

Survey of Theology 8.

The Sacraments

Outline

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What is a Sacrament?

The Greek word *mysterion* in the New Testament refers to the **saving work of God**

- very early in the church, Baptism and the Eucharist were connected to the “mystery” of the God’s saving work

Tertullian (155-220) in North Africa first used the Latin word *sacramentum* (“a sacred oath” – the oath of allegiance required of Roman soldiers) to translate *mysterion*. For Tertullian, *sacramentum* referred to:

- the mystery of God’s salvation
- the church rites associated with salvation
 - important as signs of Christian commitment & loyalty

(The Eastern Orthodox today often talk of the 7 **Mysteries** rather the 7 **Sacraments**)

What is a Sacrament?

Augustine

Augustine (354-430) first tried to define what a sacrament is. Three requirements:

- 1. a *visible sign* of an *invisible grace*. That is, a physical doorway or gate to a spiritual reality
- 2. the sign has some *resemblance* to the invisible reality it points to
 - e.g.: in the Eucharist: wine resembles blood
- 3. has an *efficacy*. Sacraments *bestow* grace

Augustine's definition later felt to be too broad. He considered the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, for example, to be sacraments, "signs of the sacred"

What is a Sacrament?

Hugh of St. Victor

Hugh of St. Victor (Paris theologian, 1096-1141). Four requirements:

- 1. a “*physical or material*” *element* pointing to a *spiritual reality* (e.g. water in baptism, bread and wine in the Eucharist)
- 2. a *resemblance* to the reality pointed to (e.g. wine resembles blood)
- 3. an *efficacy*. Sacrament *bestow* a benefit or grace
- 4. an *authorization* to signify that reality (e.g. institution of the Eucharist by Jesus)

What is a Sacrament?

Hugh of St. Victor

“**Sacraments of the Old Covenant**” versus

“**Sacraments of the New Covenant:**”

- **Sacraments of the Old Covenant** (e.g. circumcision) signified spiritual realities but bestowed no benefits – they were *not efficacious*.
- Whereas, **Sacraments of the New Covenant** bestowed benefits – they were *efficacious*.

What is a Sacrament?

Hugh of St. Victor

Problems with the definition of Hugh of St. Victor:

- at this time, early 12th century, there was general agreement there were 7 sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, marriage, ordination, extreme unction
 - *Penance* however had *no material sign*
- Hugh claimed by his definition, the incarnation, the church, and death were all sacraments

What is a Sacrament?

Peter Lombard

Peter Lombard (1100-1160) “Master of the Sentences.” His textbook *The Four Books of the Sentences* became definitive beginning theology textbook for the next 350 years. Slightly modified 4 requirements of Hugh of St. Victor:

- 1. *sign of an invisible grace of God*
(removed “physical or material”)
- 2. a *resemblance* to the reality pointed to
(e.g. wine resembles blood)

What is a Sacrament?

Peter Lombard

Peter Lombard (1100-1160) “Master of the Sentences.” Four requirements for a sacrament:

- 3. an *efficacy*. Sacrament must be able to *bestow* a benefit or grace (sanctify the believer)
- 4. authorized for a *dual purpose*:
 - to **signify** a sacred reality
 - to **sanctify** the believer

Only 7 “sacraments” met these requirements: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, marriage, ordination, extreme unction

What is a Sacrament?

Reformation: Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) narrowed the definition of a Sacrament:

- 1. a “*physical or material*” *element* pointing to a *spiritual reality* (e.g. water in baptism, bread and wine in the Eucharist)
- 2. a *resemblance* to the reality pointed to (e.g. wine resembles blood)
- 3. an *efficacy* to forgive sins
- 4. an *authorization* by Jesus, documented in the Bible to:
 - to **signify** the sacred reality
 - to forgive sins of the believer

What is a Sacrament?

Reformation: Luther

More succinctly: a physical sign instituted by Jesus with the power to forgive sins

Only 2 of the 7 Catholic sacraments met this strict definition:

- Baptism
- Eucharist

What is a Sacrament?

