

Sacraments and Worship

The Sources of Christian Theology

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Contents

Series Introduction	vii
Introduction	ix
Abbreviations	xvii
1. Sacraments in General and Sacramental Theology	1
Definitions of a Sacrament, Key Concepts, and the Number of Sacraments in Early and Medieval Theologians	2
The Protestant and Catholic Reformations	12
The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries	22
The Modern Period: A New Era in Sacramental Theology	26
2. Liturgical Theology	43
Early Christian Authors	44
Medieval Authors in East and West	51
The Protestant and Catholic Reformations	56
The Nineteenth Century	58
Contemporary Liturgical Theologians	60
3. Sacraments and Rites of Christian Initiation	103
The First Three Centuries	105
The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Centuries	117
The Medieval Period in East and West	133
The Protestant and Catholic Reformations	155
Modern Developments	168
4. The Eucharist	177
The First Three Centuries	178
The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Centuries	196
The Medieval Period	211
The Protestant and Catholic Reformations	228
The Modern Period	247
5. Liturgies of the Word	253
Premodern Development	253
Modern Development	263

6. Occasional Sacraments and Services	271
Penance, Reconciliation, Confession	271
Healing and Anointing of the Sick	286
Christian Marriage	292
Ministry and Ordination	313
Christian Burial	336
7. Liturgy and Time	343
DAILY PRAYER	344
The First Three Centuries	344
The Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Centuries	351
The Western Middle Ages	360
Reformation and Later Developments	363
THE LITURGICAL YEAR	371
The Christian Week	371
Feasts and Seasons	375
Medieval Elaboration of the Sanctoral and Temporal Cycles	392
Reformation Pruning of the Calendar	395
Modern Developments	401
Permissions	403
Suggestions for Further Reading	409
Index	415

Introduction

This volume is somewhat different than other volumes in this series, which take one particular doctrine or theological topic (e.g., creation, Christology, or eschatology) and treat it from a variety of different authors and perspectives over the wide sweep of the Christian tradition. In this volume there is no single “doctrine” or issue that provides its overall content or focus. Rather, as a collection of texts concerned specifically with sacraments and Christian worship, it is more of an introductory companion for the study of the history and theology of Christian worship from the New Testament until today. That is, the primary focus of this volume is the history and theology of the individual sacraments and their liturgical context in the church’s worship.

The discipline of liturgical study can be undertaken from different methodological perspectives, namely, liturgical history, liturgical theology, and ritual studies. By training and conviction I approach liturgical study from a strongly historical and theological perspective, an approach—thanks to my formation by such great liturgiologists as Paul Bradshaw, Robert Taft, and Gabriele Winkler—that is called *Liturgiewissenschaft* or “comparative liturgy,” the term used by the founder of this school or method, Anton Baumstark (+1948).¹

What this means concretely is that one must attend to the great variety that actually exists—liturgically and theologically—in the sources of the various Christian traditions, as that variety is revealed to us by study of those documents themselves. That is, one cannot study simply *the* history or *the* theology of baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, or anything else in liturgy, for that matter, as though there was and is a single line of development. One can study only the *histories* and *theologies* of those sacramental ceremonies and activities of the church as they actually appear in history, and one must do this not only chronologically but also geographically within the various rites of the churches, those distinct ecclesial ways of being Christian,² in both East and West.

Paul Bradshaw has cautioned against scholarship assuming a monolinear developmental model in the evolution of liturgy, criticizing the all-too-common assumption by some that there has always been such a thing as *the* liturgy of *the* church, a divinely instituted “*sacred* liturgy,” an

1. See Anton Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy*, rev. Bernard Botte; English edition by F. L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1958).

2. See Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), 100.

assumption that treats the role of historical research into the actual state of liturgical development as largely irrelevant to the faith-based conviction that there is a fundamental continuity of the church's liturgy through the ages. Such an uncritical, almost liturgical fundamentalist, approach, often based on a rather romantic vision of what has been assumed to be *the* liturgical practice of *the* early church, has fostered a mentality in approaches to liturgical study that either tends to ignore practices that obscure this romantic vision or seeks to “restore” the “true pattern” by writing off “Reformation developments as being the death of the authentic Christian liturgy . . . seen essentially as the work of fallible humans in contrast to the divine character attributed to the shaping of . . . worship.”³ Bradshaw writes:

[N]ot only is the fundamental continuity of liturgical practice assumed without historical research, but historical research itself does not give us grounds for concluding that there is any fundamental continuity, except in the very broadest of terms. The “deep structures” running through liturgy are very few indeed if we apply the test of universal observance to them. There are very few things that Christians have consistently done in worship at all times and in all places. Of course, the task is made somewhat easier if one restricts one's vision to just a single ecclesiastical tradition and ignores all the rest, but even there the genuine historical continuities are generally fewer than the often sweeping generalizations of liturgical theologians seem to suggest.⁴

Elsewhere he argues that

the past does not hold all the solutions to today's questions, and all too often it seems that the makers of modern rites have sought to restore the ancient pattern for its own sake, without adequate consideration as to whether it accords with the current theological climate, our own cultural situation, or present needs.⁵

Robert Taft makes a similar point, saying:

As a historian of Christian liturgical traditions, it is my unshakeable conviction that a tradition can be understood only genetically, with reference to its origins and evolution. Those ignorant of history are prisoners of the latest cliché, for they have nothing against which to test it. That is what a knowledge of the past can give us. . . . [T]he past is always instructive, but not necessarily normative. What we do today is not ruled by the past but by the adaptation of the tradition to the needs of the present. History can only help us decide what the essentials of that tradition are, and the parameters of its adaptation.⁶

3. Paul Bradshaw, “Difficulties in Doing Liturgical Theology,” *Pacifica* 11 (June 1998): 185.

4. *Ibid.*, 184–85.

5. Paul Bradshaw, “Liturgical Use and Abuse of Patristics,” in Kenneth Stevenson, ed., *Liturgy Reshaped* (London: SPCK, 1982), 144.

6. Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986), xiv–xv.

If such methodological caution is necessary, however, and if “history can only help us decide what the essentials of that tradition are, and the parameters of its adaptation,” this only serves to make the contemporary historical study of the sacraments and Christian worship all the more necessary precisely for the very recovery of those essentials, broadly and ecumenically understood, today. The great liturgical theologian Geoffrey Wainwright has written: “Without the heartbeat of the sacraments at its center, a church will lack confidence about the gospel message and about its own ability to proclaim that message in evangelism, to live it out in its own internal fellowship, and to embody it in service to the needy.”⁷ And, further: “A deeper re-plunging into its own tradition will, in my judgment, be necessary if the church is to survive in recognizable form, particularly in our western culture.”⁸

The “tradition” into which, according to Wainwright, the church is to replunge itself so that the sacraments become again its heartbeat, is the church’s classic liturgical tradition as that tradition is revealed in all its rich diversity and variability in the sources. Robert Taft has defended strongly the need for this historical approach in service to the church:

[A]midst all the contemporary talk of “relevance” in matters liturgical it remains my firm conviction that nothing is so relevant as knowledge, nothing so irrelevant as ignorance. So I think that in matters of pastoral relevance there is still something we can learn from comparative liturgical scholarship across a broad range of traditions. . . . [P]ractice is determined not by the past but by tradition, which encompasses not only past and present, but theological reflection on both. That is why the Catholic Church has never been guided by a retrospective ideology. Tradition is not the past; it is the Church’s self-consciousness *now* of that which has been handed on to her not as an inert treasure but as a dynamic inner life. . . . Theology must be reflection on the whole of that reality, the whole of tradition, not on just its present manifestation. One of the great contemporary illusions is that one can construct a liturgical theology without a profound knowledge of the liturgical tradition. So in spite of the (to me) rather perplexing discomfort that many Americans seem to have with history, there can be no theology without it. . . . Christian liturgy is a given, an object, an already existing reality like English literature. One discovers what English literature is only by reading Chaucer and Shakespeare and Eliot and Shaw and the contemporaries. So too with liturgy. If we want to know what Christmas and Chrismation, Eucharist and Easter mean, we shall not get far by studying anthropology or game-theory, or by asking ourselves what we *think* they mean. We must plunge into the enormous stream of liturgical and patristic evidence and wade through it piece by piece, age by age,

7. Geoffrey Wainwright, “The Sacraments in Wesleyan Perspective,” in Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 106.

8. Geoffrey Wainwright, “Renewing Worship: The Recovery of Classical Patterns,” in *Worship with One Accord*, 138.

ever alert to pick up shifts in the current as each generation reaches for its own understanding of what it is we are about.⁹

Within that “tradition,” especially the liturgical tradition—even if we do not know from the earliest period what exactly constituted Christian initiation (whether water bath or not, anointings or not), what the precise relationship between Sabbath and Sunday was among early Christians, what the earliest culinary contents of the Eucharist were, how “the” great prayer of thanksgiving was offered at the meal, or how the earliest communities were “ordered” in terms of ministry—the fact remains that all our evidence, from at least Justin Martyr on through the Reformation, indicates the existence of some kind of “baptismal” rite of incorporation, the existence of the Christian churches assembling together on Sundays and other feasts to hear the Word and share in some form of eucharistic Meal, the existence of patterns for daily prayer (whether private or communal), some form of “order,” and some form of ministry to the poor. All this points, indeed, to some kind of universal pattern of worship that the diverse churches of Christian antiquity saw as constituting a type of universal norm, which determined authentic Christian worship and transcended local diversity and variety, that which Gordon Lathrop has referred to today as an ecumenical “ordo” of and for Christian worship.¹⁰

If our evidence for specific ritual detail is not what we wish it would be, baptismal rites of incorporation, a relationship established between the church and time (Sundays, feasts, seasons, the structure of the week, and daily prayer), and the centrality of Word and Meal in Sunday worship, even if active participation in the Meal itself was to dwindle from the late fourth century on, do witness to the existence of some kind of *ordo*. The diversity we encounter in the churches of the first few centuries then is, precisely, a diversity in *how* baptism and its various encompassing rites are celebrated, *how* Sunday and festival observance is structured (e.g., whether Pascha on a calendrical date [14 Nisan] or a Sunday), *how* the Meal is celebrated and its gifts gathered and distributed, *how* the Meal prayers are to be prayed and what their various structural components were, and *how* the various ministries of *episkopé* (oversight) and *diakonia* (service) might be ordered.

But no one, to my knowledge, actually questioned the very existence, structure, and contents of Christian worship as having to do with baptism, Word, Eucharist, days and seasons, daily prayer, or the need for ordering the tasks of *episkopé* and *diakonia* or ministry to the sick, reconciliation,

9. Robert Taft, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd rev. and enlarged ed. (Rome: Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, 1997), 13–14.

10. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). For a summary of Lathrop’s approach see later in this book, chapter 2, pp. 74–76. And for a critique from a Free Church perspective, see chapter 2, pp. 90–93.

marriage, and burial of the dead. These, it seems, were givens and are constitutive parts of the inherited tradition, which may indeed serve to shape and govern present experience. To that end, Lathrop's model of the *ordo* remains not only one of "the finest available description[s] of classical Christian worship,"¹¹ but commends itself as a most fruitful model in the contemporary search for some kind of ecumenical-liturgical "norm."

