

THE SACRAMENTS AS THE SPECIAL WAYS TO ENCOUNTER GOD

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Abstract

This study is a literatur study with a descriptive approach. The main query of this articel is: "What is the meaning of sacraments as the special ways to encounter God? Its purpose is to maintain that the sacraments are the special ways to encounter Christ because, in the sacraments, Christ is present and doing our salvation. Because of Christ's presence in the sacrament, they confer grace. God's grace in the sacramental celebration is abundant. Grace is a gift from God, given freely at God's initiative unmerited and undeserved by us. But this gift does not come cheap. To have a fruitful effect on one's life, the sacraments must be received in a good (proper) disposition and the grace of the sacraments must be put into practice. Sacraments are the special ways to encounter Christ. They are "doors to the sacred," the Holy One.

Keywords: Encounter, God, Sacraments, Special Ways

Abstrak

Tulisan ini merupakan kajian pustaka dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Pertanyaan utama artikel ini adalah: "Apa makna sakramen sebagai cara khusus untuk berjumpa dengan Tuhan? Tujuannya adalah untuk menegaskan bahwa sakramen adalah cara khusus untuk berjumpa dengan Kristus karena, dalam sakramen, Kristus hadir dan melakukan keselamatan kita. Karena kehadiran Kristus dalam sakramen, sakramen memberikan rahmat. Rahmat Tuhan dalam perayaan sakramental itu berlimpah. Rahmat adalah anugerah dari Tuhan, yang diberikan secara cuma-cuma atas inisiatif Tuhan tanpa kita usahakan dan tidak kita terima. Namun, anugerah ini tidak murah. Agar berdampak baik pada kehidupan seseorang, sakramen harus diterima dengan disposisi yang baik (tepat) dan rahmat sakramen harus dipraktikkan. Sakramen adalah cara khusus untuk berjumpa dengan Kristus. Sakramen adalah "pintu menuju yang sakral," Yang Kudus.

Kata Kunci: Cara Khusus, Tuhan, Pertemuan, Sakramen-Sakramen

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate aim of humankind is to live together with God. Since falling to the power of sin, man has separated himself from God. And, the consequence of being separated from God is suffering, unhappiness and death. However, God does not want man to suffer. In His mercy, God decreed to save all men. He wants everyone to unite and live with Him. All humankind will live and undergo happiness if they live in his love. Therefore, in his love, He sent His only Son as the only way to encounter him.¹ Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John, 14:6). Through Jesus, everyone can meet God. Through Him, one can see, hear and touch God. Therefore, Jesus, in His humanity, became a sign and mean to encounter God, the Almighty Father. Jesus is the primary sacrament.

After having finished his work in the world, Jesus went back to God, the Father who sent him. However, on the other hand, He is still with his people. He said, “And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mat, 28:20). This statement means that He is always present in and through His people (the Church) who believe in him. Christ is always present in the world through His Church. In the Church, His mystical body, Jesus is present; especially when the Church celebrates her sacraments. Therefore, the Church becomes the sacrament of Christ. He said, “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven,² and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mat, 16:19). To enable everyone to encounter God, Jesus established the sacraments as special ways to encounter God, the fount of life. In the sacraments, He is always present in doing our salvation.

METHOD

The main question of this paper is: “What is the meaning of sacraments as the special ways to encounter God?” The question is answered by applying a descriptive method, which is an effort to describe the reality (sacraments) as it is through the inquiry into books, journals, Church documents, and so on. Its purpose is to expound the sacraments as special ways to encounter Christ. It argues that the sacraments are the ways through which one can meet and undergo what He is doing for our salvation.

This paper consists of three parts. First, it begins by explaining what the sacrament is. After the explanation of what the sacrament is, the reason why the sacrament becomes the special way will be given, then in the second part, which explains how the sacraments confer grace and how to receive sacramental grace. Finally, in the third part, the notion of “to encounter Christ” will be explained to enrich our consideration of the sacrament.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Sacrament

The main question in this part is, “What is sacrament?” This question leads us to consider what sacrament is. The word sacrament comes from two Latin words: *Sacramentum*, “solemn obligation”, and *sacrare* meaning “to set apart as holy and sacred.”³ The word sacramentum was related to something holy or sacred. That is why people say the sacrament is a sacred thing or the sign of a sacred thing. The sacraments are related to the word mystery. Sacrament reveals the mystery. In this notion, the sacraments are considered as signs. They are signs of holy or sacred things. According to Thomas Aquinas, “A

¹ Ad Gentes no. 2.

