

## THE SACRAMENTS AND THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

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There are, of course, many aspects under which we may consider the relations between the Bible and the liturgy. First of all, there is the fact of the importance given to biblical texts in the ceremonies of the liturgy; in particular, the first part of the Mass is a liturgy of the Word, the essential content of which is the reading of texts from the Old and New Testaments. But the liturgy is at once word and action—*logos kai ergon*—and the Bible is at once a book and a history. It is this second aspect that we are going to consider—the relationship of the actions that make up sacred history in the Old and New Testaments to the actions that are the sacraments of the Church.

We should, first of all, recall the fact that liturgical tradition continually establishes analogies between sacramental actions and the works of God in the Old and New Testaments. Let us take some examples from baptism and the Eucharist, sacraments which the fathers of the Church continually relate to the essential events of the Bible. In the space available here, it is, of course, impossible to go into the details of this teaching which fills the sacramental catecheses and the liturgical texts; I can only indicate the great themes.<sup>1</sup>

In connection with baptism, let us take the blessing of the water given in our present ritual:

O God, as thy Spirit hovered over the waters at the very beginning of the world, so that even then by their very nature they might have the power of sanctification. . . .

O God, as thou didst wash away by water the crimes of the guilty world, and so by the flood didst give us an image of the new birth; for it was the same element that signified the destruction of sin and the beginning of virtue. . . .

I bless you, O water, creature of God, by the living God, who caused you to flow from the fountain of paradise and commanded you to flow out in four rivers and water the whole earth; who changed you in the desert to a water fit to drink and caused you to flow from the rock to quench the people's thirst. . . .

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1 I have given a survey of this teaching in my book, *Bible and Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1956).

I bless you through Jesus Christ, who in the wonderful miracle at Cana changed you by his power into wine . . . who was baptized in you by John at the Jordan; who caused you to flow from his side together with his blood. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Let us go over these analogies. The first is that of the primordial waters sanctified by the Spirit. As the Spirit of God, hovering over these waters, raised up the first creation, so the same Spirit, hovering over the baptismal waters, raises up the new creation, effects our rebirth. The Spirit of God is the creative Spirit.

Christ's word refers to this aspect: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom" (John 3:5). "Why are you immersed in water?" St. Ambrose asks the neophyte. "We read: *Let the waters bring forth living things* (Gen. 1:20). And things were born. This took place at the beginning of creation. But it was reserved to our own times that water should give you a new birth by grace."<sup>3</sup>

### **"Water is the Image of Death"**

Here we can begin to see the dimension that is given to baptism by this analogy. Baptism is of the same order as the creation of the world, because to create is an action properly divine. It is the same Spirit who raised up the first creation and who will raise up the new creation. The Spirit descended on the waters of the Jordan, thence to bring forth the new creation which is that of the Man-God. And baptism is the continuation of this creative work in the era of the Church. The very context of springtime, in which baptism is administered, expresses this analogy. Spring is the yearly anniversary of the first creation and of the new creation as well.

Immediately after speaking of creation, the prayer of consecration alludes to the flood—a new act of God's power and a new symbol of water. The relationship between the flood and baptism goes back to 1 Peter, in which baptism is called the antitype of the flood (1 Pet. 3:20–22). Optatus of Milan writes in the fifth century: "The flood was a figure of baptism because the whole universe, soiled by the tide of sin, by the intervention of water was restored to its pristine purity."<sup>4</sup> Water is the instrument of God's judgment; it is water that destroys the sinful world. Baptism is a mystery of death. It means the destruction of the ancient man, as the flood

2 See F. X. Lasance and Francis Augustine Walsh, *The New Roman Missal in Latin and English* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1937), 526–529.

3 *On the Sacraments*, Bk. III, chap. 3, in *Saint Ambrose: Theological and Dogmatic Works*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1963).

4 *Against Parmenianum the Donatist*, Bk. 5, chap. 1, in *Optatus: Against the Donatists*, trans. Mark Edwards (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 1998). Also in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Garnier and J.P. Migne, 1844–1864), 11, 1041. Hereafter abbreviated *PL*.

meant the destruction of the ancient world, so that a new creature may appear, washed clean and renewed by the baptismal water.

