

Sacramental Language

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We use the word *figure* in many ways. We speak of figure-skating, of cutting a figure, of a fine figure of a man, the fuller figure, a figure of fun, figuring things out, figures of speech and being good with with figures. These are all current senses. In the past, *figure* has had other meanings. When, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Mistress Ford encourages Mistress Page to 'scrape the figures out of your husband's brains', she does not mean that he has been worrying about the mortgage, but that his head is full of mistaken ideas or fantasies.

[1] *Figura*

Figure comes from the Latin *figura*. In 1944 the German literary critic Erich Auerbach published an influential article entitled *Figura*.¹ He showed the wide range of meanings that *figura* has in classical Latin, and how these developed further in Christian usage. From the earliest records, *figura* could mean 'the shape of a thing', just as we now speak of a person's 'figure'. But it could also mean a shape representing something else. Sculptors, for instance, make *figurae* of human beings; in our dreams we see *figurae* of people who are dead.

[1.1] *Figura* in Christian Latin

Christian writers developed this second sense in a new and important way. For them, *figura* could refer to an object or event belonging to a particular point in time that represented something in the future. For Tertullian, Isaac, Joseph, Moses are all *figurae* of Christ²; the marriage of Adam and Eve is a *figura* of Christ and the Church.³ (Theologians are familiar with this way of looking at history, though we usually call it by a word of Greek origin, typology.) A *figura* finds its counterpart in truth, *veritas*.⁴ Ambrose says that reconciliation was achieved *in figura* through Isaac and *in veritate* through Christ.⁵ This does not mean that a *figura* is a fiction. Moses really existed: in one sense he was 'true', in another he points to a greater truth.

Auerbach's chief concern was Dante. He emphasised that the personages of the *Divine Comedy* were not mere personifications, but had actual historical existence. Virgil might represent Reason, but he was also a historical figure who in some sense prepared the way for Christ. Above all, Beatrice is significant not merely by representing something else, theology, for instance, or divine illumination, but by her concrete existence as a living woman. Dante's love for her opened his eyes to the possibility of the divine love which is the theme of the *Commedia* and prepared him for it.

[1.2] Figure and Allegory

Auerbach's essay was something of a reply to C.S. Lewis, who eight years earlier in *The Allegory of Love* had emphasized the importance of allegory to the medieval mind. Auerbach insisted that for most people the figural mode of understanding was the dominant one. As for allegory,

there is something scholarly, indirect, even abstruse about it . . . By its origin and nature it was limited to a relatively small circle of intellectuals and initiates.⁶

The roots of allegory were in Greek thought, particularly in Plato and Alexandrian neo-Platonism, while the *figural* mode, more friendly to Semitic patterns of thought, is found already in Scripture in the Pauline letters.⁷

In fact, both the figural and the allegorical approaches belong within a Christian view of reality, since in Christ the timeless intersects with time. He reveals to us the unchanging nature of the God who is and the mystery which that God unfolds through history.

[1.3] *Figura* as a eucharistic term

I move now to the Eucharistic controversies of the ninth century, in which a central question was whether the Eucharist is a *figura*, and from now on, I shall use the word in its English form, *figure*. Ratramnus, a monk of Corbie, begins his treatise on the Body and Blood of the Lord⁸ with two definitions. A figure is a veiled way of speaking about something, as when Christ says *I am the living bread*, or *I am the true vine*: figures say one thing and mean another. Truth, on the other hand, is the direct expression of a reality, as when we say that Christ was born of the Virgin, suffered, was crucified and so on.

The Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ in truth insofar as it feeds the faithful spiritually in a manner not apparent to the senses. The Eucharist is also a figure in at least three senses, since it represents to us at least three things: the body of Christ, glorified and present with the Father outside time; the historical event of Christ's suffering and death; and that body which is the people that believes in Christ and has been reborn in him. On the last page of his treatise Ratramnus moves towards a fourth sense in which the Eucharist is a figure, saying that it teaches us that when we see Christ we shall not need such helps, for we shall see him face to face: that is, the Eucharist is a figure of the beatific vision.

