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# Otto Semmelroth, SJ, and the Ecclesiology of the 'Church as Sacrament' at Vatican II

Dennis M. (Dennis Michael) Doyle  
*University of Dayton, [ddoyle1@udayton.edu](mailto:ddoyle1@udayton.edu)*

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# THE LEGACY OF VATICAN II

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EDITED BY  
Massimo Faggioli and  
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Dennis M. Doyle

## Otto Semmelroth, SJ, and the Ecclesiology of the “Church as Sacrament” at Vatican II

Otto Semmelroth was one of several Jesuits whose work was influential in the drafting of the documents of Vatican II.<sup>1</sup> He attended all four sessions of the Council and kept a journal of his Council-related activities during those years.<sup>2</sup> In October 1963 he was appointed *peritus* for Bishop Volk of Mainz and became a member of the Council's Theological Committee. He worked on the subcommittee that drafted *Dei Verbum*. He also worked on the subcommittee on the collegiality of bishops that was connected with several documents. Later, he served on the doctrinal subcommittee for *Gaudium et Spes*.<sup>3</sup>

What stands as Semmelroth's most important contribution to the Council is the impact that he had on *Lumen Gentium* (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”) through his work on the concept of the Church as a sacrament. After an initial draft of *De ecclesia* was rejected on the floor of the Council in 1962, the concept of the Church as sacrament was introduced into the 1963 draft. On September 30, 1963, Cardinal Josef Frings on the floor of the Council requested on behalf of sixty-six German and Scandinavian fathers that more explicit emphasis be given

to the Church as *Ursakrament*.<sup>4</sup> Even more extensively than the 1963 draft, the final 1964 *Lumen Gentium* reflects the use of the concept of the Church as sacrament as a major integrating theme and structuring element.

In the background of the introduction of the concept of the Church as sacrament into the 1963 draft as well as the petition presented by Frings stood Semmelroth's famous 1953 book, *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*. A French translation of *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* appeared in 1962, as well as a Spanish translation and a third printing of the German edition in 1963.<sup>5</sup> Semmelroth's work on the concept of Church as sacrament was also influential on *Lumen Gentium* in other ways in addition to his book. He worked directly on various drafts of what is known as the German Schema, a text that had a direct impact on the 1963 draft, including a prototype of the opening paragraph that introduced the theme of Church as sacrament. When the American *peritus* Joseph Fenton submitted a page to the Council's doctrinal commission challenging the idea of the Church as sacrament, he directly associated the idea with Semmelroth, and it was Semmelroth who wrote the response. Finally, Semmelroth wrote a significant number of commentaries on various parts of *Lumen Gentium* as well as on the document as a whole that focused on understanding the concept of the Church as a sacrament as it developed during course of the Council.

The testimony regarding Semmelroth's impact upon *Lumen Gentium* is striking. Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern assembles an impressive cast of witnesses: Matthäus Bernards said that Semmelroth had helped to bring about a breakthrough in the thought and expression of the sacramentality of the Church; Leonardo Boff spoke of the immeasurable significance (*unermeßlichen Bedeutung*) of *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* for *Lumen Gentium*; Wolfgang Beinert called its influence considerable (*erheblich*); Heinrich Döring named Semmelroth as being among the immediate trailblazers (*unmittelbaren Wegbereitern*) of the Council.<sup>6</sup> Günther Wassilowsky has since written of Semmelroth's "direction-setting" (*maßgeblich*) role in the development of the Council's ecclesiology.<sup>7</sup> He reports that "the Idea

of the Church as (*Ur-*) *Sakrament*<sup>8</sup> helped bring about a breakthrough like no other."<sup>8</sup>

This essay will demonstrate how Semmelroth's preconciliar work on the Church as sacrament connects with several ecclesiological themes that would later be developed in *Lumen Gentium*. These themes include the importance of a lay-inclusive Church, the universal call to holiness, the relationship between Mary and the Church, a Trinitarian ecclesial spirituality, and the use of sacrament as a fundamental category for organizing and interpreting a variety of images and concepts of the Church.<sup>9</sup>

First will come an attempt to take the measure of Semmelroth's significant impact on *Lumen Gentium* within the context of the myriad contributions made by a large number of theologians. His first book, *Urbild der Kirche*, will then be examined for how it anticipates his later work on the Church as sacrament, particularly as connected with a conceptual quest for a lay-inclusive Church. This will be followed by a study of *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, his work that had the most direct impact on the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Then a brief consideration of Semmelroth's later preconciliar works will show how his focus on the personal-experiential dimensions of the Church became linked with the development of a sacramental ontology.

