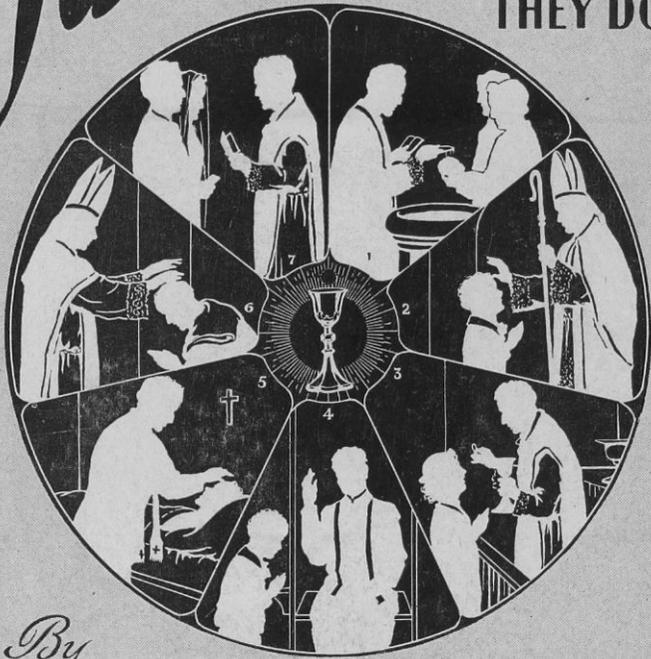


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The sacraments
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THE *Sacraments*

WHAT THEY
ARE-WHAT
THEY DO!



By

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THE SACRAMENTS

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I

DEFINITION AND NUMBER



THE word *sacrament* is derived from the Latin noun *sacramentum*. Among the ancient Romans, this noun signified *a sacred obligation*—for example, the oath of allegiance to the state taken by soldiers. In the early centuries of the Christian era the term *sacrament* was used to denote any sacred thing that was an external manifestation of God's inscrutable power or of the workings of His grace in the souls of men. Thus, the mysteries of our faith, the Lord's Prayer, the ceremony of exorcism, etc., were called *sacraments* by the writers of that period. But from the twelfth century *sacrament* has been used in a more restricted sense—namely, to signify *an external sign of grace, instituted by God, for the sanctification of mankind*. It is in this sense that we employ the word *sacrament* in this treatise.

It is very fitting that the Almighty should choose external signs whereby to manifest and to communicate His grace to men. Man is so constituted that ideas and inspirations normally present themselves to his soul only through the instrumentality of his bodily senses. All communications

between human beings are conducted by external signs—for example, by speech, writing, gestures. We employ many conventional signs to express our inward feelings. We wear black garments as a sign of mourning; we bow to a superior as a sign of respect; we shake hands as a sign of friendship. Therefore, in establishing the sacraments God has adapted His mode of manifesting the sanctification of human souls to the manner of communication natural to mankind. Thus, for the sacrament of Baptism, God chose the ceremony of washing the body with water, which is a very appropriate symbol of the spiritual cleansing that is effected by this sacrament. For the sacrament of Extreme Unction, which is directed to restore to the soul perfect spiritual health, He prescribed a rite symbolizing healing—the anointing of the body with oil.

Even before the time of Christ, there were sacraments. The rite of circumcision was an external sign prescribed by the Almighty to purify the male descendants of Abraham from sin, and to incorporate them among the chosen people (Gen. xvii.). The various purifications commanded by the Mosaic law in the book of Leviticus were also sacraments, for they were enjoined by God as signs of the remission of sin merited by the truly contrite of heart. However, these sacraments of the Old Law possessed less power to sanctify than those of the New Law, inasmuch as they did not

of themselves confer grace, but merely inspired good dispositions in the recipients (p. 24).

That the Christian religion possesses sacraments for the sanctification of its adherents is admitted by all who profess to be Christians. Indeed, it is very evident from the pages of the New Testament that Jesus Christ provided some external means of conferring grace on those who would accept His doctrines. For the spiritual rebirth of the soul to the life of grace, He prescribed the external washing of the body with water—Baptism—which all must receive in order to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (John iii. 5; Matt. xxviii. 19). For the preservation and the strengthening of the life of grace, He gave the Holy Eucharist—His own Body and Blood under the visible appearances of bread and wine, which are a most appropriate symbol of the spiritual nourishment received by those who partake devoutly of this heavenly food (John vi. 51-59; Luke xxii. 19, 20).