Some words that Ratramnus uses as equivalents of *figura* are *sacramentum*, *mysterium* and *memoria*. In his hands *figura* is a rich word, able to speak of how the Eucharist relates to past, to present and to future. Western theology lacks a word with this richness and has felt the lack. Only in recent years, the long and often sterile debate about how Christ's sacrifice is present has been given a new direction by the recovery of the Greek word, *anamnesis*. In the uses of *figura* that I have discussed, and in some of the uses of *sacramentum* that I shall be discussing soon, we find

Western expressions of the understanding of history, of the idea that two separate moments can be simultaneously present, which is contained in the concept of *anamnesis*.

Ratramnus was by no means the first to use *figure* of the Eucharist. Tertullian says that Christ gave to bread the figure of his body⁹, and that he said at the Last Supper 'This is my body', that is, 'This is the figure of my body'¹⁰. A fourth-century version of the prayer that we now know as Eucharistic Prayer I (the 'Roman Canon'), attested in Saint Ambrose's work on the Sacraments, says: Make this offering for us approved, spiritual, pleasing, because it is the figure of the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Gaudentius of Brescia (early 5c) speaks of the Eucharist as the figure of Christ's passion. Paschasius, Ratramnus' confrater, calls the Eucharist a 'figure of flesh and blood'.¹¹ Two centuries later, Lanfranc was able to admit *figura* into discussion of the Eucharist, even when arguing against Berengar, whom he regarded as having too weak a concept of the Eucharistic change.¹² Writers were encouraged in their use of the word by the Vulgate text of Hebrews 1:3, which speaks of Christ as the figure of God's substance. But the traditional contrast of *figura* with *veritas* told against it when writers wanted to assert the full reality of Christ's Eucharistic presence.

Perhaps there is another reason for *figura*'s disappointing career. Auerbach was right, I think, to claim that the figural sense of reality was dominant throughout the Middle Ages among the bulk of the population. Such iconographical schemes as that of the stained glass at Fairford in Gloucestershire and the huge historical structures of the mystery plays are indications of this, that a figural perception of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments was as alive among the people of fifteenth-century England as it was in sixth-century Ravenna, when San Vitale was built. But alongside the association of the Eucharist with salvation-history in the mystery-cycles, devotions arose which isolated the eucharist from any reminders of history. In this development we see the waning of the figural approach. Among the intelligentsia allegorism gained ground, so that C.S.Lewis was right to speak of Allegory as the dominant mode in late medieval literature.

The Council of Florence in its Decree for the Armenians (1439) said that the sacraments of the Old Law 'only figured (*solum figurabant*) the grace that was to be given through the passion of Christ'.

The Council of Trent insisted that Christ is contained in the Eucharist, and not only 'as in a sign or figure'¹³. Sacramental theologians today are preoccupied with recovering the sign-value of sacraments, and know that Trent's insistence on other aspects has given us a weak sense of sacraments as signs. We have lost something, too, by losing *figure* from our theological vocabulary. A word that can denote relationships between something we do today, things that happened in the past, things that will happen in the future, and realities that are present and independent of time could have served us well. The Eucharist is a figure of Christ's Paschal Mystery and of his Second Coming. It is a figure of his body, now

glorified in the presence of the Father. It is a figure of the Church. But we are not accustomed to saying these things.

[2] *Sacramentum*

Having shown what can happen when a word drops out of theological vocabulary, I turn now to another word, *sacrament*. Familiar though it is, *sacrament* has lost many of the senses it had in earlier times. The history of its Latin root, *sacramentum*, is fairly well known, and I shall only sketch it briefly before dealing with the English word.

Sacramentum is derived from *sacer*, which meant 'holy' or, more precisely, 'consecrated to a deity'. Anyone who instituted legal proceedings had to leave a deposit with the court which he would forfeit if he lost his case. In early times this deposit could only be used for religious purposes: it was *sacer*, whence its name *sacramentum*. A person who took an oath, for instance on entering the army, was similarly in danger of religious penalties if he broke his commitment. He himself was *sacer*, and his oath was a *sacramentum*. Both senses refer to an action done at a particular time whose effects endure through a period of time.

