



Credible Catholic

# CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

## Big Book - Volume 10

**BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION ,  
RECONCILIATION, ORDERS, AND THE  
SACRAMENT OF THE SICK**



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# **Credible Catholic Big Book Volume Ten**

## **The Sacraments, Part 2 – Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Sacrament of the Sick, and Holy Orders**

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**As dictated to Joan Jacoby**

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,  
Part Two – The Celebration of the Christian Mystery**

**NOTE:** All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to counter the viral secular myths that are leading religious people of all faiths, especially millennials, to infer that God is no longer a credible belief. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, as well as spiritual and moral conversion throughout these volumes

**Part One** from the CCC is titled, ***THE PROFESSION OF FAITH***. The first 5 Volumes in the *Credible Catholic Big Book* and *Credible Catholic Little Book* fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, ***THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY***. This is covered in Volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is ***LIFE IN CHRIST*** and information related to this topic will be found in Volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Book Volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **Christian Prayer**.

The Big Book can also be divided into two major movements – the rational justification for God, the soul, Jesus, and the Catholic Church (Volumes 1 through 6), and life in Christ through the Catholic Church (Volumes 9 through 20). If you would like a preview of this dynamic, please go to Volume 6 (Chapter 7) at the following link – [Chapter 7 – Where Have We Come From and Where are We Going?](#)

**We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said** in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

*"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven..."*

**If we don't respond to these secular myths, who will?**



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## **Introduction**

The Eucharist and the sacred liturgy lie at the heart of Christian prayer, sacramental experience, and the Church itself. It is at once the sacrament of peace, forgiveness, transformation, unity, and eternal life. Yet its centrality takes nothing away from the other six sacraments which complement it – and which it complements. We will discuss five of those sacraments in this volume – baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, sacrament of the sick, and Holy Orders – and discuss marriage more extensively in the next volume. Before proceeding to the individual sacraments, it will be helpful to give a brief explanation of a sacrament.

In Catholic doctrine, a sacrament is a visible reality that conveys an invisible grace. A grace is a sharing in divine power, wisdom, and life, and when it is received and acted upon, leads to interior transformation, inspired action, and ultimately, eternal life. The visible reality symbolizes the grace that is effected through it. So, for example, the water of baptism conveys its cleansing or purifying power, and the bread and wine of the Eucharist conveys the body and blood of Jesus given through his ritual action at the Last Supper. The grace of the sacraments becomes real through the actions of a priest or bishop (with the exception of marriage) who are configured to act in the power and place of the person of Christ Himself. This is explained for each particular sacrament below.

All seven sacraments in the Catholic Church were instituted by Jesus, who gave his apostles and their successors the power and authority to take his place in bringing them to the faithful. Some reformers have contended that some of the seven sacraments were not instituted by Jesus and are not set out in the New Testament. As will be shown below, there is ample scriptural evidence to substantiate the origin of all seven sacraments in Jesus Himself.

The presentation of baptism, confirmation, reconciliation, sacrament of the sick, and holy orders will be similar to the presentation of the Eucharist (given in Volume 9). It will have three parts:

1. The sacrament in scripture (particularly the New Testament).
2. The sacrament in the first three centuries.
3. The theology and practice of the sacrament today.

We will begin with baptism because it is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian life, the Holy Spirit, and the Church (the body of Christ). Since an historical account of the sacraments makes use of certain common historical sources, the following table (similar to the one in Volume 9, Chapter Four) is provided here to give readers a general historical context.

Letters of St. Paul	50-58 AD
Gospel of Mark	66 AD
Gospel of Matthew	75-85 AD
Gospel of Luke	80-90 AD
The Gospel of John	90-95 AD
The Book of Revelation (anonymous Christian prophet)	90-95 AD
The Didache (anonymous--earliest Church catechism)	95 AD

St. Ignatius of Antioch (multiple letters)	95-105 AD
Justin Martyr ( <i>First Apology</i> and <i>Second Apology</i> )	150 AD
St. Irenaeus ( <i>Against Heresies</i> )	180 AD
Tertullianus, ( <i>De Oratione</i> )	190 AD
Origen ( <i>On Prayer</i> )	235 AD
The Council of Nicaea	325 AD
<i>The Canons of Hippolytus</i> (anonymous--detailed liturgical instructions)	336 AD
<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i> (anonymous—detailed liturgical instructions)	375 AD
The Council of Constantinople	381 AD
The Council of Calcedon	451 AD
The Fourth Lateran Council (definition of transubstantiation)	1215 AD
The Council of Trent (Tridentine Mass)	1570 AD
Second Vatican Council ( <i>Constitution on Sacred Liturgy</i> —contemporary Mass)	1963 AD

## **Chapter One**

### **Baptism**

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*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (par. 1213-1284) has an extensive explanation of baptism, its fruits, necessity, indelible mark, and the justification of infant baptism. We will summarize this teaching below (Section III), but prior to it give a brief explanation of the baptism of John and Jesus (Section I) and the doctrine of baptism in the Acts of the Apostles and Letters of Paul and Peter (Section II).

#### **I.**

#### **The Baptism of John and Jesus**

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Though Christian baptism (leading to the inclusion in Christ's body and the reception of the Holy Spirit) is only available through the Christian Church, baptism as a ritual of purification (leading to the forgiveness of sins) was a part of Jewish religious practice (*tebilah*) for several centuries prior to the coming of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The Qumran community, which was probably an Essene community, in its *Manual of Discipline*, took *tebilah* very seriously as a means of purification, forgiveness of sins, and initiation into the community in anticipation of the end time.<sup>2</sup> If we assume that John the Baptist was an Essene, or familiar with this community, then it is likely that

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<sup>1</sup> *Tebilah*, a full immersion in water as a ritual ablution for the forgiveness of sins, was a standard part of the three initiatory rites of Judaism for centuries prior to the coming of Jesus. See Kaufmann Kohler and Samuel Krauss "Baptism" in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2456-baptism>.

<sup>2</sup> See Leonard F. Badia, "The Qumran Baptism" in *Biblical Studies* (United Kingdom), p. 16, 18. [http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-1-3\\_010.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ijt/33-1-3_010.pdf)



he derived at least part of his understanding of baptism from it<sup>3</sup> -- though he reconfigured it in two ways:

1. He made baptism an unrepeatable ritual act of repentance and forgiveness (whereas the Essene ritual was repeatable).
2. He made the baptismal ritual Messianic – pointing to the fulfillment of Israel and the time of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John. All three Synoptic Gospels (following Mark) give an account of the baptism of Jesus (Mk. 1:9-11, Mt. 3:13-17, and Lk. 3:21-22). However, the gospel of John does not mention Jesus' baptism, preferring instead to allude to it by recounting the revelation to John about the descent of the Spirit on Jesus (Jn. 1:32-33).

The historicity of Jesus' baptism is virtually unchallenged by contemporary scholars – but at first glance it presents a perplexing problem. Inasmuch as John's baptism was widely known to be a ritual rite of purification, repentance, and forgiveness, did Jesus think that He was in need of such purification and forgiveness? If so, how would this square with Jesus' awareness of being the Messiah and “Son of His Divine Father”?

As noted in Volume 8 (Chapter Two), Jesus was well aware of His Divine Sonship when He sought out John at the Jordan River for baptism. He already had an awareness of His Sonship with His Divine Father (whom He called “*Abba*”), an awareness of His divine power to heal and raise the dead by His own authority, and an awareness of the impending battle He would have with Satan to bring God's kingdom to the world in His own person. So why did Jesus pursue the baptism of John (which was a baptism of repentance) if He was aware of His divine origin and goodness? The gospel of Matthew gives us an important hint of His thinking. In that gospel, John protests when Jesus comes, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” to which Jesus responds, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3: 14-15).

What did Jesus mean by “to fulfill all righteousness”? This expression probably means to “make all past unrighteousness righteous and to bring righteousness to fulfillment.” Given that the term “righteousness” here means “ethical righteousness,”<sup>5</sup> then the “fulfillment of righteousness” probably means “to redeem and reconcile the injustice and sinfulness of the past – and to create the path to salvation (perfect righteousness).” If this is correct, then Jesus did not seek out John's baptism for his own purification and forgiveness, but rather to initiate His work of salvation in which He would make the people of the world completely righteous – that is redeem *all* past sinfulness and injustice – and provide a sure pathway to God's kingdom of eternal and perfect righteousness.

When Jesus sought out sinners, and ate with them, the Pharisees worried that Jesus was subjecting Himself to the sinfulness of those people – yet Jesus had the opposite viewpoint – He

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<sup>3</sup> See H. Wayne House, “Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins (Part 2): Sign, Seal, or Means of Grace?” in *Christian Research Journal*. <http://www.equip.org/article/new-testament-baptism/>.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> See Viviano “The Gospel According to Matthew” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* p. 637.

wanted to touch those sinners so that they would receive reconciliation and redemption *from Him*. A similar logic applies here. When Jesus subjected Himself to a ritual meant for sinners, He did so to bring the sinfulness of the world (taken into His own body) to the ritual of John's purification, so that His act of unconditional humility and love would begin His ministry – the process of reconciling the world to God and bringing God's kingdom to them through this self-sacrificial love. His baptism was only the first step in this process – He would have many more steps to complete it, including His battle with Satan in the desert, His ministry of exorcisms and healings, His preaching of the kingdom, His passion, death, and resurrection, and His gift of the Holy Spirit.

The above interpretation of Jesus' baptism is consistent with the "logic" of His ministry, passion, and death – He believed that humble and obedient self-sacrifice was the means by which true righteousness (God's unconditional love overcoming all sinfulness and providing the way to eternal salvation) would come into the world. No act of power would be able to bring the fulfillment of righteousness to people with freewill and sinful inclinations; true righteousness would have to come through an act of unconditional love recognized by free individuals who ask the Lord for it in a spirit of repentance. For Jesus, this act of unconditional love could not come from words alone -- a command or a promise -- it had to come from a gift of self – a total act of self-sacrifice done in a spirit of complete humility and love for all people. This act of total self-sacrifice began at the baptism, continued through His ministry, and was brought to completion in His passion, death, resurrection, and gift of the Spirit.

Jesus' act of humble obedience for the fulfillment of righteousness in the world leads to the Father's revelation of His true nature. The revelation is set out in an eschatological vision of the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Jesus – and the Father's voice announcing Jesus' beloved Sonship, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). Whether we take this vision literally or within the large parameters of Jewish eschatological visions, it is safe to say that there is an important historical core to this revelation that occurred immediately after the baptism of Jesus. This revelation to Jesus and John the Baptist (and perhaps others) pointed to Jesus' possession of the Holy Spirit and His divine Sonship.

Did the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus at the baptism or did the Holy Spirit belong to Him from the moment of His conception as the Incarnate Son of God? Though the pericope does not say, I would favor the latter hypothesis because it seems logical that the incarnation of Jesus' divine person (at His conception) would include the relationship He had with the Holy Spirit through all eternity. Jesus' divine person is *interpersonal* – and this interpersonal dimension is not only with the Father, but with the Holy Spirit. Hence, when His divine interpersonal personhood became enfleshed, it would have done so with the intrinsic and eternal relationship He had with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

So how should we interpret John's vision of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and remaining with Him? The safest course of action is to view it as a revelation within a visionary experience that signifies that the Holy Spirit belongs to Jesus – not simply after the baptism, but also from the moment of His conception.

How should we interpret John's vision of the voice of God coming from the clouds? In the same way we interpret the vision of the descent of the Holy Spirit – as a revelation within a visionary experience strongly indicating the Divine Sonship of Jesus. If that is the case, then why did John later send messengers to Jesus when he was in prison asking, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (Mt. 11:3). If John had such a strong revelation about Jesus' Sonship and possession of the Spirit, why did he subsequently ask Him about His identity? Apparently, John may have expected a different kind of Messiah than Jesus – one that would conform to an Old Testament prophet instead of one bringing the *good* news (the gospel). Recall from Volume 7 (Chapter Four) that the old covenant prophets urged repentance or else calamity would befall Israel or Judah. Jesus' message is decidedly different – "Repent and believe in the *good* news" (Mk. 1:15). This contrast very probably confused John who situated his prophetic ministry within the old prophetic tradition. Notice how Jesus responds to John:

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me (Mt. 11: 4-6).

Jesus responds to John with the words of Isaiah indicating that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him – and that all of the signs of the Spirit to which Isaiah pointed are taking place through Him:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor (Is. 61: 1-2).

In other words, Jesus is telling John that what John witnessed in the visionary revelation at His baptism is true – the Holy Spirit is really with Him (Jesus) – and that he should not be disedified by Jesus preaching the good news – indeed, the good news is an integral part of Isaiah's prediction of the Messiah who will possess the Holy Spirit.

John's ministry of baptism distinguished itself from that of the Old Testament and Essene baptism by pointing to the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus responds to John, He is saying, "Despite the fact that I am preaching the good news, I am truly the Messiah to whom you have been pointing – and the revelation you have received about my Messiahship at my baptism is true, because I possess the Holy Spirit as manifest through the power of God dwelling in me." At that point, John can be at peace in prison.

The visionary presence of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism (and the real presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus) not only points to Jesus' Messiahship and Sonship, but also prefigures the kind of baptism He is about to initiate – a baptism not only for the forgiveness of sins, but also one that will impart the Holy Spirit on His followers. Later, as we shall see (Section II), Paul interprets the reception of the Holy Spirit as the incorporation into the mystical body of Christ (1 Cor. 12) which is brought together by the Pauline author in the Letter to the Ephesians:



There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph. 4: 4-5).

The Pauline author here unifies baptism with *both* the reception of the one Spirit and the integration into the one body of Christ.

So what does Jesus reveal about baptism through His humble approach to John the Baptist at the beginning of his ministry? Jesus intends to initiate the ministry that will make righteous all unrighteousness (sinfulness and injustice) and will create the pathway for all those who repent to inherit perfect righteousness in the kingdom of God. This is not only the effect of Jesus' baptism (in which He takes the sins of the world into His body to be reconciled through John's baptism), but also the effect of the ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and gift of the Spirit He initiated through this first act of humble self-sacrifice offered to the Father. After Jesus' resurrection, the early Church recognized that baptism in the name of Jesus would bring about those two effects:

1. Complete reconciliation and forgiveness of sins (making righteous our unrighteousness),
2. Our integration into the kingdom of God (that would make us perfectly and eternally righteous) brought into the world through the ministry initiated at His baptism.

There is a third effect of baptism revealed at the time of Jesus' baptism – our reception of the Holy Spirit. Though this revelation does not indicate the point at which Jesus received the Holy Spirit, but rather the fact that the Holy Spirit has descended and remains in His incarnate form (from conception). It shows definitively that the Spirit belongs to Jesus – and that He can share it with whomever He wishes – not only through a Pentecost experience after the resurrection, but also through the ministry of baptism performed by His followers. The connection between the reception of the Holy Spirit and integration into the risen body of Christ will be recognized by both Peter and Paul very soon after Jesus' resurrection. The rest of the doctrines associated with baptism (e.g. necessity of baptism for those who have heard the gospel, infant baptism, freedom from original sin, and the indelible mark of baptism) will come in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4th centuries in response to theological controversies and practical needs.

What is important to recognize here is that Jesus' baptism initiates and prefigures all of the major supernatural effects of the sacrament of baptism – the forgiveness of sins, integration into the kingdom of God (later recognized as the Mystical Body of Christ), and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

## **II.**

### **Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Letters**

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The apostolic Church saw in Jesus' baptism by water the efficacious means of integrating converts into the Christian Church through the forgiveness of sins. It also recognized in the charismatic experience of receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that baptism by water confers the Holy Spirit – and also that the laying on of hands confers special charisms of the Holy Spirit

for the purpose of strengthening the Christian community and for missionary evangelization. The *Acts of the Apostles* reveals how nuanced the understanding of these gifts and charisms was in the early Church, and gives clues about how baptism by the Holy Spirit evolved into the sacrament of confirmation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (see Section II.A). The Letters of Saint Paul (Section II.B) emphasizes how baptism leads to the resurrection and the convert's integration into the mystical body of Christ. We will consider each of these sources in turn, gleaned from them the theology and practice of baptism in the apostolic church, and how this theology and practice led to the development of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries still valid today.

## **II.A**

### **Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles**

From the earliest days of the Church immediately after Jesus' resurrection, the baptism of Jesus was associated with the complete forgiveness of sins and initiation (integration) into the Church and the kingdom of God brought by Jesus (Acts 2: 38-39, 16:31, 22:16). Evidently, the early Church believed that Jesus' intention was to maintain the dimension of purification and forgiveness integral to the ministry of John the Baptist. Baptism was also considered to be an entrance into Christian life – that is an entrance into the kingdom of God brought by Jesus Christ. As noted above, these two effects were associated with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

There is a third effect of baptism in the Acts of Apostles – the gift of the Holy Spirit. Some passages indicate that the Holy Spirit comes upon the believer at the same time as baptism by water, while others suggest an additional rite of “the laying on of hands” to receive this third gift. For example, in Acts 2:37-38, Peter is asked by the members of the crowd hearing the apostles speaking in their languages followed by Peter's speech, “Brethren, what shall we do?” To which Peter responds:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Here the baptism of Jesus leading to the forgiveness of sins is directly connected with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Another passage associates baptism by water with the forgiveness of sins but does not mention the gift of the Holy Spirit. For example, Acts 22:16, “And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.”

Another passage implies that baptism by water (the baptism of Jesus leading to the forgiveness of sins and initiation into the community) was administered by the disciples of Jesus *before* baptism by the Holy Spirit. Then in a separate rite of “the laying on of hands,” the apostles baptized in the Holy Spirit:

When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17).

