

THE LITURGY: PRESENCE OF A NEW BODY, SOURCE OF A FULFILLED TIME

• José Granados •

“If the human body is the source of symbols, the ultimate example is the body of Jesus; if human history aims at transcendence, its unsurpassable crown is the life of Jesus.”

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In his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid relates the myth of Arachne.¹ This young woman, a native of Lydia, inherited a fabulous ability to weave tapestries. She received such praises that she began to believe herself superior to Pallas Athena, the goddess who was patron of her guild and of the other crafts. Such disrespect prompted Athena to appear to her, inviting her to acknowledge her error. But Arachne, who was proud, challenged the deity to a competition at the loom.

Then Athena and Arachne both set to work on their cloths, weaving splendid representations. The tapestries Athena wove showed epic combats between men and gods, where the humans were always vanquished by divine power. Arachne, for her part, was content to portray the ignoble deceits of the immortals, starting with

¹Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, in *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J. Tarrant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 152f. I have developed the ideas in this article at greater length in my book *Signos en la carne: El matrimonio y los otros sacramentos*, Didáscalos Minor 1 (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2011).

the seductions of Zeus. To her eyes the gods seemed like tyrants who exploited human weakness.

In the end, Athena had to admit the perfection of Arachne's art, but irritated by the insult she tore the tapestries into pieces and turned the girl into a spider, the eternal weaver. Dante describes her thus in the *Divine Comedy*: "O mad Arachne, I saw you already/ half-spider, wretched on the ragged remnants/ of work that you had wrought to your own hurt."²

So runs the myth, which, though invented in Greece, has a universal validity. Besides the misfortunes of Arachne, we find in it also a meditation on human life. The tapestry, woven at great speed, is a symbol of the fleetingness of existence, embroidered in time. The Bible also recognizes the brevity of human life using the simile of weaving. "Like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom" (Is 38:12). In this light, the depth of the myth of Arachne becomes apparent: can it be that this fragile cloth, patterned so quickly in the weaving of our lives, bears an image so beautiful that it endures for all time, defying the passage of the centuries and raising us to divine heights? Will Arachne one day succeed in equalling Pallas Athena, without thereby having to renounce her earthly and historical condition? The Greek world did not find a definitive solution to this dilemma. The tapestries woven by Athena and Arachne therefore represent the endless struggle between the human and the divine, the temporal and the eternal. Later eras came along and tried in their own ways to answer the same question, which is crucial if human life is to find meaning. Their attitudes differed from the Greek one, but maintained a common denominator with it: they accepted the comparison of human life with a tapestry. And this meant that the beings of the material cosmos reflected a higher light, revealing a plan and a beauty: that human history, though ephemeral, has a point. The universe was conceived of as a book in which each event occupied its proper place and indicated to man a route through time.

Modernity brought with it a change of horizon. Man dis-entangled himself from the fabric of the world to adopt the distance of the observer, who contemplates from afar the concert of what surrounds him.³ From this vantage point he could record the

²Dante, *Purgatorio* XII, 43–45 (Mandelbaum translation).

³Cf. Robert Spaemann, "Ende der Modernität?," in *Philosophische Essays*.

laws of the cosmos with precision, in accordance with the paradigm that modern science offered him. More than the tapestries of Arachne, which were primitive and childish myths, it was the spider's web with its precise order and symmetry that spoke to him. Think of the modern's fascination with the order of mathematics, which Galileo described as the alphabet with which God has written the universe.⁴

This dazzling harmony was nevertheless unable to assign a meaning to human life.⁵ And so opened the space for a doubt that has run all through modern times, a doubt to which Immanuel Kant would give expression: could not all this harmony perhaps be a projection of our own mind onto the appearances of the real? Could mathematics be located in us, rather than in the things themselves? This doubt corroded human confidence in the order of the world. If harmony is found on the side of the observer, then the movement of nature is irrational, caused by chance or autonomous necessity. So the great divorce was finalized: between the human spirit, seat of conscience and freedom, beauty and ideals, on the one hand; and the material cosmos on the other, a place of noisy agitation. The rational exists in the thinking mind; things themselves remain submerged in the chaos of the particles of mechanicism and its collisions.

Here is a question in the face of this crisis. Is it possible to recover the symbolic value of the world and to give man's footsteps an orientation in nature? Can the universe be seen as a tapestry once again, where the narrative of life has a beautiful pattern? Christian faith offers a response, which starts by considering the capacity of our own body and our own time to bear meaning. I want to show that this happens precisely in the Christian liturgy, which therefore acquires a great importance for illuminating the problems of our time. The first step will be to reflect on the sacraments, which contain the structure of the liturgy.

Erweiterte Ausgabe (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1994), 232–60.

⁴Galileo Galilei, *Il saggiaiore*, in *Opere di Galileo Galilei*, vol. 1, ed. Franz Brunetti (Turin: UTET, 1980), 631–32.

⁵The concept of a mathematical God is not sufficient to explain the phenomenon of life, as Hans Jonas has shown in "Is God a Mathematician? The Meaning of Metabolism," in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 64–98.