[2.1] Patristic uses

In Tertullian we find both the classical senses developed. He compares baptismal promises to the military oath when he says 'we were called into the militia of the living God when we answered to the words of the *sacramentum*'.¹⁴ He also uses the name *sacramentum* for persons, things and events in the Old Testament that point to the New, such as the wood laid on Isaac (Gen 22:6), the wood with which Moses sweetened the water of Marah (Ex 15:25) and the stick used by Elisha to recover an axe-head (2 Kgs 6:6), all of which look forward to Christ's Cross.¹⁵ It is as if they were God's deposits, put down before Christ to be taken up at his coming. *Sacramentum* in this sense is synonymous with *figura*, and Tertullian sometimes uses them as equivalents.¹⁶

Thirdly, the basic sense of 'holy thing' led to *sacramentum* being used for Baptism and Eucharist, and also for Christian doctrine.

Around the same time, *sacramentum* was developing an important new sense in the earliest Latin translations of the New Testament, where it was used to render Greek *mysterion*. In the Pauline writings, *mysterion* refers to God's hidden plan, the realisation of that plan in Christ, and the continuation of the plan in the Church. Nobody knows for sure why *sacramentum* was chosen to translate it, but its already established use to express links between different points in time will have been one recommending factor.

In the later patristic period, *sacramentum* was often used of an event in the life of Christ, as of Old Testament events. Had this sense continued in use, we should speak of 'the five glorious sacraments of the Rosary'. Leo the Great frequently uses *sacramentum* for a season of the liturgical year.

Augustine in particular develops the use of *sacramentum* as referring

to a rite, the sense with which we are most familiar now. He was also responsible for a simple but important definition of a sacrament as 'a sacred sign'¹⁷, which was adopted by Aquinas.

[2.2] The Middle Ages and Trent

As the Middle Ages advanced, the practice grew of classifying rites as 'major' and 'minor' sacraments and making lists of them, some as long as twelve. Peter Lombard's list of seven became classic, and was accepted by Aquinas and Trent. Thus the notion that there are seven rites called sacraments gained ground, and *sacrament* became a technical term. However, the word continued to be applied to other referents. Aquinas speaks much of the sacraments of the Old Law, and the Roman liturgy has preserved other senses of the word in its prayers. To give one example, the Prayer over the Gifts for the First Sunday of Lent, found already in the Gregorian Sacramentary (7th century), speaks of 'the beginning of this venerable sacrament'¹⁸, where 'sacrament' means the season of Lent.

Also, the figural sense of *sacramentum* when applied to the seven rites was retained from the patristic period. Aquinas explains that the seven sacraments are signs that signify simultaneously the past passion of Christ, divine grace and virtues in the present life of the Christian, and eternal life in the future¹⁹. The same theme is taken up in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, and illustrated by the Magnificat Antiphon for Corpus Christi *O sacram convivium*:

O sacred banquet in which Christ is received,
the memory of his passion is recalled,
and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

However, controversy with Protestants who saw sacraments only as signs led Trent to play down the sign-character of the seven sacraments, and a desire to stress their efficacy led to emphasis on what they contain rather than what they point to or evoke. Thus, Catholic Christianity has in the period between Trent and Vatican II had a narrower concept of sacramentality than previously.

[2.3] The sixteenth century: the Reims New Testament

In English, the word *sacrament* was used before the Reformation in several different senses drawn from the range of meanings of *sacramentum*, but in the sixteenth century it became controversial with the translation of the New Testament made from the Vulgate by Gregory Martin and published at Reims in 1582. Martin tried to keep his English as close to the Latin as possible. *Sacramentum* occurred eight times in the Vulgate, translating *mysterion*, and on seven of these, Martin used *sacrament*.

Martin defended his translation in his *Discovery of the manifold corruptions of the holy Scriptures by the Heretikes of our daies, specially the English Sectaries, and of their foule dealing herein, by partiall and*

false translations to the advantage of their heresies, in their English Bibles used and authorized since the time of Schisme (Reims, 1582). We might think, he says, that Protestants take a high view of matrimony, since they regard it as equal to virginity, yet the truth is that they flatly deny that it is a sacrament:

And to this purpose they translate in the Epistle to the Ephesians 5, where the Apostle speaketh of Matrimonie, *this is a great secret*, Whereas the Latine Church and all the Doctours thereof have ever read *this is a great Sacrament*: the greeke Church and all the Fathers thereof. *This is a great Myserie*, because that which is in Greeke, myserie: is in Latin, Sacrament . . .

