

Introduction

The twentieth century witnessed a profound shift in Roman Catholic sacramental thought and a growing interest in the sacramentality of the word. This resurgence of interest, while consistent with the Christian tradition as articulated by both Catholic and Protestant theologians, comes against the backdrop of several centuries in which Catholic sacramental thought revolved almost exclusively around the seven ritual sacraments. The renewed interest in the way in which the word functions both within and beyond these sacramental rituals has helped to deepen the Roman Catholic understanding of both the sacraments themselves in their liturgical context, and the overarching sacramentality of the world in which we live.

Within the Christian tradition, an understanding of the sacramentality of the word—the conviction that words have the power to mediate the presence of God—often occurs in discussions of sacramental theology, theology of revelation, or the convergence of the two. Theologians have taken diverse approaches to understanding the sacramentality of the word of God. Some, such as Thomas Aquinas, have begun from the perspective of a theology of God’s revelation to humanity in history. Others, such as Augustine, have begun with the way that language functions and the manner in which humans receive knowledge from God and from one another through signs and sacraments. Still others, such as Reformation theologians Martin Luther and John Calvin, have begun from a concern that the word proclaimed in preaching and sacrament be recognized as an authentically scriptural word.

In the mid-twentieth century, the Second Vatican Council’s interest in the sacred liturgy and in a theology of revelation marked a significant turning point for Roman Catholic theological work on the sacramentality of the word of God. The conciliar documents reflected the church’s growth during the years of the liturgical movement,¹ as well as the increasing importance of a theology

1. For a helpful overview see John Fenwick and Bryan D. Spinks, *Worship in Transition: The Liturgical Movement in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 23–36.

of revelation which contextualized God's gift of revelation in the language of human reason and the modern world.² The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* speaks of Christ's presence located in the proclaimed word: "Christ is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church."³ Here we see the sacramentality of the word reflected in a liturgical context. The *Constitution on Divine Revelation* also uses sacramental language when speaking of the word of God. It affirms that it is from "the one table of the word of God and the body of Christ that the church receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy."⁴ Here the image of the sacramental table reflects the grace present in both word and sacrament. *Dei Verbum* goes still further in speaking of God's word recognized not only in the sacramental context, but also in human history and in creation.⁵

The significance of the presence of Christ in the proclaimed word, and the powerful image of the one table of word and Eucharist, reflect twentieth-century approaches to a study of word and sacrament that result in a deeper understanding of the sacramentality of the word both in the liturgical context and in the context of a graced world. Twentieth-century Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner and Louis-Marie Chauvet have each considered the theological relationship between word and sacrament and have, in distinct ways, proposed theologies of the word which reflect a sacramental understanding of the word. These proposals have not only deepened understanding of the Catholic theology of the word developing in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries, but they have also illuminated the significance of a shifting doctrine of God, and a deeper understanding of sacramentality—the recognition of God's grace present in the world in diverse ways. Numerous studies have fruitfully explored Rahner's theology of revelation, symbol, word, and sacrament.⁶ More recent work has also been done

2. See *Dei Filius*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC: Sheed and Ward, 1990), 804–11; and Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

3. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1963), 7.

4. *Dei Verbum*, in Flannery, *The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 21.

5. *Ibid.*, 2. "The pattern of this revelation unfolds through deeds and words which are intrinsically connected; the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and confirm the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part proclaim the works and bring to light the mystery they contain."

6. John B. Ackley, *The Church of the Word: A Comparative Study of Word, Church and Office in the Thought of Karl Rahner and Gerhard Ebeling*, American University Studies, Theology and Religion, vol. 81 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); James J. Buckley, "On Being a Symbol: An Appraisal of Karl Rahner,"

on Chauvet's sacramental theology and the potential of his work for homiletics.⁷ No one to date, however, has done a comparative analysis of the theologies

Theological Studies 40 (1979): 453–73; Nancy Clasby, "Dancing Sophia: Rahner's Theology of Symbols," *Religion and Literature* 25, no. 1 (1993): 51–65; Stephen M. Fields, *Being as Symbol: On the Origins and Development of Karl Rahner's Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000); Reinhard Hempelmann, "Sakrament Als Erscheinung Der Liturgie Der Welt": Zur Sakramententheologie Karl Rahners (1904–1984)," in *Gottes Offenbarung in Der Welt* (Gutersloh Germany: Kaiser, 1998), 275–91; Birgitta Kleinschwärzer-Meister, *Gnade Im Zeichen: Katholische Perspektiven Zur Allgemeinen Sakramentenlehre in Ökumenischer Verständnignug Auf Der Grundlage Der Theologie Karl Rahners*, Studien Zur Systematischen Theologie Und Ethik, ed. E and P. Neuner and D. Ritschel Lessing, vol. 26, (London: Lit, 2000); Robert Masson, "Rahner's Primordial Words and Bernstein's Metaphorical Leaps: The Affinity of Art with Religion and Theology," *Horizons* 33, no. 2 (2006): 276–97; Eileen McKeown, "A Theology of Preaching Based on Karl Rahner's Theology of the Word" (PhD Diss., Fordham University, 1989); Maria E. Motzko, "Karl Rahner's Theology: A Theology of the Symbol" (PhD Diss., Fordham University, 1976); Marianne Sawicki, "Aesthetic Catechetics: An Approach Via the Effective Symbol as Described by Schillebeeckx, Rahner and Heidegger" (PhD Diss., Catholic University of America, 1984); Michael Skelley, *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991); J. H. P. Wong, "Karl Rahner's Christology of Symbol and Three Models of Christology," *Heythrop Journal* 27 (1986): 1–25; Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern, *Sakrament Kirche: Wirken Gottes Im Handeln Der Menschen* (Freiburg im Br: Herder, 1992).

