remains inconceivable, unspoken and always a mysterious Mystery to all intellectual.

God Himself Acts in the Holy Mysteries transmitting His Divine Grace bringing an essential change to the receiving soul. The power and result of the Mystery derives not from any human factor but from its Divine Institution and Power. The Holy Mysteries have their perfection not in their use but even before their use. Neither are they perfected because of the faith of the faithful. To receive the Gifts of the Holy Mysteries it is required to have faith as an indispensable pre-requirement but neither the faith, the good will nor the devotion of the partaker is the cause of the Gift and Grace of God within the Mystery. The Mystery has within it and from it the Supernatural Power and Grace to Act either way for the Salvation of those who with faith and piety receive it or for the condemnation of those who with ungodliness approach it.

This validity and effectiveness of the Holy Mysteries is proclaimed by the Orthodox Church, according to the ancient practice of offering these even to infants who enjoy the same Gifts and Charismata regardless of their understanding and faith as they do not resist or oppose the Grace. So, the Grace of God is offered not because of the

work of the Celebrant or of the one who partakes of it ('ex opera operantis'), but from its own Energy, from the Power within it ('ex opera operato'), through the exact work of the Mystery itself as the instrument of Divine Grace. It is true that these terms used by the Scholastics remained unknown to the Orthodox Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church to such extent that some Orthodox Theologians rejected this teaching.

5. The Indelible Character of Divine Grace With regard to the effectiveness of the Divine Mysteries and their results upon those who partake of them, the belief of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the indelible character of the three main Mysteries of Baptism, Chrismation and Priesthood, is that they cannot be repeated. However, the term "character indelebilis" ("indelible character") is not found in the writings of the Greek Fathers and is considered to have no foundation in either Holy Scripture or in Holy Tradition and therefore they are considered only as theological terms. The Greek Fathers do not use the term "character" but speak of Baptism as the "Holy Seal indelible" and "Mystical Seal" through which the one who is Baptized becomes known to the Master and is numbered amongst "...the holy and logic flock of Christ..." and "...is sealed with the Seal made without hands..." and "...Seal unbreakable."

Clement the Alexandrian used the example of the image and seal on coins, as well as the seal which is branded upon animals displaying "the owner" and from this analogy he declared that "... the faithful soul, which has received the Seal, carries the stigmata of Christ." The Shepherd of Hermas mentions "the Seal" which when one "receives" it, "he lays aside his deadness and receives life." "It was necessary, he said, for them to come up through water in order to be made alive, for otherwise they could not enter the Kingdom of God, unless they laid aside the deadness of their former life. So even those who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and entered the Kingdom of God. For before a man, he said, bears the Name of the Son of God, he is dead, but when he receives the seal, he lays aside his deadness and receives life. The seal, therefore, is the water; so they go down into the water dead and they come up alive. Thus this seal was proclaimed to them as well, and they made use of it in

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order that they might enter the Kingdom of God.” In the Apocrypha “Acts of Paul and Thecla,” St Paul speaks to St Thecla about future temptations and she responded by asking to be given “the Seal” so that the tempters would not touch her. St. Paul advised her to have patience, assuring her that she would receive “the water.” St. Basil raised the question of how could an Angel claim us and how could he separate us from the enemies “...if he does not recognize the Seal? How can you say that I am of God without bearing the characteristics?” He responded: “The unsealed treasure is easy for the thieves; the unsealed sheep without danger can be attacked.”

St. Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus observed that “...the sealed sheep is not an easy game; the unsealed is susceptible to thieves.” St. John Chrysostom, using the image of the seal of the soldier, observed that “As the soldiers are sealed, likewise the faithful receive the Spirit; even if he is a deserter, he is made known to all.” By means of the last sentence he proclaimed the indelible character of the Seal since even after a Christian’s desertion he is openly known as a Christian. Elsewhere the same Holy Father observed that the Orthodox Christians received the indelible character of the Seal in Baptism “...as sons in the Spirit.”

St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria commented that “...Chrismation is called Seal and is from the Holy Spirit ... The Seal imprints the Son on our souls, as though we have the form of Christ, as the Apostle says; ‘My little children for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you. “St. Paul also proclaimed: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His Resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” St Cyril of Jerusalem, referring to the newly Illuminated said that they were “...Baptized into Christ and having vested Christ they became of the same image of the Son of God ... partaking of Christ we are called Christs.”

The terms “to seal” and “seal” are used. Even in the Service the celebrant invokes the words: “Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

The use of this invocation is believed to be from the “Catecheses” of St Cyril of Jerusalem who taught that after Baptism “...the Seal was given for the communion of the Holy Spirit...” when “...the Holy Myrrh... is anointed upon the forehead and the other parts of the body...” of the newly Illuminated who “...become the anointed ones receiving the antitype of the Holy Spirit, because they are images of Christ.”

Parallel to this, the “Euchologion” of St Serapion refers to the anointing of the newly Illuminated with the Holy Myrrh that is called “Seal” which strengthens them to “...remain solid and unmovable, unharmed and spotless...” having the “...Seal of Christ on the forehead.”

The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church used of the term “Seal” in relation to the Mysteries of Holy Chrismation and Baptism based upon the following New Testament teachings, according to which: “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in Whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit.” “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” St Paul urged the Christians “...not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the Day of Redemption.”

In the 2nd century written Apocrypha book entitled “*Acta Barnaba*,” one finds the expression “sealed of the Bishop.” In the Egyptian Order (Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus) the term “sealing” is used on the laying on of hands during the Ordination. The Bishop “...seals the head of the candidate thrice.” During the preparation part of Ordination of a Bishop the confirmation of the election is called “small seal” to differentiate from the “Great Seal” which is the Ordination itself. Some Canons of the Ecumenical or Local Councils speak of invalid ordinations, which refer not to the invalidation of the Ordination, but to the invalid installation of the ordained person. The Holy Mystery continues to have its value until the unfrocking of those who performed the illegal ordination. The rights and authorities which derive from Ordination with the jurisdiction and installation to the uncanonical bishopric or parish are the ones which are cancelled and proclaimed invalid.

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Generally, it can be said for all the Holy Mysteries that within them the Action of the Divine Grace is purely creative and that the Holy Spirit is He Who acts and recreates through the Holy Mysteries perfecting all those who partake of them without any need of repetition. This refers to all Holy Mysteries in which the Holy Spirit acts with the same Divine Power.

The form of the Seal which is imprinted through the Holy Mysteries, as well as how their prints cannot be removed, especially in the Holy Mystery of Baptism, remains indescribable. Who can possibly understand the Actions of God? Who can understand with his limited mind the movements of the Holy Spirit? Who can comprehend the inexpressible ways of Regeneration and Recreation of the Newness of Life in Christ? Again, one must never forget the Biblical words: "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"

6. The Necessity of the Holy Mysteries From all the above the necessity of the Holy Mysteries is obvious. They were instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and were assigned as the ways through which the Divine Grace accomplishes the Regeneration and Sanctification of the faithful. It is also evident that the abstention from Holy Communion, Repentance and all Holy Mysteries result in the deprivation of Salvation. The Lord clearly proclaimed that Baptism is the only way for one to become a member of God's Kingdom. He taught that "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" and concerning Holy Communion He stated that "...unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no Life in you." The case of the thief on the cross who entered Paradise without partaking of the Holy Mysteries, the Holy Apostles receiving of the Holy Spirit through the breathing upon them by Christ and the descent of the Paracletus (Holy Spirit) upon the Disciples on the Day of Pentecost by which they received the Authority of forgiving or not the sins, were exceptional and unique, necessary for their Regeneration and their fulfillment of their mission. These cases are extraordinary events, which were performed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The only thing that is clearly revealed is that God can save man in different ways or to strengthen him for a mission to which He calls him. Under no circumstances is it permissible to predetermine where and when and how God should Act.

The differentiation of the Holy Mysteries as “compulsory” or “at will” (marriage and priesthood) is inaccurate because all the Holy Mysteries are necessary. It is dependent upon the free will of the faithful to choose between marriage or celibacy. In the case where we choose Marriage, it is necessary to sanctify our union through the Holy Mystery of Marriage. The same applies if one wishes to enter the Mystery of Priesthood.

Chapter 5

Medieval Sacramental Theology

The term “sacrament” originates from the Latin word *sacramentum* (*musth, rion* in Greek), which in classical times referred to an oath or an obligation, but had taken on the meaning of “something set apart.” There is no concrete evidence that the term was used in a technical sense prior to the third or fourth century, but it came to designate a particular church rite or outward sign that in some way conveys grace to the recipient. Precisely which rites or signs made up the full number of sacraments was not clear, partly due to the flexible definition of the term. Baptism and the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper, were without question considered among the sacraments, and were early on designated “dominical,” since they were authorized by the Lord Himself. Hugo of St. Victor (d. 1141), in his treatise *De Sacramentis Fidei Christianae* defined the term “sacrament” such that it encompassed not only the sign, but also the physical medium through which

grace is communicated;⁵ as a result he was able to count thirty of them. Peter Damian (d. 1072) had listed twelve sacraments, but it was Peter Lombard's list of seven sacraments in his famous *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum*, or simply "Sentences" (c. 1150), that was made official at the Council of Florence in 1439.

St. Augustine described a sacrament as a '*signum sacro sanctum efficax gratiae*' (a sacrosanct sign produces grace) this language would lay the groundwork for scholastic definitions of sacraments in the middle Ages. When speaking of sacraments, the medievals made a distinction between the the *signum* (the sign) and the *efficax gratiae* (the effect of grace). The sign is the external, visible 'stuff' of the sacrament, while the effect of grace is the internal and invisible dimension. For the outward sign, the Latin phrase *sacramentum tantum* (sacramental sign) was used to refer to the material that has sacramental symbolic value, like bread or wine. Sacramental signs involve a canonical dimension in that they ask what elements may be used for a particular sacrament, questions pertaining to matter and form: bread, leavened or unleavened, one loaf or many, and so on. The importance of words being added to the sacramental sign was indicated by the Latin phrase '*ubi verbum ad elementum...*' (where word is added to the element). Thus, the sacramental sign necessarily involves both rites and words. For baptism, one must have water *and* the Trinitarian formula ('I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'), and for the Eucharist, bread, wine, and the Eucharistic prayers (the medievals would focus on the Words of Institution as the 'essential' words of the canon).

When talking about the internal and invisible side of a sacrament, the medievals differentiated between the *sacramentum et res* (the symbolic reality or mystery) and the *res tantum* (the inward and spiritual grace). These two internal dimensions have to do with what the sacrament actually does to the person who receives it (the *sacramentum et res*) and the way the effect of the sacrament remains in that person, provided there are no barriers to fruitfulness there (*res tantum*). This distinction pertains to an ecclesial dimension and a personal dimension; the former dimension does not depend on the holiness of the minister or recipients, and the latter does depend on the holiness and receptivity of the people involved. In the *sacramentum et res*, it is Christ who acts, but the continued effect

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of the *res tantum* depends on the ‘full, conscious and active participation’ of the recipient. For the former, the medievals used the Latin phrase *ex opere operato* (by the work having been done) to describe the inward reality which the sacrament causes. For the personal dimension, they used the phrase *ex opere operantis* (the work working within me), to describe the personal disposition of someone who is receiving the sacrament. The phraseology of *ex opere operato* became a hot-button issue during the Reformation because it indicated a kind of magical power that sacraments conferred on anyone who receives them. Today, Protestants occasionally attempt to show that sacraments do indeed have a kind of efficacy.

Let me spell this medieval terminology out a little more clearly. In the case of baptism, the water is the sacramental sign (*sacramentum tantum*), which when combined with the Trinitarian formula has an ecclesial effect (*sacramentum et res*) on the baptized (he is made an official member and sealed with the Holy Spirit), and an internal effect (in this case, the indwelling grace of the Holy Spirit, by which the newly baptized grows in his faith). In the case of the Eucharist, the signs of bread and wine (and possibly water) are combined with the words of the Eucharistic prayer (specifically the words of Christ) and have an ecclesial effect (the real presence of Christ’s body and blood) and, insofar as the recipient cooperates with it, she participates in the personal dimension of the sacrament (mutual presence or communion).

God’s Power - Not the Priest’s

While clearly God bestowed grace through these acts, the church experienced them long before it precisely defined them - or numbered them, although baptism and Eucharist were always on the list. Today, Roman Catholics, eastern Orthodox, and Anglicans name seven rites as sacraments (see image and caption on p. 34). Protestants other than Anglicans usually limit the list to baptism and Eucharist. But for many centuries, the list and definitions were not so clear.

Tertullian’s *On Penance* and *On Baptism* (c. 200) are more practical handbooks about how to perform and undergo these rites than they are theological reflections. Lectures for catechumens (people undergoing the rigorous multiyear process to prepare for baptism) by Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, and John Chrysostom (347-407) reflect at some length on what baptism means, but it was

Augustine (354 - 430) who began to get more specific. He defined a sacrament memorably as “a visible word,” discussed the “invisible grace” that came through the “visible form,” and distinguished between the act itself and its power. In the Donatist controversy over who is entitled to perform the sacraments, Augustine famously argued that the sacraments communicate grace because of God’s power, not the power or the moral character of the humans who administer them.

Ashes to baptism: the breadth of early sacramental practice despite establishing categories that would define Western sacramental thought for centuries, Augustine’s list of sacraments is tremendously wide-ranging by modern standards. It includes the baptismal font, the giving of salt at baptism, the Lord’s Prayer, the nicene Creed, easter Day, and the ashes placed on the forehead in the ceremony of penance. Other writers came up with other lists, with some overlap but little consensus on exactly what each sacrament signifies. Besides baptism and the Eucharist, public repentance (originally a one-time event), anointing of the sick for healing, marriage (despite its taking place at the door of the church and not inside), and some kinds of rites surrounding Christian death and burial all took on sacramental importance in the early medieval church.

But these by no means exhausted the possibilities. Even by the twelfth century, as the church was finally formalizing its thoughts on sacraments, Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141) maintained that blessing palms, receiving ashes, bending the knee in prayer, monastic vows, saying the Creeds, dedicating a church, and death and judgment were all sacraments. The third Lateran Council of 1179 named to the list both the ordination of priests and the burial of the dead.

Peter’s List and the “Sacramentals”

The man who finally nailed down this ever-evolving list was Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160), a professor of theology and the bishop of Paris, who, in about 1150, wrote the influential *Four Books of Sentences*. In it he writes, “Now let us approach the sacraments of the new law, which are baptism, confirmation, the bread of blessing (that is the Eucharist), penance, extreme unction [anointing of the dying], orders [ordination], and marriage. Of these, some provide a remedy against sin and confer assisting grace, such as baptism; others are only a remedy, such as marriage; others strengthen us with grace

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and power, such as the Eucharist and orders.” He proceeds to describe each of the seven, using Augustine’s distinction between the invisible grace and the visible form but adding a third concept - that a true sacrament consists of the combination of both.

Lombard’s list stuck. some of the objects and acts not on his list stuck too - many mentioned above, as well as everything from holy water to saying grace at meals, giving to the poor, and saying the rosary - and began to be referred to as “sacramentals.” These were things good in themselves but lacking the dignity, and the supposed foundation in the practice of Jesus and the apostles, of Lombard’s seven. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) refined this list, to indicate that each sacrament must have the proper matter (the material object such as water, bread, wine, or oil) and form (the words of the traditional formula, such as “I baptize you” or “this is my body”). Each must also be performed by the proper minister, who in the act of presiding has the intention to do what the church does in the sacraments - as White puts it, “A priest does not perform a sacrament while acting in a play.”

Christ Present in Ordinary Things

One of the most important aspects of this refining was the word that came to define Roman Catholic Eucharistic theology for both its proponents and its detractors- “transubstantiation.” While the church had maintained for centuries that Christ was present in the Eucharist, this word first appeared in the twelfth century to describe exactly how he was present in terms drawn from the philosophy of Aristotle. Christ’s blood and body were actually present on the altar in substance, but they still looked like bread and wine on the outside, in what were called the accidents. Later, in the reformation, this term would give rise to much controversy.

It is unlikely that every person in the congregation understood the finer points of these definitions. they did understand - and they came to church to experience - that Christ was truly present in these acts and that he touched their lives and their world, physically as well as spiritually: in bread, wine, oil, and water; in hands, ashes, rosaries, art, and alms; and, above all, in the Word made flesh who made all sacraments possible.

Ex opere operato is a Latin expression meaning “by the work worked.” It refers to the fact that the sacraments confer grace when

the sign is validly affected - not as the result of activity on the part of the recipient but by the power and promise of God. This is the term defined by the Council of Trent to describe how the sacraments confer the grace they signify. Trent condemned the following proposition: "That grace is not conferred 'ex opere operato' by the sacraments of the New Law" (Denzinger 1608). Literally the expression means "from the work performed," stating that grace is always conferred by a sacrament, in virtue of the rite performed and not as a mere sign that grace has already been given, or that the sacrament stimulates the faith of the recipient and thus occasions the obtaining of grace, or that what determines the grace is the virtue of either the minister or recipient of a sacrament. Provided no obstacle (obex) is placed in the way, every sacrament properly administered confers the grace intended by the sacrament. In a true sense the sacraments are instrumental causes of grace.

Now, to receive the fruits of the sacraments, you should be properly disposed. At least in adults, there must be a predispositional receptivity to receive the grace that is always available in a validly effected sacrament. This means reception of grace via the sacraments is not automatic. But the *ex opere operato* nature of the sacraments reminds us that, while a proper disposition is necessary to receive grace in the sacraments, it isn't the *cause* of that grace.

