

The Mystery of Sacramentality: Christ, the Church, and the Seven Sacraments

CHARLES JOURNET

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TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

The thought of Charles Cardinal Journet, venerable founder of the present journal and unparalleled twentieth-century master of Thomistic ecclesiology, merits a wider reception and a more ardent love.¹ Not a few have recognized this of late, producing articles and books dedicated to explicating his teaching.² Nevertheless, much remains to be done to ensure that English speakers have fuller access to Journet’s corpus. For instance, only the first

¹ For more biographical information on Journet, see Guy Boissard, *Charles Journet: 1891–1975* (Paris: Salvator, 2008), and Jacques Rime, *Charles Journet: Vocation et jeunesse d’un théologien* (Fribourg: Press Fribourg; Éditions Saint-Paul Fribourg Suisse, 2010).

² Some of these include in them heretofore untranslated texts from Journet, as in the recent article by Roger W. Nutt and Michael R. De Salvo, “The Debate over *Dignitatis Humanae* at Vatican II: The Contribution of Charles Cardinal Journet,” *The Thomist* 85 (2021): 175–226. We have, furthermore, those works deeply influenced by Journet’s ecclesiology, among which are Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, *Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, trans. Michael J. Miller (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), and more recently, Guy Mansini, O.S.B., *Ecclesiology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021) and, most recently, John F. O’Neill, *Trinitarian Ecclesiology: Charles Journet, the Divine Missions, and the Mystery of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2024).

volume of *L'Église du Verbe incarné*,³ his *magnum opus*, has been translated into English.⁴ It is with this in mind that we set out to translate the article below. And it is no meager article that is reproduced below (though such a work is foreign to Journet), but one of considerable substance and importance. After all, it is a wonderful (and wonderfully extensive) expression of his post-conciliar Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology. Indeed, written in 1974, but one year before his death, this article represents the mature fruit of many years of contemplation and prayer.

With respect to his ecclesiology, Journet was influenced by the Second Vatican Council, in which he participated after his elevation to the episcopacy and cardinalate. As an example of this influence, an influence evident in the article below, the conciliar documents speak in several places of the sacramentality of the Church.⁵ The Church is, in Christ, a sacrament, “a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the

³ Charles Journet, *L'Église du Verbe incarné: Essai de théologie speculative*, 5 vols., *Ouvres complètes de Charles Journet* (Saint-Maurice: Éditions Saint-Augustin, 1998–2005).

⁴ Volume 1, which concerns the apostolic hierarchy (*La hiérarchie apostolique*), was published in English as Charles Journet, *The Church of the Word Incarnate: An Essay in Speculative Theology*, trans. A. H. C. Downes, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Hierarchy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955). In addition, there exists in English an abridgement of the first two volumes of *L'Église du Verbe incarné* as *The Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szcurek, O. Praem (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), originally published in French as *Théologie de L'Église* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958).

⁵ See *Lumen Gentium*, §§1, 9, and 48; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §26; *Gaudium et Spes*, §§43, 45; and *Ad Gentes*, §§1, 5. The Council thereby gave authoritative expression to an idea that had been present in various figures in the theological tradition, some of whom were proximate to the opening of the Council in 1962. William Van Roo identifies six figures involved in the pre-conciliar “rediscovery” of the broad sense of sacrament (and thus of ecclesial sacramentality): Johann Adam Möhler, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Henri de Lubac, Otto Semmelroth, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx (*The Christian Sacrament* [Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1992], 69–91). For but a smattering of works from these six figures (some in English translation), see: Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church*, trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996); Matthias Joseph Scheeben, *The Mysteries of Christianity*, trans. Cyril Vollert, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1946); Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999); Otto Semmelroth, *L'Église, sacrement de la rédemption* (Paris: Saint-Paul, 1962); Karl Rahner, “Membership in the Church according to the Doctrine of the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961–1979); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, trans. Paul Barrett (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963). De La Soujeole renders this judgment on the matter: “On the eve of Vatican II, the author who had the best view of ecclesial sacramentality, in our opinion, was Edward Schillebeeckx” (*Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, 318).

unity of the whole human race.”⁶ Describing the Church as a sacrament is part of the Council’s effort to unfold for the Catholic faithful and for the whole world the Church’s inner nature and universal mission. Following the teaching of the Council, therefore, Journet includes the Church herself, in her being and action, in “the mystery of sacramentality.”⁷

But the mystery of sacramentality includes more than the Church. Indeed, there is a respect in which the entire economy of salvation is sacramental. Furthermore, the Church is a sacrament (a sign and instrument) only in a derived sense, in a way wholly dependent on her divine Spouse and Head. It is for this reason that Journet refers to Christ as “the sacrament of the divine life in its source” and to the Church as “the sacrament of the divine life communicated.” Both Christ and the Church, then, are sacraments, but not in precisely the same manner. As Journet puts it, “Now, to which of these two is the Second Vatican Council’s definition, ‘universal sacrament of salvation,’ suited? To Christ and to his Church respectively, though proportionally (that is, analogically).”⁸

Journet’s systematic ordering (first Christ, then the Church, and finally the sacraments) is intelligible and consonant with others who suggest that, had St. Thomas written an ecclesiological treatise in the *Summa theologiae*, it would be situated between the questions on Christ (*ST* III, qq. 1–59) and the questions on the sacraments (*ST* III, qq. 60–90).⁹ Journet begins

⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, §1. Not all were satisfied with this language. The American Monsignor Joseph C. Fenton, who served as a peritus for Cardinal Ottaviani at the Second Vatican Council, expressed concerns with the use of the term “sacrament” to describe the Church. He judged the use of the term to be problematic in part because, at least in the English-speaking world, designating the Church as a sacrament originated in the writings of George Tyrrell. For an example of Fenton’s own ecclesiological vision, see *The Church of Christ: A Collection of Essays by Monsignor Joseph C. Fenton*, ed. Christian D. Washburn (Tacoma, WA: Cluny Media, 2016).

⁷ We will largely focus on ecclesial sacramentality in this introduction.

⁸ See p. 631 below.

⁹ Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole explains in the context of the “absence” of an ecclesiological treatise in St. Thomas’s *Summa theologiae*: “In this regard, St. Thomas belongs to the patristic era. The Church is not absent from his teaching. She is everywhere, though not as a mystery ‘materially’ distinct. After the appearance of distinct treatises of ecclesiology, Thomist theologians at first attempted to insert the ecclesial mystery into the *Summa Theologiae*. Widely varying options were assayed, such as placing these developments in the treatise on faith, or in the treatise on the Incarnate Word as a prolongation of question 8 on Christ’s capital grace. Today we think instead that it would be necessary to insert an entire treatise on the Church between Christology (*STh* III, qq. 1–59) and sacramental theology (*STh* III, qq. 60–90). This is indeed, it seems to me, a more appropriate solution” (“The Economy of Salvation: Entitative Sacramentality and Operative

his work, however, with a reality that he refuses to call a sacrament, namely, the Most Holy Trinity. The Trinitarian mystery stands at the heart of the Christian faith; it is the *source* of the mystery of sacramentality. We see the splendor of the entire economy of salvation, and of the New Law especially, in the mystery of the Trinitarian indwelling and missions of the Son and Spirit. The Word became flesh, became human, so that he might rescue our sin-ravaged world. Jesus is, in his sacred humanity, the sacrament of the Trinity, the sacrament of the divine life in its source, to employ again Journet's language.

Journet describes the Word as seizing or taking hold of the depths of his sacred humanity in his being and in his action. The Gospels bear authoritative witness to this, but they must be read with humility and devotion, on one's knees. Christ is at once infinite and finite, the Word of God and God's Servant, the source of light and instrument of illumination. The entire life of Jesus, the entirety of his works and deeds among us, is "the expression, translation into human behavior—in other words, the sacrament—of the Trinitarian life."¹⁰ This penetration into the mystery of Christ's sacramentality is complemented by the thought of a contemporary Thomist heavily influenced by Journet, Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole. The latter author makes a distinction between *entitative sacramentality* and *operative sacramentality*.

We have in St. Thomas a sacramentality that defines in some way a being—Christ—a sacramentality that we shall call *entitative sacramentality*. Christ's human nature is united to the divine person in such a way that his humanity is able to signify and to be the proper and

Sacramentality," *The Thomist* 75 [2011]: 537–53, at 539–40). Similarly, Yves Congar considers St. Thomas's omission of an explicit treatise on the Church to be quite deliberate. "It is true," he writes, "that on the Church St. Thomas wrote no separate treatise, characterized by a study of the distinctive marks of the Church, of its organization in the form of a kingdom, or of the authority which rules it. But it seems quite clear that St. Thomas has in his works answers to these questions, answers which are compact even though scattered. It has even been said, and perhaps truly, that he was the first to introduce into theology a doctrine of papal infallibility; above all, it appears quite certain that his works contain scattered but most explicit principles of a theology of the Church *having a different drift* from that which developed subsequently, and it is even conceivable—the writer, indeed, is strongly inclined to the opinion—that St. Thomas acted deliberately when he wrote no *separate* treatise on the Church but conceived one on the lines which shall be set forth in the following" ("The Idea of the Church in St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 1 [1939]: 331–59, at 332).

¹⁰ See p. 316 below.

conjoined instrument of God. This being—Christ—acts according as he is. His actions, preaching, and miracles are signs and instruments by which God manifests and accomplishes the gift of grace. Such action constitutes an *operative sacramentality*.¹¹

This gets at the heart of the Christian mystery. The Word assumed a human nature in order that the latter might both signify and bring about union with God. And if the humanity of Christ is the animate, conjoined instrument of his divinity, as St. Thomas explains,¹² the Church is, in de La Soujeole's language, an animate and "adjunct" instrument. De La Soujeole thinks this way of articulating things allows us to give a strong meaning to St. Paul's words in Eph 5:32, in which the Apostle speaks of the great *sacramentum* of Christ and the Church. The Church, universal sacrament of salvation, stands under and is ordained to Christ, the adjunct to the conjoined. "Salvation is," de La Soujeole explains, "the singular and unique work of one with the other."¹³

If the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, how is she constituted by Christ as such a sacrament? Journet explicates two main stages of the communication of the divine life to the Church. These stages correspond to the aforementioned visible missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit respectively. In the first place, the Church could not emerge onto the world stage and into the drama of human salvation without the visible contact of Jesus. Journet compares the Church during this time to a baby being formed in the womb. Christ gives the Church her definitive structure and prepares her for her temporal pilgrimage. This first stage lasts until the Ascension, after which time Jesus dwells in glory at the Father's side, anticipating the eschatological glorification of his brethren. Journet describes the Church as asleep and hidden in Christ's superabundant light. What is at the forefront, then, is the sacramentality of the Incarnate Word.

But there is a second stage, that of Jesus's mysterious contact with the Church after his Ascension, during which time the Church's own sacramentality slowly starts to manifest itself. Jesus's sacramental contact with the Church that renders her a sacrament together with him is twofold, magisterial and cultic. We can see this stage foretold and promised in the command of Jesus: his disciples are to teach all nations and to baptize in the

¹¹ De La Soujeole, "Economy of Salvation," 545.

¹² See, for instance, *Summa theologiae* [ST] III, q. 7, a. 1, ad 3 (wherein Christ's humanity is described as an animate instrument) and q. 62, a. 5 (wherein Christ's humanity is said to be a united instrument vis-à-vis the seven sacraments as separated instruments).

¹³ De La Soujeole, "Economy of Salvation," 550.

name of the triune God (Matt 28:19). In short, they are to preach the Good News of salvation and communicate that very salvation through the instrumentality of the sacramental mysteries. The “messianic unction” of Christ flows on the Church so as to make of her a glorious, spotless Spouse (Eph 5:27), an instrument entirely faithful and reliable in the communication of divine mercy. This second stage is most formally inaugurated at Pentecost, when the same Spirit who filled Christ’s soul with the messianic unction is sent to the Church. The Church lives thenceforth in or by the Holy Spirit, or we might say that the Spirit dwells in her as in a temple. “The event of Pentecost,” Journet explains, “marks the decisive moment when the Church, formed by Christ but hidden in his light, takes, like the newborn baby, her first autonomous breath.”¹⁴ By “autonomous” here Journet does not mean to indicate a remotion from Christ. Rather, while remaining wholly dependent on the grace and movement of Christ, the Church begins to show forth her own sacramentality.

These two stages are characterized by two baptisms, by water and by fire. The former purifies the Church and her members, whereas the latter strengthens, enkindles, and maintains her purity. Journet, drawing from his dear friend Jacques Maritain, considers Pentecost to be a corollary to the Incarnation and the moment in which the Church of heaven and earth is supernaturally constituted a person in the primary and full sense. Though she is in reality pure and holy, and forever so, human beings are called to recognize her under the rags that clad the sins of her children. Again following Maritain, whom he quotes at some length, Journet thinks that all postlapsarian human beings are drawn in a mysterious way to the Church, often unwittingly; all are able to participate in the universal sacrament of salvation which is the Church and are called to do so. This short phrase concerning each human being summarizes their position well: “He is already mysteriously a child of the Church.”¹⁵

Journet says precious little about the ecclesial *sacramentum tantum*, *res et sacramentum*, and *res tantum*. In “her visible covering,” the Church is a pure sacramental sign. But this initial glance gives us only a snapshot of her pilgrim life and action. A second look reaches deeper into the ecclesial mystery and discovers the apostolic powers (royal-magisterial and priestly-cultic) given to her by Christ. These powers are themselves profound realities but also signs of the sacramental and oriented charity whereby we are conformed to Christ and united to the members of his Mystical Body. The Eucharist, as

¹⁴ See p. 639 below.

¹⁵ See p. 643 below.

the *sacramentum caritatis*, is consequently the *sacramentum unitatis*, though its efficacy goes beyond effecting the unity of the *sacrament of the divine life communicated* to bringing the very *sacrament of the divine life in its source* into our midst.

The largest portion of the article is devoted to the seven sacraments of the New Law, which Journet frequently calls the “seven liturgical dramas.” The sacraments, as separated instruments of Christ and the privileged applications of redeeming grace, in a manner of speaking make the Church. The Church, in her turn, celebrates and “makes” the sacraments. While the relationship between the sacramentality of Christ and the sacramentality of the remaining analogues (the Church and the seven mysteries) is relatively clear, there is arguably less clarity concerning the relationship between the sacramentality of the Church and that of the seven mysteries. Journet seems to teach that the liturgical dramas are in a certain respect (ontologically, if not temporally) prior to the Church; they constitute her as a sacrament. This view has contemporary inheritors in theologians such as Lawrence Feingold, who is careful to parse the Church’s sacramentality in such a way that she is not understood to be an “eighth sacrament.” For Feingold, the Church is a sacrament because she possesses the “seven life-giving sacraments in her bosom as her dowry.”¹⁶ He adverts to authorities such as § 48 of *Lumen Gentium*¹⁷ and §11 of John Paul II’s 1984 *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*¹⁸ to support his understanding.

It can be seen both from *Lumen Gentium*, §48 and *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, §11 that the sacramentality of the Church should not be conceived to be ontologically prior to the seven sacraments or to be their source. Rather it is the reverse. The Church is a sacrament of unity and salvation because she is endowed by her Founder with seven life-giving channels of grace through which she receives the Holy Spirit to be her soul or animating principle.¹⁹

¹⁶ Lawrence Feingold, *Touched by Christ: The Sacramental Economy* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), 96.

¹⁷ “Rising from the dead He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation.”

¹⁸ “She is a sacrament by reason of the seven sacraments which, each in its own way, ‘make the church.’ For since they commemorate and renew Christ’s paschal mystery, all the sacraments are a source of life for the church and in the church’s hands they are means of conversion and of reconciliation among people.”

¹⁹ Feingold, *Touched by Christ*, 97.

For Feingold, then, the Church is a sacrament because she bears within her the seven mysteries deposited in her by Christ. The sacraments are indispensable in making or constituting the Church, for it is through them that she receives her soul or animating principle.²⁰

On the other hand, theologians such as de La Soujeole seem to make ecclesial sacramentality in a certain respect prior to the sacraments. While in the order of discovery we may go from action to being, it is otherwise in the order of speculative exposition. As de La Soujeole explains, “a sacrament is not initially an action (the aspect of efficient causality), but first of all an ontology (the aspect of formal causality).”²¹ The relative priority of ecclesial sacramentality is brought out in the following text: “Therefore, the acts of divine worship that take the name of ‘sacrament’ can be understood as the joint acts of the two sacraments of salvation, Christ and the Church: act is in accordance with being.”²² The Church is, in her very being, a sacrament, and the seven mysteries are actions issuing forth from this sacramental being.

Perhaps the *prima facie* tension between these two ways of accounting for the Church’s sacramentality is no genuine contradiction, or perhaps, if the tension is real and more profound, it can be easily resolved. Nevertheless, these distinct ways of speaking of the Church’s sacramentality manifest the need for further penetration into the mystery. This article by Journet provides the reader with valuable resources with which to do so. It may be quite suitable for use in the classroom. The first part provides insight into the Trinitarian mystery as grounding the mystery of sacramentality. In the Incarnation, the visible mission of the Son, we also see the sacrament of the divine life in its source. The second part shows an analogical realization of the mystery of sacramentality in the Church. Wholly dependent upon Christ, she stands after his Ascension as the universal sacrament of salvation, as the sacrament of the divine life communicated. Finally, part III shows a further analogical realization in the seven liturgical dramas. This third part, being so extensive, may serve well in a course on the seven sacraments. Each part, in fine, provides the reader with profound insights into the mystery of Christian sacramentality. May this translated article play some small part in affording Journet’s thought a wider reception and a more ardent love.

²⁰ We see here an aspect of formal causality. In Journet’s language, we can speak of the created soul of the Church, namely, fully Christic charity, and of the Uncreated Soul of the Church, namely, the Holy Spirit.

²¹ De La Soujeole, *Introduction to the Mystery of the Church*, 316.

²² Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, “The Mystery of the Church,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 8 (2010): 827–37, at 833.

