

Encountering Christ in the Sacraments

A Primary Source Reader

Robert Feduccia Jr.



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The publishing team included Gloria Shahin, editorial director; Joanna Dailey, development editor. Prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the production departments of Saint Mary's Press.

Cover Image @ The Crosiers / Gene Plaisted, OSC

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Printed in the United States of America

1362

ISBN 978-1-59982-046-0, print

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Introduction

Dip. Scratch, scratch, scratch. Dip. Scratch, scratch. Stop.

Brother Declan laid down his quill pen and squinted at the bright sunlight streaming through the windows of the scriptorium (“writing room”) of his medieval monastery. He straightened his back and massaged his wrists and fingers. Copying manuscripts was arduous, time-consuming, and tedious work. The pen, basically a goose feather with a sharpened point, could hold only a drop of ink—enough to make a few letters on the parchment, but no more. It required constant replenishment from the ink bottle—much as we, thought Declan, require constant replenishment from the fountains of salvation, the Sacraments. (He happened to be copying a manuscript from the great scholar and sacramental theologian Peter Lombard.)

Declan closed his eyes for a moment and recalled what his old abbot often said: “Brothers, you do not do this work for our monastery alone. Your manuscripts may be sent with missionaries to far-off places to help evangelize new Christians. Through your work, you are preserving the Sacred Tradition of the Church for future generations.”

I hope, Declan thought as he once again picked up his pen, that future generations appreciate what we are doing. Dip. Scratch, scratch, scratch. Dip. Scratch, scratch. Dip. . . .

As readers of this book of primary source excerpts on the Sacraments, we are only one of the “future generations” for which the original authors, and copyists, labored. As Jesus himself said in the Gospel of John, “Others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work” (John 4:38). Thanks to those who have treasured these texts before us, we hold in our hands a small selection of a vast library, scattered throughout the world (and on the Internet, as well), of Church teaching and reflection on the Sacraments.

The liturgy and the Sacraments are at the core of the Church's existence. They have shaped the Church's life since the time of the Apostles and have been continually pondered and discovered anew by succeeding generations. Some of the excerpts you will read in this text are old. These include the excerpts from Saint John Damascene, Saint Cyprian of Carthage, Peter Lombard, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Catherine of Siena. Many are Church documents from the twentieth century, particularly from the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which describe the renewal of sacramental rites within the context of the renewal of Christian life. Excerpts from contemporary theologians echo and expand on these themes.

The Sacraments are life-giving, because in them we encounter the Risen Christ. To be truly understood, they must be lived. With this in mind, a contemporary story about a personal encounter with Christ, either autobiographical or illustrated in fiction, has been included for each Sacrament. Perhaps these stories of personal encounter will inspire you to live the Sacraments more deeply in your own life.

When Augustine (354–430) (before he was a saint) was deep in thought one day, he heard a child chanting, "Take up and read. Take up and read." He opened the Scriptures and began his journey to encounter Christ. What more need be said? Take up and read!

Part 1

The Sacramental Nature of the Church

1 Sacrament: Visible Sign, Invisible Grace

Introduction

The Seven Sacraments are gifts to us from Jesus. In the Seven Sacraments, Jesus gave the Church seven unique ways to encounter him. Baptism, Anointing of the Sick, and, of course, the Eucharist are examples of such encounters. Over the years, the Church, in study and prayer, has reflected on these and the other Sacraments. The result of this reflection is an area of theology called sacramental theology. This chapter has a reading that has been uniquely influential in the area of sacramental theology. When Peter Lombard (c. 1100–1160) wrote the fourth book of *The Sentences* in the twelfth century, he gave the Church an understanding of the meaning of **sacrament** that would influence the Church's official teaching on the Sacraments, later defined at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century (1545–1563), and so would provide a language for sacramental theology that endures today.

In this reading you will see that Lombard defines what a sacrament is. In the famous *Baltimore Catechism*, most commonly used

in the United States in the early and mid-twentieth century, *Sacrament* was defined as “an outward sign, instituted by Christ to give grace.” As you read Lombard's definition, you will notice that his definition of *Sacrament* was a model. In addition to his

Sacrament An efficacious and visible sign of God's grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The Seven Sacraments are Baptism, the Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders.

definition of a Sacrament, he also inspired sacramental theology by providing the Church with a clarification of the meaning of the Sacraments and an understanding about the words and things used in sacramental celebrations.

Lombard explains that there are three reasons Christ gave the Sacraments to the Church: (1) humiliation, (2) erudition, and (3) exercitation (ex-ser-see-TAY-shun). Humans are humbled because the Sacraments are made of simple things that could be considered beneath our dignity to use. Bread, wine, water, and oil are all simple things, but God has chosen to use them for our salvation. It requires humility on our part to give ourselves over to them. The second reason, erudition, has to do with matters of great learning. As we meditate and reflect on the Sacraments, God teaches us about himself. Finally, Lombard explains, the Sacraments were instituted for exercitation. This word roughly means “exercise.” The Sacraments are activities that engage both the body and the soul. Because they are actions, they hold our attention and keep us from distractions.

Another important distinction with lasting effect upon sacramental theology is Lombard’s description of the Sacraments as involving words and things. Today’s sacramental theology uses the term *matter* for “things.” These things, or matter, are the materials used in the Sacraments. For example, water is used as the material, the matter, in Baptism. The words, or the form, used in Baptism is, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” When the proper things and the correct words are used by the appropriate minister with the intention to do what the Church does in celebrating a Sacrament, the Sacrament is said to be valid. This is the official teaching of the Church, and Lombard held a place of particular influence in crafting that teaching as he reflected on the Sacraments.