If the Protestants allow the word *mystery* elsewhere in their writings, but here translate *musterion* as 'secret',

must we not needs thinke . . . that they doe it because of their hereticall opinion against the sacrament of Matrimonie, and for their base estimation thereof?

Martin is aware, however, that the mere name *sacrament* does not make marriage a sacrament

For . . . Sacrament is a generall name in Scripture to other things. Neither do we so translate it, as though it were forthwith one of the seven Sacraments, because of the name: but as in other places wheresoever we finde this word in the Latine, we translate it Sacrament . . . so finding it here, we do here also so translate it: and as for the divers taking of it here, and elsewhere, that we examine otherwise, by circumstance of the text, and by the Churches and Doctors interpretation: and wee finde that here it is taken for a Sacrament in that sense as wee say, *seven Sacraments*, not so in the other places.

Baptism is nowhere in the Scriptures called a sacrament, and Martin grants that were it anywhere so called, the Protestants would not claim that that in itself proved Baptism to be a sacrament.

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Yet I trowe they would not avoid to translate it by the word Sacrament, if they found it so called. Even so, we finding Matrimonie so called, doe so translate it, neither concluding thereby that it is one of the Seven, nor yet suppressing the name, which no doubt gave occasion to the Church and the holy Doctors to esteeme it as one of the Seven.

Martin found an able opponent in William Fulke, whose *Defense of the sincere and true translation of the holy scriptures into the English tongue, against the manifold cavils, frivolous quarrels, and impudent slaunders of GREGORIE MARTIN, one of the Readers of Popish divinitie in the traiterous Seminarie of Rhemes*, published in 1583, reprints

Martin's *Discovery* and replies to it paragraph by paragraph.

The English word *secret* signifieth fully as much as the Greeke word *mysterion* . . . And it is very false that you say that the Latine word *Sacramentum* is equivalent to the Greeke: for both it signifieth an oath which the Greeke word doth not, and also it includeth holinesse, which the Greeke word doth not.

In 1589 Fulke published a complete New Testament, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, answering Martin's notes with notes of his own. On Eph 5:32 he asks

And what other argument hath Peter Lumbarde, the Maister of your divinitie, to prove that Matrimony is a Sacrament, but onely the name of *Sacramentum*, used in this place?

Fulke has a good point here: Lombard gives no justification for his enumeration of seven sacraments.

Fulke taunts Martin for failing in one place²⁰ to translate *sacramentum* as 'sacrament' and says that if he were true to his principles, he would use 'sacrament' in all the eight places where *sacramentum* occurs in the New Testament. This was in fact what was done in the Douai Old Testament.

[2.4] Revisions of the Reims NT

However, the uses of *sacrament* in the Douai Bible were found puzzling by readers. The 1633 edition printed at Antwerp by John Cousturier contains an Appendix entitled *The explication of certaine words in this translation, not familiar to the vulgar Reader, which might not conveniently be uttered otherwise*. 'Sacrament, for mysterie' is one of these. In 1718 Dr Cornelius Nary, an Irish priest, published with the encouragement of the Archbishop of Dublin a new translation of the Vulgate New Testament. In the Preface he gives as one of his motives the defects of the Rhemish Testament,

the Language whereof is so old, the Words in many places so obsolete, the Orthography so bad, and the Translation so very literal, that in a number of Places it is unintelligible, and all over so grating to the Ears of such as are accustomed to speak, in a manner, another Language, that most People will not be at pains of reading them.

In Nary's version, *sacramentum* is translated 'mystery', except at Eph 5:32. There, marriage being under discussion, *sacrament* is retained. The same practice was followed by Challoner when he came to revise the Douai Bible in the middle of the century and, so far as I have been able to ascertain, by all subsequent editions of that version.

Thus, through controversy, the breadth and richness of meaning that *sacramentum* has in Latin was lost from the English language and, as often happens, the vernacular, far from handing on tradition, served to conceal it.

