

# The Changing Meanings of *sacramentum*: Historical Sketches

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The current liturgical book containing the prayers of the Mass is the *Missale Romanum, editio typica tertia*, the third authoritative Latin version of the Roman Missal promulgated since the Second Vatican Council. Published in 2002, this Missal employs the word *sacramentum* on 252 occasions.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the word appeared only 131 times in the Roman Missal of 1962.<sup>2</sup> The word's liturgical import, then, has practically doubled in the years following the Second Vatican Council. The need to plumb the depths of its meaning has grown accordingly.

This essay sketches various meanings of *sacramentum* in a series of authors, mostly chosen for their influence, beginning with ancient pagans and ending with the Second Vatican Council. Key authors are considered from classical non-Christian Latin literature (Varro, Caesar, and Apuleius), the ante-Nicene period (especially Tertullian), the height of Latin patristic thought in the late fourth and early fifth century (Ambrose and Augustine), the transitional period of late antiquity (Isidore of Seville), the Middle Ages (Hugh of St Victor and Peter Lombard), the sixteenth century (the Council of Trent) and the twentieth century (the Second Vatican Council). This essay considers also the earliest use of *sacramentum* to designate a Christian phenomenon, and the term's appearances in early biblical translations. The result is a chronological survey that highlights the waxing, waning, introduction, re-introduction, and ongoing enrichment of the concepts that various Latin authors have conveyed with the word *sacramentum*.

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1 Manlio Sodi and Alessandro Toniolo, eds, *Concordantia et indices missalis Romani: Editio typica tertia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002) 1474-78: 34 sacramenta; 61 sacramenti; 54 sacramentis; 37 sacramento; 15 sacramentorum; 51 sacramentum.

2 Such is my count of the list compiled by André Pflieger, *Liturgicae orationis concordantia verbalia, prima pars, Missale Romanum* (Rome: Herder, 1964) 589-94.

## I. ANCIENT NON-CHRISTIAN USES OF *SACRAMENTUM*

What did *sacramentum* mean in the wider Latin-speaking world when it was first adapted by Christians? The extant uses of the word by classical pagan authors can be divided into three certain categories of meaning. The first and second categories are juridical and military. Various analogies with the word's military connotations comprise the third.

Varro, writing a history of the Latin language between 127 and 116 B.C., defines *sacramentum* as the sum of money deposited with the pontiff by both the plaintiff and the defendant in a law suit: "he who won the decision got back his deposit from the temple, but the loser's deposit passed into the state treasury."<sup>3</sup> In the mid-second century of the Christian era, Gaius, the renowned jurist, provides further details concerning a type of general legal action "by a sacrament."<sup>4</sup> Gaius specifies the formula with which the two parties in the lawsuit would pledge their sacraments in testimony to the justice of their respective claims: "The first claimant would then say: 'Inasmuch as you have claimed wrongfully, I challenge you with a sacrament of five hundred coins'; his adversary said likewise: 'And I you.'"<sup>5</sup> Since the legal *sacramentum* had fallen into disuse by early Christian times, however, the term had only distant juridical overtones for the earliest Christians who used it.<sup>6</sup>

A turning point occurs in the first century B.C., when Julius Caesar becomes the first author to designate a military phenomenon with

3 M. Terentius Varro, *De lingua latina* V.180, in *De lingua latina quae supersunt*, ed. Georgius Goetz and Fridericus Schoell (Leipzig: Teubner, 1910) 54-55: "[si is] ea pecunia quae in iudicium venit in litibus, sacramentum a sacro; qui[s] petebat et qui infitiabatur, de aliis rebus uterque quingenos aeris ad pontem deponebant, de aliis rebus item certo alio legitimo numero assum; qui iudicio vicerat, suum sacramentum e sacro auferebat, victi ad aerarium redibat," trans. Roland G. Kent in *Varro: On the Latin Language*, vol. 1, *Books V-VII*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1938) 169.

4 Gaius, *Institutiones* IV.12-14, in *Iurisprudentiae anteiustinianae reliquias*, vol. 1, ed. E. Seckel, B. Kuebler, and E. Huschke (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908) 334-35. On dating, see A. M. Honoré, *Gaius* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) 46-69.

5 Gaius, *Institutiones* IV.16, ed. Seckel, Kuebler, and Huschke, vol. 1, p. 337: "deinde qui prior uindicauerat, dicebat: QVANDO TV INIVRIA VINDICAVISTI, D AERIS SACRAMENTO TE PROVOCO; aduersarius quoque dicebat similiter: ET EGO TE," my translation.

6 Christine Mohrmann, "*Sacramentum* dans les plus anciens texts chrétiens," in *Études sur le latin des chrétiens*, vol. 1 (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958) 233-44.

the word *sacramentum*. He employs the ablative *sacramento* with *rogare* (to swear), as well as with *dicere* (to say), thereby demonstrating that he is referring to a certain verbal formula.<sup>7</sup> For Caesar, the military *sacramentum* is an oath by which or with which those who utter it become members of the highly esteemed soldiery of Rome. This soon became the primary referent of *sacramentum* in non-Christian authors: the verbal formula by which soldiers swore obedience to their general and fidelity to one another.<sup>8</sup> By extension, the term became convertible with military service itself.

Classical authors take another important step whereby the military *sacramentum* analogously indicates the oaths, loyalties, and commitments made by four other groups: philosophers, barbarians, gladiators, and thieves. Of these, the *sacramentum* of thieves most directly impacts the nascent Christian use of the term.

Apuleius, author of the *Golden Ass* or *Metamorphoses* in the second century after Christ, employs the word *sacramentum* several times in an extended cycle of stories regarding a band of thieves. One thief relates how he and his comrades “assigned the sacrament of the impending campaign (or military service),” which is to say, determined the role that each should play in a plot to rob a wealthy citizen named Democharis. They sought a volunteer to dress in the skin of a caged bear, be presented to Democharis, and unlock the gates of the villa during the night to let in his fellow thieves.<sup>9</sup> Trasyleon volunteered for this glorious task. When the plot went awry,

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7 C. Iulius Caesar, *De bello Gallico* VI.1, in *Commentarii rerum gestarum*, vol. 1, *Bellum Gallicum*, ed. Wolfgang Hering, Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987) 91: Caesar “simul ab Gnaeo Pompeio proconsule petit, quoniam ipse ad urbem cum imperio rei p. causa remaneret, quos ex Cisalpina Gallia consul[is] sacramento rogavisset, ad signa convenire et ad se proficisci iuberet.” See also *De bello civili* I.86, II.28, and II.32, in *Commentariorum: Libri III de bello civili cum libris incertorum auctorum de bello alexandrino africo hispaniensi*, ed. Renatus du Pontet, Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961 reprint) n.p.

8 This sentence and the following paragraph articulate the conclusions of an extensive analysis of over 170 surviving instances in which ancient Latin non-Christian authors employ the word *sacramentum*. For an extensive results of this research, see Daniel G. Van Slyke, “*Sacramentum* in Ancient Non-Christian Authors,” *Antiphon* 9 (2005) 167-206.

9 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* IV.14-15, in *Apulei Platonici Madaurensis opera quae supersunt*, vol. 1, *Metamorphoseon libri XI*, ed. Rudolfus Helm, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1968) 86: “instanti militiae disponimus sacramentum, ut unus e numero nostro, non qui corporis adeo, sed animi robore ceteris antistaret, atque is in primis uoluntarius, pelle illa coniectus ursae subiret effigiem domumque Democharis inlatus per opportuna noctis silentia nobis ianuam faciles praestaret aditus.”

neither with a shout nor with wailing did he betray the very fidelity of the sacrament (*fidem sacramenti prodidit*), but now mangled by [dogs'] teeth and lacerated by the sword, with strenuous roaring and with the growling of a wild animal, bearing the present misfortune with noble strength, he reserved glory for himself and surrendered his life to fate.<sup>10</sup>

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* reflect a social phenomenon of late antiquity: large bands of robbers did roam the countryside. Since many of them had deserted the Roman army, they naturally adopted military models of organization.<sup>11</sup> The Trasyleon episode suggests that these thieves took an oath or *sacramentum* to their leaders, to one another, or to both, and held it in quite high esteem. Whoever clung tenaciously to the role he was assigned in any thieving campaign for the benefit of his comrades, even at the expense of his own life, preserved the "fidelity of the sacrament."

Various scholars argue that *sacramentum* was used to describe aspects of ancient pagan religiosity, particularly religious engagements or initiation into mystery cults.<sup>12</sup> The available evidence does not justify such claims. Nevertheless, one possible use of the term in reference to a pagan cult sheds much light on subsequent developments of the term vis-à-vis Christianity. The historian Livy, in his history of Rome *Ab urbe condita*, written between 27 B.C. and A.D. 17, relates an impassioned speech purportedly delivered over 150 years earlier. In that speech, the consul Postumius accuses Bacchanalians of making young men effeminate and therefore unsuitable for military service:

If you knew at what ages males were initiated, you would feel not only pity for them but also shame. Do you think, citizens, that youths initiated by this sacrament should be made soldiers? That arms should be entrusted to men mustered from this foul shrine? Will men covered with the signs of their own debauchery and that

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10 *Metamorphoses* IV.21, ed. Helm, 90: "enimvero Thrasyleon egregium decus nostrae factionis tandem immortalitate digno illo spiritu expugnato magis quam patientia neque clamore ac ne ululatu quidem fidem sacramenti prodidit, sed iam morsibus laceratus ferroque laniatus obnixo mugitu et ferino fremitu praesentem casu< m > generoso uigore tolerans gloriam sibi reseruauit, uitam fato reddidit," my translation.

11 B. L. Hijmans, Jr., et al., *Apuleius Madaurensis Metamorphoses Book IV 1-27: Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Groningen: Bouma's, 1977) 208-9.

12 For example, Alexandre Ganoczy, *An Introduction to Catholic Sacramental Theology*, trans. William Thomas (New York: Paulist Press, 1984) 8-9.

of others fight to the death on behalf of the chastity of your wives and children?<sup>13</sup>

Livy describes the Bacchanalian oath as a ritual formula dictated first by the priest, then repeated by the initiate, and bonding the initiates to commit all sorts of wicked acts: debauchery, murder, false testimony, forgery, dishonoring of wills, and other fraudulent activities.<sup>14</sup> His protagonist Postumius argues that young men who have taken that Bacchanalian *sacramentum* are unfit for the military *sacramentum*.