Because of its medieval language and structure, this is a challenging reading; but without the sacramental theology of Peter Lombard, any study of primary sources on the topic of the Sacraments would be severely lacking.

Excerpt from *The Sentences: Book 4*

By Peter Lombard

Chapter I

On the Sacraments.

For the Samaritan, appropriating the wounded (man), for his curing employed the bindings of the Sacraments, (cf. Luke 10:10) because against the wounds of original and actual sin God has instituted the remedies of the Sacraments. Concerning which there first occurs four (questions) to be considered: what is a Sacrament; why (was it) instituted; in what (things) does it consist and is confected; and what is the distance between the Sacraments of the Old and New Law.

Chapter II

What is a Sacrament.

“A Sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing.”¹ However a sacrament is also said (to be) a *sacred secret*, just as there is said (to be) a sacrament of the Divinity, so that a sacrament is a *sacred thing signifying* and the *sacred thing signified* [*sacrum signans et sacrum signatum*]; but now one deals with the sacrament, according to which it is a *sign* [signum]. — Likewise,² “A Sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace.”

“A Sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace.”

Chapter III

What is a sign.

“A sign, however, is the thing beside the **species**, which it bears upon the senses, causing something else out of itself to come into (one’s) thinking.”³

Chapter IV

How sign and Sacrament differ.

“Of signs, however, some are *natural*, as smoke signifying fire; others

given”;⁴ and of those which are *given*, certain ones are Sacraments, certain ones not. For every Sacrament is a sign, but not conversely. A Sacrament bears the **similitude** of that thing, of which it is a sign. For if the Sacraments did not have the similitude of the things, of which they are Sacraments, they would not *properly* be said (to be) Sacraments.”

For Sacrament is properly said (to be) that which is so great a sign of the grace of God and the form of invisible grace, that it bears its image and exists as (its) cause. Therefore not only for the grace of signifying have the Sacraments been instituted, but also (for that) of sanctifying. For those things which have only been instituted for the grace of signifying, are solely signs, and not Sacraments; just as were the carnal sacrifices and ceremonial observances of the Old Law, which never could make the ones offering just; because, as the Apostle says, (Heb. 9:13) *the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer use to sanctify the polluted [iniquitous] as regards the cleansing forth of the flesh*, not of the soul. For that pollution was contact with the dead. Whence (St.) Augustine (says):⁵ “Nothing other do I understand the *pollution*, which the Law cleanses, but contact with a dead man, whom he who had touched *was unclean for seven days*; but he was purified according to the Law on the third and seventh day, and he was clean”, to now enter the Temple. Those (sacraments) of the Law sometimes used to cleanse even leprosy from the corporal (man); but never has anyone out of *the works of the Law* been justified, as the Apostle says, (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16) even if they were done in faith and charity. Why? because God imposed them as a liability [in servitutum], not for justification, and so that they would be a

Sign and Sacrament

A “sign,” for Lombard, is an indicator that something else is at work. He says that smoke is an indicator of fire. A Sacrament, on the other hand, does more. A Sacrament is an indicator of God’s presence, and it also *brings* God’s presence.

species When speaking of Sacraments, the term *species* refers to the material used in the Sacraments. It is another word for “matter” or “things.”

similitude A similarity or likeness to something else.

figure of the future, (Rom. 5:14) willing, that these be offered to Himself rather than to idols. Therefore they were *signs*, but nevertheless [tamen] in the Scriptures they are also often called *Sacraments*, because they were signs of a sacred thing, which they certainly did not insure [utique non praestabant]. Moreover those the Apostle says (Acts 15:10) (are) the *works of the Law*, which have been instituted only for the grace of signifying, and/or as a burden.

Chapter V

Why the Sacraments have been instituted.

Moreover out of a threefold cause have the Sacraments been instituted: on account of *humiliation*, *erudition*, *exercitation*. On account of *humiliation* indeed, so that while a man in the sensible things, which by nature are below him, subjects himself in reverence [se reverendo] out of the Creator's precept, out of this humility and obedience he pleases God more and merits before [apud] Him, by whose command [imperio] he seeks salvation in (the things) inferior to himself, even if not *from them*, but (rather) *through them* from God.—On account of *erudition* have they also been instituted, so that through that which is discerned [cernitur] outwardly in the visible species, the mind may be instructed to acknowledge the invisible virtue, which is within. For the Man, who before sin used to see God without a medium, was dulled through sin to such an extent, that he was unable to grasp divine (things), except by human exercitations [exercitatus].—On account of *exercitation* have they similarly been instituted: because, since man cannot be free from public duties [otiosus], there is proposed to him a useful and **salubrious exercitation** in the Sacraments, by which he may turn aside from [declinet] vain and noxious occupation. For not easily is

salubrious exercitation

This is a medieval way of saying “health-giving exercise.” Lombard is writing about the health that Sacraments give to both the soul and the body.

he grasped by a tempter, who has time for good exercise [bono vacat exercitio]; whence (St.) Jerome⁶ warns: “Always do some work, so that the devil will find you occupied.” “Moreover there are three species of *exercitations*: one pertains to the *edification of the soul*; the other

to the *foment* of the body, another to the *subversion* of both.”—Therefore though apart from the Sacraments, to which God has not

foment To stir up. Lombard uses the word to mean that the Sacraments “stir up” or occupy the body because they are visible.

bound His own power, He can grant grace to a man, He has instituted the Sacraments from the aforesaid causes. “Moreover there are two (parts), in which a Sacrament consists, that is *words* and *things*: *words*, as the invocation of the Trinity; *things*, as water, oil and (things) of this kind.”