Ex Opere Operantis

A technical term literally meaning "from the work of the doer," to be distinguished from *ex opere operato*, which refers to the grace-conferring power inherent in the sacramental rite itself, as an action of Christ. *Ex opere operantis* refers to the role and value of the recipient's or minister's moral condition in causing or receiving sacramental grace.

It is a term mainly applied to the good dispositions with which a sacrament is received, to distinguish it from the *ex opere operato*, which is the built-in efficacy of a sacrament properly conferred. But it may refer to any subjective factor that at least partially determines the amount of grace obtained by a person who performs some act of piety. Thus in the use of sacramentals or in the gaining of indulgences, the blessings received depend largely on the faith and love of God with which a sacramental is employed or an indulgenced prayer or good work is performed.

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Peter of Poitiers (d. 1205) first applied this term to baptism the distinction between the rite that is performed and the one who performs the rite. Graphically, he compares an action in the natural order to the sacramental action: “When the Jews put Christ to death their deed was evil; but the death of Christ was approved and willed by God”

What was Christ’s purpose? 1- reveal who the Father is 2- Save us from perishing 3- build up Kingdom of God

Sacrament 1- Outward sign of an inward grace
2- Efficacious sacred signs instituted by Christ.

Purpose of a Sacrament
To communicate divine life to the world. And for God to reveal himself and connect us with Christ

How is Christ a “Sacrament of the Father?”
He was the outward sign or gift from God sent to connect us to God, which is an inward grace that saves us. (He bridged the gap, bringing us back to the divine.)

How is the Church a “Sacrament of Christ?”
Christ gave us the Church to bring us closer to God and save us. The church, like sacraments, is an outward sign of the inward grace and connects us with the divine. ”The Church, in Christ,... a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among men.”

Are the sacraments Ecclesial by nature?
Explain. Yes- Christ founded them and performed them. Church is a sacrament of Christ too. (Ecclesial=pertaining to the church)

Sacramentum Tantum sacrament as such the matter and the form-just outward signs

Res et Sacramentum effect and signthe seal that remains after sacrament is over

Res Tantum effect as such the ultimate/principal effect-God’s love, presence, & power

Matter	element of creation used in sacrament (water in baptism)
Form	Actions and Words determines matter
Significance of present moment	During sacrament, it is in that moment that GOD's love, grace, presence, power, etc. happens. (and the present is all that we can control?)
3 things communicated to recipient as sacramental grace	1- love 2- presence 3- power
Does Baptism need to be repeated? Why?	NO- as long as it was valid the first time, it is a permanent seal- cant be erased.
What do the seals/characters of Bapt./Conf./Holy Orders do to the recipient?	Each is a permanent & continuous source of grace, making the recipient more like Christ1. Bapt- Sonship2. Conf- Share mission3. H.O.- headship/mediator of Church
Why does it make sense that Christ instituted the Sacraments?	They were ment to share the divine life with us, so who better than Jesus, the son of God.
2 pieces of historical evidence to refute "sacraments evolved in the life of the church to arouse faith"	1- Eastern Orthodox church has the same 7- after separating from Roman cath. church.2- New Testament evidence of Jesus' ministry which clearly shows him performing them.
Sacraments instituted in what 2 parts?	1- Pre-Pascal: before death/resurrection- Laid Foundation2- Post-Pascal: after death/res. Fulfillment
What distinction did St. Augustine made with respect to the sacraments?	Distinction between grace (RES) and the sign (SIGNUM). Donatists had sign, not grace.

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Term Why did Donatist separate from Rome?

They believed that baptisms would have to be redone when someone returns to the faith.

Donatists (4th/5th century)

Thought they were the Church of Christ
Believed in rebaptism Had sign, not grace (in baptism)

Pre-requisite to active participation in the liturgy: Paying attention

Active participation in the liturgy:

Fundamentally internal- give yourself to Christ, use will & intellect to attach yourself to sacrifice.

2 things we are attending to with Liturgical Attention

1- Itself- what is happening, what does it all mean? 2- Ourselves- what do you bring in your heart/feelings

4 steps- Daily Experiences (skills of contemplation)

1- Awareness—> call attention to (intellect)
2- Reflection—> truth of it, where do you need to work? (Intellect) 3- Reception—> Accept, deal, (shift from intellect to will)
4- Transformation—> make changes (will)

Contemplation

Art of paying attention; act of intellect, act of will, daily prayer, daily experience, liturgy

Where does the word “sacrament” come from

The Greek word, mysterion

Dying and rising?

Die to yourself/sin, rise to new life, (free from sin)

Relationship between Christ and Church can be seen as what?

Bridal image: Christ=Bridegroom, Church= His mystical bride. Cares for bride though sacraments, washes, anoints, feeds, heals, soothes her.

ex opere operato from the work worked (from the sacramental sign objectively performed)

ex opere operantis from the work of the worker

Does the holiness of the minister affect the VALIDITY of a sacrament?
NO - not dependent on minister

What factors can affect the fruit fullness of a sacrament?
1- The disposition of the recipient
2- The holiness of the minister

What's the thing that makes a sacrament invalid?
If it is done against someone's will

What is the efficacy of a Sacrament?
Intrinsic & Objection...internal sacrament that does not depend on anything else (ex opere operato)

Sacrament vs. sacrament
Sacrament- the 7 official, but also sacred mysteriessacrament- just sacred mysteries, could be a lot of things

St. Cyprian, Donatists, Carthage vs. Pope Stephen I, Rome (256)
Cyprian wants to re-baptize, Pope says NO, just use reconciliation. Then Donatists want to as well and claim to be Church of Christ- NO.

The Reformers and the Sacraments in General

Luther's view of the sacraments was that they are outward signs that company a promise. In his work, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520), Luther notes that with every promise God makes, there is a sign attached: the rainbow with the promise not to destroy the world again by flood, circumcision with the promise to Abraham of his seed's inheritance, the wet fleece to Gideon along with the promise that he would defeat the Midianites, and so forth. Ultimately, however, there is only one single sacrament, according to the usage of the term in the Latin Vulgate, Christ himself, and three sacramental signs that point to Him: baptism, "the bread" (the Eucharist), and penance. By the end of the same work, Luther came to acknowledge

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that penance lacked a tangible sign given by the Lord Himself, and so he fell in line with the other Reformers in acknowledging only baptism and the Eucharist. He insisted, however, that every promise of God had to have a word and a sign, a testament and sacrament, and the greater power is in the word, the testament, “for a man can have and use the word or testament apart from the sign or sacrament.”

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church held that the sacraments were a means of earning merit, Luther believed that the purpose of the sacraments was to encourage the faith of the believer. Whatever efficacy the sacrament had toward forgiveness of sin or receiving Christ, it was dependent upon the faith of the recipient, not on the power of the priest or any inherent power in the ceremony or the sacrament itself:

Hence it is a manifest and wicked error to offer or apply the mass for sins, for satisfactions, for the dead, or for any needs whatsoever of one’s own or of others. You will readily see the obvious truth of this if you firmly hold that the mass is a divine promise, which can benefit no one, be applied to no one, intercede for no one, and be communicated to no one, except only to him who believes with a faith of his own... Therefore, let this irrefutable truth stand fast: Where there is a divine promise, there every one must stand on his own feet; his own personal faith is demanded, he will give an account for himself and bear his own load... (*“The Babylonian Captivity of the Church”* pp. 167-168).

This does not mean that the sacraments were without value. Indeed, the sacraments visibly bring the cross to the believer. It is by means of the outward experience of the sacraments that God gives the inward experience.

For Ulrich Zwingli, who had served as a military chaplain, the word *acramentum* had more of its classical meaning of an oath or a pledge, initially understanding this in terms of a pledge of God’s faithfulness to men, then later as a pledge of loyalty between believers, to the community. By receiving the sacrament, the believer identifies himself with the Christian community. The sacrament does not communicate grace, but it signifies the presence of grace that has already been given to the recipient. Zwingli held firmly to the secondary role of signs, perhaps aware of how easily people get drawn to the

symbol and miss the spiritual reality behind it. The sacrament is subordinate to the Word of God: it is the public proclamation of God's Word that elicits the faith that the sacrament signifies. However, the sacraments appeal to the senses, and in this way can strengthen faith. But neither the preaching of the Word nor the sacrament can guarantee faith, since the Spirit blows where He will and does not need either preaching or sacrament to be effective.

John Calvin defined a sacrament as: "an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety toward him, both before himself, and before angels as well as men." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV.14.1*)

Calvin agreed with Zwingli that the Word of God is sufficient to assure believers of their salvation, and that sacraments are not necessary, however God has given the sacraments to the church in light of human ignorance and frailty. In this sense, they are helps, visual aids to the gospel truths preached from the pulpit. Thus the sacraments are, as it were, seals to seal the grace of God in our hearts, and render it more authentic, for which reason they may be termed visible doctrine.

The sacraments are symbols of a present reality in the life of the believer, and since they represent that which is true for the recipient, they do not depend upon the spiritual condition of the minister for their benefit. In this sense, Calvin agreed with Augustine and the Catholic Church - but he went a step further, agreeing with Zwingli on the supremacy of the Spirit over the sacrament: We hold, however, that they are useful only when God gives effect to them, and displays the power of his Spirit, using them as instruments. Hence the Spirit of God must act to make us feel their efficacy for our salvation.

Unlike Zwingli, who, as noted above, emphasized the fact that, while certainly useful, the sacraments were unnecessary, Calvin stressed the necessity of the sacraments in light of man's sinful condition and need for the sustenance they provide. He also identified them as one of the marks of a true Christian church: where the Word is preached and the sacraments properly administered, there is a true church, regardless of the quality of its membership.

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So, while there appears to be surface-level agreement between Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin on the number of the sacraments, and the necessity for faith with respect to the efficacy of the sacraments, there are some fundamental differences between them that will be played out as each sacrament is examined in turn. Luther held there to be a strong link between the sign of the sacrament and that which it signifies. The sacraments are not mere symbols, but they mediate the power of Christ, and are capable of demonstrating the faith of the recipient. Zwingli saw the significance of the sacraments simply in terms of an oath; they are symbols and do nothing that the Spirit could do without them. Calvin's position appears to be a mediating one: while the sacraments are signs and symbols, there is a strong link between the sacrament and that which it signifies. A lump of silver changes its value when it is stamped as a coin-it does not cease to be silver, but it has become money. Likewise, the sacraments are ordinary bread, wine, and water, but they have been "stamped" by the Lord and made into sacraments such that they have been given a new significance. The symbols are not empty: when the Lord gives the symbol of his body in the bread of the Eucharist, the recipient should be assured he is partaking of Christ. This visible sign is "in seal of an invisible gift," i.e., Christ's body given to us.

Sacramental Theology of Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner is representative of a body of theologians who during the middle of the twentieth century wanted to rearticulate Catholic sacramental theology so as to make it more palatable to the modern world. Like other theologians, Rahner focused on an articulation of the sacraments as *symbols*, and this for a number of reasons. The emphasis on “symbol” was one means of avoiding questions regarding material causality and the traditional metaphysical philosophical commitments surrounding the term “transubstantiation.” This system was considered surpassed by the contemporary philosophical landscape, which was more concerned with phenomenology and intentionality rather than ontology and causality.

He was also influenced by a zeal for ecumenical possibilities, and perhaps saw excessively precise and metaphysical articulations of the mysteries of faith as unnecessary roadblocks to that Christian unity which, amid mid-century euphoria, was expected to be just

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around the corner. In this brief essay, I will articulate aspects of Rahner's theology of the Eucharist, focusing on his concept of the "supernatural existential" which undergirds his sacramental theology and its revolutionary consequences, and the confusion that this understanding brings to the traditional articulation of Eucharistic theology. Rahner endorsed a "Copernican revolution" in sacramental theology in which "the sacraments are the historical manifestations of the grace which is always and everywhere present in the world."¹ In this scheme the sacraments are seen not as *causes* of grace, but rather *caused by* or *manifestations of* the grace which is already, always and everywhere, present.²

In order to understand much of Karl Rahner's theology, one needs to return to his theory of the "supernatural existential," which undergirds his understanding of the Eucharist. Essentially, this concept holds that man is historically and existentially always affected by grace, modally affecting who we are and what we do.³ He borrows a concept from Heidegger that man exists with certain thematic notes or qualities as a being living in time, such as guilt, worry, angst, and weaves it into his understanding of man as a being historically affected by his experience of grace. All aspects of human living, "the pangs of birth, of concupiscence, labor, toil, and death, ... all this is unquestionably experienced by persons who (consciously or unconsciously) are subject to the influence of the supernatural existential."⁴ Grace is understood as something which almost enters into the structure of our nature, and it is unclear what pure human nature would look like, what would be "left over as remainder when this inmost center {the supernatural existential} is subtracted from the substance of {human beings}' concrete quiddity, their 'nature.'"⁵ In getting rid of the traditional distinction between actual/habitual and operative/cooperative graces, and making grace to be something quasi-substantial for man with the supernatural existential, he sets himself up for an interpretation of the sacraments and of the Eucharist which almost directly inverts the traditional understanding of sacramental causality as efficacious signs of grace.

In interpreting all the sacraments in light of his theory of the supernatural existential, Rahner understands them to be manifestations of the grace which is, always and everywhere, at work, in all times and in all places and cultures: "for the official history of salvation"-

which includes the sacraments instituted by the Church - "is nothing else but the process in which there becomes *explicit and historically tangible* the history of salvation and grace which pervades all of man's dimensions and extends throughout the whole of his history {emphasis added}."6 The sacraments are not so much seen as causes of grace but as dynamic manifestations and symbolic reminders of the grace always already operative: "We are always in spiritual communion with Christ (or we could be), whether we kneel in church or walk the dusty streets of everyday life. ... The enduring sacrament *reminds us* to take up this task {emphasis added}."7 The Eucharist is for him a manifestation that the supernatural existential is all-encompassing to human experience: "when the mystery of Christ always and everywhere encompasses our being (whether or not we heed it), why should this secret of our being {the supernatural existential} not be allowed to become visible so that our eye may fall on the food {Eucharist} of the Church?"8 The Eucharist becomes an event manifesting the Church's inner dynamism, a sign of the grace already present within the Church.

Notice also the Eucharist is seen as the "becoming visible" of the supernatural existential, the secret of our being always and everywhere at work, in every good moral act, in every act of religion. It thus becomes unclear how Rahner would differentiate between a tribal religious act of sacrificing an animal to a certain deity and the Eucharistic sacrifice, as they are both manifestations of the supernatural existential. Would there be anything essentially distinct, then, between the Eucharist and the "food sacrificed to idols" which St. Paul condemns in 1 Corinthians 8? Using Rahner's model of the universally operative presence of the supernatural existential, it would be difficult to distinguish the two.

In fact, Rahner's theory that the Eucharist is a symbol of the dynamic manifestation of the supernatural existential always interiorly coming to be, holds true for his Christology as well: "The humanity {of Christ} is the self-disclosure of the Logos itself ... the revelatory symbol in which the Father enunciates himself, in his son, to the world."9 This charged theory of symbolism is replete with Hegelian resonances: God comes to be in man archetypally in Christ, and in the Eucharist, but this is always happening everywhere. Again, just as with the Eucharist, it is unclear that the Incarnation of Christ is different

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in *kind* (ontologically) or only in *degree* from the myriad manifestations of the supernatural existential present in any human reality.

There is a confusing corollary to Rahner's thought in that he makes numerous statements which express traditional, orthodox understanding of sacramental doctrine, but seemingly interpreted through the lens of the supernatural existential. This tendency makes his theories subtle and ambiguous, because they are confusingly posited amid theologically sound statements. For example, he clearly defends the Church's traditional articulation that "according to the words of Christ, the Lord is truly and substantially present in flesh and blood, in body and soul, in divinity and humanity."¹⁰ But only a few pages before in the same text, he describes how the faithful "by eating the dish of God's mercy, anticipate the eternal meal when God, no longer in earthly symbols ... makes himself into the eternal meal of the redeemed," ... "And while they eat thus, they look for the day when the Lord will be entirely with them."¹¹ Although these statements might be interpreted in an orthodox manner so that they comply with more traditional language, they are ambiguous enough to sow confusion as to whether the Eucharist simply *is* the presence of the very Christ, ontologically speaking, or whether it is a particularly intense symbol and manifestation of his presence, always and everywhere, in the supernatural existential. It is certainly open to the latter, and in fact might in the context be a more faithful "Rahnerian" interpretation of the traditional articulation. He himself seems to want to move beyond traditional articulations of the faith: "It would be pitiful if we were to reconcile ourselves forever to the inadequate, and perhaps half-magical, misconceptions which we drag along with us from early religious instruction, and from the practices of our childhood."¹²

It is also at least unclear in Rahner's thinking whether the Eucharist is the Real Presence of Christ, or merely a symbol or event of his presence active in the Church. He describes the seven sacraments as occurring when "the Church addresses itself to, and involves itself totally in, existentially decisive situations in human life," but apart from the problem that this implies, they were instituted by the Church instead of directly by Christ (as infallibly taught by Trent and Scripture), this description again strongly emphasizes the dynamic, event quality of the sacraments.¹³ Thus his tendency to describe the Eucharist merely as a symbol or event: "the sign and the promise, the sacramental

presence of that toward which {Christians} is heading... the goal {which} incorporates all movement into itself and changes it.”¹⁴ “The sacraments make concrete and actual, for the life of the individual, the symbolic reality of the church.”¹⁵ Pope Paul VI specifically warned against this excessive or exclusive concentration on sacramental symbolism in his 1965 encyclical, *Mysterium Fidei*, an admonition considered to be directed at Rahner.¹⁶ Although the ecclesial context of the sacraments is necessary to emphasize, so is the ontologically “static” doctrine of the Real Presence. We also must recognize *more* in the Eucharist, as the Real Presence of Christ who is the source of all grace, than in the Church - it cannot be reduced to a manifestation of the Church’s inner life.