Recent developments in Christian worship around the world—for example, the increasing phenomenon of megachurches, the church growth movement, the development of "seeker services," and the increasing notion across ecclesial lines that the church's liturgy is but "one" of several options for "worship"—challenge the historic priority of sacramental worship. What appears to be at stake in this, I would submit, is a particular theological understanding of how God is believed to act in the world and church.

That is, the classic sacramental-liturgical tradition claims that God acts primarily vis-à-vis creation and humanity through means, instruments, and mediation, in ways that are described as both incarnational and sacramental. So the theologian, grounded in and formed by what today might be called the ecumenical-liturgical-sacramental tradition, can no more view that foundational understanding of how God is believed to act as one "option" among several than she or he can fly in the face of canon, creed, and confession without thereby denying his or her own identity and separating himself or herself from the historic orthodox Christian faith. As Ruth Meyers has written of this sacramental view:

The ordinary elements of water, bread, and wine allow us to encounter Christ in ways readily accessible to our senses. *We meet Christ not in some abstract spiritual way, but in these very tangible substances that by their use in worship permeate the very core of our being.* An expansive use of these symbols helps us glimpse the infinite, incomprehensible, overflowing love of God in Christ Jesus.¹²

I would suggest that it is here especially where a volume on sacraments and Christian worship belongs rightly in a series devoted to the "sources" of Christian theology. For what we are dealing with in the history of sacraments and Christian worship is precisely "theology," that is, what the liturgy says and expresses theologically about God and God's relationship with the world through Christ and the Holy Spirit. As a *locus theologicus* (theological source), the church's worship has always carried the church's

11. James White, "How Do We Know It Is Us?" in E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch before God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 55–66.

12. Ruth Meyers, "Responses," in Gordon Lathrop, ed., *Open Questions in Worship*, vol. 1: *What Are the Essentials of Christian Worship?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1994), 27 (emphasis added).

doctrinal expressions and at the same time helped in developing those doctrinal expressions.

Especially with regard to the challenges of doctrinal heresy, Christian worship was not only formed by, but also helped in forming, orthodox Christian teaching. Orthodox Trinitarian and christological doctrine developed, in part at least, from the church at prayer, as the baptismal-creedal profession of faith gave rise to the “official” creeds themselves, as prayer to Christ contributed to understanding his *homoousios* with the Father, as the Holy Spirit’s “divine” role in baptism shaped the theology of the Spirit’s divinity, and as early devotion to Mary as *Theotokos* gave rise to the decree of Ephesus in 431.

While in Byzantine Greek “orthodoxy” really means “right thinking,” this “right thinking” often developed from the doxology of the church, including the sense expressed still by Russian Orthodoxy of giving “right glory” or right *doxa* to God and orthodox belief (*Pravoslavie*), where several of the central Christian doctrines were prayed liturgically long before they were formalized dogmatically. So it has been through the ages. The practice of Christian worship forms the belief of the church (*ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*, in the words of Prosper of Aquitaine¹³). In turn, worship itself is formed further by that belief and, further still, continues to form people into believers and disciples of the crucified and risen Lord.

If, thanks to historical scholarship, the “deeper re-plunging into its own tradition” envisioned by Wainwright is a much more complex endeavor today than it has ever been before, thanks to that same scholarship on the diversity of liturgical sources, the treasures to be uncovered there for Christianity and its worship life are richer than we may have so far imagined. The goal in all this, of course, is faithfulness, fidelity to the God who acts and works for human salvation through sacraments, people, and communities and to the sacramental worldview that continues to define and characterize classic Christianity in spite of its manifold diversity. This goal is well summarized in the words of Frank Senn, who writes that

the church must provide what people lack in order to offer meaning for their lives: a narratable world—a worldview that provides coherent meaning and a way of enacting it. If the world has come apart in postmodern nihilism, the church must redo the world. It must provide an aimless present with a usable past and a hope-filled future. . . . And if we face in our society’s religiosity a gnostic tendency to seek to escape from the threats of natural decay, temporal limitations, and political responsibility, *this can be at least countered with attention to the sacramental life, the historic liturgy, and traditional ecclesiastical polity.*¹⁴

13. See later in this book, chapter 2, p. 51.

14. F. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 698 (emphasis added).

May this collection be a helpful resource in bringing about that worthy goal.

The particular shape and contents of this collection owe their immediate origins to the work of another of my former teachers, Professor James F. White (+2004), who taught at the University of Notre Dame from 1983 until his retirement in 1999. In many ways, this volume is but a significantly expanded and revised version of his 1992 *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources*.¹⁵ But if White's book clearly serves here as a core document, this volume is significantly different as well. That is, while White limited himself to what he called "descriptive and interpretive sources," this work also includes many liturgical texts themselves, in an effort to provide an accessible guide to various liturgical prayers and collections of prayers and rites from within the distinct Christian liturgical traditions of both East and West, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.

Further, although *Documents of Christian Worship* did contain a chapter on "Sacraments in General,"¹⁶ this volume not only offers additional historical texts but provides selections from contemporary influential sacramental theologians as well. At the same time, this volume includes a chapter altogether reflecting the discipline of liturgical theology (chapter 2), offering, as it were, a historical overview of the discipline from Athanasius of Alexandria to a postmodern approach to the subject from the recent writings of my Notre Dame colleague Nathan Mitchell. Similarly, each chapter is provided with its own brief introduction, locating the particular documents of the chapter in their historical, liturgical, and theological contexts; each document or group of documents within the chapter is provided with short introductory and contextual comments, dealing with issues regarding the date of the document, its contents, or its influence in the wider tradition. Each chapter, or major section of a chapter, is provided with a select bibliography on the topic(s), which can be found on pages 409–14. In this way, it is intended that this volume might be of greater benefit to the reader and to those who might use it in a course.

The task of producing a volume such as this is not possible without the great assistance of others. Here I want to acknowledge and express my deep gratitude to those who have been extraordinarily helpful to me: first, to my *Doktoralvater* and now Notre Dame colleague Paul F. Bradshaw, who has read every word of this work and has made invaluable suggestions about the inclusion and exclusion of various documents (throughout the work but especially with regard to chapters 5 and 6) as well as concerning the overall context and presentation; second, to my former research

15. James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

16. *Ibid.*, 119–34.

assistant, Annie Vorhes McGowan, a recent graduate of the liturgical studies doctoral program at Notre Dame, who was invaluable in tracking down and scanning texts, in proofreading, and, certainly not least, in contacting publishers for copyright permissions to reproduce their materials here (without Annie, this work would not have been completed); third, to my research assistant, Nathanael Marx, who continued Annie's work superbly, not least, providing his own translations of Latin texts for inclusion in this volume (see pp. 361–63); to my current research assistant, Cody Unterseher, whose invaluable assistance has included both the preparation of the index and proofreading; and, fourth, to Westminster John Knox Press for providing me with an electronic copy of James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (without having this text to use as a core document with several important texts already included, I doubt that I would have agreed so willingly to take on this project); and, finally, to Don McKim of Westminster John Knox Press for inviting me to do this collection and to Dilu Nicholas for organizing the copyright permissions and taking care of the necessary financial arrangements with other publishers. To all these people I am very grateful.

***Sacraments in General and
Sacramental Theology***

Scholastic theological approaches to the study of the sacraments and to sacramental theology began with a treatise or section entitled *Sacramenta in generis*, that is, “Sacraments in general,” before going on to treat the individual sacraments themselves in subsequent sections. This volume is no exception. Beginning with Augustine’s famous and ecumenically influential definition that “the word is joined to the element and the result is a sacrament, itself becoming, in a sense, a visible word,” this chapter proceeds historically through the patristic and medieval periods, the latter of which witnesses the development of “seven sacraments,” thanks to the *Sentences of Peter the Lombard* and Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa*.

In the next section the challenge to the medieval sacramental system represented by Luther’s 1520 *Babylonian Captivity* and the works of other Protestant reformers and the renewed defense of the seven sacraments at the Council of Trent leads through the subsequent centuries to what has been called the Copernican revolution in modern sacramental theology, especially in light of the Second Vatican Council in the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1960s.

The final section of this chapter, then, provides selections from contemporary influential sacramental theologians such as Karl Rahner on the relationship of the church and sacrament, James F. White on the numbering of sacraments from an ecumenical Protestant perspective, Louis-Marie Chauvet on the relationship between Word and sacrament, and others, including a contemporary feminist approach offered by Susan Ross and an Eastern theological perspective from M. Daniel Findikyan. Thus this chapter provides a concise overview of the historical development and particular issues that constitute that area of study called sacramental theology.

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**Definitions of a Sacrament,
 Key Concepts, and the Number of Sacraments
 in Early and Medieval Theologians**
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EARLY THEOLOGIANs

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine treats the notion of what constitutes a “sacrament” in several of his writings, rather than in a special treatise on the sacraments.

Augustine of Hippo, *Treatise on the Gospel of John*, LXXX, 3 (ca. 416), trans. Paul F. Palmer, in *Sacraments and Worship* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1957), 127–28.

Why does He not say: you are clean because of the baptism with which you were washed, but says: “because of the word that I have spoken to you” [John 15:3], unless the reason is that even in water it is the word that cleanses? Take away the word and what is water but water? The word is joined to the element and the result is a sacrament, itself becoming, in a sense, a visible word as well. . . . Whence this power of water so exalted as to bathe the body and cleanse the soul, if it is not through the action of the word; not because it is spoken, but because it is believed? . . . This word of faith is of such efficacy in the Church of God that it washes clean not only the one who believes in the word, the one who presents [the child for baptism], the one who sprinkles [the child], but the child itself, be it ever so tiny, even though it is as yet incapable of believing unto justice with the heart or of making profession unto salvation with the lips. All this takes place through the word, concerning which the Lord says: “You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”

Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus the Manichaean*, XIX, 11 (ca. 398), trans. Bernard Leeming, in *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (London: Longmans, 1960), 562–63.

In no religion, whether true or whether false, can men be held in association, unless they are gathered together with a common share in some visible signs or sacraments; and the power of these sacraments is inexpressibly effective, and hence if contemned is accounted to be a sacrilege.

Augustine of Hippo, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, III, 84 (ca. 410),
trans. Bernard Leeming, in *Principles of Sacramental Theology*, 563.

How, then, do both Moses and the Lord sanctify? . . . Moses, by the visible sacraments through his ministry; God by invisible grace through the Holy Spirit, wherein is the whole fruit of the visible sacraments; for without that sanctification of invisible grace, what use are visible sacraments?

Augustine of Hippo, *Commentary on the Psalms*, LXXIII, 2 (ca. 416),
trans. Paul F. Palmer, in *Sacraments and Worship*, 128–29.

If we weigh well the two testaments, the old and the new, the sacraments are not the same, nor are the promises made the same. . . . The sacraments are not the same, since there is a difference between sacraments that give salvation and those that promise a Saviour. The sacraments of the New Law give salvation, the sacraments of the Old Law promised a Saviour.

Augustine of Hippo, *On Baptism against the Donatists*, IV, II, 18 (ca. 400),
trans. Paul F. Palmer, in *Sacraments and Worship*, 123.

