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**WHAT ARE  
SACRAMENTS**

?

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# What Are Sacraments ?

By V. REV. W. MORAN, D.D.

## INTRODUCTION: WHY THERE ARE SACRAMENTS.

The sacraments occupy an important place in God's plan for the salvation of mankind. In order, therefore, the better to understand what a sacrament is, and why such things as sacraments have been instituted at all, it may be well to begin by taking a glance at the general scheme or plan, of which the sacraments form a part.

Man differs from all other animals in having a soul endowed with reason and free will: hence he is spoken of as a rational animal. When God created our first parents, He bestowed on them (as might be expected) all the gifts of mind and body necessary to enable them to live a life in keeping with their nature as rational animals. But He did not stop at that: He gave them unexpected gifts, to which their nature as rational animals gave them no claim or title whatever. These gifts were altogether above their nature; hence they are called *supernatural* gifts (from two Latin words—*super*, meaning *above*; and *natura*, meaning *nature*). The most important of these gifts was sanctifying grace, which gave their souls a peculiar holiness and nobility in the eyes of God, and entitled them—if they preserved it till their period of trial was over—to enjoy the supernatural vision of God for all eternity.

Our first parents unfortunately did not preserve this precious gift of grace; they lost it by sin. Moreover, as Adam had been made the head and representative of the human race in the reception of supernatural gifts, he forfeited by his sin, not merely for himself but also for his posterity, the gift of grace and the supernatural destiny (vision of God in heaven), to which possession of grace had

entitled him. Worse still, neither Adam nor any of his posterity was able to recover the lost gifts. Nothing that a mere man could do by his own powers was capable of meriting, or otherwise securing a gift that was altogether above human nature. One might as well expect a horse to be able to win the Nobel prize for literature. So far as man's own efforts were concerned, everything supernatural was lost to him for ever.

But God in His mercy took pity on fallen humanity; and in His own good time He sent His Son to redeem mankind—that is, to make reparation for the sins of men, and to merit the restoration to men of the supernatural gifts that had been lost. To carry out this work, the Son of God took a human nature like ours (becoming thereby a second head of the human race); and in that human nature He died on the Cross of Calvary. Our Redeemer Jesus Christ, was both God and man. Because He was man, He could suffer and die. Because He was God, His suffering and death, freely undertaken for God's honour, were of inestimable value in the eyes of God. Because of this inestimable value in turn, the sufferings and death of Christ were far more than sufficient to make reparation for all the sins of men, and to win back for the human race the gift of grace, and the supernatural destiny, that had been lost by the sin of Adam, the first head of the race.\*

Though the redemption of the human race was completed on Calvary, it did not follow that individual men would come into the world henceforward endowed with grace and a right to heaven. We are born children of Adam; we are

\*The reader will now see how the wisdom of God found a way of reconciling the requirements of justice and mercy. God could not be expected to restore the lost gifts, till the sin by which they were lost was expiated (satisfied for). The situation had been made worse by innumerable personal sins committed by Adam's posterity. It was in accordance with justice to demand that man should satisfy for man's sins. But as a mere man could not satisfy for sin (whether the original sin of Adam, or the subsequent mortal sins of his children), divine mercy came to the rescue and gave us the God-man to do so. The sins committed by men were thus expiated by a man—not indeed a mere man, but yet a true man, the God-man Jesus Christ. Our Lord did not merely satisfy for all human sins; He also merited the restoration of our supernatural destiny, and all the graces necessary to enable us to attain it.

not born children of Christ. We come into the world, therefore, heirs to Adam's sin, rather than heirs to Christ's redemption: so that it is only when we are subsequently made children of Christ, that we actually benefit by the redemption wrought by Him. Our descent from Adam by the flesh makes us his sons and heirs; there is no similar bond between us and Christ. To become the spiritual sons and heirs of the Redeemer, we have to be linked up with Him by some means appointed by Him for the purpose. Now, the chief means actually appointed by Christ for this purpose are the sacraments. The reader will now see why there are such things as sacraments. They serve to link us up with Christ, and thereby make us heirs to the good things He has won for us. In brief, the chief purpose of the sacraments is to bring to individual souls the fruits of the redemption wrought by Christ.

In view of the comparison made above between Adam, first head of the human race, and Christ, the second head, it may occur to you to ask what is the necessity for *several* sacraments. As we are heirs of Adam by being born of him once for all, why should we not likewise become heirs of Christ by being spiritually born of Him once for all by a single sacrament, such as baptism? The answer is that we do as a matter of fact become children of God, and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven, as soon as we receive the first of the sacraments, baptism; but the generosity of God has prompted Him to give us other sacraments, to meet subsequent needs in our supernatural life. Just as there are certain crises, or periods of special need, in our natural life, so there are corresponding crises in our supernatural life. In the natural order it is not enough for our parents to give us birth, and then leave us to our own resources. We still require nourishment; we need care and watching during the period of growth; we require medicine and nursing during illness, and so on. As parents and guardians provide for their children in these respects in the natural order, so our Lord has provided for us in the supernatural order. In Baptism He gives us birth to supernatural life; in the

Blessed Eucharist He nourishes us; in Penance He cures us of the illness (or death) of sin, and so on. At a later stage, when we have discussed the question of the number of sacraments instituted by Christ, it will be possible to illustrate much more fully the parallel between our needs in the natural order, and our needs in the supernatural order. We shall then be in a position to appreciate better the generous provision made by God for all our supernatural wants.

People sometimes ask why God has chosen to provide for our spiritual wants by means of material things, such as the water of Baptism, or the oil of Extreme Unction. It appears to them a strange choice, to use a material thing for producing a spiritual effect in the spiritual soul. Or, to go a step farther, why not dispense with created means altogether? Surely, they argue, God does not require a visible instrument, such as Baptism, to confer His graces on human souls. Does He not in fact sometimes confer grace on us outside the sacraments? What is to prevent Him from doing so in all cases? Would it not be more advantageous to men, as well as more convenient for them, if the necessity of seeking sacraments (with the risk of being unable to get them) were never imposed on mankind?