Rahner does defend Eucharistic adoration as something “not necessarily {leading} away from the significance of the sacrament” of the Eucharist.¹⁷ But given his emphasis on the Eucharist as “symbol” and “event,” it stands to reason that if one follows aspects of his theology to their logical conclusions, Eucharistic adoration seems to lack the “dynamism” which he seems to make essential to this sacrament.¹⁸ Perhaps his influence had a hand in the decrease in, and even (at times) contempt for, Eucharistic devotion prevalent in the decades after the Council. He states that in Eucharistic processions “we carry through our streets the sign of the presence of him who is the way and the goal.”¹⁹ But is it merely the “sign,” the symbol of his presence, or is it really and truly his presence? He seems to want to leave enough ambiguity as to have it both ways - perhaps he is attempting to offer an explanation which would leave room for both the Reforming, and Catholic, interpretations for the sake of ecumenism. This union is a worthy goal, but not at the price of holding together two contradictory doctrines about the Eucharist at the same time.

Thus we can recognize both the slippery and ambiguous, as well as the revolutionary content found in Karl Rahner’s theology of the sacraments, in general, and the Eucharist, in particular. His doctrine of the supernatural existential tends to upend the Eucharist from being an efficacious cause and ontological presence of grace (indeed the Source of grace) to a particularly intense manifestation of that grace which is, always and everywhere, operative. In rejecting traditional distinctions between actual/habitual and operative/cooperative grace, subsuming them under his articulation of the supernatural existential,

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he also fails to distinguish between sacramental grace and other graces, and the manifestation of grace outside the Church.

The concept of operative, actual graces outside the Church explains phenomena that Rahner is trying to account for with the supernatural existential, but without jettisoning the causal efficacy of the seven sacraments, and the importance of the visible Church. Grace is always directed to the Eucharist and explicit Church membership, which are more intensive and perfective than grace operating outside these. In addition, his emphasis on the symbolism and dynamic-event quality of the Eucharist tends to minimize the doctrine of the Real Presence and transubstantiation, in spite of his apparent acceptance of these doctrines according to their traditional formulations. There is always more in the Eucharist, as the Real Presence of Christ himself, than there is in the Church. In attempting to rearticulate the traditional doctrine of the Church in conceptual language - which he believes will be more amenable to the contemporary intellectual palate, and overcome divisions among Christians - whether intentionally or not, Rahner's theology quickly slides into an unhelpful ambiguity.

Themes

Philosophical Foundations

It is impossible to understand Karl Rahner's theological method without a firm grasp of the philosophical perspective developed in his first books, *SW* and *HW*. However, since these texts are not our main concern, I give them only brief attention. In *SW*, which was intended as his philosophical dissertation, Rahner develops, "under the general influence of Maréchal and with a few particular borrowings from Heidegger, a rereading of Aquinas through the lens of Kant and the post-Kantians" (Kilby 2004, 14). Here Rahner analyzes a single question in St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica* (I, Q84, a7), "Can the intellect actually know anything through the intelligible species which it possesses, without turning to the phantasms?" This question is important for Rahner, since in this question Aquinas comes to a fundamental metaphysical issue: How can the human intellect know any non-sensible thing or God? Thomas provides three modes of this type of metaphysical apprehension: *excessus* (eminence or excess), *comparatio* (comparison), and *remotio* (removal or negation). In the "Reply to Objection 3" Aquinas argues,

Incorporeal things, of which there are no phantasms, are known to us by comparison with sensible bodies of which there are phantasms. Thus we understand truth by considering a thing of which we possess the truth; and God, as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. i), we know as cause, by way of excess [*excessus*] and by way of remotion [*remotio*]. Other incorporeal substances we know, in the present state of life, only by way of remotion [*remotio*] or by some comparison [*comparatio*] to corporeal things. And, therefore, when we understand something about these things, we need to turn to phantasms of bodies, although there are no phantasms of the things themselves.

It is clear that Rahner focuses his attention in *SW* on *excessus*. He writes, The *excessus* to metaphysics, which takes place in a conversion to the phantasm, is considered as a condition of the truth of the human experience of the world and metaphysics, insofar as it is on the one hand related to the world possessed in sensation and so always consists in a consideration of the thing through a conversion into phantasm, and yet on the other hand it contains a being-set-apart from knowledge and thing, and only in this does the knowledge become truth and the thing become object. In this being-set-apart, truth appears over against the world and thus is possible only in an *excessus* beyond the world which is possessed in sensation. Therefore it already belongs in the realm of metaphysics. (*SW*, 54)

This long citation reflects Rahner's conversations with Heidegger. Heidegger's focus on the importance of being-in-the-world ("*in-der-Welt-Sein*") is for Rahner similar to his notion of spirit-in-the-world, or in the citation above, "the human experience of the world." Yet, in order for the human spirit to be in the world, it must simultaneously be "being-set-apart... against the world." This is possible through the *excessus*, or in Rahner's term, borrowed loosely from Heidegger, the pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*). It is through the pre-apprehension of being (*Vorgriff auf esse*) that human spirit "reaches out toward what is nameless and by its very nature is infinite" (*FCF*, 62) or "reaches out beyond the word and knows the metaphysical" (*SW*, liii). The pre-apprehension itself is the condition of spirit transcending itself toward the infinite being, while still remaining in the world. Thus, Rahner modifies Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* that moves the self toward nothing, being-toward-death. On the contrary, argued Rahner, "the *Vorgriff* attains to a 'more' rather than to a 'nothing'" (Carr 1977, 75).

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Rahner also holds that we cannot distinguish knowing from being. It is human being or spirit that knows the worldly reality as well as the infinite absolute or God. Yet, in his theological works we find that Rahner maintains that God is both known and unknown (more on this below). Accordingly, God is a mysterious Being who is incomprehensible apart from God's self-communication to the world. In contrast to Schleiermacher's understanding of God as "Whence," Rahner offers the understanding of God's mysterious being as the "Whither" of pre-apprehension. Yet, he argues dialectically, "This totality, precisely as the 'whither' of the pre-apprehension, cannot be the subsequent sum, but only the original unity of the possible objects" (SW, 145). Thus, God is both the origin and goal of all reality. In short, God is the horizon of all beings. He states, "We seem to know God, the 'object' of metaphysics, only as the necessary horizon of the experience of world which is possible only in this way" (SW, 407).

I have focused my exposition above on Rahner's philosophical thought as appeared in his *SW*. His other book, *HW*, deals with the same issues and problems, but it establishes a transition from his more philosophical work to his later theological writings.

Theological Methods

Philosophizing within Theology

As we have seen, Rahner is so eager to put theology into dialogue with philosophy that one cannot find in his writings any position that is not informed by his philosophical perspective. In Rahner's own words, what he proposes is to relate both philosophy and theology by "philosophizing ... within theology itself" (*FCF*, 10). Yet, what he means by philosophy is particularly an anthropological philosophy, which focuses on humanity as the "universal question" (*FCF*, 11). Thus, philosophy refers to the question of human beings within their infinite horizon without any reference to the revealed sources. For Rahner the fact that Christianity can be the answer requires that we do theology. Moreover, the encounter between the question and the answer is made possible by understanding God's revelation as the "point of mediation" between both (*FCF*, 11).

To some extent, Rahner's approach is similar to Tillich's method of correlation, which interrelates "existential questions and theological

answers in mutual interdependence” (Tillich 1950, 60). Yet, as Fiorenza suggests, the difference between them is that of “a Catholic sacramental vision of the world as graced ... and a Lutheran vision that is sensitive to the ambiguities and sinfulness of the human condition” (in Livingstone 2000, 211).

Transcendental-Anthropological Method

How does Rahner develop this philosophical theology? It is clear that in building his own system, Rahner always starts from the human as an existential unity, who is simultaneously *historical* and *transcendental*. On the one hand, the historical dimension of human being refers to the fact that we are always connected to the world through our spatio-temporal and actual (“categorical” in Rahner’s terms) experiences. In this sense, categorical experience is *a posteriori* experience. Even, Rahner maintains, our transcendental knowledge or experience of God, which is conditioned by our transcendental, is also *a posteriori*, since it is “mediated by a categorical encounter with concrete reality in our world, both the world of things and the world of persons” (*FCF*, 52).

On the other hand, there is an *a priori* or given element in all human beings that makes it possible for them to reach out to the infinite and to receive God’s grace. This condition orients us not only in the direction of experiencing God but also in the direction of experiencing ourselves as transcendental subjects. Those two experiences, thus, “are not simply identical, still both of them exist within a unity of such a kind that apart from this unity it is quite impossible for there to be any such experiences at all” (Rahner 1993, 222).

This is the transcendental of human being that is basic to Rahner’s notion of the pre-apprehension of being (*Vorgriff auf esse*). He says, “Man is a transcendent being insofar as all of his knowledge and all of his conscious activity is grounded in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of ‘being’ as such, in an unthematic but ever-present knowledge of the infinity of reality” (*FCF*, 33). Thus, while the term “transcendental” or “transcendent” previously (e.g. in Scholasticism) referred to the quality of a being (e.g. God) that is beyond any category, Rahner now applies it to human beings as well.

For Rahner it is important to remember that we do not experience our transcendental without also experiencing our historicity. The

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question of how these two features—transcendentality and historicity—correlate to each other is undoubtedly paramount in Rahner's theology. Human transcendental experience of the infinite always takes place within real history and thus makes human beings always return to themselves.

But because we know the world objectively, we are always already present to ourselves in a complete return; in turning out to the world we have turned back to ourselves. But then the horizon of the possible experience of world necessarily becomes a theme itself, metaphysics becomes necessary in man's existence. Insofar as we ask about the world known by man, the world and the man asking are already placed in question all the way back to their absolute ground, to a ground which always lies beyond the boundaries within man's grasp, beyond the world. (SW, 407)

Therefore, there is a dynamic oscillation (*Schwebe*) between transcendentality and historicity within human life. We are all fundamentally paradoxical, if not ambivalent. We swing from one pole to another all the time. Rahner continues, Thus man is the mid-point [*schwebende Mitte*] suspended between the world and God, between time and eternity, and this boundary line is the point of his definition and his destiny: "as a certain horizon and border between the corporeal and incorporeal (ibid.)

The notion of *Schwebe* helps Rahner to elaborate his understanding of human "being" as presence-to-self (*Beisichsein des Seins*). One finds this motif throughout Rahner's theological works. In *FCF*, for instance, Rahner says, "Being a person, then, means the self-possession of a subject as such in a conscious and free relationship to the totality of itself" (*FCF*, 30). Thus, there is always a dynamic of turning to the subjective self, or in Thomas's words, "a complete return of the subject to itself" (*reditio completa subjecti in seipsum*) (Rahner 1993, 223).

Dialectical Analogy

Patrick Burke suggests a specific term to name Rahner's philosophical-theological method: *dialectical analogy* (Burke 2002). By dialectical analogy he means the method through which Rahner, oscillated constantly between unifying dynamism and

conceptual distinction and therefore united dialectically while still holding in distinction the traditional antinomies of Christian thought - God and the world, spirit and matter, grace and nature (viii).

Unlike the traditional view of analogy of being, Rahner understands the analogous language about God in his perspective of *Schwebe*. He argues, It is a tension which is not produced by us at a logically subsequent midpoint between a univocal “yes” and an equivocal “no.” It is rather a tension which we ourselves as spiritual subjects originally *are* in our self-realization, and which we can designate by the traditional term “analogy” if we understand what this word means in its original sense. (*FCF*, 72)

Here “self-realization” refers to our existence “in and through our being grounded in [God’s] holy mystery which always surpasses us” (*FCF*, 73).

Grace within the Depth of Existence

We begin now with the first dimension of God’s self-communication, that is, grace within the depth of existence. We have discussed what Rahner means by “the depth of existence” or the analysis of human beings, which becomes the point of departure in his theological system. I only need to add an important point here regarding the issue of sin.

Sin

Rahner correlates “the depth of existence” to the notion of grace because there is a circle of guilt and forgiveness that is experienced internally within human existence. It is circular because every time human beings say “no” to God in their freedom, it is also the time when they realize that God is not judgmental but is offering loving forgiveness. They are, thus, invited to say “yes” to God. For Rahner, the threat of sin is “really a permanent existential which we can never eradicate in our single, temporal history” (*FCF*, 105). At the same time, the “yes” is contained within each “no” in the sense that the “yes” as the basis for the possibility of any self-assertion is always there, even in the “no” In this context he reinterprets the notion of original sin. It is called “original sin” because human beings have established guilt throughout history. He rejects the traditional

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understanding of original sin as biologically transmitted through Adam and Eve. Rather, original sin refers to the fact that guilt is universal and ineradicable. This fact is evident since everyone is “co-determined” by others’ guilt as well as by the whole history of wrongdoing. In this context, Rahner’s statement about grace as God’s self-communication within the depth of human existence obtains its significance.

Original sin, therefore, expresses nothing else but the historical origin of the present, universal and ineradicable situation of our freedom as co-determined by guilt, and this insofar as this situation has a history in which, because of the universal determination of this history by guilt, God’s self-communication in grace come to man not from “Adam,” not from the beginning of the human race, but from the goal of this history, from the God-Man Jesus Christ. (*FCF*, 114).

Grace and the Supernatural Existential

Rahner’s view of divine grace is made possible because we have congeniality for receiving it. This is what he calls the “supernatural existential.” Rahner distinguishes existential from existential, although both are inseparable and refer to the same human finitude. While the former refers to the ontological dimension, the latter to the everyday categorical dimension. When Rahner talks about supernatural existential he criticizes both traditional scholasticism and the *nouvelle théologie* (particularly of Henri de Lubac) of his own era. Here Rahner enters the classical “nature and grace” debate within Catholic theology. The neo-scholastics held to the view of extrinsicism, namely, an understanding that God’s grace is imposed from outside on nature; whereas the theologians of the *nouvelle théologie* emphasized the intrinsic orientation of nature to grace. For the proponents of the *nouvelle théologie* (such as de Lubac), there is no such thing as “pure nature” which then accepts grace; instead there is a “natural desire” (Thomas’s *desiderium naturale*) within human nature for God.

Against both positions, Rahner argues that human beings as God’s partner have to be able to receive God’s loving grace. Here he relies on the Thomistic notion of *obediential potency*, which becomes the condition - or better, a remainder concept (*Restbegriff*) - in the human existential constitution that has been present before God offers grace,

“even prior to sin” (*FCF*, 124). This condition he calls the “supernatural existential.” In Rahner’s most-quoted words, “God’s self-communication as offer is also the necessary condition which makes its acceptance possible” (*FCF* 128). The end and goal of God’s grace, finally, is that human beings receive the final vision of God (beatific vision), which implies an ontological relationship between God and creatures. Yet, it is not merely an ideal reality in the future. Rather, according to Rahner, it is an historical experience, *hic et nunc*. In grace, that is, in the self-communication of God’s Holy Spirit, the event of immediacy to God as man’s fulfillment is prepared for in such a way that we must say of man here and now that he participates in God’s being; that he has been given the divine Spirit who fathoms the depths of God; that he is already God’s son here and now, and what he already is must only become manifest. (*FCF*, 120).

Jesus as God’s Self-Communication in History

The second dimension of God’s self-communication is through history that culminates in Jesus Christ. But before examining Rahner’s Christological views (Chapter VI of his *FCF*), we should pause a moment to review his profound account of the meaning of the history of salvation and revelation (Chapter V).

Salvation History, World History and Revelation

Rahner’s basic thesis is that human history is the *event* of transcendence. This is to say that through the supernatural existential-it “takes place” within or “is mediated” by everyday history - human beings experience their transcendental. Only within this condition of human transcendence are human beings enabled to experience and receive God’s self-communication through historical mediation, which is called “salvation history.”

This basic argument leads Rahner to offer his second thesis, i.e., that the history of salvation and the whole world history are co-existent. They are not to be equated, since there is also the history of guilt within the world history. Yet, they are also not to be separated, as if the history of salvation is another extramundane reality unrelated to human concrete history.

With regard to the notion of revelation, Rahner maintains that the universal history of salvation is also the history of revelation. He

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distinguishes two kinds of revelation: universal-transcendental revelation and special-categorical revelation. While the first refers to the experience of God that could happen anywhere and for everyone, the latter is an expression of the former within special and categorical ways, which culminates in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Anonymous Christians

Rahner's views of the supernatural existential and of revelation become the basis of his famous theory of "anonymous Christians." On the one hand, God's salvific will is universal. This leads Rahner to say that there should be a possibility for all persons to be saved. Yet, on the other hand, the Catholic tradition holds a belief that salvation is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ and the membership into the Church. For Rahner, this conflict is solvable through the notions of the "supernatural existential," as the condition for all persons in their transcendental to receive God's grace *and* "universal-transcendental revelation," which becomes God's self-communication to all people as transcendent beings. Consequently, Rahner urges, those who do not confess Jesus Christ explicitly and do not become members of the Catholic Church, "must have the possibility of a genuine saving relation with God" (Rahner 1993, 54) and therefore they are called "anonymous Christians."

