Scripture and Prayer:

Ephesians 6.10-17: [10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. [11] Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. [12] For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. [14] Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. [15] As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. [16] With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. [17] Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Almighty Father, we come before you this morning to give you thanks in response to two of your most valuable gifts to us – for the sacraments through which you shape us into your image, and for teachers through whom you enlighten our minds and direct our steps. We thank you this morning especially for the teaching ministry of Dr Charry, under whose tutelage we have all had the privilege of sitting this semester. Let us not take your many gifts for granted, and be with us now as we try to better understand these gifts with which you have graced us. All this we pray in the name of your Son – our savior – Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: one God, now and forevermore. Amen.
Biographical Sketch:

Ellen T. Charry is an Episcopalian theologian and the Margaret W. Harmon Associate Professor of Systematic Theology here at Princeton Theological Seminary. If I had to choose one word with which to describe her, that word would be “healer.” Dr. Charry has always been driven by a desire to help others flourish, and much of her theological work has been dedicated to the healing of persons and traditions – indeed, to the healing of persons precisely by the healing of traditions. The first professional manifestation of this desire was her receipt of a Masters of Social Work from Yeshiva University, followed by work in the field. As she struggled with the brokenness and hopelessness of those whom she so earnestly sought to help, Dr Charry became increasingly convinced that human flourishing must be grounded in the Creator to whom we all owe our existence. So, she enrolled at Temple University in a Master of Arts program and began to study theology.

This study was at first intended only as a supplement to and foundation for her social work, but – as she will readily attest – God has a way of changing one’s plans. It fell to her, as it has fallen to so many of us, to lead a session of a class, critically engaging with a certain writer and mediating that writer to her classmates. Dr Charry felt at the time that she had not understood the material, and that she had merely fumbled through as best she could. The class’ professor thought otherwise: “You have a mind,” he told her on her way out of the classroom. Of course, Dr Charry knew – as we all know – that a mind is a terrible thing to waste. Upon completion of her MA, she entered the PhD program at Temple University in the department of religion.

Looming on the horizon, however, was a potential problem. Dr Charry was a devout Jew interested in doing Jewish theology, but there were no Jewish theologians on faculty at Temple.
A solution soon presented itself in the person of Paul van Buren, a Christian dogmatician and student of Karl Barth – interesting fact: did you know that Dr Charry is, among the PTS faculty, the most direct educational link to Barth? – was willing to make a deal with her: he would teach her Christian theology, and she would translate and transpose it for her Jewish context. This turned out to be an excellent arrangement, made more so by van Buren’s abiding concern to correct the unhelpful and often harmful ways in which Christian theology has treated the Jews. This concern found expression in his three volume work, *Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (published throughout the 1980s). Indeed, as Van Buren taught Charry Christian theology, she taught him Jewish theology.

It would come to pass, however, that Van Buren would supervise not only Dr Charry’s dissertation, published under the title *Franz Rosenzweig and the Freedom of God* in 1987, but also her embrace of Christianity. This did not come about due to any aggressive evangelistic or proselytizing activities undertaken by Van Buren. Rather, it was the unflagging respect that he showed for Dr Charry’s Jewish identity, as well as his altruistic presentation of Christian belief, that won her over. He served as her baptismal sponsor and, upon retirement, entrusted her with the lecture manuscripts from his systematic theology course. Dr Charry is currently engaged in bringing these lectures to print, in part to contest the way in which Van Buren is often included among the ‘Death of God’ theologians.

And so Dr Charry’s desire to help others flourish has brought her to us. She has given us a number of helpful works: *By The Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* in 1997, *Inquiring After God: Classical and Contemporary Readings* in 2000, and a forthcoming work dedicated to reclaiming and advancing the Christian understanding of happiness – which I have had the privilege of assisting her with over the past year. All of Dr
Charry’s writing and teaching is summarized by this sentence, taken from her *By The Renewing of Your Minds*: “[K]nowing and loving God is the mechanism of choice for forming excellent character and promoting genuine happiness.”¹

**Ellen Charry and the Sacraments:**

“Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian’s life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of spiritual life.”²

So begins the treatment of the sacraments in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This notion of the seven sacraments corresponding to the stages of natural life actually comes from Thomas Aquinas, as the *Catechism* points out, who wrote that “spiritual life has a certain conformity with the life of the body,” and then went on to delineate how the seven sacraments match up with the natural life.³ It is not hard to see this correspondence, however. Just as we are born, we are baptized; just as we are instructed in the ways of our community and begin to live therein as responsible members, we are confirmed; just as we regularly eat and drink for our bodies’ nourishment, we communicate in the Eucharist; just as we often fall short of our community’s standards and require rehabilitation, we do penance; just as the sick are given medicine, we anoint them; and just as we dedicate our lives upon our majority to the love of another human being or to the love of God, so we undergo marriage or holy orders. For those of you who are

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interested, Dr Charry provides a brief exposition of all these sacraments – plus footwashing! – in a chapter entitled, “Sacramental Ecclesiology.”

