

The Mystery And Manners of Sacramental Efficacy ***Reconstructing The Spiritual Relation Between Signs And Things Signified***

Introduction:

There are the “sacraments,” and then there is the conjunction of sacramental mystery with sacramental manners. One without the other is like signs without things signified. And in Flannery O’Connor’s words, “If it’s only a symbol, then to hell with it!”

O’Connor was responding to fellow writer Mary McCarthy at a dinner party where it was boldly declared that the Eucharist was a mere symbol. O’Connor later explained:

That was all the defense I was capable of at the time, but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it, *outside of a story*, except that it is the center of existence for me. All the rest of life is expendable.

And the stories Flannery told! Whereas she wrote novels, her principle works were short stories written before lupus took her life at the young age of 37. In each there was a search for the connection between local, particular, even carnal *manners* and the efficacious *mystery* of sacramental grace she believed deeply infused the spirituality of everyday life. Influenced by the mystic French Jesuit scientist Teilhard de Chardin’s “Omega point,”¹ Flannery thought there was a sacramental convergence between the *manners* of local life and transformational *mystery* of grace. This was expressed in her *Everything That Rises Must Converge* and then her reflective collection of essays entitled *Mystery and Manners*.

Clearly O’Connor’s program, however inspired by church ritual, was much greater in scope than about the meaning of a mere ritual event. She was in fact exploring perhaps the most rudimentary of all human explorations, if also infinitely complex. It pertained to the meaning of ordinary life as related to something out of the ordinary, perhaps an inherently planted expression of the most sacred of sacred prayers-- “on earth as it is in heaven” shared in by all peoples of all faiths.

The universality of this prayer is reflected throughout cultures and is arguably at the heart of much post-modern, post-Christendom especially, spirituality. One thinks of the seminal work of social anthropologist Mircea Eliade her *The Sacred and Profane* and the description of “hierophany” (“manifestations of the sacred”) and their relevance to the social-cultural phenomena understood as an *axis mundi*. In her words, the cultural phenomena of an *axis mundi* represent places of ritual wherein “we encounter the sacred” as symbolized and even mediated by “sacred pillars” such as to break into the “homogeneity of space...to symbolize an opening from heaven to earth, and vice versa.” Such places, it is argued, become a “communication with heaven as expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the *axis mundi*.”²

Such is the meaning of religion from the vantage point of a social anthropologist- not an all together foreign conception regarding the religious nature of all people of all faiths encountered throughout the redemptive historical narrative of the Old and New Testament contexts. Whether by means of the “hierophany” of a sacred “Tree of Life” in Genesis, stones piled up into a heap, tabernacles and temples (all sanctioned by God for his covenant people), or the ziggurats, carved images made of stone or metal and sacred statues commemorating an unknown god (all unsanctioned by God as related to the practices of pagan religions), there seems this universal prayer “on earth as it is in heaven” as recognized by social anthropologists as the *axis mundi*.”

All this to to say that the sacramental question is much more than a mere question about a ritual event in Christian worship, though it is that too. Rather it is the question of how we as Christian answer the universal prayer that is prayed by people throughout the world, the prayer for the extra-ordinary of divinity coming into the mundane ordinariness of our lives as to enliven our existence. To be sure, according to our Christian confession, what the world is searching for is Jesus the Christ as by the salvific convergence of the Divine to human vis-à-vis history.

¹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wed his belief in evolutionary and humanistic progress to the teachings of the gospel concerning the coming of the kingdom of God. The coming of the kingdom of God could be discovered anywhere in the natural world wherein he once noted that “cosmic and human evolution are moving onwards to an ever fuller disclosure of the Spirit culminating in Christ-Omega.”

² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane, The Nature of Religion and the significance of religious myth, symbolism and ritual within life and culture* p. 37

But to our present context, there was a time when such a convergence had an address wherein the very *axis mundi* of human history became a specific location on a particular day known to the world as Jesus of Nazareth. This is of course the subject matter of the now famous “distinct but not separate” mystery of 5th century *incarnational* Christology. It is the basis for our Christian assurance by saving faith in a “once and for all” salvation accomplished. But what about salvation *applied* and today? Is there not Christian *axis mundi* remaining. Are we absent the true mediatorial presence of God on earth as from heaven?

This all brings us to the ordinary ebb and flow of a typical Southern New England Presbytery ordination exam, and especially the often asked question about *sacramental efficacy*. Sure, it pertains to the significance of a cultic ritual-event we call a sacrament, and most especially the sacraments of Christian baptism and Lord’s Supper as the only two (within our present ecclesial context, so assumed). And yet as told by our confessional consensus, the question being asked is more fundamentally about the relation of “things invisible to things visible,” of things in heaven to things on earth, and especially, in so far as we are talking about Christ in relation to the Christian meaning of salvation.

Stated in a more theologically grandiose way, the sacramental question is nothing short of wanting to discover the meaning and significance of the often neglected *historia salutis* of Christ’s ascension and its subsequent *ordo salutis* benefits wherein the sacraments derive their importance. More than a mere epilogue to salvation history, it is about the continued vivifying presence of Christ on earth from heaven. In so far as it is as essential to Christ as is the body to it’s head-- the temple to covenant-- it is to study the church as a topic in *soteriology* proper versus a mere pragmatically verifiable good idea for evangelism or credentialing.

Therefore, the sacramental question gets to what the church is by her very nature as related to Christ. The result will be to discern the church as more than a simple source of Christ’s mission to the world, but as a covenant community ordered by divine institution to become the temple of God as carefully designed and choreographed to be a participation of heaven itself on earth (Mt 16, Heb 12), the communal body of Christ such as to become “fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23). And as we will see, a sacramental conception of spirituality will change everything in terms of our Christian manners. But we would be getting ahead of ourselves at this point.

Our task then is to explore the answer to that typical ordination question about sacramental efficacy. Asked in many forms and contexts, the gist of the question is to discern what could be describes as the mystery and manners of a sacramental spirituality.

And so the sacramental question in three parts:

- I. *What is the mystery of sacrament as related to Ascension Christology Applied to Ecclesiology (The question of Temple and Historia Salutis)*
- II. *What is the mystery of sacrament as related to salvation? (The question of Efficacy and Ordo Salutis)*
- III. *What are the manners of a sacramental spirituality (The question of Ecclesial Praxis in mission and ministry)*

Questions Answered:

I. The mystery of sacrament as related to Ascension Christology (The question of Temple and Historia Salutis)

Before turning to the “ordo salutis” as per a consideration of our confessional consensus, it is perhaps useful to first consider the question as a topic in *historia salutis*, even as to form the historic connection (both in a redemptive-historical and ecclesial-historical) between sacrament, temple and Christology per then the meaning of “church.” To begin, we pick up with a 19th century context of an intramural debate within our own American Presbyterian context if but to clarify the sacramental question itself. This in turn will lead us back to the 15th debates in Christology, both incarnational and ascension Christology as then applied to ecclesiology:

The 19th century debate in sacramentology:

The debate was initiated by John Nevin’s *Mystical Presence* published in 1846. Whereas it would take Hodge two years to review Nevin’s book, it was reviewed earlier in the *Princeton Review* in an article entitled “*The Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*.” The gist of the article was to demonstrate how Nevin rightly discerned Calvin’s doctrine of Christ’s mystical presence in Christian sacraments and that such a view is consistent with “Reformed.” When Hodge finally did address the book in 1848 in the acclaimed *Biblical Repertory Review*, he entitled his piece “The Doctrine of

the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper."

Perhaps surprising to many so called "reformed" Christians today, and as implied by the title, the aim of Hodge's piece was to disassociate the Reformed" sacramental view from the "Calvinistic." In his own words, "being called upon to investigate the question, what was the *real* doctrine of the Reformed church... we differ from him indeed, essentially, as to the whole subject, not only as to the historical question, but as to what is the true doctrine."³

By these astonishing words, one expects a rather scathing and full rejection of most of what Nevin affirmed. And yet as it turns out, many a staunch Calvinist today, given an arguably low-church context in American evangelicalism, would hope for Hodge's so called un-Calvinistic concessions to Nevin's point of view. In Hodge's own words:

It is agreed... if the union were merely moral, arising from agreement and sympathy, there would be no mystery about it... but the scriptures teach that our union with Christ is far more than this.

