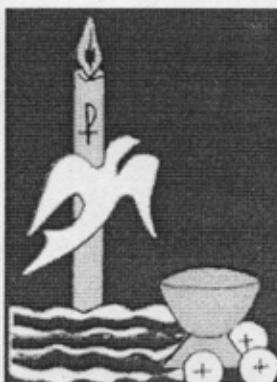


PART I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE SACRAMENTS



I. THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS

The Catholic Church officially recognizes and celebrates seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, Marriage and Holy Orders, Reconciliation and Anointing of the sick.

There was a moment in Church history that the number of sacraments was not fixed. It was only in the 13th century that the number seven was ratified by the Church. Finally, the Council of Trent in the 16th century officially declared that there are seven sacraments, no more, no less.

II. DEFINITIONS OF 'SACRAMENTS'

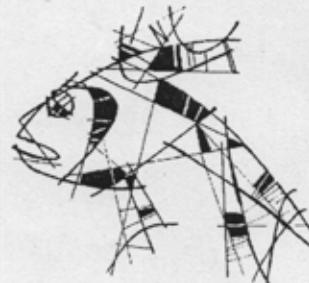
- a. According to Code of Canon Law - Sacraments are "signs and means by which faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is rendered to God and the sanctification of humankind is effected, and they thus contribute in the highest degree to the establishment, strengthening and manifestation of ecclesial communion of God's grace."¹
- b. According to St. Augustine – A sacrament is a "visible form of invisible grace"²
- c. According to the Church (Post-Vatican II) – Sacraments are "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us."³

III. ACCORDING TO THE DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH AFTER VATICAN II

a. Efficacious Signs Of Grace

As signs or symbols, Sacraments are rituals or ceremonies of worship celebrated by a community of Christians gathered together. Symbols do what abstract thought cannot do. Symbols bring us into touch with realities which are at once familiar and mysterious. Symbols make the 'invisible' grace tangible, and when we touch them we touch a mystery.⁴

The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. These are composed of realities, gestures, words or silence, which awaken an experience or living encounter. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.⁵



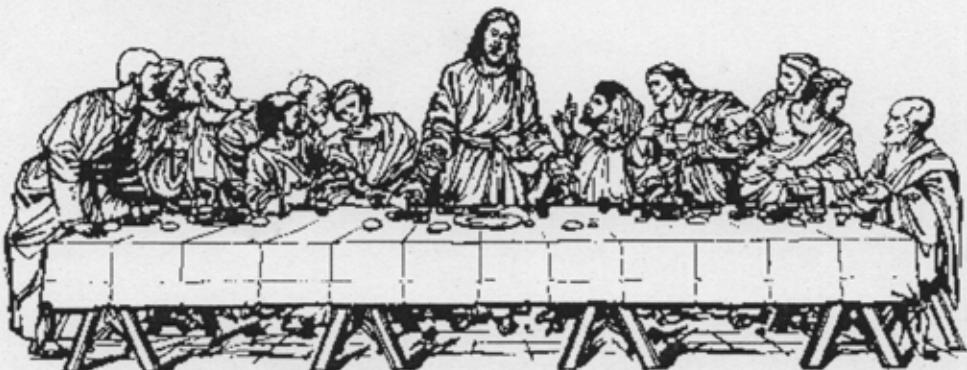
¹ Cf. Code of Canon Law, 840.

² Cf. Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 39.

³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1131.

⁴ Cf. Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics*, 47.

⁵ Cf. CCC 1131.



b. Instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church

It was Christ Himself who instituted the sacraments. Although we cannot find explicit Scriptural passages that Christ is said to have invented them, yet through His words and actions the sacraments came forth when He founded the Church.

c. Sacraments of Faith

The Sacraments, since it sanctifies men and women, builds up the Body of Christ, and gives worship to God, presupposes *faith*. They are also a school that instructs, a school that nourish, strengthen, and express faith.⁶

d. Divine Life Is Dispensed To Us

The Sacraments are necessary for our salvation. It is through the sacraments that we receive the necessary graces to transform our lives and be imitators of Jesus Christ and that we become partakers of the God's divine nature.⁷ In the sacraments, it is Christ Himself who is at work and not merely the minister.⁸ When the Sacrament is celebrated properly⁹, the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit acts on it and bestows on those who partake of it the necessary graces.

A sacrament is celebrated *ex opere operato*, which means that grace is given by God through the Sacrament itself, regardless of the moral state of the minister. In other words, there is an objective validity of the Sacraments. However, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.¹⁰



IV. CLASSIFICATION OF THE SACRAMENTS¹¹

The sacraments have an objective to sanctify men and women. They are not only for an individual person but for the entire community. In the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, the sacraments can be a means to live in a (a) personal level, and (b) in a communitarian level.¹²

⁶ Cf. CCC 1123.

⁷ Cf. CCC 1129.

⁸ Cf. CCC 1127.

⁹ i.e., in accordance with the intentions of the Church; see CCC 1128.

¹⁰ Cf. CCC 1128.

¹¹ Cf. *Handouts on Sacramental Theology* by Sr. Cecilia Payawal, PDDM

(a) In a more personal level:

(1) for promoting life

- as a gift of life: *baptism*
- as enrichment of the gift received: *confirmation*
- as nourishment of life: *Holy Eucharist*

(2) Curing sickness

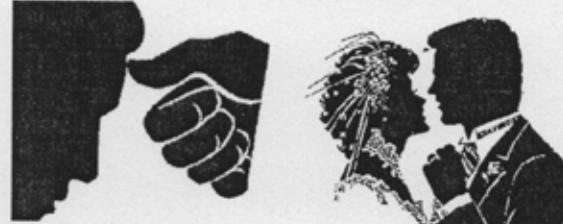
- cure of sins: *Reconciliation*
- cure of weakness: *Anointing Of The Sick*

(b) In a communitarian level:

- faculty of natural propagation: *Marriage*
- faculty to direct or “shepherd” a community and exercise public acts: *Holy Orders*

At present, the seven sacraments are grouped into three kinds:

- (a) Sacraments of Christian Initiation:
Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
- (b) Sacraments of Healing: Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick
- (c) Sacraments at the service of Communion:
Marriage and Holy Orders



Bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Definitive ed. Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994.

Code of Canon Law. English trans. Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2001.

Guzie, Tad. *The Book of Sacramental Basics*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Payawal, Cecilia. Handouts on Sacramental Theology. 2009

¹² Cf. *Handouts*

PART II. THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

I. INTRODUCTION

There are three (3) Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. The reception of these Sacraments is required for one to be considered a full member of the Church, for one to have 'entry into the Christian life.'¹ They are the three primary sacraments, on which the rest of our life as a Christian depends. Originally tied very closely together, the three sacraments are now, in the Western Church, celebrated at different milestones in our spiritual lives.²

II. THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM³

"Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, '...Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...' "(Mt. 28, 19)



a. Nature

In Christianity, *baptism*⁴ is the ritual act, with the use of water, by which one is admitted as a full member of the Christian Church.⁵ The Sacrament of Baptism is often called "The door of the Church," because it is the first of the seven sacraments since the reception of the other sacraments depends on it. It is the first of the *three Sacraments of Initiation*, the next two being the Sacraments of Confirmation and of the Eucharist. Once baptized, a person becomes a member of the Church.

Traditionally, the rite or ceremony of baptism was held outside the doors of the main part of the church, to signify this fact. By analogy, the English word "baptism" is used of any ceremony, trial, or experience by which one is initiated, purified, or given a name.⁶

b. Necessity

Christ Himself ordered His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations and to baptize those who accept the message of the Gospel. In His encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), Christ made it clear that baptism was necessary for salvation: *"Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

¹ Cf. John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), 67.

² In the Eastern Church, both Catholic and Orthodox, all three sacraments are still administered to infants at the same time.

³ Patterned after the article of Scott P. Richert, *The Sacrament of Baptism*, file downloaded from the internet, from URL: <http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Sac_Baptism.htm>, accessed on November 8, 2008.

⁴ Etymology: *baptism* a word derived from Greek *baptizein*: "to dip" or "to plunge". Cf. Glazier, Michael and Monika K. Hellwig, eds., *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1997, under the sub verse "Sacraments of Initiation" and John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), 56.

⁵ In view of some, Baptism is administered to someone who is about to become a member of a particular Church.

⁶ Cf. Scott P. Richert, *The Sacraments of Initiation*, file downloaded from the internet, URL: <http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Sac_Initiation.htm>, accessed on November 8, 2008.

For Catholics, the sacrament is not a mere formality; it is the very mark of a Christian, because it brings us into new life in Christ. St. Paul has this to say:

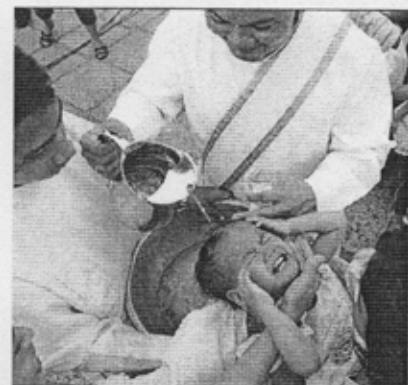
"Do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ...so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk with the newness of life." (Rom. 6, 3 – 4)

c. Who can receive Baptism?

According the Canon Law, every unbaptised person, and only such a person, can be baptized.⁷ For an infant to be baptized lawfully, at least one of the parents, or the person who lawfully holds their place, give their consent and that there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion. For adults, they must have manifested the intention to receive baptism, must be properly instructed in the truths of the faith and in the duties of a Christian, and tested in the Christian life over the course of the catechumenate. The person must also have the openness to confess his personal sins.

i. Infant Baptism

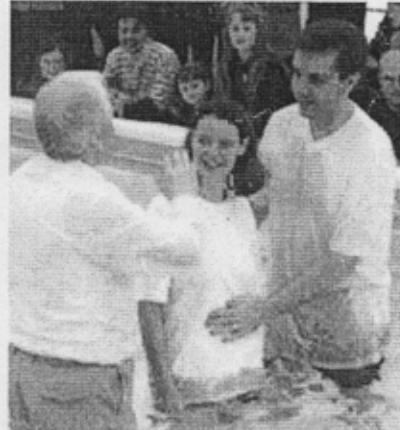
In the Catholic Church today, baptism is most commonly administered to infants. The parents of a child who is to be baptized, and those who are to undertake the office of sponsors, are to be suitably instructed on the meaning of this sacrament and the obligations attached to it. Parents are obliged to see that their infants are baptized within the first few weeks.



Since baptism removes both the guilt and the punishment due to Original Sin, delaying baptism until a child can understand the sacrament may put the child's salvation in danger, should he die unbaptised. An abandoned infant or a foundling is to be baptized unless it is proven that the child has been baptized already. Aborted fetuses, inasmuch as it is still possibly alive, are to be baptized.

ii. Adult Baptism

An adult who intends to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate. Adult converts to Catholicism also receive the sacrament, unless they have already received a Christian baptism.⁸ A person can only be baptized once as a Christian—if, say, he was baptized as a Lutheran, he cannot be rebaptized when he converts to Catholicism. Adult baptism normally occurs today as part of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and is immediately followed by Confirmation and Communion.