Yet another passage implies a distinction between the baptism of water (the baptism of John and presumably Jesus) and the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 4-5).

Finally, another passage implies that baptism by water happens after the Holy Spirit has descended. For example, when Peter enters the household of Cornelius (a Gentile), the Holy Spirit descends upon them causing Peter to subsequently baptize them with water:

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (Acts 10: 43-48).

It should be noted that this descent of the Holy Spirit (like the descent on the apostles at Pentecost – Acts 2: 1-3) was not called “baptism” – though the effects on the recipients are the same as those who are “baptized” in the Holy Spirit.

So what conclusions can we draw from these five passages that relate the baptism of water to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in five different ways? First, the early Church seems to have distinguished between these two kinds of baptism – both of which are considered important in their own right:

1. Baptism by water (taken from John the Baptist) was reconfigured to be “baptism in the name of Jesus” or “the baptism of Jesus.” It had two effects – the forgiveness of sins (which was part of John’s ministry) and initiation into the community of Jesus (unique to the Christians).
2. Baptism by the Holy Spirit effected by the laying on of hands -- gives rise to several charismatic gifts for the purpose of evangelization and community inspiration -- wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, teaching, healing, miracle working, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues (see 1 Cor. 12: 8-10). These *charismata* are not associated with the baptism of water.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit can come quite spontaneously – independently of Church leaders’ laying on of hands. This happened to the apostles and disciples at Pentecost and to Cornelius’ household. These are direct interventions by God to initiate something new within the community. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost authenticates the ministry of the Church’s earliest leaders, and gives them divine power (*dunamis tou theou*) and divine inspiration with



which to lead the community and to engage in missionary evangelization. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the household of Cornelius (a gentile centurion) was for the authentication of gentiles as true members of the Christian Church. Once this authentication occurs, Peter and John baptize them in water to forgive their sins and integrate them into the Church.

Thirdly, after the apostles and early Church leaders received the gift of the Holy Spirit, some of them administered baptism of water (the baptism of Jesus) to new converts (for the forgiveness of sins and initiation into the Church) without giving them baptism by the Holy Spirit (through the laying on of hands). In the passage from Acts 8:15-17, Peter and John discover that many of the new Samaritan believers had only received the baptism of Jesus, and so they laid their hands on them so that they could also receive the Holy Spirit. As we noted above, baptism by the Holy Spirit imparted a set of charismatic gifts that believers could use to strengthen the Christian community and to engage in missionary evangelization activities – wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, teaching, healing, miracle working, speaking in tongues, etc.

This separation of the two kinds of baptism – and the different gifts of the Holy Spirit they impart – lie at the foundation of the distinction between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of confirmation. Yet this distinction is not definitive, because the apostolic Church also connected the gift of the Holy Spirit with baptism of water (the baptism of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins):

[Peter said] Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 37-38).

We might infer from this that by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the apostolic Church had a developing theology of baptism and initiation with three major characteristics:

1. Baptism by water (the baptism of Jesus) led to the forgiveness of sins and integration into the Church.
2. Baptism by water also imparted (in an undefined general way) the gift of the Holy Spirit.
3. Baptism by the Holy Spirit imparted special gifts of the Holy Spirit for strengthening the community and missionary evangelization – wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, teaching, healing, miracle working, etc. Converts did not receive all of these gifts, but only some gifts according to each one's dispositions and God's will (see 1 Cor 12: 7-11).

The development of the doctrines of baptism and confirmation, the distinction between them, and their connection in the rites of Christian initiation seems to have occurred throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, because in 313 A.D. (with Constantine's edict of toleration/Milan), the two sacraments became increasingly more separated to accommodate the large number of converts coming into the Christian Church.<sup>6</sup> This separation enabled priests to be ordinary ministers of baptism, while reserving confirmation to the bishop whenever he was able to get to the locale.

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<sup>6</sup> Sisters of Notre Dame Chardon Ohio, 2007, *Confirmed in the Spirit* (Chicago: Loyola Univ. Press).  
<https://www.amazon.com/Confirmed-Spirit-Peoples-Confirmado-Espiritu/dp/0829436812>

There is another development which may have affected the distinction between baptism and confirmation – namely, infant baptism. It is difficult to say whether infant baptism was present in the apostolic Church but there are several passages which suggest that it was – particularly those indicating that a “whole household” (including children) were baptized in water (see Acts 2:39, 16:15, 16: 31-33, and 1 Corinthians 1:16). It is difficult to believe that there is not a precedent for infant baptism in the apostolic Church, because it seems to be strongly present in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in Irenaeus’ treatise, *Against Heresies*, dated to about 180 A.D.<sup>7</sup> Origen records three significant passages about infant baptism written about 248 A.D.<sup>8</sup> By the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century, infant baptism was so widespread that Hippolytus’ *Apostolic Tradition* gives instructions on how to perform it properly.<sup>9</sup> The above evidence suggests that there was an apostolic precedent for infant baptism which spread quite rapidly throughout the Church in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

So what might we infer about the two kinds of baptism and their seeming evolution into the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of confirmation in the early Church? First, the apostolic Church distinguished between baptism by water and baptism of the Holy Spirit, implying that baptism by water included a general conferral of the Holy Spirit. It also held that baptism by the Holy Spirit (conferred by the laying on of hands) gave rise to special charisms of the Holy Spirit for strengthening the Church community and missionary evangelization.

Secondly it seems that after the apostolic age, the term “baptism of the Holy Spirit” transitioned to the “sacrament of confirmation,” and that the explicitly charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit – e.g. prophecy, healing, miracle working, and speaking in tongues – were deemphasized while the more interior gifts of the Holy Spirit – e.g. wisdom, knowledge, faith, holiness, understanding, and fortitude -- were emphasized. The rationale for the sacrament of confirmation was essentially the same as for baptism by the Holy Spirit – namely, to strengthen the Church community and to engage in missionary evangelization.

During the apostolic era, the vast majority of converts were adults, and so they received three sacraments during their initiation into the Christian Church – baptism by water, baptism by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Eucharist. It is not known whether the children who seemed to have been baptized by the apostolic Church (when an entire household was baptized) were baptized only in water (for the forgiveness of sins and initiation into the Church) or baptized in *both* water and the Holy Spirit. Scholars are also uncertain about whether the sacrament of confirmation was administered to infants when they were baptized in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

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<sup>7</sup> See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2:22:4 – “He [Jesus] came to save all through himself; all, I say, who through him are reborn in God: infants, and children, and youths, and old men. Therefore he passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, sanctifying infants; a child for children, sanctifying those who are of that age . . . [so that] he might be the perfect teacher in all things, perfect not only in respect to the setting forth of truth, perfect also in respect to relative age.”

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 8:3 – “In the Church, baptism is given for the remission of sins, and, according to the usage of the Church, baptism is given even to infants. If there were nothing in infants which required the remission of sins and nothing in them pertinent to forgiveness, the grace of baptism would seem superfluous.”

<sup>9</sup> Though some scholars defend a date of 210 A.D. for the *Apostolic Tradition*, other scholars date it to the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century. Whatever the case, it is clear that infant baptism was widespread within the early Church by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Hippolytus of Rome, *Apostolic Tradition* 21:16 -- “Baptize first the children; and if they can speak for themselves, let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them.”

However, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century after Constantine's Edict of Toleration (313 A.D.), two occurrences enhanced the separation between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of confirmation:

1. The large number of infant baptisms (by comparison with adult baptisms) brought to the fore the distinction between the gifts of baptism and the charisms of confirmation. The gift of baptism giving rise to the forgiveness of all sins (including original sin), and initiation into the Church community (the mystical body) was appropriate for children while the charisms of the sacrament of confirmation (oriented toward strengthening the church community and missionary evangelization) were more appropriate for adults, or at the very least, adolescents between 12-14 years of age.
2. In the Roman Church, the large number of infant and adult baptisms required that the priest (Presbyter) be its ordinary minister rather than the bishop. However, the bishop reserved to himself the sacrament of confirmation, and performed it for large groups of mature young people when he was able to get to a particular church or region. Prior to 1910, confirmation was conferred before First Holy Communion, which delayed reception of the Eucharist to adolescence (between 12 – 14 years of age). In 1910, in his encyclical *Quam Singulari*, Pope Pius X lowered the age of Holy Communion to the time when a child can distinguish between mere physical bread and the sacrament (around the age of 7).<sup>10</sup> He did not change the age of confirmation which remains at about 12 years of age. This had the effect of changing the order of the three sacraments of initiation from baptism, confirmation, and then Holy Eucharist – to baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and then confirmation.

As can be seen from the above, the *Acts of the Apostles* provides a large number of clues about the apostolic Church's view of baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit (which evolved into the sacrament of confirmation). We might conclude from this that the sacrament of baptism (baptism by water – called “the baptism of Jesus”) had three central characteristics – the forgiveness of all sin, initiation into the church community, and a conferral of the Holy Spirit (in a general and undefined way). The specific charisms of the Holy Spirit needed for strengthening the Church and missionary evangelization were reserved to baptism of the Holy Spirit (and later the sacrament of confirmation).

## **II.B**

### **Baptism and the Letters of Saint Paul**

As can be seen from the above, the *Acts of the Apostles* stresses the occasion, practice, and graces of baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit, but does not endeavor a theological explanation of either. The Pauline Letters provide the perfect complement, giving us a deep insight into the theology of baptism without describing its practice in the early Church. In his

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<sup>10</sup> Appealing to the Lateran Council of 1215, and the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Pius X lowered the age of First Holy Communion to the age of reason (approximately 7 years old) so that children could be forgiven and fortified by the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. See Pius X, 1910 *Quam singulari* -- “The age of discretion for receiving Holy Communion is that at which the child knows the difference between the Eucharistic Bread and ordinary, material bread, and can therefore approach the altar with proper devotion.”



theological explanation, it is difficult to say whether Paul is speaking about baptism by water only or *both* baptism by water and the Holy Spirit. As will be seen, Paul does believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit is an integral part of baptism, but he does not explain whether this comes from baptism by water alone or an additional rite of the laying on of hands. In either case, Paul's inclusion of the gift of the Holy Spirit through baptism is consistent with the practice of the apostolic Church given in the *Acts of the Apostles* – for as we saw, *Acts* 2: 37-38, Peter says that those who receive the baptism of Jesus (baptism by water) will also receive the Holy Spirit.

Paul's theology of baptism elucidates the graces of baptism specified in *Acts* – the forgiveness of sins, integration into the Church, and the gift of the Holy Spirit:

1. Baptism into Christ's death allows us to rise with Him to eternal life (Romans 6:4 and Col. 2:12).
2. Baptism is an integration into the risen body of Christ (Gal. 3:27-29 and 1 Cor. 12:13).
3. Integration into the body of Christ means sharing in the spirit of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

We will examine each theological theme in turn.

### **II.B.1 Baptism into Jesus' Death**

Saint Paul addresses the theme of baptism into Christ's death in two passages – Romans 6:4 and Col. 2:12.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6: 4).

So what does Paul mean by being “buried with Christ by baptism into death”? Fitzmyer explains that when the believer is immersed in the water,<sup>11</sup> Paul understands this to be symbolic of death and burial – a death to fleshly existence which for Paul is “death to sin.”<sup>12</sup> This death to sin is the forgiveness of sins that Peter (*Acts* 2:38) and Ananias (*Acts* 22:16) speak about in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Yet it is more than the forgiveness of sins. It is also a grace of the Holy Spirit to enter and stay on the path to new life in Christ.<sup>13</sup> Thus, for Paul, baptism not only reconciles us to God, but also brings God's grace into our lives so that we can continue to fight against the power of sin and death to help us proceed to eternal life with Christ. The “newness of life” to which Paul

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<sup>11</sup> Recall that baptism in the apostolic Church was done almost exclusively by means of immersion – sometimes partial immersion and sometimes full immersion (sometimes called “submersion”). After the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, immersion was gradually replaced by affusion – the three-fold pouring of water on the head of an infant or catechumen with the Trinitarian formula – “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” – where water is poured on the head during the pronouncing of each of the Trinitarian persons. See Robin Jensen 2012, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic) p. 30 and 93.

<sup>12</sup> See Fitzmyer 1990 “The Letter to the Romans” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 847.

<sup>13</sup> Saint Augustine interpreted this to be a grace to help us overcome the concupiscence to which all people were subject after original sin.

refers includes the grace to resist sin and death as well as the believer's eternal life with Christ after this life.<sup>14</sup> The believer's rising from the baptismal water symbolizes his rising to new life which results in his "union with the risen Christ, a union that finds its term when the Christian will one day 'be with Christ' in glory."<sup>15</sup>

The Pauline author (of the Letter to the Colossians) reiterates Paul's symbolism of death to sin and rising to new life, combining it with the image of a new kind of circumcision, enabling the believer to be part of the new people of God:

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2: 11-12).

Though Christians broke with Judaism by discontinuing the requirement for physical circumcision, the Pauline author here uses the symbolism of circumcision to indicate a *spiritual* grace or power enabling Christians to put off what Paul would call the "body or life of the flesh," that is, the life of sin. The author considers this grace to be so powerful that it *already* incorporates the Christian into the new risen life with Christ. The implication is that if the Christian remains faithful to this life – repenting from sin and trying to follow the life of Christ through the Church and the Holy Spirit -- he will enjoy the eternal fullness of the new risen life he has *already* inherited through faith.

## **II.B.2**

### **Integration into the Body of Christ**

In Galatians 3: 27-29, Paul explains that baptism brings us into unity with Christ and makes us heirs – implying that we are no longer slaves to evil, but members of the family of God:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Paul does not make explicit here the integration of the baptized into the risen body of Christ (as in 1 Cor. 12 – see below), but implies it when he says "baptized into (*"eis"*) Christ" and "you are one in Christ Jesus." The term "*eis*" implies being united with Christ<sup>16</sup> -- and so also does "For you are all one in Christ Jesus." Paul goes on to say that union with Christ means that we belong to Him (we "are Christ's"), and if we belong to Christ – then all other distinctions vanish. There is no longer a privileged status (Jew over Gentile – or free person over slave), but only one status – belonging to Christ. This makes us heirs to Abraham's promise which Paul later interprets as being freed from slavery to the astral gods of the Galatians' former religion

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<sup>14</sup> See Fitzmyer "Letter to the Romans" p. 847.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Joseph Fitzmyer, 1990, "The Letter to the Galatians" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 787.

(“elemental spirits of the universe”<sup>17</sup> – Gal. 4:3), free from slavery to the law (Gal. 4:5), and adoption as sons who are fully entitled heirs to eternal life in Christ (Gal. 4:7). Hence, baptism for Paul means being united with Christ, freed from slavery to false gods and the law, and being made family members and heirs to eternal life in Christ.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians (perhaps written slightly later than the Letter to the Galatians<sup>18</sup>), Paul emphasizes two gifts of baptism – union through the risen body of Jesus and reception of the Holy Spirit through Christ’s risen body:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor. 12: 12-14, 26-27)

Both this passage and the one from the Letter to the Galatians address the general theme of baptism uniting us with Christ. However, the emphasis in 1 Corinthians is distinct because it focuses on being a part of the risen body of Christ and the fruits of the Holy Spirit instead of being freed from the powers of the world and the law and becoming heirs to eternal life in Christ. By revealing that “union with Christ” means integration into His risen body with all other baptized members of the Church, Paul shows that we become receivers and givers to the whole body. For Paul, baptism means not only that we enter into Christ’s risen body with all other members, but also that Christ’s risen body (with all other members) enters into us. Therefore, our lives become inextricably interrelated to the lives of all other Christians in Christ’s body. We sense the suffering and honor of other members in ourselves, and we contribute to the honor or the suffering of the whole body in others. It is sometimes difficult for Christians to understand this, but if we reflect on being part of the universal Church (both throughout the world and in heaven) during the Eucharistic Prayer at mass or when we pray the Breviary with the Church in the morning and the evening, we can actually sense (feel interiorly) our union with the Church – at least this has been my experience. This sense of unity carries with it a sense of the Christian faith manifest by saints, leaders, and all other members throughout history – almost as if the faith of people in the first, second, third, etc. centuries – both in good and troubled times – were imported into our souls – in the midst of the Eucharistic Prayer and the praying of Psalms. This is not merely reassuring or sustaining, but enlivening, edifying and mystical. Did Paul have something like this in mind when he spoke of our unity through the risen Body of Christ? I believe he did, for it is impossible for me to believe that *I* experienced something that Saint Paul did not.

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<sup>17</sup> There are many interpretations of this expression, but one common version is that they refer to the gods of the zodiac (see Ibid) or the gods of the Galatians’ former astral religion (see Oxford Biblical Studies Online: <http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e588>).

<sup>18</sup> See Fitzmyer “Letter to the Galatians,” 781.

### **II.B.3 The Fruits of the Holy Spirit**

In the same passage from 1 Corinthians 12: 12-14, Paul says that another effect of baptism is that we are “all made to drink of the same Spirit” (v.14). Throughout 1 Corinthians 12, Paul specifies the external and interior charisms of the Holy Spirit belonging to various members. We might infer from this that Paul here means *both* baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit, because the specific charisms he mentions are those associated with baptism by the Holy Spirit in the *Acts of the Apostles* – that is, charisms to strengthen the Church community and to engage in missionary evangelization. If this is correct, then Paul is referring to the gifts of both the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of confirmation (as we call them today). This would mean that the first two rites of Christian initiation – baptism and confirmation – not only integrate us in Christ’s risen body, but also give us a variety of charisms – according to our talents and God’s will – so that we can engage in the ministry of evangelization – that is, witnessing to our faith so that others might be drawn into the eternal and ultimate hope, love, fulfillment, and joy of the kingdom of the triune God.