SEVEN SACRAMENTS

However, among those who profess the Christian religion there is a disagreement as to the *number* of sacraments pertaining to the New Law. Protestants generally hold that there are only two—those we have just mentioned, Baptism and the Eucharist (which they call the Lord's Supper). The Catholic Church teaches as an article of faith

that the Christian sacraments are seven in number—Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

As we just saw, Baptism and the Holy Eucharist are clearly mentioned in the New Testament; but there are also texts that allude to the other five as external signs of grace. Confirmation was conferred on the people of Samaria by the Apostles Peter and John, through the imposition of hands and prayer (Acts viii. 15-17). Penance was instituted when Christ gave the Apostles the power to forgive and to retain sin (John xx. 22, 23). Extreme Unction is described by St. James, when he prescribes that the priests of the Church shall be called to the sick, to anoint them with oil and to pray over them (James v. 14, 15). Holy Orders is the rite referred to by St. Paul when he admonishes his fellow-bishop St. Timothy to stir up the grace of God which is in him, by the imposition of his (St. Paul's) hands (2 Tim. i. 6). Matrimony among Christians is designated by St. Paul as a symbol of the grace-giving union of Christ with the Church (Eph. v. 25-32).

We do not claim that these texts prove *conclusively* the sacramental nature of all the rites in question. But these statements of the Sacred Scripture must be taken in conjunction with the testimony of divine Tradition, which is as truly the word of God as are the written pages of the

Bible. Now, the writings of the Fathers who lived in the early centuries, and the books employed by the primitive Church in the sacred functions testify that the seven ceremonies we have enumerated were regarded from the first days of Christianity as divinely established signs of grace.

Another argument for our doctrine is the fact that the Oriental Christians who are separated by heresy or schism from the Catholic Church—and these number more than 100,000,000—all recognize the same seven sacraments that are venerated by Catholics. The secession of the Eastern Churches from Catholic unity began in the fifth century, hence their agreement with us on this matter proves that the doctrine of the sevenfold number of the sacraments must have been acknowledged as a divinely revealed truth by all Christians in the earliest centuries. For, the antagonism of these Oriental Christians to Catholicity would have deterred them from accepting any doctrine not clearly contained in the deposit of revelation which was introduced by the Catholic Church subsequent to their separation.

II

THE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENTS

EVERY Christian sacrament is composed of two elements—things and words. By *things* are here meant not only inanimate objects, such as water and oil, but also external human actions, such as the imposing of hands and the confessing of sins. The *words* to which we refer are those spoken by the person who confers the sacrament. In theological language, the things essential to a sacrament are called its *matter*, and the words are called its *form*. For example, the matter of Baptism is the water, poured on the head of the recipient by the one baptizing; and the form of this sacrament is the words, spoken by the latter: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

The words of the sacramental form must be *spoken*, so that it would not suffice if they were expressed in writing or in the sign language. The one exception to this rule is the sacrament of Matrimony, in which the consent of the contracting parties—which constitutes both the matter and the form of this sacrament—can be manifested, not only by speech, but also by signs or in writing. The reason for this is, because Christian Matrimony is simply the natural marital contract, elevated to the dignity of a sacrament; hence, like any human contract it can be sealed by any manifestation what-

soever of rational consent. (The *matter* of some sacraments is also composed, under normal conditions, of spoken words—for example, the confession of sins. This may be supplied, when necessary, by signs or by writing).

In order to constitute a sacrament, matter and form must be united; and for this, it is necessary that both be placed at the same time, or at least that one follow the other so closely that the two can be said to be practically simultaneous. Accordingly, if a person, in conferring Baptism would first pour the water, and only after the lapse of several minutes would say the requisite words, the sacrament would be null and void.