⁷ Cf. Code of Canon Law, Can. 864.

⁸ If there is any doubt about whether an adult has already been baptized, the priest will perform a conditional baptism.

d. Who can minister Baptism?

The ordinary minister of baptism is a Bishop, a priest or a deacon.⁹ If the ordinary minister is absent or impeded, a catechist or some other person delegated to this office by the Bishop, may lawfully confer baptism.¹⁰ However, when the life of a person is in danger, even a non-baptized person—including someone who does not himself believe in Christ—can baptize, provided that the person performing the baptism follows the form of baptism and intends, by the baptism, to do what the Church does—in other words, to bring the person being baptized into the fullness of the Church. In both cases, a priest may later perform a conditional baptism.



e. How is Baptism celebrated?

The essentials of that rite are two: the pouring of or the immersion in *water* of the person to be baptized,¹¹ and the saying of the words "*I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*" by the minister.

Preferably, Baptism is celebrated on a Sunday. Except in cases of emergency, the proper place for baptism is a church or an oratory. As a rule, an adult is to be baptized in his or her proper parish church, and an infant in the proper parish church of the parents.

f. Meaning of the action.

The immersion in or pouring of water is done three (3) times to represent the Trinity. This also symbolizes death and purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.

g. Of Desire and Of Blood

i. Baptism of Desire

The baptism of desire applies both to those who, while wishing to be baptized, die before receiving the sacrament and "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of conscience."¹²

ii. Baptism of Blood

The baptism of blood is similar to the baptism of desire. It refers to the martyrdom of those believers who were killed for the faith before they had a chance to be baptized. This was a common



⁹ Cf. Can. 861, § 1.

¹⁰ Cf. Can. 861, § 2.

¹¹ or the immersion of the person in water

¹² Cf. *Constitution on the Church*, Second Vatican Council

occurrence in the early centuries of the Church, but also in later times in missionary lands. It had been recognized since very early Christian times that those who were martyred for the faith while yet unbaptized were deemed to have been baptized in the blood of their martyrdom.¹³ The baptism of blood has the same effects as the baptism of water.

h. Effects

Baptism has six primary effects, which are all supernatural graces:

- i. The forgiveness of all sins, i.e. the removal of the guilt of both *original sin*¹⁴ and *personal sin*¹⁵.
- ii. The remission of all punishment that we owe because of sin, both temporal¹⁶ and eternal¹⁷.
- iii. The infusion of grace in the form of sanctifying grace¹⁸; the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the three theological virtues¹⁹.
- iv. Becoming a part of Christ.
- v. Becoming a part of the Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ on earth
- vi. Enabling participation in the sacraments, the priesthood of all believers, and the growth in grace.

i. Some Biblical passages about baptism

“Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned.” Mk. 16, 16

“They were deeply shaken. They asked Peter and the other apostles: ‘What are we to do, brothers?’ Peter answered, ‘You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 2, 37-38

“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 God the Father, we too might live a new life.” Rom. 6, 3-4

“I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Jn. 3, 5

“Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” Mt. 28, 19

¹³ Glazier and Hellwig, *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*, under the sub verse “Baptism”.

¹⁴ i.e. sin imparted to all mankind by the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

¹⁵ i.e. sins that we have committed ourselves

¹⁶ i.e. in this world and in Purgatory

¹⁷ i.e. the punishment that we would suffer in hell

¹⁸ i.e. the life of God within us

¹⁹ These will be discussed further in the next lesson, on Confirmation.

III. CONFIRMATION



"Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." Acts 8: 14-17

a. Nature

Confirmation is a Catholic sacrament of mature Christian commitment and a deepening of baptismal gifts. It is therefore a sacrament in which the Holy Spirit is given to those *already baptized* in order to make them strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ. Like Baptism and Eucharist, it is a Sacrament of Initiation for Catholics and a Sacrament of faith in God's fidelity to us.²⁰

b. Comparison between Baptism and Confirmation

We could compare Baptism with the birth of man, and Confirmation with the growth of the person. Confirmation has to be seen as development and strengthening of the spiritual life received in Baptism, as an entrance into a more conscious and intense form of following Jesus. As there is continuity between birth and growth, so it is between Baptism and Confirmation.²¹

c. It Reinforces the effects of Baptism

Confirmation does not celebrate something substantially different from Baptism. Confirmation *perfects* or *completes* Baptism by celebrating more explicitly and emphatically the Spirit's role in that life and the consequent richness and possibilities. The sacrament of Confirmation is the fulfillment of baptismal grace.²²



We do not receive two Holy Spirits because there is *ONLY ONE* Holy Spirit. However, the effects of the Holy Spirit, received in the two sacraments, are different.²³ It gives the Holy Spirit to the baptized in order to *incorporate* us more firmly into Christ, *strengthen* our bond with the

²⁰ Cf. Can. 879; see also 'Confirmation' in <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/Sacraments/Confirmation.asp>

²¹ Cf. Rudolf Horst, *The Making of a Christian* (Philippines, 1988), 119 – 120.

²² This was a reflection of the Holy Father on the Sacrament of Confirmation in the continuation of his catechesis on the Holy Spirit in his General Audience Address of October 14, 1998. See John Paul II, *Confirmation Seals Us With Gift of the Spirit*, part of the L'Osservatore Romano (Vatican, October 21, 1998). This online source was accessed in the internet, URL = <<http://www.fargodiocese.org/EducationFormation/Evangelization/Confirmation/ConfirmationSealsUsWithGiftOfTheSpirit.pdf>>, on November 13, 2008.

²³ Cf. Horst, *The Making of a Christian*, 119.

Church, *associate us more closely with her mission, and help us bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds.*²⁴

d. Indelible Mark

Like Baptism, Confirmation imprints an *indelible spiritual character* on the Christian's soul. This *indelible spiritual character* is the seal of the Holy Spirit, which signifies and brings about the baptized person's being a perfect witness of Christ.²⁵ For this reason one can receive this sacrament only once in life.



e. The Celebration of this Sacrament

i. Minister

The ordinary minister of confirmation is a *bishop*. A priest can also validly confer this sacrament if he has the faculty to do so, either from the general law or by way of a special grant from the competent authority.

ii. Recipient

Every baptized person who is not confirmed, and only such a person, is capable of receiving confirmation. He or she must have reached already the age of reason²⁶ in order to receive Confirmation, unless the conference of bishops determines another age or there is danger of death or in the judgment of the minister a grave cause urges otherwise.

iii. Matter and Form

The sacrament of confirmation is conferred by anointing with *chrism* on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through words: '*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti*' [Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit]."²⁷

iv. When to celebrate it?

It is desirable that the sacrament of confirmation be celebrated in a church and indeed during Mass. However, for a just and reasonable cause it may be celebrated apart from Mass and in any fitting place.²⁸



f. Necessity

The reception of Confirmation is obligatory for all baptized Christians, although it is not necessary as an indispensable means of salvation.

²⁴ In this last action, the Holy Spirit leads the baptized to a more profound and deeper sharing in the new life that the Lord Jesus came to bring to the world. As true witnesses of Christ, they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed. Cf. CCC 1316.

²⁵ i.e. his total belonging to Jesus Christ, his being always at Christ's service in the Church, and it implies the promise of divine protection in the trials he will have to endure to witness to his faith in the world. John Paul II, *Confirmation Seals Us With Gift of the Spirit* [online source].

²⁶ The age of reason, also called the age of discretion, is the age at which children become capable of moral responsibility. On completion of the seventh year a minor is presumed to have the use of reason (canon 97 §2 of the Code of Canon Law), but mental retardation or insanity could prevent some individuals from ever reaching it. Children under the age of reason and the mentally handicapped are sometimes called "innocents" because of their inability to commit sins even if their actions are objectively sinful, they sometimes lack capacity for subjective guilt.

²⁷ Cf. CCC 1300.

²⁸ Cf. Can. 881

g. Effects

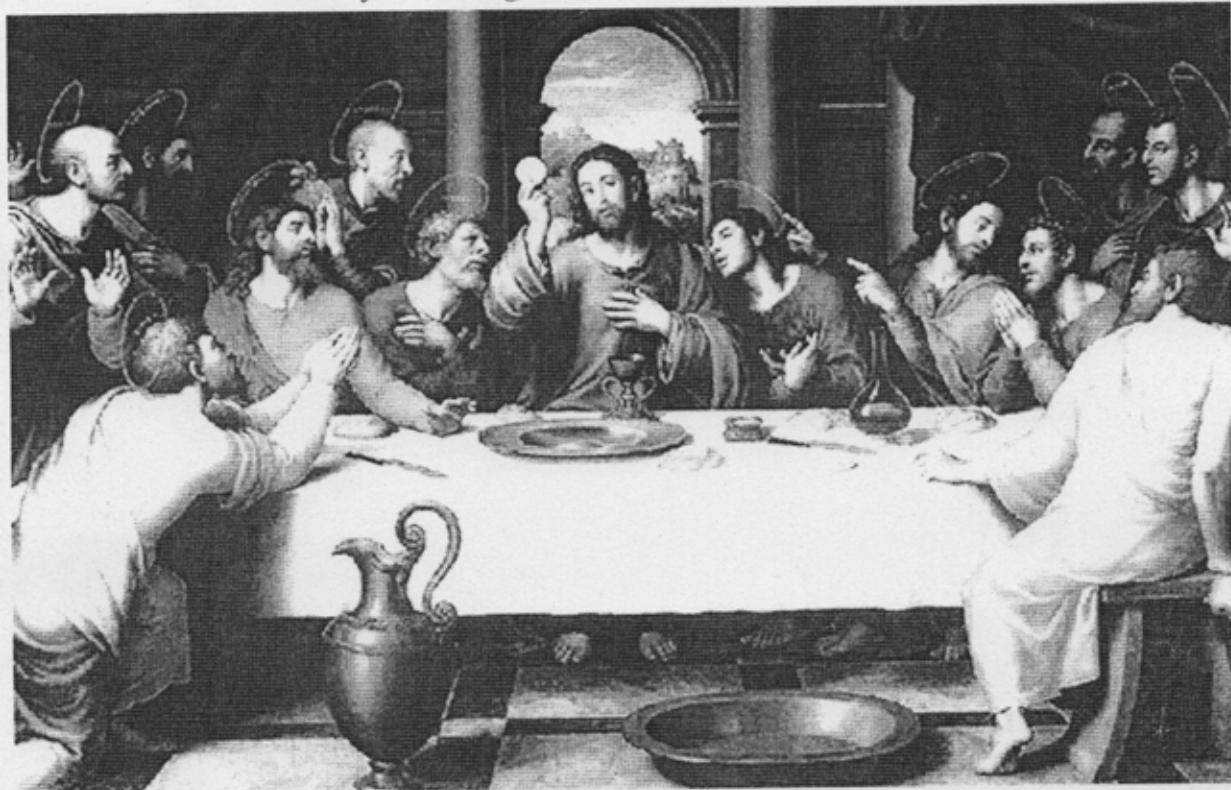
Confirmation brings about the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Hence, it brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace:

- i. It roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, "Abba! Father!"
- ii. It unites us more firmly to Christ;
- iii. It increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us:
 1. *Wisdom* - desire for the things of God, and to direct our whole life and all our actions to His honor and glory
 2. *Understanding* - enable us to know more clearly the mysteries of faith
 3. *Counsel* - warn us of the deceptions of the devil, and of the dangers to salvation
 4. *Fortitude* - strengthen us to do the will of God in all things
 5. *Knowledge* - enable us to discover the will of God in all things
 6. *Piety* - love God as a Father, and obey Him because we love Him
 7. *Fear of the Lord* - have a dread of sin and fear of offending God
- iv. It renders our bond with the Church more perfect;
- v. It gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.