We may not have reflected on what kinds of charisms were given to us for evangelization through our confirmation, but we should do this – and there is no time like the present to make an assessment of the gifts of faith that seem to have grown in us since our confirmation. We might think to ourselves that we notice no growth in spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, teaching, faith, piety, etc., but this might indicate that we have allowed our faith to go dormant. Jesus insists that if we do not use the spiritual gifts we are given, we will lose them (Mt. 13:12 and 25: 14-30). Conversely, He insists that whoever uses his spiritual gifts will be given more (Mt. 13: 31-32 and 25: 14:30).

So what spiritual gifts have been given to you? Do you work well with young people, the needy, the marginalized, the depressed, the oppressed, the homeless, the uncatechized, the unevangelized, children, adolescents, adults, men, or women? Do you have the charism of a teacher, preacher, fundraiser, psychological healer, administrator of temporal works, or helper in temporal works? Give due consideration to the charism you have so that the fruits of the Holy Spirit given to you in baptism, and particularly in confirmation will continually increase until you bear fruit 30, 60 or 100-fold.

### **II.B.4 Conclusion – Baptism in Pauline Theology**

Though Saint Paul does not distinguish baptism by water from baptism by the Holy Spirit (as in the *Acts of the Apostles*), his theology of baptism seems to include both. We cannot infer from this that Paul thought baptism by water conferred all the graces of baptism by the Holy Spirit – for it is likely that Paul believed that the graces of baptism by the Holy Spirit were conferred by the laying on of hands as distinct from immersion in water (as in the Acts of the Apostles). Is Paul suggesting here that the two rites – immersion in water and the laying on of hands – were combined into a single “double rite”? We cannot say, for Paul was not nearly as interested in describing the rite of baptism as in articulating its theology. So what did Paul teach about the grace of baptism? He elucidates five graces – some of which lead to our salvation,

some to integration in Christ's risen body, and some to evangelization and missionary activity. The graces of salvation and integration into Christ's risen body were probably associated with baptism by water, while the powers to evangelize were associated with "the laying on of hands" (connected with baptism by the Holy Spirit in *Acts*). The five graces or powers are as follows:

1. The forgiveness of sins.
2. The grace or power to put off the life of sin (contra-concupiscence).
3. The inheritance of a new risen life with Christ which will find its completion in Christ's eternal kingdom.
4. Integration into Christ's risen body so as to be one with all the members of the Church living in the world and in the kingdom.
5. The gifts of the Holy Spirit to evangelize and engage in missionary activity.

In Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:11-12, Paul articulates the first three graces of baptism – the forgiveness of our sins (which is preached repeatedly by Peter and the other disciples in the *Acts of the Apostles*), the grace to resist the life of sin – the "pull" of sin, and the integration into Christ's risen life that will lead ultimately to eternal life with Him (if we remain faithful to Him and sincerely ask for His forgiveness when we fail). There can be little doubt that these three graces form the basis for Saint Augustine's theology of baptism.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, he grounds his argument for infant baptism in the second grace – the grace to put off the life of sin – contra-concupiscence.<sup>20</sup> Augustine's views on baptism – particularly with respect to concupiscence and original sin – form the foundation for later Church theology.

In Galatians 3: 27-29 and 1 Cor. 12: 12-14, 26-27, Saint Paul develops his theology of baptism as integration into the body of Christ – a grace that unites us with Christ and all the members of the Christian community both in heaven and on earth. This integration into the body of Christ enables us to live as a family with all members of the Church (suffering what they suffer and being honored when they are honored), and also enables us to contribute the grace of our sufferings and honorable deeds to every other member (See Col. 1:24). This theology becomes the foundation for the later ecclesiology of Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943) and Saint John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis* (Part IV).

Finally, throughout 1 Cor. 12, Paul speaks of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit that come through baptism – both through baptism by water and particularly the laying on of hands (see above Section II.A). As noted earlier, the laying on of hands later becomes a second sacrament of initiation called "confirmation." These gifts give us additional inspiration and power to evangelize and engage in missionary activities. Some are interior gifts – e.g. wisdom, faith, knowledge, and understanding; some are external charisms – e.g. teaching, prophecy, healing, miracle working, charisms for corporal works of mercy, and speaking in tongues. All of us have proclivities toward some of these gifts, but generally not toward all of them. It is our

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<sup>19</sup> See Saint Augustine, *Merits and Remission of Sin, and Infant Baptism*, I, 6.6; PL 44, 112–113; cf. *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis* (De Genesi ad litteram) 9:6:11, trans. John Hammond Taylor SJ, vol. 2, pp. 76–77; PL 34, 397. See also Saint Augustine, *On Baptism, against the Donatists*, Book I. This treatise is devoted to refuting the Donatists use of Cyprian's theology of baptism to advance certain heresies, but in it, Augustine articulates the graces of baptism.

<sup>20</sup> See Saint Augustine, *Merits and Remission of Sin, and Infant Baptism*, I, 6.6; PL 44, 112–113.



responsibility to discern our gifts and to use them not only to build the kingdom of God, but also to develop our faith – for as Jesus said, “To those who have, more will be given, but to those who have not, what little they have will be taken away (see Mt. 25:29).

### **III.**

#### **Baptism in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church***

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As noted above, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives a thorough explanation of the sacrament of baptism, synthesizing the above lessons from the baptism of Jesus, baptism in the early Church (from *The Acts of the Apostles*), the theology of Saint Paul, and later developments throughout the centuries. We will split its presentation into two parts – the rite of baptism (Section III.A) and six teachings on baptism (Section III.B).

#### **III.A**

##### **The Rite of Baptism**

According to CCC 1229, the rite of baptism includes the proclamation of the word, the acceptance of the gospel, a profession of faith (normally within the baptismal vows), the actual baptism by water (bestowing the Holy Spirit), and admission to Eucharistic communion. These major steps took many forms throughout Church history, but they have been solidified by the Second Vatican Council for both adults and infants.<sup>21</sup> Adults have a lengthy period of catechetical preparation to learn the gospel, experience the life of the Church, and undergo conversion. Infant baptism requires a post-baptismal catechumenate which adults promise to give their children as a condition of being baptized.

The rite of baptism for both adults and infants begins with the sign of the cross on the forehead of those to be initiated, signifying the redemption Christ won for us by His cross, and claiming them for Him and His Church. Then the word of God is proclaimed – enlightening the congregants about the significance of baptism. This is followed by a “minor rite of exorcism”<sup>22</sup> to free candidates not only from sin, but also to protect them from their adversary, the devil. Normally, this minor exorcism consists in an anointing with the oil of catechumens, followed by the laying on of hands to dispel the devil. After this, the candidate specifically renounces Satan – normally through the first three baptismal vows – “Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?” to which the candidate responds, “I do.”

Following the exorcism, candidates proclaim their faith by either professing the creed or responding in faith to the last three baptismal vows -- “Do you believe in God, the Father, the almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church...” to which the candidate responds, “I do.” The next part of the ceremony consists in the baptism itself. It begins with a special prayer of *epiclesis* asking the

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<sup>21</sup> See *Sancrosanctum Concilium (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)*, 37-40 and 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> This is to be distinguished from a major rite of exorcism that would be performed on someone possessed by the devil. Such major rites require psychiatric assessment and permission from the Bishop to be performed. The minor rite of exorcism performed at baptism does not presume possession or oppression by the devil. It is a rite to dispel the influence of the devil on children, giving them the capacity to resist sin and pursue a life of holiness.

Lord to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of baptism through the death and resurrection of His Son.<sup>23</sup>

After the prayer of *epiclesis* and blessing of the water, the candidate is either immersed in water three times or a priest pours water over his head with the traditional formula – “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” pouring water on the head of the candidate for each person of the Holy Trinity.

Baptism is followed by a post-baptismal anointing with sacred chrism to anoint the candidate with the Holy Spirit. In the Roman Church, this anointing confers the Holy Spirit upon candidates with the particular grace of being able to *receive* inspiration and power from the body of Christ to sustain and grow in their faith. The bishop or priest then announces that this anointing anticipates another one (at confirmation) to bestow the power of the Holy Spirit on candidates for evangelization and mission – that is, to *give back* to the body of Christ from which they have received.

At this point candidates are integrated into the mystical body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit sufficient to begin putting off the life of sin (“the life of the flesh”), giving them strength to resist concupiscence – the desires pulling them toward sin (see above Section II.B). Candidates are also given the Holy Spirit to draw them toward the life of faith, holiness, wisdom, and compassion – so that they might move evermore deeply into the life of Christ and conform their desires toward Him. After the anointing with sacred chrism, a white garment is put on, symbolizing Paul’s declaration in his letter to the Galatians – that the newly baptized person has put on Christ and is now destined toward his salvation. A baptismal candle is then lit from the Easter candle signifying the enlightenment that is to come from being integrated into Christ’s body and receiving His Holy Spirit. The ceremony is completed with the Our Father and final blessing.

### **III.B**

#### **Six Teachings on Baptism from the *Catechism***

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* elaborates six teachings on baptism derived mostly from the baptism of Jesus (Section I), the *Acts of the Apostles* and The Letters of Saint Paul (Section II), and the theology of the early church from the *Didache* to Saint Augustine and to Saint Thomas Aquinas.

First, who can receive baptism? CCC 1246 says that anyone who is not yet baptized can receive baptism. This includes adults (who go through a period of catechumenate – being catechized and experiencing the life of the Church) and infants whose parents and godparents stand in their place in taking the baptismal vows, and promising to bring them up in the Church. As noted above, infant baptism entails a significant period of post-baptismal catechumenate to instruct the newly baptized and help them to enter more fully into their new risen life through the Church.

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<sup>23</sup> If water from the prayer of *epiclesis* at the Easter Vigil is saved and used at a subsequent baptism, the prayer of *epiclesis* need not be said over the water again.

Secondly, why infant baptism? As noted above, infant baptism probably goes back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Apostolic Church in which whole households were baptized by Peter and other apostles (see Acts 2:39, 16:15, 16: 31-33, and 1 Corinthians 1:16). Moreover, it is well established in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Church.<sup>24</sup> The reason for its early acceptance is found in Paul's theology of "putting off the flesh" (Col. 2:11). Apparently, the early Church believed that everyone – even children -- could use the grace to resist the inclination to sin. Furthermore, young children would be assisted in their path to holiness and union with God by being integrated into the Church and receiving the Holy Spirit. Judging from my own childhood religious experience, and those of others, I readily confirm the early Church's views of the importance of baptismal grace for the spiritual life of children. Therefore, the early Church believed that failure to baptize infants was a needless deprivation of children from the graces to resist sin and be strengthened in holiness. This deprivation of needed grace was seen to be unconscionable – and so practice of infant baptism became widely accepted until today.

Thirdly, who can baptize? The ordinary ministers of baptism are the bishop, the priest, and deacons. However, in cases of necessity, anyone – including an unbaptized person with the correct intention, can baptize a person with the Trinitarian formula (given above). The "right intention" means intending that the person be integrated into the risen life of Christ through the sacrament and the Holy Spirit.

Fourthly, is baptism necessary for salvation? CCC 1257 says "Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament." We can infer from this that baptism is not necessary for the salvation of those who have not heard and understood the gospel or have not had the possibility of realistically asking for this sacrament. This is consistent with the Church's teaching in the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (Lumen Gentium)*:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, Christians will want to evangelize and catechize those who have not yet heard the gospel so that they too may receive the five major graces of baptism (see above Section II.B.4) and be put on the assured path to eternal salvation with Christ. This is the best way to move toward eternal life.

The Church also allows baptism by blood (the baptism of martyrs who have not yet been baptized by water), baptism of catechumens (who are pursuing baptism by water), and baptism by desire – those who have some minimum exposure to the gospel and wish to be baptized though they were not able to do so by the formal ritual.

Fifthly, what is the fruit of Baptism? This is succinctly given in the *Catechism* 1279:

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<sup>24</sup> See Irenaeus *Against Heresies*. 2:22:4. The full quotation is given above in Section II.A.

<sup>25</sup> Flannery 1975, p. 376; *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter II (section 16).

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

This is a modern restatement of the five graces articulated by Saint Paul in his theology of baptism (see above Section II.B.4).

Sixthly, can baptism be repeated? Since baptism produces an indelible spiritual mark on the Christian (through the above graces), enabling him to participate in the Christian Church and Christian worship, it cannot be repeated if it is faithfully performed according to the Trinitarian formula given above. The indelible spiritual mark of baptism cannot be removed by sin – though sin can stand in the way of allowing the full fruit of baptism to be realized.

#### **IV.**

### **Conclusion**

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Baptism is the first sacrament to be received, opening recipients to the life of the Church, integration into Christ's body, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the eventual reception of five other sacraments. It leads immediately to the forgiveness of all sins – original and personal – and gives us grace through the Holy Spirit to resist sin and to desire and pursue a life of holiness. Though the unbaptized can be saved if they sincerely try to follow God according to the dictates of their conscience and the revelation they have received, baptism is the best way to be set on the path to salvation, for it integrates us into Christ's body and risen life. If we try to remain faithful to His teaching within the life of the Church and seek His unconditionally loving mercy when we fail, we have assured hope of our salvation through Him.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Confirmation**

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This explanation of confirmation will be quite brief because we have already examined the scriptural roots of confirmation in our treatment of baptism. The following treatment will be divided into two parts – the origins of confirmation (Section I), and a summary of the dogma on confirmation from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

## I. The Origins of the Sacrament of Confirmation

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As noted in Chapter One (Section II.A), the Apostolic Church's view of a distinction between baptism by water (called "baptism of Jesus") and baptism by the Holy Spirit (conferred through the laying on of hands), is articulated in *Acts* 8

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Sama'ria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (*Acts* 8: 14-17).

Evidently, baptism by water (in the name of Jesus) could be separated from baptism by the Holy Spirit which was conferred by a distinct rite of the laying on of hands.

This second rite confers powers from the Holy Spirit on the recipient that are oriented towards evangelization and missionary activity – teaching, prophecy, preaching, healing, miracle working, administration, corporal works of mercy, and speaking in tongues (See the characteristics associated with the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12). Since these two characteristics – the laying on of hands and the powers of the spirit for evangelization – describe the foundational elements of the sacrament of confirmation, it is reasonable to assume that those foundations were present in the Apostolic Church – and so also was the sacrament that was later called "confirmation."

In the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, anointing with sacred chrism (sanctified perfumed oil) was added to the laying on of hands in the early rite of confirmation. This anointing is mentioned in Tertullian's treatise on baptism (written around 210 A.D.) as if it were a long-standing practice within the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Church. It clearly distinguishes baptism by water (in the bath leading to forgiveness of sins) from the secondary rite of anointing and laying on of hands (making us "christs" – anointed ones for service):

Then having gone up from the bath we are anointed with a blessed anointing of ancient discipline, by which people were accustomed to be anointed for priesthood, by oil from a horn from which Aaron was anointed by Moses [Exodus 30:22-30]. For this reason we were called "christs" ("anointed ones") from "chrism," which is the ointment which lends its name to the Lord. It was made spiritual because the Lord was anointed with the Spirit by God the Father, as it says in Acts: 'For they were gathered together in that city against your holy Son whom you have anointed [Acts 4:27].' Thus also the anointing flows on us physically, but benefits spiritually, as the physical act of baptism (that we are



immersed in water) has a spiritual effect (that we are free from transgressions). Next, calling and inviting the Holy Spirit, the hand is imposed for the blessing.<sup>26</sup>

In the *Apostolic Tradition* (a tractate attributed to Hippolytus of Rome in about 210 A.D.<sup>27</sup>), the author presents a rite of anointing and laying on of hands that greatly resembles the rite of confirmation used today. The rite begins with the laying on of hands and a prayer to enhance and strengthen the grace of the Holy Spirit received at baptism which is followed by the anointing that symbolizes being sealed with the Holy Spirit:

The bishop, imposing his hand on them, shall make an invocation, saying, ‘O Lord God, who made them worthy of the remission of sins through the Holy Spirit’s washing unto rebirth, send into them your grace so that they may serve you according to your will, for there is glory to you, to the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit, in the holy Church, both now and through the ages of ages. Amen.’ Then, pouring the consecrated oil into his hand and imposing it on the head of the baptized, he shall say, ‘I anoint you with holy oil in the Lord, the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit.’ Signing them on the forehead, he shall kiss them and say, ‘The Lord be with you.’ He that has been signed shall say, ‘And with your spirit.’ Thus shall he do to each.<sup>28</sup>

At this juncture, the rite of anointing and laying on of hands is clearly distinguished from baptism, well-defined liturgically, and clarified theologically.

As noted above, infant baptism became widespread throughout the Eastern and Western Churches throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> century<sup>29</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> This caused a further separation between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of anointing and laying on of hands (later called “confirmation”). The number of infant baptisms was so significant was so great (and the urgency of having children baptized shortly after their birth) made it impossible for the bishop to regularly administer the sacrament. Hence, priests became the ordinary ministers of baptism while the bishop reserved to himself the sacrament of confirmation (with certain exceptions given below). This was theologically significant because the anointing with chrism and the laying on of hands bestowed spiritual gifts upon the recipient for work in evangelization and mission similar to those received by deacons and priests at ordination.<sup>31</sup> The bestowing of these graces was considered to be the proper purview of the bishop. As the number of infant baptisms increased, the separation of baptism and confirmation was solidified.

