

SACRAMENTAL RITES  
IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX  
CHURCH

*2nd Edition*

His Grace Bishop Mettaous

Abbot Of EL-SYRIAN Monastery

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## Foreword

I am delighted to have the blessing of presenting this important ritual encyclopedia to the beloved Coptic readers.

His Grace the great Bishop Mettaous is one of the prominent scholars of Ritual Theology in our contemporary era, and all his writings are useful, necessary references, as they include a scientific spirit, an elaborate research and spiritual gratification. The church meant the rite to be a living expression of enlightened thinking and a spirit sparkling by divine love.

The “Sacramental Rites” encyclopedia is an urgent need for our Coptic Orthodox Library, as there are no elaborate references now, about this enlivening topic. So here comes this encyclopedia, a gratification for the church’s children and an enrichment to the Coptic Library, at the right time, led by the Holy Spirit of God.

I do not need to elaborate about the gratifying, attractive style of His Grace Bishop Mettaous who satisfied us in his books, such as “Spirituality of the Rites of the Holy Liturgy” and “The Eminence of Monasticism” as well as many other spiritual, theological and ritual topics.

We perceive a blessed, educational revival in the era of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, by books, cassettes and video films, shared by many bishops, priests, monks, servants, led by His Holiness, his direct shepherdhood and unique example.

May the Lord bless these efforts and gratify us with more writings by His Grace Bishop Mettaous, by the prayers of

his Holiness Pope Shenouda III. May the grace of the Lord  
bless us.

*Bishop Moussa*  
General Bishop



*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
one God Amen.*

## **Introduction To The First Edition**

The seven Sacraments of the Church are the channels by which we receive the graces and blessings of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has existed in the church since the day of Pentecost, when He dwelt in it according to the Lord's promise: ***"I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth when the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him for He dwells with you, and will be in you"*** (John 14:16,17).

The Holy Spirit works in the church through the Sacraments, giving us His gifts, blessings and comfort, and teaches us and guides us to the way of truth. ***"But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you"*** (John 14:26).

## **The Seven Sacraments of the Church are:**

- 1- Sacrament of Baptism.
- 2- Sacrament of Confirmation
- 3- Sacrament of Confession
- 4- Sacrament of Eucharist
- 5- Sacrament of Unction of Sick
- 6- Sacrament of Matrimony
- 7- Sacrament of Priesthood.

The Lord Christ instituted all these Sacraments, and the Holy Bible mentions them in detail.

### **1- Sacrament of Baptism**

Instituted by the Lord Jesus by His Baptism in the River Jordan and by His words to Nicodemus saying: *“Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3), and by saying to our fathers the Apostles, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28:19).

### **2- Sacrament of Confirmation**

Instituted by Lord Jesus when He said: *“If anyone thirsts let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”. But this He*

*spoke concerning the Spirit whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified”* (John 7:37-39). About the Sacrament of Confirmation, in the Book of Acts it is mentioned : *“Now when the Apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 8:14-17).

The Holy Spirit was received by the laying of hands, but when the number of believers increased, the Apostles were unable to keep track of each individual to lay upon them their hands in order to receive the Holy Spirit. So they made the Myron out of certain oils mixed with spices; the same spices which were brought to the tomb to embalm the shrouded Christ. It was approved for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and allowed the priests to anoint the newly baptised by the Myron to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in them, in order to become temples of the Holy Spirit.

### 3- Sacrament Of Repentance

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He said to His pure disciples: *“Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in*

*heaven*” (Matthew: 18:18), and after Resurrection He said, *“As the Father has sent me, I also send you and 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: 21-22).

#### 4- Sacrament Of The Eucharist (Thanksgiving)

Instituted by the Lord Jesus in the upper room in Zion, on the night of His passion when He took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to His disciples saying, *“Take eat, this is My Body. Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it and He said to them “This is My Blood of the new covenant which is shed for many”* (Mark 14: 22-24).