IV. THE HOLY EUCHARIST

“While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” Mt. 26, 26-28



a. The Liturgical Celebration

Before tackling the subject of the Eucharist, it is important to put it in the context of the liturgy. Liturgy is the “central worship assembly of the Catholic community, consisting of prayers, Scripture readings, homily, and partial reenactment of the farewell supper of Jesus.”²⁹ The Liturgy, with the Eucharist as its center, is at the summit of our Catholic worship that there is no other rite or celebration the can equal and substitute for it. All the members of the Catholic Church ought to join and participate well since it is a celebration by the entire Church of God.

b. Nature

The greatest of the seven sacraments is the *Holy Eucharist*. Hence, all the faithful should give maximum honor to and receive with greatest devotion the Holy Eucharist.³⁰ The Catholic Church teaches that in the Eucharist:

- i. Our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is really present under the appearances of bread and wine.

²⁹ Cf. Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, eds., *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1997), sub verbe “Eucharist”.

³⁰ Cf. Can. 898.

- ii. Our Lord is not merely symbolized by the bread and wine; the two material things, bread and wine, are completely changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, leaving behind only their sensible appearances.
- iii. Thus, through the words of consecration spoken by the priest, Jesus, without ceasing to be present in a natural way in heaven, is also present sacramentally, body, blood, soul and divinity, in many places throughout the world.
- iv. The Eucharist is a memorial of the death and of the resurrection of the Lord. In it Jesus, acting through the priest, makes present again in an unbloody manner the sacrifice which he offered once for all by shedding his blood on Calvary.
- v. In Holy Communion, by obeying Jesus' command to eat his flesh and drink his blood, the faithful are also united spiritually with Jesus himself, and they unite their own prayers, works and sufferings to his perfect sacrifice.



c. Food that nourishes

If we can consider Baptism with the birth of human person, and Confirmation with growth, the Eucharist is the food that nourishes and supplies the essential nutrients for the soul.³¹ Christians need to grow and be steadfast in real life. In order to possess this, one must be ready to receive Christ as often as possible. The First Communion must be properly prepared so that a Christian may truly understand the importance of this special sacrament.

d. The ministers

The minister who celebrates the Eucharist in the person of Christ is only a validly ordained *priest* and who is not impeded canonically.³² The ordinary ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the priest, and the deacon.



The extraordinary minister, in case the need or pastoral necessity demands it, is an acolyte or also another faithful who have received the mandate.³³ In giving the Holy Eucharist in the form of Viaticum, the duty rest by rule on the parish priest, chaplains, parochial vicars, Superiors of clerical religious institutes. However, in case of emergency, every minister of communion may do it.³⁴

e. Rite of Celebration

The Eucharistic sacrifice, for it to be valid, should be celebrated with the following: *Wheat bread*, unleavened³⁵ according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church³⁶ and *Grape wine*, not corrupted, adding to the wine some drop of water.³⁷

³¹ Cf. Rudolf Horst, *The Making of a Christian* (Philippines, 1988), 119 – 120.

³² Cf. Can. 900.

³³ Cf. Can. 910.

³⁴ Cf. Can. 911.



These two species are transformed from their material states into the Body and Blood of Christ, respectively at the Consecration.³⁸ This process is called ‘*Transubstantiation*’. Although the host and wine taste and look perfectly the same prior to this, there is the real presence of Christ, i.e. the host being His flesh, and the wine being His blood.³⁹ “The bread is not changed into the whole Christ, but into his body; the wine is not changed into the whole Christ, but into his blood. But Christ lives, death has no more dominion over him...Where either body or blood is, there is Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity.”⁴⁰

f. Reception of the Eucharist

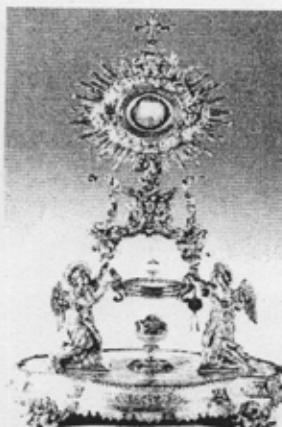
In receiving this important sacrament, one must naturally be part of the Catholic Church, hence, those who are not Catholics, or who are excommunicated, as well as those who continue to commit grave sins, may not be admitted.

Before receiving communion, one ought to fast from food and drink for at least an hour, except in the case of the sick, of the elderly. Those who are conscious that they are not in the ‘state of grace’, or that they have committed grave or mortal sins cannot receive communion. For those who are not completely sure about their moral state, they are encouraged to confess first.



Eucharistic Trivia: THE MIRACLE AT LANCIANO

Lanciano, Italy has contained for over 12 centuries the first and greatest Eucharistic Miracle of the Catholic Church. This wondrous event took place in the 8th century A.D. in the little Church of St. Legontian, as a divine response to a Basilian monk's doubt about Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist. During Holy Mass, after the two-fold consecration, the host was changed into live Flesh and the wine was changed into live Blood, which coagulated into five globules, irregular and differing in shape and size. The Host-Flesh, as can be very distinctly observed today, has the same dimensions as the large host used today in the Latin church; it is light brown and appears rose-colored when lighted from the back. The Flesh and the Blood have the same blood-type: AB.



³⁵ This can be traced during the time of Moses in the celebration of the Passover of the Jews; see the book of Exodus.

³⁶ Latin Church, or according to the Roman or Western Catholic Tradition, which is different from that of the Eastern Catholic rite, or of the Orthodox.

³⁷ Cf. Can. 924.

³⁸ For the Scriptural basis, see supra, p. 1.

³⁹ The substances are completely transformed into Christ's Body and Blood, while retaining the accidents of bread and wine.

⁴⁰ This is the doctrine of the Real Presence. Cf. Frank J. Sheed, *The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist*, taken from *Theology for Beginners* (c) 1981 by Frank J. Sheed, Chapter 18. File was downloaded from the internet, <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/eucha3.htm>, on November 24, 2008.

Bibliography

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Definitive ed. Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994.

Eucharistic Miracle. Internet article, in

<http://www.therealpresence.org/eucharst/mir/lanciano.html>, downloaded on November 24, 2008.

Flannery, Austin, general ed. *Vatican Council II.* New Revised Edition. Vol. 1, *The Concilliar and Post Concilliar Documents.* New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1984.

Glazier, Michael and Monika K. Hellwig, eds. *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia.* Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1997.

Guzie, Tad. *The Book of Sacramental Basics.* New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

Horst, Rudolf. *The Making of a Christian.* 1988.

John Paul II. *Confirmation Seals Us With Gift of the Spirit.* [online article] part of the L'Osservatore Romano. Vatican, October 21, 1998. URL = <<http://www.fargodiocese.org/EducationFormation/Evangelization/Confirmation/ConfirmationSealsUsWithGiftOfTheSpirit.pdf>>, file downloaded on November 13, 2008.

Knight, Kevin, ed. 'The New Advent.' [online encyclopedia], under the sub verse 'Confirmation'. URL = <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04215b.htm>>, downloaded on November 13, 2008.

Macquarrie, John. *A Guide to the Sacraments.* New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998.

McCauley, George. *Sacraments for Secular Man.* New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1999.

Richert, Scott P. *The Sacraments of Initiation.* Internet file, from http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Sac_Initiation.htm, downloaded on November 8, 2008.

Richert, Scott P. *The Sacrament of Baptism.* Internet file, from http://catholicism.about.com/od/beliefsteachings/p/Sac_Baptism.htm, downloaded on November 8, 2008.

Sheed, Frank J. *The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist*, taken from *Theology for Beginners* (c) 1981 by Frank J. Sheed, Chap. 18. This article was downloaded from the internet, <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/eucha3.htm>, on November 24, 2008.

Tejon, Guillermo. *Church and Sacraments in the Life of a Christian.* Manila: Life Today Publications, 2006.

PART III. THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

I. INTRODUCTION

The Church teaches us that we are in a world that is still subject to suffering, death, and illness. Even if we have been born anew into a genuine Christian life through the sacraments of Christian initiation, we can still be weakened and even completely led to perdition by sin. However, as Jesus Christ has forgiven the sins of countless sinners and healed the sick of their illnesses almost two thousand years ago, as narrated by the Gospel authors, we are also given the privilege, as members of His Church, to experience our own healing forgiveness.

II. THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" John 20: 21-23



a. Introduction: Sin

Among the great mysteries that have spawned critical interests among religious and ordinary lay circles is that of *sin*. Numerous queries have arisen in view of trying to solve this seemingly elusive anonymity. What is *sin* really? Is it something tangible? Is it something invisible? Or does it even exist or do we truly commit *sin* at all?



Basic Catholic doctrine teaches us that after *the fall of man*¹, human persons ceased to be innocent and without malice. Concupiscence settled in our human nature forever—that is, we are forever labeled as sinners, capable of committing sins. Hence, as Christians we accept the reality that we are not angels or some sort of demi-gods who do not have any moral problems. In fact, sin is one of the most real and attractive commodities that human life has to offer. The Church² teaches us that: "Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."

i. Distinctions of 'sin'

Sins may have several classifications. *First*, we can distinguish original sin from actual sin. '*Original sin*' is that which was committed by our first parents and is inherited by all of us who are born into this world as free human persons. '*Actual sin*', on the other hand, is that which is committed by an individual person, not inherited but instead is actually done.

¹ Referring to the Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's command and their eventual exit from the Garden of Eden; cf. Genesis 3.

² Cf. CCC 1849.

The *second* classification is according to the distinction of sin as either *venial* or *mortal*. Any actual sin may either be *venial* or *mortal*. It is the former when the sin involves a "temporary loss of grace" from God. One commits *venial sin* when, in a less serious matter, he does not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent.³ When a mortal sin is committed and if it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back.⁴ A sin is mortal when the following elements are present: (a) its subject must be 'grave matter'; (b) it must be committed with *full knowledge*, both of the sin and of the gravity of the offense; and (c) it must be committed with *complete freedom*.



