

QUESTION 65

The Number of the Sacraments

Next we have to consider the number of the sacraments. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Are there seven sacraments? (2) How are they ordered with respect to one another? (3) How do they compare with one another? (4) Are all the sacraments necessary for salvation?

Article 1

Should there be seven sacraments?

It seems that there should not be seven sacraments (*non debeant esse septem sacramenta*):

Objection 1: The sacraments have their efficacy from the divine power and from the power of Christ's passion. But the divine power is one, and Christ's passion is one, since, as Hebrews 10:14 says, "By one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified." Therefore, there should have been just one sacrament (*non debuit esse nisi unum sacramentum*).

Objection 2: A sacrament is ordered against the defect of sin. But this defect is twofold, viz., punishment and guilt. Therefore, it would be sufficient for there to be two sacraments.

Objection 3: As is clear from Dionysius, the sacraments involve the actions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. But as he puts it, there are three actions on the part of this hierarchy: "purging, illuminating, and perfecting." Therefore, there should be just three sacraments.

Objection 4: In *Contra Faustum* Augustine claims that the sacraments of the New Law are "fewer in number" than the sacraments of the Old Law. But in the Old Law there were no sacraments corresponding to confirmation and extreme unction. Therefore, they should not be numbered among the sacraments of the New Law.

Objection 5: As is clear from what was said in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 74, a. 5 and *ST* 2-2, q. 154, a. 3), lust (*luxuria*) is not the most grievous of sins. But no sacrament is instituted against other sins. Therefore, neither should a sacrament of matrimony have been instituted against lust.

But contrary to this: It seems that there are more sacraments:

1. The sacraments are called a sort of sacred sign. But many other sanctifications are performed in the Church with respect to signs that can be sensed, e.g., blessing water, consecrating an altar, and other things of this sort. Therefore, there are more than seven sacraments.

2. Hugh of St. Victor claims that the sacraments of the Old Law were offerings, tithes, and sacrifices (*oblaciones, decimae, et sacrificia*). But the Church's sacrifice is one sacrament, which is called the Eucharist. Therefore, offerings and tithes should likewise be called sacraments.

3. There are three kinds of sin: *original* sin, *mortal* sin, and *venial* sin. But baptism is ordered against original sin, whereas [the sacrament of] penance is ordered against mortal sin. Therefore, there should be another sacrament, over and beyond the seven, that is ordered against venial sin.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 62, a. 5 and q. 63, a. 1), the Church's sacraments are ordered toward two things, viz., (a) perfecting a man in those things that belong to the worship of God in accord with the religion of the Christian life, and also (b) remedying the defect of sin. And in both these ways it is appropriate to posit seven sacraments.

For the spiritual life has some conformity to the bodily life, just as certain other corporeal things have some similarity to spiritual things. Now in the bodily life there are two ways in which one is moved toward fulfillment: (a) in one way, with respect to *his own person*, and (b), in a second way, with respect to the *whole common life* of the society in which he lives, given that man is naturally a social animal.

Now with respect to *himself*, there are two ways in which a man is brought to fulfillment in his bodily life: (a) in one way, in its own right (*per se*), by acquiring some degree of perfection in life, and

(b), in a second way, incidentally (*per accidens*), by removing impediments to life, e.g., illnesses or something of this sort.

Now there are three ways in which bodily life is brought to fulfillment in its own right (*per se*):

First, by *generation*, by which a man begins to exist and to live. And in place of this in the spiritual life there is *baptism*, which is a spiritual regeneration—this according to Titus 3:5 (“... through the bath of regeneration, etc.”).

Second, through *growth*, by which one reaches full size and power. And in place of this in the spiritual life there is *confirmation*, in which the Holy Spirit is given for firmness (*ad robur*). Hence, in Luke 24:49 the disciples, who had already been baptized, are told, “Wait in the city until you are clothed with power from above.”

Third, through *nutrition*, by which a man’s life and strength are preserved. And in place of this in the spiritual life there is *the Eucharist*. Hence, John 6:54 says, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you.”

