



A CATHOLIC BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
OF THE SACRAMENTS

THE BIBLE *and* THE PRIESTHOOD

*Priestly Participation
in the One Sacrifice for Sins*



ANTHONY GIAMBRONE, OP

THE BIBLE
and THE
PRIESTHOOD

*Priestly Participation
in the One Sacrifice for Sins*



ANTHONY GIAMBRONE, OP

B
Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Contents

List of Sidebars	ix
Series Preface	xi
Preface	xv
Abbreviations	xix

PART 1 Introduction

1. Priesthood and the Project of Catholic Exegesis 3
Hermeneutical Interlude: A Catholic Alternative 23

PART 2 “The Sons of Aaron in Their Splendor”

2. “The Glory of the LORD Appeared” (Lev. 9:23): *Priesthood as Theophany* 39
Excursus 1: Purity and Holiness 69
Excursus 2: Levi, Levites, and the Priesthood 76
3. “Like People, like Priest” (Hosea 4:9): *Priestly Sin and the Prophetic Critique* 81
Excursus 3: The Corruption of Priests and Temple 105
Excursus 4: The Priesthood of Eli and Sons at Shiloh 111
4. “I Will Clothe You with Festal Apparel” (Zech. 3:4): *The Promise of a New Priesthood* 116
Excursus 5: David’s Royal Priesthood 146
Excursus 6: Transfiguration of the Temple and the Future of Theophany 152

PART 3 “The Order of Melchizedek”

5. “Feed My Sheep” (John 21:17): *The Inauguration of New Covenant Ordo* 161
 - Excursus 7: Israel’s Last Prophet 192
 - Excursus 8: The Language of Pastoral Order 202
 6. “A Spiritual Temple, a Holy Priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:5): *Priestly Sacrifice and the New Law* 210
 - Excursus 9: The Laying On of Hands 237
 - Excursus 10: Priests in the Letter to the Hebrews 246
 7. Conclusion: *Jesus as Charismatic Founder of a Hierarchical Church* 255
- Suggested Resources 275
- Selected Bibliography 277
- Subject Index 285
- Scripture and Other Ancient Sources Index 289

PART 1



INTRODUCTION

Priesthood and the Project of Catholic Exegesis

At the very opening of his exceptional reflection “The Catholic Priesthood,” spoken with profound personal feeling from out of the silence of his retreat, the former pontiff Benedict XVI identifies with disarming clarity the precise exegetical malpractice that has undermined the sacrament of Holy Orders in our day.

Given the lasting crisis that the priesthood has been going through for many years, it seemed to me necessary to get to the deep roots of the problem. . . .

At the foundation of the serious situation in which the priesthood finds itself today, we find a methodological flaw in the reception of Scripture as the Word of God.

The abandonment of the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament led many contemporary exegetes to a deficient theology of worship. They did not understand that Jesus, far from abolishing the worship and adoration owed to God, took them upon himself and accomplished them in the loving act of his sacrifice. As a result, some went so far as to reject the necessity of an authentically cultic priesthood in the New Covenant.¹

The present work is offered as a meditation on these words and as an attempt to begin the work of addressing “the deep roots of the problem.” The mystery of priestly life in the Church is here examined through an encounter with *Scripture as the Word of God*—approached in contemplation of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice of love.

1. Benedict XVI and Robert Cardinal Sarah, *From the Depths of Our Hearts: Priesthood, Celibacy, and the Crisis of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2019), 25.

Seen from a biblical angle, of course, the “crisis” of the priesthood, of which Benedict speaks, is a “lasting” thing indeed and actually anything but new. Like the monarchy, the priesthood is both glorious and contemptible in the Bible. One might even say that a crisis of priestly sin and its supernatural resolution stands at the very center of the priestly mystery as it is revealed in the Scriptures. A failed institution of mediation with God, a beautiful but broken covenantal and cultic aspiration, stands re-created in the holiness of Jesus Christ, the one mediator of a new and “better” covenant and cult.

It would be an error, of course, to imagine that the sort of reflection and *ressourcement* offered here is an entirely new initiative. In the wake of Vatican II, a huge swell of scriptural reflection flooded into the Catholic bloodstream. This powerfully affected long-held perceptions of priestly service. Even if the biblical renewal ultimately engendered the fatal “methodological flaw” that Benedict evokes, this derailing of a vast intellectual and spiritual movement of true reform in the Church must not lead to full retreat or hardened opposition. This must be insisted upon in the face of the manifest theological sterility of so much modern exegetical writing, which frequently renders the living and effective Word of God quite dead and inert. Understandably, given such shortcomings, there is a strong sense among many theologians and students today that alternative patristic or dogmatic approaches are simply “safer” and more fruitful than direct engagement with the biblical text. This is a theologically untenable situation. The “abandonment of the Christological interpretation of the Old Testament” cannot be made right by a simple about-face in interpretative fashion, abandoning modern exegetical methods in favor of older models. The challenges confronting an exegetical *sanatio in radice*, a healing of certain diseased hermeneutical roots, are considerable and will be addressed below. It is clear, however, what must be attempted. Like scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven, we must draw forth from the treasure both the new and the old (Matt. 13:52).

The openly ecclesial orientation of a study such as this is obvious and unavoidable. This orientation must be more markedly *Catholic* than a similar study on baptism would be, moreover, for sacramental priesthood is a prominent point of ecumenical disagreement. It would clearly be irresponsible in this context merely to ignore the monumental, earnest, and unambiguous objection raised against the entire Catholic viewpoint represented by the Protestant position. “Of this sacrament [Holy Orders] the Church of Christ knows nothing; it was invented by the pope’s church,” said Martin Luther. “Not only is no promise of grace attached to it anywhere in the scriptures; not a single word is devoted to it in the entire New Testament.”² Without en-

2. Martin Luther, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* 7.1 (AT).

tering into “controversial theology” in the older sense of Catholic-Protestant exchange, I will thus take account of certain key points of interpretative divergence, with the indirect hope that some explanations might be useful also to non-Catholic Christian readers.

Whatever ecumenical and ecclesial audiences it may in the end actually find, this book largely targets Catholic seminarians preparing for initiation into the mysteries here described. For this reason, with a pedagogical interest in mind, following the example of a far greater teacher of Catholic truth in his magisterial instruction of beginners, I hope to avoid “the multiplication of useless questions” that only bring “weariness and confusion to the minds of readers.”³ Exegetical literature is often a noteworthy offender on this front, capable of stultifying extremities of detail. It is no less a “methodological flaw,” however, when dogmatic theology rests content (as it too often does) to skim superficially over the scriptural witness, abstracting a few key, syllogistically susceptible thoughts, with no real patience for the exegetical tool kit required to actually study and savor the Bible. What is proposed here is accordingly offered as a sort of reading guide for thinking scripturally about Holy Orders: introductory, incomplete, and schematic, yet with sufficient landmarks staked out to permit the unhurried navigation of a few essential themes as I see them.

Holy Scripture is the first of Melchior Cano’s ten *loci theologici*, and it will be the focus of all the chapters that follow. No exegesis ever is free of the influence of the other legitimate sources of theological reflection, however. It is therefore fitting here at the outset to make some acknowledgment of the general understanding of the sacrament of Holy Orders that informs this experiment in biblical theology.

Doctrinal Definitions

Authoritative Catholic dogma is most conveniently concentrated in exercises of the magisterium. Although several pronouncements reaching back to the twelfth century number Orders in lists of the seven sacraments (Denzinger §§718, 860, 1310, 1326), the Council of Trent was the first (and only) Church council required to make a solemn and lengthy statement about the nature of Holy Orders *per se*, so as “to condemn the errors of our time,” as the decree says (§1763). Three basic teachings are offered.

(1) To begin, the existence of a sacrificial priesthood is affirmed. Trent’s doctrinal summary is compact and makes broad appeal to Scripture and Tradition, without offering any specific discussion.

3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Preface. See <https://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

Sacrifice and priesthood are, by the ordinance of God, so united that both have existed under every law. Since, therefore, in the New Testament the Catholic Church has received from the institution of Christ the holy, visible sacrifice of the Eucharist, it must also be acknowledged that there exists in the Church a new, visible and external priesthood into which the old one was changed [cf. Heb. 7:12]. Moreover the Sacred Scriptures make it clear and the tradition of the Catholic Church has always taught that this priesthood was instituted by the same Lord and Savior and that the power of consecrating, offering, and administering his Body and Blood, and likewise of remitting and retaining sins, was given to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood. (Denzinger §1764)

The Council's view here is very tightly bound to the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, already taught in the previous session (Denzinger §§1739–40). Canon 2 of that previous session codifies the traditional understanding of a coincident institution of both priesthood and the Eucharist together at the Last Supper: “If anyone says that by the words ‘Do this in memory of me’ [Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24] Christ did not establish [*instituisse*] the Apostles as priests or that he did not order that they and other priests should offer his body and blood, let him be anathema” (Denzinger §1752).

(2) Next, a more developed statement on the specifically sacramental nature of Orders expands this doctrine. The Council again appeals to the authoritative sources of this teaching in a hermeneutical spiral of *auctoritas*:

Since from the testimony of Scripture, apostolic tradition, and the unanimous agreement of the Fathers it is clear that grace is conferred by sacred ordination, which is performed by words and outwards signs, so one ought not to doubt that orders is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of Holy Church. For the apostle says: “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands: for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self-control” [2 Tim. 1:6]. (Denzinger §1766)

It is added (echoing the bull *Exultate Deo* published in 1439) that, as an effect of this grace, “in the sacrament of orders, as also in baptism and confirmation, a character is imprinted [*character imprimatur*] that can neither be erased nor taken away” (Denzinger §1767; cf. §1774).

