Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 42, No. 2, 361-382.
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SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY AND ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITY

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Introduction

Sacramental theology developed as a corollary to Christian soteriology. While Christianity promises salvation to all who accept it, different theories have developed as to how salvation is obtained or transmitted. Understanding the problem of the sacraments as the means of salvation, therefore, is a crucial soteriological issue of considerable relevance to contemporary Christians. Furthermore, sacramental theology exerts considerable influence upon ecclesiology, particularly ecclesiastical authority.

The purpose of this paper is to present the historical development of sacramental theology, leading to the contemporary understanding of the sacraments within various Christian confessions; and to discuss the relationship between the sacraments and ecclesiastical authority, with special reference to the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation.

The Development of Roman Catholic Sacramental Theology

The Early Church

The origin of modern Roman Catholic sacramental theology developed in the earliest history of the Christian church. While the NT does not utilize the term "sacrament," some scholars speculate that the postapostolic church felt it necessary to bring Christianity into line with other religions of the time, which utilized various "mysterious rites." The Greek equivalent for the term "sacrament," *musterion*, reinforces this view. In addition to the Lord's Supper and baptism, which had always carried special importance, the early church recognized many rites as "holy ordinances."[1] It was not until the Middle Ages that the number of sacraments was officially defined.[2]

The term "sacrament," a translation of the Latin *sacramentum* ("oath,"

[1]G. Bornkamm, "Musterion," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:824-827.

[2]Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 800.

"pledge"), derives its meaning from the word *sacrare*, which, in turn, points to a person or thing set aside for public authority by divine right (*ius divinum*).[3] Its common usage refers to an act of consecration, to the one performing it, or to the person or thing being consecrated. The oath of allegiance and loyalty to the Roman Emperor, thus, was considered a *sacramentum*, as the soldiers dedicated themselves in service to the gods and their divinely instituted representative, the Emperor.[4]

In the Christian church, the most significant development of sacramental theology occurred in Roman North Africa during the third and fourth centuries, especially in the writings of Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 225), Cyprian of Carthage (ca.200-258), and Augustine of Hippo (354-430). While some discussion regarding the nature of Christian rites occurred during the second century in writings such as the *Didache* (ca. 80-100)[5] and the work of Irenaeus (ca.130-ca.200),[6] scholars are in agreement that it was only with Tertullian that the term "sacrament" entered Christian theology.[7] Tertullian exploits the theological significance of the parallel between the sacraments and military oaths. Just as the *sacramentum* was a sign of allegiance and loyalty to the Roman Emperor, the sacraments point to commitment and loyalty within the church. Most importantly, however, Tertullian appears to be the first Christian thinker to identify the Latin *sacramentum* with the

[3]Avery R. Dulles, *A Church to Believe In* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 83.

[4]Bornkamm, 4:827. The term *sacramentum* was also used in various secular settings, i.e., with reference to oaths in legal proceedings and financial matters.

[5]See *Did.* 7.1-4; 9.1-5, in *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation,* ed. Edgar J. Goodspeed (London: Independent Press, 1950), 11-18. The *Didache* is an important document of Christian antiquity and has been considered the first Christian catechism. Since the discovery of the *Didache* in 1875, its authorship and date have been debated. Most scholars place it at the end of the first century. The importance of this early document lies in the fact that it gives insight into early Church ministry and, according to some, parallels much of the NT data. See Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church: The First Christian Century,* 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 1:483-501.

[6]For Ireneaus, baptism is "the seal of eternal life" and a "rebirth unto God, that we be no more children of mortal men, but of the eternal and everlasting God" (*Epid.* 3, in *Ancient Christian Writers,* 16 vols., ed. Joseph P. Smith [New York: Newman, 1952], 16:49). Participation in the Eucharist not only nourishes and supports believers, but it also transforms them in such a way that they are "no longer corruptible, having the hope of the eternal resurrection" (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.18.4-6, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969]). Unless otherwise noted, references to Ante-Nicene Fathers will be taken from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* edition.

[7]Cf. Bornkamm, 4:826-827; and Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), s.v. "Sacrament," 911.

biblical *musterion*,[8] though in the NT *musterion* is used specifically with reference to the saving work of God[9] and is never applied to such rites as the Lord's Supper or baptism. As will become evident shortly, this identification proved to be a watershed in Catholic thinking. Thus Tertullian may be regarded as the father of Roman Catholic sacramental theology.

Cyprian, Tertullian's most influential pupil, contributed to the development of sacramental theology by developing the notion of sacramental efficacy—a theme later expanded in the writings of Augustine. In his writings, which are chiefly concerned with church unity,[10] Cyprian argued that no true sacraments could exist outside of the church, therefore, there cannot be salvation outside of the church.[11] Thus, Cyprian was the first influential Christian thinker to link participation in the holy rites of the church with salvation. Cyprian also applied the OT passages regarding priesthood to the ministry of Christian bishops, thereby contributing to the development of sacerdotalism.[12] This new terminology was applied especially to the Eucharist and to baptism, of which, according to Cyprian, the bishop was the *only* celebrant.[13] This innovation elevated the authority of the

[8]See Tertullian, *Praescr.* 40, *Bapt.* 13, and *Nat.*, where he appears to use these terms interchangeably, while comparing pagan "mysteries" with Christian sacraments, although he never designates pagan rituals as sacraments. For him, pagan rituals constitute a depraved imitation of the Christian sacraments.

[9]Bornkamm, 4:822. See Rom 11:25ff.; 1 Cor 15:51; Eph 1:9-10. Cf. Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *LW*, 56 vols., ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), 36:93.

[10]See especially Cyprian's treatise *Unit. eccl.* (5:421-429). Cyprian's theology arose within a context of difficult historical circumstances. Severe persecution and schismatic movements threatened the well-being of the church.

[11]Cyprian, *Letter* 73.11; idem, *Unit. eccl.* 6.