## SITUATING SEMMELROTH'S CONTRIBUTIONS AMONG A HOST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Fr. Semmelroth was known and is still remembered as a humble and somewhat quiet man with a quick wit and a pleasant temperament whose own work was widely considered to be balanced and deeply solid. Although his name was the one most associated with the concept of the Church as sacrament at the time of the Council, he had not been working alone. He was neither the inventor of the concept, nor the only one involved in introducing the concept into the document on the Church, nor the only one contributing to the development of the concept as the drafting of the document continued. In his journal of the

Council, Semmelroth does not highlight his own specific contributions. He later denied that his book or his contributions had a determinative effect on *Lumen Gentium*, and in this way he seems to have been acknowledging the truth that there were dozens of experts who made contributions to the document, among them several individuals and groups who also had very significant influence. So many voices went into the various drafts and versions that lay behind the official drafts that it can be difficult even for the people involved to claim direct influence for any one particular point or direction. Reading Catholic theological literature of this period has left me with the impression that it was generally understood that the work of the Council was to be put forth in the name of the bishops and the pope representing the Church universal with the hope that the Holy Spirit would ultimately be recognized as having had the most decisive influence on the texts.

The concept of the Church as sacrament has a complex history. Semmelroth himself cites Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Heinrich Stirnimann, and Thaddäus Soiron as background sources in *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*.<sup>10</sup> Achim Dittrich finds the basic concept of the Church as sacrament already expressed in Carl Feckes's 1934 book, *Das Mysterium der heiligen Kirche*.<sup>11</sup> Feckes himself most frequently cites Matthias J. Sheeben as his source of inspiration when he speaks of the sacred humanity of Jesus as the *Ur-sacrament* of salvation and of the Church as continuing the saving presence of Christ through its sacramental organization. The sacraments, he says, give entry into the sacramental world, and the sacramental world is the world of the Church.<sup>12</sup> At the time of Vatican II, those most identified with the concept of the Church as sacrament were Semmelroth, his fellow Jesuit Karl Rahner, and the Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx. Also closely associated with the concept were the Jesuits de Lubac and Pieter Smulders as well as the Dominican Yves Congar.

In November 1962, after the initial draft of *De ecclesia* had been rejected, Semmelroth and Rahner collaborated on a critique, *Animadversiones criticae ad Schema De ecclesia*, that recommended using the concept of the Church as sacrament as the fundamental category for understanding the Church as representing

the saving will of God, extending even to non-Christians. It is hard to say who originated which idea. One might speculate, however, that in these *Animadversiones*, ideas associated with the Church as sacrament of the world with regard to the salvation of non-Christians, a position that later became known as "anonymous Christianity," stem mainly from Rahner. The basic idea that the Church as *Ursakrament* signifies God's universal saving will could be found already in Semmelroth's 1953 book, as well as the claim that *Ursakrament* provides the most fundamental category for understanding the nature of the Church.<sup>13</sup> Semmelroth's reference to an unpublished manuscript of Rahner that would later appear in an early volume of *Schriften der Theologie*, however, signals the possibility that Rahner's influence on the 1953 book may have already been significant.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of the Church as sacrament was directly introduced into the 1963 draft of *Lumen Gentium* through the German Schema, the first paragraph of which appears in *Lumen Gentium* in an edited fashion. This German Schema was one of many documents drawn upon by the Belgian theologian Gérard Philips in putting together the 1963 draft. The Schema was itself developed over a series of four versions to which Semmelroth contributed significantly, as did Rahner as well as several other German theologians. Semmelroth and Rahner were together part of a Catholic intellectual world in which there was much cross-influence. Bishop Herman Volk of Mainz, who would soon appoint Semmelroth a *peritus*, assembled a working group of theologians that included Jesuits Johannes Baptist Hirschmann and Alois Grillmeier, as well as Joseph Ratzinger, Michael Schmaus, and Rudolf Schnackenburg.

Semmelroth thus worked as a team player in helping to develop the concept of the Church as sacrament and in introducing this concept into the text of *Lumen Gentium*. His most distinctive contribution was in producing *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* as a book-length, systematic development of the concept in relation to several key ecclesiological issues of the time. When, as previously mentioned, Cardinal Frings presented the petition of the German-speaking and Scandinavian theologians requesting that more stress be placed upon the Church as

*Ursakrament* in the text of *Lumen Gentium*, the work of Otto Semmelroth stood recognizably in the background. Yves Congar, recounting this event in his journal of the Council, noted that "O. Semmelroth had first highlighted this expression in order to describe the Church."<sup>15</sup>

### URBILD DER KIRCHE (1950)

Although Semmelroth does not explicitly call the Church a sacrament in this first book, *Urbild der Kirche: Organischer Aufbau des Marien Geheimnisses*,<sup>16</sup> he comes within a hair's breadth, clearly expressing the underlying theology. In an early passage, Semmelroth connects the ideas of type, symbol, and mystery with the sacramental life of the Church.<sup>17</sup> Yet both Mary's role as archetype and the Church as sacrament operate in support of what comes through as a yet more urgent theme. Read with hindsight against the background of the body of his later work, Semmelroth's first book appears to have as its main purpose the development of a fully lay-inclusive ecclesiology, emphasizing the importance of every Christian's reception of and response to God's gracious offer of salvation.<sup>18</sup> A lay-inclusive ecclesiology affirms the crucial importance of the hierarchy, but tends to stress its service to the laity's living out the faith in the context of the world. Other purposes of the book, in my judgment, function as secondary and in support of this main purpose.

