

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL AND BAPTISM

A. Introductory remarks; Trent on the sacraments in general

5 In the remainder of this part, I will treat the sacraments and Christian life insofar as it is organized by them. The sacraments are divine-human cooperative acts; in them God, Jesus as glorified man, the Church acting by its minister, and the person who receives the sacrament are bound together in the work of redemption and sanctification. As basic human and Christian acts of the recipient, the sacraments make a person's human
10 life also have a divine character.

Because the sacraments of confirmation, reconciliation, anointing, and the Eucharist organize all the other actions of a Christian's life--in several distinct, simultaneous, but harmonious ways--the treatment of these four sacraments in the next three chapters will make clear how they are important Christian moral principles. They do not determine what is right and wrong, but they do shape the living of a Christian life toward
15 its perfection in this world and toward eternal fulfillment in Christ.

In the present chapter I treat the sacraments in general, in order to make clear what they are from the point of view of Christian moral principles. I also treat baptism, which is the sacrament of entry into Christian life. As I explained in chapter thirty-one, section A, I do not undertake here a dogmatic treatise on the sacraments; neither do I deal with the moral and canonical problems of the valid and licit administration of the sacraments. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the essential teaching of the Church about the sacraments in general. Therefore, I begin with a brief summary of what the Council of Trent says about them.

25 The Council of Trent teaches that all true justification--that is, all sanctifying grace, one's share in divine life--either begins through the sacraments, or once begun increases through them, or when lost is regained through them (DS 1600/843a). The implication is that even sincere nonbelievers receive grace by some sort of relationship to the sacraments.

30 Trent also teaches that the sacraments are seven, no more no less, and that all of them were instituted by Jesus Christ (DS 1601/844). These sacraments of Christ differ essentially from the sacraments of the Old Law (DS 1602/845). They are not all equally important; some are more basic than others (DS 1603/846). Not all the sacraments are necessary for each individual, but the sacraments as a whole are essential for salvation; those who do not receive them must at least somehow desire them (DS 1604/847). Faith by
35 itself is insufficient, and the sacraments do more than merely nourish faith (DS 1605/848).

Trent further teaches that the sacraments of Christ contain the grace which they signify and that they confer this grace on those who do not obstruct it (DS 1606/849). The grace received in the sacraments certainly is a gift of God, but when one receives the sacraments properly, God always gives the grace He has promised (DS 1607/850). Faith by itself is not sufficient to obtain grace, but the sacramental rite itself (properly performed and received) does confer grace (DS 1608/851).

Trent also teaches that baptism, confirmation, and holy orders imprint a character on the soul--an indelible spiritual sign--so that these three sacraments cannot be repeated (DS 1609/852). Not every Christian has the power to preach the Word and to administer all the sacraments (DS 1610/853). One must be ordained. The minister of the sacrament must intend at least to do what the Church does in the sacrament (DS 1611/854). In other words, the minister of a sacrament acts for the Church; the sacrament is an action, the minister is an agent authorized to do this action. The minister need not
50 personally be holy; he can be in mortal sin without invalidating the sacramental act (DS 1612/855).

Finally, Trent teaches that the accepted and approved rites customarily used by the Catholic Church in the administration of the sacraments cannot without sin be belittled or omitted by ministers as they see fit, nor may any individual pastor (bishop)
55 change the rites (DS 1613/856).

In the following sections on the sacraments in general, I will first treat them with respect to the unity of cooperation they involve (sections B, C, and D), then with respect to the specific contribution of God, the Spirit (E), our Lord Jesus (F), the Church acting by the minister (G), and the recipient (H).

60 B. Background and a preliminary summary

Because the sacraments are complex, accounts of them tend quickly to become bewildering. Therefore, this section will provide some background and a summary of the account which will be articulated in sections C through H. I already treated the life of Christ as the principle of Christian life in chapters eleven and twelve, and referred back to that treatment in chapter thirty-one, sections K and L. The present section will help the student to relate the sacraments to the redemptive act of Christ which is their principle.

70 The redemption of humankind from sin and the conferral on created persons of a share in divine life essentially is work only God can do. Redemption demands re-creation; deification can occur only by a divine begetting. However, God did not wish to redeem us and deify us without our free consent and willing cooperation. He is trying to bring us up to the dignity of mature children of God, not to make puppets out of us. His problem was: How to make human persons able to cooperate in their own redemption and deification?

80 God's solution to this problem is the Incarnation, the human acts of Jesus, culminating in His self-oblation on the cross, and the divine response of the resurrection and glorification of Jesus. The outcome of this process is not a sort of object--something seated at the Father's right hand--but a Person: our Lord Jesus in glory. He indissolubly unites in Himself the whole power for good, the total capacity to achieve fulfillment, of creator and creature. His potentiality is for the totality of goodness which God wills. He is in process of realizing this capacity. The ultimate realization of it, as I explained in part two, will be the fulfillment of everything in Christ.

The New Covenant principally is Christ Jesus in glory. What He does, the Father and the Spirit also do; the divine Persons are perfectly unanimous--that is, of one mind and purpose. This point is very important to bear in mind. The forgiveness of sin and the begetting of created persons to divine life is at our disposal, not as if re-creation and divinization were acts within creaturely power, but because we are united with our Lord, who in glory acts simultaneously as God and as man. Through Him God has put Himself at the disposal of His creatures.

The human life of Jesus centers in His personal commitment to do the Father's will, and specifically to carry out the personal vocation of being the community-forming Son of Man. Replacing Adam who separated humankind from God, Jesus reconciles humankind to God, to the extent that human action can do so. Jesus undertakes to act out the roles of Son of Man, Messiah, and Suffering Servant. In doing this, He accomplishes two things at once. First, He provides a community-forming human act--thus a principle homogenous to us, something we can plug into. In this respect, His human life is the revelatory and communicative work of the Word Incarnate. But second, He acts toward God precisely as a human creature, in His situation, should act. He does all in His human power to be a perfect Son. Consequently, the divine act by which He is raised from the dead and established in glory as Lord of the universe is not imposed on creation willy-nilly. The Word Incarnate has freely consented to and fully cooperated with God's plan. He has earned His role as Lord in power (cf. Rom 1.4).

It is worth noting that by accomplishing redemption in this way, creation is enriched, and the glory of God (which is the expression of His goodness) wonderfully achieved. Had God redeemed and divinized us without the action of Jesus, creation would be so much the poorer, and the manifestation of God's goodness the less. Thus, the glory of the Word Incarnate detracts nothing from the Father and the Spirit, but rather glorifies all three Persons at once. The same thing will be true of our glory. Hence, there is no need to be anxious when sacramental doctrine attributes much to the work of created persons; to attribute much to ourselves is to attribute more to God, for we are and have nothing (but sin) which is not His gift.

During His earthly life, Jesus gathered a group of men who would be the foundation of the Church--the Twelve. He formed them and prepared them to complete His work. At the Last Supper, as I explained in chapter twelve, section J, He carried out the very action by the choice of which He also freely accepted the suffering and death which followed the next day--namely, the action of giving Himself in form of bread and wine for humankind and to His chosen band. Moreover, He directed them to do the same thing on His behalf. Subsequently, the acts of the apostles and their successors and priestly assistants which fulfill the command of Jesus all are included within His single act of self-oblation. Thus, in the Eucharist--and by association with the Eucharist in all the other sacraments--the redemptive act of Christ is made present to us, available for our cooperation, and effective for our sanctification.

Because the sacraments extend into the present Christ's unique redemptive act, they have all the complexity this act has. The sacraments both reveal and communicate the divine life they signify, and at the same time respond with appropriate human worship. Moreover, these two aspects mutually include one another. Further, as revelatory the sacraments have the complexity of every revelatory sign: They involve mutually complementary words and deeds. And as acts of human worship, the sacraments involve the complexity of all such acts: They involve mutually complementary prayers and rituals of worship.

Just as one can imagine that God could have redeemed us and deified us without the incarnate Word--that is, without any really adequate creaturely cooperation--one also can imagine that Jesus could offer us the benefits of His achievement without any adequate human cooperation on our part. He could have simply given forgiveness and a share in divine life to those who would accept it, perhaps even without arranging that they should know explicitly what they were receiving. Such at least seems to be the case with sincere nonbelievers. Or He could have arranged that His accomplishment be broadcast, with the provision that those who believed and trusted in Him would passively receive the benefits of His work. Such is the Protestant conception of Christianity.

