

Where Did the Seven Sacraments Come From?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

“Do you know the actual history of ‘Seven Sacraments’? Were all of these brought about at the same time?”

The term “sacrament” derives from the Latin *sacramentum*. The meaning is “a thing set apart as holy.”

The New Testament never isolates certain acts of obedience from others by designating them as sacraments.

However, as the early church of late first century and onward began to drift from the New Testament pattern (cf. 2 Thes. 2:1ff; 1 Tim. 4:1ff; 2 Tim. 4:1ff), certain acts began to be distinguished from others as conveying a special sort of grace. These practices originally had a biblically-based background but gradually became perverted by misguided or unscrupulous teachers.

By medieval times (ca. A.D. 500 to 1500), the Roman Church had become deeply steeped in considerable error. One such error is that its clergy had begun isolating several of acts as sacraments. But it was not until the 16th century that they were cataloged as seven.

These seven sacraments were: Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, the Eucharist, Sacred Orders, Holy Matrimony and Extreme Unction.

The Augustinian cleric, Hugo of St. Victor (1096-1141) characterized the sacraments as outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace. Some Protestants, while rejecting five of the so-called sacraments, nonetheless adorned both baptism and the Lord’s supper with the sacramental mantle.

This paved the way for the false notion that these rites, in and of themselves, bestowed grace quite apart of from a faith-motivated, personal submission to the will of God (as in the case of infant baptism).

This is not the place for an extended discussion of the history and nature of the sacraments, as the designation is recognized by the Roman Church. Nevertheless, the following brief comments may be helpful.

Baptism

Baptism is not a magical rite administered by the sprinkling or pouring of water upon the candidate’s head that bestows the grace of pardon or the removal of “original sin” as alleged in Roman theology.

Rather, baptism is exclusively the burial in water and resurrection therefrom of a **penitent believer**. It thus involves a person who has arrived at a **responsible level of faith** in God and his Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. 11:6; Jn. 8:24). Further, he is also willing to confess the same in a public fashion (Rom. 10:9-10). That personal faith leads one to resolve to turn from sin in repentance, as much as is humanly possible (Lk. 13:3, 5; Acts 17:31).

These preliminaries result in the sincere person seeking forgiveness from sin, on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus of Nazareth, in yielding to the sacred command to be baptized for the remission of one’s sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Baptism is not an outward sign" of an inward grace **already received**. It is an outward act of obedience leading to pardon and the obtaining of a clear conscience before God (1 Pet. 3:21).

Confirmation

Confirmation is a ritual that was bequeathed sacramental status in the twelfth century A.D. by Peter Lombard. It is administered by a Catholic Bishop or sometimes delegated to a priest. In Roman circles, it generally is bestowed at about the age of seven to twelve, somewhere in proximity to the child’s first communion.

In Lutheran practice, though not characterized as a sacrament, a similar rite is given to youngsters in their early teens who choose to confirm in their hearts the baptism their parents had performed upon them as infants. These rituals are without New Testament authority.

Penance

Penance derives from the Latin *poena* (“penalty”). It refers to disciplinary procedures imposed by the apostate Church.

Penance was codified as a sacrament by the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545-63; Sess. xiv, 3). It involves the confession of one’s sins to a priest, who then pronounces “absolution” (i.e., forgiveness extended by the cleric). The priest then provides requirements for satisfaction, which is the confessor’s submission to a temporal penalty (e.g., a monetary fine or assigned works) exacted in order to effect a reconciliation between the offender and the Church.

The practice of Penance is of human origin and is an affront to the principles of the Christian faith in several particulars.

Holy Eucharist

Holy Eucharist is the expression used in the Roman Catholic environment for what is more commonly referred to as the Lord’s supper.

“Eucharist” derives from a Greek term which signifies “thankful,” or “to give thanks” (cf. *eucharisteo*, “gave thanks” – Mt. 26:27). The doctrine of the Eucharist involves the idea of **transubstantiation**. This is the notion that when the priest pronounces sacred words “this is my body [blood]” the bread and the fruit of the vine are transformed into the **literal body and blood** of the Savior.

This concept became an article of faith at the Council of Trent in 1551. The lay member eats only the bread (wafer), but supposedly he receives both elements (flesh and blood) within the bread. This is called “communion under one kind.”

During the Eucharist ceremony, Christ allegedly is **sacrificed again** for sin. This is why it is called the “sacrifice of the mass.” According to the dictum handed down by the Council of Trent, this sacrifice is identical with the type of sacrifice that Jesus suffered on the cross.

These ideas are contradictory to the plain teaching of the New Testament.

Transubstantiation fails to appreciate the **symbolic nature** of the Lord’s supper, which is a **memorial**, not an actual **physical presence**.

Communion under one kind specifically ignores the Savior’s instruction that all are to drink (see Mt. 26:27 ESV). The theory of multiple messianic sacrifices stands in opposition to the explicit testimony of Scripture that Christ was offered but **once** (see Heb. 9:28).

Holy Orders

Holy Orders has reference to the special appointment of certain officers in the Church. In Romanism, it has to do with the ordination of offices (e.g., bishops, priests, deacons, and sub-deacons).

By means of special ceremonies, those being ordained receive a sacred “unction” (anointing), which transfers to them an essence of such an exalted spiritual nature, that such can never be forfeited.

According to this doctrine, no personal sin can ever make the ordained person unfit to function in this capacity. This mysticism has no parallel in the literature of the New Testament. The hierarchy system of the Roman church was patterned after the governmental structure of pagan Rome.

Holy Matrimony

Holy Matrimony, of course, refers to the institution of marriage.

The Roman Catholic Church contends that marriage is a church institution. And since they believe that the Catholic church is the true, universal church of Christ, the Roman Church claims marital jurisdiction over all who have been baptized in that communion. Frequently, Catholics will claim that the Roman Catholic Church “invented” marriage — simply a blatantly false assertion.

Marriage between Catholics is considered a sacrament (Council of Trent, Sess. xxix, can. 2). Marriage between two non-Catholics is but a mere contract. Contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ (Mt. 5:32; 19:9), the Catholic Church permits no valid cause for divorce.

However, with influence in the right places and especially if one has sufficient financial resources, an annulment can be obtained on almost any basis. An annulment is a declaration that one’s original marriage **was never valid**.

Catholics may remarry following the annulment. Modern clergymen are as adept as were the ancient Pharisees at manipulating divine law for the desired result!

Extreme Unction

Extreme Unction in the Roman Catholic system is a part of the “last rites” administered to those who are dying.

It involves the application of consecrated oil by a properly ordained priest to the eyes, ears, nostrils, lips, hands, and feet of the failing victim. It is alleged to be valid in granting pardon from sin. It is claimed to be grounded in Scripture (Mk. 6:13; Jas. 5:14-15), though these passages have nothing to do with preparation for death. The doctrine was defined at the Council of Trent.

Conclusion

It should be noted in conclusion that over the many centuries of its digressive development the Roman Church has widely fluctuated as to what constitutes a genuine sacrament. The number of sacraments has varied from five to twelve. It was not until the session of Trent in 1549 that the number seven became fixed as an article of faith.

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Scripture References

1 Thessalonians 2:1; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5; Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24; Romans 10:9-10; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:31; Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Matthew 26:27; Hebrews 9:28; Matthew 5:32, 19:9; Mark 6:13; James 5:14-15

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