

# The Efficacy of the Sacraments

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## The Efficacy of the Sacraments

This question [of how children are received into the visible Church by baptism] touches the controversy about the efficiency, working and operation of the sacraments, of which I will give a taste shortly.

Sacraments are considered [in these four ways]:

1. As sacraments in abstract.<sup>1</sup> The reprobate do receive holy seals and sacraments, else they could not be said to profane the holy things of God. And so they [the seals] may be sacraments and work no grace, either by themselves or from God. All operation from or about the sacrament then, must be accidental [not necessary] to [the being of] a sacrament.
2. In concrete, according to all which they include in their use, as they consist of the sign, the thing signified, the institution of God and the promise of grace. And in this meaning Altisiodorensis<sup>2</sup> (as I conceive) makes the sacraments not to be efficient causes of grace, yet material causes containing grace.<sup>3</sup> So the Scripture says, 'baptism saves,' [1 Pet. 3:21] as the physician's glass cures the disease. And Guliel. Parisiens said<sup>4</sup> not ill, that the sacraments have a power to obtain grace by faith and prayer, that is, being used in faith and sincere calling upon God, they obtain grace. So, to speak accurately, this is all about the sacrament, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> *in genere signorum*

<sup>2</sup> Altisiodorens, *in Princip.*, book 4, sim. tract 3 [[Altisiodorens](#) was an appellation for William of Auxerre (d. circa 1230), who was eminent alongside of Aquinas, Scotus, Hale and Bonaventure. He was 'the first theologian to draw the distinction between the matter and the form of the sacraments.' His principle work was the *Summa Aurea in quatuor libros Sententiarum* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Paris, 1500).]

<sup>3</sup> *uti vas medicinam*

<sup>4</sup> Guliel. Parisiens, *Ract. de Sacram. in Gen. cap. 1*, 'Sacramenta habentiuim impetratoria gratiae, ratione orationum ministri et ecclesiae.'

from the sacrament. To which sense Durandus,<sup>5</sup> Occam,<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Biel,<sup>7</sup> and Aliacensis<sup>8</sup> do deny the sacraments to be physical instruments producing grace in a physical way (though Papists cry out against our divines for teaching so). Only, they say: 'God at the presence of the sacrament produces grace of his mere free will.'<sup>9</sup> And for this cause Gregorius de Valentia says<sup>10</sup> that these schoolmen 'give no more to the sacraments than heretics give.'<sup>11</sup> Yet Vasquez,<sup>12</sup> and a Jesuit professor at Rome, Joan. de Lugo, teach<sup>13</sup> that the sacraments are moral causes of grace, but not physical [causes]. It is gross that Henricus says<sup>14</sup> that God creates grace, 'by the touch of the sacraments,'<sup>15</sup> as Christ cured the leper by the touch of his hand. For sacraments are not miracles, as Papists say that physic [medicine] works upon a man's body when he sleeps, so do sacraments justify and work grace, *ex opere operato* [automatically by itself], though the faith of the sacrament-receiver works nothing at all.

Sacraments are considered as:

1. Holy signs;
2. Religious seals;
3. Instruments by which faith works;
4. Means used by us out of conscience of obedience to Christ's commandment who has willed us to use them.

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<sup>5</sup> *Durand*, 4. d. 1, art. 2, C. 7 [Guillaume Durandus of St. Pourcain (c. 1230-1296) was a French canonist and liturgical writer. His principle work on liturgy was *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 'a treatise on the origin and symbolic sense of the Christian ritual.' It gives 'a picture of the liturgy of the 13th century in the West' and is one 'of the main authorities on Western liturgies.']

<sup>6</sup> Occam, in 4, question 1 [William of Ockham (1287-1347) 'was an English Franciscan friar and scholastic philosopher and theologian.']

<sup>7</sup> Gabriel Biel, 4 d. 1 art. 2, c. 7 [Gabriel Biel (1420-1495) 'was a German scholastic philosopher.']

<sup>8</sup> Aliacensis, in 4. q. 1, art. 1, concl. 3 [Petrus Aliacensis (1351-1420) 'was a French theologian, astrologer, and cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church.']

<sup>9</sup> 'Ad praesentiam sacramenti operatur deus gratiam ex sola libera sua voluntate.'

<sup>10</sup> Greg. de Valent., *de Offic. Sacr.* c. 1. 2 [Gregory of Valencia (1549-1603) 'was a Spanish humanist and scholar who was a professor at the University of Ingolstadt.']

<sup>11</sup> 'Nihil amplius tribuere sacramentis, quam haeretici tribuunt.'

<sup>12</sup> Vasquez, in 3. Thom. tom. 2, dis. 132, c. 4

<sup>13</sup> Joan de Lugo, *de Sacram.*, dis. 4, sect. 4 & 5

<sup>14</sup> Henricus quodli., 4, q. 37

<sup>15</sup> 'Per tactum sacramentorum'

1. Sacraments as signs are objective and moral causes, exciting the mind as the Word does in a moral way. They represent Christ and Him crucified; this, sacraments have common with the Word. The sacrament is a visible Word, teaching us.