It is agreed... if it is a vital union; we are partakers of his life, for it is not we that live, but Christ that lives in us.. analogous to our union with Adam;

It is agreed... that this union includes a federal or representative relation, arising from divine constitution; and on the part of Christ, a participation of our nature.

It is agreed... that this union includes on our part a participation of the Spirit of Christ. Its the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of Christ, and dwells without measure in him as our head, who dwells also in his people, so that they become one body in Christ. As the human body is one by being animated and pervaded by one soul, so Christ and his people are one in virtue of the indwelling of one and the same Spirit, the Holy Ghost.

It is agreed... that this union relates to the bodies as well as the souls of believers... "know you not." asks the apostle "that your bodes are the members of Christ; know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost who dwells in you?" This union was always represented as real union, not merely imaginary nor simply moral, nor arising from the mere reception of the benefits which Christ has procured. We receive Christ himself and are in Christ, united to him by the indwelling of his Spirit and by a living faith. So far all the Reformed at least agreed.⁴

This from the vantage point of a Nevin contrarian! Nevin was at times also surprised by the sometimes vehemence of Hodge compared to his actually concessions. There were many instances that in response to Hodges critical review, Nevin could as well concede agreement to the substance of Hodge's points.

To Hodge's question, *What is meant by feeding on the body and blood of Christ*, Nevin answered, "we are told, all reformed agreed," and after reviewing the four things noted by Hodge, Nevin emphatically affirms "We find no difficulty in granting all of this."⁵

To the question, *In what sense is Christ present in the Lord's Supper*, Nevin replied, "there is not a word in *Mystical Presence* which can be said to affirm what is here (by Hodge) denied... The presence it is made to assert in the Eucharist is always most carefully represented to be spiritual and not material, dynamic and not local, for the apprehension of faith and not for the apprehension of sense."⁶

And to the question, *What is meant by the body and blood of Christ as received in the sacrament*, Nevin will testify, "here again, that it does not mean that we partake of the material particles of Christ's body, nor do they express any mixture or transfusion of substance—here again there is no controversy."⁷

And on it went, the point being that if in an ordination exam we could even come to this sort of agreement today, it could be agreed that we are all within our confessional consensus "reformed" reflecting great progress in our confessional consensus to date. But there was a question that still remained then, as it does now, as pertaining to a fuller understanding of the sacramental mystery. For the question remained concerning why Hodge held that the Nevin-Calvin view of sacraments, and subsequently ecclesiology proper, was contrary to being "reformed."

³ Charles Hodge, "Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord's Supper", *The Biblical Repertory and the Princeton Review*, 20 (April 1848): 227-77. Essays, p. 341.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 342-343.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁶ Nevin, DR, Essays, p. 433.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

Before returning to the debate itself, it is useful to make note of a significant transition that took place in theological education at the time. The transition was influenced by Francis Turretin's *Institutio Theologicae Elencticae* (1679-1685) as it replaced Calvin's *Institutes* both at Union and Princeton where Hodge taught during the mid-nineteenth century, but not at Columbia or Mercersburg where Nevin taught.

The significance is noted in that Turretin sought to develop the 17th century principle "the finite cannot contain the infinite" throughout his more rationalist leaning Christology. Applied to incarnational Christology, this principle led to an emphasis upon the "distinctness" between the human and divine natures of Christ by Turretin, and subsequently by Hodge. This was the "new reformed" idea of Hodge's inclination that took on a decidedly more scholastic and rationalist emphasis.

More specifically, as incarnational Christology was applied to Ascension Christology and by inference ecclesiology, the distinctness was predictably emphasized by Hodge as to diminish the mystical aspect of Christ's union of two natures vis-à-vis the mediatorial presence of Christ acting through the temple-church as both covenant head and temple-body as depicted by the incarnational Christology of John 1:14 applied then to Ascension Christology in Ephesians 1:22-23.

Regarding the different emphasis of Turretin compared to Calvin, historian Brian Nicholson observes how Calvin's contrasting emphasis "achieved clarity in his treatment of the sacrament not by thinking *through* it but by thinking *around* it. Calvin acknowledged that at the heart of the sacrament there is a miracle and a profound mystery. He never sought to reduce the mystery to reason but rather preserved the mysterious element."⁸

In short, Hodge would have represented a more progressive and modernist leaning perspective concerning even the concept of "mystery" in sacramental theology as was increasingly popular prominent in 19th century modernist leaning philosophy. (Perhaps awaiting a post-modern reaction, if preferably *back* toward pre-modern leaning vs. "more-modern leaning spirituality!). We are therefore brought back to the 19th century debate itself, and the fundamental disagreement between Nevin and Hodge.

For Hodge's part, he asked Nevin, "Do the Scripture teach besides all this, that we are partakers of the *human nature*, of the real flesh and blood of Christ... in what sense do we *eat his flesh and drink his blood* as to have communion with them? According to Hodge, "all the reformers answered that by receiving the body and blood of Christ is meant receiving their virtue or efficacy." And yet, in an astounding concession as pertaining especially to Calvin, Hodge admits how "some" within the reformed tradition "say it was their virtue as broken and shed... meaning their sacrificial virtue; others said, it was a mysterious supernatural efficacy flowing from the glorified body of Christ in heaven."⁹

Nevin, like Calvin (again as conceded by Hodge), would have nothing to do with associating the received virtue in communion as related to the body and blood of Christ as a "sacrificial virtue." He explain how justification... "rests on the objective merit of Christ, by whose blood alone propitiation has been made for the sins of the world. "Redemption accomplished (past tense) is to be received by faith alone. In this, Nevin was distinguishing Christ's work as covenant executor (head) from Christ's work as temple presence (body).

But with Calvin, Nevin explained that for justification "to become ours in fact, [the spirit] must insert us into Christ's life... we must have Christ himself formed in us more and more in a real way in order that "he may be made unto us of God, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."¹⁰ That is, to affirm the benefit of effectual calling as gained by means of mystical union with Christ. This led to the question "what properties are formed in our union with the church? Nevin's answer "Christ's life... rests not in his separate person, but passes over to his people; thus constituting the Church, which is his body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."¹¹ C.f. Eph. 1:14ff

By the end of the debate, it was clear that the differences between Nevin and Hodge were more of emphasis than belief. And yet, with the reformed "others" (e.g. Calvin), Nevin very much wanted to retain the virtue of receiving Christ's body and blood in the Lord's supper with "a mysterious supernatural efficacy flowing from the glorified body of Christ in heaven."

⁸ Brian Nicholson, *Calvin's Doctrine*. p. NA.

⁹ Hodge, DR, *Essays*, P. 343

¹⁰ *The Mystical Presence*, p. 170. Interestingly, this idea of the objective and subjective applied to justification is very much what Michael Horton is after in his *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2007). He will however and yet assigned the two aspects relative to "justification" and "participation" to a single orientation of "covenant" rather than what we are here attempted in terms of a more dialectical relationship between "covenant" and "temple" albeit "distinct and never separate." (247). This will I think later play out as to slightly diminish a "total" church ecclesiology, but is otherwise in perfect sympathy with what we are after here.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.169.

Hodge, the good historical theologian that he was, again agreed that Nevin's position "was clearly Calvin's idea" and proceeded even to quote Calvin in defense of Nevin. The quote spoke volumes as to the distinguishing "Calvinistic" perspective, contra Turretin, concerning the sacramental mystery.

We acknowledge without any circumlocution that the flesh of Christ, is life-giving, not only because once in it our salvation was obtained; but because now we being united to him in sacred union, it breathes life into us... because being by the power of the Spirit engrafted into the body of Christ, we have a common life with him; fore from the hidden fountain of divinity life is, in a wonderful way, infused into the flesh of Christ and thence flows out to us..." Christ is absent from us as to the body; by his Spirit, however dwelling in us, he so lifts us to himself in heaven, that he transfuses the life-giving vigor of his flesh into us, as we grow by vital heat of the sun."¹²

Notice especially "without any circumlocution." That is, without attempting to talk through the mystery, Calvin was comfortable by faith talking around it. Historian Brooks Holifield notes how for Nevin and Calvin,

"salvation required more than forensic atonement, but also a living union with Christ in order to attain a new order of existence... Christ, by overcoming the chasm between the human and divine, manifested his life in the mundane."