Some of these questions are based on a misunderstanding of the manner in which the sacraments work; and in so far as this is the case, the objector's difficulties will disappear at a later stage, when the working of the sacraments will be explained in detail. By way of reply to those questions that are not based on such misunderstanding, it may be well to point out in the first place that every grace we receive, whether it be received through a sacrament or otherwise, has been won for us by the Redeemer; it is one of the fruits of His passion and death. Now, even if Christ had no other reason than His own will for arranging to have those fruits distributed to us by means of visible sacraments, it would be very ungenerous of men to complain

of the conditions on which the graces won by Christ are made available for them. The gifts bestowed are so great and so gratuitous, and the conditions are so easy, that I need not labour the point.

In the second place, Christ had His own good reasons for instituting the grace-giving rites, which we call sacraments; and some at least of these reasons we can see for ourselves. In view of the parts played by Adam and by Christ respectively in the relations of mankind with God, it is obviously desirable to have some visible sign to mark the breaking of our connection (as heirs) with Adam, and the establishment of our connection (as heirs) with Christ. In this way we are made to realise more fully the seriousness of sin, the greatness of the redemption, and our complete dependence on the Redeemer for everything we have and hope to have in the supernatural order. The better understanding of these truths in turn helps to increase the love of Christ in our hearts.

We can see other reasons for the institution of sacraments. They have a social value for the faithful. Like the common faith which we profess, and the common authority which we obey, the sacraments are visible bonds, by which the faithful are united with one another, and by which also those outside the Church are attracted to it. They have also another kind of value. Because we are not pure spirits, but a combination of body and soul, we find it hard to grasp spiritual realities without the help of material things. Now, the sacraments give us the help we need. For instance, even the African bushman can form some notion of the spiritual effects produced in his soul when he is baptised. The washing of his body is a sign for him of the washing of his soul. If he had no such sign to help him, how much more difficult it would be for the missionary to give him an idea of the meaning of justification (getting out of the state of sin and getting into the state of grace)! Even in the natural order men feel the necessity of employing material things to give fuller expression to many of their ideas, though the ideas and realities con-

cerned are not nearly so difficult to grasp as those that concern our salvation. Take, for instance the elaborate ceremonial of a king's coronation, and the publicity given to it. What is the meaning of it all? The coronation does not make the king; he is a king before it. No: the coronation is merely a symbolic ceremony. Its purpose is to help people to realise more fully, than they otherwise would, the king's august position in the State—just as baptism helps the African bushman to realise more fully, than he otherwise would, the meaning of the justification which it gives. If we look around us, we may notice examples of this symbolic use of material things in all departments of civil life. And yet some people seem to be surprised that Christ has instituted visible sacraments!

#### THE DEFINITION OF A SACRAMENT.

In the catechism books studied by children at school, these grace giving rites (baptism, confirmation, etc.) are grouped together in one chapter under the common heading *The Sacraments*. Notwithstanding the obvious advantage of this arrangement, it was a long time before anyone thought of adopting it. In the early Church the teacher told his pupils about Baptism in one lesson, about Penance in a different lesson, and so on. It did not occur to him to bring all these rites together under one common name, as they are now brought together in our catechism under the common name *sacraments*. It was only when people began to compare these rites with one another, and to see how many points they had in common, that they realised the necessity of having a common name for them—a name that would cover them all, and would not cover anything else. The name *sacrament* is the one that came to be adopted and reserved for this purpose in course of time. In this way the word *sacrament* was given the exact technical meaning we now attach to it\*.

\*The word (in Latin, *sacramentum*) previously had several meanings. In the courts it was used for the money lodged in connection with civil actions; in the army it was used for the oath taken by soldiers; in the Bible it is used in much the same sense as our word *mystery*; and in the writings of the early Fathers it is often used for a sacred sign of any kind.

When a technical term comes into use, a definition of it becomes necessary. As soon as children came to the word *sacrament* in their catechism, they were sure to ask the teacher: *What is a sacrament?*—if the question and answer were not already in the book. To frame a suitable definition of the word—or, if you like, to answer the question: *What is a sacrament?*—it was necessary to compare with one another the grace-giving rites handed down by the apostles; to see what points they had in common; and to express these common points in a brief and simple formula. The definition usually found in our catechism books reads something like this: a sacrament is an outward sign appointed by Christ to signify and to confer grace. The formula varies slightly in its wording from place to place, but the meaning is always the same. Let us take this definition word by word, and see what it means.

By "outward" we mean what can be perceived by one or more of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). In baptism, for instance, the pouring of the water can be seen and felt, and the words "I baptise thee, etc." can be heard.

By a "sign" is meant something which is itself perceived, and which when perceived signifies (is sign of: gives information about) something else which is not itself perceived. For instance, if you see smoke coming from a house, it signifies a fire somewhere in the house. You cannot see the fire, but the smoke tells you it is there. Now, a sacrament is a sign of grace: and the grace that it signifies is the grace produced in the soul of the person who receives that sacrament. In baptism, for instance, the washing of the child's head with water, accompanied by the words "I baptise thee, etc.," is a sign of the washing of his soul from sin, and the infusion of grace to replace sin.

"To signify and to confer grace." A sacrament signifies (is a sign of) grace, as already explained. But it is more than a mere sign of grace; it confers (gives, causes) the

grace that it signifies. The smoke you see coming out of a chimney is not the cause of the fire underneath; it is only a sign of it. A sacrament, on the other hand, is a cause as well as a sign of grace.

"Appointed by Christ". All the graces which we receive through the sacraments have been won for us by Christ. It is only reasonable, therefore, that Christ, who merited the graces, should select the means or instruments, by which these graces are made available to us. In worldly affairs we describe a corresponding situation, by saying that the man who pays the piper has the right to call the tune. In any case, if we are assured that a rite, such as baptism, not only signifies but also confers grace, we can infer that it cannot have been instituted by a mere man. The reason is this: grace is a divine gift; and no man has the power to attach to an outward sign the giving of a divine gift. We have already seen that a Redeemer was necessary, because neither Adam nor any of his posterity was able to win back the gift of grace lost by the fall. It was just as impossible for them, and for the same reasons, to institute a sacrament that would have the power of giving grace.