CARDINAL JOURNET'S TEXT²³

- I. The Incarnation, Sacrament of the Divine Life in Its Source
(1) The Most Holy Trinity. (2) The mystery of the Word made flesh as sacrament of the Trinity. (3) The grace of personal union brings with it the grace of messianic unction. (4) The Word seizes the depths of his humanity in his being and in his action. (5) The "natural" activities of Jesus. (6) The instrumentally elevated activities of Jesus: (a) to confer divine grace; (b) to give the "signs" of his mission. (7) Conclusion.
- II. The Church, Sacrament of the Divine Life Communicated
(1) From Christ to the Church: From the divine life in its source to the divine life communicated. (2) The Church as sacrament of salvation: the conciliar doctrine. (3) The first stage of the communication of the divine life to the Church: the visible contact of Jesus. (4) The second stage: Jesus's twofold magisterial and cultic sacramental contact. (5) Pentecost. (6) Baptism of water and baptism of fire. (7) What is it that, in each man, meets the holiness of the Church? (8) What is it that, in the Church-sacrament of the divine life communicated, is pure sacramental sign, reality and sign, and pure sacramental reality? (9) Conclusion.
- III. The Seven Sacraments of the New Law
(1) A royal priesthood, a holy nation. (2) The three sacramental *characters* of Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders are participations in the priesthood of Christ. (3) The seven sacraments of the New Law are the privileged applications of *redeeming grace*. (4) The liturgical-sacramental drama: (a) its human component; (b) its ritual component; (c) its divine component. (5) Institution and number of the sacraments. (6) Sacramental grace. (7) A particular question: the reviviscence of certain sacraments. (8) The various sacramental regimes. (9) The sacramentals.

IV. Conclusion

²³ [Trans. note: Special thanks are due to Guy Mansini, O.S.B., Matthew Levering, and Matthew Miner. Fr. Mansini helped to look over select passages of an early draft; Matthew Levering was gracious enough to publish this important work, to the benefit of the theological community; and Matthew Miner, bringing to bear a wealth of experience as a translator, provided many valuable comments and suggestions. As a Ruthenian Catholic, Miner notes his theological differences on several minor points in Cardinal Journet's work that seem at variance with the sacramental practice of the Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox Churches (e.g., regarding the proper minister of Matrimony).]

[MYSTERY-SACRAMENT]

The Greeks have only one word, “mystery,” to designate the things, the profound realities, that have been announced to us by way of divine revelation and which are the object of our faith. The Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church—these are mysteries. For them, the seven liturgical dramas of Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick (*Euchelaion*), Orders, and Marriage are the seven mysteries.

The Latin theological tradition has two words. When the mystery, in order to accommodate itself to our weakness, wraps itself in veils, which at once protect it and enable us to see and touch it, they will designate it as a “sacrament,” a sacred thing, a sacred sign, in order to separate it from profane realities. We will not use the term “sacrament” for the Trinity.

Can the mystery of the *Incarnation* be called a sacrament? In the text of St. Paul to the Ephesians—“God has made known to us the *mystery of his will* . . . to recapitulate all things in Christ” (1:9–10)—the expression “mystery of his will” is translated in the Vulgate as “sacrament of his will.” The same goes for the beginning of the hymn we read in 1 Tim 3:16: “And evidently great is the *mystery of godliness*: he was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” The expression “mystery of godliness” has been rendered “sacrament of godliness.” Christ is the subject of these texts, though in his relationship with the Church and the salvation of the world. We can therefore retain the word “sacrament” to designate the mystery of Christ, but in him giving it an absolutely unique meaning.

Can we speak of the Church herself as a sacrament? The Second Vatican Council did not hesitate to do so.

However, in the common usage of theology and the Christian life, the word “sacrament” is used for the seven rites, the *seven liturgical dramas* enumerated above.

We will attempt to consider these three essentially related, though distinct, realizations of the mystery of sacramentality: The Incarnation, sacrament of the divine life in its source; the Church, sacrament of the divine life communicated by Christ to his Spouse; the seven sacraments of the New Law.

I. The Incarnation, Sacrament of the Divine Life in Its Source

1. The Most Holy Trinity

“Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). Here is the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

We must represent the unique nature or divine life as a super-activity of thought and love, an ineffable communion among three equal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Thus, there are three terms that we must always remember: one nature, two intra-Trinitarian activities, three persons.²⁴

The élan of thought on the part of the person of the Father irresistibly bears fruit in his Son, his Word, his Wisdom. These are his three names.

With the exception of his relation of paternity, the Father gives absolutely all that he is to the Son, communicating to him all the love of which he is the source. The élan of love will then go, proceed, from the Father and the Son simultaneously, from the Father through the Son. This élan of love is irresistible breath, “spiritus,” *Spirit*. The terminus in which it bears fruit is the *Gift* of the first two persons to the third. He seals their mutual love, much like the child seals the mutual love of his parents. For this privileged title, the third person will bear the name of *Love*. It is the third of his names.

Each of the three points which we mark on a circumference undividedly possesses the whole circle. Each of the three persons undividedly possesses the entire Godhead: the Father as the one communicating it to the Word by way of thought and light; the Father and the Son as communicating it to the Spirit by way of love.

Such is the Trinity, which, finding the soul in a state of grace, comes to dwell there: “If anyone loves me, . . . my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). Fervent hearts understand these things: “It is the entire Trinity which comes to rest in us, all this mystery which will be our vision in heaven. May this be our cloister. I am Elizabeth of the Trinity, that is to say, Elizabeth disappearing, losing herself, allowing herself to be overcome by the Three.”²⁵

2. The Mystery of the Word Made Flesh as Sacrament of the Trinity

The first work of love of the Holy Trinity is the creation of the universe in splendor. The second work of love, more remarkable, more amazing, will

²⁴ A *person* is a *Me*, an *I*, a someone who can think and love. A *nature* (to be born) is a being considered as a principle of activity and of properties: the nature of a mineral, a plant, an animal, etc.

²⁵ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Ecrits spirituels* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1949), 71.

be God's gift of his beloved Son to our world in distress and ravaged by sin: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whomever believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Word will become flesh in order to live among us. The Word who, eternally, in equality with the Father, possessed the divine nature—"Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)—will intimately join to himself, by receiving it from the Virgin Mary, a human nature in all similarity to ours, yet without sin. He draws this human nature to himself; he assumes it, makes it his own personally. (This is the mystery of the Hypostatic Union). The very Word of God: this is who from now on will be loved and adored, as well as hated and scorned, through this human nature.

This is the mystery of the Incarnation. The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity spoke of three divine persons in one unique divine nature. The mystery of the Incarnation speaks of only one divine person in two natures. These two natures are infinitely unequal to each other: the one divine and uncreated, the other human and created. However, in the person of the Word, they are found indissolubly joined and knit together.²⁶ Jesus is true God and true man: true God eternally, true man for two thousand years and forever. During his mortal life, "under the ashes of his humanity hid the fire of his divinity" (St. Catherine of Sienna). He is the Word born eternally from the Father according to his divine nature, and born of the Virgin temporally according to his human nature. He is the one who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and buried, descended into hell, and rose again on the third day. God is his Father according to his divinity. However, Mary is his mother according to his humanity, and since motherhood, like adoration, like love, is directly concerned with the person adored or loved, we must confess that Mary is Mother of God, *Theotokos*. To deny it is to deny the divinity of Christ.

The entire Trinity is at work in the mystery of the Incarnation. From the moment when the "yes" of the Annunciation was pronounced, the three persons together form in the womb of the Virgin and anoint with messianic unction the human nature, body and soul, with which they will clothe, as with a cloak, the one person of the Word. Only the Word becomes *bodily* present in the world.

Nevertheless, the three persons, distinct from one another, are inseparable

²⁶ See Aloys Grillmeier, *Le Christ dans la Tradition chretienne* (Paris: Cerf, 1973), 150: "The doctrine of *one sole person in two natures* was the only way out of the dilemma posed by Celsus. The question was to know whether God truly entered into history while remaining God, the very problem in which contemporary theology is still engaged, albeit under a different form, in the debate with Rudolf Bultmann."

from one another. They share an ineffable communion with each other. It is on account of the great text of St. John (14:9–11) that theologians speak of their intercommunication: “Have I been with you so long, and you do not know me, Philip? He who sees me sees the Father. How can you say: ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you, I do not speak of myself: the Father, dwelling in me, accomplishes his works. Believe me, I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”²⁷ The persons communicate among themselves under three aspects.²⁸ First of all, this is so because of their immanence in the divine essence—we have spoken about *circumincession* (from *circum-insidere*). Secondly, there is the fact of their mutual relations: the Father is impossible without the Son and vice versa; their mutual love is impossible without the Spirit and vice versa. The divine persons are interpenetrable. A “movement” is established between them. The technical term expressing this “movement” is the Greek word *perichoresis*, rendered by the word “circum-incession” (from *in-cedere*) in the Latin translation of St. John Damascene’s *De fide orthodoxa*.²⁹ Finally, the divine persons inter-communicate because of their origin: it is in the very bosom of God that the thought of the Father brings forth the Word, and that the love of the Father and the Son brings forth the Spirit.

The divine persons are wonderfully transparent to one another. They cannot be separated from each other. Where one is found, there too are the others found.³⁰ Whoever has one has the other two—he who has one pearl

²⁷ See Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon saint Jean* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1925), 377: “The first lesson of this passage with regard to the Apostles is that he who speaks to them is divine. If we could say that God was in the prophets by his Spirit, we could not say that they were in God. However, besides their primary meaning in the context of the Last Supper, Jesus’s words usher in a revelation concerning the intimate life of God. When he affirms most energetically that he is God, he distinguishes himself from the Father, thus as Son and not only as man. Thus, theology needed to determine appropriate terms for introducing distinction into this unity. In addition, the Fathers understand that these words, although strong against the Arians, did not favor Sabellius. Quite the contrary. For, what mattered most in the Upper Room was to show in Jesus the action of one personality in the divine unity.”

²⁸ St. Thomas, *ST I*, q. 42, a. 5 (“Utrum Filius sit in Patre et in converso?”), where the intercommunication is shown without recourse to the technical word *perichoresis*.

²⁹ See Jacques-Guy Bougerol, O.F.M., *Lexique saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Ed. Franciscaines, 1969), 34.

³⁰ What one does, the other two do commonly, but according to the personal mode which characterizes him. On the role of the divine persons in the mission, conception, and assumption of the Word, see E. Bailleux, “Le Christ et son Esprit,” *Revue thomiste* 3 (1973): 373–400, at 379.

has the whole necklace. But not in the same way. Only the person of the Word is rendered *bodily* present to the world through the Incarnation. The persons of the Father and of the Spirit, joined to his person, become, by the very fact of his Incarnation, *newly* present in the world, are rendered (and remain) closer to the world than they had ever been, though by a presence which cannot be bodily and which remains purely spiritual. They find in Jesus an unprecedented way to come down to us. Jesus is himself an unprecedented way for us to reach them: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). The Son of God, says St. Augustine in a Christmas text which Paul VI likes to cite, “remaining with the Father Truth and Life, taking on flesh became the Way” (“manens apud Patrem veritas et vita, induens se carne factus est via”).³¹ The bodily presence of the person of the Son of God in the tabernacle of our churches is the extraordinary door that opens out onto the silence of the three divine persons.

The Incarnation, Sacrament of the Trinity: this will be the first and loftiest realization of the “mystery of sacramentality.”

3. *The Grace of Personal Union Brings with It the Grace of Messianic Unction*

It is at the very moment when the human nature of Jesus is conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary that it is assumed by the Word and subsists in him: this is the grace of personal union. And it is at this very moment that the holy soul of Jesus is flooded with the gifts of the Holy Spirit: this is the grace of messianic unction.³²

The grace of personal union is proper to the only Son of God. It is strictly incommunicable. Because of it, Jesus is deserving of our unique adoration: “The Word became flesh; . . . we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14).

The grace of messianic unction is announced in Isa 11:1–2: “A shoot shall come forth from the stump of Jesse, a branch shall grow out of his roots. Upon him shall rest the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and

³¹ Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus* 34, no. 9 [PL, 35:1656].

³² Starting from another biblical image, the Pauline image of Christ, the Head of which the Church is the Body, St. Thomas uses the term *Christ's capital grace* for what we have called *the grace of messianic unction*. According to him, this capital grace includes the three prerogatives of Christ: *Christ the Illuminator* (King, Prophet, Teacher), who announces the things to be believed and the things to be done in his Kingdom; *Christ the Priest*, who inaugurates a new worship by his sacrifice and his sacraments; and above all *Christ the Holy One*, Source of holiness, who is able to communicate around him the holiness of faith, hope, and charity—in short, the holiness of grace. Cf. ST III, q. 8, a. 1; q. 64, a. 4; and our book *Le Message révélé* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1964), 19.

understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.”³³ It is given to Christ with such fullness that it will be able to overflow from him and pour out onto the world, in order to make his Church appear there. He is the Head; she will be his Mystical Body. “Yes, from his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace. For the Law was given through (the intermediary of) Moses; grace and Truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16–17).

As we said earlier, by the personal union of his human nature to the Word, Christ is the sacrament (that is, the sign and instrument) that brings us closer to the ineffable bond between the three persons of the Trinity. By the messianic unction of the Spirit, Christ becomes the sacrament (that is, the sign and instrument) of the divine life insofar as it is, from him, rendered communicable to the world.

We will have respected this double valence of sacramentality in saying of Christ that he is “the sacrament, the visible expression, of the divine life in its source.”

4. The Word Seizes the Depths of His Humanity in His Being and in His Action

How do we approach such a sacrament? How do we speak without betraying it? Will not the surest answer come from constantly examining the Gospels? But you must read them on your knees.³⁴ There is no point merely saying, “the Word became flesh.” We must penetrate into the depths of this mystery. Between the eternal divinity of the Word and the fragile humanity that he takes from the Virgin, the distance remains, properly speaking, infinite;

³³ All of his *divine* life Christ communicates to the Holy Spirit, and he receives from the Holy Spirit all the anointing of grace of his *human* life.

³⁴ Read the Gospel on your knees. Because the written text is silent, it does not defend itself from misunderstandings by the reader. Our reading of it must be constantly illuminated by the living faith of the apostolic Church. Much more profoundly than learned exegetes, someone like Thérèse of the Child Jesus was able to grasp such texts from St. Luke (“Who could have invented the Blessed Virgin?”), St. John, and St. Paul.

To the question “Why did Christ not write?” St. Thomas’s second response is as follows: “If Christ had committed his doctrine to writing, men would have had no deeper thought of his doctrine than that which appears on the surface of the writing” (*ST* III, q. 42, a. 4). The first response cited Matt 7:29—“He taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes”—and added: the excellence of the Master demands excellence of transmission, namely, the imprinting of doctrine on hearts. Neither Pythagoras nor Socrates were willing to write anything. On the question of *speaking* and *writing*, how can we fail to recommend the pages of Etienne Gilson, evoking Plato’s *Phaedrus* and his *Seventh Letter*? See *Linguistique et Philosophie: Essai sur les constantes philosophiques du langage* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1969), 203–62.

however, this distance is wholly bridged by the almighty solicitude that falls on Jesus from above. It is not to the Word alone, it is to the Servant of Yahweh coming up from the waters of baptism that a voice from heaven will say: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). At the moment of the Transfiguration, when the glory which he carried in him suddenly bursts forth, what is transfigured is his whole, indivisible *being*, the being of the Word Incarnate; and the flesh of his humanity, illuminated, becomes in its own turn illuminating: "And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as light" (Matt 17:2). Death may well separate Jesus's soul and body from one another, but it separates neither of them from their belonging to the Word. The body deprived of life and buried, the same body marked by the wounds, is thus kept for the Resurrection: "He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up." Such is the meaning of this text in Acts 2:31–32.³⁵

In like manner, the divine omnipotence, penetrating Jesus's being, subordinated all of his action: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34); "He who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). "Philip, do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (John 14:10). If freedom is defined as a dominating indifference to created realities, the soul immersed in sovereign creative freedom will be the freest of souls. "If the Father loves me, it is because I lay down my life (my soul) in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, I give it of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down and the power to take it up again; this is the order that I have received from my Father" (John 10:17–18). There is no soul surer of itself than the soul of Jesus: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt 24:35). "At that time, Jesus spoke and said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for thus was your good pleasure. All things have been handed over to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will refresh you'" (Matt 11:25–28). "The last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried

³⁵ This will be the theologian's response to Dostoevsky's discomfort before Holbein's painting.

out: 'If anyone thirsts let him (come to me and) drink. Whoever believes in me, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water, (as) the Scripture says'" (John 7:37–38). Jesus knows who he is. When his enemies claim against him that Abraham is their Father, he will respond to them by naming himself as Yahweh did to Moses: "Truly, truly, I say to you: Before Abraham was, I Am. So they picked up stones to throw at him; but he hid himself and went out of the Temple" (John 8:58–59).

5. The "Natural" Activities of Jesus

The Gospel presents two ways that the divine omnipotence, which Jesus has in communion with his Father, takes hold of his action in order to strengthen it.³⁶

First, there is the realm of actions that are inherently human. They permeate Jesus's life. He travels the roads of Palestine with his disciples. His parables are fashioned from heaven and from the traditions of this region. He goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover and prays in the Temple. He preaches in the synagogues, teaches the multitudes, questions his disciples, responds to devious questions from his enemies, and to final questions from Caiaphas and from Pontius Pilate. He agrees to eat with Pharisees and with sinners. But in all of this, what freedom, what greatness! "The crowds were deeply struck by his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes" (Matt 7:28). At Nazareth, his homeland, "they rose up, (and) they drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off. But he, passing through the midst of them, went away" (Luke. 4:29–30). When he had washed their feet, put on his garment, and returned to table, he said to them: "Do you understand what I have done to you?"³⁷ You call me Teacher and Lord and you speak well, for so I am" (John 13:12–13). During his arrest, the crowds, upon hearing him say, "Whom are you seeking? . . . It is me," drew back, falling down (John 18:3 [Trans. note: should be v. 6]). "The way of Jesus! The style of Jesus! The thousand actions he did as everyone else in the world, he did like no one else in the world—in a unique way in the world. He went, passing among them—yes, with such simple majesty,

³⁶ There are the actions in which his humanity took the initiative, acting as a *principal secondary cause*: he adored, supplicated, suffered, and offered himself in sacrifice. And there are the actions in which his divinity took the initiative, his humanity acting then as, properly speaking, an *instrumental cause*: the miracles, the forgiveness of sins, and the illumination of hearts (see Journet, *L'Église du Verbe incarné*, 2:196).

³⁷ The debasements of the purification by water herald the debasements of the imminent purification by blood.

with such peace, such tranquil and gentle assurance, which prevented any hand from being placed on him!”³⁸ What was the life of Jesus if not, with a sovereign freedom and absolute clarity, the expression, translation into human behavior—in other words, the sacrament—of the Trinitarian life? Every step he took on our earth, every word he pronounced, was in accord with the mystery of his eternal preexistence with his Father and his Holy Spirit: “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27). Hence, after twenty centuries and its translation into all the languages of the world, the Gospel retains all of its powerful and imperishable influence.