7. Katerina Bauer, "The Psychoanalytical Inspiration of Chauvet's Notion of Symbol," *Communio Viatorum* 51, no. 1 (2009): 37–54; Philippe Bordeyne and Bruce T. Morrill, eds., *Sacraments: Revelation of the Humanity of God: Engaging the Fundamental Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2008); Timothy Brunk, *Liturgy and Life: The Unity of Sacrament and Ethics in the Theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet*, Theology and Religion, vol. 254 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), Brunk, "Consumer Culture and the Body: Chauvet's Perspective," *Worship* 82, no. 4 (2008): 290–310; Ivana Dolejsova, "The Symbolic Nature of Christian Existence According to Ricoeur and Chauvet," *Communio Viatorum* 43, no. 1 (2001):39–59; A. H. C. van Eijk, "Ethics and the Eucharist," *Bijdragen* 55, no. 4 (1994): 350–75; Joseph Fortuna, "Two Approaches to the Role of Language in Sacramental Efficacy Compared: Thomas Aquinas in the 'Summa Theologiae' and Louis-Marie Chauvet" (PhD Diss., The Catholic University of America, 1989); Lorelei F. Fuchs, "Chauvet's Theology of Sacrament and Ecumenical Theology," in *Contemporary Sacramental Contours of God Incarnate*, ed. Lieven Boeve and Lambert Leijssen Studies in Liturgy (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 63–73; Kevin W. Irwin, "The *Petit* Chauvet on the Sacraments," *Antiphon* 6, no. 3 (2001): 49–54; Robert Mager, "L'eglise-Sacrament a L'epreuve Du Symbole: L'apport De Louis-Marie Chauvet," *Eglise et Theologie* 21, no. 2 (1990): 169–93; Vincent J. Miller, "An Abyss at the Heart of Mediation: Louis-Marie Chauvet's Fundamental Theology of Sacramentality," *Horizons* 24, no. 2 (1997), 230–47; Kevin Mongrain, "Worship in Spirit and Truth: Louis-Marie Chauvet's Sacramental Reading of John 4:21–24," in *Multivalence of Biblical Texts and Theological Meaning* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 125–44; Ivana Noble, "From the Sacramentality of the Church to the Sacramentality of the World: An Exploration of the Theology of Alexander Schmemmann and Louis-Marie Chauvet," in *Charting Churches in a Changing Europe* (New York: Rodophi, 2006), 165–200; Robert Todd Townshend. *The Sacramentality of Preaching: Homiletic Uses of Louis-Marie Chauvet's Theology of Sacramentality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

of the word of Rahner and Chauvet, and of their respective contributions to a developing Catholic understanding of the word as sacramental. This work will engage that task, highlighting the ways that each makes a significant contribution to a theology of the word, which draws on distinct resources from the Catholic sacramental tradition, but also retrieves key insights preserved in the writings of the Reformation theologians Martin Luther and John Calvin.

DEFINING THE TERMS

Due to the complexity of the theological conversations surrounding the relationship between word and sacrament, we pause here to define some of the terms that will be employed most frequently. While some terms such as *symbol* are best understood within the context of the work of individual theologians, other terms such as *sign*, *sacrament*, *revelation*, *word of God*, and *sacramentality* can be employed consistently, except where otherwise stated, and are thus defined here in the introduction.

For a basic definition of *sign*, we turn to the work of Augustine of Hippo. Augustine defines a sign as “a thing, which besides the impression it conveys to the senses, also has the effect of making something else come to mind.”⁸ Augustine recognizes both natural signs, those that occur in nature such as smoke, which signifies a fire, and conventional signs, which once designated as such by human beings, convey information from one person to another.⁹ Agreed-upon signs, such as a red traffic light or a tornado siren, are examples of conventional signs. Most basically, a sign attracts the attention of the human senses and, once interpreted, conveys some sort of information to the interpreter.¹⁰ As R. A. Markus has noted, words, for Augustine, are “signs *par excellence*.”¹¹ Alone or combined with material elements, words act to convey ideas to the mind through the senses. Words and material elements therefore do not exist in contrast to one another, but can be understood as components of a sign.

8. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, in *Teaching Christianity: De doctrina christiana*, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1996), 2.1.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *De magistro*, in *The Teacher, The Free Choice of the Will, Grace and Free Will*, trans. Robert P. Russell, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1967), 4.

11. As R. A. Markus puts it, for Augustine “words are . . . signs *par excellence*, and his theory of signs is meant to be, from the start, a theory of language as well as of other types of sign.” R. A. Markus, “St. Augustine on Signs,” *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957), 65.