#### THE NUMBER OF SACRAMENTS.

Let us now go back in imagination to a time, about 800 years ago, when some teacher of Christian doctrine was preparing a new edition of the catechism—the first edition to have a special chapter under the heading *The Sacraments*. Having settled on the definition, which we have just explained, he will naturally think of the question: *How many sacraments are there?* There are various ways in which he may make up his mind about the answer to be given to this question. He may, for instance, try to remember all the rites used by the Church, with a view to counting how many of them comply with his definition of a sacrament. Or he may make a study of the New Testament, or of the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, or of the old edition of his catechism, for the same

purpose. It is possible by any of these methods to arrive at the right answer to the question: *How many sacraments are there?* But it is also possible to make a mistake. The reason is because, in using any of the methods mentioned, he is depending on his own private judgment to tell him whether any particular rite does or does not fulfil perfectly the terms of his definition; and private judgment is liable to err.

A much better method would be to consult the Church, the official guardian into whose keeping Christ has entrusted both the sacraments themselves and the doctrine concerning them. Christ has promised to be with this guardian all days to the end of the world; He has promised her the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth; He has promised that the gates (powers) of hell shall never prevail against her. The sacraments are safe, therefore, in her keeping; and her understanding of what is a sacrament and what is not can be absolutely relied on. Let us imagine our teacher saying to the Church: "Here is my definition of a sacrament; what do you think of it? If it has your approval, I wish to know how many of the rites handed down to you by the Apostles comply with this definition." And we can imagine the reply of the Church: "Your definition of a sacrament is quite suitable. We have received from the Apostles seven such sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony."

The dialogue just described is, of course, only an imaginary one; but it represents with substantial accuracy what has actually taken place, in the drafting of the questions and answers now found in our catechism concerning the sacraments. Individual scholars wrote books, in which they discussed the definition, number, efficacy, etc., of the sacraments. If these books contained errors of doctrine, the Church censured them. If the doctrine was sound, the Church gave them her approval by allowing them to circulate freely among the faithful. It was only on rare occasions, when this gentle kind of guidance proved in-

sufficient, that the Pope or a General Council of the bishops of the Church deemed it necessary to issue a solemn exposition of a Catholic doctrine, or a solemn condemnation of some serious error.

The first time that it became necessary to issue a solemn condemnation of an error in regard to the number of the sacraments was in the sixteenth century. At that time the leaders of the new heresy of Protestantism would admit no sacraments at all in the sense understood by the Church\*. They were prepared, however, to admit some of the sacraments—they differed among themselves about the number—in a new sense, a sense that would rob even these sacraments (the ones they admitted) of any real power to confer grace. The Council of Trent issued a number of condemnations against these errors. The first one runs as follows: "If any man says that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Christ, our Lord; or that they are more or less than seven in number, namely: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony; or that any one of these seven is not a true sacrament in the strict sense of the word, let that man be anathema (accursed)". The last five words are a formula, borrowed from the Apostle S. Paul and used ever since by the Church to show that she is speaking with the full weight of her infallible authority, and means to put the doctrine in question beyond all possibility of doubt†

For many centuries past, men have been accustomed to speak of "the five senses," meaning by that expression the power of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. Nevertheless, it would be possible to find in every country

\*Luther, the founder of Protestantism, was forced to take up this position by reason of his fundamental error, namely, that faith alone justifies a man.

†Even before this pronouncement of Trent, anyone, who accepted the teaching authority of the Church, could have no doubt about the number of the sacraments. Three centuries earlier, another General Council (held at Lyons in 1274) had proclaimed the belief of the Catholic Church in seven sacraments; and every book of Christian doctrine written after that date, as well as many written before it, mentioned the number seven expressly.

uneducated people who could not answer the question: How many senses has a man? The reason they could not answer the question is because they do not understand it; they do not know what exactly is meant by "senses." They know they have the five powers of seeing, hearing, etc.; but they only know these powers by the separate names *sight*, *taste*, etc.; they do not know them by the common name *senses*. If you gave them a definition of the word *sense*—a definition they could understand—and then asked them how many senses they have, they would probably be able to give you the correct answer after they had thought over the question for a few minutes.

The example just given will help to illustrate the situation in the early Church in regard to the question: How many sacraments are there? Although the Fathers discussed the various sacraments separately, the want of a common name for all seven prevented them from discussing the question: How many sacraments are there? Hence we never find them saying "There are seven sacraments, neither more nor less"; just as we never find them saying there are only two or three. This fact gave the Protestant leaders an excuse for pretending to uneducated people that the doctrine of seven sacraments was unknown in the early Church, and must have been invented by the Pope. In order to gain some show of authority for this piece of anti-papal propaganda, a Protestant deputation was sent to Constantinople in 1576 to enlist the support of the Schismatical\* Greek Church. These Eastern Christians had broken away from their allegiance to the Pope in the eleventh century; and hopes were entertained that they would now join in the Protestant campaign against him. But the appeal was a complete failure. However much the Easterns disliked the Pope, they were not prepared to deny the faith they had inherited, merely to accommodate his

\*Christians who reject a doctrine, which is taught as an article of faith by the Catholic Church, are called heretics. Those who reject the ruling authority of the Catholic Church, and set up a rival government, are called schismatics. People who break with the Church by becoming schismatics, usually entertain heretical opinions about the Pope's authority.

enemies. They told the deputation that they too accepted the seven sacraments instituted by Christ, and handed down by the Apostles. Later on, at Councils of their bishops, held at Yassy (in Moldavia) in 1643, and at Constantinople and Jerusalem in 1672, the doctrine of seven sacraments was pronounced to be an article of faith.

If the Protestant deputation had been sent to the smaller schismatical and heretical Churches of the East—some of which (the Nestorian groups) had been cut off from the Catholic Church since A.D. 432—it would have fared no better. In these Churches too it would have found the tradition of seven sacraments.

There can be only one explanation of this unanimity among rival Christian bodies; and that is that the doctrine of seven sacraments was already part of the faith accepted by all parties before they separated. It is not a doctrine that could be easily tampered with. The sacraments are the parts of the Christian religion, that touch both the clergy and the laity most nearly and most continuously: they are the channels of grace, to which (before the coming of Protestantism) the faithful have had recourse in all Christian bodies for their supernatural needs. It is impossible to imagine how a change could be introduced without the knowledge of the whole Church, clergy and laity alike. Such a change, if it ever did take place, must have left its traces on history—traces of the movement that brought about the change, traces of the Council or other authority that ordered it, traces of the protests and controversy that it aroused, and so on. Yet history knows nothing whatever of any such change. On the contrary, it affords ample evidence of the existence since apostolic times of each particular one of the sacraments now accepted by the Church. If the Protestant contention were true (namely that seven sacraments were unknown in the early Church), it would follow that men scattered over Europe, Asia and Africa, and differing in matters of faith, in blood and in general outlook—men who were disposed to squabble with one another about comparative trifles—allowed a

doctrine of vast practical importance to be foisted on them, without the intervention of any common authority (for they recognised no common authority), and without a trace of protest or opposition from any one of the rival bodies. Such supposition is ruled out by common sense.