I will leave treating how history and tradition arrived at such a position to the McGrath chapter assigned, but I will make one contextual observation. This account of the sacraments was developed in the 12th and 13th centuries. The religious instincts of those who lived in this period were structured by a very sharp distinction between the holy and the profane. That which is holy is not profane, that that which is profane is not holy. However, that which is profane can be made holy by the application of ritual. And so the seven sacraments develop with the aim of setting one off from the profane by making every aspect of one’s life holy.

Some of you may be taken with the pop-literature surrounding what has come to be known as ‘Celtic Christianity.’ While it is likely that this movement is nothing more than the projection onto a marginal culture of values that our present culture feels it has lost, the ‘worldview’ ostensibly associated with this movement was one in which the physical and the spiritual were very closely related, and where the spiritual often bled through – as it were – into the physical realm. Certain theologians – such as Leonard Vander Zee in the first chapter of his recent work aimed at recommending the sacraments to Reformed evangelicals – have lately been enticed by this position to found the Christian sacraments upon notions such as the ‘sacramental nature of the universe.’ While it is true that God is the Creator, that the creation is as such ordered toward its Creator in some way, and that God is perfectly capable of employing any and every aspect of creation as a witness to himself – let us not forget Luke 19.40! – it seems

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to me that extending the language of sacrament to the whole of creation devalues that language. Vander Zee is aware of this danger, and makes a distinction between the world as ‘sacramental’ and a particular ‘sacrament’: “All created things are sacramental in the sense that as God’s creatures they point to, or signify, their Creator… A sacrament, however, is a particular created thing to which God attaches a word of promise.”

While the language of God attaching ‘a word of promise’ to particular created things and thereby constituting them as sacraments is particularly Reformed, it does make a point that all Christian traditions can agree upon, namely, that the sacraments are special. If this were not the case, what need would we have of them? If all of created life is sacramental in a strong sense, why would one need a sacrament of marriage on top of a lifelong commitment of love? Why would we need baptism on top of being born? You get the idea, of course. This question concerning how the sacraments are special will be in the background throughout this lecture, but our next step is to turn to the two articles of Dr Charry’s in your assigned reading for today. We will take them in reverse chronological order.

“Experiencing Salvation Liturgically” (2008)

This article is only tangentially about the sacraments. Instead, it is about the liturgical year. It does, however, reveal some of Charry’s basic patterns of thought. Consider, for instance, the opening section. Dr Charry gives us here a typology of pieties, distinguishing between what she calls personal, social, and liturgical pieties. While both personal and social pieties are commendable in their own rights, they are finally incomplete because both – when taken individually – rest on no deeper foundation than an individual’s conception of what it means to

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7 Zee, Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship, 23.
be a Christian. The goal of piety is to “engender spiritual participation in and internalization of” the drama of salvation “in order to help one read the world through it” (57). In personal and social pieties, one gets very little help, as it were. One musters one’s own participation in the drama of salvation based on one’s own conception of what that participation means. Liturgical piety, on the other hand, includes all the strengths of personal and social piety while grounding them in their proper dimension of depth. “Liturgical worship roots both psychology and politics in the divine drama of the salvation of the cosmos,” and it does so by looking “back to the paradigmatic events of salvation history” and “reenacting them in public worship in order to encourage believers to interpret the world in terms of the good news of God played out in Israel and Jesus Christ” (58).

To summarize, individual believers do not possess the resources within themselves to become the sort of people that Christians should be, either psychologically or politically. They need to be shaped into such, and participation in the church’s reenactment of the drama of salvation throughout the liturgical year – as will be explained in some detail throughout the remainder of Charray’s article – provides such formation.