Endnotes

Chapters I–IV:

1. (St.) Augustine, *On the City of God*, Bk. X, ch. 5, and *Against the Adversaries of the Law and Prophets*, ch. 9, n. 34.—A little more below this after *just as* [sicut] the Vatican text and very many editions omit *there is said (to be)* [dicitur], disagreeing with the codices.
2. (St.) Augustine, *Questions on the Pentateuch*, Bk. III, q. 84.
3. (St.) Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Bk. II, ch. 1, n. 1; in which text codex C and the editions, except 6, have *cognition* [cognitionem] in place of *thinking* [cogitationem], in disagreement even with the original.
4. *Loc. cit.*, n. 2. The following passage is from (St.) Augustine, *Epistle 98* (alias 23), “To Boniface the Bishop,” n. 9.
5. *Questions on the Pentateuch*, Bk. IV, q. 33, n. 10, according to the sense, where it refers to Num. 19:11.—In this quote before *clean* [mundus] codices C and D and very many editions add *thus* [ita].

Chapter V:

6. *Epistle 125* (alias 4), “To Rusticus,” n. 11.—Those which proceed in this chapter and the two following passages have been taken from Hugo (of St. Victor), *Summa of Sentences*, tr. 4, ch. 1, and *On Sacraments*, Bk. I, p. IX, ch. 3.

For Reflection

1. Peter Lombard says Sacraments bring “invisible” grace. Why would it be important for humans to have something visible that brings the invisible presence of God? Please explain.
2. After reading this chapter, how would you define a Sacrament?
3. Lombard offers three reasons the Sacraments were given to the Church. Explain the meaning each of these reasons has for you.

2 The Sacraments: Union with Christ

Introduction

“Christ is the Light of nations”: this quotation begins *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, 1964)*. When the Church issues a dogmatic statement such as this, the statement represents an unchanging statement of truth. This document from the Second Vatican Council is the Church’s authoritative teaching about the Church’s self-identity. It begins with a statement about Christ because he is the reason for the Church. Jesus lived and taught among the Apostles, and he left them with ways to continue his presence throughout the ages. If Christ is the light of the nations, then the Church, the People of God, is the light as well, because Christ has entrusted us with his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and reconciling all people to God.

This document on the Church makes clear its two purposes. First, it intends to reflect upon the nature of the Church and uses images of stability, unity, and dynamism to describe this nature. It affirms that there has been an unbroken line from Jesus, to the Apostles, to the Pope and bishops, to the Church of today. This unbroken line indicates the Church’s stability and endurance despite times of great difficulty. In highlighting the Church’s unity, this document describes the Church as the Body of Christ and also as the Bride of Christ. There is only one, single Body of Christ or Bride of Christ. Therefore, there is an essential unity among the members of the Church. Finally, the Church is dynamic and alive with the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has been given to the Church, and this same Spirit, as the soul of the Body of Christ (see *Lumen Gentium, 7*), moves its members, especially through the Sacraments, to Christlike holiness.

The second purpose of this document is to describe the mission of the Church, which is essentially a mission of unity and reconciliation. Just as the Holy Spirit rests within the Church to make its members holy, it also drives the members of the Body of Christ to continue the work of Christ. God's desire is to draw every person into unity and to share the very life of God with each person. This document on the Church describes God as a Father who has a single desire: to draw all people into his loving embrace. This is the reason he sent his Son, Jesus, and that is why Jesus established the Church. Acting as a sacrament of Christ, a sign and instrument of unity in Christ, the Church, being true to its nature and identity in the unity of the Holy Spirit, must work without ceasing to draw all people to the Father by proclaiming Jesus Christ as the way to the Father.

Note: This document and others in this book, according to the practice of previous times, uses the word *man* and *men* in a universal context to mean both men and women.

Excerpt from *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*

By the Second Vatican Council

1. Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature, (Cf. Mk. 16:15.) to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission.

2. The eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world. His plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life. Fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave men to themselves, but ceaselessly offered helps to salvation, in view

Divine Life

There are many differing thoughts about what Heaven is. Although there is much to speculate about, one clear thing in the Church's teaching is that Heaven is entering into the life of God. Being united with Jesus means we enjoy that same relationship with God the Father that Jesus has through the power of the Holy Spirit. This will be a sharing of the divine life.

of Christ, the Redeemer “who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature.” (Col. 1:15.) All the elect, before time began, the Father “foreknew and pre-destined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that he should be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:29.) He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. It was prepared

in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant. In the present era of time the Church was constituted and, by the outpouring of the Spirit, was made manifest. At the end of time it will gloriously achieve completion, when, as is read in the Fathers, all the just, from Adam and “from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,”¹ will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church.

3. The Son, therefore, came, sent by the Father. It was in Him, before the foundation of the world, that the Father chose us and predestined us to become adopted sons, for in Him it pleased the Father to re-establish all things. (Cf. Eph. 1:4–5 and 10.) To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the Kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us the mystery of that kingdom. By His obedience He brought about redemption. The Church, or, in other words, the kingdom of Christ now present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world. This inauguration and this growth are both symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of a crucified Jesus, (Cf. Jn. 19:34.) and are foretold in the words of the Lord referring to His death on the Cross: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.” (Jn. 12:32.) As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, (1 Cor. 5:7.) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried

on, and, in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (Cf. 1 Cor. 10:17.) is both expressed and brought about. All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains.