When baptism is given in the words of the gospel, no matter how great the perverseness of either minister or recipient, the sacrament is inherently holy on His account whose sacrament it is. And if any one receives baptism from a misguided man, he does not on that account receive the perversity of the minister, but only the holiness of the mystery, and if he is intimately united to the Church in good faith and hope and charity, he receives the remission of his sins. . . . But if the recipient himself is perverse, that which is given is of no profit while he remains in his perversity; and yet that which is received does remain holy within him, nor is the sacrament repeated when he has been corrected.

Augustine applies the terminology of “sacrament” to the annual celebration of the Pascha.

Augustine of Hippo, *Letter 55 to Januarius* 1, 2; in *Easter in the Early Church: An Anthology of Jewish and Early Christian Texts*, selected, annotated, and introduced by Raniero Cantalamessa (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 108–9.

Here you must know, first of all, that the Lord’s birthday is not celebrated in a sacrament but his birth is simply remembered, and for this it was only necessary to mark with festive devotion each year the day on which the event took place. But there is a sacrament in any

celebration when the commemoration of the event is done in such a way as to make us understand that it signifies something that is to be taken in a holy manner. This is in fact how we keep the Pascha. Not only do we call to mind again what happened, that is, that Christ died and rose again, but we also do not leave out the other things about him which confirm the signification of the sacraments. For, since he “died for our sins and rose for our justification,” as the apostle says, a certain passage from death to life has been consecrated in the passion and resurrection of the Lord.

Leo I

Leo’s statement “What was visible in our Redeemer when on earth has become operative in sacramental signs” has become a standard and key text in sacramental and liturgical theology.

Leo I, *De Ascensione Domini* II, in *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 300-301.

The Lord’s resurrection brought us joy; so should his ascension, as we recall the event that exalted our lowly nature beyond the angels and highest created powers to the Father’s side. These divine actions provide a sure foundation; through them God’s grace works marvelously to keep our faith firm, our hope confident, and our love ardent, even though the visible events as such are now a part of history.

It takes great strength of mind and a faithful and enlightened heart to believe without hesitation in what escapes the bodily eye and to desire unswervingly what cannot be seen. Yet how could our hearts be inflamed and how could one be justified by faith if our salvation arose only from what is visible? Therefore, what was visible in our Redeemer when on earth has become operative in sacramental signs [*Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit, in sacramenta transivit*]. And, in order that faith might become stronger and more perfect, teaching replaces sight, and the hearts of the faithful are illumined by God to accept its authority.

Even the blessed Apostles, despite the signs they saw and the sermons they heard, were fearful when the Lord suffered, and did not accept his resurrection unhesitatingly. So much did his ascension influence them, however, that all fear was turned to joy. Their minds contemplated the divine Christ at the Father’s side; no earthly trial could distract them from the fact that Christ had not left the Father when he descended nor left the disciples when he returned.

Therefore, beloved, the Son of Man who is Son of God has in an

ineffable way become more present to us in his Godhead now that he has departed from us in his humanity. Faith now reaches to the Son, who is equal to the Father, and no longer needs the bodily presence of Jesus, in which he is less than the Father. For though his incarnate nature continues to exist, faith is summoned to touch the only-begotten Son, not with bodily sense but with spiritual understanding.

MEDIEVAL THEOLOGIANS

The definition of what constitutes a sacrament becomes more precise.

Hugh of St. Victor

Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, I, 9 (1140), trans. Roy J. Deferrari, in *Hugh of Saint Victor on the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1951), 155.

Now if any one wishes to define more fully and more perfectly what a sacrament is, he can say: “A sacrament is a corporeal or material element set before the senses without, representing by similitude and signifying by institution and containing by sanctification some invisible and spiritual grace.” This definition is recognized as so fitting and perfect that it is found to befit every sacrament and a sacrament alone. For every thing that has these three is a sacrament, and every thing that lacks these three can not be properly called a sacrament.

For every sacrament ought to have a kind of similitude to the thing itself of which it is the sacrament, according to which it is capable of representing the same thing; every sacrament ought to have also institution through which it is ordered to signify this thing and finally sanctification through which it contains that thing and is efficacious for conferring the same on those to be sanctified.

Peter Lombard

Peter Lombard, “Distinction I,” 2–7, trans. Owen R. Ott, in *The Four Books of Sentences*, IV (ca. 1152), in LCC 10:338–41.

“A sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing” [Augustine]. However a sacrament is also called a sacred secret just as it is called a sacrament of the deity, so that a sacrament both signifies something sacred and is something sacred signified; but now it is a question of a sacrament as a sign.

Again, “A sacrament is the visible form of an invisible grace” [Augustine].

“A sign is something beyond the appearance, which it presses on the senses, for it makes something else enter thought” [Augustine].

“Some signs are natural, such as smoke signifying fire; others are given” [Augustine] and of those which are given, certain ones are sacraments, certain ones are not, for every sacrament is a sign, but not conversely.

A sacrament bears a likeness of that thing, whose sign it is. “For if sacraments did not have a likeness of the things whose sacraments they are, they would properly not be called sacraments” [Augustine]. For that is properly called a sacrament which is a sign of the grace of God and a form of invisible grace, so that it bears its image and exists as its cause. Sacraments were instituted, therefore, for the sake, not only of signifying, but also of sanctifying. . . .

“The sacraments were instituted for a threefold cause: as a means of increasing humility, as a means of instruction, and as a spur to activity” [Hugh of St. Victor]. . . .

“Moreover, there are two constituents of a sacrament, namely, words and things: words such as the invocation of the Trinity; things such as water, oil, and the like.”

Now there remains to be seen the difference between the old sacraments and the new, so that we may call sacraments what in former times used to signify sacred things, such as sacrifices and oblations and the like.

Augustine, indeed, briefly indicated the difference between these, when he said, “While the former only promised and signified, the latter gave salvation.”

Nevertheless there was among them a certain sacrament, namely circumcision, conferring the same remedy against sin which baptism now does. . . .

Through circumcision, from the time of its institution, the remission of original and actual sin for young and old was offered by God, just as now it is given in baptism.

Peter the Lombard is the first to articulate a list of seven sacraments for the Western church.

Peter Lombard, “Distinction II,” 1, trans. Owen R. Ott, in LCC 10:344–45.

Now let us approach the sacraments of the new law, which are: baptism, confirmation, the bread of blessing, that is the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, marriage. Of these, some provide a remedy against sin and confer assisting grace, such as baptism;

others are only a remedy, such as marriage; others strengthen us with grace and power, such as the eucharist and orders.

If it is asked why the sacraments were not instituted soon after the fall of man, since righteousness and salvation are in them, we say that the sacraments of grace were not to be given before the coming of Christ, who brought grace, for they receive power from his death and Passion. Christ did not wish to come before man was convinced that neither the natural nor the written law could support him.

“Marriage, however, was certainly not instituted before sin [the fall] as a remedy, but as a sacrament and a duty” [Hugh of St. Victor]; after sin, indeed, it was a remedy against the corrupting effect of carnal concupiscence, with which we shall deal in its place.

Peter Lombard, “Distinction IV,” 1, trans. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, in *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (Merrick, NY: Richwood Publishing Co., 1976), 95.

[Baptism]: Here we must say that some receive the sacrament and the thing [*res*], some the sacrament and not the thing, some the thing and not the sacrament.

Peter Lombard, “Distinction VIII,” 6–7, trans. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, in *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, 122.

[Eucharist]: Now let us see what is the sacrament and what the thing [*res*]: “The sacrament is the visible form of invisible grace” [Augustine]; the form therefore of the bread and wine which appears here is the sacrament, that is “the sign of a sacred thing, because it calls something to mind beyond the appearance which it presents to the senses.” Therefore the appearances “keep the names of the things which they were before, namely, bread and wine.”

“Moreover the thing [*res*] of this sacrament is two-fold: one, what is contained and signified, the other what is signified but not contained. The thing contained and signified is the flesh of Christ which he received from the Virgin and the blood which he shed for us. The thing signified and not contained is the unity of the Church in those who are predestined, called, justified, and glorified.”

Peter Lombard, “Distinction XXIII,” 3, trans. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, in *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, 221.

[Extreme unction] This sacrament of the unction of the sick is said to have been instituted by the apostles. For James says: “Is any sick among you?” [James 5:14].

Peter Lombard, “Distinction XXIV,” 1–3, trans. Owen R. Ott, in LCC 10:349.

[Ordination] Let us now enter upon the consideration of sacred orders.

There are seven degrees or orders of spiritual function, as is plainly handed down by the writings of the holy Fathers and is shown by the example of our head, namely, Jesus Christ. He exhibited the functions of all in himself and left to his body, which is the Church, the same orders to be observed.

Moreover there are seven on account of the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit, and those who are not partakers of the Spirit approach ecclesiastical orders unworthily. . . .

In the sacrament of the sevenfold Spirit there are seven ecclesiastical degrees, namely, doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, priest; all, however, are called clerics, that is, those chosen by lot [Acts 1:26].

Peter Lombard, “Distinction XXIV,” 11, trans. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, in *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System*, 231.

Wherefore also among men of old times bishops and presbyters were the same, because it is the name of a dignity, not of an age.

Peter Lombard, “Distinction XXIV,” 12–16, trans. Owen R. Ott, in LCC 10:350–51.

Although all spiritual states are sacred, the canons well conclude that only two are so called, namely, the diaconate and the presbyterate; for “it is written that the primitive Church had these alone” [Gratian]. . . . The Church appointed subdeacons and acolytes for itself as time went on” [Gratian].

If it is asked what that which is called an order is, it can definitely be said that it is a certain sign, that is, a sacred something, by which spiritual power and office are handed to the ordinand. Therefore a spiritual character in which there is an increase of power is called an order or grade.

And these orders are called sacraments because in receiving them a sacred thing, grace, which the things that are there done figure, is conferred.

There are certain other names, not of orders, but of dignities and offices. “Bishop” is both the name of a dignity and of an office. . . .

“The bishop is the chief of priests, as it were the path of those who follow. He is also called the highest priest; for he makes priests and deacons, and distributes all ecclesiastical orders” [Isidore of Seville].

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part III, 61–65
(ca. 1271), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province
(New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), 2:2352–79.

Question 61: First Article: “Whether Sacraments Are Necessary for Man’s Salvation?” . . .

I answer that, Sacraments are necessary unto man’s salvation for three reasons. The first is taken from the condition of human nature which is such that it has to be led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible. . . . The second reason is taken from the state of man who in sinning subjected himself by his affections to corporeal things. . . . The third reason is taken from the fact that man is prone to direct his activity chiefly toward material things. . . .

Question 62: First Article: “Whether the Sacraments Are the Cause of Grace?” . . .

I answer that, We must needs say that in some way the sacraments of the New Law cause grace. For it is evident that through the sacraments of the New Law man is incorporated with Christ. . . .

Fourth Article: “Whether There Be in the Sacraments a Power of Causing Grace?” . . .

I answer that, . . . If we hold that a sacrament is an instrumental cause of grace, we must needs allow that there is in the sacraments a certain instrumental power of bringing about the sacramental effects. . . .

Sixth Article: “Whether the Sacraments of the Old Law Caused Grace?” . . .

I answer that, It cannot be said that the sacraments of the Old Law conferred sanctifying grace of themselves, i.e., by their own power: since thus Christ’s Passion would not have been necessary. . . .

Question 63: First Article: “Whether a Sacrament Imprints a Character on the Soul?” . . .