6. *The Instrumentally Elevated Activities of Jesus:*

(a) to Confer Divine Grace; (b) to Give the “Signs” of His Mission

Jesus’s omnipotence never ceases to enlighten his activities of the properly human order. Moreover, when it wills, it takes hold of the humanity which is intimately conjoined to it—in the words of St. John Damascene, his humanity is the “instrument of the divinity”³⁹—as an instrument of marvelous delicacy, gifted with sensitivity, intelligence, and love, in order to bring about, through this humanity, effects which exceed the entire order of created powers. Through it, Jesus is able to communicate the divine life of grace to sinners (this is the invisible [essential] supernaturality of the *mystery*); or when he needs to confirm by a sign given from heaven the truth of his mission (this is the visible [modal] supernaturality of *miracles*).⁴⁰

The story of the spiritual and temporal healing of the paralytic is here admirably profound and clear, Mark 2:3–12: “They came to him bringing a paralytic, carried by four men. . . . Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the

³⁸ Jacques Maritain, *De la grâce et de l’humanité de Jésus* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967), 128. [Trans. note: For an English translation, see *On the Grace and Humanity of Jesus*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).]

³⁹ See St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 3.15: “The flesh served as an instrument of the deity” [PG, 94:1060]. See also St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 4: “The human nature in Christ was like an instrument of the divinity.” [Trans. note: See the volume by Theophil Tschipke, O.P., *L’humanité du Christ comme Instrument de Salut de la Divinité*, trans. Philibert Secrétan (1939; repr. Fribourg: Academic Press, 2003). For more about the influence of the Greek Fathers, such as St. John Damascene, on St. Thomas, see *Thomas Aquinas and the Greek Fathers*, ed. Michael Dauphinais, Andrew Hofer, O.P., and Roger Nutt (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2019).]

⁴⁰ [Trans. note: For a brief discussion of the modally supernatural vis-à-vis the essentially supernatural, see Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Sense of Mystery: Clarity and Obscurity in the Intellectual Life*, trans. Matthew K. Miner (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 206–16.]

paralytic: My son, your sins are forgiven. Now there were in the audience some scribes who thought to themselves: 'Why does this man speak thus? He blasphemes! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Immediately, perceiving inwardly that they thought thus, Jesus said to them: 'Why do you think thus in your hearts? Which is easier to say to say to the paralytic: 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say to him: 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk?' But, that you may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins, 'I order you,' he said to the paralytic, 'rise, take up your pallet and go home.' He rose up at once, taking his pallet, and went out before them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God: 'Never have we seen anything like this.'"

Yes, God alone can forgive sins. But behold: in Jesus, the forgiving omnipotence became flesh, became human, in order to forgive more mercifully. For the first time in all of history, a human word was able to utter with divine assurance these amazing words: "My son, have confidence, your sins are forgiven." The divine power, passing through Jesus's humanity, is humanized to touch the sinner more intimately. This is the mystery to which a St. John Damascene and a St. Thomas Aquinas draw our attention when they see in the humanity of Christ the "organ," the instrument of his divinity.⁴¹

The divine omnipotence is grasped by the decision of Jesus to justify the paralytic and to deliver him from his sins (the invisible supernaturality of the mystery). It is grasped a second time when Jesus, in order to manifest his sovereign authority, orders the paralytic to rise (the visible supernaturality of the miracle).⁴²

The power to perform miracles is not external to Jesus. It is one with him.

⁴¹ The analysis of St. Thomas is admirable here. It is of the nature of an instrument to collaborate with, to consent to, the impulse which is given to it: a knife that does not cut is no longer an instrument. When the instrument is animate, the consent is of a higher order, it is not simply "bodily," it is "vital." It is with all its sensitive being that the horse is made docile to its rider. It is with all its intelligent and free being that the good servant makes himself the instrument of his master, and here we are referred to Aristotle's venerable analysis. It is with the full decision of his will, strengthened by divine grace, that the humanity of Christ will be the instrument of his divinity. See *ST* III, q. 18, a. 1, ad 2; q. 7, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴² The entire meaning of the miracles recounted in the Gospel is to refer us to the Kingdom which is not of this world. For those who do not refuse a priori the possibility of an appeal coming from this Kingdom, the miracles will be *light*; for those who refuse a priori this possibility, the signs will be a *scandal*.

The Savior himself appeals to the signs that he performs: "The works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me" (John 5:36); "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep" (John 10:25-26).

He makes use of it freely. Hence his amazing confidence in the face of the death of the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11), the young daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:34), and Lazarus (John 11:1).

Speaking of the people who came from afar and who crowded around Jesus, St. Luke writes: "And all this crowd sought to touch him because from him came a power which healed them all" (16:19). The story of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage is striking: "She said to herself: 'If I can only touch his garments, I will be healed.' Immediately the flow of blood dried up and she felt in her body that she was healed from her disease. And Jesus immediately perceived in himself that power had gone out from him, and turning about in the crowd he said: 'Who touched me?'" (Mark 5:25–34).

7. Conclusion

In contact with the omnipotence of Christ, his humanity, sanctified by the messianic unction, becomes the "organ," the perfect instrument of his divinity.

The Incarnation, which appeared to us as the *sacrament of the Trinity*, appears to us more generally, with the messianic unction which accompanies it, as the *sacrament of the divine life in its source*.

We are here in the presence of the supreme realization of the only authentic spiritualism—in contrast to the Gnostic spiritualism that separates matter from spirit—namely, the *Christian spiritualism of the assumption, illumination, and transfiguration of matter by spirit and the human by the divine*.

Such is the great theology of the Word made flesh, that of the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church, from St. Cyril of Alexandria to St. John Damascene and beyond, from St. Augustine to St. Thomas Aquinas and beyond.

We must now point out the rift of this great traditional theology, which can occur even where it is still professed that Christ is a person who is man and God.

Let us return to the paralytic in the Gospel. Under the deforming pressure of the *spiritual Gnosticism of the separation of matter from spirit and the human from the divine*, we will start to think that Christ as man could well have *pointed* the paralytic to the divine mercy, but that the forgiveness and the miracle of the healing were the effect of his divinity *only*, and not of his divinity working through the instrument of his humanity.

At this precise moment, we will have had our hands on the very mystery of the Incarnation. In place of the *Christian hermeneutic*, we will have substituted a *Gnostic hermeneutic* for understanding the greatest mystery of the faith after that of the Trinity.

The rift will only grow wider. It will extend from Christ to his Mystical

Body, which is the Church. By tearing apart Christ, we will have torn apart Christianity and, of course, in addition, Christendom.⁴³

II. The Church, Sacrament of the Divine Life Communicated

1. *From Christ to the Church: From the Divine Life in Its Source to the Divine Life Communicated*

From the darkening of the world through the Fall, all the graces of salvation offered to men depend on the Cross of Christ: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.—He signified by what death he was to die” (John 12:31–32); “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Before Christ’s coming, salvation was given in foresight of his coming and by way of *anticipation*: the shadow of the Cross covered the world. Since Christ’s advent, salvation comes to us by *derivation* from his bloody Cross: its light illumines the world.

Christ is the superabundant source; to the degree that his superabundance is communicated, the Church appears.

If he is the sacrament of the divine life in its source, she will be the sacrament of the divine life communicated.

He is the Head, she the Body; He is the Husband, she the Wife.

Now, to which of these two is the Second Vatican Council’s definition, “universal sacrament of salvation,” suited? To Christ and to his Church respectively, though proportionally (that is, analogically).

Christ is the universal sacrament of salvation in its source. The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation communicated. If, in the words of an expression dear to St. Augustine, we bring together Christ and the Church, the Head and the Body, under the name of the “whole Christ”—*Totus Christus, Caput et Corpus*—we will make clear that the “whole Christ” is the universal sacrament of salvation under its double proportional realization: the one original and primary, namely the individual Christ; the other derived and secondary, namely the Church. Our attention here will now turn to the second of these realizations.

⁴³ In what place did Johann Adam Möhler write: “The meaning of ‘the Word became flesh, became man,’ was never clear to Luther”? [Trans. note: Journet is referring to Möhler’s 1832 *Symbolik*. For an English translation of this text, see Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolic Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 333 (§48).]

2. *The Church-Sacrament of Salvation: The Conciliar Doctrine*

1. The descent of the Word at the moment of the Incarnation, the descent of the Holy Spirit at the moment of Pentecost—these are the supreme foundations of the Church. And such is the perspective of the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*. Here are three essential texts on the Church-sacrament.⁴⁴

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

Here is the second text:

God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity, “sacramentum visibile huius salutiferae unitatis.” While it transcends all limits of time and confines of race, the Church is destined to extend to all regions of the earth and so enters into the history of mankind. (§9)

And here is the third text:

Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to Himself (John 12:32). Rising from the dead (Rom 6:9) He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through Him has established His Body which is the Church *as the universal sacrament of salvation*, “*universale salutis sacramentum*.” Sitting at the right hand of the Father, He is continually active in the world that He might lead men to the Church and through it join them to Himself and that He might make them partakers of His glorious life by nourishing them with His own Body and Blood. (§48)

⁴⁴ [Trans. note: These quotes from *Lumen Gentium* are taken, for familiarity and ease of access, from the translation available on the Vatican website. The same holds true for magisterial documents below.]

Thus, the Church is *universal sacrament*, that is to say, the universal sign and instrument of a *salvation* that consists in *intimate union with God*, consequently producing the *spiritual unity of the whole human race*, broken by the first sin and perpetually defeated by our subsequent sins.

2. This Church, this single Church, which holds such great treasures, where do we seek her today? Where does she subsist? The first of six points developed in the important declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae*⁴⁵ of June 24, 1973, is entitled "The Oneness of Christ's Church." We read there:

One is the Church, which after His Resurrection our Savior handed over to Peter as Shepherd (cf. John 21:17), commissioning him and the other apostles to propagate and govern her (cf. Matt 18:18ff.) (and which) He erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (cf. 1 Tim 3:15). And this Church of Christ, "constituted and organized in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and the bishops in union with that Successor." This declaration of the Second Vatican Council is illustrated by the same Council's statement that "it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the general means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained,"⁴⁶ and that same Catholic Church "has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all the means of grace"⁴⁷ with which Christ wished to enhance His messianic community. This is no obstacle to the fact that during her earthly pilgrimage the Church, "embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified,"⁴⁸ nor to the fact that "outside her visible structure," namely in Churches and ecclesial communities which are joined to the Catholic Church by an imperfect communion, there are to be found "many elements of sanctification and truth (which), as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism towards Catholic unity."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ "Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church against Certain Errors of the Present Day," *L'Osservatore romano*, July 5, 1973; cf. *La Documentation catholique*, July 15, 1973, 664.

⁴⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §3.

⁴⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §4.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, §8.

⁴⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, §9.

For these reasons, “Catholics must *joyfully* acknowledge and esteem truly Christian endowments derived from our common heritage, which are to be found among our separated brethren,”⁵⁰ and they must strive for the re-establishment of unity among all Christians, by making a common effort of purification and renewal,⁵¹ so that the will of Christ may be fulfilled and the division of Christians may cease to be an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world.⁵² But at the same time Catholics are bound to profess that through the gift of God’s mercy they belong to that Church which Christ founded and which is governed by the successors of Peter and the other Apostles, who are the depositories of the original Apostolic tradition, living and intact, which is the permanent heritage of doctrine and holiness of that same Church.⁵³ The followers of Christ are therefore not permitted to imagine that Christ’s Church is nothing more than a collection (divided, but still possessing a certain unity) of Churches and ecclesial communities. Nor are they free to hold that Christ’s Church nowhere really exists today and that it is to be considered only as an end which all Churches and ecclesial communities must strive to reach.

In *L’Osservatore Romano* on July 6, 1973, this text is accompanied by an observation written in Italian, concluding: “Catholics will never be too grateful to God for the grace he has given them to belong to this Church. It is true that the unique fullness that they recognize in her *does not permit a facile irenicism; rather, it imposes a deep ecumenism*. They cannot avoid bearing witness to the fullness possessed and retained by their Church, but they must do so with humility, because it is a pure gift from God. Indeed, their dialogue must be completely inspired by the desire to see Jesus Christ reign ever more in themselves and in their Christian brethren.”⁵⁴ In the view of *Lumen Gentium*, the descent of the Word at the moment of the Incarnation and the descent of his Spirit at the moment of Pentecost are, as we have said, the two supreme foundations of the Church. These two descents or missions are inextricably interconnected, but they follow each other in time. Hence the very foundation of the Church involves two stages.

⁵⁰ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §4.

⁵¹ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §§6–8.

⁵² *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §1.

⁵³ Paul VI, encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1964): 629.

⁵⁴ See *Doc. cath.*, October 7, 1973, 837.

3. The First Stage of the Communication of the Divine Life to the Church: The Visible Contact of Jesus

The first stage of the communication of the divine life to the Church is that of the visible contact of Jesus. It lasts until the Ascension.

When the Word becomes flesh, it is by his love and the plan of his love that all the graces of salvation are derived that “God, who wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4) spreads over the world. “But the knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer, of which we were the object from the first moment of His Incarnation, exceed all that the human intellect can hope to grasp. For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when He began to enjoy the Beatific Vision, and in that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love.”⁵⁵ Our Savior, “constituted the Head of the whole human family in the womb of the Blessed Virgin”⁵⁶ begins to make his life-giving influence felt even in the most distant regions of the earth, but he will fully exercise it only gradually. The mysteries of the Kingdom can only gradually become part of the fabric of human history. An order will need to be observed. Everything must begin in the small people prepared from the time of Abraham and Moses. It is in Israel that Jesus will appear. There his burning love to save the whole world will be supremely concentrated; there he will, by his visible contact, gather his Church around him before sending her to all nations and to all ages. He himself is sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24).

His humanity is the organ of his divine person, the instrument conjoined to his divine person, as our hand and our whole body are, for each of us, the instrument conjoined to our person. It is through it that he acts.

He founds the Church, forming her by protecting her, by surrounding her with his power and his light, by carrying her, in a way, in himself, as a child is formed and put together in his mother’s womb.

He gives her structure, her definitive structure as the Church making her pilgrimage in time. She will be able to subsist only gathered under the apostolic body. After a whole night spent on the mountain praying to God, “when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles” (Luke 6:12–13). They will have the mission *to evangelize* in his name: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me,

⁵⁵ Pius XII, encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1943): 230 [§75].

⁵⁶ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, p. 206 [§30].

and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). They will have the power *to bind and loose* on earth what will be held as bound and loosed in heaven (Matt 18:18). Among them, one will be *the rock* upon which the Church will be built and will possess the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16:17–18), the shepherd of all of Jesus’s sheep (John 21:15–17).

They will have the mission to make present through all time, until the end of days, the very self-sacrifice that Jesus himself inaugurated on the night of the *Last Supper* and consummated on the Cross (Matt 26:26–27; Luke 22:19–20). In his name, they will have the power to forgive or to retain the sins of men (John 20:21).

This structure, arranged by Christ after his departure, will at first remain asleep and hidden in his light. The time will come for her to awaken and set forth into the world. “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus has directed them. . . . And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’” (Matt 28[:16] and 18–20).

During Jesus’s visible life, what appears—and how would it be otherwise?—is less the sacramentality of the Church still being formed, than the sacramentality of the very person of the Word descended among us.

Another descent, another visible mission, announced by Jesus (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7), that of his Holy Spirit, will be required for the full manifestation of the sacramentality that he willed for his Church.

*4. The Second Stage of the Communication of the Divine Life to the Church: Jesus’s Twofold Magisterial and Cultic Sacramental Contact*⁵⁷

1. What will happen at the moment of the Ascension when the cloud of glory envelops Jesus’s humanity in order to take him to the Father? “Father, glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was” (John 17:5).

Certainly, Christ’s love and care for his Church can in no way decline. However, an entirely unpredictable separation is going to rend the heart of the disciples: “Now, I am going to Him who sent me. . . . And because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts” (John 16:5–6).

⁵⁷ Namely the contact of Christ in glory considered here under the twofold veil of the *magisterial* power to announce the Gospel and the *cultic* power to receive or to dispense the sacraments.

Visible contact with Jesus will no longer be possible for us. Will the graces of privileged contact needed in order for the Church to be visible and retain her existence in the world be taken away? But how is this possible? Here more than ever, “the gifts of God are without repentance.” The same gifts that Christ communicated to the Church by his visible contact in order to establish her, he will continue to communicate to her through the contact of the instruments that he himself here below disposed for this purpose when he lived among us in order to sustain her until the end of her pilgrimage. It is the twofold apostolic mission to announce the Gospel to the world and to communicate to the latter the graces and mercies of Christ. This twofold apostolic mission extends to the visible structure of the Church. The Church presents herself as the means of supernatural salvation. Therefore, she deserves to be called a *sacrament*. And at this level, we will already speak of the *supernatural apostolic character* proper to the Church. The second stage of the life of the pilgrim Church will be defined as her passage from Jesus’s visible contact with the world to his invisible *sacramental* contact.

For a time, the humanity of the Word was visible: “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have touched with our hands concerning the Word of life, . . . it is that which we announce to you” (1 John 1:1–3). Now, there is the time when the humanity of the Word, hidden in the unbearable glory of heaven, joins to itself an instrument in order to act in our midst, an instrument used by his humanity here below for this purpose.

In the glorified Christ’s sacramental contact with his pilgrim Church, the role of instrument placed between him and mankind is to deliver, without alteration, the motion received from Christ: “He who hears you hears me” (Luke 10:16). Peter baptizes, Paul baptizes, but through them “it is Jesus who baptizes in the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). Between the principal agent and the effect produced, there is undoubtedly the interposition or mediation of a subject, namely of the instrument (*mediatio suppositi*), but immediate exercise of the power transmitted (*immediatio virtutis*). The moon is borne by the earth, and the latter by the sun, but the full weight of the moon is pulled by the sun’s gravitation. Let us say that there is a transparency in the transmission.

In Christ’s humanity and the sacraments, we have a conjoined instrument and separated instruments. We will say that the hand of the artist is an instrument *conjoined* to his person, and that the pencil with which he draws is an instrument *separated* from his person. This is true for the range of *being*. However, according to the range of *action*, the instrument called “separated” acts in intimate continuity with the one who uses it.

Let us add that the separated instrument can be *per se* and by nature either *inanimate* (the artist's pencil) or else *animate* (for example, at the level of sense life, the sheepdog, and at the level of intelligence and freedom, the faithful servant of the Gospel).

2. The instrument left to the Church, by which Christ in glory now intends to gather and save humanity consists, we say, in the twofold apostolic power *to announce* to it the truth of the Gospel and *to communicate* to it the mercies of God.

This twofold power belongs to the *visible structure* of the pilgrim Church. It is essential to her. She cannot subsist without it. She owes to it her miraculous constancy through all the twists and turns of history, with all the forces of destruction which threaten her from all sides.⁵⁸

She owes it still more. Under the sovereign motion of Christ who established them, the two apostolic powers *bring about the sacramental contact*. They become the instrument by which the privileged gifts of heaven flow secretly to the very interior of the Church as a twofold gushing fountain, flowing over her, filling her, making of her in the midst of a sinful people, "in multitudine operantium iniquitatem," the Spouse "glorious, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and immaculate" (Eph 5:27).