[12]In other words, relating to priesthood. Cyprian is responsible for extending the OT passages regarding the priesthood to the ministry of Christian bishops. For him, the Bishop "truly discharges the office of Christ . . . [and] imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father, when he proceeds to offer it according to what he sees Christ Himself to have offered" (*Letter* 63.14). The Bishop, thus, becomes a sacrificing priest in the order of the Jewish priesthood. If Christ was the originator of the Jewish priesthood, then the Hebrew priests are the predecessors of the Christian priesthood (idem, *Letter* 67.4). This connection between the Jewish and Christian priesthood is also clearly seen in *Letter* 64. This development paved the way for the later Catholic teaching that the episcopacy was an indispensable channel of God's grace and blessing. For a more detailed description of Cyprian's views, see Edward White Benson, *Cyprian, His Life: His Times, His Work* (London: MacMillan, 1897).

[13]Cyprian, *Letter* 62. Edward Schillebeeckx notes that originally the title "priest" was bestowed only on the bishop. However, with the passage of time, as presbyters

episcopate and contributed to the rise of clericalism, a doctrine that promotes separation between the clergy and laity, as it caused the spiritual life of the faithful to be entirely dependent upon the bishop.[14] In agreement with J. B. Lightfoot, it may be said that "Cyprian took his stand on the combination of the ecclesiastical authority . . . with the sacerdotal claim which he himself endorsed and which has ever since dominated the understanding of Roman Catholic ministry."[15]

Augustine was the first Christian theologian to give serious thought to the nature of the sacraments. Without his work, the medieval teaching regarding the sacraments would have been entirely incoherent. Like his predecessors, Augustine's sacramental theology is characterized by a certain flexibility that was only exhibited during the era of Scholasticism. As a result, he was willing to ascribe the term "sacrament" to a variety of rites and practices.[16] In a more specific way, however, he applied the term to the Eucharist, to baptism, and to ordination.[17] Augustine's contribution is twofold. First, he provided a

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increasingly replaced bishops at the Eucharist, they too were finally called priests. In this way, "sacerdotalizing" enveloped all ministers of the church (*Ministry* [New York: Crossroad, 1981], 48-49).

[14]Thus Cyprian wrote: "Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church" (*Letter* 68.8).

[15]J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: MacMillan, 1869), 240. Cf. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner's, 1970), 67, 90-91; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 159.

[16]Thus Augustine writes: "The celebration of an event becomes sacramental in its nature, only when the commemoration of the event is so ordered that it is understood to be significant of something which is to be received with reverence as sacred" (*Letter* 55.1.2 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (*NPNF*), First Series, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956; unless otherwise indicated, references to the Nicene Fathers will come from this edition). These "sacraments, which are in number very few, in observance most easy, and in significance most excellent, as baptism solemnized in the name of the Trinity, the communion of his body and blood, and such other things as are prescribed in the canonical Scriptures, with the exception of those enactments which were a yoke of bondage to God's ancient people, suited to their state of heart and to the times of the prophets, and which are found in the five books of Moses" (Augustine, *Letter* 54.1.1). It is also interesting to note that Augustine considered the ordinance of foot washing as sacramental (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 80.3).

[17]Augustine, *Letter* 54.1.1; idem, *Letter* 61.2; idem, *Bon. conj.*, 21, 32. Augustine's sacramental theology, like that of Cyprian's, developed within doctrinal controversies. In Augustine's case, it was Donatism and Pelagianism. For a description of his involvement in these debates, see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s.v. "Augustine, St. of Hippo."

clear definition of the sacraments, which reads: "[S]ymbolical actions . . . pertaining to divine things, are called sacraments,"[18] or "A sacrament . . . is the visible sacrament or sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice."[19] In order to function as sacraments, however, these "signs" must bear some relation to that which is signified (e.g., wine resembles blood).[20] Second, Augustine established a clear distinction between the use of the sacraments and their efficacy.[21] His views on this matter arose during the Donatist controversy, in which he was deeply involved.[22] Donatists questioned the validity of sacraments performed by heretical/schismatic ministers or those whose personal worthiness had been compromised. Thus, they argued, the Eucharist, baptisms, and ordinations performed by such ministers were invalid. A secondary issue was that of the validity of the baptism of someone baptized within a schismatic movement and wishing to join the Catholic Church.[23] Augustine argued against the necessity of rebaptism or reordination of heretics or apostates. He based his argument on the concept that each sacrament essentially consisted of two elements: the interior seal conferred by the rite[24] and

[18]Augustine, *Letter* 138.1.7.

[19]Augustine, *Civ.* 10.5. Another definition reads: "The word is added to the element, and there results the Sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word" (idem, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 80.3).

[20]In *Letter* 98.9 to Boniface, Augustine writes: "For if sacraments had not some points of real resemblance to the things of which they are the sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all."

[21]Augustine writes: "[B]ut the sacrament is one thing, the virtue of the sacrament another" (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 26.11); see also idem, *Letter* 138. The efficacy of the sacraments, according to Augustine, refers to their ability to convey God's grace, as well as, in the case of baptism and ordination, placing upon the recipient a special seal or indelible character (*character indelebilis*).

[22]The origins of Donatism can be traced to the persecution of Diocletian, A.D. 303-305. The leaders of the church were asked to turn in the Christian Scriptures and other catechetical materials to government officials. Some Christian leaders, fearing persecution, collaborated with the government and ceased religious activity. Others refused to submit and became subject to ferocious persecution. After the persecution, many of those who had surrendered to the authority of the state (designated by their contemporaries as *traditores*) returned to church office and the question arose regarding the validity of sacraments performed by such church leaders (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s.v. "Donatism," 499-500). For a good description of the Donatist controversy, see also Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 26-29.

[23]*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s.v. "Donatism."