I answer that, . . . Since, therefore by the sacraments, men are deputed to a spiritual service pertaining to the worship of God, it follows that by their names the faithful receive a certain spiritual character. . . .

Fifth Article: “Whether a Character Can Be Blotted Out from the Soul?” . . .

I answer that, . . . It is clear that the intellect being perpetual and incorruptible, a character cannot be blotted out from the soul. . . .

Sixth Article: “Whether a Character Is Imprinted by Each Sacrament of the New Law?” . . .

I answer that, . . . These three sacraments imprint a character, namely, Baptism, Confirmation, and Order. . . .

Question 64: Second Article: “Whether the Sacraments Are Instituted by God Alone?” . . .

I answer that, . . . Since, therefore, the power of the sacrament is from God alone, it follows that God alone can institute the sacraments. . . .

Fifth Article: “Whether the Sacraments Can be Conferred by Evil Ministers?” . . .

I answer that, . . . The ministers of the Church can confer the sacraments, though they be wicked. . . .

Seventh Article: “Whether Angels Can Administer Sacraments?” . . .

I answer that, . . . It belongs to men, but not to angels, to dispense the sacraments and to take part in their administration. . . .

Ninth Article: “Whether Faith Is Required of Necessity in the Minister of a Sacrament?” . . .

I answer that, . . . Wherefore, just as the validity of a sacrament does not require that the minister should have charity, and even sinners can confer sacraments, . . . so neither is it necessary that he should have faith, and even an unbeliever can confer a true sacrament, provided that the other essentials are there. . . .

Question 65: First Article: “Whether There Should Be Seven Sacraments?” . . .

I answer that, . . . As stated above, the sacraments of the Church were instituted for a twofold purpose: namely, in order to perfect man in things pertaining to the worship of God according to the religion of Christian life, and to be a remedy against the defects caused by sin. And in either way it is becoming that there should be seven sacraments. . . .

Third Article: “Whether the Eucharist Is the Greatest of the Sacraments?” . . .

I answer that, . . . Absolutely speaking, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the greatest of all the sacraments: and this may be shown in three ways. First of all because it contains Christ Himself substantially. . . . Secondly, this is made clear by considering the relation of the sacraments to one another. For all the other sacraments seem to be

ordained to this one as to their end. . . . Thirdly, this is made clear by considering the rites of the sacraments. For nearly all the sacraments terminate in the Eucharist. . . .

Fourth Article: "Whether All the Sacraments Are Necessary to Salvation?" . . .

I answer that, . . . In the first way, three sacraments are necessary for salvation. Two of them are necessary for the individual; Baptism, simply and absolutely; Penance, in the case of mortal sin committed after Baptism; while the sacrament of Order is necessary to the Church, since *where there is no governor the people shall fall* (Prov. 11:14).

But in the second way the other sacraments are necessary. For in a sense Confirmation perfects Baptism; Extreme Unction perfects Penance; while Matrimony, by multiplying them, preserves the numbers in the Church.

Council of Florence

This fifteenth-century decree becomes the classic statement of the definition and number of the sacraments in the West.

Council of Florence, "Decree for the Armenians" (1439), trans. from *Enchiridion: Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum*, ed. Henry Denzinger and Adolf Schönmetzer, 33rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 332–33.

Fifthly, we have set down in briefest form the truth about the sacraments of the Church for the easier instruction of the Armenians at present or in the future. There are seven sacraments of the new law: namely, baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, extreme unction, ordination and marriage. These differ much from the sacraments of the old law. The latter did not cause grace but only served as a figure of the passion of Christ. Ours truly contain grace and confer it on those who worthily receive it.

Of these, five pertain to the spiritual perfecting of individuals; the other two are ordained to the governing and increase of the Church. Through baptism we are spiritually reborn; through confirmation we are made to grow in grace and are strengthened in faith. When we have been reborn and strengthened, we are sustained by the divine nourishment of the eucharist. But if through sin we incur sickness of the soul, through penance we are made healthy; we are healed, spiritually and physically according as the soul needs, through extreme

unction. Through ordination the Church is governed and increased spiritually, through marriage it grows physically.

All these sacraments are made complete by three things, namely things or matter, words or form, and the person of the minister performing the sacrament with the intention of doing what the Church does. If any of these is absent, the sacrament is not complete.

Among these sacraments there are three—baptism, confirmation, and ordination—which impose on the soul indelibly a character, a certain spiritual sign distinguished from all others. These are not repeated for the same person. The other four do not impose a character and allow repetition.

The Protestant and Catholic Reformations

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reforms

Luther attacks the sacramental system of the medieval Western church and yet articulates a sacramental principle of a biblical “single sacrament” (i.e., Christ himself), which will become common in modern sacramental theology.

Martin Luther, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), trans. A. T. W. Steinhäuser, Frederick C. Ahrens, and Abdel Ross Wentz, in LW 36:18, 91–92, 106–7, 117–18, 123–25.

To begin with, I must deny that there are seven sacraments, and for the present maintain that there are but three: baptism, penance, and the bread. All three have been subjected to a miserable captivity by the Roman curia, and the church has been robbed of all her liberty. Yet, if I were to speak according to the usage of the Scriptures, I should have only one single sacrament [Christ, I Tim. 3:16], but with three sacramental signs, of which I shall treat more fully at the proper time. . . .

Confirmation

It is amazing that it should have entered the minds of these men to make a sacrament of confirmation out of the laying on of hands. . . .

I do not say this because I condemn the seven sacraments, but because I deny that they can be proved from the Scriptures. Would

that there were in the church such a laying on of hands as there was in apostolic times, whether we chose to call it confirmation or healing! But there is nothing left of it now but what we ourselves have invented to adorn the office of bishops, that they may not be entirely without work in the church. . . .

For to constitute a sacrament there must be above all things else a word of divine promise, by which faith may be exercised. . . .

These things cannot be called sacraments of faith, because they have no divine promise connected with them, neither do they save, but the sacraments do save those who believe the divine promise.

Marriage

Not only is marriage regarded as a sacrament without the least warrant of Scripture, but the very ordinances which extol it as a sacrament have turned it into a farce. Let us look into this a little.

We have said that in every sacrament there is a word of divine promise, to be believed by whoever receives the sign, and that the sign alone cannot be a sacrament. . . .

Ordination

Of this sacrament the church of Christ knows nothing; it is an invention of the church of the pope. Not only is there nowhere any promise of grace attached to it, but there is not a single word said about it in the whole New Testament. Now it is ridiculous to put forth as a sacrament of God something that cannot be proved to have been instituted by God. . . . We ought to see that every article of faith of which we boast is certain, pure, and based on clear passages of Scripture. But we are utterly unable to do that in the case of the sacrament under consideration. . . .

The Sacrament of Extreme Unction

To this rite of anointing the sick the theologians of our day have made two additions which are worthy of them: first, they call it a sacrament, and second, they make it the last sacrament. . . .

I still would say, that no apostle [James] has the right on his own authority to institute a sacrament, that is, to give a divine promise with a sign attached. For this belongs to Christ alone. . . .

There are still a few other things which it might seem possible to regard as sacraments; namely, all those things to which a divine promise has been given, such as prayer, the Word, and the cross. . . .

Nevertheless, it has seemed proper to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises which have signs attached to them. The remainder, not being bound to signs, are bare promises. Hence there are, strictly speaking, but two sacraments in the church of God—baptism and the

bread. For only in these two do we find both the divinely instituted sign and the promise of forgiveness of sins. The sacrament of penance, which I added to these two, lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a way and a return to baptism. Nor can the scholastics say that their definition fits penance, for they too ascribe to the true sacraments a visible sign, which is to impress upon the senses the form of that which it effects invisibly. But penance or absolution has no such sign. Therefore they are compelled by their own definition either to admit that penance is not a sacrament and thus to reduce their number, or else to bring forth another definition of a sacrament.

Baptism, however, which we have applied to the whole of life, will truly be a sufficient substitute for all the sacraments which we might need as long as we live. And the bread is truly the sacrament of the dying and departing; for in it we commemorate the passing of Christ out of this world, that we may imitate him. . . . Thus he clearly seems to have instituted the sacrament of the bread with a view to our entrance into the life to come. For then, when the purpose of both sacraments is fulfilled, baptism and bread will cease.

Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism* (1529), trans. Theodore G. Tappert, in *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 436.

It remains for us to speak of our two sacraments, instituted by Christ. Every Christian ought to have at least some brief, elementary instruction in them because without these no one can be a Christian, although unfortunately in the past nothing was taught about them.

Augsburg Confession

Augsburg Confession (1530), Articles VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, and XXVIII, in trans. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 32–34, 81.

Article VII. It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers [or “saints”] among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient [*satis est*] for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word [or, “are administered rightly”].

Art. VIII. . . . [B]ecause in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly, the

sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men. . . .

Art. IX. It is taught among us that Baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children too should be baptized, for in baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to him. On this account the Anabaptists who teach that infant Baptism is not right are rejected.

Art. X. It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected.

Art. XI. It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse. However, in confession it is not necessary to enumerate all trespasses and sins, for this is impossible. Ps. 19:12, “Who can discern his errors?”

Art. XXVIII. Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments. . . . This power of keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the Word of God and by administering the sacraments. . . . In this way are imparted not bodily but eternal things and gifts, namely, eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. These gifts cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching and of administering the sacraments.

Apology to the Augsburg Confession

The Lutheran confessional tradition leaves the door open as to the number of sacraments in the church.

Apology to the Augsburg Confession (1531), Art. VII, VIII, and XIII,
in trans. Theodore G. Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 173, 211–13.

Art. VII and VIII. . . . They [i.e., the ordained] do not represent their own persons but the person of Christ, because of the church’s call, as Christ testifies (Luke 10:16), “He who hears you hears me.” When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they do so in Christ’s place and stead.

Art. XIII. The genuine sacraments, therefore, are Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and absolution (which is the sacrament of penitence), for these rites have the commandment of God and the promise of

grace, which is the heart of the New Testament. When we are baptized, when we eat the Lord's body, when we are absolved, our hearts should firmly believe that God really forgives us for Christ's sake. . . .

. . . If ordination is interpreted in relation to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament. The ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promise: "The Gospel is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Rom. 1:16), again, "My word that goes forth from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). If ordination is interpreted this way, we shall not object either to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament. The church has the command to appoint ministers; to this we must subscribe wholeheartedly, for we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it. . . .

. . . Ultimately, if we should list as sacraments all things that have God's command and a promise attached to them, then why not prayer, which can most truly be called a sacrament? It has both the command of God and many promises. . . . No intelligent person will quibble about the number of sacraments or the terminology, so long as those things are kept which have God's command and promise.

Ulrich Zwingli

Zwingli's approach to the sacraments focuses on their being "memorials."

Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion* (1525), trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 184.

The sacraments are, then, signs or ceremonies—let me say it with the good permission of all both of the new school and the old—by which a man proves to the Church that he either aims to be, or is, a soldier of Christ, and which inform the whole Church rather than yourself of your faith. For if your faith is not so perfect as not to need a ceremonial sign to confirm it, it is not faith. For faith is that by which we rely on the mercy of God unwaveringly, firmly, and singleheartedly, as Paul shows us in many passages.

