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What Is Christianity?—XV.

# SACRAMENTS — THE MINISTER

by  
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## WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

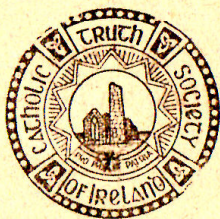
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## SACRAMENTS—THE MINISTER

BEING THE FIFTEENTH BOOKLET IN THE SERIES "WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?"

By REV. W. MORAN, D.D.

### HOW CHRIST IS THE PRINCIPAL MINISTER

In a previous booklet of this series, we saw that the sacraments are rites instituted by Christ, to put us in possession of the graces merited for us by His passion and death. Christ was both God and man; and He exercised both His divine power and His human power in the institution of the Sacraments. The exercise of divine power was necessary to attach the giving of grace to a sensible sign. This is clear from the fact that sanctifying grace is a *supernatural gift*, which makes us "sharers of the divine nature" (II Pet. I). As God alone can make us sharers of His own divine nature, it follows that He alone has authority and power to give us sanctifying grace, or to attach its giving to a sensible sign. But Christ also exercised His human power in the institution of the sacraments. It was in His human nature that He suffered, and thus merited for us the graces now attached to the sacraments. If Christ as man merited the graces, it was only to be expected that Christ as man would select the particular signs or rites, by which these graces should be conferred upon us. And so it happened, as we learn from Scripture and Tradition. Christ, therefore, exercised His human power by choosing the rites; and He exercised His divine power by making these rites efficacious signs of grace.

If Christ merited those graces, chose the signs to which they were to be attached, and finally made the necessary

link between the graces and the signs; then it follows that the sacraments are conferred in the name and by the authority of Christ. This is what we mean, when we say that Christ is the principal minister of the sacraments. When Baptism, for instance, is conferred, Christ does not intervene by a new personal act of His own; it is His human minister who confers the sacrament. Yet, because the human minister derives from Christ the power to baptize, the baptism can also be attributed to Christ. This point can be illustrated from the letters of S. Paul. On the one hand, S. Paul tells us that Christ sanctifies the Church, "cleansing it by the bath of water in the word of life" (Eph. v.). On the other hand, he tells us that the Apostles are "the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. iv.). The two statements supplement each other: Christ does not baptize the faithful by His own personal act, but through the ministry of those to whom He has entrusted that work. And that raises the practical question: to whom has Christ entrusted the administration of the sacraments?

### THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY OVER MINISTRY OF SACRAMENTS

Our Lord Himself completed the first phase of man's redemption, by satisfying for human sin, and meriting justification and eternal life for all men. But a second phase of the work of redemption still remained to be accomplished. We have to be linked up with the Redeemer, in order to come into actual possession of the good things He has merited for us. The ordinary links instituted by Christ for this purpose are faith and the sacraments. To make these means of salvation available to all men, Christ established an organised society (His Church), to which He entrusted His doctrine and sacraments for dissemination throughout the world: "And Jesus spoke to them (the Apostles) saying: all power is given Me in heaven and on earth. Going, therefore, teach all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And behold I am with you all days even to the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii). From this and other passages of the New Testament, it is clear that Our Lord meant to place the administration of the sacraments under the jurisdiction of the Church. In fact without such a custodian, the sacramental system must inevitably have been corrupted in course of time through the infiltration of errors of various kinds.

The first inference we can draw from these facts is that no one can *lawfully* administer a sacrament, except in accordance with the laws laid down by Christ's Church. Such laws have been enacted, partly to ensure that the sacramental rite will not be corrupted, or invalidly administered; partly to secure due reverence for the sacraments; and partly to ensure, as far as possible, that those who receive the sacraments will benefit by their reception. But a sacrament is not necessarily invalid because it is unlawfully administered. And so the question remains: who can confer a sacrament validly? To answer this question fully, we should have to consider each sacrament in turn; for Christ may have (and in fact has) made different arrangements for the administration of different sacraments. What these arrangements are in each case can be considered most conveniently in connection with the study of individual sacraments. In the present context we shall confine ourselves to the more general question, whether all men, or at least all Christians, are equally deputed and empowered by Christ to administer *all* the sacraments validly. Here we are face to face with one of the chief errors of the Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century. If, as Luther thought, a sacrament were merely a sign intended to excite justifying faith, it could make little difference who the minister was. In fact many of the Reformers required no more than that the minister of a sacrament should be a Christian. Against this new doctrine the Council of Trent issued the following defini-

tive condemnation: "If anyone says that all Christians have power to administer the word and all the sacraments, let him be anathema" (Sess. vii, Can. 10). This definition enshrines not only the teaching of Christian tradition, but the teaching of Scripture as well.