² In the Bible, the term “heaven” refers to God Himself. In this notion, it is understandable that whatever the Church do in the name of Christ, Christ Himself does the act.

³ R. Ekstrom Reynolds, *The New Concise Dictionary* (St. Paul Press, Mumbai, 2005), 238.

sacrament is a sign of some sacred reality for the sanctification of human beings.”⁴ When Edward Schillebeeckx defined a sacrament as “a *signum efficax gratiae*, a sign which really and bestows the grace it signifies”,⁵ he meant that the sacrament deals with the Holy One, God himself, who is the source of all grace.

There are many definitions from scholars about what the sacrament is, but in this paper, I want to base my consideration of the sacrament on the definition of Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas Aquinas, “A sacrament is a sign of some sacred reality for the sanctification of human being.”⁶ I want to add something to Thomas’ definition. For me, a sacrament is a sign of some sacred reality, instituted by Christ, for the sanctification of human beings. There are four elements in this definition which need to be explained. They are Signs, Sacred Reality, Instituted by Christ and for the sanctification of human beings.

Sacrament is a sign. As a sign, it is visible. The sign reveals something behind the sign itself. As a sign, the sacrament refers to the liturgical celebration in which the thing is said, heard and done. As a sign, the things which are said, heard and done are visible. Therefore, they are called visible signs. These visible signs involve: the matter and the form, symbols or gestures used and the words spoken; the minister of the sacrament and the recipient of the sacrament.⁷

A sacrament is a sign of sacred reality. In the above paragraph, I have stated that the sign revealed something behind the sign itself. At this point, it is clear that the sacrament, as a sign, reveals a sacred reality. But what is the sacred reality? The sacred reality is Christ (God) Himself. That is why it is understandable that in *Lumen Gentium*, Sacrament is defined as “a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (LG. Par. 1). Augustinian tradition defined sacrament as a visible sign, a perceptible symbol of something invisible and sacred. The invisible or sacred reality, to which the sign bears witness, is grace: God’s gift of his love.⁸

The Sacraments are instituted by Christ. The council of Trent asserted, “If anyone says that all the sacraments of the new law were not all instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ... let that person be anathema.”⁹ It is true because sacraments are not of human origin. They are God’s gift for the salvation of human beings. This statement means that God has taken the initiative to save his people through Jesus Christ His only Son. God alone has freely given us presence, love and mercy.

For the sanctification of human beings. The sacraments are for the sanctification of human beings. This definition reveals the function of the sacraments. The Second Vatican Council in its document, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, stated that for a well-disposed member of the faithful, the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event in their lives; they are given access to the stream of divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death, the resurrection of Christ, the font from which all sacraments and sacramentals draw their power. There is hardly any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of man and the praise of God.¹⁰ Some theologians stressed the sanctification of human beings as grace. That is why they defined sacraments as “a visible sign instituted by Christ to give grace.”¹¹ There are seven sacraments which are Baptism,

⁴ Philippe Beguerie and Claude Duchesneau, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, (SCM Press, London, 1991), 59.

⁵ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church: Sacrament of the Risen Christ, in Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter With God*, (Franklin Wis: Sheed and Ward, 1999), 75.

⁶ Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, 59.

⁷ Kurt Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology; Means of Grace, Way of Life*, (Loyola Press, Chicago, 2002), 18.

⁸ Kenan B. Osborne, *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1988), 7.

⁹ Kenan B. Osborne, *Sacramental Guidelines: A Companion to the New Catechism for Religious Educators*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1995), 24.

¹⁰ SC. No. 7.

¹¹ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 16.

Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance (Reconciliation or confession), Anointing of the Sick (extreme unction), Holy Order and Matrimony.