Infant baptism led to the separation of baptism from confirmation for another reason (beyond the impracticality of having the bishop regularly baptize infants) – namely, the distinction between the graces of the two sacraments. As noted above, the sacramental grace of

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<sup>26</sup> Tertullian *On Baptism* 6-8.

<sup>27</sup> Some modern scholars believe this dating to be correct, while others believe that there are later elements integrated into the tractate, suggesting a dating in the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>28</sup> Hippolytus of Rome *Apostolic Tradition* 21-22.

<sup>29</sup> See Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2:22:4, written in about 180 A.D.

<sup>30</sup> See for example, Hippolytus of Rome *Apostolic Tradition* 21:16.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian specifically identifies the anointing of confirmation with that of priesthood in his *Treatise on Baptism* 7 – “[the anointing] by which people were accustomed to be anointed for priesthood.”

baptism was seen as significant for the salvation of young children – because of its power to forgive sins and reconfigure our lives to the life of the risen Christ; however the grace of the sacrament of confirmation was oriented to *giving back* or contributing to the Church –inspiring and strengthening the community and evangelizing and catechizing new members. These graces seemed more appropriate to someone who had reached the age of reason (thought to be around 7 years old) who could make such contributions to the Church.

By the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, in the West, the priest was thought to be the ordinary minister of baptism which imparted gifts helpful to young children for their sanctification and salvation – but the sacrament of confirmation was reserved for older children (or adults) who could effectively use the powers bestowed on them through this second sacrament by the bishop. The Eastern Church did not follow the Western Church in this separation, and to this day, perform both sacraments at the same time in a double-rite of initiation for both infants and adults.

Though the theology and administration of confirmation was slightly modified and developed after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the major framework and theology were firmly in place by that time.

## **II.**

### **The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on Confirmation**

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By now the reader will probably know much about the rite of confirmation, its liturgical administration, its theology, yet a brief review of the catechism's synopsis of these matters may prove helpful.

## **II.A**

### **The Rite of Confirmation**

The rite of confirmation has four parts:

1. The confirmands begin by renewing their baptismal vows and reciting the Profession of Faith.
2. A prayer to invoke the Holy Spirit and to galvanize the Spirit's powers within the confirmands is then said so that they may have the special grace to strengthen the Church and evangelize new members. The bishop extends his hand over the entire group of confirmands and prays as follows:

All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by water and the Holy Spirit  
you freed your sons and daughters from sin  
and gave them new life.  
Send your Holy Spirit upon them  
to be their helper and guide.  
Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of right judgment and courage,  
the spirit of knowledge and reverence.  
Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord (CCC 1299).

Notice that the graces prayed for are similar to the interior graces of the Holy Spirit for strengthening the Church elucidated by Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians (see above Chapter One, Section II.B.3).

3. The bishop then lays his hand on each candidate and anoints them with the sacred chrism blessed at the chrism mass on Holy Thursday. He then pronounces the words, “Be sealed with the Holy Spirit.” In the words of the *Catechism*:

This seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial (CCC 1296).

At this juncture, the candidates are confirmed and endowed with the powers of the Holy Spirit to strengthen, inspire, and defend the Church -- and to engage in evangelization and missionary activities. It should be remembered that those who are confirmed should make an assessment of their particular charisms so that they can be practiced and cultivated, for without this, the graces of the sacrament will simply grow stale or lie fallow.

4. The sign of peace that concludes the ceremony signifies ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all the faithful.

## **II.B**

### **Five Teachings on Confirmation from the *Catechism***

First, the effect of confirmation, as indicated by the rite and its symbols is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit which brings about an increase and deepening of baptismal grace for inspiring, strengthening, and defending the Church as well as for evangelization and missionary activity. In the words of the *Catechism*:

It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross (CCC 1303).

The seal of the Holy Spirit completes the conferral of universal priesthood on the newly confirmed which authorizes them to evangelize and witness to their faith officially – “*quasi Ex officio*” (CCC 1305).

Secondly, this outpouring of the Spirit, like baptism, produces an indelible spiritual mark in the candidate, and so the sacrament can be given only once.

Thirdly, who should receive the sacrament? Any person who has been baptized and has reached the age of reason and the capacity for spiritual maturity (which can occur in children who are six or seven years old<sup>32</sup>) can be confirmed. Teenagers and adults who have been properly instructed should complete their initiation into the mystical body through the reception of these special graces so that they have all the graces necessary to grow in their faith.

Fourthly, what is required before a candidate can be confirmed? There are three requirements:

1. Candidates must be prepared not only with doctrinal knowledge about the Church and the sacraments, but also helped to engage in a deeper relationship with Christ through prayer. Of particular importance is for candidates to be attuned to the gifts of the Holy Spirit to inspire, strengthen, and defend the Church as well as to evangelize new members. An awareness of how to follow and discern the Holy Spirit is important for helping candidates to recognize the interior and exterior promptings of the Holy Spirit.
2. Candidates should be in a state of grace – and so the sacrament of reconciliation is highly recommended before confirmation.
3. Candidates should select a sponsor to help them mature spiritually. The Church recommends that one of the baptismal sponsors be a confirmation sponsor as a sign of the unity between baptism and confirmation.

Fifthly, who is the ordinary minister of confirmation? In the Latin Rite, the bishop is the ordinary minister, because the grace conferred through confirmation builds and strengthens the Church which is led regionally by the bishop. The bishop can delegate the power to confirm on a priest who is taking adult candidates through all three sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and First Holy Communion) at Easter Vigil or other special occasions. Any priest can administer the sacrament of confirmation to an unconfirmed baptized person in danger of dying.

We conclude our treatment of the sacrament of confirmation with the summary given in the *Catechism*:

Confirmation perfects Baptismal grace; it is the sacrament which gives the Holy Spirit in order to root us more deeply in the divine filiation, incorporate us more firmly into Christ, strengthen our bond with the Church, associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds (CCC 1316).

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<sup>32</sup> See CCC 1308 and also the defense of this thesis by St. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* III, Q 72, Art. 8, ad 2.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance**

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As with our treatment of Baptism and Confirmation (Chapters One and Two respectively), we will begin with the origin of the sacrament of reconciliation in scripture (Section I) then proceed to a brief history of the sacrament (Section II), and then to the theology and practice of the sacrament today (Section III).

#### **I.**

### **The Origin of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Jesus and the New Testament**

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The sacrament of reconciliation or penance has its origin in the New Testament in which Jesus clearly imparts the power to forgive sins through the Holy Spirit on the apostles after the resurrection:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained (Jn 20: 21-23).

The meaning of this passage is clear – Jesus gave a universal power to forgive and retain sins to His apostles – “If you forgive the sins of *any*...” Though the form under which this power is to be administered is not defined, it is clear that the apostles (and by implication their successors) are to be mediators of divine power and authority. Since the power to forgive sins belongs to God alone,<sup>33</sup> the apostles must be mediators of the power of God – mediators of the power of the Holy Spirit which Jesus has given them. As such it is a specific sacramental power which is the ground of the sacrament of reconciliation that has been administered by the Church since its inception.

Jesus claimed to have this divine power within Himself – and to be the administrator of it by His own authority. In the gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees challenge Jesus to explain Himself when He claims to have the power to forgive a paralytic’s sins:

And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming” (Mt. 9:2-3).

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<sup>33</sup> The power to forgive sins belongs to God alone -- see Psalm 103:2-3 and Is. 43:25.

The Pharisees assume that Jesus is blaspheming because they believe that the power to forgive sins is an exclusively divine power, which means that Jesus is claiming to possess divine power within Himself. Jesus confirms this moments later by saying:

“That you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. (Mt. 9: 6-9)

All we need do now is connect the dots—God confers the power to forgive sins on Jesus (see Mt. 9:6-9) and then Jesus confers that same divine power upon the apostles and their successors (Jn 20:21-23). The conferral of this power on the apostles is the foundation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and as we shall see below, the first and second century churches believed it to be so.

There are three other passages that confirm the Johannine foundation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation: Jesus’ conferral of the power to bind and loose on the apostles (Mt18:18), Jesus’ conferral of the power to bind and loose on Peter (which is different from the Apostles, Mt16:18) and Paul’s reference to the ministry of reconciliation (2Cor 5:18-20). Let us begin with Jesus’ conferral of the power to bind and loose on the Apostles:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mt 18:15-18)

This passage concerns the forgiveness of grave sins that need to be redressed within the community. There are three layers of potential action—a personal one( v.15), a communal one (v16), and a juridical one (“take it up with the church” v 17). In the context of seeking a juridical solution, Jesus confers the power on the Apostles to bind and loose on behalf of the whole Church. Thus, the power to bind is the power to impose a penance or exclude a member from the community – and the power to loose is the power to pardon (forgive) and readmit a member to the community. So again we see Jesus not only conferring the power to forgive sins on His Apostles (as in Jn 20:21-23), but also the power to bind and loose by juridical sanction.

Far too much ink has been spilled on arguing whether Jesus would have been concerned with juridical sanctions and whether He would have used the term ekklesia (Church - v17), because it really does not matter whether Jesus used these terms or whether the apostolic church interpreted His words to mean this. What matters is that the apostolic church believed He meant this, and so put it into action.



This is sufficient to show that both the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the power of juridical sanction (conferred on the Apostles and their successors) had their origin in Jesus.

We now turn to Jesus' conferral of the power to bind and loose on Peter. Note that the context of this conferral of authority is quite different from that of the Apostles. The latter, as we saw, is focused specifically on imposing penance and forgiveness of sins while the latter, as we shall see, is in the much broader context of Peter being the foundation of the Church and receiving the Keys to the Kingdom.

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (MT 16:16-19)

As we saw in Volume 6 (Chapter Two), the elements of this commissioning have their roots in Jesus. Furthermore, Jesus' commissioning of Peter as the foundation rock and His conferral of "the keys to the kingdom" give him the office and authority of prime minister<sup>34</sup> of the Church – that is, an office of supreme authority in place of the king (who is Jesus Himself). As noted in Volume Six (Chapter Two), Jesus created an office of supreme authority (as implied in the passage from Isaiah to which Jesus was likely referring)<sup>35</sup>, and so the authority conferred on Peter is also given to the successors of Peter's office.

As with all New Testament passages, the meaning of any specific saying must be derived from the context in which it was said. So what does the "power to bind and loose" mean in this context? It means far more than the power to bind and loose given to the Apostles (Mt 18:17-18) where that context reveals that their power is limited to imposing penance, forgiving sins, and imposing and remitting juridical sanctions. In the case of Peter, the context shows that his power to bind and loose is primary, heavenly, and absolute – like that of Shebna and Eliakim (Isaiah 22:19-22). Peter's authority goes beyond that of Shebna and Eliakim inasmuch as Jesus grants him heavenly authority (to lead the Church) as well. Thus we might say that there is an implicit conferral of the power to forgive sins and impose sanctions on Peter in Mt. 16:17-19, but this is only the tip of the iceberg – for the context reveals that Peter's power extends to the power to "rule" the Church in the place of Christ in every doctrinal and juridical way that may be required to carry out the charge of that office.

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<sup>34</sup> Recall that Isaiah uses "keys to the kingdom" in the sense of "the power of prime minister (highest office) in the kingdom of Israel" in his oracle against Shebna, deposing him and elevating Eliakim to that office:

"I will thrust you from your *office*, and you will be cast down from your station. In that day I will call my servant Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your belt on him, and will commit your *authority* to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; and I will place on his [Eliakim's] shoulder the *key of the house of David*; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Is 22:19-22). Notice that the power to bind and loose follows precisely upon the conferral of the keys to the kingdom of Israel giving Eliakim the office of prime minister.

<sup>35</sup> See previous note

We now turn to a passage from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians that references "a ministry of reconciliation":

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (2Cor 5:17-18).

There can be little doubt that Paul means by "the ministry of reconciliation" the power to forgive sins conferred upon men. Jerome Murphy O'Connor states it this way:

In the Divine plan human agents mediate grace. Paul cites and interprets a traditional formula which mentioned the initiator (God), the agent (Christ), and the means of reconciliation (forgiveness of sins)...Paul answers the question how, arising out of the present participle in the formula, by introducing the mediators, who make the action of Christ real to their contemporaries [i.e. human ministers of Reconciliation] <sup>36</sup>

As Murphy- O'Connor implies, St. Paul believes that Christ has imparted the authority to forgive sins on human beings who are mediators of the grace of God actualized through Christ. He does not speak about a specific form in which this ministry is carried out, but refers to it as a "ministry." "Ministry" ("*Diakonia*") refers to a specific office within the Church, <sup>37</sup> and so we may infer that the ministry of reconciliation is not conferred on every Christian, but only on those who have been given that office by Church leaders – in this case, the Apostles. This probably implies that the office of Reconciliation extended to more than the Apostles, and was conferred on prophets who later became presbyters and later priests. (see Volume Nine, Chapter Two.)

So what might we conclude about the origins of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Jesus and the New Testament? There is considerable direct evidence of the origin of this sacrament in Jesus, particularly in Jn 20:21-23 and also in Mt 18:17-18 (which includes the power to impose and remit juridical sanctions). Though Mt 16:17-19 (Peter's Commission) implicitly addresses the power to forgive sins on Peter, it is really focused on Peter's primary and heavenly authority to "rule" the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (5:17-18) strongly implies an office of reconciliation (forgiveness of sins) given to the Apostles, and through them, to others (probably presbyters) in the early Church. These references are sufficient to show that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is present in the New Testament and had its origins in Jesus Christ who commissioned the Apostles (and their successors) to carry it out in a specific ministry (*diakonia*).

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<sup>36</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 1990, "The Second Letter to the Corinthians" *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p822.

<sup>37</sup> Strong's Concordance (G1248) links "*diakonia*" to specific church offices in both the Old and New Testaments - "those who by the command of God proclaim and promote religion among men, of the office of Moses, of the office of the apostles and its administration, of the office of prophets, evangelists, elders etc." Strong's Online Concordance, 2016 (<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g1248>).

## II.

### A Brief History of the Sacrament of Reconciliation after the Apostolic Age

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In the first two centuries, the Church implemented the Sacrament of Reconciliation in two ways:

1. In cases of grave public sins (where the sin was known by members inside and outside the Church community) public penances (satisfaction) – such as periods of service, prayer, or fasting—had to be completed before absolution was administered. These periods of penance could be several months or even longer for particularly grave public sins.
2. In cases of less serious sins, a general confession of sins in the assembly—i.e., the *Confiteor* at Mass—was followed by absolution from the presbyter (priest) which was sufficient to produce a clear conscience (i.e., complete absolution). This kind of “confession of sins” occurred virtually before every Sunday Mass.

A brief examination of texts from the *Didache*, the *Letter of Barnabas*, and the *Letter of Ignatius of Antioch* will reveal both kinds of “confession and absolution”.

The *Didache* (written around 95 A.D.) implies confession-absolution was available before Sunday Masses:

"Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . . On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure".<sup>38</sup>

Was “confession of sins” a public ritual within the church assembly? If so, what did it consist in? Was it accompanied by absolution? It is difficult to say what “confession of sins” refers to, but it very probably refers to a general confession within the assembly --like the *Confiteor* in today's Mass. We do not know whether sins were mentioned publicly, but at the very least, they were brought to mind within the group's *Confiteor* prayer. We may assume that the absolution positioned at the end of the *Confiteor* was also part of this rite—“may almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you your sins, and bring you to everlasting life.” Evidently, this kind of confession of sins was repeatable, since it seems to have been available before all Sunday Masses. Furthermore, the absolution for sins confessed or remembered was sufficient to produce a clear conscience after this penitential rite, suggesting that the absolution was complete.

In the *Letter of Barnabas* (c. 95 AD<sup>39</sup>), the author mentions the confession of sins as a means of forgiveness (producing a clear conscience):

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<sup>38</sup> *Didache* 4:14, 14:1

<sup>39</sup> Helmut Koester estimates that the letter was written in the late first century (90-95?) based on the way in which it makes references to New Testament scripture. See Helmut Koester 1982, *Introduction to the New Testament – Vol II : History and Literature of Early Christianity*, New York, Walter de Gruyter & Co, p13

"You shall confess your sins. You shall not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light." <sup>40</sup>

The above lines conclude Chapter 19 of the *Letter of Barnabas* which contains a lengthy list of sins—some of them grave and others less serious. The reader may have noticed that the passages from the *Didache* and the *Letter of Barnabas* are similar which gives rise to the question—if “the confession of sins” refers to the *Confiteor* and absolution at Sunday Mass, and the confession of sins produces a clear conscience after the commission of the sins mentioned in Chapter 19 (some of which are quite grave), then it would seem that the *Confiteor* and absolution at Mass had the power to absolve the penitent from very serious sins. Yet we cannot draw this conclusion from the *Letter of Barnabas* because it does not say that the confession of sins at Mass *does in fact* lead to absolution for every sin in the long list given in Chapter 19. The Letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Philadelphians (c.105AD) may shed additional light on this query:

For as many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. And as many as shall, in the exercise of penance, return into the unity of the Church, these, too, shall belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ<sup>41</sup>... To all them that repent, the Lord grants forgiveness, if they turn in penitence to the unity of God, and to communion with the bishop <sup>42</sup>

This passage uses the term “penance” instead of “confession of sins” (used in the *Didache* and the *Letter of Barnabas*). It refers to something more than the forgiveness of sins—namely restoring unity with the Bishop which imparts unity with the Church. We might infer from this that the letter is referring to grave sins that would have alienated a person from unity with the Bishop and church, such as heresy, apostasy, or grave public sins causing alienation from and embarrassment to the church community.