End Notes

1. Karl Rahner, "Thoughts about the Sacraments in General," *Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning*, (ed. by G. Kelly), p. 288.
2. See Patrick Burke, *Reinterpreting Rahner: A Critical Study of His Major Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 47-48: "Rahner, although never actually denying the nature-grace distinction, stresses ever more their existential unity and by interpreting transcendental given grace as revelation in itself, which is expressed categorically in history even outside of official revelation, begins to see categorical revelation as only the posterior explicitization of what man always and originally is." Here, Burke notes the development in Rahner's thought which sees the sacraments of particularly intense manifestations of the grace always present in virtue of the supernatural existential. The same basic thrust is present in his understanding of the sacraments and the Eucharist.

3. He states in "Sacraments," (Kelly, pp. 283-284), that "Grace, in the strictest sense of the word, is not a particular discrete datum within consciousness ... instead it is the comprehensive radical opening up of a human being's total consciousness in the direction of the immediacy of God." Note some of the words he uses in describing the operation of grace: "comprehensive, total, immediacy." Grace is everywhere with the supernatural existential, and this profoundly affects Rahner's sacramental theology.
4. Karl Rahner, "On the Relationship of Grace and Nature," *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 314.
5. Ibid.
6. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, tr. William Dych, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), p. 411.
7. Karl Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), p. 36.
8. Ibid., p. 36.
9. Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Symbolic Reality," *Theological Investigations* 4 (Baltimore: Halicon, 1966), p. 239.
10. Rahner, *Sacraments*, p. 36. He even ends this treatise on the Eucharist by invoking St. Thomas' famous prayer, "O holy banquet, ..." on page 41.
11. Ibid., p. 32.
12. Ibid., p. 39. It would be one thing if Rahner was seeking a deeper penetration into the mystery as it has already been dogmatically articulated, without contradicting the articulation of the reality which the Church herself has deemed "adequate," if not comprehensive or beyond improvement.
13. Rahner, *Foundations*, pp. 412-413.
14. Rahner, *Sacraments*, p. 38.
15. Karl Rahner, "On the Theology of Symbolic Reality," *Theological Investigations* 4, p. 241.
16. See for example *Mysterium Fidei* paragraph 11: "it is not permissible ... to concentrate on the notion of sacramental sign as if the symbolism - which no one will deny is certainly present in the Most Blessed Eucharist - fully expressed and exhausted the manner of Christ's presence in this Sacrament; or to discuss the mystery of transubstantiation without mentioning what the Council of Trent had to say about the marvelous conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and the whole substance of the wine into the Blood of Christ, as if they involve nothing more than "transignification," or "transfinalization" as they call it." {emphasis added} The encyclical is available at www.vatican.va. Servant of God John Hardon, S.J., taught that this correction by Paul VI was directed principally at Rahner - seetherealpresence.org/archives/Faith/Faith_006.htm.
17. Rahner, *Sacraments*, p. 36.

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18. For example, Rahner states in *Sacraments*, p. 31, that in the Eucharist Christ “makes himself exist in the form of bread and wine . . . so that all of this- his sacrificed reality for their salvation-becomes manifest and manifestly operative; it truly belongs to {his disciples} and enters into the center of their being.” Notice the existential dynamism and emphasis on “manifestation,” an inevitably subjective perspective. He also describes in *Sacraments*, p. 29, the Last Supper as Christ’s gift of himself to his disciples “in the event and the symbol of a meal.”
19. Rahner, *Sacraments*, p. 38.

Symbols and Sacraments: Their Human Foundations

Christianity is a religion of sacraments and in theology we call Jesus Christ a ‘*sacrament*’, the Church a ‘*sacrament*’, and the Eucharist a ‘*sacrament*’. But the term ‘*sacrament*’ is much broader in meaning than its application to Jesus Christ as a sacrament, to the Church as a sacrament, and to any of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. St. Augustine (354-430 AD) described the term ‘*sacrament*’ in several ways. He had both a broad understanding and a more particular and specific one. For now it’s his broad understanding that concerns us. He said a ‘*sacrament*’ is ‘*a visible form of invisible grace*’, i.e. a visible or otherwise sense-perceptible form of the presence of God. More simply, he also said that a ‘*sacrament*’ is ‘*a sacred sign*’ (*signum sacrum*), i.e. a sign of something sacred, and that it is a ‘*visible word*’ (*verbum visibile*).

So our understanding of sacraments is not concerned simply with the seven rituals of the Catholic Church

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that we call '*the sacraments*', but with an experience of the presence of God in a range of human experiences. Richard McBrien says: '*A sacramental perspective is one that "sees" the divine in the human, the infinite in the finite, the spiritual in the material, the transcendent in the imminent, the eternal in the historical.*'¹ It will therefore be valuable to explore the general meaning of the term before going on to consider Jesus Christ as sacrament and the Church as sacrament, etc. This will involve an investigation of how a '*sacrament*' is something within human experience, something that is earthly, visible or otherwise perceptible. It will involve the effort to discover within a range of human experiences what is variously labelled '*the more*', '*the beyond*', '*the transcendent*', '*mystery*', '*the ultimate*', '*the sacred*', '*the divine*', '*God*'. In short, we will be investigating the anthropological, the human basis of the idea of sacrament, i.e. what is sometimes called '*sacramentality*'.

To delve into this, it will be useful to first examine the meaning of '*symbol*' in general, since any '*sacrament*' is a specific type of symbol.

1. The Meaning of "Symbol" in General and its Role in Human Life

A symbol belongs to the category of '*sign*', i.e. it is a kind of sign. As sign, it points beyond itself to something else, something more, and is a means of communicating this more to those who experience it.

Signs in general give information, and frequently tend to have only one meaning - e.g. a car's indicator light; an '*exit*' sign; a '*For sale*' sign outside a house; mathematical signs such as +, -, =; a traffic policeman's raised hand. Signs which have a single meaning can also be explained.

A symbol is a more complex kind of sign. It tends to convey not one but a series of meanings. This is to say that a symbol has several associated connotations.² In the second place, a symbol does more than communicate ideas. It touches our imaginations and stirs up our feelings, such as joy, love, hope and fear. It touches our values, beliefs, ideals and traditions, as well as our insights and ideas. A symbol is very useful for sharing inner feelings and attitudes, e.g. candles lit on a cake to honour a child on her birthday; flowers sent to express grief and sympathy; a wedding ring to pledge lasting love and fidelity.

The kind of sign which a symbol is may be illustrated by comparing the difference in meaning an old photo album has for a stranger browsing through its pages, and for a member of the family who knows and appreciates the people pictured there. For the stranger, the photos will tend to say at most who the people in the pictures are, what they look like, and what they are doing. For the family member they are precious memories of what the subjects have meant to them personally, what their association with them has been like, the life and love and laughter they have shared with them. For the family member *'every picture tells a story'*, as we say. Whereas the stranger leafing through the pages may hurry to get to the end, the family member may have difficulty in putting the album down.

The implication is that a symbol tends to participate in the reality it signifies, that it realizes what it signifies, that it is what it means, and that it takes us beyond the surface of things to their depth. Thus, e.g. a naval wife holding the photo of her husband in her hand and kissing it, may feel that she is with him now, even though his ship is somewhere in the Persian gulf. Our national flag and national anthem are not just a piece of coloured cloth and a piece of music set to words but put us in touch with our history, our beliefs, our hopes, our dreams, and our ideals.

Because a symbol tends to have a range of meanings, it is easier to experience it than to explain it, and because it touches the heart and not just the head, a symbol will tend to work more powerfully than logical explanation.

The appreciation of symbol involves the capacity to *'see more'*, to *'feel about'*, to reflect, to contemplate, and to wonder. To think symbolically involves something of the art of the poet, e.g. of a William Blake exclaiming with enthusiasm on the impact made on him by the sight of a tiger:

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright in the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye

Could frame thy fearful symmetry!

In Jesus we sense such a poetic cast of mind, the ability to think symbolically and to *'see more'*, as e.g. he speaks to his disciples of *'shining in people's sight'* like *'a city built on a hill-top'* and *'a*

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lamp on a lamp-stand; about the sound tree producing good fruit and the rotten tree bad (Mt 7:17); about the sensible man who built his house on rock and the stupid one who built his on sand (Mt 7:24-27); about the sower who went out to sow (Mt 3:3-9).

To think and indeed to act in a symbolic way tends also to require previous experience. The lack of this will e.g. lead a stranger to hurry through a photo album in which the people depicted are strangers. (Hence the risk of showing *'the slides we took in Germany last year'*). The appreciation of a religious symbol tends to pre-suppose some previous acquaintance with it.

2. A Range of Sacramental Experiences

In his book *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography*,³ already something of a classic in the field, John Shea has discussed a range of human experiences, which, in the context of his discussion, he regards as sacramental, and which he calls *'vehicles for contact with Mystery'* (p.17), *'paths to an awareness of Mystery'* (p.25). It will be valuable to recall and further develop the range of human experiences he has discussed.⁴

1. Contingency

Shea mentions contingency,⁵ the awareness of the uncertainty of life, leading us to wonder, *'Why is there anything at all?'* At times we experience contingency in a positive way, when we experience the feeling that it's good to be alive, days when we are jumping out of our skin, so to speak.

Yet not all that far away from the *'exhilarating awareness that life is given, is the anxious awareness that it is not guaranteed'* (p.27). No insurance policy can save us from death and from its lesser indignities, sickness and suffering. In this precarious life situation, the meanings which things have for us are fragile and can easily crumble. In this situation, the love and friendships in our lives which we value, but tend to take for granted, can easily fade out or fade away. All too easily our hopes for the sort of future we have planned can be dashed.

When we come to wonder about all this, and when our wondering begins to take us beyond such uncertainties, it is then that we may possibly enter into *'Mystery'*.

2. Dialogue (Conversations) and Communion (Sharing and Caring Love)

A second path to Mystery, a second symbol/ sacrament of daily life, is when people enter into deep dialogue and communion with one another. Dialogue and communion have been skilfully presented by Gregory Baum⁶ as ways to both grow as persons to our potential, and as ways in which God is present to human beings everywhere in a redeeming way.⁷

In Baum's thinking, people mature through contact with other human beings. Of particular importance in the maturing process of learning to move away from self and to reach out towards others is the phenomenon of dialogue, i.e. genuine conversations we have with others. In the sharing which takes place, we listen and we respond. By means of the insights shared, we are assisted to grow and develop as responsible people.

Again and again if we are to make progress and change our ways of living, it may be necessary to hear from others things which are challenging, things which are perhaps even quite painful, but which turn out, at least in the long run, to set us free to become better people. In fact, through the course of a whole life, many challenges and many changes may be called for.

There is another dimension to all this. In the words of others, even unintended remarks and chance conversations, God's word may be addressed to us, God's word of saving truth.

As previously said, the word of God as it comes to us from others in conversation can be painful. We need strength to reply to the call (from God) addressed to us by others. To be addressed by others (and God) creates fears. Can we, e.g., take the risk of listening to them? Isn't there some danger that if we listen to others, our self-esteem may go down? Isn't there some danger that if we listen to the revealing word from another person, we will end up being psychologically dependent, even under that person's spell?

Faced with such threatening risks, it takes a lot of courage to engage in the kind of conversations which will challenge us to become more mature and more responsible. We find the courage to face the truth only if the other addresses us sensitively, i.e. with respect, with

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care, and with love. Love is the only way which works. Were we to be brutally confronted with what may be in us, e.g. superficiality, anger and resentment, self-rejection, we might crumble to pieces. But the gift of the accepting and encouraging love of the significant other creates in us the strength we need - to listen, to attain self-knowledge, to accept ourselves with our weaknesses, our strengths, and our possibilities. The gift of the other's love and care, the human communion, communicates freedom - freedom to become a better person, freedom to open up and share with others the love and care which has been given to us.

Faced with the risks involved, the freedom to take those risks and let ourselves enter into a life-giving dialogue and communion with others, is experienced as both a power and a gift. It is a gift, not something self-generated, a gift given to us by people who love us and care for us. Yet should we start to state what they have done for us and express our gratitude, this would be too much. For typically, those significant people we talk to and support us, simply don't realize just how much they mean to us. They may cut us short, or say something like this - '*it was nothing*'; '*think nothing of it*'; or '*what are friends for?*' The strength and support which they communicate to us goes beyond what they see themselves as giving. This fact takes us beyond them as God's instruments to God's self, the ultimate source of that understanding and support which another human being has communicated to us.⁸

The implication of this experience is that in the human dialogue and communion by whom we grow as persons, God is present as the deeper dimension of that dialogue and communion. God is present as Word and as Spirit. Human dialogue and communion are therefore sacraments of the presence and activity of God, of the Word of God and of the Spirit of God. This is so true that we can truly speak of certain people who have been significant supports and sustainers in our lives as '*God-sends*'. So much so that Baum does not hesitate to assert, '*the locus of the divine is the inter-personal*',⁹ an insight shared by the author of 1 Jn 4:12: '*No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us,*' and by James McCauley in the hymn, '*Where There is Charity and Love, There the God of Love Abides*'.

3. *The Collapse of Our Ordered World*

A third path to Mystery, another type of sacrament, is the collapse of our ordered world. When the people and possessions we prize most, when the things which are most important to us, are suddenly ripped away from us, and when there are no props and supports which help to make some sense of the senseless, it is then and perhaps only then, that we may begin to see the face of Mystery.

I suggest that a particularly powerful symbol of this is the gospel picture of Jesus on the cross crying out to the Father in a loud voice the words of the twenty-second psalm. This is a psalm of trust, certainly, but one which begins: *‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’* (Mk 15:34) It is from the dark chaos engulfing his consciousness, from the sense of God’s seeming absence and seeming neglect, that Jesus makes his confident and trustful plea for aid and deliverance (esp. in vv.19-20).

4. *Our Failures to Live Up to Our Moral Standards*

A fourth path to Mystery, a further sacrament, can be our failures to live up to our moral ideals. We adopt the standard of a Christian person given by Paul in the fifth chapter of his letter to the Galatians. We aim at living as loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, good, kind, faithful and self-controlled people. In practice, however, self-interest and various evil tendencies tend to come to the fore. We may think: *‘What’s in it for me?’* or *‘Look after number one’*. We may manipulate others and use others to gain an advantage. What Paul said may be only too true: *‘For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do’* (Rom 7:19).

The positive side of the internal war which goes on inside us is that it may direct us to God the Mystery, the God in whom *“we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28), the God of our salvation, for both explanation and healing.

5. *Disenchantment*

A fifth path to Mystery, and yet another sacrament in the wider sense of the term, is the path of disenchantment. Disenchantment may occur when the symbols we once trusted to bring us closer to God, are swept away, or, at the very least, are de-emphasized. This has happened in recent Catholic culture. For many Catholics not so long ago, *‘doing the right thing’* was doing what the Church approved

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or recommended. The goal of their lives was the Church's approval. When they were young they learned that the 'good' things to do, the actions which their Church approved of, were daily Mass, bowed heads after Holy Communion, seriousness and silence in church, not eating meat on Friday, paying into the planned-giving project. In the message of the Church today, these ways of being Catholic no longer enjoy the same high ratings, and are therefore given less emphasis. What counts most now is being a loving person, developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, following him as a disciple. What counts too in the effort to follow Christ is prayer, and especially prayer based on scripture, and Sunday Eucharist. What also counts a great deal is social action for the poor and powerless, the broken and the abandoned.

For people who relied on the old group practices to be on side with both their Church and their God (often identified in their minds), the new ways can be disturbing, disorienting, even shocking. The new ways can evoke resentment and hostility. Not only is there the loss of the old securities (e.g. reliance on relics, indulgences, and First Friday practices), but also the painful feeling of having been misled and betrayed. The pain of discovering that what they were once told so forcefully in the past was either a wrong road, or, at least, a bit of a side-track.

Disenchantment, however, need not be a totally negative experience. It can lead to a positive evaluation of the worth of various church symbols and the discovery of genuine priorities among the range of symbols. It can lead to a heightened awareness of the pilgrim nature of the Church. It can teach people not to identify the symbols of God with God's self, and thus save them from a form of idolatry. It can lead them to a purer and more adult worship of God, who is ultimately beyond any finite representation of God's presence and power.

6. The Nature of Birth, Life, Growth and Death

For some people the path to Mystery is less round-about. Contact with the wonders of nature, the wonders of birth, life, growth, and death, are sacraments. John Shea paints such a sacramental word-picture: An old man sits by the sea and knows that the waves he watches will crash on those shores long after he is gone. He is triggered into an awareness of the Mystery within which both he and the waves

dwell. A young mother watches her child at the park and suddenly wonder seizes her and carries her into an awareness of mystery.¹⁰

William Bausch shows his appreciation of the wonders of nature as paths to Mystery when he writes: A father looks down on his newborn son and in a precious moment he is caught up in the wonder of this small miracle. He catches a whole sudden insight into birth and life, harmony and meaning, and his own godlike creative powers. He knows that something greater than he has been at work. A girl looks at a sunset and is pulled out of herself as it were. She suddenly grasps (or is grasped by) a sense of another dimension of reality and senses the mystery of a divine presence. There are experiences like this in the lives of many. In these special moments individuals and a whole people can look back. On reflection they sense that they had witnessed or felt or experienced in some way a golden moment; that in this or that experience they truly came alive, saw reality in a different way and felt a love born and a growth take place. In their minds there was no doubt that something beautiful and meaningful happened. A Power was felt, experienced.¹¹

3. Evaluation of Sacramental Paths to Mystery

1. In Principle and Finite Experience can be a Sacrament

We have been exploring a range of human experiences which can be typical paths leading to the Mystery which Christians name as God. But the awareness that there are other paths to Mystery, other sacraments, leads us in the direction that, in principle, any human experience, any finite experience, can be a sacrament, i.e., a path to the Mystery which is God, since, as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins expresses it, *'The world is charged with the grandeur of God.'*¹²

2. In Sacramental Encounter, God remains Mystery

In sacramental encounter, God remains Mystery, for God is incomprehensible. While in sacramental encounter God does emerge from hiddenness and makes himself known, this is only in part. Even as he is revealed, he remains concealed, baffling, transcendent, beyond, other, and mysterious. The words of Paul come to mind: *'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face'* (1 Cor 13:12). There is no question of the sacraments of everyday life delivering God to us on a platter. God is not served up as an object, so

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that we can clearly say, *'he is this, he is not that'*. We do experience God, but in glimpses, traces and shadows. To confuse the signs of his presence and activity with himself in his full reality would amount to idolatry, Sacraments are signs of God which communicate God, but they are not God himself.