The Basic Elements of the Sacrament

There are three basic elements required for a valid celebration of the sacraments which are proper matter and form, the intention of the minister and the disposition of the recipient of the sacrament. These elements are constitutive. They define a valid sacrament. Robert E. Rodes said, "A sacrament is valid if and only if the performative by which it is effectuated is in order. All the traditional theological categories - matter, form, intention, subject, minister – can be subsumed under the reference to the performative being in order."¹² Each of these elements will be explained.

The Matter and the Form of Sacraments

The matter and the form of sacraments are the basic elements which determine a sacrament. A sacrament is made up of matter (*the certain things which are used in sacramental celebration*) and form (*the words uttered when the sacrament is celebrated*). There is no sacrament if there is no matter and the form of the particular sacrament. Invalid material causes the sacrament invalid. An invalid form causes the sacrament to be invalid. Kenan Osborne quoted what Thomas Aquinas stated about the importance of the matter and the form of the sacraments: "Changes in the material things or words, according to Thomas, might very well go against the intention of Jesus himself, and therefore invalidate the sacramental action. Acceptable material things and acceptable words play a role. Unacceptable material things and unacceptable words invalidate the sacramental event."¹³

The Matter of the Sacrament

The matter of the sacrament is the things or materials and gestures (symbols) which are used in the sacramental celebrations. The matter of the sacrament involves natural things and gestures. Theologians differentiated the two kinds of matter of the sacrament: *materia remota* and *materia proxima*. *Materia remota* is the material thing which is taken from nature. The natural things like water (in baptism), oil of chrism (in Confirmation), bread and wine (in Eucharist) and oil (Anointing of the sick). *Materia proxima* is gestures which is conducted as a part of the celebration like: pouring water on the head of the recipient (Baptism), the anointing on the forehead with chrism (Confirmation), confession (Penance), the anointing on the forehead and hands of the sick (Anointing of the sick), the mutual exchange of vows between a man and a woman (Matrimony), and imposing hands over the candidate (Holy Order).¹⁴

The Form of the Sacrament

The form of the sacrament is the words which are spoken when the sacrament is being done. The spoken words (a form of the sacrament) give form and meaning to the 'visible words' of symbols and gestures of the sacrament.

"The words of the sacramental rite, especially those words that are considered the form of the sacrament, are most important. It is these spoken words that give form and meaning to the 'visible words' of symbols and gestures."¹⁵ It is for this reason that the Church provides the essential words, rather than

¹² Robert, E. Rodes Jr., "On Validity and Invalidity of Sacraments," *Theological Studies* 42, no. 4 (December 1981), 583.

¹³ Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 50-51.

¹⁴ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 134.

¹⁵ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 27.

relying upon the ability of the priest. That is why, as CCC states, “no sacramental rite may be modified or manipulated at the will of the minister or the community” (#1125). The sacraments do not “belong” to a particular minister or particular community; they belong to the Church because they are action of the Church.”¹⁶ The essential words in the sacramental celebrations that become the form of the sacraments are “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Baptism), “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Confirmation), Eucharistic prayer (Eucharist), “God, the Father,may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sin in the name of the Father, and of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Penance), and “Almighty Father, grant to this servant of yours the dignity of the priesthood. Renew within him the Spirit of holiness.” (Holy Order).¹⁷

The Minister of the Sacrament

A minister is required for each sacrament. He has to confer the sacrament with (according to) the intention of doing what the Church intends to do. This statement needs to be expounded more. The sacramental celebration requires a minister but the minister has to intend to do what the Church intend to do. The important statement here is the minister must do what the Church does. Why does the minister have to intend to do what the Church intend to do? The first reason is that the sacraments do not “belong” to a particular minister or particular community; they belong to the Church (the body of Christ) because they are actions of the Church.”¹⁸ And the second reason is that the main minister of the sacramental celebration is Christ himself. Therefore, the Church does not require much from her minister of the sacraments so that the sacrament to be valid and confer grace. It is enough that the minister has to intend to do ‘what the church does.’ “For the validity of the sacrament, a sacrament must be celebrated in such way that the Church would recognize the action as her action.”¹⁹