For the *third* classification of sin, there is the distinction of the *personal* from the *social sin*. In the proper sense, sin is always a personal act, since it is an act of freedom on the part of an individual person and not properly of a group or community.⁵ Some sins, by their very nature, constitute a direct attack on one's neighbor. This is *social sin*, which is done either (a) by an individual to another person, (b) by an individual to a community or vice versa, or (c) by a community/-ies to another community/-ies.⁶ To illustrate the three different interpretations of social sin:

1 st :	A (<i>individual</i>)	vs.	B (<i>another individual</i>)
2 nd :	A (<i>individual</i>)	vs.	C (<i>community</i>)
	C (<i>community</i>)	vs.	A (<i>individual</i>)
3 rd :	C (<i>community</i>)	vs.	D (<i>another community</i>)

ii. Effect Of Sin To The Entire Church

Every sin, though it is naturally personal, is also an offence against the Church since it every sin is the denial of God. To deny God means to deny also the Church which He founded, together with His Son and the Holy Spirit. The whole Church suffers from the sin of one of her members.⁷ Considering the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, if one part of the body suffers and is being infected by a virus or bacteria, say a finger, it's not only the finger that feels the pain of infection but also the entire body since the finger is part of a whole. In a similar way, when a particular member of this Mystical Body is corrupted by sin, the entire Body likewise feels the brunt of sin.

iii. The Loss Of The Sense Of Sin (An excerpt taken from the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* of John Paul II)

Over the course of generations, the Christian mind has gained from the Gospel as it is read in the ecclesial community a fine sensitivity and an acute perception of the seeds of death contained in sin, as well as a sensitivity and an acuteness of perception for identifying them in

³ Cf. CCC 1862.

⁴ Cf. CCC 1861.

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Penitentia* 16.

⁶ Cf. JP II, R. P. 16.

⁷ Cf. Bernard Haring, *A Sacramental Spirituality* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 114-115.

the thousand guises under which sin shows itself. This is what is commonly called the sense of sin.

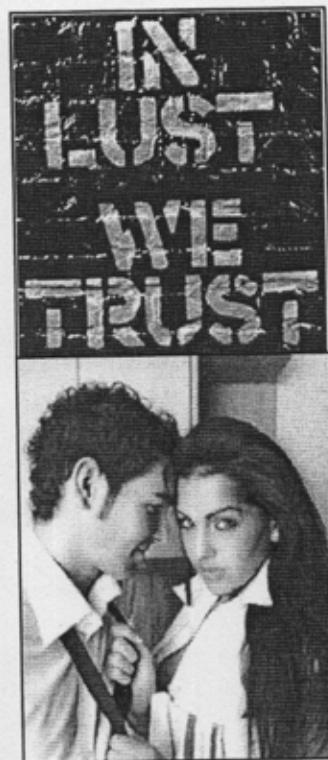
This sense is rooted in man's moral conscience and is as it were its thermometer. It is linked to the sense of God, since it derives from man's conscious relationship with God as his Creator, Lord and Father. Hence, just as it is impossible to eradicate completely the sense of God or to silence the conscience completely, so the sense of sin is never completely eliminated.

Nevertheless, it happens not infrequently in history, for more or less lengthy periods and under the influence of many different factors, that the moral conscience of many people becomes seriously clouded. "Have we the right idea of conscience?" - I asked two years ago in an address to the faithful! Is it not true that modern man is threatened by an eclipse of conscience? By a deformation of conscience? By a numbness or '*deadening*' of conscience? Too many signs indicate that such an eclipse exists in our time. This is all the more disturbing in that conscience, defined by the council as "the most secret core and sanctuary of a man," is "strictly related to human freedom.... For this reason conscience, to a great extent, constitutes the basis of man's interior dignity and, at the same time, of his relationship to God. It is inevitable therefore that in this situation there is an obscuring also of the sense of sin, which is closely connected with the moral conscience, the search for truth and the desire to make a responsible use of freedom. When the conscience is weakened the sense of God is also obscured, and as a result, with the loss of this decisive inner point of reference, the sense of sin is lost. This explains why my predecessor Pius XI, one day declared, in words that have almost become proverbial, that "the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin."

Why has this happened in our time? A glance at certain aspects of contemporary culture can help us to understand the progressive weakening of the sense of sin, precisely because of the crisis of conscience and crisis of the sense of God already mentioned.



"Secularism" is by nature and definition a movement of ideas and behavior which advocates a humanism totally without God, completely centered upon the cult of action and production and caught up in the heady enthusiasm of consumerism and pleasure seeking, unconcerned with the danger of "losing one's soul." This secularism cannot but undermine the sense of sin. At the very most, sin will be reduced to what offends man. But it is precisely here that we are faced with the bitter experience which I already alluded to in my first encyclical namely, that man can build a world without God, but this world will end by turning against him." In fact, God is the origin and the supreme end of man and man carries in himself a divine seed. Hence it is the reality of God that reveals and illustrates the mystery of man. It is therefore vain to hope that there will take root a sense of sin against man and against human values, if there is no sense of offense against God, namely the true sense of sin.



Another reason for the disappearance of the sense of sin in contemporary society is to be found in the errors made in evaluating certain findings of the *human sciences*. Thus on the basis of certain affirmations of psychology, concern to avoid creating feelings of guilt or to place limits on freedom leads to a refusal ever to admit any shortcoming. Through an undue extrapolation of the criteria of the science of sociology, it finally happens-as I have already said-that all failings are blamed upon society, and the individual is declared innocent of them. Again, a certain cultural anthropology so emphasizes the undeniable environmental and historical conditioning and influences which act upon man, that it reduces his responsibility to the point of not acknowledging his ability to perform truly human acts and therefore his ability to sin.



The sense of sin also easily declines as a result of a system of ethics deriving from a certain *historical relativism*. This may take the form of an ethical system which relativizes the moral norm, denying its absolute and unconditional value, and as a consequence denying that there can be intrinsically illicit acts independent of the circumstances in which they are performed by the subject. Herein lies a real "overthrowing and downfall of moral values," and "the problem is not so much one of ignorance of Christian ethics," but ignorance "rather of the meaning, foundations and criteria of the moral attitude." Another effect of this ethical turning upside down is always such an attenuation of the notion of sin as almost to reach the point of saying that sin does exist, but no one knows who commits it.

Finally the sense of sin disappears when-as can happen in the education of youth, in the mass media and even in education within the family-*it is wrongly identified with a morbid feeling of guilt or with the mere transgression of legal norms and precepts*.

The loss of the sense of sin is thus a form or consequence of the **DENIAL OF GOD**: not only in the form of atheism but also in the form of secularism. If sin is the breaking off of one's filial relationship to God in order to situate one's life outside of obedience to him, then to sin is not merely to deny God. To sin is also to live as if he did not exist, to eliminate him from one's daily life. A model of society which is mutilated or distorted in one sense or another, as is often encouraged by the mass media, greatly favors the gradual loss of the sense of sin.



In such a situation the obscuring or weakening of the sense of sin comes from several sources: from a rejection of any reference to the transcendent in the name of the individual's aspiration to personal independence; from acceptance of ethical models imposed by general consensus and behavior, even when condemned by the individual conscience; from the tragic social and economic conditions that oppress a great part of humanity, causing a tendency to

see errors and faults only in the context of society; finally and especially, from the obscuring of the notion of God's fatherhood and dominion over man's life.

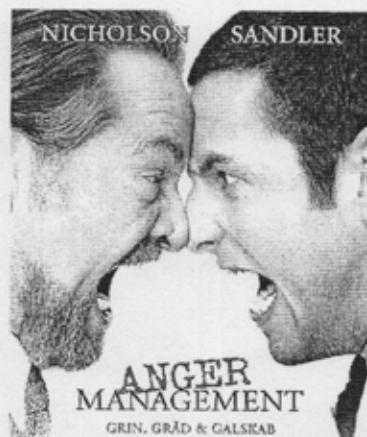


Even in the field of the thought and life of the church certain trends inevitably favor the decline of the sense of sin. For example, some are inclined to replace exaggerated attitudes of the past with other exaggerations: From seeing sin everywhere they pass to not recognizing it anywhere; from too much emphasis on the fear of eternal punishment they pass to preaching a love of God that excludes any punishment deserved by sin; from severity in trying to correct erroneous consciences they pass to a kind of respect for conscience which excludes the duty of

telling the truth. And should it not be added that the confusion caused in the consciences of many of the faithful by differences of opinions and teachings in theology, preaching, catechesis and spiritual direction on serious and delicate questions of Christian morals ends by diminishing the true sense of sin almost to the point of eliminating it altogether? Nor can certain deficiencies in the practice of sacramental penance be overlooked. These include the tendency to obscure the ecclesial significance of sin and of conversion and to reduce them to merely personal matters; or vice versa, the tendency to nullify the personal value of good and evil and to consider only their community dimension. There also exists the danger, never totally eliminated, of routine ritualism that deprives the sacrament of its full significance and formative effectiveness.

The restoration of a proper sense of sin is the first way of facing the grave spiritual crisis looming over man today. But the sense of sin can only be restored through a clear reminder of the unchangeable principles of reason and faith which the moral teaching of the church has always upheld.

There are good grounds for hoping that a healthy sense of sin will once again flourish, especially in the Christian world and in the church. This will be aided by (a) sound catechetics, illuminated by the biblical theology of the covenant, by (b) an attentive listening and trustful openness to the magisterium of the church, which never ceases to enlighten consciences, and by (c) an ever more careful practice of the sacrament of penance.



b. NATURE

Knowing that her members are naturally vulnerable to commit sin, the Church never accuses or condemns her members. Instead, she is more concerned to admit back an erring Christian back to her fold after wandering away from her. As narrated by Christ in the story of

the prodigal son and the forgiving father (Lk 15, 11-32), we can easily conclude that the love of God surpasses the sinfulness of every person. God is ever willing to forgive sinners and is ever generous in bestowing sanctifying grace back to the wretched sinner. Canon Law describes the sacrament as that sacrament through which the faithful, *confessing* to the legitimate minister the sins committed after baptism with full *contrition* and with the firm *resolve* to amend himself, by means of the *absolution*, imparted by the same minister, obtains from God the forgiveness of



his sins and is reconciled at the same time with the Church that he has wounded because of his sins.⁸ For this the sacrament of Penance is also called the sacrament of Reconciliation.

c. The Penitent And The Minister

In order that the faithful may receive the saving remedy of the sacrament of penance, they must be disposed to turn back to God and should acknowledge their sinfulness and the sins they have committed. They must also have that heartfelt and honest desire to change their sinful ways. They are bound to confess all the sins they have committed, whether mortal or venial sins.



