

*Against Christianity*  
**Peter J. Leithart**  
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**Week 3: Chapter 3**  
**“Against Sacraments”**

In the previous chapter, Leithart argued that a community’s language, story, and rituals have political consequences that take place in space and time. Every culture has its own ways of making sense of reality — its myths — and the various feasts, habits, and practices — rituals — of a culture enact those myths. These rituals are, in fact, what make a common culture. In this chapter, Leithart takes a closer look at ritual and one of the aspects most central to the worshiping life of the Church: the sacraments. For this conversation, Leithart constrains sacraments to refer to the two rituals instituted by Christ: baptism and the Lord’s supper. However, even though sacraments are rituals of the Church — and Leithart is *for* rituals — he titles his chapter “*Against Sacraments*” and says that he is “against sacraments to the degree that he is against Christianity.” Leithart points out how sacraments can be misconstrued as a type of religious paraphernalia that is super-added to the Church’s alternative account about the whole of reality. If this is true, than Christian ritual becomes a precious spectacle of a few people rather than a common participation in reality.

**Opening Question:**

How are rituals perceived among your peers and within the communities you are a part of (e.g., work, special interest groups, sports teams, church, family)? Does this perception change depending on the context? Does it make any difference if a ritual is indirect, individually chosen, or unspoken versus intended, commonly inherited, or explicit?

**Study Questions:**

1. In the first few pages of this chapter, Leithart discusses some essential features of ritual as well as some defining characteristics of modernity and postmodernity. What are these features and how are they opposed to each other?
2. Sections 6 through 8 offer some tendencies among evangelicals that make it difficult for them to grasp the significance of baptism and the Lord’s supper. Do you agree with Leithart’s description? How are these tendencies related to modernity?
3. In section 12, Leithart reveals why he is *against* sacraments. He reasons: “If ‘sacraments’ are completely different sorts of things from the signs and rituals of cultural life, then Christianity is something completely different from culture.” What does he mean by this and how does Leithart think the Church should relate sacraments to the rest of the world (i.e., cultural life and nature)? What is lost if the Church fails to make this connection?
4. Leithart says that “the new creation must take a social form.” If we are to imagine the Church as a new creation and rituals as social forms, how might we avoid the danger of our rituals degenerating into “postmodern spectacle”? How can (and how have) baptism and the Lord’s supper function as social forms that avoid this pitfall?