(3) Finally, as an important point of correction, the Pauline doctrine of the mystical body is invoked to insist upon the hierarchical nature of the Church against false conceptions of the baptismal priesthood.

If Christians should assert that all Christians are without distinction priests of the New Testament or that all are equally endowed with the same spiritual power, they seem to be doing nothing else than upsetting the ecclesiastical

hierarchy, which is like “an army set in array” [Song 6:3, 9], as if, contrary to the teaching of St. Paul, all were apostles, all prophets, all evangelists, all pastors, all doctors [cf. 1 Cor. 12:29; Eph. 4:11]. (Denzinger §1767)

The specific grades of clerical hierarchy were recognized from ancient usage to include all seven traditional orders, but only priests and deacons were acknowledged as openly mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures (Denzinger §1765; cf. Acts 6:5; 21:8; 1 Tim. 3:8–13; Phil. 1:1). Bishops, of course, are also present in the Scriptures; and “priests” in this context plainly includes both bishops and presbyters.

The Second Vatican Council amplified at length Trent’s teaching on the hierarchical nature of the Church, emphasizing the communion between head and members and giving great attention to the office of bishop, in which the “fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred” (*LG* 21, 18–29; cf. Denzinger §4354). Vatican II also clarified that the ministerial and common priesthoods, though interrelated as shares in the one priesthood of Christ, differ in essence, not just degree (*LG* 10). Pius XII, in the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947), prepared for this statement when he specified that, while the baptized do “offer the divine Victim” in a special sense, they do this by virtue of their intention, not their ministry. Accordingly, the ordained minister, who offers the sacrifice *in the person* of Christ, is “inferior to Christ, but superior to the people,” who “are not the conciliator between themselves and God” and can “in no way enjoy the sacerdotal power” (Denzinger §§3849–50).

The essential sum of these pronouncements is simple and pointed. In accord with Scripture and Tradition, the Church recognizes a hierarchical priesthood, elevated by a special grace above the baptismal dignity and entrusted with offering the eucharistic sacrifice in the person of Christ, to be a sacramental reality established by Jesus himself. This dense yet minimal framework gives articulate expression to the universal *sensus fidei* and defines the doctrinal space of Catholic orthodoxy. It hardly exhausts what theology might explore or say about Holy Orders, however.

Disputed Questions

These basic teachings of Trent are naturally vehemently contested from the Protestant side. Honesty thus requires not only some attention to objections that are raised but also an interest in the live questions that Catholic theology itself, as a work of faith seeking understanding, poses about these definitions. Each of the three dogmatic emphases above can be taken as the starting point for a short discussion that will help situate the chapters to follow.

1. Institution of the Priesthood

Baptism and celebration of the Holy Eucharist are the two most obvious sacramental rituals endorsed by the New Testament witness. Not only are these rites' grounding in the life of Christ and in the liturgical experience of the primitive Christian community both quite clear, but the supernatural grace conferred by each ritual is also expressly revealed: rebirth, remission of sins, adoption as sons (John 3; cf. Rom. 6–8); remission of sins, participation in the death of the Lord (Matt. 26:26–28; cf. 1 Cor. 10:16–17). It occasions little surprise, then, that during the Reformation it was often only these two major sacraments that survived—at least in some mitigated ritual form. They are the easiest to recognize and justify on the basis of Scripture alone.⁴

A Church conformed to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures is not exclusively the desire of Protestant Christians, nor in any way a false demand on their part—even if *sola scriptura* is a premise that cannot be shared. Catholic efforts to ground the Church's full sacramental system in the Gospels must, nevertheless, be admitted as being frequently a tenuous apologetic undertaking, grounded upon naïve biblical hermeneutics and enshrined in a mediocre manual tradition. More searching, late post-Tridentine theology ultimately acknowledged the depth of the problem. In his *questio disputata* on the sacraments, written on the very eve of the Second Vatican Council, Karl Rahner frankly stated the difficulty.

We must ask how it is possible to demonstrate in an historically credible way the sacramentality of matrimony, holy order, extreme unction and confirmation, that is to say, here, their institution by Christ, which is, of course, a dogma. We have no sayings of Jesus about these sacraments. The authorization given to the apostles to celebrate the Lord's supper is not the institution of a sacramental rite which confers ministry and office. For no one can deny that in the new covenant there are official powers by divine law, and the transmission of such powers, which are not sacraments. One has only to think of Peter and his successors [i.e., the papal office]. The sacrament of order does not therefore follow from the *anamnesis* precept, the command to commemorate. Consequently, for four sacraments we have no words of institution from Jesus Christ himself.⁵

Rahner, who is clearly interested to stay within the bounds of defined Catholic dogma, nevertheless poses an open challenge to the canon cited above on

4. Penance, which is not without a strong biblical base, lost ritual standing in part because of Martin Luther's discovery that the Greek *metanoia* had quite a different sense than the Vulgate's *penitentiam agite* had acquired. The medieval Church's practice of sacramental penance, of course, stood at the very center of Luther's protest. See Luther's 1519 treatise on penance (LW 35:9–22).

5. Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963), 41–42. The original German edition was published a few years earlier (1960).

the institution of the priesthood. The concern, as he sees it, is historical, and he is right that the problem here should not be underestimated. Finding a “historically credible” approach will be a preoccupation in much of what follows. Is it possible to bind Jesus convincingly to the institution of a new eschatological priesthood?

Given many scholarly reconstructions of Jesus as a millenarian prophet who was ultimately mistaken in his expectation of the imminent end of the world, the more basic question is perhaps whether Jesus could have envisioned an institutional Church at all (a theme taken up and discussed below in chap. 7). In this connection, Rahner’s own rigorously ecclesiological attempts to address the sacramental concern as he perceived it, which obviously took the form of abstract dogmatic reflection, not historical investigation or biblical exegesis, certainly has much merit. Jesus founded the Church itself, the primordial sacrament, which fully actualizes and manifests its own properly sacramental nature in a range of seven discretely efficacious acts, all somehow belonging to divine law yet tied to diverse historical conditions.

Invoking divine law calls attention to the sacraments’ decisive material forms, which find their basis in something deeper than the human decisions of canon law. To this degree, insofar as the Church itself is not ultimately only an *institution* but a corporate union with Christ in the Spirit, the very language in which the sacramental question is posed is seen to be misleading. To claim that Jesus “instituted” (*instituisse*) the priesthood must mean something more than institutional stipulations governing the Church’s future leadership class, though the essential elements of this are not excluded. It must indicate, ultimately, a living reality of union, by which God’s perfect law reigns among men and Christ is made present.

If the ecclesiological turn is thus foundational and compelling, an evolutionist solution, excessively detached from Christ’s own living actions, clearly poses intolerable risks.⁶ Still, whatever questions Rahner’s broader premises and private speculations might raise, he points in the right direction. Applied to the Church’s hierarchical construction in sacred ranks of bishops, priests, and deacons, empowered to exercise those fundamental kerygmatic and eucharistic actions by which the Church is continually constituted, the situation is clear. The deepest essence of the *ekklēsia* as Christ’s living body is profoundly engaged, thus sacramentally implicated in these consecrated grades. Indeed, in a real way the Church is never more herself than when the headship of Christ is made sacramentally present in this hierarchically constituted form. (Yves Congar’s critique of so-called hierarchiology, an overly juridical simulacrum

6. The following Modernist thesis was condemned by Pius X in *Lamentabili* 49: “When the Christian supper gradually assumed the nature of a liturgical action, those who customarily presided over the supper acquired the sacerdotal character.”

of ecclesiology, can be acknowledged here but for the moment set aside.⁷) In a word, the Church experiences and recognizes herself present in the living sign and grace of Holy Orders. The existence of the sacramental priesthood is as real and revealing as the very existence of Christ's Church.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

In our post-Reformation and modern democratic context, appeals to the Church's intuitive self-understanding quickly become problematic, of course. A hierarchical constitution and sacrificial cult are no longer obvious first principles of Christian social experience. The essential *holiness* of the Church (*sine macula et ruga*), on the other hand, is one defining mark that at least classically commands firm ecumenical agreement⁸—ironically enough, despite what might easily appear to be formidable counterevidence.

In manifold ways, the scars of evil tragically mar ecclesial life—a fact that has long preoccupied reformers, both Protestant and Catholic. The Donatist crisis was the first frontal confrontation with the considerable challenge posed by this obvious sinfulness in the Church's members—and notably her ordained ministers. The authoritative answer that emerged at an early date is very clear, however. Sacramental action itself is the locus of indefectible ecclesial holiness. This has been unambiguously maintained at least since Optatus of Milevis, who preceded Augustine as the Church's voice during the early period of the Donatist fight.⁹ Augustine subsequently applied the principle with memorable precision:

It was said of the Lord before He suffered, that He baptized more than John; then it was added: "Howbeit, Jesus Himself baptized not, but his disciples" [John 4:1–2]. He, and not He: He by power, they by ministry; they performed the service of baptizing, the power of baptizing remained in Christ. His disciples, then, baptized, and Judas was still among his disciples. . . . Those whom Judas baptized, Christ baptized. In like manner, then, they whom a drunkard baptized, those whom a murderer baptized, those whom an adulterer baptized, if it was the baptism of Christ, were baptized by Christ.¹⁰

Chrysostom, in a different context independent of Augustine's formulations, articulates a similar perspective on the untarnished dignity of priestly office.¹¹

7. See Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1965).

8. In the treatise *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen* (On the Councils and the Church) in 1539, for instance, Luther saw the Spirit sanctifying believers through the Word as the most important mark of the Church.