[3] Sacramentality in the modern liturgy

[3.1] The Wedding Service

I now turn to the liturgy of the Roman Rite as we currently celebrate it in English, to point out how we use and avoid the word *sacrament*. I hope thus to shed some light on the concept of sacramentality that is operative in our liturgy. I shall concentrate initially on the Wedding Service.

[3.1.1] The Introduction

I suspect I may not be the only person who has winced at a Catholic wedding on hearing the words

He (i.e. Christ) has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament . . .²¹

This gives the impression of the sacrament as an injection of power from God delivered during the wedding ceremony. *Sacrament* is used here in its narrow, technical sense, not only in the English but also in the Latin original, which was composed in the 1960s for the liturgical reform. But the English goes further than the Latin. As so often, it is the little words that do most damage, in this case *now* in ‘*now* he enriches and strengthens’ which focusses God’s action too narrowly. A more faithful translation would be:

he enriches and strengthens with a special sacrament those whom he has already consecrated in Baptism.

The Latin speaks of God’s action throughout a couple’s married life, and on married couples throughout Christian history. The English restricts the reference of the text to this couple and this ceremony: ‘*now* he enriches and strengthens *you*.’

[3.1.2] ‘The sacrament of Christ and the Church’

Other texts in the marriage rite contain older senses of *sacramentum*. Two prayers contain the phrase *Christi et Ecclesiae sacramentum*, literally ‘the sacrament of Christ and his Church’, which is drawn from a Nuptial Blessing in the Gregorian Sacramentary, and ultimately based on Ephesians 5:32. *Sacramentum* here is plainly used of the bond between Christ and the Church, not one of the Seven. I would offer as a faithful if not elegant translation

God, who consecrated the union of husband and wife to be so excellent a mystery that you made the marriage-bond prefigure the sacrament of Christ and the Church, . . .²²

I do not advocate Gregory Martin’s policy of using *sacrament* on every occasion to translate *sacramentum*, but here it might be suitable. We are accustomed to thinking of Christ and the Church as sacraments, so to

think of their union as a sacrament is an extension and deepening of those ideas: the patristic expression might well find a new home among us. The ICEL translators backed away from using *sacrament* here. Instead they say:

Father, you have made the bond of marriage a holy mystery, a symbol of Christ's love for his Church.

I see several difficulties here. Firstly, the original does not say marriage is a mystery, but that it has been consecrated to be a mystery. That is, marriage, one of the blessings of creation, is transformed in God's plan of redemption: creation is distinguished from consecration, the natural sacrament from the Christian one. Secondly, the original says that marriage is not merely a symbol but a *prefiguration* of the sacrament of Christ and the Church. I think this means both that before Christ marriage was a sign of what was to begin when he came and that now it shows what will happen when he comes again. *Sacramentum* here expresses a figural view of marriage. All this historical richness is lost in the English. Furthermore, whereas the Latin speaks of the sacrament of Christ and the Church, the English says 'Christ's love for his Church', allowing no room for the Church's love of Christ, and turning the model into a male-dominated one, implying a disparity of roles between husband and wife, which is exactly what the Council wished to avoid when it decreed that the Prayer over the Bride should be revised!²³ This version also implies a view of sacraments as something done by God to passive humans rather than by God and humans together²⁴.

[3.1.3] Nuptial Blessing II

The second alternative Nuptial Blessing was composed in the 1960s, and contains a bold use of *sacramentum*:

O God, who to make known the plan of your love
willed that the covenant you made with your people
should be foreshadowed in the mutual love of husband and wife,
and the meaning of that sacrament be fully revealed
when the married life of your faithful people,
makes known the nuptial mystery of Christ and the Church, . . .²⁵

Here *sacramentum* seems to have the meaning 'sacred sign', a sign present in creation whose meaning is fully revealed in the life of the Church. Thus marriage is a 'sacrament in process', whose sacramentality is complete only insofar as its significance is recognised. The liturgical reformers were operating with a renewed and enriched concept of sacramentality which found its way into their texts. Translators are not always so theologically aware. Our version reads:

Father, to reveal the plan of your love,
you made the union of husband and wife
an image of the covenant between you and your people . .

