

Sacramentology

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Sacramental Universe

Foundation 1: The goodness of the material world.

- A. God created the material world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing)
- B. The Son became fully incarnate in his material world
- C. The Son was materially resurrected and ascended into Heaven with a physical body
- D. Salvation is not an escape from physical existence, but the hope of physical resurrection

Foundation 2: Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.

This is the common view in catholic theology. Nature is not opposed to grace, but grace infuses nature and perfects it, making it more of that which it is supposed to be.

Foundation 3: God works through his material world.

Examples:

1. Jacob's striped sticks and the spotted lambs (Genesis 30:35-43)
2. Moses' staff divides the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16)
3. Moses' throws a piece of wood in bitter water to make it sweet (Exodus 15:25)
4. Moses' staff wins a battle (Exodus 17:10-12)
5. The incident with the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:8-9)
6. Jesus heals blindness with clay (John 9:6-7)
7. A touch of Jesus' garment heals a woman (Mark 5:21-34)
8. Pieces of cloth from the Apostles bring healing (Acts 19:11-12)

Foundation 4: We are fully spiritual and material creatures, and so encounter God with our whole selves, spiritual and material.

We are not souls "trapped" in bodies, but our bodies are truly part of who we are. We encounter God both spiritually and physical, because we are both spiritual and physical. We *need* our physical bodies to worship because we *need* our physical bodies to be fully and truly human. We should view the sacraments as an inherent part of our reality, and the way things ought to be for embodied creatures.

Foundation 5: The Bible says so

Finally, scripture itself presents the Sacraments as means of grace. One of the more obvious is Baptism. Scripture "plainly says" that Baptism forgives sins and grants the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

Nature of the Sacraments

The Sacraments in General

Q. What are the sacraments?

A. The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.

(Book of Common Prayer Catechism, 857)

Sacraments answer the question “how do I know that God worked here?”

Sacramental Metaphysics

- I. Humanity is made in the image of God
- II. Being in the “image” of someone in the Ancient Near East meant to be a representative of that person, typically a deity [idols were images of the gods, representatives]
- III. Thus humanity is the “idol” of God, in that we reflect God to the rest of creation, that is the context for being given the dominion of the earth
- IV. Humanity then was to be the mediator between God and creation, priests of nature
- V. We were created in perfect relationships to facilitate and express this priesthood, a relationship with God, with each other, within a family, within ourselves, and with the rest of creation
- VI. Sin distorted the image, and destroyed our dominion
- VII. Sin destroyed the relationships established in connection to the imago Dei
- VIII. Christ became perfect man, the perfect Imago Dei
- IX. The Church IS the body of Christ in a more than allegorical way, but in a real metaphysical sense
- X. The Church is a “kingdom of priests” not that each person is a priest in and of themselves, but that the Church is the embodiment of the imago Dei priesthood [not the same as Christ’s covenantal priesthood]
- XI. Christian priests actualize the imago Dei priesthood
- XII. Thus, Christian priests have an aspect of the lost imago Dei restored in them
- XIII. The sacraments are expressions of this priesthood in restoring order to chaotic relationships and purifying the corruptions of sin on nature

Sacramental Grace

Nature of Sacramental Grace

Sacraments produce different effects and have different graces. There is no reason to expect that all sacraments should work essentially the same way. They all have the same source in Christ and his sacrifice, in that they are instrumental but not the principal cause of grace.

Efficacy

Ex opere operato is saying that the sacraments work by the work worked, ie without regard to the worthiness of the priest nor their own particular theology. Christ acts in his power by mere fact that the sacrament was performed. This is the foundational concept for the *objective* efficacy of the Sacraments. This means that the grace is always present in the sacrament to be received, it does not mean that the person always receives it. A person can, through hardened sin or apathy or some other means, reject or block the grace being made available.

The Sacramentals in effect work *ex opere operantis*, in that they depend on the subjective state of the person doing the work. Primarily this is seen as *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*, the work of prayer done by the Church.

Number

The word “sacrament” does not appear directly in Scripture. The Latin word *sacramentum* was used in the Vulgate to translate the Greek *mysterion* (μυστήριον) in places such as Ephesians 5:32 where the context is Marriage.

Sacramentum was the word generally used for a military oath. This became adopted by the Church, and initially was widely used for lots of different rites including consecrating Christian Kings and Queens.

Eventually, the word came to designate seven particular Ecclesiastical Rites that were seen to give grace in special ways: Eucharist, Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Ordination, Unction and Penance. Various other rituals and blessings were then designated “sacramentals” which were considered related to the Sacraments but not fully Sacraments in their own right.

During the Reformation, a debate as to the number of Sacraments arose. One of the principals of Lutheran and Reformed theology is that only those things instituted directly by Christ can be called sacraments. For Anglicanism in particular, this led to the distinction between *Dominical sacraments* and *Ecclesiastical sacraments*. *Dominical sacraments* are so called because they were instituted directly by Jesus (from *Dominus* which means “Lord”), these are Baptism and Eucharist.

I would say that there are at least seven sacraments. There are the big seven, and then other ways that God brings his grace through the physical world.

Validity

The Western Church tradition has systematized the idea of a valid sacrament into five criteria:

- 1- Form (words)
- 2- Matter or Substance (material sign)
- 3- Subject (“worthy” receiver, NB the grace is always offered, but the person can reject it)
- 4- Intention (Some type of intent to actually be doing the sacrament)
- 5- Agent (valid priest or bishop in Apostolic Succession)