9. Optatus of Milevis, *On the Donatist Schism* 5.4 (PL 11:1053).

10. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 5.18 (PL 35:1423). Translation from *NPNF* 7:38.

11. "If you see an unworthy priest, do not criticise the priesthood: one should not criticise the office—just the one exercising a good office badly, since Judas also proved a traitor, yet this

There is at once a sober realism and a buoyant hope in this unbroken teaching of the Church. It recalls an all-important article in Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*: "That the sacraments may be administered through [*per*] wicked ministers" (4.77). Thomas reasons very succinctly: "It would be unfitting for one to place the hope of his salvation in the goodness of a mere man, for it is said in Jeremiah 17:5, 'Cursed is the man who puts his trust in man.' . . . In order then that we might place the hope of our salvation in Christ, who is God and man, it is to be confessed that the sacraments work salvation by the power of Christ [*ex virtute Christe*], whether they be administered by good or evil ministers."¹² The exercise of theological hope actually depends upon faith in this doctrine of the true source of saving virtue.

An alternative and not incompatible foundation for the superstructure of sacramental theology is accordingly to begin not with the Church's members (as Rahner's paradigm might suggest) but, rather, with *the priesthood of Christ*—that is to say, Christ's supreme headship: a conception of the Church's sacramental economy as his own eschatologically triumphant, high priestly *opus operatum*.¹³ This christological recentering accentuates the direct agency of God in the sacramental order and recalibrates "hierarchy" as more than a simple accidental and external sociological status. Contemplated in the elevation of the head, hierarchy instead becomes the recapitulative (*in capite*) manner in which Christ holds all things together (Col. 1:17–18), just as the head of the body exercises an immediate energy and life-giving power of movement within all the members. In this vein, hierarchy within the *totus Christus* is reconceived as a cascade of capital grace touching the whole: the original, integrative Dionysian sense of "hierarchy" as the "perfect total of all [the Church's] sacred constituents" (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.3 [373C]).¹⁴

A view of sacramental life centered upon the high priesthood of Christ boasts a solid biblical warrant in the Epistle to the Hebrews (and elsewhere).

was a fault not of apostleship but of his free will, not a charge against priesthood but against the evil of free will" (John Chrysostom, *I Have Seen the Lord*, quoted in *St. John Chrysostom: Old Testament Homilies; Volume Two, Homilies on Isaiah and Jeremiah*, trans. Robert Charles Hill [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2003], homily 4.4–5, p. 89 [PG 56:126]; cf. *On Priesthood* 3.10 [PG 48:646–47]; *Homilies on the Epistle to Titus* [PG 62:672]).

12. "Nothing can act in what exceeds its own competence [*in id quod eius facultatem excedit*] unless it receives the power from another. . . . But what is done in the sacraments exceeds human competence, as is clear from the premise. Therefore no one may dispense the sacraments, no matter how good he is, unless he receives the power of dispensing. Now malice and sin are the opposite of goodness. Therefore neither is he hindered by sin from the administration of the sacraments who has received the power to do so" (Thomas Aquinas, SCG 4.77 [AT]).

13. See, e.g., Colman E. O'Neill, *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments* (New York: Alba House, 1990 [1964]). See also O'Neill, *Sacramental Realism* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983).

14. Translation by Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 197.

Luther's disregard for this letter did not help enable an adequate doctrine of Holy Orders within the Lutheran context. Yet Catholic dogmatic reflection has also, unfortunately, left Christ's priesthood rather underdeveloped, as a recent survey of the subject notes with regret.¹⁵ The most general scan of Hebrews yields an immediately useful framework, however. The priesthood of Christ recasts with saving power the prefiguring rituals of the old order and mediates the efficacious and "better" (*kreittōn*) rites of a "better" covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; cf. 6:9; 7:19; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16). Jesus is the great high priest whose one supreme sacrifice attains the "perfection" (*teleoisis*, Heb. 7:11), that supreme aspiration and reality (*res*) that the old regime of offerings could not effect and yet somehow desired: atonement for sins and union with God. The Gospel of John, in which Jesus' high priesthood is again at play, if in a considerably less pronounced fashion, programmatically pursues a similar "grace in place of grace" motif, indicating how Jesus' heavenly gifts (*anōthen*) effect a systematic replacement of Jewish ritual life.

There are ample grounds to attribute to Christ himself a self-identification with the messianic priest of the order of Melchizedek addressed in Psalm 110 and celebrated in the Letter to the Hebrews. As our study advances, vistas will also open on Jesus' own aims for the inauguration of a new eschatological cult and a new temple. Rahner is thus ultimately right to move our research away from too narrow a focus upon precise words of institution and to seek instead to integrate Christ's institution of the priesthood into the wider constitution of the Church (though Rahner's take on Peter is profoundly unhelpful, as I will suggest in chap. 5). This does not mean leaving all to later, ecclesially sanctioned innovations—of which there are plenty. The epochal institution of a New Covenant belongs strictly to Christ's own personal priestly action, formally announced in the context of the Last Supper: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Luke 22:20).

The broad replacement framework suggested here obviously cannot be pressed as a simple one-to-one mapping of the Church's seven sacraments onto some preexisting Jewish array of seven mystical rites. Certain sacraments of the New Law, eschatological reconfigurations of the Old—for example, baptism for circumcision—do nevertheless suggest themselves and find clear expression in the tradition. The question of a similar eschatological correspondence between the priestly hierarchies in the old and the new dispensations is in many ways the central problem that any biblical theology of Holy Orders must address. Are there spiritual Levites in eschatological Israel? In what concrete way has Christ replaced the old priestly order?

15. See Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

2. *The Grace of the Sacrament*

Grounded upon a wide base of New Testament data, it was the common opinion of the medieval schools that, “because the Old Law merely instructed, its sacraments were only signs of grace; whereas because the New Law both instructs and justifies, its sacraments are both the sign and the cause of grace.”¹⁶ Sacramental theology in the latter part of the twentieth century, by contrast, frequently unmoored itself from this scholastic paradigm of signs and instrumental causality, adopting instead an alternative account oriented around *symbols* and attentive to anthropological/cultural and linguistic considerations, more than to metaphysics.¹⁷

While room can be easily found in the traditional paradigm for the evocative dimensions stressed in newer models, it is also important to appreciate what is at stake in maintaining that the sacraments of the New Law are a cause (and not just a sign) of grace. Ironically, despite the classic Protestant charge that Catholic sacramental praxis is somehow stunted in a “fleshly” Old Testament framework, it is precisely in this doctrine of the causality of the sacraments where the Church most clearly asserts the specific *newness* of the New Law: the powerful work of grace. From this vantage point, the failure to appreciate the grace of the gospel is not the danger of so-called Catholic “magic” but, rather, the risk run by so much Protestant theology, which still sees in the Catholic Church’s ritual life the empty shadows that characterized Israel’s cult of mere signs. What precise sense does the ritual performance of a Calvinist “Lord’s Supper” have on its own terms, after all? It makes no claims to transmit Christ’s grace; such ceremonies thus stall in a strange pre-though-post-gospel twilight. If Protestant thought is ultimately preoccupied by a concern to ensure that Christian existence be centered on faith, Catholic doctrine has long been perfectly transparent that the sacraments are always *sacramenta fidei*.¹⁸

A second reason for insisting upon the causality of the sacraments may be added beyond this epochal metaphysical marking of the border distinguishing the Old and the New. Emphasis on instrumentality safeguards the full, realistic force of the biblical language. It does not proceed from an obtuse

16. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 27, a. 4.

17. See Bernhard Blankenhorn, “The Instrumental Causality of the Sacraments: Thomas Aquinas and Louis-Marie Chauvet,” *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 255–94. Signs stand for some other thing and are more limited in their meaning than symbols. For a seminal treatment, see Karl Rahner, “Theology of Symbol,” in *Theological Investigations IV* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 221–52. See also C. Annice Callahan, “Karl Rahner’s Theology of Symbol: Basis for His Theology of the Church and Sacraments,” *ITQ* 49 (1982): 195–205.

18. A marvelously succinct and lucid account of this primacy of faith in the sacramental order appears in the first chapter of Abbot Vonier’s classic *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (Bethesda, MD: Zaccheus, 2003), 1–6.

interest in employing Aristotelian categories for the pure philosophical fun of it. Scripture plainly attributes to Christ's humanity a genuine instrumental power in the work of making people holy. For instance: "It is by God's will that we have been sanctified *through* [*dia*] the offering [*tēs prosphoras*] of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). This is not merely an exemplary, occasional, or disposing causality but a true perfective causality, as the *teleios* word group in Hebrews underlines. It is cast in the unmistakable form of Christ's priestly work. He "sanctifies" us by means of his unique sacrificial "offering." The application of this same biblical language and principle of Christ's own high priestly causation in the case of baptism—"Christ [not Peter or Judas or any other administering agent] saved us through [*dia*] a bath of regeneration" (Titus 3:5 AT)—enabled theologians to see its extension across the entire sacramental field. In each of the sacraments, and in a way proper to each sacrament, through the action of Christ's priesthood something supernatural *happens*: specifically, we are supernaturally sanctified.