So much for the meaning of the name. Christ left us two sacraments and no more, Baptism and The Lord's Supper. By these we are initiated, giving the name with the one, and showing by the other that we are mindful of Christ's victory and are members of His Church. In Baptism we receive a token that we are to fashion our lives according to the rule of Christ; by the Lord's Supper we give

proof that we trust in the death of Christ, glad and thankful to be in that company which gives thanks to the Lord for the blessing of redemption which He freely gave us by dying for us. The other sacraments are rather ceremonials, for they have no initiatory function in the Church of God. Hence it is not improper to exclude them; for they were not instituted by God to help us initiate anything in the Church.

John Calvin

John Calvin has a much higher appreciation for sacramental signs than does Ulrich Zwingli.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, 14, 1–26 (1559),
trans. Ford Lewis Battles, in LCC 21:1277–1303.

Chapter XIV. The Sacraments.

1. First, we must consider what a sacrament is. It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men. Here is another briefer definition: one may call it a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him. Whichever of these definitions you may choose, it does not differ in meaning from that of Augustine, who teaches that a sacrament is a “visible sign of a sacred thing,” or “a visible form of an invisible grace,” but it better and more clearly explains the thing itself. . . .

3. But as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, totters, and at last gives way. Here our merciful Lord, according to his infinite kindness, so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings. For if we were incorporated (as Chrysostom says), he would give us these very things naked and incorporeal. Now, because we have souls engrafted in bodies, he imparts spiritual things under visible ones. . . .

7. It is therefore certain that the Lord offers us mercy and the pledge of his grace both in his Sacred Word and in his sacraments. But it is understood only by those who take Word and sacraments

with sure faith, just as Christ is offered and held forth by the Father to all unto salvation, yet not all acknowledge and receive him. In one place Augustine, meaning to convey this, said that the efficacy of the Word is brought to light in the sacrament, not because it is spoken, but because it is believed. . . .

9. But the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in. If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears. Therefore, I make such a division between Spirit and the sacraments that the power to act rests with the former, and the ministry alone is left to the latter—a ministry empty and trifling, apart from the action of the Spirit, but charged with great effect when the Spirit works within and manifests his power. . . .

17. Therefore, let it be regarded as a settled principle that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace. . . .

They do not bestow any grace of themselves, but announce and tell us, and (as they are guarantees and tokens) ratify among us, those things given us by divine bounty. . . .

God therefore truly executes whatever he promises and represents in signs; nor do the signs lack their own effect in proving their Author truthful and faithful. . . .

20. These [circumcision, purifications, sacrifices, and other rites] were the sacraments of the Jews until the coming of Christ. When at his coming these were abrogated, two sacraments were instituted which the Christian church now uses, Baptism and the Lord's Supper [Matt. 28:19; 26:26–28]. I am speaking of those which were established for the use of the whole church. I would not go against calling the laying on of hands, by which ministers of the church are initiated into their office, a sacrament, but I do not include it among the ordinary sacraments. In what place the rest of what are commonly considered sacraments should be held, we shall soon see.

Yet those ancient sacraments looked to the same purpose to which ours now tend: to direct and almost lead men by the hand to Christ, or rather, as images, to represent him and show him forth to be known. . . . There is only one difference: the former foreshadowed Christ promised while he was as yet awaited: the latter attest him as already given and revealed.

21. When these things are individually explained, they will become much clearer.

For the Jews, circumcision was the symbol by which they were admonished that whatever comes forth from man's seed, that is, the whole nature of mankind, is corrupt and needs pruning. Moreover, circumcision was a token and reminder to confirm them in the promise given to Abraham of the blessed seed in which all nations of the earth were to be blessed [Gen. 22:18], from whom they were also to await their own blessing. Now that saving seed (as we are taught by Paul) was Christ [Gal. 3:16]. . . .

26. It is good that our readers be briefly apprised of this thing also: whatever the Sophists have dreamed up concerning the *opus operatum* is not only false but contradicts the nature of the sacraments, which God so instituted that believers, poor and deprived of all goods, should bring nothing to it but begging. From this it follows that in receiving the sacraments believers do nothing to deserve praise, and that even in this act (which on their part is merely passive) no work can be ascribed to them.

Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland stands with Calvin's theological focus.

Church of Scotland, *The Scotch Confession of Faith* (1560), in trans. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 3:467–68 (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation modernized).

Article XXI. Of the Sacraments

As the fathers under the law, besides the verity of the sacrifices, had two chief sacraments, to wit, circumcision and the Passover, the despisers and contemners whereof were not reputed for God's people; so do we acknowledge and confess that we now in the time of the Evangel have two chief sacraments, only instituted by the Lord *Jesus* and commanded to be used of all they that will be reputed members of his body, to wit Baptism and the Supper or Table of the Lord *Jesus*, called the Communion of his Body and his Blood. And these sacraments, as well of Old as of New Testament, now instituted of God, not only to make any visible difference betwixt his people and they that were without his league: But also to exercise the faith of his children, and, by participation of the same sacraments, to seal in their hearts the assurance of his promise, and of that most blessed conjunction, union, and society, which the elect have with their head *Christ Jesus*. And thus we utterly damn the vanity of they that affirm sacraments to be nothing else but naked and bare signs.

Church of England

While only baptism and Lord's Supper are retained as official sacraments of the "Gospel," the Church of England underscores that the sacraments are effectual signs of grace by which God works.

Articles of Religion (1563), in *The Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford, 1784); bracketed items omitted or modernized by John Wesley (1784), in *John Wesley's Sunday Service* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 311–12.

Article XXV [XVI]. Of the Sacraments.

Sacraments ordained of Christ, [be] not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they [be] certain [sure witnesses, and effectual] signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures: but yet have not like nature of [Sacraments with] Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, [for that] they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained by God.

The Sacraments were not ordained [of] Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves [damnation], as Saint *Paul* saith.

THE CATHOLIC REFORMATION

Council of Trent

The Council of Trent reaffirms the traditional seven sacraments, including their institution by Christ.

The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (1547),
in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 2:119–22.

Seventh Session, held March 3, 1547

Canon I.—If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law were

not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or, that they are more, or less, than seven, to wit, Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament: let him be anathema.

Canon II.—If any one saith, that these said sacraments of the New Law do not differ from the sacraments of the Old Law, save that the ceremonies are different, and different the outward rites: let him be anathema.

Canon III.—If any one saith, that these seven sacraments are in such wise equal to each other, as that one is not in any way more worthy than another: let him be anathema.

Canon IV.—If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification;—though all [the sacraments] are not indeed necessary for every individual: let him be anathema.

Canon V.—If any one saith, that these sacraments were instituted for the sake of nourishing faith alone: let him be anathema.

Canon VI.—If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify; or, that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place an obstacle thereunto; as though they were merely outward signs of grace or justice received through faith, and certain marks of the Christian profession, whereby believers are distinguished amongst men from unbelievers: let him be anathema.

Canon VII.—If any one saith, that grace, as far as God's part is concerned, is not given through the said sacraments, always, and to all men, even though they receive them rightly but [only] sometimes, and to some persons: let him be anathema.

Canon VIII.—If any one saith, that by the said sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred through the act performed, but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace: let him be anathema.

Canon IX.—If any one saith, that, in the three sacraments, to wit, Baptism, Confirmation, and Order, there is not imprinted in the soul a character, that is, a certain spiritual and indelible sign, on account of which they can not be repeated: let him be anathema.

Canon X.—If any one saith, that all Christians have power to administer the word, and all the sacraments: let him be anathema.

Canon XI.—If any one saith, that, in ministers, when they effect, and confer the sacraments, there is not required the intention at least of doing what the Church does: let him be anathema.

Canon XII.—If any one saith, that a minister, being in moral sin,—if so be that he observe all the essentials which belong to the effecting, or conferring of, the sacrament,—neither effects, nor confers the sacrament: let him be anathema.

Canon XIII.—If any one saith, that the received and approved rites of the Catholic Church, wont to be used in the solemn administration of the sacraments, may be contemned, or without sin be omitted at pleasure by the ministers, or be changed, by every pastor of the churches, into other new ones: let him be anathema.

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The Puritans

The Calvinist tradition remains among the Puritans.

The Puritans, *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647),
in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:660–61.

Chapter XXVII. Of the Sacraments.

I. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.

II. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and the effects of the one are attributed to the other.

III. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.

IV. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel, that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained.

V. The sacraments of the Old Testament, in regard to the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the New.

Robert Barclay, Society of Friends

External sacraments have ceased in favor of the inward workings of God's Spirit.

Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (English trans. from Latin, 1678; Manchester: William Irwin, 1869), 215, 222, 240, 257, 280.

Proposition Eleventh. Concerning Worship.

All true and acceptable worship to God is offered in the inward and immediate moving and drawing of his own Spirit, which is neither limited to places, times, nor persons. . . .

And there being many joined together in the same work, there is an inward travail and wrestling; and also, as the measure of grace is abode in, an overcoming of the power and spirit of darkness; and thus we are often greatly strengthened and renewed in the spirits of our minds without a word, and we enjoy and possess the *holy fellowship*, and *communion of the body and blood of Christ*, by which our inward man is nourished and fed; which makes us not to dote upon outward *water*, and *bread* and *wine*, in our spiritual things. . . .

He [God] causeth the inward life (which is also many times not conveyed by the outward senses) the more to abound, when his children assemble themselves diligently together to wait upon him; so that *as iron sharpeneth iron* [Prov. 27:17], the seeing of the faces one of another, when both are inwardly gathered unto the life, giveth occasion for the life secretly to arise, and pass from vessel to vessel. And as many candles lighted, and put in one place, do greatly augment the light, and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life, there is more of the glory of God, and his power appears to the refreshment of each individual; for that he partakes not only of the light and life raised in himself but in all the rest. And therefore Christ hath particularly promised a blessing to such as assemble together in his *name*, seeing he will be *in the midst of them*, Matt. 18:20. . . .

Proposition Twelfth. Concerning Baptism.

And this baptism is a pure and spiritual thing, to wit, the baptism of the Spirit and fire, by which we are buried with him, that being washed and purged from our sins, we may *walk in newness of life*; of

which the baptism of John was a figure, which was commanded for a time, and not to continue for ever. As to the baptism of *infants*, it is a mere human tradition, for which neither *precept* nor *practice* is to be found in all the scripture. . . .

Proposition Thirteenth. Concerning the Communion, or Participation of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The *communion* of the body and blood of Christ is *inward* and *spiritual*, which is the participation of his flesh and blood, by which the *inward man* is daily nourished in the hearts of those in whom Christ dwells; of which things the *breaking of bread* by Christ with his disciples was a *figure*, which even they who had received the substance used in the church for a time, for the sake of the weak; even as *abstaining from things strangled, and from blood; the washing one another's feet, and the anointing of the sick with oil*; all which are commanded with no less authority and solemnity than the former; yet seeing they are but *shadows* of better things, they cease in such as have obtained the *substance*.

Immanuel Kant

The Enlightenment values the sacraments chiefly as moral exhortations.

Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 182–89.

