Ordinances and Sacraments

• Definitions
• What constitutes a sacrament?
• Sacramentalism and sacerdotalism
• Why do we define ordinances or sacraments?

Definitions

• Important acts of the believing community which represent and express central truths about our relationship with God and our relationship with others in the community.
• Controversies over how they represent these truths.
• Grenz: community acts of commitment.

What Constitutes a Sacrament?

• Sacramentum = soldier’s loyalty oath or good faith money.
  – Soon overshadowed by idea of conveying grace.
  – First worked out in detail by Augustine.
What Constitutes a Sacrament?

- Definition by Hugh of St. Victor (12th c.):
  - “A sacrament is a physical or material element set before the external senses, representing by likeness, signifying by its institution, and containing by sanctification, some invisible and spiritual grace.”
  - Material object (bread, wine, water)
  - Likeness (resemblance to things signified)
  - Authorization (instituted by Christ)
  - Efficacy (contain and impart grace)

- Catholic church recognizes seven.
  - Baptism, Eucharist, confirmation, penance
  - Marriage, holy orders, extreme unction (anointing of the sick)
  - Practice preceded theology.

- Common definition: an outward, visible sign of an inward, spiritual grace.

- Luther redefined sacrament and reduced the number.
  - Two essential characteristics: Word of God and physical sign.
  - Only two: baptism and Eucharist.
- Most Protestants today recognize these two.
  - Some don’t observe any (Quakers, Salvation Army).
  - Mid-Acts Dispensational churches observe communion only.
Sacramentalism & Sacerdotalism

- Catholic view of sacraments rests on sacramentalism and sacerdotalism.
  - Sacramentalism: these acts infuse divine grace into recipients (means of grace). Grace is conveyed *ex opere operato* (from the work done) if the recipients don’t resist.
  - Orthodox: these are mysteries.
  - Sacerdotalism: from *sacerdos*, priest. Ordained priest necessary for sacraments to work. Based on sacramental view of ordination.

- Reformation groups attacked both sacramentalism and sacerdotalism.
  - Luther: faith is necessary.
  - Luther: clergy have no special spiritual power.
  - Luther: acts are still means of grace.
  - Anabaptists, Baptists used “ordinance.”
    - Something ordained or established by Christ.
    - Emphasizes element of obedience.
    - Ordinances can be occasions of grace.

- Grenz: ordinances - we do them out of obedience.
- But concept of sacrament has value, too.
  - We declare our loyalty (*sacramentum*).
  - We get benefit from them.
  - They strengthen our faith.
  - The Spirit has the opportunity to “facilitate our participation in the reality the acts symbolize.”
  - They help form our identity as God’s people.
Why Do We Define Sacraments?

• Why separate some acts from others and call them sacraments or ordinances?
  – Idea that something special happens.
  – Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed say it does.
• Why do non-sacramental traditions isolate these acts from other acts we do?
  – Grenz: commanded by Christ, symbol of the heart of the gospel.
  – We let Catholicism set the framework.

Why Do We Define Sacraments?

• Which ordinances/sacraments we practice rests on tradition rather than Scripture.
  – Despite Jesus’ command, most Christians don’t practice footwashing.
  – There are no biblical or theological reasons for this.
  – The reason is that the church stopped doing it.
  – It may have disappeared along with the love feast.