Clearly for Calvin, as followed by Nevin, the efficacy of sacramental ecclesiology is real, conceived in more ways than the forensic union that is our by faith alone unto justification. This efficacious union that Calvin envisioned is again sufficiently illustrated by Calvin in his *Institutes* wherein he confirms:

We expect salvation from him — not because he stands aloof from us, but because engrafting us into his body he not only makes us partakers of all his benefits, but also of himself... you become a member of him, and hence one with him... It will never do to separate Christ from neither us, nor us from him; but we must, with both hands, keep firm hold of that alliance by which he has riveted us to himself. ... That Christ is not external to us, but dwells in us; and not only unites us to himself by an undivided bond of fellowship, but by a wondrous communion brings us daily into closer connection, until he becomes altogether one with us.¹³

One final observation is especially noteworthy by way of transition. Nevin throughout the debate was clear to say that he was clearly committed to Chalcedon Christology applied to Ecclesiology. According to Nevin, it is the very mystery of the incarnation that explains the mystery of our mystical union with Christ being transacted unto salvation as then participated in at the Lord's Table."

So for instance, in his *Mystical Presence*, Nevin argued that "by the hypostatical union of the two nature in the person of Jesus Christ, our humanity as fallen in Adam was exalted again to a new and imperishable divine life." He further explained, "the object of the incarnation was to couple the human nature in real union with the Logos, as a permanent source of life."¹⁴

Hodge again conceded to Nevins point that the whole debate hinges upon Christology applied to ecclesiology, or better, incarnational Christology applied to ascension Christology. While agreeing however that Christology was the 'centre and sum' of Nevin's "mystical system,"¹⁵ Hodge, per his Turretin influence, accused Nevin of exaggerating the unity of the two natures and denying "any dualism in the constitution Christ... the divine and human are so united in him (Nevin) as to constitute one divisible life."¹⁶

Not to be outdone, Nevin shoot back that Hodge was guilty of Nestorianism—the 5th century belief rejected at the Counsel of Ephesus in 431 AD that Jesus existed as two separate persons, rather than two natures, one person-- the man Jesus and the divine Son of God. It should be noted however that both Nevin and Hodge failed to acknowledge Nestorius' vindication and restoration to the church in the second Ephesus council of 433 AD by his clarification made to this very point, and in a manner that speaks volumes concerning a more biblical-theological conception of Christology than a philosophical one. Therefore, from then the 19th century debate in sacramentology, we are led back to the 5th century debates in Christology, even as to illustrate the movements in construction a *historia salutis* conception of Ascension Spirituality.

¹² Quoted in Hodge, DR, *Essays*, p. 364.

¹³ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1559*, ed. J. T. McNeill and F.L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.2.24. C.f. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953)

¹⁴ Nevin, MP, p. 197.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.243.

¹⁶ Hodge, DR, *Essays*, 378

A 5th Century Debate in Christology Applied to Ecclesiology

The 5th century controversy in Christology involved the relation of the divine and human within Jesus Christ. The questions were: To what extent was Christ human? And to what extent was Christ divine even as to relate to Christ the divine logos (covenant Word) and human flesh (temple presence) respectively.

The protagonists involved Bishop Nestorius of Constantinople and Bishop Cyril of Alexandria representing the East and West respectively. Cyril emphasized the unity of the two in one Person, while Nestorius emphasized their distinctness that seemed to Cyril to be splitting Christ into two Persons acting in concert. The former stressed two natures to preserve Christ's humanity(temple). The later stressed one nature to preserve Christ's divinity (logos). And yet both conceded the absolute necessity of preserving a *dialectical understanding of the relationship between the human and divine in Christology*.¹⁷ John 1:14 loomed large throughout the debate, even as it would later in Augustine as applied to Ascension Christology in Ephesians 1: 22-23. Beginning with the incarnational context for Christology:

It was all charged within a political context surrounding whether to venerate Mary as the "mother of God"(Cyril), or not (Nestorius). Accordingly, historian Ben Green makes the observation how "the challenge for understanding the debate between Nestorius and Cyril is to distinguish the moderate from the extreme. It all culminated in two councils: Ephesus (part 1: AD 431) and part 2: AD 433, and Calcedon

1) The Council(s) at Ephesus in 431 and 433:

The Council at Ephesus Part 1 (AD 431): Armed with a commission to represent Pope Celestine I as well as himself, Cyril convened the council and condemned Nestorius. He had not waited, however, for the arrival of certain bishops from the East, particularly from the see of Antioch, where Nestorius had lived before he became bishop of Constantinople. When they did reach Ephesus, they reconvened the council and condemned Cyril.

Papal recognition of Cyril's council was eventually obtained however and Nestorius was banished as a heretic. Even so, the dispute continued with a whole host of politicking and subsequently more personalities who held to the more radicalized positions on both sides-- The Antiochene "school" per Eutyches on the east side and the Alexandrian school per Dioscorus on the west side

2) The Council at Ephesus Part 2 (433 AD): And yet peace in the church was finally restored in 433, when Cyril accepted a statement, representing a compromise with Antioch that emphasized the distinctness of the two natures within the one Person of Christ. Significantly, the statement by Nestorius that proved essential to his vindication was in reference to the language of John's gospel in 1:14:

"I did not say that the Son was one (person) and God the Word another; I said that God the Word was by nature one and the temple by nature another, one Son by conjunction."¹⁸

2) Chalcedon in AD 451:

It took Chalcedon to finally clarify the Christological doctrine itself as would eventually become widely accepted in the Greek, Roman and Protestant traditions. The Chalcedon creed reflected more of a "win-win" compromise between the original Nestorian and Cyril positions and codified the language: "*Distinct but never separate*" as regarding Christ's human and divine nature albeit mystically conjoined in one person.

The counsel would eventually clarify, "that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation." That is, "the distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person."¹⁹ The mention of "character proper to each person" was

¹⁷ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, *Last Updated 4-23-2013*

¹⁸ Green.. Quote taken from a sermon Nestorius preached in 430 as quoted by Aloys Grillmeier, S.J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, Vol. 1: *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd revised edition, trans. John Bowden (Atlanta: John Knox

¹⁹ Green, p. 455

clearly a reference to Nestorius commentary on John 1:14 as to the Word/Temple natures of the single person, Christ.

Christology Applied: Augustine's "Totus Christus" Explained

Before returning to the Christological debates of the 5th century, and Augustines contribution especially I ascension Christology, it is significance to note that the arguments centered upon the meaning of John 1:14 especially. That is, the very nature of Christ's person is related to his fulfillment of ancient redemptive historical trajectories concerning the divine institutions of Covenant-Logos and Temple- Presence. Stated differently, John's reference to "Word" and "Temple" is of course a reference to God's appointed means of grace throughout history in mediating Christ's presence unto salvation relevant to before, during and after Christ's incarnation ministry. Christ is depicted not in terms of a rationalist metaphysics, however much this would eventually make its way into Christological formulation, but in terms of two redemptive historical trajectories as from promise and shadows to fulfillment and execution in Christ.

This is of course consistent with Christ's own self-introduction to travelers on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24:27.

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

After the hermeneutic pattern set forth by Christ, a Christology is most "biblical" as it is revealed in the unfolding narrative of redemptive history applied to Christ's incarnation and ascension ministries both.

Such a christo-centric and redemptive-historical reading of scripture will expose the fullness of Christ as both the fulfillment and embodiment of God's covenant-word and temple-presence. This dual trajectory through redemptive history begins in Genesis and nicely summarized by Meredith Kline wherein the holy garden is described as both a "Kingdom Prologue" and a "Glory-Temple" relative to covenant and temple respectively. The one establishes a legal-declarative paradigm that in Christ is the basis for gospel centered spirituality, even if the other establishes an effectual-participationist power in divine presence that in Christ is the basis for a missional ecclesiology. Together, Eden is portrayed as both covenantal and temple, forensic paradigm presence power, as prologue to the whole of redemptive history fulfilled in Christ.