This is illustrated in a powerful scene in Exodus 33. Moses is deeply concerned that the Lord will refuse to travel with his people any further on their journey to the Promised Land. For they have displeased the Lord by making a golden calf and dancing around it. Moses is also concerned that his own leadership will be discredited if the Lord deserts them. In his concern about all this, Moses pleads aloud with the Lord, and the Lord relents.

Encouraged by this sign of the Lord's favour, Moses blurts out to the Lord: *'Show me your glory!'* God replies that he will make all his goodness pass before Moses, and declare to Moses his own name Yahweh, but he warns that Moses cannot see the face of God. For God says: *'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live'* (v. 20). But in answer to Moses' request, God will make one concession to Moses: *'while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand while I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen'* (vv.22-23).

'You shall see my back ...' Moses may not encounter the Lord directly, in all his glory. What is permitted to him is to see the Lord's back, to glimpse the Lord from behind. This is to say in an indirect way, a sacramental way, a way that is a genuine way, but one that is less than clear, a mysterious way, a way that is both light and darkness, a way that is both reality and shadow.¹³

The God whom we encounter in sacraments is, I have been saying, Mystery. Real though it is, the sacramental encounter is limited. Even as we experience the presence of God, within and through the signs of the presence of God, we experience also the absence of God. There can be no pretence that in any human experience, even in a special sacramental ritual like the Eucharist, we can capture the full reality of God. There can be no question of objectifying God, of delivering God in a packet or a package, as it were. And yet, one does

not hesitate to claim that in sacraments of all kinds, God does meet us, and we do meet God.

4. A Common Factor in a Range of Sacramental Experiences

The question arises concerning whether, in the huge array of real and possible sacramental experiences, there is any common factor.

It seems that what is common to a variety of experiences is that they raise fundamental and significant questions. Questions about origin: - e.g. *why does the world exist? Why is there anything at all? Where did I come from?* Questions about destiny: - e.g. *where is the world heading? What will happen to me when I die?* Questions about the meaning of life now: - e.g. *where does my sense of moral obligation come from? Why OUGHT I do anything at all? Why go on living? 'To be or not to be?' Why go on loving? Why be generous and compassionate and forgiving? Why bother? What's the point?*

I have said that such basic ultimate questioning triggered off by human experiences may lead to God. I am not pretending they will infallibly do so. Of their nature, symbols are somewhat ambiguous. Other interpretations, other answers, other conclusions, are possible, e.g. in the words of Frederick Lang bridge (1849-1923): *'Two men looked out from prison bars; one saw mud, the other saw stars.'*

But when it happens that particular human experiences do lead to basic questioning, such experiences may well become *'an invitation to transcendence.'*¹⁴ They may offer an opportunity to transcend the limits of personal experience, i.e., as the word *'transcend'* suggests, to climb up and over the present experience, reach God, and embrace God as the ultimate source and meaning of one's whole life. In the process of discovering God, such experiences may also offer the opportunity to gain a whole new way of looking at life, a new heart and a new spirit.

It is out of a whole process of experience, questioning and vision that the reality of God emerges. But God does not emerge as this particular thing, this particular object. God is discovered as a background, as being with a capital 'B', out of which, within which, and in terms of which, everything else is seen. It is out of this whole process that God is discovered as an active presence, dynamism, the

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source and sustainer and destiny of all there is. Joseph Powers's remarks: '*When we open ourselves... in total self-transcendence... We don't get the Answer. Hopefully, the Answer gets us.*'¹⁵

5. Sacramental Experience Not the Experience of Everyone

In this treatment of the subject I have proposed that human experiences of one kind or another can be signs or sacraments of the presence and activity of God. The operative words are '*can be*'. We have to face the fact that apparently this is not the case for everyone. For some people, God is more absent than present. Some do not see any shadows or traces or glimpses of God in their lives. Some even deny or doubt that God exists. Sandra DeGidio remarks: A sunset, a period of quiet prayer, a storm, the birth of a child, an intimate conversation with a close friend all have the potential for revealing God to us in new and deeper ways. The phrase "potential for" is important here. Such experiences may not always be sacramental for all people. Some aspects of creation are more "charged" with God than others. And people vary in their capacity to see God in these sacramental manifestations because of their individual backgrounds and experiences. For example, a sunset or conversation with a close friend is a more poignant sacramental experience for me than a storm or the birth of a child. Storms frighten me, and I have never given birth.¹⁶

Is there anything more that can be said about this? Why does one person discern God and another fail completely to recognize God in any shape or form?

In answer to this question, nothing clear and indisputable can be asserted. We are stepping into the cloudy area of the gift and workings of faith. However, the following considerations are put forward to help illuminate the dimness and darkness about this.

1. Everyday Awareness vs. Sacramental Awareness

To discover God in and through human experience requires a particular kind of awareness, a particular kind of consciousness. Shea, in this regard, makes a useful distinction between '*everyday awareness*' and '*sacramental awareness*'.

Everyday awareness has two points of reference. For example, I (1) see a bird (2). Sacramental awareness has three points of

reference. For example, I (1) see a bird (2), and in and through this interaction become aware of the dimension of Mystery (3).¹⁷

2. Sacramental Awareness is not the Way of the Mystic or Philosopher

'The process of becoming aware of the dimension of Mystery,' claims Shea, *'differs from both mysticism and rationalism.'* Mystics, looking for a pure, unencumbered communion with the divine, leave behind their everyday environment as an obstacle to the immediate, intense merger with the divine, which they are pursuing. They are looking for a special religious experience *'and not the religious dimension of ordinary human experience'*. The philosopher, beginning with some indisputable fact, proceeds by the stepladder approach of logical inference: If this is so, then that also must be the case, and may conclude e.g. that God is the Unmoved Mover.¹⁸

3. Sacramental Awareness is the of the Poet and the Novelist

Sacramental awareness is the way of the poet, the novelist, and the artist. It is the way of feeling and sensitivity. Not in the way of blind emotionality, but in a way which is both cognitive and affective. It perceives Mystery by sensitively entering into and reflecting upon human experiences. It perceives by participation. Shea remarks: *'Sacramental consciousness does not desert the concrete, historical world but turns it into a symbol.'*¹⁹

4. Sacramental Awareness is Difficult for People Today

It has been suggested that sacramental awareness does not come easy to people nowadays. For the modern person tends to be blocked, entrapped, in two-point awareness, unable to touch the dimension of Mystery. It is claimed that the cause of this blockage is the technological spirit, which encourages manipulation of the surface of reality but is insensitive to its depth.²⁰ For people who stay at the surface of reality, there is not much room left for getting to its depths, not much room for what Abraham Maslow has called *'peak experiences'* and others have called *'depth experiences'*. For a person with the mind-set *'what you see is what you get and all you get'*, moving any distance into the depth of Mystery is barred by the narrow norms of scientific truth and method. Shea remarks that *'in this situation ... Being is forgotten.'*²¹ in this situation, the grace, the

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beauty and the poetry of life are edged out. With this mentality, sacramentality, sacramental consciousness, may be all but extinguished, in favour of what Shea has labelled '*the flat-earth impulse*.'²²

It doesn't have to be this way. Albert Einstein believed that the kind of consciousness Shea discusses is the source of all science as well as all art. He made the observation: The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious side of life. It is the deep feeling which is at the cradle of all true art and science. In this sense, and only in this sense, I count myself amongst the most deeply religious people.²³

Scientific advance, per se, ought to intensify rather than blunt our sensitivity to the sense of Mystery. One has only to contemplate e.g. the marvelous and intricate workings of the human body, with its extraordinary balance and co-ordination, in order to praise the Creator, for the emergence of that incredible combination of systems which is the human body.

6. The Role of Symbol in Liturgy (Including the Sacraments)

The Constitution on the Liturgy of Vatican II speaks of the role of symbol in liturgy when it says: 'In the liturgy the sanctification of women and men is given expression in symbols perceptible to the senses and is carried out in ways appropriate to each of them.'²⁴ This implies that the words that we say, the things that we use, and the actions that we carry out, take us beyond ourselves and put us into contact with Mystery, i.e. with the God whom we cannot see and touch and hear directly with our human senses.

The liturgy is an extension of the Incarnation. The realities which liturgy expresses in celebration are embodied in objects and in human gestures and actions. By using water, oil, bread, wine, words, movement, music, singing, etc, we experience the presence of God and his love, and make appropriate responses of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, repentance, etc. We also experience one another as fellow Christians, and reach out to them in openness, acceptance, welcome and hospitality. Thus, e.g. in the celebration of the Eucharist the bread and wine which, as food, symbolize the human life they nourish, come to symbolize Christ giving himself to his community as '*the bread of life and the cup of everlasting salvation*'.²⁵ In the

'Liturgy of the Eucharist' those taking part enact in symbol what Jesus did when *'he took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and gave to his disciples saying ...'* Thus through liturgy as a symbol system, our relationship with God becomes a concrete relationship, an embodied relationship.

7. Some Conclusions

From what has been said on the topic up till now, we may conclude that the seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism are not the only sacraments or symbols of God's presence in the world, life, history, and Church. From the concrete examples considered, we may move to some statements of general principle about the anthropological or human basis of the notion of sacrament. That is, of how what we call *'sacrament'* is earthed in the visible, the tangible, and the finite. That is, of how sacrament is the point of contact between the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible, or, to put it another way, how our human experiences function as *'doors to the sacred.'*²⁶

1. The Sacramental Principle

What is particularly distinctive about Catholicism is its commitment to *'the principle of sacramentality.'*²⁷ the sacramental principle means, in a nutshell, that the invisible God whom *'no one has ever seen'* (Jn 1:18) is disclosed through something that is earthly, visible, tangible, through something, in short, which may be humanly experienced. All sorts of experiences function as signs of the presence of God. So, for Richard McBrien, the word *'sacrament'* in its widest sense *'applies to any finite reality through which the divine is perceived to be disclosed and communicated, and through which our human response to the divine assumes some measure of shape, form, and structure.'*²⁸

This is to say that God, the source of all good and the ultimate depth of reality, is disclosed through signs of his presence - e.g. the universe, environment, movements, events, persons, communities, objects, places, words, and rituals. A sacramental vision *'sees'* God in all things (St Ignatius Loyola).

The *'sacramental principle'* has much in common with *'the incarnational principle'*. This is to say that God's way to us and our

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way to God is through the human, the fleshly, the historical, and the particular. Richard Gula remarks: '*There is no other way for us who are body-persons to experience the invisible except through that which we can touch, or to hear the inaudible except through that which strikes the ears.*'²⁹ People of faith don't stop at the appearance of things, but see through them to the deeper reality of God.

2. The Principle of Mediation

The related '*principle of mediation*' is summarized in the traditional maxim: '*Sacraments are not just signs of grace, they cause what they signify.*' This is to say that something earthly, something in human experience, not only suggests the existence and presence of God, but it also mediates or communicates that presence. Thus through their human experiences, people of faith encounter God and enter into a personal relationship with God.

3. Implications of these Principles

Among the implications of the double principles of sacramentality and mediation, the following stand out:

1. In principle, everything we experience is capable of embodying and communicating the divine;

2. As a general rule, our relationship with the invisible God is an indirect relationship;

3. So grace (God as love) comes to us through various signs and instruments of God; and

4. Jesus Christ and the Church are special signs of God communicating his love for people, and drawing forth their responses. In his earthly existence he communicated through bodily signs. His own human nature was for people the sign and instrument of God and his love. In his present risen state, he has taken on his disciples (the Church) as his body. They are to be his face, hands, feet, heart and voice, to the human race. This is to say that the Church is the sacrament of Christ in the world today, the sacrament of the coming of the kingdom of God.

End Notes

- ¹ Richard Mc Brien, *Catholicism*, revised and updated edition (North Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1994), 9-10.
- ² The capacity of symbols to carry many meanings is referred to as their ‘multivalence’ or ‘polyvalence’.
- ³ See John Shea, *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978), esp. Ch.1, ‘Exceeding Darkness and Undeserved Light’. Cf. Peter Malone, *Traces of God: Understanding God’s Presence in the World Today* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991). He discusses God in life stories, loving relationships, people, our daily lives, nature, imagination, music, words, theatre and film.
- ⁴ Cf. Shea, ‘The Way of Revelation and Faith’, in *Stories of Faith* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1980) 13-35.
- ⁵ Defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* as ‘uncertainty of occurrence; chance occurrence ... thing dependent on an uncertain event’.
- ⁶ Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), Ch.2, ‘Redemptive Immanence’.
- ⁷ An appreciation of the dynamics and processes involved will often be the factor which changes the sacrament of reconciliation from being something rather mechanical and impersonal to an experience which is personal, joyful, encouraging and liberating. The same can be said about pastoral counselling and spiritual direction.
- ⁸ Cf. the Bernard Cooke’s discussion of the value and importance of human friendship in its different forms in his *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-third Publications, 1983), 23ff.
- ⁹ Baum, *Man Becoming*, 58.
- ¹⁰ Shea, *Stories of God*, 25.
- ¹¹ William Bausch, *A New Look at the Sacraments* (West Mystic: Twenty-third Publications, revised ed. 1983, 1977), 13-14.
- ¹² This is the opening line of his poem ‘God’s Grandeur’.
- ¹³ For the germ of this idea developed in my own way, see Joseph Powers, *Spirit and Sacrament: The Humanizing Experience* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 1f.
- ¹⁴ Powers, *Spirit and Sacrament*, 12.
- ¹⁵ Powers, *Spirit and Sacrament*, 18.
- ¹⁶ Sandra DeGidio, *Sacraments Alive: Their History Celebration and Significance* (Mystic: Twenty-third Publications, 1991), 9.
- ¹⁷ Shea, *Stories of God*, 18.
- ¹⁸ Shea, *Stories of God*, 17f.
- ¹⁹ Shea, *Stories of God*, 21.

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- ²⁰ Shea, *Stories of God*, 21.
- ²¹ Shea, *Stories of God*, 22.
- ²² Shea, *Stories of God*, 24.
- ²³ Albert Einstein, cited in Shea, *Stories of God*, 24.
- ²⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §7.
- ²⁵ First Eucharistic Prayer, Order of Mass.
- ²⁶ The expression was coined by Joseph Martos as the title of his work, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Christian Church* (Tarrytown, N.Y. Triumph Books, 1981, 1982, 1991).
- ²⁷ Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (East Malvern: Collins Dove, 1994), 787.
- ²⁸ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 788.
- ²⁹ Richard Gula, *To Walk Together Again: The Sacrament of Reconciliation* (Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1983), 72.

Certain Ecumenical Issues in Sacramental Theology

Fundamentalists often criticize the Catholic Church's practice of baptizing infants. According to them, baptism is for adults and older children, because it is to be administered only after one has undergone a "born again" experience—that is, after one has "accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior." At the instant of acceptance, when he is "born again," the adult becomes a Christian, and his salvation is assured forever. Baptism follows, though it has no actual salvific value. In fact, one who dies before being baptized, but after "being saved," goes to heaven anyway.

Infant Baptism

As Fundamentalists see it, baptism is not a sacrament (in the true sense of the word), but an ordinance. It does not in any way convey the grace it symbolizes; rather, it is merely a public manifestation of the person's

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conversion. Since only an adult or older child can be converted, baptism is inappropriate for infants or for children who have not yet reached the age of reason (generally considered to be age seven). Most Fundamentalists say that during the years before they reach the age of reason infants and young children are automatically saved. Only once a person reaches the age of reason does he need to “accept Jesus” in order to reach heaven.

Since the New Testament era, the Catholic Church has always understood baptism differently, teaching that it is a sacrament which accomplishes several things, the first of which is the remission of sin, both original sin and actual sin—only original sin in the case of infants and young children, since they are incapable of actual sin; and both original and actual sin in the case of older persons.

Peter explained what happens at baptism when he said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). But he did not restrict this teaching to adults. He added, “For the promise is to you *and to your children* and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him” (2:39). We also read: “Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16). These commands are universal, not restricted to adults. Further, these commands make clear the necessary connection between baptism and salvation, a connection explicitly stated in 1 Peter 3:21: “Baptism... now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

1. Christ Calls All to Baptism

Although Fundamentalists are the most recent critics of infant baptism, opposition to infant baptism is not a new phenomenon. In the middle Ages, some groups developed that rejected infant baptism, e.g., the Waldenses and Catharists. Later, the Anabaptists (“re-baptizers”) echoed them, claiming that infants are incapable of being baptized validly. But the historic Christian Church has always held that Christ’s law applies to infants as well as adults, for Jesus said that no one can enter heaven unless he has been born again of water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). His words can be taken to apply to

anyone capable of belonging to his kingdom. He asserted such even for children: “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14).