The Council of Florence (Denzinger §1326), closely following St. Thomas's *De articulis fidei et ecclesiae sacramentis*, defined that the effect of the sacrament of Orders is "an increase in grace so that one may be made a suitable minister of Christ." This surge of holiness that transforms a weak human into Christ's own sanctifying agent is described as an ineffaceable character. It essentially charges the priest, with an instrumental mission of his own, to be himself a font of sacramental causation (cf. *ST* III, q. 63, a. 2). It was fitting, says St. Thomas, that God in his goodness thus not only established spiritual ministries but also joined those ministries to the grace necessary for their proper exercise (*SCG* 4.74). For Bonaventure, this was not just suitable but required (*In quartum librum Sent. dist. 24, pars 1, a. 2 q. 2*). Matthias Scheeben spoke about sacramental character as "the signature"—the author's personal mark of attestation—by which members of the mystical body show their belonging to the divine-human head through an organic link. It is Jesus' own living version of Paul's promise of authenticity, when he writes with his own hand (Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17). In the case of Orders, this signature of the God-man somehow underwrites and validates the whole sacramental system as a source of grace. Priestly character is a divine seal upon and a sanctification of the ordering principle that stands at the root of the *ordo salutis* itself.

Can priests really be so personally accredited by God? A deep suspicion of metaphysics and lingering doubt about the grace-enabled "suitability" of patently unholy priestly ministers has presented a challenge to this teaching from the time of the Reformation down to this day. Some recent scholars thus confidently reduce the entire doctrine of sacramental grace to a mere rhetorical power-play by clerical elites. Ultimately, however, as Walter Kasper notes, the doctrine of an ontological infusion of stable grace is a source of

consolation not only for priests, burdened with the immense weight of their impossible task, but for the community as well.¹⁹

If the metaphysical arguments stand ultimately in service of the biblical data, the grace of the sacrament in its biblical formulation has several highly evocative expressions. Ontological change defends the force of the revealed prophetic promise of a priestly minister who decisively acts “according to God’s heart” (see chap. 4). This need not and does not mean that every New Covenant priest burns with the shepherd’s heart of a *Curé d’Ars*, any more than all the baptized, who also bear the mark of God’s divine sign, live lives even remotely worthy of the gift they have received. It signals, rather, that God’s intentions are fulfilled in a new and definitive way in this dispensation. A sort of inviolability is conferred by which the eschatological priesthood itself accomplishes God’s purpose of salvation, in virtue of Christ and irrespective of individual priests. At the same time, at the individual level, just as in the letters of Paul the baptized are often seen to live in fundamental contradiction with their deeper identity as persons sharing in the common priesthood, and must therefore be reminded to be what they nevertheless are, so too from time to time it appears necessary to “rekindle” (*anazōpyrein*) “the gift of God” (*to charisma tou theou*) that comes through the laying on of hands (2 Tim. 1:6)—not to *ignite* this grace from scratch, as though it could somehow die out (cf. Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 1.1).

The open question from the Catholic view is not whether there is a sacramental character given in Orders but, rather, how to understand the internal differentiation of this grace. This must be acknowledged as a murky domain. The high scholastics discerned a sevenfold arrangement following the Church’s ancient ranks of major and minor orders. The biblical temple hierarchy knows a very similar, if less neatly ranged, series of grades. There is high priest, priest, and Levite, with the Levites further divided into cantors (lectors), those responsible for the liturgical vessels (acolytes), and the gatekeepers (porters). The Levites—being a priestly tribe but also a distinctly subpriestly rank, with more menial functions and dignity—are a very complicated group in the Bible (see excursus 2). The extreme historical blurriness that surrounds them might be considered a sort of scriptural version of the doctrinal questions about the diaconate in its relation to the episcopate and presbyterate.

Despite the utopian Marxist dream of a perfectly classless state, the natural tendency of human societies—like communities of cows or chickens—to establish internal order and rankings makes perfectly clear that, as with all the sacraments, Holy Orders is a case of grace elevating and transforming

19. Walter Kasper, “Ministry in the Church: Taking Issue with Edward Schillebeeckx,” *Communio* 10 (1983): 185–95.

nature. In this regard and in harmony with the newer paradigm in sacramental theology, but without the reductionist temptation, it is fruitful to consider priesthood as a phenomenon of religious anthropology. Israel and the Church are hardly alone, after all, in harboring at their heart a priestly caste.

Without offering a survey of pagan priesthood, which is obviously enormously diverse, it is very useful to observe two passing anthropological points. First, priestly colleges and individuals are, at least within the cultural world of the Bible, without fail connected to a sanctuary. This essential juncture of priest and temple will take on a particular configuration in the New Testament, where the temple will no longer be a localized material holding. Here we encounter in a particularly striking way the *novum* of grace that both builds on nature and replaces an older grace. Second, the Old Testament Levites were a dynastic institution, whereas Roman priesthood, to take a contrasting example, was an official function, often gained by election and unconnected (at least in principle) to lineal descent, in nearly all cases being a service of temporary duration. In the New Testament, we encounter a momentous break with the deeply ethnic matrix of the Levitical order. This is of high theological import and is not unrelated to the point about the temple just made. Both of these points of anthropological readjustment will be carefully explored in chapter 6.

The nature of the New Testament priesthood, though acquiring something of the character of an elected or appointed office, ultimately differs from the Greco-Roman model in the lifelong character it presumes. In its own way, this transformation into a nondynastic yet life-consuming form of priesthood is a cultural expression of the ontological force of the Christian conception. The Christian pastor's entire life is required of him in the form of a self-sacrifice, on behalf of the flock and in union with Christ: a form of total claim not unlike the baptismal condition (dying with Christ) for being born anew of supernatural stock. The ecclesiological reorientation of sacramental reflection thus comes once again into view in this graced fusion of anthropology and personal biography in priestly existence, so reminiscent of Christian baptism. The priest of Jesus Christ subsists as a foundational part of the structure of a people supernaturally constituted as Christ's living body. Priestly ministry accordingly represents an extraordinary witness to what Joseph Ratzinger's *communio* theology of the Church understands as "the people of God living from the body of Christ."

3. Baptismal and Hierarchical Priesthood

At least since 1520 and Luther's *Appeal to the German Nobility*—a revolutionary and passionate call to raze what he called "the three walls" by which the "Romanists" preserved their clerical privilege—the Church's

centuries-long understanding of hierarchical priesthood has been actively assailed. The supposed superiority of the spiritual over the temporal power, an enforced interpretative monopoly on the Word of God, and the pretended rights of the popes over councils were what Luther specifically saw as these “walls of straw and paper,” but it was against the first that his largest siege engines were brought forward. As a demonstration that the notion of an elevated spiritual status was the cleric’s own self-serving “pure invention,” Luther affirms the community’s adequacy simply to depute and thus to create bishops from its own baptismal priestly power. His proof is that the early Church elected its leaders by simple acclamation. This, like much in Luther’s polemics, is far too hasty.

Dom Gregory Dix, the great Anglican liturgical scholar of the mid-twentieth century, offers the following balanced assessment:

A multitude of passages can be cited which emphasize the extreme importance attached in pre-Nicene times to the bishop’s proper and free election. . . . A genuine election by his own Church and the free acceptance by all its members as their bishop (symbolized by the kiss of peace given him immediately after his consecration) . . . were as much a *sine qua non* for the episcopate as consecration itself. (I do not think this puts the matter too strongly.) Yet the election and acceptance did not and could not of themselves make a man a bishop. Only God could do that. No man can stand for his fellow sinners before God, still less stand for God before them, simply by their own choice of him. Only God’s choice and empowering of him can make him a mediator in that fashion. Hence the insistence in the [consecration] prayer that it is God Himself who has “chosen this Thy servant for the episcopate” . . . just as it is God himself who is prayed “now to pour forth that power which is from Thee upon him to equip him for the task.”²⁰

In a word, God, not the people, makes the priest. The Church’s ancient understanding of ministerial service is thus rightly captured in the declaration “No one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God” (Heb. 5:4 ESV). Church history here is illustrative of an inherited understanding that reaches back as far as we can possibly hope to see. In the very first ministerial succession, in the days still before Pentecost, when the community “proposed” Joseph Barsabbas and Justus Matthias but then cast lots in order to divine God’s own choice—the Lord alone knows the hearts of all—the essential pattern of God’s own special election is already unmistakably observed (Acts 1:23–26). Both men were already fully disciples from the time

20. Dom Gregory Dix, “Ministry in the Early Church,” in *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and the Doctrine of Episcopacy*, ed. Kenneth Kirk (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957), 198–99.

of John's baptism; this was a condition of their elevation. Yet God himself had to intervene to establish the elect one in Judas's "office" (*episkopē*, Acts 1:20 RSV; Ps. 109:8 LXX). It is not enough for the community simply to will it for them to create a new bishop (*episkopos*).

To (literally) "give lots" (*edōkan klerous*), a Levitical practice from which the word "cleric" (*klēros*) ultimately derives, in the end offers an unusually weighty hint of the primitive community's specifically priestly understanding of this apostolic office and succession. It is interesting to note that, during the First Jewish War, roughly contemporaneous with Acts, Josephus recounts the rebels identifying a new high priest by exactly this method. The phrase "to give lots" continues as a technical expression meaning "to ordain priests" in the earliest and most explicit Christian evidence preserved—namely, the late second-century *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus.

Admittedly, Matthias in Acts is never called a priest; and on the surface, the Bible can seem openly to advance quite the opposite view from what the Catholic Church proposes. The incontestable fact that the Greek word for priest, *hiereus*, is conspicuously never used for Christian pastors or ministers in the New Testament is quite striking (see the discussions in excursus 8 and chap. 6). In fact, Jesus alone and the Christian community as a whole are the exclusive parties (apart from Jewish leaders) openly described as "priests" in the New Testament. Luther was obviously keen to cite exactly these key "nation of priests" texts. Coupled with a strong anticlerical sentiment, stoked by real, late medieval clerics deserving real anticlerical ire, a negative conclusion was accordingly drawn on the Protestant side from this "perspicuous" doctrine of baptismal priesthood. In the New Covenant, there is no longer any hierarchical structure proper to God's priestly people.