#### CHRIST ESTABLISHED AN OFFICIAL MINISTRY.

Even under the Mosaic Law, which contained only types and shadows of the good things to come under the New Law, certain people were set apart by divine command for the more important functions, such as sacrifice. When King Saul, on the plea of necessity, once ventured to offer sacrifice by his own hand, he was reprimanded by the prophet Samuel in these words: "Thou hast done foolishly, and hast not kept the commandments of the Lord thy God. If thou hadst not done this, the Lord would have established thy kingdom over Israel for ever; but thy kingdom shall not continue" (I Kings, xiii). If the line was drawn so strictly in the Old Law between those deputed, and those not deputed to offer sacrifice, it was only to be expected that Christ would depute special ministers for the much more important ministry of the New Law\*. The author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* gives expression to this consideration, when he writes: "Every high priest taken from among men is ordained (or appointed) for men in the things pertaining to God, that he may offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins . . . neither doth any man take the honour to himself, but he that is called by God, as Aaron was" (Heb. v). In the New Law Christ has made provision for calling men to this high office, by establishing the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Both the Scriptural passages and the subsequent early Christian documents, that deal with the origin and early

\*In the New Law there is only one sacrifice, and the offering of that sacrifice is inseparably bound up with one of the sacraments—the Blessed Eucharist.

history of the Christian ministry, provide abundant evidence of the clear-cut distinction, that existed from the beginning, between those ordained to the ministry on the one hand, and the rest of the faithful on the other. To appreciate the full force of the evidence, it must be remembered that in the ministration of the sacraments we are dealing with *supernatural* things—with things beyond man's natural powers. The man who confers a sacrament validly is exercising a supernatural function. Where does he get the power to do so? If he has the power at all, it must have come to him from Christ. Now, the New Testament contains not the slightest hint that Christ conferred some kind of indiscriminate delegation on all Christians, to enable them to confer *all* the sacraments validly on one another. On the contrary, it shows clearly that Christ selected a small group of men (the Apostles), on whom alone He conferred certain special powers and that the Apostles in turn transmitted these special powers to specially selected candidates, by an ordination rite consisting of imposition of hands with prayer. No one except those so ordained was believed to possess the special powers in question. This last point can be established in two different ways—first, by examining the prayers in the most ancient ordination services that have come down to us; and secondly by drawing the obvious inferences from facts recorded in the New Testament.

#### THE ADMINISTRATION OF SOME SACRAMENTS RESERVED TO OFFICIAL MINISTERS

In the first days of Christianity the Apostles alone were "Ministers of Christ and dispensers of the mysteries of God." But before many years had passed, the Apostles had transmitted some of their Christ-given powers to a hierarchy of Christian ministers, wielding various degrees of spiritual power and authority. Men were promoted to the ranks of this ministerial hierarchy by imposition of hands with prayer. The New Testament tells us so much;

but it does not record any of the prayers used at these ordination services. Neither have we any record of these prayers in the limited Christian literature that has survived from the second century. Probably the oldest surviving document giving prayers to be used at ordination services, is one based on the works of Hippolytus, who died about A.D. 235. From the prayers in this and subsequent records we gather that the principal powers, which the ordination rite was intended to convey to the person ordained, were usually mentioned explicitly in the prayers of the ordination service. For instance, in the ordination of a priest, God was asked to confer on the ordained the power to consecrate the Eucharist (or "offer the gifts," i.e., celebrate Mass), and the power to forgive sins. The implication is obvious, namely, that before the ordination the candidate for Orders did not possess these powers. In other words, the valid ministry of the sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist is reserved to official ordained ministers.