Ignatius does not address how confession and absolution during Mass might affect or redress these kinds of serious sins. Instead, he focuses on the steps that need to be taken to bring a penitent back into communion with the Church through communion with the Bishop. Communion with the Church would certainly have been viewed as the primary way of restoring a person to communion with Christ.

So how does one come back into communion with the Bishop and the Church? Ignatius refers to this special means of reconciliation as “penance.” It implies, as later church fathers indicate, a period of either public penance (for public sins) or private penance (for private sins) to make satisfaction for grave sins that would have alienated the penitent from the Church. It seems that this period of penance preceded absolution from the Bishop who had the power to restore the penitent to full communion with him, the Church, and Christ Himself.

(*The Lapsed* 15:1–3 (A.D. 251)).

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<sup>40</sup> *Letter of Barnabas*, Chapter 19

<sup>41</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians*, Ch. 3

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 8

There were several developments and clarifications in the administration of the confession of sins-sacrament of penance over the next 150 years, the manifestation of which is found in a tractate of St. Cyprian of Carthage entitled *The Lapsed*.<sup>43</sup> Saint Cyprian was bishop of Carthage during a time of harsh persecution against the Christians in which a large number of Christians sacrificed to Roman gods in order to avoid harsh punishment. Cyprian took a middle position between rigorists who did not want to readmit lapsed Christians back into the Church and laxists who were willing to readmit the lapsed by a simple private confession with virtually no public penance. In the following passages, Cyprian tries to take a pastoral approach that will allow the efficacy of seemingly private confession of sins to priests and some public penance for temporary apostasy.

...how much greater is the faith and more salutary the fear of those who, though bound by no crime of sacrifice or certificate, yet merely because they entertained such a thought, confess even this to the priest of God simply and contritely, and manifest their conscience to them. They lay bare the burden that is on their minds and seek treatment for their wounds, light and superficial as they are...<sup>44</sup>

In this passage, Cyprian addresses confession of sins by those who have committed a minor sin – entertaining the thought of sacrificing to the Roman gods to avoid persecution, but not really doing so. Cyprian here says that confession of these sins (which are obviously non-public) to the priests leads to both forgiveness and healing. This passage reveals three clarifications in the administration of the sacrament:

1. Individual *confessions* are available for both major and minor penitents.
2. Individual confessions can be heard by *priests* as well as the bishop.
3. Confession is available for both major and *minor* sins – and the grace of confession for even minor sins leads to healing of the soul.

Cyprian does not make clear whether these private confessions to priests can be repeated – or whether confession-penance is available only once. He does not rule out multiple confessions, but the following passage suggests that the common practice may have been to receive the sacrament only once:

Let each one, I entreat you, brethren, confess his sin while he who has sinned is still in this world, while his confession can still be heard, while satisfaction and forgiveness granted through the priests are pleasing to God. Let us turn back to the lord with our whole heart and, expressing our repentance in deep sorrow, implore God for His mercy.<sup>45</sup>

The Western Church appears to have followed the three practices for confession-penance mentioned by the *Didache*, Saint Ignatius of Antioch, and Cyprian of Carthage for another 400 years (until the 7<sup>th</sup> century):

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<sup>43</sup> Saint Cyprian of Carthage, 1957, *The Lapsed: The Unity of the Catholic Church in Ancient Christian Writers*, Vol. 25). Trans. by Maurice Bevenot (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p. 37.

1. General confession of sinfulness with absolution (*Confiteor* and absolution) at mass prior to the Eucharistic prayer.
2. Private confession of minor sins to priests and the bishop for forgiveness, penance, and healing.
3. Confession to priests or the bishop for forgiveness and public penance.

With respect to the third mode of confession-penance – namely, public penance – the objective was to ask for the prayers and support of the whole community to help the penitent – not public humiliation to redress a public scandal. In the 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, various regional Church councils systematize the public penances to be administered for particular grave public sins (such as apostasy).

In about 644 A.D., Christian monks from Ireland and England made their way to continental Europe (after the fall of Rome) to evangelize the tribes that had overrun the Roman legions and government. Many of the dioceses of France, Italy, Germany, and Austria were founded by those monks, who transformed continental Europe culturally and above all, spiritually.<sup>46</sup> These monks had orthodox Christian theology, but several distinctive spiritual practices from that of the Roman Church – such as the calculation of the date of Easter, and the practice of individual repeatable confession-penance.<sup>47</sup>

One of the distinctive spiritual practices that the Celtic Church developed in isolation from Rome was the practice of confession-reconciliation which was *repeatable* individual confession to a priest in which the priest gave a private penance in accordance with guidelines fixed by the Celtic bishops. Apparently the monks were unaware of the practice of unrepeatable public penances. Since the influence of their monasteries and diocesan churches was very significant, the formally Celtic practice began to spread throughout continental Europe until it became the common practice.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, individual private confession was required of the faithful once per year by the Fourth Lateran Council (Canon 21), and during the counterreformation, public penances (even for grave public sins) seems to have been abandoned by the Church which moved its theological emphasis from reconciliation with the “Church and God” to “reconciliation with God.”<sup>48</sup> This effectively moved the sacrament from a public community act to a private and personal experience – much like the practice of the sacrament today.

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<sup>46</sup> See Enzo Farinella “Europe and the Irish Monks,” ( <http://www.saint-brendan.org/news.asp?p=europe-and-the-irish-monks-by-enzo-farinella>).

<sup>47</sup> Christianity dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in the Celtic world, which at that time was dominated by the Roman Empire. After several revolts and raids, the Romans pulled out of Briton and Ireland never to return. As a result, the Celtic Church developed many of its spiritual practices – including the practice of individual confession – independently of the Church of Rome. Apparently they did not even know of the canonical penances defined in Church councils between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries in continental Europe. See John T. Koch, 2006, *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO/Greenwood Praeger) pp. 431-434.

<sup>48</sup> See John Bossy, 1975, “The Social History of Confession in the Age of the Reformation,” in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 25, pp. 21-38.



The Second Vatican Council issued subsequent documents to revise the sacrament of penance:

The rite and formulas for the sacrament of penance are to be revised so that they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament.<sup>49</sup>

This has been done by regional councils resulting in a more personal approach to the sacrament (e.g. optional face-to-face confessions) and taking the emphasis off of excessive scrupulosity so that penitents may concentrate on more serious sins and spiritual healing. Unfortunately, participation in the sacrament of reconciliation has decreased considerably since the Second Vatican Council, though parish Advent and Lenten penance services draw considerable numbers of practicing Catholics at least once per year. Saint John Paul II attempted to revitalize participation in the sacrament – noting its great spiritual and healing power – in two encyclicals: *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984) and *Misericordia Dei* (2002).

### **III.**

## **Theology and Practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation Today**

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In Sections 1422 to 1498, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the elements, form, minister, and theology of the sacrament of penance or reconciliation. The *Catechism* affirms what the Church has practiced throughout the centuries – that the sacrament reconciles the penitent to *both* God and the Church. Thus, when absolution is given and the particular penance completed, the penitent is brought back into communion with both God and the Church. We now proceed to an explanation of the form of the sacrament and the three acts of the penitent (Section III.A) and a spiritual explanation of the four graces of the sacrament (Section III.B).

### **III.A**

## **The Form of the Sacrament and the Three Acts of the Penitent**

There are three essential acts of the penitent that complement the actions of the priest within the sacrament: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The first act -- *Contrition* (sorrow for sins) is part of the examination of conscience (before confession), the confession itself, and the doing of penance (“satisfaction”). The Church (since the Council of Trent) teaches that there are two kinds of contrition:

1. Perfect contrition – done out of love of God (CCC 1452).
2. Imperfect contrition – done out of fear of damnation or punishment (CCC 1453).

In the case of mortal sin (see the definition below), perfect contrition is sufficient for reconciliation with God if it is accompanied by sacramental confession within a year. However,

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<sup>49</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*

imperfect contrition must be accompanied by sacramental absolution to be effective in reconciling the penitent to God and the Church.

The need for the sacrament of reconciliation to complete the process of forgiveness (and restoration of communion with God) turns on the definition of mortal sin which is given later in the *Catechism*:

For a *sin* to be *mortal*, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent... Mortal sin requires *full knowledge* and *complete consent* (CCC 1857-1859).

The gravity of sin is defined by the Ten Commandments – though there are degrees of gravity among the sins and within each sin. For example, murder and adultery are graver than stealing or lying – and within stealing and lying, some offenses are venial (e.g. stealing pencils at work or harmlessly exaggerating one's merits), while others are grave (e.g. stealing a car or lying to hurt the reputation of another).

With respect to the second condition, sufficient knowledge means having a proper understanding that a particular action is not only sinful, but gravely sinful. In the case of certain sins – such as murder, theft, and adultery – it is assumed that most people who have reached the age of reason are by nature aware of the sinfulness and gravity of such actions. Knowing the sinfulness and gravity of other actions may require instruction and the formation of conscience. Without such instruction, the second condition of mortal sin may be absent – in which case it would not be mortally sinful.

The third condition is the most difficult to meet – complete consent of the will. It means not having any impediments to the free use of the will. Impediments may be external (such as being constrained, forced, or threatened to do something against one's will) or internal (such as strong passions or feelings,<sup>50</sup> strong unconscious motivations, psychological disorders,<sup>51</sup> addictions, deeply engrained habits, and strong situational fear, duress, and depression).<sup>52</sup>

Not infrequently, the above impediments to complete consent of the will are influential in the commission of certain grave sins, which would mitigate the mortal nature of the sin. In this case, the sin in question would not threaten the salvation of the penitent and confession would not be *required* in order for complete reconciliation with God to be restored. However, one should try to make recourse to the sacrament as soon as possible, if such sins are committed. This will assure the penitent of absolution and impart the healing power of the sacrament as well.

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<sup>50</sup> According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1860, "The promptings of feelings and passions can also diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures or pathological disorders."

<sup>51</sup> Psychological disorders may include psychosis, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and long-standing neuroses – among other disorders.

<sup>52</sup> The philosophical and psychological analysis of Paul Ricoeur is one of the most complete contemporary phenomenological and psychological assessments of both free will and its impediments.

See Paul Ricoeur 1966, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press).

Even if contrition occurs immediately after the commission of a sin, a good examination of conscience before confession can revive feelings of sorrow for having offended God who has loved us so – as well as our neighbor who may have also been offended or hurt. The *Catechism* recommends the following sources for examination of conscience:

The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an *examination of conscience* made in the light of the Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the Ten Commandments [Ex. 20: 1-17], the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount [Mt. 5-7] and the apostolic teachings.<sup>53</sup>

There are some excellent published works<sup>54</sup> and web resources<sup>55</sup> to give a summary and explanation of the above passages of Sacred Scripture. You might want to bring these to Church to focus and elucidate your examination of conscience.

The second act of the penitent is the actual confession of sins with a priest. The form may differ slightly from diocese to diocese or priest to priest, but the general form for the liturgy of the sacrament in the USA is as follows:

In the Liturgy of Penance, the elements are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, a reading from Scripture, the confession of sins, the giving and accepting of a penance, an act of contrition, the priest absolution, a proclamation of praise of God, and a dismissal.<sup>56</sup>

Each one of these elements is explained and illustrated in the website of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*.<sup>57</sup>

Penitents should confess to the priest all sins that they judge to be mortal (according to the three conditions mentioned above). All adults should attempt to go to the sacrament at least once per year. The penance services during Advent and Lent can be very helpful for recollection, examination, and contemplation, and can bring together members of the community to reinforce and pray for one another.

The third act of the penitent is the acceptance and completion of a penance (satisfaction for sins committed). Satisfaction may have two components:

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<sup>53</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1454.

<sup>54</sup> See for example, George Aschenbrenner 2007 *The Examination of Conscience* (Chicago: Loyola Press).

<sup>55</sup> The USCCB has a free online reflection on the examination of conscience which can be printed and used before confession – see <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience.cfm>. . Father John Trigilio has also provided an examination of conscience based on the Ten Commandments – see <http://www.ewtn.com/library/prayer/examconscience.htm>. “Beginning Catholic” also provides a good examination of conscience based on the Ten Commandments and the precepts of the Church – see: <http://www.beginningcatholic.com/catholic-examination-of-conscience>.

<sup>56</sup> *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (<http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/#264>).

<sup>57</sup> <http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/uscca/#264>.

1. Seeking to repair the damage of sin to our neighbor (e.g. payment for stolen goods, asking forgiveness for transgressions, correcting damage to someone's reputation, etc.)
2. Some form of prayer or sacrifice to initiate the process of healing within the penitent and with the Lord.

The *Catechism* states in this regard:

The *penance* the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed.<sup>58</sup>

After the confession of sins and the imposition of a penance, the priest absolves the penitent from his sins by the following formula:

God, the Father of mercies,  
through the death and the resurrection of his Son  
has reconciled the world to himself  
and sent the Holy Spirit among us  
for the forgiveness of sins;  
through the ministry of the Church  
may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve  
you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of  
the Holy Spirit, Amen.<sup>59</sup>

The ordinary form of the sacrament is individual confession and absolution (the liturgy of which was described above in this section). However, there are a few occasions in which general absolution can be administered. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes it as follows:

In case of grave necessity recourse may be had to a *communal celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution*. Grave necessity of this sort can arise when there is imminent danger of death without sufficient time for the priest or priests to hear each penitent's confession. Grave necessity can also exist when, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors to hear individual confessions properly in a reasonable time, so that the penitents through no fault of their own would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In this case, for the absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of individually confessing their grave sins in the time required. The diocesan bishop is the judge of whether or not the conditions required for general absolution exist. A large gathering of the faithful on the occasion of major feasts or pilgrimages does not constitute a case of grave necessity.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1460.

<sup>59</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1449.

<sup>60</sup> CCC 1483 based on Canon 961 SS 1 of the *Code of Canon Law*.

### III.B

#### A Spiritual Explanation of the Four Major Graces of the Sacrament

There are four major graces associated with the sacrament of reconciliation or penance which makes it a powerful vehicle for spiritual healing and the deepening of conversion toward the heart of Christ:

1. Reconciliation with God.
2. Reconciliation with the Church.
3. Healing of the interior damage and darkness of sinfulness.
4. Continual conversion toward the heart of Christ.

With respect to reconciliation with God, we must remember that God wants only what will bring us to our true dignity and fulfillment in His truth, goodness, and love, because He created us to experience the fullness of joy through the spiritual and transcendental powers that He gave us. Above all, He loves us, and wants us to find our joy in His love – and giving our love to Him and others in the kingdom. God cannot simply give us this life without our free acceptance of it and participation in it, because love must be born out of freedom. Recall from Volumes 2 and 4 that if love is to originate from within us (and not to be merely a robotic program from God) we have to *choose* it over against the possibility of choosing “unlove” or “anti-love.” If we do not have the possibility of choosing to do something contrary to love, then we do not have the possibility of choosing love either, because love would be our only possible course of action – which means it would be programmed into us. Evidently this means that we can choose actions which are at once contrary to God’s will and contrary to our ultimate happiness and fulfillment.

Of course at the time we choose something contrary to God’s goodness and love, we don’t think that it will be contrary to our happiness and fulfillment. Rather, we believe that going against God’s will (His goodness and love) *will* make us happy and fulfilled, and so we ignore or rebel against God’s goodness and love (manifest in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount) and delude ourselves into thinking that we will find “true happiness” through vice or sin. We can stray on that path for a little while – and turn back in repentance – or we can pursue a path contrary to God’s goodness and love (contrary to His commandments and virtues) intoxicating ourselves with narcissistic egocentricity, power, domination, money, and even self-worship.

Even if we do take the long road into darkness and sin, our true nature – and the grace of God – eventually reveal the falsity and destructiveness of the road we have chosen. We begin to feel pangs of emptiness, loneliness, and alienation on a cosmic level (see Volume 13), and if we allow ourselves to feel it, our conscience begins to weigh heavily (in guilt) against the destruction we have caused to our neighbor and ourselves. At this juncture, we must *choose* to acknowledge the error and destructiveness of our ways, and to reconcile ourselves with both God and neighbor.

Recalling that God is not a stoic, angry, and vengeful critic and judge, but rather like the father of the prodigal son who Jesus addressed as *Abba*, we will want to return to Him who has

been seeking us out like the shepherd of the lost sheep. This return can *feel* difficult or even impossible if we have been away from God or in a state of rebellion – and it is here that the sacrament of reconciliation is so important. In these circumstances, we need only swallow our pride – admitting our mistakes, failures, and destructiveness – and seek out a priest we trust and with whom we can communicate and go to the sacrament of reconciliation.

Since the sacrament has a set liturgy, we need not be confused or uncertain about how reconciliation will occur – or whether it will occur. The form of the sacrament and the definitive absolution by the priest gives us a process and assurance of reconciliation with God – who has loved us unconditionally even in our sin. After finding a good confessor, we will then want to obtain one of the above resources for the examination of conscience, and with a sincere desire to change, and regret for the harm caused to others, ourselves, and our relationship with God, proceed to the sacrament of reconciliation – trusting in the Lord’s love, the definitive power of absolution, and the priest who will mediate Christ’s mercy and absolution. We will then want to satisfy the penance asked of us to complete the process of reconciliation.

The action of the priest and the definitiveness of absolution form a strong foundation upon which we can base certain hope in our resurrection and rebuild our lives after a period of darkness and wandering. This gift of definitive absolution is so powerful that I have seen it turn the lives of thousands of college students from a downward to an upward spiral – giving them not only a *feeling* of being restored to relationship with the Lord, but a resolve to reorient their lives towards God’s goodness and will. I have been involved in many FOCUS conferences where literally thousands of students will participate in the sacrament of reconciliation – some of them for the first time since their confirmation. Some of them stand in line for hours to participate, but one feature is almost universal – they all have a renewed sense of hope and relationship with God – and they are resolved to maintain that new status as they return to their college campuses. I have also participated in dozens of reconciliation ceremonies at *Agapé* retreats and Ignatian retreats at Georgetown University, Seattle University, and Gonzaga University. The experience of the students is essentially the same.