1. Liturgy and sacrament

The study of the sacraments is of great interest in forming a response to the question we have asked. For in them is found the point of union between matter and spirit, between the physical phenomena of the universe and the spiritual sphere of liberty and consciousness. Tertullian expressed the connection thus:

[T]he flesh is washed that the soul may be made spotless: the flesh is anointed that the soul may be consecrated: the flesh is signed (with the cross) that the soul too may be protected: the flesh is overshadowed by the imposition of the hand that the soul may be illumined by the Spirit: the flesh feeds on the Body and Blood of Christ so that the soul also may be replete with God.⁶

Contemporary theology has well understood this cultural relevance of the sacraments. And so we speak of how all reality is sacramental, because in it God manifests himself and acts. This means viewing all creation as a great book where the divine image becomes present and efficacious. The concept of sacrament has become, for this reason, a cosmic concept, applicable to nature and to man-made objects. The Ignatian motto—to see God in all things and all things in God—takes on renewed meaning as an expression of this new mysticism of open eyes. A modern author, who has helped popularize this vision, writes of the sacrament of the mountain, the sacrament of the jar of cold water, the sacrament of the house. . . .⁷

Not everyone seems pleased with the new focus. Some argue that if creation is already a sacrament, an efficacious sign of salvation, what is the value of the Christian sacraments? If we connect the work of Jesus to the experience of the created world that we share with all men, with the good intention of making it more comprehensible, do we not thereby render his work superfluous and diminish the particular weight of the signs he instituted?⁸

⁶Tertullian, *De resurrectione carnis* 8.3 (CCL 2.931). Translated by Ernest Evans as *Tertullian's Treatise on the Resurrection* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), 25; cf. also Tertullian, *De baptismo* 7.2 (CCL 1.282).

⁷See Leonardo Boff, *Los sacramentos de la vida y la vida de los sacramentos* (Bogotá: Indo-American Press Service, 1975).

⁸Cf. Giuseppe Colombo, "Dove va la teologia sacramentaria?," *La Scuola cattolica* 102 (1974): 673–717.

In what follows I will keep in mind this risk and warning, yet I will not relinquish a sacramental vision of created things. If creation were viewed any other way, the Christian sacraments would not be able to accomplish the fullness they announce. The bread and wine have to stammer already, in their creaturely condition, the eucharistic language that Jesus makes them pronounce clearly. Justin Martyr said that he would not believe the Lord himself if he had preached a God other than the Creator; we can add that we would not understand the sacraments instituted by Christ if they did not speak the language of creation, which is the point of origin for all human experience.⁹

Let us begin by turning to the origins of the concept of sacrament in the Scriptures, as the Word of God reveals it. There we find the notion of sacrament bound up with the Greek term “mystery,” which appears above all in the writings of St. Paul. What is the meaning of this word? Why does the apostle use it in his writings? The Old Testament offers the right background to understand it.

For Paul, the “mystery” refers to the revelation of God’s designs upon history. Mystery is the unveiling in Jesus, and especially in his death and resurrection, of the hidden divine plan, which has been unfolding through the ages of the world and more concretely in the history of his holy People.¹⁰ Mystery is thus a key term for the exegesis of the events of Israel’s past inasmuch as they tend toward Christ. So the concept is intimately connected with typology, with an understanding of the events of Israel’s history as figures that find completion in Jesus.

So it is the proper function of mystery to clarify how the blood of Abel cries with greater eloquence in Christ, how the offering of Melchizedek finds its summit in Jesus, and how the sacrifice of Isaac was consummated by the Son of God.¹¹ And this process was already being realized within the Old Testament itself: the return from the Babylonian exile is sung with the joy of the Exodus, and the Jordan is crossed like another Red Sea. Scripture is constantly

⁹St. Irenaeus uses the same expression, *Adv. haer.* IV.6.2 (SC 100, 440).

¹⁰Cf. Ramón Arnau, *Tratado general de los sacramentos* (Madrid: BAC, 1994), 35–47.

¹¹Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Zum Begriff des Sakramentes* (Munich: Minerva Publikation, 1979).

relating back to itself, from figure to figure, in the search for cohesion and completion.

The Christian mystery, seen in this light, does not simply point us to a higher plane like the axis of Platonic ascent running from what is lower toward what is higher. Rather it shows up in the fabric of time, in the relationships among various moments in history from its origin at creation to its definitive destiny. The signs do not point up and away to Empyrian regions but rather to the past, to the future, and to the unity of the divine design in the world. It is only in this way, through the mediation of time, that they open up to God.

Having situated “mystery” in the history of Israel, we ask ourselves how it came to be associated with the Christian liturgy and thus with the Latin term “sacrament.” The Old Testament gives us the answer through its way of measuring history. The rhythm of the ages is interpreted in the religious rite, in divine service and worship. There, one could read the hour being marked by the clock of the Covenant, for liturgy was the place of commemorating the acts of God and recalling his promises, which open up the future. In worship, time acquired a symbolic weight; worship generated the true time of Israel.

So we understand the nexus that connects the Pauline “mystery,” a key for reading history, to Christian worship, which as heir to the Old Testament rite reveals the fullness of time. Both clarify how God reveals himself in the concrete succession of calendrical moments. They are signs that open the way toward the fullness brought by Jesus. Let us then study, first of all, the signs of the Old Covenant.

2. The liturgy of creation

We begin with a question: where does Israel encounter God? There is no doubt that God, for Israel, has his throne on high. It would seem, then, that that is the place to which man must turn his gaze in order to discover him. But it so happens that the heavens are inaccessible to human beings. Are there other places to espy the face of God? The Bible has a surprise for us here: the original place where one could find Yahweh was the earth. Think of the primeval garden where Adam was placed and where his Creator walked, or of the promised land of Canaan toward which the people journeyed. Israel’s progress toward God does not happen through flying away

from earth, but through possessing it in plenitude, deepening the connection that unites man to the world.¹²

2.1. *The liturgy of Israel*

The body, which allows man to take his place on earth, appears in this view as the primordial locus of the blessing and presence of God. Take the biblical depiction of the high priest Aaron, for example, centered on his figure and his vestments, establishing thus a parallel between the priestly body and the Temple of God, Yahweh's presence among his own.¹³ And let us recall how the prophets deepen this connection between body and Temple. When the Sanctuary, profaned by human infidelity, no longer serves as a dwelling place for divine glory, the body of the prophet becomes a living temple, a place where God speaks to his own.¹⁴

To the importance of the body as a place where God reveals himself, we must add the value of history and its plot. To reach the presence of the transcendent God, the body, fragile and humble, has to walk a path, and it needs time. For this reason the worship of Israel is celebrated along a temporal path, accompanying the journey of the body toward transcendence.

