

QUESTION 71

Catechesis and Exorcism

Next we have to consider those preparations that occur together with baptism. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is catechesis supposed to precede baptism? (2) Is exorcism supposed to precede baptism? (3) Do the things done in the exorcism bring about any effect, or are they just signs? (4) Should those who are going to be baptized be catechized and exorcized by priests?

Article 1

Is catechesis supposed to precede baptism?

It seems that catechesis is not supposed to precede baptism (*catechismus non debeat praecedere baptismum*):

Objection 1: Through baptism men are reborn into the spiritual life. But a man receives life prior to receiving teaching. Therefore, a man should not be catechized, i.e., taught, before being baptized.

Objection 2: Baptism is offered not only to adults but also to young children, who are not able to understand teaching (*non sunt doctrinae perceptibiles*) because they do not have the use of reason. Therefore, it is ridiculous for them to be catechized.

Objection 3: In catechesis, the one who is being catechized professes his faith. But a young child cannot profess his faith in his own right and no one else can profess it for him, both because no one can bind anyone else to anything and also because no one can know whether a young child will assent to the faith when he comes of age (*cum ad legitimam aetatem pervenerit*). Therefore, catechesis ought not to precede baptism.

But contrary to this: In *De Institutione Clericorum* Rabanus says, “Before baptism a man should be prepared by catechesis, in order that the catechumen might receive the rudiments of faith.”

I respond: As has been explained (q. 70, a. 1), baptism is the sacrament of faith, since it is a sort of profession of the Christian Faith. But in order for an individual to accept the Faith, it is required that he be instructed about the Faith—this according to Romans 10:14 (“How are they to believe Him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear if no one preaches?”) And so it is fitting for catechesis to precede baptism. That is why, when our Lord hands down to the disciples the mandate to baptize, He first mentions teaching by saying, “Go teach all nations, baptizing them, etc.” (Matthew 28:19).

Reply to objection 1: The life of grace into which an individual is reborn presupposes the life of a rational nature, with which a man can be a participant in learning.

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above (q. 69, a. 6, ad 3), just as Mother Church “makes available to young children” who are going to be baptized “the feet of others, in order that they might come forth [for baptism], and the heart of others, in order that they might believe,” so, too, she makes available to them the ears of others, in order that they might hear, and understanding, in order that they might be instructed through others. And so they are to be catechized in the same way in which they are to be baptized.

Reply to objection 3: The one who responds “I do believe” on behalf of a young child being baptized is not predicting that the child is going to believe when he has come of age; otherwise, he would say, “He will believe.” Instead, he is professing the faith of the Church in the person of the child to whom faith is being communicated, who is receiving the sacrament of faith, and who is being obligated to faith by someone else.

Nor is it inappropriate for an individual to be obligated by another in those matters that are necessary for salvation. Similarly, the godparent, responding on behalf of the child, promises to do what is needed in order for the child to believe. However, this would not be sufficient in the case of adults who

have the use of reason.

Article 2

Is exorcism supposed to precede baptism?

It seems that exorcism is not supposed to precede baptism (*exorcismus non debeat praecedere baptismum*):

Objection 1: Exorcism is directed against energumens, i.e., possessed individuals (*contra energumenos, idest arreptitios ordinatus*). But not everyone is like that. Therefore, exorcism does not need to precede baptism.

Objection 2: As long as a man is subject to sin, the devil has power within him; as John 8:34 puts it, “Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.” But sin is removed through baptism. Therefore, it is not the case that men have to be exorcized before baptism.

Objection 3: Holy water was introduced in order to limit the power of demons. Therefore, it is not the case that another remedy for this needs to be applied through exorcisms.

But contrary to this: Pope Celestine says, “When either young children or youths come to the sacrament of regeneration, they should not approach the font of life before the unclean spirit has been driven from them by their being exorcized and breathed over by clerics.”

I respond: If anyone intends to do some work wisely, he first removes impediments to his work; hence, Jeremiah 4:3 says, “Break up your fallow ground and sow not upon thorns.” Now the devil is the enemy of the human salvation that is acquired through baptism, and he has some power within a man by the fact that the man is subject to original sin or even to actual sin. Hence, it is appropriate for demons to be expelled through exorcisms, lest they impede a man’s salvation, and the act of breathing over [the one to be baptized] signifies this expulsion. Moreover, the blessing, along with the imposition of hands, blocks the one who has been expelled from being able to return. Again, the salt placed in the mouth, along with the anointing of the nose and ears with spittle, signifies (a) the reception of the doctrine of the Faith as regards the ears, (b) the approval of the doctrine as regards the nose, and (c) the profession of the doctrine as regards the mouth. Lastly, the anointing with oil signifies the man’s ability to fight against the demons.

