

## QUESTION 61

### The Necessity for Sacraments

Next we have to consider the necessity for sacraments. On this topic there are four questions: (1) Are sacraments necessary for human salvation? (2) Were sacraments necessary in the state that existed before sin? (3) Were sacraments necessary in the state that existed after sin but before Christ? (4) Were sacraments necessary after the coming of Christ?

#### Article 1

##### Are sacraments necessary for human salvation?

It seems that sacraments are not necessary for human salvation (*sacramenta non fuerint necessaria ad humanam salutem*):

**Objection 1:** In 1 Timothy 4:8 the Apostle says, “Bodily exercise (*corporalis exercitatio*) is of little profit.” But making use of sacraments (*usus sacramentorum*) pertains to bodily exercise, because, as has been explained (q. 60, a. 6), sacraments are brought to completion in the signification of words and of entities that can be sensed. Therefore, sacraments are not necessary for human salvation.

**Objection 2:** In 2 Corinthians 12:9 it is said to the Apostle, “My grace is sufficient for you.” But the grace would not be sufficient if sacraments were necessary for salvation. Therefore, it is not the case that sacraments are necessary for human salvation.

**Objection 3:** Once a sufficient cause is posited, nothing else seems to be needed for the effect. But Christ’s passion is a sufficient cause of our salvation; for in Romans 5:10 the Apostle says, “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled with God through the death of His Son, then much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by His life.” Therefore, it is not the case that sacraments are required for human salvation.

**But contrary to this:** In *Contra Faustum* 19 Augustine says, “Men cannot be united under the name of any religion (*in nullum nomine religionis*), whether true or false, unless they are brought together by sharing in visible signs or sacraments.” But it is necessary for human salvation that men be united under the one name of the true religion. Therefore, sacraments are necessary for human salvation.

**I respond:** There are three reasons why sacraments are necessary for human salvation:

The first of these reasons has to be taken from the *condition of human nature*, to which it is proper to be led from things that are corporeal and able to be sensed to things that are spiritual and intelligible. But it belongs to divine providence to provide for each entity according to the mode of its condition. And so it was fitting that God’s wisdom should confer the aids to salvation on a man under those corporeal and sensory signs that are called sacraments.

The second reason has to be taken from *the state of man*, who by sinning has given himself over to corporeal things by his affections. Now a medicinal remedy should be applied to a man in the area where he is suffering from the illness. And so it was fitting for God to apply spiritual medicine to men through certain corporeal signs, since if purely spiritual entities had been proposed to him, his mind, given over to corporeal things, would not have been able to apply itself to them.

The third reason has to be taken from the *application of human action*, which has to do mainly with corporeal entities. Therefore, lest it should be difficult for man to be totally removed from corporeal acts, what were proposed to him were corporeal exercises in sacraments by which he might act in a salvific way—and this in order that he might avoid (a) superstitious exercises, which consist in the worship of demons, or (b) exercises that are in some way or other harmful and consist in sinful acts.

So, then, by the institution of sacraments man was, in a way appropriate to his nature, (a) instructed through entities that can be sensed, (b) made humble in recognizing himself to be subject to corporeal

entities while at the same time being helped by corporeal entities, and (c) preserved from harmful corporeal entities through the salvific acts of sacraments.

**Reply to objection 1:** Corporeal exercise, insofar as it is corporeal, is not of much profit. But corporeal exercise made use of in sacraments is not purely corporeal, but is in a certain sense spiritual, viz., in what it signifies and in what it causes.

**Reply to objection 2:** God's grace is a sufficient cause of human salvation. But God gives men grace in a way that it is fitting for them. And so sacraments are necessary in order for men to receive grace.

**Reply to objection 3:** Christ's passion is a sufficient cause of human salvation. But it does not thereby follow that sacraments are not necessary for human salvation, since sacraments operate in the power of Christ's passion, and Christ's passion is in some way applied to men through sacraments—this according to Romans 6:3 (“... all of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus have been baptized in His death”).

## Article 2

### Were sacraments necessary for man before sin?

It seems that sacraments were necessary for man before sin (*ante peccatum fuerint homini necessaria sacramenta*):

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 1, ad 2), sacraments are necessary in order for man to receive grace. But as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 95, a. 4), man needed grace even in the state of innocence. Therefore, sacraments were likewise necessary even in that state.

**Objection 2:** As has been explained (a. 1), sacraments are fitting for man, given the condition of human nature. But the nature of man is the same before sin and after sin. Therefore, it seems that man needed sacraments before sin.