To return to the New Testament. Soon after the Ascension a complaint was made to the Apostles by the Greek-speaking members of the Church in Jerusalem. The latter complained that their poor were being neglected in the distribution of alms. To avoid the necessity of frittering away their time on tasks of minor importance, the Apostles availed of this occasion to confer a limited share in their own special powers on seven men of good repute. S. Luke's account of the whole incident, and of the subsequent activity of two of the seven men appointed, shows that these men were not intended to be merely outdoor relieving officers. Two distinct facts are mentioned in connection with their appointment—an election, and an ordination ceremony. The reason for the election is obvious. In view of the complaint already mentioned, S. Peter wanted the community to choose and present candidates, who would command confidence on all sides. But notice the terms of reference put before the electors by S. Peter:

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom *we* may appoint over this business" (Acts, vi). And S. Luke continues: "And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, etc . . . These they set before the Apostles, and they (the Apostles) praying imposed hands on them." In this incident we have, according to the unanimous voice of antiquity, the first ordination to deaconship. The narrative itself confirms this interpretation; for instead of telling us how "the seven" dealt with the alms problem, it immediately proceeds to record the success of Stephen's preaching; and a little later records the conversion and baptism of the Samaritans by Philip, another of "the seven." These activities in turn help us to understand why S. Peter reserved to the Apostles the actual appointment of the seven, and why that appointment was made by imposition of hands with prayer.

In his account of Philip's mission in Samaria, S. Luke records an incident that has an important bearing on the question we are now discussing: "Then Simon (Magus) himself believed also, and having been baptized adhered to Philip . . . Now when the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who when they were 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 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). In this incident, as all the early commentators point out, we have the first reference to the sacrament of Confirmation; and already the question of the minister of Confirmation is brought before us pointedly. Simon, though a baptized Christian and a close disciple of Philip, cannot confer Confirmation. If he could,

he would not have to try to bribe the Apostles to give him power to do so. Even Philip, though already ordained to deaconship, cannot confer confirmation. We can infer so much from the fact that the Apostles in Jerusalem thought it necessary to send Peter and John on a long journey for the purpose, and that the latter returned to Jerusalem, when they had accomplished their mission.

In the *Acts of the Apostles* and in the epistles of the New Testament we find frequent reference to another grade of the hierarchy, superior to deaconship. Its members are called *bishops* and *presbyters*—the latter a Greek word, from which the English word *priest* is derived.\* These presbyters are an essential element in every Christian community; and a number of them are ordained as soon as a new centre of Christianity is established. We are told, for instance, that Paul and Barnabas at the conclusion of their first apostolic journey “confirmed the souls of the faithful, exhorting them to continue in the faith . . . and having appointed presbyters for them in every Church . . . commended them to the Lord” (Acts xiv). A few years later, S. Paul sent his disciple, Titus, to Crete to appoint presbyters in every town on the island (Tit. i). The Apostle left another disciple, Timothy, at Ephesus for a similar purpose. In his letters to both Titus and Timothy, S. Paul gives detailed instructions about the qualifications they are to look for in candidates for the presbyterate; and he warns Timothy not to “impose hands hastily on any man.” He is referring, of course, to the rite of ordination. It was by imposition of hands with prayer that S. Paul himself was ordained; and it was by the same rite that S. Paul in turn ordained Timothy (Acts xiii, 3; II Tim. I, 6).

Although the New Testament nowhere gives us anything

\*The words “bishop” and “presbyter” (the latter meaning older or elder) appear to be used indiscriminately in the New Testament. About the end of the Apostolic Age, however, the two words began to be used in distinct senses, the word “bishop” being reserved for those presbyters who had received the power of ordaining others. The title “presbyter” continued to be given to those presbyters who had not received that power.

like a complete list of the functions of these presbyters, it throws many interesting sidelights on the nature of their office. The presbyters are not merely the older men of the community. They hold a definite ecclesiastical office, in virtue of which they are the rulers and shepherds of their flocks. Their right to rule and shepherd the flock does not come from the flock itself, but from the Holy Ghost (Acts xx, 28). Among their duties as shepherds is the teaching of sound doctrine, and the counteracting of heresy. For our present purpose, however, the most interesting reference to the presbyters is that contained in the *Epistle of S. James*: “Is anyone sick among you? Let him call in the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him” (James v). The instruction to call in the presbyters carries with it an unusually clear implication in connection with this particular sacrament. In the case of other sacraments a man can make his own arrangements at leisure for the reception of the sacrament. In the case of Extreme Unction he is taken unawares; for sickness is nearly always unexpected, and the administration of Extreme Unction is frequently a matter of great urgency. Now, if the members of the sick man’s family could confer the sacrament of Extreme Unction validly, there would be no necessity for waiting for the presbyters, with the consequent risk of allowing the patient to die without the sacrament. The obvious implication of S. James’s words is that the ordinary faithful cannot confer Extreme Unction.