To round off our argument, we might trace back the belief in each of the seven sacraments from the year 432 (when the Nestorians already mentioned broke away) to the lifetime of the Apostles. As this can be done more conveniently in the booklets dealing with the individual sacraments, we shall here skip the intervening period, and merely mention for each sacrament in turn one or two references found in the New Testament. Some of these are mere passing references, made incidentally by the writer; yet they suffice to show that in the lifetime of the Apostles all our present sacraments were already known to the faithful. In most cases the reader will have little difficulty in recognising the outward sign. From what is said about it he can infer that it gives grace; for instance, if it is said to blot out sin, or sanctify souls, or give the Holy Ghost (to whom the work of sanctification is specially attributed in Scripture). If a rite used by the Apostles has power to confer grace, we conclude that it has the authority of Christ behind it; because a mere man could not attach to a sign the power to give grace. Bearing these few remarks in mind, the reader will appreciate more fully the implications of the following passages:—

For Baptism. "Going therefore teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (*Matthew, XXVIII*). "That He (Christ) might sanctify it (the Church) cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life" (*Ephesians, V*). "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (*Acts, XXII*).

For Confirmation. After Philip the deacon had converted and baptized the Samaritans, the Apostles "sent unto them Peter and John; who, when they had come, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost



. . . . Then they laid their hands upon them; and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon (Magus) saw that by the imposition of the hands of the Apostles the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying: give me also this power that on whomsoever I shall lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (*Acts VIII*).

For the B. Eucharist. "And taking bread . . . do this in commemoration of Me" (*Luke, XXII*). "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him. . . . he that eateth this bread shall live for ever" (*John, VI*).

For Penance. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained" (*John, XX*). The double power (of forgiving or retaining) implies some kind of judicial process; and hence an outward sign.

For Extreme Unction. "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord . . . and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him" (*Ep. of James, V.*).

For Holy Orders. The New Testament has numerous references to ordination by imposition (laying on) of hands with prayer. S. Paul's ordination by this rite is described (*Acts, XIII*). S. Paul in turn ordains S. Timothy in the same way; and subsequently writes to him "I admonish thee that thou stir up the grace\* of God which is in thee by the imposition of my hands" (*2nd Timothy, I*).

For Matrimony. "Husbands love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered Himself for it, that He might sanctify it . . . . So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies . . . . because we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones . . . . This is

\*It is possible that S. Paul here has in mind not so much sanctifying grace as the power of Orders—a power used for the sanctification of others. But as God, when He calls a man to a great spiritual work, always gives him the graces necessary to fit him for that work, the Church has always believed that the person ordained receives sanctifying grace for himself, as well as powers or gifts to be used for the sanctification of others.

a great sacrament (mystery), I speak in (in reference to) Christ and His Church" (*Ephesians, V*). Christian marriage, according to the Apostle, is a symbol or sign of the union between Christ and His Church; and therefore indirectly a sign of grace. Why? Because the union between Christ and His Church is a union based on grace.

### WHY SO MANY SACRAMENTS?

The needs provided for by these seven sacraments are thus briefly described in an official document issued by Pope Eugene IV. in A.D. 1493: "These (sacraments) confer grace on those who receive them worthily. The first five were instituted for the perfection of the individual Christian; the last two for the government and multiplication of the Church. By Baptism we are spiritually reborn; by Confirmation we are increased in grace and strengthened in faith; having been thus reborn and strengthened we are nourished by the divine food of the Eucharist. If we contract illness of soul by sin, we are spiritually healed by Penance. We are spiritually healed also by Extreme Unction, and corporally as well if it be for the soul's good. By Orders the Church is governed and multiplied spiritually; while by Matrimony it is multiplied corporally." In the sacramental system, therefore, God has provided for the needs of the individual Christian and for the needs of the Church alike. The generosity and wisdom of the provision He has made will be realised more fully, if we illustrate it by an example.

Suppose a prophet were sent to the king of Ireland about A.D. 1170, to warn him of the seriousness of the Norman invasion. His message might run something like this: If you wish to save your people, you must organise them for war. It will be a long and bitter struggle, and will continue for centuries after you yourself have gone to heaven. But if you now lay your plans wisely, your cause will triumph in the end; and a great part of your race will be saved. What should the king do in the circum-

stances? It is clear that he must organise an army. As the war is to be a long one, he must make arrangements for the continuous enrolment of recruits during the whole period of the struggle. Secondly, as soldiers, however brave, cannot be expected to defeat armed men with their bare fists, he must provide for the arming of his recruits. He will next have to make plans for the feeding of his soldiers; an army without food would soon be forced to surrender. When the fighting begins, numbers of his men will be wounded: hence he must make arrangements beforehand for field hospitals, where they can be cured, and rendered fit to return to the fighting line. But in a very long war, even the best and bravest men will eventually become unfit for further service. As no king would think of abandoning such men, and allowing them to be slaughtered by the enemy, he will make arrangements for transport to take them safely home out of the fighting line, when their period of service is over. Besides the needs of the individual soldiers, the needs of the army as a whole must be provided for. There must be officers to plan the campaign, and lead the men: and as these officers will gradually disappear, he must arrange for the training and appointment of others to take their place. Last of all, he must bear in mind the effects of a war prolonged over several centuries. If the population goes down, the supply of recruits will fail; and if that happens the army will be eventually defeated. He must therefore devise some scheme to ensure that the population and the supply of recruits will not fail.