Thomas Aquinas concurs that words are one of the most common examples of signs. He likewise emphasizes the sign quality of sacraments, defining a sacrament as “a sign of a sacred reality inasmuch as it has the property of sanctifying man.”¹² This will serve as the working definition for *sacrament* in this work. Aquinas’s broad definition highlights the properties of sacrament which have become central to Roman Catholic theology. A sacrament is first of all a sign. Aquinas’s definition recognizes that a sacrament necessarily points beyond itself. It reflects the “sacred reality” which is not itself visible in its entirety, but which is the reason for the sacrament. Finally, a sacrament is distinguished from other signs of sacred realities in that it has the property of sanctifying human beings. For Aquinas, sacraments are signs that function as instrumental causes. The sacramental sign does not leave the recipient unchanged, but is rather a specific kind of sign by means of which God acts on an individual or community for the purposes of sanctification. The sacramental sign, Aquinas is clear, is not itself the principal cause of the sanctification.¹³ God is the principal cause, and the sacramental sign is the instrumental cause, intended to signify the sanctification that is effected by God.¹⁴

Since God is the principal cause of the sacraments, theologians throughout the tradition have found it necessary to remember that although God may choose, and does indeed promise, to sanctify humanity through the sacraments, God is not limited to the sacraments as tools for sanctification. Writing in the twentieth century, Edward Schillebeeckx reflects on the sacramentality that exists in the world in relation to the seven ritual sacraments. For Schillebeeckx, and for others in the twentieth century, the incarnation is the key to this broader understanding of sacramentality. Schillebeeckx writes: “If the human love and all the human acts of Jesus possess a divine saving power, then the realization in human shape of this saving power necessarily includes as one of its aspects the manifestation of salvation: includes, in other words, sacramentality.”¹⁵ Sacramentality, or what is often called the *sacramental principle*, thus reflects the mediation of grace in and through the created and

12. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (New York: Blackfriars and McGraw-Hill, 1963), 3, Q 60, a 2. The Blackfriars translation of the *Summa theologiae* translates the Latin *homines* as “man.” In faithfulness to the translation, this non-inclusive rendering will be used throughout the work.

13. *Ibid.*, 3, Q 63, a 3.

14. *Ibid.*, 3, Q 60, a 3.

15. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 1963 ed. (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 1999), 15. In view of the implications of the incarnation for all of creation, Schillebeeckx extends the sacramental principle to include all of creation as capable of mediating the divine.

human realm. In Schillebeeckx's words, this principle refers to "an earthly embodiment which we can see and touch."¹⁶ Such an embodiment is not limited to the seven ritual sacraments, but refers to the principle of sacramentality that stands behind them.¹⁷

The belief that the divine is revealed and could be discovered in the created world was widely accepted prior to the advent of modernity, which many trace to the rise of science and rational philosophy in the seventeenth century. As Avery Dulles points out, although the concept of God's revelation is present in the scriptures and in Christian history, the impetus for the church to define revelation came much later when, in the seventeenth century, rationalist philosophers began to dispute the possibility of supernatural revelation.¹⁸ Although a definition of revelation was not the focus of the First Vatican Council's *Decree on Revelation*, the operative understanding of revelation at that time is evident in *Dei Filius* where the bishops discuss revelation in terms of the certitudes of faith which can be known from the natural world, from scripture and from the tradition.¹⁹

Dulles notes that the Second Vatican Council describes revelation as "the action by which God freely makes known the hidden purposes (*sacramentum*) of the divine will and lovingly speaks to human beings as friends, inviting them 'into fellowship with himself' (*DV* 2)."²⁰ This more personal approach to revelation reflects the more personal emphasis on Christ as the "mediator and sum total of revelation, [unfolding] through deeds and words which are intrinsically connected."²¹ Dulles emphasizes that in theological usage, the term revelation does not necessarily imply a disruptive or "extraordinary

16. *Ibid.*, 45. Schillebeeckx adds in footnote 94 that "'sacramentalizes' indicates the personal act of Christ who through his Church gives visible shape to his invisible saving activity or gift of grace and thereby makes himself present to us."

17. Richard McBrien has pithily described the principle of sacramentality as follows: it is "the notion that all reality, both animate and inanimate, is potentially or in fact the bearer of God's presence and the instrument of God's saving activity on humanity's behalf." Richard P. McBrien, "Sacramentality, principle of," in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 1148.

18. Bernard Lonergan describes this seventeenth-century shift toward "the basic and central significance [of] the certitudes of faith, their presuppositions, and their consequences." Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its Context," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 57. See also Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 92.

19. *Dei Filius*, 3 and 5.

20. "Faith and Revelation," 93.

psychological experience.”²² On the contrary “it can come in a non-ecstatic manner through nature, historical records, current events, and living proclamation.”²³ Revelation is thus understood as the personal, historical, self-communication of God and the divine will. This self-disclosure and divine offer is capable of altering the relationship between God and the individual, should the invitation to fellowship be accepted.

As the title of the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* makes clear, and as Dulles has also noted, in the broadest sense, the term *word of God* is a “virtual synonym for revelation.”²⁴ Dulles observes that the word of God, abiding in the church in the forms of scripture and tradition, includes all “spoken and written words of those who are divinely inspired to put the divine message into human language.”²⁵ Drawing on the Hebrew word *dabar*, Dulles emphasizes a second point that is highlighted in *Dei Verbum*: God’s word—God’s self-communication—occurs in actions as well as in words.

The Hebrew term for “word” *dabar* . . . when applied to God includes not only speech and writing but all the external signs by which the mind of God is communicated to human beings. Thus the symbolic gestures of prophets and the expressive actions of inspired believers are forms of the word of God insofar as these agents are taken up in the process of God’s self-communication.²⁶

Elsewhere Dulles observes that “strictly speaking, there is nothing which could not, under favorable circumstances, become a symbol of the divine.”²⁷ In light of the incarnation, a Christian understanding of the word of God adds yet another dimension: God communicates in words and deeds, but the most definitive self-expression of God is to be found in Jesus Christ, the *Logos* or “Word made flesh.”²⁸ This christological understanding of the primary meaning of the word of God is central to the later insights of both Rahner and Chauvet.