[24]Augustine writes: "A man baptized in the Church, if he be a deserter from the Church, will lack holiness of life, but will not lack the mark of the sacrament, the kingly character" (cited in *Serm.* 71.19.32, in *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, trans. Bernard

the grace of God that the seal was to communicate.[25] When one was baptized or ordained, one could receive the seal but not necessarily the grace, which depended on the recipients' communion with the visible Catholic Church.[26] Thus, if persons turned away from heresy, they would not need to be rebaptized or reordained because the indelible seal (*character indelebilis*) would be retained and become effective, i.e., able to convey grace upon joining the true church.[27]

Augustine also argued against the Donatist tendency to place excessive emphasis upon the worthiness of the human agent, as, for the most part, it was impossible to distinguish between worthy and unworthy ministers. Moreover, undue stress upon the human agent detracted from the grace of Jesus Christ, who instituted the sacraments and upon whose merits their validity was based.[28]

From the above survey, it is clear that Augustine placed the sacraments within a soteriological framework by defining them as the means of salvation.[29] Together with Cyprian's emphasis on sacerdotalism and his notion that salvation did not exist outside of the church—which Augustine accepted[30]—the theory of the sacraments as the means of grace set the stage for the development of hierarchical institutionalism.

The Middle Ages

The death of Augustine marks the decline of the development of sacramental theology. Subsequent centuries were characterized by barbarian invasions, the collapse of the Roman Empire, and a general decline in culture and learning. During these centuries, the sacramental rituals continued to exemplify the diversity typical of the patristic period. The list of sacraments, understood within an Augustinian

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Leemings [London: Longmans, 1960], 152). Cf. Augustine, *Parm.* 2.13.29, in Leemings, 152, and Augustine, *On Baptism* 5.15.20.

[25]Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 121.4; idem, *On Baptism* 3.13.18.

[26]Augustine, *On Baptism* 5.5.5; 3.13.18.

[27]Augustine, *Parm.* 2.13.28 in Leemings, 156-157. Cf. Leemings, 130-131.

[28]See Augustine, *The Letters of Petilian, the Donatist* 1.6.7 and 1.9.10. It is within this context that Augustine pronounced his famous dictum: "Judas may baptize, still this is He [the Holy Spirit] that baptizeth" (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 6.7).

[29]This is clearly seen in Augustine, *Letter* 98.2.

[30]Augustine states: "The Churches of Christ maintain it to be an inherent principle, that without baptism and partaking of the supper of the Lord it is impossible for any man to attain either to the kingdom of God or to salvation and everlasting life" (*On Forgiveness of Sins, and Baptism* 1:34).

framework, continued to grow and included many rites, such as the Lord's prayer, the veneration of relics, the use of holy water, the sign of the cross, and recitation of the Christian creeds.[31]

With the onset of the Middle Ages and the increasing number of rituals classified as sacraments, it became clear that Augustine's definition of the sacraments was inadequate. Two noted medieval scholars, Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1142) and Peter Lombard (ca. 1100-1160), successfully narrowed the definition. Hugh indicated that the general Augustinian definition of a sacrament as a "sign of a sacred thing" was inadequate, because "not every sign of a sacred thing can be properly called the sacrament of the same (because the letters in sacred expressions and statues or pictures are signs of sacred things, of which, however, they cannot reasonably be called the sacraments)."[32] He, thus, clarified the concept of the sacraments by describing four essential components: first, he insisted on the presence of some physical or material element, such as the water of baptism or the bread and wine of the Eucharist; second, he agreed with Augustine that similitude to that which the sacrament signified was essential; third, the sacraments had to be instituted by Christ; and finally, the sacraments had to be capable of conferring the benefits of grace.[33] Like his predecessors, however, Hugh considered a variety of rites to have sacramental powers, thus his definition proved inadequate since some sacramental rites, such as penance or marriage, did not contain a physical element.

These problems were solved by Peter Lombard, who defined the sacraments as "such a sign of God's grace and such a form of invisible grace, as to bear its likeness and to exist as its cause."[34] This definition was a significant improvement over earlier attempts, but it appeared to be adequate for only a small number of sacraments, subsequently

[31]*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s.v. "Sacraments"; J. R. Quinn, "Sacramental Theology," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 10:789.

[32]Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Cambridge: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951), 154-155.

[33]Ibid. According to Hugh, 155, a sacrament is "a corporeal or material element set before the senses without, representing by similitude and signifying by institution and containing by sanctification some invisible and spiritual grace." Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine: The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 209.

[34]Peter Lombard, *Book of the Sentences* 4, cited in Leeming, 568. An official English translation of this text is not available. Since Lombard's definition did not contain the idea of a visible element of the sacrament, he could easily designate as sacraments rites in which there is no "element," such as marriage or penance.

limited to seven rites: baptism, confirmation, communion, penance, ordination, marriage, and extreme unction. Lombard's definition and number of the sacraments, expressed in his *Book of the Sentences*, became accepted as the authoritative theological text in the Roman Catholic Church.[35] Peter's position has remained characteristic of Roman Catholic sacramental theology since his time.

Two other aspects of far-reaching importance for Roman Catholic sacramental theology were worked out during the Middle Ages. First, under the influence of Aristotelian philosophy and through the work of Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274), a distinction was made between the "matter" and the "form" of the sacraments. Aristotle distinguished between the sheer potency in nature ("matter") and that which actualizes the potency and makes it what it is ("form"). This distinction was used to differentiate between the external, visible elements of the sacraments (potency), and the meaning (form) that the elements assumed through the consecratory words of the priest. In other words, the consecratory words of the priest transform the sacraments in such a way that they become effective, i.e., may convey grace.[36] Second, the problem addressed by Augustine during the Donatist controversy regarding the worthiness of the minister administering the sacraments was further refined. *Ex opere operato* —literally, "on account of the work which is done"— became the key phrase. First used in the thirteenth century and officially adopted by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), this phrase indicated that the conferral of grace depended upon the act itself, rather than on the merits of either the administering priest or the recipient.[37] Certain preconditions were required, however, so that a "mechanical" understanding of the sacraments was avoided and their

[35]Up until the time of Peter Lombard, some theologians found as many as thirty sacraments, whereas the more conservative of them counted as few as five. Pelikan notes that it is not clear where the idea of seven sacraments began. He suggests that the anonymous *Sentences of Divinity*, published in 1145, may have been the first work citing seven sacraments. This was the list, Pelikan writes, that Peter Lombard adopted, and quoting Bernhard Geyer, he states that "for the further development of the doctrinal concept the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard were decisive. . . . It is significant that . . . his doctrine of the sacraments, especially the number seven, finds universal acceptance" (*The Growth of Medieval Theology*, 210); cf. Bernhard Geyer, "Die Siebenzahl der Sakramente in ihrer historischen Entwicklung," *Theologie und Glaube* 10 (1918): 342.