In the immediate background of *Urbild der Kirche* stands Pius XII's pending 1950 declaration of the bodily assumption of Mary.<sup>19</sup> In order for a doctrine to be eligible to be formally declared in an infallible manner, it must be something taught, as the phrase goes, for the sake of our salvation. Semmelroth forcefully made the case for this connection. He argued that the deepest, most fundamental point in Mariology is that Mary is Archetype of the Church and that all other points of Marian doctrine and devotion, including her assumption, find their grounding in this point. What makes Mary the Archetype of the Church is her active role in the saving mystery of Christ and how her role parallels the call of every Christian to actively cooperate in their

own salvation. For this reason, the doctrine of the assumption can be said to be taught for the sake of our salvation.

Semmelroth contrasts his own position with that of Carl Feckes, who held that the mother/bridal character of Mary, rather than Mary as *Urbild* of the Church, should be recognized as the most theologically grounding Marian concept. Feckes in this 1934 book had already claimed that Mary is the *Urbild* of the Church; that Christ is the sacrament of God and the Church the continuing presence of Christ; that a focus on the hierarchy should not obscure the Church as the bride, which includes all of the laity, and that a focus on individual salvation should complement rather than overshadow a focus on living out the sacramental life in this world.<sup>20</sup> Semmelroth argued that the various images of Mary, as the Second Eve, as the Mother of God, as the Bride who says yes, all take on their full meaning in connection with the doctrine of salvation as they are interrelated within the deeper category of Mary as Archetype of the Church. If, as Feckes held, Mary's bridal character is what is most fundamental, then it becomes hard to justify the doctrine of the assumption as being taught for the sake of our salvation. Mary as Archetype, in contrast, holds together various images and roles of Mary as integral to each other. Only by operating within such a framework can one make a case for an integral connection between the doctrine of the assumption and what is taught for the sake of our salvation. This use of Archetype as a meta-category that stands above and organizes other categories anticipates Semmelroth's later use of the concept of the Church as a sacrament.

For Semmelroth, the Church of which Mary is the Archetype is the Church of the laity. He highlights the distinction within the body of Christ between those who represent the head and those who represent the members. Mary is the Archetype of the Church of the members, of those who respond to the offer of God's grace. Mary exemplifies the Church as the bride of Christ, as the representative type of what it means for the Church to cooperate with the saving, sacramental work of Christ.

Semmelroth refers to the Church with its sacraments as a continuation of the sacramental event of Christ:

Since the Church lives within a world extended in time and space, Christ's work must be taken up in time and space. His sacrifice is one only....This one sacrifice must unfold within a Church growing in time and space into multiple single acts from the one sacramental event. The sacraments raise Christ's work from its historical and temporal setting to a supra-temporal level of mystery. At the same time they extend the work within the space-time confines of our own earthly existence.<sup>21</sup>

Semmelroth's main purpose here in applying sacramental theology to the Church is to emphasize the theme of receptive cooperation in the response of Mary as well as that of all Christians to God's offer of salvation. Just as sacraments require that the one who receives has a proper disposition and the intention of living in accordance with the grace received, so does one's fundamental participation in the life of the Church pose the same requirement.

For Semmelroth, being a Christian is something that should carry over into how one lives one's life in the world. Traditional Catholic sacramental theology already combined a strong affirmation of the objective reality of the grace being offered with significant attention to the disposition required of the subject receiving it. Semmelroth finds that Mary exemplifies the proper disposition to the point that she is the model of receptive cooperation:

The Church, the Bride of Christ, must confront Him as a personal figure and seize hold of the work fully accomplished by Him alone. Here Mary's function enters. She gives her consent to the approaching *Logos* because, redeemed and endowed with grace, she is able to do so. Because she gives her affirmation for the coming of the *Logos* and for Christ's Sacrifice, she has taken on the work of Christ and made its fruits of grace her own. These gifts are ours "through Christ's death alone." But Mary's cooperation with her own

redemption is performed by her for herself, and through her as representative of the humanity which is to become the Church—"in the place of the entire human race." Mary, that is to say the Church, has become "disposed" for the reception of the Arch-sacrament, the Incarnate God and His sacrifice on the Cross. Because of this receptivity, or rather through it, "the fullness of all blessings has been deposited in her," that is to say, the *pleroma* that fills the Church.<sup>22</sup>

Semmelroth suggests that in his emphasis on reception and cooperation he is building upon *Mystici Corporis Christi*, a document that he refers to frequently. He pays special attention to the claim in no. 12 that "through the Church every man performs a work of collaboration with Christ in dispensing the graces of Redemption." Semmelroth adds, "Therefore they are 'co-redeemers.'"<sup>23</sup> Semmelroth will drop the controversial term *co-redeemers* in his later work. The underlying meaning of the free response of human beings to the offer of God's grace and their continuing cooperation, however, will remain a key theme in Semmelroth's theology of the laity and of the Church as sacrament. In *Urbild der Kirche*, Semmelroth used sacramental theology to stress that redemption has two phases, the pure gift accomplished and given by Christ, and the human embrace and working out of that gift. In *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, this twofold characteristic will be applied directly and explicitly to Christ and the Church in their sacramental natures.