In view of the evidence outlined so far, it may appear strange that the Protestant Reformers could ever have believed that ordination to Holy Orders is not necessary for the valid administration of at least some of the sacraments. It will not appear so strange, if we remember that this particular error was a necessary link in a series of errors connected logically together. The fundamental

error was the Protestant doctrine of imputed "justification" by faith alone. Once this doctrine was accepted, it became necessary to deny that the sacraments can have any of the supernatural effects attributed to them by Catholics. If the sacraments produce no supernatural effects, it follows that no special powers are necessary to administer them. The problem was still further simplified, from the Reformers' point of view, by the rejection of all the sacraments except Baptism and the Blessed Eucharist. Now, Catholics as well as Protestants admit the validity of lay Baptism. And so there remained only one sacrament to cause any misgiving. The power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is obviously a supernatural power, which no man possesses till he receives it from those empowered to give it to him. Most of the sects soon got over this difficulty by denying the doctrine of the Real Presence as well as the sacrificial character of the Mass. With the rejection of the doctrines of the Real Presence and of the grace-giving power of the sacraments, ordination ceased to have any real meaning. It conferred no grace; and it conferred no special powers. No wonder the Reformers struck it out of the list of Christian sacraments.

#### LAY MINISTRY OF TWO SACRAMENTS.

In a discussion about the minister of the sacraments, two sacraments require special mention. These are Baptism and Matrimony. In the case of Matrimony, the priest who assists at the marriage is not the minister of the sacrament; he is only an official witness on behalf of the Church. Matrimony is not conferred in the same way as other sacraments; in fact we can hardly use the word "confer" in connection with it at all. Long before the coming of Christ marriage was, as it still is, a natural contract between a man and a woman, whereby each receives certain rights, and undertakes certain obligations in return. When Christ instituted the sacrament of Matri-

mony, He simply raised to the status of a sacrament the natural contract of marriage made between Christians. Consequently, whenever two validly baptized Christians enter into a valid contract of marriage, they automatically receive a sacrament as well. Now, as it is the parties being married that make the marriage contract, it follows that it is the parties themselves who administer the sacrament of Matrimony.

The reason for the lay administration of Baptism in case of necessity is not so obvious. In the administration of Baptism two distinct interests are involved—the interest of the Church, and the interest of the person baptized. The Church is a visible society; and Baptism is the rite of initiation, by which a person becomes a member of it. Now, it is clear that no society can hope to achieve its object, unless it has power to refuse admission to undesirable outsiders who, if admitted to membership, would only use their position to defeat the very purpose for which the society was founded. For this reason every society exercises some kind of check on the admission of prospective members. Sometimes a committee of members or officials of the society is appointed to consider applications for membership; sometimes the secretary or other officer of the society is entrusted with the task. But in all cases it is a recognised principle that a rank outsider cannot elect to membership either himself or another outsider. Now, the Church must have the same power as other societies to turn away from her fold those who will not agree to abide by her rules—those, for instance, who will not accept her defined doctrine. These considerations naturally lead one to suppose that Christ has placed the administration of Baptism under the jurisdiction of the Church; and that the Church in turn looks after her interests by reserving the administration of Baptism to certain ministers deputed for the purpose. Such in fact is the actual situation with, however, certain limitations. It was to the Apostles, as the ruling body in the Church, that Christ addressed the words "Going therefore teach all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii). The Church in turn has, from time immemorial, told those being ordained to deaconship that she is sending them to baptize. Moreover in the actual ceremony of Baptism she instructs her official minister to demand a profession of faith\* in her doctrine from the baptizand, before the latter is admitted to the sacrament. If we considered only the interests and rights of the Church, Our Lord's commission to the Apostles, the ordination service of deaconship, and the Baptismal service given in the Roman Ritual, we should regard lay Baptism as at least probably invalid in all cases, and as certainly invalid when conferred by an infidel or a heretic.