As she begins the section entitled, ‘The Counterintuitive Drama,’ Charray points out how “The flow of [the liturgical year’s] seasons weave the natural rhythms of birth and death with the salvation themes of creation, fall, and redemption, and the emotions of fear, hope, love, and joy into a Christian tapestry that integrates nature, history, and emotion” (58). What might this notion remind us of? Answer: the way in which the traditional seven sacraments are designed to mirror spiritually the stages of natural life. In both the traditional seven sacraments and the liturgical year, what we find is natural life taken up, reinterpreted, and made to participate in the life with God that Jesus Christ has secured for us. Both make that salvation present not merely
conceptually but tangibly. This is necessary because, as Charry puts it, “The redeeming power of God is not something that we are simply told happened once upon a time. It is something that occurs in us here and now, again and again. It is not enough to hear about it—the drama of salvation must be experienced viscerally to be internalized” (61). Our lives are shaped into the sort of lives that followers of Christ ought to lead by the church corporately conceived as it reenacts salvation history in the liturgical year and applies the fruit of Christ’s work to us sacramentally.

Now, you will notice in this last phrase that a bit of a jump has been made. Talk about the application of Christ’s saving benefits to us by the sacraments does not appear in this article, but it is lurking below the surface. Charry expresses such a notion, albeit obliquely, when she writes in an essay not assigned to you this week, that “God’s grace and judgment come to us through matter because we more readily grasp things sensuously than conceptually.” The main thrust of this sentence parallels her point in our assigned article concerning our need to viscerally experience salvation. But, there is also language here of God’s grace – and God’s judgment, mind you – coming to us through material things. The context of this sentence leaves no doubt that she is thinking here about the sacraments, and so we have no reason to believe that she has set aside the traditional understanding of the sacraments as ‘means of grace.’ Her ecclesial tradition maintains this language, we see her bumping up against this language in print, and she is more than willing to own such language in personal conversation or communication – I have the e-mail to prove it! But, as we might already suspect, this is not a dominant strand in her sacramental thought. For more insight into these matters, let us turn to the week’s second assigned article from Dr Charry’s keyboard.

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We find in this article the same basic orientation as we did in the previous discussion of liturgical piety, only Charry’s attention is now directed explicitly and primarily to the sacraments, and specifically the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. The notion of formation, and the need to be formed in the Christian life from outside oneself, are again at the fore. She writes in the first paragraph, “Christians do not aim to be self-created or self-directed. Instead, they are directed by God” (1). This theme dominates the opening paragraphs of this essay. A little further on we find the affirmation that “Christians need to be re-Christianized, to have their true identity in Christ made palpable” (ibid). Again, we see here – as we saw before – an emphasis on tangibility. Then, in the next paragraph, Charry recognizes that “Most are not up to living the Christian life alone” – and we can almost hear her thinking in the background that those who think that they are up to going it alone are fooling themselves. Christians must gather as a community to pursue “a distinctively Christian way of life…They need to taste and touch together” (ibid). Again, tangibility. With all these needs piling up and perhaps making the reader wonder where these things are to be found, Charry lets us in on the secret: “Fortunately, the church has the means of focusing Christian minds and upbuilding the community: the sacraments” (1-2).

But, what are the sacraments? We have addressed this question from a couple of different angles already, but it is worth discussing Charry’s own definition. As she states the matter, “Sacraments are concrete actions by which Christians may be marked, fed and touched by the Holy Spirit so that the reality of God and the work of Christ become embedded in the
body and psyche” (2). Note here two themes that we have been returning to in our analysis. First, Christians are ‘marked’ and salvation is secured in their psyche, that is, their identity is established. This is the formation motif. Second, Christians are ‘fed and touched’ and salvation is secured in their body, that is, their identities are established and maintained in what might be called a corporeal way. This is the tangibility motif. However, what terminology does this definition fail to employ? Answer: language of grace. Rather than conceiving the sacraments primarily as means of communicating grace, they are envisioned as means of establishing and sustaining Christian identity as those who are included in the salvation wrought by Christ.

One might think, however, that there is not a vast difference between conceiving of the sacraments as means of grace and as means of establishing and sustaining Christian identity and inclusion in the salvation wrought by Christ. It is true that one could read the second as a gloss on the former. However, a distinction ought to be made. We do not have from Churry a conception of grace as a ‘thing’ that is received and modifies one’s capabilities. This is a break with the tradition of Thomas Aquinas, who defined grace as “supernatural qualities, whereby [humans] may be moved by [God]…to acquire eternal good.”\textsuperscript{11} For Thomas, just as human beings naturally have powers and capacities to pursue the natural good, so grace provides the powers and capacities necessary to pursue the supernatural good. It is grace that supplies these powers and capacities, opening up an entirely new realm of possibilities for one’s activities. On this model, grace is kind of like a technology upgrade – If I would only upgrade my computer’s graphics card, then I would be able to play that neat new video game I have had my eye on.