As the overshadowing Glory was present at the beginning of the first creation, so it was again present at epochal beginnings in the history of re-creation in both old and new covenants – at Sinai, at the incarnation, baptism, and transfiguration of the Son of God, and at Pentecost. And because the Spirit's presence in redemptive re-creation is once more both as power and as paradigm, the consummation of redemptive history witnesses the appearing of the eternal cosmic-human temple of God.²⁰

Therefore, as relevant to the present concern in sacramental mystery,

*It is revealed that there was never a time in all of redemptive history wherein salvation was accomplished apart from **covenant fulfillment**, albeit in the Old Testament shadows and promises as fulfilled in the New Testament in Christ. For example:*

In the Old covenant context:

- The Hebrew word for "covenant" (berith) is used at least 289 times.
- The Hebrew word covenant is explicitly used to summarize the whole of the Genesis history in Exodus 2:24 and the Old Covenant "Bible" itself was called the "book of the covenant" in Exodus 24:7.
- The prophet Jeremiah in the old covenant context anticipates the coming of a "new covenant" (Jer.31: 31. c.f Malachi 3:1) even as Paul in the new covenant context references the "veil" of the old covenant that was lifted by Christ in the new covenant (c.f. 2Cor 3:14).

In the New Covenant,

- Matthew introduces Christ in fulfilling of the law-covenant. For instance, Matthew narrates Christ's saying, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish

²⁰ Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue, Genesis Foundations For A Covenantal Worldview*. Meredith Kline/Two Age Press, 1989/2000.

them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18)

- Here again, Christ is shown throughout his ministry to fulfill the law-covenant in relation to the “law” of love (Dt. 6:5, 13:3 and Matt. 22:29-32).
- Christ is described as the “mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15, 12:15)
- Beyond even the explicit references to “covenant” in the New Testament, we discern as well the use of “law” (nomos) as again synonymous with “covenant” throughout. For instance, the “book of the law,” is often used by the prophets in reference to the “book of the covenant” (Josh 24:26, Neh. 8:8, 18, etc) and is perfectly aligned with Paul’s use of the same in reference to the old covenant (Rom. 7:22, 25, 1Cor.9: 21).

Likewise,

*It is revealed that there was never a time in all of redemptive history wherein salvation was applied apart from participation in God’s mediatorial **temple presence**, albeit in the Old Testament shadows and promises as fulfilled in the New Testament in Christ.*

In the Old Covenant:

- Salvation history in the Old Testament was accomplished with such words as *dwelling place* and *tabernacle*, even as covenants were initiated and sealed through rites whereby God manifested his saving, albeit mediated, *presence* to his people by means of the temple. (Cf. Gen. 15; 26:24; Exod. 29:42; Deut. 12:5; Lev. 22:3; Ps.76.2; Num. 35:34).
- The description, *God in the midst of us* (Ps 49), was the single most coveted reality, even as “excommunication” was the most feared curse (Gen.3)

In the New Covenant:

- The gospel is not a transition from temple presence to “no temple presence,” but rather temple presence fulfilled and then mediated by Christ during his ascension ministry. For instance, Paul described salvation with the promise “I will dwell with them” (2 Cor. 6:16) just as under the Old Covenant. And lest this “dwelling” be confused with a private experience, Paul, in 1Cor 3, dares to assert “Do you not know that *you* (plural) are God’s temple and that Gods Spirit dwells in *you* (plural)?
- Therefore, throughout the New Covenant, words like “temple” and “tabernacle” and “dwelling place” describe God’s saving presence as pertaining to the “household of God” or “the church of the living God” no less than it did under the Old Covenant context (c.f. Eph. 2:18-22, Rev. 21:3).

It is essential to discern how the two institutions of covenant and temple respectively were distinct but never separate (Sound familiar). They act throughout redemptive history in an inter-dependent fashion, the covenant instituting, designing and regulating the temple, the temple executing and satisfying the covenant. Salvation without either would be incomplete, lacking either the objective-forensic paradigm that would lead to grace received by faith alone, or the subjective-presence power that would lead to grace conferred.

Just as in Christology, Christology applied means that the Covenant and Temple are at once distinct, but never separat... throughout redemptive history and equal aspects of Christ as foreshadowed in the Old Covenant to be fully realized in fulfillment in the New Covenant. In their inter-dependent relation upon one another:

- *If the covenant constitutes and regulates the temple*
- *The temple executed and participated in the covenant*

- *If “Covenant” is divine law unto salvation*
- *Temple is divine presence unto salvation*

- *If covenant is the basis of assurance by grace through faith alone in Christ our covenant executor*
- *The temple is the means by which that grace is mediated or “fleshed out” into the common vernacular of the socio-*

cultural flesh of the nations...

- *If Covenant is objectifying/personal grace—the basis of our assurance*
- *Temple is subjectifying/communal grace—the basis for our participation in that assurance...*

- *Neither “save” us—but are the means through which GOD saves us, as to bring his salvation into our existence on earth as it is in heaven the power of the Holy Spirit.*

- *It could be said that the covenant justifies and assures us*
- *It could be said that the temple converts, sanctifies and perseveres us ...*

This then sets up Augustine’s Ascension Christology applied to Ecclesiology

Augustine’s Total Christ Christology (Incarnational Christology Applied to Ascension):

The question is raised as to what exactly is the meaning of Nestorius’ earlier clarification, “ I said that God *the Word* was by nature one and the *temple* by nature another, one Son by conjunction”, especially as applied to Christ’s ascension ministry.”²¹ Enter Augustine’s *Totus Christus* idea.

The focus of Augustine’s *Totus Christus* Christology was concerned to address both the “distinct” but “not separate” aspects of Christ’s ascension ministry vis-à-vis the institution of the church. His source was the same as before (John 1:14), with the addition of Ephesians 1:22-23.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us; to that flesh is joined the church, and there is made the *total Christ*, head and body. ²²

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:22-23)

The meaning of “to that flesh is joined the church” is of particular significance. . It would appear that Augustine’s point is that the significance of the church is something more than a witness. Rather, it is also a mediated presence wherein the very flesh of the people, albeit in many cultural forms, is mystically joined to Christ by the Holy Spirit to be the mediatorial body of Christ on earth in union with Christ ascension presence in haven, really, if also fallibly. This seems clearly to be in step with Paul’s use of Ephesians 1:22-23 in Ephesians 2

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)

Augustine’s point is that the visibly and organically socialized church into a given cultural-linguistic “flesh” as carefully patterned after the apostolic foundation with Christ as the cornerstone IS (not necessarily, not necessarily immediately) the mediatorial presence of Christ in the midst of us today. Augustine writes for instance:

Then let us rejoice and give thanks that we are made not only Christians, but Christ. Do you understand, brothers, and apprehend the grace of God upon us? Marvel, be glad, we are made Christ. For if he is the head, we are the members: the whole man is he and we... The fullness of Christ, then, is head and members. Head and members, what is that? Christ and the Church.²³

To further illustrate this point, Martin Luther in the 16th century often applied Augustine’s *Totus Christus* to Christ’s presence acting through “communion of the saints.” Luther’s application of Christology to ecclesial communion is illustrated in mercy,

²¹ Ibid.

²² St. Augustine, *On the Epistle of John* 1.2.

²³ St. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, In. lo. XXI.8).

for instance:

*That even as we have eaten and drunk the body and blood of Christ the Lord, we in turn permit ourselves to be eaten and drunk, and say the same words to our neighbor, Take, eat and drink; and this by no means in jest, but in all seriousness, meaning to offer yourself with all your life, even as Christ did with all that he had, in the sacramental words.*²⁴

That is, Christ is “not separate” from the church. But what about the “distinct” side of Christology applied to ascension ecclesiology? Perhaps lost on many protestant “totus Christus” distractors, Augustine carefully qualifies his ascension Christology applied to ecclesiology as to distinguish spiritual vs. carnal presence. This is illustrated in his comments about the meaning of Paul’s warning that “some have died” concerning a wrongful participation in the Lord’s Supper. Augustine raised the question “why then are there some that have not died who have eaten the bread improperly?” His answer:

“Why? Because they understood the visible food spiritually, hungered spiritually, tasted spiritually, that they might be filled spiritually. For even we at this day receive visible food: but the sacrament is one thing, the virtue of the sacrament another.”