## II. THE FIRST CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTUM

Given that few Latin Christian writings pre-date the late second century, Tertullian (active from 197 to about 220) provides the earliest witness of *sacramentum* as a Christian theological concept. One century earlier, however, a pagan who appears to think in terms of the oaths sworn by both criminal bands and Bacchanalians becomes the first author to apply the term to a Christian phenomenon. Describing the practices of Christians in a letter to Emperor Trajan early in the second century, Pliny the Younger writes:

But they confirmed this to have been the principal matter either of their guilt or of their error, that they had been accustomed to assemble regularly before light on a fixed day, and to sing a hymn to Christ as if to a god and to pledge among themselves by a sacrament (*sacramento*) not unto any crime, but that they might not commit fraud, robbery, or adultery, that they might not break faith, that they might not refuse to repay a deposit. After these things had been accomplished, they had the habit of departing to their homes and of meeting again in order to take a common and harmless meal (*cibum*); although they had ceased to do this after my edict by which, according to your command, I had forbidden fraternities to exist.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Livy [Titus Liuius], *Ab urbe condita* [henceforth: Liv.] XXXIX.15, in *Ab urbe condita: Libri XXXI-XL*, vol. 6, *Libri XXXVI-XL*, ed. P. G. Walsh, *Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999) 225: “Si quibus aetatibus initientur mares sciatis, non misereat uos eorum solum, sed etiam pudeat. Hoc sacramento initiatos iuuenes milites faciendos censetis, Quirites? His ex obsceno sacrario eductis arma committenda? Hi cooperti stupris suis alienisque pro pudicitia coniugum ac liberorum uestrorum ferro decernent?” trans. Evan T. Sage, *Livy*, vol. 11, *Books XXXVIII-XXXIX*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1936) 263; I have made one minor emendation to the translation.

14 Liv. XXXIX.18, ed. Walsh, vol. 6, p. 228.

15 C. *Plini Caecili Secundi: Epistularum libri decem* X.96, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 339: “Adfirmabant autem hanc fuisse

Pliny specifies that this *sacramentum* does not bind Christians to one another for any criminal purpose. They swear rather to avoid such misdeeds as violating informal or consensual contracts for sales and loans – misdeeds that pagans apparently accused Christians of committing.<sup>16</sup> Pliny's list of wicked acts that Christians swear *not to* commit bears some similarity to the list of deeds that Livy depicts Bacchanalians swearing *to* commit. Pliny keeps the Bacchanalian precedent in mind while investigating the possible crimes of Christians. He also weighs the Christian *sacramentum* in terms of that sworn by thieves, who do indeed bind themselves together for a criminal purpose. Pliny's goal, after all, is to determine whether or not Christians are guilty of any crimes worthy of punishment.

Strikingly, this is the earliest use of the word *sacramentum* in reference to a particularly Christian phenomenon. Yet many questions remain about the episode. What word did the Christians whom Pliny interrogated use, since they likely did not speak Latin? What Christian phenomenon does Pliny have in mind? Does Pliny understand that Christian practice accurately? Pliny might be referring to the rites of Christian initiation,<sup>17</sup> although this is by no means entirely clear.

### III. SACRAMENTUM IN THE ANTE-NICENE PERIOD

In the century separating Pliny from Tertullian, Latin-speaking Christian communities began to develop, and with them a Latin Christian vocabulary. Certainly it was influenced by the Greek Christian culture that preceded it. One important word to consider from that perspective is *μυστήριον* or *mysterion*. With this term the Greeks united several different notions, including the sacred, arcane or hidden, and initiation (*sacra*, *arcanum*, *initia*). Since no single Latin word – including *sacramentum* – bore this set of meanings, Latin speakers simply transliterated it as *mysterium*. The Latin word *mysterium*, with which *sacramentum* is sometimes equated, was borrowed from the

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summam uel culpae suae uel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem conuenire, carmenque Christo quasi deo dicere secum inuicem seque sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta ne latrocinia ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum adpellati abnegarent. Quibus peractis morem sibi discedendi fuisse rursusque coeundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen et innoxium; quod ipsum facere desisse post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetaerias esse uetueram,” my translation.

16 Elias Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History*, vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1986) 154-55.

17 A. D. Nock, “The Christian *sacramentum* in Pliny and a Pagan Counterpart,” *The Classical Review* 38 (1924) 58.

Greek well before the second Christian century, and no longer had any exotic character.

Unlike *sacramentum*, *mysterium* did designate pagan religious cults. Hence Tertullian sharply contrasts divine *sacramenta* with the *mysteria* of pagan rituals, which he sees as demonic imitations of godly realities. He writes that the devil, who subverts the truth, “emulates the very things of the divine sacraments (*sacramentorum*) with the mysteries (*mysteriis*) of idols.”<sup>18</sup> The earliest significant Latin Christian author, then, considers the words *mysterium* and *sacramentum* to have very different contexts and contents. Tertullian and other second-century Christians may have preferred *sacramentum* to *mysterium* precisely because the former was free from the pagan cultic connotations that plagued the latter.<sup>19</sup>

Along with Tertullian, several other Latin Christians writing before the Council of Nicaea in 325 use the word *sacramentum*: Commodian the mid-third-century poet; Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (248/9-258); Arnobius the Elder, who authored *Seven Books Against the Pagans* around 303-305; and finally Lactantius (d. ca. 325). Among the many shades of meaning with which these authors employ *sacramentum*, three particularly recommend themselves for consideration in the present context. The first is derived from the word’s etymology. The second and third meanings are, respectively, oath and sign.<sup>20</sup>

From the etymological perspective, *sacramentum* combines *sacra* with the suffix *mentum*. *Sacra* is related to *sacrare* (to sanctify or consecrate or make holy), and generally designates something which is sanctified. *Sacramentum*, then, relates to the thing made sacred – what the verb *sacrare* produces – or to the thing that makes something sacred – the subject of the verb *sacrare*. In his treatise on baptism, Tertullian

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18 Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* XL (CCSL 1:220): “A diabolo scilicet, cuius sunt partes interuertendi ueritatem qui ipsas quoque res sacramentorum diuinorum idolorum mysteriis aemulatur,” my translation.

19 Mohrmann, “*Sacramentum* dans les plus anciens textes,” 235-36.

20 Although they consider other categories as well, I have drawn these from J. De Ghellinck, *Pour l’histoire du mot sacramentum*, vol. 1, *Les Antécédents* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, 1924), and Dimitri Michaélidès, *Sacramentum chez Tertullien* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1970). Note also the sometimes-overlapping categories into which the editors of CCSL vol. 2 divide Tertullian’s use of *sacramentum* in the “Index rerum et locutionum,” p. 1604: (1) id quod sacratur, id quo sacratur, res sacra; (2) iuramentum, formula baptismalis, baptisma; (3) initiatio, mysteria; (4) ritus, sacrificium; (5) religio, doctrina, reuelatio, doctrina; (6) signum, signaculum; (7) figura, praefiguratio, prophetia; (8) arcanum, res occulta; (9) dispositio, ordo, oeconomia.

utilizes *sacramentum* in a manner that reflects the implications of this basic etymological analysis:

Igitur omnes aquae de pristina originis praerogatiua sacramentum sanctificationis consecuntur inuocato deo: superuenit enim statim spiritus de caelis et aquis superest sanctificans eas de semetipso et ita sanctificatae uim sanctificandi combibunt. Quamquam ad simplicem actum competat similitudo, ut, quoniam uice sordum delictis inquinamur, aquis abluamur.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore all waters, from the pristine prerogative of the beginning, attain the sacrament of sanctification by the invocation of God. For the Spirit from heaven at once supervenes and remains over the waters, sanctifying them from himself, and thus sanctified they drink the power of sanctifying. The likeness should be fit for whatever pertains to the simple act, such that, since in the manner of dirt we are stained with sins, with the waters we are cleansed.

Here the Holy Spirit invoked upon the waters sanctifies them, such that they in turn receive the power of sanctifying; the waters become the subject that, having been sanctified, sanctify. The sanctified waters are capable of sanctifying the one to be baptized, washing away sin in a likeness to the manner in which water usually cleanses one of dirt. Tertullian argues that any type of water can attain the power of the sacrament of sanctifying, that is, the sacrament of baptism, by virtue of the Holy Spirit. The etymological import of *sacramentum* evident in this passage may suggest why it appealed to the first generation of Latin theologians. Yet in subsequent centuries this shade of meaning largely fades from the consciousness of Christian authors, to reappear in the seventh century with Isidore, a perceptive student of etymology.

Tertullian also employs *sacramentum* to indicate an oath, viewing the Christian oath analogously with that of the Roman military. Thus he insists that the oath sworn to God is incompatible with the soldier's oath.<sup>22</sup> Arnobius of Sicca similarly employs the military analogy.<sup>23</sup> For

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21 Tertullian, *De baptismo* IV.4-5 (CCSL 1:280), my translation; cf. *Adversus Marcionem* III.16.5 (SC 399:146): "ideo is uir, qui in huius sacramenti imagines parabatur, etiam nominis dominici inauguratus est figura, Iesus cognominatus."

22 Tertullian, *De idololatria* XIX.2 (CCSL 2:1120): "Non conuenit sacramento diuino et humano, signo Christi et signo diaboli, castris lucis et castris tenebrarum; non potest una anima duobus deberi, deo et Caesari"; *Liber Scorpiace* IV.5 (CCSL 2:1076): "Huic sacramento militans ab hostibus prouocor. Par sum illis, nisi illis manus dedero. Hoc defendendo depugno in acie, uulneror, concidor, occidor. Quis hunc militi suo exitum uoluit, nisi qui tali sacramento eum consignauit?"

23 Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* II.5 (PL 5:816-17): "quod ab dominis se serui cruciatibus affici, quibus statuerint, malunt, solvi coniuges matrimoniis,

these ante-Nicene Christians, the military oath of initiation provides an apt analogy for initiation into the militia of Christ or the service of Christ, which is also expressed with certain verbal formulae. In this light, Tertullian's use of *sacramentum* to indicate the rites of initiation into the Christian Church, particularly baptism and the Eucharist,<sup>24</sup> appears as a natural extension of that analogy.

Moreover, this analogous use of *sacramentum* provides a means of adapting the Judeo-Christian notion of covenant (*testamentum*) to the Latin language and world-view.<sup>25</sup> The oath of baptism constitutes an engagement between God and the Christian, as well as among Christians. The man thus engaged by God becomes a *servus Dei* (servant of God) as well as a *miles Dei* (soldier of God), with a new set of relationships to other servants and soldiers of God. Indeed, the most plausible theory explaining what unites Tertullian's multifaceted uses of *sacramentum* hinges on the notion of *sacramentum* as oath, along the lines of the military analogy. Consider the variety of implications of baptismal commitment uttered by the Christian in baptism: a new and exclusive relationship with God, analogous with the new soldier's relationship with the emperor; a new personality or identity for the new Christian, analogous with the new soldier's change in status; a new *disciplina* or rule of conduct, complete with obligations; the promise of an eschatological reward, analogous with the soldiers' reward at dismissal.

Despite its probable importance in the formative ante-Nicene period, however, the notion of *sacramentum* as a sort of Christian military oath diminishes with time. The third shade of meaning

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exhaeredari a parentibus liberi, quam fidem rumpere christianam, et salutaris militiae sacramenta deponere?" Arnobius utilizes *sacramentum* on five other occasions in *Adversus nationes* I.3 (PL 5:724): "quid est istud, quod dicitur invectam esse labem terries, postquam religio christiana intulit se mundo, et veritatis absconditae sacramenta patefecit?"; II.5 (PL 5:816): "Nonne vel haec saltem fidem vobis faciunt argumenta credendi, quod jam per omnes terras in tam brevi tempore et parvo, immensi hujus sacramenta diffusa sunt?"; III.6 (PL 5:944): "Et tamen, ne nos quisquam pervicaciter arbitretur sacramenta nolle suscipere caeterorum, quaecumque sunt, numinum"; IV.16 (PL 5:1036): "aut quis quaesitor, quis arbiter cervicibus tantis erit, qui inter personas hujusmodi, aut vindicias justas dare, aut sacramenta conetur pronuntiare non justa?"; IV.20 (PL 5:1040): "Uxores enim dii habent, atque in conjugalia foedera conditionibus veniunt ante quaesitis? usu, farre, coemptione, genialis lectuli sacramenta condicunt?"