### DIE KIRCHE ALS URSAKRAMENT (1953)

The title of Semmelroth's *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* announces clearly that he will no longer hesitate to call the Church itself a sacrament. He retains from his first book both the theme of Mary as Archetype of the Church and the theme of the sacramental nature of the Church, but the leading and supporting roles are reversed. Here the theme of the Church as sacrament takes front stage. Semmelroth tells his readers in a foreword that he had previously connected the parallel living

realities of the consciousness of the Church (*Kirchenbewusstsein*) with Marian thought in order to bring both together in the concept of Mary as the Archetype of the Church. He finds, however, that the awareness of the mystery of the Church in his time is so tightly connected with the objective practice of the liturgy and the sacraments that he will here put forth a study of the sacramental being of the Church. He will show, however, that the Marian as well as the sacramental approaches, along with the consciousness of the Church, represent together key points of religious interest of the then-present decade, and that these three things are intrinsically connected.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Semmelroth finds that the concept of the Church as sacrament adds to his previous work an explicit way of bringing together the objective and the subjective. He takes care to note that the concept underlying the Church as sacrament, though not the label, can be found in *Mystici Corporis Christi*,<sup>25</sup> and that an emphasis on the sacramental dimensions will guard against any naturalistic or mystical misinterpretations. A naturalistic misinterpretation is one that focuses exclusively on the visible elements of the Church, a mystical misinterpretation on the invisible elements. Semmelroth notes that each of these errors make ecumenical efforts appear to be unimportant. In other words, if the Church is only visible, then ecumenism is merely the return of schismatics and heretics to the Catholic fold. If the Church is only invisible, then all belong already to the mystical body of Christ. In response to these potential errors, Semmelroth draws upon a developing theological view that sees in Christ the sacrament of God and in the Church the sacrament of Christ. The concept of the Church as sacrament brings together the invisible and the visible elements. The Church as the mystical body of Christ is not to be understood in a purely mystical way, but rather in a way that the invisible, mystical dimensions are expressed and made present and effective in and through the visible, social dimensions. The human organization of the social body of the Church simultaneously signifies and contains the mystical body of Christ.

As in *Urbild der Kirche*, a central, perhaps the central, goal of *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* is establishing the theological

priority of a lay-inclusive Church. Semmelroth works toward this goal in a way that anticipates what *Lumen Gentium* will label "the universal call to holiness."<sup>26</sup> He laments that the word *Church* seems most often to be used to refer to the Church of offices in a way that implies that the laity do not fully belong:

From a very fundamental standpoint the community is the most important element among the complex collective elements of the "Church." For the consecrated offices are created for the sake of the community. The Church has its significance in this, that it is the visibly unfolding saving will, God's economy of salvation for human beings. For this reason every element in this human community connected with salvation and with the Church as led to Christ by the pure virgin stands in the forefront. That, however, is the community to the extent that it is objectively becoming Christian as it stands in a polar relationship with those in the offices. For this reason, in fact, when one says "Church," it should elicit in the consciousness of the speaker much more the community as bride, whereas today for most people it is the reverse: they mean, when they say "Church," first always the official Church to which they themselves do not belong. For this reason, then, it happens that to them the Church has become a strange, perhaps downright uncomfortable quantity, not, however, that reality in which they themselves are bound up with their own salvation. (170)

When Semmelroth speaks of the Church as "bride," he means the Church of the laity, the people of God. In 1953, Semmelroth did not use the image of the people of God in a way that included both the hierarchy and the laity. His position is in its own way very progressive, though, in that he identified the laity, understood as the people of God, as the more important element in the Church with the hierarchy in their service. He used a different concept, that of the total Christ, to put forth a

representation of the Church that includes all members, both lay and clerical. He quoted St. Augustine: "The total Christ is the head and the body: The head, the only-begotten Son of God, his body, the Church: Bridegroom and Bride, two in one flesh."<sup>27</sup>

Semmelroth saw a sacramental polarity in the way that the hierarchy stands in the place of Christ, the head and the Bridegroom, whereas the laity represents the body and the bride, as typified in Mary (181).<sup>28</sup> He used this polarity as a way of emphasizing simultaneously the objective and subjective dimensions of the Church as sacrament. He drew upon a line in Pius XII's *Mediator Dei* to explain how the distinctive role of the hierarchy helps to guarantee that one who participates in the sacramental life of the Church will truly come into contact, in an objective manner, with the saving work of Christ on the cross (175-76). In contrast with *Lumen Gentium*, he applied the threefold designation of Christ's ministry as priest, prophet, and king only to the hierarchy, not to the entire people of God (196). Through his application of the concept of sacrament, however, he expressed other positions that do directly anticipate *Lumen Gentium*.