There can, indeed, be three kinds of *illusory faith* that involve the possibility of our overstepping the bounds of our reason in the direction of the supernatural (which is not, according to the laws of reason, an object either of theoretical or practical use). *First*, . . . (the faith in *miracles*). *Second*, . . . (the faith in *mysteries*). *Third*, the illusion of being able to bring about, through the use of merely natural means, an effect which is, for us, a mystery, namely the influence of God upon our morality (the faith in *means of grace*). . . . It still remains, therefore, for us to treat of the means of grace, (which are further distinguished from *works of grace*, i.e., supernatural moral influences in relation to which we are merely passive; but the imagined experience of these is a fanatical illusion pertaining entirely to the emotions).

1. *Praying*, thought of as an *inner formal* service of God and hence as a means of grace, is a superstitious illusion. . . .

2. *Church-going*, thought of as the ceremonial *public service of God* in a church, *in general*, [only as] a *means of grace*, is an illusion.

3. The ceremonial initiation, taking place but once, into the church . . . community, that is, one's first acceptance as a member of a church (in the Christian Church through *baptism*) is a highly significant ceremony which lays a grave obligation either upon the initiate, if he is in a position himself to confess his faith, or upon the witnesses who pledge themselves to take care of his education in this faith. This aims at something holy (the development of a man into a citizen in a divine state) but this act performed by others is not in itself holy or productive of holiness and receptivity for the divine grace in this individual; hence it is no *means of grace*, however exaggerated the esteem in which it was held in the early Greek church, where it was believed capable, in an instant, of washing away all sins—and here this illusion publicly revealed its affinity to an almost more than heathenism superstition.

4. The oft-repeated ceremony (*communion*) of a *renewal, continuation, and propagation of this churchly community* under laws of *equality*, a ceremony which indeed can be performed, after the example of the Founder of such a church (and, at the same time, in memory of him), through the formality of a common partaking at the same table, contains within itself something great, expanding the narrow selfish, and unsociable cast of mind among men, especially in matters of religion, towards the idea of a cosmopolitan *moral community*; and it is a good means of enlivening a community to the moral disposition of brotherly love which it represents. But to assert that God has attached special favors to the celebration of this solemnity, and to incorporate among the articles of faith the proposition that this ceremony, which is after all but a churchly act, is, in addition, a *means of grace*—this is a religious illusion which can do naught but work counter to the spirit of religion. *Clericalism* in general would therefore be the dominion of the clergy over men's hearts, usurped by the dint of arrogating to themselves the prestige attached to exclusive possession of means of grace.

All such artificial self-deceptions in religious matters have a common basis. Among the three divine attributes, holiness, mercy, and justice, man habitually turns directly to the second in order thus to avoid the forbidding condition of conforming to the requirements of the first. . . .

To this end man busies himself with every conceivable formality, designed to indicate how greatly he *respects* the divine commands, in order that it may not be necessary for him to *obey* them; and, that his idle wishes may serve also good to make good the disobedience of these commands, he cries: "Lord, Lord," so as not to have to "do the will of his heavenly Father" (Mt. 7:21). . . . He busies himself

with piety (a passive respect for the law of God) rather than with *virtue*. . . .

When the illusion of this supposed favorite of heaven mounts to the point where he fanatically imagines that he feels special works of grace within himself (or even where he actually presumes to be confident of a fancied occult *intercourse* with God), virtue comes at last actually to arouse his loathing and becomes for him an object of contempt.

The Modern Period: A New Era in Sacramental Theology

Edward Schillebeeckx

Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx sets the agenda for contemporary Roman Catholic and ecumenical sacramental thinking by focusing on the language of personal encounter in the sacraments.

Edward Schillebeeckx, OP, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (1960),
trans. Paul Barrett et al. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 15–17, 44–45.

The man Jesus, as the personal visible realization of the divine grace of redemption, is *the* sacrament, the primordial sacrament, because this man, the Son of God himself, is intended by the Father to be in his humanity the only way to the actuality of redemption. “For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus” [I Tim. 2:5]. Personally to be approached by the man Jesus was, for his contemporaries, an invitation to a personal encounter with the life-giving God, because personally that man was the Son of God. Human encounter with Jesus is therefore the sacrament of the encounter with God, or of the religious life as a theological [*sic*] attitude of existence towards God. Jesus’ human redeeming acts are therefore a “sign and cause of grace.” “Sign” and “cause” of salvation are not brought together here as two elements fortuitously conjoined. Human bodiliness is human interiority itself in visible form.

Now because the inward power of Jesus’ will to redeem and of his human love is God’s own saving power realized in human form, the human saving acts of Jesus are the divine bestowal of grace itself

realized in visible form; that is to say they cause what they signify; they are sacraments. . . .

From this account of the sacraments as the earthly prolongation of Christ's glorified bodiliness, it follows immediately that the Church's sacraments are not things but encounters of men on earth with the glorified man Jesus by way of a visible form. On the plane of history they are the visible and tangible embodiment of the heavenly saving action of Christ. They are this saving action itself in its availability to us; a personal act of the Lord in earthly visibility and open availability.

Here the first and most fundamental definition of sacramentality is made evident. In an earthly embodiment which we can see and touch, the heavenly Christ sacramentalizes both his continual intercession for us and his active gift of grace. Therefore the sacraments are the visible realization on earth of Christ's mystery of saving worship. "What was visible in Christ has now passed over into the sacraments of the Church" [Ascension Day sermon of Leo I].

The fact which we must now begin to analyze in detail is therefore this: Through the sacraments we are placed in living contact with the mystery of Christ the High Priest's saving worship. In them we encounter Christ in his mystery of Passover and Pentecost. The sacraments *are* this saving mystery in earthly guise. This visible manifestation is the visible Church.

Karl Rahner

The highly influential Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner grounds the sacraments in the sacramental nature of the church expressing itself sacramentally rather than in explicit dominical institution.

Karl Rahner, SJ, *The Church and the Sacraments*, Quaestiones Disputatae 9
(London: Search Press, Ltd., 1963), 38–41.

[W]e must distinguish between two aspects: the dependence of the actual manifestation on what is manifesting itself, and the difference between the two. To cite a comparable relationship, a spiritual being is an intellectual substance, yet only constitutes itself as such, as mind, by there emanating from it what is not identical with itself, its really distinct power of knowing. A proportionately similar relation holds between phenomenon and underlying reality. Hence it is possible to perceive why the symbol can be really distinct from what is symbolized and yet an intrinsic factor of what is symbolized. . . .

What is manifesting itself posits its own identity and existence by manifesting itself in this manifestation which is distinct from itself. An example of this relationship is available for the scholastic philosopher in the relation between soul and body. The body is the manifestation of the soul, through which and in which the soul realizes its own essence. The sign is therefore a cause of what it signifies by being the way in which what is signified effects itself. The kind of causality expressed in such a conception of symbolism occurs on various levels of human reality. In substantial being (body as the sign or symbol of the soul); in the sphere of activity (bodily gesture through which the inner attitude itself which is expressed by it first attains its own full depth). . . .

. . . This concept of the intrinsic symbol . . . must now be employed if we are to grasp what characterizes sacramental causation, and if we are to do this on the basis of the ecclesiological origin of the sacraments. The Church in her visible historical form is herself an intrinsic symbol of the eschatologically triumphant grace of God; in that spatio-temporal visible form, this grace is made present. And because the sacraments are the actual fulfillment, the actualization of the Church's very nature, in regard to individual men, precisely in as much as the Church's whole reality is to be the real presence of God's grace, as the new covenant, these sacramental signs are efficacious. Their efficacy is that of the intrinsic symbol. Christ acts through the Church in regard to an individual human being, by giving his action spatio-temporal embodiment by having the gift of his grace manifested in the sacrament. This visible form is itself an effect of the coming of grace; it is there because God is gracious to men; and in this self-embodiment of grace, grace itself occurs. The sacramental sign is cause of grace in as much as grace is conferred by being signified. And this presence (by signifying) of grace in the sacraments is simply the actuality of the Church herself as the visible manifestation of grace. Consequently the converse holds. The relation between the Church as the historical visible manifestation of grace and grace itself, one of reciprocal conditioning, extends into the relation between sacramental sign and grace conferred. The sign effects grace, by grace producing the sacrament as sign of the sanctification effected. This, of course, can only be said if the Church as an entity is truly and inseparably connected with grace. Only then is her act, when it is an unconditional realization of her essence (that is of the Church as the presence of grace), essentially and irrevocably a manifestation of grace, so that the manifestation necessarily renders present what is manifested. . . .

. . . From the principle that the Church is the primal sacrament it would be possible to see that the existence of true sacraments in

the strictest traditional sense is not necessarily and always based on a definite statement, which has been preserved or is presumed to have existed, in which the historical Jesus Christ explicitly spoke about a certain definite sacrament. This would have its importance for apologetics of a less anxious and worried kind in the history of dogma, in the matter of the institution of all the sacraments by Christ. A fundamental act of the Church in an individual's regard, in situations that are decisive for him, an act which truly involves the nature of the Church as the historical, eschatological presence of redemptive grace, is *ipso facto* a sacrament, even if it were only later that reflection was directed to its sacramental character that follows from its connection with the nature of the Church. The institution of a sacrament can . . . follow simply from the fact that Christ founded the Church with its sacramental nature. It is clear too that, properly understood, the treatise *De sacramentis in genere* is not an abstract formulation of the nature of the individual sacraments, but is part of the treatise *De ecclesia*. It rightly precedes doctrine about the individual sacraments; it does not follow as a subsequent secondary generalization; for only on the basis of the doctrine about the Church, the fundamental sacrament, can the sacramentality of several sacraments be recognized at all.

Mark Searle

Searle provides a succinct summary of contemporary sacramental theology.

Mark Searle, "Infant Baptism Reconsidered," in *LWSS*, 365.

During the past twenty or thirty years sacramental theology has undergone an enormous transformation. Undoubtedly the leading indicator if not the cause of this transformation is the abandonment of the questions and vocabulary of Scholasticism in favor of more existentialist and personalist approaches to understanding what sacraments are and how they function in the Christian life. What began as a recovery of the ecclesial dimension of the sacraments quickly led to further shifts: from speaking of sacraments as "means of grace" to speaking of them as encounters with Christ himself; from thinking of them primarily as acts of God to thinking of them mainly as celebrations of the faith community; from seeing sacraments as momentary incursions from another world to seeing them as manifestations of the graced character of all human life; from interpreting them as remedies for sin and weakness to seeing them as promoting growth in Christ.

J. D. Crichton

The influence of both Schillebeeckx and Rahner is obvious in Crichton's helpful summary of contemporary Roman Catholic approaches to sacramental theology today.

J. D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in C. Jones, G. Wainwright, E. Yarnold, and P. Bradshaw, eds., *The Study of Liturgy*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 23.

The ultimate subject of the liturgical celebration . . . is . . . Christ who acts in and through his Church. Obviously his action is invisible, but the people of God, his body, is a visible and structured community and over the whole range of its liturgical action, which . . . consists of both word and sacrament, manifests Christ's presence, shows forth the nature of his activity, which is redemptive, and by his power makes his redeeming work effectual and available to men and women today. It is for these reasons that the Church is called the "sacrament of Christ." Like him it is both visible and invisible, and its sole *raison d'être* is to mediate his saving love to humankind. . . . From Christ, the sacrament of the Father and of his saving purpose, to the Church, which is the sacrament of Christ, and then to the liturgy, which exists to manifest and convey the redeeming love of God, the line is clear. The liturgy then is essentially and by its nature sacramental. . . . It addresses a word to us but it embodies this word in actions, gestures and symbols; . . . [and] the gesture or thing (water, bread, wine) forces us to attend to the word, enables us to grasp its import and to appropriate its content.