[36]*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s. v. "Sacrament." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 3a.60.6.7.

[37]This is in contrast to the principle expressed by the phrase *ex opere operantis*— literally, "on account of the work of the one who works"—which simply means that the effectiveness of the sacrament depends on the qualities of the minister, as the Donatists would argue.

validity affirmed. First, the administrant had to have the intention of performing the sacramental act according to its institution by the church.[38] Second, the recipient had to be spiritually disposed, that is, to exhibit a sincere desire to receive the benefits of the sacrament. These conditions fulfilled, the sacrament would convey grace by the fact of its reception, i.e., *ex opere operato*. It was affirmed, however, that the efficacy of the sacraments depended on the virtue of Christ's sacrifice rather than on human merit.[39] Thus, according to the Roman Catholic view, the sacraments are absolutely necessary for salvation.[40]

The theological systems of high Scholasticism further underscored the theological significance of the sacraments. The sacraments, it was taught, contained grace and infused it into the believer. Thus, the presence of faith on the part of the believer was helpful but not necessary.[41]

While each of the seven sacraments conveys God's grace and is crucial to salvation, there are distinctions between them. Catholics believe that baptism, confirmation, and holy orders convey a special imprint or character (*character indelibilis*) and, thus, cannot be repeated. While the Eucharist and the remaining sacraments do not confer a special character upon the recipient, they are necessary because Christ commanded them, and they are eminently helpful because they have the power to effect spiritual change that would not otherwise occur.[42] This notion of the sacraments as the means of salvific grace was of primary importance because it gave rise to a sacramental understanding of the church and ecclesiastical authority. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church, as the only institution which can be traced back to Christ and thus being of divine origin, should also be seen as a sacrament of Christ, i.e., an exclusive channel of his grace. Submission to the church and its leadership, thus, becomes of primary importance for salvation.[43]

[38]This means, for instance, that the accidental splashing with water by the priest of someone who is present in the church would not constitute the sacrament of baptism.

[39]Quinn, 12:808-809.

[40]Joseph Pohle states that "the justification of the sinner . . . is ordinarily not a purely internal and invisible process or series of acts, but requires the instrumentality of external visible signs instituted by Jesus Christ, which either confer grace or augment it. Such visible means of grace are called Sacraments" (*The Sacraments: A Dogmatic Treatise* [Saint Louis: Herder, 1942], 1:1).

[41]Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 152.

[42]Richard P. McBrien, ed., *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, s.v. "sacramental character" (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 1147-1148. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s. v. "Sacrament."

[43]It must be noted, however, that in recent years and through the influence of

Sacramental Ecclesiology and Authority of the Church

In Roman Catholic ecclesiology, the church itself is understood as a primordial sacrament.[44] Sacrament, as we have already indicated, is a visible sign of an invisible grace. It is alleged, furthermore, that it contains and transmits the grace that it signifies. It is believed that Christ, who was a sacrament of God, performed certain signs through which he accomplished the salvation of human beings. The greatest of these, his sacrifice on the cross, gave birth to the church. The church, in turn, became a sacrament of Christ, "manifesting Him to the world and continuing His worship for the redemption of mankind." Through the church, "Christ saves mankind."[45] The church, thus, is Christ's representative on earth, as it effects the grace of Christ and confers it upon the world. Understanding the church as a sacrament is in agreement with its institutional nature and enhances the authority of the ecclesiastical leadership. By virtue of their episcopal ordination, the pope and bishops constitute a channel through which God continues to communicate with humanity and, as such, these leaders perform a "prophetic function" within the church. In the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation, when Jesus exclaimed in Matt 6:18, "I will build my church,"[46] it was a declaration that marked the beginning of the church's existence. This interpretation is allegedly confirmed in v. 19, where Jesus gives the disciples the "power of the keys." In Roman Catholic teaching, these statements indicate that Jesus entrusted Peter and the disciples with special status and authority, which enabled them to define official doctrine and to be guardians of the means of grace. It is believed that these functions were later delegated to the apostles' successors, the pope and the bishops, who, according to divine law, have absolute power over believers. When these leaders make doctrinal decisions or judgments, they pronounce them with the same authority as if God himself were speaking; and when they administer the sacraments, the salvific grace of

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scholars such as Karl Rahner and Yves Congar, Roman Catholics have been more open to viewing salvation in broader terms, thus accepting that God's grace may be operative outside the official Roman Catholic Church. These thinkers would argue, however, that the *fullness* of God's grace can only be communicated to those who remain in communion with the visible Catholic Church.

[44]For an excellent presentation on the church as sacrament, see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 63-75.

[45]Quinn, 12:812-813.

[46]S. E. Donlon, "Authority, Ecclesiastical," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1:1115; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), art. 552-553.

God is conveyed through their actions. Their decisions, thus, are binding upon all church members. The church, therefore, through its institutional structures, has control over the salvation of its members. Obviously, such an interpretation places extreme importance upon the authority of the church's leadership: the pope and the bishops. Authority, in such an environment, is derived from above and flows downward as the pope exercises his supreme leadership through the bishops.[47]

As the church is a sacrament of Christ, through which he continues to minister to the world, only bishops and priests, viewed as Christ's representatives by virtue of their ordination, are qualified to administer the sacraments.[48] This is because they share in Christ's priestly powers through the impartation of the sacramental character (*character indelibilis*). The leading document of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, states that the ordained priest possesses special sacred powers through which he "forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people."[49] A related issue concerns the gender of the Catholic minister. Traditionally, the church has only ordained *celibate men* as priests and bishops, since only such individuals could "adequately represent Christ at the Eucharist. . . . The maleness of Christ was not accidental . . . but essential to the profoundly symbolic nuptial language of Scripture, which describes God's people as the spouse of God, the divine bridegroom. Only a male priest therefore could fittingly symbolize Christ as the bridegroom come to possess in spiritual communion his bride, the Church."[50] Thus, the maleness of Christ is

[47]The Second Vatican Council attempted to somewhat temper the perception of the pope as the supreme ruler of the church from whom all authority flows downwards. Thus he was placed within a college of bishops whose authority, like his own, was derived from the apostles. In such a setting, the pope becomes "the first among equals." Cf. *Lumen gentium* 3.18-29 in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello, 1988), 369-387. In practice, however, the pope continues to exercise his authority through the bishops. While they may act independently from him, they still receive their power from him.