This purely negative, egalitarian conclusion moves (like Luther) far too quickly, of course. It must either disregard or otherwise explain the quite patent (even *perspicuous*) fact that being a corporate "nation of priests" (Exod. 19:6) is not actually new to the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, Israel's commonly shared priestly status as a people was perfectly compatible with an elaborately hierarchical priestly service. Why should the common and hierarchical priesthoods not be equally compatible under the New Law as well? The answer would seem to be bound up with a pronounced and characteristically Lutheran dialectical opposition between law and gospel—that is, the supposition of radical discontinuity between Israel and the Church: in this case expressed in the full abolition of the ministerial priesthood. The Catholic understanding of the grace that Christ brings, by contrast, envisions an eschatologically profound but also much less radically disjunctive transformation of Israel's priestly experience, which was at once both ministerial and common.

The common or baptismal priesthood is one of multiple Reformation-era motifs that prospered in the more irenic mood of the twentieth century and was significantly embraced at Vatican II. A terminological gesture in this direction, seriously masked in most English translations, is the Council's epochal shift in its language of reference for Holy Orders so as to better harmonize with the New Testament discourse, moving from *sacerdos* (priest) to *presbyter* (elder)—namely, from a cultic official who offers sacrifice to a community leader of moral probity and proven wisdom. While important aspects of New Testament ministry are obviously retrieved by this move, the consequent obscuring of the Old Testament language must not be wrongly read as a dialectical opposition of absolute discontinuity. Though the priestly lexicon of the New Testament has its own peculiarities suited to the situation of the primitive Church, the Catholic hermeneutic, in adopting a wider biblical terminology, has not simply reverted to the Old Covenant dispensation.

THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK

How shall Christian theology view the transformation of the Levitical estate under the power of grace? Hebrews again provides a direct reply and an indispensable index for addressing this question in Melchizedek's priestly model. The significance of this motif cannot here be even remotely exhausted, but one startling and deeply suggestive circumstance can be mentioned.

Melchizedek was a pagan priest—albeit a pagan priest of *El Elyon*, “God Most High,” a biblical title also given to YHWH. Implicit in adopting Melchizedek as a model of the transformed New Testament priesthood is thus a radical break with the genealogical, fleshly principle that restricted priestly honor not only to the biological family of Aaron but to ethnic Israel itself. The implications extend far beyond simply addressing the difficulty posed by Jesus' Judahite lineage. Priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek means (i) somehow being “without father, without mother, without genealogy” and (ii) possessing an eternal sacerdotal office (Heb. 7:3), according to the oath of Psalm 110:4, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Summed up in a word: Christ became “a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16). Thus, Hebrews describes a new mode of priestly status “resembling the Son of God” (7:3)—that is to say, conformed to Jesus' divine sonship and eternal life in heaven.

Appealing to the figure of Melchizedek to articulate Christ's new filial possession of the priesthood is a way of asserting a primordial continuity within the unbroken plan of God, as attested in the Scriptures. Indeed, as Melchizedek is prior even to the Mosaic law, he functions in Hebrews very similarly to the way Abraham functions in the argumentation of Paul in

Galatians and Romans. Still more: as the sole agent so elevated that he can bless even Abraham himself—“See how great he is!” (Heb. 7:4)—Melchizedek implicitly represents the priestly instrument of God Most High’s own foundational promise: to make the patriarch a blessing (Gen. 12:1–3). In this sense, the eschatological fulfillment of God’s promise in the radical equality of all who, like Abraham, are justified by faith—“There is no distinction” (Rom. 3:22); “There is no longer Jew or Greek . . . slave or free . . . male and female” (Gal. 3:28)—is a radical baptismal equality that ultimately depends upon a hierarchical distinction. Without the sacerdotal role of Melchizedek (i.e., Christ), who stands above even Abraham (i.e., those justified by faith), there can be no mediation of the divine blessing.

The case of baptism, which also entails a sacramental share on the part of Christ’s members in his own divine sonship (Rom. 8), permits one further important remark. Namely, an objection is answered; for the clear possibility emerges here of a sacramental share in the distinctly sacerdotal aspect of Christ’s sonship. That is to say, a gracious seal (*signum*) of priestly character, conforming a man to Jesus’ filial headship, cannot be any more excluded on the grounds of Christ’s unique possession of the Church’s high priesthood than baptized believers can be prevented from crying out *Abba* in the Spirit of their adopted sonship on the grounds that Christ alone is the unique Son of God. Christ’s members participate in his divine life with the Father.

The pointed question thus arises: Is there scriptural evidence that such a distinctive participation in the eternal Son’s mediating humanity, somehow different from the normal baptismal portion in this dying and rising (Rom. 8), is indeed shared with a special priestly class in the New Testament Church? A great deal obviously depends on the answer given to this question. In the Old Testament, priestly office is the undergirding matrix of Israel’s worship, the very medium of her whole ritual life. To this degree—as the history of theology can confirm—the Church’s entire sacramental system also substantially stands or falls with one’s conceptualization of New Testament priesthood.

The Shape of Biblical Theology: *Semper Reformanda*

Before at last launching out upon the biblical sea, it is important to consider why the Protestant Reformers, who were so keenly attentive to the scriptural data, drew conclusions so different from what will be proposed in the following pages. In other words, why has the very thought of a biblical theology of the priesthood been openly rejected by a massive sector of the Christian world?

Historically, but theoretically as well, it is impossible to address the Protestant position by ignoring the glaring problem of clerical sin, a problem so

towering that it must openly configure any proposed biblical perspective on the priesthood—as it here will. Late medieval abuses—hypocrisy, ignorance, corruption, luxury and license, avarice, simony, unchastity, and so on—are the essential context of the formative Protestant hermeneutic. The problem is not exclusively late medieval, of course, as I have already said, but endemic in its own way to the priestly caste (not that the wider human race is immune from sin). The point in emphasizing this unflattering clerical context is merely to highlight two simple things.

First, the Protestant account of the biblical witness gives great attention to an important, largely prophetic, and highly polemical anticlerical tradition in the Scriptures. Blistering critiques of the cult and its ministers do indeed form a significant part of the relevant data, for misbehaving priests are a very old problem. Useful as these texts have proved to be as polemical ammunition and as a pastoral point of orientation, it is, nevertheless, wrong to give them disproportionate weight. Other, much more positive perspectives on priests are also found in the Bible. Unfortunately, the literature stemming from the so-called Priestly school is very difficult to approach for a variety of reasons, which has resulted in its effective marginalization and even vilification. Joseph Blenkinsopp understates the case when he remarks that “the Israelite priesthood and its literary productions have not had a good press in Christian Old Testament scholarship since the Enlightenment.”²¹ Instinctive distrust of “priestcraft” has been a staple of modernity, and the prejudices remain so deep that, remarkably, after more than two centuries of concentrated historical research, it is still possible to say that “the study of the cult and priesthood in ancient Israel is still very much in its infancy.”²² This points indirectly to the second Reformation tendency.

The Protestant position was articulated in opposition to a perceived clerical claim to have a monopoly on divine truth (the second of Luther’s “three walls”). Only the priests were theological doctors (like the specialists behind the Bible’s highly technical Priestly writings), so this elitist wall of separation also had to be torn down. The ultimate result was the hermeneutical adoption of a more or less explicit doctrine of the “perspicuity of Scripture” (*perspicuitas*; e.g., Westminster Confession I.7): namely, an insistence that every believer gifted with the Holy Spirit, even the unlearned, can apprehend in an unmediated way all necessary biblical doctrine, as though what is essential in the Bible is always inevitably easily accessible to faith.

From the Catholic perspective, this hermeneutical view not only gravely underestimates the challenge of understanding texts written millennia ago

21. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 66–67.

22. Gary Anderson and Saul M. Olyan, *Priesthood and Cult in Ancient Israel*, JSOTSup 125 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 7.

in very different languages and cultures than our own, but it would exclude the teaching service of a living magisterium altogether. St. Augustine, in the preface to his important treatise on the rules of biblical interpretation, *On Christian Instruction*, openly rejects the claims of those who would thus “talk vauntingly of divine grace and boast that they understand and can explain scripture” without aid, supposing that understanding the Scriptures is best served “by the unassisted grace of God.” Accordingly, if we lay special emphasis here on certain privileged scriptural deposits, notably the Priestly literature and the Letter to the Hebrews, this is not because the profound doctrinal richness of these texts concerning the mystery of priesthood is always transparent. It is not. It is only perceptible, in fact, with laborious study and within an ecclesial air hospitable to what Aidan Nichols calls the “hermeneutic of recognition.”²³ Christian sacramental priesthood is no more facilely present in the Bible than is the “Trinity” itself. But like this credal cornerstone, it is vital to the very structure of Christian existence.

The Reformers’ energetic protest, however unbalanced from a Catholic viewpoint, is nevertheless salutary for a Church that is indeed *semper reformanda*. On the one hand, the huge biblical accent laid upon clerical sin guards against complacent and exaggerated constructions of the priestly ministry. On the other hand, the stress on exegetical transparency rightly holds the clarity of the Church’s scriptural teaching to account.

