24. Seven sacraments or two ordinances?

Often heard: "Jesus only commanded two things: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Catholics invented the rest."
Also heard: "If rites only symbolize, why does James tie anointing to forgiveness, and Acts tie the laying on of hands to the Spirit?"

Two ordinances of obedience, not channels of grace

HELD BY Baptist

Christ instituted two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are acts of obedience and remembrance that symbolize grace already received, not channels of grace. Marriage, ordination, confirmation and the rest are good practices but not sacraments.

VERSES CITED

Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23–26; Rom 6:3–4; Eph 2:8–9 (grace through faith, not rites).

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Luther (*Babylonian Captivity*, 1520) kept baptism, the Eucharist and at first penance; Calvin kept two. Zwingli and the Anabaptists reframed them as signs. Baptists use "ordinance" (1644 and 1689 confessions; BF&M art. VII). The number seven was fixed in the 12th century (Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, c. 1150) professed at Lyons II (1274) and Florence (1439), and defined at Trent (1547).

Seven sacraments that give the grace they signify

HELD BY Catholic · Orthodox seven mysteries

Christ instituted seven sacraments, visible signs that give the grace they signify: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders and marriage. They work by the power of Christ acting in them (*ex opere operato*), not by the minister's holiness, though their fruit depends on the recipient's disposition. Each has a scriptural basis even though the list of seven was formally numbered later.

VERSES CITED

Confirmation: Acts 8:14–17; 19:5–6; Heb 6:2. Anointing: Jas 5:14–15; Mark 6:13. Orders: Acts 6:6; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6. Marriage: Matt 19:4–6; Eph 5:31–32. Penance: John 20:22–23. Eucharist: John 6; 1 Cor 10:16. Baptism: John 3:5; Acts 2:38.

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Hippolytus describes anointing and hand-laying after baptism (c. 215). Cyprian speaks of confirmation as completing baptism. Augustine calls marriage a *sacramentum*. Pope Innocent I (416) describes anointing the sick with oil blessed by the bishop.

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 1113–1134 (esp. 1113, 1127–1128), 1210–1212; Trent Sess. 7, canon 1 (1547).

Two sacraments of the Gospel, effectual signs of grace

HELD BY Lutheran also absolution · Reformed · Anglican · Methodist

Christ ordained two sacraments in the Gospel, baptism and the Lord's Supper, for only these have His command, a visible sign and an added promise of grace. They are not bare badges of Christian profession but, in the words of the Anglican article, "effectual signs of grace," by which God works invisibly in us and quickens and strengthens faith; their power lies in Christ's word and the work of the Spirit, received by faith, not in the rite itself or the minister's worthiness. Confirmation, ordination, marriage and the other rites may be kept as godly rites or callings but are not sacraments of the Gospel. Lutherans also count absolution a sacrament, will call ordination one if it means the ministry of the Word, and hold that no prudent man will strive greatly over the number.

VERSES CITED

Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:23–26; Rom 4:11 (a sign and seal); Rom 6:3–4; Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 10:16; Rom 10:17 (faith comes by hearing); 1 Cor 11:29.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Luther's Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520) reduced the seven to baptism, the Supper and at first penance, and the Augsburg Confession (1530, art. XIII) and its Apology defined a sacrament as a rite with God's command and promise of grace. The Thirty-Nine Articles (art. XXV, 1563/1571) and the Westminster Confession (1646, ch. 27) settled on two sacraments, and Wesley carried the Anglican article into Methodism (1784, art. XVI).

CONFESSIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Augsburg Confession, art. XIII; Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII.3–6, 11–17; Thirty-Nine Articles, art. XXV; Westminster Confession 27.1, 27.3–4; Heidelberg Catechism Q 66–68; Methodist Articles of Religion, art. XVI.

Confirmation and chrismation

Catholic: confirmation is needed to complete baptismal grace. The Latin Church gives it at the "age of discretion"; the bishop is the ordinary minister, though for grave reasons he may let priests confirm (CCC 1285, 1307, 1312–1313). **Orthodox:** the priest chrismates immediately after baptism, with chrism consecrated by a bishop, and the newly baptized, infants included, receive Communion at once (Longer Catechism Q 307–310; OCA; CCC 1290). **Lutheran:** a rite received from the Fathers (Apology XIII.6), "a public rite of the church preceded by a period of instruction" (Small Catechism, CPH). **Anglican:** not a sacrament of the Gospel (Article XXV). In the 1662 Prayer Book the bishop lays hands on those who have learned the Catechism and ratify their baptismal vows (Order of Confirmation; Canon B 27). **Reformed:** no confirmation; Calvin wanted children instead to give an account of their faith before the church (*Institutes* 4.19.13), and baptized children enter full communion by public profession of faith (OPC Directory for Worship IV). **Methodist:** United Methodists confirm, teaching that "confirmation is what the Holy Spirit does" (*By Water and the Spirit*). **Baptist:** no confirmation; baptism is "the immersion of a believer" (BF&M art. VII).

