

Why Sacred Mysteries: The Sacraments and Why We Practice Them

Week Two Handout

II. Number and order of Sacraments

A. Roman Catholic/Eastern Orthodoxy

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Matrimony
4. Holy Orders
5. The Eucharist/the Mass (Holy Communion)
6. Confession
7. Anointing of the Sick (Last Rites, Extreme Unction)

B. Lutheran

1. Baptism
- (1a). Confession
2. Holy Communion

C. Anglican (Episcopalian)/Presbyterian/Reformed

1. Baptism
2. Holy Communion

D. Baptist/Anabaptist/Other Protestant (often called rites/ordinances)

1. Baptism
2. Holy Communion

III. The Lutheran understanding of what is and isn't a Sacrament

A. Luther: a sacrament has three elements:

1. The divine promise (God's Word)
2. A visible/physical element (sign)
3. Authorized and Instituted by Christ (the church cannot "make" a sacrament)

B. Baptism

1. Is it a sacrament? Yes
2. The divine promise: Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:16; Titus 3:5-8; Rom. 6:1-4
3. A visible/physical element: Water
4. Authorized and Instituted by Christ

C. Holy Communion

1. Is it a sacrament? Yes
2. The divine promise: Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26
3. A visible/physical element: unleavened bread and wine
4. Authorized and Instituted by Christ

D. Confession (The Office of the Keys)

1. Is it a sacrament? Yes, sort of, no, not really; daily repentance & living in our baptism
2. The divine promise: Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18; John 20:22-23; 1 John 1:9-10
3. A visible/physical element: none (one of two main reasons not considered a sacrament)
4. Authorized and Instituted by Christ
5. Public, private, or both?
6. The opening salvo against the sacramental system: Satisfaction & Indulgences
7. The Medieval Catholic system of Penance:
 - a. Necessary because sin removes the grace bestowed in baptism (Penance is the "plank" that keeps you afloat after the shipwreck of your faith; otherwise you will drown in sin)
 - b. Contrition: or, making yourself feel guilty for everything you do and don't do
 - i. Penitentials: Helpful lists of sins in case you forget something

- ii. Watch out for the “secret” sins!
 - c. Confession: Don’t forget to confess everything
 - d. Satisfaction: you may feel sorry, and God may forgive you, but you still have to make amends for everything you’ve done wrong
 - i. Prayers, pilgrimages, mortifications, and the grand prize, indulgences
8. The Lutheran understanding of Confession:
- a. Hearing the truth of God’s threat (Law) and God’s promise (Gospel) brings the sinner to repentance
 - b. It is necessary to confess our sins because we are sinners (1 John 1:9-10)
 - c. Confession is not separate from Baptism; it is the process of living out our Baptism daily
 - d. Confession: Don’t worry about remembering everything; God knows the contrite heart
 - e. Absolution: The pronouncement of forgiveness and the reminder of the promise

E. Confirmation

- 1. Is it a sacrament? No
- 2. The divine promise: None, no direct reference in Scripture
- 3. A visible/physical element: none
- 4. Not authorized and instituted by Christ
- 5. Originated as a “sacrament” reserved for bishops (laying on of hands)
- 6. In Lutheran understanding, confirmation is a rite that “confirms” those baptized have been taught the faith in accordance with Matt. 28:18-20. It is part of the sacrament of Baptism and not a distinct sacrament

F. Marriage

- 1. Is it a sacrament? No
- 2. The divine promise: None; marriage has nothing to do with salvation
- 3. A visible/physical element: None
- 4. Eph. 5:32 seems to treat marriage as a sign representing Christ and his church
 - i. Remember: All sacraments are signs, but not all signs are sacraments
 - ii. While marriage can function as a sign revealing the mystery of the relationship between Christ and his church, it often doesn’t: broken marriages, abusive marriages, separations, and divorce don’t
 - iii. Marriage is not unique to the church; marriage of non-believers, same-sex marriages, polygamous and polyandrous marriages do not point to the mystery
 - iv. Remember: Paul is using the word mystery differently here; cf. our week 1 discussion
 - v. Paul is using sign in an allegorical or typological sense, rather than in the sacramental sense as Luther defines it
- 5. Not authorized and instituted by Christ (as a sacrament of grace unique to the church)

G. Ordination

- 1. Is it a sacrament? No
- 2. The divine promise: None
- 3. A visible/physical element: None
- 4. Not authorized and instituted by Christ himself

H. Anointing of the Sick (Last rites, Extreme Unction)

- 1. Is it a sacrament? No
- 2. The divine promise: None (and no, Jas. 5:14-15 doesn’t count)
- 3. A visible/physical element: None
- 4. Not authorized and instituted by Christ himself
- 5. The medieval sacrament, while appealing to Jas. 5:14-15 for support, does and means the exact opposite of what James actually says

There are still a few other things which it might seem possible to regard as sacraments; namely, all those things to which a divine promise has been given, such as prayer, the Word, and the cross. For Christ has promised, in many places, that those who pray should be heard; especially in Luke 11[:5–13], where by many parables he invites us to pray. Of the Word he says: “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it” [Luke 11:28]. And who can count all the times he promises aid and glory to those who are afflicted, suffer, and are cast down? Indeed, who can recount all the promises of God? Why, the whole Scripture is concerned with provoking us to faith; now driving us with commands and threats, now drawing us with promises and consolations. In fact, everything in Scripture is either a command or a promise. The commands humble the proud with their demands, the promises exalt the humble with their forgiveness.

Nevertheless, it has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them. The remainder, not being bound to signs, are bare promises. Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the bread. For only in these two do we find both the divinely instituted sign and the promise of forgiveness of sins. The sacrament of penance, which I added to these two, lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a way and a return to baptism. Nor can the scholastics say that their definition fits penance, for they too ascribe to the true sacrament a visible sign, which is to impress upon the senses the form of that which it effects invisibly. But penance or absolution has no such sign. Therefore they are compelled by their own definition either to admit that penance is not a sacrament and thus to reduce their number, or else to bring forth another definition of a sacrament.

Baptism, however, which we have applied to the whole of life, will truly be a sufficient substitute for all the sacraments which we might need as long as we live. And the bread is truly the sacrament of the dying and departing; for in it we commemorate the passing of Christ out of this world, that we may imitate him. Thus we may apportion these two sacraments as follows: baptism may be allotted to the beginning and the entire course of life, while the bread belongs to the end and to death. And the Christian should use them both as long as he is in this mortal frame, until, fully baptized and strengthened, he passes out of this world, and is born into the new eternal life, to eat with Christ in the kingdom of his Father, as he promised at the Last Supper, when he said: “Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” [Matt. 26:29, Mark 14:25, Luke 22:18]. Thus he clearly seems to have instituted the sacrament of the bread with a view to our entrance into the life to come. For then, when the purpose of both sacraments is fulfilled, baptism and bread will cease.

—Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*