[48]Quinn, 812.

[49]*Lumen gentium*, 10.

[50]Thomas Bokenkotter, *Dynamic Catholicism: A Historical Catechism* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 273. The issue of women's ordination has been hotly debated in the Roman Catholic communion since the Second Vatican Council. In 1967, the Biblical Pontifical Commission declared that opposition to women's ordination can not be sustained on biblical grounds. The Commission concluded: "It does not seem that the New Testament by itself alone will permit us to settle in a clear way and once and for all the problem of the possible accession of women to the presbyterate" (*Origins* 6:6 [July

placed within the sacramental framework and is necessary for salvific grace to operate through the person of the priest.

Eucharistic Controversies

As observance of the Eucharist is clearly rooted in the NT, special rank has been given to this sacrament since early times. Although the other sacraments, particularly baptism, have their own controversies, the Eucharistic definitions have always served as a foundation for the development of sacramental theology.[51] It seems fitting, therefore, to deal with the historical development of this particular sacrament.

With time, the Eucharist, literally "thanksgiving," lost its original informality and came to be viewed as a solemn ritual with set prayers and solemn ceremony. As early as the second century, the bread and wine were referred to as "sacrifice," a departure from the original meaning of memorial.[52] While sacrificial terminology was used by writers as diverse as Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, it was Cyprian who took a decisive step and defined the wine and the bread as the real body of Christ and the Eucharist as a sacrificial gift offered by the priests. In the Eucharist, he asserted, the propitiatory offering upon the

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1, 1976], 92-96). Even more significant is the following remark: "It must be repeated that the texts of the New Testament, even on such important points as the sacraments, do not always give all the light that one would wish to find in them" (*Commentary on the Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* [Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1977], 27). Notwithstanding such findings, both Paul VI and John Paul II defend(ed) the male priesthood. In 1994, John Paul II published an apostolic letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis,* in which he authoritatively declared that the church had no authority to ordain women on traditional grounds. To substantiate this decision, John Paul II used the so-called "iconic" argument, which states that "the priest at the altar acts in the person of Christ the Bridegroom. These theological reasons . . . show why it was fitting for Christ to have freely decided to reserve priestly service to men. If the maleness of the priest is essential to enable him to act symbolically *in persona Christi* in the eucharistic sacrifice, it follows that women should not be priests" (Avery Dulles, "Infallible: Rome's Word On Women's Ordination," *National Catholic Register,* January 7, 1996, 1, 10).

[51]Jaroslav Pelikan notes that centuries of sacramental theology led to the belief that "the Eucharist was the sacrament of each of the other sacraments; for if the body of Christ were not present in the Eucharist, none of the other sacraments would count for anything and all devotion in the church would cease to exist. The institution of this venerable sacrament was supreme among all the works of Christ" (*The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine: Reformation of Church and Dogma [1300-1700]* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 52).

[52]See *Did.* 14; 1 Cor 11:23-26.

cross was repeated.[53] Ambrose (ca. 339-397) likewise insisted that through the words of consecration the elements were changed into the real blood and body of Christ. Although the question of how this "transmutation" took place attracted the interest of some patristic writers, most were content to affirm that it was a mystery. While Augustine agreed with his precursors on the issue of the Eucharist as a sacrifice, he refused to affirm the real presence in favor of a more symbolical understanding of the sacrament. The bread and wine, he asserted, were only "signs" or "symbols" of the body of Christ and whoever was part of the one, true church ate and drank this body spiritually.[54]

This variety of beliefs regarding the nature of the eucharistic elements coexisted within the church and did not became controversial until the ninth century. Two obscure French monks, Radbertus (ca. 790-ca. 860) and Ratramnus (d. ca. 865), each wrote treatises of the same title, *Concerning the Body and the Blood of Christ*, which developed two opposite conclusions regarding the real presence. Radbertus promoted the view that the wine and the bread became the blood and body of Christ in reality. Namely, after the words of consecration, the elements became *nothing* but the blood and body. Ratramnus, offended by Radbertus's crude realism, defended the view that the elements were merely symbolic of the body and blood. For him, Christ was truly present in the elements, although not in a way discernible by the senses. The presence was thus spiritual and discerned only by the eyes of faith. Considerably greater controversy was caused by Berengar (ca. 1010-1088), who also argued against any material change in the elements. Instead, he proposed that something new and invisible was *added* to the elements. During the Eucharist, Christ was spiritually present. These controversies raised the need for a precise definition as to what exactly happened during the Eucharist.[55]

Thus, in 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council formally accepted the term "transubstantiation" to define what became of the elements following their consecration. According to this definition, the body of Christ is truly present at the Eucharist as soon as the words of consecration are spoken. This doctrine has its basis in the Aristotelian

[53]Cyprian wrote that "that priest truly discharges the office of Christ, who imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father, when he proceeds to offer it according to what he sees Christ Himself to have offered" (*Letter* 62.14).

[54]Leeming, 252; cf. N. M. Haring, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Eucharist," 5:618.