And, to be sure, this would be sufficient for a man if he had a life that was impassible both corporeally and spiritually. But because man sometimes runs into both bodily and spiritual infirmity, i.e., illness (*peccatum*), recovery from his weakness (*curatio ab infirmitate*) is necessary for a man. And this involves two things:

One thing is *healing* (*sanatio*), which restores health (*quae restituit sanitatem*). And in place of this in the spiritual life there is *penance*—this according to Psalm 40:5 (“Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You”)

The second thing is the *restoration* of one’s earlier full strength by means of a suitable diet and appropriate exercise. And in place of this in the spiritual life there is *extreme unction*, which removes the remains of sin and renders a man prepared for final glory. Hence, James 5:15 says, “... and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

On the other hand, there are two ways in which a man is brought to fulfillment in relation to his whole community:

In one way, by *receiving the power to rule over a multitude and to exercise public acts*. And in place of this in the spiritual life there is the sacrament of *holy orders*—this according to Hebrews 7:27, which explains that priests offer sacrifices not only for themselves, but also for the people.

Second, with respect to *natural propagation*, which is effected by *matrimony*, both in the bodily life and in the spiritual life, because matrimony is not only a sacrament, but also a task of nature (*officium naturae*).

On this basis, the number of the sacraments is also clear from the fact that the sacraments are ordered against the defect of sin. For *baptism* is ordered against the lack of spiritual life; *confirmation* against the weakness of mind that is found in those who were born not long ago; *the Eucharist* against the mind’s tendency to sin; *penance* against actual sin committed after baptism; *extreme unction* against the remains of sin, i.e., of those sins that have not been sufficiently removed through repentance, either because of negligence or because of ignorance; *holy orders* against the dissolution of the multitude; and *matrimony* as a remedy for an individual person’s excessive sensual desire (*in remedium contra concupiscentiam personalem*) and also as a remedy for the loss of population that results from death.

On the other hand, some arrive at the number of the sacraments by way of a certain adaptation to the virtues and to the defects associated with [the levels of] sin and with the penal effects of [original] sin (*per quamdam adaptationem ad virtutes et ad defectus culparum et poenalitatum*). They claim that *baptism* corresponds to faith and is ordered against original sin; *extreme unction* corresponds to hope and is ordered against venial sin; *the Eucharist* corresponds to charity and is ordered against malice as a penal effect; *holy orders* corresponds to prudence and is ordered against ignorance [as a penal effect]; *penance* corresponds to justice and is ordered against mortal sin; *matrimony* corresponds to temperance

and is ordered against excessive sensual desire [as a penal effect]; and *confirmation* corresponds to fortitude and is ordered against weakness [as a penal effect].

Reply to objection 1: The same principal agent makes use of diverse instruments for diverse effects in accord with how the works fit together. Similarly, the divine power and Christ's passion work in us through diverse sacraments as through diverse instruments.

Reply to objection 2: Sin and punishment are diverse both insofar as there are different species of sin and punishment and insofar as men have diverse states and situations. And as is clear from what has been said, that is why it was necessary for the sacraments to be multiplied.

Reply to objection 3: What are considered in hierarchical actions are the agents, the recipients, and the actions. Now the agents are the ministers of the Church, to whom the sacrament of *holy orders* belongs. The recipients are those who come forward for the sacraments and who are produced by *matrimony*. And the actions are "purging, illuminating, and perfecting."

However, purging by itself cannot be a sacrament of the New Law, because a sacrament confers grace. Instead, purging by itself belongs to certain sacramentals, viz., catechesis and exorcism.

On the other hand, according to Dionysius, purging and illuminating, when taken together, belong to *baptism*, and because of the one who falls back into sin (*propter recidivum*), they belong secondarily to *penance* and to *extreme unction*.

And perfecting, as regards its power, which is a sort of formal perfection, belongs to *confirmation*, whereas with respect to its attainment of the end, it belongs to *the Eucharist*.

Reply to objection 4: What is given in the sacrament of confirmation is the fullness of the Holy Spirit with respect to firmness (*ad robur*), whereas in extreme unction a man is prepared for the immediate reception of glory. Neither of these belongs to the Old Testament, and so there was nothing in the Old Law that could have corresponded to these sacraments. Nevertheless, the sacraments of the Old Law were many in number because of the diversity of sacrifices and ceremonies.