Reply to objection 1: They are called ‘energumens’ in the sense of ‘laboring interiorly’ by an extrinsic operation of the devil. And even though not every one who comes forward for baptism is corporally vexed by him, all of the unbaptized are nonetheless subject to the power of the demons, at least because of the debt of punishment that accrues to original sin.

Reply to objection 2: Through the washing involved in baptism the power of a demon is excluded from a man to the extent that the demon’s power impedes the man *from receiving glory*. By contrast, the exorcisms exclude the power of a demon to the extent that the demon’s power impedes a man *from receiving the sacrament*.

Reply to objection 3: Holy water is given against the attacks of demons that are from the outside. By contrast, exorcism is ordered against the attacks of the demons that are from the inside; that is why the individuals who are exorcized are called energumens, in the sense of laboring inwardly.

An alternative reply is that just as the sacrament of penance is given in the second place as a remedy against sin because baptism is not repeated, so holy water is given as a remedy in the second place against the attacks of demons because the baptismal exorcisms are not repeated.

Article 3

Do the things done in the exorcism cause any effect, or are they instead just signs?

It seems that the things done in the exorcism do not cause any effect, but are instead just signs (*ea quae aguntur in exorcismo non efficiant aliquid, sed solum significant*):

Objection 1: If a child died after the exorcisms that take place before the baptism, he would not attain salvation. But the effects of those things that are done in the sacraments are ordered toward a man's attaining salvation; hence, Mark 16:18 says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Therefore, the things done in the exorcism do not cause any effect, but are instead just signs.

Objection 2: As was explained above (q. 62, a. 1), all that is required for a sacrament of the New Law is that it be a sign and a cause. Therefore, if those things done in the exorcism caused some effect, it seems that each of them would be a sort of sacrament.

Objection 3: Just as the exorcism is ordered toward the baptism, so, if some effect were caused in the exorcism, it would be ordered toward baptism's effect. But a disposition necessarily precedes a completed form, since a form is received only in a matter that has been disposed. Therefore, it would follow that no one could attain the effect of baptism unless he had been exorcized beforehand—which is clearly false. Therefore, it is not the case that the things done in the exorcisms cause any effect.

Objection 4: Just as certain things are done in the exorcism that precedes baptism, so, too, certain things are done after the baptism, e.g., the priest anoints the baptized individual on the top of the head. But the things that are done after the baptism do not seem to cause any effect, since if they did, then the effect of the baptism would be incomplete. Therefore, neither do the things done before the baptism cause any effect.

But contrary to this: In *De Symbolo* Augustine says, "Young children are breathed upon and exorcized, in order that the devil's hostile power, which has deceived man, might be driven away from them." But the Church does nothing in vain. Therefore, breathings of this sort cause the power of the demons to be repelled.

I respond: Some claim that the things done in the exorcism do not cause any effect, but instead are only signs. But it is clearly false, as is evident from the fact that in the exorcisms the Church uses imperative verbs to expel the power of a demon, viz., when it is said, "Therefore, accursed devil, depart from him, etc."

And so one should reply that those things do cause some effect, though in a way different from baptism itself. For through baptism a man is given grace for the full remission of his sins, whereas through the things done in the exorcism, two impediments to receiving saving grace are excluded:

One of them is an *extrinsic* impediment, insofar as demons are trying to prevent a man's salvation. And this impediment is excluded through the breathings, by which, as is clear from the passage cited above from Augustine, the power of a demon is repelled—more specifically, the demon's power to pose an obstacle to the man's receiving the sacrament. Yet there still remains the demon's power within the man with respect to the stain of sin and the debt of punishment (*quantum ad maculam peccati et reatum poenae*), right up to the point that the sin is removed through baptism. And on this score Cyprian says, "Know that the devil's evil power remains present right up to the moment of the saving water, but in baptism he loses it all."

The second impediment is *intrinsic*, viz., insofar as, because of the infection of original sin, a man has his understanding clouded with respect to perceiving the mysteries of salvation. Hence, in *De Institutione Clericorum* Rabanus says, "By means of the symbolic spittle and touch of the priest, the divine wisdom and power bring salvation to the catechumens, with the result that their nostrils are opened to receive the odor of the knowledge of God, their ears are opened to hear the commandments of

God, and their senses are opened to respond in their inmost heart.”

Reply to objection 1: It is not the case that the sin for which a man is punished after death is removed by the things done in the exorcisms; instead, what are removed are just the impediments to receiving the remission of sins through the sacrament. Hence, without baptism the exorcism has no power after death.