Both matter and form of a sacrament must be placed by the *same person*. Thus, if two would share the administration of Baptism, one pouring the water and the other pronouncing the words, the sacrament would not be given. There are two exceptions to this rule—Penance and Matrimony. The matter of the former is necessarily placed by the recipient, for it is composed of the three acts of the penitent—confession, contrition (externally expressed) and the fulfillment of the sacramental penance; while the form of this sacrament is the absolution from sin pronounced by the priest. In Matrimony, the matter is the *giving* of conjugal consent by each of the contracting parties; and the form is the *acceptance* of that consent by the other. From this it can be seen that when two Christians

contract marriage, each furnishes the matter for his or her own reception of the sacrament, and at the same time supplies the form of the sacrament received by the other. Thus, each confers on the other the sacrament of Christian Matrimony.

CHANGE OF MATTER OR FORM

If words or things *essentially different* from the proper matter and form are employed, the sacrament is not given. Thus, Baptism could not be given with milk or wine, in place of water. A priest could not consecrate barley bread into the Body of Christ for the Holy Eucharist, because *wheaten* bread is the necessary matter of this sacrament. Again, Baptism would be null and void if the one administering the rite would simply say, while pouring the water: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," omitting the essential phrase, "I baptize thee." On the other hand, a slight change of matter or of form would not nullify the sacrament, although to make such a modification deliberately would be a sin. Such would be the case if a very small amount of wine were added to the baptismal water, or if the one baptizing were to say "battize," instead of "baptize."

A very practical conclusion from these points is, that if one is ever called on to baptize an infant in danger of death (when no priest can be had),

he should be extremely careful to procure *pure* water—not necessarily *holy* water—to pronounce the words *while* pouring the water on the child's head, and to say most exactly every word of the form "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

III

THE AUTHOR OF THE SACRAMENTS

IT is a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith that Jesus Christ was both God and Man. In other words, He possessed two perfect natures—the one divine, the other human. Under both aspects He is the author of the seven sacraments of the New Law. As God, in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost, He is the principal cause of the sacraments and of all the graces that are bestowed through them. For supernatural grace is a participation of the divine nature; hence, all graces, as well as the external signs through which they are conferred, must depend for their existence and their efficacy principally on the divine nature, which is God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Under this aspect, the sacraments of the Old Law also had God for their author.

But likewise as Man—that is, in His human nature, united to and dependent on His divine personality—Jesus Christ was the author of the seven Christian sacraments. This means that during His life of three and thirty years on earth He designated these seven external rites as means of grace, to be used by the faithful until the end of time. That He instituted Baptism and the Holy Eucharist is clearly stated in the Gospels, as we saw above (p. 3). Moreover, every unprejudiced

person must admit that the sacrament of Penance, as it is administered in the Catholic Church, is implied in the commission given to the Apostles by their Master on the day of His Resurrection: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John xx. 22, 23).

The New Testament does not furnish convincing arguments that the other sacraments were instituted by Christ in person. However, this is no proof that He is not their author. St. John tells us that Jesus did many things that are not related in the New Testament (John xxi. 25); and in the Acts of the Apostles (i. 3) we read that during the forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension, Our Lord frequently appeared to the Apostles and gave them instructions regarding the constitution and the management of His Kingdom on earth, the Church. Moreover, there are abundant proofs from early Tradition that Christ personally instituted all seven sacraments. St. Augustine even ventures to give a reason why Our Lord did this Himself, instead of committing the power to do so to the rulers of His Church—because, if some mere man possessed so great a power, we should be tempted to place our hope of salvation in him rather than in God (In Joan., Tr. v., n. 7).

SEVEN SACRAMENTS BY DIVINE DECREE

From this it follows that the Church can never abrogate any of the seven sacraments nor add any of her own choosing; for it is by Christ's unalterable decree that these seven and only these shall be the external signs of grace in His Church until the end of time. The sacramental system, therefore, is an essential component of the Church as established by Our Divine Redeemer. St. Paul tells us that the Church is, in a certain sense, the Body of Christ. Applying this figure to the present matter, we can say that the sacraments are the arteries of this Mystic Body, through which the life-giving Blood of the Savior is transmitted to the members of His Church.