One finds this relation between worship and temporality already present among the peoples of the ancient world. For them time was by its nature always leading toward corruption and nothingness. Worship, the feasts of the new year, had the function of situating time in relation to eternity and in this way renewing it, invigorating it. Ritual helped people to escape the seasons' cycle of decay and find in the eternal the strength that sustains life.

In this context Israel introduced a novelty: it broke the closed circle, introducing the definitive into the flow of time, making the

¹²Cf. José Granados, *La carne si fa amore: Il corpo nella storia della salvezza* (Siena: Cantagalli, 2010), 37–41.

¹³Cf. P. Rota Scalabrini, "Il corpo: passione di Dio e dell'uomo. Elementi di una teologia biblica del corpo nell'Antico Testamento," in *L'io e il corpo* (Milan: Glossa, 1997), 83–137.

¹⁴Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also Pietro Bovati, "Il corpo vivente. Riflessioni sulla vocazione profetica," in *Così parla il Signore. Studi sul profetismo biblico* (Bologna: EDB, 2008), 77–104.

mere repetition of vital seasons impossible. It has been said that, if the Greeks invented history, the Jews came up with “the meaning of history.”¹⁵ One must add that the description of Jewish history as “linear history,” as opposed to Greek circular history, is not perfectly precise. It is appropriate to speak of circularity in Israel as well, because its history always returns to the origin, to God the Creator. But in this case the circle is open, capable of newness, like an ascending spiral, which Paul Beauchamp has called the “birthing circle.”¹⁶ Just as woman, in union with the fount of life, is able to engender a child, so history, in its return to the beginning, gives birth to the newness of the future.

This new perspective does not arise from interpreting human action in a different, more insightful or optimistic way. For Israel, the difference lies in the way God himself acts in history. If history takes on meaning, if events acquire a weight that makes them unrepeatable, if the definitive can exist in time, it is because Yahweh makes himself present through his salvific actions.¹⁷ From this point of view, we can share the opinion of Karl Barth: the only time we have is the time God has for us, and this time is the time of his revelation.¹⁸

And so it is worship, relationship with God, that awakens the meaning of history, bestowing on human time a weight and density.¹⁹ If God the ever-new, who never repeats himself because he en-

¹⁵Y. H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 8: “If Herodotus was the father of history, the fathers of meaning in history were the Jews.”

¹⁶Paul Beauchamp, *L'un et l'autre Testament, II: Accomplir les Écritures* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 228: “C’est un cercle, mais un cercle orienté. Plus encore, c’est un cercle parturient: il est allé jusqu’au bout de l’ancien pour expulser le nouveau.”

¹⁷Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Zeit und Ewigkeit in der religiösen Erfahrung Israels und des Christentums,” in *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie* (Göttingen: Ruprecht, 1980), 188–206.

¹⁸Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1, pt. 2, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), §14, p. 45.

¹⁹For a description of the Old Testament rite and its connection with time, see Giuseppe Angelini, *Il tempo e il rito alla luce delle Scritture* (Assisi: Cittadella, 2006), 87–138.

joys a plenitude of creativity, has acted in history, then the past takes on an eternal dignity and cannot just cycle around again because in that past, a new impulse was given to the movement of the world.

From here one can understand the connection of worship with memory. Ritual is a gaze toward the past, because there one encounters the salvific work of God who forms his people, Israel. In this case, openness to the past is not a defect in the life of man, a limitation or an imperfection, but rather his ability to enter into contact with Yahweh and discover in him the origin of his own path. This remembrance begins with birth: Israel appears as a child, borne on eagle's wings by God, freed from the oppression of Egypt (Dt 32:11).

We should add that this gaze toward the past is not a nostalgic vision. On the contrary, precisely because of its return to the *origin*, Israel can be *original*, can open new pathways. How can that be? The category that explains this future projection is "promise." The cultic memory of Israel does not stop at remembrance, but tends to the future, because it is the memory of a promise and in this sense a *memoria futuri*, a memory of things to come.²⁰ If God is God, his remembrance always has to open new horizons. From this vantage point, the future cannot be interpreted as the mere project of man, nor as a simple passive openness to the totally other, but rather is based on a primordial receptivity to the gifts of God, which make human work possible and fruitful.

We observe here an important fact: in light of God's action in its history, Israel grasps the weight that the experiences of life have acquired, especially the ties of marriage and family. So birth, for instance, ceases to be a cyclic event that repeats from generation to generation and comes to be seen as the fruit of God's personal action in time. And the continuity of the People's history is based on its fidelity to a promise of God, which will take a spousal form. For its part, the future also has a concrete expression: the birth of a child, the hope of the Messiah.

We can say that worship is the way in which Israel learns to live the mystery already written in the body and in time, as revealed in the experiences of the family. The biblical vision thus helps us reflect on the way in which body and time are open to the transcendent in the experiences connected with human love.

²⁰Cf. *ibid.*, 124.

2.2. Liturgy and the bodily experience of man

It sounds paradoxical, since the body and time seem to limit our possibilities for action. Isn't the weight of the body what keeps us tied to the ground, what prevents us from flying? Isn't the swiftness of time what keeps us from enjoying life calmly?

There is nevertheless another point of view that allows us to see the body and time not as mere obstacles but as openings that breach the isolation of the individual in order to activate his potential. That is: the body puts us into contact with the world and with other men; it exposes our life to relationship with others; it allows us to establish universes in common with them. Is that not a great richness and a new freedom? The body, which belongs to the personal name and being of each person, also leads the person outside himself, to the encounters that enlarge his life.

In this regard it is worth pausing over the concept of sign, which is fundamental to understanding the sacraments.²¹ Every sign points to a signified reality, distinct from itself. How to conceive of this nexus between sign and signified?

The signified can be external to the sign, having no intrinsic relation with it. This occurs, for instance, when the sign is chosen arbitrarily. Thus the road sign indicating the distance to Rome has nothing to do with the actual city; and the word "water" refers to a liquid that has no connection with the letter "w" or the syllable "ter." In this case the sign points to something found further on; to reach it one has to pass beyond the sign, following the direction it indicates. Once the signified is reached, one can dispense with the sign.