He further explains:

*Consequently, he that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, doubtless neither eateth His flesh [spiritually] nor drinketh His blood [although he may press the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ carnally and visibly with his teeth].*²⁵

Accordingly, J. N.D. Kelley will conclude how “in the 4th and 5th century... the universal, if somewhat vague assumption was that the sacraments were outward and visible signs marking the presence of an invisible, but none the less genuine grace.” Kelley further explains that in Augustine’s view of baptismal efficacy, “the sacrament itself is one thing and the power of the sacrament is another... in baptism the water serves as the sacrament of the grace imported, but the grace itself is invisibly operated by the Holy Spirit.”²⁶

That Augustine’s Totus Christus Ascension Christology is warranted in scripture is perhaps nowhere more demonstrated than in John’s Gospel, especially Chapter 14 in context. Beginning at the end, according to John, the great commission reads “Just as the father has sent me, so also I am sending you [plural]” (John 20:21). The “just as...so” way of framing the commission was of course meant to remember *how* the Father sent Christ as again sends us back to John 1:14.

The Word [Christ’s Divinity] became flesh [Christ’s humanity] and temped among us (John 1:14).

Following this introduction to Christ as temple in John 1:14, John continues this theme throughout his narrative. In just the second chapter, we hear Jesus say such things as “*destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” (John 2:19-20 speaking of the resurrection). John then carefully construct his narrative in a way that draws attention to Christ self-revelation within the context of the great temple feasts.²⁷

But the real climax for John’s gospel was not the death and resurrection of Christ, rather it was His ascension!

Almost a third of John’s gospel (starting in John 14) focuses on Christ preparing the disciples for his ascension ministry! Richard Gaffin, in his *Perspectives on Pentecost* has observed how, “As far back as the first chapter of John there is the promise that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit (vs. 33).” This promise anticipates Christ’s teachings in John 14-17 concerning His ascension presence *in the Holy Spirit*—a clear reference to Pentecost and the ensuing temple formation built upon the foundation of the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone.

For instance, *about the coming of the Holy Spirit*, Jesus in the mystery of Trinity can speak in the first person

²⁴ Martin Luther, Palm Sunday Sermon from 1524 "On Confession and the Lord's Supper."

²⁵ Augustine, *Homilies in John*, Tractice 26, Sec. 11.

²⁶ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, (1978)p. 422.

²⁷ For instance, while celebrating the Passover, Jesus is proclaimed to be the true bread from heaven (6:35ff). While celebrating the feast of the tabernacles, Jesus is proclaimed to be the true light of the world (8:12ff). During the feast of temple dedication that celebrated the reconstruction of the temple in 164BC, Jesus is proclaimed to be the consecrated one (10:36ff)—all images of the Old Testament temple now “in Christ” fulfilled!

that:

I will not leave you as orphans for I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and [also] you [p] in me, and I in you [p].

Christ further speaks of making his “home with us” (vs. 14:23) and then immediately he says, “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (vs. 25-26). Here again, Christ will leave, but then “will “come” after “a short while” to manifest himself to them (14:23) just as at some time he will come again to take them to himself in his Fathers house” (14:3).

This is extraordinary language that speaks to the mystery of Christology itself applied to Christ’s present ministry on earth by the Holy Spirit! That this was speaking about his ascension ministry as mediated by the Holy Spirit acting through the temple church, and not his consummate return to earth or an inter-mediate return after his resurrection before his ascension is clearly reflected throughout. As summarized by Gaffin:

The gift of the Spirit is nothing less than the gift of Christ himself to the church, the Christ who has become what he is by virtue of his sufferings, death, and exaltation. In this sense the gift (baptism, outpouring) of the Spirit is the crowning achievement of Christ’s work. It is his coming in exaltation to the church in the power of the Spirit. *IT completes the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation.* It is the apex thus far reached in the unfolding of redemptive history. Without it, the work that climaxes in Christ’s death and resurrection would be unfinished, incomplete.²⁸

This all leads to Christ’s so called “priestly (temple)”prayer in John 17:21-23.

Reminiscent of the temple glory of old, Christ prays:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

This amazing prayer speaks at once to to the mystery of Christology applied to Christ’s present ministry on earth by the Holy Spirit even as he is with the Father in heaven! (a clear implication from his earlier teachings about his ascension ministry in John 14) This all sets up John’s equally amazing rendition of the “great commission.”

In vs. 21ff as carefully within the context of a CONTINUED temple of Christ’s presence! The commission goes like this:

Temple Benediction: “Peace be with you.”

Temple Commission: “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

Temple Power: “And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (c.f. 1:33)

Temple Absolution: “ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.” (c.f. Mt 16)

This soteriological related promise given to the church to execute of course speaks to what only God can do, and yet here given to the church. Mathews version says basically the same thing, yet in covenantal terms less temple, in Matthew 16:

8 *And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19* *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”²⁹*

According then to Mary Coloe about John’s Gospel:

²⁸ Gaffin, Perspectives In Pentecost, p.21

²⁹ Notice how the whole binding and loosing is associated by Matthew as related to the “keys,” not only a clear reference to the church as the epi-center of the kingdom of God (vs.19), but a reference as well to the opening and closing of the temple as was to be given to the Messiah (c.f. Is 22:20-22, also Neh 7 and 2 Chron 19)

The temple is not a peripheral image. It is used consistently throughout the text and moves beyond the life of Jesus into the life of the community, giving the community a clear sense of identity and a way of sustaining faith in the absence of Jesus.

More than a witness to salvation, there is a power associated with the sacramental temple church that is itself related to the power of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling (always remembering the sacramental qualification as related to a mediated vs. immediate presence as predicated upon divine sovereignty).

As then related to the *historia salutis* of Christ's ascension ministry, ecclesiology is at once a participant in the *ordo salutis* of confessional soteriology, albeit with important qualifications handed down through the centuries and codified within our Westminster Confession of Faith.

II. The mystery of sacrament as related to salvation? (The question of Efficacy and Ordo Salutis)

Back then to the context of Southern New England Presbytery, there is our “not so difficult to understand, if hard to comprehend,” ecclesial consensus of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

We begin with our confessional description of the visible church in WCF 25.2 wherein we believe that the scriptures principally teach that “the *visible* church, which is also catholic and universal, is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, *out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation*.³⁰

With the language “visible” comes all that flesh-on-flesh ebb and flow of gathering together, working together, sharing life together. It is the church that “one-anothers” as to become local and corporate. Necessarily, the whole thing requires some organization, presumably one that is carefully designed by Christ himself as passed down through the apostles to preserve both the authenticity of His divine presence and His corresponding power. And the all important conclusion, “out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (and do note the qualifier “ordinarily” as related to a mediated vs. immediate presence of God unto salvation as ultimately predicated upon divine sovereignty). Herein about the church we begin to hear a sacramental spirituality as distinguished from a sacerdotal spirituality.

This organic and fleshed out local congregation (the church as we see it) is united to other congregations in its universal catholicity in so far as each congregation shares in the apostolic design together (the church as God sees it). While no church is infallible in its conformity to the prescribed pattern, the visible church is described in scripture as no less than “the body of Christ, the *fullness* of him who fills all in all.³¹ Paul even goes so far as to describe this activity as “a holy temple and a dwelling place of God.” Again, throughout redemptive history, God was always distinct from the “temple” but never separate from it (unless as in the case of Ezekiel’s prophecy of God’s judgment, the temple outwardly ceases to be the temple really by God’s removal of divine presence).

And the question is raised-- what exactly is being transacted in this localized presence of Christ?

The historic consensus is that through the local body of Christ “all saints (Christians) are united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit” such as to “have fellowship with HIM in his graces.” It further clarifies how this fellowship in Christ’s graces (mystery) is “being united to one another in love” such as to have “communion in each others gifts and graces... both in the inward and outward man” (Manners?).³²

Notice especially we notice the sacramental language of “communion” and “inward and outward” and “united to” and “by His Spirit!” The convergence of Sacraments to sacramental manners (fleshed out nature to efficacious grace) is starting to emerge—and it has to do with flesh and blood, local life on life, community wherein the outward and the inward converge!