**Objection 3:** Matrimony is a sacrament—this according to Ephesians 5:32 (“This is a great mystery (*sacramentum*)—I am speaking of Christ and the Church”). But as Genesis 2:22ff. indicates, matrimony was instituted before sin. Therefore, sacraments were necessary for man before sin.

**But contrary to this:** Medicine is necessary only for one who is sick—this according to Matthew 9:12 (“It is not the healthy who need a physician”). But sacraments are certain spiritual medicines that are applied to the wounds of sin. Therefore, they were not necessary before sin.

**I respond:** In the state of innocence sacraments were not necessary. The reason for this can be taken from the rectitude of that state, in which the higher powers dominated the lower powers and were in no way dependent on them; for just as the mind was subject to God, so the lower powers of the soul were subject to the mind, and the body was subject to the soul itself.

Now it would have been contrary to this order if the soul had been perfected, either with respect to knowledge or with respect to grace, by something corporeal, which is what happens in the case of sacraments. And so in the state of innocence man did not need sacraments—not only insofar as sacraments are ordered toward being a remedy for sin, but also insofar as they are ordered toward the perfection of the soul.

**Reply to objection 1:** In the state of innocence man did indeed need grace, but he did not need to receive grace through any signs that can be sensed; instead, he received it spiritually and invisibly.

**Reply to objection 2:** The *nature* of man is the same before and after sin, but the *state* of the nature is not the same. For after sin, the soul, even with respect to its higher part, needs to receive

something from corporeal entities for its perfection—and this was not necessary for man in that other state.

**Reply to objection 3:** Matrimony was instituted in the state of innocence not insofar as it is a sacrament, but insofar as it contributed to a duty of nature (*non secundum quod est sacramentum, sed secundum quod est in officium naturae*)—though as a result it signified something future regarding Christ and the Church, just like all the other things that preceded as a prefigurement of Christ.

### Article 3

#### Did sacraments have to exist after sin and before Christ?

It seems that sacraments did not have to exist after sin and before Christ (*post peccatum, ante Christum, sacramenta non debuerunt esse*):

**Objection 1:** It has been explained (a. 1, ad 3) that Christ's passion is applied to men through sacraments, and so Christ's passion is related to sacraments as a cause to an effect. But an effect does not precede its cause. Therefore, sacraments did not have to exist before Christ's coming.

**Objection 2:** As is clear from Augustine in *Contra Faustum*, sacraments have to be appropriate to the state of the human race. But the state of the human race did not change after sin until the reparation made by Christ. Therefore, sacraments did not have to be changed in such a way that, besides the sacraments of the law of nature, other sacraments should be established in the Law of Moses.

**Objection 3:** The closer a given thing is to what is complete (*magis propinquum perfectio*), the more it has to be assimilated to it. But the completion of human salvation was effected by Christ, to whom the sacraments of the Old Law were closer than the sacraments that existed before the Law. Yet the contrary of this appears to be the case, because, as Hebrews 7:11 has it, it is foretold that "Christ's priesthood is to be according to the order of Melchisedech and not according to the order of Aaron." Therefore, sacraments were not appropriately set up before Christ.

**But contrary to this:** In *Contra Faustum* 19 Augustine says, "The first sacraments that were celebrated and observed under the Law were announcements of the future coming of the Christ." But it was necessary for human salvation that the coming of the Christ should be announced ahead of time. Therefore, it was necessary for certain sacraments to be set up before Christ.

**I respond:** Sacraments are necessary for human salvation insofar as they are certain visible signs (*sensibilia signa*) of the invisible things by which men are sanctified. Now after sin no one can be justified except through Christ, "whom God has set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith, to manifest His justice ... so that He Himself is just and makes just him who has faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:25). And so before the coming of the Christ there had to be certain visible signs by which man would profess his faith in the future coming of the savior. And signs of this sort are called sacraments. And so it is clear that before Christ's coming it was necessary for certain sacraments to be instituted.

**Reply to objection 1:** Christ's passion is a final cause of the old sacraments, which were instituted in order to signify it. But a final cause precedes [the effect] not in time but only in the intention of the agent. And so it is not unfitting for some sacraments to have existed before Christ's passion.

**Reply to objection 2:** The state of the human race after sin and before Christ can be thought of in two ways:

In one way, *according to the notion of faith*. And on this score it always remained one and the same, since men were justified through faith in the future coming of the Christ.