24 For example, Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* IV.34.5 (SC 456:416): "ad sacramentum baptismatis et eucharistiae admittens"; *De virginibus velandis* II.2 (CCSL 2:1210): "eadem lauacri sacramenta"; *De baptismo* IX.1 (CSEL 20:208): "quae figura manifestior in baptismi sacramento?"

25 See Dennis J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965) 217-40.

predominates in the centuries after Nicaea: *sacramentum* as sign. Tertullian already mentions prophetic *sacramenta*,<sup>26</sup> or the sacraments of the Old Testament that prepare for the coming of the Savior. The sense of *sacramentum* as sign increasingly becomes the most important, and finally encompasses even the visible or observable elements of Christian rites, through which invisible power is made manifest, as will become evident in the subsequent discussions of Ambrose and Isidore. The notion of sign associates *sacramentum* with similar concepts and terms, including figure, type, symbol, or sign of things past, present, and future, as well as of God's self-revelation and the divine precepts. This meaning opens the door to the broad use of the term evident in ancient Latin biblical translations and patristic writings.

#### IV. ANCIENT BIBLICAL TRANSLATIONS

Translations of the Bible into Latin before the late-fourth century tended to employ such words as *signum*, *typus*, *mirabilium*, and *mysterium* to render the Greek *μυστήριον*.<sup>27</sup> When *sacramentum* was used to translate *μυστήριον* in various biblical passages, the continued use of the word was assured.

At the dawn of Latin Christianity, biblical translations were numerous and of varying qualities: "whenever in the early days of the faith a Greek codex came into anybody's hands, and he felt that he had the slightest familiarity with each language, he rushed in with a [Latin] translation."<sup>28</sup> On this level some unknown translator or

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26 Tertullian, *De baptismo* VIII.2 (CSEL 20:207): "sed est hoc quoque de ueteri sacramento, quo nepotes suos ex Ioseph, Ephrem et Manassem, Iacob capitibus impositis et intermutatis manibus benedixerit, et quidem ita transuersim obliquatis in se, ut Christum deformantes iam tunc portenderent benedictionem in Christum futuram"; *De monogamia* V.7 (CCSL 2:1235): "... monogamus occurrit in spiritu, unam habens ecclesiam sponsam, secundum Adam et Euae figuram, quam apostolus in illud magnum sacramentum interpretatur, in Christum et ecclesiam, competentes carnali monogamiae per spiritalem" (cf. Eph 5:32); *Adversus Iudaeos* XIII.21 (CCSL 2:1388-89): "Sed quoniam haec fuerant sacramenta, quae temporibus Christi percipienda seruabantur, et Isaac tum ligno solutus est, ariete oblato in uepre cornibus haerente, et Christus suis temporibus lignum humeris suis partauit inhaerens cornibus crucis, corona spinea capiti eius circumdata"; *Adversus Marcionem* IV.40.1 (SC 456:494): "In hoc enim sacramentum pronuntiarat Moyses: *Pascha est domini*" (Lv 23:5); *Adversus Marcionem* IV.16.12 (SC 456:210): "Ideoque quamdiu intra Israhalem erat sacramentum, merito in solos fratres misericordiam mandabat, at ubi Christo dedit gentes hereditatem et possessionem terminos terrae."

27 De Ghellinck, *Pour l'histoire du mot sacramentum*, vol. 1, pp. 309-10.

28 Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* II.11.16 (CCSL 32:42): "Vt enim cuique primis fidei temporibus in manus uenit codex graecus, et

translators first introduced *sacramentum* into the text of the Bible. For example, consider 1 Corinthians 13:2, which reads in English translated from the Greek:

And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries [τα μυστήριον πᾶντα] and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Cor 13:2, NAB)

In North Africa, a Latin translation circulated wherein μυστήρια was rendered *sacramenta*. It survives in a citation from one of Augustine's sermons:

*Si sciam omnia sacramenta et omnem scientiam, et habeam omnem prophetiam et omnem fidem, ita ut montes transferam – quanta potentia! – caritatem autem non habeam, nihil sum.*<sup>29</sup> “And if I knew all sacraments and all science, and I had all prophecy and all faith, such that I might move mountains” – what power! – “but I did not have love, I am nothing.”

The meaning of “all sacraments” here is unclear. The translator loosely associates the phrase with science or knowledge in general, and more loosely still with prophecy and faith. The juxtaposition with “all science” intimates that the knowledge of “all sacraments” is quite difficult to attain.

Jerome's Latin Vulgate, largely produced in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries, gradually superseded the numerous versions of Scripture that circulated in the first centuries of Latin Christianity. The authority of his edition led to its widespread use; it became the standard version of Scripture for both liturgical and private reading, and permanently influenced Christian vocabulary.<sup>30</sup>

Jerome employs the word *sacramentum* to render μυστήριον on fifteen occasions – and 1 Corinthians 13:2 is not among them. The word appears four times each in Daniel and Ephesians, thrice in Wisdom, twice in Revelation, and once each in Paul's Letter to the

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aliquantum facultatis sibi utriusque linguae habere videbantur, ausus est interpretari,” trans. Edmund Hill, *Teaching Christianity*, The Works of St. Augustine 1.11 (Hyde Park NY: New City) 136; see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker) 29-32.

29 Augustine, *Sermo XXXVII.28* (CCSL 41:470), my translation.

30 Arthur Vööbus, *Early Versions of the New Testament: Manuscript Studies* (Stockholm, 1954) 56-57, 62-65; Metzger, *Bible in Translation*, 30: “The theology and the devotional language typical of the Roman Catholic Church were either created or transmitted by the Vulgate. Both Protestants

Colossians and I Timothy. Six of the fifteen occurrences of *sacramentum* in the Vulgate are found in Daniel and Revelation. These apocalyptic books depict visions wherein the seers Daniel and John symbolically witness the events that will take place at the end of time.

ut quaerent misericordiam a facie Dei caeli super sacramento isto, et non perirent Daniel, et socii eius cum ceteris sapientibus Babylonis (Dn 2:18)<sup>31</sup>

to the end that they should ask mercy before the face of the God of heaven concerning this sacrament, and that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon<sup>32</sup>

Mihi quoque non in sapientia, quae est in me plus quam in cunctis viventibus, sacramentum hoc revelatum est: sed ut interpretatio regi manifesta fieret, et cogitationes mentis tuae scires (Dn 2:30)

To me also this sacrament is revealed, not by any wisdom that I have more than all men alive: but that the interpretation might be made manifest to the king, and thou mightest know the thoughts of thy mind

Loquens ergo rex, ait Danieli: Vere Deus vester Deus deorum est, et Dominus regum, et revelans mysteria: quoniam tu potuisti aperire hoc sacramentum (Dn 2:47)

And the king spoke to Daniel, and said: Verily your God is the God of gods, and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries: seeing thou couldst discover this sacrament

Baltassar princeps ariolorum, quoniam ego scio quod spiritum sanctorum deorum habeas in te, et omne sacramentum non est impossibile tibi: visiones somniorum meorum, quas vidi, et solutionem earum narra (Dn 4:6)

Baltassar, prince of the diviners, because I know that thou hast in thee the spirit of the holy gods, and that no sacrament is impossible to thee: tell me the visions of my dreams that I have seen, and the interpretation of them

sacramentum septem stellarum quas vidisti in dextera mea et septem candelabra aurea septem stellae

the sacrament of the seven stars, which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.

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and Roman Catholics are heirs of terminology that Jerome either coined or baptized with fresh significance – words such as salvation, regeneration, justification ... sacrament, and many others.”

31 All citations of the Vulgate are taken from Robert Weber et al., eds, *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

32 All translations of the Vulgate loosely follow the Douay-Rheims version (Rockford IL: TAN, 1989), to which I have introduced numerous emendations.

angeli sunt septem ecclesiarum et  
candelabra septem septem ecclesiae  
sunt (Rev 1:20)

The seven stars are the angels of  
the seven churches. And the seven  
candlesticks are the seven churches

et dixit mihi angelus quare miraris  
ego tibi dicam sacramentum mulieris  
et bestiae quae portat eam quae habet  
capita septem et decem cornua (Rev  
17:7)

and the angel said to me: Why dost  
thou wonder? I will tell thee the  
sacrament of the woman, and of the  
beast which carrieth her, which hath  
the seven heads and ten horns

In each of these instances, the Greek word rendered *sacramentum* is *μυστήριον*. Yet in many other instances the same Greek word is translated by other words, especially *mysterium* – as for example in Daniel 2:47 above.<sup>33</sup> The *sacramentum* in each of these passages is something hidden that is being made known to the seer in a manner that does not necessarily make it clearer: through the signs and symbols of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and John’s visions, including the statue, the great tree, the seven stars, the seven candles, the woman and the beast. Two elements tie all of these sacraments together: first, something is being revealed about the divine plan concerning events that will be fulfilled in the future; second, the manner in which that something is revealed does not make it obvious, but rather demands divinely inspired interpretation. It is likely with this sort of meaning in mind that Jerome claims the Book of Revelation has as many *sacramenta* as it has words.<sup>34</sup>

In the remainder of the relevant New Testament passages utilizing *sacramentum*, Jerome therewith indicates something hidden which has been or is being made known in Christ:

ut notum faceret nobis sacramentum  
voluntatis suae secundum bonum  
placitum eius quod proposuit in eo  
(Eph 1:9)

that he might make known unto us  
the sacrament of his will, according  
to his good pleasure, which he hath  
purposed in him

quoniam secundum revelationem  
notum mihi factum est sacramentum  
sicut supra scripsi in brevi (Eph 3:3)

how, according to revelation, the  
sacrament hath been made known to  
me, as I have written above in brief

33 See also G. Bornkamm, “μυστήριον,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1967) 813-15.

34 Jerome *Epistula LIII.9* (CSEL 54.1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.:463): “Apocalypsis Iohannis tot habet sacramenta, quot verba. parum dixi et pro merito uoluminis laus omnis inferior est; in uerbis singulis multiplices latent intelligentiae.”

et inluminare omnes quae sit dispensatio sacramenti absconditi a saeculis in Deo qui omnia creavit (Eph 3:9)

and to enlighten all regarding what is the dispensation of the sacrament hidden from eternity in God, who created all things

Sacramentum hoc magnum est ego autem dico in Christo et in ecclesia (Eph 5:32)

this is a great sacrament, but I speak in Christ and in the Church

quibus voluit Deus notas facere divitias gloriae sacramenti huius in gentibus quod est Christus in vobis spes gloriae (Col 1:27)<sup>35</sup>

to whom God willed to make known the riches of the glory of this sacrament among the gentiles, which is Christ, in you the hope of glory

et manifeste magnum est pietatis sacramentum quod manifestatum est in carne iustificatum est in spiritu apparuit angelis praedicatum est gentibus creditum est in mundo adsumptum est in gloria (1 Tim 3:16)

and evidently great is the sacrament of godliness, which was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the spirit, appeared unto angels, hath been preached unto the Gentiles, is believed in the world, is taken up in glory

In a sense, the deeper meaning of all salvation history is the *sacramentum* formerly hidden but now made known (*facere notum* or *manifestatum*) in Christ. Jerome exemplifies this understanding when he writes that “the whole world is described in the sacrament of the tabernacle” or tent of meeting described in the book of Exodus, although this could only be understood after Christ.<sup>36</sup> The Gospel not only opens the meaning of the sacraments of old, but also extends their saving efficacy to all nations: “Every sacrament of the Jews,” according to Jerome, “was translated to the nations through the Apostles.”<sup>37</sup>

The New Testament occurrences of *sacramentum* just considered reflect the content and context of the word in the Book of Wisdom:

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35 Note that the word *μυστήριον* occurs also in Col 1:26, where Jerome renders it *mysterium*.