#### 5- Sacrament Of The Unction Of The Sick

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He said to His disciples, *“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers”* (Matthew 10:8), and, *“Whatever city you enter ... heal the sick who are there”* (Luke 10:8). The Apostles then put the Lord’s words into practice : *“They anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them”* (Mark 6:13). Our teacher St. James the Apostle advised believers to practice it, by saying, *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has*



*committed sins, he will be forgiven*” (James 5:14-15).

## 6- **Sacrament of The Holy Matrimony**

Instituted by the Lord Jesus who blessed the Sacrament of Matrimony by attending the wedding of Cana of Galilee, where, ***“He manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him”*** (John 2: 1-11). Also, teacher St. Paul says, ***“This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Churches”*** (Ephesians 5:32). This means that the physical union between a man and his wife is a sign and symbol of a greater spiritual matter, that is, of the unity of heart and soul, resembling the unity of Christ and the Church.

## 7- **Sacrament of Priesthood**

Instituted by the Lord Jesus when He chose His twelve disciples among many of His followers, and called them Apostles. The selection was accomplished after a whole night of prayer, when the Lord Jesus went out to the mountain to pray (Luke 6: 12-13), and then sent them to preach saying, ***“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”*** (Matthew 10:7). The Lord said to them, ***“I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain”*** (John 15:16). He gave them the authority saying, ***“Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”*** (Matthew 18:18). After the resurrection, the Lord, ***“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 2:23), and to them only, He said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Matthew: 28:19-20). He gave the mystery of His Holy Body and Blood only to them saying, *“Do this in remembrance of Me”* (Luke 22:19).

### **Definition of a Church Sacrament**

The Church Sacrament is an invisible grace we receive by practicing a visible rite, and a visible sign or substance performed by a priest.

- 1- In the Baptism the substance is water by which we receive the second birth from Water and Spirit.
- 2- In the Confirmation the substance is the oil of Myron, by which the Holy Spirit dwells in us.
- 3- The sign of the Sacrament of Confession is the confessing person, who accepts the prayer of absolution at the end of Confession to gain forgiveness of sins.
- 4- The substance of the Sacrament of Communion is the bread and wine, by which we eat the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Emmanuel our God.

- 5- The substance of the Sacrament of Unction of sick is oil, by which we receive physical and psychological remedy.
- 6- The sign of the Sacrament of Matrimony is the bride and groom who receive the prayers, so the Holy Spirit dwells upon them and unites them in body and spirit.
- 7- The sign of the Sacrament of Priesthood is the ordained person, who accepts the prayers of the Sacrament of Priesthood and the laying of hands for a certain priestly rank, to gain the grace for starting church services - whether Sacraments or authority for various church matters and management.

### **Redemptive and Non-Redemptive Sacraments**

There are four redemptive Sacraments out of the Seven Sacraments. They are necessary for eternal salvation, and every believer should practice them in order to gain eternal salvation. These are :

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1- Baptism    | 2- Confirmation |
| 3- Confession | 4- Communion    |

The other three Sacraments are non-redemptive and unnecessary for eternal salvation.

- 5- Sacrament of Unction of the Sick  
Given for the remedy of those who are physically or psychologically unwell only.
- 6- Sacrament of Matrimony  
For those who want to marry for the purpose of sharing lives and bearing children. However, there are many monks and nuns, and those who live celibate lives who gain eternal life with merit.
- 7- Sacrament of Priesthood  
Reserved only for those who are ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop. However, the majority of the Congregation have no priestly ranks, but are called for redemption and eternal life.

### **Physical Medicine and Spiritual Medicine:**

Physical medicine has three classes of medicine:-

- Preventive Medicine: like vaccination given to children against smallpox, paralysis and others, to protect them against these diseases.
- Curative Medicine: prescribed for a person after having had the doctor diagnose the reason for illness.
- Supplementary Medicine: various vitamins, prescribed by the doctor to strengthen the human body, giving energy and immunity against a disease once more.

The same applies to the soul in that resembles the body; it is

prone to spiritual diseases like sin, satanic warfare's and others.