But there is another way to conceive of the sign, a stronger definition of the word. In this case, the sign contains the signified reality, makes it efficacious, lends it a sphere of action. The signified is not found by surpassing the sign, as one finds the kernel by discarding the husk; but by going deeper into the sign, as the beauty of a van Gogh painting inheres in the strokes of oil paint on the canvas, and cannot be separated from them.

The symbol *par excellence* in the world is the human body. In the body, the person is made present: in it and not in addition to it, for the body itself is the person. The smile *is* the happiness, the tears

²¹Cf. Karl Rahner, "Zur Theologie des Symbols," in *Schriften zur Theologie* IV (Einsiedeln: Benzinger Verlag, 1964), 275–311.

are the sadness, the dignity is the gaze. That is to say, the body is not just one more symbol among others, but the place where all symbols are generated. If there exist signs in the strong sense, signs that make present and efficacious the reality to which they point, signs inseparable from that reality, then this is owing to the incarnate condition of man.

Thus: whoever, believing himself a pure spirit, does not accept the body as proper to himself; whoever does not see his flesh as an irreducible dimension of the person; this person will look at the world from outside, will always situate himself at a distance from things. The relationships that unite him to objects and the ties that associate him with other beings will always appear extrinsic to him. Signs, in the strong sense, will not exist for him.

The one who accepts his body as a dimension of his very being, as a syllable belonging to his own name, will act very differently. For this man, the world does not remain far away, but touches his most profound identity. To know who he is, the embodied man cannot flee from things and look at them from far off, or consider himself removed from their influence. His body puts him into intimate contact with the world; he is only himself in the extent to which he manifests and acts; that he is connected to and encounters other lives and participates in them. For this reason he does not view the inter-relatedness of beings as something wholly extrinsic to them.²²

Take the experience of pain as an example. If the suffering were just a mechanism useful to the self-preservation of the organism, it would be enough for it to work like the sensor on a robot, lighting up to indicate a threat. This would just be a conventional sign, not a symbol in the strong sense. The sensor light would only have an extrinsic relationship to the danger that threatens. But pain, in the man who suffers, is not like this: suffering makes us feel the ill within us. Illness takes hold of our being to lacerate our entrails. Suffering not only points toward death, but makes it present and efficacious, makes us feel its breath close at hand, and anticipates it.²³

²²On the relation between body and liturgy, see Elmar Salmann, "L'evento intercorporeo tra verità e rito," in *Liturgia e incarnazione, Caro Salutis Cardo* 14, ed. A. N. Terrin (Padua: Messaggero, 1997), 21–44; Luigi Girardi, "Il corpo celebrante e l'esperienza della salvezza. Riflessioni di teologia liturgica fondamentale," *Revista liturgica* 89 (2002): 59–81.

²³On this point see Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: Presses

The body is therefore a symbol, because it makes us participate in the world and, precisely by means of this communion with things, carries us beyond ourselves. Even acknowledging as much, though, we might posit a difficulty: is it a desirable thing, this condition of openness to the world into which the body places us? Doesn't the bodily condition expose us to an invasion of our privacy? Doesn't it impose a limit on our plans? To these questions, the experience of embodiment, in and of itself, cannot offer an answer. A light that comes from outside is needed to reveal the goodness of our life in the body.

This light springs from the experience of interpersonal encounter, the only thing that can clarify the symbolism of the body and help us take root in it. In effect, the encounter of love illumines the ambiguity of our openness to the world in the flesh, assuring us of the goodness of our existence among things. To demonstrate this, let us take a passage from Paul Claudel in which one of his characters, Pensée—a blind girl—directs these words to Orian, the man she loves:

PENSÉE: Orian, I wonder whether you know what it is to be blind? When I raise my hand, I can't see it. I only know it exists when someone takes hold of it, and so makes me aware of it. When I'm alone, I'm like a person who has no body, no position, no face. Only if someone comes to me, and takes me in his arms, and holds me close, only then do I exist bodily. Only through him do I know it [my body].
I know it only if I have given it to him.²⁴

The text bears witness to a circle that moves from the perception of one's own body to the experience of love and back again.

Universitaires de France, 1983), 55–58.

²⁴Paul Claudel, *Le Père humilié* (Paris: Gallimard, 1920), 104: "Orian, comprenez-vous ce que c'est qu'une aveugle? Ma main, si je la lève, je ne la vois pas. Elle n'existe pour moi que si quelqu'un la saisit et m'en donne le sentiment. Tant que je suis seule, je suis comme quelqu'un qui n'a point de corps, pas de position, nul visage. / Seulement, si quelqu'un vient, / Me prend et me serre entre ses bras, / C'est alors seulement que j'existe dans un corps. C'est par lui seulement que je le connais. Je ne le connais que si je le lui ai donné." John Heard, trans., *Three Plays: The Hostage, Crusts, The Humiliation of the Father* (Boston: J. W. Luce Company, 1945). Translation slightly modified.

Only love reveals that existence in the body is good. How can it not be, when it is in the body that this encounter, which so expands the life of the lover, finds consummation? The flip side of this is that the body allows love to touch the most profound core of the person, where it does not remain a mere accident or superficial event. Thanks to the body we understand the depth at which love touches us, how much it transforms our lives, the robustness with which it defines our name.

This connection between love and corporeality offers the real key to understanding the concept of symbol. Symbolism is not just the self-expression of being. The true symbol is rooted in openness to the other, in the capacity to enter into relation by means of which each being points beyond itself, but does not thereby lose itself or dilute its identity. There is symbolism wherever love makes itself present in the body. In this way the sign is always visible, palpable; while on the other hand it also leads us beyond ourselves, into communion with the other person. This is a communion that does not happen at the outer margins of the body but in the interior space bounded by them.