The essential point here is the symbolism of water. Lactantius writes: "Water is the figure of death,"<sup>5</sup> and Ambrose: "In the water is the image of death."<sup>6</sup> Lundberg has brought out the importance of this theme of the waters of death, which seems strange to us until we remember the text of Paul showing us that baptism is at once death with Christ and resurrection with him (Rom. 6:3–5).

The prayer of consecration brings out the contrast between water as creative and destructive, between the creation and the flood: "It was the same element that signified the destruction of sin and the beginning of virtue." Thus the text of Paul refers to the baptismal rite; this is seen to be a putting to death by immersion in water and a new birth by arising from water. We rediscover the true symbolism of the rite by referring to the realities of the Old Testament.

But we have by no means exhausted the biblical analogies of baptism. The prayer of consecration goes on to speak of the rivers of paradise. Here we enter a whole new field. In the commentaries of the fathers no theme recurs more frequently than that of the analogy between Adam and the catechumen. Adam, after he had sinned, was driven out of paradise. Christ promised the good thief that he would be with him in paradise. Baptism is the return to paradise, which is the Church.

From the beginning, preparation for baptism was seen as the antitype of the temptation in the garden of Eden. St. Cyril of Jerusalem calls the baptismal renunciation of Satan the breaking of the pact which, since the fall, binds man to the devil. Baptism, as we all know, is the destruction of original sin. But the image is not that of the stain that the water washes away; it is the dramatic contrast between our exclusion from paradise and our return to paradise.

This theme of baptism as a return to paradise<sup>7</sup> is as essential to the liturgy as is the paschal theme. Christ is the new Adam, the first to re-enter paradise; and by baptism the catechumen enters also, for the Church is paradise. De Bruyne and other scholars have shown how the symbolism of the ancient baptistries is concerned with paradise, its tree of life, its four rivers. Cyprian writes: "The Church, like paradise, contains within its walls trees loaded with fruit. These trees are watered by four rivers, by which she dispenses the grace of baptism."<sup>8</sup> And

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5 *The Divine Institutes*, Bk. 2, chap. 10, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 57. *PL* 6, 311a.

6 *On the Holy Spirit*, Bk. 1, chap. 6, para. 76, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 10, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 103. *PL*, 16, 722d.

7 See "Catechese Pascale et Retour au Paradis," *La Maison-Dieu* 45 (1956), 99–120.

8 *Letter 73*, para. 10, in *The Letters of Cyprian of Carthage: Letters 67–82*, trans. G.W. Clarke, vol. 47 in *Ancient Christian Writers*, eds. Walter J. Burghardt and Thomas Comerford Lawler (New York, NY: Newman, 1989), 59.

Ephraim adds: "It is here that each day the fruit is gathered that gives life to all."<sup>9</sup> No theme is more ancient in the Church than this; it is to be found in the Odes of Solomon, in the Epistle to Diognetus; Papias got it from apostolic centers.

The prayer of consecration then alludes to the rock in the desert. We have come now to the cycle of Exodus; and first we have to consider a theme not mentioned in the prayer of consecration, but in the *Exsultet*. This is one of the most important of all: that of the crossing of the Red Sea; Paul, in 1 Corinthians, sees here a figure of baptism.

### *Redemption in the Waters of the Red Sea*

This figure has recently been the subject of a lengthy study by Martelet.<sup>10</sup> I shall do no more than quote one of the most ancient patristic witnesses, Tertullian: "When the people, leaving Egypt without hindrance, escaped from the power of Pharaoh by passing across the water, the water destroyed the king and all his army. What clearer figure of baptism could we give? The nations are freed from the world; they are freed by water; they leave the devil, who once tyrannized over them, annihilated in the water."<sup>11</sup>

Here again we must be careful not to stop at the images but to discover the theological analogy. Tertullian points it out to us. What is the essence of the great work that God accomplished at the crossing of the Red Sea? The people were in a desperate situation, in imminent danger of destruction. By the power of God alone, a path was opened up through the sea, the people passed through and came to the further shore, there to sing the hymn of the redeemed. This was not a work of creation, nor a work of judgment, nor a work of sanctification; it was a work of redemption, in the etymological sense of the word. It was God who delivered the people, and he alone.

Now, the catechumen is in an analogous situation just before he is baptized. He is still under the domination of the prince of this world and so given up to death. Then, by an act of the power of God alone, the water of the baptismal pool opens and he passes through. And when he has arrived at the other side, he also sings the canticle of the redeemed. In both cases, we are in the presence of a divine act of salvation. And between the deliverance of the Red Sea and the deliverance of baptism, here again intervenes the deliverance of Christ, who made himself the prisoner of death and who, on this same paschal night, by the power of God, broke the iron bolts and the bronze locks of death's prison and arose to become the firstborn from the dead.