Our great physician, the Lord Jesus made the church our spiritual hospital, and the priest as its spiritual physician, as St. John Chrysostom once said, "Are you a sinner? Go to the Church which is a hospital not a court". In the church you will find the spiritual physician who is the priest. Tell him your sins, as he accurately examines everything and prescribes the appropriate cure.

The spiritual medicines are the Seven Sacraments of the Church, which are preventive, curative and supplementary.

- PREVENTIVE

- ✠ Sacrament of Myron: by which the Holy Spirit dwells to fortify against sin and evil, helps to overcome sin and provides victory in spiritual struggle.

- ✠ Sacrament of Matrimony: protects the couple from falling into the sin of adultery.

- CURATIVE

- ✠ Sacrament of Baptism: provides the cure from the original sin for children, and from the committed sins of those older.

- ✠ Sacrament of Confession and Repentance: for those who repent and confess, this sacrament provides the cure and forgiveness of their sins.

✠ Sacrament of Unction of the Sick: provides cure for those who are physically and psychologically ill, caused by sin.

• SUPPLEMENTARY

✠ Sacrament of Communion:- after receiving the Holy Body and precious Blood of the Lord Jesus, we gain power to help us in overcoming the evil one.

✠ Sacrament of Priesthood:- Priesthood gives the priest grace and power in his struggle as he strives to be our example in attitude, and not be a stumbling block, but rather to keep himself pure from sin, and accept the great rank of priesthood in reverence. He should remember what our teacher St. Paul said: ***“We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men”*** (1 Corinthians 4:9).

**An Unperishable Feature**

Certain Church Sacraments are performed with an unperishable feature, so must not be repeated again at any time.

✠ By Baptism we are made children of God our Father, and this is unperishable.

✠ By Chrism we are made soldiers of our great King, and this is unperishable.

✠ By Priesthood we are made servants and priests of the great High Priest, and this is unperishable.

But the rest of the Sacraments are performed repeatedly as needed.

### **Conditions To Accomplish The Seven Sacraments**

For every Sacrament of the seven, there are three essential and necessary conditions in order to administer them :

- ✠ An adequate substance for the Sacrament like water for Baptism, bread and wine for the Sacrament of Communion, oil for the Unction of the Sick, and so on.
- ✠ An ordained priest by the laying on of the apostolic hand.
- ✠ Invocation of the Holy Spirit by the priest, by praying certain prayers for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit and sanctification of the Sacrament.

That is why the Sacraments must be administered in a correct official way according to the order given by God, as our Good Saviour instituted and organised them, placing the adequate substance and specific prayers for every Sacrament, placed by the fathers guided by the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament is not true and effective for the believers unless it is administered correctly according to God's will, and the placement of the fathers guided by the Holy Spirit, and handed over by the Church and Holy Councils.

These pages, dear reader, are a detailed study in the rituals and prayers of the Seven Church Sacraments in our Coptic

Orthodox Church, according to the original situation as placed by our fathers the saints, and it is a humble trial to explain these rites and prayers, clarifying the wisdom of their organisation, and also a trial to manifest the spirituality of these rituals and specific prayers of the Seven Sacraments.

We pray to God to make it a success and a blessing for every person studying these rites and every reader of this book, through the intercessions of our pure mother St. Mary and the prayers of our blessed father Pope Shenouda the III, Amen.

*Bishop Mettaous*

Bishop and Abbot of El-Syrian Monastery





*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
one God Amen.*

## **Introduction To The Second Edition**

The First Edition of this book was published in 1991, in two parts, by the Bishopric of Youth in Egypt. As stock ran out, it was requested that this book be republished.

Now we present it to you, dear reader, in a new edition, as we collected the two parts in one edition to facilitate its acquirement.

We hope the book satisfies you in its new edition, and may you help us by your prayers so the book becomes a blessing and benefit for whoever reads it.

Through the intercessions of our mother St. Mary and all the saints, and the prayers of our blessed father Pope Shenouda III and his partner in the Apostolic service, our honoured father His Grace Bishop Moussa, the General Bishop of Youth Affairs. May the grace of the Lord blesses us, Amen.

**Bishop Mettaous**  
Bishop of El-Syrian Monastery  
only takes place once.