There are some consequences of this statement which are, the minister does not have to understand everything about the sacrament; the minister does not have to believe in every aspect of the church teaching regarding the sacrament, which is celebrated, and the minister does not have to be in ‘the state of grace’ himself. So, for the validity of the sacrament, it is enough that the minister has to intend to do what the Church does.²⁰

In the sacramental celebration, Christ himself does our salvation. “God’s action in the sacraments does not depend on the intention or holiness of the minister.”²¹ The Council of Trent in its decree on Sacraments, Can. 11 and 12 state that ‘one cannot deny that a minister who intends to do what the church does is not real minister of the sacrament; nor can one deny that a minister, in the state of serious sin, cannot truly minister the sacrament.’²²

In 430 St. Augustine argued with the Donatists who believed that a minister of the sacrament could not give to others what he did not have. This statement means, that if a minister is not in the sense of grace, he cannot give grace through the sacrament he celebrates. To respond to the Donatists, Augustine said that the grace of the sacrament comes through (from) Christ, not through the priest. *Cristus auctor sacramentorum*. St. Ambrose (d.397) asserted that Christ is the minister behind the sacrament.²³ The fundamental sacrament of God’s love for the world is Christ, so Christ is also the fundamental minister of

¹⁶ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 27.

¹⁷ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 135.

¹⁸ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 27.

¹⁹ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 22.

²⁰ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 22.

²¹ Osborne, *Sacramental Guidelines*, 32

²² Osborne, *Sacramental Guidelines*, 32.

²³ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 23.

every sacramental celebration. This is what the church means that the sacrament confers grace *ex opere operato*.²⁴ Schillebeeckx added that *ex opere operato* indicates that the efficacy of the sacramental grace does not depend on the moral and religious disposition of the minister.²⁵

The Recipient of the Sacrament

The Church does not require much from the recipient of the sacrament. The important thing is the recipient is not in an impediment situation. For example, a man whose wife is still alive but he wants to marry another woman. This situation causes an invalid celebration. The Church appoints the minimum requirements for the recipient. The recipient does not have to understand everything about the sacrament. It is enough for the recipient to know for what the sacrament is done. The recipient needs to have at least a minimum understanding of what he or she will celebrate.

For instance, the recipient of the sacrament of Penance does not need to know everything about the sacrament of penance. It is enough for the recipient to approach the sacrament freely and contritely. The penitent must intend to confess at least all the mortal sins, and he must have the intention of trying to do his best to avoid those sins in the future. It is enough for the boy and the girl who wants to marry need to know what they want to marry and the responsibility for their decision to marry. They have to state clearly that they love one another and they want to live together.²⁶

The main requirement for all the recipients of the sacraments is every recipient has to know what he wants to receive the sacrament freely. But there are two exceptions or special cases. The first one is about the infant baptism and the anointing of the sick. In these two cases, the recipient's free will is presumed. The free will of the infants is presumed by his or her parents who freely bring them to be baptized. The recipient of the anointing of the sick is presumed to have an 'open disposition.' The recipient mustn't have barriers or obstacles to receive the sacrament. Father Kurt Stasiak asserted that in these two extreme cases, the Church show an important truth about the sacrament. "Human weakness, even inability to understand that God is acting on our behalf or to respond to that action, does not prevent God from offering us grace and love."²⁷

Sacrament as a Special Way

From the definition of the sacrament as a sign of some sacred reality, instituted by Christ, for the sanctification of human beings, we can see something special about the sacrament. Sacraments deal with sacred reality that is God himself. Moreover, we realize that in the sacramental celebration, God himself act for our salvation. From the definition, it is also clear that the sacraments are for our sanctification, they confer grace. And the grace is God himself. In the history of salvation, we know that the Almighty God, because of His love, gave His only son to redeem us. In Jesus Christ, God's love was revealed to us. Jesus became the sacrament of God the Father through the incarnation, word became flesh and dwelt among us. Now, Jesus has gone back to the Father, but He is still with us through the Church, His mystical body. In His mystical body, He is present when the Church celebrates the sacraments. In the sacrament, Christ Himself is present and doing our salvation. But, how can we understand Christ's presence in the sacrament? And, how can the sacrament confer the grace it contains?