Let us add one more ingredient to the formula of the symbol.²⁵ The communion that takes place in the flesh has to mature and therefore takes time. If the body, where the person is expressed, is the basis of all symbols, this always happens according to a temporal progression. One who lacks symbols also lacks time—that is, he will always look at time from outside and not as something that pertains to his own biography. Let us then examine how past, present, and future are key coordinates for the symbol.

a) The first symbolic dimension of time is the past. To have a past is a mysterious thing, worthy of meditation. Because in reality we don't just "have" a past, but we "are" our own past: so that in order to explain our identity it is necessary to tell our story. Now, and this is the paradox, this history that we "are" does not belong to us: we cannot change it at will, it does not conform to our whim. In other words, the past is a part of me that, without being changeable by me, defines who I am.²⁶ For this reason the one who says "I am my past" has understood that modernity's dream of the isolated

²⁵For a more complete explanation of the following topic, cf. José Grana-dos, *Teología del tiempo. Ensayo sobre la memoria, la promesa y la fecundidad* (Sala-manca: Sígueme, 2012).

²⁶Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), 25–52.

subject, radically autonomous, is unrealizable. And he discovers the symbolism that dwells in the center of the person: in us something is made visible that goes beyond us: our history, our past, our origin.

Certainly, this relationship to the past could be seen as merely an imperfection or limitation. Such is the attitude of one who complains that he cannot recover lost time, nor undo the crime that burdens him or has made him a prisoner. But there is a concrete experience in which man's openness to the past brims with meaning: the relationship of a child with his parents. It is this tie that assures the child that his relation to the past should not fill him with fear. Confronted with the testimony of parental love, the small child understands that he did not come to be through chance or blind necessity. He sees that his origin lies in the love of his father and mother. In his eyes, the past contains an originating gift whose remembrance reveals to him the first grace he received in coming into the world: I am a son, someone whose origin lies beyond himself, in a primary love that assures my progress in the world. It can be concluded from all this that memory has a symbolic structure and that this symbolism reveals its fullness by acknowledging within itself the grace of filial relationship.

b) The symbolic character of time, its capacity to open one's life beyond itself, also appears when we consider the present. The fleetingness of the present moment seems to fragment life, which is continually escaping from the individual. Understanding the continuity of one's own time is an impossible task for a person who takes only himself into account. How can one give unity to those moments if they are constantly in flux, escaping from the self's control? Isn't there always a risk of forgetting one's own past? Isn't it impossible to perceive the routes the future will take?

The ambiguity is resolved once again in the experience of love, which now assumes the form of a *promise*. This is something that man learns from childhood. In his relationship with his parents, in their faithful love that assures him support, the child experiences the continuity that sustains his action. He receives there a promise that allows him to develop his own capacity to promise. From that he recovers the unity of time, conjugating it now in the plural as shared time, a story interlaced with others. The culmination is the spousal promise, when one commits all one's time, giving up one's own time and embracing the time of communion, which is the foundry of shared memories and hopes.

The present time that escapes with a sensation of continual

loss, of an open wound, is in reality an opportunity, a dilatation of life. The fragmentation of the instant forces us to trust in the promise and from it to conjugate our own time in the plural as shared time, a story interlaced with others.²⁷ The swift flow of time threatens the individual project, but it in turn allows for the time of the promise: the promise one receives, embraces, gives, keeps. When promise appears on the scene life becomes bigger than personal projects, because it offers a past and future joined to the past and future of others, in a new time of communion, capable of bringing the person beyond himself. That is to say, in the promise present time is opened up and changed into a symbol of the whole life of the person, of his vocation and destiny.

c) In time there appears, lastly, a relation to the future. The future is beyond the individual's control and cannot be moored to the present. As the sociologist Niklas Luhmann affirms, "the future cannot begin,"²⁸ or rather, the future's beginning is out of our hands. The future, nevertheless—and this is its paradox—is already determining the present by means of our expectations and projects, which reveal the capacity of the now to be more than itself. We can therefore affirm that we are our future; that each man amounts to the dreams he forges and the visions that inspire him.

In this way the future opens the life of man beyond itself, making him see that his existence escapes his control. This opening could be lived as a source of anxiety or fear were it not for the existence of another experience, another word of grace: the *fruitfulness* of action. This fruitfulness happens, for example, when we see that our work gives back more than we put into it. For this reason sometimes the work itself surprises us, as happens to the painter who, from a distance of years, is astonished by his paintings. It happens in a singular way in the experience of love, when the lovers help each other grow beyond themselves, in a synergy where the whole surpasses the strength of its parts.

The culmination of this experience appears in the generation of the child, the fruit of its parents' love. The body that engenders is a body capable of more than itself, because it contains something that is in principle uncontainable: a new human life. The bodies of

²⁷On this subject see José Granados, "El sacramento de la promesa," *Anthropotes* 27 (2011).

²⁸Niklas Luhmann, "The Future Cannot Begin: Temporal Structures in Modern Society," *Social Research* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 130–52.

man and woman, in conjugal and fruitful love, discover the power of their communion, which touches the future without dominating it, without dissolving it into the present, just as the child can never be reduced to a desire or project of his parents. Here again is another way in which body and time attain the status of symbol, a sacramental significance.

We have spoken of the experience of Israel, for whom the liturgical rite engenders time, filling it with meaning and weaving it together in unity. To express the quality of this new time, Scripture uses language like the memory of the origin, the faithful promise, the fruitfulness of the divine blessing that lasts through the generations. These same key phrases explain the rhythm of human experience, as we have seen. The body (which situates man in the world) and time (which grafts man's life onto the past, extends it through the present, and directs it toward the future) both lend existence a sacramental character. Grace can appear in it: the grace of sonship, of a faithful promise, of copious fruit. And there is in all these dimensions an opening toward God, toward transcendence, which takes the form of a primeval origin (past) that allows for us to live in the unshakeable promise (present) and makes that life bear fruit beyond death (future). There is thus a reciprocity between religious rites and the experiences lived in the family: both live in two times that synchronize and mutually reclaim each other.