21. *Dei Verbum*, 2. “The pattern of this revelation unfolds through deeds and words which are intrinsically connected; the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and confirm the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part proclaim the works and bring to light the mystery they contain. The most intimate truths thus revealed about God and human salvation shine forth for us in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation” (ibid.).

22. “Faith and Revelation,” 93.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 118.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. “The Symbolic Structure of Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 41, no. 1 (1980): 56.

In keeping with the traditional categories in which the term *word of God* is not typically applied to the sacramental words, Dulles does not address the significance of the proclamation of the word of God in the seven ritual sacraments. This work will suggest that explicit recognition of the sacramental word as the revelatory word of God is an important development in the theologies of Rahner and Chauvet.

These definitions will provide a starting point for the subsequent discussion of the converging interests in word and sacrament that developed in the twentieth century and would eventually move toward an evolving interest in the sacramentality of the word. This evolving interest, in turn, sheds new light on the possibilities for a Roman Catholic theology of the word in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. We now turn to a brief overview of some of the most significant contributors to this twentieth-century retrieval.

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE SACRAMENTAL CONTEXT

While the documents of the Second Vatican Council mark an important turning point in the Roman Catholic Church's twentieth-century quest for a more adequate theology of the word, credit must also be given to those theologians who, prior to and immediately after the Council, addressed the importance of the word of God in the sacramental context. Among the most significant of these theologians are Otto Semmelroth, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Karl Rahner. Following the Council, many other theologians have taken up questions regarding the principle of sacramentality, the significance of the liturgical context for the proclamation of the word, and new approaches to revelation which consider its symbolic structure. Each of these topics in the areas of sacramental theology and revelation has in some way advanced theological reflection on the sacramentality of the word. We turn first to the foundational contributions of Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx, and Rahner, and then to the more recent work on sacramentality, liturgical context, and the symbolic structure of revelation.

FOUNDATIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO A ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY OF THE WORD

Theologians such as Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and Semmelroth, writing both before and after the Council, had a significant impact on post-Vatican II understanding of the sacramentality of the word.²⁹ In highlighting the close

28. Karl Rahner, "Word of God and Theology," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 1830.

relationship between preaching and sacrament, the christological significance of the sacramental word, and the importance of the word in the context of the sacraments, these theologians laid a foundation for both the conciliar documents and the work of later theologians.

Otto Semmelroth's work is primarily concerned with the relationship of the sacraments to the church. Among his most substantial contributions are his emphasis on the efficacy of God's word in the church, and his understanding of the linguistic qualities of communication between humans and the divine.³⁰ Semmelroth does not go so far as to suggest that preaching is a sacrament, but notes that it has many sacramental characteristics. He emphasizes the efficacious nature of preaching, but argues that it is *most* efficacious within the sacramental context. Preaching and sacrament are therefore a "single work."³¹ If one is known to impart grace, the other must participate in this process to some degree, even if preaching and sacrament appear to be separated. Semmelroth directly addresses the theological difficulty of separating preaching and sacrament in the liturgical context. His solution, which extends the efficacy of the sacramental word to include the preached word, points toward the realization that there is really only one word of God, which is efficacious for salvation regardless of context.

It is in great part due to the work of theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx that Catholic theology has been able to move beyond the excessively rigid understanding of sacrament which took root in the neo-scholastic manual tradition. Schillebeeckx, like some others of his generation, returned to a close reading of the texts of Aquinas himself rather than building on the work of Thomistic interpreters. His interest in phenomenology allowed him to understand the sacraments in more visible and personal terms than were common to his predecessors.³² This renewed understanding of *personal*

29. The nuances of these contributions have been treated at length by Paul Janowiak in his volume *The Holy Preaching: The Sacramentality of the Word in the Liturgical Assembly* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2000).

30. See Otto Semmelroth, "God's Word and Man's Reply," in *The Word: Readings in Theology* (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1964), 278–79; *Church and Sacrament*, trans. Emily Schossberger (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1965); "The Christ Event and Our Salvation," in *Man Before God: Toward a Theology of Man; Readings in Theology*, ed. Juan Alfaro and Denis Burkhard (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1966), 209–26; "The Integral Idea of the Church," *Theology Today* 1 (1965): 129–47; *The Preaching Word: On the Theology of Proclamation* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).

31. *The Preaching Word*, 233–35.

32. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*; "The Sacraments: An Encounter with God," in *Christianity Divided: Protestant and Roman Catholic Theological Issues*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman, Daniel O'Hanlon, and Daniel J. Callahan (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 245–75; *Revelation and Theology*, trans. N. D. Smith, 2 vols. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967).

encounter within the ecclesial context has made it possible for subsequent Roman Catholic sacramental theologies to focus attention on the personal experience of the individual within the Church, rather than on the Church as dispenser of sacramental grace to the individual.

The contemporary understanding of sacraments as a means of encounter, or dialogue, between the human person and God, owes much to the insights of Schillebeeckx. Making the link to theology of revelation, Schillebeeckx, in his classic work *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, argues that revelation-in-word (the Church's *verbum fidei*) is an intrinsic and necessary dimension of sacrament. "The ecclesial sacramental confession of faith makes the symbolic action into a sacramental realization that Christ's personal act of redemption; makes it, that is to say, a sacrament."³³ The sacrament is here understood not only as God's offer of grace, but also as a personal encounter between the recipient and God. Thus the sacramental words spoken by the church are not only a mediation of God's offer of grace, but also a form of worship, a confession of faith.