This is the Church, the object of our *faith*, which we confess in the Creed, but also bearing within her the *signs* of her election. "The Church," recalls the First Vatican Council, "because of her holiness, her catholic unity, her unconquerable stability, is herself a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an incontrovertible proof of her divine mission."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ [Blaise] Pascal repeatedly emphasized the supernatural character of this perpetuity: "We have seen so many schisms and heresies arise, so many states overthrown, so many changes of every kind, while the Church that worships him who has always been, has continued on without interruption. What is wonderful, incomparable and wholly divine is that this religion, which has always survived, has always been under attack. Countless times, she has been on the verge of total destruction, and every time she has been in such a state God has rescued her by extraordinary manifestations of his power. For what is amazing is that she has continued without bending and bowing to the will of tyrants" (*Pensées*, ed. Léon Brunschvicg [Paris: Hachette, 1904], no. 613). [Trans. note: English translation (slightly modified) by Alban J. Kralishmeier (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 90–91.]

⁵⁹ Vatican I, session III, constitution *De fide catholica* [*Dei Filius*], ch. 3 (Denziger-Schönmetzer [DS], no. 3013). Built on apostolic foundations, the Church remains on earth the perpetual sign of the holiness of God (*signum perpetuum sanctitatis* [*Dei*]); see *Roman Missal*, 2nd preface of the Apostles.

As the supreme title of her holiness, she merits the name of “universal sacrament of salvation,” for the entire human race.

5. Pentecost

“When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me. And you also are my witnesses because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26–27). The whole execution of the apostolic mission left by Christ to his Church will be carried out by the descent on her of the Spirit who proceeds from him. The event of Pentecost marks the decisive moment when the Church, formed by Christ but hidden in his light, takes, like the newborn baby, her first autonomous breath.

The same Spirit who filled his soul with the messianic unction Christ sent to the Church, with the mission to make the superabundance of this unction flow over onto her. As we see depicted in the Pentecost at Vézelay, descending from Christ in glory and passing from his wounded [*stigmatisées*] hands, the same grace and life as the very grace and life of Christ, fell on the Apostles in order to send them out to the ends of the earth.

He had been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24). He sends his eleven disciples to evangelize and baptize all the nations, even until the end of the ages. Therefore, they will perform, in a sense—namely extensively, certainly not intensively!—greater works than his: “He who believes in me . . . will also do the works that I do. He will do even greater works, because I go to the Father” (John 14:12).

6. Baptism of Water and Baptism of Fire

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt 3:11). For each of us, there is a baptism of water by which we become fragile children of the indefectible and immaculate Church. And for the Church herself, there is a baptism of fire by which she is invincibly faithful and holy. Let us open now Maritain’s commentary on Song of Songs:

Baptism of water, which washes away original sin and all other sin, is received by the members of the Church—they were born sinners—and is for each of them a new birth. And from the nuptial bath of this baptism which causes them to be born again, the Church, the community of those *born again*, is herself born immaculate, absolutely clean from original sin as from all other sin. She is *to remain thus immaculate throughout the ages*, and to increase constantly in charity, for which she needs a special strengthening of grace, received by her

at the very moment she is born without spot, and which does in each of her acts triumph over human fragility.

Let us say therefore that at the very moment when the Church on earth— [becoming] a visible social body to the eyes of men and [acting] among them, perfectly distinct from the whole temporal order—comes out wholly pure and immaculate from *the waters of baptism* received by her members, she receives herself as a person constituted from above, a special strengthening of grace, another “baptism,” the baptism *of fire and the Spirit*, which the Bridegroom gives to her at the moment she emerges in person before him. Christ gives this baptism to the Church on earth so that she may triumph over human fragility in all that she says and does. He gives it to her, not to purify her, but in order to enkindle and maintain her purity forever.⁶⁰

On the day of Pentecost, of this amazing event, corollary to the Incarnation, in which the entire Holy Trinity took part, the Church of heaven and of earth was supernaturally constituted a *person* in the primary and full sense:

[At the very moment] the apostolic college, receiving the tongues of fire, was made in the Upper Room and for all the ages to come the very voice and *supremely vital instrument* of the Church, . . . the Apostles themselves, while remaining sinful men, became the unshakeable pillars of the faith and the light of the world, dwelling-places of the Holy Spirit who enkindles their hearts and illumines their minds, guides them and strengthens them in their tremendous mission. And by them, on the day of Pentecost, the person of the Church cried out: It is done, here I am, I, the Bride of Christ, in heaven and on earth, *ecce adsum* . . .

⁶⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Le Cantiques des Cantiques* (Paris: Hors Commerce, 1971), 30. [Trans note: This text was meant to be a complement or supplement to Maritain's *De L'Église du Christ: La personne de l'Eglise et son personnel* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970). It may also be found in *Approches sans entraves* (Paris: Fayard, 1973), 532–95. For an English translation of the latter work, see *Untrammelled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). Journet wrote to Maritain in 1971 concerning the latter's commentary on the *Song of Songs*, saying it represented the flowering of his aforementioned work, *De L'Église du Christ*. See *Journet/Maritain: Correspondance*, vol. 6 (Paris: Éditions Saint-Augustin, 2008), 715. For an English translation of *De L'Église du Christ*, see Jacques Maritain, *On the Church of Christ: The Person of the Church and Her Personnel*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).]

For the Church on earth, . . . in indivisible unity with the Church of heaven, triumphing in all her acts over our fragility, she will remain here below until the end of the ages an immaculate, an indefectibly holy (person) drawn from poor humanity—the Beloved of Christ, the blessed Bride on her way toward equality of love with her Bridegroom.⁶¹

7. What Is It That, in Each Man, Meets the Holiness of the Church?

To say that the Church of Christ, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, an object of our faith, is the universal sacrament of salvation is tantamount to saying that God, “who wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth,” secretly orients each of their hearts toward her from the beginning. This is the mysterious encounter between the holiness of the Church and the initial drama of each life. It is in the depths of each man, throughout the whole world, that the Church discovers what she has a mission to save. What is it in each man that meets the holiness of the Church? This is a profound question, one that Maritain poses, and to which he responds in three pages of his book *De l’Église du Christ*,⁶² which will remain the most penetrating illustration of the declaration of Vatican II on the Church as universal sacrament of salvation. Since it is impossible to summarize these pages, we must provide these four sections as they are:

[section 1] It is an absolutely fundamental and universal element of Church which we must discover. Where to seek it? To my mind, in *man himself such as he comes into the world*. I think that the primitive and fundamental element of Church, and one which exists everywhere on earth, is each human person who bears it in him, according as *by nature* he aspires to know the Cause of being, so also to a state of happy flourishing of his being; and according, as wounded in his nature by the sin of Adam—to such a degree that in his first act of freedom he cannot choose the good (and therefore love naturally above all things the subsisting Good) without grace *naturam sanans*—he has at the same time, if he does not *shrink away from the grace* initially given, a thirst for God which is at once of nature and of grace (of grace, in other words, “exceeding all created nature”).

⁶¹ Maritain, *Le Cantiques des Cantiques*, 32–33.

⁶² Maritain, *De L’Église du Christ*, 211–13.

And he also has, even if he *shrinks away* from grace, a desire *to save his being* which is consubstantial with him, because his being is wounded (he does not know it, but he experiences it right from childhood through the suffering and grief). It is this desire to save his being, and to be aided by all the means which are necessary for this, however unknown they may be, which, in act in the supraconscious of the spirit, makes of each man an element of Church in the proper sense of the word, and it is through this desire—*voto non re* (I would prefer to say “truly, but in virtue only of desire, not of accomplishment”) that in each of those to whom the Good News has not reached, and by the sole fact that they are men born after the fall, the whole Church is *virtually present*—virtually and invisibly.

[section 2] The philosophers tell us that the beloved is in the one loving, the desired in the one desiring. But, applied to the question which occupies us, this maxim takes on a meaning of exceptional significance and profundity.

On the one hand, indeed, in what concerns the desiring *subject*, we are dealing with a desire rooted in being, and therefore incomparably more fundamental than all the ordinary desires which can pass in the soul. As long as man exists, this desire torments him, conscious in those of us who have the religious sense, supraconscious in all.

On the other hand, in what concerns the *term* of the desire, it is important to distinguish two very different cases. It is a question of the object of desire taken solely *as object* of the latter; it is from the desire itself that it possesses its being in the soul of the one desiring; the desired is in the one desiring, but it is in him only *ideally*, as, for example, a journey I desire to make. If on the contrary that which is object of desire is also, with or without the knowledge of the one desiring, *a thing possessing its own existence* outside of the desiring subject, the desired in question is then a real being in the world, which by the desire is rendered *virtually* present in the one desiring, and which as such finds itself virtually and invisibly immanent in its life.

Supposing that a woman exists somewhere in the world who would be for a given man the unique perfect companion possible, so to speak tailor-made for him; this woman, whom he does not know, exists virtually in him by the desire for human complementarity which dwells in him. She is mysteriously immanent in his life. It is she whom he loves through all the women whom he will be able to love. And it may be that one day he will meet her . . .

[section 3] Well! The Church of Christ exists, she is there, visible on the earth, and sovereignly real, with all the means of salvation which she provides. Such and such a man “born in the forests” or in some primitive tribe does not know her; but through the desire to save his being, and to receive the aid of all the means necessary for this, which dwells in the man in question, this really existing Church is in her entirety *virtually* present in him, *virtually and invisibly* immanent in his life.

She attracts him to her reality without his knowing it. And by following the desire to save his being which dwells in him—in other words, the desire which he has for her without knowing her—he will have in his life, even if he be a sinner, and in the options which he will make, occasions to obey inspirations which come from above, to profit better from the good which there is in his religious family, if he has one, to be guided in his path by the angels, and to open himself to the grace of God which, in one manner or another is offered to each, and of which no one is deprived except through his own fault. (And perhaps one day he will meet this true Church, and perhaps he will recognize her.)

This is how I perceive that man himself is the most fundamental and the most universal element of Church, in whatever region of the earth he finds himself, and whatever complementary help he may be able to receive from a religious family, Christian-dissident or non-Christian, in which he may have been born and may have been raised.

Every human being is thus, by the very fact that he is a man come into the world after the Fall, able to participate in some fashion in the universal sacrament of salvation which is the Church; he can receive and is called to receive the effects of the *universal sign and instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race*. He is already mysteriously a child of the Church.

[section 4] And this is how I understand—but on the condition that one goes further than the consideration of the diverse spiritual families when one implements the notion of “element of the Church”—the theological text of an admirable richness of thought which has nourished my reflections of an old philosopher while I was working on the present section.

Such is the all holy Church of Christ that everyone is invited to recognize under the rags that clad the sins of her children.

8. *In the Church, the Sacrament of the Divine Life Communicated,
What Is the Pure Sacramental Sign, Reality and Sign,
and Pure Sacramental Reality?*

The ancients⁶³ saw, in that which is external, signs of profound things, signs in turn of ultimate things. The universe of the theologian was thus divided into pure *signs*, *thing-signs*, and pure *things*.

Let us speak now of the Church, object of our faith. A first glance will give us only the photo of her pilgrim behavior: here is her visible covering, that which in her is *pure sacramental sign*.

A second glance reaches the profound realities hidden under these signs, namely the apostolic powers deposited in her by Christ: the royal magisterial power and the priestly cultic power. These are the intermediary sacramental realities; they are *realities and signs*.

They signify the *sacramental reality ultimately constitutive* of the Church, namely the messianic unction, the charity which, being sacramental and oriented, can be fully Christ-conforming and unite in communion with Christ his whole Mystical Body.

This is the Church, the sacrament of the *divine life communicated* by Christ, the supreme dwelling place of the Holy Trinity here below. One of the seven sacraments, the Eucharist, is the sacrament par excellence of the consummation of this union of Christ and the Church. However, the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Church's unity, will do more still; it will bring into our midst the bodily presence of Christ on the Cross and Christ in glory, namely the sacrament of the *divine life in its source*.

9. *Conclusion*

Thus, we have seen that the *sacramentality proper to the Church* is found in the *apostolic privilege* and the *holiness* that the Spirit of Christ causes, by her mediation, to overflow onto the world.

The apostolic privilege entails the twofold mission *to announce* the Gospel and *to communicate* the graces and mercies of heaven: "Go therefore, *teach* all the nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The second mission, that of communicating the divine life in the name

⁶³ See St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.2, to which Peter Lombard refers in *Sent.* I, d. 1.

of Christ and of the three divine persons, is more mysterious than the first.⁶⁴ It puts us in the presence of seven liturgical dramas, the seven sacraments of the New Law. Here, the word “sacrament” takes on a particular meaning.

And, let us note right away, without the sacraments of the New Law, which cause Christ-conforming grace to flow in the Church, without the central and radiant power of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the entire Church could never be what she is: *the universal sacrament of salvation* of the whole human race.

III. The Seven Sacraments of the New Law

The Church, the sacrament of the divine life communicated, is born of the superabundance of the messianic unction which Christ, now in his glory, lavishes on her over the course of her earthly pilgrimage in order to gather her together in the communion of his Holy Spirit and to make of her the dwelling place of the Trinity. It is under this supreme title of her *holiness* that all men, wounded by original sin and called by divine grace, find their mysterious homeland in the Church, who thereby merits, in the most intimate and extended sense of the words, to be recognized as the universal sacrament of salvation.

1. *A Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation*

Such plenitude of holiness appears to us, according to Scripture, as carrying a twofold dignity of a twofold power, the royal power and the priestly power: “You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet 2:9); Christ “made us a kingdom, priests to God and his Father” (Rev 1:6). The origin of this *twofold privilege of Christian holiness* is to be found in the fact that Christ, to whom all power has been given in heaven and on earth, communicates it to his Church through the instrumentality of two apostolic powers, the two institutional charisms which he deposited in her. First, there is the *royal*, magisterial, prophetic charism to teach infallibly the Good News, entrusted to Peter and to the Apostles and to their successors. It is up to them to discern, encourage, and approve, in the last instance, the rays of truth that the Spirit of Christ constantly arouses in his Mystical Body by the inspirations of private prophecy.⁶⁵ Second, there is the *sacerdotal*, cultic, sacramental

⁶⁴ On this first mission, one may see, for example, *Le Message révélé*.

⁶⁵ For the *apostolic period*, these are the Apostles, enlightened by the twofold prophetic light of revelation (*apocalypsis*) and inspiration (*theopneustia*) which transmits to the primitive Church the deposit of faith, namely Scripture and the oral Tradition, creating the medium of light in which Scripture can appear and take on its true meaning. The

charism, which assures the continuation and valid exercise, until the end of time, of the worship of the New Law, the New Law having been inaugurated by the sacrifice of the Cross and the institution of the sacraments. These two dignities, these two institutions or charismatic missions, are essential to the existence of the wayfaring Church. However, the second is even more mysterious than the first, and it will be the subject that retains our attention here.

2. *The Three Sacramental Characters of Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders Are Participations in the Priesthood of Christ*

Through the messianic unction—through Christ’s “capital grace”—which fills his humanity in order to overflow on his Mystical Body, Christ is constituted High Priest in view of inaugurating the worship of the New Law. In no way is this a mere juridical designation. No, it is a divine consecration that is truly ontological: God “designated him High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 5:10); “He became High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 6:20). And in turn, an ontological consecration is necessary for those whom he will call under his influence to continue, in the Mystical Body, the worship founded by him, thereby participating, according to one’s own manner in his cultic-priestly mission. Three of the sacraments of the New Law—namely, Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders—will communicate to them a mark of Christ, a “character” or cultic power.⁶⁶ “Each of the faithful,” writes St. Thomas, “is deputed either himself to receive,

transmission that goes from Jesus and the Apostles to the primitive Church is vertical. For the *postapostolic period*, the successors of Peter and of the Apostles, enlightened by the prophetic light providing an assistance that is either absolute or prudential, transmit faithfully, from age to age, the original deposit by unveiling its riches. The transmission which goes from the Church to that of later ages is horizontal. See *Le Message révélé*, 39.

⁶⁶ Since it is a consecration, the character can be received only by sacramental means: “Character nunquam imprimitur nisi per sacramentum” (*ST* III, q. 64, a. 8, ad 2). One has already deviated from the profound traditional doctrine when one writes (with Héribert Mühlen, *L’Esprit dans l’Eglise*, vol. 2 [Paris: Cerf, 1969], 242) that, just as the effects of the baptism of water are in a way anticipated in the desire for baptism, so too may one say that “the spiritual effects of the sacrament of Orders are anticipated—in protestant ministers—by the commission to the proclamation of the Word conferred *in one way or another*.” The desire for Baptism, inspired by theological charity, anticipates the spiritual effect of Baptism, namely *redemptive grace*, insofar as since the Fall it is necessary for all men in order to be saved, though not insofar as it is sacramental and fully Christ-conforming; however, it does not anticipate in any way the spiritual effect of Baptism that is the *character*, namely the apostolic power to exercise validly the worship of the new Law inaugurated by Christ. And what applies to the baptismal character applies to the priestly character of Orders.

or to bestow on others, the riches of divine worship. However, the whole rite of the Christian religion is derived from the priesthood of Christ, to whom the faithful are configured by the sacramental characters; these are nothing other than *participations of Christ's Priesthood, derived from Christ himself*.⁶⁷

The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is fundamentally a priestly people, a people of priests, where, in a state of perpetual dependence on the "unchanging priesthood" of Christ, "always living to intercede for those who through him draw near to God" (Heb 7:25), will be celebrated until the end of time the great sacrificial and sacramental Liturgy of the New Law. The participants in this Liturgy, who assure its validity, are the faithful marked by the three successive consecrations which are, ordered among themselves and dependent on each other, Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders.⁶⁸ The first two represent the "common priesthood" of the faithful; the third, to which, since the last Council, we have reserved by antonomasia the name of "ministerial priesthood,"⁶⁹ is *hierarchical, that is to say conferred on someone for the service and the good of the entire community*.

Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation and incorporation into Christ. It confers on baptized persons a character, a fundamental consecration that makes them apt to receive validly the other sacraments of the New Law. Without this character, such reception would remain ineffective, whatever may be the good dispositions and intentions of the subject. In this *receptivity*, in this receptive power as regards the whole exercise of Christian worship, resides the essential aspect of the baptismal character. It manifests and expresses itself outwardly by two cultic *activities*. The baptized person indeed has the power *to cooperate liturgically in the Sacrifice of the Mass*, where Jesus ceaselessly offers the world to his heavenly Father. He can be, in the Mass, not solely a spectator and an assistant, but an actor and a participant. We may find a sign for example in the collective form of prayers that join with the celebrant, or else in the ancient custom of dismissing the catechumens before the offertory. In addition, a *marriage* entered into by the baptized as the proper ministers thereof is, by the very fact of their baptism, a Christian and sacramental marriage. By the sacramental character

⁶⁷ ST III, q. 63, a. 3.