In one of his aphorisms, Nietzsche says that man and woman misinterpret each other continually because their affectivity has different timing.²⁹ This is true when temporality is understood as the exclusive property of the individual, a personal rhythm not synchronizable with other rhythms. But if time is openness—if it is in time that human life is capable of an encounter that touches the depths of the person and places him in contact with others—then the difference of times does not render union impossible. Rather, the opposite happens. The difference of these times makes them capable of association with each other and allows the appearance of a new time, the time that founds the family. Like the “yes” of Israel to God in the rite, so the “yes” of the spouses not only is pronounced in time but generates a new time. In what follows we will examine the fulfillment of this time in the coming of Christ, at the foundation of the Christian sacraments.

²⁹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), ch. 4, no. 85, p. 89.

3. *The signs in the flesh of Christ*

The person, in the body and in time, opens beyond himself; body and time offer the fabric where life opens up in relation to the world and others. The center of the Christian faith, the Incarnation, confirms and completes this truth of our experience. If the human body is the source of symbols, the ultimate example is the body of Jesus; if human history aims at transcendence, its unsurpassable crown is the life of Jesus. The flesh of Christ, and the history realized in it, become the primary fount from which all other signs flow. Only from this starting point can we make sense of the sacraments and their importance for the faith.

In examining these signs of Jesus, which build on the foundation of the ancient signs in order to raise them to a new height, I will focus on the sacrament of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the summit of the sacraments, the one that allows us to understand all the others. Thus the study of it will serve to test what has been said up to now. In what follows we will discover its close connection with the flesh and with time, by means of which it is also linked in a unique way to the sacrament of Matrimony.

The connection *with the body* appears in the words of institution (“this is my body, which will be given up for you”). The bread and wine over which thanks is given are not ordinary food, but the body and blood of Christ. Every attempt to reduce them to a mere indicative sign fails because, as we have shown, there is no true symbolism without corporeality. Theology has occupied itself with this theme in studying transubstantiation and the real presence of Jesus.

The connection *with time* is also clear: the Eucharist is anamnesis, remembrance that makes the past be present; and at the same time it is the anticipation of the future eschatology of the kingdom, when Jesus will return to drink the cup with his own (Lk 22:18).³⁰ Theology has also studied this subject, considering the identity between the eucharistic sacrifice and that accomplished by Jesus on Golgotha: how can the past event of Jesus’ Passion, which happened only once, also be made present throughout

³⁰Cf. Pierre E. Bonnard, *Anamnesis: recherches sur le Nouveau Testament* (Geneva: Revue de Théologie et de philosophie, 1980); cf. also Antonio Orbe, “En torno a la Eucaristía,” in *Espiritualidad de San Ireneo* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1989), 299–314.

the long history of the Church?³¹ It is clear, then, that body and time are central coordinates for understanding this sacrament.

In fact, this was the meaning that the Last Supper had for Jesus. He understood his symbolic action from the perspective of Israel, which he summed up, purified, and fulfilled. We already know what this point of view was: in its liturgy the People learned (a) that the body is the place of encounter with God and (b) that time resonates with the rhythm of the Covenant.

The Christian Eucharist finds its roots in the Last Supper and takes its definitive form in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Eucharist is the place where the believer learns the full language of the body and the complete measure of time, which I would like now to explore at greater length.

3.1. Gift of self and gift of body

In the first place, the Eucharist reveals to us the link between “body” and “gift of self.” The words of institution speak of the body given “for you,” of blood “poured out.” The background is the sacrifice of Moses, who sprinkled the blood of a bull over the assembly (Ex 24:5–6). Today it has become difficult to understand the meaning of this kind of sacrifice.³² The letter to the Hebrews is helpful in this regard, explaining the sacrifice of Jesus as an offering of self out of love (“he offered himself,” Heb 9:14), freely given to the Father for the salvation of men.

This explanation, however, leaves us with a problem: how to interpret the bodily elements of the sacrifice? Romano Guardini puts the question this way: “What did Christ mean when he said, ‘He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up on the last day’? (Jn 6:55). Why did he not say, he that attaches his spirit to my spirit, who undertakes to do my will?”³³

³¹Cf. Robert Sokolowski, “The Eucharist and Transubstantiation,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 868–80.

³²Cf. John Dunnill, “Communicative Bodies and Economies of Grace: The Role of Sacrifice in the Christian Understanding of the Body,” *The Journal of Religion* 83 (2003): 79–93.

³³Romano Guardini, *The Last Things*, trans. Charlotte E. Forsyth and Grace B. Branham (New York: Pantheon, 1954), 75.

In other words: if this is a sacrifice of love, why are surrender of will and union of spirits not enough?

To respond we must consider what was said above regarding the body and its connection with love. The Eucharist underscores the link between the meaning of the body and the experience of self-gift. Whoever participates in this sacrament understands that the most primordial language of the body is the language of gift: “my body given up.” In this way we understand that self-surrender cannot dispense with the concrete bodily elements through which life unfolds. That is to say, there is no gift if there is no corporeality as presence and participation in the world and with others. But why should this be so?

Whoever accepts his existence in the body understands that he does not live in and for himself. His actions, on the contrary, are interconnected with those of others. He learns that he lives from others, because the body testifies that others gave him being. He learns to live with others, because in the body he enters into contact with them and shares a common history. He learns to live toward others, because his embodied life endures only in those to whom he transmits this inheritance. That is to say, the enfleshed condition prevents man from defining himself as subject-bubble, separate from others. This condition makes it possible to live “for the other,” that is, to adopt a way of existing in which communion with the other—everything that comes into play with respect to him—touches the deepest parts of the self.