36 Jerome, *Epistula LXIV* 9 (CSEL 54.1, 2nd ed.:596): “totus mundus in tabernaculi describitur sacramento,” my translation.

37 Jerome, *Epistula XLVI* 4 (CSEL 54.1, 2nd ed.:334): “tunc omne sacramentum Iudaeae et antiquam dei familiaritatem, per apostolos in nationes fuisse translata,” my translation; cf. Lorenzo Perrone, “*Sacramentum Iudaeae* (Gerolamo, Ep 46): Gerusalemme e la Terra Santa nel pensiero cristiano dei primi secoli: continuità e trasformazioni,” in *Cristianesimo nella storia* (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 1996) 445-78.

et nescierunt sacramenta Dei neque mercedem speraverunt iustitiae nec iudicaverunt honorem animarum sanctarum (Wis 2:22)

And they knew not the sacraments of God, nor hoped for the wages of justice, nor esteemed the honor of holy souls

quid est autem sapientia et quemadmodum facta sit referam et non abscondam a vobis sacramenta Dei sed ab initio nativitatis investigabo et ponam in lucem scientiam illius et non praeteribo veritatem (Wis 6:24)

Now what wisdom is, and what was her origin, I will declare: and I will not hide from you the sacraments of God, but will seek her out from the beginning of her birth, and bring the knowledge of her to light, and will not pass over the truth

et filiorum necatores sine misericordia et comestores viscerum hominum devorationem et sanguinis a medio sacramento tuo (Wis 12:5)<sup>38</sup>

And those merciless murderers of their own children, and eaters of men's bowels, and devourers of blood from the midst of your sacrament

In the first of these passages, *sacramenta* indicate things of God that are not known to or are hidden from the wicked, such that the use of the word here is akin to its appearances in Colossians and Ephesians 1:9, 3:3, and 3:9. The second passage has affinities with the North African version of 1 Corinthians 13:2 cited above, insofar as it loosely equates the sacraments of God with wisdom. The author of the passage promises to reveal something not yet readily accessible. The last of these passages is in many ways unique and unclear; it demands more analysis than can be given in the present essay.

These fifteen appearances of *sacramentum* are exceedingly important in the term's theological development. Yet in the Vulgate the word is largely devoid of the cultic content or the relation to the rites of worship which will dominate the more particular definitions formulated in the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, *sacramentum* appears as a sign of something previously hidden that now is being made manifest in Christ, all the while maintaining a hidden characteristic. Thus the Vulgate charges the word with the value of a sign – hidden yet revealed – which scholastics in the Middle Ages, facing new challenges and theological questions, draw upon in their discussions of key elements of Christian worship. In the meantime, patristic authors such as Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and Isidore of Seville paved the way for the developments of the scholastic period by applying the term *sacramentum* to elements of Christian worship.

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<sup>38</sup> Note that this passage is unique insofar as *μυστήριον* is not found in the Greek text, but *medio sacramento tuo* renders *μέσου μυσταθείας σου*.

## V. AMBROSE OF MILAN

Ambrose, bishop of the imperial city of Milan from 373 or 374 until 397, strongly influenced the theologians of subsequent centuries. A close reading of his writings, especially the mystagogical catecheses *De mysteriis* and *De sacramentis*,<sup>39</sup> reveals a distinction of meaning between *sacramentum* and *mysterium*. Dwelling upon the distinction enables one to highlight what is unique about *sacramentum* in the patristic period and to trace Ambrose's influence on the word's subsequent meaning.

With the term *mysterium* Ambrose signifies historical realities that are in fact manifestations of the salvation given by God. While *sacramenta* indicates the sacred rites celebrated by the Church, as is demonstrated below, *mysteria* indicates the deeper meanings of Scripture.<sup>40</sup> As Giampietro Francesconi argues in an extensive study of historical and sacramental symbolism in Ambrose's language and theology, this deeper and intrinsically hidden *mysterium* is ultimately convertible with God's salvific plan, "which Scripture attests and the Church believes and lives."<sup>41</sup>

What, then, is the relationship between *mysterium* and *sacramentum*? Revealing is Ambrose's use of the phrase *ratio sacramentorum* (plan or reason of the sacraments), by which he indicates the explanation of the sacred rites in light of the mysteries of Scripture.<sup>42</sup> For example,

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39 Debates over the authorship of *De sacramentis* are generally thought to have been put to rest in the world of Anglophone scholarship by R. Hugh Connolly, *The De sacramentis, a Work of Ambrose: Two Papers* (Bath, England: Downside Abbey, 1942); for a recent review of the debate on the European front concluding that Ambrose's authorship of the work is most probable, see Matthieu Smyth, *La liturgie oubliée: La prière eucharistique en Gaule antique et dans l'Occident non romain* (Paris: Cerf, 2003) 38-40.

40 Enrico Mazza, *Mystagogy*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo, 1989) 23.

41 Giampietro Francesconi, *Storia e simbolo: mysterium in figura, la simbolica storico-sacramentale nel linguaggio e nella teologia di Ambrogio di Milano*, *Ricerche di Scienze Teologiche* 18 (Brescia, Italy: Morcelliana, 1981) 317: "In sostanza il contenuto del 'mysterium' è riconducibile al progetto salvifico di Dio, quale la Scrittura attesta e la Chiesa crede e vive. Esso è sempre 'secretum', 'arcanum', 'occultum'. Questo carattere di occultezza e di conseguente inaccessibilità diretta è proprio del 'mysterium' per sua intrinseca natura."

42 Ambrose, *De mysteriis* I.2 (SC 25bis:156): "Nunc de mysteriis dicere tempus admonet, atque ipsam rationem sacramentorum edere"; see Bernard Botte, Introduction, in Ambrose of Milan, *Des sacraments, Des mystères, Explication du symbole*, Sources Chrétiennes 25bis (Paris: Cerf, 1994) 33-34, and Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 23.

Ambrose links the saving efficacy of the *sacramentum* of baptism with the figure of Naaman's cure in 2 Kings 5:1-14.<sup>43</sup> Thus Ambrose identifies the *sacramentum* experienced by Christians in their worship with the Old Testament figure that precedes it.<sup>44</sup> Another example is the flood, which Ambrose sees as a figure of baptism preceding the mysteries of the Jews and thereby demonstrating that Christian mysteries are older.<sup>45</sup>

Ambrose's typological interpretation supports his argument that the Christian mysteries and sacraments are older than the Jewish law without compromising the central role of Christ. For example, the sacrament received when the priest says "The Body of Christ" and the neophytes respond "Amen," is preceded in figure by Melchizedek's sacrifice<sup>46</sup> and constitutes a commemoration of the Lord,<sup>47</sup> Author of the sacraments even in their figure.<sup>48</sup> The figure – not the reality – of the eucharistic sacraments is in the sacrifice of Melchizedek.<sup>49</sup> By identifying Melchizedek with Christ, Ambrose

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43 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* II.8 (SC 25bis:78); see also *De sacramentis* I.13-15 (SC 25bis:66-68) and *De mysteriis* II.16-18 (SC 25bis:164).

44 Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 30.

45 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* I.vi.23 (SC 25bis:72): "In diluio quoque fuit iam tunc figura baptismatis et adhuc utique non erant mysteria Iudaeorum. Si ergo huius baptismatis forma praecessit, uides superiora mysteria Christianorum quam fuerint Iudaeorum." For a list of figures of baptism indicated in Ambrose's corpus of writings, see Francesconi, *Storia e simbolo*, 310-11.

46 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* Vi.i.1 (SC 25bis:120): "Hesterno sermo noster atque tractatus usque ad sancti altaris sacramenta deductus est et cognouimus sacramentorum istorum figuram Abrahae temporibus praecessisse, quando obtulit sacrificium sanctus Melchisedech *neque initium dierum neque finem habens*" (Heb 7:3).

47 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.v.25-vi.26 (SC 25bis:116): "Cum ergo tu petieris, dicit tibi sacerdos: Corpus Christi, et tu dicis: Amen, hoc est, uerum. Quod confitetur lingua, teneat adfectus. Vt scias autem: hoc est sacramentum, cuius figura ante praecessit. Deinde quantum sit sacramentum cognosce. Vide quid dicat: *Quotiescumque hoc feceritis, totiens commemorationem mei facietis donec iterum adueniam.*"

48 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.iv.13 (SC 25bis:108): "Ergo auctor sacramentorum quis est nisi dominus Iesus? De caelo ista sacramenta uenerunt, consilium enim omne de caelo est. Vere autem magnum et diuinum miraculum quod populo pluit deus manna de caelo, et non laborabat populus et manducabat."

49 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.iii.10 (SC 25bis:106): "Accipe quae dico, et anteriora esse mysteria Christianorum quam Iudaeorum et diuiniora esse sacramenta Christianorum quam Iudaeorum.... Tunc deus manna Iudaeis murmurantibus pluit e caelo, tibi autem sacramentorum horum figura

insists both that the sacraments are peculiar to the Church and that they are more divine and older than the sacraments of the Jews, such as the manna.<sup>50</sup>

On another level, Ambrose theologically weaves together the visible sacraments of the Church's worship, the invisible power communicated through them, and the passion of Christ. Ambrose explicitly identifies baptism with the crucifixion of Christ, such that the *sacramentum crucis* (sacrament of the cross) is baptism.<sup>51</sup> The *mysterium* of Christ's cross is no mere image, but the source of baptism's power: "from whence is baptism if not from the cross of Christ, from the death of Christ? There is every mystery (*omne mysterium*) because he suffered for you. In him you are redeemed, in him you are saved."<sup>52</sup> Without the blood of Christ shed on the cross, one does not have the

praecessit quando Abraham erat, quando uernaculos trecentos decem et octo conlegit et iuit, persecutus est aduersarios, de captiuitate eruit nepotem suum. Tunc victor uenit, occurrit illi Melchisedech sacerdos et obtulit panem et uinum. Quis habuit panem et uinum? Abraham non habuit. Sed quis habuit? Melchisedech. Ipse ergo auctor sacramentorum."