9 *Hymns on Paradise* 6, para. 9, in *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1997).

10 Gustave Martelet, "Sacraments, Figures et Exhortation en 1 Cor. 10:1–11," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 44 (1956), 323–359; 515–560.

11 *On Baptism*, chap. 9, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:673.

The figure of the rock from which living water gushed forth introduces us to a new and equally essential perspective. Paul makes this also a figure of baptism: "Our fathers . . . all drank the same spiritual drink (for they drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, but the rock was Christ)" (1 Cor. 10:1–4). In the Old Testament, the outpouring of living water, united with the effusion of the Spirit, is a promise for the end of time, and the texts of Ezekiel and Isaiah referring to this are part of our present liturgy of baptism. Now it is very probable, as Lampe has shown,<sup>12</sup> that the baptism of John referred to this prophecy, for he also connected water and the Spirit. His baptism signified the fact that the eschatological times of the outpouring of the Spirit had now come. (And we know how dear this theme was to the community at Qumran.) But John baptized only in water. It is Christ who gives water and the Spirit.

Christ said this same thing of himself: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture says, 'From within him shall flow rivers of living water.' He said this, however, of the Spirit whom they who believed in him were to receive; for the Spirit had not yet been given" (John 7:37–39). We may, with Cullmann, discover an announcement of baptism in the texts of John concerning living water, that of the Samaritan woman in particular.<sup>13</sup> And certainly we must, with him and with the whole of tradition, recognize in the water and blood flowing from the side of Christ the image of water united with the Spirit, for the blood is the figure of the Spirit (John 19:34). And so Christ crucified is the eschatological rock from whose pure side flows the water that refreshes us for everlasting life, the baptism that gives the Spirit.

We should notice in this connection that the gift of the Spirit is essentially connected with the outpouring of water. In the third century we find a tendency to distinguish the rite of water, which purifies, from another rite, the anointing or imposition of hands, which gives the Spirit. Gregory Dix makes use of these texts to distinguish within Christian initiation a sacrament of the Spirit, distinct from baptism, which would be confirmation. But this is contrary to primitive tradition and to tradition as a whole. It is the water, and it alone, that gives the Holy Spirit. The accompanying rites are illustrative only. Confirmation is a different sacrament, connected with spiritual growth and with participation in the ministry.

The biblical themes that we have been considering up to this point have been concerned with water. But, once again, this is not the essence of their relationship with baptism. In a theme such as that of the return to paradise, the mention of water is secondary; the emphasis is much more on the restoration of Adam to the realm of grace for which God had destined him from the beginning and to which

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12 G. W. H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit: A Study in the Doctrine of Baptism and Confirmation in the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1951), 27–28.

13 Oscar Cullman, "Les Sacrements dans l'Évangile Johannique: La Vie de Jésus et le Culte de l'église Primitive," *Études d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 42 (Paris, 1951), 51–55.

baptism restores him. Moreover, in this theme of paradise, the Eucharist appears as well as baptism, and both are closely associated. In the same way, the rock of living water is related to the Eucharist and to baptism as well.

### ***Baptismal Grace and the New Covenant***

It is the theological analogy that is essential in every case. This appears also in the other biblical themes which tradition relates to baptism and the Eucharist. For example, let us take that of the covenant. Gregory Nazianzen writes plainly: "We must call the grace of baptism a covenant, *diatheke*."<sup>14</sup>

The covenant is the act by which God promises, in an irrevocable way, to establish communion of life between man and Himself. Christ realizes the new and eternal covenant by uniting in himself for ever the divine nature and a human nature in such a way that they will never be separated. We should not forget the fact that "the Covenant" was one of our Lord's names in primitive Christianity, following the text of Isaiah: "I have made you: Covenant of the peoples" (Isa. 42:6).

Baptism is our introduction into this covenant. Baptism establishes it by the pledge of God and that of man. When baptism was given in an interrogative form, this pledging formed part of the very form of baptism, which was given in faith and in water, as Justin says.