4. When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth (Cf. Jn. 17:4.) was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have

“ All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains. ”

access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. (Cf. Eph. 1:18.) He is the Spirit of Life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal. (Cf. Jn. 4:14; 7:38–39.) To men, dead in sin, the Father gives life through Him, until, in Christ, He brings to life their mortal bodies. (Cf. Rom. 8:10–11.) The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple. (Cf. Cor. 3:16; 6:19.) In them He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons. (Cf. Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15–16 and 26.) The Church, which the Spirit guides in [the] way of all truth (Cf. Jn. 16:13.) and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with **hierarchical** and **charismatic** gifts and adorns with His fruits. (Cf. Eph. 1:11–12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal. 5:22.) By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. Uninterruptedly He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, “Come!” (Rev. 22:17.)

Thus, the Church has been seen as “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²

hierarchical Related to the visible structure of service and teaching authority to the Body of Christ, with the bishops as shepherds and the Pope as the chief shepherd. Within this orderly structure, the Holy Spirit is active.

charismatic Referring to the gifts, or charisms, of the Holy Spirit that move all members of the Body of Christ.

5. The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation. The Lord Jesus set it on its course by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15; cf. Mt. 4:17.). In the word, in the works, and in the presence of Christ, this kingdom was clearly open to the view of men. . . .

When Jesus, who had suffered the death of the cross for mankind, had risen, He appeared as the one constituted as Lord, Christ and eternal Priest, (Cf. Acts 2:36; Heb. 5:6; 7:17–21.) and He poured out on His disciples the Spirit promised by the Father. (Cf. Acts 2:33.) From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King.

7. In the human nature united to Himself[,] the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and re-molded him into a new creation. (Cf. Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17.) By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body.

In that Body the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified. Through Baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13.) In this sacred rite a oneness with Christ's death and resurrection is both symbolized and brought about: "For we were buried with Him by means of Baptism into death"; and if "we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be so in the likeness of His resurrection also." (Rom. 6:15.) Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. "Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread." (1 Cor. 10:17.) In this way all of us are made members of His Body, (Cf. 1 Cor 12:27.) "but severally

members one of another.” (Rom. 12:5.)

As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ. (Cf. 1 Cor 12:12.) Also, in the building up of Christ’s Body various members and functions have their part to play. There is only one Spirit who, according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives His different gifts for the welfare of the Church. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:1–11.) What has a special place among these gifts is the grace of the apostles to whose authority the Spirit Himself subjected even those who were endowed with **charisms**. (Cf. 1 Cor 14.) Giving the body unity through Himself and through His power and inner joining of the members, this same Spirit produces and urges love among the believers. From all this it follows that if one member endures anything, all the members co-endure it, and if one member is honored, all the members together rejoice. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:26.)

The Head of this Body is Christ. He is the image of the invisible God and in Him all things came into being. He is before all creatures and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the Body which is the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the first place. (Cf. Col. 1:15–18.) By the greatness of His power He rules the things in heaven and the things on earth, and with His all-surpassing perfection and way of acting He fills the whole body with the riches of His glory.

All the members ought to be molded in the likeness of Him, until Christ be formed in them. (Cf. Gal. 4:19.) For this reason we, who have been made to conform with Him, who have died with Him and risen with Him, are taken up into the mysteries of His life, until we will reign together with Him. (Cf. Phil. 3:21; 2 Tim. 2:11; Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12 etc.) On earth, still as pilgrims in a strange land, tracing in trial and in oppression the paths He trod, we are made one with His sufferings like the body is one with the Head, suffering with Him, that with Him we may be glorified. (Cf. Rom. 8:17.)

From Him “the whole body, supplied and built up by joints and ligaments,

charism A special gift or grace of the Holy Spirit given to an individual Christian or community, commonly for the benefit and building up of the entire Church.

attains a growth that is of God.” (Col. 2:19.) He continually distributes in His body, that is, in the Church, gifts of ministries in which, by His own power, we serve each other unto salvation so that, carrying out the truth in love, we might through all things grow unto Him who is our Head. (Cf. Eph. 4:11–16.)

In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in Him, (Cf. Eph. 4:23.) He has shared with us His Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the Head and in the members, gives life to, unifies and moves through the whole body. This He does in such a way that His work could be compared by the holy Fathers with the function which the principle of life, that is, the soul, fulfills in the human body.

Christ loves the Church as His bride, having become the model of a man loving his wife as his body; (Cf. Eph. 5:25–28.) the Church, indeed, is subject to its Head. (Ibid. 23–24.) “Because in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (Col. 2:9.) He fills the Church, which is His body and His fullness, with His divine gifts (Cf. Eph. 1:22–23.) so that it may expand and reach all the fullness of God. (Cf. Eph. 3:19.)

Endnotes

1. Cfr. S. Gregorius M., Hom in Evang. 19, 1: PL 76, 1154 B. S. Augustinus, Sermon. 341, 9, 11: PL 39, 1499 s. S. Io. Damascenus, Adv. Iconocl. 11: PG 96, 1357.
2. S. Cyprianus, De Orat Dom. 23: PL 4, 5S3, Hartel, III A, p. 28S. S. Augustinus, Sermon. 71, 20, 33: PL 38, 463 s. S. Io. Damascenus, Adv. Iconocl. 12: PG 96, 1358 D.