50 How closely Ambrose identifies Melchizedek with Christ is a matter of debate, as outlined by R. Gryson, "Melchisédech, type du Christ, selon saint Ambroise," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 10 (1979), pp. 180-81; at p. 193, Gryson points out that Ambrose uses Melchizedek in *De sacramentis* and *De mysteriis* in order to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian economy over the Jewish, and particularly the superiority of the Eucharist over the manna of Exodus. Ambrose insists on the greater antiquity of Christian sacraments in the following passages: *De mysteriis* VIII.44 (SC 25bis:180): "summo studio uolumus conprobare quia et antiquiora sunt sacramenta ecclesiae quam synagogae et praestantiora quam manna est"; *De sacramentis* I.i.11 (SC 25bis:66): "diuiniora et priora sacramenta sunt Christianorum quam Iudaeorum"; and IV.iii.11 (SC 25bis:106-8): "Ergo primum intellege sacramenta haec quae accipis anteriora esse quam sunt sacramenta quaecumque Iudaei habere se dicunt et prius coepisse populum Christianum quam coepisse populum Iudaeorum, sed nos in praedestinatione, illum in nomine."

51 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* II.vii.23 (SC 25bis:88): "Cum enim mergis, mortis suscipis et sepulturae similitudinem, crucis illius accipis sacramentum, quod in cruce Christus pependit et clauis confixum est corpus"; see Botte, Introduction, p. 35, and William Ledwich, "Baptism, Sacrament of the Cross: Looking Behind St. Ambrose," in *The Sacrifice of Praise: Studies on the Themes of Thanksgiving and Redemption in the Central Prayers of the Eucharistic and Baptismal Liturgies*, Bibliotheca Ephemerides Liturgicae Subsidia 19 (Rome: Centro Liturgico Vincenziano, 1981) 201.

52 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* II.ii.6 (SC 25bis:76): "Vide ubi baptizaris, unde sit baptisma nisi de cruce Christi, de morte Christi. Ibi est omne mysterium quia pro te passus est. In ipso redimeris, in ipso saluaris," my translation.

effect of the baptismal sacrament; without water, the invisible mystery of regeneration (*regenerationis mysterium*) is not present.<sup>53</sup>

Above all in Ambrose's exposition of the Eucharist, *sacramentum* appears as the material element experienced through the senses of the Christian worshiper. The words of consecration, Christ's words at the Last Supper, also appear to belong particularly to the sacrament. Although the bread remains quite ordinary in appearance, "the words of Christ make this the sacrament," the flesh of Christ.<sup>54</sup> The neophytes that Ambrose addresses have received the sacrament,<sup>55</sup> they have fixated their attention upon the sacraments placed upon the altar, and they have marveled upon seeing only ordinary created things.<sup>56</sup> Several times in *De sacramentis*, Ambrose utilizes the verb *consequor* to describe how the newly baptized attained, acquired, or perhaps approached the tangible sacraments when they came unto the altar,<sup>57</sup> and by receiving the sacraments attained invisible grace and strength.<sup>58</sup>

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53 Ambrose, *De mysteriis* IV.20 (SC 25bis:166): "Ideoque legisti quod tres testes in baptisate *unum sunt*, aqua, sanguis et spiritus, quia si in unum horum detrahas, non stat baptismatis sacramentum. Quid est enim aqua sine cruce Christi nisi elementum commune sine ullo sacramenti profectu? Nec iterum sine aqua regenerationis mysterium est"; for more on the connection between the Eucharist and the cross in Ambrose, see Francesconi, *Storia e simbolo*, pp. 314-15. Cf. Ambrose's use of the waters of Marah to this effect in *De sacramentis* II.iv.13 (SC 25bis:80): "Amara ergo aqua, sed ubi crucem Christi, ubi acceperit caeleste sacramentum, incipit esse dulcis et suavis. Et merito dulcis in qua culpa reuocatur."

54 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.iv.14 (SC 25bis:108-10): "Tu forte dicis: Meus panis est usitatus. Sed panis iste panis est ante uerba sacramentorum; ubi accesserit consecratio de pane fit caro Christi.... Ergo sermo Christi hoc conficit sacramentum."

55 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.ii.7 (SC 25bis:104): "Veniebas ergo desiderans, utpote qui tantam gratiam uideras, ueniebas desiderans ad altare, quo acciperes sacramentum. Dicit anima tua: *Et introibo ad altare dei mei, ad deum qui laetificat iuuentutem meam*. Deposuisti peccatorum senectutem, sumpsisti gratiae iuuentutem. Hoc praestiterunt tibi sacramenta caelestia."

56 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* IV.iii.8 (SC 25bis:106): "Venisti ad altare, adtendisti sacramenta posita super altare et ipsam quidem miratus es creaturam; tamen creatura sollempnis et nota."

57 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* V.iii.12 (SC 25bis:124): "Ergo uenisti ad altare, accepisti corpus Christi. Audi iterum quae sacramenta es consecutus. Audi dicentem sanctum Daud. Et ille in spiritu haec mysteria praeuidebat et laetabatur et nihil sibi abesse dicebat. Quare? Quia qui acceperit corpus Christi non esuriet in aeternum"; the saying of David mentioned here is Psalm 22, *Dominus pascit me* – as Ambrose cites it in V.iii.13 (SC 25bis:124-26). See also *De sacramentis* V.iii.14 (SC 25bis:126): "Venistis ergo ad altare, accepistis gratiam Christi, sacramenta estis caelestia consecuti."

58 Ambrose, *De sacramentis* VI.i.3 (SC 25bis:138): "in similitudinem quidem accipis sacramenta, sed uerae naturae gratiam uirtutemque consequeris."

These brief considerations confirm what Enrico Mazza, building upon Francesconi's study, observes regarding Ambrose's doctrine:

. . . Ambrose wishes to prevent "what is seen" from being confused with "that great mystery"; it follows from this that the *mysterium* consists precisely in what is *unseen*. If in the celebration of the sacrament, the *mysterium* is the invisible aspect that is brought to pass by the Spirit and is opposed to the sign of water, which has "been seen daily," then we can draw the following conclusion: Ambrose is here setting forth a theology in which the distinction between *sacramentum* and *mysterium* is a necessity, even if this necessity is not immediately evident at the level of terminology.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Ambrose distinguishes between the waters that one sees and the "great mystery, 'that the eye has not seen and the ear has not heard and has not arisen in the heart of man'" (1 Cor 2:9).<sup>60</sup> The *mysterium*, then, is neither seen nor heard. The Christian community sensibly experiences the *sacramentum* in worship, whereas the *mysterium* is the hidden reality effected by divine power, the working out of God's salvific plan in history and above all in the cross of Christ.

## VI. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Augustine profoundly influenced the development of *sacramentum* as a theological notion. Yet his use of the term is quite complex, and it carries a long series of meanings in his writings.<sup>61</sup> While he uses the

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<sup>59</sup> Mazza, *Mystagogy*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Ambrose, *De mysteriis* IV.19 (SC 25bis:164): "Ideo tibi ante praedictum est ut non hoc solum crederes quod uidebas, ne forte et tu diceres: Hoc est illud magnum mysterium quod oculus non uidit nec auris audiuit nec in cor hominis adscendit [1 Cor 2:9]? Aquas uideo quas uidebam quotidie, istae me habent mundare in quas saepe descendi et numquam mundatus sum? Hinc cognosce quod aqua non mundat sine spiritu."

<sup>61</sup> For a summary description with accompanying bibliography, see Emmanuel J. Cutrone, "Sacraments," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald et al. (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1999) 741-47. Especially noteworthy are the following: André Mandouze, "A propos de *sacramentum* chez s. Augustin: polyvalence lexicologique et foisonnement théologique," in *Mélanges offerts à Mademoiselle Christine Mohrmann*, ed. L. J. Engels et al. (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1963) 222-32; Basil Studer, "*Sacramentum et exemplum* chez saint Augustin," *Studia patristica* (1985) 570-88; and Josef Finkenzeller, *Die Lehre von den Sakramenten im allgemeinen: von der Schrift bis zur Scholastik*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Band 4, Faszikel 1a (Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 38-61.

term to refer to key Christian liturgical events – especially baptism and the Eucharist<sup>62</sup> – he uses it also for a number of ceremonials involved in the rites, such as the exorcisms and salt of the catechumens.<sup>63</sup> Another broad, indeed “innumerable,” category of sacraments in Augustine’s writings encompasses the events, people and objects of Scripture – “things spoken, read and understood.”<sup>64</sup> If the list ended here, the problem might still admit of easy solution, but in addition Augustine speaks of the sacrament of Scripture, the sacrament of marriage, the sacrament of charity, the sacrament of the Incarnation – and this is only a beginning.<sup>65</sup> William Van Roo provides a helpful, although

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62 Augustine, *Sermo CCXXVII: Sermo beati Augustini episcopi de sacramentis habitus die sancto Paschae* (SC 116:234): “mensae dominicae sacramentum,” and *ibid.*, p. 236: “Sacramentum mensae dominicae”; *De baptismo* IV.21.28 (CSEL 51:255): “nec ideo tamen sacramento baptismatis, quo iste nondum, ille iam inbutus est, facimus iniuriam aut catechumeni sacramentum sacramento baptismi praefendum putamus, cum aliquem catechumenum aliquo baptizato fidiorem melioremque cognoscimus”; *Epistula CLXXXV* 6.24 (CSEL 57:23): “conuiuium domini unitas est corporis Christi non solum in sacramento altaris sed etiam in uinculo pacis”; see Cutrone, “Sacraments,” 743, and Mandouze, “A propos de *sacramentum* chez s. Augustin,” 222-23: “... un bon tiers des emplois augustiniens de *sacramentum* concernant précisément les rites du baptême et de l’eucharistie. Il n’est que de jeter un coup d’œil sur le tableau des *sacraments rites chrétiens* pour constater que, loin de chercher à isoler en quelque sorte deux cas privilégiés, Augustin omet rarement d’en faire mention au cours des énumérations plus ou moins développées qu’il donne de *sacramenta* fort variés.”

63 Augustine, referring to some kind of food received by the catechumens, writes in *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* II.26 (CSEL 60:113): “nam et catechumenos secundum quendam modum suum per signum Christi et orationem manus inpositionis puto sanctificari et, quod accipiunt quamuis non sit corpus Christi, sanctum est tamen et sanctius quam cibi quibus alimur, quoniam sacramentum est”; *Sermo CCXXVII: Sermo beati Augustini episcopi de sacramentis habitus die sancto Paschae* (SC 116:236): “Sic et uos ante ieiunii humiliatione et exorcismi sacramento quasi molebamini.”