Against this account, Churry defines grace as “divine power that illumines the believer with the divine dignity that directs personal life” (2), and she defines the sacraments as “occasions in which the power of God comes to dwell in the believer” (4). The believer does

\textsuperscript{11} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologica}, 1-2.110.2.
receive something, but it is not simply a tech upgrade. It is the presence of God’s power. First, what is this power? It is God’s activity: God’s power is simply his activity. Here we find a more positive relationship to Thomas Aquinas, who said that God’s essence is actus purus – “God is pure act, without any potentiality.”¹² God is not like a battery, holding an albeit infinite supply of potential energy that may at some point be converted into kinetic energy. Rather, God is always already kinetic energy. God’s power simply is God’s activity and, if God is active in the believer through the sacraments, God is present with the believer. In fact, this is precisely how Charry finally defines grace: “The grace conveyed to the believer in the sacraments is the presence of God…from which the believer takes strength and comfort” (2).

So, let us consolidate what we have learned from Dr Charry. The sacraments – and the liturgical year, for that matter – are means through which Christians are established in their identities as God’s children on the basis of participating in the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ. In the sacraments, this participation occurs through their transmission of grace. Grace, however, is understood as God’s presence. It is God, then, who is present and active in the sacraments to establish Christians in their identities. In the end, we are back to where Charry began this article, with the affirmation that “Christians do not aim to be self-created or self-directed. Instead, they are directed by God” (1).

When searching for a way to characterize Charry’s sacramentology, I landed on the following formulation: for her, the sacraments are like cognitive-behavior therapy on steroids! And, yes, she would accept this characterization – again, I have the e-mail to prove it!

Cognitive-behavioral therapy, far too briefly and simplistically explained, is a psychological therapy methodology characterized by – among other things – modifying one’s self-concept in

¹² Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1.3.2. Barth followed Thomas in this as well, although with certain modifications. See Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, trans. and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, 4 volumes in 13 part vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-75), II/1, 263-4.
order to produce modifications in one’s behavior. This well matches Charry’s sacramentology, which focuses on the identify formation that occurs in the sacraments with a view to enabling believers to live properly Christian lives. But, what occurs in the sacraments is not merely the religious or ritual equivalent of cognitive-behavioral therapy. There is something more, and that something more is the presence of God. God is a more skilled therapist than we could ever imagine, and his presence and activity in our lives is more effective treatment than any drug that could be prescribed. Of course, God often chooses to work through qualified therapists and pharmaceutical treatments, but this does not diminish the point. In the sacraments, God is set about shaping our identities as Christians so that we might better live the lives that he intends us to lead – that is, in the sacraments, God is working toward our flourishing.

Ellen Charry and John Calvin – In the same sentence?!

Dr Charry often serves as the ‘resident Catholic’ for the theology department here at PTS. Such an image of her is advanced by considering the people whom she spends her time reading and writing about: Augustine, the Cappadocians, Aquinas, etc. She is, however, Episcopalian, which means that she is part of a Christian tradition long characterized by a tug of war between Catholic and Protestant impulses. Furthermore, as has been noted, Dr Charry received her theological training from Paul Van Buren, a student of Karl Barth. Indeed, at her previous institution it fell to Dr Charry to teach Protestant dogmatics. Protestant theologians like Calvin, and perhaps especially Calvin, are never far from her thought even if she finds that she must often disagree with them – something that we all had the privilege of witnessing last week. Besides, she is the one who assigned readings from Calvin for today to stand alongside her own articles. For all these reasons, it is fitting that we consider how her sacramentology compares to
that of Calvin. To this end, I will draw our attention to four striking and interesting similarities between Charry’s and Calvin’s positions, before finally pointing out one major difference.

Convergences:

First, Charry and Calvin agree as to the need for tangible interaction with God. We saw that this was a recurring motif throughout Charry’s discussion, and now it appears in Calvin. Perhaps Calvin’s dominant way of thinking about this is in terms of God as an accommodating God, that is, as a God who descends to meet his creatures where they are at in order to raise them to fellowship with himself. However, Calvin adds to this broader pattern a humility-driven piety to which Charry would want to object – as we saw last week. We see both strands in the following comment: “[In the sacraments] our merciful Lord, according to his infinite kindness, so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to leads us to himself by these earthly elements.”

Throughout the material from Calvin that you have been assigned you will see him defending God’s right and ability to use material things – the sacraments – to build up our faith. He does so against numerous more radical thinkers, who generally go unnamed in the text, who – following Zwingli – elevate the principle *finitum non capax infiniti*, the finite is not capable of the infinite. Calvin would agree with this, of course, when the finite is conceived in and of itself. He is, after all, a good Augustinian. But, Calvin’s point is that despite creation’s natural inability to accomplish anything pertaining to our salvation, God is perfectly capable of employing creation to that end. I suspect that Charry would agree since, in an essay that you have not been

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assigned, she bases the function of the sacraments upon “the confession that God became a human being.”