⁶⁸ See ST III, q. 63, a. 6, ad 1: "All the sacraments, in a sense, make us participate in Christ's priesthood, since they dispense *some of its fruits*. Not all of them, however, give *the power to receive what pertains to the worship of the priesthood of Christ*. Only *those that imprint a character in the soul* do this."

⁶⁹ Properly speaking the *three* sacramental characters are ministerial, standing in dependence on Christ, who uses them instrumentally and, therefore, ministerially. But they are *unequally* ministerial. See ST III, q. 63, a. 2.

of Baptism, the faithful are initially connaturalized with Christ in view of the actualization, until the end of time, of his high priestly mission: they are already “members of the Christian religion.”⁷⁰ The cultic consecration which they have received is indelible. The sacraments which confer a character are not repeatable.⁷¹ The Christian who renounces his baptismal faith cannot efface his baptismal character: it remains in him as the last witness of his membership in Christ and of his Christian dignity, a secret possibility of returning to the light.

A second consecration is called for by the baptismal consecration. It is signaled two times in the Acts of the Apostles: Peter and John are sent to the baptized to lay hands on them (8:17); Paul, having baptized some disciples, lays hands on them (19:1–7). In the two cases, the Holy Spirit is given in view of new roles. The consecration by the laying on of hands *confirms* the baptismal consecration by developing it in the way in which a plant by growing confirms its roots. It crowns the baptized by entrusting to him the cultic mission of confessing the faith in the spiritual battle that the world wages against the Church. He is mandated to continue the *public, exterior, liturgical testimony* proclaimed solemnly before Pilate—“I was born and came into the world to bear witness to the Truth” (John 18:37)—and which since Pentecost will not pass away.

A third consecration is conferred by the sacrament of Orders. What Jesus did at the Last Supper, namely changing the bread and wine into his Body and Blood so that the faithful might be united to the redemptive sacrifice not only by faith and charity, but by communion and by the eating of the sacrificial victim, he wills that in memory of him *this very thing be done by his ministers* until he returns at the Parousia. To celebrate the Eucharist—which is at once the Sacrifice of the New Law and the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Savior—is the *first* and the loftiest mission of the Christian priesthood. Its *second mission* will concern not only the individual body of Christ, but his social or Mystical Body: to bring the people of God to the Eucharist. To this end, the power is granted to the Christian priesthood to purify souls either of sin through the Sacrament of Penance (John 20:21–23) or from the remnants of sin through the Sacrament of Extreme Unction (Jas 5:14). Priests are the ordinary ministers of solemn Baptism and can be extraordinary ministers of Confirmation. Bishops, in whom alone resides the fullness of the Christian priesthood, have the power to confer it by the laying

⁷⁰ Thomas Cajetan, *In III ST*, q. 69, a. 10, n. IV [*ST*, Leonine ed., 12:115].

⁷¹ The “historical problem” of re-baptisms and of re-ordinations places us, in fact, in the presence of baptisms which we considered—rightly or wrongly—null and invalid and which we intend now to confer.

on of hands, and their consecration designates them to be, in communion with the supreme pontiff, the custodians of magisterial power. As for the *diaconate*, if one defines it by its principal act, as does St. Thomas, it appears as a power to prepare, directly or indirectly, the Eucharistic Sacrifice.⁷²

“Christ did not appoint himself to be High Priest, but was appointed by Him who said: You are my Son, today I have begotten you” (Heb 5:5). Jesus is and will remain a priest in a way that no one else will ever be a priest. Those who are called today by this name are simply the vehicles of his irreplaceable priesthood, the custodians of his redemption, the conduit through which he willed that his redemption might descend on the people. In the priests of the New Law, the power of Orders is a permanent quality that, by itself, is not active, but that, in the manner of an instrument, needs to receive from Christ, each time that it is exercised, the power that will actualize it, applying it to produce its effect. The divine power is what utilizes the power of Orders. It is certainly not, as some will impute to us, the power of Orders which would “utilize” and “subdue” the divine power!⁷³ When consecrating the Eucharistic Sacrifice, in which Christ desires to unite us to the offering of his bloody Cross, and when conferring the sacraments of grace, priests, in virtue of the power of Orders in them, are, in the hand of Christ who acts from heaven, somewhat like a tuned instrument in the hand of the artist, like a pen in the hand of a writer, ready to be used, already dipped in ink, and calling, in a way, for the writer’s own freely performed motion. In relation to the priestly power of Christ, the power of Orders is a *constantly and completely subordinated* power, a *purely instrumental or ministerial* power.⁷⁴

Thus, like the ointment which runs down the head of Aaron to the collar of his vestments, the priesthood of Christ is poured out by degrees in the

⁷² The Reformers innovated by seeing in ordination not a sacrament conferring a cultic power, a consecration, but a simple designation of ministers who could become laymen again at will. Faced with this rupture, the Council of Trent recalls the constant doctrine of the Church. Orders is a sacrament which imprints on the soul an indelible character preventing its reiteration (DS, no. 1609). It is not given to all (nos. 853, 1710). It is the power to consecrate the true Body and the true Blood of the Savior, and to forgive or to retain sins (no. 1771), so that the priesthood of Christ is not extinguished in the world (no. 1740). This power, being a ministerial power (no. 1612), can be exercised validly even by an unworthy minister (no. 1710). It resides in the soul as an indelible mark, such that a man, once a priest, cannot become again a layman (no. 1609).

⁷³ At a conference held in 1922, Karl Barth went so far as to declare twice, with the deepest conviction, that according to Catholics the priest is *creator creatoris*! See Barth, *Parole de Dieu et parole humaine*, trans. Pierre Maury and Alexandre Lavanchy (Paris: Éditions “Je sers,” 1933), 139, 154.

⁷⁴ *L’Église du Verbe incarné*, 1:113.

whole Church, among clerics and the laity. By exercising the priestly power that they possess, both are efficient ministerial causes of Christian worship.⁷⁵

3. *The Seven Sacraments of the New Law Are the Privileged Applications of Redemptive Grace*

The great cultic Liturgy of the New Law essentially consists in the carrying out of the seven sacraments deposited by Christ in the Church. The participants of this Liturgy are all, to varying degrees, consecrated. This consecration is the effect of the three sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders. But it is not their only or even their principal effect. It is immediately ordered to assure, for the present time, the *validity of the worship* of the New Law. It is a *preliminary* consecration; it prepares, announces, calls, and provokes a loftier and more mysterious consecration. The principal effect of the seven sacraments of the New Law is to communicate to men, in its fullness, the *holiness of redemptive grace* that immediately orders them to the *fruition of heavenly glory*.⁷⁶ These two consecrations, the one immediately cultic, the other immediately sanctifying, often seem to be stuck together in the richness of the first Christian documents.⁷⁷

Let us enter for a moment into the movement of the redemptive plan where we see the mystery of the Incarnation completed in the mystery of

⁷⁵ Inclusion, therefore, of the “priesthood” of Christians in the always enveloping and active priesthood of Christ! It is the inclusion of the entire “apostolic succession” in the thought of Christ that St. Ignatius of Antioch shows in his *Letter to the Ephesians* 3.2: “Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, is the *gnômè* of the Father—the thought of the Father, the word of the Father—as also the bishops, established to the ends of the earth, are in the thought of Jesus Christ.” Recently citing this text, Fr. Marie-Joseph Le Guillou comments: “You see the movement, a movement of *inclusion*: there is Jesus Christ who is in the mind of the Father, in the *gnômè* of the Father—at once the thought and the decision, last in the purpose of God—as the bishops established to the ends of the earth are in the mind of Jesus Christ. You see the structuring which happens spontaneously: Ignatius sees the bishops’ own activity taken from within Jesus Christ, within apostolicity: they are taken in, they are incorporated.”

⁷⁶ See *ST III*, q. 63, a. 3.

⁷⁷ For example, in the beautiful texts of St. Paul: “But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has *put his seal* upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor 1:[21–]22). Colossians 2:19 exhorts us to hold fast “to the Head, from whom the whole Body, nourished and knit together through its *joints and ligaments*, grows with a growth that is from God” (cf. Eph 6:16). “It is in him [Christ] that you also, after having heard the Word of truth, the Good News of your salvation, and having believed, were *sealed* by the Holy Spirit of Promise, this Holy Spirit who is the down payment of our inheritance” (Eph 1:13–14). Cf. Rev 7:3: “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have *sealed* the servants of our God.”

sacramentality. When the “fullness of time” came, what was needed for the world to be saved? It was necessary that “the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father” be “born of a woman,” that he dwell among us, and that, through contact with his bodily presence and his bloody Passion in a particular time and place, he could cause the superabundance of messianic grace around him to overflow onto his Church, a grace capable of dispelling the night of sin by illuminating hearts. “That which we have seen with our eyes, that which we have touched with our hands concerning the Word of life, . . . we proclaim to you so that you may be in communion with us” (1 John 1:1–3). Without this touch and this influx of life, the Church could never have *come into being*.

And without this same touch and influx of life, the Church could never *subsist*. The purity and holiness that Christ demands of his Spouse is too sublime, and left to us alone we are too vulnerable, too fragile, too inconstant to resist for very long the “spirit of the world.” This is why the Savior, before reassuming the glory which he had “before the world was,” arranged on earth the seven sacraments, the seven liturgical actions which he will use as instruments to touch us bodily and communicate the influx of life to us.

The sacraments are the spatiotemporal extension of the amazing bodily gestures by which Christ forgave sins and healed the wounds of hearts. There is a relationship between Christ allowing divine holiness to be shown through him and communicating it to us and the sacraments signifying the divine grace which they give: purification by the water of Baptism, spiritual anointing by the sacred oil, and so on. Additionally, the sacraments are constantly referred to the Passion and the Resurrection of the Savior. They are signs, reminders in which the Passion, the cause of our salvation, is *commemorated*, the effect of grace from the Passion is *designated*, and future glory is *announced* and *promised*.⁷⁸

God alone is the Author of grace, which is in us a participation in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). But he can communicate it to us mediately “using either the humanity of Christ as an instrument *conjoined* to his person, or the sacrament as a *separated* instrument: in such a way that the power by which we are saved [*virtus salutifera*] is derived from the divinity of Christ through his humanity in the sacraments themselves. . . . It is manifest that the sacraments of the Church have their power specially from the Passion of Christ, and this power touches us, *quodam modo nobis copulatur*, every

⁷⁸ ST III, q. 60, a. 3. Cf. the refrain of the Magnificat at second vespers of the Feast of Corpus Christi: “O sacrum convivium in quo Christus sumitur: recolitur memoria passionis ejus, mens impletur gratia, et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur”—“O sacred banquet, in which Christ is received: the memorial of his passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.”

time we receive a sacrament. As a sign of this, water and blood flowed from Christ's side as he hung on the Cross, signifying the two principal sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.⁷⁹ This is the Church, the new Eve, born from the new Adam. She emerges when the seven sacraments of the New Law are applied.

4. *The Liturgical-Sacramental Drama*

ITS HUMAN COMPONENT

The seven rites deposited by Christ in his Church are the nexus of a liturgical drama where the human and the divine, earth and heaven, meet. It is fitting to examine more closely each of the moments, each of the components of this unique drama: the human component, the ritual component, and the divine component.

The first of the components of the sacramental drama is the human person for whom the sacrament is intended. Whether he knows it or not, he is, on the one hand, connected to the tragedy in which the original harmony of the order of creation was broken.⁸⁰ On the other hand, he is invited to enter into the "most admirable" order of the redemption by the Cross of Christ, in which the sufferings and pains of life have not yet been eliminated but can be mysteriously illuminated. For this person, it is necessary that he approach the sacrament with all the dispositions of his heart and mind.⁸¹ He must be prepared for his descent into the riches of Christ's messianic unction.

THE RITUAL COMPONENT

1. The sacramental rite is the nexus where the human and the divine, earth and heaven, meet. It constitutes itself a whole, a drama, an action. This action, once accomplished, will be the instrument which Christ takes hold of, in his omnipotence, to communicate to his Church the fullness of Christ-conforming grace. Christ asks the Church to accomplish the ritual action. Nevertheless, and within this limit, namely, as a necessary condition,

⁷⁹ *ST* III, q. 62, a. 5: "Whether the sacraments of the new law derive their power from Christ's Passion?"

⁸⁰ In the state of innocence, there was no place either for the Incarnation and humiliations of Christ or for recourse to the sacramental remedy. All the light of knowledge and of grace descended from heaven into the highest part of man's mind to rule the lower parts of his soul and body. He did not have to receive spiritual help through the mediation of visible things. See *ST* III, q. 61, a. 2.

⁸¹ No preparation is required of the little child who is baptized and who has not sinned personally.

it will be true to say that *the Church makes the sacraments*. However, in the decisive order of efficient causality, under the sovereign motion of Christ, *the sacraments are what make the Church*, and without them, the Church could not be what she is: “the universal sacrament of salvation.”

We must see in the sacramental rites a marvelous condescension by the divine mercy in relation to our human condition. They are simple and near to us. They are made of a visible reality and a human word, a reverberation of that of Christ. On the one hand, they resemble Christ, the Word incarnate, from whom they proceed. On the other hand, they resemble man, spirit and body, for whom they are intended.⁸² Their purpose is to signify concretely the spiritual effect that will be produced: purification by water, spiritual anointing by oil, union of assimilation by the bread and wine, and so on.

2. In performing the sacramental rite, the qualified minister intervenes in the name of the Church.⁸³ His role is that of an “animate instrument,” endowed with intelligence and freedom. It is he who coordinates the elements of the rite and who ultimately specifies the meaning. Two things will be demanded of him, in different ways: one concerns the intention of his act, the other the holiness of his life.

Firstly, what is required of him is to have the aim, *the intention* to carry out the sacramental act willed by Christ and his Church,⁸⁴ without which the whole rite would be rendered invalid. This fundamental intention, provided that it has not been revoked, is real, authentic, and therefore valid, even when it remains in the minister in a solely habitual or virtual state.⁸⁵ It is obviously desirable that it be reenkindled by the minister and made present, whenever

⁸² Great piety emerges from q. 60, in which St. Thomas describes the nature of the sacraments of the New Law. He sees it as a testimony to the tenderness of God with regard to his human creature which is doubly dear to him: on account of his difficult condition which makes of him a horizon between two worlds, and on account of the wound which he carries since the first sin. The reasons for the fittingness of the Incarnation and for the necessity of the sacraments provided by the holy doctor are similar: “From the moment that man, having deserted God, found himself buried in corporeal realities, it was fitting that God should take flesh, offering salvation under the very veil of corporeal things. Hence the text of St. Augustine: *The Word was made flesh: Flesh had blinded you, flesh heals you, for Christ came and overthrew the vices of the flesh*.” The reason given here to elucidate the reason for the Incarnation (*ST* III, q. 1, a. 3, ad 1) is used again to elucidate the necessity of salvation through the sacraments (q. 61, a. 1).

⁸³ In *Marriage*, the baptized spouses are themselves the ministers of the sacrament. In case of necessity, any person can *baptize*. In order to confer the *other five* sacraments, the minister is qualified by the consecration of Orders.

⁸⁴ See *ST* III, q. 64, a. 8, ad 1: “Ut scilicet intendat facere quod facit Christus et Ecclesia.”

⁸⁵ *ST* III, q. 64, a. 8, ad 3.

it is asked of him to confer a sacrament. But, even if he should not avoid the distractions and be overcome by fatigue or human frailty, never will he be lacking the presence of the Church to whom he is referred and in whose name he acts. Supposing, thinks St. Thomas, that a sacramental act (e.g., the baptism of little children) left us uncertain as to the existence of the sufficient intention of the minister, we must conclude that nothing was lacking in the perfection of the sacrament, since the words spoken expressed the intention of the Church, and since the minister acted *in persona totius Ecclesiae*.⁸⁶ A question, one that we will encounter again, remains here: what does it mean to “act in the name of the Church”?

The sacraments willed by Christ are *holy things*, and the minister who approaches them must ensure the holiness of his life. Otherwise, there would be a supreme disconnect between the function which is entrusted to him and his interior state of sin and separation from God. But the stain of his life leaves intact a rite validly performed in the name of Christ and which Christ’s omnipotence takes hold of as an instrument to confer on the world fully Christ-conforming grace. Here the frequently used analogies of St. Augustine, analogies taken up by St. Thomas, are worth considering: as long as the water flows, does it matter whether the pipe is silver or lead?⁸⁷ The baptism that the Donatists had absconded with when they broke away from the Church, and which they continued to confer, remained valid despite their schism and had to be recognized by the Church. On the text “He on whom you shall see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33), St. Augustine writes: “Innumerable ministers may baptize, some just and others unjust, but the holiness of baptism comes from him alone on whom the Dove descended. Peter may baptize, Paul may baptize, Judas may baptize; but each time, it is [Christ] who baptizes.”⁸⁸ St. Thomas poses here a question more frightening today than ever. What about an ordained minister, let us say a priest, who has seen collapse in his heart little by little the whole content of his *Catholic faith* and who, nevertheless, in order to remain honest with respect to his external commitments, continues to exercise his ministry? He consecrates the Eucharist and confers the sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction. He knows very well what the Church teaches as to the efficacy of these sacraments; he no longer believes it; nevertheless, he intends to do what

⁸⁶ ST III, q. 64, a. 8, ad 2.

⁸⁷ ST III, q. 64, a. 5. The sacrament, *from the very fact that it is validly applied—ex opere operato*—is efficacious independently of the holy dispositions of the minister. This is a first meaning of the expression *ex opere operato*.

⁸⁸ In Joannis Evangelium tractatus 6, no. 7 [PL, 35:1429].

the Church wills. Is such ministry valid? Yes, says St. Thomas, and he gives this great reason, that “the minister of the sacrament acts *in persona totius Ecclesiae*, whose *faith* supplies what is lacking in the *faith* of the minister.”⁸⁹ What is the meaning of this phrase, “*the faith of the Church supplies what is lacking in the faith of the minister*”? Only one response is possible. The entire ministry of this unfortunate priest is in a difficult position. This ministry is the residue of a shipwreck. It floats like a wreck in a devastated heart. So the Church takes it upon herself to insert it into the context of her own *faith*, her own light and blazing charity.