Anointing of the sick

Catholic: a sacrament for the seriously ill (Jas 5:14–15; Mark 6:13), given only by priests. Once given mainly to the dying as "extreme unction," it is not only for those at the point of death; Vatican II preferred the name "anointing of the sick," and Paul VI revised the rite in 1972 (CCC 1510–1516; *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 73). **Orthodox:** holy unction heals soul and body and forgives sins; it is not "last rites" (Longer Catechism Q 364–365; OCA). On Holy Wednesday it is offered to all who come (GOARCH). **Anglican:** Article XXV denies that extreme unction is a sacrament of the Gospel. The 1549 Prayer Book allowed anointing at the sick person's wish; 1552 and 1662 omit it; Canon B 37 now permits it. **Lutheran:** unction is a rite from the Fathers (Apology XIII.6); the ELCA counts anointing with oil among its ministries of healing (*Caring for Health*, 2003). **Reformed:** Calvin held that the apostles' oil went with a gift of healing that "was temporary" (*Institutes* 4.19.18–21). **Methodist** and **Baptist:** prayer over the sick, sometimes with oil, as a sign, not a sacrament (UMC *Book of Worship*, "Healing Services and Prayers"; Jas 5:14–15).

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

Christ instituted seven sacraments, visible signs that give the grace they signify by the power of Christ acting in them; the list of seven was formally numbered later, but each rite is held to have a scriptural basis. The full case is set out above.

Sources: CCC 1113–1134 (esp. 1113, 1127–1128), 1210–1212; Council of Trent, Session 7, canon 1 (as cited in the chapter).

Orthodox

The Orthodox call the sacraments mysteries, holy acts through which God's saving power works on people in a hidden way. The catechism counts seven: baptism, chrismation, communion, penitence, orders, matrimony and unction, and the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) taught that they are seven, no more and no fewer. Many Orthodox teachers add that the Church has never formally fixed the number, calling the Eucharist the "Sacrament of Sacraments" and surrounding the seven with other blessings.

Sources: Longer Catechism of St Philaret, Q 284–285; Confession of Dositheus (Synod of Jerusalem, 1672), decree 15; Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, "Understanding the Sacraments of the Orthodox Church" (Fr Thomas Fitzgerald), sections The Eucharist and Other Sacraments and Blessings.

Lutheran

A sacrament is a rite with God's command and an added promise of grace. On that test the Apology names baptism, the Lord's Supper and absolution as true sacraments, and is willing to call ordination one if it means the ministry of the Word. Confirmation and extreme unction are rites from the Fathers, not necessary to salvation. The Lutheran confessions treat the count itself as of little consequence, and stress that sacraments require faith, not the outward act alone.

Sources: Apology of the Augsburg Confession XIII.2–6, 11–17; Augsburg Confession XIII.

Reformed

Christ instituted only two sacraments in the new covenant, baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace; their grace comes from the Spirit and Christ's word, not from any power in them or from the minister's piety. Repentance, ordination and marriage are useful ordinances of God but not sacraments, while confirmation and extreme unction are human inventions the church can do without.

Sources: Westminster Confession 27.1, 27.3, 27.4; Westminster Larger Catechism Q 164; Heidelberg Catechism Q 68; Second Helvetic Confession ch. 19.

Anglican

Methodist

There are "two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel," baptism and the Supper of the Lord. Confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony and extreme unction are "commonly called Sacraments" but are not to be counted sacraments of the Gospel, because they have no visible sign or ceremony ordained of God. The 1662 Prayer Book still keeps rites of confirmation, matrimony, ordination and the absolution of the sick, though it has no rite of anointing.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles XXV; Book of Common Prayer 1662 (Order of Confirmation; Visitation of the Sick; Solemnization of Matrimony; Ordinal).

John Wesley's Articles of Religion repeat the Anglican article: two sacraments are ordained of Christ in the Gospel, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the five commonly called sacraments are not to be counted sacraments of the Gospel. United Methodists treat baptism and Communion as means of God's unmerited grace: baptism the once-for-all sacrament of entrance, Communion the sacrament of sustenance received frequently.

Sources: Methodist Articles of Religion XVI (umc.org); United Methodist Church, *This Holy Mystery* (2004), "Invitation to the Lord's Table", practice.

Baptist

Christ instituted two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, acts of obedience and remembrance that symbolize grace already received rather than channels of grace; marriage, ordination and the rest are good practices but not sacraments. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Baptist Faith and Message 2000, art. VII; Second London Confession 28; First London Confession 1644 (as cited in the chapter).

Where it gets contested: The list of seven is medieval as a formal count, and those who count two (Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists) press this. Catholics answer that the rites themselves are ancient and that the number reflects later classification, not invention.

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