The minister of the sacrament of Penance is *only the priest*.⁹ For a valid absolution of sins, it is required however that the minister, besides the power of order, also has the faculty to exercise it on the faithful to whom he imparts the absolution. The priest must never divulge, whether by word or any gesture, anything that was confided or confessed by a penitent. This is called the sacramental seal, which is inviolable. Violating this seal would not only make a priest deposed from the priestly office but that he shall also be sent into the confinement of a monastery to do perpetual penance.¹⁰

d. Before And After Confession

The ordinary celebration of the sacrament is done through (a) the individual and integral confession of one's sins, and (b) the absolution imparted to the individual penitent.



The proper place for confession is the Church or oratory¹¹. Except for a just reason, confessions are not to be heard elsewhere than in a confessional.

Before declaring officially, in the name of God, that the sins of an individual are forgiven, the priest must impose a suitable penance.¹² The penitent is bound to accept and perform a reasonable penance, an act which is the outward sign of our goodwill to change as a better person and to strive not to sin again.

In exceptional cases it is licit to give the *general absolution* imparted simultaneously to many faithful when there is imminent *danger of death* and the priest does not have enough time to listen to the individual confessions (e.g. war, natural disasters, etc.), or when there is *scarcity of confessors* for a great number of penitents. He who has received general absolution should however make his individual confession once the danger of death or the necessity ceases.¹³

⁸ Cf. Canon 959.

⁹ Cf. Can. 965.

¹⁰ R. Nolan, *The Law of the Seal of Confession*. In The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company), Retrieved December 10, 2008 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13649b.htm>.

¹¹ A place devoted to prayer and other wholesome and formative activities.

¹² Cf. John Heenan, *Confession* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), 87-89.

¹³ Cf. Can. 964.

The guilt of sin is forgiven after the absolution is given. However, there still remains the temporal punishment due to sin. An indulgence is the remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due for the sins. An indulgence presupposes that the sin has already been forgiven. It means a more complete payment of the debt which the sinner owes to God. It does not confer immunity from temptation or remove the possibility of subsequent lapses into sin. It is never a form of purchase of a pardon, which secures the buyer's salvation or releases the soul of another from Purgatory.

Ten Easy Steps for celebrating *Reconciliation*

1. Greet the Priest ("Hello Father" is fine.)
2. Together you will make the "Sign of the Cross."
3. Tell him how long it has been since your last Confession.
4. Tell him your sins.
5. The priest may advise you.
6. He will then give you some type of penance. This could be prayers or some other assignment for you to do.
7. You then pray the "Act of Contrition."
8. Father will extend his hand and say the words of absolution.
9. You can thank him and leave.
10. Complete your penance as soon as possible and give thanks God.
11. Make the Act of Contrition

Rite of Penance given by the priest to the penitent:

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

III. THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

"...they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" Mark 6:13

"Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven." James 5:14-15



a. Introduction

Traditionally referred to as *Extreme Unction*, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was previously most commonly administered to the dying for the remission of sins and the provision of spiritual strength and health. In modern times, however, the celebration of this sacrament has been extended to all who are seriously ill or who are about to undergo a serious operation. It is in this regard that the Church stresses a secondary effect of the sacrament, which is *to help a person recover his health*. Like Confession and Holy Communion, to which it is closely linked, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can be repeated as often as is necessary. The Second Vatican Council stresses that the sacrament of the 'Anointing of the Sick' is not only for those who are at the point of death. Hence, as soon as any Christian faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, the appropriate time for him to receive this sacrament has certainly already arrived.¹⁴

b. According to Canon Law

The Anointing of the Sick is the sacrament through which the Church recommends to the Lord, suffering and glorified, the sick faithful so that they may be consoled and saved.¹⁵

c. Celebration

It is conferred by means of the anointing with oil, normally blessed by the Bishop, on the forehead, the hands and the feet of the faithful, while pronouncing the words established in the liturgical books.¹⁶ In the case of emergency, a priest may bless oil at the moment of the actual anointing and only for that particular case.¹⁷ The sacrament primarily brings spiritual strength to those who are physically ill, not only by reminding them that they are loved and forgiven by God but also by reassuring them of God's concern of their physical well-being.¹⁸



d. The Minister

The minister of this sacrament is only the *priest*, in particular he to whom the care of souls has been entrusted¹⁹; e.g. the Parish Priest, the superior of a religious community, etc. On the part of the pastors, this sacrament should take place within their total pastoral ministry to the sick. Priests should visit not just the dying but all those in their care who are suffering. Moreover, anointing is not enough. He should

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, Const. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 73.

¹⁵ Cf. *Can. 998*.

¹⁶ Cf. *Can. 998-1000*.

¹⁷ Cf. *Can. 999*.

¹⁸ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, Revised and updated ed. (Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2001), 346.

¹⁹ Cf. *Can. 1003*.

also counsel, comfort, and pray with them during this desperate and difficult time.

e. Those Who May Be Anointed

This sacrament can be administered to any faithful who have reached the use of reason and who, because of old age or sickness, begin to find themselves in the danger of death. This also extends to the anointing of anyone who is *chronically ill*, the *aged* and *infirm*, and *those who are about to undergo surgery*, even if there is no obvious danger of death.²⁰

It is a sacrament that calls for awareness and so it may be offered to children and even to the mentally ill who can understand and acknowledge God's desire for their recovery.

In case of necessity, the anointing can be repeated many times, as often as the danger lasts, or when the danger becomes more serious.²¹ When in doubt as to whether the sick has reached the use of reason or is already dead, the anointing must be administered.²²



IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Catechism of the Catholic Church. Definitive ed. Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994.

Code of Canon Law. English trans. Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2001.

Flannery, Austin, gen. ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. 1984.

Heenan, John. *Confession*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937.

Haring, Bernard, *A Sacramental Spirituality*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963.

Nolan, R. (1912). *The Law of the Seal of Confession*. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved December 10, 2008 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13649b.htm>

Martos, Joseph. *The Sacraments: Seven Stories of Growth*. Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1989.

Martos, Joseph. *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*. Revised and updated ed. Missouri: Liguori/Triumph, 2001.

Pope John Paul II. *Splendor Veritatis*. August 6, 1993.

Pope John Paul II. *Reconciliatio et Penitentia*. December 1984.

Google internet search engine for some of the images

²⁰ Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 345.

²¹ Cf. *Can. 1004*.

²² Cf. *Can. 1005*.

PART IV: THE SACRAMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION



I. INTRODUCTION

Any person who wishes to a particular way of life—that which best suits his or her own interests and aspirations—always encounters a certain feeling of uncertainty inasmuch as nobody really knows what is in the future. There are specific moments in our life that we need extra care and discernment whether to pursue a particular path of life.

Christians have that fundamental vocation to a life of holiness and to the mission of evangelizing the world. Such a vocation finds its roots in the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. They confer the graces needed for the life according to the Spirit of God.¹ Thus, for every initiated Christian, life's meaning is living a life according to God's designs. Happiness and fulfillment are attained once there is coherence in one's way of living to his or her sublime calling. The aim of life now is not according to one's own selfish motives but of one's own genuine love for God and of the people he or she encounters.

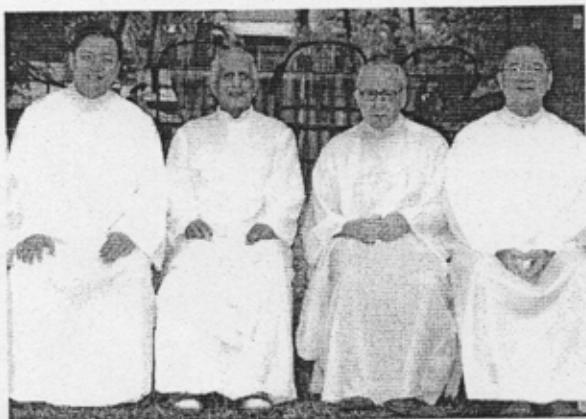
The married life appears to be a common and attractive vocation for the normal person. To have a stable job, earn a modest pay, and plan for a family of two or three children seem to be ideal. There are also persons called to a single life, without an intimate someone to share each other's sentiments, riches, sufferings, and love for a lifetime. But there are also those who are called to a special way of life, which is the priesthood, one that entails total dedication of one's life to the Lord. All this is part of the mysterious reality that we are in—human life.

In any case, Mother Church holds two special vocations, sanctified through the sacraments, since in them She continues to grow and have its purpose. These two—Holy Orders and Matrimony—are directed towards the salvation of others. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.”²

¹ Cf. CCC 1533.

² Cf. CCC 1534.

II. THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY ORDERS



"Taken from among men...appointed for men in the things pertaining to God." Hebrews 5:1

"But now Christ has come, as the high priest of all the blessings which were to come...and he has entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats and bull calves, but his own blood, having won an eternal redemption for us." Heb 9: 11-12

"And we have the supreme high priest over all the house of God. So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Heb 10: 21-23

A. Priesthood in the Jewish Tradition

The Catholic tradition of having priests and bishops celebrate the important Christian Liturgical celebrations today is rooted in the ancient Jewish tradition, especially when the great Jewish temple was built.³ Of the twelve tribes that composed Israel, one was specially chosen by God and was set apart for liturgical services only: the tribe of Levi. There was also a special rite that consecrated the priests of the Old Testament. For the Jews, the priest is given the office of the *minister of sacrifice* (Lv. 21), and the chosen *speakers of the words of faith* (Ex.24; Deut.27). Sacrifice was done by them on behalf of all of Israel's inhabitants. Moreover, they proclaimed the Word of God and were instrumental in the restoration of communion of Israelites with God by sacrifices and prayer. Such was the relevance of the Jewish priest in the Israelite community of old.

However, all that was anticipated in the Old Covenant now finds its completion in Jesus Christ, who is the only "mediator between God and men." When Jesus Christ came, the Jewish tradition now became obsolete and introduced a new covenant, thus founding the Church. To all the Catholic faithful, Jesus Christ is the ultimate model of priesthood. Although the old Jewish priesthood is no longer being followed, there are still vestiges found in the Catholic priesthood.⁴

B. Jesus Christ: the ultimate Priest

In the book of Genesis, the mythical Melchizedek appears only once throughout the Sacred Scriptures. Christian tradition considers this mysterious Melchizedek as the prefiguration of Jesus' priesthood. The letter to the Hebrews teaches us that Jesus the "high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10).

Jesus, like Melchizedek, had only a single sacrificial offering—His death on the cross. This particularly unique sacrifice is considered the only "perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:14). The Old Testament priesthood is now abolished to give way to the new and definitive priest—Jesus, the true high priest. Jesus, once and for all, restored the communion with God.



³ This dates back to the time of King Solomon, c. 1000 B.C.E.; see 1 Kings 6:1 ff.

⁴ Cf. CCC 1539, 1540.