Now, "man's life on earth is a warfare"; and the war will last till the end of time. The enemy is the Devil, with his allies the world and the flesh like traitors in our midst. Christ is our King. Let us see how thoroughly and how wisely He provided for the successful conduct of the war, before He ascended into heaven. He has organised an army, the Church. By Baptism we are enrolled in that army. By Confirmation we are armed for the fray. By the B. Eucharist we are fed. Penance heals our wounds,

and leaves us fit to return once more to the battle. When our fighting days are over, we have Extreme Unction to take us safely home out of the enemy's reach. Holy Orders provide officers for the army. And Matrimony ensures a supply of recruits for the future. Our King has thus fully provided for the triumph of His cause. Individual men, even individual soldiers of His army, may still be lost by their own folly; but the army (His Church) is invincible—"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"—and through the army a great part of the race will be saved.

The example just given not only illustrates the purpose of the various sacraments, but it also serves to emphasise a truth already touched on, namely, that the sacraments, the Church, the Redemption and the salvation of mankind are all parts of one great scheme, planned by an infinitely good God from all eternity.

#### HOW THE SACRAMENTS PROVIDE FOR OUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS.

Let us now consider somewhat more in detail what exactly the sacraments do for us. In the first place, all sacraments confer sanctifying\* grace on those who receive them worthily. Two of them, Baptism and Penance, are intended to lift us out of the state of sin, and put us into the state of grace. Hence these two sacraments are called sacraments of the dead, because they are primarily intended for those who are spiritually dead (in the state of sin). But a person who is already in the state of grace can, of course, receive these sacraments worthily and in that case they increase the grace in his soul. The other sacraments† suppose the recipient to be already in the

\*Sanctifying grace causes us to be something, namely children of God, and heirs to heaven. It is a permanent gift (unless and until it is lost by grievous sin). Actual grace enables us to do something, or to do it more easily—to accomplish a good work, or overcome some temptation. It is not a permanent gift, but merely a helping hand held out to us for the moment.

†Extreme Unction in certain circumstances may be received by a person in the state of sin. But as a rule the recipient should be in the state of grace.

state of grace; hence they are called sacraments of the living. These sacraments give an increase of grace to the recipient. This increase of grace means (carries with it) greater holiness in the eyes of God, greater power of meriting supernatural rewards, and a right to greater glory hereafter. These consequences of grace, like the grace itself, can all be lost by the subsequent commission of mortal sin.

Besides this first effect (the giving of *sanctifying* grace) which is common to all the sacraments, there are other effects which are peculiar to the different sacraments. These effects consist chiefly of *actual* graces, or the right to actual graces. Each sacrament gives a special set of actual graces; and in so far as we do not require these graces at the time we receive the sacrament, it gives us a claim to them later on, when we do require them. The special graces to be expected from each sacrament can be inferred from the purpose, for which that sacrament was instituted. Confirmation, for instance, gives a man the special graces necessary to help him to maintain his faith, and keep up the practice of his religious duties in difficult surroundings, such as obtain in places where the Catholic religion is persecuted or scoffed at. Or to put it another way, the Catholic who neglects Confirmation might be compared with a nation that neglects to provide its army with modern weapons.

There is a third effect, a sacramental "character", which is produced by three, and only three, of the sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation and Orders. The word *character* is borrowed from the Greek language, and means a mark. It was often used in early times of the marks stamped on things to show who owned them. It was also used of the mark stamped on a piece of wax by means of a seal. In the natural order men use such marks for various purposes. An official document is stamped or sealed to show that it is genuine. A farmer brands his stock to show that they are his. A king gives his soldiers a uniform (which is a

kind of mark), to distinguish them both from the enemy and from the civil population.

In the spiritual order also, God marks His own: and because Baptism, Confirmation and Orders make us belong to God in a special way, each of these sacraments brings with it a mark or character. Following up the illustration of Christ the King\* already given, we might explain the character as follows: By Baptism we join His army, and He gives us the uniform of a Christian (the character of Baptism); by Confirmation we are fully armed for the battle, and He gives us the badge of first-line troops (the character of Confirmation); by Orders we become officers in the army, and He gives us the stripes corresponding to our rank (the character of Orders).

We know very little about how exactly God marks the souls of Christians in these cases; but that He marks them somehow is beyond doubt. The Council of Trent issued the following definition: "If anyone says that in the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Orders, there is not imprinted on the soul a character, that is, a certain spiritual and indelible mark, on account of which they cannot be repeated, let him be anathema." This definition, issued against one of the errors of Luther, is merely a solemn statement (carrying the full weight of the Church's authority) of a doctrine well known since the beginning of Christianity.

The first references to a sacramental character are found in the Epistles of S. Paul. In several passages he speaks of the seal, with which Christians are sealed; but he does not give any details about it.\* The early Fathers explain and develop these references; and endeavour by illustrations to throw some light on the nature of the sacramental character. For instance, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (who died A. D. 386) compares the character of Baptism to the mark left on Jews by circumcision, to the mark stamped by a seal, to the brand put by a farmer on

\*See, for instance, II. Corinthians, I, 21-22; Ephesians, I, 13; and Ephesians IV., 30.

his sheep, to the distinguishing badges given to soldiers to help them to recognise one another in the heat of battle. Unlike the military badge, however, the character cannot be laid aside; it is not a material thing. It is a spiritual mark, according to St. Cyril, and cannot be destroyed or blotted out. The same language would apply equally well to the characters of Confirmation and Orders.

The sacramental character helps us to understand why these three sacraments cannot be repeated. As a dealer in a fair will not buy a second time a beast that he has already bought and marked; or as a recruiting officer will not enlist a man that is already wearing a soldier's uniform; so God will not a second time promote to the rank of soldier or officer in his army a man bearing the badge of that rank.

In each of the three sacraments mentioned we are dedicated to the service of God in a special way; and the character of the sacrament is a sign of that dedication. It is consequently a sign also of the obligations we have undertaken; and it is a sign of the actual graces due to us that we may be able to fulfil those obligations. God does not, of course, require any sign to remind Him either of the obligations or the graces in question—just as He does not require sacraments in order to give us the gift of sanctifying grace. But He has His own good reasons for the choice He has made in both cases. We have already considered some of the probable reasons that prompted Him to institute the sacraments. In connection with the character also at least one probable reason suggests itself to the mind: it is the greater glory of God, and the greater glory or greater shame of Christians in the life to come. If a Christian is lost, the character (or characters) on his soul will be a standing vindication of God's justice; for it will show that the soul in question got the means of salvation, but failed to profit by them. If the soul has not merely one character but two or three, its shame will be all the greater. If a soul is saved, the characters it bears

will have a permanent testimony to God's goodness to it, as well as a source of joy to the soul itself.