Reformation: Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli (1481-1531, Swiss Reformer): a sacrament (Baptism and the Eucharist) is a sign instituted by Jesus, which signifies the commitment and loyalty of the believer.

- a sacrament does not bestow grace (is not efficacious)

The Donatist Controversy and the Efficacy of Sacraments

Roman emperor Diocletian (b. 284, d. 313)
issued Edict of February 303:

- Christian books ordered to be burned
- Christian churches to be demolished

This persecution of Christians ended with
conversion of Emperor Constantine (b.
280, d. 337) and Edict of Milan 313

Church leaders who had turned over their
books to be burned called *traditores*
“those who handed over” [their books]

The Donatist Controversy and the Efficacy of Sacraments

Felix of Aptunga was a *traditor* who later consecrated Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage, North Africa in 311

Donatists in North Africa (leader was Donatus) argued:

- Caecilian's consecration invalid
- sacramental system of Catholic church corrupted. All baptisms, ordinations by Caecilian and his priests tainted and invalid
- church leaders must be pure and cannot include *traditores*, even if they repent

The Donatist Controversy and the Efficacy of Sacraments

Donatists formed a separate church.

Sociological issues complicated the theology:

- most Donatists: native Africans
- most Catholics: Roman colonists

By 388, when Augustine returned to North Africa from Rome, the Donatist Church was larger than the Catholic Church

The Donatist Controversy and the Efficacy of Sacraments

Efficacy of Sacraments based on:

- **Donatists:** *ex opere operantis* = “on account of the work of the one who works.” Efficacy depends on the personal qualities of the minister
- **Catholics (Augustine):** *ex opere operato* = “on account of the work which is done.” Efficacy depends on the grace of Christ

The Donatist Controversy and the Efficacy of Sacraments

Nothing more is accomplished by a good priest and nothing less by a wicked priest, because is it accomplished by the word of the creator and not the merit of the priest. Thus the wickedness of the priest does not nullify the effect of the sacrament, just as the sickness of a doctor does not destroy the power of his medicine. Although the “doing of the thing (*opus operans*)” may be unclear, nevertheless, the “thing which is done (*opus operatum*)” is always clean

- Pope Innocent III (1160-1216)

The Donatist Controversy and the Efficacy of Sacraments

Article 25, Articles of Religion, Book of
Common Prayer (p. 873):

On the Sacraments

“. . . Neither is the effect of Christ’s ordinance taken away by their [a minister’s] wickedness, nor the grace of God’s gifts diminished 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 ministered by evil men.”

The Function of the Sacraments

The role or function of sacraments (not mutually exclusive)

- 1. convey grace
- 2. strengthen faith and reassure us of God's promises
- 3. enhance unity and commitment in the Church

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Convey Grace

The ability to bestow grace (the efficacy of a sacrament) part of the definition of a sacraments until the Reformation, when some Reformers (Zwingli) disputed whether a sacrament bestowed grace

Medieval theologians debated whether the sacraments:

- themselves **cause** the bestowal of grace
- act as *causa sine qua non*; that is, are **indispensable preconditions** for God to bestow grace

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Convey Grace

When Peter Lombard states that the sacraments effect what they signify, this must not be understood to mean that the sacraments themselves cause grace, in the strict sense of the world. Rather, God effects grace at the presence of the sacraments

- Peter of Aquila

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Strengthen Faith, Reassure Us

Emphasized by Protestant Reformers:

- In an ideal world, the **Word of God** (which already promises us grace and the forgiveness of sins) *should be enough* for us
- Because of the *weakness of our faith* and the *mistrust in our hearts*, God added **Signs** (the sacraments) to **God's Word** in order to:
 - reassure us of God's promises
 - strengthen our faith

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Strengthen Faith, Reassure Us

Sacraments as a means of strengthening faith and reassuring us is also emphasized in Post Vatican II Catholicism:

Sacraments sustain and nourish both:

- *fides qua creditur* = “the faith by which it is believed.” The trust that lies at the heart of belief.
- *fides quae creditur* = “the faith which is believed.” The content of the Christian faith in the Creeds, catechism, etc.