C. Etymology

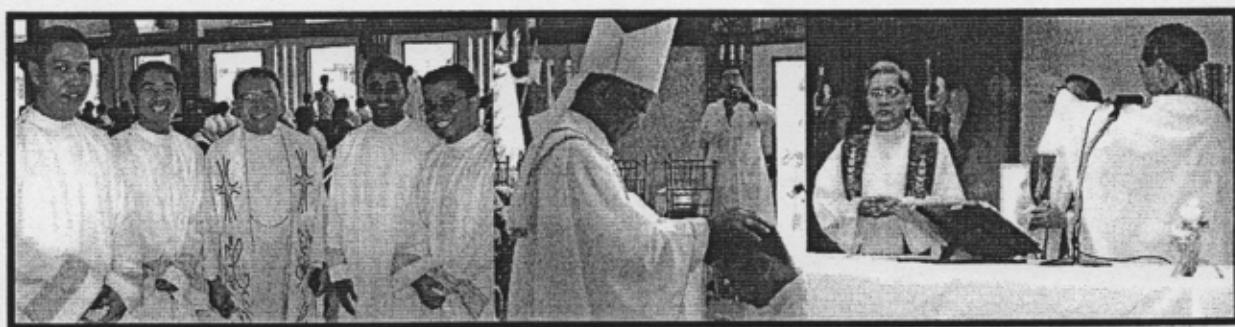
The English word bishop is derived from the Greek original *episkopos* (επίσκοπος) which means “watcher, overseer” from *epi* (over) + *skopos* (watcher). The term priest or presbyter is derived from the Greek term *presbyteros* (πρεσβύτερος), which literally means “elder”. Finally, the term deacon comes from the Greek word *diakonos* (διάκονος), which means “servant”.

D. Nature

The Church says: “through the ordained ministry, especially that of bishops and priests, the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community of believers.”⁵ Holy Orders is the sacrament in which is conferred the spiritual power to administer the sacraments and to discharge properly other spiritual duties. It imprints a *character* and establishes in the one receiving it a rank of spiritual leadership.

There are three types of holy orders: (a) *Diaconate*, (b) *Priesthood*, and (c) *Episcopate*. Vatican II speaks of these as the exercise of the divinely instituted ministry “in different degrees by those who even from ancient times have been called bishops, priests and deacons.”⁶ They are conferred by the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration which the Liturgical books prescribe for each degree.⁷

E. The Three Degrees of the Sacrament of Holy Orders



i. Bishop: Episcopal Ordination

Jesus Christ clearly commissioned his disciples to baptize all peoples and to teach them all that He has taught them. In other words, these disciples were now sent for a divine mission, which is destined until the end of the World (Mt 28:20). They were tasked to preach the good news, Jesus Christ. Hence, they have to be careful in appointing their successors. It must be according to their proper and enlightened discernment. The successors to Jesus' Apostles are properly called the bishops.

1.) Fullness of the Priesthood

The fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders is conferred by Episcopal consecration—or when one becomes a bishop. Each Bishop is given the power to govern a number of priests and lay people in a local Church. In the Philippine context, every diocese⁸ has a ruling bishop

⁵ Cf. CCC 1549.

⁶ Cf. LG 28, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 384.

⁷ Cf. Can. 1009.

⁸ e.g. Manila, Paranaque, Cebu, etc.

or, in canonical terminology, local ordinary. The bishop is the legitimate successor of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Hence, the role of the bishops in the entire Church, especially in her mission to evangelize the world and her vocation to live a holy life, is indispensably significant. They are the “teachers of doctrine, ministers of sacred worship and holders of office in government.”⁹

2.) Pre-eminence of Archbishops

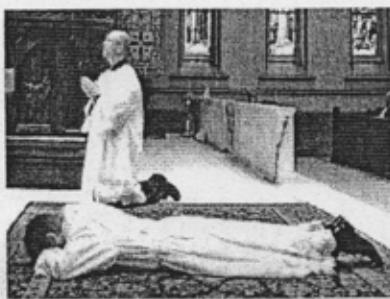
According to Church traditions, the most eminent dioceses were regarded with special reverence and were called ‘metropolitan sees’ or archdiocese. Their leaders are called *archbishops* or *patriarchs*. They had a certain degree of authority over the other bishops in their general area. By the middle of the 5th century, there were five most important dioceses: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. At present, there are now a good number of Archdioceses all over the world. Every Christian locality has an archdiocese in which the start of Catholic religion spread throughout its neighboring areas, and thus they may properly be called ‘mother dioceses’.

3.) The Pope: Christ’s vicar and Peter’s successor

The bishop of the Archdiocese of Rome is, at the same time, the head of all bishops. He is called the *Roman Pontiff*, or the *Pope*. The role of the Bishop of Rome, or simply the Pope, can be traced back when Jesus Christ entrusted the ‘keys of heaven’ to His disciple Peter, the Rock (Mt 16:18). It was first elaborated by Pope Leo the Great, 5th century, who mentioned that the pope was heir and successor to Peter. Peter enjoyed the merit in recognizing the true reality of Christ, who in turn, conferred the primacy upon him. The papacy was seen as a monarchic institution, where the sum total of powers was in the hands of the Pope. Ordinary bishops or patriarchs did not participate in the papal plenitude of power.



Other than being the head of all bishops, he is considered the Vicar of Christ, the pastor of the entire Church, and has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, which he can always exercise without restraint.¹⁰ The bishops, united as one body or college, has authority only inasmuch as they are united with the Pope who, like Peter, is their head. The Pope enjoys infallibility when he teaches doctrines of faith and morals. This infallibility means, by virtue of his exercise his office as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful, he does not commit any substantial error when preaching about Church doctrines because the Holy Spirit faithfully guides him. In all his proclamations of truths of faith and morals, he does need any form of approval or scrutiny insofar as the Holy Spirit unswervingly assures their conformity to the revealed truths found in Sacred Scriptures and in the Church’s Traditions.



ii. Priest: Presbyteral or Priestly ordination¹¹

The priests are both co-workers and assistants of the bishops. In recent times, the apostolic mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to his Apostles cannot be fulfilled by the bishops alone—mainly because there are just too many of Christ’s faithful who need leaders and good shepherds who can lead them to the right path of life. Hence, in a subordinate degree,

⁹ Cf. LG 20, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 372.

¹⁰ Cf. LG 22, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 374.

¹¹ Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 863 – 902.

the function of the bishops' ministry was handed over to the priests. Once an able person is ordained as a priest by a bishop, he now has that special character so that he can now act in the person of Christ (*in Oe persona Christi*).

1.) Task of the priest

The main task of the priest, together with the bishop, is the "procuring of the glory of God the Father in Christ."¹² The priest can only obtain God's glory by evangelizing all persons and make them believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who is our Redeemer. It is therefore an impetus for every Catholic priest to devote their lives to "prayer, adoration, or preach the Word, or offer the Eucharistic sacrifice and administer the other sacraments, or exercise other services for the benefit of men."¹³



2.) Diocesan and Religious

A priest can either be diocesan or religious. In terms of their immediate superiors, the former is directly under the authority of a bishop, while the latter a Provincial superior inasmuch as he must always belong to a certain province or territory. Each is also under the Supreme Pontiff who is the official pastor and caretaker of all the baptized Catholics.¹⁴ Each diocesan priest takes an oath of obedience of to his bishop and promises the ecclesiastical discipline of

perfect continence and celibacy. A religious priest, on the other hand, has vows on chastity, poverty, and obedience according to the evangelical counsels. He also takes into serious consideration his congregation's laws or ordinances, which is often called constitutions. For practical reason, one can easily distinguish a diocesan from a religious priest by simply looking at how they write their full name. For example: (a) Diocesan: Fr. Carlo Dela Cruz, (b) Religious: Fr. John Mercado, SDB. From this given example, Fr. Dela Cruz does not have any initials because he is diocesan. Fr. Mercado, on the other hand, has the additional initials SDB, which signifies that he belongs to a certain religious institute.

3.) Total obedience to the immediate superior

In the case of a diocesan priest, he must always be associated with and obedient to his bishop. The priest can only exercise his ministry in full communion with his appropriate bishop and must be dependent upon him. Once the bishop ordains the priest, the latter will now promise full obedience, trust and confidence to his immediate superior and must therefore be ready to work at the service of the bishop.



A religious priest, by virtue of the vow of obedience, is directly under his Provincial superior, who in turn is answerable to the General superior. If a religious priest belongs to an institute that requires him to stay in a community, then he is answerable both to the Rector of his community, and to the Provincial superior. The Rector is the main animator of any given religious community. Therefore, any priest under his care is directly under his care. However, in the wider scope of animation, it is the Provincial superior who takes care of every priest under his province or territory.

¹² Cf. PO 2, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 866.

¹³ Cf. PO 2, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 866.

¹⁴ See above

4.) *Ordination and consecration*

Only a bishop can ordain a male person suitable to become a priest. Priests are set apart in some way from the people of God and must be consecrated to certain tasks proper to their identity as priests of Christ. Priests are conformed to things that are not of the world (Rom 12:2) but spiritual things. They do live among people, but they do live according to the standards of the people in the world. In fact, they are to be witnesses of Christ and must counter the pervading ‘evil’ culture that might exist in their particular contexts. Hence, they are obliged to cultivate certain virtues that can equip them such that they can be treated in high esteem, that is, well-respected especially as they do their best to spread Jesus Christ to the world. These virtues can be the following: goodness of heart, sincerity, strength and constancy of mind, careful attention to justice, courtesy and many others.

iii. Deacon: Diaconal ordination



The deacons are, in some way, in a level lower than that of priests as far as the Church hierarchy is concerned. They are directly under the authority of the bishops and his body of priests especially “in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity.”¹⁵ This means they are allowed only to administer some of the sacraments. In summary, they do only the following tasks, provided they are assigned by the competent authority, in accordance to those mentioned in by Vatican II:

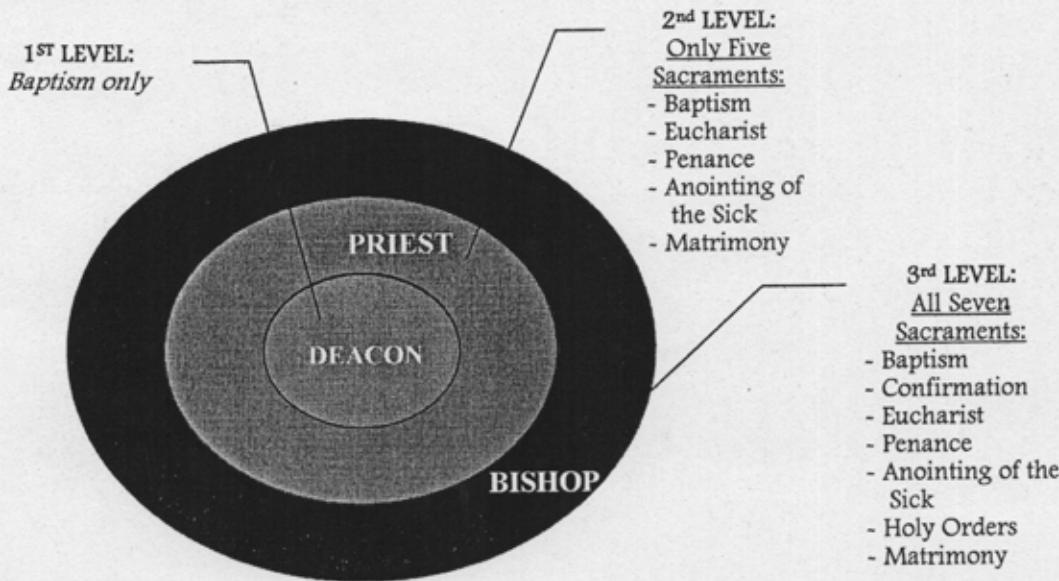
- administer Baptism
- distribute the Eucharist
- assist at and bless marriages
- bring Viaticum to the dying
- read the sacred scripture to the faithful
- instruct and exhort the people
- preside over the worship and the prayer of the faithful
- administer sacramentals
- officiate at funeral and burial services