Later on, this aspect was connected with the pre-baptismal profession of faith: "You catechumens," writes John Chrysostom, "should learn to know the meaning of this word: I renounce Satan. For this word in fact is the covenant (*syntheke*) with the Lord."<sup>15</sup> This pledge is called *symbolon*, "pact," and it is from here that the term came to be applied to the profession of faith preceding baptism. John Chrysostom emphasizes the unconditional and irrevocable character of this engagement of God's: "God does not say: If this, or, if otherwise. Such were the words of Moses when he poured out the blood of the covenant. And God promises eternal life."<sup>16</sup>

We should take note of the allusion to the blood of the covenant poured out by Moses. The Old Covenant was sanctioned by a sacrament, by the sprinkling of the same blood on the people and on the altar, signifying and bringing about a communion of life. It is certainly in reference to this gesture of Moses that Christ, when he took the wine and blessed it, declared: "This is my blood, the blood of the New Covenant," before giving it to his disciples, a sign of the communion of life brought about between them and himself (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25). The Eucharist is truly the new rite which succeeds the Old Covenant and which at once

14 *Oration on Holy Baptism*, 8, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, 7:362.

15 *Second Instruction to the Catechumens*, 5, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, 9:170. Also in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Garnier and J.P. Migne, 1957-1866), 49, 239. Hereafter abbreviated PG.

16 *Homilies on Colossians 6* (On Col. 2:6-7), in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, 13:287. PG 62, 342.

witnesses to and brings about the covenant made by Christ with mankind in his incarnation and his passion.

Here again we can see the irreplaceable value of the biblical analogy. It enables us to see the full significance of eucharistic communion as participation in the life of God, the participation that mankind has irrevocably gained in Christ himself and that is now offered to each man. It connects the Eucharist with Scripture by showing us that the Eucharist continues, in the era of the Church, the divine actions which took place in both testaments. It illuminates the symbolism of the sacramental rites by showing us the partaking of the eucharistic blood as being the supreme expression of communion of life, for blood is the expression of life itself.

And again, as the covenant is our bond with God, it is also our incorporation into the people of God. In the Old Covenant, this incorporation was expressed by circumcision. Cullmann, Sahlin, and many others have shown the connection of circumcision with baptism and the valuable elements which this connection brings to the theology of baptism.<sup>17</sup>

“The baptism of the Christian was expressed in the circumcision of the Hebrews,” writes Optatus of Milevis.<sup>18</sup> But Ephesians had already brought out the parallelism:

Wherefore bear in mind that once you, the Gentiles in flesh, who are called “uncircumcision” by the so-called “circumcision” in flesh made by human hand—bear in mind that you were at that time without Christ, excluded as aliens from the community of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise. . . .But now in Christ Jesus you, who were once afar off, have been brought near through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11–13).

It is baptism itself that is the new rite of incorporation into the people of God in the Church. But, as other aspects of the sacrament are expressed by particular ceremonies, such as the clothing with a white garment and the anointing, so with this one. The expression of our incorporation into the people of God by baptism is the ceremony of the *sphragis*, the Sign of the Cross marked on the forehead of the candidate.

Ezekiel had prophesied that the members of the eschatological community would wear on their foreheads the mark of the [Hebrew letter] *taw*, the sign signifying Yahweh, the *name* of Yahweh. It seems probable that the Sadocites of Damas actually bore this mark. And the Apocalypse of John shows us the elect as marked with the name of Yahweh, that is, with the *taw*. It is very likely that this was the

17 See “Circoncision et Bapteme,” in *Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Michael Schmaus zum Sechzigsten Geburtstag Dargebracht von Seinen Freunden und Schülern*, ed. Johann Auer and Hermann Volk (Munich, 1957), 755–777.

18 *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam*, Bk. 5, chap. 1, PG 11, 1045a.

sign with which Christians were marked originally as the sign of their incorporation into the eschatological community. Now this sign is in the form of a cross. This is why, in the Greek communities which no longer understood the meaning of the Hebrew letter, it was interpreted as being the sign of the Cross of Christ. But Hermas still says: "Those who are marked with the name."<sup>19</sup>

This leads us to another theme akin to that of the covenant, that of the dwelling, the *shekinah*. Yahweh had caused his name to dwell among his own. This is the mystery of the tabernacle. This presence abandoned the people of the Old Covenant when the veil of the Temple was rent. Henceforth its dwelling-place is the humanity of Christ, in whom the name has set up its tabernacle. And this dwelling-place is in our midst in the Eucharist.