23. See Aidan Nichols, *Holy Order: Apostolic Priesthood from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 4:

If we accept the notion of a development of doctrine, whereby some features of Catholic faith, ethics and worship are regarded as legitimate outgrowths from New Testament origins, then we commit ourselves to what may be termed a “hermeneutic of recognition,” whereby we who share the developed consciousness of the later Church come to the evidences of the earliest Church in positive expectation of finding the seeds from which the great tree of the *Catholica* has grown. This is not a value-free or presuppositionless enquiry, even were such things possible. It is Scripture read in Tradition. Indeed, Tradition is, for the most part, nothing other than the reading of Scripture by the Church’s eyes of faith—which organs alone are fully adequate to their wondrous object.

HERMENEUTICAL INTERLUDE

A Catholic Alternative

How shall Catholics honestly approach the scriptural foundations of the New Covenant priesthood? Is there indeed no historically credible way to link Jesus to its inception? How shall the Church say something fittingly biblical about the mystery of priestly grace?

The enterprise of elaborating a sound biblical theology of the sacramental priesthood (or elaborating a “biblical theology” of anything, for that matter) faces an immediate challenge: the successful integration of all the elements enumerated in *Dei Verbum* 12 as necessary for a correct interpretation of the biblical text. These include (1) the meaning intended by the sacred writers in their historical context; (2) the content and unity of all Scripture; (3) the living Tradition of the whole Church; and (4) the analogy of faith. This seamless fusion of historical perspectives within a single canon, somehow attentive to the living Tradition and balanced by the inner proportions of the revealed data, is not a process easily subjected to a formula or a simple method. This explains, in part, why Vatican II’s envisioned synthesis still remains largely untried, with contemporary study generally stagnated in the discussion of historical context.

Successfully weaving an exegetically responsible, theological vision out of these four hermeneutical strands inescapably invites a certain measure of personal intuition and experiment. The mind of the Church as expressed in *Dei Verbum* must, nevertheless, operate as a framework and control. The recognized standards of judgment regarding research into the historical context have long been sufficiently well established to secure a basic objectivity for that dimension of the project. Historical-critical investigation is thus assumed and followed throughout. It remains, in order to stand accountable, to offer

some explanation of how the latter three criteria will here be understood and applied.

1. The Unity of Christian Scripture

The “unity” of the canonical Scriptures as intended by the Council is a dogmatic proposition, originally articulated in the face of the Marcionite threat. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, God is the “author” of both Testaments. This means that God is the single, ultimate source both of Scripture’s inspired words and of the realities to which those inspired words point. The unity of Scripture is thus a divine work and is expressive of the one God’s own unity as manifested in the unbroken oneness of his eternal plan: that all humankind should have access to the Father through the incarnate Son in the Holy Spirit. In this light, it is important to see that the unity of the two written Testaments, Old and New, which together comprise the single book of Christian Scripture, mirrors the profound inner accord between two epochal regimes of God’s grace actively uniting humanity to himself, first in Israel and finally in Christ.¹

Jesus’ high priestly prayer, “That [*hina*] they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:11), represents the great purpose clause governing this whole economy of salvation and ordering of all things under a single divine unity of design and direction. Christ’s own priesthood, captured in this prayer for union and expressed in his unique high priestly role of mediation (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; cf. *ST* III, q. 22; q. 26, a. 1–2), thus stands in a special way at the very heart of the great dispensational unity of God’s saving plan. Indeed, this plan of human sharing in God’s triune oneness is the most final of all the remote causes of the priesthood. The specific, unifying oneness of Christ’s priestly work is itself grounded upon the oneness of the incarnate Son’s perfect sacrifice, offered once for all (Heb. 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:18), yet shared with men sacramentally joined to him to offer that one selfsame sacrifice and participate in his own “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

As a mystery uniquely localized at the unity of God and man in Christ, priestly ministry in the Church is inevitably central to the hermeneutical unity of the Scriptures. Accordingly, the Christian Bible’s twofold inner division into the Old and New Testaments—the first and primary partition (*divisio textus*) of the unified biblical whole—entails an architectonic asymmetry not simply in the text but in the reality of the priestly work of uniting God and man

1. See further Anthony Giambrone, “Revelation in Christian Scripture,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation*, ed. Balázs M. Mezei, Francesca Aran Murphy, and Kenneth Oakes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

that is there revealed. The single sacrament of Orders is thus itself configured through a double internal movement—law and gospel—“enjoining by commandments and aiding by the gift of grace.”² There is an Old Covenant and a New Covenant priesthood, somehow unified as one within God’s higher plan.

It is vital to recognize this higher plan in Christ’s one priesthood. For if the division between law and gospel, between the old priesthood and the new, is not rightly parsed, a theologically deadly duality can emerge: an irreconcilable, dialectical opposition. This explains the huge significance of correctly understanding Paul’s intricate teaching about the law, its *telos* in Christ, and its eschatological perfection in the Spirit. Reformation readings of Paul, however distant they may appear to the immediate questions of the present study, are thus central to the larger theological operation. The specific risk in Protestant controversial thought is, namely, to create an absolute antagonism of the *spiritual-and-inward* against the *merely ritual*. This touches directly upon the “methodological flaw” that Benedict XVI identifies (see chap. 1).

From the Catholic standpoint, the distinction between the sacraments of the Old Law and the sacraments of the New presents a clear case of continuity in discontinuity. Ritual acquires a new interior power; it is not radically abrogated. Thus, Augustine, echoing Matthew 5:17, says that the sacraments of the Old Law were retired, not because they were somehow fundamentally errant and misleading, but because they were incomplete and had been fulfilled in Christ. The new sacraments, he said echoing Hebrews, are more efficacious and more useful—also less cumbersome and not so excessively numerous (*Reply to Faustus* 19.13). With compact precision, the Decree for the Armenians of the Council of Florence teaches that the sacraments of the Old Law did not confer grace by their own power; yet they did prefigure the grace that was to be given by the passion of Christ. For Aquinas, this meant that rites like circumcision occasioned that grace by reason of the faith in Christ that they represented (*ex fide significata*, *ST* I-II, q. 102, a. 5)—which is to say, the change in sacramental regime from the Old Covenant to the New is a change from the principle of *ex opere operantis* to *ex opere operato*. In short, the validating minister in the New Testament sacraments is now Christ.

As a hermeneutical point, this Catholic commitment to the division yet internal unity of God’s single plan of grace legitimates, among other interpretative moves, the typological instinct. Old Testament rituals in truth signify what New Testament realities in truth accomplish. Holocausts, sin offerings, and peace offerings, for instance, in which nothing of the giver’s is reserved, *do* really point to that most perfect sacrifice offered by Christ, just as the Fathers and medieval doctors taught. This interpretative perspective derives from a

2. Thomas Aquinas, *Hic est Liber*, pars 2.

unity of scriptural subject—namely, the Church’s firm self-understanding that it occupies the place of Israel. The *totus Christus* thus finds itself reflected in Israel’s experiences as in a mirror—or rather in a *typos*, to use the language of St. Paul (1 Cor. 10:6). An honored instrument in the Church’s traditional exegetical tool kit, typology has been too long neglected in modern attempts at doing biblical theology. Its controlled adoption here (notably in chap. 2) represents an important element in this present effort at *ressourcement*.

At the same time, a more comprehensive and complex intertestamental unity is considered as a controlling dimension of this project. For “at the heart of the problem of Biblical Theology lies the issue of doing full justice to the subtle canonical relationship of the two testaments within the one Christian Bible.”³ Brevard Childs is profoundly correct on this point. I add only a strong intonation upon the key adjective “subtle” and note that growing appeals to Childs’s so-called canonical reading of Scripture frequently misconstrue his proposal as a naïve, synchronic, purely narrative, Genesis-to-Revelation, “salvation history” sort of exposition, rather than an engaged diachronic manner of reading, deeply concerned with discerning the right theological balance of the historically layered elements comprising the canonical whole. The broad canonical shape of the present study was already mentioned in the preface: Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings; Gospels and the Apostolic corpus. Appropriate attention to the subtleties interweaving this arrangement of corpora interior to the Church’s unified canon will be an aspiration against which the following chapters may be judged.⁴

2. The Living Tradition

It is obvious that the shape of Catholic exegesis, as outlined in *Dei Verbum*, is not confined by the dogma of *sola scriptura*. To this extent, Catholic exegesis is closely attuned to the shape of Christian life itself. Yves Congar is the recognized spokesman for this dimension of the Church’s existence.

Christianity, I repeat, is a reality. It was given to us as a life to be received and practiced and not simply a text to be consulted. As a transmitted, lived reality,

3. Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 78. Childs continues in another place: “The problem of the early church was not what to do with the Old Testament in the light of the gospel, which was Luther’s concern, but rather the reverse. In the light of the Jewish scriptures which were acknowledged to be the true oracles of God, how were Christians to understand the good news of Jesus Christ?” (227).

4. As an illustrative point of methodological contrast, the present study may be compared to the approach of John Bergsma, *Jesus and the Old Testament Roots of the Priesthood* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2021).

Christianity completely transcends what we are able to say about it. . . . In their haste to rebel against the Church and their impatience to find fault in order to justify their rebellion, the reformers failed to understand that these kinds of Christian realities are *handed over* more than they are *proclaimed*. Among these Christian realities are the sacraments, the lives of the saints, and the Church itself.⁵

Congar's exposition of the theme of Tradition was groundbreaking a generation ago and is now already classic. It is hardly necessary here to belabor the theme. The essential point is that the sacrament of Orders and indeed the whole liturgical life of believers belongs to this extratextual sphere of Tradition, just as episcopal office was handed over in apostolic succession.