Of the three effects described above—sanctifying grace, actual grace and sacramental character—the most important is sanctifying grace. It is the supernatural life of the soul, the basis of our friendship with God, and our title to eternal happiness in heaven. A man cannot be in the state of grace, without being at the same time a friend of God, and heir to heaven. It follows that whatever prevents us from becoming friends of God, must also prevent us from receiving sanctifying grace. Now, as God does not force His friendship or grace on anyone, man has it in his power to reject both. It is possible, for instance, for a man to be so attached to some vice (sinful habit), that he prefers to live in sin as God's enemy, rather than give up the sin to become a friend of God and heir to heaven. Such a person cannot become God's friend, and consequently cannot receive sanctifying grace, so long as he perseveres in that choice. He has erected a barrier, so to speak, against the infusion of grace into his soul; and only repentance will remove that barrier.\*

Suppose an unrepentant sinner, such as I have described, were to receive a sacrament—just to appear as good as his neighbours—what would be the result? In the first place he would commit a grave sin by receiving the sacrament unworthily. And secondly, the sacrament unworthily received would not confer grace upon him. This failure to confer grace is not due to any defect in the sacrament; it is due to the fact that the man cannot for the time being receive grace, because he has erected a barrier or obstacle against its infusion into his soul.

It does not follow, however, that a sacrament unworthily received is altogether null and void: it may still be a valid (real, genuine) sacrament, even though it is prevented from conferring grace. This is an important consideration, where there is question of Baptism, Confirma-

\*He can still receive actual graces, especially the grace of repentance; for God, who wills not the death of the sinner, gives actual graces to even the greatest sinners.

tion or Orders, which cannot be received a second time. In such cases the unworthy recipient gets the sacramental character of the sacrament; but he will not get sanctifying grace so long as he remains in his present state of mind—or, as we say, so long as his bad dispositions continue. If however, he should repent later on, the sacrament will then “revive”, that is, it will confer on the now penitent sinner the grace, which it was prevented from conferring when it was received. Were it not for this merciful concession on the part of God, a person who received one of those sacraments unworthily could never get the grace it was intended to confer, since the sacrament could not be received a second time. It is practically certain that the sacraments of Extreme Unction and Matrimony revive likewise in similar circumstances. It is unlikely, however, that either Penance or the Blessed Eucharist revives, since these sacraments can be repeated as soon as the unworthy recipient repents.

#### HOW A SACRAMENT CONFERS GRACE

We have now to consider *how* the sacraments confer grace. The question is of some importance, because our doctrine is often misunderstood or misrepresented by Protestant writers. To make the discussion of the question more intelligible to the reader, it may be well to begin by taking a glance at some modern errors about the efficacy of the sacraments (that is, their power and manner of working).

We have already seen that the worthy reception of a sacrament of the dead (Baptism or Penance) “justifies” a sinner, that is, lifts him out of the state of sin and puts him into the state of grace. This process of justification has two aspects—(1) the blotting out of sin, and (2) the infusion of sanctifying grace. The state, in which the man finds himself after justification, is called the state of grace, state of justice, or state of justification\*; and the man himself is spoken of as a “just” man.

\*These three expressions mean the same thing.

Luther fell into his most serious errors in explaining justification. He erred about what justification is, and about how it is got. Although he continued to speak about “forgiveness of sins,” “justification,” “grace” and “sanctification”, he did not mean by these expressions what the Church had meant from time immemorial. According to Luther’s doctrine, no real change, no true sanctification, takes place in the soul when a man is “justified”. Sin is not really blotted out, but merely put out of sight behind the merits of Christ. Sanctifying grace, as we understand that gift, is not infused into the soul. And man, at least in this life, does not become really pleasing to God, but merely shelters behind, or borrows the justice of Christ. In a word, we are merely reckoned just without being really so—somewhat as a criminal is counted just in the eyes of the law, when a jury acquits him (though he may be in fact guilty). Justification, as understood by Luther, is reducible to this:—For the sake of Christ (the one and only really just man), God ceases to hold us liable to punishment for sin, and gives us instead a free pass to heaven—provided only we have faith in Christ’s promises. In the last few words we have Luther’s second error, namely, that nothing is of any avail to justify a man except faith in Christ’s promises.

Starting with these false premises, Luther was forced to draw erroneous conclusions about the value of the sacraments. For him a sacrament was a sign, to be used for the purpose of exciting (stirring up) or nourishing “justifying faith.” It was not the sacrament, but the faith it stirred up, that procured and preserved justification. A sacrament might indeed be looked on as a token of justification already received by faith; but no sacrament could give us justification; only faith could do that. The value of a sacrament is thus on a level with that of a sermon—or perhaps a little below it. A sermon stirs up a man’s faith by the words of the preacher; a sacrament stirs up faith by the words and acts of the minister of the sacrament. To be consistent with himself, Luther should have rejected

infant Baptism; since it is clear that the sacrament could not excite faith in a baby. Tradition and sentiment were too strong for him, however; so he allowed the practice of infant Baptism to continue.

Some of the Protestant leaders went even farther than Luther in debasing the value of the sacraments. They regarded a sacrament as a kind of profession of Christian faith, a sign of one's belief in Christ. According to this view, a sacrament could serve as a bond of union between the faithful, and could distinguish them from unbelievers; but it could have no influence on one's salvation. There was little fixity, however, about the Protestant doctrine of sacramental efficacy in the sixteenth century. Not merely did different parties hold different views; but the same party sometimes changed its doctrine in the space of a few years.

These new errors were condemned, and the traditional doctrine of the Church was clearly stated in a number of definitions (i.e. doctrinal statements, backed by the full weight of the Church's infallible teaching authority) issued by the Council of Trent in 1547. Here are three of them—

“If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or that they do not confer that grace on those who place no obstacle to it; as though the sacraments were only outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and marks of Christian profession whereby believers are distinguished among men from unbelievers, let him be anathema.”

“If anyone says that the sacraments were instituted merely to nourish faith, let him be anathema.”

“If anyone says that grace is not conferred by the sacraments of the New Law by virtue of the sacramental rite (*ex opere operato*), but that faith (in the divine promise) alone suffices to secure grace, let him be anathema.”