However, in line with the purpose for the Incarnation itself--to ennoble created humankind, and therefore for the greater glory of God--Jesus arranged from the beginning to make sinful men and women His coworkers both in redeeming themselves and in redeeming their brothers and sisters. He instituted the sacraments to make this cooperative work possible for us and performable in a way wholly suited to our needs and capacities.

This last point is central to understanding the sacraments as Christian moral principles, and so I next explain it.

C. What are the sacraments insofar as they are Christian moral principles?

The sacraments from one point of view are dramatic acts performed according to a script provided in outline by Christ, and produced and directed by His Church. If the sacraments are approached from this aspect, they are rightly defined as a type of sign. However, morality is concerned much more with actions than it is with outward performances. Hence, insofar as they are principles of Christian life, the sacraments ought to be considered primarily as acts. The human acts involved in the sacraments then can be used to organize all of the other acts in one's Christian life. I take this approach; the idea of sign will have a subordinate role.

Insofar as they involve human acts, the sacraments are cooperative actions in which God the Spirit, Christ the Lord in glory, the Church by her ordained minister, and the recipient (except in the case of the baptism of infants) join together to accomplish redemption and perfection in divine life in human persons by extending to them the redemption (from the consequences of sin) and glorification already accomplished by God in Jesus with His human cooperation as man. The human redemptive act of Jesus is a social act; the sacraments allow us to become conscious participants not only in the benefits of this act but also in the very doing of it. They do this by joining several human acts--the redemptive human act of Jesus, the human act of the ordained minister on behalf

of the Church, and the human act of the recipient (except in the case of infant baptism) --to the divine act of restoration and divinization which first restored Jesus from the dead and glorified His humanity and which is now at work in the world, where the Spirit of Christ whom He has sent forth gradually renews the face of the earth.

5 It is very important to keep in mind that the cooperation involved in the sacraments is not of coequal partners. It is not like the cooperation of a husband and wife in generating and raising children. It is more like the cooperation of parents and children in the education of the children, or the cooperation of the mother and the infant in nursing. The divine act and the human acts which together constitute a unified sacramental act are infinitely different, and even the various human acts which are done by 10 the Lord in glory, the minister for the Church, and the recipient are diverse in kind and in importance. For this reason, those who receive sacraments should not say: God and I are sanctifying me, or even: The Church and I are overcoming sin in me. God allows us to cooperate in His work, but our role is very much a subordinate one, ours by 15 His gift not because of His need but because of His infinite condescension.

The situation is like that of a mother who makes bread for her family and has her small children help with the work. One holds his finger carefully at a place on the recipe where the mother puts it; she could as well or even better use a ruler to keep her place. Another holds the pans to receive the formed loaves; the mother could as well 20 set the pans on the counter. A third watches the clock until the big hand reaches a certain designated point; the mother could more dependably use the automatic timer on the range to call her attention to the time when she ought to check the bread. Yet the children do help. As a result of their help, they can proudly present their father with a sample of bread when he comes home from work: "We helped mama make it!"

25 The mother actually did more rather than less by using the help of her children. She could more easily have baked the bread in the evening after they were all in bed. But she is interested not only in making bread, but in making men and women; indeed, she is more interested in the latter than in the former. Similarly, in redeeming us from sin and perfecting us to glory God is interested in the raising of mature members of the 30 divine family. Our cooperation is not a necessary means to attaining His objective; rather, it is part of His objective. By the gift of this cooperation God causes us to freely determine ourselves to be the humanly fulfilled divine children He wishes us to be forever.

35 D. Further aspects of the reality of the sacraments

Once the essential character of the sacraments as cooperative acts is understood, one can proceed to clarify several other aspects of their complex reality.

40 The sacraments as outward performances have a passing, symbolic dimension. In heaven, this dimension no longer will be necessary, and so the sacraments, like faith and hope, will be surpassed. But the sacraments also involve something permanent, insofar as they restore and perfect fallen human persons. Thus, baptism, confirmation, and orders give a permanent character; penance gives reconciliation (in principle meant to last) and anointing prepares the body for resurrection; the Eucharist and matrimony establish loving interpersonal communion which is a beginning of heavenly fulfillment. In 45 all the sacraments, we are united with Christ as He now lives and are drawn from our present unstable situation into His lasting glory.

The passing, symbolic dimension of the sacraments belongs to them as outward performances--as sets of words and ritual acts which are dramatically carried out and sensibly experienced and participated in. This dimension is what is taken to be central in 50 the definition of the sacraments as signs. Generally it is pointed out--and rightly--that this outward and sensible quality of the sacraments is important for human persons because we are bodily, we learn by experience, and the tremendous realities involved in the sacraments are too great for us. Hence, God kindly provides a simple, sensible sign 55 which is suited to our condition.

As I say, this point is right. Yet it ought not to be misunderstood. As Trent teaches, the sacraments are not mere signs of faith. They really do contain and confer the grace which they signify. Like the glorified Christ, whose acts they are, the sacraments are complex realities, and the bodily dimension of their reality is not what is 60 most important. Yet the bodily, symbolic dimension of the sacraments is not a mere means extrinsic to the sacred reality; rather, like the body of Christ in glory, it is an essential part of the sacrament's redeeming and sanctifying power.

The correct point commonly made can be deepened if it is understood in terms of the essence of the sacraments as cooperative acts. Human persons want to be humanly in touch 65 with God. They wish to contribute consciously to their own salvation. They wish to do something to be saved. Like the children of the mother making bread, they wish to help.

To allow us to help, God provides the sacraments as the forms of His own salvific work. As God redeems in principle by Incarnation so that creation (the humanity of Christ) can help in its own re-creation, so He completes redemption by sacraments-- 70 which make the glorified Christ present here and now--so that created persons, who must do something outward if they are to do anything socially significant at all, can help bring about their own reconciliation and perfection.

One might imagine the work of sanctification occurring through a purely spiritual and interior intercourse of the soul with God; Protestants who are faithful to the Reformation do imagine it to occur in this way. The difficulty is that if things were done 75 in this way, there would be no social act, for human individuals, being in communion only by way of bodily cooperation, cannot do anything together (as a human act) if they do not do something together as an outward performance--at least something symbolic such as utter words and make gestures. Thus, the elimination of the sacraments eliminates the possibility of effective cooperation between our Lord in glory and us.[1] 80

It is a profound and very common error to think of God as immaterial rather than bodily, as if this meant He were something like our own mind. God is no more a mental than a bodily reality; He is beyond all such finite categories. Therefore, the bodily is no more alien to Him than is the immaterial reality of thoughts and choices. The

bodily resurrection and glorification of Jesus, His bodily presence in the Eucharist, and our own hoped for bodily communion with Him in heaven, which already mysteriously begins when we receive the Eucharist here on earth--all this argues that the bodily dimension of the sacraments is an intrinsic and indispensable part of the fulfillment God is accomplishing in Christ.

At the same time, the pure symbolism of the sacraments is secondary; it is determined to be essential precisely as it is only because of God's dramatic ingenuity and Christ's choice to use some rather than other words and deeds as appropriate, expressive performances. The Eucharist being under two species symbolizes the separation of Jesus' body and blood in His passion and death, and allows us symbolically not only to eat His flesh but also to drink His blood--that is, His very life (since the blood is the life of a living body). Yet the whole reality of Jesus in glory is present under both species. Similarly, the liturgical year provides a quasi-chronological experience of the complex reality of the redemptive act of Jesus and the re-creative response of God, although this reality is not essentially temporal, and the particular events we review each year as particular events are simply past. Likewise, the waters of baptism symbolize the washing away of sin or one's being buried with Christ.

Other symbols could have been used. Yet some symbols or others are necessary if we are to be able to cooperate with Christ. The ones He in fact has provided serve us with something to do to cooperate humanly with Him; they serve Him as appropriate tokens of the very same redemptive act (the basic human act which is shaped by His lasting commitments and choices) which He once carried out by all the performances of His public life which culminated in His going to Jerusalem, eating the Passover with His friends, giving them His flesh and blood to eat and drink, and then allowing the consequences of what He had done to take their course.