Jesus brought this language of the body to its fullness at the Last Supper. When he said “my body for you,” he was accepting that his history would be bound up with ours—that our actions would touch him deeply. On the one hand, he was receiving our heritage in plenitude, making it his own, from Adam through Israel. On the other hand, in this condition of brotherhood, made capable of touching us within, he was living wholly for us, impressing on our life his logic of the gift, “that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:15).

All this allows us to discover a connection between the Eucharist and the sacrament of matrimony. For the family preserves the link between body and self-gift that makes the words of Jesus

intelligible.³⁴ Man and woman learn, in their complementarity, that the body makes the gift possible and seals their mutual belonging. Husband and wife become one flesh and live for one another. St. Paul has developed this connection in his letter to the Ephesians, where he invites the spouses to love each other as Christ loved the Church (Eph 5:22–32). The experiences of fatherhood and motherhood, rooted in the body, are also an example of total gift of self. To their children, and in a certain sense only to them, the parents can give themselves completely, down to their very name, thus putting in their hands the continuation of their own history. The other gifts we make are only possible thanks to these primary forms of gift, inseparable from the body, learned in the family.

When the gift of the body and its openness to love establish this dynamic of giving and receiving, they do so with reference to another gift, the gift of a completed time, to which the Eucharist also bears witness. I will consider this with respect to the three dimensions that have already appeared here: memory, promise, fruitfulness.

3.2. Eucharist: anticipated gratitude

A particular light for understanding the sacrifice of Jesus lies in its connection with the *todah*, the sacrifice of thanksgiving in the Old Testament. The offerer, having overcome a grave danger, presented an offering of bread, and he also shared this bread with his friends.³⁵ The Christian Eucharist means, in this light, a continuation of the Jewish *todah*, in which Jesus gives thanks to the Father for his rescue. At the same time, there is a difference of prominence, because Christ makes the thanksgiving *before* he receives the Father's salvation. This reveals the extent to which Jesus' action relies on the Father's previous gift. Jesus enjoys a memory that, founded on such a radical paternal gift, can also clarify the future as time of gift and so make

³⁴Cf. Angelo Scola, "Il mistero nuziale. Originarietà e fecondità," *Anthropotes* 23 (2007): 57–70.

³⁵Cf. Hartmut Gese, "Die Herkunft des Herrenmahls," in *Zur biblischen Theologie. Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (Munich: Kaiser, 1983), 107–27; cf. J. Ratzinger, "Gestalt und Gehalt der eucharistischen Feier," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. G. L. Müller (Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 359–82.

possible the generous work of the Son.³⁶

The sacrifice of Jesus, therefore, even before being a gift of self, is a receiving of self from the hands of the Father. The bread and wine, fruits of creation and testimony to the original care of the Creator for man, indicate this essential aspect of the Son's offering. Now, if bread and wine point toward the Creator, as a sustenance received from him, the ultimate basis of this remembrance of origin is the body, whose concrete materiality reminds man that his existence comes from God. The flesh is the most radical sort of memory, preserving the fingerprints of the one who molded us. The Eucharist, in its connection to the fruits of creation that sustain man, reveals the body as witness to the gift that is the precondition of all our actions.

Hence we can shed new light on the meaning of marriage. This supremacy of gratitude, foundation of the gift of self, is initially experienced in the family. Man and woman learn that the capacity of their reciprocal gift passes through the common memory of the creative act. As John Paul II observed in his *Catechesis on Human Love*, "uniting with each other (in the conjugal act) so closely as to become 'one flesh,' man and woman rediscover, so to speak, every time and in a special way, the mystery of creation."³⁷ The language written in the body by the Creator, the language which they have received, is what allows them to unite. They can give themselves to each other only if they receive one another with gratitude, accepting both their own corporeality and that of their beloved.

3.3. *To give the Body and "give the Word"*

As we have seen, the roots of Jesus' action are found in the promise received from the Father. Grateful for his gifts, sure of the faithfulness of God who does not abandon him, Jesus can for his part promise faithfulness, to the Father and to his own, thus unfolding the horizon of his action.

³⁶Cf. Albert Vanhoye, *Dio ha tanto amato il mondo. Lectio divina sul 'sacrificio' di Cristo* (Milan: Paoline, 2007), 7–24.

³⁷John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis*, "In the First Chapters of Genesis, Marriage Is One and Indissoluble" (Vatican City, 21 November 1979), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/catechesis_genesis/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19791121_en.html.

Only the promise manages to give continuity to the history of man, because in it past, present, and future meet. This means that he who promises keeps the memory of the word received and given, and possesses the future of the mutual fidelity to the pact. This means that life in time can only be lived as covenant, as life in communion.

This dynamic reaches completion in the action of Jesus. He was able to understand the cohesion of his life in light of the promise received from the Father, the promise to which the Son, for his part, corresponded exactly, sealing the new covenant in his blood (Lk 22:20, 1 Cor 11:25). The Eucharist is, therefore, the sacrament of the new promise. Against the horizon of the Father's unshakeable faithfulness, Jesus can remain faithful, with a fidelity capable of enduring not only unto death but beyond it.

Only in the Eucharist does time reach its full symbolism as time of the promise. Here the love between the Father and the Son, together with the love of Jesus for his own, bestows a consummate unity on all of history. From here flows the time of the "real presence," for no presence is real if it is limited only to the instant and does not embrace the whole of a life.³⁸ The body of Jesus is really present here, because he lives the promise fully: in this presence the past and future appear, the originating memory of the Father and the definitive destiny of communion with God. For this reason Irenaeus would call the eucharistic cup a "compendium," understanding that it sums up the history of the ages.³⁹

The link between this aspect of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Matrimony, which can also be defined as a sacrament of promise, is clear. From this vantage point one can perceive well the relationship between the two sacraments. On the one hand marriage and family offer the primary arena of experiencing the promise and so permit one to understand the offering of the time of Jesus. On the other hand the supreme fidelity of Christ, unto death and beyond it, able to conquer indifference and rejection, engendering even a faithful response in an unfaithful spouse (cf. Rom 5:1-10), is the spring from which the sacrament of matrimony flows. The grace of this sacrament is the grace of a unique promise, bestowing the energy

³⁸Cf. Angelini, *Il tempo e il rito alla luce delle Scritture*, 263–64.