Will they fall again and get themselves into darkness? Many will – but their recollection of rediscovering the sacrament of reconciliation induces them to return to it and restore their relationship with God. I believe this sacrament has almost a miraculous effect on people who have wandered away from faith and religious commitment. It is so powerful, so assuring, and so definitive that it allows people who have fallen away to pivot radically and build their lives anew. It is at once the foundation for forgiveness, restoration, healing, and conversion – the intention of Jesus Christ in giving men His authority and power to forgive sins for the life of the world.

The second grace of the sacrament is reconciliation with the Church. You might be thinking, “I can see why this would be important if we undermine someone’s faith, scandalized someone, or publicly apostatized – as might have been the case in the first three centuries of Christianity – but why would this be important in today’s Church where most penitents have not publicly undermined the Church or the Christian faith?” The key to understanding this is found in Saint Paul’s declaration about the Church as the Body of Christ:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. (1 Cor. 12: 12-14 & 26-27).

When we are baptized into the body of Christ – the Church – then we affect it for better or worse. If we wander into spiritual darkness, emptiness, and alienation, it brings that darkness, emptiness, and alienation into the rest of the body. The body of Christ – the Church -- does not feel it in the same way we do, but our darkness does cause the Church to suffer. This cannot be helped because we are loved by Christ and if we are suffering from spiritual darkness, Christ feels our suffering and alienation which is, in turn, communicated throughout His Body – the Church. Our darkness sends a haunted vibration or whisper -- a “compassion,” a “suffering with” to every member of the body – and this “aching” will not be resolved until we begin to move out of the darkness and return to the One who loves us.

In the sacrament of reconciliation, Christ has given the Church and the ministers of the sacrament (the priests) the authority and power to lift the darkness and to restore peace to our aching souls (see [NABRE John 20:23](#)). That is why the formula of absolution says, “By the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon *and peace*.” The sacrament not only brings absolution and reconciliation with God (the first grace), it also reunites us with Christ’s body, lifts our alienation and darkness, and sends our restored light and peace to all of its members. Thus, when we go to confession, we not only do it to reconcile *ourselves* to God, but also to bring light and peace to the Church – Christ’s body – which formerly felt our darkness and discord. Our participation in the sacrament of reconciliation, then, not only reunites us with Christ’s body, it is also a gift and grace to the Church with which we are reunited.

The third grace of the sacrament of reconciliation is healing. Though this grace comes primarily from receiving the Holy Eucharist (see Volume 9, Chapter Five), it is greatly enhanced by the sacrament of reconciliation for two reasons. First, if we are separated from God and the Church by our sin, we are unlikely to experience any healing of our darkness, alienation, emptiness, or loneliness. Spiritual wounds are similar to physical ones – as long as the wound is open and losing blood, healing cannot begin – and the longer the wound remains open, the weaker the body/soul becomes. Thus the sacrament of reconciliation is the initial step in healing both the wound and the soul. Its power to reconcile us to God and restore us to life in the Church enables the spiritual healing process to begin. At this juncture, our participation at mass and our reception of the Holy Eucharist can take over and build on the foundation initially wrought by the sacrament of reconciliation.

Secondly, the sacrament of reconciliation reinforces our resolve to do better in the future, and this “graced” resolve is precisely what enables us to make progress in the spiritual life. As we make little steps away from the darkness into the light, our souls, filled with the light, become stronger and healthier – that is, they are able to recognize wisdom and generate wisdom, recognize God’s presence and connect with it, recognize the needs of others and respond to



them, recognize pitfalls, dangers, and errors, and react to them – all of which enables us to love both God and neighbor more authentically and deeply. “Graced resolve” is healing of the highest order – because it leads to a purification of love that will define our relationship with God and one another forever.

The fourth grace of reconciliation – continued conversion -- is related to the previous point. The objective of conversion is to become like Christ – in His heart of love. In our discussion of Saint Paul (Chapter One, Section II.B.4), we explained Paul’s conviction that baptism helps us put off the life of the flesh (the strong tendency toward sin that Saint Augustine called “concupiscence”). The process of overcoming concupiscence does not stop at baptism --it – is continued in the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. As noted above, “graced resolve” is one of the major gifts of the sacrament of reconciliation – it blends the fruit of *our will* to do better (elicited by examination of conscience, contrition, and confession) with God’s grace – the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to go toward and stay in the light of Christ. Thus, “graced resolve” initiates and perpetuates the purification of our desires – what Saint Paul called “putting off the life of the flesh” and Saint Augustine called “concupiscence.”

Purification of desire has two dimensions – becoming less attached to disordered desires (leading toward spiritual darkness and alienation) and greater attachment to ordered desires (leading to the light, wisdom, and love of Christ). “Graced resolve” initiates and perpetuates both dimensions of purification of desire, because detachment from disordered desires and attachment to ordered ones requires the interaction of the fruit of our will with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Without willpower, resolve would be a fiction – there would be nothing for the Spirit to inspire. But once the sacrament of reconciliation has galvanized and fueled our resolve to do better (by examination of conscience, contrition, and confession), the Holy Spirit can act on that resolve, and enhance its effects on our process of detachment and attachment by imparting spiritual consolation toward good desires and affective desolation toward disordered desires (see Volume 16). Inspired by consolation and informed by desolation, our resolve to detach from the desires of darkness and attach to the desires of light, becomes much clearer and stronger than we could ever achieve on our own. We might say, then, that the sacrament of reconciliation galvanizes our resolve which enables the Holy Spirit to inspire it in our process of purifying our desires to conform more and more with those of Jesus Christ – that is, to imitate the heart of Christ.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Sacrament of the Sick**

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As with our treatment of the previous sacraments, we will begin with the foundations of the sacrament of the sick in the New Testament (Section I), proceed to a brief history of the sacrament (Section II), and then to the theology and practice of the sacrament today (Section III).

## I. Anointing and Sacrament of the Sick in the New Testament

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The anointing of the sick has a strong foundation in both the gospels and the Letter of James (c. 63 A.D.). The Catholic Church considers it a sacrament because working through the laying on of hands and the sign of blessed oil; it confers not only the forgiveness of sins, but also the healing power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (all of which are attested in the Letter of James cited below).<sup>61</sup> This sacramental view of anointing is implicit in Jesus' teaching during the ministry and His command after His resurrection.

In Mark 6, Jesus prepares His disciples with instructions for missionary activity, imparting on them the power to exorcize demons and to heal the sick by anointing them with oil. They did as Jesus instructed using His power to extend His ministry of exorcism and healing:

So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them (Mk. 6:12-13).

Jesus possessed the power to exorcise and heal the sick within Himself, but He shares these powers of the Holy Spirit with His disciples before His resurrection. Not only to extend His own mission of healing within the world, but to prepare them for their missionary activity after His resurrection.

After the resurrection, Jesus imparts the Holy Spirit to His apostles (at Pentecost) enabling them to heal people by "the laying on of hands in His name." The Marcan Appendix attests to this as follows:

In my name . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mk. 16: 17-18).

The Acts of the Apostles (Luke) is filled with many such healings,<sup>62</sup> and this power to heal through the laying on of hands in the name of Jesus became a foundation for the apostle's missionary activity and the conversion of many. Though the Marcan Appendix and the above passages from the Acts of the Apostles speak of healing through the laying on of hands, the Letter of James speaks only of the apostles "praying over the sick" and anointing them with oil:

Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders [*presbyters*] of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will

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<sup>61</sup> The formal declaration of the sacramentality of this sacred anointing by a priest was declared at the Council of Trent (Session XIV).

<sup>62</sup> For the laying on of hands, see Acts 8: 17-18, 9:17-18, 14:3, 19:12, and 28:8. For the name of Jesus, see Acts 3: 6-8, 5:12, 16:18,

raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (Jas 5:14-15).

Perhaps “praying over the sick” refers to laying on of hands, but it is unclear. What is clear is that prior to James’ Epistle, there was a strong convention (that James presupposes) of praying over and anointing the sick in the name of the Lord<sup>63</sup> for the forgiveness of sins, restoration to physical health, and restoration to spiritual health (“save”<sup>64</sup>).

Notice that the laying on of hands (in Matthew 16 and the many passages in Acts) and the anointing with oil (in Mark 6: 12-13 and James 5: 14-15) is not restricted to individuals who are in danger of death, but is open to any one who is seriously ill. Notice also that James assumes that physical healing is closely connected to spiritual healing (just as physical illness is connected with spiritual illness) – and so James weaves the two kinds of healing together in his description and formula for the anointing.

As we shall see in Section III, the Church combines the elements from all three scripture passages in the rite of the sacrament of the sick – the laying on of hands, the anointing with oil, the prayer for forgiveness, the prayer for physical healing, and the prayer for eternal salvation.

We may conclude from the above that Jesus intended to initiate a rite of anointing for the sick that would heal them not only physically, but spiritually. He gave His disciples the specific charism to do this on their missionary journeys, and gave them the Holy Spirit after His resurrection so that they too would have the power to forgive sins and heal the sick in His name. As long as physical healing is commensurate with God’s will (it will not take away graces helpful for our or others’ salvation or our or others’ freedom), the sick person has faith, and the presbyter (priest) lays his hands on him and anoints him in the name of Jesus with prayers for forgiveness, physical healing, and salvation, we should expect both spiritual healing (leading to salvation), as well as physical healing from the sacrament. However, if healing is not commensurate with God’s will (for the above reasons), then physical healing will not occur – but spiritual healing will always be present.

## **II.**

### **A Brief History of the Sacrament of the Sick**

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Though there are few passages from the early Church fathers (between 100 to 200 A.D.), attesting to the practice of laying hands on and anointing the sick, we may infer from its prevalence in the apostolic Church (witnessed in the Acts of the Apostles) and its later presence in the mid-third century (in Origen – see below), that the practice was also a central part of

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Leahy believes that “the Lord” probably refers to Jesus.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Leahy believes that James’ use of “save” (“sōzein”) in the phrase “the prayer of faith will save the sick man” refers to spiritual salvation because this is precisely the way he uses it throughout the rest of the letter. See Thomas Leahy 1990 “The Epistle of James” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* pp. 915-916.

church life between those years. Origen's description of the practice relies on the Letter of James with a few minor edits:

[The penitent Christian] does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine...[of] which the apostle James says: "If then there is anyone sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church and let them impose hands upon him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him."<sup>65</sup>

Notice that Origen interprets James' words "pray over him" as "impose hands upon him," which probably indicates that the 3<sup>rd</sup> century practice was the laying on of hands.

In *The Sacramentary of Serapion* (c 350 A.D.), we are given a blessing of the oil to be used for the anointing of the sick. Notice that it contains many of the elements of the Letter of James (as well as the homily of Origen), particularly with respect to infusing the power of Christ to effect both physical and spiritual healing – as well as the forgiveness of sins:

We beseech you, Savior of all men, you that have all virtue and power, Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we pray that you send down from heaven the healing power of the only-begotten [Son] upon this oil, so that for those who are anointed... it may be effected for the casting out of every disease and every bodily infirmity... for good grace and remission of sins.<sup>66</sup>

The first attempt to give a list of sacraments was made by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (c. 500 A.D.). He includes four sacraments we recognize today – baptism, the Holy Eucharist, unction (sacrament of the sick), and Holy Orders.<sup>67</sup> "Unction" here means "anointing for healing the whole person" and was commonly administered along with the laying on of hands.<sup>68</sup>

We can see the tradition and practice of anointing the sick in a sermon of Caesar of Arles (c. 542 A.D.):

As often as some infirmity overtakes a man, let him who is ill receive the body and blood of Christ; let him humbly and in faith ask the presbyters for blessed oil, to anoint his body, so that what was written may be fulfilled in him: 'Is anyone among you sick? Let him bring in the presbyters, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins, they will be forgiven him... See to it, brethren, that whoever is ill hasten to the church, both that he may receive health of body and will merit to obtain the forgiveness of his sin.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Origen *Homilies on Leviticus* 2:4.

<sup>66</sup> Bishop Serapion "Blessing of oil for the sick" in *The Sacramentary of Serapion* 29:1.

<sup>67</sup> Frank Leslie Cross, Elizabeth A. Livingstone 2005 *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press) p. 1445.

<sup>68</sup> See *ibid.* p. 1542.

<sup>69</sup> Caesar of Arles *Sermons* 13 [325]:3.

Notice that the tradition going back to the Letter of James appears to be well-known by the congregation of Caesar – not only the anointing of the sick, but also the reception of the body and blood of Christ which was also thought to be a powerful agent of spiritual *and* physical healing. This convention of uniting reception of the Eucharist with the anointing of the sick (prior to the 6<sup>th</sup> century) seems to be the basis for what later becomes viaticum (the reception of the Holy Eucharist before death).

In the early Middle Ages (perhaps around 700 A.D.), the anointing of the sick (“unction”) is joined closely to viaticum and the sacrament of penance in the three-fold rite to help the dying pass into the kingdom of God. This had the effect of gradually identifying the anointing of the sick with the three rites for the dying, and the sacrament became gradually more restricted to this purpose instead of healing the sick.<sup>70</sup> By the later Middle Ages (“Unction” became “extreme unction”). In the *Sentences* of Peter the Lombard (c. 1130-40 A.D.), the seven sacraments are identified as Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, *Extreme Unction*, Orders, and Matrimony.<sup>71</sup> The identification of the sacrament with “Extreme Unction” (final anointing before dying) continued through the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council.

Pope Paul VI promulgated a post-conciliar document on *the sacrament of anointing the sick* in 1972 that essentially returned to the original practice of the Church set out in James 5 and practiced in the first six centuries.<sup>72</sup> It encouraged the celebration of the sacrament for anyone who is seriously ill – or even those who are in danger of becoming seriously ill. This document prescribes the current form under which the sacrament is to be administered (which is described below in Section III). Though the sacrament is rightfully celebrated for those who are sick, it still remains one of the three sacraments to prepare the Christian for death and resurrection – the sacrament of penance, then the anointing of the sick, and thirdly the final reception of the Holy Eucharist called “viaticum” which refers to “the necessities for making a journey”.

### **III.**

## **Theology and Current Practice of the Sacrament of the Sick**

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We will first discuss the current form and administration of the sacrament since 1972<sup>73</sup> (Section III.A) and then proceed to a spiritual discussion of the effects of the sacrament (Section III.B).

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<sup>70</sup> See Ibid p. 1668.

<sup>71</sup> Peter the Lombard *Sentences* Book 4, dist. 1, num. 2. See also *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* p. 1445.

<sup>72</sup> See Pope Paul VI 1972 *Sacram Unctionem Infirorum (On the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick)* [https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apc\\_19721130\\_sacram-unctionem.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-vi_apc_19721130_sacram-unctionem.html). This was a post-conciliar document written to fulfill the requirement of the Second Vatican Council.

<sup>73</sup> See Pope Paul VI on *The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*.

### III.A

#### The Current Form and Administration of the Sacrament

The words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* give a succinct description of the parts of the liturgy constituting the sacrament of the sick. These reflect the mandates in Pope Paul VI's post-conciliar document, *Sacram Unctionem Infimorum (On the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick)*.

Bishops and priests are the ordinary ministers of this sacrament, and no one else may celebrate it. It may be celebrated within mass, outside of mass, in a communal ceremony, or individually – within a church or outside a church – wherever the sick may be (in a hospital, in hospice, or a personal home, etc). The following describes the essential rite of the sacrament outside of mass:

The Liturgy of the Word, preceded by an act of repentance, opens the celebration. The words of Christ, the witness of the apostles, awaken the faith of the sick person and of the community to ask the Lord for the strength of his Spirit... The celebration of the sacrament includes the following principal elements: the "priests of the Church" - in silence - lay hands on the sick; they pray over them in the faith of the Church - this is the epiclesis proper to this sacrament; they then anoint them with oil blessed, if possible, by the bishop (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1518-1519).

The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given to those who are seriously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with duly blessed oil - pressed from olives or from other plants - saying, only once: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1513).

If possible, it is preferable to give the sick person an opportunity for the sacrament of penance. If there is no possibility for the sick person to participate in the sacrament of penance, then a penitential rite followed by the words of absolution from mass<sup>74</sup> is done. When this is combined with the grace of the sacrament of the sick, the sick person may be certain of the Lord's forgiveness of his sin.

If a person is in danger of death, then it is preferable to give the sick person the opportunity for all three sacraments that will help him pass over from this world to the Lord – the sacrament of reconciliation followed by the sacrament of the sick, and concluding with the Holy Eucharist (which is viaticum for his journey to the Lord).

The sacrament of the sick may be celebrated within mass, and if celebrated this way, then the penitential rite precedes the Eucharistic prayer which precedes the sacrament of the sick which in turn precedes the reception of the Holy Eucharist – the final sacrament to be received.

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<sup>74</sup> "May Almighty God Have Mercy on you, forgive you your sins, and bring you to everlasting life."

If there is no sacred chrism blessed by the bishop available for the celebration of the sacrament, the priest may also bless the oil with the formula contained in *Sacram Unctionem Infimorum*.

The celebration of the sacrament -- with or without viaticum -- is concluded by a blessing of the sick person as well as any participants who may be nearby to support him.

### **III.B The Effects of the Sacrament**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes five graces of the sacrament of the sick as follows:

The special grace of the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick has as its effects:

- the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church;
- the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;
- the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;
- the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;
- the preparation for passing over to eternal life (CCC 1532).