The matter and the form of at least some of the sacraments were specifically determined by Christ Himself. He prescribed, for example, that the matter of Baptism should be the laving of the body with water, and that the form should denote that the recipient is being spiritually cleansed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Again, He specified that the matter of the Holy Eucharist should be wheaten bread and wine from the grape, and that the form should be the words that He himself used at the Last Supper to change these elements into His Body and Blood (Luke xxii. 19, 20). We are not sure, however, that Our Lord determined so explicitly the essen-

tial constitutives of all the sacraments. Some theologians think that in the case of certain sacraments—especially Confirmation and Holy Orders—He merely decreed that there should be such sacraments, productive of certain definite effects, but left to the rulers of His Church the right to determine what things and words should constitute the matter and form of these sacraments, and also the right to change these constitutive elements when they deemed such modification feasible. Considerable probability is given to this view by the fact that the Church seems actually to have modified the matter and form of some sacraments in the course of time. For example, Sacred Scripture (Acts viii. 17; xix. 6) and the literature of the early Church make reference to the imposition of hands as the entire matter of Confirmation; while nowadays the anointing of the brow with chrism is also essential to this sacrament.

The variety of effects produced by the seven sacraments gives striking proof of our loving Savior's earnest wish to provide us with special graces for the principal phases and contingencies of our earthly exile. For our birth to the supernatural life of grace, He has given us Baptism; for our spiritual maturity, Confirmation; for the nourishment of our souls, the Holy Eucharist; for the cleansing of our soul and the restoration of the life of grace, if we fall into sin, Penance. For those who choose to enter the married state, He has insti-

tuted the sacrament of Matrimony; for those called to the exalted dignity of the sacred ministry, Holy Orders. Finally, He established Extreme Unction in order to comfort the soul of the dying Christian, to cleanse it of the dross of earthly imperfections, and to prepare it for a speedy entrance into His Kingdom of everlasting happiness.

IV

THE MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENTS

By the *minister* of a sacrament is meant the person who confers this sacred sign. Since God established the sacraments for mortal men, it is to men and not to angels that He has assigned the honorable task of conferring them. However, in a particular case, God could employ an angel (or a saint in heavenly glory) for this office. Thus, St. Stanislas Kostka received Holy Communion from an angel; and the same miraculous favor was granted to St. Gerard Majella.

Two of the sacraments—Baptism and Matrimony—demand no special priestly or sacred power in the minister. The former sacrament can be administered validly by any one,—even by one who is not himself baptized. However, a lay person is allowed to baptize only in a case of necessity, when an ordained minister cannot be had. Moreover; *solemn* Baptism—that is, with the accompaniment of the liturgical ceremonies such as anointing and exorcism—can be given only by a priest, or, with special permission, by a deacon. The ministers of the sacrament of Matrimony, as was stated above (p. 7), are the contracting parties themselves.

The other five sacraments can be administered only by duly ordained priests or bishops. This is clear from the practice of the Church from the earliest centuries. It is implied in Sacred Scrip-

ture—for example, Our Lord commissioned only the Apostles to consecrate the Holy Eucharist and to forgive sins; St. James commands that the *priests* of the Church be summoned to anoint the sick (James v. 14). Now, Bishops and, in a limited degree, priests are the successors of the Apostles in the sacred ministry. From the constant practice of the Church we know that priests can be the ministers of the Holy Eucharist, which they consecrate at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass,¹ of Penance, and of Extreme Unction; and that only a Bishop can be the ordinary minister of Confirmation and of Holy Orders. With the special permission of the Pope, a priest can confer Confirmation and the lower degrees of Holy Orders.

INTENTION AND DISPOSITIONS OF MINISTER

To confer a sacrament, the minister must have the *intention* of doing so. In other words, he must know that he is giving a sacred rite and must mean to give it. Thus, a priest who had lost his reason would not administer a sacrament, even though he performed the ceremony correctly. For, although the minister is but the instrument of the divine power, yet, he is an instrument endowed with reason and free will, and God wishes to use him in the giving of the sacraments, with the co-

¹ Of course, anyone can *give* the Holy Eucharist after It is consecrated; and in extraordinary circumstances it is lawful for a lay person to do so.

operation of these faculties, and not as one would use an inanimate instrument, such as a pen or a knife.