We have already seen the Eucharist as communion, covenant. Now we see it as presence, *shekinah*. As the eucharistic prayer of the *Didache* expresses it: "We give thee thanks, O Father, for thy holy name which thou hast caused to dwell in our hearts."<sup>20</sup> Here the name is the Word, as Peterson has pointed out. But the expression "the name" is the older and the more fitting. For in the Old Testament it is the name, and not the Word, which is connected with the dwelling.

As for the last great aspect of the Eucharist—sacrifice—which is at once adoration, thanksgiving, and expiation, the liturgy of the Mass itself invites us to seek its prefiguring in the sacrifice of Abel, in that of Abraham, and in that of Melchizedek. Here again, the prophets had proclaimed that at the end of time the perfect sacrifice would be offered by the obedient servant, the new Isaac, and the true Lamb. It is this priestly act, by which all glory is forever rendered to the blessed Trinity, which the eucharistic sacrifice makes perpetually present in all times and all places.

### ***The Bible and the Liturgy Are Sacred History***

Thus we have brought out the traditional teaching. The sacraments are conceived in relation to the acts of God in the Old Testament and the New. God acts in the world; His actions are the *mirabilia*, the deeds that are his alone. God creates, judges, makes a covenant, is present, makes holy, delivers. These same acts are carried out in the different phases of the history of salvation. There is, then, a fundamental analogy between these actions. The sacraments are simply the continuation in the era of the Church of God's acts in the Old Testament and the New. This is the proper significance of the relationship between the Bible and the liturgy. The Bible is a sacred history; the liturgy is a sacred history.

19 *Similitude* 9, chap. 13, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 2:48. See also Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 330–331.

20 *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, 10, in *The Didache, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Epistles and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, The Fragments of Papias, The Epistle to Diognetus*, trans. James A. Kleist, vol. 6 in *Ancient Christian Writers*, eds. Johannes Quasten and Joseph Plumpe (New York: Newman, 1948), 20.



The Bible is a witness given to real events; it is a sacred *history*. There is a profane history, which is that of civilizations, witnessing to the great deeds done by men. But the Bible is the history of divine actions; it witnesses to the great deeds carried out by God. It is all for the glory of God. And so it is the proper object of faith. For “to believe” does not mean only to believe that God exists, but also that he intervenes in human life. Faith is wholly concerned with these interventions of God: the covenant, the incarnation, the resurrection, the diffusion of the Spirit. And the Old Testament, in particular, is already essentially a sacred history.

This point needs to be emphasized today. For in Bultmann and his disciples, we find a tendency to see in the Old Testament, and in Scripture in general, only a word that God addresses to us here and now. Under the pretext that the divine events are presented in a stylized form, their very historicity is questioned. Demythization has become dehistoricization. But Cullmann and Eichrodt<sup>21</sup>—the latter precisely in connection with the problem that concerns us here, that of typology—have brought out the primacy of the event over the word, of the *ergon* over the *logos*. The object of faith is the existence of a divine plan. It is the objective reality of the divine interventions which modifies ontologically the human situation, and to the reality of which faith causes us to adhere.

This history is properly the history of the works of God which are grasped only by faith. It does not consist in reconstituting the historical and archeological context of the people of Israel or of the primitive Church. This is a part of the history of civilizations and is of a different order. Sacred history reaches, beyond the order of bodies and minds, what Pascal calls the “order of charity”—which meant to him, good Augustinian that he was, the supernatural order. It is concerned, therefore, with the supernatural history of mankind, the most important history ultimately, since it is concerned with the final questions of the destiny of man and of mankind, the very depths of human nature.

Thus the Old Testament has as its purpose to recall to us the great deeds that God did for His people. But this represents only one aspect. It includes the Law, but it includes also the prophets. Prophecy is part of its very substance. We must give this word its true meaning; it is not merely prediction, not merely proclamation. Prophecy is the announcement of the fact that, at the end of time, God will accomplish works still greater than in the past. Here the movement of the Old Testament is quite different from that of natural religions. These are essentially, as Eliade and van den Leeuw have shown, the effort to defend primordial energies against the destructive action of time.

It is with the Bible that time acquires a positive content as being the setting in which the design of God is being carried out. But this orientation toward the future is an act of faith, founded on the promises of God. The great Biblical figure

21 W. Eichrodt, “Ist die Typologische Exegese Sachgemasse Exegese?” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 81 (1956), 641–653.