²⁴ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 23.

²⁵ Schillebeeckx, *The Church*, 84.

²⁶ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 24.

²⁷ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 25.

Christ is Present in the Sacramental Celebration

To understand the presence of Christ in sacramental celebration one has to consider that Christ is the risen one. In this notion, we do not think about the historical Jesus but the risen Christ, as He presents to his disciples through the closing door. Now, the risen Christ is still with the church in her sacramental celebrations. Kenan Osborne explained the presence of God in the sacramental celebration by saying, “In the sacrament, we indeed celebrate God’s presence, God’s forgiving presence, God’s forgiving grace.....” In a sacramental celebration, we are celebrating what God has been doing, what God is presently doing and what God will continue to do.”²⁸

Therefore, as Schillebeeckx said, a sacrament is primarily and fundamentally a personal act of Christ himself. “Each sacrament is the personal saving act of the risen Christ Himself but realized in the visible form of an official act of the Church. In other words, a sacrament is the saving action of Christ in the visible form of ecclesial action. To receive the sacrament of the Church in faith is therefore the same thing as to encounter Christ himself.”²⁹ The second Vatican Council, in its document ‘*Sacrosanctum Concilium*’, very clearly explained:

To accomplish so great work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross, but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power, He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is He who speaks when the holy scripture is read in the church. He is present, lastly, when the church prays and sings, for He promised: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20).”³⁰

The above statement of the Second Vatican Council expounded the core of liturgical celebration in which the sacraments become the focus of the celebration. By this teaching, it is clear enough that in the sacramental celebration, Christ himself is present and doing our salvation. However, how can one understand or accept that in the sacramental celebration, Christ is present? What is the form of the Christ’s presence? St. Augustine says,

The merits of Christ brought about salvation in a more hidden manner under the cover of visible things. The sacraments of the new law, on the other hand, both contain grace and confer it. A sacrament of the new law is a visible form of invisible grace.... Thus, the exterior washing which takes place when the water is poured in baptism represents that interior cleansing which takes away sin by the sacrament of baptism.³¹

Steven A. Long asserted, that Sacramental efficacy led us to consider God as creator. Through certain instrumental finite God brings about the real presence of the incarnate word. The sacraments are divine acts. Only God can bring something from nothing, can bring holiness from sin, and can make himself present in space and time through the finite substance.³² In his explanation about sacramental imagination,

²⁸ Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 65.

²⁹ Schillebeeckx, *The Church*, 54.

³⁰ SC no. 7.

³¹ Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, 39.

³² Steven A. Long, “The Efficacy of God’s Sacramental Presence,” *Nova et Vetera* 7, no 4, (2009), 871.

Anthony J. Godzieba stated that the finite can mediate the infinite and that all aspects of created being can mediate grace.³³ We do not experience God directly but in a sacramental way.³⁴

Sacraments Confer Grace

The thing that has to be explained first is what grace is. Kenan Osborne defined Grace as “a supernatural gift of God bestowed on us through the merits of Jesus Christ for our salvation.”³⁵ However, he continued, grace is not “a thing because talking about grace means to talk about God.”³⁶ According to Kurt Stasiak, “Grace is God’s favor; Grace is participation in God’s life.”³⁷ Moreover, he explained, “Grace is favor, and favor is a gracious, kind, friendly attitude’ or ‘an act evidencing such an attitude.’ Thus, Grace is not a thing that comes from God, but is an act of God that shows us something of who God is. To ‘receive grace’ is to experience God acting – for our good – in our lives.”³⁸ Philippe Beguerie and Claude Duchesneau added, “This grace is goodness and mercy. Grace is also the gift that God gives to men and women: it is the fruit of generosity, the benediction that he gives them. For Christians, grace is the gift that God gives when He makes us participants in his life. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit is the gift par excellence.”³⁹

From the above opinions, one can conclude that grace is not to be understood as a thing, but as a participation in God’s life. To receive grace means to experience God’s presence. In other words, one can say that to receive grace means a human being is enabled to enter communion with God. The power of sin has separated human beings from God, but God’s mercy enables us to be reunited with Him. That is grace. And, if grace is understood as experiencing God’s presence, then sacramental celebration has a double function which is to present Christ and lead the believer to experience the presence of Christ.