However, a sufficient intention is had by one who is distracted while he is giving the sacrament, provided he is acting in virtue of an intention previously elicited. Moreover, only a very meager knowledge of the sacrament he is giving and consequently, only a very general intention are required on the part of the minister. He may not even believe in the sacrament; yet, he can administer it. For example, a Jewish doctor can confer Baptism on a dying child (if he observes the proper rite), for, although he does not believe in the efficacy of this ceremony, yet he wishes to administer the rite that Christian parents provide for their children; and thus he has the required intention.

A sacrament can be validly administered by one who is in the state of sin. For, it must be remembered, it is God Who imparts grace through the sacraments, and His power is not weakened by the defects of His human agents. However, a priest would commit a great sacrilege if he were to administer a sacrament in the state of mortal sin.

No one can confer a sacrament on himself; for in the supernatural order, as in the natural order, God wishes us to depend to some extent on others for our well-being. Thus, an unbaptized adult could not baptize himself; a priest could not absolve himself from sin, nor, if he were dying, give

himself Extreme Unction. The one exception is the Holy Eucharist, which—as is evident from Its very nature—a person can give to himself, as the priest receives Holy Communion during the Sacrifice of the Mass.

V

THE SUBJECT OF THE SACRAMENTS

By the *subject* of a sacrament we mean the person who receives it. Only human beings in their earthly stage of existence can be the subjects of the sacraments. The devils and the lost souls cannot receive them, because they have placed themselves beyond God's mercy; nor can the angels and the saints and the souls in Purgatory, because they have attained the completion of their measure of grace.

Infants—and under this designation are included all who have never attained the use of reason even though they may have reached bodily maturity—can receive Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. This doctrine as regards Baptism is implied in the words of Christ, Who made the reception of this sacrament a necessary condition of entrance into the Kingdom of heaven (John iii. 5), and Who certainly wishes children to be saved. That the other two sacraments can be received by those who have not attained the use of reason is manifest from the practice of the early Church (which practice still prevails in the Oriental churches) of administering Confirmation and Holy Communion to infants immediately after Baptism. It is a proof of Our Lord's unbounded love for souls that He has given to these sacraments the power to confer their salutary effects on

those who are not yet capable of rendering free cooperation. Even the sacrament of Holy Orders could be received by a baptized male infant, though no Bishop would be permitted to give this sacrament to one not in possession of the use of reason. In the Latin Church at the present time only Baptism is ordinarily conferred on infants; although Confirmation can be given in extraordinary cases—for example, when a baby is in danger of death and a Bishop is at hand. (It must be noted that no one, whether adult or infant, is capable of any other sacrament until he has first received Baptism).

RECEPTION BY ADULTS

God has decreed, however, that adults—those who have attained the use of reason (which usually takes place around the seventh year),—shall not receive the benefits of the sacraments save with their own free cooperation. We must here distinguish carefully between the *valid* and the *fruitful* reception of a sacrament. A sacrament is *validly* received when it places some spiritual reality capable of producing grace in the subject's soul; it is *fruitfully* received when grace is actually produced by this spiritual factor. For example, a person receives Baptism validly when the character—which is a spiritual quality productive of grace—is impressed on his soul; he receives this sacrament fruitfully when the regenerating grace, consequent

on this character, is also infused. As is evident, a sacrament may be received validly, but at the same time may be unfruitful, because the subject is unworthy to receive grace into his soul.

To receive a sacrament *validly*, an adult must have the intention of receiving it. An intention once made—even in a general manner—and not retracted is sufficient, so that even one who is unconscious may validly receive the sacraments. For example, a practical Catholic who is severely injured and rendered unconscious can receive Extreme Unction, because, as the general tenor of his life showed, he intended to live and die as a Catholic, with the spiritual helps the Church provides for her children. However, consciousness is required for the reception of Matrimony and Penance, since for the former the recipient must give conjugal consent, and for the latter the penitent must make some manner of confession and express his contrition.

To receive a sacrament *fruitfully*, other dispositions of soul besides an intention are required of an adult. Here we must distinguish between the *sacraments of the dead*—so called because they are primarily intended to bestow the life of grace on souls that are spiritually dead in mortal sin—and the *sacraments of the living*—so called because they were established by Christ principally to increase grace in those souls that already possess this supernatural life. The sacraments of the dead are

Baptism and Penance; the sacraments of the living are the other five.