More detail is given in Luke’s account of this event, which reads: “Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to him, saying, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God’” (Luke 18:15-16).

Now Fundamentalists say this event does not apply to young children or infants since it implies the children to which Christ was referring were able to approach him on their own. (Older translations have, “Suffer the little children to come unto me,” which seems to suggest they could do so under their own power.) Fundamentalists conclude the passage refers only to children old enough to walk, and, presumably, capable of sinning. But the text in Luke 18:15 says, “Now they were bringing even *infants* to him” (Greek, *Prosepheron de auto kai ta brepha*). The Greek word *brepha* means “infants” - children who are quite unable to approach Christ on their own and who could not possibly make a conscious decision to “accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.” And that is precisely the problem. Fundamentalists refuse to permit the baptism of infants and young children, because they are not yet capable of making such a conscious act. But notice what Jesus said: “to such as these [referring to the infants and children who had been brought to him by their mothers] belongs the kingdom of heaven.” The Lord did not require them to make a conscious decision. He says that they are precisely the kind of people who *can* come to him and receive the kingdom. So on what basis, Fundamentalists should be asked; can infants and young children be excluded from the sacrament of baptism? If Jesus said “let them come unto me,” who are we to say “no,” and withhold baptism from them?

2. In Place of Circumcision

Furthermore, Paul notes that baptism has replaced circumcision (Col. 2:11–12). In that passage, he refers to baptism as “the circumcision of Christ” and “the circumcision made without hands.” Of course, usually only infants were circumcised under the Old Law;

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circumcision of adults was rare, since there were few converts to Judaism. If Paul meant to exclude infants, he would not have chosen circumcision as a parallel for baptism.

This comparison between who could receive baptism and circumcision is an appropriate one. In the Old Testament, if a man wanted to become a Jew, he had to believe in the God of Israel and be circumcised. In the New Testament, if one wants to become a Christian, one must believe in God and Jesus and be baptized. In the Old Testament, those born into Jewish households could be circumcised in anticipation of the Jewish faith in which they would be raised. Thus in the New Testament, those born in Christian households can be baptized in anticipation of the Christian faith in which they will be raised. The pattern is the same: If one is an adult, one must have faith before receiving the rite of membership; if one is a child too young to have faith, one may be given the rite of membership in the knowledge that one will be raised in the faith. This is the basis of Paul's reference to baptism as "the circumcision of Christ"- that is, the Christian equivalent of circumcision.

3. Were Only Adults Baptized?

Fundamentalists are reluctant to admit that the Bible nowhere says baptism is to be restricted to adults, but when pressed, they will. They just conclude that is what it should be taken as meaning, even if the text does not explicitly support such a view. Naturally enough, the people whose baptisms we read about in Scripture (and few are individually identified) are adults, because they were converted as adults. This makes sense, because Christianity was just beginning - there were no "cradle Christians," people brought up from childhood in Christian homes.

Even in the books of the New Testament that were written later in the first century, during the time when children were raised in the first Christian homes, we never - not even once - find an example of a child raised in a Christian home who is baptized only upon making a "decision for Christ." Rather, it is always assumed that the children of Christian homes are already Christians, that they have already been "baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3). If infant baptism were not the rule, then we should have references to the children of Christian parents

joining the Church only after they had come to the age of reason, and there are no such records in the Bible.

4. Specific Biblical References?

But, one might ask, does the Bible ever say that infants or young children can be baptized? The indications are clear. In the New Testament we read that Lydia was converted by Paul's preaching and that "She was baptized, with her household" (Acts 16:15). The Philippian jailer whom Paul and Silas had converted to the faith was baptized that night along with his household. We are told that "the same hour of the night . . . he was baptized, with all his family" (Acts 16:33). And in his greetings to the Corinthians, Paul recalled that, "I did baptize also the household of Stephanas" (1 Cor. 1:16).

In all these cases, whole households or families were baptized. This means more than just the spouse; the children too were included. If the text of Acts referred simply to the Philippian jailer and his wife, then we would read that "he and his wife were baptized," but we do not. Thus his children must have been baptized as well. The same applies to the other cases of household baptism in Scripture.

Granted, we do not know the exact age of the children; they may have been past the age of reason, rather than infants. Then again, they could have been babes in arms. More probably, there were both younger and older children. Certainly there were children younger than the age of reason in some of the households that were baptized, especially if one considers that society at this time had no reliable form of birth control. Furthermore, given the New Testament pattern of household baptism, if there were to be exceptions to this rule (such as infants), they would be explicit.

5. Catholics From the First

The present Catholic attitude accords perfectly with early Christian practices. Origen, for instance, wrote in the third century that "according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants" (*Holilies on Leviticus*, 8:3:11 [A.D. 244]). The Council of Carthage, in 253, condemned the opinion that baptism should be withheld from infants until the eighth day after birth. Later, Augustine taught, "The custom of Mother Church in baptizing

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infants is certainly not to be scorned... nor is it to be believed that its tradition is anything except apostolic” (*Literal Interpretation of Genesis* 10:23:39 [A.D. 408]).

1. No Cry of “Invention!”

None of the Fathers or councils of the Church was claiming that the practice was contrary to Scripture or tradition. They agreed that the practice of baptizing infants was the customary and appropriate practice since the days of the early Church; the only uncertainty seemed to be when- exactly - an infant should be baptized. Further evidence that infant baptism was the accepted practice in the early Church is the fact that if infant baptism had been opposed to the religious practices of the first believers, why do we have no record of early Christian writers condemning it?

But Fundamentalists try to ignore the historical writings from the early Church which clearly indicate the legitimacy of infant baptism. They attempt to sidestep appeals to history by saying baptism requires faith and, since children are incapable of having faith, they cannot be baptized. It is true that Christ prescribed instruction and actual faith for adult converts (Matt. 28:19–20), but his general law on the necessity of baptism (John 3:5) puts no restriction on the subjects of baptism. Although infants are included in the law he establishes, requirements of that law that are impossible to meet because of their age are not applicable to them. They cannot be expected to be instructed and have faith when they are incapable of receiving instruction or manifesting faith. The same was true of circumcision; faith in the Lord was necessary for an adult convert to receive it, but it was not necessary for the children of believers.

Furthermore, the Bible never says, “Faith in Christ is necessary for salvation except for infants”; it simply says, “Faith in Christ is necessary for salvation.” Yet Fundamentalists must admit there is an exception for infants unless they wish to condemn instantaneously all infants to hell. Therefore, the Fundamentalist himself makes an exception for infants regarding the necessity of faith for salvation. He can thus scarcely criticize the Catholic for making the exact same exception for baptism, especially if, as Catholics believe, baptism is an instrument of salvation.

It becomes apparent, then, that the Fundamentalist position on infant baptism is not really a consequence of the Bible's strictures, but of the demands of Fundamentalism's idea of salvation. In reality, the Bible indicates that infants are to be baptized, that they too are meant to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Further, the witness of the earliest Christian practices and writings must once and for all silence those who criticize the Catholic Church's teaching on infant baptism. The Catholic Church is merely continuing the tradition established by the first Christians, who heeded the words of Christ: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16).

2. The Real Presence of Jesus in Eucharist

The doctrine of the Real Presence asserts that in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is literally and wholly present - body and blood, soul and divinity - under the appearances of bread and wine. Evangelicals and Fundamentalists frequently attack this doctrine as "unbiblical," but the Bible is forthright in declaring it (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17, 11:23-29; and, most forcefully, John 6:32-71).

The Lord Jesus, on the night before he suffered on the cross, shared one last meal with his disciples. During this meal our Savior instituted the sacrament of his Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the ages and to entrust to the Church his Spouse a memorial of his death and resurrection. As the Gospel of Matthew tells us:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins." (Mt 26:26-28; cf. Mk 14:22-24, Lk 22:17-20, 1 Cor 11:23-25)

Recalling these words of Jesus, the Catholic Church professes that, in the celebration of the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the priest. Jesus said: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever;

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and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world... For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink” (Jn 6:51-55). The whole Christ is truly present, body, blood, soul, and divinity, under the appearances of bread and wine - the glorified Christ who rose from the dead after dying for our sins. This is what the Church means when she speaks of the “Real Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist. This presence of Christ in the Eucharist is called “real” not to exclude other types of his presence as if they could not be understood as real (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1374). The risen Christ is present to his Church in many ways, but most especially through the sacrament of his Body and Blood.

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine? How does this happen? The presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist is an inexhaustible mystery that the Church can never fully explain in words. We must remember that the triune God is the creator of all that exists and has the power to do more than we can possibly imagine. As St. Ambrose said: “If the word of the Lord Jesus is so powerful as to bring into existence things which were not, then *a fortiori* those things which already exist can be changed into something else” (*De Sacramentis*, IV, 5-16). God created the world in order to share his life with persons who are not God. This great plan of salvation reveals a wisdom that surpasses our understanding. But we are not left in ignorance: for out of his love for us, God reveals his truth to us in ways that we can understand through the gift of faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We are thus enabled to understand at least in some measure what would otherwise remain unknown to us, though we can never completely comprehend the mystery of God.

As successors of the Apostles and teachers of the Church, the bishops have the duty to hand on what God has revealed to us and to encourage all members of the Church to deepen their understanding of the mystery and gift of the Eucharist. In order to foster such a deepening of faith, we have prepared this text to respond to fifteen questions that commonly arise with regard to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We offer this text to pastors and religious educators to assist them in their teaching responsibilities.

We recognize that some of these questions involve rather complex theological ideas. It is our hope, however, that study and discussion of the text will aid many of the Catholic faithful in our country to enrich their understanding of this mystery of the faith.

1. Why does Jesus give himself to us as food and drink?

Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual nourishment because he loves us. God's whole plan for our salvation is directed to our participation in the life of the Trinity, the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our sharing in this life begins with our Baptism, when by the power of the Holy Spirit we are joined to Christ, thus becoming adopted sons and daughters of the Father. It is strengthened and increased in Confirmation. It is nourished and deepened through our participation in the Eucharist. By eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist we become united to the person of Christ through his humanity. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56). In being united to the humanity of Christ we are at the same time united to his divinity. Our mortal and corruptible natures are transformed by being joined to the source of life. "Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" (Jn 6:57). By being united to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are drawn up into the eternal relationship of love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As Jesus is the eternal Son of God by nature, so we become sons and daughters of God by adoption through the sacrament of Baptism. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (Chrismation), we are temples of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and by his indwelling we are made holy by the gift of sanctifying grace. The ultimate promise of the Gospel is that we will share in the life of the Holy Trinity. The Fathers of the Church called this participation in the divine life "divinization" (*theosis*). In this we see that God does not merely send us good things from on high; instead, we are brought up into the inner life of God, the communion among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the celebration of the Eucharist (which means "thanksgiving") we give praise and glory to God for this sublime gift.

2. Why is the Eucharist not only a meal but also a sacrifice?

While our sins would have made it impossible for us to share in the life of God, Jesus Christ was sent to remove this obstacle. His death was a sacrifice for our sins. Christ is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Through his death and resurrection, he conquered sin and death and reconciled us to God. The Eucharist is the memorial of this sacrifice. The Church gathers to remember and to re-present the sacrifice of Christ in which we share through the action of the priest and the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the celebration of the Eucharist, we are joined to Christ’s sacrifice and receive its inexhaustible benefits. As the Letter to the Hebrews explains, Jesus is the one eternal high priest who always lives to make intercession for the people before the Father. In this way, he surpasses the many high priests who over centuries used to offer sacrifices for sin in the Jerusalem temple. The eternal high priest Jesus offers the perfect sacrifice which is his very self, not something else. “He entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12). Jesus’ act belongs to human history, for he is truly human and has entered into history. At the same time, however, Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity; he is the eternal Son, who is not confined within time or history. His actions transcend time, which is part of creation. “Passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation” (Heb 9:11), Jesus the eternal Son of God made his act of sacrifice in the presence of his Father, who lives in eternity. Jesus’ one perfect sacrifice is thus eternally present before the Father, who eternally accepts it. This means that in the Eucharist, Jesus does not sacrifice himself again and again. Rather, by the power of the Holy Spirit his one eternal sacrifice is made present once again, re-presented, so that we may share in it. Christ does not have to leave where he is in heaven to be with us. Rather, we partake of the heavenly liturgy where Christ eternally intercedes for us and presents his sacrifice to the Father and where the angels and saints constantly glorify God and give thanks for all his gifts: “To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever” (Rev 5:13). As the *Catechism of the Catholic*

Church states, “By the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all” (no. 1326). The *Sanctus* proclamation, “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord...,” is the song of the angels who are in the presence of God (Is 6:3). When in the Eucharist we proclaim the *Sanctus* we echo on earth the song of angels as they worship God in heaven. In the eucharistic celebration we do not simply remember an event in history. Rather, through the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit in the eucharistic celebration the Lord’s Paschal Mystery is made present and contemporaneous to his Spouse the Church. Furthermore, in the eucharistic re-presentation of Christ’s eternal sacrifice before the Father, we are not simply spectators. The priest and the worshipping community are in different ways active in the eucharistic sacrifice. The ordained priest standing at the altar represents Christ as head of the Church. All the baptized, as members of Christ’s Body, share in his priesthood, as both priest and victim. The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church. The Church, which is the Body and Bride of Christ, participates in the sacrificial offering of her Head and Spouse. In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ becomes the sacrifice of the members of his Body who united to Christ form one sacrificial offering (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1368). As Christ’s sacrifice is made sacramentally present, united with Christ, we offer ourselves as a sacrifice to the Father. “The whole Church exercises the role of priest and victim along with Christ, offering the Sacrifice of the Mass and itself completely offered in it” (*Mysterium Fidei*, no. 31; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11).

3. When the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, why do they still look and taste like bread and wine?

In the celebration of the Eucharist, the glorified Christ becomes present under the appearances of bread and wine in a way that is unique, a way that is uniquely suited to the Eucharist. In the Church’s traditional theological language, in the act of consecration during the Eucharist the “substance” of the bread and wine is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit into the “substance” of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. At the same time, the “accidents” or appearances of bread and wine remain. “Substance” and “accident” are here used as philosophical terms that have been adapted by great medieval

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theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas in their efforts to understand and explain the faith. Such terms are used to convey the fact that what appears to be bread and wine in every way (at the level of “accidents” or physical attributes - that is, what can be seen, touched, tasted, or measured) in fact is now the Body and Blood of Christ (at the level of “substance” or deepest reality). This change at the level of substance from bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is called “transubstantiation.” According to Catholic faith, we can speak of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist because this transubstantiation has occurred (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1376). This is a great mystery of our faith—we can only know it from Christ’s teaching given us in the Scriptures and in the Tradition of the Church. Every other change that occurs in the world involves a change in accidents or characteristics. Sometimes the accidents change while the substance remains the same. For example, when a child reaches adulthood, the characteristics of the human person change in many ways, but the adult remains the same person—the same substance. At other times, the substance and the accidents both change. For example, when a person eats an apple, the apple is incorporated into the body of that person—is changed into the body of that person. When this change of substance occurs, however, the accidents or characteristics of the apple do not remain. As the apple is changed into the body of the person, it takes on the accidents or characteristics of the body of that person. Christ’s presence in the Eucharist is unique in that, even though the consecrated bread and wine truly are in substance the Body and Blood of Christ, they have none of the accidents or characteristics of a human body, but only those of bread and wine.

4. Does the bread cease to be bread and the wine cease to be wine?

Yes. In order for the whole Christ to be present - body, blood, soul, and divinity - the bread and wine cannot remain, but must give way so that his glorified Body and Blood may be present. Thus in the Eucharist the bread ceases to be bread in substance, and becomes the Body of Christ, while the wine ceases to be wine in substance, and becomes the Blood of Christ. As St. Thomas Aquinas observed, Christ is not quoted as saying, “*This bread is my body*,” but “*This is my body*” (*Summa Theologiae*, III q. 78, a. 5).

5. *Is it fitting that Christ's Body and Blood become present in the Eucharist under the appearances of bread and wine?*

Yes, for this way of being present corresponds perfectly to the sacramental celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus Christ gives himself to us in a form that employs the symbolism inherent in eating bread and drinking wine. Furthermore, being present under the appearances of bread and wine, Christ gives himself to us in a form that is appropriate for human eating and drinking. Also, this kind of presence corresponds to the virtue of faith, for the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ cannot be detected or discerned by any way other than faith. That is why St. Bonaventure affirmed: "There is no difficulty over Christ's being present in the sacrament as in a sign; the great difficulty is in the fact that He is really in the sacrament, as He is in heaven. And so believing this is especially meritorious" (*In IV Sent.*, dist. X, P. I, art. un., qu. I). on the authority of God who reveals himself to us, by faith we believe that which cannot be grasped by our human faculties (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1381).