The sacraments are something like a system of transferring funds by checks. One could do it in other ways. But if the system is established and if a person without income is given a checkbook with the promise that the account will be kept solvent, then that individual can and must write checks if he or she wishes to spend money. The checks are like our doing of the sacraments, and the constant funding is like the action of our Lord in glory. One can extend this analogy by recalling that He Himself shared our insolvent condition, but while living in it earned the right to the inheritance which provides the means of livelihood for all of us; the resources on which we draw are not our own, but part of that inheritance, which is made up not of tokens of wealth but of pure gold.

Once one understands clearly both the essential and the secondary role of the symbolic dimension of the sacraments, one can see why the actual performance of the sacrament need not coincide with the grace which flows from the cooperative act. One who is preparing for baptism perhaps already is in grace; similarly, one who comes with the right dispositions to sacramental confession. The sacraments of anointing and matrimony also perhaps have important effects upon those preparing to receive them worthily, by sanctifying a long process of preparation for death or engagement to be married.

Yet the actual reception of the sacrament remains vital, since in the performance one's cooperation really is carried through. By desiring the sacrament (even in a quite implicit way), by preparing for it (however remotely), one already is beginning the cooperation which culminates in the sacramental performance itself. If one is not somehow aiming toward this performance, then one is in no way humanly disposed to cooperate in the human redemptive work of Christ, through which alone the remission of sin and deification is given us. For this reason, even those who have not heard the Gospel are redeemed only by some sort of remote relationship to the sacraments. (Perhaps their sincere groping amounts to an implicit wish to receive them.)

Thus what appears to us at times an illogical sequence of events--for example, contrition and reconciliation, followed by an examination of conscience and a sacramental confession, and only finally absolution--is not really illogical, because it is not a sequence of events in a causal process but an assembling of the elements required to constitute the complex whole of the sacrament. A similar situation is narrated in the Gospel, when the woman with a hemorrhage first touches Jesus and is healed, then is noticed by Him and nervously admits what she has done, and only finally is told: "'Go in peace and be free of this illness'" (Mk 5.34). He also tells her that her faith had worked the cure, but the account makes clear that healing power had gone out from Jesus (cf. Mk 5.30). Thus divine causality, the woman's faith, and the human act of Jesus combine in the cure.

Considering the sacraments as signs, one might paraphrase and expand a received definition of them: A sacrament is a meaningful performance instituted by Christ to communicate to human persons the fruits of His redemptive act, so that these fruits will be received by them as gifts in the reception of which for themselves and the giving of which to others they can consciously and freely cooperate.

One more analogy might be helpful for the understanding of this definition. The analogy here is more complex than that of the mother making bread, since both the divine-human cooperation and the symbolic aspect of the sacrament must be represented.

Let us imagine a situation in an operating room, where a man is being operated on; the patient's blood is being circulated by a heart-lung machine concealed behind a one-way mirror, and he is conscious, since the anesthetic blocks pain only. When he begins to feel pain, he is told to blink his eyes; when he does so, an attendant who is facing the mirror grimaces. The person in control of the heart-lung machine which is sustaining life then adds anesthetic to the bloodstream. To do this, however, the anesthetic must be provided; some source outside the hospital is responsible for this.

The patient is like the recipient of the sacrament. The attendant who is authorized to signal for more anesthetic is like the minister of the sacrament. The person operating the heart-lung machine is like Jesus, who lives beyond the veil, but acts now to sustain our lives (cf. Heb 6.19). Finally, the source of the anesthetic is God. Let us remember He also is the source of all the other elements; not one of them can exist or contribute without His loving and creative will.

E. What is God's part in the sacramental cooperation?

God's work in the sacraments is not simply one role among others. Everything else --including the other actors themselves--is a divine gift which is itself part of God's work, for He gives all these gifts, fills them with life and goodness, blesses them and makes them holy. "God is the one who firmly establishes us along with you in Christ; it is he who anointed us and has sealed us, thereby depositing the first payment, the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor 1.21-22). We are baptized in the name of the Trinity (cf. Mt 28.19)--that is, not only into their family but by their power, for divine authority is given to the risen Jesus, and this authority underwrites this act (cf. Mt 28.18).

The Father begins the work of salvation in us and brings it to perfection (cf. Phil 1.6); if we do anything, it is only because He does it in us (cf. Phil 2.13). He makes everything work together for the good of those who love Him (cf. Rom 8.28), for He means to bring us to the perfection of Jesus Himself in glory (cf. Rom 8.29). Thus prayer for the grace required to gain perfection appropriately is addressed to the Father (cf. Rom 15.5).

Christ our Lord, in communion with the Father, makes charity abound (cf. 1 Thess 3.12). He is the head and source of the Church (cf. Col 1.8). Thus He is the author of life for us (cf. Acts 3.15). Moreover, our progress is toward His perfection; we grow up toward Him, to conformity to His pattern (cf. Eph 4.15, 5.2; 2 Cor 3.18). Insofar as He is God, our Lord Himself brings about our transformation into His own likeness (cf. 2 Cor 3.18). The glorified Christ is in the process of filling the universe (cf. Eph 4.10). He holds in Himself the total capacity for all the good which is to be, and He associates us with Himself in realizing fulfillment (cf. Eph 2.6; Col 3.1).

During His earthly life, Jesus walked always in the Spirit (cf. Lk 1.35; 3.21; and so on). He promised that the Father would give the Spirit to those who ask (cf. Lk 11.13). However, only through His resurrection is Jesus made Lord in power and enabled to impart the Spirit (cf. Jn 7.39; Rom 1.4).[2] He promises to send the Spirit, but must leave this life and be transformed by resurrection to do so (cf. Jn 16.7). When He appears as glorified Lord, He comes as one sent by the Father who is able to send human persons as He Himself is sent, with the power of the Spirit: "'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'" Then he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20.21-22), and He handed over the authority to extend redemption to all humankind (cf. Mt 28.18-20).

The Church teaches that the sacraments contain and confer grace (cf. DS 1310/695, 1451/741, 1606/849). The Church does not teach that the sacraments cause grace, although this often is said by theologians and in popular writing.[3] The sacraments contain and confer grace because they contain the divine action, just summarized, which reconciles and sanctifies; they contain this action not as if the finite performance comprehended the infinite love of God, but because God makes His love available to us in this way, as He makes it available in the words of Scripture and in the humanity of the Word, which the sacraments make present and effective for us. As human acts (even as the human act of Jesus), a sacrament is effective only insofar as it is a mode of cooperation with the action of God which alone re-creates and divinizes.

However, sacraments are not merely human acts. In them the Spirit is united with the water and the blood of Christ's redemptive death (cf. Jn 19.34; 1 Jn 5.6-9). The divine power of the Spirit, available to our glorified Lord to complete His work (cf. Jn 7.38-39, 15.26, 16.7, 19.30-35, 20.22), does complete it in us.

If one understands the role of divine action in the sacraments, one can understand why they both work from the very performance of the rite (ex opere operato) and work only by virtue of a divine response to the faith and prayer of the Church. The sacraments are effective whenever they are properly carried out and worthily received, because the covenant established in Christ is real and effective--the gift of the Spirit to the Church is true and irrevocable. There is nothing more magical about this than there is in obtaining gold in exchange for a check, when someone keeps the account full of funds to draw upon. God has sworn and He will not repent.

At the same time, the Church never takes the Spirit for granted. His work is free and personal cooperation. Hence, in various invocations, such as the epicleses which ask the Spirit to effect the consecration of the Eucharist and to make Communion fruitful, the Church (like a loving wife) gently asks the Spirit of her Lord to do what He has promised and is always ready to do.[4]

Finally, God's role in the sacraments not only makes them effective, it also reveals this effectiveness. The sacraments are revelatory signs; they are made up of words and deeds, which although ours also are Christ's (cf. DV 2; SC 5). God not only reconciles and divinizes us, but also makes plain to us what He is doing by giving us evidence of it (cf. 1 Jn 5.6-8). Thus faith is nourished; our relationship with God grows as one which can be fully conscious and personal on our side too. God's revelation is effective; He communicates not mere information, but His own truth and love: His very Self.