Now Praepositivus claims that if young children die after being exorcized but before being baptized, they suffer a lesser darkness. But this does not seem to be true, because that darkness consists in being deprived of the vision of God—a deprivation that does not admit of greater and lesser.

Reply to objection 2: It is of the nature of the sacrament to bring its principal effect to completion, i.e., the grace which remits sin and makes up for some of a man’s defects. This is not effected by the things done in the exorcism; instead, only impediments to [the sacramental effects] are removed. And so the exorcisms are not themselves sacraments, but are instead certain sacramentals.

Reply to objection 3: The disposition that is sufficient for receiving the baptismal grace includes faith and the intention [to receive baptism], either the individual’s own faith and intention, if he is an adult, or the Church’s faith and intention, if the individual is a small child. By contrast, the things done in the exorcism are ordered toward removing impediments. And so an individual can receive the effect of baptism without those things.

Still things of the sort in question should not be omitted except in a case of necessity. And in such a case, once the danger passes, those things should be provided, in order to preserve a uniformity in baptism. Nor are they supplied in vain after baptism, since just as the effect of baptism may be impeded before baptism is received, so the effect can be impeded after baptism has been received.

Reply to objection 4: Of the things done to the newly baptized individual after the baptism, some are not just signs but have an effect, e.g., the anointing that is made on the top of the head, which brings about the conservation of the baptismal grace. On the other hand, some are just signs and do not cause anything, e.g., the giving of a white garment to the newly baptized as the sign of a newness of life.

Article 4

Is it the role of a priest to catechize and exorcize one who is going to be baptized?

It seems that it is not the role of a priest to catechize and exorcize one who is going to be baptized (*non sit sacerdotis catechizare et exorcizare baptizandum*):

Objection 1: As Dionysius explains in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 5, it belongs to the role of ministers to act on the unclean. But, as Dionysius points out in the same place, catechumens, who are being instructed in catechesis, and energumens, which are purged in exorcism, are counted among the unclean. Therefore, catechizing and exorcizing belong to the role of the ministers and not to the role of the priest.

Objection 2: Catechumens are instructed in the Faith by means of Sacred Scripture, which is recited in church by the ministers; for just as the Old Testament is read aloud in church by the lectors, so, too, the New Testament is read aloud by the deacons and subdeacons. Similarly, exorcizing, it seems, belongs to the ministers as well. For in a certain letter Isidore says, “An exorcist should know the exorcisms by heart and impose his hands on the energumens and on the catechumens during an exorcism.” Therefore, it does not belong to the role of a priest to catechize and exorcize.

Objection 3: Catechizing is the same as teaching or instructing, and the latter is the same as bringing to perfection. But this belongs to the role of bishops, as Dionysius explains in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 5. Therefore, it does not belong to role of a priest.

But contrary to this: Pope Nicholas says, “The catechizing of those to be baptized can be done by the priests who belong to each church.” And in *Super Ezechiel* Gregory says, “When priests impose their hands on believers through the grace of exorcism, what else do they do except drive away demons?”

I respond: As the very name ‘minister’ suggests, a minister is related to a priest in the way that a secondary and instrumental agent is related to its principal agent. Now in its operations a secondary agent does not bring about anything without the principal agent. And to the extent that the operation is greater, the principal agent stands in need of more powerful instruments.

Now a priest’s operation in conferring the sacrament itself is greater than the operations that are preparations for the sacrament. And so the highest ministers, who are called *deacons*, cooperate with the priest in the very conferral of the sacraments; for Isidore says, “It is the role of the deacons to assist the priests in all the things that are done in Christ’s sacraments, viz., in baptism, in chrism, and in the paten and the chalice.” On the other hand, the lower ministers cooperate with the priest in those things done in preparation for the sacraments, e.g., the *lectors* in catechizing and the *exorcists* in the exorcisms.

Reply to objection 1: Ministers have a ministerial and, as it were, instrumental operation with respect to the unclean, but priests have the principal operation.

Reply to objection 2: Lectors and exorcists have the role of catechizing and exorcizing—not principally, to be sure, but as ministering to the priests in those matters.

Reply to objection 3: There are many sorts of instruction:

One sort involves *conversion* to the Faith. This is what Dionysius attributes to the bishop in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 2, and it can belong to any preacher or even to any individual among the faithful.

The second sort is instruction by which an individual is instructed in the basics of the Faith and in how to comport oneself in the *reception of the sacraments*. This belongs secondarily to the ministers, but principally to the priests.

The third sort is instruction about the *living of the Christian life*. And this belongs to the godparents.

The fourth sort is instruction concerning the profound mysteries of the Faith and concerning the perfection of the Christian life. And this belongs *ex officio* to the bishops.