The sacramental polarity between the hierarchy and the laity opened up the possibility for Semmelroth to explore more fully the lay side of the equation. He stressed how the role of the hierarchy and the role of the laity are both essential in the living out of the sacrament that is the Church. He referred to the laity as belonging to a community grounded in baptism and confirmation (172) and as having a mission that flows from their baptism and confirmation (234). He described the real offering that the laity makes in the consecration of the Eucharist (196). He spoke of Catholic Action and of how the laity, in connection with the hierarchy, shares in the apostolic mission of the Church (224). And he explained how the laity live out their mission in the Church in the various spheres of family, business, culture, and politics in ways that are not directly mediated through the Church's offices (233).

Semmelroth thus developed many progressive positions while operating with this strong distinction between, on the one hand, the Church of hierarchical offices, and, on the other hand, this Church of the laity, also known as the people of God and as

the Church typified in Mary. Although the hierarchy stands as the guarantee of the objective reality of God's gift of grace, Semmelroth stressed even more that grace is not an object and that the encounter with God's revelation is personal. This personalist-experiential theme concerning revelation as encounter will later surface in a significant way not only in *Lumen Gentium* but also in *Dei Verbum*, the "Constitution on Divine Revelation" (for which Semmelroth served on the composing subcommission).<sup>29</sup> Semmelroth argued that grace is Christ himself insofar as he has brought human beings into his living community. Receiving grace is thus being and living in Christ. In this regard, the Church as the community of the saved is the community living with Christ in the unity of his mystical body. The entire Church is the forward living of Christ (199).

Yet one more important way in which Semmelroth built off the sacramental polarity of the hierarchy and the laity is in his extensive exploration of the Church as proceeding from the planning and execution of the Trinity as well as being itself the image of the Trinity. Semmelroth drew upon the Last Supper discourse in John's Gospel to recall God's sending of the Son: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). The Holy Spirit is the love between the Father and the Son. Semmelroth first applied this threefold dynamic to marriage, in which the love between the man and the woman make as it were a third person expressing the unity between them (212-14; 221). The laity is sent into the world in a way that reflects how the Son is sent into the world. In addition to the two elements in polar tension, there is furthermore the relationship of love between them (221).<sup>30</sup> Semmelroth also discussed a Marian form of the reception of one's mission based on Mary's response to Gabriel that has its own immediacy (230-31). This reception of mission stands alongside the form given to the apostles, and can be applied to the manner in which the laity live out their mission in the world.

This trinitarian approach to the Church maintains the strong personalist-experiential stress on divine revelation. There is a focus on how Christians become adopted children of God (207) who, like the Son, carry out a mission to transform the

world (233). This approach thereby connects the sign element of the Church as sacrament with participation in the life of the Trinity and the instrumental element with the moral living out of the sign in the world. This secular world itself belongs to God and possesses a kind of autonomy. It is a place in which Christians, empowered by their baptism and confirmation, can encounter God in ways that are not directly mediated through the official Church. Invisible grace receives visible embodiment in the manner in which Christians live their lives in the world.

Semmelroth ended this book with a reflection on a Marian passage near the end of *Mystici Corporis Christi*. It is almost as though he were saying that, after all, *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* is but a theological meditation that reflects upon the teachings already contained in the encyclical. And, indeed, *Mystici Corporis Christi* did promote an ecclesiological personalism over against a juridical reductionism. It did itself present the Church as the total Christ (67) and spoke of all Church members sharing in the Church's mission, along with a special mention of Catholic Action (98). It explicitly named and addressed the errors of naturalism (along with rationalism) and mysticism (9). Without applying the term *sacrament* directly to Christ or the Church, it did express the way in which the Church as the body of Christ and the Church as a social institution are elements of one complex reality (64-65). The final passages presented Mary as a type of the Church and stress her role in the plan of salvation (110-11).

For Semmelroth, naming the Church a sacrament enabled him to acknowledge the objective reality of God's gift of grace while giving serious emphasis to the free human embrace of this grace and the need for ongoing cooperation. He granted primary ecclesial status to the sacramental nature of Christian life lived out in the world as an encounter with the God who reveals and saves. The laity does not represent a theological afterthought to be appended to a Church that is centered in the hierarchy. In Semmelroth's vision, the Church itself should be recognized as fully lay inclusive. It is a Marian Church, the people of God, a Church that gives birth to hierarchical offices and is served by them.

In the chart that follows, some of the visible/invisible sacramental relationships may seem repetitious. The differences can be subtle, but I think they are important for capturing the implications of specific points made by Semmelroth.