Rahner's work in fundamental theology and theology of revelation,³⁴ sacramental theology,³⁵ as well as theology of symbol,³⁶ has also proved to be foundational for the work of subsequent theologians. Closely linked to his Christology and ecclesiology, Rahner's understanding of the sacramentality of the word is inseparable from his understanding of the church as both hearer and proclaimer of the word, and his understanding of Christ as primordial sacrament. For Rahner, sacramental theology is itself situated within the context of theology of the word.³⁷ He refers to a sacrament as "one quite specific word-event within a theology of the word,"³⁸ and describes the word as "the

33. See *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter With God*, 96–100.

34. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1997); *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andrew Tallon, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Continuum, 1994); "Priest and Poet," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (New York: Crossroad, 1967), 294–317.

35. "Introductory Observations on Thomas Aquinas's Theology of the Sacraments in General," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1976), 149–85; "The Word and the Eucharist," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, Kevin Smyth (New York: Seabury, 1974), 253–86; *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (Freiburg: Herder, 1963); "What Is a Sacrament?," *Worship* 47, no. 5 (1973), 275–84; "On the Theology of Worship," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 141–49; "Faith and Sacrament," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 23, trans. Joseph Donceel and Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 181–88; "Questions on the Theology of Sacraments," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 23, 189–94.

36. "The Theology of the Symbol," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, 221–52.

primordial sacrament of transcendence . . . capable of becoming the primordial sacrament of the conscious presence in the world of the God who is superior to the world.”³⁹ Due to his understanding of the world as graced, sacraments do not import grace which has been lacking, but rather serve as landmarks for the grace which is always already present. For Rahner, “Grace is always there in the form of the word.”⁴⁰

THE PRINCIPLE OF SACRAMENTALITY AND THE SACRAMENTALITY OF THE WORD

Within the Roman Catholic tradition, Kevin Irwin has suggested that since the Second Vatican Council, “an unwitting lack of respect [has been] paid to the principle of sacramentality.”⁴¹ While this is true to some extent, sacramentality is found at the heart of the theologies of both Rahner and Chauvet. Their awareness of the world as fundamentally the place of God’s self-revealing grace has shaped their own thought and the thought of those who have encountered their work.

Both Rahner and Chauvet have benefited from Schillebeeckx’s earlier work on encounter, which has been particularly significant to a renewed understanding of sacramentality in the twentieth century. Schillebeeckx’s claim that “every supernatural reality which is realized historically in our lives is sacramental,”⁴² has provided a renewed foundation for sacramentality on which other theologians have continued to build. This broader view of sacramentality reduces the theological focus on the seven ritual sacraments and opens the door to a renewed understanding of the graced context of human life in which supernatural realities may be encountered at various places and times.

Although sacramentality has traditionally received more attention from Catholic theologians than from Protestants, the twentieth century has witnessed a growing interest in sacramentality from Protestant liturgical theologians.⁴³ In

37. Although the focus here is on Roman Catholic understanding of the sacramentality of the word, Rahner’s published dialogue with Eberhard Jüngel (see Eberhard Jüngel and Karl Rahner, *Was ist ein Sakrament?* Freiburg: Herder, 1971) and his dialogue with the thought of Gerhard Ebeling should not go without notice. For an overview see Regis A. Duffy, “Sacraments in General,” in Schüssler Fiorenza and Galvin, *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 183–210.

38. Karl Rahner, “What is a Sacrament?,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14, 138.

39. “Priest and Poet,” 304.

40. “The Word and the Eucharist,” 286.

41. Kevin W. Irwin, “A Sacramental World—Sacramentality As the Primary Language for Sacraments,” *Worship* 76, no. 3 (2002), 201.

42. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 6.

the Lutheran tradition, Gordon Lathrop has recently used symbolic language to speak about preaching.⁴⁴ Anglican theologians have also contributed to the growing understanding of the sacramentality of the word by focusing on the close connection between the ritual sacramental words and the incarnation.⁴⁵

LITURGICAL CONTEXT OF THE PROCLAIMED WORD

Regis Duffy has noted that in the years following the Second Vatican Council, sacramental theology has frequently and fruitfully been contextualized within the larger category of liturgy,⁴⁶ broadly defined by the Second Vatican Council as “public worship . . . performed by the mystical body of Christ.”⁴⁷ This realignment has had the positive effect of encouraging theological reflection on the sacraments within their liturgical context, thus emphasizing the liturgical assembly as the privileged place of the word of God.⁴⁸

David Power’s work on the sacraments emphasizes the significance of the liturgical celebration as the context for sacramental theology, focusing on the sacraments as language events embedded in culture which allow for diverse ritual expressions of the single mystery of “the word proclaimed, the memory kept, and the divine gift offered.”⁴⁹ Within this framework, Power addresses the

43. In addition to those discussed below see also Brian Haymes, “Toward a Sacramental Understanding of Preaching,” in *Baptist Sacramentalism*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2003), 263–70; John E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005); and Don Saliers, *Worship Come to Its Senses* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

44. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1999). See especially *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*, 104.

45. See David Brown and Ann Loades, eds. *Christ: The Sacramental Word: Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry* (London: SPCK, 1996).

46. David N. Power, Regis Duffy and Kevin Irwin, “Sacramental Theology: A Review of Literature,” *Theological Studies* 55, no. 4 (1994): 657–05.

47. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7. “In the liturgy the sanctification of women and men is given expression in symbols perceptible by the senses and is carried out in ways appropriate to each of them. In it, complete and definitive public worship is performed by the mystical body of Jesus Christ, that is by the Head and his members. . . . Every liturgical celebration . . . is a preeminently sacred action” (ibid.). See also A. G. Martimort, Irénée Henri Dalmais, Pierre Marie Gy, and Pierre Jounel, *The Church at Prayer: An Introduction to the Liturgy*, ed. A. G. Martimort, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1987), 7–12.