[55]Gonzalez, 11:119-123, 150-156.

dichotomy between "substance" and "accident." The "substance" is something that constitutes the essential nature of a given matter, whereas "accidents" are its qualities discernible by the senses (e.g., color, taste). The doctrine of transubstantiation, thus, affirms that, following the consecration, the "accidents" of the wine and bread remain the same and humans can still discern them as such, but the "substance" changes from that of wine and bread to the body and blood of Christ. Following the Reformation, the Council of Trent strongly affirmed the real substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The doctrine of transubstantiation, thus, remains an official Roman Catholic doctrine to the present.[56]

In summary, it must be stressed that the Roman Catholic position, as it developed throughout the centuries, asserts that salvation depends on the church. This is because the church possesses and controls the sacraments, which were established and entrusted to the church by Christ and are indispensable for one's salvation.[57] The proper administration of the sacraments requires the presence of a qualified minister, i.e., someone who has been validly ordained by the church. Ordination qualifies the minister by placing upon him a seal, or character, that ensures "that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church."[58] The essence of this position is that salvation is effected by the sacraments. If one wants to be saved, therefore, one must be a member of the one, true church, whose leadership stands in the apostolic succession and which is the guardian of pure doctrine and ensures the proper administration of the sacraments.[59] This position leads to a pyramidal understanding of the church, or an "ecclesiology from above," where all authority in matters of doctrine comes down to believers from the pope and the bishops. The pope and the bishops are viewed as a supernaturally empowered medium through which Christ continues his mission on earth and through which the faithful have access to God. For these reasons, all Catholics are expected to submit to the authority of the episcopate and consider its decisions as the voice of God.

[56]Ibid.

[57]*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1994), art. 1118.

[58]Ibid., art. 1120-1121.

[59]Ibid., art. 1129. In the post-Vatican II era, there have been many ecumenically motivated voices attempting to soften this position and allow for the possibility of salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church. However, the official Roman Catholic position continues to be that "outside the Church there is no salvation" (ibid., art. 846).

The Reformation

The theology of the sacraments as the means of grace led to many abuses during the pre-Reformation era. Many Catholics believed that if they paid a regular stipend to the priest or gave money to the church they would receive special benefits from the sacraments. This encouraged major abuses, associated particularly with the eucharistic sacrifice and the sacrament of penance. People were led to expect many favors, such as healing, the release of a relative's soul from purgatory, and the avoidance of sudden death. An honest penitent would encounter a demanding penitential system with temporary, rather than permanent, relief. Unconditional forgiveness of sin and the assurance of salvation were concepts rejected by medieval theology, since they would lead to the demise of income-generating religious institutions. In many instances, only those who had money could count on forgiveness, which was mediated by the church. These abuses resulted in dissatisfaction on the part of some believers, eventually leading to a full-blown rebellion against the Catholic Church, i.e., the Reformation.[60]

Martin Luther

Martin Luther challenged the Roman Catholic understanding of the sacraments on several fronts. First, he asserted that the translation of the Greek *musterion* into the Latin *sacramentum* was largely unjustified, as the former referred only to Christ and the manner in which he effected salvation for humanity.[61] Second, Luther rejected the concept of seven sacraments. He concluded that, on the basis of Scripture, there could only be two sacraments: baptism and the Eucharist. The church had no authority to institute sacraments for which there were no explicit commands in the Scriptures.[62] Third, with specific reference to the Eucharist, he argued against the Aristotelian distinction between "substance" and "accident." Such views, Luther concluded, kept sacramental theology in the captivity of Aristotelian metaphysics and led to a mistaken notion of transubstantiation.[63] Finally, Luther attacked the notion of the mass as a sacrifice, and concomitant with it, the special

[60]Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 216.

[61]Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 36:93.

[62]Ibid., 18. Originally, Luther also viewed penance as a sacrament. In later years, he accepted only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999], 257-259).

[63]Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 28-29.

status of the priesthood.[64] Notwithstanding this, he accepted some aspects of sacramental theology worked out during the Middle Ages; for example, he believed in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and that the validity of the sacraments did not depend upon the holiness or sinfulness of the minister, but upon their institution by Christ.[65] Furthermore, he recognized the sacraments as a means of grace, though not in the Roman Catholic sense.[66]

Luther's sacramental theology was centered on the concept of the primacy of the Word of God. The Word, he argued, was given to believers primarily through Scripture and the preaching of the gospel. Due to human weakness in accepting and responding to divine promises, however, the Word of God was supplemented with visible and tangible signs of the gracious divine favor—the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. These represented the promises of God, mediated through material objects of everyday use.[67] Ideally, human beings should be able to trust God on the basis of his Word alone. In our fallenness, however, we need sacramental signs to enhance our trust in God. Sacraments, thus, were closely related to faith, as they functioned as another form in which the Word was heard in faith. So, while Luther strongly affirmed the idea that salvation came through faith alone and did not depend on human works, the sacraments were still necessary as they formed the means by which faith was created.[68]

Luther's views on baptism and the Eucharist constituted a significant departure from Roman Catholic views. Baptism did not create a permanent seal or confer a permanent character upon the soul of a believer, but was unbreakably bound with faith, as there could be no true sacrament without faith. For Luther, however, faith did not necessarily precede baptism. Instead, baptism was the initiative of God, who bestows his faith. This is why Luther did not oppose the baptism of infants. Denial of such a baptism on the grounds that an infant did not have faith would amount to the negation of the power of baptism

[64]See Martin Luther, *The Misuse of the Mass*, in Wentz (1959), 133-230; idem, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 36:35-36.

[65]Luther, *The Adoration of the Sacrament*, in Wentz (1959), 36:275.

[66]Luther is clear on this matter when he states: "[I]t is a most pernicious error to say that the sacraments of the new law are efficacious signs of grace in such a way that they do not require any disposition in the recipient except that he should put no obstacle in the way" (*Lectures on Hebrews*, in *LW* 29:172).

[67]Luther, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 66-67.

[68]Martin Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, in *LW*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 3:252-253.

and to the affirmation that the sacrament depended on human ability to receive it, thereby implying a new form of justification by works.[69]

It was the issue of the Eucharist, however, that became a major bone of contention for Luther, not only with the Roman Catholic Church, but also with other reformers. First, Luther most emphatically rejected the concept of the Lord's Supper as sacrifice, as it made the sacraments effective on account of human merit, thereby striking at the heart of the gospel and endangering the uniqueness and inclusiveness of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Second, he rejected the idea of transubstantiation, which he considered an absurdity, an attempt to rationalize the mystery.[70] At the same time, however, he retained the traditional Catholic idea that Christ's body and blood are physically present in the elements. Thus, he proposed a theory of the simultaneous presence of both the bread and the wine and the body of Christ. This view became known as consubstantiation, although Luther himself never used this term.[71] He also rejected sacerdotalism—a teaching that only certain persons were qualified to administer the sacraments. He argued that the presence of Christ's body was not a result of the priest's action, but rather that it occurred by the power of Christ. While, in Catholicism, transubstantiation takes place when the priest consecrates the elements, Luther did not speculate as to when the substances were joined. Although he maintained that an ordained minister should administer the Lord's Supper, he did not attribute the presence of the body of Christ to the minister or to anything that he did.[72]

Luther's sacramental theology led to a new understanding of the nature of the church. The church was no longer viewed as a sacrament, or means of grace, but as the communion of saints—the gathering where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered.[73] Jaroslav Pelikan writes: "That definition, as it was formulated, was intended to . . . [distinguish the Lutheran] view from views of the church that added other institutional requirements such as liturgical uniformity or obedience to the papacy."[74] As

[69]Ibid. Cf. M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 1090-1093.