<i>Die Kirche als Ursakrament</i> 1953	
INVISIBLE	VISIBLE
Mystical body of Christ	Church as a social body
Clergy as head of mystical body (representing Christ the head)	Laity as other members of the mystical body
Christ as Bridegroom	Mary/Church as bride
Clergy as Bridegroom	Laity as bride
Christ as sent by Father	Laity as sent by clergy (as sacramental representatives of Christ)
Mary saying yes to God/ incarnation	Laity saying yes to God
God to be encountered in the world	Laity as those who have been empowered through baptism and confirmation

### BETWEEN URSAKRAMENT AND VATICAN II

Semmelroth wrote many books and articles between the time of *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* and Vatican II. They all contribute in some way to his mission to awaken a lay-inclusive Church to discern and take up its call to live out the gospel in the world of the twentieth century. One book explored the false dichotomy found in the choice between devotion to Christ or devotion to Mary by explaining how correct Marian devotion is always connected with the mystery of salvation through Christ.<sup>31</sup> Another book focused on the existential encounter with God while bringing the discussion around to Christ, the Church,

and the sacraments.<sup>32</sup> Yet another book considered the meaning of the offices in the Church, their connections with word and sacrament, their crucial role in the Church, their existential dimensions, and finally their connections with apostolic succession.<sup>33</sup> The following book offered an extensive theological and pastoral reflection on the Church in its many dimensions.<sup>34</sup> Yet another book spent the second half discussing the meaning of each of the seven sacraments after spending the first half explaining the meaning of the Church as sacrament and the saving work of the Church through word and sacrament.<sup>35</sup> Still another book countered the impersonalism of the modern world with an exploration of how the natural world takes on its meaning and purpose when understood as God's creation in which the human person receives a call, ultimately from Christ.<sup>36</sup> These books all continued Semmelroth's interest in developing a lay-inclusive ecclesiology focused on the Church as sacrament and including the personal experience of and encounter with God.

In a 1959 article, Semmelroth summed up well his overall approach to the Church as sacrament, drawing upon three basic images of the Church: *people of God*; *body of Christ*; *bride of Christ*.<sup>37</sup> He spoke about the category of the Church as *Ursakrament* in a way that hearkened back to what he had earlier claimed about the category of Mary as Archetype of the Church. The Church as *Ursakrament* is not just one concept of the Church among others, but rather consciousness of the supernatural ontology that expresses itself through the most commonly used predications about the Church in revelation. All images and concepts of the Church convey in some way that what is invisible is expressed through what is visible, bringing together the Church's "meta-empirical-divine interior" with its "social-human-outward realization."

Grasping the reality of the Church as *Ursakrament* gives one a framework for (1) addressing an issue that cannot be resolved with the use of a particular image and (2) reconciling images that could otherwise appear incompatible. As an example of the problem of irresolvable issues, Semmelroth discussed how the mystical body of Christ is identical with the visible

Catholic Church to which it is necessary to belong in order to be saved, and yet it is also true that there are righteous people outside of the visible Church. He suggested that the mystical body of Christ cannot in itself resolve this difficulty, and that a more appropriate image should be used in this case. What justifies this approach is an understanding that, since the Church is *Ursakrament*, no one image can fully express or exhaust its mystery. If one image creates irresolvable difficulties on the literal level, other images can be used in its place.

As an example of hard-to-reconcile images, Semmelroth points to the difficulty of thinking of the *people of God* and the *mystical body of Christ* as expressing the same reality. How can the same thing be both a *people* and a *body*? Semmelroth again uses the concept of the Church as *Ursakrament* as the solution, but in a very specific way. In the realization of a sacrament there are three elements: the visible sign, the saving power of the sign, and the human disposition. All three images being discussed—*people of God*, *body of Christ*, *bride of Christ*—in themselves entail the expression of divine mystery through visible signs, but each one has extra value in relation to one of the elements of a sacrament. Semmelroth explains that *people of God* is best suited for focusing on the visible sign; the *body of Christ* is best suited for focusing on the saving power of the sign; and the *bride of Christ* is best suited for focusing on the element of human disposition.<sup>38</sup> These images are compatible insofar as they are all express important aspects of the sacramental nature of the Church, yet none of them offers anything like full comprehension of what remains an inexhaustible mystery.

What finally holds these images together is not just another image or concept, but a type of consciousness, a consciousness of a supernatural ontology. It is a consciousness of how the mystery of the invisible, transcendent God is made manifest sacramentally through visible things in this world, primarily through the saving work of Christ. The personalist-experiential dimensions of the Church as *Ursakrament* had now come fully to the fore.

CONCLUSION

Two areas remain to be explored further. First, the concept of the Church as sacrament was opposed at the Council by a group of traditionalists. Another group accepted the Church as sacrament but wanted it to play a secondary, supporting role to the leading concept of the Church as a communion. How did the Church as sacrament fare in the midst of its opponents and its moderators? Second, the Church as sacrament was developed much further in *Lumen Gentium* between the drafts of 1963 and 1964. Semmelroth was involved in the drafting, in some ways as a contributor but even more so as a learner and later as a commentator. How did the Church as sacrament fare as the Council progressed? These areas will be the subject of further essays.