³⁹Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* III.16.7 (SC 211, 314). (Roberts and Rambaut have "cup of emblematic significance," which does not really capture the idea.)

to resist evil and triumph over the ultimate misfortune (in Spanish *contratiempo*, “anti-time”): that of death.

3.4. *Engendering the future: the Spirit who transforms the offering*

It remains to consider the aspect of fruitfulness that inheres in the Eucharist and allows us to understand its connection to the future. In the surrender of Jesus, an unexpected future opens up, a consummate newness.

For this reason the Eucharist is a mystery of transformations. The most obvious is that of the bread and wine, which transubstantiate into the body and blood of Christ. But this change is based on a previous one, which makes it possible: the body of Jesus, through his prayer and surrender for men, becomes a body open to love, able to express communion to the fullest extent, transformed at last by the Father into a spiritual body. At the same time, being nourished on this eucharistic bread and wine allows a new transformation: that of the believer’s body into a body that is ready for the final resurrection, made one with the flesh of Christ.⁴⁰ Some of the Church Fathers have seen here the fulfillment of what happened in paradise, when Eve was taken out of Adam’s side.⁴¹ Now the Church is likewise born from the rib of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit breathed into her.

This eucharistic fruitfulness, its way of being open to a new future, has another link to the sacrament of matrimony. The fruitfulness of love as it is lived in the family sheds light on the fruitfulness of the eucharistic body. In the family one learns that love always bears fruit. The clearest case is the generation of a new life that proceeds from the conjugal union. But fruitfulness is not limited to procreation: love always causes the maturation of the beloved, it is a force that impels him to grow beyond himself.⁴² These experiences allow him to draw close to the fruit of the Eucharist and understand the strength with which it takes over the future, giving it the form of a definitive, eschatological harvest.

⁴⁰Cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* V.2.3 (SC 153, 34).

⁴¹For example, see Hilary of Poitiers, *De mysteriis* 5 (SC 19, 84).

⁴²Cf. Marc Ouellet, *Mistero e sacramento dell’amore: Teologia del matrimonio e della famiglia per la nuova evangelizzazione* (Siena: Cantagalli, 2007), 185–87.

And so the Eucharist reveals to spouses the fullness to which their fruitfulness is called, offering them a new measure. The Spirit's presence in the surrender of Jesus enables his outpouring over the spouses, which converts their human love into conjugal charity.⁴³ The transformations that are given in the Eucharist, the work of the Spirit, will always accompany their path. The lives of both will be, because of their union, a process of continual bodily transformation. Their mutual attraction, the affection that helps them share a world, their one-flesh union: all will go toward making them more docile to the Spirit every day, integrated in a perfect union according to the rules of the art of love. And when they welcome a new child into their family, they will receive him against the horizon of the definitive life, the final, eschatological transformation, to which the Eucharist offers them daily testimony.

Conclusion: The tapestry of the sacraments

We took as our starting point the necessity of restoring the symbolism of time and the body, making possible a liturgical existence, so that in these men might be able to recover his lost bearings. A reflection on the sacraments, centered on the Eucharist and matrimony, has emerged as the best setting in which to pose this question.

Taking this point of view, is it possible to offer a Christian re-reading of the myth of Arachne, with which I began these reflections? A well-known painting of Velázquez, preserved in the Museo del Prado—"The Weavers"—will help us in this regard. Just recently it was discovered that the canvas, far from representing a simple scene of daily life, recalls the myth told by Ovid.

In the foreground of the painting there appear women who prepare the materials for weaving. In the background Arachne shows Athena her cloths, with the ensuing admiration of the goddess. As he has done in other paintings, Velázquez reflects here, with his brush, on the meaning of art and its fragile combination of volatile materials and eternal beauty. He represents fleetingness and movement with great mastery in the foreground, where you can almost see the turn of the wheel, and where a weaver is working so fast that

⁴³Cf. José Noriega, *El destino del eros. Perspectivas de moral sexual* (Madrid: Palabra, 2005), 226–34.

her hand seems to have six fingers.

To understand the painter's intent it is helpful to consider some discussions on art that were taking place at his time. Certain neoplatonic thinkers were dividing painting into two moments: design and color. Only the first had artistic value. The technical execution, the mix on the palette and the strokes on the canvas, were reduced to servile instruments. Velázquez opposed this interpretation, insisting that material execution was inseparable from design, since art depends on an equilibrium between body and spirit. In "The Weavers," the choice of tapestry as the model for art makes its materiality stand out: thus the laborious preparation of the cloth takes the foreground. On the other hand the method of painting he adopts in this painting is innovative. Velázquez used the technique of smudging, thereby underscoring how impossible it is to separate artistic execution and design, the body and soul of the painting, the mind and hand of the artist.⁴⁴ The beauty the painter creates, like that of Arachne before which Athena was astonished, cannot be separated from the fleeting corporeality of this world. It is only in the concrete weaving of the tapestry that eternal beauty is able to appear.

This concept of art finds its definitive fullness in the Christian experience. For now God himself has chosen to enter the warp and woof of human life in order to express there the immensity of his mystery. Now the tapestry no longer represents the struggle between the divine and the human, between ancient gods and poor mortals, but rather shows the close alliance of God with his People, as though Athena and Arachne had begun to weave together.—*Translated by C.M. Neulieb.* □

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⁴⁴Cf. Verena Krieger, "Arachne als Künstlerin. Velázquez' 'Las hilanderas' als Gegenentwurf zum neuplatonischen Künstlerkonzept," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 65 (2002): 545–61. On the technique of smudging, see Gridley McKim-Smith, "Writing and Painting in the Age of Velázquez," in *Examining Velázquez* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 1–33.