* For a brief illustrative analysis of the Reformed “sacramental” perspective compared to the so called “Reformed Baptist” perspective on sacraments, c.f. **Addendum #1**: From Chapter one of “A Baptism That Saves”

The visual and carnal that is connected to “Christ’s Spirit” appears again in Westminster’s description of the sacraments:

³⁰ WCF 25.2

³¹ Eph 1:23. Some have confused this passage as referencing the so called “invisible” church. Notwithstanding a misunderstanding of “invisible” (as if “unorganized” and not gathered) Paul’s use of the same language in Ephesians 4 relative to local ministry and in context of Eph 2:19ff in relation to a “temple” conception of the church proves otherwise.

³² WCF 26.1

There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other. ³³

To be clear, the “things signified” refer to the saving benefits of partaking in the life of Christ. These graces are described in phrases like “engrafting into Christ” “remission of sins” (Baptism)³⁴, “spiritual nourishment and growth” and “members of the mystical body of Christ” (Lord’s Supper)³⁵. This then brings us to the heart of our confessional statement concerning the sacraments is this phrase:

There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other. (WCF 27:2)

This then brings us to those vexatious “both-and” concepts as to depict a mystery, no less a fact, as concerning the convergence of heaven to earth, signs to things signified, mystery to manners.

According to WCF 27.3:

NO: whatever grace may be conferred as by a “spiritual relation” as pertaining to meaning of “sacramental union” it is not meant any power immediately attached to the signs themselves.

The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them (WCF 27.3)

NO: Nor is such grace efficaciously conferred to do with the person administering it on behalf of the church:

neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it (WCF 273b)

YES: There is an efficacious power and conferred as by a spiritual relation” as pertaining to the meaning of “sacramental union:

E.g. (piecing together the whole sentence) The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used... the efficacy of the sacrament... depends upon... the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.”

Notice again the qualifying “worthy receivers” which of course begs the question of “worthiness” as pertaining to Christian Baptism and Lord’s Supper—the gist of which is that the former recipient being defined as “all believers together with their children,” the latter being defined as those who are admitted by the church “by credible profession of faith.” (c.f. Manners below)

Moreover, and by way of a summary regarding sacramental efficacy, we learn that in every sacrament *grace IS conferred, but not necessarily, and not necessarily immediately. Take for instance the sacrament of Christian baptism (as properly administered to all believers and their children prior to “saving faith” even).*

Yes, grace is conferred through Christian Baptism:

the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, (WCF 28.6) :

But *not necessarily*:

grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it; or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated. (WCF 28.5)

And *not necessarily immediately*

The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered... in his [God's] appointed time (28.6)

³³ WCF 27.1

³⁴ WCF 28.1

³⁵ Lord’s Supper- c.f. WCF 29.1

All ultimately predicated upon divine sovereignty:

According to the counsel of God's own will... (WCF 28.6)

What then do the sacraments actually affect? The key phrase is the "spiritual relation" used synonymously to "sacramental union" as then having the power to effect what is signified—e.g. "*the sign (signifying names) and things signified (effects of what is signified) of the one are attributed to the other.*"(WCF 27.2) How all this works out in the two sacraments?

As a "holy Sign:" (or "Named")

- 1) What is signified in Christian **Baptism**? WCF 28.1 *of his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.*
- 2) What is signified in the **Lord's Supper**? WCF 29.1 *of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death;*

As a holy Seal (or "Affected") Notice again the sacramental relation: *the names and affects of the one are attributed to the other.*

In Baptism: *engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life.* Thus, WCF 28.6

by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost...

(Read Mt.28:19, Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 3:21, Gal.3:27, 1Cor.12:13, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Rom.6:3-4)

Try and ask yourself if by a plain reading of these passage they don't all speak of effecting salvation in some way... albeit "not necessarily and not necessarily immediately. e.g.

1 Pet. 3:21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (Baptism that saves, what other baptism is there but Christian baptism in this context?)

Titus 3:5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (Baptism as effecting regeneration)

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Baptism as a means toward receiving the Holy Spirit unto regeneration)

In The Lord's Supper: WCF 29.1 *the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, . . . to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.* Thus 29.5, and then section 7

Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.

(Read 1Cor.10:15 and the language of "koinonia" as to "participate in some sense." See also John 6: 51, 55-56, 63. etc)

Again, does this mean getting baptized makes you a Christian? The consensus is “Yes and No.” The sacramental convergence of the sign and things signified are qualified with the equivalent of “not necessarily and not necessarily immediately, but ordinarily” as ultimately predicated upon divine election as received by saving faith alone (further defined as “assenting, receiving and resting).”³⁶

Eph. 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

So it's true. Just doing the sacraments doesn't make one a Christian necessarily. And yet, the mystery of grace united to the sacramental manners is “ordinarily” a means of converting and renewing grace—baptism and Lord's Supper respectively. Westminster even goes so far as to clarify that the converting/renewing power of Christ's presence is NOT in, with or under the signatory elements of the sacraments themselves, but is “spiritually present.” Grace IS conferred, ordinarily!³⁷ As in the words of John Calvin in *Treatise on the Lord's Supper*:

All the benefits which we should seek in the Supper is annihilated if Jesus Christ be not there given to us as the substance and foundation of all... Thus it is with the communion, which we have in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It is a spiritual mystery that can neither be seen by the eye nor comprehended by the human understanding... the substance of the sacraments is the Lord Jesus, and the efficacy of them the graces and blessings which we have by his means.”³⁸

Stated more pastorally, if for the sake of Christian assurance we focus a person on the once and for all fulfillment of the *covenant* by Christ's incarnation ministry as received unto salvation by grace through faith alone (salvation accomplished unto justification and assurance), we at once also encourage a person to actively participate in the life giving presence of Christ's ascension ministry as mediated by the Holy Spirit in/with/through his temple-church (salvation applied unto effectual calling, sanctification and perseverance). Christ's ascension ministry is no less a topic of *historia salutis* than Christ's incarnation ministry, effectual calling, sanctification and perseverance are no less than a topic of *ordo salutis* than justification and assurance.

c.f. Addendum 2: Handout on The Sacraments

III. The manners of sacrament as related to ecclesiology (The question of ecclesial praxis in mission and ministry)

Thomas Torrance comments that “we cannot pay too much attention to the fact that the Holy Spirit was sent upon the church after the crucifixion, resurrection and the ascension of Christ. In that series Pentecost belongs as one of the mighty salvation events, and to that series the parousia will belong as the last.”³⁹ In other words, Christ's ascension viewed as an *historia salutis* event and by the Holy Spirit must be inextricably linked to the church. For within the church,

The spirit operates by creating out of the word a body that St. Paul calls the Body of Christ.... It is the sphere where through the presence of the Spirit the salvation-events of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension are operative here and now in history, the sphere wherever within the old creation the new creation has broken in with power.”⁴⁰

How then does all this vertical ebb and flow get transacted by the Holy Spirit except mediated through the horizontal activities or “manners” of a people who according to Paul are busy “joining together.” Surely, to speak of the sacramental manners of ecclesial conversion, servant leadership, sacramental worship all within a localized contextualization will change the way we read Paul's final salutations and thanksgivings that conclude most of Paul's epistles (c.f. Rom 16)! Leslie Newbigin's summary seems apropos:

³⁶ WCF 28.5-6, WCF 14.2.

³⁷ WCF 27.3

³⁸ *Treatise...*, 17.

³⁹ T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd LTD, 1955), p. 23.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.23.

The Bible is not the story of ideas about God, but the story of the people of God...the gospel does not come to each of us in isolation. It comes to us through a particular book and through a particular fellowship... it is a false spirituality, divorced from the whole teaching of the Bible which regards this visible and continuing church as of subordinate importance for the life of Christ... God meets us through his people here and now in the form of an actual invitation into the fellowship of a body of people calling themselves one Church?⁴¹

If therefore we were to follow O'Conner's lead in telling stories of sacramental manners in the temple-church as related to the sacramental mystery, I would suggest that at the very least we would want to tell stories related to the manners of *ecclesial* oriented conversions, *participation oriented* worship and *local oriented* one-anothering.