The reader will notice how the various Protestant errors mentioned above are condemned in these pronouncements.

The sacraments are not merely bonds of union between the faithful, nor tokens of justification received by faith: they are causes of grace. And they are not causes of grace merely in the indirect and roundabout manner contemplated by Luther, that is, by acting as stepping stones to faith, which in turn might be supposed to win grace or justification from God. The sacraments cause grace directly and immediately by virtue of the sacramental rite itself: or, as one of the definitions has it, they “contain” grace. This last statement does not mean, of course, that the sacraments contain grace bodily by physical content, as a bucket contains water; it only means that they contain grace, as a cause contains its effect—as a violin, for instance, contains music, or as a postal order contains money.

In order that a sacrament may actually cause (produce) grace in the soul of the recipient, there is one important condition that must be fulfilled—the recipient must not place a barrier or obstacle to the infusion of grace into his soul. The recipient places such an obstacle as we have already seen, whenever his “dispositions” (frame of mind, state of will) are such that it is impossible for him, for the time being, to become a friend of God. A sacrament might be compared to the sun. The sun will light your room if you allow it: but you can prevent it from doing so by keeping the shutters of your window closed against its rays. A sacrament will give you grace likewise if you allow it; but you can shut out its grace by refusing to remove the shutters, that is, the obstacles that prevent you from becoming God's friend.

What exactly are those obstacles? In the first place, such an attachment to sin, that the person is not prepared to give up the sin even to become God's friend and heir to heaven. Such a state of will would make an obstacle to grace, whether the sacrament received were a sacrament of the living or a sacrament of the dead. In the second place, the sacraments of the living are intended only for those who are already in the state of grace. Hence if a person

is in the state of mortal sin, and without waiting to obtain pardon, proceeds to receive a sacrament of the living, he too places an obstacle to the grace, which that sacrament would otherwise confer on him. In short, whenever a man receives a sacrament unworthily (without the dispositions he is bound to have), he places an obstacle to the infusion of grace by that sacrament. The Catholic doctrine could be summed up in one sentence, by saying: the sacraments will produce grace in your soul if you receive them worthily, but not if you receive them unworthily.

A man may leave the shutters of his window permanently open, and yet allow the glass to become so dirty, that much of the available light from the sun is prevented from coming into his room. Similarly the recipient of a sacrament may have the dispositions he is absolutely bound to have; and yet his conscience may be like the dirty window. His will may be out of line with the will of God in many small things, not serious enough to be mortal sins: he may be one of those who have no higher ambition than to be saved by the skin of their teeth, and who have no scruple about committing deliberate venial sins. In such cases the sacrament confers grace; but it does not confer as much grace as it was intended to confer. The petty obstacles it meets are not sufficient to shut out grace altogether; but they are sufficient to diminish it. It follows, therefore, that the better the dispositions of the recipient (i.e., the nearer his will comes to being in line with the will of God), the greater will be the amount of grace conferred by the sacrament.

In a previous paragraph we saw that the sacraments are direct and immediate causes of grace. To avoid any possible misunderstanding of this statement, it is necessary to note the distinction between a principal cause and an instrumental cause. When a musician plays a violin, the music produced is caused both by the musician and by the violin, but in different ways—by the musician as principal cause, and by the violin as instrumental cause. No one doubts but that the violin really produces music; but it

does so only as the instrument or tool of the musician. Left to itself, it could not produce a single note. In this respect the sacraments are like the violin. They are causes, but only instrumental causes, in the conferring of grace. God is the principal cause.

When we say that the sacraments are direct causes of grace (rather than mere stepping stones to justifying faith); or when we say that they confer grace by virtue of the sacramental rite correctly performed, we are only expressing in modern scientific language the teaching of Christ and His Apostles. This will be clear from a glance at a few of the statements made about sacraments in the New Testament. In these statements, the writer, (or speaker) uses a preposition denoting causality (*by, through, of, etc.*), to show that the conferring of grace is to be attributed to two causes simultaneously—one cause being the sacrament, and the other cause God (or the Holy Ghost\*). Here are a few examples:—

Our Lord says “Unless a man be born again *of* water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John, 3). Baptism and the Holy Ghost are here mentioned jointly as the causes of man’s spiritual rebirth. He does not say (nor does He mean) “Unless a man be born again of justifying faith, which in turn is, or may be, born of water”. The obvious sense of the words, and the practice of infant Baptism since the beginning of Christianity clearly show that spiritual rebirth is to be attributed directly to Baptism, as it is attributed directly to the Holy Ghost. Our Lord does not state in technical language the precise relation between the two causes He mentions (i.e., Baptism and the Holy Ghost). But His general meaning is clear: the grace *of* the Holy Ghost is given by Baptism.

“And when Simon saw that *by* the imposition of the

\*Like creation and other external works of God, the conferring of grace upon creatures is equally the work of all three divine persons. Yet (for reasons I need not here explain) Scripture “appropriates” (i.e. refers specially) certain works to one or other of the divine persons. One of the works “appropriated” in this way to the Holy Ghost in the sanctification of souls.

hands of the Apostles the Holy Ghost was given, etc." (Acts, 8). Here the manner of expression is different, but the meaning is similar. The Holy Ghost (bringing with Him the graces of Confirmation) is given *by* imposition of hands. In other words, the grace of the Holy Ghost is given *by* Confirmation.

"Stir up the grace of God, which is in thee *by* the imposition of my hands" (2nd Tim. 1). Here we have the same idea expressed in connection with Holy Orders. The grace of God is given *by* ordination. The directness of the causality exercised by the sacrament could hardly be more clearly stated.

"That He (Christ) might sanctify it (the Church), cleansing it *by* the laver (bath) of water in the word of life" (Ephes. 5). Christ, we are told, cleanses and sanctifies the Church; and He does so *by means of* Baptism. The Apostle, it will be noticed, speaks of Baptism as the instrument of Christ.

"God, our Saviour . . . saved us *by* the laver of regeneration, and renovation of the Holy Ghost" (Titus, 3). Again, Baptism is represented as the instrument used by "God our Saviour" for our regeneration (rebirth) and renovation (renewal) at the hands of the Holy Ghost. The "renovation" is not a different thing from the "regeneration"; they are only different aspects of the one thing, justification. In the word "regeneration" here, the Apostle has in mind chiefly the negative aspect, i.e., cleansing from sin: in the word "renovation" he has chiefly in mind the positive aspect, i.e., inward sanctification by the grace of the Holy Ghost.

