

## CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE SACRAMENTS

- The following are the Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church:<sup>[4]</sup>
  - Baptism (Christening)
  - Confirmation (Chrismation)
  - Holy Eucharist (or Holy Communion)
  - Penance (Confession)
  - Anointing of the Sick (known prior to Vatican II as Extreme Unction (or more literally from Latin: Last Anointing); informally, the "Last Rites")
  - Holy Orders
  - Matrimony
- Traditionally the Catholic Church defined sacraments as "An outward sign of inward grace, a sacred and mysterious sign or ceremony, ordained by Christ, by which grace is conveyed to our souls."<sup>[5]</sup> Regarding the validity of the sacraments, however, The Catholic church teaches that:

- All sacraments must have proper *matter*, *form*, and *intention*.

- The **form** is the sacramental sign, the verbal and physical liturgical action, e.g. the "this is my body" spoken during communion.
- The **matter** is the part of the sacrament to which something is done, the physical objects, e.g. the waters of baptism (although not all physical objects used in administering a sacrament are considered essential matter).
- **Intention** means that the priest or minister must have the willful intention to do what the Church does (*facere quod facit ecclesia*).
- Note that a minister does not have to believe personally all that the Church believes for the sacraments to be valid; he simply has to intend to do what the Church does.
- This means that if a person pours water over your head, reciting the words spoken at baptism, but is doing so only to demonstrate how to baptize, that baptism is not valid.

- Also, a child who is pretending to baptize another child would not confer a valid baptism upon that child, because his intention is to play, not to baptize.
- The importance of intention also shows that while the sacraments are effectual in and of themselves, they are not magic whereby God works against our will.
- Sacraments are effective *ex opere operato*, i.e. effective on account of the work itself. As expressed by professors of sacred theology, the phrase conveys the fact that the sacrament signifies what it accomplishes, and it accomplishes by signifying.
- During the 4th century some otherwise orthodox Christians asserted that the effectiveness of the sacraments depended on the holiness of the minister. In other words, if the presbyter baptizing was in a state of sin, his baptisms didn't "take"
- These Christians eventually broke off from the wider Catholic Church, and were called "Donatists." The

Donatists, situated primarily in North Africa, asserted that bishops consecrated by sinful bishops weren't really bishops at all.

- St. Augustine and others spilled a lot of ink to refute this position regarding sacraments, which is characterized in the Latin as *ex opere operantis*, i.e. sacraments are effective on account of the one doing the work.
- While the Church calls her priests (and all Christians) to high standards of holiness, the sacraments are effective independent of a minister's holiness because a perfect God is ultimately providing the sacramental grace, not the imperfect human minister.<sup>[6]</sup>