But there is another interest involved—the interest of the person baptised. Baptism is not merely the rite of initiation into the Church; it has another and still more important purpose, namely, to bring justification and the right to heaven to the person baptized. This second interest can be most easily appreciated in the case of children, who die soon after birth. Such souls can attain eternal life by one means, and by one means only, the sacrament of Baptism. In view of the urgency associated with so many of these cases, it is clear that in the course of ages the salvation of millions of souls must depend on whether or not a lay person can validly baptize. The interests of the souls concerned seem to cry out to God to permit lay Baptism. The interests of the Church, as a visible society, seem to demand that new members shall not be admitted except in the constitutional way. In short, there is a clash of interests; and the question arises: which interest is to prevail? The Bible throws no light on that question. We have to depend entirely on Tradition and the living voice of the Church for an answer. It is the Church herself that tells us that, in view of the supreme issue at stake for countless souls, Christ has allowed the

\*That is the meaning of the recitation of the Creed.

laity as well as the clergy, to confer Baptism validly.\* A layman who baptizes when there is no necessity, acts unlawfully by usurping the functions of those set apart by the Church to act in her name. But even in such cases the Baptism is valid. Our Lord did not wish the validity of the sacrament to be left dependent on nicely-weighed probabilities of life or death; nor did He wish to have people troubled in later life with doubts about the validity of Baptism conferred on them by a lay person in case of doubtful necessity.

As a matter of historical fact, the validity of Baptism conferred by a *Catholic* layman was never seriously questioned at any period in the Church's history. The clash of interests, already referred to, appears to have been grasped from the beginning. As early as A.D. 200, or thereabouts, we find Tertullian of Carthage expounding (in his book on Baptism) the rights of the Church, and their limitations, in this matter. He explains that the bishop has the first right to baptize, and after him the presbyters and deacons, "yet not without the bishop's authority, on account of the honour of the Church." "Besides these, even (Catholic) laymen have the right to baptize" but reverence and modesty should prevent them from "assuming (usurping) to themselves the function of the bishop" (i.e., by baptizing when there is no necessity). Two centuries later, S. Augustine summed up the situation as follows: "If it (lay Baptism) is done without necessity, it is a usurpation of another's office . . . But even though it is usurped without any necessity, and is conferred *by whomsoever on whomsoever*, what is given cannot be said to be not given, though it may be truly said to have been given unlawfully" (Contra. Epist. Parmen. ii).

\*Among many official pronouncements, the following from a General Council (Fourth Lateran, A.D. 1215) may be mentioned: "The sacrament of baptism . . . properly conferred *by whomsoever* is useful for salvation."



### CAN HERETICS AND SINNERS CONFER SACRAMENTS?

When S. Augustine wrote the words I have just quoted, he was not thinking merely of Baptism conferred by a Catholic layman. He had before his mind the question of the validity of Baptism conferred by one heretic on another, whether the agent was a minister or a layman in the heretical sect. He had before his mind the possibility that both the minister and the recipient of Baptism might be unrepentant sinners. In short, when he says that Baptism can be validly conferred "by whomsoever and on whomsoever," he means exactly what he says—supposing only that the recipient had not been already baptized. S. Augustine does not say that Baptism will actually confer sanctifying grace on everyone who receives it. He is well aware of the fact that bad dispositions place an obstacle to its grace-giving efficacy; and he is inclined to think that the heretic's dispositions are always bad. Nevertheless the Baptism received by the heretic from another heretic is valid; so that, if the recipient ever repents and returns to the Church, the Baptism already received will then produce its sanctifying effects.