3. Let us return to the problem of the minister’s *intention*: it is necessary to constitute the sacraments validly, to posit the condition *sine qua non* of their validity. As we see it, this is a contribution that, in relation to the sanctifying power of Christ which will pass through the sacrament, remains purely lateral. It is in this accompanying line of conditioning that the minister is required to act. He will act in the name of the whole Church, *in persona totius Ecclesiae*. What does this expression mean here? Is the intervention of the Church a simple legal fiction? We would need to forget *what the Church is* in order to think so. What is she, then? She is the Church of heaven and earth, the multitudinous but indivisibly unified person, already partly touching the goal in the brightness of glory with the Virgin, the angels and saints, and still partly walking in the night of faith, but entirely engaged in the work of the redemption of the world. She is the Bride attentive to each application of the rites prescribed by the Bridegroom who has promised to make them the instruments of his special mercies. If the intention of the minister is present in him only in a habitual or virtual state, she will come invisibly to elevate and to actualize it. She will act like an invisible master who would place his hand on the hand of the apprentice artist in order to communicate to him his assurance and direction.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ ST III, q. 64, a. 9, ad 2 [Trans. note: Journet means to refer to the reply to the first objection (ad 1)].

⁹⁰ See Maritain, *De l'Église du Christ*, 245: “When a priest or a layperson confers baptism on someone, it is the person of the whole Church who confers baptism on him through the instrumentality of this priest or of this layperson. When a priest grants absolution to a penitent, it is the person of the Church who grants absolution to him through the instrumentality of this priest. The same goes for all the other sacraments. And when a priest offers the Sacrifice of the Mass, it is the person of the Church who offers the Sacrifice of the Mass through the instrumentality of this priest. I recall here that the person of the Church is one and the same person in her state of glory and on her state of earthly pilgrimage: it is the Church on earth who offers the Sacrifice of the Mass; but because she is the same person in heaven and on earth, we can say that, through

THE DIVINE COMPONENT

This is the moment when the divine omnipotence will take hold of the sacramental rite set down by the Church and her ministers in order to *confer* on the subject who requests the sacrament the very grace *signified* by the sacramental rite: that of spiritual birth in Baptism, of spiritual anointing in Confirmation and the Sacrament of the Sick, of forgiveness of sins in Penance, of participation in the sacrifice of the Savior in the Eucharist, and so on. The sacraments of the New Law are not merely “practical signs” of a grace which will be given,⁹¹ they are more than this: they are “instrumental causes” of the grace which they give.

Let us stop for a bit—it is worth the trouble—at this mystery of instrumental causality. It fills the order of nature and culture. It is radiant in the domain of art. Let us imagine Michelangelo drawing a face of the Virgin. His hand is an instrument joined to his person, the pencil is a separated

the Church on earth and the instrumentality of her priest, the Church in heaven also offers this sacrifice, *carried to the altar of Almighty God by the hands of your holy Angel* (Roman Canon of the Mass). For it is also, and above all, Christ who offers it through the instrumentality of the priest and through that of the Church.”

⁹¹ Certainly, remarks St. Thomas, some think that the sacraments cause grace only *by way of concomitance*. They do not think that there is in the sacrament a power bringing about the effect of the sacrament; only the divine power, juxtaposed to the sacraments (*co-assistens*), brings about the sacramental effect. But if they maintain that the sacrament is *instrumental cause* of grace, they will have to maintain consequently that there is in the sacrament an instrumental power capable of producing the sacramental effect. See *ST* III, q. 62, a. 4.

The first position, rejected by St. Thomas, proceeds radically from a *nominalist and fundamentally deficient interpretation* of the ontological mystery of the Word made flesh. The humanity of Christ which they juxtapose in such a way to his divinity cannot be consequently the instrument of his divinity, either to work miracles or to communicate the grace and mercies of God. But the Gospel itself tells us that Jesus was aware of the power which came out from him (Mark 5:30).

Only the second position conforms to the Gospel of the Word made flesh. The divine power floods the flesh and the humanity of Christ, it makes it vivifying and divinizing, it glorifies it during the Transfiguration and the Resurrection.

Whether they like it or not, they must opt here either for the spiritualism of the *transfiguration* of the human by the divine, the visible and the invisible, or for the *separation* of the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible. The choice is clear: on the one hand, the *ontological hermeneutic of the Christian mystery*; on the other hand, the *profuse hermeneutics of the Gnostic nominalist*. And they know the famous text of Luther: “Christ has two natures. What does that have to do with me? . . . To believe in Christ does not mean that Christ is a person who is man and God, which is of no use to anyone; it means that this person is Christ, that is to say, that for us he came from God into the world: it is from this office that he takes his name.” See [Charles Journet, “De la Réforme protestante,”] *Nova et Vetera* 42, [no. 3] (1967): 166.

instrument. He only makes strokes, but these strokes are intelligent. The spiritual beauty of the work will appear only at the end, when it is done, produced on the blank piece of paper. But it must be acknowledged that, in a mysterious way, in the state of becoming and flux, it will have successively passed entirely into the pencil, it will have been really, physically, entirely contained in the intelligent movement of the pencil. Is this magic? Then let us say yes to this blessed magic! But it is something more profound than magic.⁹² It is, in the domain of art and culture, a particular realization of the law of assumption, of transfiguration, of the spiritualization of the lower by the higher, of matter by spirit.

In terms of the Kingdom which is in this world but not of this world, what has become of the law of the transfiguration of the visible by the invisible? The Son of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, through contact with his sacred humanity, brings to us the river of love which flows from the Trinity. Furthermore, hidden now in glory, having decided to continue to touch us, he sends his disciples to all the nations to baptize them with water in the name of the three divine persons. Between the unbearable holiness of God and the profound misery of our condition, Jesus interposes the mediation of a twofold contact: that of his heart and of his human nature, and that of the sacramental rite deposited by him in his pilgrim Church (*mediation* in the line of *being*). But this mediation is not only the “condition”; it is the “instrument” through which a special ray of divine and Christ-conforming grace is communicated to us (*immediation* in the line of *action*), in all its

⁹² Magic, properly speaking, will consist in an identification of sign and of the signified: “The movement toward the sign or the image, says St. Thomas following Aristotle, is identically the movement toward the object itself: The sign is thus something quite astonishing, at which the routine of culture alone prevents us from marveling. And this marvelous function of containing the object—for the mind—of having the thing itself present in it, the sign exercises it in full for the primitive man. Words are not pale or discolored, they are teeming with life—with their life of signs—for the primitive. But this itself is a trap for his imagination. . . . The presence of knowledge of the signified in the sign becomes for him a presence of reality, a physical interchangeability. . . . One will think that the symbols cause us to enter the heart of things in order to act physically on them and submit them to us physically. . . . The myth, as soon as it makes known the origin of things, *reminds* them of their origin in order to bring them to act, it *signifies* their origin and at the same time their destination and efficient function”; Jacques Maritain, “Signe et symbole,” in *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937), 97, 111 [In English, *Redeeming the Time*, trans. Harry Lorin Binsse (London: Geoffrey Bles; Centenary, 1944). This translation also appeared in an earlier edition as *Ransoming the Time* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941)]; New edition with an appendix on *Le langage et la théorie du signe* (Paris: Alsatia, 1956), 87 and 98.

power and purity. A little water poured on the forehead of an infant causes to descend on him something of the very holiness of God: "All of you, baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). "Whence comes water of such power that, touching the body it purifies the heart, *quae tanta vis aquae ut corpus tangat et cor ablaut?*," asks St. Augustine. And St. Thomas⁹³ responds with a quote from St. Bede: "The Lord, by the touch of his most pure flesh, has conferred on us the power to be born again."⁹⁴ The spiritualism of the Kingdom is the spiritualism of the Word made flesh and of sacramentality.

It is the power—even the fierceness—of the love of Christ that comes down to meet me in the simple and serene liturgy of the sacraments of the New Law. It is he who secretly prepared me by his invitation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him" (Rev 3:20). I come as a poor man. I put myself under the water of Baptism and the anointing of Confirmation; I beg for the forgiveness of Christ at the gate of a confessional; trembling I will approach his Eucharist; I will hold out my two hands to him for Extreme Unction—these dispositions of the subject are undoubtedly required under pain of invalidity. And it is then that Christ, as he used a little mud to enlighten the blind man of Siloam (John [9]:9), takes hold of the sacramental rite, by touching us, to illuminate the heart by his fully Christ-conforming grace.

To say, with the Council of Trent,⁹⁵ that the sacraments of the New Law *contain* and *confer* grace to those who place no obstacle is not to attribute to them an efficient causality that is *juxtaposed* to God's, but rather one that is

⁹³ ST III, q. 62, a. 4, sc.

⁹⁴ This idea appears already in St. Ignatius of Antioch: "Our God, Jesus Christ . . . was born and was baptized in order to purify water by his passion" (*To the Ephesians* 18.2, in *Sources Chrétiennes*, no. 10 [Paris: Cerf, 1945], 65).

⁹⁵ The seventh session of the Council of Trent (March 3, 1547) recalls in thirteen canons the doctrine concerning the sacraments in general. Here are two of them:

can. 6. If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace they signify, or that they do not confer that grace to those who place no obstacle, . . . let him be anathema. (DS, no. 1606)

can. 8. If anyone says that these sacraments of the New Law do not contain grace in virtue of the sacramental act accomplished, *ex opere operato*, . . . let him be anathema." (DS, no. 1608)

The formula of condemnation is taken from St. Paul: "If anyone announces to you another Gospel, different from the one which you have received, let him be anathema" (Gal 1:9). It supposes a conscious and culpable refusal. Today, so as not to prejudice anything, in place of "let him be anathema," we read: "he is outside the profession of the Catholic faith."

subordinated to his causal action and good pleasure. When the Savior teaches that, without being born again of water and the Spirit, one cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:5), he certainly does not juxtapose the efficient causality of water alongside that of the Spirit. Rather, he subordinates the first to the second, as the instrumental cause to the principal cause. And God can leave his ministers the free initiative to baptize without abdicating anything of his dignity as First Cause. In response to the claim that God, by giving to beings who at each moment of their existence can subsist only through him, the freedom to act or not to act, has once and for all forfeited his dignity as First Cause and submitted to their whim, Pascal simply says that “this is absurd.”⁹⁶

And to say, with the Council of Trent, that the sacraments of the New Law act *ex opere operato*, this means, according to Catholic theology, that they act: (1) certainly not independently, but *dependently* on the dispositions of the subject, dispositions which will be merely negative in the little child, but which will need to be positive in the adult; (2) nor only *to the measure* (*juxta*), but beyond (*ultra*) these dispositions, and because of the superabundant efficiency of the Savior; (3) *in accordance with*, nevertheless, and *in proportion to* these dispositions, in such a way that, like the sinner to whom more was forgiven the more she loved (Luke 7:47), the one who comes with two receives four, and the one who comes with three receives six.⁹⁷ Is it not

⁹⁶ See Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 513: “Why God established prayer. 1. To communicate to his creatures the dignity of causality. . . . But, to maintain the preeminence, he gives prayer to whomever he pleases. Objection: But one will think that he has prayer of himself. This is absurd.”

⁹⁷ See John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus* III, q. 62; disp. 24, a. 6, no. 29, t. 11: “Causalitas ex opere operato non excludit opus operantis ut dispositionem ad gratiam, sed excludit opus operantis ut principium a quo habeat vim suam, cum illam habeat *ex meritis Christi*. . . . Sacramenta conferunt gratiam ex opere operato, quia tenent se ex parte *virtutis Christi* conferentis gratiam subjecto disposito. Et etiam qui conferunt *ultra* propriam dispositionem, *conformiter* tamen et *proportionaliter* ad ipsam, sed non sine ella”—“*Ex opere operato* causality does not exclude causality *ex opere operantis* as a disposition for grace, but excludes it as a principle from which [the sacrament] derives its power, since it derives its power *from the merits of Christ*. . . . Sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, since they possess on the part of the *power of Christ* the ability to confer grace on the disposed subject. And indeed, what they confer is *beyond* the subject’s own disposition (albeit *conformed* and *proportioned* to it) but not without it” ([Paris: Vivès, 1886], 152).

To say that the sacraments of the New Law are efficacious *ex opere operato*, namely by the very fact that they are validly carried out, can mean: (1) In relation to the *minister who* confers them—they are efficacious independently of the holiness of the minister; (2) in relation to the *subject who* receives them—they are efficacious not only

written, indeed, that, to the one who has, more will be given, and to the one who has not, even what he thinks he has will be taken away (Luke 8:18)?

This whole great doctrine is expressed in a vision experienced by St. Catherine of Sienna in which the faithful, who came near the Holy Table with unequal altar candles, all returned with lights, but unequal.

Christ who is faithful is bound by his promise in the sacraments, but there are no two people who receive Penance or the Eucharist or Marriage or Extreme Unction in exactly the same way.

5. Institution and Number of the Sacraments

1. God alone could institute the sacraments and deposit in his Church sensible means to touch men, so that the light and holiness of grace could descend into the very depths of their soul. It is in virtue of his divinity that Christ can, through his humanity, forgive sins—"He blasphemes! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7)—and give to his Church the seven sacraments.

The conjoined instrument is always richer than the separated instrument, which specifies the power. Man's hand can write, sew, and sculpt; its motion is not distorted but specified when it is subordinated to an external instrument. The grace of Christ the Head, realized with a fullness of superabundance only in Christ's human nature, the instrument of his divinity, will pour out on his pilgrim Church, which is his Mystical Body, so as to draw her completely into his own mysterious destiny of Cross and glory, of kenosis and exaltation. Christ-conforming grace is not distorted by passing through the sacraments. However, it can be specified or particularized in order to reproduce in the life of the Mystical Body the great features of life subject to Christ, and in order to come, in the *key moments* of our Christian lives, to visit and strengthen each of us personally.

2. The key moments of the Christian life in the Kingdom, which are marked by Christ's visit and sacramental touch, correspond in some measure to the key moments in our natural and temporal life, and we can find here an indication of how to enumerate the sacraments. The spiritual regeneration of Baptism corresponds to our temporal birth; the strengthening of Confirmation to our physical growth; the mystery of the Eucharist to the mystery of assimilation by intussusception; the remedies to sin of Penance and Anointing of the Sick to the struggle against illness and its consequences; for the

by the dispositions of the subject, *ex opere operantis*, but by conferring grace, by making it flow from outside to whomever places no obstacle. See can. 12 and can. of the Council of Trent on the sacraments (DS, nos. 1612, 1608).

hierarchy, the Sacrament of Orders to the necessities of life in society; and, for the perpetuation of the ecclesial communion, Marriage was elevated to the dignity of a sacrament.

These seven sacraments, ordained to different precise purposes, are not equal to each other,⁹⁸ and each of them, in communicating Christ-conforming grace, brings a proper modality to it. Baptism is the sacrament of birth and initiation, the Eucharist the sacrament of consummation and plenitude. The grace of Baptism is the most fundamental; it is at the root of the stem; it contains, *virtualiter*, the whole development. It is not idle during the reception of the other sacraments, but aroused, made explicit, and unfolded. It is ordered, as to its supreme flowering, to the grace of the Eucharist, the Eucharist being the plenitude and perfection of charity and of the unity of the Mystical Body.⁹⁹

3. When we read Scripture as it should be, in the perspective of the mystery of the Incarnation, with the eyes and faith of the Church sent out to all peoples of all ages,¹⁰⁰ how can we not discover the seven sacraments of the New Law?

Jesus enters the baptism of John as the sun enters the day, not to receive

⁹⁸ The third canon of the Council of Trent on the sacraments, taking aim at errors then widespread, holds: "If anyone says that the seven sacraments are so equal among themselves that one is not more worthy than another, let him be anathema" (DS, no. 1603).

⁹⁹ *ST* III, q. 65, a. 3; q. 73, a. 3.

¹⁰⁰ The beautiful study by Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C., "Charisme et Institution," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 96, no. 1 (1974): 1–19, reminds us of it forcefully: "The Church is competent to define her own ministries and functions. One of the *most widespread illusions* betrayed in our day in the discussions about this subject consists in thinking that we cannot arrive at any certitude as to the nature of the priesthood (as for that matter of the other sacraments) before the *historical* problems posed by their origins have received a satisfactory solution. Such a position would condemn us to perpetual incertitude and indecision concerning the most essential functions of the Christian life. The truth is quite different: we can arrive at greater certainty about the essence of many ecclesial realities than about the *history* of their origins. Like a seed which becomes a tree, the Church defines herself by her growth, and those things which were vague and still relatively ambiguous in the embryonic stage are clarified and determined in the course of the development of the concrete life of the Church, in which, we must never forget, the Holy Spirit plays a constant role. This does not mean that everything that has arisen in the Church in the course of time is sacred and irreformable. It is essential that a critical function and a reforming action be exercised here. All we want to emphasize here is that, if the theologian can receive precious lessons and useful warnings from *history*, he cannot find decisive criteria there. Certitude comes to us from the light of revelation such as the people of God have understood it, that is to say, from the teaching of the Church."

but to give. The water touched by Jesus and his Holy Spirit brings to the world the purification that the baptism of John could only represent. The Baptism of the New Law is “superimposed” on the baptism of John, whose mission is recognized, honored, but “accomplished” in both senses of the word. Hence the solemnity of the baptism of Jesus in the four Gospels (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:31–34). There will be a little after the grave word to Nicodemus: “Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). And finally, the mission given to the disciples on the mountain of Galilee: “Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

The words regarding the promise of the Eucharist, in which Jesus announces that eternal life will be given to those who eat his Flesh and drink his Blood, scandalized the whole synagogue of Capernaum by their realism, and separated from him “many of his disciples” (John 6:52–59). These are the very words, however, that will be solemnly used during the institution of the sacrament: “Take, eat, this is my body; . . . drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood” (Matt 26:26–28).

And Jesus institutes the sacrament of Orders when he commands his disciples to do what he has just done, namely change the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood.