1. The Manners of Ecclesial Conversion:

A common Christendom telling of St. Augustine's conversion will want to focus on the so called "garden experience" of chapter 8 in Augustine's *Confessions*. By way of illustration, Harry Boer in his, *A Short History of Early Church*, tells the story this way:

It was in this situation [convicted of his sin and his bondage to it—his famous "Give me chastity, but not yet"] that Augustine entered upon the great religious crisis of his life... As he was reflecting in the garden of his house on what he had heard, and feeling more deeply than ever his sinfulness and need of salvation, he suddenly heard a voice saying, "Take and read, take and read..." [and after going back to his room] He saw the Bible lying on the table, opened it, and read the first words that met his eye:

The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.⁴²

Accordingly, Baer concludes, "Augustine's conversion dates from the moment of this reading, in the summer of 386."⁴³

It's true. There was a garden experience. Augustine would even comment:

I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.⁴⁴

To be sure, a decision was made to follow Christ, but *was he converted?* Perhaps surprisingly to the *conversionist* paradigm that focuses on the so called "sinners prayer," Augustine would say, NO! For instance, he wrote about his feelings *after* the garden event, "thus in that depth I recognized the act for your will and I gave praise to your name rejoicing in faith. *But this faith would not let me feel safe about my past sins, since your baptism had not yet come to remit them*"⁴⁵

It was almost a year later, longing for the full and salvific presence of God, that Augustine took heed to the counsel of Simplicianus concerning true Christian conversion. By telling Augustine the story of Victorinus reluctance to go to church and be baptized in order to be converted, Simplicianus counseled, *I shall not believe it or count you as a Christian until I see you in the Church of Christ.*" The eventual response of Victorinus to Augustine is especially telling in relation to the ancient conversionist paradigm:

Let us go to the church then, I want to be made a Christian.

⁴¹ Leslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church*, (NY, NY: Harper & Row, 1948)p. 27, 29

⁴² Romans 13:13-14, Interestingly, the immediate context of the scripture passage, albeit not quoted in the *Confessions* reads: "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Vs. 11.

⁴³ Taken from Harry Boer, *A Short History of Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1976). P. 157-158.

⁴⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessions* (Alfred A Knopf, Random House, NY, 2001) p., 178.

⁴⁵ *The Confessions*, Book 9, chapter 4.

Augustine evidently got the message and was later baptized by Ambrose on Easter, April 24, 387, together with many others. Accordingly, Augustine explains:

*We were baptized and all anxiety as to our past life fled away.*⁴⁶

The story of Victorinus and subsequently Augustine fits perfectly the ancient pattern of conversion that forms the polity contained in *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*. As summarized by Robert Webber,

*In the early Church, this process of conversion was ordered around the rites that culminated in baptism and entrance into the Christian community. Through these rites the new Christian experienced Christ as Lord over the powers of evil.*⁴⁷

AS further described by George Lindbeck about early Christian conversions:

*Pagan converts to the [Christian] mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather, the process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely, they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life... they submitted themselves to prolonged catechetical instruction in which they practiced new modes of behavior and learned the stories of Israel and their fulfillment in Christ. Only after they had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed able intelligently and responsibly to profess the faith, to be baptized.*⁴⁸

It could be argued how this was not altogether different than the conversion we read about in Act 2 wherein the church, just being the church, was evangelistic by her very nature. We are told how

Awe came upon everyone... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together with one accord in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And day by day the Lord added to them those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

Such is the vision we get of the ascended ministry of Christ in the present redemptive age of Pentecost. Notice the activity that is framed within a “temple” context and a community that “broke bread together” as related to the Lord’s Supper. And the important thing, it all happened as unbelievers were present and getting saved. In context, when asked “what must we do to be saved, Paul’s answer was not “pray this prayer with me” but

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

Throughout the book of Acts, we don’t hear about “sinners prayers” as evidence of conversion, we hear about baptisms and incorporation into the church. The sacramental manners of conversion will therefore want to emphasis the Holy Spirit acting through the church corporately, less individuals in isolation from the church. The church acting jointly and severally is the evangelist of God, even as every gift that serves the missional interest of the church is participating in evangelism. Such a manner of conversion is more than a mere assent to Christ and his ethics (per Augustines Garden experience), but a joining with Christ wherein by baptism a person is engrafted into Christ’s body through Christian baptism and admission to full communicant membership mediated within the binding and loosing ministry of Christ’s church (Mt. 16, 18).

The sacramental manners of conversion states, quite simple, that just the church *being* the church with the whole world present *is* God’s missionary strategy to the world. More that a source of mission, the church become the very *locus* of mission. This is because the sacramental church, while not the agent of grace, is a means of saving grace wherein the power of the Holy Spirit is ordinarily mediated sacramentally in/with/through the manners of participating in the local church

⁴⁶ *Confessions*. Book 9, chapter 6.

⁴⁷ Robert E. Webber, *What is Ancient Future Evangelism?* From: *Theology, News and Notes*- used by permission ©2004 by Fuller Theological Seminary

⁴⁸ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984) p. 132

(see below). The church as such is a subcategory (not necessarily, not necessarily immediately) of Christology applied to soteriology as then fleshed out in the manners of how we do mission.

The sacramental manners of conversion in the church will tend to manifest itself in the following ways:

- An emphasis upon participational apologetics vs. just declarative apologetics. (e.g. a spiritual epistemology of participation in the body of Christ).
- Non-Christians participating in the life of the church and worship.
- Worship that both, and at the same time, is a participation in the mystery of Christ's transcendent otherness yet is accessed through the incarnate presence of Christ within local mannerisms. (the transcendent elements in the vernacular forms).
- A willingness to suffer all things for the sake of the "elect"—both unchurched and churched—no false dichotomies.
- A confidence in the outward means of grace as a missionary strategy to our world (preaching, sacraments, community, prayers)
- A church that assumes a missionary mentality.

And again, the assumption is that there is a spiritual relation between the sacramental manners and the sacramental mystery wherein,

We expect salvation from him — not because he stands aloof from us, but because engrafting us into his body he not only makes us partakers of all his benefits, but also of himself... you become a member of him, and hence one with him.⁴⁹

** c.f. Addendum 3: From Baptism to Lord's Supper (Speaks to the issue of Children's "Baptismal" informed discipleship in relation to Admission to the Lord's Supper—what does a high view of baptismal efficacy mean in the question of children communion?)*

2. The Manners of Sacramental Participation In Worship:

There are basically two types of Christian services: One brings a person *TO* Christ and the gospel—known as the Revival Service (Band, Bible and Altar Call). The other *empowers* persons to *DO* the gospel by a participation in the life of Christ in a way hospitable to both seekers and believers both (a sacramental informed worship service)!⁵⁰ In the former, a person is in the audience watching the dance. In the latter, the person is on the dance floor dancing. Our contention is that by the paradigm in Acts 2 and the whole of "temple spirituality," the latter is more biblical. At the very least, two inferences are obvious:

The first inference is to make sure every Christian worship service is sacramental by the weekly participation of the Lord's Supper and Baptism (when needed). The whole service then is oriented as informed by the sacrament principle that would stress participation vs. proclamation only. To do anything less is to experience less than the sacramental mannerisms of a total Christ church.

At the rise of repeating what was already noted about conversion, as a converting or initiating sacrament, baptism in the context of participation in worship is given to those who are brought into the jurisdictional presence of Christ *in order to be saved*. This is expressed in the counsel of Peter for instance in Acts 2:38 and 1Peter 3:21. More than a witness or testimony, Christian baptism is a means of grace leading to salvation! This is the sacramental mystery of baptism merely applied to the "manner" of doing it after the principle already surveyed.