I have quoted from Augustine the phrase, "by whomsoever and on whomsoever," because it expresses so neatly the teaching of the Church on a question that caused considerable controversy in the third and fourth centuries. The question was this: Must a man be a member of the true Church, or must he be himself in the state of grace, before he can administer a valid sacrament? The question, as to whether true faith is necessary in the minister of a sacrament, first presented itself in connection with the validity of Baptism conferred by heretics. But the principle at stake was one that applied equally in the case of the other sacraments. There was precisely the same reason—or absence of reason—for questioning a heretical bishop's power to baptize, as there was for questioning his power to confirm or ordain. And the same arguments, that led

some early writers to deny the validity of Baptism conferred by a heretic, led others to deny the validity of Baptism conferred by a person in the state of mortal sin. There are consequently two questions to be discussed—one concerning the faith of the minister of a sacrament; the other concerning his personal sanctity. The following definitions, issued by the Council of Trent, express the infallible teaching of the Church on these questions. "If anyone say that a minister in mortal sin does not confer a sacrament even though he observes all the essentials that pertain to the conferring of the sacrament, let him be anathema." "If anyone says that Baptism, which is given by heretics in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost with the intention of doing what the Church does, is not true Baptism let him be anathema." (Sess. vii).

As neither of the questions just mentioned is discussed in the New Testament, the answers to them can only be known from Tradition and the living voice of the Church. To explain how the Tradition in question led to the formulation of a definite answer to both questions, it is necessary to make a historical digression of some length.

Tertullian is the earliest known writer to deny the validity of Baptism conferred outside the true Church. About the time Tertullian wrote, and possibly under his influence, the bishop of Carthage and some neighbouring bishops decided that in future they would baptize all converts, even converted heretics already baptized in a heretical sect. This was a departure from the traditional discipline, which required only the imposition of penance on converted heretics already baptized. As the African bishops made no attempt to censure the bishops of other parts of Christendom, who still continued to follow the traditional custom, the question was regarded as one of discipline rather than of doctrine, and no controversy ensued.

Half a century later, St. Cyprian, then bishop of Carth-

age, called a council of the bishops of his province, and got them to issue a joint pronouncement condemning as invalid a Baptism conferred by heretics. When this pronouncement and some relevant correspondence were forwarded to Rome, they created a crisis. The Pope (S. Stephen) saw that a traditional doctrine was being denied and he insisted that the traditional discipline should be restored, as a safeguard for the maintenance of the traditional doctrine. He laid down the law for the African bishops; let there be no innovation; but stick to what has been handed down. Moreover, he threatened to excommunicate them, if they did not comply with his order. S. Cyprian and his party could not see the necessity for changing the discipline followed in North Africa for the last half-century. They wanted a compromise, by which they would be allowed to follow their own discipline, while the Pope and the rest of the bishops might do as they pleased in their own churches. It is hard to say what might have happened, if both Cyprian and the Pope had not been called to the martyr's crown soon afterwards.

The new Pope, wishing to avoid the danger of schism, did not press the Carthaginian party to fall into line with the discipline prevailing in Rome. Meanwhile, the arguments on which S. Cyprian had relied were taken up and sifted by his opponents, and shown to be unsound. When the conversion of the Emperor Constantine restored peace to the Church some sixty years later, a council was held at Arles (A.D. 314), at which a large number of African bishops attended. At that Council it was decreed that converted heretics should not be rebaptized, unless there was reason to think that their baptism in the heretical sect had not been properly administered. This ruling was repeated in a slightly different form at the first General Council of the Church (A.D. 325). And so the doctrine was definitely established that a person need not be a member of the true Church to confer a valid sacrament. It follows indirectly that he need not be in the state of grace; for no one could seriously maintain that *all* heretics in all ages

have been in the state of grace when conferring Baptism. Yet the Baptism conferred by them, if properly administered, is valid.

As a God-fearing man like S. Cyprian would not bring the Church to the verge of schism, except under pressure of arguments to which he could see no answer, it may be of interest to glance at the reasons that convinced S. Cyprian of the invalidity of Baptism conferred outside the true Church. If the fallacies in his reasoning are rather obvious to us, we have to remember that a great development has taken place in sacramental theology since the third century, and that certain distinctions, quite familiar to us, may have been unknown to Cyprian and his supporters. The following are his principal arguments.

A man cannot be saved outside the true Church. But if a man could be validly baptized outside the true Church, he would get sanctifying grace and a right to heaven. Therefore he cannot be validly baptized outside the true Church. It will be noticed that Cyprian makes no distinction between a man who remains outside the Church through his own fault, and one who is a heretic in good faith. Neither does he see any difference between Baptism that is merely valid, and Baptism that is both valid and fruitful (i.e., productive of grace here and now). As soon as we make these distinctions, or even one of them, the whole argument collapses.