This essay has focused on the preconciliar work of Semmelroth on the Church as sacrament that made such a significant impact on the ecclesiology of Vatican II, especially in the transition from the first draft of *De ecclesia* to the 1963 draft of what came to be called *Lumen Gentium*. The Church as sacrament was introduced in the very first passage of the 1963 draft such that it was linked with the concept of the Church as a mystery. The people of God as linked with the laity became a chapter, as did the universal call to holiness. Among several important contributors, including especially Karl Rahner, when it came to the introduction of the Church as sacrament to the 1963 draft as well as to the decision to place yet more emphasis upon the concept during the final year of drafting, it was Otto Semmelroth, SJ, who stood the tallest.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst* for its generous funding of six months of teaching and study in 2012–13 at the University of Augsburg, where I completed the bulk of the research for this essay.

2. "Otto Semmelroth, SJ, *Tagebuch des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*" is being prepared for publication. I accessed a photocopy of the *Tagebuch* in the Vatican II Archive at KU Leuven. Hereinafter, referred to as TBOS. My thanks to Peter De Mey and

Dries Bosschaert for their help with my archival work. In addition to TBOS, see also Santiago Madrigal Terrazas, "El Vaticano II en el Diario Conciliar de Otto Semmelroth," *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 87 (2012): 105–64.

3. Semmelroth's participation in working groups at the Council can be traced through using the indices of the *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, trans. Joseph A. Komonchak, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: 1995–2005). Günther Wassilowsky traces through Semmelroth's contributions specifically in relation to *Lumen Gentium*. See *Universales Heilssakrament Kirche: Karl Rahner's Beitrag zur Ekklesiologie des II. Vatikanums* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2001).

4. See also Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, 3:44.

5. *L'église, sacrement de la redemption*, trans. Germain Varin (Paris: Éditions Saint-Paul, 1962); *La Iglesia como sacramento original*, vol. 79 of *Colección Prisma*, trans. Victor Bazterrica (San Sebastian: Dinor, 1963).

6. The following four references are found in Josef Meyer zu Schloctern, *Sakrament Kirche: Wirken Gottes im Handeln der Menschen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 121; Matthäus Bernards, "Zur Lehre von der Kirche als Sakrament," in *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 20 (1969): 29–54, at 35; Leonardo Boff, *Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung: Versuch einer struktur-funktionalistischen Grundlegen der Kirche in Anschluß an das II. Vatikanische Konzil* (Paderborn: Bonifacius Druckerei, 1972), 344; Wolfgang Beinert, "Die Sakramentalität der Kirche im Theologische Gespräch," in *Theologische Berichte* 9, ed. Josef Pfammater and Franz Furger (Zürich: Einsiedeln, 1980), 13–66, at 27; Heinrich Döring, *Grundriß der Ekklesiologie: Zentrale Aspekte des katholischen Selbstverständnisses und ihre ökumenische Relevanz* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1986), 103.

7. Wassilowsky, *Universales Heilssakrament*, 170.

8. Günther Wassilowsky, "Otto Semmelroth," in *Personenlexikon zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Michael Quisinsky and Peter Walter (Freiburg: Herder, 2012), 250–51.

9. This essay is the first part of a larger study that connects the work of Semmelroth on the Church as sacrament with Vatican II. I intend to write a second article focusing on understanding the Church as sacrament in tension both with anti-

modernists and with those who favor a dominant focus on the Church as a communion. I plan yet a third article focusing on Semmelroth's experience and interpretation of how the Church as sacrament developed further between the 1963 draft and the final document, *Lumen Gentium*.

10. Semmelroth cites de Lubac, Rahner, Stirnimann, and Soiron respectively on pp. 38, 43, 45, and 45. See Henri de Lubac, *Meditation sur L'Eglise* (Paris: Seuil, 1953), 157; Heinrich Stirnimann, "Die Kirche und der Geist Christi," *Divus Thomas* (1953): 16; Karl Rahner, *Sacramentum radicale: De paenitentia tractatus historico-dogmaticus* (Innsbruck 1952) as a manuscript; Thaddäus Soiron, *Der Sakramental Mensch* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 1946), 4ff. De Lubac had discussed the Church as sacrament in *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris, Cerf, 1938). Semmelroth also cites a line from Augustine: "There is no other sacrament of God except Christ" [my translation], cited in *Ursakrament*, 102; 239n81 (Ep. 187, n. 34-ML 38, 835).

11. Achim Dittich, *Mater Ecclesiae: Geschichte und Bedeutung eines umstrittenen Marientitels* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2009), 745.

12. Carl Feckes, *Das Mysterium der heiligen Kirche* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1934), 93-102.

13. As quoted earlier: "The Church has its significance in this, that it is the visibly unfolding saving will, God's economy of salvation for human beings." Semmelroth, *Ursakrament*, 170.