48. Chauvet writes: “the liturgical assemblies provide a place for the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.” Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1995), 200.

49. David N. Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God’s Giving* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 38.

many liturgical contexts in which the word is proclaimed, and considers issues of liturgical translations, the use of word in poetry, song, and prayer, and the challenges of preaching and hearing the word in particular liturgical contexts.⁵⁰ Kevin Irwin has also noted the benefits of reflecting on a theology of the word in a liturgical context. It is in the “liturgical proclamation of the Word [that] texts are restored to their native *context* in proclamation and where proclaimed texts give life to the Church.”⁵¹

Many recent efforts to consider the sacramentality of the word in liturgical contexts have emerged within the context of theology of preaching. Mary Catherine Hilbert’s work in *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* has been influential in pointing out the contribution of a Roman Catholic sacramental understanding of grace to theologies of preaching.⁵² Paul Janowiak’s *The Holy Preaching: The Sacramentality of the Word in the Liturgical Assembly* approaches the discussion from the perspective of the intersection between ritual studies and literary theory.⁵³ In order to achieve a “richer understanding of the sacramentality of proclamation in the Roman Catholic liturgical tradition,”⁵⁴ Janowiak suggests a turn to Luther and Calvin, whose theologies offer a deep understanding of the presence of God in preaching. Several recent dissertations have also addressed the relationship between word and sacrament from the perspective of preaching.⁵⁵

50. David N. Power, *The Word of the Lord: Liturgy's Use of Scripture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001).

51. Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Pueblo/Liturgical, 1994), 90.

52. Mary Catherine Hilbert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997). Drawing on the work of Rahner, Schillebeeckx, and liberation theologians, Hilbert connects proclamation of the gospel with both the scriptures and with human experience. In contrast to many Protestant theologies of the word which focus solely on scripture and emphasize the radical sinfulness of humanity, Hilbert’s approach advocates a sacramental rather than a dialectical understanding. Her work treats the intersection of the word of God and human experience in liturgical preaching. Her attention to the role of experience and human history allows for consideration of the place of lament within preaching, as well as for attention to the voices and experiences of the marginalized. Hilbert’s work has been foundational for subsequent Roman Catholic theologies of preaching.

53. Paul Janowiak, *The Holy Preaching*. Janowiak focuses on the contributions that literary and ritual theory make to understanding members of the assembly as both hearers and proclaimers of the word. Building on the work of figures such as Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Otto Semmelroth, Janowiak himself turns to new historicism, which considers the role of the contemporary community in the interpretation of texts, and reader response criticism, which shifts attention away from the text and toward the reading itself as event. He concludes by arguing that what is preached must be related “to the paschal mystery celebrated sacramentally at the table and the font” (*ibid.*, 162).

54. *Ibid.*, 178.

In addition to the attention it has received from theologians, the liturgical relationship between word and sacrament has also been the topic of recent documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In the introduction to the 1985 document *Fulfilled in Your Hearing*, the bishops emphasize the “intimate link between preaching and the celebration of the sacraments, especially of the Sunday Eucharist.”⁵⁶ They remind preachers that the homily is “a part of the liturgy itself,” which “points to the presence of God in the people’s lives and then leads a congregation into the Eucharist, providing, as it were, the motive for celebrating the Eucharist in this time and place.”⁵⁷ Although the bishops do not argue explicitly for a sacramental understanding of the word, they are clear that the words of preaching take place within a context which cannot be divorced from the sacramental celebration.⁵⁸

The move to re-situate sacramental theology in its liturgical context is an important one for the late-twentieth century. While a more doctrinal approach has fruitfully explored the christological, anthropological, and ecclesial aspects of the sacraments, the praxis of the worshipping Church had been neglected. When word and sacrament are considered in the liturgical context their close relationship is more clearly seen.

SYMBOLIC STRUCTURES OF REVELATION

In the wake of Vatican II, the definitions of revelation and faith expounded by neo-scholasticism and discussed in the decrees of Vatican I were expanded to focus less on the debate concerning the “sources” of revelation and more on an understanding of God’s presence and interaction with the present day church and world.⁵⁹ An interest in the role that symbols can play in revelation has moved Roman Catholic theologies of revelation closer to the work of sacramental theology, which itself has traditionally been concerned with the role of symbol in God’s divine self-communication.

55. J. Sergius Halvorsen, “Encountering the Word: From a Bipartite Understanding of Word and Sacrament Toward a Holistic Perspective on the Eucharistic Liturgy” (PhD Diss., Drew University, 2002); Eileen McKeown, “A Theology of Preaching,”

56. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Fulfilled in Your Hearing,” ed. The Bishops’ Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry (Washington, DC: Office of Publishing Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1982), 1.

57. *Ibid.*, 23.

58. The document also implies that the word of God can be found in human experience when that experience is interpreted through the lens of scripture. “The preacher does not so much attempt to explain the Scriptures as to interpret the human situation through the Scriptures” (*ibid.*, 20).