F. What is the human action of our glorified Lord in the sacraments?

Insofar as our Lord is the Incarnate Word, His entire human life, death, and resurrection has the character of a revelatory sign. In Him is revealed the mystery, the hidden plan of God (cf. Eph 1.9). During the time of His earthly life, He revealed the Father (cf. Jn 1.18). Now the mystery, which is Christ Himself in glory, is itself communicated to us (cf. Col 1.26-27), so that we can be formed into the great mystery, the whole Christ (cf. Eph 5.32).[5]

This forming is accomplished in the Spirit by the action of Christ in the sacraments. Whenever the sacraments are administered, they are always Jesus' human acts (cf. SC 6).[6] The Church also acts in the sacraments, but before the Church can act, it must first exist, and it exists only insofar as Christ instituted the sacraments and formed the Church by them (cf. DS 1601/844). The washing of the feet of the apostles at the Last Supper (cf. Jn 13.8-10), the institution of the Eucharist and authorization of the apostles to do it in memory of Him--that is, to keep His act always present--(cf. 1 Cor 11.23-29), the conferral of the Spirit and power to forgive sins (cf. Jn 20.21-23),

the authorization to proclaim the Gospel and baptize into a gathering of the people of the New Covenant (cf. Mt 28.18-20), and the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (cf. Acts 1.4-5) were personal acts by which Jesus instituted the sacraments by performing the signs which brought the Church into being (cf. LG 9; SC 6).

5 Insofar as He is Incarnate Word--that is, insofar as He is man--our Lord's redemptive act is a perfect sacrifice, as I explained in chapter eleven, sections M, N, and O. This sacrificial act of Christ as a human act lasts, because human acts as determinations of the person endure, as I explained in chapter eight, section J. This point--which I explained in chapter twelve, sections J and K, with respect to the sacrifice of the Mass--
10 is taught quite clearly in Scripture (cf. Heb 8.1-2; 9.11-17; 10.10-18). The death of Jesus is past, but the human commitment which led to His death remains forever, just as the wound in His side lasts as an outward sign of the love of His sacred heart.[7]

15 Since the human, redemptive act of Jesus still exists, all the Masses done in remembrance--acts authorized by Him at the Last Supper in the very act which carried out the choice which led to His death--really are performances of this same, enduring redemptive act, as I explained in chapter twelve, section K. To "remember" here is not to go back in memory to the past, but rather to keep fully in view for its current relevance what is essentially timeless, although it began to be in the past. "Remembering" here has much the same sense it does when one remembers a friend by sending a gift to keep a
20 relationship alive; one is not simply recalling old times, but rather is expressing afresh a bond which in itself is timeless.[8]

25 As I explained in chapter eleven, section G, the human operation of Jesus ought not to be reduced to the status of a mere instrument of the divine Person. The human acts of Jesus really are human acts of the Word. The divine nature does not use the human operation; rather, the divine Person acts according to His assumed human nature and capacities.

30 The same thing is true in the sacraments which extend the operations of our Lord in glory to us here and now. The actions of the Word Himself are made visibly present in the sacraments. Although the species of the Eucharist conceal the bodily presence of our Lord, as every well-instructed Catholic child knows, He is substantially present in it with a presence which includes His whole being and action. But what is less often realized is that Jesus is visibly present in the sacramental acts which personally belong to Him, although they are carried out by human persons acting as His agents. Thus, when one meets Christ in the sacraments, one really meets the Word Himself (and thereby
35 also meets the Father and the Spirit); one does not enjoy a contact which symbolizes or expresses a purely spiritual meeting with God, but rather enjoys by means of the sacraments a real, human meeting with the Incarnate God.[9]

40 Insofar as the sacraments are cooperative acts in which we are united with Christ, we come to share morally by our commitments and performances in His redemptive act. However, there is another communion--that which derives from the bodily dimension of the human meeting, both in its substantial (hidden Eucharistic) aspect and in its dynamic (sacramental performance-contact) aspect.[10] It is this bodily dimension of human meeting with God in Christ which gives the sacraments their unique importance, for without this we might follow Christ by imitating Him, but our Christian lives would not be the
45 carrying out of His very own life. Because of the sacraments, we can do the very same works Jesus does and constantly enlarge upon them (cf. Jn 14.9-21).

50 It is primarily insofar as the sacraments are performances of the redeeming act of our glorified Lord Jesus that they effect what they signify, because they do this by making His act present and effective. Thus the sacraments both signify grace and communicate the grace which is God's response to the sacrifice of Jesus. Because the human, redemptive act of Jesus which exists now and is communicated in the sacraments began during His earthly life and will be wholly fulfilled only in His second coming, the sacramental sign also refers back to the passion and death of Christ and ahead to the end of ages.[11]

55 G. The Church's action in the sacraments

60 In chapter thirty-one, section K, I already considered briefly the role of the Church in the cooperative actions which are sacraments. For the Church, the sacraments are part--and the supreme part--of her activity, for in them she offers her worship in union with our Lord to the Father, and confers His redemptive love, effective through the same Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, upon her children (cf. SC 9, 10, and 59).

65 Many people think of the Church and her sacramental actions as an obstruction between Christians and Christ Himself. The Church as institution, as visible society and agent through her ministers of redemption, seems to them a medium with which they should like to dispense. This view certainly is that of Protestants who are faithful to the spirit of the Reformation.

70 However, this view is mistaken. The Church is no third something between Christians and Christ; rather, she is the very communion of Christians with Him in the Spirit, and so Christ is present in the Church (cf. LG 14).[12] The Church is the very body of Christ, and the sacraments--far from being objects which obstruct the Christian's union with Christ--are the means by which the Christian is incorporated into Christ. This great theme of Pius XII's encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ is reaffirmed by
75 Vatican II (cf. LG 7).

80 True enough, the present situation in which the Christian in the body is apart from the Lord is not wholly satisfactory (cf. 2 Cor 5.1-9). However, to wish to dispense with the sacraments before we attain to heavenly fulfillment is to wish to abort ourselves, for the sacraments are our present vital link with Christ, just as the umbilical cord is the unborn child's vital link with its mother (and not an obstacle to its immediate relationship with her). Again (to change the analogy), the sacraments are the organs by which the Church, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, materially builds herself up as the body of Christ (cf. Eph 4.16; also LG 8 and 11).

In chapter thirteen, section H, and chapter fifteen, section H, I discussed the

apostolicity of the Church, which establishes her structure as a visible society of human persons. It is Christ Himself "who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ" (Eph 4.11-12). Jesus warned that His appointed ministers should be like Him in serving (cf. Jn 13.12-16). Unfortunately, all too often bishops and priests either have disregarded this requirement and used their office for personal self-aggrandizement of one or another sort (more common at some times in the past than today) or have misunderstood this requirement to justify pastoral irresponsibility. The latter happens when service is mistaken to mean providing people with what they want, rather than with what Christ has to offer: an easy illusion of faithfulness instead of the hard reality of loyalty.

In any case, defects in the minister of the sacraments create the impression that the Church herself is an obstacle between the Christian and Christ. But the only obstacle is the deficient minister, whose failings obstruct the very communion his work ought to serve. Still, as Trent teaches, the scandal need not be fatal. One can receive the sacraments fruitfully from sinful ministers of them (cf. DS 1612/855). It is enough that the minister of the sacrament be validly ordained and authorized to act for the Church, and that he intend to do what the Church does (cf. DS 1611/854). Similarly, the truth of Christ can be spread by those who proclaim it with bad motives (cf. Phil 1.15-18).

Of the seven sacraments, three--baptism, confirmation, and orders--are sacraments of the Church not only in the sense that they are her acts, but also in the sense that they inaugurate individuals into her offices, and so make (certain of) their actions be official actions of the Church, actions themselves involved in sacramental cooperation. The sacramental character which these sacraments confer precisely is the permanent role which the recipient has in the Church, a role which always ought to be fulfilled worthily even if it is not (cf. DS 1609/852). Precisely how the three roles differ will be considered when I consider each of the three constitutional sacraments.[13]

H. What is the importance of the recipient's action in sacramental cooperation?

As I explained in section B, above, the Word became flesh in order that creation might be enriched for its own excellence and God's glory by having a share in its own renewal and transformation into divine fulfillment in Christ. Similarly, our Lord Jesus now acts through the sacraments in extending His redemptive act, crowned as it is with divine glory and power, in order that we created persons might be enriched for our own excellence and God's greater glory by having our own personal share in our own renewal and sanctification (and that of our fellows). From this point of view, the action of the recipient (and the action of the minister as a personal act) is the whole point of the sacramental economy. This action is impossible without the sacrament. The sacraments bake no bread; they are designed precisely in order to allow the children of God to have a way of helping Him accomplish what only He can do.