For the fruitful reception of one of the *sacraments of the dead*, an adult must have made acts of faith, hope, and especially contrition or sorrow for sin, which must extend to all, at least mortal, sins. It is sufficient if this contrition be *imperfect*—for example, inspired by fear of the eternal pains of hell which, as we are taught by revelation, are the lot of those who die in mortal sin. To receive fruitfully one of the *sacraments of the living*, a person must possess the state of sanctifying grace; for, as the very nature of these sacraments indicates, they are intended only for those who are spiritually alive by supernatural grace.

However, it is commonly held by theologians that in an extraordinary case a person in mortal sin can receive the sacraments of the living fruitfully, thus obtaining the remission of his sins and restitution to the life of grace. The case is that of the sinner who receives one of these sacraments without consciousness of his unworthiness and with imperfect contrition. (If his contrition were perfect, he would acquire the state of grace before receiving the sacrament). For example, a Catholic in mortal sin is stricken with a sudden and serious sickness, but before lapsing into unconsciousness makes an act of imperfect contrition. This act, though supernaturally good, is not of itself sufficient to procure for the sinner the state of

grace. The priest is summoned and imparts sacramental absolution; but since the sick man cannot confess or manifest externally his contrition, the efficacy of this absolution is very doubtful. But the priest also gives him Extreme Unction. This sacrament the sick man receives *validly* because—despite his moral lapses—he always retained the intention of dying as a Catholic. He also receives this sacrament *fruitfully* because of the efficacy of the sacramental rite joined to his imperfect contrition and to the fact that he is now unconscious of the condition of his soul. Thus, in an extraordinary way, through a sacrament of the living, a sinner recovers God's grace and receives the pardon of his sins; and if he dies without regaining consciousness, he is eternally saved. Of course, if he becomes conscious, he is obliged to confess his sins.

A similar case of the acquisition of grace by a sinner through a sacrament of the living would be that of a person who approaches Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin, but thinking he is in grace, and with imperfect contrition for all his sins.

VI

THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENTS

THE chief effect of the Christian sacraments is *grace*. There are two kinds of grace produced by these sacred signs—*sanctifying* and *sacramental*.

Sanctifying grace is a supernatural quality by which the soul is made in some manner a partaker of the life of God, and acquires a right to eternal happiness. The sacraments of the dead—Baptism and Penance—are primarily intended to give what is known as *first* sanctifying grace, or the infusion of this supernatural quality into a soul that is dead in sin. The sacraments of the living—the other five—are principally ordained to give *second* sanctifying grace, or an increase of this divine gift to one that already possesses it in some measure. Of course, the sacraments of the dead give second grace when received by one already possessing sanctifying grace (for example, a person going to confession with only venial sins on his soul); and as we saw above (p. 22), in certain extraordinary cases, the sacraments of the living can give first grace.

Besides sanctifying grace, every sacrament produces, when worthily received, a species of grace proper to itself, called *sacramental* grace. It stands to reason that each sacrament must bestow some special gift, distinct from the favors given by the other six, for otherwise there would be no need of seven different sacraments. This sacramental

grace principally consists in a claim to those special divine helps that are necessary for the fulfillment of the duties imposed by this particular sacrament. Thus, the sacramental grace of Baptism gives the recipient a right to obtain the assistance of God in fulfilling his obligations as a Christian; the sacramental grace of Holy Orders confers a right to the graces required for the performance of the duties of the priesthood. This sacramental grace may be productive of effects outside the supernatural sphere. For example, one of the special effects of Extreme Unction is bodily health, when this is conducive to the good of the soul.

HOW SACRAMENTS GIVE GRACE

Regarding the manner in which the sacraments produce grace, the Catholic doctrine is radically different from that of Protestants. These latter hold that the sacraments work on the soul *indirectly, through the dispositions that they inspire in the recipient* (in theological Latin, *ex opere operantis*). According to Protestant tenets, a sacrament is like a sermon or a holy picture, which inspires us with sentiments of faith, love of God, etc., through which dispositions we merit grace. Catholics hold that, although the sacraments of the Old Law worked in this manner (p. 3), those of the New Law produce grace *directly through a supernatural efficacy given them by God* (technically,

ex opere operato). We believe that when a person receives a sacrament with the proper dispositions God uses the sacrament as an instrument to beautify the soul of the recipient with His divine grace, just as the artist uses a brush to paint a picture on canvas. Water and oil and the other elements of the sacraments have no inherent power to confer supernatural grace, any more than the brush can, of itself, paint a picture; but the Almighty can certainly communicate the image of His divinity to the human soul through those material elements, just as the artist can transmit through the brush to the canvas a scene of beauty that his mind has conceived. Thus, though we call the sacraments *signs*, we hold that they are *practical* signs—that is, capable of producing the grace that they signify.