There is no sense of distance in time between the sign and what it signifies, between creation and covenant. The prayer continues:

In the fulfillment of this sacrament,
the marriage of Christian man and woman
is a sign of the marriage between Christ and the Church.

I am not sure how to take this. 'Sacrament' has been retained as a translation of *sacramentum*, but its coupling with 'this' will, I think, suggest to the majority of worshippers that what is being referred to is Christian marriage, or perhaps the wedding currently being solemnized, rather than the institution of human marriage throughout history, already sacramental before Christ. This shows how we cannot enrich our sacramental theology simply by using the word *sacrament* more frequently. In fact, if we use it frequently but narrowly, we impoverish our understanding of sacramentality.

[3.1.4] Marriage Preface I

Nonetheless, our present rites are very fond of the word *sacrament*, often introducing it where *sacramentum* does not occur in the Latin, for instance in the first Preface for Weddings, which comes from the Gelasian sacramentary. The original may be translated:

you have united men and women in the covenant of marriage,
an indissoluble bond of peace (cf. Eph 4:3)
laying upon them your gentle yoke (cf. Matt 11:30) . . .²⁸

All this is about marriage as a human institution, part of creation. The Preface goes on to say that God has instituted marriage for the increase both of the human family and of the Church. The Latin does not use *sacramentum*, but our English version reads:

By this sacrament your grace unites man and woman in an
unbreakable bond of love and peace. . . .

losing the echoes of Scripture. Furthermore, most people hearing the words 'this sacrament' will think they refer exclusively to Christian marriage and will consequently lose the figural dimension, the parallel between marriage in Creation and marriage in Redemption.

[3.2] 'This'

In that last example, the word *this* works together with *sacrament* to narrow the focus of the prayer. I said earlier that it is the little words that cause most trouble. Perhaps the most misused word in our English liturgy is *this*. Let me end with some examples of its use which help to give our liturgy its narrow concept of the sacramental. I begin with one from this week's Mass-texts.

[3.2.1] Week 22: Prayer over the Gifts

After the Preparation of the Gifts in Week 22 of the Year we pray:

Lord, may the sacred offering always bring upon us your saving blessing,⁷⁷

but our current version runs:

Lord, may this holy offering bring us your blessing.

Whereas the original thinks of the effects of the eucharist throughout our lives, the English narrows the focus of the prayer to *this* celebration, pointing exclusively to the here and now.

[3.2.2] Eucharistic Prayer 2

In the second Eucharistic Prayer we say:

we offer you, Father, this life-giving bread,
this saving cup,⁷⁸

where the original could more accurately be translated

we offer you, Lord, the bread of life
and the cup of salvation.

The echoes of Scripture here (John 6:35;48 and Psalm 116:13) invite our imaginations beyond the immediate ritual context towards Christ's discourse after feeding the Five Thousand in John 6 and his sacrificial death which Christian tradition sees prefigured in Psalm 116:

I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,
Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints. (Ps 116:13,15)

[3.2.3] Eucharistic Prayer 3

In Eucharistic Prayer III we speak of

our Lord Jesus Christ
at whose command we celebrate this eucharist . . . ⁷⁹

but what the original says is:

at whose command we celebrate these mysteries.

That is, whenever we celebrate the eucharist we do so at Christ's command: the focus is not on 'this Mass', but on the whole eucharistic activity of the whole Church.

[3.2.4] 'This is the Word of the Lord'

'This is the Word of the Lord', we say at the end of a reading from Scripture, and some embellish the words by picking up the Lectionary and waving it about. But that is to localise the Word of God excessively. The form proposed for the revised Missal currently in preparation is simply 'The word of the Lord'. ICEL has given as one reason for this change a desire 'to counter the tendency evoked by 'This is . . .' to make the acclamation the equivalent of a narrow "pointing gesture" rather than a faith acclamation to God who speaks when the Scriptures are read'. In this case, ICEL has seen the pernicious force of the word 'this'.