Reply to objection 5: It was specifically necessary for some remedy to be applied against excessive sexual desire (*contra concupiscentiam venereorum*)—first of all, because through excessive desire of this sort it is not just the *person* that is vitiated, but the *nature* as well, and, second, because of the vehemence of this desire, by which reason is overwhelmed.

Reply to argument 1 for the contrary: The blessing of water and other consecrations are not called sacraments because they do not lead to the effect of a sacrament, which is the reception of grace. Instead, they are certain dispositions toward the sacraments—either (a) by removing obstacles, in the way that holy water is ordered against the snares of the demons and against venial sins, or (b) by making things suitable for the conferring of a sacrament, in the way that an altar and [sacred] vessels are consecrated out of reverence for the Eucharist.

Reply to argument 2 for the contrary: The oblations and tithes, both in the law of nature and in the Law of Moses, were not only ordered toward supporting the ministers and the poor, but were also prefigurements, and that is why they were sacraments. However, because they were prefigurements, they did not remain, and that is why they are not now sacraments.

Reply to argument 3 for the contrary: An infusion of grace is not required for erasing venial sin. Hence, since grace is infused in every sacrament of the New Law, no sacrament of the New Law is instituted directly against venial sin, which is removed by certain sacramentals such as holy water and other things of this sort.

Still, some claim that extreme unction is ordered against venial sin. However, this claim will be addressed in its own place below (*Supplement*, q. 3, a. 1).

Article 2

Are the sacraments appropriately ordered in the manner just explained?

It seems that the sacraments are not appropriately ordered in the manner just explained (*inconvenienter sacramenta ordinentur secundum modum praedictum*):

Objection 1: As the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 15:46, “What is physical (*animale*) comes first, and then what is spiritual.” But it is through matrimony that a man is generated by his first generation, which is physical, whereas it is through baptism that a man is regenerated by his second generation. Therefore, matrimony should come before baptism.

Objection 2: It is through the sacrament of holy orders (*per sacramentum ordinis*) that an individual receives the power to perform the sacramental actions. But an agent is prior to his action. Therefore, holy orders should come before baptism and the other sacraments.

Objection 3: The Eucharist is spiritual nourishment, whereas confirmation corresponds to growth. But nourishment is a cause of growth and, as a result, is prior to it. Therefore, the Eucharist comes before confirmation.

Objection 4: [The sacrament of] penance prepares a man for the Eucharist. But a disposition precedes its fulfillment. Therefore, penance should come before the Eucharist.

Objection 5: What is closer to the ultimate end comes later. But among all the sacraments, it is extreme unction that is closer to the ultimate end of beatitude. Therefore, it should have the last place among the sacraments.

But contrary to this: The sacraments are ordered by everyone in the way that has been explained.

I respond: The reason for the ordering of the sacraments is apparent from what was said above (a. 1). For just as *one* (*unum*) is prior to *many* (*multitudo*), so the sacraments that are ordered toward the perfection of an individual person naturally precede those that are ordered toward the perfection of a multitude. And so what is placed last among the sacraments are *holy orders* and *matrimony*, which are ordered toward the perfection of a multitude, and *matrimony* is placed after *holy orders* because it participates to a lesser degree in the character of the spiritual life, toward which the sacraments are ordered.

On the other hand, among those sacraments that are ordered toward the perfection of an individual person, those that are ordered in their own right (*per se*) toward the perfection of the spiritual life are prior to those that are ordered toward this incidentally (*per accidens*), viz. by removing a harmful supervening accident; and the sacraments of this latter sort are *penance* and *extreme unction*—though *extreme unction*, which conserves the health that *penance* initiates, is naturally posterior to *penance*.

Among the other three sacraments, it is clear that *baptism*, which is a spiritual regeneration, is first, and then comes *confirmation*, which is ordered toward the formal fulfillment of power, and then *the Eucharist*, which is ordered toward the fulfillment of the final end.

Reply to objection 1: Insofar as matrimony is ordered toward physical life, it is a task of nature (*officium naturae*). But insofar as it contains something of the spiritual life (*aliquid spiritualitatis*), it is a sacrament. And since it has a minimum of the spiritual life, it is placed last among the sacraments.