2. Sacraments have the consideration of seals and not only teaching and representing signs.<sup>16</sup> In this way, also, they have no real or physical action in them or from them. For a seal of a prince and state, as it is such, confers not an acre or ridge of land, but it is a legal declaration that those lands written in the body of the charter do duly belong to the person to whom the charter is given. But Arminians<sup>17</sup> do here err (as Episcopius<sup>18</sup>), and also Socinus<sup>19</sup> and Smalcus,<sup>20</sup> who teach that the sacraments are nothing but external rites and declarative signs, shadowing out Christ and the benefits of his death to us, because they find a moral objective working in the Word of God, but a substantial and physical working between us and Christ's body (they say) is ridiculous. But they should remember that this is an insufficient enumeration. The seal of a king's charter has, besides a moral action on the mind (by bringing to the mind such lands given to such a man, and so the seals and works upon the witnesses, or any who reads the charter as well, as upon the owner of the charter; I say besides this), the seal has some real action. I grant: not in it; but about it and beside it. For it seals that such lands are really, and in effect, given by the prince and state. The action is about the seal, not in or from the seal. When a general of an army delivers the keys of a castle to a keeper thereof, he says, 'I deliver the house to you,' when he delivers the keys only physically, and not the stones, walls or timber of the house, by 'a physical action' or 'physical touch.'<sup>21</sup> Yet in delivering the keys, he does really deliver to him the castle, but in a legal and moral way.

Arminians and Socinians may see here that there is neither an action by way of naked representation and teaching (for the sacrament is a teaching sign to the beholders who receive it not), nor is it a physical action (as if Christ's physical body, in a physical way,

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<sup>16</sup> [in Greek] 'sphragides and not snutha only'

<sup>17</sup> [The Arminian party stemmed from [James Arminius](#) (1560-1609), the Dutch professor who was famous for teaching the ultimate freedom man's will apart from God's influence, whose teachings provoked the counter-response of the Synod of Dort (1618-9).] *Romonst. in Apol ca. 23, 'in caena non obsignatur peccatorum remissio, sed tantum consequenter una cum Christi morte, cujus effectus illa obsignatio est, illam olim obsignatam fuisse comme moratur ac praedicatur.'*

<sup>18</sup> Episcopius, *dis. 29, thesis 8* [Simon Episcopius (1583-1643) was a leading Arminian.]

<sup>19</sup> Socinus, *de officio homini Christi, cap. 4* [[Fausto Sozzini](#) was the founder of [Socinianism](#), a school of thought that taught a number of unorthodox Christian beliefs.]

<sup>20</sup> Smalcus, *disp. 9, contra Frautzium, p. 199, 'Fabulae sunt aliquam esse internam efficaciam in baptismo.'* [[Valentinus Smalcus](#) (1572-1622) 'was a German Socinian theologian. He was known for his German translation of the Racovian Catechism, and Racovian New Testament (1606).']

<sup>21</sup> 'Contactu physico'

were given); yet it is a real and moral action. So the sacraments are signs exhibitiv<sup>22</sup> and not naked signs.

Our Brethren [the New England Independents] do side with Arminians and Socinians, who so often teach that ‘sacraments make nothing to be what they are not, but only declare things to be what they are.’ It is true that the formal effect of a sacrament is to seal and confirm. To seal and confirm is but a legal strengthening of a right, and not the adding of any new thing.

Yet, in this, the sacrament differs from a seal:

That to a civil seal there is not required the believing and faith of the owner of the charter to make the seal effectual. For whether the lord of the lands believes that his seal does confirm him in the lands or not, the seal of itself, by the law of the prince and state, makes good his right to the lands. But sacraments do not work *ex opere operato* [automatically by itself] as civil seals do work, even as physic works upon the body without the faith of the mind, though the man be sleeping.

3. Hence the third consideration of a sacrament as an instrument: Faith, being wakened and stirred up in and through the sacrament, lays hold upon Christ’s death and benefits. And for this cause there is a real exhibition<sup>19</sup> of the thing signified; the sacrament is an exhibitiv<sup>e</sup> seal.

4. The use of the sacrament is considered as we use it in obedience to God, who says in the Lord’s Supper: ‘Do this in remembrance of Me.’

And in this [way,] it differs from a civil seal also. The prince does not confer a seal to confirm a man in his land upon condition that he will make use of it, otherwise it shall be to him as no seal. But God has given the seal of grace upon condition that we make use thereof in faith, else the sacrament is blank and null. Therefore, if you believe (and not

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<sup>22</sup> [The meaning of ‘to exhibit’ here, is to ‘confer,’ as in the context it conveys more than simply to display or offer. That is, by a person’s faith being stirred up and laying hold on what the sacraments signify, there is a real spiritual conferring through faith of what the sacraments signify (the spiritual benefits of Christ) to the person. This is how the Westminster Confession of Faith uses the term ‘confer’ in ch. 28.6: ‘...by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred...’ During the 1600’s, the various meanings of ‘to exhibit’ are given by the Oxford English Dictionary as: (1) ‘to offer furnish, administer’, (2) ‘to grant, provide, furnish’ (3) ‘to administer (a remedy), (4) ‘to expose to view; to show, display’ (5) ‘To submit for consideration; to present; to promulgate’ (6) ‘To set forth (in words or figures)’ (7) ‘To manifest to the senses’ (8) ‘To represent by figure, drawing’ (9) ‘To manifest by signs, indicate the existence of, display’.]

otherwise), the sacrament of the Supper seals and confirms you in this, that Christ is given already and is in the present given to be nourishment to your soul to life eternal. And so oft as you eat, the certioration<sup>23</sup> and assurance [of one] grows, and the faith [of the person] is increased, and a further degree of a communion with Christ is confirmed. But it is not so in civil seals. Though you repeat and reiterate the same seal of lands ten thousand times, it never adds one acre more to the inheritance because the repetition of a civil seal is not commanded under<sup>24</sup> the promise of addition of new lands [upon the repetition of the seal], nor is it commanded as obedience to the owner of the charter that he should make use of the seal. But from using the sacrament in faith, we receive increase of grace and a sacramental grace.<sup>25</sup>

The End

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<sup>23</sup> [Making certain or sure; certification.]

<sup>24</sup> [That is, with.]

<sup>25</sup> [That is, a grace specific to, and through, the sacrament.]