For Reflection

1. After reading this excerpt from *Lumen Gentium*, how would you describe the Church’s mission?
2. Describe, in your own words, the Body of Christ, the Church, and how we participate in it through the Sacraments.
3. The Church has the mission of drawing all people into unity. What do you think causes division within your community? What do you think you can do to break down those divisions?

3 The Sacraments: Encounters with Christ

Introduction

In the 1950s the world was changing. Two wars had just been fought on a global scale. Modern methods of communication meant that a free exchange of ideas was taking place among many different people from diverse cultures. People began to believe that scientific advancements could make space travel possible. University enrollments were increasing as more people, particularly in North America and Western Europe, sought educational opportunities. The dawn of the modern world was breaking, and the Christian faith was receiving renewed attention. At this same time, a group of young European theologians began to bring a new expression to the ancient Christian faith. The faith itself wasn't changing, but the world was.

Edward Schillebeeckx, OP (1914–2009), was among that group of young scholars. During these years he devoted much of his research, writings, and teaching to a theology of the Sacraments. In 1952, he completed his doctoral thesis, the major paper a student must complete to earn a doctor of philosophy degree. It explored the Sacraments and their role in salvation. Seven years later his book *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* was published. This book brought a fresh understanding to the Sacraments of the Catholic Church, and it helped to shape the sacramental theology and the theology of the Church later expressed during the Second Vatican Council. In his book Schillebeeckx outlines God's plan of salvation as originating in God the Father, then expressed in the Word of the Father, Jesus Christ, then from Christ to the Church, and from the Church to the Sacraments.

Schillebeeckx reasons in this way: God the Father wants to offer salvation to us, his people. Because human beings are bodily creatures, God's offer of salvation must be extended in visible, concrete ways. This is how Schillebeeckx defines a Sacrament: it is an offer of salvation that our bodies can perceive. Jesus is God's ultimate offer of salvation to us. For example, the people who heard Jesus' message and watched him heal both heard and saw the "sacrament" of God. Jesus, however, ascended into Heaven. Because he is in Heaven and no longer visible to us, how can our bodies receive God's offer of salvation? The visible invitation to salvation now comes through the Church. Christ is the sacrament of God, and the Church is the sacrament of Christ.

In the reading for this chapter, Schillebeeckx emphasizes the point that the Church is the Body of Christ, and he asks the reader to consider the full meaning of this term. The Body of Christ has individuals as members, and Jesus is the Head of that Body. Body and Head together constitute the "whole Christ." In the closing paragraph of the reading, Schillebeeckx writes, "To receive the sacraments of the Church in faith is therefore the same thing as to encounter Christ himself." The Church mediates physical encounters with the Risen Christ. This goes back to the original thought that human beings are bodily creatures. For a person to have any kind of encounter, it must be visible and perceptible to the body. For this reason, the Church is the sacrament of Christ.

Excerpt from *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*

By Edward Schillebeeckx

1. The Church, Earthly Sacrament of Christ in Heaven

We have said that Jesus as man and Messiah is unthinkable without his redemptive community. Established by God precisely in his vocation as representative of fallen mankind, Jesus had by his human life to win this

community to himself and make of it a redeemed people of God. This means that Jesus the Messiah, through his death which the Father accepts, becomes in fact the head of the People of God, the Church assembled in his death. It is thus that he wins the Church to himself, by his **messianic** life as the Servant

of God, as the fruit of the sufferings of his messianic sacrifice: "Christ dies that the Church might be born."¹ In his messianic sacrifice, which the Father accepts, Christ in his glorified body is himself the eschatological redemptive community of the Church. In his own self the glorified Christ is simultaneously "Head and members."

The earthly Church is the visible realization of this saving reality in history. The Church is a visible communion in grace. This communion itself, consisting of members and a hierarchical leadership, is the earthly sign of the triumphant redeeming grace of Christ. The fact must be emphasized that not only the hierarchical Church but also the community of the faithful belong to this grace-giving sign that is the Church. As much in its hierarchy as in the laity the community of the Church is the realization in historical form of the victory achieved by Christ. The inward communion in grace with God in Christ becomes visible in and is realized through the outward social sign. Thus the essence of the Church consists in this, that the final goal of grace achieved by Christ becomes visibly present in the whole Church as a visible society.

It was the custom in the past to distinguish between the soul of the Church (this would be the inward communion in grace with Christ) and the body of the Church (the visible society with its members and its authority). Only too rightly, this view has been abandoned. It was even, in a

Eschatological Redemptive Community

Eschaton refers to the end times and the final act of salvation. The Church is the community of believers through whom the final act of salvation will come.

messianic Referring to the Messiah. The people of Israel were waiting for the messiah, the "anointed one," to appear. The Messiah would come and save God's people. The Greek term for Messiah is *christos*. Jesus is the Christ and the Messiah because he is the Anointed One.

Priestly Hierarchy

The Church is hierarchical because it has an order of service and leadership from the Pope to the bishops to the priests. These servants and leaders are ordained to act as the person of Christ during sacramental celebrations.

sense, condemned by Pope Pius XII. The visible Church itself is the Lord's mystical body. The Church is the visible expression of Christ's grace and redemption, realized in the form of a society which is a sign (*societas signum*)[.] Any attempt to introduce a dualism here is the work of evil—as if one could play off the inward communion in grace with Christ against

the juridical society of the Church, or vice versa. The Church therefore is not merely a means of salvation. It is Christ's salvation itself, this salvation as visibly realized in this world. Thus it is, by a kind of identity, the body of the Lord.