Abraham is quite different from the Greek hero Ulysses. The title of Homer's poem is *Nostoi*, "the returns." The outstanding characteristic of Ulysses is nostalgia, and finally after his long journeying, he returns to the place from which he set out. Time destroys itself. But Abraham leaves Ur of the Chaldees forever and sets out on a journey to the land that God is to give him. For the man of the Bible, paradise and the state of innocence are not the points of departure; they are the end of the journey. Such a man cannot help having an eschatological attitude.

But, wonderful to say, these hoped-for future events are not unrelated to the events of the past. The promises of God remain unchanged. God said to Isaiah: "Remember no more what is past; behold, I will make a new wonder. I will make a path through the sea" (Isa. 43:16–29).

### ***The New Exodus and God's Design***

One of the deeds of the past was the crossing of the Red Sea, the act of deliverance by which Yahweh delivered his people from their hopeless condition. The eschatological event will be a new Exodus, a new deliverance, a new redemption. And so we begin to see what is the real basis of typology—as Goppelt and Eichrodt have pointed out—the analogy between the divine deeds carried out in the different epochs of the history of salvation.

Prophecy announces to us eschatological events. The New Testament is the paradoxical affirmation that these events have taken place in Jesus Christ. We have lost sight of the importance of the expression that continually recurs in the New Testament: "so that the prophecies might be fulfilled,"<sup>22</sup> and this is because we have lost the understanding of what prophecy really is. It is because prophecy announces the end of time—and not some one event to come—and because Christ *is* the end of time that Christ fulfills prophecy. What is essential, then, is the fact that Christ is proclaimed to us as being the end of time. This is the meaning of John's gesture: *Ecce Agnus Dei* ("behold the lamb of God," John 1:29, 36). Not: "There is a Lamb of God." But: "The Lamb of God is here."

We should remember here that the phrase, "the *end* of time," is to be taken in its full meaning: not only the end in the sense of the conclusion of time, but also in the sense of the goal of time, the definite and decisive event, that beyond which there is nothing more because there can be nothing beyond it. The paradoxical Christian affirmation is, as Cullmann has well shown, that the decisive event is already accomplished. No discovery, no revolution can ever bring about anything as important to mankind as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, in the resurrection of Christ two things were accomplished beyond which nothing further is possible: God is perfectly glorified and man is perfectly united to God. We can never go beyond Jesus Christ. He is the final goal of God's design.

But did sacred history stop with Jesus Christ? This is, indeed, what we

<sup>22</sup> For example, John 12:38; 13:18; 19:36; Acts 1:16.

usually seem to ask. And this is because we do not place the sacraments in the perspective of sacred history. We forget that, although Jesus Christ is the goal of sacred history, his coming into the world is only the inauguration of his mysteries. In the Apostles' Creed, after the mysteries of the past, we speak of a mystery still to come: *inde venturus est* ("he will come again"). But between the two there is a mystery of the present: *sedet ad dexteram Patris* ("he is seated at the right hand of the Father").

For Christ's enthronement at the right hand of the Father is only the definitive installation of the incarnate Word, who at his ascension entered into the heavenly tabernacle, in his functions as king and priest. The glorious humanity of Christ, during the whole era of the Church, causes every grace, every illumination, every sanctification, every blessing. And these divine works carried out by Christ in glory are, above all, the works of the sacraments. These constitute the deeds properly divine being carried out in the heart of our world, the deeds by which God accomplishes our sanctification and builds up the Body of Christ. It is in their radiance that all holiness, all virtue, all ministry is developed.

Thus the nature of the sacraments is made clear to us in the perspective of the history of salvation. They are the divine acts corresponding to this particular era in the history of salvation, the era of the Church. These divine acts are the continuation of the acts of God in the Old and New Testaments, as Cullmann has already shown.<sup>23</sup> For the ways in which God acts are always the same: He creates, judges, saves, makes a covenant, is present. But these acts have a different modality in each era of the history of salvation.

What characterizes the era of the Church is, on the one hand, the fact that it comes *after* the essential event of sacred history, the event by which creation has attained its purpose in such a way that nothing can be added to it. The sacramental acts are, therefore, only saving actualizations of the passion and resurrection of Christ. Baptism plunges us into his death and resurrection. The Mass is not *another* sacrifice, but the *unique* sacrifice made present in the sacrament; in this sense it is true that the sacraments add nothing to Christ and that they are only the sacramental imitation of what has already been effectively accomplished in him.