Reply to objection 2: In order for something to be an agent, it is presupposed that it is perfect or complete in itself (*in se perfectum*). And so the sacraments by which someone is perfected in himself are prior to the sacrament of holy orders, in which someone is put into a position to perfect others.

Reply to objection 3: Nutrition both precedes growth as its cause and also follows growth as that which conserves a man in his full size and power. And that is why the Eucharist can be placed before confirmation, as Dionysius does in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, and also why it can be placed after

confirmation, as the Master does in *Sentences* 4.

Reply to objection 4: This argument would indeed go through if penance were necessarily required as a preparation for the Eucharist. But this is not so. For if an individual were without mortal sin, then he would not need penance in order to receive the Eucharist. And so it is clear that penance incidentally prepares one for the Eucharist, viz., given that there is sin. Hence, 2 Paralipomenon 33:18 says, “You, Lord of the righteous, have not imposed penance on the righteous.”

Reply to objection 5: Because of the argument already given, extreme unction is the last among the sacraments that are ordered toward the perfection of an individual person.

Article 3

Is the sacrament of the Eucharist the greatest among the sacraments?

It seems that the sacrament of the Eucharist is not the greatest among the sacraments (*sacramentum Eucharistiae non sit potissimum inter sacramenta*):

Objection 1: As *Ethics* 1 explains, the common good is more important than the good of a single individual. But matrimony is ordered toward the common good of the human species by way of generation, whereas the sacrament of the Eucharist is ordered toward the proper good of the one who receives it (*ad bonum proprium sumentis*). Therefore, the Eucharist is not the greatest of the sacraments.

Objection 2: The more dignified sacraments seem to be those that are conferred by a greater minister. But the sacrament of confirmation and the sacrament of holy orders are conferred only by a bishop, who is a greater minister than a simple minister, i.e., a priest, by whom the sacrament of the Eucharist is conferred.

Objection 3: To the extent that a sacrament is greater, it has more power. But certain sacraments, viz., baptism, confirmation, and holy orders, imprint a character—something that the Eucharist does not do. Therefore, those sacraments are greater than the Eucharist.

Objection 4: What seems to be greater is that which other things depend upon, and not vice versa. But the Eucharist depends upon baptism, since no one can receive the Eucharist unless he has been baptized. Therefore, baptism is greater than the Eucharist.

But contrary to this: In *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 3, Dionysius says, “It is impossible for anyone to be brought to fulfillment by a hierarchical perfection except through the most divine Eucharist.” Therefore, this sacrament is the greatest and brings all the others to completion.

I respond: Absolutely speaking, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the greatest among the sacraments. There are three reasons why this is clear:

First of all, from the fact that Christ is contained in it *substantially* (*substantialiter*), whereas what is contained in the other sacraments is, as is clear from what was said above (q. 62, a. 4, ad 3 and a. 5), a certain instrumental power participated in by Christ. But what exists through its essence is always greater than what exists through participation.

It is clear, second, from the ordering of the sacraments to each other, since all the other sacraments seem to be ordered toward this sacrament as toward an end. For it is clear that the sacrament of holy orders is ordered toward the consecration of the Eucharist. On the hand, baptism is ordered toward the reception of the Eucharist—on which point the individual is brought to perfection through confirmation, with the result that he does not fear that he might separate himself from such a sacrament. Again, through penance and extreme unction a man is prepared to receive the body of Christ worthily. And matrimony, at least in its signification, attains to this sacrament insofar as it signifies the union between Christ and

His Church, a union that is portrayed figuratively by the sacrament of the Eucharist; hence, in Ephesians 5:32 the Apostle says, “This is a great mystery (*sacramentum*)—I mean in reference to Christ and the Church.”

Third, it is clear from the rites of the sacraments. For as Dionysius explains in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, almost every sacrament is consummated in the Eucharist; for instance, it is clear that those who are ordained receive Holy Communion (*communicant*), as the baptized likewise do if they are mature enough (*si sint adulti*).

