

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the Light of Scripture

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SACRAMENTS *

* See note at beginning of Chapter 11.

ACCORDING TO THE TENETS of the Roman Catholic Church, seven sacraments were ordained by Christ. They are here enumerated, together with claims made for them.

1. *Baptism*. This sacrament washes away original sin, together with all actual sin committed prior to baptism. It regenerates, and brings the soul into favor with God and makes him a child of God. By it he enters the church.
2. *Confirmation*. This recognizes and completes the grace received at baptism. The bishop anoints the forehead, nose, ears, and breast with oil and places his hand upon the recipient. This is not a mere symbolic act, but an actual bestowal of the Holy Spirit.
3. *Penance*. Contrition (or alternatively attrition, a less complete thing than contrition), confession and satisfaction; the three together constituting the sacrament of penance, making absolution possible. This is for sins committed after baptism. Since the priest's function is to mediate between God and men, apart from coming to the priest no absolution is possible, and no prayers or fasting, no performance of good works and charities, and no acts of self-denial can avail to save the soul.
4. *Holy Communion*. The taking and eating of the actual body and blood of Christ. This can be received only after absolution, and must be taken at least once a year.
5. *Extreme Unction*. The priest uses oil blessed by the bishop to anoint the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, hands, feet, and loins of the dying, or if in extremis, so that there is no time for all, the anointing of the forehead suffices. He then reads the prayers for the dying and grants absolution.
6. *Ordination or Holy Orders*. This is required for all who hold any office in the Church of Rome, and by its means divine unction is imparted to the recipient in the power of which he can fulfil the ministry committed to him.

Ordination, like baptism and confirmation, actually imparts something to the spiritual nature of the one ordained, which cannot be lost. These three sacraments, therefore, cannot be repeated. Having received this unction, the recipient is unassailable in his office, and no personal sin can unfit him or impair his efficacy as a priest.

7. *Holy Matrimony*. Since the Roman Catholic Church makes marriage a sacrament, she claims jurisdiction over the marriages of all those who have been baptized by her, whether they are practicing adherents or not, and no baptized person may marry an unbaptized person without permission of the Church.

Conditions are imposed, one being that the children begotten shall be baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith. To consummate such a marriage without permission is to commit fornication, even after a legal civil ceremony. In spite of Rome's claims to the contrary, it is evident from the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles that our Lord instituted only two ordinances: baptism, once for all, for all believers, and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion to be received repeatedly by His disciple "**till he come.**"

The early church used only these two, but during the passing of centuries other opinions were put forward, so that at different times the church has stood for five, six, ten, and even twelve sacraments—until in the twelfth century scholars generally favored seven, though even then no official pronouncement was made and no evidence in support of their views was brought forward. At last the Council of 1439 decided on seven, and in 1442 the pope confirmed this by proclamation, at the same time declaring that the sacraments themselves imparted grace. Finally, at the nineteenth General Council (Trent) of 1549, belief in the seven sacraments was made an Article of Faith.

The seven sacraments are linked together in the teaching of Rome.

- Baptism regenerates,
- Confirmation introduces into the privileges and duties of Christian discipleship,
- Penance delivers from the punishment of sin,
- Holy Communion gives spiritual nourishment,
- Extreme Unction prepares for death,
- Ordination fits the priesthood to celebrate masses,
- Holy Matrimony provides a succession of the faithful to hear the masses said.

Or again,

- The first sacrament enlists soldiers into the army,
- The second strengthens their resolution,
- The third increases their strength,
- The fourth preserves their spiritual life,
- The fifth prepares them for the end,
- The sixth furnishes their leadership,
- The seventh brings new recruits into the army.

Rome declares that the sacraments are essential to salvation, and to illustrate this says that God is like the physician, man is the patient, the priest is the servant, divine grace is the medicine, and the sacraments are the containers. The sacraments are not mere symbols, but actually impart grace, and since they can be administered only by a priest, the recipient is dependent upon him too, so that from birth to death, and even in the life beyond, the soul is dependent on the priest, who alone can celebrate the masses which gain release from purgatory.

An immense gulf lies between the priesthood and the laity. The priesthood, from the pope downwards through the whole hierarchy of cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and priests, is in effect the Church, and exercises authority over every phase of the life of the laity.

- The priest leads, they follow;
- The priest teaches, they learn;
- The priest commands, and they obey.

And it is through the sacraments that the priest's authority is imposed. Little wonder that Rome makes so much of them!

The sacraments of Baptism and Penance have been dealt with in Chapters 11 and 13, and the way the teaching of Rome concerning them has perverted and contradicted the Scriptures has been pointed out. Chapters 18 and 19 will deal with Holy Communion or the Eucharist. Here we must briefly examine the so-called sacraments of Confirmation, Extreme Unction, Ordination, and Matrimony.

Confirmation. The Roman Catholic sacrament of Confirmation is based on the fallacy that saving grace has already been received by the rite of baptism, which in Catholic families has been administered as a matter of course in infancy without any element of faith on the part of the recipient. Thus the Council of Florence declared: “*By Confirmation we receive an increase of grace, and are strengthened in the faith.*”

The word “**confirm**” occurs several times in the book of The Acts, but with nothing sacerdotal about it.

Paul and Barnabas, after being shamefully treated at Lystra, returned to that city, “**confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God**” (Acts 14:22).

Two brethren from the church at Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, went with Paul and Barnabas when they returned to Antioch, to help heal the breach which had arisen about circumcision, and “**themselves exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them**” (Acts 15:32).

A little later, Paul, now accompanied by Silas, revisited the brethren in every city in Syria and Cilicia where Paul had before preached the Gospel, “**confirming the churches**” (Acts 15:41). There is no question of sacramental confirmation in any of these cases. It was manifestly pastoral visitation, to strengthen their faith in view of persecution and erroneous teaching.