The Catholic Church bases this doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments, first, on those passages of the New Testament that ascribe to the sacramental rites a far greater power than merely the inspiring of pious dispositions. Thus, Our Lord proposes the water of Baptism as the *cause* of man's spiritual regeneration (John iii. 5), and St. Paul speaks of the imposition of hands as the *cause* of the grace of Holy Orders (2 Tim. i. 6). Moreover, the custom of baptizing infants, which has been in the Church from the earliest times, cannot be explained in the Protestant view, for infants are incapable of being inspired to acts of faith, love of God, etc., by the external rite of the sacrament.

Therefore, the sacrament itself must possess through divine omnipotence the power to sanctify the recipient.

REQUIRED DISPOSITION

It must not be forgotten, however, that it is a Catholic doctrine that, although the sacraments are divine instruments of grace, yet adults must dispose themselves by their own free cooperation before they can receive this grace (p. 22). The light of the sun causes objects to be visible, yet we cannot see them if we keep our eyes closed. So too, the sacraments are the causes of grace; but adults cannot partake of this grace unless they open their hearts by acts of faith, sorrow for sin, love for God, etc. And the more fervently a person prepares for the reception of a sacrament, the more abundantly will he partake of its sanctifying and sacramental grace.

The *revival* of the sacraments is a very consoling teaching of Catholic theology. This means that when a person has received certain of the sacraments unworthily and unfruitfully, he may later receive the grace of which he then deprived himself, provided he repents of his sins, and returns to God's friendship. This doctrine is certain in regard to Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders; and it is also generally held by theologians that Matrimony can revive as long as the married

pair are both living, and Extreme Unction as long as the recipient remains in the same danger of death in which he received this sacrament.

Besides producing sanctifying and sacramental grace, three of the sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders—also imprint on the soul an indelible spiritual mark, called a *character*. This character is a participation of the priestly power of Christ. It is impressed whenever the sacrament is validly received—even though it be unfruitful—and cannot be blotted out during life, no matter what sins the recipient may afterward commit. Hence, these three sacraments once validly received can never be repeated. Theologians commonly teach that this character remains on the soul for all eternity, for the greater glory of those who are saved, for the greater humiliation of those who are lost.

* * *

We can never be sufficiently grateful to Our Heavenly Father for giving us through His Divine Son, Jesus Christ, the seven sacraments, to provide us with ample means of obtaining the forgiveness of our sins, an increase of grace and of virtue, strength in temptation, consolation in sorrow. The best way of expressing gratitude for a proffered gift is to make use of it; and thus should we testify to God our gratitude for the sacraments. True, some of these great gifts can be received only once;

others, only on special occasions. But there are two that are ours for the asking—Penance and the Holy Eucharist. Whenever we will, we can kneel before the priest to be absolved from the burden of sin, or even from the minor transgressions of our daily lives. And it is the unmistakable wish of Christ and of His Church that every dawn should find us at the altar-rail, receiving the Eucharistic Bread, come down from heaven. No wonder that they whose hearts Christ visits every morning can face each day the noisy world unafraid. If alluring temptations come, or staggering disappointments, or bodily pains, or mental woes—they can bear up bravely, for they know that there came into their souls this day not only grace, but the source of all graces, the living Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS

(Intended especially for Study Club Discussions)

I

1. A sacrament is an external sign of grace, instituted by God, for the sanctification of men. In establishing sacraments, God adapts Himself to human nature, which is so constituted that the soul naturally depends for its ideas and inspirations on what comes through the medium of the senses.

2. God established sacraments in the Old Law (Genesis xvii.; Leviticus); but they did not possess the same efficacy as the Christian sacraments. Christ established sacraments for the New Law (Matthew xxviii. 19; Luke xxii. 19, 20; John iii. 5; vi. 51-59; xx. 22, 23).