59. See Dulles, “Faith and Revelation.”

Avery Dulles situates this symbolic understanding of revelation within the context of several other models.⁶⁰ This approach, which Dulles suggests is Rahner's approach, argues that God's revelation always occurs in an experience which is mediated by a symbol.⁶¹ Here Dulles defines a *symbol* as "an externally perceived sign that works mysteriously on the human consciousness so as to suggest more than it can clearly describe or define."⁶² While this definition does not adequately reflect all that Rahner and Chauvet each mean by *symbol*, the definition does correctly indicate that a symbolic understanding of revelation will necessarily emphasize knowledge as it is mediated by the human senses. Dulles's work attends to words as symbolic (making a deeper reality present) and also potentially, sacramental (making grace present). He suggests that revelation is "a grace, an anticipation of the blessed vision to be consummated in heaven. God's word, which comes externally through visible and tangible signs, resounds also within, in the depths of human consciousness."⁶³ Although it lacks explicit reference to the liturgical context, Dulles's definition of symbolic revelation bears striking resemblance to contemporary understandings of sacrament.

In his discussion of Roman Catholic contributions to theologies of revelation, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza emphasizes that symbolic understandings of revelation lead to sacramental understandings of revelation, in which words and symbols effect what they signify. He attends to the ways in which revelation is mediated in human history and human subjectivity,⁶⁴ and draws attention to the salvific and sacramental component of revelation as it is described in *Dei Verbum*.⁶⁵ "Revelation . . . should be understood primarily as salvation. . . . God's gracious revelation in Jesus Christ is the high point and culmination of God's gift of creation."⁶⁶ Revelation is thus recognized as

60. These include the propositional, the historical, the mystical, and the dialectical. See "The Symbolic Structure of Revelation," 52–54.

61. Dulles notes that this approach has been used with some degree of variation by Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur, Langdon Gilkey, Ray Hart, John Macquarrie, Louis Dupré, and Gregory Baum. *Ibid.*, 55.

62. *Ibid.*, 56.

63. "Faith and Revelation," 97.

64. Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*; Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966); Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*; "Revelation," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 1453–73.

65. *Dei Verbum*, 6 and 11.

66. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "A Roman Catholic Perspective on the Offense of Revelation: Response to William Abraham," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 3 (2002), 270.

having the potential to effect salvation when mediated in history by words and symbols.

Gerald O'Collins has attended to the use of symbol in his efforts to present revelation as a present-day reality. O'Collins points out that the Second Vatican Council speaks of divine revelation in both the past and in the present tenses. Jesus is described as the one who "completed and perfected Revelation,"⁶⁷ yet revelation is also understood as a present-day occurrence: "God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse with the spouse of his beloved Son."⁶⁸ O'Collins draws attention to *Sacrosanctum Concilium* as another significant place in which revelation is described as a present reality.

Apropos of the various liturgical presences of Christ, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy acknowledges that "it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church" (SC 7). . . . In the context of the community's worship, "Christ is still proclaiming his gospel" (SC 33).⁶⁹

Here revelation may be understood to be mediated through the liturgical texts and the community which both listens and proclaims. O'Collins is reluctant to downplay this as only a "development in understanding of a closed and past revelation."⁷⁰ He argues that to deny present-day revelation is to deny the active power of the Spirit "guiding the Tradition and mediating the presence of the risen Christ."⁷¹ He concludes that present-day revelation does not add anything to the content of what has been revealed in Christ. It does, however, actualize "the living event of the divine self-manifestation."⁷² This takes place through the liturgy and the reading of the scriptures, as well as in other contexts.

Building on the work of Semmelroth, Schillebeeckx, and Rahner, theologians of the twentieth century have wrestled with the significance of traditional ideas such as the principle of sacramentality and the importance of the liturgical context for sacramental theology. In the still developing area of theology of revelation, theologians such as Dulles, Fiorenza, and O'Collins have reflected on the ways in which revelation is mediated in history through word

67. *Dei Verbum*, 4. See also *Gaudium et Spes*, in Flannery, *The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 58.

68. *Dei Verbum*, 8. For more examples of this tension between past and present, see Gerald O'Collins, "Revelation Past and Present," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962–1987)*, ed. Rene Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988).

69. "Revelation Past and Present," 126.

70. *Ibid.*, 128.

71. *Ibid.*, 129.

72. *Ibid.*

and symbol. Considered together, this work indicates a growing interest in the ways in which words are sacramental and sacraments are word-events.

In order to examine both the theological history and the implications of this work in the theology of Rahner and Chauvet, this work will take a chronological approach to the ways in which the word of God and the sacraments have been considered in relation to one another at several significant points in the Christian tradition. A comparison between two classical and two Reformation approaches will demonstrate that the Christian understandings of word and of sacrament have evolved in tandem. The two twentieth-century approaches, while different, reflect the sacramental and revelatory concerns of the theologians mentioned above, and share a common interest in the sacramentality of the word both in the liturgical context and in the broader context of the modern world. We turn now to a brief overview of the chapters.

CHAPTER OUTLINES: THE SACRAMENTALITY OF THE WORD

We will turn first, in chapter 2, to the work of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, in order to take a fresh look at the foundational texts for Roman Catholic sacramental theology and theology of revelation. It is important to note that neither Augustine nor Aquinas themselves thought specifically in these later categories. Both are concerned, broadly speaking, with the ways in which God communicates to human beings, through signs comprised of human language, material objects, and actions, in ways that human beings can ascertain through their senses. Both offer foundational definitions of sacrament that reflect their understanding of the sacramentality, or graced nature, of the created world. This sense of sacramentality can be seen in Augustine's broad definition of sacrament, and in Aquinas's incarnational Christology and his reflection on sacraments in the broader context of revelation perceived through the senses. It is also visible in the ways in which both Augustine and Aquinas reflect on the revelatory nature of events recorded in the scriptures. In this chapter we will reach back to the work of theologians who thought broadly about God's communication to humanity through words, material elements, signs, actions, and images. Their work illustrates both the importance of the word and the necessity of a theology of the word that exists in the context of awareness of the sacramentality of the world.