We remarked that this visibility of grace defines the whole Church; not the hierarchical Church only, but also the community of the faithful. The whole Church, the People of God led by a priestly hierarchy is “the sign raised up among the nations.”² The activity, as much of the faithful as of their leaders, is thus an **ecclesial** activity.³ This means that not only the hierarchy but also the believing people belong essentially to the **primordial sacrament** which is the earthly expression of this reality. As the sacramental Christ, the Church too is mystically both Head and members. When the twofold function of Christ becomes visible in the sign of the Christian community, it produces the distinction between hierarchy and faithful—a distinction of offices and of those who hold them. Even the hierarchy, on

the one hand, are themselves part of the believing Church, and the faithful, on the other hand, share in the lordship of Christ and to some extent give it visibility, the sacramental functions of hierarchy and faithful differ within the Church and show the distinction.

ecclesial The Greek word *ekklesia* is best translated as “the gathering,” “assembly,” or “congregation.” *Ecclesial* has come to mean “of or relating to a church.”

primordial sacrament *Primordial* means “before time.” In this sense *primordial sacrament* means the “original sacrament” or “the sacrament that is the source for all other sacraments.”

4. A Sacrament: Official Act of the Church as Redemptive Institution

We are now in a position to draw up a definition of the sacramental action of the Church. A sacrament, that is an act of the primordial sacrament which is the Church, is a visible action proceeding from the Church as a redemptive institution, an official ecclesial act preformed in virtue either of the character of the priesthood or of the characters of baptism and confirmation. Hence in this sense a sacrament is actually something more than that which we usually understand under the term “seven sacraments,” but it is also something more limited than that which we have just called “general visibility,” meaning sacramentality as an outward manifestation not of office, but directly of inward communion in grace (i.e., the outwardly visible holiness of the life of the faithful in the Church). It is, however, necessary to assess the seven sacraments in their proper place within the wider sacramental context of the entire Church. A sacrament is primarily and fundamentally a personal act of Christ himself, which reaches and involves us in the form of an institutional act performed by a person in the Church who, in virtue of a sacramental character, is empowered to do so by Christ himself: an act *ex officio*. . . .

It follows from all we have said that these seven sacraments—before this or that particular one is specified—are all fundamentally and primarily a visible, official act of the Church.⁴ Thus from the definition of the Church as the primordial sacrament, we come already to a first and general definition of the seven sacraments: 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 an ecclesial action. The validity of a sacrament is therefore simply its authenticity as an act of the Church as such. The essential reality that in one or other of seven possible ways is outwardly expressed in the reception of each of the sacraments is consequently the entry into living contact with

“ 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. ”

the visible Church as the earthly mystery of Christ in heaven. To receive the sacraments of the Church in faith is therefore the same thing as to encounter Christ himself. In this light the sacramentality of the seven sacraments is the same as the sacramentality of the whole Church. This pervading “structure” of sacramentality is manifested by each of the seven sacraments in its own proper way.

Endnotes

1. “Moritur Christus ut fiat Ecclesia.” (St. Augustine. In *Evangelium Johannis*, tract 9, 10 [PL, 35, col. 1463].)
2. Thus the Vatican Council. (DB, no. 1794.)
3. It is necessary for a clear presentation of the argument to adopt this form of the adjective. In everyday usage “ecclesiastical” has become so closely linked with all that concerns the hierarchical element in the Church; this currently more common word would therefore be misleading here and in the pages to follow, and circumlocution would not only prove cumbersome but also obscure the already compact text. “Ecclesial” is used to signify all that is proper to the Church in its entirety, a synthesis of hierarchical and lay elements (Translator).[]
4. It is not possible to set out every element implicit in our analysis. But it should be clear enough from all the subsequent discussion that seven sacraments, although primarily an official action of the hierarchical Church (through the minister), are not this alone, but also an official action of the recipient who, in virtue of his baptism, by the intention he expresses in the actual reception of the sacrament truly and coessentially contributes to the validity, the fully ecclesial realization, of the sacrament. This does not eliminate the differences specific to each individual sacrament (e.g., the special instances of the Eucharist, of matrimony, and of that sacrament which is the first to be received, baptism).

For Reflection

1. Schillebeeckx says that the Church is the visible sign of Christ. How have you seen the Church act as a visible sign of Christ to the world?
2. The reading speaks about the priestly hierarchy, but it also mentions the laity. How do you think you are called to be a visible sign of Christ to the world?
3. The first paragraph has the following quote: “Christ dies that the Church might be born.” Considering everything you read in this chapter, how would you explain that quote?
4. After reading this chapter, how would you define the term *Sacrament*?

4 The Church as Sacrament

Introduction

What does it mean to say that the Church is a sacrament of Christ and so a missionary Church? This means that in every era the Church seeks to bring the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, to all people and to all nations. The Church exists for this very reason. Continuing the sacramental mission of Jesus Christ means that the Church is to be focused on outreach to the world that lies beyond the bounds of the Church. Despite this outward focus, it is also appropriate for the Church to take time to look within and seek deeper self-understanding. Such an examination is meant to make the Church more faithful and committed to her mission. The reading in this chapter is excerpted from a book written to help the Church to better understand her identity.

Avery Dulles, SJ (1918–2008), came from a family of famous and influential people. His father, his grandfather, and one of his great-uncles all served as U.S. secretaries of state. Washington Dulles International Airport, the airport that serves the Washington, D.C., area, was named for his father, John Foster Dulles.