[3.2.5] 'This is the Lamb of God'

The words before Communion 'This is the Lamb of God'³⁰ are taken from John 1:35, where the Baptist points to Jesus from a certain distance and says 'there is the Lamb of God'. This would not be an appropriate translation in the liturgical context, since the priest is actually holding the Host. But his words invite us to do more than look at the Eucharistic Bread and affirm its identity with the Lamb of God. They prepare for the words that follow: 'Blessed are they who are called to the Supper of the Lamb'. Perhaps no moment in the liturgy is more patient of a figural understanding. The words invite us to see at once Jesus beside the Jordan at the beginning of his ministry, the Host in the hands of the priest, and the Lamb to whose wedding-banquet we look forward. The traditional translation 'Behold the Lamb of God', adopted for the revision, will allow room for these broader connotations.

[4] Conclusion

I have tried to show how theological controversy led to a narrowing of the meaning of two words, *figure* and *sacrament*. As a result, the number of things called 'sacraments' was gradually reduced to seven. Also, understanding of the meaning of these seven was impoverished. They were seen as windows onto the transcendent, channels of grace, but not as events which make powerful for us other events, both past and future. The figural sense of sacramentality was lost.

The twentieth century has seen a recovery of this richer concept, largely under the influence of the Mystery Theology of Odo Casel and his successors. This movement has passed by our vernacular liturgy, the production of which has been one further stage in the impoverishment of sacramental awareness among English speakers. We theologians are, I think, too passive in our acceptance of vernacular liturgical texts. A revision of the Catholic liturgy in English is now in progress. If the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain does not turn a critical eye on its results, then who will?

- 1 Auerbach, Erich. 'Figura' in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, with an introduction by Paolo Valesio, 11–76. *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 9. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- 2 *Adversus Marcionem* 3,18,2-7;

- 3 *Adversus Marcionem* 5,18,10.
 4 *Adversus Marcionem* 5,19,9.
 5 *De Isaac vel Anima* 4,22
 6 *Op.cit.* pp.55–56.
 7 Rom 5:12ff; 1 Cor 10:6;11; 15:21; 2 Cor 3:14; Gal 4:21–31; Col 2:16–17.
 8 PL 121, 125–170.
 9 *Adversus Marcionem* 3,19,4.
 10 *Adversus Marcionem* 4,40,3.
 11 *De Corpore et sanguine Domini* 4,2 (PL 120, 1279).
 12 *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* 6; 14 (PL 150, 416c; 424b).
 13 Canon 1 on the Eucharist: D.-S. 1651.
 14 *Ad Martyras* 3,1.
 15 *Adversus Iudaeos* 13.
 16 *Adversus Marcionem* 3,16,5.
 17 *De Civitate Dei* 10,5.
 18 *ipsius venerabilis sacramenti . . . exordium*
 19 S. Th IIIa q60 a3c
 20 *Apoc 17:7: sacramentum mulieris*
 21 In Latin, *eos peculiari dilat et roborat Sacramento, quos ipse sancto iam Baptismate consecravit.*
 22 *Deus, qui tam excellenti mysterio coniugalem copulam consecrasti, ut Christi et Ecclesiae sacramentum praesignares in foedere nuptiarum . . .*
 23 *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 78.
 24 The Anglican translation from 1549 onwards was 'the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church'; the Alternative Service Book translates 'the marriage of Christ with his Church'.
 25 *Deus, qui ad amoris tui consilium revelandum, in mutua dilectione sponsorum foedus illud adumbrari voluisti quod ipse cum populo tuo inire dignatus es, ut, sacramenti significatione completa, in fidelium tuorum coniugali consortio Christi et Ecclesiae nuptiale pateret mysterium . . .*
 26 *Qui foedera nuptiarum blando concordiae iugo et insolubili pacis vinculo nexuisti . . .*
 27 *Benedictionem nobis, Domine, conferat salutarem sacra semper oblatio . . .*
 28 *tibi, Domine, panem vitae et calicem salutis offerimus . . .*
 29 *Domini nostri Iesu Christi, cuius mandato haec mysteria celebramus.*
 30 NJB and RNEB have 'there is the Lamb . . .'; NRSV has 'here is . . .'; New American Bible has 'Behold . . .'