64 Frederik van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961) 281.

65 Augustine, *Sermo II.7* (CCSL 41:14): “Ante omnia tamen, fratres, hoc in nomine domini et admonemus quantum possumus, et praecipimus, ut quando auditis exponi sacramentum scripturae narrantis quae gesta sunt, prius illud quod lectum est credatis sic gestum, quomodo lectum est, ne subtracto fundamento rei gestae, quasi in aere quaeratis aedificare”; *De sancta uirginitate* 12.12 (CSEL 41:245): “quia sacramentum conubii non uiolant”; Augustinus, *Questionum evangeliorum* I.27 (CCSL 44b:22): “uel ad sacramentum caritatis ostendendum, minus enim quam inter duos caritas esse non potest.” For a longer list, see Cutrone, “Sacraments,” 742.

highly simplified and admittedly fluid, three-fold differentiation of the general kinds of *sacramentum* found in Augustine's writings: "(1) rites or ceremonies of the Old Testament or of the New, or of any religion; (2) symbols or figures; (3) mysteries in the sense of revealed dogmas of the Christian religion."<sup>66</sup> The first kind demonstrates that Tertullian's distinction between Christian sacraments and pagan mysteries had faded within two centuries. The second and third meanings accord on many levels with Ambrose's precedent, as might be expected in light of Augustine's relationship with Ambrose: Augustine learned to interpret Scripture and underwent the rites of initiation into the Church under Ambrose's tutelage.<sup>67</sup>

Like Ambrose, Augustine associates the *sacramentum* of a certain rite with its tangible elements.<sup>68</sup> Augustine also expatiates on his Milanese mentor's stress upon the verbal formula in the sacraments of Christian worship, and articulates a clear distinction between that formula and the element, such as water in baptism.<sup>69</sup> Although Augustine did not pen the phrase often attributed to him, *sacramentum est signum rei sacrae* (a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing), his sign theory did indeed have a major impact on sacramental theology.<sup>70</sup> Since an analysis that would do justice to this impact and the many meanings that *sacramentum* exhibits in Augustine's works is not possible in the space available here, this brief overview must suffice for present purposes.

## VII. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE

Isidore, who held the bishopric of Seville from 600 to 636, provides a compendium that proved an influential source of common knowledge during the Middle Ages in his books of *Etymologies*. As one might expect from a work with such a name, Isidore harkens back to the root meaning of *sacramentum* occasionally reflected in ante-Nicene authors such as Tertullian. This leads him to emphasize the hidden or secret element of *sacramentum* with regard to particular rites of Christian worship:

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66 William A. Van Roo, *The Christian Sacrament* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1992) 39.

67 Augustine, *Confessiones* V.xiv.24 (CCSL 27:71).

68 For example, Augustine, *De civitate Dei* X.5 (CCSL 47:277): "Sacrificium ergo visibile inuisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, id est sacrum signum est."

69 For example, Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium* LXXX.3 (CCSL 36:529): "Detrahe uerbum, et quid est aqua nisi aqua? Accedit uerbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum, etiam ipsum tamquam uisibile uerbum."

70 I plan to treat of this topic at length in a subsequent article.

Sacramentum est in aliqua celebratione, cum res gesta ita fit ut aliquid significare intelligatur, quod sancte accipiendum est. Sunt autem sacramenta baptismum et chrisma, corpus et sanguis. Quae ob id sacramenta dicuntur, quia sub tegumento corporalium rerum virtus divina secretius salutem eorundem sacramentorum operatur; unde et a secretis virtutibus vel a sacris sacramenta dicuntur. Quae ideo fructuose penes Ecclesiam fiunt, quia sanctus in ea manens Spiritus eundem sacramentorum operatur effectum . . . unde et Graece mysterium dicitur quod secretam et reconditam habeat dispositionem.<sup>71</sup>

A sacrament is in some celebration, when the rite is so performed that it might be understood to signify something that is going to be received in a holy manner. For baptism and chrism, the Body and Blood, are sacraments. These things are called sacraments from this, that under the covering of corporal things, divine power very secretly effects salvation of the same sacraments; wherefore sacraments are named from *secretis virtutibus* (hidden powers) or from *sacris* (sacred things). They therefore occur fruitfully within the Church, because the Holy Spirit remaining in it produces the same effect of the sacraments ... whence it is called *mysterium* in Greek because it has a secret and hidden disposition.

Phrases from this definition exercised much authority in discussions of *sacramentum* during the scholastic period.<sup>72</sup> The *res gesta*, here translated as “rite,” is the action taking place in Christian worship – in this context used without reference to the scriptural typology seen in Ambrose and Augustine. Isidore also differs from Ambrose and Augustine insofar as he identifies the sacraments not as the bread and wine, but as the Body and Blood.<sup>73</sup> The emphasis on the hidden

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71 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum* VI.19.40-41, ed. W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911), n.p., my translation.

72 The form this definition took is noted in J. De Ghellinck, “Un chapitre dans l’histoire de la définition des sacrements au XIIe siècle,” in *Mélanges Mandonnet: Études d’histoire littéraire et doctrinale du Moyen Age*, vol. 2, Bibliothèque Thomiste 14 (Paris: Vrin, 1930) 79: “Sacramentum est in quo sub tegumento rerum visibilium, divina virtus secretius operatur salutem.”

73 As Damien Van den Eynde explains in “Les définitions des sacrements pendant la première période de la théologie scolastique (1050-1235),” *Antonianum* 24 (1949) 186, for Augustine the Body and Blood of Christ is the *res sacramenti*, whereas for Isidore it is the *sacramentum* itself. See also Isidore of Seville, *Allegoriae quaedam sacrae scripturae* 19 (PL 83:104): “Melchisedech (*Genes. XIV*), qui de fructibus terrae sacrificium Domino obtulit, regnum Christi, qui est verus rex iustitiae, et sacerdotium figuravit, cuius corporis et sanguinis sacramentum, id est, oblatio panis et vini in toto orbe terrarum offertur”; *Mysticorum expositiones sacramentorum seu*

element of the sacrament, however, most clearly stands out in Isidore's definition. It appears to represent the fruit of reflection upon biblical uses of the word as much as Isidore's dubious etymology. Van Roo comments that for Isidore, as for ancient Latin scriptural translations, a sacrament hides under sensible objects the Holy Spirit's action effecting salvation:

The whole emphasis is on secret power: The Holy Spirit working under the cover of perceptible bodily things. These perceptible things are not signs so much as covers which hide. Understandably then Isidore concludes with the reference to the Greek *mysterion*, stressing the hidden, the secret.<sup>74</sup>

As a final note, in this rather unique context of an etymological study, Isidore parts from Ambrose as well as from Tertullian by conflating the notions of *sacramentum* and *mysterium*.

Nonetheless, in his *De ecclesiasticis officiis* (*On Ecclesiastical Offices*) or *De origine officiorum* (*On the Origin of the Offices*) – what today would be called a treatise on the liturgy – Isidore retains much of the content with which *sacramentum* was charged by his predecessors. For example, Isidore follows Ambrose in using *sacramentum* for biblical types that were hidden in the Old Testament but are revealed in the New. He divides the ages of the world into three categories: before the Mosaic Law, during the time of the Mosaic Law, and during the age of grace following the redemption of Christ. In this third age, “the *sacramentum* that was hidden in prophetic enigma is now manifest.”<sup>75</sup> Isidore here appears to follow both Ambrose and Vulgate usage, while retaining his emphasis on the hidden.

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*quaestiones in vetus testamentum, in Genesin* 11.5 (PL 83:240): “Ipse quoque sacerdos aeternus, ad quem dicitur: *Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech* (*Psalms*. CIX). Utique propter mysterium sacramenti, quod Christianis celebrare praecepit, ut non secundum Aaron pecudum victimas, sed oblationem panis et vini, id est, corporis et sanguinis eius sacramentum, in sacrificium offeramus”; *Mysticorum expositiones sacramentorum seu quaestiones in vetus testamentum, in Genesin* 3.8 (PL 83:217): “Dormit Adam, et fit illi mulier de latere. Patitur Christus in cruce, pungitur latus lancea, et profluunt sacramenta sanguinis, ex quibus formetur Ecclesia.”

74 Van Roo, *Christian Sacrament*, 44.

75 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.32.4-5 (CCSL 113:36-37): “Quia uero in toto tempore saeculi nunc tertium tempus apparuit ideo resurrectio domini triduana est; Primum enim tempus est ante legem, secundum sub lege, tertium sub gratia ubi iam manifestatum est sacramentum quod erat in prophetico enigmate occultum”; for a similar passage, see *Etymologiarum* VI.17.15-16, ed. Lindsay.

Like Tertullian and Augustine, Isidore frequently uses the word *sacramentum* in reference to the Eucharist and baptism.<sup>76</sup> Three examples follow:

Sacrificium autem, quod a Christianis deo offertur, primum Christus dominus noster et magister instituit quando commendauit apostolis corpus et sanguinem suum priusquam traderetur, sicut et legitur in euangelio: *Accepit, inquit, Iesus panem et calicem et benedicens dedit eis.* Quod quidem sacramentum Melchisedech rex Salem figuratiter in typum corporis et sanguinis Christi primus obtulit, primusque mysterium tanti sacrificii imaginarie idem expressit, praeferens similitudinem domini et saluatoris nostri Iesu Christi sacerdotis aeterni, ad quem dicitur: *Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.*<sup>77</sup>

The sacrifice that is offered to God by Christians, Christ our Lord and teacher first instituted when he commended his Body to the apostles and before he handed over his Blood, just as is read in the Gospel: “Jesus took the bread” and the chalice, it says, and, “blessing, gave to them.” Melchizedek the king of Salem figuratively in type first offered the same sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, and first expressed the same mystery of so great a sacrifice by an image, presenting the similitude of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the eternal priest, to whom it is said: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Iam nunc rationem sacramentorum siue ordinem ad fidem uenientium persequamur; quorum primus gradus est caticuminorum, secundus competentium, tertius baptizatorum.<sup>78</sup>

Now for the plan of the sacraments or the order we follow in coming to the faith; of which the first is the step of the catechumens; the second of the *competentes*, the third of the baptized.

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76 Following the biblical precedent and Augustine, he also uses it for marriage in *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.20.10-11 (CCSL 113:93): “Nuptialia autem bona tria sunt: proles, fides et sacramentum.... Sacramentum autem ideo inter coniugatos dictum est quia, sicut non potest ecclesia diuidi a Christo, ita nec uxor a uiro”; cf. *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.20.3 (CCSL 113:90): “Item secundum spiritalis nuptias, sicut unus Christus et una Ecclesia, sic unus vir et una uxor tam secundum generis documentum quam secundum Christi sacramentum.”

77 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* I.18.1 (CCSL 113:19), my translation.

78 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.20.14 (CCSL 113:95), my translation; cf. *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.17.5 (CCSL 113:81): “unum baptismi sacramentum”; *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.25.1 (CCSL 113:102): “Baptismi sacramentum”; *De fide catholica ex veteri et novo testamento contra Iudaeos* II.24.2 (PL 83:530): “Ad quod baptismi sacramentum idem Isaias Iudaeos et gentes ita provocat”; *De fide catholica ex veteri et novo testamento contra Iudaeos* II.24.8 (PL 83:532): “baptismi sacramenta sub figura transitus maris.”

In patre autem et filio et spiritu sancto salutaria baptismi dona consistunt; unde nequaquam baptismi sanctificatur officio, nisi qui sub Trinitatis tinguitur sacramento.<sup>79</sup>

The salutary gifts of baptism consist in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; wherefore the office of baptism is not at all sanctified, unless it is dipped under the sacrament of the Trinity.