[70]Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 18-35. Cf. Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 36:179.

[71]Luther used an analogy of a heated iron to illustrate the mystery of the presence of Christ at the Eucharist. When iron is placed in a fire and heated, it glows, and in the glowing iron, both the iron and heat are present (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 36:32, 35).

[72]Ibid., 27-28, 52-54.

[73]Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Catechism* in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1961), 212-213.

[74]Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 173.

such, the church was below and subject to the Word of God, rather than above it. Thus, in the writings of Luther a shift occurs from a sacramental or institutional notion of the church and its ministry toward a more *functional* one.[75] Notwithstanding this shift, the importance of the sacraments for Luther's ecclesiology was that they were constitutive of the church. Through baptism, people were received into the kingdom of God and their faith was created; through the Eucharist their faith was maintained. Thus, Luther did not intend for *sola* in *sola fide* to exclude the Word of God as it comes to believers through the sacraments. "Properly understood," writes Pelikan, "the sacraments were an epitome of the very gospel; without them no one could be a Christian."[76] Salvation, thus, is in some way still dependent on the church and its sacraments.

The Reformed Tradition

In his sacramental theology, John Calvin was much in agreement with Luther. Like Luther, he rejected the Roman Catholic notion of the seven sacraments and narrowed their number to two: baptism and the Eucharist. Also he believed that the sacraments were truly efficacious, although not in the Roman Catholic sense.[77] Rather than being channels of God's grace, the sacraments strengthened or augmented the faith of the participant.[78] Finally, he agreed with Luther that where there was right preaching of the Word and proper administration of the sacraments, there Christ was present. And wherever Christ was, there his church was to be found as well.[79]

The only real disagreement between Calvin and Luther in regard to the sacraments was in the area of the bodily presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Calvin believed that Christ's body was in heaven and, therefore,

[75]"Functional" is defined here as "designed for or adapted to a particular function or use." *Functional ecclesiology* recognizes that while Scripture provides certain universal principles regarding church structure and ministry, it does not establish a fixed model for the church, thus encouraging the church to exercise responsible freedom in structuring itself.

[76]Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 178.

[77]John Calvin strongly argued against "the error of a magical conception of the sacraments" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967], 4.14.14).

[78]Ibid., 4.14.7-8. In the same volume, Calvin, 4.14.1, defines the term "sacrament" as an "outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith." Calvin, ibid., added that his definition "does not differ in meaning from that of Augustine . . . but it better and more clearly explains the thing itself."

[79]Ibid., 4.14.17.

could not simultaneously be present during the Lord's Supper. Thus Calvin spoke of a spiritual or dynamic presence of Christ during the eucharistic meal. In marked contrast to Luther's position, Calvin wrote: "The body of Christ is [not] given us under the bread or with the bread, because it is not a substantial union of corruptible food with the flesh of Christ that is denoted, but sacramental conjunction."[80] To illustrate his ideas, Calvin used the analogy of the sun. As the sun was far removed from earth and yet its warmth and light were present on earth, so Christ was influentially present at the Eucharist. The radiance of the Spirit communicated the communion of Christ's flesh and blood; thus, the partakers were spiritually nourished by the bread and wine. Through the sacrament, the Holy Spirit brought them into a closer relationship with Christ, the head of the church and the source of spiritual vitality.[81] Finally, participation in the Eucharist sealed the love of Christ to believers and assured them of the reality of salvation.[82]

In his early sacramental theology, the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli agreed with Luther and Calvin that baptism and the Eucharist were signs of God's faithfulness to the church and his promise of forgiveness. Moving away from his early position, however, he began to view the sacraments as tokens of belonging to the Christian community.[83] Thus, the entire purpose of the sacraments was, above all, to show that a person belonged to the community of faith.[84] Baptism, as with circumcision in the OT, was a public declaration that an infant (or an adult) was a member of the church. Likewise, participating in the Lord's Supper symbolized a continuing loyalty to the Christian community.[85] Zwingli categorically refuted the Catholic as well as Lutheran understandings of how the sacraments worked. Against the Catholic view, he argued that the Latin *sacramentum* originally referred to an act of initiation or a pledge and that the notion of the sacraments as the means of grace was not scriptural.[86] Against Luther, he stated that there could not be any correlation between the external sign and the internal

[80]John Calvin, *Best Method of Obtaining Concord*, in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: S C M Press, 1954), 328.

[81]Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.12.

[82]Ibid., 4.14.5 and 20.

[83]*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Faith*, s.v. "Zwingli," 1784.

[84]Thus, in the treatise *Of Baptism*, Zwingli defines the term "sacrament" as "a covenant sign or pledge" that signifies a person's belonging to the church (in *Zwingli and Bullinger: Selected Translations*, ed. G. W. Bromiley [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953], 131).