On the evening of Easter, when Jesus comes, though all the doors are locked, into the midst of his disciples and breathes on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit: Those whose sins you shall forgive are forgiven them; those whose sins you shall retain are retained” (John 20:22–23), he confers on them a power, exercised by way of judgment, to forgive post-baptismal sins. And this is the sacrament of Penance.¹⁰¹

And so, for four of the sacraments of the New Law, we recognize in the Gospel the circumstances of their institution by the Savior. For the other three sacraments, Scripture will show us their enactment by the Apostles. It is thus for Confirmation. Twice in the Acts of the Apostles (8:14–17; 19:1–7), this involves an imposition of hands by an apostle on one of the faithful already baptized in order to confer on him the Holy Spirit and the subsequent charismatic gifts. The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick has its origin in the anointing that the Twelve, sent as missionaries by Jesus, practiced, not as doctors, of course, but as miracle workers: “They anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them” (Mark 6:13). It is recommended to the faithful and implemented, “promulgated,” by St. James (5:14–15), who

¹⁰¹ See Council of Trent, session 14, can. 3 (DS, no. 1703).

describes the rite with precision. Marriage is solemnly reestablished by Jesus in its original dignity of indissoluble union (Luke 16:19; Mark 10:2–12; Matt 19:3–12). In the great text of St. Paul to the Ephesians (5:22–33), “the symbol reminiscent of Christ and the Church, applied by the apostle to the union of spouses in the state of marriage, implies the efficacy of the sacrament in relation to the production of a grace which sanctifies, makes holy and immaculate.”¹⁰²

4. The seven sacraments of the New Law are present in the Church from her beginning. They were immediately inscribed by Christ into her constitution. *She is not ignorant of it. She knows it mysteriously—in the supraconsciousness of her being and spirit—from a vital, instinctive, and preconceptual awareness, from an absolute and unwavering certitude of divine faith,* a certitude never betrayed by her own heart, whatever may have been the fumbling over the ages, that is, the hesitations or deviations of some of her children. This certitude will allow her, when the truth will demand to be conceptualized and promulgated, not strictly speaking *to know* it, but *to recognize* it as hers. And this certitude will make her say in all spontaneity and truth—as she makes each new dogmatic definition—that what is so proclaimed, she always believed, *Ecclesia semper credidit*.¹⁰³ We are given the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and sacramentality in the intensity of an unbearable light. *They must be lived in the night of faith and love before explaining themselves.* It will take time, the impact of events, the experience of the Christian life, often the division of heresies, and above all the light promised by Jesus to his Church, for what has been given as revealed gradually to unveil itself, so that what was known and granted in the supraconsciousness of faith may descend into what is conscious and be conceptually translated. One such “realization,” one such approach to the mystery, will have for its single end not to lay a sacrilegious hand on it, but to release it from what surrounds it, to protect it from corrupting or minimizing interpretations, to propose it especially for our adoration in the virginal purity of its transcendence.

“The Church used her sacraments well before making a sacramental theology; she lived her sacramental dogma before formulating it. Sacramental practice significantly preceded the systematic work, and the latter was only a perfectly accurate expression of the former: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.”¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰² Albert Michel, “Sacraments,” in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 14 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1939), 498.

¹⁰³ It is already true to say that there are more things in the heart of a man than in his “philosophy.”

¹⁰⁴ See Michel, “Sacraments,” 541. We can follow in this exposition *the stages of historical*

path will be long which will lead to the great medieval synthesis, consecrated by the Council of Trent. Constantly present in the thought of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, it is summed up in *Lumen Gentium* §7:

In the human nature united to Himself the Son of God, by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection, redeemed man and re-molded him into a new creation (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body. In that Body the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified. Through Baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (1 Cor 12:13). In this sacred rite a oneness with Christ's death and resurrection is both symbolized and brought about: "For we were buried with Him by means of Baptism into death"; and if "we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall be so in the likeness of His resurrection also" (Rom 6:4–5). Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. "Because the bread

development of sacramental doctrine. (1) Under the yet hesitant formulas by which the first Latin authors rendered *mysterion* as *sacramentum*, the Christian sacrament appears, applied to the mysterious rites used by the Church in the initiation and the religious life of her members, as uniting in it the twofold idea of *sign* and of *sanctification*. It is a sacred sign because it symbolizes a holy reality, and signifies efficaciously because the sacrament itself produces sanctification in the soul; it is an "efficacious symbol of sanctification." This notion is expressed in Scripture most especially with respect to Baptism and the Eucharist (494–95). (2) It is affirmed and extended to the other sacraments—Confirmation, Orders—in the Greek theology of the third and fourth centuries (503–7). (3) St. Augustine will advance the concept of efficacious sign by studying it in its generality and not only according to such a sacrament. In its narrowest sense, the Augustinian sacrament is a sacred sign which awakens the idea of a religious thing—to this material sign is tied the spiritual gift meant to sanctify man—the efficient cause tying the sensible sign to the gift of a spiritual power is the minister's formula of blessing ("accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum") The Institutor of the sacraments is Christ. These are the four essential ideas for the definition of St. Augustine (519). (4) It is in the twelfth century in book IV of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, bishop of Paris († 1160), that we find the first treatise on the sacraments in general. The specific character which differentiates the sacrament from every other sign, even sacred, is its efficacy "ita signum est gratiae Dei ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat"). The ceremonial observances of the Old Law, because they did not cause grace, can be called sacraments (530) only as mere signs of grace (See p. 673 below).

is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of His Body, "but severally members one of another" (Rom 12:6).

Section 11 of the same constitution reminds us, in a synthetic manner, how the seven sacraments of the New Law, enumerated in the usual way, operate within the organic priestly community of the faithful.

6. Sacramental Grace

1. *Toward a definition.* The principal effect of the sacraments of the New Law is interior regeneration, the life of the spirit, and purity of heart: in a word, sanctifying grace. And undoubtedly, the sanctifying omnipotence of the Lord is not bound to the sacraments ("potentia Dei sacramentis visibilibus non alligatur"),¹⁰⁵ it overflows from all sides and goes to bring the gift of the Holy Spirit to East and West.

The fact remains, however, that the sacraments of the New Law are the privileged means, placed by Christ to communicate the fullness of sanctifying grace to the world. Passing through them, it is clothed, as it were, in exceptional riches, for which reason it is called *sacramental grace*. It acquires the power to produce certain special effects characteristic of the Christian life, ("ordinatur sacramenta ad quosdam speciales effectus necessarios in vita christiana").¹⁰⁶ It models the Church in the likeness of Christ.

However, are we going to compare divine grace coming to us through the sacraments, as has sometimes been done,¹⁰⁷ to the white light which becomes colored and diversified by going through a stained-glass window, or to the spring which in its course is imbued with mineral properties? These are obviously only images. What could the sacraments *add* to grace? In truth, it is grace itself which, by making its way through them, diversifies and multiplies its own riches. We will say, therefore: sacramental grace is precisely *sanctifying and Christ-conforming grace itself, insofar as it is affected by the modality signified and communicated by each of the seven sacraments.*

2. *Diversity of sacramental graces.*¹⁰⁸ "Those whom he foreknew, God predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29). Conformity to Christ's

¹⁰⁵ ST III, q. 68, a. 2.

¹⁰⁶ ST III, q. 62, a. 2.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Louis Chardon, *La Croix de Jésus* (Paris: Cerf, 1937), 127.

¹⁰⁸ See Journet, *Théologie de l'Église* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958), 204 and following.

glory presupposes conformity to Christ's Passion, given diversely through the Christian sacraments.

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the mystery of Christ's Passion: this is its specific modality. The grace which it communicates is a participation in the [God] who, in order to redeem and save the world, drove Christ into the Passion, death, and Resurrection. It aims to produce similar effects in us, to drive us into the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The whole journey that demands in us the death of the old man and the birth of the new man, is inscribed and already contained in the grace of Baptism (Rom 6:3–8).

The grace of *Confirmation* is connected to that of Baptism and Penance.¹⁰⁹ It comes to unfold in us the initial gift of the Spirit bestowed at Baptism (Acts 8:17; 19:6). It confirms and strengthens us, principally in view (and this is its specific modality) of allowing us to confess the faith in a holy way, not simply on a private and spontaneous basis, but in the very name of the Church, in order to continue in time and space, in a cultic and liturgical manner, the public testimony to the Truth solemnly inaugurated by Jesus before Pilate (John. 18:37) and which henceforth must never cease. "The confirmed person," says St. Thomas, "receives the power of publicly confessing the faith of Christ by his words as by mandate, *ex officio*."¹¹⁰ This is the *character* of Confirmation. The *grace* of Confirmation will give the fulfillment of this mission in intimate union with the charity of Christ, "*ex sacramentali conjunctione ad Christum*."¹¹¹

The grace of *Penance* has as its specific modality to take away the sins that have occurred in those who since their baptism are members of Christ, to deepen in them the shame and confusion of their ingratitude, the sorrow of the offense done to Love, the adoration for the consideration of a mercy which pardons more than seventy times seven times (Matt. 18:22), an insatiable need for interior purification, and finally an ardent hunger and

¹⁰⁹ See St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic catecheses*: "When, washed in the waters of the Jordan, and having communicated to them the fragrance of his divinity, Christ came up, the Holy Spirit in person descended upon him, like resting upon like. Likewise, coming up from the pool of the sacred waters, you received chrismation, the mark with which Christ was anointed. Now this chrismation is the Holy Spirit. . . . Just as Christ, after his baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit, went out to fight against the Adversary, so you, after holy baptism and the mysterious chrismation, adorned with the whole armor of the Holy Spirit, you stood up to the opposing Power, you fought by saying: I can do all things in him who strengthens me, Christ" (*Troisième catéchèse mystagogique*, trans. J. Bouvet [Namur, 1962], 466–68).

¹¹⁰ *ST* III, q. 72, a. 5, ad 2.

¹¹¹ John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theologicus: De Sacramentis*, t. 9 (Paris: Vivès, 1886), 291.

thirst for the Eucharist, which, after the ruptures, brings assurance of the recovery of intimacy.

Given to the sick Christian especially in danger of death, grappling with the struggles of agony, *Extreme Unction* “will save” him, and “if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas 5:15). But the sins may already have been forgiven, as regards fault or stain, by the sacrament of Penance. However, they leave in us the obligation to a punishment and a compensation, traces and what we call “remnants of sin,” namely a kind of infirmity, an inclination toward evil and a difficulty toward the good, “which means that man at the point of leaving this life must be purified, in order that nothing in him may be opposed to the interiorization of glory.”¹¹² This is not the only object of Extreme Unction, but it is its immediate object. It consummates the whole healing process which prepares man for his entry into the heavenly homeland.

By entrusting to ministers the powers of *Orders*, the divine liberality does not refuse them the grace which allows them to exercise these powers in a holy way.¹¹³ The acts of worship, the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and the dispensation of the sacraments, must be continuously carried out with the flame of charity which carried Christ to institute them for the glory of God and the salvation of men. This is the specific modality of the grace of Orders.

The Sacrament of *Marriage* unites spouses not only in terms of natural affection but also in terms of the life of grace as members of Christ. This union is so lofty that the Apostle does not hesitate to compare it to the indissoluble union between Christ and the Church: “This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32). The specific modality of the grace of Marriage is such sacramental love, which results from a conformity of the union between the spouses to the union of Christ and the Church.

3. *The grace of the Eucharist.* What Baptism began, the Eucharist will consummate. It is the sacrament of the unity of the Church par excellence. The union of Christians with Christ is symbolized here by the union of *assimilation*, the strongest union that visible reality can offer; but there is a reversal: material food, which is inanimate, causes life only by allowing itself to be assimilated,

¹¹² Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] IV, ch. 73. [Trans. note: That is to say that nothing may remain in him to prevent his reception or entrance into glory.]

¹¹³ SCG IV, ch. 74.

whereas the Bread in question here is Life and gives life by assimilating: "He who eats me will live because of me" (John 6:57).

Christians must allow themselves to be assimilated by *Christ on the Cross*. The Passion begins when Jesus institutes the Eucharist and gives it to the disciples: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). The Apostle adds: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). To proclaim the Lord's death and Resurrection is to agree to enter, so as to get lost in, the mystery of this death and Resurrection.

Hence the *eschatological* character of the Eucharist. As Israel in its march toward the Promised Land was sustained by water from the rock and the manna, so too the Church on her march toward the heavenly homeland of the last end is mysteriously comforted by Baptism and the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:1-5). The eschatological character of the Christian sacraments culminates in the Eucharist. It contains the Body of the Risen One who has promised to raise us up on the last day (John 6:39, 40, 54).

The *final* unity of the Church is what will fully manifest to us the meaning of her *pilgrim* unity. At the end of the first century, this notion inspired one of the most ancient Eucharistic prayers that we know of: "We give you thanks, our Father. . . . As this broken bread was scattered upon the hills, was brought together and become one, gather likewise your Church from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom. Yes, to You is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever."¹¹⁴

Unity results from love, and the extraordinary unity of the Church results from the extraordinary love that the Holy Spirit communicates to men through contact with Christ. And this extraordinary love, which inaugurates in the midst of men a dwelling of the Holy Spirit of an intimacy and a depth unknown to prior ages, is communicated under its holiest, loftiest form, the form most able to conform to Christ, by the Eucharist. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). With the Body and Blood of Christ the victim, what the Eucharist gives to Christians is the very fire of his charity, so that they may become, body and soul, a likeness of Christ, a willing victim offered to God for the salvation of the world, so that they can reproduce in themselves intensely the joyous and glorious mysteries and, in particular, his sorrowful mysteries, his poverty, his humiliations, the affliction of his body, the agony of his soul. St. John Damascene writes: "Let us draw near to the Eucharist with an ardent desire, and

¹¹⁴ *Didache* 9.2.

with our hands in the form of a cross, let us receive the body of the Crucified One. Let us draw near with our eyes, our lips, our brows. Let us partake of the divine coal in order that the fire of desire which is in us, increased by the heat of the coal, may consume our sins and illumine our hearts, in order that, participating in the fire, we may be inflamed and divinized.”¹¹⁵

4. *The Cross and glory.* “Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). The path traced by Christ must continue in his Mystical Body. This is one of the great themes in the letters of St. Paul. The Passion, crucifixion, death, burial, return to life, Resurrection, Ascension, entrance into the possession of his inheritance, enthronement in glory—all the decisive events which marked the career of Christ—must be reproduced in some manner in his members. And the Apostle expressly points out that this will be in virtue of the thrust of an internal force which will work within them as it had worked in Christ: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11).¹¹⁶

“I came from the Father and have come into the world; now I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28). The destiny of the Savior is, according to the letter to the Philippians (2:6–11), an inexpressible destiny of kenosis and humiliation, even unto death on the Cross, as well as an inexpressible destiny of exaltation above all things in heaven, on earth, and in hell, unto Lordship in the glory of God the Father. What an example for the Body of which he is the Head: and how we will have need at each moment of the journey to be touched by him so as not to fail!

First comes the descent to the Cross, and *then* the ascent into glory: these are the main features. But on the course of this journey, glory and the Cross will intertwine and will approach each other in a strange way, as if to oppose each other more violently. They *coexisted* in Christ during his earthly life. There was in the highest part or the “paradise” of his soul, from the moment of his conception, the glory of the beatific vision,¹¹⁷ and it

¹¹⁵ John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 4.13.

¹¹⁶ Hence the new words devised by the Apostle: *compati, commori, convivere, conresuscitare, consedere, conregnare*. On the properties of Christic and Christ-conforming grace, see *L'Église du Verbe incarné*, 2:306–32.

¹¹⁷ See John 3:11 (“Truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to *what we have seen*”); 8:38 (“Me, I speak of *what I have seen* with my Father”); 3:32 (“He who comes from above bears witness to what he has *seen and heard*”); 6:46 (“Not that anyone has seen the Father, except him who is from God; *he has seen the Father*”). See also Maritain, *De la grâce et de l'humanité de Jésus*, 111: “In all of these texts the one who is involved is *that man who is speaking to us at this moment*. By affirming that *he*

existed, in the lower regions or “the here below” of his soul, with the agony and the crucifixion. For Christians, the law is to gather around the Cross of Christ. They have to walk in faith, not in glory. But the *paradox* is that, the more you hold fast to the Cross, the more you experience the closeness of glory. It shows up all over the New Testament: in the “beatitudes” which prepare one in the midst of persecutions; in the transfiguration of sufferings by hope—“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18)—“the light momentary affliction is preparing us for, well beyond all comparison, an eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17); in the expectation of the entire creation “which waits for the revelation of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19); in the ardent appeals of the Apocalypse: “Oh yes, come, Lord Jesus!” Eternal life is not only something we await; it has already arrived and is present in time; it is veiled there by *the transparent night* of faith. “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we shall be has not yet appeared; we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Attempting to give a theological expression of these great revelations dear to the Fathers of the Church and to contemplative souls, Fr. Marie-Dominique Molinié defines the grace brought to the world through the bodily contact of Christ and his sacramental contact as “a dwelling by glory in the obscurity of faith.” It is a repercussion, in the Christian faith, of the paradox of the coexistence of the beatific vision and redemptive suffering in the pilgrim Christ. “By dying on the Cross,” he writes, “Christ retroactively merited all redemptive graces¹¹⁸ offered since the evening of the fall. But by rising, *he received the power to communicate his glory to all those who, by an act of faith and an initiation fittingly called evangelization,*

has seen the Father, and that he says *what he has seen* with the Father, Jesus bears witness to the *science de vision* which he has on earth as have in heaven ‘the Angels who see the face of the Father’ (Matt 18:10) and as will have in heaven ‘those whose heart is pure’ (Matt 5:8).”

See ST III, q. 15, a. 10. Christ was simultaneously *viator* and *comprehensor*: on the road to glory and in possession of glory. See also Marie-Dominique Molinié, O.P., *La Sainte Vierge et la gloire* (Nancy, 1973), 9–10: “This traditional doctrine is questioned today for strictly *theological* reasons: we do not grasp how Jesus can be a true man like us if he enjoys the face-to-face vision. The Fathers of the Church did not grasp it any better, but they respected the mystery of the psychology of Christ, like ours and yet transcendent to ours. . . . The sudden entrance of the Word incarnate introduced in the world an entirely new psychology, his: I call it the *psychology of glory*.”

¹¹⁸ Fr. Molinié opposes *redemptive grace* in general (= grace given at a distance) to *Christian grace* (= grace given through sacramental contact).

come into contact with his Body according to very precise ways which are called the sacraments.

“This is absolutely new—for what Christ communicates in this way is no longer just grace but *something* of his glory, . . . namely a singular participation, in the obscurity of faith, in the split psychology of Christ, eating at once at the table of the Father and at the table of sinners, according to the striking expression of Thérèse of the Child Jesus. . . . Those who allow themselves to be initiated into the psychology of Christ are evidently no longer merely *saved*; they become *saviors* following Jesus Christ; they complete in their bodies what is lacking in the Passion . . .”¹¹⁹

“We observe the following principle in the Gospel and in the life of the Church: any physical contact with the body of Christ, if it takes place in faith, becomes a contact *with the glory* which dwells in his body. . . . The mystery is that this human touch, physical and accessible to everyone who has faith, infallibly delivers the divine touch which of itself takes us into glory. By touching the body of Christ—by eating his body and drinking his blood—Christians touch the glory of God and eat ‘the bread of angels,’ which is glory. This is the general economy.”