In application to this biblical theology of the priesthood, it is clear that we must indulge a respect not only for nonbiblical expressions of sacramental and priestly life (as found preeminently in the writings of the Fathers and other monuments) but also for all the instruments of *Traditio*: liturgical books and the acts of the martyrs, for example—even archaeology in its own way. Tradition also concerns what I mentioned above with Aidan Nichols's phrase: a "hermeneutic of recognition."⁶ This is not a concocted exegetical method based on an ideological theory, like the so-called hermeneutic of suspicion. It is the simple operation of a supernatural instinct, the *sensus fidei*. Without this application of Christian supernatural life to the work of biblical interpretation, moreover, the winds and rains of historical-critical methods will inevitably prevail and cast every ecclesial community built on the sand of *sola scriptura* into a permanent identity crisis. In his *Symbolism*, Möhler writes: "Without doubt, if the Church were a historical or antiquarian society, if she had no self-concept, no knowledge of her origin, of her essence and her mission," then it would be necessary for her to search with the exegetes to find her identity in the Scriptures. "She would be like someone who, by researching documents he himself has written, tries to discover whether he really exists!"⁷

"Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). His body, too, the Church, exists as a living subject, always contemporaneous with itself. For this reason, every age of the Church holds the faith in its entirety, even when it is not explicitly formulated equally in every age. It is accordingly in the supernatural synergy of the *sensus fidei* together with the testimony of the

5. Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 274.

6. See Aidan Nichols, *Holy Order: Apostolic Priesthood from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 4.

7. Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolic Writings* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1997), 296.

Fathers that we discover the real meaning of the famous Vincentian Canon: *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (What is believed always, everywhere, and by everyone). The Canon is not an absolute, positivistic rule for recognizing what is and *what is not* Tradition; rather, it is to be applied positively, not negatively. Thus, that which has not been *explicitly* believed always, everywhere, and by everyone is not thereby automatically barred from Catholic doctrine. This would be incompatible with a living growth in doctrinal insight and would squelch any authentic *sensus fidelium communis*, supplementing the silence of the Fathers on many matters. It is noteworthy in embracing this precise understanding of the Vincentian Canon that, although the Oxford Movement had applied it in a negative fashion, John Henry Newman himself eventually came to revise his understanding of the dynamics of the Church's living Tradition under the influence of the great Roman School Jesuit Giovanni Perrone, whose work on the development of doctrine argued for this positive sense and so prepared for the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.⁸

The doctrine of the sacrament of Orders, like the Marian dogmas, must be approached with this double attention to the testimony of the ancient Church and to the living instinct of the faithful. In this mode, while obviously always alert to anachronism, contemporary Catholic exegesis will have little difficulty seeing the pages of Scripture ripe with indications of the Church's familiar sacramental life, just as the Fathers also easily saw this. Joined with them, we gain a vision of the priestly mystery wider and truer than any vision supposedly based upon Scripture alone. Even the entirely negative datum of the New Testament's lack of the explicit word "priest" for early Christian officeholders will, for instance, do little to discourage this sure recognition of the well-known reality (see excursus 8). The hermeneutic of recognition adopted here is not the Church's narrow effort to pull itself up by its own exegetical bootstraps, by main force of *sola scriptura*, but rather the confident vision of a living community of readers that knows itself to be in solid possession of the broad interpretative keys for understanding its very own books. Living Tradition in *Dei Verbum's* proposal is this envelope of ecclesial life by which the Bible is delivered to us as an intelligible Christian text.

3. The Analogy of Faith

The final member in *Dei Verbum's* list, the *analogia fidei*, is in many ways the most elusive but also the most critical for holding the integral project together.

8. See C. Michael Shea, "Father Giovanni Perrone and Doctrinal Development in Rome: An Overlooked Legacy of Newman's *Essay on Development*," *JHMTb/ZNTbG* 20 (2013): 85–116.

It somehow assimilates (or blurs into) both the unity of Scripture and the living Tradition and enmeshes them in the *ordo salutis*.

The phrase “analogy of faith” is a biblical expression, originally indicating that prophetic charisms are somehow normed by the gift of faith (Rom. 12:6); yet as a theological category it first emerged as an explicit principle during the Reformation era.⁹ Both Luther and (especially) Calvin discerned in the prophetic grace not only the forecasting of future events but above all the interpretation of Scripture, recognized as the preeminent Spirit-led ministry of the Word (cf. 1 Cor. 14).¹⁰ Paul’s normative “analogy of faith” was accordingly the supreme criterion of all exegesis, and thus of all preaching and theology in the Church.

Luther, for his part, pinned between radical, sectarian enthusiasts on the one side and papists on the other, each camp appealing equally to the Bible, determined that the regulative *fides* in question was not and could not be the *fides qua*, the subjective faith of individual believers, but rather the common and objective deposit of truth: the articles of faith or *fides quae*. This deposit of faith was emphatically not located in inherited traditions, however, but rather in Scripture itself and more precisely in the “gospel” of justification *sola fide*. Interpretation “according to the analogy of faith” was thus reading in agreement with the central salvific truth of biblical revelation: exegesis normed by *faith in faith alone*.

While Luther’s outright rejection of Tradition is obviously unacceptable as such (and already addressed in the preceding criterion), the existence of a certain exegetical norm somehow interior to the Bible is not problematic in itself. It essentially means that interpretative priority must be given to the most developed and explicit scriptural ideas, with less obvious materials understood only in that clearer light. This principle of “Scripture interprets Scripture” was not an invention (only an emphasis) of Protestant hermeneutics. In the work of St. Thomas and medieval theology more generally, for instance, nothing may be theologically demonstrated by the spiritual sense that is not elsewhere attested more plainly in the *sensus literalis*. The rabbis also, well before this,

9. See, e.g., Luther, *Marburg Colloquy*; Calvin, *Prefatory Address*; Westminster Confession I.9. See also Otto Hof, “Luther’s Exegetical Principle of the Analogy of Faith,” *CTM* 38 (1967): 242–57; and David Starling, “The Analogy of Faith in the Theology of Luther and Calvin,” *RTR* 72 (2013): 5–19.

10. Luther: “To interpret Scripture, that is the noblest, highest, and greatest gift of prophecy” (WA 17 II, 39 l. 26); “Prophesying does not mean [to speak] as the prophets once did of future things but to interpret the Prophets, the Psalms, as we have done here in Wittenberg; we are prophets” (WA 34 I, 104, 16 [AT]). Calvin: “Prophesying at this day amongst Christians is almost nothing else than a right understanding of the Scripture, and singular gift of expounding the same, since all the old prophecies and oracles of God have been finished in Christ and his gospel” (John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans* [Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844], 460).

had their own carefully formulated rules for a related hermeneutical idea. Modern study, indeed, especially since the work of Michael Fishbane, recognizes even a prerabbinical form of intrabiblical interpretation: expressions of self-exegesis native and entirely interior to the Bible. In multiple ways these various expressions of this “Scripture interprets Scripture” phenomenon will play a significant role in this study.

The analogy of faith is more complex than just a “canon in the canon,” however. On account of its history of polemical use, appreciative Catholic appeals to the *analogia fidei* first began in the nineteenth century, when, especially in the work of the Roman School, the phrase took on an Augustinian sense of agreement between the Old and New Testaments. Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) subsequently introduced the term into magisterial teaching as a hermeneutical rule for the ecclesial reading of Scripture. The sense here is arguably quite similar to its earlier usage: a harmony between the Old and New Testaments. Thereafter the term became a settled but unexplained feature of biblical interpretation *ad mentem ecclesiae*. Reflection upon the idea developed considerably in the twentieth century, however, after Karl Barth adopted *analogia fidei* as his counterproposal to the Catholic metaphysical notion of the *analogia entis*.

Gottlieb Söhngen, the *Doktorvater* and mentor of Joseph Ratzinger, in responding to Barth (evidently to Barth’s own surprised satisfaction), formulated an intricate series of meanings in his brilliant but dense two-part essay on the *analogia fidei*. In the first place, there is the Catholic version of the principle that Scripture is a self-interpreting whole.

The analogy of faith is the *oeconomia Scripturae*, the economy of Scripture: the words of Scripture are interpreted by corresponding words in Scripture. The Catholic exposition of Scripture also works under the assumption that the Word of God is its own interpreter. The Word of God set down in Scripture presents a divine economy in which everything is related to everything else—testament to testament, book to book, word to word—in an analogy that dispels any apparent contradictions.¹¹

This unified internal ordering and proportion among all the intricate parts of Scripture—between prophetic attacks on the clerical establishment and priestly perspectives on cultic life, or between the Levitical and New Testament priesthoods, for instance—stands in harmony, however, with another term: the rule of faith (*regula fidei*). This echoes Luther’s attention to the *fides quae*, yet also pertains to a Catholic conception of the basic character

11. Gottlieb Söhngen, “The Analogy of Faith: Likeness to God from Faith Alone?” and “The Analogy of Faith: Unity in the Science of Faith,” *Pro Ecclesia* 21 (2012): 56–76, 169–94 (here 171).

of the theological act, which is never so simple as a mere interpretative act of reading. The result is a hermeneutical spiral relating dogmatic to exegetical truth; and here a conundrum arises: “We are spinning within a vicious circle of a Catholic variety.”¹² Scripture somehow both governs and is governed by the rule of faith.

The *regula fidei* as it is applied in authors like Tertullian and Irenaeus appears to be something like the sum content of apostolic doctrine, functioning as a governing framework within which the Scriptures must be read. Thus, for Irenaeus this canon or rule contrasts with the alternative, pseudo-apostolic Gnostic systems in and through which the same biblical data might also be (mis)interpreted. In the classical Catholic understanding, this governing deposit and apostolic interpretative space comes to special self-expression in doctrinal formulae such as creeds and in other authoritative acts of the magisterial *ecclesia docens*.