James F. White

James White (+2004) offers a modern Protestant way to rethink the number and definition of the sacraments.

James F. White, *Sacraments as God's Self-Giving* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 70–75.

Throughout most of the history of Christianity, the number of sacraments was not defined. Over the centuries, Christians recognized a variety of ways God's self-giving was experienced in worship. Dozens of these forms have been called sacraments at one time or another. Augustine applied the term to an assortment of objects and sign-acts: the giving of salt in baptism, the use of ashes for penitents,

recital of creeds and the Lord's Prayer, the baptismal font, and Easter Day. Each of these sacred signs represents something inward and spiritual. For the seven following centuries there was still considerable latitude; as late as 1140, Hugh of St. Victor could consider genuflection, the blessing of palms, the receiving of ashes, and reciting creeds as sacraments. Almost to the end of the twelfth century (1179), the third Lateran Council could still speak of instituting priests in office or burial of the dead as sacraments.

Such latitude seems strange today, so familiar are we with sharply restricted lists. . . . Yet almost a dozen centuries passed before the Church felt any need to systematize what is experienced in the sacraments. The experience of God's self giving in the sacraments is primary; theological systematization was a rather late secondary concern.

The key figure who pulled together the wide assortment of theological reflections about what the Church experienced in the sacraments . . . was a twelfth-century theologian, Peter Lombard, a professor in Paris and (briefly) bishop. . . . In order to systematize what the Church had been experiencing in sacraments, Peter found it necessary to list them. "Now let us approach the sacraments of the new law, which are: baptism, confirmation, the bread of blessing, that is the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, marriage." By the following century the list had become standard, so that the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century could anathematize anyone claiming "that they are more, or less, than seven."

But one step Peter Lombard did not take—he did not find it necessary to affirm that all seven sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ himself. Indeed, he tells us that the unction of the sick was said to be "instituted by the apostles," though Lombard is clear that Christ instituted baptism and the eucharist. . . .

The problem would be much simpler if we were to admit several levels of authority for sacraments. We suggest that they be looked at as dominical, apostolic, and natural. In relation to Christ's institution of baptism and the eucharist, we seem to have ample evidence, and thus we shall call them *dominical sacraments*. . . .

. . . But scripture gives us not only Christ's words . . . but records his actions and intentions. We have, for example, abundant examples of Christ's forgiving sin. Certainly there is ample evidence of Jesus' ministry of forgiveness (e.g., Matt. 9:2), or of Jesus' will that his disciples should do likewise (John 20:23). Nor is there any doubt of the apostles fulfilling the Lord's intention (Acts 13:38; 26:18). . . . The apostles and their followers carried on Jesus' work of forgiveness as has the Church ever since. . . . Thus the apostolic practice is evidence of obedience to what the early Church considered to be the

will of Christ. And on this basis the practice was retained by the Church.

Closely related is Christ's work of healing; examples abound of his healing work and his sending the disciples to do likewise: "the sick on whom they lay their hands will recover" (Mark 16:18). The apostolic Church obeyed these intentions to heal faithfully. . . . James 5:13–16 speaks of what had later apparently become routine healing by elders in local congregations.

The evidence of ordination is equally indirect and equally strong. Jesus obviously chose people to be his disciples (Mark 1:16–20) and sent them on mission (6:7–13), having first empowered them. . . . John makes it more formal: Jesus greets the disciples and commissions them, "As the Father sent me, so I send you," and transmits the Holy Spirit (John 20:21–22). Apostolic practice did likewise. Suitable people were chosen, there was prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:3–6). . . . As the Lord had done, so did the apostolic Church in choosing representative persons to carry out its mission.

In these three examples—reconciliation, healing, and ordination—we have cases of apostolic practice continuing the intentions and actions of Jesus. Thus, though we cannot call them sacraments of dominical institution . . . , we can call them *apostolic sacraments* since their institution can be based on evidence of apostolic practice. . . .

. . . [T]here is one more type of sacrament. We prefer to speak of the Christian marriage ceremony and Christian burial as *natural sacraments*. Both have been listed as Christian sacraments, Christian burial as late as the Third Lateran Council in 1179, and matrimony made the Tridentine list. . . .

. . . In these cases, we are dealing with life events common to all humanity. In virtually every society there are rites of marriage and observance at the time of death. It is no surprise that Christians have adapted the wedding customs and burial practices of Jewish and Roman cultures (and almost every culture in the world) to their own purposes.

The humanity of the sacraments is reflected in the Church's celebration of normal and necessary human passages that are common to all people as witnesses to God's self-giving. Not every human rite of passage has been so treated by Christians. . . . But marriage and death have been treated as moments we can call natural sacraments. In them, the Church sees God's work through the community of faith in supporting people as they enter new relationships to each other and the community. . . .

. . . There is no reason to be too precise about God's actions now than there was in the first twelve Christian centuries. We would rather leave the number of sacraments once again indeterminate.

Susan A. Ross

Susan A. Ross, "God's Embodiment and Women," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 198–99, 206–7; endnotes from 208–9.

The challenge of feminism to Christian theology is the expression of the full humanity of women and men, not only "in Christ" but in society and in the church. What has hampered this realization in Catholic theology in particular is a historical reliance on a theology of natural law that regards biological sex differences as essential factors in the significance of human nature, resulting in differential treatment of women and men. Women's "nature" is understood (as in the writings of John Paul II) to be primarily oriented toward childbearing and rearing, thus relegating women to the sphere of the home.¹ The vocations of religious women are sometimes seen as extensions of this maternal role, as pope John Paul II points out. In addition, the almost primeval character of religious symbolism has been infected by the pervasive influence of sexism. The resistance not only by many men but by many women to use feminine imagery for God suggests that our language and vision need reeducation.²

Where a sacramental feminist theology begins, then, is in the basic conviction of the full humanity of women and the recognition that the meaning associated with sex differences over the centuries is highly suspect. This meaning, usually seen as complementarity, is rooted in history and culture and therefore its claim to understand women's supposedly essential and timeless nature is without an adequate basis. In addition to this challenge comes the conviction of the interconnectedness of human life and of human and nonhuman life. Much of feminist thought over the last twenty years has pointed out the distinctive nature of women's experiences and has thus opened itself to criticism that these distinctive elements look suspiciously like stereotypically feminine qualities attributed to women by men. But what distinguishes these efforts are, first, the concern to know and value women's experiences and not to model expectations for women on male experience alone; and, second, a recognition of the ambiguity of women's experience. That is, because women have been both included in and excluded from the category men and have been included in the structures of society as domestic shapers of culture

1. John Paul II, "Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women," *Origins* 18, no. 17 (Oct. 6, 1988).

2. Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

yet excluded from public positions of power, women have developed a dual consciousness, an awareness of “twoness”—in short, a sense of radical ambiguity that does not lend itself easily to strategies of separation and isolation.³

What some psychologists label as the greater permeability of women’s ego boundaries, and what some ethicists have labeled as the inability of women to make clear moral distinctions, have been understood to handicap women. But women’s sense of ambiguity, reluctance to make separations, and tendency to identify with the other are closer to the heart of Christian sacramentality than the strict separations that have become pervasive in much sacramental theology and practice. Such a sense of interconnection and an appreciation of the often conflicting realities that coexist in such interconnection is characteristic of much of contemporary feminist theory in psychology, literary theory, history, and ethics. These ideas have important implications for sacramental theology as well.⁴

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Certain issues remain critical in any continuing reflection on women and the sacramental life of the church.

1. The meaning of the Incarnation and its connection with theological anthropology are at the core of sacramental theology. The recognition that God took on human (not specifically male) flesh is central, as is the recognition that the historical and social constructions of gender have played crucial roles in maintaining assumptions about women’s so-called proper role in the church. The threats to women’s full humanity have been recognized especially in the last one hundred and fifty years. While differences between men and women remain a controversial subject, traditional notions of complementarity are no longer adequate. Differences have most often been seen from a male perspective, so that women’s awareness of their own experience has only recently begun to emerge. The post-modern focus on the multiplicity and diversity of human experience offers one way of accounting for difference without the stereotyped categories of complementarity. This focus also opens up the consideration of human experience from the perspectives of race and class as well as gender.

2. The influential role of symbolic expression and the recognition of the ways in which gender is an unacknowledged dimension of that expression require careful interdisciplinary analysis. Literary, psychoanalytic, and social critiques have revealed hidden biases in

3. See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

4. See Susan A. Ross, “Sacraments and Women’s Experience,” *Listening* 28 (1993): 52–64.

so-called universal expressions of human experience in novels, in psychological analyses of human development, and in the dynamics of social groups. Theologians need to be especially attentive to the contributions of their colleagues in these fields, since they can shed needed light on central theological questions. Sacramental theology, because of its reliance on studies of symbol and metaphor and its rootedness in human developmental processes, can especially benefit from such collaborative work.

3. The connection between sacramental praxis and social justice has received renewed emphasis since the rise of the liberation movements of the 1960s. Tissa Balisuriya writes that “the Eucharist has to be related positively to human life if it is to be faithful to its origins and its performance.”⁵ In more traditional language, sacraments must effect what they signify. The disjunction between social praxis and ecclesiology maintained in *Inter Insigniores* will no longer suffice as an adequate explanation for “sacramental sex discrimination.” As long as sacramental theology continues to privilege the experience of men over women, there will not be a just sacramental praxis.

To a great extent, reflection on women and sacraments is at a very early stage. The depth of symbolic meaning precludes rapid change or change by fiat, but the realization that the structures of the imagination are deeply rooted should not be allowed to inhibit all changes. Openness to new developments, continuing reflection on women’s experience, and careful scrutiny of our theological and symbolic heritage will work to transform the ways in which we live out the Christian belief that Christ lives among us, in the flesh and blood of the church.

M. Daniel Findikyan

Armenian Apostolic priest M. Daniel Findikyan directs attention to the presence of the phrase “unfailing Word” in Eastern Christian sacramental texts as a way of understanding anew the relationship between word and sacrament.

M. Daniel Findikyan, “The Unfailing Word in Eastern Sacramental Prayers,” in Maxwell E. Johnson and L. Edward Phillips, eds., *Studia Liturgica Diversa: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Bradshaw* (Portland: Pastoral Press, 2004), 179–80, 188–89.

One of the enduring issues in the field of liturgical theology is the relationship between Word and Sacrament. Having roots reaching back to medieval Catholic and Reformation polemics, the problem

5. Tissa Balisuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 86.

continues to attract the attention of Protestant and Catholic theologians, not to mention a few Orthodox scholars, who are beginning to add their voices to the fray.