But, it will be asked, was not the visit of Peter and John to Samaria more than this?

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14-17).

Yes. In this case there seems to have been more than ordinary pastoral visitation. Here we are at the beginning of a new forward movement in the preaching of the Gospel. Christ had said to His disciples, “**Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth**” (Acts 1:8).

Up to this time they had witnessed only in Jerusalem and Judea, but now, scattered by persecution they had started their wider ministry to the outside world and preached in Samaria. Here, as at Jerusalem and in Judea, God had blessed the preaching of the Gospel, so that souls had turned to God in repentance and faith. But Jewish prejudice died hard, in Peter no less than in the other Jewish believers, and it was perhaps for this reason that God allowed him to be sent with John to Samaria.

As Peter had opened the door of faith to the Jews in Jerusalem, so now he opens the door to the Samaritans, as he did later to the Gentile group gathered in the house of Cornelius. This may explain why in this instance the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the hands of Peter and John, but it would be unwise to dogmatize. This is history, a record of what actually happened. God can and does work in sovereign right, in different ways and at different times and places, and if we attempt to build a doctrine upon one particular happening, we may easily fall into error.

We dare not build a sacrament on what Peter and John did on this occasion, and call it Confirmation, especially when our Lord did not specifically command it as something He had instituted. Many churches beside Rome confirm believers, and the Lord blesses the service to the strengthening of those already saved by faith in Him, but they do not call it a sacrament which in itself imparts grace. Nor does it have to be accompanied by “anointing with chrism, a mixture of oil and balsam, specially blessed on Holy Thursday.” This is another Romish invention. Nor is confirmation necessary to salvation, as it is claimed to be in the Church of Rome.

Extreme Unction. The Scriptures claimed as supporting this sacrament are two.

And they [the twelve disciples] cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them (Mark 6:13).

Is any sick among you? 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 shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him (James 5:14, 15).

But neither of these passages has anything to do with extreme unction, which is administered in expectation of the death of the sick person. On the contrary, the anointing and prayer referred to in both passages is for restoration to health. It is life that is in view, not death. It is sheer superstition to build upon these passages a doctrine by which the sick man at the point of death, through the offices of the priest can, by application of consecrated oil to various parts of the body, obtain forgiveness for his sins, even though he knows nothing of what is being done, and so escape the fires of Hell.

According to Scripture, however, where forgiveness is given, it is granted out of the pure love of God, on the ground of the atoning work of His well-beloved Son, our Saviour, in answer to repentance and faith in His promise. Where that repentance and faith exist, forgiveness, full and free, has already been bestowed. Where repentance and faith in Christ are non-existent, no sacrament can take their place, and the priest who gives absolution is a deceiver, even though he may not realize it.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1, 2).

Ordination. No one with a Bible in his hand can deny the fact of ordination.

And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils (Mark 3:14, 15).

Quite clearly the twelve were ordained by their Master for a definite ministry of preaching and healing, and endowed by Him with power to cast out demons in His name. Paul also claims ordination for himself:

God our Saviour . . . who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. . . . Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle . . . a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity (I Timothy 2:3, 4,7).

Paul and Barnabas ordained others:

When they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed (Acts 14: 23).

The Roman Catholic Douay Version of the New Testament uses the word priests instead of elders, but entirely without justification, for two separate Greek words are used for these. *Presbyteros* for elders and *hiereus* for priests are never used interchangeably in the Bible. Paul and Barnabas ordained elders, and not priests.

When Paul left Titus behind in Crete, he charged him to “**set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city**” (Titus 1:5).

When Timothy first joined Paul as his minister and companion in travel, as recorded in Acts 16:1-3, the presbytery laid their hands upon him (I Timothy 4:14). The word ordain is not used in the passage, but there is little doubt but that this was an ordination service in which Timothy was set apart for his new ministry. On two occasions Paul himself certainly had hands laid upon him: once by Ananias at his conversion (Acts 9:17), and again at Antioch before he and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).

Many churches besides the Church of Rome have ordination or commissioning services for their ministers, but they are not considered sacraments in the same sense as baptism or the Lord’s Supper, which were definitely commanded by the Lord, and are therefore binding upon His people.

The idea that ordination imparts a new something to the spiritual nature of the one ordained, which cannot be lost, is completely foreign to Scripture. Still less is there any support for the spurious doctrine that by virtue of ordination, a priest, whatever his condition of moral unfitness, can still fulfill his ministry effectively. It is incongruous that a man living in sin can absolve the sins of others, not merely pronouncing forgiveness, but actually granting forgiveness!

Holy Matrimony. In many important particulars the Roman Catholic Church and other churches are at one on this subject, but Protestants do not believe that marriage is a sacrament, for several reasons.

While there can be no doubt that marriage has its place in the Christian church by Christ’s authority, there is no Scripture which speaks of His so instituting it. It was ordained by God at the beginning of human history, just as the Sabbath was divinely appointed, and typifies the rest that the true believer finds in Christ (Hebrews 4:1-6). But neither the Sabbath nor marriage, are sacraments. God’s blessing certainly rests upon a devout husband and wife, dwelling together in unity and love. But His blessing equally rests upon the unmarried, as they seek to live their single lives for His glory.

The Roman Catholic Church appeals to Ephesians 5: 32: “**This is a great mystery.**” Here the apostle is not referring to the marriage ceremony, but rather to the relationship between Christ and His church. The Greek word for “**mystery**” does not imply something which cannot be understood, but something which is known only to the initiated, and this is the force of the word here. The relationship between Christ and His church is something which could not have been known apart from divine revelation. That does not make the marriage ceremony of a Christian a sacrament which is only acceptable to God when a priest is there to administer it.

~ end of chapter 17 ~

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