Dei Verbum's extraordinarily strong claim about the exclusive rights of the Church's teaching office to interpret the Word of God in an authentic manner should here be recalled.

The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed. (*Dei Verbum* 10)

The Council thus recognizes the “vicious circle of a Catholic variety” that Söhngen mentions: Scripture norming the teaching office norming Scripture, and so on. This intrusion of the episcopal structure into the exegetical dynamic represents an ongoing scandal to Protestant observers, despite a version of circularity all their own. It is quite plain that Catholic hermeneutics belong soundly within an ecclesiology that openly *presumes* the hierarchical reality of Holy Orders. In this sense, Luther's aggressive attack simultaneously upon both the clergy as such and the clergy's claimed rights over authoritative interpretation rightly saw and targeted a critical knot. The entire project of Catholic biblical theology as such is inextricably tied to the existence of a priestly ministry.

The bishops' unique custody of the authentic Christ-given apostolic *munus* of teaching has never excluded having non-episcopal coworkers, of course,

12. Söhngen, “Analogy of Faith,” 175.

both clerical and lay. This book is an expression of such collaboration from the side of the lower clergy, from a member also, as it so happens, of the *ordo praedicatorum*, enjoying a special share in the teaching charism of the episcopal office, and one who is, finally, concretely deputed by the Apostolic See for a special mission of biblical study and teaching. This naturally carries a certain measure of official authority, beyond whatever credentials I may enjoy as a private scholar. Nevertheless, the positions presented in this book cannot honestly be presented as a Catholic interpretation of Scripture in the fullest sense of that word, except to the extent that they coincide with apostolic teaching, both embracing and embraced by the bishops' universal magisterial *munus*.

In describing the magisterium's reverent docility to the Word, *Dei Verbum* rightly adverts to the help of the Holy Spirit. For Söhngen, this pneumatic solution ultimately eases the tension teasing the relation of the *analogia* and the *regula fidei*.

How does the Catholic account of the rule of faith mesh with the Catholic claim that the Word of God is its own interpreter? Are we not bringing a second, external standard to the Word of God and to Scripture? Not at all! This claim about Scripture remains true and vigorously true; it is only rendered more personal. The Holy Spirit, the primary author of Holy Scripture, is and remains its own proclaimer and interpreter through his work in the formation of the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ.¹³

Interpretation of the sacred text in the prophetic Spirit in which it was written (*Dei Verbum* 12) is what ultimately prevents the Catholic account from simply objectifying the *depositum fidei* as a lifeless letter that stands above and kills the pneumatic *actualitas* of the Word of God. And yet this active attunement of ecclesial interpretation to the living Spirit remains, in the Catholic vision, also greatly concerned, as Söhngen says, that “the substance of the Word and faith cannot turn into a fleeting reality,” an actualized will-o'-the-wisp, an interpretation moved by the *Zeitgeist*—a word, in short, that fades like the proverbial flower of the field. For the Word of God is both “living and abiding” (1 Pet. 1:23 ESV; cf. Isa. 40:8).¹⁴

In the end, therefore, pursuing this pneumatic understanding of the intertwining ecclesial exegesis and doctrine, Söhngen presents a typically *both-and* Catholic view, quite a bit bolder than Luther.

The rule of faith, the Apostles' Creed, is certainly *fides quae creditur*, that is, the content of the faith that is believed. But is not the rule of faith in the

13. Söhngen, “Analogy of Faith,” 176.

14. Söhngen, “Analogy of Faith,” 177.

analogy under consideration simultaneously active as *fides qua creditur*, not in the usual sense of the act of faith in which the content of faith is believed but also as *fides qua intelligitur Scriptura ad credendum verbum Dei?* . . . Does our understanding of Scripture, if our theology is genuinely theological, which can only mean biblical, not point to the understanding of faith?¹⁵

The faith at stake in the analogy of faith is at once *fides quae* and *fides qua*. To this extent, all Christians possessed of the Spirit can equally participate as interpreters of the Word, in proportion to the understanding of their own faith as in Romans 12:6. This understanding of faith boils down, of course, to having the *mind of Christ*—namely, the real union of members of the one body, in the one Spirit, with Christ the one head. The analogy of faith, in this charismatic and ecclesially unitive sense, is thus another expression for the same premise of coworking unity with the episcopal office just described. Yet it also presents a coordinate measure of the bishops' own individual submission in faith to the governing Word.

Following Söhngen, one final aspect of the analogy of faith must be considered. There is the twofold meaning already broached of (1) the whole range of internal connections within Scripture and (2) this connection between the understanding of Scripture and the rule of faith. Now there also arises a kind of proportion between the “economy of Scripture” and the economy of salvation: the living *nexus mysteriorum*.¹⁶ This nexus is often taken as a kind of dogmatic map, the hierarchy of truths, against which a given motif must be plotted. Priestly ministry, for instance, bears a close inner relation to specific doctrinal landmarks: the incarnation, the atonement, Christ's ascension to God's right hand, the saving character of the Church, and eternal life in the presence of the triune God. More unexpected, perhaps, but a special contribution of this study, will be the attention that is paid here to Christ's transfiguration as a mystery of distinctly priestly meaning.

The economy of salvation is more than an occasion for doctrinal orienteering, however. It ultimately evokes the vital power of the saving realities that Church doctrine describes. Taken in this way, as the living *ordo salutis*, scriptural reflection can never be a purely academic and abstract exercise. The Bible's witness to Holy Orders accordingly appears not only at the intersection of key Old and New Testament texts and in connection with certain important Church teachings. *Contemplation of the revelation of the priesthood of Christ and the gift of that priesthood to his Church is itself a participation*

15. Söhngen, “Analogy of Faith,” 178.

16. The succinct definition of the “analogy of faith” offered in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §114 evokes this basic sense of the phrase: “By analogy of faith we mean the coherence of the truths among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation.”

in this same priesthood's very action. Sacred Scripture inserts us directly within the celestial hierarchy and its cascade of supernatural light. For the Bible itself is handed down to us through chosen mediators of God's saving truth, ecclesial hierarchs in the strongest Dionysian sense: priestly writers, entrusted with the rites of the Mosaic covenant; prophets, illumined to lead God's people on the paths of salvation; apostles, bathed in the light of Christ.

A kind of theurgy thus governs the interpretation of the Church's Scriptures. And this brings us at last back around to the original biblical datum. The analogy of faith in Romans 12:6 is the control placed upon a prophetic gift of the Spirit. The similar discussion in 1 Corinthians 14 makes the proper place of the *analogia fidei* within a liturgical setting perfectly clear. This setting is fitting as a hermeneutical rule, moreover, for the Bible belongs firmly to the cult of the Church. Indeed, the Church, the *ecclesia*, is itself one enormous cosmic liturgy, a great assembly, in which the prophetic Scriptures resound and surround the offering of Christ our Pasch. "To interpret the Scriptures in the same Spirit in which they were written" (*Dei Verbum* 12) is thus, in the end, nothing else than to be attuned to a prophetic grace that sounds out in this vast liturgy bridging heaven and earth: a liturgy that far excels some brute anthropological fact, as this would be viewed from the vantage point of "ritual studies." A heavenly high priest, triumphantly interceding at God's right hand, presides as the eternal head of a cult spanning the cosmos. Heaven and earth intersect and are united precisely in this great high priest's one sacrifice for sins.

What does this imply for our reading of Scripture and its presentation of this selfsame priestly act? Since the destruction of the temple and the end of Israel's Mosaic economy of sacrifice, pious Jews celebrate the Feast of Yom Kippur, not through the actual offering of blood by the high priest within the holy of holies, but by devoutly reading and studying the priestly ritual described in Leviticus 16. Scripture functions both as a surrogate and also as a mediation and medium of real participation in the truth of what it describes. Post-temple Jewish *avodah* in the form of Torah study corresponds in this way rather closely to what Catholics would understand as a spiritual communion. In the Christian economy, for which the Mosaic system of sacrifice is also definitively ended, the same study of the same text, but with a different gift of divine light, unites the mind with the more elevated heavenly sacrifice that the earthly Day of Atonement foreshadowed. Here too there is true worship and a spiritual communion.¹⁷ The inspired oracles to which

17. St. Thomas writes, "Since every word of wisdom is derived from the Only Begotten Word of God—'The fountain of wisdom is the Only Begotten of God' (Sir 1:5)—this Word of God is especially called the bread of life. Thus Christ says, 'I am the bread of life'" (*St. Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 6–12*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A.

we are now ready to turn initiate us in mind into an inner sanctum reserved for the highest priestly action. Our exposition will, to this extent, carry the character of a mystagogy: an exegetical ascent from prophetic shadows to the reality of better things, yet an exposition that presumes the consummation of the high priestly ministry that it describes.

The project of scriptural study that now opens before us must be pursued in a resolutely contemplative and ecclesial frame of mind. It is substantially grounded upon a firm faith in the very truth that it seeks to understand and uncover. The circular character of this hermeneutic of recognition is manifest from multiple directions, as we have seen. Believers will perceive this ecclesial epistemology, however, as a participation of the faith-filled mind in the mystery of the infinite God. Taking *Dei Verbum* 12 as the comprehensive norm for genuine Catholic biblical theology, our study must thus be moved by the same supernatural Spirit who animates the assembly of the elect. This means—to make one final but critical point—that we must, for the duration of at least the next five chapters, be coworkers in an ecclesial charism of priestly teaching. And that demands no less docility to the action of divine grace on the part of this little book's readers than it requires of its author.

Weisheipl [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010], chap. 6, *lectio* 4, no. 914 [p. 25]).