Another argument ran something like this: no one can give to another what he has not himself. But no heretic has the Holy Ghost abiding in him (i.e., no heretic has the gift of sanctifying grace). Therefore no heretic can give the Holy Ghost (or sanctifying grace) to another. But if a heretic could validly baptize, he would give the Holy Ghost (or sanctifying grace) to the person baptized. Consequently we must conclude that a heretic cannot validly baptize. The same argument was used by the Donatists later on, to prove that a sinner (whether he be a heretic

or a member of the true Church) cannot confer a valid sacrament. Apart from the unwarranted assumption made by Cyprian, that no heretic can possibly be in the state of grace, the argument is based on a complete misconception of the parts played by the minister and the sacrament respectively in the causation of grace. The minister does not share his own grace or his own merits with the recipient. He gives nothing whatever of his own; and consequently he need not have anything of his own to give. He merely applies to the recipient the instrument instituted by Christ, to bring the fruits of *Christ's* merits to the person baptized.

Probably the most plausible of Cyprian's arguments was one based on the unity of Baptism. There is only one true Church, and one true Baptism. Christ left the one true Baptism to the one true Church. Therefore the Baptism which the heretics have is not true Baptism at all. It is not the Baptism of Christ, but a fraudulent imitation of it. The weak point in the argument is that the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises. In the discussion of lay Baptism, we saw that Christ entrusted the administration of Baptism to the Apostles and their successors—in other words, to those in authority in the Church. Yet when a Catholic layman usurps the rights and functions of the official ministry, by baptizing when there is no necessity, his action though unlawful is nevertheless valid. Is it only the Catholic layman's usurpation that can be reconciled with the validity of Baptism; or can the heretic's usurpation be reconciled also? Cyprian's argument throws no light on that question. It is a question that must be answered in the last resort by appealing to Tradition, since the New Testament does not deal with the subject. Hence the importance of the traditional discipline, to which Pope Stephen referred. The traditional *custom* of not rebaptizing converted heretics was a standing assertion of the traditional *doctrine*, that the Baptism already given in the heretical sect was valid. S. Cyprian made no attempt to face this argument from Tradition. He merely

said that a custom that was wrong should be discontinued.

Scarcely had one controversy been settled, when another broke out. A schism took place in the Church of Carthage over the election of a bishop, and soon spread to the provinces of North Africa. After a time the schism developed into a heresy—the Donatist heresy. The Donatists upheld the old Carthaginian error about the invalidity of Baptism conferred by heretics—and they reckoned as heretics, of course, all who did not agree with them. They brought the error a stage farther, by maintaining that a person in the state of mortal sin cannot confer a valid sacrament. Their arguments were mostly a rehash of those of S. Cyprian; but they laid special emphasis on the principle that a man cannot give to another what he has not himself. From this they concluded that a sinner cannot sanctify another sinner (by validly baptizing him)—as if it were the minister himself that conferred, not merely the sacrament, but the grace of the sacrament as well! "What we look for," said one of them, "is the conscience of the giver to cleanse that of the recipient." S. Augustine replied by asking the very pertinent and practical question: "But supposing the conscience of the giver is concealed from view, and perhaps defiled by sin—what then?" He allows the Donatist to draw his own rather disquieting conclusions. These might be summed up as follows: According to Donatist theology no man can have any certainty that he is validly baptized himself, since he knows nothing about the state of conscience of the man who baptized him. He has no certainty that his clergy were validly baptized, or validly ordained; because the conscience of the minister concerned is not open to inspection. In fine, the Donatist theory leads to hopeless insecurity and uncertainty about all the means of grace and salvation. S. Augustine does not develop this point at length. He just throws out the suggestion, and lets the Donatists ponder over it.

There is no evidence either in Scripture or Tradition to support this puritanical theory of the Donatists. On the contrary, from what we know of Christ's love for souls,

we can be assured that He will not allow His instruments of grace to be rendered useless and invalid by the frailty of the men whom He has called to apply them to the faithful. We cannot suppose that Christ has made it necessary for the faithful, in their own interest, to be continually prying into the private lives of their clergy—without even the assurance that such prying will guarantee the validity of the sacraments they receive. Christ instituted the sacraments for men, not for angels; and He knew well the frailty of human nature when He was instituting them.

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