F. Varying levels of power to administer the Sacraments

We have already encountered that the bishop possesses the fullness of priesthood. The priests are the co-workers of the bishops but definitely do not possess yet the full power of the priesthood. The deacons belong to a level that is certainly lower than both bishops and priests in the Church hierarchy. The power to celebrate the sacraments is dependent upon the level of ordination or Holy Order of the minister. Hence, we need to have in mind that in administering the sacraments, those in the lowest level (1st Level) cannot fulfill what those in

¹⁵ Cf. LG 29, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 387.

the higher levels (2nd and 3rd Levels) can do. Here is a practical illustration for a better understanding:



G. Preliminary Considerations Before Ordination¹⁶

This part includes the main considerations before the diaconal, priestly, or Episcopal ordinations. It is important to take note of these requisites or qualifications; otherwise the ordination might be rightfully revoked.

i. Sacraments of Christian Initiation and Mature Faith

Before anyone can be ordained to any of the holy orders, it is of utmost importance that the male person must have received already all the sacraments of Christian Initiation.¹⁷ Aside from securing the Christian upbringing and education of the candidate to the Holy Orders, it is understood that he must be mature already when it comes to defending his faith and upholding his dignity and identity as a Christian. This is definitely a necessary quality since he will become a future minister of the Word of God, the good news of Salvation, mainly the name of Jesus Christ. This is also to ensure that he is truly part of the Catholic Church and is ready to live and die as a member of this Church, which is founded by Jesus Christ.

ii. Necessary Human Qualities

Among the most important considerations before imparting the permanent sacramental seal of the Holy Orders are the human qualities that the candidates possess.

1.) Absolute freedom, full knowledge, right intention

All candidates must receive the holy orders with absolute freedom and full knowledge, and right intention. Otherwise, the conferment of the sacrament is invalid. Understandably, anyone



¹⁶ Cf. Can. 375–380, 1024–1039.

¹⁷ See above, chapter II.

who is ignorant or erroneous of certain facts about what he is doing or receiving cannot be fully responsible of his action. Knowing that holy orders are neither simple nor ordinary presupposes the absence of error or ignorance on the part of the candidates. They should be fully aware that priesthood is a lifetime commitment. Once the ordination takes place, there is never a turning back to the former life as a lay person. This means, one is aware of the implications of priesthood in his life—continence and celibacy, apostolate, life of prayer, perfect commitment with the Lord, obedience to his direct superior, etc. Moreover, they cannot be given to anyone who is merely deceived or who is coerced by any external factor. The holy orders absolutely cannot be given to those who are motivated by any selfish or evil intent.

2.) Good moral character

Logic tells us that any person who is not living according to the civil or Church precepts, or according to his own conscience, cannot possibly fulfill the duty of leading the people of God, or the Church, towards a holy Christian life—in other words, salvation. Hence, it is important that any candidate must enjoy a good reputation, predisposed at upholding the moral dignity of persons, and should possess virtues appropriate for a minister of Jesus Christ. There must no irregularities in his relationships with his fellow human persons; these might impede his ordination.



3.) Sound Attributes

Taking into account the great responsibility of the deacons, priests and Bishops, any candidate should have a sound physical, intellectual, emotional or psychological make-up such that they are able to fulfill without enormous trouble the ministries that may be assigned to them in the future. He does not necessarily have to be a highly gifted individual in all human aspects—physical attributes, eccentric musician, genius mind, etc. As long as he is physically, emotionally, intellectually, and psychology able to perform any given task of a Church minister then he may possibly be admitted to the order.



iii. Appropriate Preparation

Candidates to the holy orders must be prepared well by competent authorities or formators. One of the main objectives is to train them for their future ministry, which is not so simple at all in that the salvation of souls is at stake. Therefore any deacon, priest or bishop must truly be careful in his ministerial duties. If ill-equipped, he might prove to be detrimental to those who are supposed to receive the fruits of his pastoral duties like

administering the sacraments, rendering a homily, edifying the laity by his examples and others. In other words, becoming a deacon or priest is not a joke. It entails genuine vocation, motivation, studies, sacrifice, pastoral skills and many other aspects to lead the people of God towards holiness of life and, ultimately, to God.

iv. Age Of Ordination

One can be ordained a deacon if he has already completed his twenty-third (23rd) year of age.¹⁸ In the case of the priesthood, one can only be ordained if he has completed his

¹⁸ That is, 23 years and 1 day old.

twenty-fifth (25th) year of age¹⁹ and at six (6) months as an ordained deacon. In an Episcopal ordination, the candidate must be at least 35 years old, and ordained as a priest for at least five (5) years.

v. Educational Attainment

A candidate's educational attainment determines his capability to accomplish his ministry appropriately and competently. For the diaconal ordination, one needs to have at least two (2) years of philosophical studies and three (3) years of theology. For a priest to be ordained a bishop, he must be well versed in the fields of Sacred Scripture, Theology, Canon Law, or other institutes approved by the Apostolic See.

H. Challenges of Modern-day Priesthood

There has never been a more challenging era for the proclamation of God's Word than in the recent times. For more than two millennia, the Catholic Church, ever since Christ founded it, has stood tall and strong. However, inasmuch as it is an institution that relies not on facts but on faith as the framework where we scientifically study²⁰ about God and the truths about our religion, there have been so many developments, both in quantity and quality. Quantity here means the number of Catholics, which has dramatically increased from a simple community of twelve disciples to more than a billion believers. Growth in quality pertains to the deepening of our understanding of God through faith.



Bishops gather inside St. Peter's Basilica for the Vatican II

There has been a gradual development in the Church leading to the present time after the liberation of the Church from persecutions. Part of this is the emergence of ecumenical councils, which were vital to many decision-makings, formulations of certain universal Church doctrines, and many other religious purposes. The first of these councils is the First Council of Nicaea, which was convoked in the year 325 by Emperor Constantine. The last one is the Second Vatican Council, which was convoked in 25 January 1959 by Pope John XXIII. There were varying circumstances surrounding the different ecumenical councils. Each of them was convoked for a specific purpose in respect to the present context. Knowing these distinctions can help us understand that, indeed, the Church is part of history that slowly unfolds itself in time. This is a heritage which makes us appreciate more the value of our being part of the entire picture, i.e.

of the history-in-the-making within the context of our Church.

However, the flight of human inquiry seemed to get too high every second towards the twentieth century. This ultimately brought a deluge of anxiety, disbelief, apostasy, doubt, and confusion. Different ideals appeared to create more havoc. Such extreme ideals were Atheism, or disbelief in the existence of the Divine, and Rationalism, or the exaltation of the human reason. These dangerous ideals fundamentally disregarded faith and religiosity and has crept into the realm of Christian life. Liberalism was also very much part of this. It would be a great relief if Christians would have a solid foundation of its faith vis-à-vis these novel

¹⁹ That is, 25 years and 1 day old.

²⁰ Cf. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella, editors, *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* (1994), English-language edition, s.v. "Theology".

ideas. Renewal, synthesis, and upgrading of our Christian doctrines, as well as unity among the dividing Churches were essential in creating a formidable shield against these perils. Not only revolutionary ideals came to fore but also some extreme socio-economic factors. Among these were unarguably the two deadliest wars the world has ever known: the First and Second World Wars. Primarily catapulted by the prodigious growth of technology when it comes to warfare, these world wars were the costliest and had the most number of casualties. The First World War was followed by the second only few decades after.



manipulated the power of human reasoning and made it a very strong weapon against Christian faith. A rationalist can simply ask, "Why do I need God when I have Science to explain the world to me?"

With the advent of such rational and technological advancements, certain difficulties and doubt in terms of faith, vocation and identity are inevitable. These are serious possibilities that must be countered by the present day priest. And so, how will he live up to these colossal demands? The answer can be a radical renewal on the part of the Church. The Second Vatican Council has already started this revitalization. It is now up to the Church's priests to re-echo such views of rejuvenation with the right attitude and Christian faith—one that is fundamentally rooted in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, the world will truly devour them. Indeed, the real challenge is out there for every priest, deacon or bishop to face, and listen to St. Paul's timeless words:

"...let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet that is hope for salvation... Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil."

1 Thessalonians 5: 8, 17-22

III. THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY



"This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife and they become one body." Gen 2:24

"Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Eph 5:21

"...let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband must give his wife what she has the right to expect, and so too the wife to the husband. The wife has no rights over her own body; it is the husband who has them. In the same way, the husband has no rights over his body; the wife has them." 1 Cor 7:2-5

A. Nature

The Sacrament of Matrimony is a contract between a man and a woman, both baptized and free to enter this contract, by which they consent to live together for the purpose of begetting and bringing up children and cherishing each other in mutual affection.

Marriage is a celebration of friendship, a communion of love. One important prerequisite of this particular sacrament is that unequivocal love that unites both the man and the woman. This presupposes that each of them possesses a more mature and altruistic love and is willing to commit oneself to the spouse until the end of time, in whatever condition that their life has to offer.

Christian marriage, celebrated in the sacrament of matrimony, is truly the sacrament of friendship. All sacraments are signs of God's friendship and love; they are celebrations of His ongoing presence to us in our ordinary lives. So too, Christians who marry in the Lord are a living sign of God's love in human relationships, in life-giving procreation, in family living. We, who have been made in God's image and likeness, mirror Him best when we love. God comes to us in love because He is love. Marriage is a sacrament because it celebrates that love.

B. Matrimonial Consent¹

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, it is very important that both man and woman must be free as they engage in a formal covenant of love. They must not be under constraint. In other words, they can only be married if, and only if each of them is totally free to contract marriage. It is a free exchange of individual consent, without any form of external or internal coercion. The Church of that "irrevocable personal consent" as a pre-requisite for Matrimony and it automatically provides for that natural capacity of any man or woman to establish a formal union and, at the same time, an intimate partnership of life.

The absence of such a personal consent from either of the two makes their marriage null and void. Indeed there is no human power that can take the place of this consent.²



¹ This is based on CCC 1625 – 1632; GS 47 – 52, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 949 – 957.

² Cf. CCC 1628.