6. *Are the Consecrated bread and wine "merely symbols"?*

In everyday language, we call a "symbol" something that points beyond itself to something else, often to several other realities at once. The transformed bread and wine that are the Body and Blood of Christ are not merely symbols because they truly are the Body and Blood of Christ. As St. John Damascene wrote: "The bread and wine are not a foreshadowing of the body and blood of Christ - By no means! - but the actual deified body of the Lord, because the Lord Himself said: 'This is my body'; not 'a foreshadowing of my body' but 'my body,' and not 'a foreshadowing of my blood' but 'my blood'" (*The Orthodox Faith*, IV [PG 94, 1148-49]). At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the Body and Blood of Christ come to us in the Eucharist in a sacramental form. In other words, Christ is present under the appearances of bread and wine, not in his own proper form. We cannot presume to know all the reasons behind God's actions. God uses, however, the symbolism inherent in the eating of bread and the drinking of wine at the natural level to illuminate the meaning of what is being accomplished in the Eucharist through Jesus Christ. There are various ways in which the symbolism of eating

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bread and drinking wine discloses the meaning of the Eucharist. For example, just as natural food gives nourishment to the body, so the eucharistic food gives spiritual nourishment. Furthermore, the sharing of an ordinary meal establishes a certain communion among the people who share it; in the Eucharist, the People of God share a meal that brings them into communion not only with each other but with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Similarly, as St. Paul tells us, the single loaf that is shared among many during the eucharistic meal is an indication of the unity of those who have been called together by the Holy Spirit as one body, the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17). To take another example, the individual grains of wheat and individual grapes have to be harvested and to undergo a process of grinding or crushing before they are unified as bread and as wine. Because of this, bread and wine point to both the union of the many that takes place in the Body of Christ and the suffering undergone by Christ, a suffering that must also be embraced by his disciples. Much more could be said about the many ways in which the eating of bread and drinking of wine symbolize what God does for us through Christ, since symbols carry multiple meanings and connotations.

7. Do the consecrated bread and wine cease to be the Body and Blood of Christ when the Mass is over?

No. During the celebration of the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, and this they remain. They cannot turn back into bread and wine, for they are no longer bread and wine at all. There is thus no reason for them to change back to their “normal” state after the special circumstances of the Mass are past. Once the substance has really changed, the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ “endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist” (*Catechism*, no. 1377). Against those who maintained that the bread that is consecrated during the Eucharist has no sanctifying power if it is left over until the next day, St. Cyril of Alexandria replied, “Christ is not altered, nor is his holy body changed, but the power of the consecration and his life-giving grace is perpetual in it” (*Letter 83, to Calosyrius, Bishop of Arsinoe* [PG 76, 1076]). The Church teaches that Christ remains present under the appearances of bread and wine as long as the appearances of bread and wine remain (cf. *Catechism*, no. 1377).

8. *Why are some of the consecrated hosts reserved after the Mass?*

While it would be possible to eat all of the bread that is consecrated during the Mass, some is usually kept in the tabernacle. The Body of Christ under the appearance of bread that is kept or “reserved” after the Mass is commonly referred to as the “Blessed Sacrament.” There are several pastoral reasons for reserving the Blessed Sacrament. First of all, it is used for distribution to the dying (*Viaticum*), the sick, and those who legitimately cannot be present for the celebration of the Eucharist. Secondly, the Body of Christ in the form of bread is to be adored when it is exposed, as in the Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction, when it is carried in eucharistic processions, or when it is simply placed in the tabernacle, before which people pray privately. These devotions are based on the fact that Christ himself is present under the appearance of bread. Many holy people well known to American Catholics, such as St. John Neumann, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Katharine Drexel, and Blessed Damien of Molokai, practiced great personal devotion to Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. In the Eastern Catholic Churches, devotion to the reserved Blessed Sacrament is practiced most directly at the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, offered on weekdays of Lent.

9. *What are appropriate signs of reverence with respect to the Body and Blood of Christ?*

The Body and Blood of Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine are treated with the greatest reverence both during and after the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. *Mysterium Fidei*, nos. 56-61). For example, the tabernacle in which the consecrated bread is reserved is placed “in some part of the church or oratory which is distinguished, conspicuous, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer” (*Code of Canon Law*, Can. 938, §2). According to the tradition of the Latin Church, one should genuflect in the presence of the tabernacle containing the reserved sacrament. In the Eastern Catholic Churches, the traditional practice is to make the sign of the cross and to bow profoundly. The liturgical gestures from both traditions reflect reverence, respect, and adoration. It is appropriate for the members of the assembly to greet each other in the gathering space of the church (that is, the vestibule or narthex), but it is not

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appropriate to speak in loud or boisterous tones in the body of the church (that is, the nave) because of the presence of Christ in the tabernacle. Also, the Church requires everyone to fast before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ as a sign of reverence and recollection (unless illness prevents one from doing so). In the Latin Church, one must generally fast for at least one hour; members of Eastern Catholic Churches must follow the practice established by their own Church.

10. If someone without faith eats and drinks the consecrated bread and wine, does he or she still receive the Body and Blood of Christ?

If “to receive” means “to consume,” the answer is yes, for what the person consumes is the Body and Blood of Christ. If “to receive” means “to accept the Body and Blood of Christ knowingly and willingly as what they are, so as to obtain the spiritual benefit,” then the answer is no. A lack of faith on the part of the person eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ cannot change what these are, but it does prevent the person from obtaining the spiritual benefit, which is communion with Christ. Such reception of Christ’s Body and Blood would be in vain and, if done knowingly, would be sacrilegious (1 Cor 11:29). Reception of the Blessed Sacrament is not an automatic remedy. If we do not desire communion with Christ, God does not force this upon us. Rather, we must by faith accept God’s offer of communion in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, and cooperate with God’s grace in order to have our hearts and minds transformed and our faith and love of God increased.

11. If a believer who is conscious of having committed a mortal sin eats and drinks the consecrated bread and wine, does he or she still receive the Body and Blood of Christ?

Yes. The attitude or disposition of the recipient cannot change what the consecrated bread and wine are. The question here is thus not primarily about the nature of the Real Presence, but about how sin affects the relationship between an individual and the Lord. Before one steps forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, one needs to be in a right relationship with the Lord and his Mystical Body, the Church - that is, in a state of grace, free of all

mortal sin. While sin damages and can even destroy, that relationship, the sacrament of Penance can restore it. St. Paul tells us that “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup” (1 Cor 11:27-28). Anyone who is conscious of having committed a mortal sin should be reconciled through the sacrament of Penance before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, unless a grave reason exists for doing so and there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, that is, an act of sorrow for sins that “arises from a love by which God is loved above all else” (*Catechism*, no. 1452). The act of perfect contrition must be accompanied by the firm intention of making a sacramental confession as soon as possible.

12. Does one receive the whole Christ if one receives Holy Communion under a single form?

Yes. Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is wholly present under the appearance either of bread or of wine in the Eucharist. Furthermore, Christ is wholly present in any fragment of the consecrated Host or in any drop of the Precious Blood. Nevertheless, it is especially fitting to receive Christ in both forms during the celebration of the Eucharist. This allows the Eucharist to appear more perfectly as a banquet, a banquet that is a foretaste of the banquet that will be celebrated with Christ at the end of time when the Kingdom of God is established in its fullness (cf. *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, no. 32).

13. Is Christ present during the celebration of the Eucharist in other ways in addition to his Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament?

Yes. Christ is present during the Eucharist in various ways. He is present in the person of the priest who offers the sacrifice of the Mass. According to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council, Christ is present in his Word “since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.” He is also present in the assembled people as they pray and sing, “for he has promised ‘where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them’ (Mt 18:20)” (*Sacrosanctum*

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Concilium, no. 7). Furthermore, he is likewise present in other sacraments; for example, “when anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes” (ibid.). We speak of the presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine as “real” in order to emphasize the special nature of that presence. What appears to be bread and wine is in its very substance the Body and Blood of Christ. The entire Christ is present, God and man, body and blood, soul and divinity. While the other ways in which Christ is present in the celebration of the Eucharist are certainly not unreal, this way surpasses the others. “This presence is called ‘real’ not to exclude the idea that the others are ‘real’ too, but rather to indicate presence par excellence, because it is substantial and through it Christ becomes present whole and entire, God and man” (*Mysterium Fidei*, no. 39).

14. Why do we speak of the “Body of Christ” in more than one sense?

First, the Body of Christ refers to the human body of Jesus Christ, who is the divine Word become man. During the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. As human, Jesus Christ has a human body, a resurrected and glorified body that in the Eucharist is offered to us in the form of bread and wine. Secondly, as St. Paul taught us in his letters, using the analogy of the human body, the Church is the Body of Christ, in which many members are united with Christ their head (1 Cor 10:16-17, 12:12-31; Rom 12:4-8). This reality is frequently referred to as the Mystical Body of Christ. All those united to Christ, the living and the dead, are joined together as one Body in Christ. This union is not one that can be seen by human eyes, for it is a mystical union brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Mystical Body of Christ and the eucharistic Body of Christ are inseparably linked. By Baptism we enter the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, and by receiving the eucharistic Body of Christ we are strengthened and built up into the Mystical Body of Christ. The central act of the Church is the celebration of the Eucharist; the individual believers are sustained as members of the Church, members of the Mystical Body of Christ, through their reception of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. Playing on the two meanings of “Body of Christ,” St. Augustine tells those who are to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist: “Be what you see, and receive what you are”

(Sermon 272). In another sermon he says, “If you receive worthily, you are what you have received” (Sermon 227). The work of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of the Eucharist is twofold in a way that corresponds to the twofold meaning of “Body of Christ.” On the one hand, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the risen Christ and his act of sacrifice become present. In the eucharistic prayer, the priest asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit down upon the gifts of bread and wine to transform them into the Body and Blood of Christ (a prayer known as the *epiclesis* or “invocation upon”). On the other hand, at the same time the priest also asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit down upon the whole assembly so that “those who take part in the Eucharist may be one body and one spirit” (*Catechism*, no. 1353). It is through the Holy Spirit that the gift of the eucharistic Body of Christ comes to us and through the Holy Spirit that we are joined to Christ and each other as the Mystical Body of Christ. By this we can see that the celebration of the Eucharist does not just unite us to God as individuals who are isolated from one another. Rather, we are united to Christ together with all the other members of the Mystical Body. The celebration of the Eucharist should thus increase our love for one another and remind us of our responsibilities toward one another. Furthermore, as members of the Mystical Body, we have a duty to represent Christ and to bring Christ to the world. We have a responsibility to share the Good News of Christ not only by our words but also by how we live our lives. We also have a responsibility to work against all the forces in our world that oppose the Gospel, including all forms of injustice. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us: “The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren” (no. 1397).

15. Why do we call the presence of Christ in the Eucharist a “mystery”?

The word “mystery” is commonly used to refer to something that escapes the full comprehension of the human mind. In the Bible, however, the word has a deeper and more specific meaning, for it refers to aspects of God’s plan of salvation for humanity, which has already begun but will be completed only with the end of time. In ancient Israel, through the Holy Spirit God revealed to the prophets

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some of the secrets of what he was going to accomplish for the salvation of his people (cf. Am 3:7; Is 21:28; Dan 2:27-45). Likewise, through the preaching and teaching of Jesus, the mystery of “the Kingdom of God” was being revealed to his disciples (Mk 4:11-12). St. Paul explained that the mysteries of God may challenge our human understanding or may even seem to be foolishness, but their meaning is revealed to the People of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25, 2:6-10; Rom 16:25-27; Rev 10:7). The Eucharist is a mystery because it participates in the mystery of Jesus Christ and God’s plan to save humanity through Christ. We should not be surprised if there are aspects of the Eucharist that are not easy to understand, for God’s plan for the world has repeatedly surpassed human expectations and human understanding (cf. Jn 6:60-66). For example, even the disciples did not at first understand that it was necessary for the Messiah to be put to death and then to rise from the dead (cf. Mk 8:31-33, 9:31-32, 10:32-34; Mt 16: 21-23, 17:22-23, 20:17-19; Lk 9:22, 9:43-45, 18:31-34). Furthermore, any time that we are speaking of God we need to keep in mind that our human concepts never entirely grasp God. We must not try to limit God to our understanding, but allow our understanding to be stretched beyond its normal limitations by God’s revelation.

From the Church’s early days, the Fathers referred to Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. Kelly writes: “Ignatius roundly declares that... [t]he bread is the flesh of Jesus, the cup his blood. Clearly he intends this realism to be taken strictly, for he makes it the basis of his argument against the Docetists’ denial of the reality of Christ’s body... Irenaeus teaches that the bread and wine are really the Lord’s body and blood. His witness is, indeed, all the more impressive because he produces it quite incidentally while refuting the Gnostic and Docetic rejection of the Lord’s real humanity” (ibid., 197–98).

“Hippolytus speaks of ‘the body and the blood’ through which the Church is saved, and Tertullian regularly describes the bread as ‘the Lord’s body.’ The converted pagan, he remarks, ‘feeds on the richness of the Lord’s body, that is, on the Eucharist.’ The realism of his theology comes to light in the argument, based on the intimate relation of body and soul, that just as in baptism the body is washed with water so that the soul may be cleansed, so in the Eucharist ‘the flesh feeds upon

Christ's body and blood so that the soul may be filled with God.' Clearly his assumption is that the Savior's body and blood are as real as the baptismal water. Cyprian's attitude is similar. Lapsed Christians who claim communion without doing penance, he declares, 'do violence to his body and blood, a sin more heinous against the Lord with their hands and mouths than when they denied him.' Later he expatiates on the terrifying consequences of profaning the sacrament, and the stories he tells confirm that he took the Real Presence literally" (ibid., 211–12).

- ❖ **Ignatius of Antioch:** "I have no taste for corruptible food or for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible" (*Letter to the Romans* 7:3 [A.D. 110]).
- * "Take note of those who hold heterodox opinions on the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary their opinions are to the mind of God... They abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, flesh which suffered for our sins and which that Father, in his goodness, raised up again. They who deny the gifts of God are perishing in their disputes" (*Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6:2–7:1 [A.D. 110]).
- ❖ **Justin Martyr:** "We call this food Eucharist, and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration [i.e., has received baptism] and is thereby living as Christ enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nurtured, is both the flesh and the blood of that incarnated Jesus" (*First Apology* 66 [A.D. 151]).
- ❖ **Irenaeus:** "If the Lord were from other than the Father, how could he rightly take bread, which is of the same creation as our

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own, and confess it to be his body and affirm that the mixture in the cup is his blood?" (*Against Heresies* 4:33–32 [A.D. 189]).

- * "He has declared the cup, a part of creation, to be his own blood, from which he causes our blood to flow; and the bread, a part of creation, he has established as his own body, from which he gives increase unto our bodies. When, therefore, the mixed cup [wine and water] and the baked bread receives the Word of God and becomes the Eucharist, the body of Christ, and from these the substance of our flesh is increased and supported, how can they say that the flesh is not capable of receiving the gift of God, which is eternal life - flesh which is nourished by the body and blood of the Lord, and is in fact a member of him?" (ibid., 5:2).
- ❖ **Clement of Alexandria:** "'Eat my flesh,' [Jesus] says, 'and drink my blood.' The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutrients, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children" (*The Instructor of Children* 1:6:43:3 [A.D. 191]).
- ❖ **Tertullian:** "[T]here is not a soul that can at all procure salvation, except it believe whilst it is in the flesh, so true is it that the flesh is the very condition on which salvation hinges. And since the soul is, in consequence of its salvation, chosen to the service of God, it is the flesh which actually renders it capable of such service. The flesh, indeed, is washed [in baptism], in order that the soul may be cleansed... the flesh is shadowed with the imposition of hands [in confirmation], that the soul also may be illuminated by the Spirit; the flesh feeds [in the Eucharist] on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may be filled with God" (*The Resurrection of the Dead* 8 [A.D. 210]).
- ❖ **Hippolytus:** "'And she [Wisdom] has furnished her table' [Prov. 9:2]... refers to his [Christ's] honored and undefiled body and blood, which day by day are administered and offered sacrificially at the spiritual divine table, as a memorial of that first and ever-memorable table of the spiritual divine supper [i.e., the Last Supper]" (Fragment from *Commentary on Proverbs* [A.D. 217]).
- ❖ **Origen:** "Formerly there was baptism in an obscure way . . . now, however, in full view; there is regeneration in water and in

the Holy Spirit. Formerly, in an obscure way, there was manna for food; now, however, in full view, there is the true food, the flesh of the Word of God, as he himself says: ‘My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink’ [John 6:55]” (*Homilies on Numbers* 7:2 [A.D. 248]).

- ❖ **Cyprian of Carthage:** “He [Paul] threatens, moreover, the stubborn and forward, and denounces them, saying, ‘Whosoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord’ [1 Cor. 11:27]. All these warnings being scorned and contemned - [lapsed Christians will often take Communion] before their sin is expiated, before confession has been made of their crime, before their conscience has been purged by sacrifice and by the hand of the priest, before the offense of an angry and threatening Lord has been appeased, [and so] violence is done to his body and blood; and they sin now against their Lord more with their hand and mouth than when they denied their Lord” (*The Lapsed* 15–16 [A.D. 251]).
- ❖ **Council of Nicaea I:** “It has come to the knowledge of the holy and great synod that, in some districts and cities, the deacons administer the Eucharist to the presbyters [i.e., priests], whereas neither canon nor custom permits that they who have no right to offer [the Eucharistic sacrifice] should give the Body of Christ to them that do offer [it]” (Canon 18 [A.D. 325]).
- ❖ **Aphraahat the Persian Sage:** “After having spoken thus [at the Last Supper], the Lord rose up from the place where he had made the Passover and had given his body as food and his blood as drink, and he went with his disciples to the place where he was to be arrested. But he ate of his own body and drank of his own blood, while he was pondering on the dead. With his own hands the Lord presented his own body to be eaten, and before he was crucified he gave his blood as drink” (*Treatises* 12:6 [A.D. 340]).
- ❖ **Cyril of Jerusalem:** “The bread and the wine of the Eucharist before the holy invocation of the adorable Trinity were simple bread and wine, but the invocation having been made, the bread becomes the body of Christ and the wine the blood of Christ” (*Catechetical Lectures* 19:7 [A.D. 350]).