Second, Charry and Calvin agree as to the effective agency of the sacraments. The previous point introduces this one. If the finite is not inherently capable of the infinite but is able to function as though it were because God has so chosen, it is clear that God is in some respect the effective agent in the sacraments. We saw previously that Charry takes this further, understanding the benefit of the sacraments not as the communication of some impersonal thing called grace, but as instances of God’s special presence and activity within us. Calvin makes the same point: “we place no power in creatures…God uses means and instruments which he himself sees to be expedient.” Further, “whatever instruments [God] uses, these detract nothing from his original activity” – that is, God remains personally active in the sacraments and does not simply delegate his power or establish the sacraments as effective in some static way apart from his own presence and activity.

Third, Charry and Calvin agree as to what occurs in the sacraments. We saw previously that the sacraments are, for Charry, something like receiving cognitive-behavioral therapy from God. God acts in the sacraments to establish believers in their identities as Christians and to teach them to live lives consonant with that identity. For Calvin, the sacraments seal God’s promises to his children “with the purpose of confirming and sealing the promise itself, and of making it more evident to us,” or, they seal “on our consciences the promises of [God’s] good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith.” The idea is that, through the sacraments, we become more aware of and convinced about who we really are in Christ and of

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16 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.17.
17 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.3 and 4.14.1, respectively.
how God consequently thinks about us. The result of this is that our faith is strengthened, enabling us to bear more confident witness to the gospel. Calvin sums up this two-fold aspect of the sacraments thusly: “the first point is that the sacraments should serve our faith before God; after this, that they should attest our confession before men.”\(^{18}\)

Fourth, both Charry and Calvin are explicitly trinitarian in their understanding of the sacraments. For Calvin, the crux of sacramental benefit is the relationship with Jesus Christ into which one is brought by the Holy Spirit: “these benefits…are conferred upon us by Christ alone. And they are conferred through the Holy Spirit, who makes us partakers in Christ; conferred, indeed, with the help of outward signs,”\(^{19}\) that is, with the help of the sacraments. As for Charry, her definition of a sacrament, examined earlier, is similarly trinitarian: “Sacraments are concrete actions by which Christians may be marked, fed and touched by the Holy Spirit so that the reality of God and the Work of Christ become embedded in the body and psyche” (2).\(^{20}\) However, Charry could be even more trinitarian than Calvin if she set her mind to it. This is because one of her great strengths, bequeathed to her from her Jewish heritage, is the recognition that God the Father has often gotten short shrift in the Christian tradition. Consider the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, for instance. Which is the shortest article? Answer: the first! Although Charry does not do so in the articles presented to us, she could very well work out her sacramentology with more direct reference to the anchoring place of the Father in the soteriological – and, derivatively, the sacramental – economy.

Divergence:

\(^{19}\) Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.16.
The primary divergence between Calvin and Charry is an issue of Protestant emphasis, namely, the close association of word and sacraments. This is something that Calvin cares a great deal about, and about which we get nothing at all from Charry, as far as I can tell. We saw that Calvin thinks of the sacraments as sealing God’s promises to us. Where are these promises to be found? Scripture. So, Scripture must be expounded and the meaning of the sacraments explained before they can be of any benefit to us. Thus, Calvin begins this chapter by saying that “We have in the sacraments another aid to our faith related to the preaching of the gospel.”

Later, he writes that “the sacrament requires preaching to beget faith.” Later still he says that “the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us.”

Although she does not herself develop such a position, I do not think that an emphasis on the close relation between word and sacrament is incompatible with Charry’s sacramentology. Indeed, it may strengthen her position. Let us recall that she is concerned with the shaping of Christian self-identity. Bringing the sacraments into close relation to the proclaimed word would, in my opinion, further augment the resources for identity formation. Furthermore, some of Charry’s own ways of talking about the sacraments seem to beg for further elaboration along these lines. For instance, she writes that the sacraments “recall God’s promises…to the worshiping community” and we recognize the language of ‘promise’ from Calvin’s text.

All of this is to say that I find Charry’s position amenable to a greater emphasis on the close relationship between word and sacrament. Perhaps such an augmentation would cast into even greater relief her own most basic concern, namely, the healing of human beings through their increasing formation into the people that God intends them to be.

22 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.3.
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