[85]Ibid., 131-132, 148,

[86]Ibid., 131. Ulrich Zwingli, *On True and False Religion*, in *The Latin Works and the Correspondence of Ulrich Zwingli*, ed. S. M. Jackson (Philadelphia: Heidelberg, 1929), 3:181.

event caused by such a sign. Such a notion would take away the freedom of the Spirit.[87] Zwingli presented his own understanding of the sacraments with the help of a military analogy. Just as soldiers revealed their allegiance by wearing the appropriate insignia, so Christians demonstrated their commitment to the church publicly first by baptism and subsequently by participating in the Eucharist. He also rejected Luther's views regarding the real presence of Christ in the elements. For "until the last day Christ cannot be anywhere but at the right hand of God the Father."[88] For Zwingli, the Eucharist was no more than what it meant: "the remembrance of that deliverance by which he [Christ] redeemed the whole world . . . that we might never forget . . . but that we might publicly attest it with praise and thanksgiving."[89] The Eucharist, thus, was a *memorial* of the historical event leading to the establishment of the Christian church and a public declaration of membership in the church.[90] Notwithstanding his views on the sacraments as tokens of Christian allegiance, it might be argued that, in essence, Zwingli was in agreement with Luther regarding their efficacy because he believed, especially with regard to the Lord's Supper, that the physical eating might still be a means of grace through which the believer's "soul [is] being strengthened by the faith which [he] attests in the tokens." Thus, in Zwingli's theology, the sacraments "augment faith and are an aid to it. This is particularly true," he writes, "of the Supper."[91]

It was the notion of the sacrament as the means of grace that was one of the reasons for the controversy between Zwingli and the movement commonly designated as Anabaptism or "rebaptizers."[92] The sacramental theology of this Christian group represents a complete departure from the concept of the sacraments as the means of grace. The Anabaptists were critical of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, asserting that although these reformers had emphasized the *sola fide* principle, they had not sufficiently freed themselves from Catholic thinking by continuing to hold to the concept of sacramental efficacy, thus relying,

[87]Ibid., 3:183.

[88]Ulrich Zwingli, *On the Lord's Supper*, in *Zwingli and Bullinger: Selected Translations*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 216.

[89]Ibid., 234.

[90]Ibid., 235.

[91]Ulrich Zwingli, *An Exposition of the Faith*, in *Zwingli and Bullinger: Selected Translations*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 259, 263.

[92]F. H. Littell, *The Origin of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), xv. The Anabaptist movement was not uniform and consisted of many groups.

in one way or another, on "outward works." The Anabaptists, on the other hand, argued that just as good works did not secure salvation but were a result of faith, so the Lord's Supper did not constitute the means of grace, but rather, signified the grace already given.[93] Likewise, contrary to Luther's assertion that "baptism effects forgiveness of sins," the Anabaptists believed that baptism simply bore testimony to the "inward yes in the heart." This conviction was at the center of their rejection of infant baptism. According to them, therefore, the value of the sacraments lay simply in accepting by faith the benefits of Jesus' death. The sacraments were no more effective than other forms of proclamation, such as a sermon or personal witness.[94]

The Anabaptist view on the sacraments led to a primarily functional ecclesiology as they strove to restore NT Christianity in its purity. The church, in their understanding, was nothing more than a community of baptized and regenerated Christians.[95] The emphasis was upon the individual, unmediated relationship with Jesus Christ rather than on association with a visible, organized body. Membership in the church did not in any way guarantee salvation. Baptismal and eucharistic celebrations took place in the local congregation, but the church held no ecclesiastical control over the means of grace, as salvation could only be obtained through a personal relationship with Christ. Local congregations could choose their ministers, who, while not receiving any remuneration, facilitated the celebration of communion and baptism, but held no special authority other than that which was delegated to them by the congregation.[96] Anabaptist theology, thus, was

[93]Thus Conrad Grebel could write regarding the Lord's Supper: "Although it is only bread, *if faith and brotherly love precede*, it should be taken with joy. If the Lord's Supper is practiced in this way in the community, it should show us that we are truly one bread and one body, and true brothers of one another, and that we are God's" ("Letter to Thomas Müntzer," in *The Radical Reformation*, ed. Michael G. Baylor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 39 [emphasis added]). Cf. Littell, 52, 68, 80.

[94]Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 317-319. Cf. Martin Luther, *Small Catechism* (Adelaide: United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Australia, 1941), 13. It must also be noted that, in agreement with Zwingli, the Anabaptists strongly reacted against the real presence of the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper: "For them, to worship the physical bread and wine was the most awful idolatry and materialization of the spiritual truth of the presence of Christ in the midst of believers assembled. The doctrine of the real presence was blasphemy, wherein Christ was martyred again" (Littell, 69, 100).

[95]Littell, 69, 86-87, 89, 95-98,.

[96]Ibid., 91-93, 99; Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 90-91; Erickson, 1045; Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 313-322.

a complete departure from an institutional or sacramental ecclesiology.

Conclusion

Modern Roman Catholic sacramental theology, with its understanding of the sacraments as the means of grace, developed over many centuries. Early in church history, the institutional church introduced a separation between common believers and the clerical caste. This gap increased during the third and fourth centuries through the elevation of the ordination rite to the level of a sacrament. From that time, the bishops, seen as the direct successors of the apostles, gained enormous power and prestige, and the church with its sacraments came to be viewed as the exclusive channel of God's grace. Thus there is a clear link between Catholic sacramental theology and the growth of ecclesiastical authority.

The Reformation emphasized the importance of personal faith in the Savior, over against the reliance on outward performances, such as church membership and participation in the sacraments. As a result, the church was no longer seen in sacramental or institutional terms, but began to be understood as a community of believers. The sacraments, reduced to baptism and the Eucharist, were still considered by the majority of reformers as a means of grace that served to increase the personal faith of a believer. The work of the sacraments, however, was no longer effected through the priestly powers of the minister. Thus the church was no longer seen as the guardian and overseer of the means of salvation. In the teachings of the reformers, therefore, there is a gradual shift from the authority of the institution, represented by the pope and the bishops, to the authority of the congregation, united in common faith.

It was only with the rise of Anabaptism that a complete reversal of sacramentalism occurred. The church, in the Anabaptist view, was a community of baptized and regenerated Christians. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were no longer the means of grace, but rather signified the grace already given through the Holy Spirit. Proper functioning of the church required leaders who, selected on the basis of their spiritual qualifications, ministered to the congregation. These leaders were seen as representatives of the congregation and had no more power than had been delegated to them by the community. All major decisions regarding the community's organization, teachings, and mission were agreed on by the entire membership, rather than by a select group of individuals.