Those who are under the jurisdiction of Christ (even if by virtue of being under the jurisdiction of an adult who is) but not yet in possession of saving faith (assenting, receiving, resting in the gospel) are the proper recipients of Christian baptism in

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.24

⁵⁰ Even Seekers who abstain from the Lord's table as a act of conscience and searching are still "tasting").

order to be saved! Baptized children are considered Christians outwardly, awaiting personal or inward confirmation of self-discerned faith as related to the life of Christ. This faith is individually discovered and tested before a person should partake of the confirming/renewing sacraments of the Lord's Supper."⁵¹

As a renewing sacrament, the Lord's Supper is a "weekly" event by apostolic design. This is paradigmatically illustrated in the worship of Acts. The sacraments of both Christian baptism and the Lord's supper together with sermons, prayers (sung and spoken) and "one anothering" in Acts 2:42ff. And in Acts 20:7, it is even explained that "on the first day of the week (Sunday), Christian's gathered (organized) together with the intentional "*in order to* break bread." That the Lord's Supper was an essential element of Christian worship is expected given the Lord's instructions to the apostles about their post-ascension gatherings and his admonishment "do this (Eucharist) in remembrance of me" (John 6).

The second inference concerning sacramental worship is to carefully follow the Biblical manner of participating vs. just declaring in the gospel presence of Christ in worship. For this to happen, we follow the logic of temple worship, which is also the four-movement logic of the gospel itself renewed. The four-movement service is also expressed in the heavenly worship of Rev. 4-5. The movements are meant to empower the worshiper to participate in the life of Christ in the midst of the congregation and to experience (vs. just hear about) the transformational experience of the gospel. The Four movements of sacramental worship are:

- Movement of rediscovering God's glory and rightful claim over our lives through Invocation and praise.
- Movement of Reapplying God's grace and forgiveness through confession of sin and absolution.
- Movement of Renewal in the mediated Word become flesh through a priestly sermon (see below) leading to a reaffirmation of faith and celebration of the Lord's Supper.
- Movement of Recommitment to Christ's lordship (coronation) and the final blessing of receiving our king and savior's Benediction (a covenant blessing, not to be confused with a commissioning or even doxology).

Again, the movements are meant to stress participation in the gospel, not merely bringing a people to the gospel. It is what Mike Horton calls "the drama of Christ-centered worship" or what Bryan Chapell calls "gospel 're-representation.'" Kevin DeYoung describes it as the carefully constructed, though flexible, liturgy which progresses with a distinct gospel logic" as contrasted with what he describes as the "New Evangelical Worship service." (or what I have describe as the "revival service."⁵²

And to be clear, it is not that the revival service has not use. It could be argued that the revival style event may be useful as a kind of pre-evangelistic event as much a genre of entertainment for the sake of engaging a point of contact with unbelievers as anything. But to trust in the revival service as a means of grace is to diminish the nature of grace as a sacramental event in the fullest sense of being united to Christ.

3. The Manners of Sacramental Localism in Flesh and Flesh "One Anothering":

In Augustine's "Total Christ" spirituality, the heart of sacramental manners is the mystery of Christ being united to the specific socio-cultural flesh of local one anothering as carefully designed by the apostles with Christ as the cornerstone. For instance:

Localism Applied To Worship:

The manner of doing the four movements of worship must necessarily be localized into the socio-cultural flesh of the people for it to be fully sacramental. While the four movements are prescribed in scripture by apostolic design, the cultural *forms* that flesh out these elements are left to the discretion of the local congregation and its leaders, even if directed by scripture. How much of the worship is verbally scripted vs. unscripted, liturgically formal vs. informal, one or another genres of music and use of instruments--these are all necessarily fleshed out *and* informed by the local socio-cultural identity of a particular congregation. The criteria of "media fit the message" is necessarily a local determination depending on local, socio-cultural associations. What constitutes "sacred" sounds as related to the whole range of emotions that are fitting a four movement

⁵¹ 1Cor. 11:28-29

⁵² Kevin DeYoung, Is the New Evangelical Liturgy Really an Improvement? (Located on the Gospel Coalition blog--<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/08/01/is-the-new-evangelical-liturgy-really-an-improvement/>)

service is inherently local!

Localism Applied to the Sermon:

A “sermon” isn’t really (sacramentally speaking) a sermon unless it is live within the context of a local congregation in time and place. Only local worship transacts the mystery of “Word become flesh” wherein Christ is mediately present by the Holy Spirit in the flesh of the people. There is a necessary *priestlyness* to a sermon that transacts the God-humanward AND human-Godward movements of Christ descending-ascending (Eph 4) in worship. Virtual sermons detached from the unique narrative that is experienced in the context of a specific congregation just isn’t a sermon. It may be a very helpful and informative talk about Christian faith and/or practice, but it is not a transaction in the mystery of Christ in the midst of us, or within the context of the gospel in worship as tied to the manners of a local people. The sermon is related less to personalities and more to office, a “priest with no name” that directs people to the transcendent presence of Christ become flesh in a sermon.

The result? Walter Brueggemann, describes a sermon as an event wherein God’s word is mediated by the local preacher as the, “*Ready, steady, surprising proposal that the real world in which God invites us to live is not the one made available by the rulers of this age... a voice that shatters settled reality and evokes new possibilities.*”⁵³ And for this to happen, it must be localized in a site-specific way as to embody the vernacular and vocational habits, sins, idols and dreams related to the living flesh of the people. As the pastor listens to all the words, and observes all the patters of life that are throughout the week, his office is transformed and expressed in the holy conversation of a sacramental sermon.

Localism Applied to “One-Anothering:”

The transformative power of grace is unleashed in concrete and real ways in/with/through the one-anothering manners of the people. This is done in many ways in the life of a localized church and often taken for granted. It happens when someone ventures to expose their own brokenness or sin and discovers acceptance and compassion. Or when a meal is delivered in the presence of a church at a wake in support of the grieving. It involves the countless “lay counseling” that is happening on in a phone conversation or over coffee. It involves picnics and celebrations. It is intentional, and spontaneous. And all together, this *one-anothering* becomes the very sacramental presence of Christ that is celebrated in Acts 2:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Localism applied to Mission:

Edmund Clowney describes the Biblical conception of the church this way:

The organic concept that appears in the New Testament... is defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.”⁵⁴

A sacramental missiology as applied to growing the church would want to favor a multi-congregational method of church growth vs. mega-church method or even multi-site method (many congregations with virtual or itinerate sermons). The multi-congregational strategy consists of many small congregations organically united to other congregations within a geographically related region such as together to be “one big church.” These united congregations share a unified financial plan (in multi-congregational expressions), a Confession of Faith (perhaps in multiple-forms), the four movements of worship (expressed in multiple cultural forms/styles) a shared government consisting of representatives from each congregation forming one “city-governing board or “session.” This “Total Christ” spirituality of mission has the advantage of

⁵³ Walter Brueggemann in his *Finally comes the Poet, Daring Speech for Proclamation* p.3, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Edmund Clowney, *Distinctives of the Presbyterian Polity*

expressing both local and global aspects of a church movement fleshed out in multiple vernaculars but organically connected in mutually inter-dependent ways.

A multi-congregational approach provides all the practical advantages of a big church through various cooperatives while retaining a small church feel. The sacramental result of this “manner” of mission is that the body of Christ is necessarily clothed within a socio-cultural “flesh” that is brilliantly multi-form in cultural diversity, as related to Christ’s humanity in the midst of us. Christ’s divinity is at once mono-elemental in theological consensus and multi-cultural across social difference. To do otherwise risks one cultural form inadvertently oppressing the cultural form of another to the demise of sacramental efficacy. While all cultures are equal, not all are the same. There is a necessary limit to how far one culture can accommodate another without reducing the local element of culture necessary to sacramental manner in mission.

Conclusion:

Thomas Trotter observed how,

The setting of Flannery O’Connor’s stories is a world from which human beings have generally eliminated mystery (grace) only discover the power of that reality in sudden, startling, and unexpected ways.

Trotter continues,

Half of her characters are hopelessly sentimental and half are obscene lunatics. Neither are aware of the presence of grace in the world.⁵⁵

I fear the setting of O’Connors stories are too often the reality today even among those who aspire to become gospel centered. In our noble and global pursuits we often neglect the power of local, carnal, and therefore, *mediated* divine presence. There are the Sacraments. And there are the sacramental manners that flesh them out into spiritual reality. Reunited, there is a relation between the mystery of grace and efficacious power that is *present* in, with and through, the local manners of a local church. In such a place, it is again worth nothing that it can be said with John Calvin

“No extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Thomas Trotter, Flannery O’Connor: Her Vision, Religion Online, (<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3600>)

⁵⁶ John Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum*, 37: 48