In chapter 3 we will focus on the Reformation view of word and sacrament, which highlights the significance of the word. The work of Martin Luther and John Calvin is characterized by a sacramental minimalism which highlights specific aspects of word and sacrament that can sometimes be overlooked within Roman Catholic discussions of the broader context of

sacramentality. Each of these theologians focuses on the significance of the word of God. This word is a personal word. Its purpose is to convey the personal offer of salvation from God to human beings. No matter the context (sacrament, preaching, scripture) the authentic word of God is always the same and is always an invitation to faith. It does not convey information about God so much as reveal God's offer of salvation for humanity. Luther emphasizes that the word of God, the word of promise, must always be an embodied word. It is embodied first and definitively in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, but also in the sacraments and in the images of Christ which are conveyed by the scriptural word. Calvin reminds us of the brokenness of humanity and the created world. The created world functions as a kind of sacrament which has been damaged by the fall. Calvin also draws attention to the personal and sovereign nature of God's ongoing *spiritual* presence in the world, through word and sacrament, which is always effected by the Holy Spirit. Because of the fall, human beings are unable to perceive this presence clearly. They are thus constantly aware of the distance that exists between them and God. While their approaches differ, Luther and Calvin each offer an understanding of the word of God that emphasizes the relationship between the ritual sacramental word and the proclaimed word, and thus offers a model for a renewed Roman Catholic approach. Their conviction of the efficacy of the word with or without the explicitly ritual sacramental context serves as a reminder that the word of God effectively proclaimed can function in a sacramental way even outside the liturgical context, and that sacraments themselves are "visible words."

The work of Karl Rahner in the mid-twentieth century highlights, for Roman Catholic theology, the importance of a renewed study of the word of God within the context of world recognized as always already graced. It is to Rahner that we move in chapter 4. Rahner understands human beings as the expression of God in history, created with an innate ability to exist in communicative relationship with God. This theological anthropology illuminates his understanding of the ways in which God communicates with humanity through language and symbol. Like Aquinas, Rahner regards the incarnation as the primary example of this communication. He speaks of the incarnation and of certain other types of signs as *Realsymbols*, or signs which make present what they signify. He also speaks of primordial human words such as the words of a poet, which have a similar capacity to bring about what they signify, even outside the context of explicit faith. Rahner's later work on the sacraments as landmarks in an already graced world allows him to focus on the similarities between word and sacrament within the context of God's continuous self-communication to humanity. In this chapter we will

examine the ways in which Rahner's Christology and theological anthropology support his evolving understanding of the self-communication of God. We will suggest that Rahner's study of the relationship between word and sacrament lays a foundation for the Roman Catholic theology of the word for which he famously called.

Chapter 5 examines Louis-Marie Chauvet's theology, which begins with sacramentality and an understanding of human life lived in the context of language and culture. It is this language context that allows Chauvet, like Calvin, to emphasize the absence, as well as the presence, of God in the created world. Chauvet's work tempers Rahner's optimistic view of the world as graced. While Chauvet does not explicitly disagree with Rahner's assessment, his work emphasizes the *sacramental* presence of God, a presence which brings with it an awareness of absence. Chauvet employs a system of symbolic mediation to analyze the ways in which the word of God is manifested in scripture, sacrament, and ethics, which he understands to be the marks of Christian identity. Chauvet's emphasis on pneumatology, a shift from the more christological approaches of the earlier twentieth century, provides the lens for a theology which is grounded in the work of the Spirit done by human beings, each in his or her own historical context. In transcending the divide between word and sacrament, yet maintaining the necessary distance between divine and human, Chauvet offers a theology that both recognizes the significance of the sacramentality of the word and makes it foundational for his theological system. This chapter will examine the ways in which Chauvet's work on sacramentality is influenced by postmodern and post-conciliar concerns such as the contributions which linguistic theory can make to an understanding of word and sacrament. It will then examine the implications of his trinitarian Christology, which begins with the paschal mystery and emphasizes the importance of proclamation in history by the risen Christ, who seeks a body in humanity. Finally it will examine the ways in which the role of the word in Chauvet's structure of Christian identity, including an understanding of the ethical manifestation of the word, offers new possibilities for a Roman Catholic theology of the word.

The concluding chapter of this study will examine some of the ways in which Rahner and Chauvet, drawing on the work of earlier theologians, have influenced the development of an evolving Roman Catholic theology of the word. We will see that the twentieth-century effort to engage questions concerning the relationship between word and sacrament has resulted in an expansion of the Church's understanding of a "sacramental" word. In contrast to preceding centuries, theologians of the twentieth century have recognized

the sacramentality of words beyond the explicitly ecclesial sacramental context. While words such as the words of institution are of course understood as sacramental, other words both within and beyond the liturgical context have also been recognized as conveyers of grace. This shift is related to an increasing emphasis on the sacramentality of human language, culture, and the created world as context for encounter with God. When language, culture, and the material world are recognized as fundamentally graced, theological understanding of the ritual proclamation of the word of God is seen in a different light. This change in perspective is reflected in the ways that sacramental theologians of the twentieth century have relied on trinitarian theology to support their understanding of God's self-communication with humanity. With the increasing awareness of sacramentality has come increasing attention to the role of the Holy Spirit as the ongoing presence of God in history. The conclusion addresses these shifts as they pertain to theologies of Rahner and Chauvet and as they illustrate the role of the word in theological reflection at the end of the twentieth century.