How the sacrament confers grace needs to be considered. The council of Trent affirmed that the sacraments did give grace.⁴⁰ But, how do sacraments confer grace? Many theological theories have been offered. The three most popular theories during centuries are the theory of instrumental causality, moral causality and occasional causality.⁴¹ Instrumental causality is also called *ex opere operato* (proposed by Thomas Aquinas). According to this theory, the sacraments are the reservoirs of and the pipeline for grace. “God ‘place’ grace in the sacraments and the sacraments make that grace available to us.”⁴² That is why this theory is called instrumental causality, ‘by the power of the rite.’ How can it be understood?

Ex opere operato, is the Latin phrase that means, “by the work worked.” This technical theological expression means that “if the right rites are rightly done,” then grace is conferred through the very celebration of the sacrament.⁴³ This concept is sometimes misunderstood as magic action because people think, “Only by doing a certain action, grace is poured out to the one who celebrates it.” The proper understanding of *ex opera operato* is the “guarantee that when sacraments were approached in faith (the

³³ Anthony J. Godzieba, “The Catholic Sacramental Imagination and the Access / Excess of Grace,” *Theology Review*, (August, 2008), 21.

³⁴ Osborne, *Sacramental Guidelines*, 30.

³⁵ Kenan B. Osborne, *Sacramental Theology, A General Introduction*, (Paulist Press, New York, 1988), 49.

³⁶ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 30.

³⁷ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 31.

³⁸ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 31. See also R.R. Ekstrom, *The New Concise Catholic Dictionary*, (St. Paul Press, Mumbay, 2005), 133.

³⁹ Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, 40.

⁴⁰ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 33.

⁴¹ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 34.

⁴² Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 34. See also Osborne, *Sacramental Guidelines*, 26.

⁴³ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 38.

correct disposition) and if the ritual is celebrated properly by the minister, God's grace is conferred and our relationship with Christ and His Church is affirmed."⁴⁴

Schillebeeckx stated that the term *ex opere operato* will be understood more clearly if we recall and agree that "the sacraments are the saving mystery of the worship of Christ himself in ecclesial visibility; the mystery of worship, to which the infallible response is the effective bestowal of grace. This connection is now present in the sacraments, expressed by the term *ex opere operato* or 'by the power of the rite.'"⁴⁵ "*Ex opere operato* efficacy means that this act is Christ's act."⁴⁶

The second theory is moral causality, taught by John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan theologian. According to this theory, "the sacramental celebration reminds God of his love for humankind; God then gives grace directly to those asking for it."⁴⁷ In this case, the sacramental rite is similar to a prayer, a pleading with God to produce grace.⁴⁸

The third theory about how the sacraments confer grace is occasional causality (it is also called intentional causality), proposed by L. Billot (1931) a modern Scholastic theologian. Billot suggested, "By celebrating the sacrament, people became disposed – their hearts are opened – to receive grace."⁴⁹ In this theory, Billot wanted to say that sacramental celebration can help us to experience the grace that was offered to us by God.

The Seven Sacraments and the Grace They Contained

The seven sacraments grew in history. The sacraments had been practised before they were defined. Maurice Jourjon said, "The sacraments were born before there was a term which to describe them."⁵⁰ Besides baptism and Eucharist, some practical actions showed that the other sacraments had been practised by the early Christians. Matt, 18: 15-18 and 1 Cor. 5 proved the practice of the sacrament of penance (reconciliation), Matt, 16:18 and 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17 pointed out the sacrament of Holy Orders, Acts 8:17 pointed out the sacrament of Confirmation, James 5:14 was about the anointing of the sick, Matt, 19:4 and Eph. 5:32 were about the sacrament of Matrimony.⁵¹

During centuries before Peter Lombard (1150), it was not clear how many sacraments there were. Abelard who distinguished between the sacramenta majora (baptism, eucharist, orders, penitence) and the sacramenta minora (bless water, ashes), registered also blessed water and ashes as sacrament. Peter Lombard examined all the sacred rites and finally decreed that only seven rites can be called sacraments because they cause grace based on the consideration of sign, institution and efficacy. Since then, the number of the seven sacraments has been established. The first council which named the seven sacraments was the fourth Lateran Council. But, finally, in the council of Trent, the seven sacraments were defined, as no more and no less.⁵² In the following list, I want to point out the seven sacraments and the special grace they signified.⁵³

1. Baptism is a sacrament of God's gift of life in its all-created dimension, both natural and supernatural. Through this sacrament, the recipient receives indelible baptismal character

⁴⁴ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 39.

⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx, *The Church*, 70.

⁴⁶ Schillebeeckx, *The Church*.

⁴⁷ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 34.

⁴⁸ Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 54.

⁴⁹ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 34.

⁵⁰ Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, 55.

⁵¹ Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, 55.

⁵² Beguerie, *How to Understand the Sacrament*, 59.

⁵³ This explanation is taken from Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 45-46.

- and baptismal grace includes forgiveness of all sins, birth into a new life in Christ and incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ.
2. Confirmation is a sacrament of God's gift of life in its all-created dimension, both natural and supernatural. Through this sacrament, one receives a spiritual mark and perfection of baptismal grace for Christian ministry.
 3. The Eucharist is a sacrament of Jesus' fellowship with all his followers, men and women; a fellowship that is saving, reconciling, and promising. Through this sacrament, the recipient experiences the risen Christ in Eucharistic species and the grace of communion with God and the whole Church.
 4. Reconciliation is the sacrament of Jesus' forgiveness to all of his followers. Through this sacrament, the recipient is reconciled with God and his Church. He or she will be reintegrated into the communion with God through the Church.
 5. Anointing of the sick is the sacrament of Jesus' love for his followers even when they are sick, a love that is with them down to the end of their lives if it is necessary. Through this sacrament, the sick is united with Christ's passion and he is cured from sinfulness and bodily illness. Marriage or matrimony is a sacrament of Jesus' love for the Church, which manifests in Christian marriage, and the Church's love for Jesus also manifests in Christian Marriage.
 6. Holy Orders is a sacrament of Jesus' continuing ministry of service within the Church. Through this sacrament, the recipient receives the indelible character of a sacred power and configuration to Christ the head as priest, prophet and king.

Sacrament as Special Way to Encounter Christ

I want to begin this part with the story about the visit of the magi.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." ...On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and myrrh" (Mat. 2:1-11).

To meet Jesus, the New King, the three wise men had to depart from home and go for a long journey. They had to divest their selves of everything that might protect them from meeting the new king. Indeed, they not only had left their hometown, but also, they had left themselves and went on an exhausting journey. They had prepared themselves for the meeting. Their gifts of gold and incense and myrrh just revealed their pure heart. They had come to give Jesus their homage.

The three wise men (Magi) had shown something about how to encounter God. To encounter means to come (or to go) to meet someone. Encountering others, as Martin Buber said, one must be aware or realize himself.⁵⁴ In the encounter, one has to realize that his existence is for others and that the existence of others is an invitation for him to do something. The existence of others in the process of encountering becomes an appeal to do something good. Encounters between people suppose that everyone who gets involved in it has to confirm one another.

"Encounter takes place not only among humans but also between people and God."⁵⁵ And, in the sacramental celebration, the encounter (the meeting) between God and men occurs. In the sacramental celebration, Christ is present to do our salvation. The sacraments are the ways through which one can meet

⁵⁴ Anselm Grün, *Prayer as Encounter*, (St. Paul, Makati, 2005), 2.

⁵⁵ Grün, *Prayer as Encounter*, 2.

and undergo what he is doing for our salvation. To get in touch in the process of encounter with Christ in the sacramental celebration, we have to become like the magi who left their egos and came to Jesus and did him homage.

How to Receive Sacrament

I want to begin this part with the invitation of Jesus, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mat, 11:28). This statement means that God’s grace is abundant, but we have to come to Him, we have to believe in Him. God is always ready to forgive everyone who has sinned against Him. God is always ready to give forgiveness, strength, healing, and love if we come to him. “Come to God” means we have to entrust our whole life to Him, and do what He wants us to do. There is only one requirement to receive God’s grace which is to believe in Him and repent.