There can be many ways in which the remaining sacraments are related to one another. For instance, in terms of *necessity*, baptism is the greatest of the sacraments, whereas in terms of *perfection*, it is the sacrament of holy orders, and in the middle between them stands the sacrament of confirmation. On the other hand, the sacraments of penance and extreme unction belong to a lower grade than the previous sacraments because, as has been explained (a. 2), they are ordered toward the Christian life not in their own right, but, as it were, incidentally (*non per se sed quasi per accidens*), viz., as a remedy for supervening defects. As regards one another, extreme unction is related to penance in the way that confirmation is related to baptism—so that, namely, penance has a greater necessity, whereas extreme unction has a greater perfection.

Reply to objection 1: Matrimony is ordered toward the common good corporeally. But the common spiritual good of the whole Church is contained substantially within the sacrament itself of the Eucharist.

Reply to objection 2: By holy orders and confirmation the faithful of Christ are deputized for certain special roles, and this deputizing belongs to the office of a leader (*quod pertinet ad officium principis*). And so conferring sacraments of this sort falls only to the bishop, who is, as it were, a leader in the Church (*qui est quasi princeps in Ecclesia*).

By contrast, it is not the case that a man is deputized through the sacrament of the Eucharist for some role; instead, this sacrament is, as has been explained, the final end of all duties and roles (*finis omnium officiorum*).

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 63, a. 3), a sacramental character is a certain participation in Christ’s priesthood. Hence, the sacrament in which Christ joins Himself to man has more dignity than a sacrament that imprints a character of Christ.

Reply to objection 4: This argument goes through as regards *necessity*. For on this score, because baptism has maximal necessity, it is the greatest sacrament—just as holy orders and confirmation have a certain excellence as regards *ministry* and matrimony as regards its *signification*. For there is nothing to prevent a thing from being more dignified *in a certain respect*, even though it is not more dignified *absolutely speaking*.

Article 4

Are all the sacraments necessary for salvation?

It seems that all the sacraments are necessary for salvation (*omnia sacramenta sunt de necessitate salutis*):

Objection 1: What is not necessary seems to be superfluous. But no sacrament is superfluous, since God does nothing in vain. Therefore, all the sacraments are necessary for salvation.

Objection 2: Just as it is said of baptism, “Unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he will not enter into the kingdom of God,” so in John 6:54 it is said of the Eucharist, “Unless you eat the

flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you.” Therefore, just baptism is a sacrament of necessity, so, too, is the Eucharist.

Objection 3: An individual can be saved without the sacrament of baptism, provided that (a) he is not contemptuous of religion and (b) some sort of necessity precludes the sacrament. But in the case of every sacrament, contempt for religion prevents a man’s being saved. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, all the sacraments are necessary for salvation.

But contrary to this: Children are saved by baptism alone, without the other sacraments.

I respond: There are two ways in which something is said to be necessary with respect to an end (*necessarium respectu finis*)—which is the sort of necessity that we are speaking of here:

In one way, what is necessary with respect to an end is *that without which the end cannot exist*, in the way that food is necessary for human life. And this is what is *necessary for an end absolutely speaking* (*simpliciter necessarium ad finem*).

In a second way, what is said to be necessary [with respect to an end] is *that without which the end cannot be had as fittingly*, in the way that a horse is necessary for a journey, even though it is not necessary for the end absolutely speaking.

Thus, three of the sacraments are necessary in the first way. Two are necessary *for the individual person*, viz., (a) baptism simply and absolutely speaking and (b) penance, on the supposition that a mortal sin has been committed after his baptism. On the other hand, the sacrament of holy orders is necessary *for the Church*, since, as Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no governor, the people shall fail.”

However, it is in the second way that the other sacraments are necessary. For confirmation in some sense brings baptism to completion, and extreme unction does the same thing with respect to penance, whereas matrimony conserves the population of the Church through propagation.

Reply to objection 1: Being necessary in the first or second way is sufficient for something’s not being superfluous. And it is in the sense, as has been explained, that the sacraments are necessary.

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine comments in *Super Ioannem*, these words of our Lord should be taken to be about spiritual eating and not about sacramental eating alone.

Reply to objection 3: Even though contempt for all the sacraments is contrary to salvation, it is nonetheless not contemptuous for someone not to care about receiving a sacrament that is not necessary for salvation. Otherwise, anyone who did not receive holy orders, along with anyone who did not contract matrimony, would be showing contempt for sacraments of this sort.