Considering his family tree and his Harvard education, Avery Dulles, a convert to Catholicism in his early twenties, could have chosen a path of great worldly influence. Instead, after a year and a half at Harvard Law School and service in the U.S. Navy, he devoted himself to serving God as a priest in the Jesuit order. After earning a doctorate in sacred theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, Dulles became quite influential as a teacher and theologian and was eventually named a cardinal of the Church. He is especially remembered for his groundbreaking book *Models of Church*.

This book explores five valid, but different, ways or models of the Church: (1) Church as institution, (2) Church as mystical communion, (3) Church as sacrament, (4) Church as herald, and (5) Church as servant. The reading in this chapter is taken from the chapter “The Church as Sacrament.” You will notice many similarities between this reading and the reading from Edward Schillebeeckx in chapter 3. Both describe Christ as the sacrament of God and the Church as the sacrament of Christ. Dulles examines this understanding of the Church as sacrament and completes the reflections on sacrament offered by Schillebeeckx. The Church is the sacrament of Christ to the world, but it is also a sacrament of the world to God. Just as Christ is the final and greatest offer of salvation from God, Christ is the final and greatest acceptance of God’s offer of salvation. As a sacrament of Christ, the Church brings God’s offer of salvation through Christ to the world, and it brings the world’s acceptance of that offer through Christ to God.

Excerpt from *Models of the Church*

By Avery Dulles

The Church as Sacrament

As understood in the Christian tradition, sacraments are never merely individual transactions. Nobody baptizes, absolves, or anoints himself, and it is anomalous for the Eucharist to be celebrated in solitude. Here again the order of grace corresponds to the order of nature. Man comes into the world as a member of a family, a race, a people. He comes to maturity through encounter with his fellow men. Sacraments therefore have a dialogic structure. They take place in a mutual interaction that permits the people together to achieve a spiritual breakthrough that they could not achieve in isolation. A sacrament therefore is a socially constituted or communal symbol of the presence of grace coming to fulfillment.

On the basis of this general conception of sacrament we may now turn to two more specific theological notions: of Christ and of the Church as sacrament.

As Christians we believe that God is good and merciful, that he wills to communicate himself to man in spite of man's sinfulness and resistance to grace. We believe also that God's redemptive will is powerful and efficacious; that it therefore produces effects in history. God's grace is more powerful than man's sinfulness, so that when sin abounded, grace abounded even more (Rom. 5:20). Our belief in the superabundant power of grace when confronted by evil is founded upon the historical tangibility of God's redemptive love in Christ. Jesus Christ is the sacrament of God as turned toward man. He represents for us God's loving acceptance of man and his rehabilitation of man notwithstanding man's unworthiness.

In characterizing Christ as God's sacrament, we are looking at Christ as he comes from above. But there is also, so to speak, a "Christology from below."¹ Grace impels men toward communion with God, and as grace works upon men it helps them to express what they are at a given stage in the process of redemption. Only in exteriorizing itself does grace achieve the highest intensity of its realization. Already in the Old Testament, Israel as a people constitutes a **sign** that historically expresses a real though imperfect yes-saying to God and no-saying to idolatry. Seen from below, Jesus belongs to this tangible history of salvation. As Servant of God he is the supreme sacrament of man's faithful response to God and of God's recognition of that fidelity. The entire history of grace has its summit and crown in Jesus Christ. He is simultaneously the sacrament of God's self-gift and of man's fully obedient acceptance. The mutual acceptance of God and man, initially signified by the history of Israel, reaches its consummation in Christ's cross and resurrection.

Christology from Below

In this case, we can contrast "Christology from above" as being God's offering of salvation coming "down" to us from Christ. "Christology from below" describes our desire to be lifted "up" to God through Christ.

sign In sacramental theology, *sign* has a unique meaning. It is a symbol of God's grace, but it also makes God's grace present. The Church is a symbol of people being united in Christ, but it also brings unity in Christ to reality.

Christ, as the sacrament of God, contains the grace that he signifies. Conversely, he signifies and confers the grace he contains. In him the invisible grace of God takes on visible form. But the sacrament of redemption is not complete in Jesus as a single individual. In order to become the kind of sign he must be, he must appear as the sign of God's redemptive love extended toward all mankind, and of the response of all mankind to that redemptive love.

The Church therefore is in the first instance a sign. It must signify in a historically tangible form the redeeming grace of Christ. It signifies that grace as relevantly given to men of every age, race, kind, and condition. Hence the Church must incarnate itself in every human culture.

The Church does not always signify this equally well. It stands under a divine imperative to make itself a convincing sign. It appears most fully as a sign when its members are evidently united to one another and to God through holiness and mutual love, and when they visibly gather to confess their faith in Christ and to celebrate what God has done for them in Christ.

As a sacrament the Church has both an outer and an inner aspect. The institutional or structural aspect of the Church—its external reality—is essential, since without it the Church would not be visible. Visible unity among all Christians is demanded, for without this the sign or communion that the Church is would be fragmented into a multitude of disconnected signs. It is thus of crucial importance that there should be manifest links of continuity among all the particular churches at any given time. Furthermore, it is important that the links should connect the Church of today with the Church of apostolic times. Otherwise the Church could not appear as the sign of our redemption in and through the historical Christ.

On the other hand, the institutional or structural aspect is never sufficient to constitute the Church.

Institutional or Structural

The Church has a visible organization and order. This structure must be enlivened with faith, hope, and love.