By receiving the sacraments, one consciously and freely accepts and grows in divine life; one is formed by a direct relationship with God who presents Himself in the form of palpable actions; and one worships God fittingly in union with the redemptive act of our Lord in glory (cf. SC 59).[14] In this way, we are allowed to share in the priesthood of Christ (cf. IG 10). In the sacramental cooperation, we share in a divine act which is suited to us as children of God by means of a human act which is suited to our condition as children who as yet are not what we are going to be.

One respect in which our actions as recipients of the sacraments are especially suited to us is their obviously subordinate role. Even though we are allowed to help in the work of God, the structure of the sacraments makes clear to us that our contribution is insignificant in comparison with His, for we only bring about the symbol of what the Spirit is doing in the sacrament. If we did not have sacraments, we might well imagine that our role--for example, in believing--is more important than it is. In fact, the manner in which we cooperate with God in His salvific work makes clear to us that our role is more like that of the children who help mother than that of the mother who cooperates with the father in raising the children.

There is another aspect to the actions of recipients of the sacraments. The sacraments nourish Christian life (cf. SC 59). This life as a whole includes not only the acts by which we receive the sacraments, but acts by which all the virtues are exercised (cf. IG 11). Thus, by the medium of one's acts of sacramental participation in the redemptive act of Christ, each individual Christian is enabled to make one's entire life into a living sacrifice (cf. Rom 12.1), as I explained in chapter twelve, sections K and L.

Precisely how the sacraments organize Christian life will be the subject of the remaining sections of this chapter (with respect to baptism) and the remaining chapters of this volume. The general and fundamental point, however, is simply this: The acts by which we receive the sacraments enable us to bring everything else in ourselves into perfect integration with charity, and so to live totally toward God through Christ as mediator, in human conscious and free cooperation with Him as our elder Brother who is first-born, and in Him as the unifying Lord whose fulfillment is the object of God's plan--the mystery in which we are privileged to share.

I. What is the importance of baptism?

The Catholic Church teaches that baptism or the desire for it is essential for salvation (cf. DS 1524/861). This teaching has been repeated very clearly by Vatican II. The missionary activity of the Church

... finds its reason in the will of God, "who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tm 2.4-5), "neither is there salvation in any other" (Acts 4.12).

Therefore, all must be converted to Him as He is made known by the Church's preaching. All must be incorporated into Him by baptism, and into the Church which is His body. For Christ Himself "in explicit terms . . . affirmed the necessity of

faith and baptism (cf. Mk 16.16; Jn 3.5) and thereby affirmed also the necessity of the Church, for through baptism as through a door men enter the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter her or to remain in her could not be saved" (AG 7; cf. LG 14).

Thus salvation demands baptism. The demand is the same demand as that one accept Christ, by whom alone we are saved, that one have faith (which is the acceptance of Christ), that one enter the Church (which is the communion of those who accept Christ, and the community in which those who seek Christ find Him).

Our Lord in glory is the New Covenant, the new and everlasting unity of God and humankind. Baptism is personal union with Christ. Everything else follows from this fact. Sin is separation from God; baptism overcomes sin, because one united with Christ cannot be separated from God. Baptism means the reception of the Spirit and the charity He pours forth in one's heart; one shares in the Spirit by being united with Christ whose Spirit He is (cf. DS 1530/800). Those who accept Christ abide in Him and the Father, who send the Spirit and abide in all united with Christ; as a result, human persons are similarly bonded with one another (cf. Jn 17.20-23). Thus the Church is formed, for members of Christ and children of God must be members of one another and brothers and sisters in the same divine family (cf. 1 Cor 12.12-13, 25-27).

The Church's teaching on the necessity of baptism and membership in the Church raises the question of the status of those who through blameless ignorance miss hearing the Gospel. The Church teaches that such persons can be saved, but not without somehow being led to faith (cf. AG 7). I discussed this matter in chapter thirteen, section I. It seems right to believe that as the Church extends her effort to bring the Gospel and baptism to those who have not yet had an opportunity to believe explicitly, such persons also with God's grace can stretch out their hearts gropingly in preparation to receive the Word of God and to consciously cling to Christ (cf. LG 16). (Similarly, the hunger of every person of good will for goodness implicitly is a hunger for the Eucharist, whose presence in the world transforms the whole of humankind even if its leavening effect is not at once evident in every part.)

Once the preceding point is understood, one will realize that the possibility that people who have not heard the Gospel can be saved in no way renders unnecessary the hearing of the Gospel, explicit faith, baptism, and active membership in the Church. On the contrary, those who have not heard the Gospel can be saved because it is possible that already in some manner they are on their way to the baptismal font, and thus that their baptism is begun.

Moreover, a wholly conscious and deliberate participation in the life of the Church is highly desirable. Such perfect participation ennoble the individual and so gives greater glory to God. It also makes available to those who enjoy it the whole wealth of the Church's liturgical life, her teaching, and her guiding and supporting pastoral ministry and fellowship.

The special character which is received in the sacrament of baptism is something like citizenship in a political society. The baptized are members of the Church, and so they are entitled not only to receive the Eucharist and everything else the Church has to give, but also to share in the common actions of Church members--that is, to participate in the offering of the Eucharist and in other acts which the Church does in common. Jesus has given to those who accept Him the power to become children of God (cf. Jn 1.12). As St. John Chrysostom suggests, this power is like that of an agent; it enables one who is being baptized to freely become a child of God.[15] (If this insight is correct, one --who is an adult--both receives and exercises the baptismal character in receiving baptism; one both becomes a member of the Church and acts in the role of a member of the Church; one both receives the gift of living faith and commits oneself to Christ with this faith.)

As there is a sense in which life is the most important human good--for only those who live can seek and enjoy other goods--so there is a sense in which baptism is the most important sacrament. It contains in itself in an embryonic form the whole of the Christian life, for it unites one in His Church with Christ, and confers the grace of divine adoption. Other sacraments add nothing extrinsic to baptism, but rather develop to distinct and flowering maturity what is contained in embryo in baptism.

For this reason, those whose Christian life is cut short (such as infants) and those who by mistake fail to appreciate the fullness of Catholic truth (such as well-intentioned Protestants) can enjoy a true sacramental life by baptism alone. Because of their inadequate view, Protestants tend to try to find in baptism what really more properly belongs, in a mature Christian life, to the other sacraments, and even to other aspects of Christian life, such as its practical fulfillment in good works.

Catholic faith teaches that the fullness of mature Christian life requires that the embryonic richness of baptism be unfolded--for example, into the fullness of the gift of the Spirit in confirmation, the fullness of communion with Christ in the Eucharist, the fullness of overcoming sin and its effects in penance and anointing, the fullness of sharing in Christ's priesthood in orders, and so forth. This Catholic view no more detracts from the beauty and richness of the total gift received in baptism than an appreciation of the physiology of an adult organism detracts from wonder at the perfection of a tiny embryo, in which all the beginnings are present.

J. On infant baptism

The Catholic Church definitively teaches that infants require baptism and that it is right and suitable for them to be baptized, provided only that their parents or guardians intend to bring them up in the faith (cf. DS 802/430, 1514/791, 1626/869). The point I made at the end of the preceding section concerning the nature of baptism as the primordial sacrament of Christian life shows, in some way, the fittingness of infant baptism. Moreover, Jesus' desire that little children come to Him and not be prevented also argues for this practice (cf. Mk 10.13-16; Mt 19.13-15; Lk 18.15-17).

On some Protestant views, not only is baptism taken to be the whole of sacramental

life, but baptism also is thought of as an outward expression of what really is (on this view) the only thing essential: personal faith. Understandably, those who think along these lines consider infant baptism inappropriate.

5 Similarly, if one imagines that belonging to the Church is rather like belonging to a club or some other sort of voluntary association, then one is likely to think that children should not be made members of the Church by their parents, but rather ought to be allowed to decide this matter for themselves when they are old enough to do so. But since membership in Christ is essential for a fully human life and for participation in the riches of divine life, and since baptism is necessary for this membership, the with-
10 holding of baptism makes about as much sense as it would for a refugee family whose children otherwise would have no place to live to fail to obtain citizenship for them in the family's nation of refuge.

Moreover, it is a mistake to think that children in infancy and before they have the use of reason do not already have some sort of religious existence. Religion never
15 is absent from the life of a human person, although some aspects of it can emerge only with the unfolding of moral capacity. Infants share in religious feeling and experience just as they share in human friendship, at least from the first moment they are cuddled and nursed and talked to. This religious life either is Christian or it will be something else. Thus, to fail to baptize infants and to bring them up as members of the
20 Church is to choose some alternative form of religious existence for them. Neutrality does not exist.