In the first of these passages Isidore again identifies the sacrament with the Body and Blood, rather than with the bread. Furthermore, he again associates *sacramentum* and *mysterium*, this time by juxtaposing Melchizedek's prevenient offering of the sacrament with his prevenient expression of the mystery. In the second passage cited above, Isidore uses the phrase *ratio sacramentorum* much more precisely than Ambrose. Whereas for Ambrose it indicates a broader and deeper, typological explanation of the sacraments, for Isidore it indicates the ordering of the initiation rites. Yet like Ambrose, Isidore contrasts the Christian *sacramentum* with the rites of the Jews.<sup>80</sup> Following Ambrose in still another respect, Isidore links the term *sacramentum* to Christian liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist and baptism, while occasionally applying a broader use.

In short, in his use of the term *sacramentum*, Isidore retains much of the content that the word had for his predecessors. He obscures some of that content, while on other levels introducing clarifications and refinements occasioned by the context and method of his own work.

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79 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.24.4 (CCSL 113:104), my translation.

80 Isidore, *De fide catholica ex veteri et novo testamento contra Judaeos* II.27.2 (PL 83:535): "Non ergo jam victimas Judaicas, quales sacerdos Aaron obtulit, credentes offerunt; sed quales idem Melchisedech rex Salem immolavit, id est, panem et vinum, quod est corporis et sanguinis Domini verissimum sacramentum"; cf. *De fide catholica ex veteri et novo testamento contra Judaeos* II.19.1 (PL 83:528): "Hactenus ritus Judaicos et celebrationes divinis testimoniis confutavimus; dehinc sacramenta nostrae fidei perstringamus, manifestantes primum quia non solum propter Judaeos Testamentum legis datum est, sed etiam propter omnes gentes"; *De fide catholica ex veteri et novo testamento contra Judaeos* II.27.1 (PL 83:535): "Et quia panis et calicis sacramentum Deo placitum esset in holocausto, Scripturarum testimoniis non taceatur. Hujus enim sacrificii praefiguratio in sacerdotio Melchisedech antea fuit expressa. Iste enim sacerdos Dei excelsi, cum benediceret Abrahae, ob mysterium futuri holocausti panem et vinum in sacrificio Domino obtulit.... Hoc est juxta ritum hujusmodi sacrificii, quod et in passione sua perficiens Christus implevit, quodque etiam apostolis in commemorationem suam fieri jussit."

## VIII. THE MIDDLE AGES

The goal of providing an accessible historical survey demands only the passing mention of a few monumental contributions following Isidore.

Hugh of St Victor (d. 1141) defines *sacramentum* in his treatise *De sacramentis*:

a sacrament is a corporeal or material element set before the senses without, representing by similitude (*ex similitudine*) and signifying by institution (*ex institutione*) and containing by sanctification (*ex sanctificatione continens*) some invisible and spiritual grace.<sup>81</sup>

Each of the elements of Hugh's definition can be discerned in the theologians who precede him. Isidore's *Etymologies* contains many of them: the physically sensible element, its likeness to the grace it effects, and its sanctification. Hugh's heightened consciousness of the role of the human minister's benediction especially reflects the influence of Isidore.<sup>82</sup> The notion of sanctification also distantly echoes Tertullian's etymological approach. Despite the fact that his definition is largely derivative, Hugh takes a major step forward by uniting these elements into one statement. Moreover, newer elements also are evident: for example, Hugh highlights their divine institution, an emphasis which is nascent in Ambrose's insistence upon the words of Christ. In short, Hugh effectively fuses and adapts material from his predecessors to lay the foundation of the more rigorous definitions of sacraments that will follow him.<sup>83</sup>

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81 Hugh of St Victor, *De sacramentis christianae fidei* 1.9.2 (PL 176:317): "Quid sit sacramentum, doctores brevi descriptione designaverant: 'Sacramentum est sacrae rei signum' ... Si quis autem plenius et perfectius quid sit sacramentum diffinire voluerit, diffinire potest quod 'sacramentum est corporale vel materiale elementum foris sensibiliter propositum ex similitudine repraesentans, et ex institutione significans, et ex sanctificatione continens aliquam invisibilem et spiritalem gratiam,'" trans. Roy J. Deferrari, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith* (Cambridge MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1951) 155.

82 Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* II.8.3 (CCSL 113:67), where Isidore speaks of the respective offices of priest and deacon: "Nam sicut in sacerdote consecratio, ita in ministro dispensatio sacramenti est ... ille oblata sanctificat, hic sanctificata dispensat."

83 Van den Eynde, "Les définitions des sacramento," 215-16; Johann Auer, *A General Doctrine of the Sacraments and the Mystery of the Eucharist*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Hugh M. Riley, *Dogmatic Theology* 6 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) 12.

In the earliest systematic treatise on the sacraments in general, Peter Lombard (d. 1160) builds upon Hugh's definition of *sacramentum*. Lombard is one of the first, and certainly the most influential, to enumerate the seven sacraments of the New Law.<sup>84</sup> Drawing from an anonymous work titled *Summa sententiarum*, Lombard writes:

For every sacrament is a sign, but the converse is not true. A sacrament bears a resemblance to the thing, of which it is a sign.... For a sacrament is properly so called, because it is a sign (*signum*) of the grace of God and the expression (*forma*) of invisible grace, so that it bears its image (*imaginem*) and is manifest as its cause (*causa*). Sacraments, therefore, were not instituted merely in order to signify something, but also as a means of sanctification.<sup>85</sup>

Again, the fundamental continuity of this definition with the manner in which previous Latin ecclesiastical authors employed *sacramentum* is abundantly evident. For example, the attention to the sacrament's power of sanctification reflects Tertullian, Isidore, and Hugh of St Victor. Yet Lombard achieves a level of precision that surpasses anything from the patristic period. Two aspects of Lombard's contribution are particularly noteworthy. First, he centers his definition on grace and focuses on the sacrament as cause: henceforth, the seven sacraments Lombard enumerates are regarded as efficacious because they are causes of grace.<sup>86</sup> Second, Lombard does not simply identify the corporal element with the sacrament, but rather combines the material element and the formula which accompanies the administration of the sacrament – as did Ambrose in his catechesis on the Eucharist.<sup>87</sup> The

<sup>84</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* IV.ii.1(11), in *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (Rome: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas Grottaferrata, 1981) 239: "Iam ad sacramenta novae Legis accedamus: quae sunt baptismus, confirmatio, panis benedictionis, id est eucharistia, poenitentia, unctio extrema, ordo, coniugium"; see Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1992) 52.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sententiae* IV.i.1-2, in *Sententiae in IV libris*, 233: "Omne enim sacramentum est signum, sed non e converso. Sacramentum eius rei similitudinem gerit, cuius signum est.... Sacramentum enim proprie dicitur, quod ita signum est gratiae Dei et invisibilis gratiae forma, ut ipsius imaginem gerat et causa existat. Non igitur significandi tantum gratia sacramenta instituta sunt, sed et sanctificandi," trans. Elizabeth Frances Rogers, *Peter Lombard and the Sacramental System* (Merrick NY: Richwood, 1976) 80; I have emended slightly Rogers' translation.

<sup>86</sup> Van den Eynde, "Les définitions des sacrements," 225-26.

<sup>87</sup> A. Michel, "Sacrements," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, contenant l'exposé des doctrines de la théologie catholique, leurs preuves et leur histoire*,

merits of Lombard's definition are such that the subsequent history of the definitions of *sacramentum* might largely be characterized as a history of Lombard's formula.<sup>88</sup>

Thomas Aquinas provides the consummate scholastic theological discussion of *sacramentum* in the third part of the *Summa theologiae*, questions 60-65. Beginning with the Augustinian given that a sacrament is a sign, Aquinas provides an anthropological center to Lombard's definition when he writes that *sacramentum*, properly understood, "is a sign of a sacred thing, insofar as it sanctifies men."<sup>89</sup> It sanctifies us by bringing together the past, present, and future: calling to mind the passion of Christ, showing forth the grace now effected in us by the passion, and foretelling the future glory of the saints.<sup>90</sup> After setting forth basic elements of the definition, Aquinas considers the necessity of the sacraments (q. 61), their principle effect, grace (q. 62), the character imprinted by some sacraments (q. 63), their principal and ministerial causes (q. 64), and the number of sacraments, namely, seven (q. 65).

The seventh session of the Council of Trent in 1547 confirmed many developments in the definition of *sacramentum* as elements of the Church's doctrine: there are seven sacraments of the New Law; they are instituted by Christ; they are signs of grace that contain the grace they signify.<sup>91</sup> The fact that the council does not mention the broader uses of *sacramentum* among the Latin Fathers does not mean that they were forgotten. This is evident in the *Roman Catechism* (1566) produced in the wake of the Council of Trent, which includes the following passage early in its discussion of the sacraments:

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vol. 14, ed. Alfred Vacant, Eugène Mangenot, et al. (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1939) 531; see also the lengthy discussion of Lombard's definition in De Ghellinck, "Un chapitre dans l'histoire de la définition," 81-96.

88 Van den Eynde, "Les définitions des sacrements," 228.

89 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [henceforth: ST] III, q. 60, art. 2, in *Summa theologica*, vol. 4, ed. Bernardo Maria de Rubeis et al. (Taurini: Marietti, 1932) 785: "Et ideo proprie dicitur sacramentum quod est signum alicujus rei sacrae ad homines pertinentis; ut scilicet proprie dicatur sacramentum secundum quod nunc de sacramentis loquimur, quod est 'signum rei sacrae, in quantum est sanctificans homines.'"

90 ST III, q. 60, art. 3, ed. De Rubeis, 786: "Unde sacramentum est et signum rememorative ejus quod praecessit, scilicet passionis Christi, et demonstrative ejus quod in nobis efficitur per Christi passionem, scilicet gratiae, at prognosticum, id est, praenuntiativum futurae gloriae."

91 Council of Trent, seventh session, *De sacramentis in genere*, can. 1, 6, in *Concilii Tridentini canones et decreta*, ed. Engelbert Sterckz (Mechlin: Van Velsen-Van der Elst, 1847) 53-54.

But by the Latin Fathers who have written on theological subjects, the word *sacrament* is used to signify a sacred thing which lies concealed. The Greeks, to express the same idea, made use of the word *mystery*. This we understand to be the meaning of the word, when, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, it is said: *That he might make known to us the mystery (sacramentum) of his will* [Eph 1:9]; and to Timothy: *great is the mystery (sacramentum) of godliness* [1 Tm 3:16]; and in the Book of Wisdom: *They knew not the secrets (sacramenta) of God* [Wis 2:22]. In these and many other passages the word *sacrament*, it will be perceived, signifies nothing more than a holy thing that lies concealed and hidden.

The Latin Doctors, therefore, deemed the word a very appropriate term to express certain sensible signs which at once communicate grace, declare it, and, as it were, place it before the eyes.<sup>92</sup>

This description of patristic uses reflects Ambrose and Augustine as reflected through the prisms of Isidore's *Etymologies* and, above all, Latin scriptural translations. With these words the Roman Catechism reasonably explains why the doctors of more recent years adapted the word *sacramentum* from patristic and biblical uses, to provide it with a new and different, but related meaning.

By the close of the Middle Ages, *sacramentum* had become a heavily loaded theological and dogmatic word, with its primary referents in the ambit of liturgical practice. The highly developed definitions of the period overshadowed the complexities of usage in the ante-Nicene era and the typological approach of Ambrose and Augustine, but, as the above passage from the Roman Catechism demonstrates, they were not forgotten.