3. Protestants generally hold that Christ instituted only two sacraments—Baptism and the Eucharist. Catholics believe that there are seven sacraments, established by Our Savior. It is true, the New Testament contains only meager references to some of the sacraments, but we have convincing proof that there are seven (a) from the tradition of the Catholic Church, (b) from the agreement of the Oriental non-Catholic churches.

II

1. Every sacrament is composed of two elements—things (including human actions) and words—which are known respectively as *matter* and *form*.

2. To constitute a valid sacrament, the matter and the form must be united. Moreover, both must be placed by the same person. Exceptions to this latter rule are Penance and Matrimony, in which the matter is placed by the recipient, the form by the minister.

3. An essential change of matter or form renders a sacrament null and void.

III

1. All the sacraments of the New Law were instituted by Jesus Christ during His earthly life. The Scriptures prove this for some of the sacraments; tradition proves it for all.

2. The Church cannot abrogate sacraments or add new ones. It seems probable, however, that the Church can modify the essential matter and form of some sacraments, especially Confirmation and Holy Orders. In such a supposition Christ is said to have de-

terminated the matter and form of these sacraments *generically*, not *specifically*.

3. The seven sacraments are well adapted to provide spiritual assistance for the chief phases and the principal needs of human life.

IV

1. Only a mortal man can be the ordinary minister of the sacraments; but God can—and sometimes does—employ angels as extraordinary ministers.

2. With the exception of Baptism and Matrimony, the sacraments can be administered only by priests or bishops.

3. To give a sacrament validly, a person must have intention of administering it. The minister need not have the state of grace to confer a sacrament validly; though under ordinary circumstances it is a grievous sacrilege to administer a sacrament in the state of mortal sin.

4. A person cannot administer any sacrament to himself except the Holy Eucharist.

V

1. Only a human being in the state of the present life can be the recipient of a sacrament.

2. Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist can be administered validly to infants, and Holy Orders also can be given validly (though unlawfully) to a male infant.

3. One who has attained the age of reason can receive a sacrament *validly* only if he has the intention of receiving it. In addition, to receive a sacrament *fruitfully* such a person must have certain dispositions of soul.

VI

1. Every sacrament, when fruitfully received, confers a two-fold grace—*sanctifying*, which is a participation of the nature of God, and *sacramental*, which is a claim to the special graces needed to attain to the end of the particular sacrament.

2. The sacraments do not give grace merely by inspiring the recipient to perform good acts by which he merits grace—as the majority of Protestants hold—but confer grace by virtue of an intrinsic efficacy, given them by God, on all who place no impediment to their fruitfulness.

3. Most of the sacraments, if received unfruitfully, are capable of subsequent revival when the recipient disposes himself properly.

4. Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, whenever validly received, imprint on the soul an indelible spiritual mark called a *character*.

TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

The analogy between man's natural life and the supernatural life engendered by the sacraments—The precise matter and form of the various sacraments—Various ways in which the sacraments can be rendered invalid by changes of matter or form—The manner and the occasion of the institution of the seven sacraments by Christ—The changes that have occurred in the rites of the sacraments, especially Confirmation and Holy Orders, in the course of the centuries—The nature of the intention required in the minister and in the recipient of the sacraments—The specific dispositions required in the recipient of the various sacraments in order to receive their graces—The difference between the valid and the fruitful reception of the sacraments—The revival of sacraments received unworthily—The nature of the character conferred by Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders—The relation of the sacraments to the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

REFERENCES FOR COLLATERAL READING

1. For all: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, under the headings, "Sacraments," "Character," "Intention," "Baptism," "Confirmation," etc.; *Manual of Theology for the Laity*, by Geiermann; *The Catholic Religion*, by Martin; *The Sevenfold Gift*, by Robison; *The Sacramental System*, by Martindale (Treasury of the Faith series).

2. For more advanced students: *Christian Life and Worship*, by Ellard; *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae*, by Tanqueray; *The Mystical Christ*, by Gruden; *The Sacraments*, by Pohle-Preuss; *De Sacramentis Ecclesiae*, by Connell; *Handbook of the Christian Religion*, by Wilmers.

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