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Strengthen Faith, Reassure Us

Because [sacraments] are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it. That is why they are called “sacraments of faith.” They do indeed confer grace, but in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace to their profit, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

- Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, p.20.

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Enhance Unity & Commitment to the Church

In no religion, whether true or false, can people be held together in association, unless they are gathered together with some common share in some visible signs or sacraments.

-Augustine of Hippo

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Enhance Unity & Commitment to the Church

The role of sacraments as enhancing unity and commitment was greatly emphasized by the Protestant reformers. For some of them, this was the primary purpose of a sacrament

The Function of the Sacraments

Sacraments Enhance Unity & Commitment to the Church

Ulrich Zwingli (Swiss Reformer):

- a sacrament was *primarily* a token to show that an individual belonged to the community of faith
- Baptism the Christian equivalent of circumcision, public demonstration of membership
- Eucharist a continuing public declaration of membership in the Church

The Eucharist:

The Question of the Real Presence

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

- Matthew 26:26-28 (NRSV)

What does “this is my body” really mean?

The Eucharist:

The Question of the Real Presence

Views in the Early Church:

[Jesus Christ] by his own will once changed water into wine at Cana in Galilee. So why should we not believe that he can change wine into blood? . . . We should therefore have full assurance that we are sharing in the body and blood of Christ. For in the type of bread, his body is given to you, and in the type of wine, his blood is given to you, so that by partaking of the body and blood of Christ you may become of one body and one blood with him.

- Cyril of Jerasalem, Catechetical Lectures
given to those preparing
for baptism, 350 A.D.

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence

Views in the Early Church:

And now you ask how the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the wine and the water become the blood of Christ. I shall tell you. The Holy Spirit comes upon them, and achieves things which surpass every word and thought... Let it be enough for you to understand that this takes place by the Holy Spirit.

- John of Damascus, (665-749)

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence

Theories on the Real Presence

- Transubstantiation
- Transsignification
- Transfinalization
- Consubstantiation
- Memorialism

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence Transubstantiation

Fourth Lateran Council 1215

- first doctrinal explanation of the meaning of the “real presence”

Transubstantiation

- based on Aristotle’s view of reality. All matter had two qualities:
 - **accidents** (its outward appearance, color, shape, etc.)
 - **substance** (its essential nature)
- at the moment of consecration, the **substance** of bread and wine changed into the body and blood of Jesus. Only their **accidents** remained unchanged

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence: Transsignification and Transfinalization

Developed by group of Belgian Roman Catholic theologians in 1960's, most prominently Edward Schillebeeckx

Based on the idea the **identity** of an **object** cannot be isolated from the object's

- **meaning** or **significance** within the context in which it is used

- **purpose** or **end goal** (“**finality**”)

within the context in which it is used

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence: Transsignification and Transfinalization

Transsignification

- at moment of consecration, the *meaning* / “*significance*” of bread and wine fundamentally changes
- it no longer *means* / *signifies* food, but *means* / *signifies* Christ

Transfinalization

- at the moment of consecration, the *end* (“*finality*”) / *purpose* of bread and wine changes
- *end* / *purpose* of physical nourishment is replaced by *end* / *purpose* of spiritual nourishment

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence: Transsignification and Transfinalization

As a result of transubstantiation, the species of bread and wine undoubtedly take on a new signification and a new finality, for they are no longer ordinary bread and wine but instead a sign of something sacred and a sign of spiritual food. Yet they take on this new signification, this new finality, precisely because they contain a new “reality.” ... For what now lies beneath the aforementioned species [that is, what is now the new substance of the elements] is not what was there before, but something completely different... namely the body and blood of Christ.

- Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*, 1965

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence: Consubstantiation

Luther:

- the *substance* of both bread and the body of Christ are present *together*
- how they can be together is a mystery

Analogy (taken from Origen, 185-254)

- an iron placed in a fire begins to glow
- in that glowing iron, both *iron* and *heat* are present together

The Eucharist: The Question of the Real Presence: Memorialism

Zwingli: the Eucharist is:

- a memorial of the suffering of Christ
- a token left by Christ to remember him by until the day he returns
- “This is my body:” the “is” means “signifies.” Jesus intended it metaphorically / figuratively, *not* literally

Baptism:

The Debate Over Infant Baptism

Passages in the New Testament which can be interpreted as condoning infant baptism:

- baptizing of entire households (Acts 16:15, Acts 33:1; 1 Cor. 1:16)
- spiritual counterpart to circumcision (Col. 2:11-12)

Possible pressures for infant baptism in the early church:

- rite of passage for Christian infants like Jewish circumcision
- serves pastoral need to celebrate birth of an infant within Christian household

Baptism:

The Debate Over Infant Baptism

Infant baptism had become normal by the second or third century

There has remained unease over the theological basis and need for infant baptism in some mainstream Christian denominations. Karl Barth (1886-1968, Reformed theologian), wrote that baptism:

- is without biblical foundation
- devalues the grace of God (“cheap grace”)
- weakens the link between grace of baptism & the response to that grace which is Christian discipleship

Baptism:

The Debate Over Infant Baptism

Three major views on the need for infant baptism:

- 1. remits the guilt of original sin
- 2. grounded in the covenant between God and the church
- 3. is unjustified

Baptism: Infant Baptism Remits the Guilt of Original Sin

“Original Sin: the “disease,” “bondage,”
“guilt” that explains why, if human
beings were created by a good God, they:
- possess a nature that seems to dispose
them to sin
- all do sin

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (~200-258):
grace imparted by baptism provides:
- forgiveness of sinful acts
- forgiveness of original sin

Baptism:

Infant Baptism Remits the Guilt of Original Sin

Augustine (354-430):

- baptism removes the *guilt* of original sin, but not the *disease* – so the tendency to sin continues through life
- an infant who dies without baptism still has the *guilt* of original sin and will go to hell

Peter Lombard (1100-1160): unbaptized infants who die go to “limbo”

- receive the “penalty of being condemned” but not “the penalty of the senses” (the experience of the physical pain of hell)

Baptism: Infant Baptism is Grounded in the Covenant Between God and the Church

Ulrich Zwingli (1481-1531, Swiss
Reformer)

- did not believe sacraments bestow grace
- was skeptical of the Augustinian concept of “original guilt”

Justified infant baptism as the outward sign of membership in the People of God, the “successor” to circumcision in the Old Covenant

Baptism:

Infant Baptism is Grounded in the Covenant Between God and the Church

Ulrich Zwingli: infant baptism illustrated the more *inclusive* and *gentle* character of Christianity:

- *inclusive*: women as well as men could be baptized
- *gentle*: no pain or shedding of blood

Baptism:

Infant Baptism is Unjustified

Radical reformers, and the later Baptist church in England in the 17th century, rejected infant baptism.

- Argued the sacrament of baptism does not *confer* grace and the forgiveness of sins, but rather *declares* that grace and is already present and the forgiveness of sins has already taken place
- Baptism should therefore be the **public declaration** of conversion to Christianity

Baptism:

Infant Baptism is Unjustified

Benajah Harvey Carroll (1843-1914),
leading Southern Baptist in Texas. Four
requirements for a valid Baptism:

- 1. The *proper authority* (the church) must administer the sacrament
- 2. The *proper subject* (the penitent believer) must receive the sacrament
- 3. The *proper act* (total immersion in water) must be performed
- 4. The *proper design* (baptism is declarative and in no way causative of the believer's conversion) must be affirmed

Primary Reference

“The Doctrine of the Sacraments,” Chapter 16 in: **Christian Theology. An Introduction. Third Edition.** Alister E. McGrath, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 2001