It has been explained that the sacraments confer grace because Christ is the primary actor, and minister of the sacrament, but the fruitfulness of the sacramental grace received, depends on the recipient’s disposition. “Grace is a gift from God, given freely at God’s initiative unmerited and undeserved by us.... But this gift does not come cheap: Grace is, in one sense, a gift given with strings attached.”⁵⁶ Kurt Stasiak gave more explanation, “From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated following the intention of the church, the power of Christ and His Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruit of the sacraments also depends on the disposition of the one who receives them.”⁵⁷ Further, the Second Vatican Council stressed that the liturgical celebration of the sacrament may be able to produce its full effect if the recipient has a proper disposition. “But so that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper disposition, that their mind should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain”⁵⁸ (2 Cor, 6:1).

The phrase *ex opere operantis* means ‘by the work of the worker.’ This phrase refers to the person receiving the sacrament. “The sacraments are effective – they confer grace – by the work worked (*Ex opere operato*), but they (the sacraments) are fruitful in a person’s life – only to the extent that we take advantage of them and put them to use.”⁵⁹

Gratia sponit naturam. Grace supposed nature. God’s grace is abundant, but it becomes fruitful if we have a good disposition. In the parable of the sower, it is said that the seeds which fell on good soil yielded a hundred times more than was sown. God’s grace will be fruitful in our lives if we humble our hearts before him and do His commandments. Saint Augustine said, “Badman receives sacrament but not grace; the right man, however, receives sacrament and grace.”⁶⁰ By saying this, Saint Augustine meant that to receive the sacrament and its fruitfulness, we have to be good men. Being good men means we have to humble our hearts and believe in Him. “Whoever believes...will be saved” (Mark, 16:16).

CONCLUSION

The sacraments are the special ways to encounter Christ because, in the sacraments, Christ is present and doing our salvation. And, because of Christ’s presence in the sacrament, they confer grace. Baptism is the way to receive God’s gift of life. We become God’s children. Through Confirmation, one receives a spiritual mark and perfection of baptismal grace for Christian ministry. Through the Eucharist, we

⁵⁶ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 32.

⁵⁷ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 25.

⁵⁸ SC, no. 11

⁵⁹ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 40.

⁶⁰ Paul F. Palmer, “The Theology of the Res et Sacramentum,” in Sullivan, C. Stephen, *Reading in Sacramental Theology*, (Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1965), 106.

experience the risen Christ and we receive the grace of communion with God and the whole Church. Through Reconciliation, we are forgiven and we are reintegrated in communion with God through the Church. In Anointing of the Sick, we experience Jesus' love for us even when we are sick. In it, we are united with Christ until the end of our life. In matrimony, we experience Christ's love that strengthens us to love one another. In Holy Orders, God gives us the grace of sanctification for our ministry.

God's grace in the sacramental celebration is abundant. "Grace is a gift from God, given freely at God's initiative unmerited and undeserved by us.... But this gift does not come cheap."⁶¹ So that the grace has full effects on the life of the recipient, the faithful must come to it with proper disposition. To have a fruitful effect on one's life, the sacraments must be received in a good (proper) disposition and the grace of the sacraments must be put into practice. In the sacramental celebration, said Paul, "As you just received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and build up in Him, strengthened in faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col, 2:6-7). By saying this, Paul wanted to say that in Christ we receive grace. As a result of the receiving of grace, we have to leave according to the grace we have received. There is a *gabe* (grace). But, we should not forget that grace demands an *aufgabe* (duty). Sacraments are special ways to encounter Christ. In the sacramental celebration, Christ invites us to come to Him and we will be saved. "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mat, 11:28).

Sacraments are the special ways to encounter Christ. They are "doors to the sacred," the Holy One.⁶² The sacraments are easy to take. They facilitate us to encounter God. They enable us to experience God in our life. Through the sacraments, God, in Christ, is ready to meet us. Through the sacraments, all believers can be brought to experience God's presence. The sacraments are the instruments to encounter Christ.

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⁶¹ Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 32.

⁶² Stasiak, *Sacramental Theology*, 16.

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