Finally, one of the reasons why infant baptism is not appreciated is that people take an excessively individualistic view of religion. They think that religion must be strictly personal, entirely a matter of the relationship of one's soul to God. But the
25 whole Christian doctrine of corporate sin in Adam and corporate redemption in Christ argues against such individualism. Also, the whole sacramental system is based not on individualism but on a deep principle of corporate action: We are saved by acting in the body of Christ with Him, and together with other members of this body. It would be odd indeed to accept the sacramental system for adults yet not allow children to partici-
30 pate--not to do for them what they cannot yet do for themselves.

Personally, I think that the case for infant baptism also is a strong case for infant participation in the Holy Eucharist. One does not wait to feed one's children until they are old enough to know what food is. The practice of welcoming infants to Communion has existed and still exists in some rites of the Catholic Church; the Church does not
35 reject it, although the view that participation of infants in the Eucharist is necessary has been condemned by Trent (cf. DS 1734/937). I do not say it is necessary, but do assert it could only be beneficial for infants to come to Jesus and He to them in bodily Communion.[16] (Of course, unless and until infant Communion is authorized in the Latin rite, no one in this rite may adopt this practice.)

40 K. How are preaching, conversion, and faith related to baptism?

By baptism, sinful human persons are united with our Lord in glory, and so their sin (which is separation from God) is overcome. In Christ, God's natural son, they be-
45 come adopted children of God, called to a life in this world and in eternity appropriate to their new being as members of the divine family. St. Paul summarizes the situation:

In Christ the fullness of deity resides in bodily form.
Yours is a share in this fullness,
in him who is the head of every principality and power.
50 You were also circumcised in him,
not with the circumcision administered by hand
but with Christ's circumcision which strips off the carnal body completely.
In baptism you were not only buried with him
but also raised to life with him
55 because you believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead.
Even when you were dead in sin and your flesh was uncircumcised,
God gave you new life in company with Christ.
He pardoned all our sins.
He canceled the bond that stood against us with all its claims,
60 snatching it up and nailing it to the cross (Col 2.9-14).
Since you have been raised up in company with Christ,
set your heart on what pertains to higher realms
where Christ is seated at God's right hand.
Be intent on things above rather than on things of earth.
65 After all, you have died! Your life is hidden now with Christ in God.
When Christ our life appears, then you shall appear with him in glory.
Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth:
fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and that lust which is idolatry.
These are the sins which provoke God's wrath (Col 3.1-6).

70 In these two passages is the entire theology of baptism. A movement of turning toward Christ, which is aroused by the preaching of the Gospel and the grace of the Spirit, brings one to baptism; there one receives living faith, which is a sharing in the communion with God, the New Covenant, established in Christ by His redemptive act and God's redeeming response to it. This communion with God wipes away sin and makes one share in
75 the fullness of deity present bodily in Christ. In consequence, one has died to the former sinful life of fallen humankind; one has a new life to lead.

In the present section I will discuss in further detail certain aspects of this complex whole: the preaching of the Gospel, conversion to Christ, faith, and the forgiveness of sin. In section L I will focus upon the divinization accomplished by baptism.
80 In section M I will consider the moral implications of this new status. However, while the treatment distinguishes these various aspects, they cannot be separated, and among them undoubtedly what is central is the new, divine life which one has by being united to Christ, the gift of the Spirit: one's share in the fullness which resides in Jesus in bodily form. All the other aspects are subordinate to this one.

From the point of view of the Church, the liturgy is not the whole of her work, but is the heart of it. To prepare people for participation in the Eucharist, the Church first must bring them in baptism to living faith. To do this, she must first preach the Gospel of repentance and faith (cf. SC 9). As St. Paul teaches, faith in the heart
5 justifies, but faith comes into one's heart only by the acceptance of the Gospel, and one cannot accept it unless it is preached by men commissioned to do so (cf. Rom 10.10-17).

The first preaching of Jesus was a call to repentance--that is, to conversion--because God's kingdom is at hand (cf. Mk 1.14-15; Mt 4.17). The apostolic Church continued the preaching of conversion and the call to baptism (cf. Acts 2.38-39). This
10 preaching sometimes sounds like a threat: Prepare to meet your Maker (cf. Acts 17.30-31)! However, the Gospel is less a threat than a joyful announcement, for the kingdom means not exploitation and suppression of humankind, but rescue, vindication, protection, and enrichment.

Conversion essentially is a turning toward the dawn which arises in the darkness,
15 a dawn which is liberating (cf. Lk 1.78-79). One need only accept this new light in order to receive the power to become a child of God--not a slave, but a friend and member of the divine family (cf. Jn 1.12, 15.15). Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to judge it mercifully, if only the world will accept Him in faith (cf. Jn 3.17, 5.22-30, 12.47). Hence, the announcement of the kingdom and the call for repentance must be understood as a summons to mercy: "'Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will
20 give you light'" (Eph 5.14).

According to the Church's definitive teaching, a person who is capable of acting, who hears the Gospel, and who does not resist the grace of the Spirit is turned and turns toward God, by a preliminary human disposition of imperfect faith, hope, and love, a
25 disposition which prepares for baptism (cf. DS 1526-1527/798, 1557-1559/817-819). Grace is primary, but given grace one can and must cooperate with it (cf. DS 1525/797, 1554/814). Thus it is true both to regard conversion as the sinner's act: "Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts" (Zec 1.3), and to regard it as God's act: "Lead us back to you, O Lord, that we may be restored" (Lam 5.21).

The call to conversion which the Church proclaims is a call to penance and the remission of sins (cf. Mt 28.16-20; Lk 24, 47; 1 Cor 6.11), and for this very reason it is an invitation to baptism. In baptism, the preliminary dispositions of conversion are
30 accepted by the Church as the token of one's willingness to be united with Christ (cf. DS 781/411). The person baptized receives the perfect, living faith and hope, together with the love of God which is poured forth by the Holy Spirit (cf. DS 1528-1530/799-800). Faith and baptism are closely bound together (cf. Mk 16.16; Gal 3.26-27; Eph 4.5; Heb 10.22-23; Acts 8.12). Acceptance of the Gospel brings one to baptism; baptism itself makes one's acceptance of the Gospel into a personal acceptance of the truth and love of
35 God, a real beginning of eternal communion in the new Covenant of Christ.[17]

Therefore, it is in baptism itself that sin is taken away, as St. Paul teaches in the beautiful passage quoted at length above (cf. Col 2.13-14). Faith brings the remission of sin only insofar as it brings one to new life in Christ. Therefore, baptism is the door of the spiritual life. By it one is initiated into communion with the death
40 of Christ, and thereby original sin and all actual sins are taken away, together with all the punishment due to sin (cf. DS 1314/696).

Moreover, God's forgiveness of sin in baptism is most gracious and magnanimous, for the individual who is baptized need not confess his or her sins and need accept no
45 personal responsibility to do penance for them. The heavenly Father welcomes His prodigal children with joy (cf. Lk 15.11-24), treating them all with the same kindness with which He always treats their sinless elder Brother, who by rights enjoys the whole estate of the Father, since He never has left His Father's side (cf. Lk 15.31).

It is worth noticing that those who are baptized in infancy and raised in the faith of Christ are spared the experience of living in sin, alienated from God, and having to
50 undergo the soul-shaking process of basic conversion from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, from orphanhood to the status of divine adoptees in the bosom of Holy Mother Church. Still, their faith and rejection of sin must be perfected by the other sacraments, often by the second, harder baptism of penance, required because of personal, mortal sin. This perfection of Christian life by the other sacraments ought not to be
55 confused with the specific role of baptism (cf. UR 22). Protestants often do confuse the two things, and some Catholics influenced by Protestant theology (through associations in charismatic prayer groups and otherwise) now are tending to do.

L. How is baptism related to one's sharing in the Church and in divine life?

65 As Vatican II teaches, through baptism as through a door, men and women, as well as infants, enter the Church (cf. DS 14), for the Church is the communion of those who make up God's family by being united with Jesus Christ, His Son (cf. LG 8-11).

Thus, by baptism, men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him (cf. Rom 6.4; Eph 2.6; Col 3.1; 2 Tm
70 2.11); they receive the spirit of adoption as sons "by virtue of which we cry: Abba, Father" (Rom 8.15), and thus become those true adorers whom the Father seeks (cf. Jn 4.23) (SC 6).