The offices and rituals of the Church must palpably appear as the actual expressions of the faith, hope, and love of living men. Otherwise the Church would be a dead body

rather than a living Christian community. It would be an inauthentic sign—a sign of something not really present, and therefore not a sacrament.

But sacrament, as we have been saying, is a sign of grace realizing itself. Sacrament has an event character; it is dynamic. The Church becomes Church insofar as the grace of Christ, operative within it, achieves historical tangibility through the actions of the Church as such.

The Church becomes an actual event of grace when it appears most concretely as a sacrament—that is in the actions of the Church as such whereby men are bound together in grace by a visible expression. The more widely and intensely the faithful participate in this corporate action of the Church, the more the Church achieves itself.

In summary, the Church is not just a sign, but a sacrament. Considered as a bare institution, the Church might be characterized as just an empty sign. It could be going through formalities and be a hollow shell rather than a living community of grace.

But where the Church as sacrament is present, the grace of Christ will not be absent. That grace, seeking its appropriate form of expression—as grace inevitably does—will impel men to prayer, confession, worship, and other acts whereby the Church externally realizes its essence. Through these actions the

Church signifies what it contains and contains what it signifies. In coming to expression the grace of the Church realizes itself as

“ But where the Church as sacrament is present, the grace of Christ will not be absent. ”

grace. The Church therefore confers the grace that it contains, and contains it precisely as conferring it. The Church becomes an event of grace as the lives of its members are transformed in hope, in joy, in self-forgetful love, in peace, in patience, and in all other Christlike virtues.

Endnote

1. See the article “Jesus Christ” in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 3 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), pp. 191–92 (Grillmeier), and pp. 197–98, 205–5 (Rahner).

For Reflection

1. Dulles says that when people interact with one another, they can achieve spiritual breakthroughs that they could not reach on their own. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
2. The reading describes Christ as both the expression of God's self-gift to humanity and humanity's acceptance of God. How do you think this is reflected in the Sacraments?
3. The Church is to be visible to the world. That is why there is structure to the Church. But the Church could become a "dead body." What does Dulles mean by this?
4. Dulles wrote, "The Church becomes an event of grace as the lives of its members are transformed in hope, in joy, in self-forgetful love, in peace, in patience, and in all other Christlike virtues." As a member of the Church, how do you see grace acting in your life—in hope, joy, love, peace, patience and in other Christlike ways?

5 Sacraments and Liturgy

Introduction

Pope John XXIII (1881–1963) convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962 to examine how the Church can best bring the Gospel to the modern world. In an ecumenical council, all of the bishops of the Church gathered together with theologians, scholars, and even leaders of other Christian communities to address this great challenge. Pope John XXIII believed that the message of Jesus Christ and the beauty of the Catholic Church could have a greater effect on the lives of men and women. With this charge the gathered leaders sought to bring a renewed understanding and interest in the Word of God, in the nature and mission of the Church, and in the sacred liturgy to people of the modern era.

The first document to emerge from the Second Vatican Council was *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 1963)*. This groundbreaking document has provided the Church with a new understanding of all liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharistic liturgy. This chapter provides the most memorable parts of this important document. You will read that the Church recognizes that Christ is truly present at the Eucharistic liturgy in four ways: (1) in the sacred minister, the **priest**, (2) in the Church as it sings and prays, (3) in the reading of the Sacred Scripture, and (4) in the Eucharistic species. Before this document it was rare for the presence of Christ to be recognized in the liturgy in ways other

priest One who offers a sacrifice to God in worship. In the Catholic Church, one who has received the ministerial priesthood through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The priest serves the community of faith by representing and assisting the bishop in teaching, governing, and presiding over the community's worship.

than in the Eucharistic species. You will also see that the Church proclaims that it is within the liturgy that our salvation is worked out, that the liturgy is the summit and the font of our faith, and that the liturgy is the action of all of the body of Christ and not limited to the priest alone. All of these points and new insights reach their fulfillment in the statement that the Church must ensure that the people gathered for worship will be fully conscious and actively involved in the worship of God in the liturgy. Before this document, people were urged to pray *at* Mass. Now they were being urged to pray *the* Mass. The Eucharistic liturgy, regardless of how beautifully presented, is not simply to be observed. It was given to the Church so that the people of God might participate with their whole being, offering themselves to Jesus and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ as his gift of life to them. Thus in this self-offering, the Body of Christ, the Church, would truly “live in Christ” and grow to be more like him.

Excerpt from *Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*

By the Second Vatican Council

1. This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.

2. For the liturgy, “through which the work of our redemption is accomplished,”¹ most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on

contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek [Cf. Heb. 13:14]. While the liturgy daily builds up those who are within into a holy temple of the Lord, into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit [Cf. Eph. 2:21–22], to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ [Cf. Eph. 4:13], at the same time it marvelously strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations [Cf. Is. 11:12] under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together [Cf. John 11:52], until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd [Cf. John 10:16]. . . .

7. To accomplish so great a 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,”² but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes.³ He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are 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 the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

Christ indeed always associates the Church with Himself in this great work wherein God is perfectly glorified and men are sanctified. The Church is His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord, and through Him offers worship to the Eternal Father.

Great Paradox

Often called “the great paradox of the Church,” Christians are to live in the world as witnesses to Christ. However, they are not to be *of* the world.

Four Ways Christ Is Present

Christ is truly present at the Eucharistic liturgy in four ways: (1) the prayers and singing, (2) the Scriptures, (3) the priest, and (4) especially the Eucharistic species.