In the second way, it can be thought of *according to the intensification and remission of sin and of the explicit cognition of the Christ*. For time went on and sin began to be more dominant in man—to such an extent that as man’s reason became clouded by sin, the precepts of the law of nature were not sufficient for a man’s living uprightly, but it instead became necessary for the precepts—and, along with them, certain sacraments of faith—to be made determinate in a written law. It was likewise necessary over the course of time for the cognition of faith to be made more explicit, since, as Gregory says, “Through the course of time there was growth in the cognition of divine things.” And so it was likewise necessary that certain sacraments should be determined in the Old Law which involved the faith that they had in the Christ who was going to come, and these were related to the sacraments which had existed before the Law as the determinate is related to the indeterminate. For, more specifically, before the Law it had not been determinately fixed just which sacraments were to be used—in the way that this *was* fixed by the Law. This was necessary both because the natural law had been clouded over and in order that the signification of the faith might be more determinate.

**Reply to objection 3:** The sacrament of Melchisedech, which existed before the Law, was more similar to the sacrament of the New Law in its *matter*, viz., insofar as “he offered bread and wine,” as Genesis 14:19 reports, in the way that the sacrifice of the New Testament is carried out by offering bread and wine. On the other hand, the sacraments of the Mosaic Law are more similar with respect to *the thing signified* by the sacrament, viz., the passion of Christ, as is clear from the paschal lamb and other things of this sort. And [the reason for invoking Melchisedech] was lest, because of the temporal continuity, if the appearance of the sacrament were to remain the same, it would seem to be a continuation of the same sacrament.

#### Article 4

##### Was it necessary for there to be sacraments after Christ?

It seems that it was not necessary for there to be any sacraments after Christ (*post Christum non debuerint esse aliqua sacramenta*):

**Objection 1:** Once the truth arrives, the prefigurement should cease. But as John 1:17 says, “... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Therefore, since sacraments are signs or prefigurements of the truth, it seems that after Christ’s passion it was not necessary for there to be sacraments.

**Objection 2:** As is clear from what was said above (q. 60, a. 4), sacraments consist in certain elements. But in Galatians 4:3-4 the Apostle says, “When we were children, we were servants of the elements of the world, but now that the fullness of time has come,” we are no longer children. Therefore, it seems that it is not necessary for us to serve God under the elements of this world by making use of corporeal sacraments.

**Objection 3:** As James 1:17 says, “With God there is no change or shadow of alteration.” But it seems to point to a sort of change in the divine will that He bestows on men sacraments for their sanctification now in the time of grace that are different from the sacraments before Christ. Therefore, it seems that different sacraments should not have been instituted after Christ.

**But contrary to this:** In *Contra Faustum* 19 Augustine says that the sacraments of the Old Law “have been removed, since they were fulfilled, and other sacraments have been instituted—more powerful, more profitable, easier to carry out (*faciliora actu*), fewer in number.”

**I respond:** Just as the ancient fathers were saved through faith in the Christ who was going to come, so, too, we ourselves are saved through faith in the Christ who has now been born and has

suffered. Now sacraments are certain signs confessing the faith by which a man is justified. But future things and past things, i.e., present things, have to be signified by different signs; for as Augustine explains in *Contra Faustum* 19, “The same reality is announced in one way as *going to occur* and in another way as *having occurred*—just as the verbs ‘going to suffer’ and ‘has suffered’ do not sound alike.” Therefore, there have to be sacraments in the New Law, which signify the things that have gone before us in Christ, that are different from the sacraments of the Old Law, which prefigured future things.

**Reply to objection 1:** As Dionysius explains in *Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, chap. 5, the state of the New Law lies in between the state of the Old Law, whose prefigurements are fulfilled in the New Law, and the state of glory, in which every truth will be made manifest in an unadorned and complete way. And so at that time there will be no sacraments. At present, however, for as long as “we know through a mirror in a dark way” (1 Corinthians 13:12), it is necessary for us to arrive at spiritual things through signs that can be sensed—something that pertains to the character of sacraments.

**Reply to objection 2:** The Apostle calls the sacraments of the Old Law “weak and beggarly elements” (Galatians 4:9) because they neither contain grace nor cause grace. And the reason why the Apostle claims that those who made use of those sacraments served God “under the elements of this world” is that they were nothing other than the elements of this world. By contrast, our sacraments contain grace and cause grace, and so the arguments are not parallel.

**Reply to objection 3:** Just as the father of a household is not proven to have a changeable will by the fact that he proposes different rules for his family over a change of seasons, not commanding the same things in the summer and in the winter, so, too, no change is shown to exist in God by the fact after the coming of Christ He instituted sacraments that were different from those that He had instituted during the time of the Law. For the latter were fit to prefigure grace, whereas the former are fit to demonstrate grace as something present.