C. Celebration

i. Exchange of Consent

Shorter Form

The ceremony may, or may not, include Nuptial Mass. If it does, the marriage ceremony takes place after the gospel and homily. In the shorter form, the bride and groom with two witnesses stand before the altar, and the priest puts the following question, first to the bridegroom and then to the bride:

“(name), do you take (name) to be your wife (husband)? Do you promise to be true to her (him) in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love her (him) and honor her (him) all the days of your life?”

Each answers “I do” to this questioning. The priest then confirms the marriage bond and sprinkles them with holy water. After the blessing of the ring(s) the priest prays that God will help them throughout married life.

Longer Form

In the longer and more solemn form, the following is the exchange of consents:

Priest: It is clear that your intention is to be married. So may I ask you to join your right hands and pronounce your intentions and promises to love each other for life before God and His Church.

Couple: We believe that our love, we bear witness to the union of Christ and His Church. We believe that we were drawn to, and are meant for each other and that this is a sign of Christ’s love. We believe that we are called upon to build a family for God here on earth, and that we should give our children to serve God and the community.

(Man): In His loving Presence, therefore, I (*man’s name*), take you (*woman’s name*) as my lawful wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, from here to eternity.

(Woman): And in His loving presence, I, (*woman’s name*), take you (*man’s name*), as my loving lawful husband, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, from here to eternity.

After the exchange of consents, the priest then confirms it and solemnly expresses the blessings of the Church on them:

And I, by the authority of the Church, calling on all those present here as witnesses, confirm and bless the bond of marriage which you have contracted. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

ii. Nuptial blessing

In the Rite of celebrating a Catholic Marriage or Holy Matrimony, there is a particular part which consists of the expressions of the responsibilities of the spouses in a form of prayer and petition. This can be found in Nuptial blessing, which the minister prays:

And now we pray you, Lord, that these servants of yours might remain bound in faith and the commandments and, joined to a single spouse, they might be notable for the integrity of their conduct; united by the strength of the gospel, may they exhibit good testimony to Christ before all; (may they be fertile in offspring, may they be parents of tested virtue; may they both see their children's children [literally, "the sons of their sons"]); and, having come at last to a desirable old age, may they come to the life of the blessed and to the heavenly kingdom. Through Christ our Lord...

D. What kind of life must the married couple aim at? (based on the Nuptial blessing)

i. The couple should live in the Christian Faith and in the Commandments



To start with, the nuptial blessing poignantly rekindles in the couple that unmistakable desire to live in the Christian faith³ and living the commandment of God to love Him and their neighbors: "...bound in faith and the commandments..." It was Jesus himself who mentioned this to the scribe who asked Him about the greatest commandment in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 12: 29-31).

ii. They should strive to live holy lives.

Mention is made of this need for this effort towards salvific bliss inasmuch as there is the presumption that married couples are naturally inclined to sin and imperfection⁴: "...they might be notable for the integrity of their conduct; united by the strength of the gospel, may they exhibit good testimony to Christ before all..." While it is true that human persons are called to share in God's divinity (2 Pet 1:4)⁵ by virtue of their being made according to God's image and likeness⁶, it is also an undeniable reality that they commit sin and at times can truly be led astray. However, this does not mean that the married couples remain in their own state of transgression and therefore lose any hope of ever transcending their purely mundane practices. The Christian couple is not exempted from the universal call to holiness⁷ and is obliged to be witnesses of their faith in Christ to all people in the world.⁸ This is simple a reiteration of the fundamental calling of all Baptized Christians as part of their being incorporated to Christ.⁹



iii. The couple must be open to beget children and promote human dignity.

In this enclosed lines "(may they be fertile in offspring, may they be parents of tested virtue; may they both see their children's children [literally, "the sons of their sons"])", some Scriptural passages may be referred to. The passages in the Old Testament can teach us that being

³ Cf. CCC 26.

⁴ Cf. CCC 1707 – 1709.

⁵ Cf. CCC 1691, 1998, 1721.

⁶ Cf. CCC 1700.

⁷ Cf. LG 39 – 42, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 396 - 402.

⁸ Cf. GS 52, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 956.

⁹ Cf. CCC 1270.

fertile is indeed a blessing from the Lord. God gave Adam and Eve this blessing: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth..." (Ex 1:28); to Noah and his sons, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth" (Ex. 9:1, 7); to Abraham, "... 'Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants' he told him" (Ex 15:5). But definitely the importance of having children as a blessing from God may be best taken from the two Wisdom books of Psalms, "Sons are a bounty from Yahweh, he rewards with descendants: like the arrows in a hero's hand are the sons you father when young" (Ps 127:3–4), and Proverbs, "The crown of the aged is their children's children" (Prov 17:6).

The Church, in the post-Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, re-echoes a similar insight in that children are truly the greatest gift that a married couple can receive from God.¹⁰ This puts into consideration the conjugal love that must subsist in within the married couple and that they must truly be open to the calling of having children, educating them into upright citizens, and thus promote the dignity and welfare of human life.¹¹

Following the Jewish tradition of the Old Testament, sterility may even lead to despair, as in the case of Rachel when she was barren for quite some time and asked her husband Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" The joy of conceiving and bearing a child brings utmost joy to the mother, as in the case of Hannah, whose prayers were answered by Yahweh (1 Sam 1:1-18). In the modern times, however, having children may be an option. Although this might favor married couples inasmuch as they are not yet bound to parental responsibility, it basically goes against the Church's exhortation of being open to bearing and educating children:

"By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."¹²

iv. The couple must strive for their own salvation.



Lastly, it highlights that character of Holy Matrimony as a means for the couple to live their lives for their own salvation.¹³ As what was mentioned already above, the husband and wife are basically called, like any other baptized Christian, to be holy and eventually to share in God's divine nature. Hence, the line "may they come to the life of the blessed and to the heavenly kingdom" necessarily punctuates our ultimate vocation to partake in God's banquet in the heavenly Kingdom. In this way, we can be numbered among the many saints who are already in union with God in Beatific vision with God.¹⁴

E. Group Interaction: *Present realities concerning the married Life*

Suggested questions for group interaction:

- 1) How do you describe the marriage of your parents, or of your brothers or sisters, or of your close relatives?
- 2) What are the sad realities as regards married life today?
- 3) What are some joyful realities surrounding the married life today?
- 4) What are the challenges of married life today?
- 5) How do you stay hopeful amidst all these perversities and challenges that seem to destroy and downgrade the dignity of marriage?

¹⁰ Cf. GS 48, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 950-952.

¹¹ Cf. GS 49 – 52, Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 952-957.

¹² Cf. CCC 1652; GS 48, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 950.

¹³ Cf. Searle and Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy*, 267-269.

¹⁴ Cf. LG 39 – 42, Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 396 – 402.

- 6) Would you prefer live-in over sacramental marriage?
- 7) Do you think divorce must be allowed? What can you say about the trend of divorce in other countries?
- 8) As true Christians, how do we uphold the true dignity of marriage?

F. Same-sex marriage???

i. Natural Law: Absolutely Not!

Marriage, according to the Natural Law, is the union between a man, or a male person, and a woman, or a female one. However, there are people who argue that this very definition of marriage may be altered. The reality is that they try to accommodate their own desires of cohabitating with a person of the same sex (homosexuals). This, according to the Church, is a perversion of the true nature of marriage.

It must also be noted that in the abovementioned, the purpose why a couple, composed of male and female, get married because, apart from being so much in love with each other, they aim at *begetting and bringing up children*, at the same time cherishing each other in *mutual affection*. And if one of these elements of the objectives of marriage is lost, then marriage can be considered a partial one.

In the case of two persons of the same sex, could they truly beget children by engaging in sexual intercourse? It is quite obvious that this particular aim of marriage, which is one of the most pronounced, is excluded by default. Hence, these homosexual couples may reason out that it is mutual affection that they are after. They argue that marriage can and should not be contained in this traditional man-and-woman concept. Could this be possible? The Church takes its cue from the Word of God, which we shall discuss below.

ii. Sacred Scriptures: Only between Man and Woman

1) Old Testament

It is clear in the Scriptures that only man and woman can be united in marriage. It is difficult to put into bad light the validity of the ethical lessons that are being taught by the inspired books of the Bible. Although what is evident in the Sacred Texts as regards this matter is highly Jewish, nevertheless these words are also meant for all Christians since we also own the Scriptures as our own. Hence, one can consider the sensibility of the Sacred Scriptures as authentic teachings of God, especially in teaching us how to live responsible lives based on the Divine precepts. We shall cite some very important scriptural passages that speak of Marriage as only between man and woman and not between those with the same gender.

• Genesis 2:23-24

“This at last is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh! This is to be called woman...This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife and they become one body.”

• Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.”

2) *New Testament: Pauline Letters*¹⁵

Before citing the important Pauline sayings that speak about the absurdity of homosexual relations, it is important to consider that Paul is highly influenced by the Jewish traditions as regards the matter at hand. According to St. Paul, the homosexual practices of the gentiles (i.e. Greeks, Romans, or pagans) are a form of punishment or ‘wrath of God’ inflicted upon them because of their turning away from the one true God. In particular, the Greek culture has a very peculiar interest with regard to homosexuality. They practice ‘pederasty’, a love that is directed to a young boy, which is naturally a sexual form of love. They even exalt this form of love. To them, it is an insult for a young male not to have any adult lover at all.

In the following passages, Paul wishes to teach his readers that homosexuality is indeed a punishment granted upon these non-worshippers of the one true God.

• 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

• Romans 1:26-27

Their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the males likewise gave up natural relations with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with males and thus received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity.

Hence, it is important to remember that in reading these verses, St. Paul actually tells us that homosexuality is an evil result of idolatry—a radical turning away from God. Worshipping false gods or idols leads to these absurd phenomena: women lust for their fellow women; men likewise possess that insatiable sexual appetite towards their fellow men. The natural aim of sexual union is now adulterated in that it is directed to an unnatural object: same gender. Although St. Paul does not offer us any comprehensive lecture as regards homosexuality, nevertheless we can concur with him that homosexuality is totally against the order of creation. It is a perversion and must not be considered as ethically proper.

G. Responsible Parenthood

We have already seen how married couples ought to commit themselves into begetting children, or at least a child. Children are the greatest gift that a married couple can receive from God. Hence, parents are bound to take care of their children by nurturing them, providing them food, shelter, clothing, and all the basic necessities of any human person. In a similar manner, weaning them, providing for their children’s Christian upbringing, offering them with suitable scholastic formation or education, and making them know how to be independent are definitely not an option for the parents but an obligation.

Deciding the number of children requires proper planning and execution on the part of the married couple. Their present mode of living must truly be based on the exigencies that are laid before them. A couple must take into consideration the family’s financial capacity. For instance, if they foresee that their net income can only afford them a modest standard of living, then they must fulfill their conjugal obligations accordingly. Otherwise, the couple may suffer dire consequences.

¹⁵ This is thoroughly discussed in Victor Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 53-83.