Recent scholarship in liturgical theology is clearly attempting to reconcile what has been, at times in the history of Christian dogma, a stated or perceived divorce of Word and Sacrament in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. In a fine summary of the vast scholarship on the issue, Andrew Ciferni has recently written: “There is hardly a single Christian church which would today admit to an opposition between word and sacrament. These are no longer considered independent and different manners of divine self-communication but complementary realities incapable of accomplishing their task without reciprocal penetration.”⁶

The very rubric “Word and Sacrament,” however, is in need of clarification and delimitation, since it has come to characterize an array of diverse theological issues. These include, but are by no means limited to the proper balance in the liturgical service between the ritual act on the one hand, and the proclamation of the word, often understood either as the homily or as the reading of sacred scripture, on the other hand. In theological discussions of this sort “word” and “sacrament” are inevitably, at least on some level, viewed in opposition, as discrete entities in need of reconciliation. Reformation-era polemics, which tended to absolutize one or the other of the two entities as normative or primary, have given way, in modern sacramental theology, to a variety of solutions that attempt to articulate the modality of “reciprocal penetration” of Word and Sacrament, which the modern scholarly consensus increasingly holds as the key to an authentic and accurate understanding of how, in the words of Peter Fink, “the whole church, assembled of its faith and its mission, embod[ies] and make[s] accessible the saving work of Christ.”⁷

I do not presume here to make any landmark contribution to this great theological discussion, but rather to invite attention to an interesting little textual formula observable in a number of Armenian and other eastern sacramental prayers, which may shed light on the relationship of word and sacrament. It is the explicit reference to the “unfailing” or “infallible” Word of the Lord, which numerous prayers invoke as the ultimate authority and power justifying the sacramental action or claim. As a characteristic of the liturgical text itself, the observation I shall make regarding the Word-Sacrament relationship stems directly from the *lex orandi*, a foundation which

6. Andrew D. Ciferni, O. Praem., “Word and Sacrament” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (henceforth *NDSW*), ed. Peter E. Fink, SJ (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 1320.

7. Peter E. Fink, SJ, “Sacramental Theology after Vatican II,” in *NDSW*, 1109–10.

much contemporary sacramental theology seeks and espouses, but which has, in fact, been only marginally achieved. After presenting some examples of this liturgical formula in various liturgical texts, I shall conclude by suggesting, in the most tentative way, what its implications may be for our understanding of the ongoing theological discourse regarding “word” and “sacrament.” . . .

. . . What, then, is to be made of all this? At the very least we have drawn attention to a phrase from sacred scripture that seems to reflect a traditional attitude of liturgical prayer in the Deuteronomic school; which finds its way into some of the earliest extant sacramental texts, and from there into a remarkable number of sacramental prayers of various rites, the Armenian Rite in particular. Such an ancient common liturgical thread is of interest if for no other reason than that.

The “unfailing word” may indeed, however, have greater significance for our understanding of the sacraments within the life of the church; and, perhaps, for a renewed appreciation of an eventual patristic, or first-millennium theology of the sacraments that is firmly rooted in the *lex orandi*. In light of the tentative nature of my observations, instead of conclusions I should like to offer a few propositions that seem to emerge from the invocation of the “unfailing word” in the prayers we have analyzed.

1. The “unfailing word” clarifies the proverbial problem in sacramental theology of the relationship between divine initiative and the ecclesial response of faith in the sacraments, the *ex opere operato/operantis* dispute. The only guarantee of the sacrament’s efficacy is the church’s faith in the Lord’s promises. Implied in these prayers’ appeal to the “unfailing word” is a total rejection of any sense of “automatic efficacy” for the sacraments. The only criterion for sacramental efficaciousness, in other words, is the “unfailing word,” the church’s faith that God will do what God promised to do. The role of the faithful in the sacramental encounter is not merely gratefully to accept or internalize some abstract notion of grace, either intellectually or emotionally, but in faith to proclaim and profess the word of the Lord. Here, embedded in the *lex orandi*, is tangible evidence for the assertion in *Sacrosanctum concilium* 59 that: “[The sacraments] not only presuppose the faith, but through words and things also nourish it, strengthen it and express it. That is why they are called sacraments of faith.”⁸

2. The invocation of the “unfailing word” *de facto* repudiates the notion that the sacrament is magic, or that the minister is a magician.

8. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed., Austin Flannery, OP, ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 20.

The church and her ministers' only claim is for what the Lord himself has already promised by his word, and what, therefore, none other than the Lord can accomplish.

3. . . . [T]he logical arguments that culminate in the invocation of an "unfailing word" of the Lord virtually compel the Lord to act, in a way that is very reminiscent of Deuteronomic prayer, but startlingly bold and perhaps refreshing when compared with the sappy tone of much contemporary liturgical prayer.

4. The invocation of the word of the Lord in the anamnestic context of the sacramental prayer text serves to contextualize the sacrament in the divine economy of salvation history. The sacrament is far more than a visible vehicle for invisible grace, but an extension and perpetuation, in the church's time and space, of Christ's redemptive, loving activity based upon a specific promise by the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord, in other words, is fully harmonized within, and justifies the sacrament in its narrative prayer.

5. Finally, the "unfailing word" reconciles the word-sacrament dichotomy. The sacrament is a proclamation of the word of God, the celebration of the sacrament a profession of fidelity to that divine Word. Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant theologians have long asserted that "the liturgy of the Word is as sacramental as the Sacrament is 'evangelical,'" as one theologian has put it.⁹ But they have done so largely by intuition, without grounding their arguments in the liturgical texts themselves.¹⁰

Yet behind the early and widespread invocation of the "unfailing word" in liturgical texts lie an ancient, biblical theology of the sacraments and perhaps the seeds of a truly "ecumenical" sacramental theology that responds to the concerns of classical Protestantism without sacrificing or mitigating the centrality of sacramental life for the church.

9. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 32–33.

10. Suffice it to mention four theologians who, in different ways, seek to reconcile Word and Sacrament, but without reference to the texts of the sacramental prayers. In this way their work is emblematic of much recent scholarship in this field. Catholic perspectives include Karl Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," in *Theological Investigations IV* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1960), 253–86, and Edward Kilmartin, SJ, "A Modern Approach to the Word of God," in *The Sacraments: God's Love and Mercy Actualized*, Francis A. Eigo, OSA, ed. (Philadelphia: Villanova University Press, 1979), 59–109. An Orthodox perspective is offered by John Breck, "The Sacramental Power of the Word," in *The Power of the Word* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 11–22. For an enlightening view from a Protestant author, see Daniel Shin, "Some Light from Origen: Scripture as Sacrament," *Worship* 75 (1999): 399–425.

Louis-Marie Chauvet

Louis-Marie Chauvet, noted French Roman Catholic sacramental theologian, returns to Augustine to elucidate the meaning of sacrament in relationship to the Word.

Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, Pueblo, 2001), 47–48.

The Sacrament, “Precipitate” of the Scriptures

The word of God does not reach us except through the sacramental mediation of the Scriptures read in church; conversely, the sacraments are like the precipitate (in the chemical sense) of the Scriptures as word. Of course, sacraments are rites, and we cannot understand them theologically without most carefully taking into account their ritual modality. However, although every sacrament is a rite, the rite becomes a sacrament only if it is converted by the word and the Spirit.

Word and Sacrament

That every sacrament is a sacrament of the word, is attested by the *lex orandi* (“the rule of prayer”) of the church. The story of Emmaus already reflects a practice where the “breaking of the bread” followed the readings of Moses and the Prophets interpreted in the homily. The sequence Liturgy of the Word/Liturgy of the Sacrament, which is observed not only at Mass but also in every sacramental celebration, is not arbitrary. Is the sacrament anything else, according to Augustine’s formula, than a *visibile verbum*, a “visible word,” or rather the very word made visible? “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” which is the sacramental word of baptism and reconciliation, is a synthesis of the Christian reading of all the Scriptures to such a point that these words are precisely those which accompany the sign of the cross, the Christian symbol par excellence, and condense in themselves the whole of Christian identity.

“The word comes over the element and becomes sacrament.”¹¹ This formula, which was current in all the textbooks of the Middle Ages, has become a true adage. It must be understood on three levels:

11. “*Accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum.*” The “word” is the grammatical subject of the two verbs in the sentence, rather than the subject of only the first one, according to the rather frequent translation, “The word comes to the element and here is [or ‘and thus is made’] the sacrament.” The whole tenor of Augustine’s sacramental theology favors our translation,

(a) first, the Christological level since the Word, which through the Spirit comes over the element of bread or water, is Christ himself, the Word of God; (b) then, the liturgical level since this risen Christ who is always the same, comes “in-formed” by the liturgy or the color of the day, color that differs depending on the time one is in, Lent, Eastertide, Ordinary Sundays; (c) last, the properly sacramental level where the sacramental word, pronounced in faith by the priest in the capacity of minister, that is, pronounced “in the name of Christ,”¹² is recognized as the word of Christ himself. Indeed, as Augustine had underscored against the Donatists, who held that the reality of the sacrament depended on the personal dignity of the minister who confers it, it is always Christ who baptizes, even through an unworthy minister. . . .

. . . [I]t is clear theologically that every sacrament is a sacrament of the word, or to say it differently, *the word itself mediated under the ritual mode, different from the mode of Scripture*. Although the distinction between word and sacrament is a legitimate one, their dichotomy has had disastrous results. Initiated by the Reformers of the sixteenth century in the context of excessive sacramentalism, against which a reaction in favor of returning to the word is easily understandable, this reaction, recently reconfigured by the ideological opposition between “faith” and “religion,” ended by establishing a true competition between the two.¹³ The word, source of the “true” faith, would be endowed with all virtues of “authenticity,” “responsibility,” “commitment,” Christian “adulthood” or “maturity” finally reached, whereas sacraments would be suspected of bordering on magic, of fostering the most dubious anthropological and social archaism, of encouraging dependency among believers, and so on. Such reasoning shows forgetfulness of two things: first, that the word also reaches us only through the mediation of a body of writings which is as liable to manipulation as anything else and which is subject to highly ritualized uses even in the most spare liturgies; second, that the sacraments, obviously exposed to pitfalls because of their ritual character . . . are nothing but a particular modality of the word. . . .

. . . It is always *as word* that Christ gives himself to be eaten in the Eucharist. It is impossible to receive communion fruitfully without having “eaten the book” (see Ezek 2–3; Rev 10:9–10), ruminated the word in the Spirit. Here again, nothing is more traditional. Thus

12. This is the translation of the formula “*in persona Christi*.”

13. The distinction between “faith” and “religion” is precious when it is used to stress the originality of the act of faith. But it is tendentious, even untenable, when it is applied to categories of persons, as sometimes happened in the 1970s.

Ambrose in the fourth century, speaking of the Scriptures: “Eat this food first, in order to be able to come afterward to the food of the body of Christ”; or Augustine: “Sisters and brothers, see that you eat the heavenly bread in a spiritual sense . . . so that all this may help us, beloved, not to eat the flesh and blood of Christ merely in the sacrament, as many of the wicked do, but to eat and drink in order to participate in the Spirit.”¹⁴

What we just said is important. Important of course with regard to the nature of the sacraments: they have no more magical efficacy than the word of God transmitted through the mediation of the Scriptures, since they too are sacraments of the same word. Important also with regard to the understanding of their mode of efficacy: it is the path of the word, in human communication, and not the path of the efficacy of the “instrument” as in classical theology. . . .

14. Ambrose, *Expositio in Psalmum 118*, in PL 15:1197–1526; Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 26.11; 27.11; *NPNF*¹ 7:171 and 178.