Jesus is the mediator. By communion with Him, one comes to the goal of baptism: adoption as a child of God.

75 Baptism makes one a child of God, because one receives faith in baptism and by it is united with Christ (cf. Gal 3.26-28). Those who were born as human persons in Adam are reborn in Christ (cf. DS 1523/795). Buried with Christ (cf. Col 2.12), they are reborn from the water of baptism, not as from the waters of the natural womb, to a merely human life, but to become new people and part of a new creation (cf. Eph 2.15-18; 2 Cor
80 5.17). Baptism truly is a new birth (cf. Jn 3.5; Ti 3.5; 1 Pt 1.3, 2.2); therefore, it gives one a new heart, which means a new inner self, a new personal being (cf. Ex 36.25-26; Is 32.15; Jl 2.28-29; Jer 31.22).

The new person whom one becomes by baptism is not simply a new individual self. One becomes the new man who is Christ (cf. Eph 2.15). He unifies all creation, first of

all by forming His Church (cf. Col 3.10-11; also LG 7 and 8). Those who have been baptized are clothed with Christ (cf. Gal 3.27); in Him they form one single body, the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12.27-28).

Baptism into Christ is not of water only, but is a baptism into His reality, a sharing in His Spirit (cf. Jn 3.1-21). This central truth about the Christian already has been treated at length in chapter six, sections H and I. Those who body out Christ into His Church are adopted children of God, really sharing His status by the gift of His Spirit, who pours forth the love of God into their hearts (cf. Rom 5.5, 8.14-17). The present gift of the Spirit is a downpayment (cf. Eph 1.13-14) on the fullness of the experience of divine family life which is to come to us as the fruit of the death of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1.18-25; 1 Jn 3.1-2). Inasmuch as the Spirit is the soul of the Church (cf. LG 7), baptism makes us not only one in body, but even one in soul.[18]

So closely united with our Lord in glory are we by baptism, that we already share in His resurrection and glory, although in an invisible way (cf. Eph 2.5-6; Col 2.12, 3.1-4). The glory of being divine children to whom immortality and heavenly fulfillment is due is not only future, but present, waiting only to be revealed (cf. Rom 8.18-19). Still, resurrection is not yet completed in us (cf. 1 Cor 15.20-28). For the present, our resurrection begins to appear in this: We can and must live the life of good deeds which God has prepared for us (cf. Eph 2.6-10).

20 M. What are the implications of baptism for the moral life of Christians?

Jesus already taught that the faith which saves is not simply intellectual assent and an initial willingness to do the Father's will, but rather is a rocklike foundation (cf. Mt 7.24-27; Lk 6.47-49). Not the son who says "yes" to the father but the one who does what is asked, even after he says "no" to the request, is the model for the Christian (cf. Mt 21.28-31). Jesus demands a faith which is more than mental, one which involves a passionate commitment (cf. Mt 10.37-38; Lk 14.25-27; Mk 8.34). The inherent normativity of faith for moral life already was treated more fully in chapter thirteen, section J.

One is not justified and deified due to one's works; salvation is by grace through faith (cf. Rom 3.22; 1 Tm 3.8; DS 1532/801). "I repeat, it is owing to his [God's] favor that salvation is yours through faith. This is not your own doing, it is God's gift; neither is it a reward for anything you have accomplished, so let no one pride himself on it" (Eph 3.8-9).

However, no sooner is the gift given than one must begin to live out the new life one has received, to complete the acceptance of the gift by accepting also its moral implications (cf. Eph 2.10). All that matters is that one is created anew (cf. Gal 6.15) by the gift of divine life received in baptism. But this gift includes a call to live in the freedom of holiness appropriate to God's family (cf. Gal 5.13-6.10). Being baptized, we are trained by grace to live according to the Spirit, as children of God (cf. Ti 2.11-3, 8).

Are you not aware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Through baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. If we have been united with him through likeness to his death, so shall we be through a like resurrection. This we know: our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might be slaves to sin no longer. A man who is dead has been freed from sin. If we have died with Christ, we believe that we are also to live with him. We know that Christ, once raised from the dead, will never die again; death has no more power over him. His death was death to sin, once for all; his life is life for God. In the same way, you must consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6.3-11). In short, salvation is the work of grace, but this divine work includes as an essential part our own work: the living of a Christlike life.

One who does not accept the fullness of salvation cannot have any of it, for it is an indivisible whole. That is why Jesus teaches that not all who receive the word but only those who abide in it are true disciples who will be saved (cf. Jn 8.31-32; Mk 4.1-9; Mt 13.1-9; Lk 8.4-8). More than for her physical motherhood, by which she bore the Word of God, Mary is to be praised (together with all like her) for this, that she heard the word of God and kept it (cf. Lk 11.27-28). To keep the word is to live by it. No one who acts in an unholy way is a child of God (cf. 1 Jn 3.4-10).

Because baptism does have moral implications, namely, the requirement that one live a morally good life, the Church asks those about to be baptized whether they reject Satan, his works, his empty promises; whether they reject sin so as to live as God's children; whether they reject the glamor of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin.[19] Or again, the Church asks simply and bluntly: "Have you listened to Christ's word and made up your mind to keep his commandments?"[20] In the case of the baptism of children, the Church explains to the parents what they are doing and asks for a commitment:

70 You have asked to have your children baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?[21]

The Catholic Church definitively teaches (in the Council of Trent) that the person who receives the grace of baptism can and must keep the commandments, that the commandments to be kept include the Ten Commandments, and that Jesus is not only a trustworthy redeemer but also a lawgiver who must be obeyed (cf. DS 1536-1539/804, 1568-1571/828-831).

The renunciation of Satan means not merely the renunciation of extreme, diabolical wickedness. Satan is the father of all evil (cf. Is 14.12-14; 1 Jn 3.8); all evil somehow belongs to him (cf. Rv 12.1-17). Therefore, the renunciation of Satan means the renunciation of all evil whatsoever.

Even the baptism of John the Baptist, which was only with water and which aimed only at repentance for sin, required practical fruits fitting for one who turns away from evil (cf. Mt 3.8; Lk 3.8-14). Jesus baptizes not merely with water, but with fire and

the Holy Spirit--that is, with His redemptive act and the adoption as divine children which is effected for those who enter into it (cf. Mk 1.8; Mt 3.11; Lk 3.16; Jn 1.12; 3.5-8; Acts 1.5, 11.16). How much the more, then, does the baptism of Jesus require the keeping of all His commandments (cf. Mt 28.20).

5 Of course, baptism with the Spirit not only requires the fulfillment of the commandments, but also makes possible the perfect living of life according to the Spirit. Freed from the law, Christians are able to live according to the Spirit, as I explained in chapter twelve, section P. No longer is there any excuse for sin (cf. Rom 8.9-13).

10 N. The basic life of prayer and devotion suited to all the baptized

An adequate treatment of the religious and other responsibilities common to all Christians belongs to the second volume of this work. However, since prayer and devotion are so essential as principles of the remainder of Christian life, I think it appropriate to indicate here in a very summary way what should be considered minimally essential for every baptized Catholic as a basic life of prayer.

In a beautiful passage concerning his own baptism, St. Cyprian of Carthage indicates how the new life is experienced. Before baptism, he had been wedded to sin as if it were part of himself:

20 But afterwards, when the stain of my past life had been washed away by means of the water of re-birth, a light from above poured itself upon my chastened and now pure heart; afterwards, through the Spirit which is breathed from heaven, a second birth made of me a new man. And then in a marvelous manner, doubts immediately clarified themselves, the closed opened, the darkness became illuminated, what

25 before had seemed difficult offered a way of accomplishment, and what had been thought impossible was able to be done. Thus it had to be acknowledged that what was of the earth and was born of the flesh and had lived submissive to sins, had now begun to be of God, inasmuch as the holy Spirit was animating it (FEF 548).

30 Although the person baptized in infancy can be spared the reign of sin, the Christian child as well as the adult convert should enjoy the same experience of illumination and of the power to attain goodness. It is this reality and experience which the basic life of Christian prayer and devotion ought to protect, foster, and develop to maturity.