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- * “Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master’s declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm. Do not judge in this matter by taste, but be fully assured by the faith, not doubting that you have been deemed worthy of the body and blood of Christ... [Since you are] fully convinced that the apparent bread is not bread, even though it is sensible to the taste, but the body of Christ, and that the apparent wine is not wine, even though the taste would have it so,... partake of that bread as something spiritual, and put a cheerful face on your soul” (ibid., 22:6, 9).
- ❖ **Ambrose of Milan:** “Perhaps you may be saying, ‘I see something else; how can you assure me that I am receiving the body of Christ?’ It but remains for us to prove it. And how many are the examples we might use!... Christ is in that sacrament, because it is the body of Christ” (*The Mysteries* 9:50, 58 [A.D. 390]).
- ❖ **Theodore of Mopsuestia:** “When [Christ] gave the bread he did not say, ‘This is the symbol of my body,’ but, ‘This is my body.’ In the same way, when he gave the cup of his blood he did not say, ‘This is the symbol of my blood,’ but, ‘This is my blood’; for he wanted us to look upon the [Eucharistic elements] after their reception of grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit not according to their nature, but receive them as they are, the body and blood of our Lord. We ought... not regard [the elements] merely as bread and cup, but as the body and blood of the Lord, into which they were transformed by the descent of the Holy Spirit” (*Catechetical Homilies* 5:1 [A.D. 405]).
- ❖ **Augustine:** “Christ was carried in his own hands when, referring to his own body, he said, ‘This is my body’ [Matt. 26:26]. For he carried that body in his hands” (*Explanations of the Psalms* 33:1:10 [A.D. 405]).
- * “I promised you [new Christians], who have now been baptized, a sermon in which I would explain the sacrament of the Lord’s Table... That bread which you see on the altar, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That chalice,

or rather, what is in that chalice, having been sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ” (*Sermons 227* [A.D. 411]).

- * “What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith; yet faith does not desire instruction” (*ibid.*, 272).
- ❖ **Council of Ephesus:** “We will necessarily add this also. Proclaiming the death, according to the flesh, of the only-begotten Son of God, that is Jesus Christ, confessing his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, we offer the unbloody sacrifice in the churches, and so go on to the mystical thanksgivings, and are sanctified, having received his holy flesh and the precious blood of Christ the Savior of us all. And not as common flesh do we receive it; God forbid: nor as of a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of worth, or as having a divine indwelling, but as truly the life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself. For he is the life according to his nature as God, and when he became united to his flesh, he made it also to be life-giving” (Session 1, *Letter of Cyril to Nestorius* [A.D. 431]).

3. Ministerial and Common Priesthood

Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest, wished that his one and indivisible priesthood be transmitted to his Church. This Church is the people of the New Covenant who, “through Baptism and the anointing of the Holy Spirit are reborn and consecrated as a spiritual temple and a holy priesthood. By living the Christian life, they offer up spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the prodigious deeds of Him who called them from darkness into his own wonderful light (cf. 1 Pt 2, 4-10)”. “There is but one chosen People of God: ‘one Lord, one faith, one Baptism’ (Eph 4, 5): there is a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace of filial adoption, a common vocation to perfection”. There exists “a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ”. By the will of Christ some are

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constituted “teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors”. The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood “though they differ essentially and not only in degree... are none the less ordered one to another; [since] each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ”. Between both there is an effective unity since the Holy Spirit makes the Church one in communion, in service and in the outpouring of the diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts.

Thus the essential difference between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood is not found in the priesthood of Christ, which remains forever one and indivisible, nor in the sanctity to which all of the faithful are called: “Indeed the ministerial priesthood does not of itself signify a greater degree of holiness with regard to the common priesthood of the faithful; through it, Christ gives to priests, in the Spirit, a particular gift so that they can help the People of God to exercise faithfully and fully the common priesthood which it has received”. For the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ, there is a diversity of members and functions but only one Spirit who, for the good of the Church, distributes his various gifts with munificence proportionate to his riches and the needs of service, (cf. 1 Cor 12, 1-11).

This diversity exists at the mode of participation in the priesthood of Christ and is essential in the sense that “while the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace, - a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit - the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood... and directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians”. Consequently, the ministerial priesthood “differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful”. For this reason the priest is exhorted “...to grow in awareness of the deep communion uniting him to the People of God” in order to “awaken and deepen co-responsibility in the one common mission of salvation, with a prompt and heartfelt esteem for all the charisms and tasks which the Spirit gives believers for the building up of the Church”.

The characteristics which differentiate the ministerial priesthood of Bishops and Priests from the common priesthood of the faithful

and consequently delineate the extent, to which other members of the faithful cooperate with this ministry, may be summarized in the following fashion:

A. the ministerial priesthood is rooted in the Apostolic Succession, and vested with “*potestas sacra*” consisting of the faculty and the responsibility of acting in the person of Christ the Head and the Shepherd.

B. it is a priesthood which renders its sacred ministers servants of Christ and of the Church by means of authoritative proclamation of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments and the pastoral direction of the faithful.

To base the foundations of the ordained ministry on Apostolic Succession, because this ministry continues the mission received by the Apostles from Christ, is an essential point of Catholic ecclesiological doctrine.

The ordained ministry, therefore, is established on the foundation of the Apostles for the up building of the Church: “and is completely at the service of the Church”. “Intrinsically linked to the sacramental nature of ecclesial ministry is its character of service. Entirely dependent on Christ who gives mission and authority, ministers are truly ‘servants of Christ’ (Rom 1, 1) in the image of him who freely took for us ‘the form of a slave’ (Phil 2,7). Because the word and grace of which they are ministers are not their own, but are given to them by Christ for the sake of others, they must freely become the slaves of all”.

Unity and Diversity of Ministerial Function

The functions of the ordained minister, taken as a whole, constitute a single indivisible unity in virtue of their singular foundation in Christ. As with Christ, salvific activity is one and unique. It is signified and realized by the minister through the functions of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful. This unity essentially defines the exercise of the sacred minister’s functions which are always an exercise, in different ways, of the role of Christ as Head of the Church.

Therefore, since the exercise of the *munus docendi*, *sanctificandi* et *regendi* by the sacred minister constitute the essence of pastoral

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ministry, the diverse functions proper to ordained ministers form an indivisible unity and cannot be understood if separated, one from the other. Rather they must be viewed in terms of mutual correspondence and complementarity. Only in some of these functions, and to a limited degree, may the non-ordained faithful cooperate with their pastors should they be called to do so by lawful Authority and in accordance with the prescribed manner. “He (Jesus Christ) continually provides in his body, that is, in the Church, for gifts of ministries through which, by his power, we serve each other unto salvation...”. “The exercise of such tasks does not make Pastors of the lay faithful, in fact, a person is not a minister simply in performing a task, but through sacramental ordination. Only the Sacrament of Orders gives the ordained minister a particular participation in the office of Christ, the Shepherd and Head in his Eternal Priesthood. The task exercised in virtue of supply takes its legitimacy formally and immediately from the official deputation given by Pastors, as well as from its concrete exercise under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority”.

This doctrine needs to be reaffirmed especially in the light of certain practices which seek to compensate for numerical shortages of ordained ministers arising in some communities. In some instances, such have given rise to an idea of the common priesthood of the faithful which mistakes its nature and specific meaning. Amongst other things, it can encourage a reduction in vocations to the [ministerial] priesthood and obscure the specific purpose of seminaries as places of formation for the ordained ministry. These are closely related phenomena. Their interdependence calls for careful reflection so as to arrive at well considered conclusions in their regard.

The Indispensability of the Ordained Ministry

For a community of the faithful to be called a Church, and indeed to truly be a Church, it cannot be guided according to political criteria or those of human organizations. Every particular Church owes its guidance to Christ since it was He who fundamentally linked apostolic mission to the Church and hence no community has the power to grant that mission to itself or to delegate it. In effect, a canonical or juridical determination made by hierarchal authority is necessary for the exercise of the munus of teaching and governing.

The ministerial priesthood is therefore necessary for a community to exist as “Church”: “The ordained priesthood ought not to be thought of as existing [...] posterior to the ecclesial community, as if the Church could be imagined as already established without this priesthood”. Indeed, were a community to lack a priest, it would be deprived of the exercise and sacramental action of Christ, the Head and Pastor, which are essential for the very life of every ecclesial community.

Thus the ordained priesthood is absolutely irreplaceable. As an immediate consequence of this there is the necessity for a continuing, zealous and well-organized pastoral promotion of vocations so as to provide the Church with those ministers which she needs and to ensure proper seminary training for those preparing for the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Any other solution to problems deriving from a shortage of sacred ministers can only lead to precarious consequences.

“The duty of fostering vocations falls on the whole Christian community, and they should discharge it principally by living full Christian lives”. By following Christ more closely and in overcoming indifference, all the faithful have a responsibility to foster a positive response to priestly vocation. This is especially true for those nations where a strong sense of materialism is evident.

Part I-IV. The Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful in Pastoral Ministry

Among the various aspects of the participation of the non-ordained faithful in the Church’s mission considered by the conciliar documents, that of their direct collaboration with the ministry of the Church’s pastors is considered. Indeed, “when necessity and expediency in the Church require it, the Pastors, according to established norms from universal law, can entrust to the lay faithful certain offices and roles that are connected to their pastoral ministry but do not require the character of Orders”. In this way, it is not one merely of assistance but of mutual enrichment of the common Christian vocation. This collaboration was regulated by successive post-conciliar legislation and particularly by the *Codex Iuris Canonici*.

The Code, having referred to the rights and duties of all the faithful, in the subsequent title devoted to the rights and duties of the lay faithful, treats not only of those which are theirs in virtue of their secular

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condition, but also of those tasks and functions which are not exclusively theirs. Some of these latter refer to any member of the faithful, whether ordained or not, while others are considered along the lines of collaboration with the sacred ministry of cleric. With regard to these last mentioned areas or functions, the non-ordained faithful do not enjoy a right to such tasks and functions. Rather, they are “capable of being admitted by the sacred Pastors... to those functions which, in accordance with the provisions of law, they can discharge” or where “ministers are not available... they can supply certain of their functions... in accordance with the provisions of law”.

To ensure that such collaboration is harmoniously incorporated into pastoral ministry, and to avoid situations of abuse and disciplinary irregularity in pastoral practice, it is always necessary to have clarity in doctrinal principles. Therefore a consistent, faithful and serious application of the current canonical dispositions throughout the entire Church, while avoiding the abuse of multiplying “exceptional” cases over and above those so designated and regulated by normative discipline, is extremely necessary.

Where the existence of abuses or improper practices has been proved, Pastors will promptly employ those means judged necessary to prevent their dissemination and to ensure that the correct understanding of the Church’s nature is not impaired. In particular, they will apply the established disciplinary norms to promote knowledge of and assiduous respect for that distinction and complementarity of functions which are vital for ecclesial communion. Where abusive practices have become widespread, it is absolutely necessary for those who exercise authority to intervene responsibly so as to promote communion which can only be done by adherence to the truth. Communion, truth, justice, peace and charity are all interdependent terms.

In the light of the aforementioned principles, remedies, based on the normative discipline of the Church, and deemed opportune to correct abuses which have been brought to the attention of our Dicasteries, are hereby set forth.

Catechism of the Catholic Church interprets both these priesthoods in the following numbers:

- ❖ Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church “a kingdom, priests for his God and Father.” The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own vocation, in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet, and king. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are “consecrated to be... a holy priesthood.”
- ❖ The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, “each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ.” While being “ordered one to another,” they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit—, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders.

An example of the distinction between these two priesthoods can be seen in how one participates in the Mass and other liturgies:

- ❖ The celebrating assembly is the community of the baptized who, “by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices.” This “common priesthood” is that of Christ the sole priest, in which all his members participate. Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people,” have a right and an obligation by reason of their Baptism.
- ❖ But “the members do not all have the same function.” Certain members are called by God, in and through the Church, to a special service of the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the Holy

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Spirit enables them to act in the person of Christ the head, for the service of all the members of the Church. The ordained minister is, as it were, an “icon” of Christ the priest. Since it is in the Eucharist that the sacrament of the Church is made fully visible, it is in his presiding at the Eucharist that the bishop’s ministry is most evident, as well as, in communion with him, the ministry of priests and deacons.

4. Why do Catholics confess their sins to a priest?

The quick answer is because that’s the way God wants us to do it. In James 5:16, God, through Sacred Scripture, commands us to “confess our sins to one another.” Notice, Scripture does not say confess your sins straight to God and only to God - it says confess your sins to one another. In Matthew, chapter 9, verse 6, Jesus tells us that He was given authority on earth to forgive sins. And then Scripture proceeds to tell us, in verse 8, that this authority was given to “men”...plural.

In John 20, verses 21-23, what is the first thing Jesus says to the gathered disciples on the night of His resurrection? “Jesus said to them, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’” How did the Father send Jesus? Well, we just saw in Matthew 9 that the Father sent Jesus with the authority on earth to forgive sins. Now, Jesus sends out His disciples as the Father has sent Him...so, what authority must Jesus be sending His disciples out with? The authority on earth to forgive sins. And, just in case they didn’t get it, verses 22-23 say this, “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

Why would Jesus give the Apostles the power to forgive or to retain sins if He wasn’t expecting folks to confess their sins to them? And how could they forgive or retain sins if no one was confessing their sins to them?

Of course, God is the one who alone can and does forgive us our sins, but God in His mysterious plan for us from the beginning chose to show His love, including His forgiving love, through the Church.

Remember the healing of the paralytic by Jesus and the reaction of the crowd? First, Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." Then He told him to rise and walk. The reaction of the leaders to the first statement was: "He has blasphemed. Only God can forgive sins." The response of the people to the whole experience was different. They praised God for giving such authority to men.

The emphasis of the Bible is the fact that Jesus forgave sins as the Son of Man, as one sent by God. This power to forgive sins Jesus passed on to the Apostles. The words are from John's Gospel (John 20:21 ff.): "Peace be with you," Jesus said again, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them: if you hold them bound, they are held bound."

But how can one know what sins to forgive or what sins to retain unless these are made known; that means unless they are confessed? This experience of confession of sins to a priest to receive the sign of God's healing forgiveness is called by the Church the Sacrament of Penance or the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We are once more made one with God. Jesus intended this power to be exercised not only by the Apostles, but also by their successors for the good of sinners.

In Matthew, chapter twenty eight, we read: "Full authority has been given to me both in Heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you and know that I am with you always until the end of the world." Now, as Catholics, we believe that by ordination, a priest is given as much power to minister God's healing forgiveness as the Apostles themselves possessed.

So the first reason why Catholics confess their sins to a priest is that God has chosen to express his forgiving love this way. Our humanity is sacred to God; He reaches out to us through and in accord with our humanity. God knows that one of our needs is to be certain, to be re-assured. God wants me to know with faith assurance that when I am sincerely repentant, when I am truly sorry, that He has forgiven my sins. Again and again Jesus showed His love through outward, external signs. The words said by the priest, "I absolve you from all your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and

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of the Holy Spirit,” are those faith-signs of the certainty of God’s forgiveness.

Another need that we have is to get things off the chest, so to speak. We may know what is bothering us, but until we speak about it to someone else, the burden remains heavy. In the actual confession of our sinfulness to a priest, there is also a human feeling of being made free. In our letting go, God’s healing grace renews us and by the humbling experience of admitting our sins to another, we are responding to God’s call. A humble and contrite heart God will not spurn.

Besides being at one with God, Jesus indicated that we need to be at peace with one another. In Matthew 5:23, Jesus said: “If you bring your gift to the altar and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar. Go first to be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Sin is both personal and communal. It affects me and my relationship with God. Practically, I cannot go to everyone personally and ask forgiveness, but the priest, as confessor and leader, represents the Church, the Community of Faith. In the experience of confession I am not only asking God to forgive me, but I am also asking the same from my brothers and sisters in the Lord. Faith in Jesus opens me to receive the sign of the Father’s forgiveness, healing and love each time I confess my sins this way. To summarize, the following reasons justify the practice of confessing to a priest:

1. God commanded we confess our sins to one another in the Bible. (James 5:16)
2. It is the ordinary way to have our sins forgiven..
3. We receive grace to resist sin through the Sacrament, as well as forgiveness.
4. We learn humility by having to confess to another person.
5. There is built-in accountability in every human being.
6. Our relationship with the rest of the Church is healed.
7. We receive counsel from the priest.
8. We can be comforted hearing the words of absolution *in persona Christi*.

9. All our sins are wiped away.
10. The sacramental grace helps us with the strength to forgive others.
11. Helps us go deep within and think about how we can improve.
12. It feels good emotionally.
13. When we realize (again) we are sinners, it is easier to be patient with others.
14. Always confidential – what is said in the confessional stays in the confessional.
15. No more guilt feeling remains within us.
16. We are better prepared to receive the Eucharist.
17. Forgiveness is a necessary part of growing in holiness.
18. Our consciences can be better formed.
19. If we have mortally sinned, then Confession brings us back into the family of God – The Church as well as restores sanctifying grace in our souls!
20. Without the act of confession to a priest, due to our phenomenological nature, we will go on justifying every sin that we commit.
21. Those who claim to confess directly to God are often not doing so. Nobody experienced the forgiveness from God as clearly and intensely as in the sacrament of confession.