From these texts it will be seen that a sacrament is not merely an incentive to faith: it is a direct cause of the infusion of grace into the soul. In each passage quoted, grace (or one of its equivalents, rebirth, sanctification, gift of the Holy Ghost) is stated to be conferred *by means of* the sacramental rite—washing with water in Baptism; imposition of hands in Confirmation and Orders. As the principle of direct causality of grace by the sacraments is

thus amply established, we need not delay further on the subject.

Piecing together the information given in the passages quoted above, the reader will notice that three causes of our sanctification are mentioned—Christ, the sacraments, and the Holy Ghost. In the passages dealing with Baptism, for instance, all three are represented as true causes of our spiritual regeneration. S. Paul tells us that Christ sanctifies and cleanses the Church, using as His instrument "the laver (bath) of water in the word of life." Our Lord attributes the same effect to water and the Holy Ghost. If we can form some idea of the parts played by these three causes (Christ, Baptism, and the Holy Ghost) respectively, it will help us to understand more fully the manner in which the sacraments work.

A man can produce (cause) an effect in either of two ways—by his own act, or by the act of another. An example will illustrate the point. When King David of Israel decided to get rid of Urias, he wrote a letter to the general of his army, commanding him to put Urias in the most exposed part of the fighting line, where he was sure to be killed by the enemy. After Urias had been killed, God sent the prophet Nathan to denounce David for the sin of murder: "Thou hast killed Urias . . . slain him with the sword of the Ammonites" (2nd Kings, 12). In this incident we have examples of two kinds of causality—(1) moral causality, the kind exercised when you cause the effect by the act of somebody else; and (2) physical causality, the kind exercised when you cause the effect by your own act. In each case, both the principal cause and the instrumental cause are mentioned. David is the principal moral cause of the death of Urias; and the letter by which he got it done is the instrumental moral cause. The Ammonites (who actually slew Urias) are the principal physical cause; and the swords used by them are the instrumental physical cause. The fact that it is David (not the Ammonites), that is denounced for murder, shows that a cause is no less truly a cause when its influence on



the effect is only moral. Both physical and moral causes are real causes—both really influence the production of the effect—but their influence is exercised in different ways.

Here is another example of moral causality—one that is more closely akin to the question we are now discussing. A man puts a large sum of money in the bank, and takes out a cheque book. Subsequently his wife, who is going to town to do some shopping, asks him for £10. Not having that amount in ready cash, he writes a cheque for £10 in her favour, signs it and gives it to her. When she arrives in town, she presents the cheque at the bank, and signs it: the cashier pays her out £10, and deducts the same amount from her husband's account in the bank. Instead of giving £10 to his wife by his own act, the man has caused the bank to give her that amount; and the instrument he used to get the bank to do so was the cheque. The husband was the principal moral cause of the payment; the cheque was the instrumental moral cause; the cashier who actually handed out the money was the physical cause. If you ask: to whom is she principally indebted for now having the £10, the answer is, of course, her husband—just as in the other example David was denounced as the murderer.

We have already seen that every grace we receive in the supernatural order has been won for us by Christ. We have seen too, that the value of the passion and death of the God-man was so great in the eyes of God, that it far more than sufficed for two purposes—(1) to satisfy fully for the dishonour done to God by all the sins of mankind; and (2) to merit for men all the graces they require to obtain eternal salvation. And yet, 1900 years after Christ's death, men still come into the world in a state of sin, because they are born children and heirs to Adam, not children and heirs of Christ. Our Lord has paid the price of our redemption; but we have to be linked up with Him, before we can actually benefit by what He has done for us. The sacraments are the links, that connect us with Christ,

and enable us to participate in the fruits of the redemption wrought by Him.

We are now in a position to illustrate by an example the parts played in our sanctification by the three causes already mentioned—Christ, the sacraments, and the Holy Ghost. Christ has paid into the hands of God an inestimable treasure of satisfaction and merit. To enable mankind to draw on this treasure, He has entrusted to His spouse, the Church, for distribution among men, seven books of cheques signed by Himself. When the Church gives us Baptism, she gives us a cheque (signed by Christ) out of the first of these seven books. We present that cheque to the divine banker; and the Holy Ghost pays out the graces mentioned on our cheque—the graces of Baptism. When the Church gives us Confirmation, she gives us a cheque out of the second book: we present it to God; and again the Holy Ghost gives us the graces mentioned on our cheque—this time the graces of Confirmation. And so on for the other sacraments.

The reader will now see how Christ sanctifies the Church, cleansing it by the laver of water, as S. Paul teaches. And he will see how it can be true at the same time that man is reborn of water and the Holy Ghost, as Our Lord teaches. Christ is the principal moral cause of our justification in Baptism; the sacrament is the instrumental moral cause; the Holy Ghost is the physical cause. The parallel between the natural order and the supernatural order is very close. Christ says of the supernatural order: unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. The corresponding statement in the natural order (in the illustration given above) would run: unless the lady gets £10 by means of the cheque and the banker, she cannot do her shopping. S. Paul says of the supernatural order: Christ sanctifies the Church, cleansing it by the laver of water. The corresponding statement in the natural order would run: the man provides for the wants of his wife, paying for her shopping by means of his cheque.

One other point of similarity is worth noticing. When the lady presented her cheque for £10, there was one condition she had to fulfil, before she was paid; she had to write her name on the back of the cheque. If she refused to do so, no payment would have been made. The cheque itself was all right; the signature of her husband was all right; his account in the bank was all right: but according to the regulations of the bank, her refusal to sign her name created an obstacle to the payment of the money. We too can place an obstacle to the cashing of our sacramental cheques, by refusing to endorse them. We have to write our name, so to speak, on the back of our cheque, to acknowledge that we are in fact what we are described to be on the front of it, namely, true followers of Christ, willing to serve God and be His friends, whatever it may cost us to do so.

From the foregoing pages the reader will see that in the sacraments we have a wonderful example of God's mercy and goodness to us, and one that is of the highest practical importance to every one of us.

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