Here I take for granted that every baptized person must be instructed in the truth of faith and Christian morality, according to his or her capacity. Of special importance

35 in this instruction is that the recipient, even a young child, be taught to receive Christian teaching meditatively. Enriched as much as possible with sacred Scripture, even elementary catechism should aim at cultivating a prayerful acceptance of the Word of God, so that the assent of faith will be not merely intellectual acceptance, but a wholehearted commitment to the personal truth which God reveals and an unconditional

40 response to the love which He communicates in our Lord Jesus.

Among the truths of faith, it seems to me that three especially need to be accepted as fully real: first, that heaven exists although it is invisible, and that our present life is important only insofar as it is a hidden beginning of eternal life with God; second, that God has generously forgiven all of our sins, and that He wills and enables

45 us to be perfect; third, that one lives as a Christian not in isolation but in the midst of the Church, in real continuity with Jesus, Mary, and the saints, and also in real continuity with the whole of God's saving work toward humankind, from Abraham until the second coming of Christ. A lively sense of these truths will protect one through one's whole Christian life against worldliness, pelagianism, moral indifference, and historicist relativism. These, it seems to me, are the most dangerous threats to faith.

Among prayers, the Lord's Prayer holds a special place. It is part of the essential Christian tradition which, like the Creed itself, is handed over to those about to be baptized, so that they can join in both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer when they

55 first begin to participate fully in the Eucharist.[22] In this prayer we ask that God's name and Person be honored and held holy, as will be the case if we remember who we are and live as good children of the Father; that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth, which demands our faithfulness; that our needs and hunger for good be satisfied, which certainly will be done by the Father's mercy if we only humbly accept the good things He offers us; that we be forgiven, which demands that we forgive others; and that

60 we be preserved from temptation and sin, which is assured provided that we do not wantonly expose ourselves to sin.[23]

The bishops of the United States have wisely directed that children be taught to memorize certain prayers "such as the Sign of the Cross, Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Apostles' Creed, Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity, Act of Contrition." It is worth noticing that the first four of these comprise the prayers used in the rosary; the bishops

65 also desire that children learn the mysteries of the rosary.[24]

Among the various devotions, probably none has been more often commended by the Church for all the faithful than the rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Code of Canon Law even urges that this devotion be practiced by priests (Canon 125). The rosary can

70 be taught to and practiced by small children, who can pray it with their families long before they have the use of reason.

Properly taught, the rosary is very suitable for developing habits of meditation, since the vocal prayer itself is simple, and the mysteries are provided as material to which one can let one's attention be distracted. Moreover, the early learning of the

75 rosary ensures the special devotion to Mary which the Church requires of all her children, insofar as Mary leads us to Christ and manifests clearly what God wills for all of us--children of Man, worthy of death, called to be children of the Father, and destined for eternal life with the Son of Man in glory (cf. LG 66-69).

80 Notes to chapter thirty-two

1. See Josef Jungmann, S.J., The Liturgy of the Word, trans. H. E. Winstone (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1966), p. 7.

2. See Lucien Cerfaux, The Christian in the Theology of St. Paul (New York: Herder

and Herder, 1967), pp. 292-295. This is not to say that Jesus lacked divine power during His earthly life (cf. Acts 10.38). However, the power to send the Spirit and bestow Him at will depends upon the status of Christ as glorified Lord (cf. Jn 16.7, 20.21-22).

3. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 3, qu. 62, art. 1-5. Thomas' way of speaking has been widely adopted; it surely is a consequence of his conception of sanctifying grace as a created quality. For reasons given in chapter six, section I, I disagree with Thomas on this point. However, even on my account one could say in a loose sense that the sacraments cause grace, since they do bring it about that the divine nature is communicated and that the human person shares in and is perfected gradually in divine life. E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1963), pp. 4-5, says that grace is an encounter (personal meeting) with God as seen from the human side. It seems to me that this conception is far less adequate than that of St. Thomas, for it reduces still more the inward transformation of the human person affected by the Spirit. Indeed, I do not see how Schillebeeckx' conception of grace can satisfy the requirement of Trent that grace inhere (cf. DS 1530/800, 1561/821), because an encounter does not inhere. Does Schillebeeckx perhaps think of adoption as a sort of legal fiction rather than as a genuine begetting into divine life?

4. Joseph A. Jungmann, S.J., The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great, trans. Francis A. Brunner, C.Ss.R. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1959), pp. 70, 218-220. To say that the Spirit acts is not to deny that both the Father and Jesus as Word also act divinely in all the sacraments.

5. See Cerfaux, op. cit., pp. 474-494.

6. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa contra gentiles, 4, 76.

7. Schillebeeckx, op. cit., pp. 55-56, fails to grasp the lasting character of human acts as such; he attributes the enduring quality of the redemption to Jesus' divinity. This position involves commingling, for it amounts to attributing a divine characteristic to something properly human.

8. See Bastiaan van Iersel, S.M.M., "Some Biblical Roots of the Christian Sacrament," in Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., and Boniface Willems, O.P., The Sacraments in General: A New Perspective, Concilium, vol. 31 (New York, N.Y., and Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1968), pp. 6-15, for a Scriptural study on this important point about remembering.

9. When Schillebeeckx says "Christ the sacrament," it seems to me one can tell at once that something is seriously wrong. Christ is not a sacrament; He is God. One who sees Him sees the Father (cf. Jn 14.9). The sacraments are not signs of a meeting with God; they are so many meetings in cooperative action with God. They are signs (expressive performances or carryings-out on us and for our benefit) of the one complex human redemptive act of Jesus and divine response to that basic act of self-oblation.

10. Odo Casel, O.S.B., The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings, ed. Burkhard Neunheuser, O.S.B. (London, Westminster, Md.: Darton, Longman & Todd, The Newman Press, 1962), pp. 14-15, 150-160, clearly states this point. In general, Casel rightly understands the sacraments as actions and takes realistically the presence in the sacrament of Christ's very same redemptive act. Unfortunately, he lacks the theory of action to explain what he correctly asserts, he also overstates the relationship between the mystery of Christ and the pagan mysteries. However, his theory of the sacraments is much sounder than that of Schillebeeckx, who criticizes (op. cit., pp. 55-56) Casel, wrongly supposing that human acts are events which are past when the performance is completed. Schillebeeckx fails altogether to realize that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus are not acts of His, but foreseen consequences of His act, which was to eat the Passover, a meal which still goes on in every Mass as the continuing performance of the very same choice Jesus was carrying out when He commanded: Do this in memory of Me, and now carries out by priests acting in His person when they fulfill this command according to His still-actual human self-determination.

11. See St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae, 3, qu. 61, art. 3, ad 1.

12. See Louis Bouyer, Liturgical Piety (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954), pp. 178-179. Although somewhat dated because Vatican II carried out many ideas contained in it, this book remains an excellent treatment of the liturgy as the primary form of Catholic spirituality.

13. On sacramental character, see St. Thomas, op. cit., 3, qu. 63, art. 2. Also see Colman E. O'Neill, O.P., Meeting Christ in the Sacraments (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1964), pp. 110-118.

14. John Paul II, Dominicae cenae, 7 (L'Osservatore Romano, English edition, March 24, 1980, pp. 6-7), makes the point that the worship of God centered upon the Eucharist springs from intimacy and gives all of Christian life a sacramental style. In other words, Christian life as a whole is lived in cooperation with God who is present, very much as marriage is lived in cooperation with a spouse whom one loves because of communion in one flesh.

15. St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of John, 1, 12.

16. If sweet wine were used and infants and small children received Communion under this species, adults brought up in the Church would rightly know from as far back as they could remember that the Blood of Christ is good, although the life one shares by receiving this Blood can burn.

17. If someone argues that the catechumen receives grace before baptism, I answer that perhaps the catechumen receives grace before the rite of baptism is performed, but that the sacrament begins when the catechumen, moved by grace, begins to move toward baptism. The sacramental rite only completes the long journeys of souls seeking Christ and of Christ (in His Church) seeking souls.

18. See St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3, 17, 1-3.

19. See The Rites, pp. 98-99, 145-146.

20. Ibid., p. 109.

21. Ibid., p. 198.

22. Ibid., pp. 86-88.

23. For a very helpful and extremely rich treatment of the Lord's Prayer, see the Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests, trans. John A. McHugh, O.P., and

Charles J. Callan, O.P. (New York and London: Joseph F. Wagner and B. Herder, 1934), pp. 501-589.

24. See National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1979), p. 102 (#176). This directory not only has the authority of the U.S. bishops, but also that of the Holy See, because it was approved by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, October 30, 1978.