On the other hand, the era of the Church is that in which what has already been accomplished in Christ, the head, is communicated to all men, who form the body. The era of the Church is the time of the mission, the growth of the Church, and the sacraments are the instruments of this growth, incorporating into Christ his new members. As Gregory of Nyssa says: "Christ builds Himself up by means of those who continually join themselves to the faith" by baptism.<sup>24</sup> And Methodius of Olympia shows us how the sacramental life is the continual espousal

23 Cullmann, *Les Sacrements dans l'Évangile Johannique*, 85.

24 PG 1397c.

of Christ and the Church.<sup>25</sup> We can understand why Cyril of Jerusalem made the Canticle of Canticles the sacramental text par excellence.<sup>26</sup>

But the last characteristic of the era of the Church is that the transformation carried out by Christ actually reaches mankind, but it is not yet made manifest: "You are now the sons of God, but it has not yet appeared what you shall be" (1 John 3:2). Thus the sacraments have a hidden aspect. They are a veil as well as a reality. *Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio . . . ut te revelata cernens facie . . .* ("Jesus, whom I now behold under a veil . . . may I [one day] behold you with your face unveiled . . .").<sup>27</sup>

And this shows us one more aspect of the sacraments in the history of salvation. They are not the final stage. After the mysteries of the past, there are the mysteries of the future. Prefigured by the realities of the Old Testament and the New, the sacraments are themselves prefigurations of eternal life. Baptism anticipates the Judgment; the Eucharist is the eschatological banquet already made present in mystery. And so the sacraments recapitulate the whole history of salvation: *Recolitur memoria passionis, mens impletur gratia, et futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur* ("the memory of his passion is kept, the soul filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory given to us").<sup>28</sup>

Thus, we see the sacraments as being the acts of God in the era of the Church. As we have said, God's ways of acting are always the same. This is what finally defines the right of the Church to bring out the analogies between the sacraments and the divine events recorded in Scripture. It is here that we find the ultimate basis of what we explained at the start of this article. The universe of the liturgy is a marvelous symphony in which appear the harmonies between the different eras of the history of salvation, in which we pass from the Old Testament to the sacraments, from eschatology to spirituality, from the New Testament to eschatology, in virtue of these fundamental analogies. Knowledge of these correspondences is *the* Christian wisdom as the fathers understood it, the spiritual understanding of Scripture. And this is where the liturgy is the mistress of exegesis.

To conclude: One of the greatest difficulties for many minds is to understand the connection between Scripture and the Church. They hold to Scripture, but they do not see the need for the Church. It is of the utmost importance that such people be shown the strict continuity between Scripture and the Church. And it is precisely this continuity that appears at the climax of the history of salvation. It is here that the realities spoken of by Scripture and the realities that constitute the

25 *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, Discourse 3, chap. 8, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 6:320.

26 See Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 191–207.

27 Thomas Aquinas, "Adoro te Devote" ("I Adore You Devoutly"), in *Latin Hymns*, arr. and trans. Adrian Fortescue (Harrison, NY: Roman Catholic Books, n.d.), 76–77.

28 Thomas Aquinas, "Antiphon of the Magnificat at the Second Vespers of Corpus Christi," in *Latin Hymns*, 60–61.

Church appear as being various stages of one work. And, furthermore, by employing a unique language, which is that used by the Word of God, and by causing us to discover the scriptural categories in the sacraments, the continual reference to Scripture found in the explanation of the sacraments manifests the fact that they belong to the same universe.

Thus Bible and liturgy illuminate one another. The Bible both authorizes and clarifies the liturgy. It authorizes it by the authority of the prophets and the figures of which it is the fulfillment, and by thus placing it in the whole pattern of God's plan. It illuminates it by giving us the forms of expression by which we can understand the authentic meaning of the rites. In its turn, the liturgy illuminates the Bible. It gives us its authentic interpretation by showing us how it is a witness to the *mirabilia Dei*. And, much more, as these acts are continued in the sacraments, they actualize the Word of God by authorizing us to apply it to the present acts of God in the Church in virtue of the analogy between these acts in the different phases of history.