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92 *Catechismus Romanus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini ad parochos* II.1.2, 4th ed. (Ratisbon: Pustet, 1907) 109-10: "Verum apud latinos Patres, qui res divinas scriptis tradiderunt, Sacramenti nomen aliquam rem sacram, quae in occulto latet, declarat, quemadmodum Graeci ad eandem rem significandam mysterii vocabulo usi sunt. In eam vero sententiam Sacramenti vocem accipiendam esse intelligimus, quum ad Ephesios scribitur: 'Ut notum faceret nobis Sacramentum voluntatis suae'. Deinde ad Timotheum: 'Magnum est pietatis Sacramentum'. Praeterea in libro Sapientiae: 'Nescierunt Sacramenta Dei'. Quibus in locis et aliis multis licet animadvertere, Sacramentum nihil aliud, nisi rem sacram, abditam atque occultam significare. Quare latini Doctores signa quaedam sensibus subjecta, quae gratiam, quam efficiunt, simul etiam declarant, ac veluti ante oculos ponunt, Sacramenta commode appellari posse existimarunt," trans. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan, *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests* (Rockford IL: TAN, 1982) 142.

## IX. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council directly recalled the broader patristic understanding of *sacramentum*. The council also demonstrates awareness of the distinction between *sacramentum*<sup>93</sup> and *mysterium*. Like Ambrose, *Sacrosanctum concilium* teaches that the *sacramenta* derive their power from the paschal *mysterium* of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.<sup>94</sup> The revised liturgy occasionally reflects this notion,<sup>95</sup> as does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when it discusses the paschal *mysterium* in the *sacramenta* of the Church.<sup>96</sup>

The closest the documents of the Second Vatican Council come to defining the sacraments is in the following passage from *Sacrosanctum concilium*:

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ and finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but

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93 Van Roo outlines this in *Christian Sacrament*, 91-98; Van Roo also discusses six modern theologians to whom he attributes the reawakening of the broader sense of sacrament in pp. 69-89: Johann Adam Möhler, Matthias Joseph Scheeben, Henri de Lubac, Otto Semmelroth, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeeckx.

94 Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* (4 December 1963) [henceforth SC] 61, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner et al. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990) 832: "... ex mysterio paschali passionis mortis et resurrectionis Christi, a quo omnia sacramenta et sacramentalia suam virtutem derivant."

95 E.g., Collecta, Feria III hebdomodae sanctae, in *Missale Romanum*, editio typica tertia (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2002) p. 287: "Omnipotens sempiternae Deus, da nobis ita dominicae passionis sacramenta peragere, ut indulgentiam percipere mereamur"; Ad nonam, Dominica de passione Domini, in *Officium divinum: Liturgia horarum*, vol. 2, *Tempus quadregesimae, sacrum triduum paschale, tempus paschale* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1986) 342: "V. Adoremus crucis signaculum. R. Per quod salutis sumpsimus sacramentum."

96 *Catechismus catholicae ecclesiae* [henceforth: CCE] (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) 1113 ff. See also CCE 1075, where liturgical catechesis is described as follows: "Catechesis liturgica in mysterium Christi conatur introducere ... ab invisibili ad visibile procedens, a significanti ad significatum, a 'sacramentis' ad 'mysteria.'" See also CCE 774: "Verbum graecum μυστήριον duobus vocabulis in linguam latinam versum est: *mysterium* et *sacramentum*. In ulteriore interpretatione, vocabulum *sacramentum* magis visibile exprimit signum realitatis occultae salutis, quam vocabulum *mysterium* denotat."

by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it; that is why they are called “sacraments of faith.” They do indeed impart grace, but in addition the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly and to practice charity.<sup>97</sup>

Three movements appear in this passage, one corresponding to each of the three sentences.<sup>98</sup> The first sentence describes what the sacraments do, rather than what they are. The second sentence turns from the purposes of the sacraments to their relationship with faith, with an accent placed on symbolism. The final sentence highlights the efficaciousness of the sacraments vis-à-vis their relationship to grace. The passage overall reflects both patristic and scholastic concepts, respective examples of each being the attention to the experiential component of sacramental celebration which Ambrose exploited, and the conferring of grace seen in Peter Lombard.

As a final note, the council’s description of the Church itself as a sacrament profoundly impacts the meaning of the term. This is not an invention of the modern period. When *Sacrosanctum concilium* first calls the Church *unitatis sacramentum* (sacrament of unity), it cites Cyprian, bishop of Carthage in the mid-third century.<sup>99</sup> Although this essay does not trace it, the understanding of the Church as a sacrament “that sees the unity of the divine and the human, the visible and the invisible, the historical and the metahistorical,” was particularly widespread among Latin authors until the twelfth cen-

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97 SC 59, ed. Tanner, 59, translation in *The Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Marianne Lorraine Trouvé (Boston: Daughters of St Paul, 1999) 66.

98 My observations in this paragraph are guided by Henri Bourgeois, “Les sacrements selon Vatican II,” in *Histoire des dogmes*, vol. 3, *Les signes du salut*, by Henri Bourgeois, Bernard Sesboué, and Paul Tihon (Paris: Desclée, 1995) 265-68.

99 SC 26 and note 33, ed. Tanner, 826; the footnote refers to Cyprian’s *De unitate catholicae ecclesiae* 7 and *Epistula* 66. Cyprian, *De unitate catholicae ecclesiae* 7 (CCSL 3:254-55): “Hoc unitatis sacramentum, hoc unculum concordiae inseparabiliter cohaerentis ostenditur quando in euangelio tunica Domini Iesu Christi non diuiditur omnino nec scinditur ... sacramento uestis et signo declarauit ecclesiae unitatem.” In *Epistula* LXVI 8.3 (CCSL 3B:443), Cyprian addresses the importance of the office of bishop for preserving the unity of the Church without using the word *sacramentum*. Other examples in which Cyprian treats of the sacrament of unity include *Epistula* LXXIII 11 (CCSL 3B:542), where he mentions baptism, and *Epistula* LXXIV 11 (CCSL 3B:578), where he so closely associates the Church and baptism that one may read either or both together as the *unitatis sacramentum*.

ture.<sup>100</sup> Highlighting this notion, the first paragraph of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* teaches:

Since the Church is in Christ as sacrament or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, closely following the teaching of previous councils, She [the Church] intends to declare her own nature and universal mission to her own faithful and to the whole world.<sup>101</sup>

*Lumen gentium* explains that God has called and constituted the Church “in order that it might be to all and to each the visible sacrament of this saving unity” that has its source in Christ.<sup>102</sup> The dogmatic constitution also designates the Church as the *universale salutis sacramentum* or universal sacrament of salvation,<sup>103</sup> a phrase which is quoted and further expanded in both *Ad gentes* and *Gaudium et spes*.<sup>104</sup>

This meaning of *sacramentum* must be distinguished from its use to indicate the seven sacraments. Pope John Paul II comments on the

100 Johann Auer, *The Church: The Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, trans. Michael Waldstein, Dogmatic Theology 8 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993) 87. In pp. 85-91, Auer briefly sketches the history of this notion of *sacramentum*, including its decline and its re-introduction, especially through the contribution of the *nouvelle théologie* movement. Auer draws from the following more extensive study: Leonardo Boff, *Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung: Versuch einer Legitimation und einer struktur-funktionalistischen Grundlegung der Kirche im Anschluss an das II. Vatikanische Konzil* (Paderborn: Bonifacius-Druckerei, 1972).

101 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964) [henceforth: LG] 1, ed. Tanner, 849: “Cum autem ecclesia sit in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis, naturam missionemque suam universalem, praecedentium conciliorum argumento instans, pressius fidelibus suis et mundo universo declarare intendit,” my translation.

102 LG 9, ed. Tanner, 856: “Deus congregationem eorum qui in Iesum, salutis auctorem et unitatis pacisque principium, credentes aspiciunt, convocavit et constituit ecclesiam, ut sit universis et singulis sacramentum visibile huius salutiferae unitatis,” my translation. See also Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1974) 22-24.

103 LG 48, ed. Tanner, 887: “Christus ... et per eum corpus suum quod est ecclesia ut universale salutis sacramentum constituit.”

104 Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad gentes* (7 December 1965) 1, ed. Tanner, 1011; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965) 45, ed. Tanner, 1099.

first paragraph of *Lumen gentium*: “it indicates that one must speak of the sacramentality of the Church in a manner which is analogical and not identical in regard to what we mean when we speak of the seven sacraments administered by the Church by Christ’s institution.”<sup>105</sup> The analogy can be meaningful only to one familiar with the theological import of the seven sacraments. Moreover, when the council calls the Church the *sacramentum unitatis* and the *universale salutis sacramentum*, it stresses three ecclesiological points: (1) salvation is the goal and meaning of the Church, and in her is contained the entirety of what “salvation” implies; (2) the Church is universal both because her “mission of salvation extends to all human beings of all times and places” and because her every action bears the sacramental character of being “a sign, a means, and a place of salvation for all”; (3) “The unity given in the Church, not only to all human beings of all times and places, but at the end of time even to the universe, the cosmos, is the unity that has its origin and final realization in God,” in Christ, and in the Holy Spirit.<sup>106</sup>

### CONCLUSION<sup>107</sup>

Concluding a survey is a challenging task, especially when the topic of investigation is as broad as the history of the word *sacramentum*. From Varro to the Second Vatican Council, the word’s contents and contexts develop, transform, and multiply. Each of the ecclesiastical authors considered contributes something new to its use, but also retains elements of previous uses. It is in the nature of Christian theological tradition that older concepts are retained alongside newer ones. Some patristic uses of *sacramentum*, such as its distinction from and relation to the concept of *mysterium*, were overshadowed but not forgotten, only to be highlighted anew in more recent years. From Isidore of Seville to the scholastic period, new theological challenges led to more particular definitions of *sacramentum* that focused increas-

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105 John Paul II, General Audience of 8 September 1982 “Christ’s Redemptive Love Has a Spousal Nature,” in *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1997) 323. For a helpful summary of the pope’s teaching on this topic see Cardinal Hans Groër, “The Church, Sacrament of Salvation,” trans. Eugene Selzer, in *John Paul II: A Panorama of His Teachings* (New York: New City, 1989) 27-37.

106 This enumeration and the quotations that appear therein are drawn from Auer, *The Church*, 95-97.

107 I express thanks to those scholars and friends who have assisted me in editing this essay with their invaluable comments: Robert Fastiggi, Michael Foley, Olga Izzo, Esther Mary Nickel RSM, Neil J. Roy, and Samuel Weber OSB.

ingly on seven specific rites of worship. The broader patristic sense received less attention in the context of discussions leading to this doctrinal development, yet the earlier sense was retained and used in different contexts.

As a final note, there is no other word like the word *sacramentum*. Even *mysterium*, which Isidore and others occasionally conflate with *sacramentum*, does not prove a viable alternative term in light of ancient Latin pagan and Christian authors, and even the documents of the Second Vatican Council. This is a lesson not only for the student of the history of Christian worship, but also for the translator who may at times wonder whether this or that instance of *sacramentum* in the current Roman Missal might be translated better by some word other than “sacrament.”

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