We will consider each of these graces in turn.

The first grace -- the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ -- joins the sufferings of the sick person to the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. As explained in Volume 4 (Chapter Five), Jesus converted His suffering and death into an act of voluntary self-sacrifice to the Father, making himself a sin offering for the forgiveness of sins and the eternal salvation of all people in the world. Recall that Jesus viewed self-sacrifice (gift of self) as an act of unconditional love which had the power to forgive sins, transform hearts, and help us to enter into eternal life with Him. Saint Paul invites us to join our sufferings to Jesus' sufferings to transform them into the same loving grace that the Father will use to help the Church and redeem the world (see Col. 1:24). The sacrament of the sick helps us to make this offering of ourselves in imitation of Jesus so that our sufferings may have an optimally good effect on our families, friends, strangers, and the whole kingdom of God. Saint Therese of Lisieux turned this self-offering into a whole spiritual life which became her reason for living as she died from tuberculosis.

The second grace of the sacrament is the peace and courage to endure suffering through our Christian faith. We may recall times when we have lost a loved one or suffered a setback, and in the midst of feeling grief and loss, we also feel an overwhelming sense of peace -- that everything is going to be alright -- that God is taking care of everything. Even though we have no idea why this would be the case -- or how it might come to pass -- we have a strong sense of

conviction and peace that we do not have to be in charge because God is already taking care of us and the ones we love. Sometimes the Lord gives us this peace, conviction, and courage gratuitously, nevertheless He likes to be asked – and this sacrament is the ideal way to do so, because His Son has provided us with the Holy Spirit who brings to us “peace beyond all understanding”<sup>75</sup> through the laying on of hands and the anointing with sacred oil (see Mk. 6:12-13 & 16:17-18). Many have been the times I have seen this peace flow through the recipients of Holy Anointing before surgeries, extensive medical treatments, and passing from this world to the next.

The third grace -- the forgiveness of sins – is given through the sacrament of the sick as James proclaims – “and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven” (Jas. 5:15). As noted above (Chapter Three), the sacrament of reconciliation has several distinct graces that make it the ideal way to obtain the forgiveness of sins, reunification with the mystical body of Christ, and graced resolve to do better in the future. Nevertheless, there are many occasions in which a sick person will not be able to receive the sacrament of reconciliation before receiving the sacrament of the sick – time is short and the sick person is not able to prepare for reconciliation, cognitive impairment from injury or illness, inability to concentrate for long enough periods of time to examine conscience and confess sins, etc. In all such cases, the sacrament of the sick, by itself, is capable of mediating through the bishop or priest, Christ’s gift of the forgiveness of sins. Evidently, this gift – along with viaticum – is essential for a dying person – as well as those who are seriously ill.

The fourth grace – restoration to health – is a grace of the sacrament effected by both the laying on of hands and the anointing with sacred oil. Recall that there are many opportunities in sickness and suffering that help us toward salvation (and also help us to help others toward salvation) – shocking us out of superficial or dark lives, strengthening our reliance on God, helping us to be humble, deepening our empathy and compassion, and helping us to live in the light of faith and the Holy Spirit so that we can become true spiritual leaders, imitating Jesus in His self-offering to the Father (unconditional love) for the world. If sickness and suffering are having these important good effects on us, then the Lord will not remedy our illness through the sacrament of the sick. His first priority is to *save us*, His second priority to help us lead others to salvation, and His third priority to alleviate sickness and suffering. Hence, this fourth grace – restoration to health through the supernatural power of God – will only occur if it does not interrupt the more important graces of salvation, spiritual efficacy, and spiritual leadership. However, if our sickness or suffering is not needed for these more important graces, then we can be sure, in faith, that God’s supernatural power will help us to regain our health. This does not mean that we should rely solely on supernatural power through the grace of the sacrament to heal us. We should avail ourselves of every feasible and ethical medical treatment to restore our health, and then complement these treatments with the supernatural power of God. Grace builds on nature – not only in our spiritual lives, but also in our physical bodies.

The fifth grace of the sacrament is preparation to pass over into eternal life. It is really a combination of the previous four graces – forgiveness to reconcile us with God, peace to settle our minds and hearts amidst apprehensions at the time of passing, the endurance of suffering

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<sup>75</sup> Phil. 4:7.



during the time of transition, and the grace to unite our sufferings with those of Christ. As we listen to the words of the sacramental formula, “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up,” the Spirit galvanizes our sense of peace, endurance, and confidence so that when we receive Christ’s body and blood, we will meet him in our hearts as he prepare us to leave this world and go to His kingdom.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Holy Orders**

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As in the previous four chapters, we will begin our explanation of the sacrament of Holy Orders by examining its roots in scripture (Section I), proceed to a brief history of its development in the West (Section II), and finally proceed to an explanation of the theology and practice of the sacrament today (Section III).

#### **I.**

### **The Sacrament of Holy Orders in the New Testament**

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The New Testament does not speak about the ministerial priesthood arising out of the sacrament of Holy Orders, but rather about apostles, prophets, and presbyters who are responsible for celebrating the Eucharistic commemoration. As was explained (in Volume 9, Chapter Two), the apostolic Church did not want to confuse their ordained ministers (apostles and prophets) with the Jewish priesthood, and so it shied away from using the term “priest” of its ordained ministers. Nevertheless, New Testament sources reveal that the successors to the apostles became known as “bishops” (“*Episcopoi*”) and successors to the prophets became “*Presbyteroi*.” Later, in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Presbyteroi were called “priests,” because of the association of the Eucharistic celebration with a sacrifice in the 1<sup>st</sup> century onward. Let’s examine some of these New Testament texts.

We have four primary texts showing Jesus’ intention to initiate a special ministerial office (having special powers) within the Church. We have seen these passages before – the first with respect to Jesus’ institution of the Holy Eucharist, and the second passage with respect to the sacrament of penance or reconciliation, the third with respect to the juridical authority to excommunicate and restore membership within the community, and the fourth with respect to baptism. Let us examine each passage.

In all three synoptic gospels, Jesus concludes His Eucharistic commemoration with the words of anamnesis – “Do this in memory of me” (Mt. 26: 17-30, Mk. 14:12-26, Lk. 22:7-30). As explained in Volume 9 (Chapter One), these words are addressed to the apostles who are being directed by Jesus to commemorate his Eucharistic words after His passion and resurrection. Recall that this commemoration produces a collapse of time that brings the grace of

the past (Jesus' whole self given in complete self-offering – unconditional love) into the present through the reliving of the Eucharistic event by designated presiders of the ritual. The Apostolic Church interpreted Jesus' words to mean that not only the apostles would be official presiders over the Eucharistic commemoration, but also their successors and a second tier of leaders – the prophets (explained below).

The second passage concerned with Jesus' intention to initiate a special ministerial office for the apostles and their successor is John 20:21-23:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

As we saw in Chapter Three above, Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit on the apostles to give them the power to forgive sins in His place. He is calling them to a special ministerial status through these special powers – and this special indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Again, the apostolic church interpreted Jesus' intention in this action to be not only for the apostles, but also for their successors and the prophets (the second rung of Church leadership).

The third passage indicating Jesus' intention to create a special ministerial office is Matthew 18:18.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

As noted above (Chapter Three), this passage refers to the apostles' power to excommunicate (exclude) a person from the community, as well as the power to restore a person to the community after excommunication. This is a juridical power that complements the power to forgive sins imparted by Jesus in John 20:23.

The fourth passage concerned with Jesus' intention to start a special ministerial office is Matthew 28:18-19:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."...

After the Resurrection, the Disciples see the risen Jesus in His glory, at which point He commissions them to evangelize all nations and to baptize them, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Though there is disagreement about whether Jesus would have used the Trinitarian Formula of Baptism, the matter is really a moot point with respect to the institution of the sacrament of Baptism. Matthew validates that the apostolic church clearly believed that the

apostles and their successors were infused with the power to baptize all peoples not only in the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but also in the name of the Father.

What can we conclude from these four gospel passages? It is quite clear that Jesus intended to give a special ministerial office to the apostles by imparting four ministerial powers (authority) upon them.<sup>76</sup>

As will be seen below, the Apostles understood themselves to have one other ministerial power—the power to convey the ministerial office (and its four powers) to other worthy disciples to carry out the work of evangelization to which Jesus had commissioned them. The Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul speak of this additional power as belonging to the apostles and their successors (the *Episcopoi*) alone.

As noted in Volume 9 (Chapter Two), Luke indicates that Paul & Barnabas appointed elders (presbyters) by the laying on of hands in the missionary regions they visited:

And when they had appointed [ordained through the laying on of hands]<sup>77</sup> elders [presbyters] for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed (Acts 14:23).

What is the office of elder (presbyter)? In the Old Testament, “elders” have considerable authority—tantamount to scribes and priests—and their authority to interpret Torah was significant.<sup>78</sup> In the Christian church, elders were accorded similar authority to teach, preach, and minister to the people. They were commissioned in the same way as elders in the Old Testament – by the laying on of hands (Num. 27:18-23; Deut 34:9). Robert Wild suggests that the discernment of worthy candidates occurred through the community’s prophets who discerned the charism of possible candidates. When they were selected, the apostles and elders laid hands on them conveying special charisms of the Holy Spirit for their ministerial office.<sup>79</sup>

The elders (presbyters) are associated with the Apostles and have authority similar to them during the Council of Jerusalem (see Acts 15).<sup>80</sup> Though the powers of the elders are not explicitly listed in the New Testament, we can infer from passages in the pastoral letters and the letter of James that they had the power to teach, preach (1 Tim 5:17), and minister to the sick (James 5:14-15). We might also infer from 1 Timothy 4:14 that elders were given the charism of prophecy through the laying on of hands.

As noted in Volume 9 (Chapter 2), prophecy is second only to the office of apostle in the early church (see 1 Cor 12:28). It may seem strange to refer to the prophetic charism as indicative

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<sup>76</sup> The term “apostle” means “one who is sent away” or “one who is sent on mission.” When Jesus gave the apostles the four powers described above, He changes the meaning of the term from “one who is sent” to “one who has a ministerial office instituted by Jesus who imparted His ministerial power and authority on them.”

<sup>77</sup> The Greek words “*cheirotoneo*” (literally – “hand-outstretching selecting”) means more than “appointment.” It refers directly to the laying on of hands which refers to ordination to the Presbyterate (see 1 Tim. 4:14).

<sup>78</sup> John McKenzie, S.J., 1965, “*Dictionary of the Bible*”, p 226

<sup>79</sup> Robert Wild, 1990 “The Pastoral Letters” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p 898

<sup>80</sup> See John McKenzie, 1965, “*Dictionary of the Bible*”, p226

of a ministerial office, but this seems to be the understanding of St. Paul and the Apostolic Church. Moreover, this ministerial office seems to be similar to that of the Apostles in authority (see Rom12:6, 1Cor12:10, Eph 2:20, 3:5, 4:11).<sup>81</sup> Prophets not only had the charism to speak on behalf of God (as in the Old Testament), but also a cultic charism (to carry out the ministries assigned to the Apostles—to celebrate the Eucharist, Baptism, Forgiveness of Sins, and to determine membership or exclusion from the Christian community).<sup>82</sup> This cultic function of the prophets is confirmed in the *Didache* (written c. 95 A.D.) which explicitly mentions the roles of the apostles and the prophets in the Eucharist: “but suffer the prophets to hold Eucharist as they will.”<sup>83</sup> The *Didache* also indicates that there were itinerant apostles and prophets in missionary territories who celebrated the Eucharistic Commemoration.<sup>84</sup>

The prophetic office—and its special authority and power within the Church—closely parallels the later-mentioned office of elders (presbyters) in the Acts of the Apostles (written c. 85 A.D.) and the Pastoral Letters (written c. 100 A.D.).<sup>85</sup> Apparently, in the 20 or so years between the writing of Paul’s letters and the completion of the Acts of the Apostles, the ministerial and leadership office of prophet is gradually referred to as the “office of presbyter.” They are essentially the same office with similar authority and power to lead the Church in a particular region (or a part of a region) as well as to preach, teach, and celebrate the Eucharist and other cultic activities.

By 100 A.D. (the writing of the Letter to Titus), the office of prophet has transitioned almost fully into the office of presbyter, and presbyters are being appointed (through the laying on of hands) by bishops (Episcopoi) in every missionary region:

"This is why I left you in Crete, that you amend what was defective, and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you" (*Titus* 1:5).

How did the office of bishop (Episcopoi) develop? By the year 100 A.D. (the writing of the Pastoral Letters) all the Apostles had passed away, and so the office of Apostle had no membership. The new office of the successors to the Apostles was eventually called “*Episcopoi*” (overseers or guardians). Episcopoi were already recognized as a group of trusted leaders in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians (see Phil.1:1). By the writing of the Pastoral Letters, Episcopoi had two functions:

- Leaders of household churches in which a local community congregated (for the Eucharistic commemoration and other ministries), and
- A regional leader (succeeding the apostles) with the power to appoint presbyters and to monitor, correct, and discipline other bishops (leaders of household churches).

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<sup>81</sup> See John McKenzie, 1965, “*Dictionary of the Bible*”, p 699

<sup>82</sup> See *ibid*

<sup>83</sup> See *Didache* 10:7

<sup>84</sup> In *Didache* Chapter 11, a set of rules is given to distinguish true apostles and prophets from false apostles and prophets, with the implication being that there were itinerant apostles and prophets who had to be tested before they would be allowed to celebrate the Eucharist (see *Didache* 10:7) and instruct the faithful.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Wild, 1990 “The Pastoral Letters” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p 893

In the Letter to Titus, the Pauline author treats Titus as a successor to the apostle Paul in the region of Crete, and instructs him not only to appoint presbyters in all towns, but also to monitor, correct, and discipline “bishops” (presumably leaders of household churches):

This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you... A bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless... He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it (Titus 1: 5-9).

Titus, as bishop of bishops, and successor to the apostle Paul in the region of Crete appears to have the same powers and authority as bishops today. This is borne out by the development of the office in the early second century.

## **II.**

### **Bishops, Presbyters, and Priests from the New Testament through the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century**

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The leadership authority of bishops over presbyters is set in place by 100 A.D. as manifest by the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch (died c. 105 A.D.). As bishop of Antioch, he demonstrated his regional authority as a successor of the apostles, and also insisted that the presbyters and deacons within *every* regional church submit themselves to their bishop. For example, in the Letter to the Magnesians 2, he writes:

Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest.<sup>86</sup>

What can we conclude about the ministerial offices within the Catholic Church<sup>87</sup> during the 1<sup>st</sup> Century? Jesus imparted a ministerial office on the Apostles with the power and authority to lead the Church and administer three sacraments—Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and Forgiveness of Sins (Reconciliation). He also gave them the power to excommunicate and readmit members to the Church community. Holders of this office were originally called “prophets” and then “presbyters” and finally in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, “priests.” This office became the foundation of the ministerial priesthood we know today.

How did this occur? After Pentecost, the apostles apparently appointed prophets by the laying on of hands as presiders of the Eucharist, reconciliation, and baptism to assist them in

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<sup>86</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1

<sup>87</sup> The term “Catholic church” – meaning “of the whole” or “the whole church” as a “unified body” is used by St. Ignatius of Antioch in the letter to the Smyrnaeans in 107 AD. He uses it in a way that implies its use in the Church prior to him. See Letter to Smyrnaeans 8.

ministry and leadership. They not only had cultic authority (to celebrate the Eucharist, Baptize, and forgive sins), but also the authority to teach and preach, and exercise limited juridical authority. Though it seems that Paul was aware of the term “presbyters/elders” (see Acts 14:23), he does not use it in his letters, preferring the term “prophets” to refer to this second highest ministerial office. However, the Jerusalem church (under James) who kept closer ties with Jewish tradition did use the term “presbyter/elders” (see Acts 11:30 & 15:22).

The Jerusalem Church would have recognized and valued the parallels between the Christian office of prophets and the Jewish tradition of “presbyters/elders” as those holding a prophetic leadership office communicated by the laying on of hands. Between 64 A.D. (the conclusion to Saint Paul’s Letters) and 100 A.D. (the writing of the Pastoral Letters and those of Ignatius of Antioch), the office of prophet seems to have transitioned into the office of presbyter/elder -- giving emphasis to the terminology of the Jerusalem Church. After 100 A.D. the term “presbyter,” with a few exceptions,<sup>88</sup> was used to refer to this ministerial and leadership office.

Bishops (Episcopoi/overseers) became successors to the Apostles after most of the Apostles had died (c. 80 A.D.?). Prior to that time, the term “Episcopoi” was used to refer to church leaders within Paul’s gentile missionary areas (see Phil. 1:1). The term was also used to refer to leaders of house churches and regional churches. Most of the apostles started regional churches in their missionary journeys, and as they died, they were replaced by Episcopoi. By the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, “Episcopoi” was used to refer to the head of a regional church as well as the presbyters and deacons serving there.<sup>89</sup> Thus at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, bishops (Episcopoi) were heads of regional churches, the presbyters were second in rank – presiding over the liturgy, preaching and teaching. Deacons helped their bishop and presbyters with works of mercy and a myriad of other kinds of service to the Church. Bishops and presbyters were ordained by the laying on of hands to receive special powers of the Holy Spirit for their ministry.

One other group was admitted to orders by the laying on of hands – deacons who were designated to help with the administration of the Church so that the apostles (and presumably the prophets/presbyters) could devote themselves to preaching and evangelizing:

Now in those days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmentas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them (Acts 6: 1-6).

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<sup>88</sup> The above passages of the *Didache* still refer the ministerial office as “prophets.”