Christ was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 15:24). He will send his disciples to baptize all the nations (Matt 28:18). In this sense, being able to bring to all men the touch of Christ, they will do greater works than his (John 14:12). “After the paschal victory,” notes Fr. Molinié, “the communication of glory, always obeying the *law of contact*, could not have become universal and humbly inserted itself into the fabric of daily life without the extraordinary invention of the *sacraments*, both an explosive and a discreet extension of the Body of Christ to the whole world.”¹²⁰

Fr. Molinié thinks that this emergence of glory under faith, this “dwelling of glory in the obscurity of faith,” which is brought to us through sacramental contact with Christ in glory, were it not as stifled in our hearts by the burden of our unconsciousness, would usher us into a state of life similar to that which the Virgin knew from the day of Easter to that of her Assumption.

Let us conclude that it is from sacramental grace that there comes to the Church what is most complete in her holiness, most secret in her beauty, most perfect in her likeness to Christ.

¹¹⁹ Molinié, *La Sainte Vierge et la gloire*, 11.

¹²⁰ Molinié, *La Sainte Vierge et la gloire*, 141–44.

7. *A Particular Question: The Reviviscence of Certain Sacraments*

[This question] touches on the relationship of the sacramental characters and grace in the life of Christians. Three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Orders, have a twofold effect: they imprint a character; they communicate grace.

The *character* or sacramental power immediately orders the faithful to the valid celebration, here below, of Christian worship. It is a participation in the priestly function of Christ. It is a structural, functional, *prerequisite* gift. It is given by means of consecration; it is indelible and unrepeatable. Sacramental *grace* orders the faithful immediately to the fruition of the beatific vision in heavenly glory. It is the gift that offers us the *supreme* invitation of Love. It is incomparably more precious than the sacramental character. But it demands to be welcomed and kept by the free consent of our love. And alas, it can be lost.

Let us consider the Christian who by a mortal sin offends Love. Everything falls apart in him. The depth of the catastrophe is of the metaphysical order. The Christ-conforming and sacramental grace of his baptism, of his confirmation, and possibly of his priestly ordination, is all lost. Forever, it seems, since these three sacraments are not repeatable. But this Christian retains the sacramental character of his baptism, confirmation, and priestly ordination; in this respect, he remains a member of the Christian religion, a participant in the priesthood of Christ, incorporated into Christ insofar as Christ is Chief and Head of the worship of the New Covenant. He does not renounce this title, relationship, and dignity. It exists in him as a form, a tendency, an ontological pledge of a full integration into the sanctity to which all worship is ordered.¹²¹ But, when this broken Christian comes to repentance, when he stops refusing to give God his first love, and behold, when he is called by the presence of the sacramental characters, then what suddenly blossoms anew in him is divine grace *with the fullness of its Christ-conforming and sacramental perfection*, in proportion to the intensity of his penitent love.

Furthermore, what is true of these three non-repeatable sacraments

¹²¹ "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). On this text of the Apostle, St. Thomas writes in *ST* III, q. 69, a. 9, ad 1; a. 10 that: To be baptized into Christ may be taken in two ways: (1) by the conformity of *grace*, according to faith and charity; (2) by the configuration merely of sacramental *character*, without the conformity of grace. The character received in Baptism is a form (*forma*) which, while not thwarted by sin, has the proper effect of producing grace, which takes away all sins. When the obstacle of sin is removed by Penance, Baptism immediately produces its effect.

applies still for two other sacraments, namely *Marriage* and *Extreme Unction*, which are accompanied by a temporary consecration, somewhat similar to a sacramental character, making them similarly unrepeatable: it is impossible to get married again as long as one's spouse is still alive, or to repeat Extreme Unction for the same mortal danger.¹²² When, in a marriage validly celebrated, the sacramental grace of the marriage would have been initially refused,¹²³ or when it would have been destroyed later by some mortal fault, it can always, in a soul touched by repentance, be born or reborn, flower or bloom again, with its original sacramental beauty. Despair will never have the last word. "Deus innocentiae restitutor et amator."

Therefore, when the divine grace *lost by sin* comes back into the soul of the baptized person, for example, it returns with the power and the freshness of its sacramental baptismal virtue. And when, in a soul *always faithful*, the level of divine grace rises by an act of intense fervor, it is, in the same movement, all the power of the sacramental graces deposited in it which shine with a splendor still unknown to itself.

8. The Various Sacramental Regimes

1. We can define the sacraments as *sensible signs of a divine grace which will be given*. In this exceedingly broad, *generic* sense, the authentic notion of sacrament is realized after the Fall under the various regimes of human salvation: the regime of the law of nature, in which the sacramental signs were proposed to men by an interior instinct, *ex interiori instinctu*; the regime of the Mosaic law, in which the sacramental signs were specified by way of revelation; and the regime of the New Law. By defining the sacraments of salvation as "signs of grace," by placing them in the category of signs ("utrum sacramentum sit in genere signi"), it is a profound view, that of the presence of redemptive grace offered to all men after the Fall, which St. Thomas wants to safeguard.¹²⁴

2. In coming under the regime of the New Law, the notion of "sacrament-sign" will not therefore disappear. On the contrary, it will be incomparably unfolded. In particular, it will become more mysterious. It will now have to convey and give the new grace that it signifies. The sacraments of the New

¹²² See *L'Eglise du Verbe incarné*, 1:91.

¹²³ The sacraments that imprint a character, and likewise Marriage, can be received *validly*, and consequently are unrepeatable, without being received *in a holy manner*, when they are received by an unrepentant sinner, who thus places an obstacle to the grace of the sacrament.

¹²⁴ *ST* III, q. 60, a. 1; a. 5, ad 3; q. 61.

Law cease to be mere *signs*; they become *causes*—instrumental causes—of grace. They give what they signify; they signify what they give.

It is “through Christ and for Christ,” writes the Apostle, “that it pleased God to reconcile all things, on earth and in heaven, making peace by the Blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). The sacraments *before* Christ were the sacraments of a world not yet reconciled. They could be only the signs, the precious but impoverished signs, of a salvation to come; grace, offered then in anticipation of the Passion of Christ, could not yet pass through them. The *coming* of Christ changes everything.¹²⁵ The signification of the sacraments is returned and renewed. They refer to the Source of Salvation now come among us. The grace that they signify is that which, descending from the divinity of Christ, and passing through his humanity, can pass through the rites deposited by him in his Church in order to continue to touch us, as at the time of his mortal life.

3. There was no sacrament in the state of innocence, says St. Thomas. As long as the mind of man was subject to God, the lower parts remained subject to him, and the body to the soul.¹²⁶ “But now, where we see in a mirror and know as in an enigma” (1 Cor 13:12), we need sensible signs to raise us up to spiritual things. The state of the New Law is thus between the state of the Old Law, the figures of which are fulfilled in the New Law, and the state of glory in which the whole truth will be openly and perfectly revealed.¹²⁷ And then, the sacraments will disappear, (“tunc nulla erunt sacramenta”). “When completion comes,” writes the author of the *Imitation*, “the use of the sacraments will cease; for the blessed in heavenly glory no longer need sacramental mediation; indeed, they rejoice forever in the presence of God, contemplating his glory face to face, and, transformed from glory to glory in the abyss of the Deity, they enjoy the Word of God made flesh, as he was in the beginning and will be forever.”¹²⁸

Echoing the Areopagite and Thomas Aquinas, is it not the status of the New Law that the poet of the *Cantate à trois voix* [Paul Claudel] describes? “This hour which is between spring and summer . . . —The only hour which is left between this evening and tomorrow.—Sleep without any sleep before

¹²⁵ The theory of the sacrament “understood as a mere sign of justifying faith” has taken Protestantism, tempted by the spiritualism of gnosis, back to the notion of a sacramental regime *prior to the mystery of the Word made flesh*.

¹²⁶ ST III, q. 61, a. 2.

¹²⁷ ST III, q. 61, a. 4, ad 1. On the “the three states of the saints”—*figures of the Law, truth of the Faith, eternity of Glory*—see ST III, q. 53, a. 2.

¹²⁸ [Thomas à Kempis,] *De imitatione Christi* 4.11.

the sun is reborn . . . —Night without any night . . . —Continuously full of mysterious birds and of the song that you hear when it is finished . . . —Leaves and a faint cry, and whispered words, and noise . . . —Distant water falling and wind fleeing!—Pure sky, without any blemish, Blue sky that the large moon fills!—O Serene hour!”¹²⁹

There is a great gentleness in the sacraments of the New Law, a gentleness of the Gospel, the gentleness of a deliverance. There were no sacraments in the state of innocence because there was then neither wound nor misery. It is the catastrophe of the state of innocence which called into our midst the response of the redemptive Cross and the ineffable tenderness and confidences of the Son of man who came “not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and to tell us, during the Last Supper, “Take, Eat, This is my Body. . . . Drink this, all of you, for this is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:26–28). And the Apostle will write: if “God has consigned all men to obedience it was in order to have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32).

9. The Sacramentals

Sacramentals are essentially distinct from the *sacraments* instituted by Christ (deposited by him in his Church and lovingly safeguarded by the Church) and do not undermine the number or purpose of the sacraments. Sacramentals are provisions or cultic, liturgical usages, instituted by the Church herself over the course of the ages and are able to be modified by her according to the needs of her children.

These provisions have as their *first* and primary *purpose* to surround the sacraments—hence their name, *sacramentalia*—to prepare for their holy reception and dispensation, to form a liturgical context in which they can appear with all their grandeur and solemnity. This is the meaning of the great and solemn blessing of the baptismal fonts on Easter night, the penitential ceremonies of Lent intended to prepare an intimate and personal approach to the Sacrament of Penance (and certainly not to supplant it), the solicitude and veneration with which the Church surrounds the celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in our places of worship, and the processions of Corpus Christi. If the purpose of the sacraments of the New Law is above all and eminently *personal*, if it is to bring

¹²⁹ [Trans. Note: See Paul Claudel, *Deux poèmes d'été: la cantate a trois voix* (Paris: Éditions de la Nouvelle revue française, 1914). For the correspondence between Journet and Claudel, see *Paul Claudel – Charles Journet: entre poésie et théologie*, ed. Michael Cagin (Paris: Ad Solem, 2006).]

the redemption of Christ directly into the depths of the heart of each man, the purpose of the sacramental, before this intimate and impenetrable drama of our personal salvation which plays itself out in us each time we receive a sacrament, is to surround us visibly, to bring the assurance all around us of the great beloved, prayerful, fraternal, presence of the Church of earth and of heaven.

The meaning of the word “sacramental” may *extend* well beyond what concerns more immediately the dispensation of the sacraments. It will cover then all the devotions and traditions of the Christian life touched by a profound blessing of the Church: pilgrimages; hymns; prayers; litanies; sacred chant, and of course first of all Gregorian chant, in which “the Church acknowledges the chant proper to the Roman liturgy: therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services”;¹³⁰ the images blessed and made meaningful by the Church’s own blessing—“In the case of the icon, they are not simple illustrations. Then united in the same Tradition, the West and the East stood together against heresy because, by meddling with the icon, one meddles with dogma, one undermines the whole economy of salvation.”¹³¹ We may include in the sacramentals even prayers of intercession, such as the rogations, in which the Church asks for sufficient temporal goods for her children.

The sacramentals are a permanent invitation from the Church asking her children to unite their fragile lives to the great supplication of her *spousal prayer*, which Christ cannot reject. What he would refuse to our individual prayers *per poco amor*, made with too little love, he will be able to grant when they take refuge as sparrows on the wings of the great eagle which will take them into the sky.

However, the *efficacy* of sacramentals is not comparable to that of the sacraments. The sacraments are instrumental causes of an outpouring of grace which comes to us immediately from Christ and exceeds all of our interior dispositions; they act *ex opere operato*. The efficacy of sacramentals has to do with the order of supplication and prayer, it is commensurate with the intensity of the one who prays; it causes *ex opere operantis*. The one who prays is here on the one hand the faithful, and on the other the Church on whom he leans by a given sacramental. Therefore, the response will depend partly on the personal devotion of the faithful, and partly (and more mysteriously) on the intensity of the intercessory prayer of the Church—which is the “communion of saints”—measured, during her earthly pilgrimage, by

¹³⁰ Second Vatican Council, constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §116.

¹³¹ Paul Evdokimov, *L'art de l'icône* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 175.

the rhythm of the descent on her of the invisible missions of the Word and of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted to outline each of the three essentially distinct but related realizations of the profound mystery of the Catholic faith that sacramentality represents.

I. *Christ* appeared to us as the supreme Sacrament of the divine life in its source. He is a sacrament for a twofold reason: by the *personal union* of his human nature to the Word, he is the sacrament (that is to say, the sign and instrument) which brings us closer to the ineffable bond uniting the three persons of the Trinity; by the *messianic unction* poured out on him by the Spirit, he becomes the sacrament (that is to say, the sign and instrument) of the divine life insofar as it is from him communicable to the world. The supreme paradox of the life of Christ during his passage in our time was the presence in him simultaneously of the *glory* of the divine vision in the highest part of his soul (he was *comprehensor*, already at the end) and of the *Cross* in the lower parts of his being (he was *viator*, accomplishing the redemption of the world). Such was in Christ, before his Resurrection, the paradox of *Christic grace*.

II. With *the Church*, the notion of sacramentality changes meaning. She is realized on a plane *essentially* different—the plane of creatures—but in total dependence on Christ and living in him deeply and intimately conjoined and *connected*. The Church, a mystery of faith, appeared to us as *the sacrament*—the expression—*of the divine life communicated*, as the sign and instrument of the divine life received from Christ in order to be communicated by her to the world by means of the *infectious power of charity*. She is the privileged place of *participated Christic grace*, which extends, as toward its asymptote, to reproduce in Christians the paradox of Christ at once *viator* and *comprehensor*, inextricably joining in him the abyss of glory and the Cross, victory over the world and descent into the agony of the world. It is according to this divine charity that the Church can be, for all men coming into the world wounded by original sin and called to the divine life, the response which he awaits without yet knowing it. “Every human being is thus, by the very fact that he is a man come into the world after the fall, able to participate in some fashion in the universal sacrament of salvation which is the Church; he can receive and is called to receive the effects of the *universal sign and instrument*

of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race. He is already mysteriously a child of the Church."¹³²

III. The twofold *sacramental-apostolic power*. We will call sacramental the twofold apostolic power, *magisterial and cultic*, deposited by Christ in his Church, and by which, called back now into the glory of heaven, he can touch her, rule over and pour out over her in fullness his grace and truth. It is here a third realization of the notion of sacramentality, essentially different from the two preceding, but which is closely united to them. To say that this twofold apostolic power is *sacramental* is to recognize that it is sign and instrument of the twofold gift which it brings to the world. Under the sovereign actuation of Christ, in fact, it has a magisterial mission to announce the Gospel ("All power has been given me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, *teach* all nations") and the more mysterious cultic mission to purify hearts: "*Baptizing them* in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, . . . And behold, I am with you until the end of time."

These two apostolic powers are inseparable and complementary. They are specifically distinct. The magisterial power is to announce to the outside world in truth and with authority what to believe and do in the Kingdom, under the authority of *Christ the King and Prophet*: "He who hears you hears me, he who rejects you rejects me; but the one who rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Luke 10:16). The more mysterious cultic mission is to take up again the acts and words through which Christ, by touching men, pours into them the graces and mercies of heaven, under the authority of *Christ the Priest and Sanctifier*: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. . . . The one whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them" (John 20:21–23).

This is where the "seven mysteries" take place, the "seven liturgical dramas" deposited by Christ in his Church. *Here are, in the most individualized and strictest sense, the seven sacraments of the New Law*. It is through them that Christ makes the Church—and they make her as well, but instrumentally, the way in which the pencil makes and lets pass the beauty of a drawing. It is through them that Christ pours into her the fullness of Christ-conforming grace. For as far as it is possible for the Bride to follow the Bridegroom and the Body to follow the Head, the destiny of the Church here below is to be drawn into the deep and paradoxical destiny of kenosis and exaltation and exultation, Cross and glory of her Savior, at once *viator* and *comprehensor*.

The Eucharist is the sacrament in which the holy unity of the Church, the hidden object of our theological faith and love ("Credo unam sanctam

¹³² See p. 642 above.

catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam”), is prepared and consummated here below. It is in the Eucharist that the baptized are gathered together and are one like the grains of wheat and the grapes scattered on the hills are one in the bread and wine. But the Eucharist has its divine way of bringing about this unity. The former exceeds the latter. The Eucharist brings about this unity as a secondary effect, by way of superabundance and overflow. The Eucharist, sacrament of the Church, is greater than the Church: the Church is a creature; the Eucharist is worthy of adoration. Its first effect is to call into our midst the immediate bodily presence of the Word made flesh. At the Mass, this act of worship which exceeds any liturgy¹³³ is Jesus himself who comes to touch us, under his two states, sacrificial and glorified. The *redemptive sacrifice* begun at the Last Supper and finished on the bloody Cross, offered once and for all under Pontius Pilate, exists during the interval separating the double consecration of the bread and wine. This sacrifice is given to us so that we might, through an overwhelming miracle of tenderness, immerse ourselves in it, as if the two thousand years of our chronological time which separates us from it were abolished. And after

¹³³ See Jacques and Raissa Maritain, *Liturgie et contemplation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 27:

However, is there not in Catholic worship something that altogether surpasses the human order? Yes, certainly. Indeed, not only is it essential to Christian worship, to worship in spirit and in truth, to make use of the three theological virtues, but God himself intervenes in the worship which is rendered to him, God himself is present at the center of the liturgy. The center of the liturgy is the Holy Mass, the sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated on the altar, the unbloody immolation in which, through the ministry of the earthly priest, the Eternal Priest offers himself as a victim to his Father. The center of the liturgy is an act of an infinite and infinitely transcendent value, an act properly divine, without common measure with the highest works of grace in the human soul: because it is an act of God (using the instrumentality of the priest), not an act of man.

We must conclude from this, on the one hand, that the more a soul is elevated in infused contemplation and the ways of the spirit, the more profound will be its devotion to the Mass and the more ardent its desire to unite itself to it; and, on the other hand, that to assist at Mass with dispositions which are in some way proportioned to the act which is accomplished on the altar, the highest contemplation would be required—but no contemplation, no matter how lofty it might be, will ever be truly proportioned to the divine mystery of the altar, which asks of love and the living faith of the soul, and of its purifications, ever and ever more.

[Trans. note: The translation here is our own; an English translation is readily available on the EWTN website, ewtn.com/catholicism/library/liturgy-and-contemplation-10083.]

the consecration, there is no longer on the altar either bread or wine. It is *the glorified Christ*, over whom death has no hold (Rom 6:9), who comes to embrace us, but here below, before the time of our death, under the nearly transparent *Noli me tangere* of the Eucharistic species.

Corpus Christi, 1974

N·V