14. Semmelroth cites Rahner's use of the term *root-sacrament* (*Wurzelsakrament*) in *Die Kirche als Ursakrament*, 45n35 (p. 46 in the 1953 edition). The note itself on p. 238 reads, "Sacramentum radicale. K. Rahner S.J., *De paenitentia tractatus historico-dogmaticus*. Innsbruck 1952. (als Manuskript vervielfältigt). 411."

15. Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne and Mary Cecily Boulding (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012 [French orig. 2002]), 322n4.

16. Otto Semmelroth, *Urbild der Kirche: Organischer Aufbau des Marien Geheimnisses* (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1950). English: *Mary: Archetype of the Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963). Meyer zu Schloctern's *Sakrament Kirche* devotes an entire and quite helpful chapter to Semmelroth, but he begins with the 1953 *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* and does not include Semmelroth's Mariology. That *Urbild der Kirche* anticipates some

of the positions in *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* might be simply an interesting side point if it were not for the important connections between Mariology and the Church as sacrament found in the text of *Lumen Gentium* as well as in the commentaries by Semmelroth.

17. Semmelroth, *Urbild der Kirche*, 24. In the 1963 English translation, Semmelroth inserts here an explanatory note to his 1953 *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* (see p. 31 of *Mary: Archetype*), thus confirming my claim that the theme if not the explicit phrase is already present in the 1950 book. This is one of only two substantive changes I have found between the German and the English editions, the other being referred to in the note to *Munificentissimus Deus* below.

18. Many theologians of the time were stressing some type of lay-inclusive ecclesiology, including Romano Guardini, who staunchly defended the mystical body of Christ as the reigning image of the Church, and Feckes, Grosche, and Koster, who challenged it. On Guardini, see Robert Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). Yves Congar's 1950 *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, appearing the same year as *Urbild*, also promotes a lay-inclusive approach.

19. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, November 1, 1950. In the original 1950 *Urbild der Kirche*, 105, Semmelroth speaks of the doctrine as not yet being defined as dogma. He refers to the papal definition in the 1963 *Mary: Archetype*, 161.

20. Feckes, *Das Mysterium*. These thematic points are made throughout the text.

21. Semmelroth, *Mary: Archetype*, 84 (*Urbild der Kirche*, 57).

22. *Ibid.*, 85 (57-58).

23. *Ibid.*, 82 (56). The English translation mistakenly includes the word *co-redeemers* as part of the quote from *Mystici Corporis*. In the original German Semmelroth adds *Miterlöser* (co-redeemers) as an explanatory term not to be taken as quoted from the text.

24. Semmelroth, *Ursakrament*, 7-8 (same in 1963 edition.)

25. *Ibid.*, 29 (p. 30 in 1963 edition).

26. The theme of the universal call to holiness goes hand in hand with the theme of the lay-inclusive Church, and in varying terminologies and with different nuances was promoted by many theologians, including Guardini, Feckes, Grosche, Koster,

and Congar. See Robert Grosche, *Pilgernde Kirche* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1938); also M. D. Koster, *Ekklesiologie im Werden* (Paderborn: Verlag der Bonifacius Druckerei, Mainz, 1940).

27. Semmelroth, *Ursakrament*, 205. Semmelroth's citation of Augustine reads, *Contra Donat. Ep.*, cap. 4, n. 7—ML 43, 395. This concept of the "total Christ" is not unique to Semmelroth, and is today associated with the preconciliar work of Congar.

28. Semmelroth is still stressing Mary's connection with the plan of redemption, though now without his naming of Mary analogously as coredeemer and as comediator. He was probably influenced by the well-known essay of Karl Rahner in which he argued against the naming of Mary as coredeemer, though Semmelroth did not cite it. See Rahner, "Probleme Heutiger Mariologie," in *Aus der Theologie der Zeit: Herausgeben im Auftrag der Theologischen Fakultät München von Gottlieb Söhngen* (Regensburg: Gregorius-Verlag, 1948), 85–113.

29. Alberigo and Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, 3:374. Richard R. Gaillardetz brings out the personalist connection between *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum* in *By What Authority: A Primer on Scripture, the Magisterium, and the Sense of the Faithful* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 43–45; see also *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 69–76.

30. In one regard, the hierarchy is to the laity as the bridegroom is to the bride. In another regard, the laity is sent into the world as the Son has been sent by the Father.

31. Otto Semmelroth, *Maria oder Christus* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1954).

32. Otto Semmelroth, *Gott und Mensch in Begegnung* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1956).

33. Otto Semmelroth, *Das Geistliche Amt* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1957).

34. Otto Semmelroth, *Ich Glaube an der Kirche* (Dusseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1959).

35. Otto Semmelroth, *Vom Sinn der Sakramente* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1960).

36. Otto Semmelroth, *Die Welt als Schöpfung* (Frankfurt: Josef Knecht, 1962).

37. Otto Semmelroth, "Um die Einheit des Kirchenbegriffs," 319–35, in *Fragen der Theologie Heute*, eds. Johannes Feiner et al. (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1959).

38. Semmelroth, "Um die Einheit," 328–34.