<sup>89</sup> See the above cited quotation of Ignatius of Antioch – Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch (c. 105 A.D.) clearly acknowledges deacons as a high office in the Church after the bishops and presbyters.<sup>90</sup> Though he does not say specifically that deacons are ordained by the laying on of hands, he implies that they are of special ministerial status enjoying collegiality with the bishop similar to that of presbyters.

Thus at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, there is a clear delineation of three ministerial offices grounded in the laying on of hands performed by the bishop who is in the line of apostolic succession: bishops themselves (Episcopoi), presbyters, and deacons. Inasmuch as these ministerial offices originate with ordination (the laying on of hands), the sacrament is referred to as “orders” or “holy orders.”

Bishops are not the highest authority in the Church in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. This supreme authority belongs to the Pope – the successor of Peter in the See of Rome -- alone. As noted in Volume 6 (Chapter Two), bishops were *regional* authorities, but subject to the Pope. The Letter of Clement of Rome (fourth pope succeeding Saint Peter at the Roman See from 80 – 99 A.D.) makes this clear. Clement believed that he held the power to adjudicate a dispute taking place in the Church at Corinth – where a certain group of the faithful had deposed their leaders. Clement claims that he holds the authority of God and is speaking through the Holy Spirit when he makes a definitive judgment telling the group of deponents to restore their leaders immediately under pain of grave sin:

Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and misfortunes which have befallen us, we must acknowledge that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute among you, beloved; and especially that abominable and unholy sedition, alien and foreign to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-willed persons have inflamed to such madness that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be loved by all men, has been greatly defamed. . . . Accept our counsel and you will have nothing to regret. . . . If anyone disobey the things which have been said by him [God] **through us** [i.e., that you must reinstate your leaders], let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger. . . . You will afford us joy and gladness if being obedient to the things which we have **written through the Holy Spirit**, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy." <sup>91</sup>

Clement’s use of “obedience” and “disobedience” reveals his conviction that he has supreme authority to adjudicate matters in the Corinthian Church under pain of sin with the authority of God. The view of the Roman See as the highest authority over regional Sees is shared by Saint

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<sup>90</sup> “Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and with the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and with the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the business of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father from the beginning and is at last made manifest” (Saint Ignatius of Antioch Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1).

<sup>91</sup> *Letter to the Corinthians* 1, 58–59, 63.

<http://www.catholic.com/tracts/the-authority-of-the-pope-part-i>

Ignatius of Antioch. Writing shortly after Clement of Rome (c. 100 A.D.), he acknowledges the Roman Church to be president (highest authority) over his regional church as well as others:

Ignatius . . . to the church also which holds the *presidency*, in the location of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you hold the *presidency* in love, named after Christ and named after the Father.<sup>92</sup>

According to Ludwig Ott:

Clear recognition of the consciousness of the Primacy of the Roman Bishops, and of the recognition of the Primacy by the other churches appears at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century... St. Ignatius elevated the Roman community over all the communities using his epistle as a solemn form of address. Twice he says of it that it is the presiding community, which expresses a relationship of superiority...<sup>93</sup>

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, the general structure of Church hierarchy was completed – the Pope had supreme authority, bishops had regional authority, presbyters had parochial authority, and deacons had certain kinds of ministerial powers under the authority of their presbyters. One question remains – “Why weren’t presbyters called ‘priests’ in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century -- and when did this association occur? As noted in Volume 9 (Chapter 2), there is no clear mention of a ministerial priesthood in the New Testament. Though there is reference to the priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5&7) and the royal priesthood of the faithful (1 Peter 2:9), there is no clear expression of priesthood with respect to Christian ministry. Why didn’t the early Church clearly associate prophets and presbyters with “priests” who were designated as “offerors of sacrifice” in the Old Testament? After all, Jesus<sup>94</sup> (and His followers<sup>95</sup>) clearly associated the Eucharist with His self-sacrifice -- and the authority to celebrate that sacrifice (the Eucharist) was given to the apostles/bishops and prophets/presbyters.

As noted in Volume 9 (Chapter 2), there are three major reasons why the apostolic church did not associate prophets and presbyters with priests. First, as implied in the Letter to the Hebrews (Chaps 5&7), the early church would have had a keen interest to distinguish the animal sacrifices of the Levitical priesthood from the complete self-sacrifice of the Son of God. As noted in Volume 9 (in Chapter One), Jesus replaced the sacrificial animal with Himself – as the exclusive Son of the Father – to make perfect, eternal, and unconditional sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, liberation from evil, and sure impetus toward eternal life. The early church, recognizing the perfection and superiority of Jesus’ sacrifice (over previous sacrifices), would have wanted to keep them quite distinct.

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<sup>92</sup> Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Romans* 1:1.

<sup>93</sup> Ludwig Ott 2009 *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books) p. 283.

<sup>94</sup> See Chapter One above for a complete explanation.

<sup>95</sup> See *Didache* 14:1 – as explained above in this section.



Secondly, the Jewish priesthood was derived from the lineage of Aaron (Moses' brother and the first high priest of the Israelites). Jesus' self-sacrifice was meant for *all people* – not simply for the Jewish people served by the Levitical priesthood (in the lineage of Aaron). This universal character of Jesus' sacrifice and priesthood would have deterred the early church from making an association of Jesus' priesthood (manifest in the Eucharistic self-sacrifice) with the priesthood of Aaron. Furthermore, Jesus wanted to separate Himself from the Jewish temple (located in Jerusalem and associated with a single people) so that He would become in His own body the new universal temple for all people and all nations (see Volume 6, Chapter Two, Section I).

Thirdly, the Christian Church did not want to associate its apostles, prophets, and Presbyteroi with the lineage of Aaron, because it wanted to become – as Jesus had instructed – a universal Church where those who presided over the Eucharistic celebration could come from every race, people, and nation. As noted above, Paul ordained Presbyteroi in the local churches he initiated. A close association between prophets/presbyters and priesthood (associated with the Jewish Levitical priesthood) would have contradicted this – or at the very least, confused the issue.

After 80 A.D., when tensions between the synagogue and the Christian Church would force a separation between them, the Christian Church wanted to establish the superiority of Jesus' high priesthood over that of the Levitical priesthood of Aaron. This is explained in the Letter to the Hebrews, particularly Chapters 5&7.

So when did the concept of ministerial priesthood become attached to the Presbyteroi who were presiding over the Eucharistic commemoration of Jesus' self-sacrifice? The first clear indication is found in about 180 A.D. in St. Irenaeus' work *Against Heresies*:

And all the apostles of the Lord are priests, who do inherit here neither lands nor houses, but serve God and the altar continually.<sup>96</sup>

Around 232-235 A.D., Origen associates the apostles and their successors with priesthood:

So, too, the apostles, and those who have become like apostles, being priests according to the Great High Priest and having received knowledge of the service of God, know under the Spirit's teaching for which sins, and when, and how they ought to offer sacrifices, and recognize for which they ought not to do so.<sup>97</sup>

Apparently, by the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century (Irenaeus) and the early 3<sup>rd</sup> Century (Origen), the separation between Christianity and Judaism was so significant that concerns about associating Jesus'/Christian priesthood with Jewish priesthood had all but disappeared. As a result, Jesus' priesthood (manifest in His Eucharistic self-sacrifice) was freely associated with the commemoration of His Eucharistic self-sacrifice by bishops and presbyters – and so they were associated with "priests." Irenaeus relates this Presbyteral priesthood with the altar, and Origen

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<sup>96</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies* Bk. 4, Chap. 8, par. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Origen *On Prayer*, Chapter 18.

relates it to the forgiveness of sins. After the late 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, the office of presbyter was subsumed into the Christian ministerial priesthood.

What can be said about the requirement for celibacy on the part of apostles, bishops, and priests in the first three centuries of the Christian Church? It is clear from the above passages that many of the Apostles and early bishops/presbyters were married. So when did the requirement develop? In brief, it evolved throughout the third to fifth centuries because of Jesus' and St. Paul's preference for celibacy over marriage so that individuals could devote themselves completely to building the Kingdom of God. The theology and history of this development is explained in detail in Volume 11 (Chapter One, Section I.C.5).

### **III.**

#### **Holy Orders and the Ministerial Priesthood Today**

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From the above study of the New Testament and early history of prophets/presbyters/priests, we can infer the definition of Holy Orders given in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate (CCC 1536).

The *Catechism* goes on to explain the meaning of ordination and how it occurs:

[Ordination] is a religious and liturgical act which was a consecration, a blessing or a sacrament. Today the word "*ordination*" is reserved for the sacramental act which integrates a man into the order of bishops, presbyters, or deacons, and goes beyond a simple *election, designation, delegation, or institution* by the community, for it confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a "sacred power" (*sacra potestas*) which can come only from Christ himself through his Church. Ordination is also called *consecratio*, for it is a setting apart and an investiture by Christ himself for his Church. The *laying on of hands* by the bishop, with the consecratory prayer, constitutes the visible sign of this ordination (CCC 1538).

Ordination is an integration into one of the three ministerial offices ("ordo") instituted by Jesus – bishop, presbyter, or deacon. It confers special power of the Holy Spirit upon the ordinand through the laying on of hands and a special blessing of consecration by the bishop. Thus, ordination imparts a special gift of the Holy Spirit that gives a sacramental power, and sets the man apart as a successor of the apostles (consecration).

The priest, by virtue of his ordination, acts in the person of Christ himself who is the one and only high priest. In *Mediator Dei*, Pius XII explains:

It is the same priest, Christ Jesus, whose sacred person his minister truly represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is truly made like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself (*virtute ac persona ipsius Christi*).<sup>98</sup>

Though the association of presbyters with ministerial priests occurs initially in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, the “authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ” was given to the apostles and their successors by Jesus when he gave them the same three sacred powers he exercised throughout his ministry:

- The power to imitate him in the celebration of the Eucharist (“Do this in memory of me” -- Mt. 26: 17-30, Mk. 14:12-26, Lk. 22:7-30),
- The power to forgive sins (“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven” – Jn. 20:22 – as well as “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven” – Mt. 16:19 and Mt. 18:18 ),
- The power to teach and baptize (“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you” -- Matthew 28:18-19).

These ministerial commissions given to the apostles and their successors imparts the power of Christ himself -- to take the place of Christ the high priest.

The power to “act in the place of the person of Christ” is ministerial – it does not mean that a priest is always a reflection of the person of Christ. Priests can make theological errors and misleading statements; they can sin, be imprudent, and make poor judgments -- though they are called to do their best to imitate Christ whose person they represent. Since the priest acts in place of the person of Christ during his sacramental service, his sinfulness and imperfection cannot impede the power and perfection of Christ’s presence in the sacramental action (see CCC 1550).

As noted countless times above, there are three degrees of Holy Orders: bishops (the fullness of Holy Orders), presbyters (who share in the ministerial priesthood with the bishops, but are subordinate to them), and deacons (who are in service to the bishop and presbyters in the administration of the Church, but do not share in the ministerial priesthood). Thus there are two degrees of orders within ministerial priesthood – bishops and presbyters, and one non-priestly degree of orders – deacons. Each degree of orders has specific powers and authority that are imparted by the laying on of hands and the specific blessing of consecration. We will discuss each in turn.

*The office of bishop* – the fullness of Holy Orders –provides the sacred character needed: for the Church -- to act in the power and place of Christ as teacher, shepherd, and priest. It confers the offices of sanctifying, teaching, and ruling (see CCC 1558). It has five special powers/modes of

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<sup>98</sup> Pius XII, encyclical, *Mediator Dei*: AAS, 39 (1947) 548.

authority attached to it.<sup>99</sup> These have been recognized since the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>100</sup> Bishops hold these powers within an unbroken line of apostolic succession:

1. The authority to oversee a particular geographical region of the Church under the supreme authority of the Pope, including authority over presbyters and deacons as well as the laity.
2. Magisterial authority within the college of bishops – i.e. the power in concert with other bishops to act in ecumenical council to decree doctrines when done with the consent of the Pope.
3. The power to ordain priests and deacons.
4. The power in concert with other bishops to consecrate bishops (after approval from the Pope).
5. The *summa* of priesthood – the powers of priestly ordination and the authority of high priesthood within a region.

*The office of presbyter* shares in the ministry of priesthood. Through Holy Orders, presbyters/priests are also given the universal ministry to preach and build the kingdom throughout the whole world. Though priests can exercise their ministry only in dependence on and in communion with their bishop, they are given the authority to act in the power and place of Jesus Christ (See CCC 1567). As noted above (Section I), Jesus himself bestowed four sacramental powers – in addition to the authority to preach and teach -- upon them:

1. The power to act in place of His person in the Eucharistic commemoration (the mass).
2. The power to forgive sins.
3. The power to baptize.
4. The power to lay hands on and anoint the sick.

Using these powers in concert with the bishop and in collegial relationship with fellow priests, priests are missioned to bring Christ's salvation to the world.

*The office of deacon* – a non-priestly degree of Holy Orders – configures the deacon to the person of Christ who called himself “servant of the faithful” (Mt. 20:28). Deacons are appointed to help the bishop and presbyters in service, administration, and certain ritual celebrations. Diaconate ordination confers the power/authority to do the following (see CCC 1570):

1. To proclaim the gospel during the celebration of the mass and to preach (deliver the homily).
2. Assisting at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.
3. Assisting at and blessing marriages.
4. Presiding over funerals.
5. Dedicating themselves to works of charity.

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<sup>99</sup> See *Lumen Gentium* 21.

<sup>100</sup> See the above cited quotation of Ignatius of Antioch – Letter to the Magnesians 2, 6:1.

The permanent diaconate can be bestowed on married men who are involved in work and careers independent of the Church.

The celebration of Holy Orders – whether it be for the consecration of a bishop or the ordination of a priest or deacon – has as its central rite the laying on of hands (as described in 2 Tim. 1:6) and a special prayer of consecration. The prayer of consecration differs for bishops, presbyters, and deacons – and asks for the powers and authority specific to each office. When this central rite is completed, an indelible sacred character is imprinted on the newly ordained, which configures him to the person of Christ so that he can faithfully carry out the responsibilities of his new ministerial office.

There are some preliminary rituals preceding the central rite that are specific to each office. These are described in full from the Roman Missal online:

- The consecration of a bishop.<sup>101</sup>
- The ordination of a priest.<sup>102</sup>
- The ordination of a deacon.<sup>103</sup>

In conclusion, through the sacrament of baptism, the faithful are integrated into the common priesthood of the body of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9). Yet Christ also instituted a ministerial priesthood by giving the apostles and their successors, the commission, authority, and special ministerial powers to preside over the sacraments and the governance of the Church. Thus, ordained ministers -- whether they be bishops, presbyters, or deacons – are the unifying and governing fabric of the Church without which it would not exist. The sacrament of Holy Orders confers a special, indelible, sacred character upon the ordained minister that cannot be repeated or removed. It configures him to the person of Christ, and enables priests (bishops and presbyters) to act in the power and place of his person. The integral hierarchical structure of the Church that results from Christ's institution of ordained ministry to the apostles and their successors is summarized as follows in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

Since the beginning, the ordained ministry has been conferred and exercised in three degrees: that of bishops, that of presbyters, and that of deacons. The ministries conferred by ordination are irreplaceable for the organic structure of the Church: without the bishop, presbyters, and deacons, one cannot speak of the Church (cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Trall.* 3,1). The bishop receives the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders, which integrates him into the episcopal college and makes him the visible head of the particular Church entrusted to him. As successors of the apostles and members of the college, the bishops share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of

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<sup>101</sup> See St. Thomas University 1968 “Rite of Ordination of a Bishop) -- [http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/jmjoncas/LiturgicalStudiesInternetLinks/ChristianWorship/Texts/Centuries/Texts\\_1900\\_2000CE/RCWorshipTexts1900\\_2000CE/Rite\\_of\\_Ordination\\_of\\_a\\_Deacon.htm](http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/jmjoncas/LiturgicalStudiesInternetLinks/ChristianWorship/Texts/Centuries/Texts_1900_2000CE/RCWorshipTexts1900_2000CE/Rite_of_Ordination_of_a_Deacon.htm).

<sup>102</sup> See the Roman Pontifical 1962 “Ordination of a priest” -- <http://www.sanctamissa.org/en/resources/books-1962/rituale-romanum/40-the-sacrament-of-holy-orders-rite-of-priestly-ordination.html>

<sup>103</sup> See St. Thomas University 1968 “The Rite of Ordination of a Deacon” -- [http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/jmjoncas/LiturgicalStudiesInternetLinks/ChristianWorship/Texts/Centuries/Texts\\_1900\\_2000CE/RCWorshipTexts1900\\_2000CE/Rite\\_of\\_Ordination\\_of\\_a\\_Deacon.htm](http://courseweb.stthomas.edu/jmjoncas/LiturgicalStudiesInternetLinks/ChristianWorship/Texts/Centuries/Texts_1900_2000CE/RCWorshipTexts1900_2000CE/Rite_of_Ordination_of_a_Deacon.htm).

the Pope, successor of St. Peter. Priests are united with the bishops in sacerdotal dignity and at the same time depend on them in the exercise of their pastoral functions; they are called to be the bishops' prudent co-workers. They form around their bishop the presbyterium which bears responsibility with him for the particular Church. They receive from the bishop the charge of a parish community or a determinate ecclesial office. Deacons are ministers ordained for tasks of service of the Church; they do not receive the ministerial priesthood, but ordination confers on them important functions in the ministry of the word, divine worship, pastoral governance, and the service of charity, tasks which they must carry out under the pastoral authority of their bishop (*CCC* 1593-1596).