

THE PASCHAL MYSTERY AND THE 'ORDO BAPTISMI PARVULORUM'

(Second Part)

Man's response to the divine call to salvation

On reading the rite of baptism one cannot help observing that the very opening words of the same ('What name do you wish to give...?' 'What do you desire from the Church of God?') do not adequately bring out God's initiative in man's salvation. However, in all justice one will at the same time also realize that the OBP must be taken in its entire context, and on p. 12 of this study we have referred to the several passages where the OBP speaks about the initiative of God in offering salvation to man in baptism. Now, such a divine invitation to salvation calls for a fitting response which the children's parents make, asking for 'faith', 'the grace of Christ', 'eternal life', 'salvation'.⁷⁵ This initial acceptance of the divine call to salvation (which will a little later on be confirmed through the profession of faith and baptism itself) is ratified by a pact. The infant is signed with the sign of the Cross, '*the sphragis*', which from very early times has been used in the baptismal rite of the Church to signify the seal of the new alliance and of incorporation into the new Israel, the sign that the infant now belongs to Christ and shares (by anticipation) in Christ's victory over the forces of evil through his death on the cross.⁷⁶

Man's response to the divine invitation will be summed up in a *conversion* concretely expressed through a renunciation of evil,⁷⁷ a profession of faith⁷⁸ and baptism,⁷⁹ all of which will be for the infant the actualization of the paschal mystery of Christ. However, before this takes place, the Church humbly acknowledges that salvation comes

⁷⁵ cfr. OBP., p. 23, n. 37.

⁷⁶ On the significance and symbolism of the '*sphragis*' cfr. J. DANIELOU, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1964., pp. 54ff., L. BOUYER, *Christian Initiation*, Burns & Oates, London, 1960, pp. 53ff.

⁷⁷ cfr. OBP., p. 30, nn. 56-57.

⁷⁸ cfr. Ibid., p. 31, nn. 58-59.

⁷⁹ cfr. Ibid., pp. 31-32, n. 60.

from God⁸⁰ and therefore in the prayers of the faithful it implores the divine mercy so that through the actualization of the death and resurrection of Christ the infants to be baptized might effectively die to sin and rise to a new life, be aggregated to the Church, the Mystical Body of his Son, and receive the help necessary to grow in the divine life soon to be had until the end of time.⁸¹ For, the paschal mystery in baptism does not only look to *the past* and to *the present*, as we have already pointed out above, but *also to the future*. Everyone immersed into Christ in baptism must continue to live out the paschal mystery constantly in his own life, must continue to die constantly to sin in order to live to God. That is why the Church prays God 'so that through the splendour of the divine mystery of your death and resurrection you may design to regenerate these children through baptism, aggregate them to the holy Church' and 'lead them through holiness of life to the joys of the heavenly kingdom'.⁸²

The death that the infants must undergo is a death to sin, a liberation from sin in virtue of Christ's paschal mystery. This is expressed in *the prayer of the exorcism*: God, who had sent his Son into the world to vanquish Satan, the spirit of evil, and to liberate mankind from the powers of darkness, is humbly petitioned to make Christ's victory over sin once again actual in the case of the infants present so that they may *pass over from the slavery of sin to the sonship of God*, from the realm of darkness to that of light, from being abodes of evil to being temples of the Holy Spirit.⁸³ The presence of an exorcism in the OBP far from appearing as something incomprehensible or anachronistic to the modern mind boldly serves to underline the fact that part of the answer to the problem of evil that keeps tormenting him lies in the existence in the world of a host of spiritual forces far superior to himself and inimical to God, and that he just cannot overcome these forces of evil except in union with him who has vanquished them once and for all and to whom 'every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth'.⁸⁴ The exorcism reminds those to be baptized that 'our wrestling is not against flesh and blood but against the Prin-

⁸⁰ cfr. I Cor. 1, 21; 3, 6; Rom. 7, 25; 8, 28-30; Eph. 2, 8; Tit. 3, 5.

⁸¹ cfr. OBP., pp. 25-26, nn. 47-48.

⁸² OBP., p. 26, n. 47.

⁸³ cfr. OBP., p. 27, n. 49., cfr. R. BERAUDY, op. cit., pp. 546ff.

⁸⁴ Phil. 2, 10., Apoc. 12, 11.

cialties and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high'⁸⁵ and that if one is to die continually to evil and live to God one has constant need of divine assistance.⁸⁶ Immediately following the liberation of the infants from the power of Satan, they are *anointed with oil* to signify that they are now 'strengthened with the power of Christ the Saviour'.⁸⁷ Ever since very early times the anointing with oil during the baptismal rite had a double significance: the healing of every trace of sin and iniquity in the souls of the candidates after the expulsion of Satan, and the strengthening of their souls to triumph over the attacks of hostile powers.⁸⁸ 'So it is', says the Pseudo-Dionysius, 'that having overcome all the stratagems and all the powers that oppose his deification, in dying to sin by baptism, we can say that he (the postulant) partakes of the very death of Christ'.⁸⁹

We now come to the central part of the baptismal rite which comprises: the blessing of the water and the invocation of God upon the same, the renunciation of Satan, the profession of faith, and the baptism itself. The early Church had always held *the blessing of the baptismal water* in high esteem. The epicletic prayer that was recited during this rite strongly underlined the fact that baptism was no magic rite since it was God himself who effected the insertion of man into the paschal mystery of Christ utilizing water as the sacrament of faith to save man in virtue of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.⁹⁰ Theodore of Mopsuestia, for instance, writes: 'First of all the bishop, according to the law of the pontifical service, should use the prescribed words and ask of God that the grace of the Holy Spirit should come on the water and make it capable of this awe-inspiring birth'.⁹¹ And St. Ambrose says more explicitly: 'You have seen the water, but all water does not

⁸⁵ Eph. 6, 12.

⁸⁶ cfr. L. BOUYER, *Le Mystère Pascal*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1967, pp. 150ff., L. BOUYER, *Christian Initiation*, op. cit., pp. 53ff.

⁸⁷ OBP., p. 27, n. 51.

⁸⁸ cfr. A. HAMMAN, op. cit., pp. 82ff., On the symbolism of oil in baptism cfr. J. DANIELOU, op. cit., pp. 40ff., and L. BOUYER, *Le Mystère Pascal*, op. cit., pp. 162ff.

⁸⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, Hier. Eccl., 401D-404A.

⁹⁰ cfr. B. NEUNHEUSER, *De Benedictione Aquae baptismatis*, in Eph. Lit., Roma, 44 (1930) 194-207; 258-281; 369-412; 455-492.

⁹¹ XIV, 9.

heal; that water heals which has the grace of Christ. The water is the instrument but it is the Holy Spirit who acts. The water does not heal, if the Spirit does not descend to consecrate it'.⁹² The OBP too insists upon the important truth that the salvation that comes to the postulants comes from God through the sacrament of baptism which is the re-presentation of the greatest of the 'mirabilia Dei', the passion, death and resurrection of his only-begotten Son, and that it is the sacrament of regeneration and insertion into the paschal mystery of Christ.⁹³

Following New Testament⁹⁴ and Patristic⁹⁵ catecheses, the OBP pictures baptism as being in the line of the great works of creation and redemption accomplished by God in the Old Testament, and shows how the baptismal waters are at one and the same time the principle of destruction and a new creation, the instrument of judgment whereby the sinful world is destroyed and those who adhere to God by faith are brought forth to a new life in Christ. Starting with the eschatological typology provides us in the primitive waters of Genesis in which the first creation is presented as the type of the new creation which is to be accomplished at the end of time and gradually working through the history of salvation to the antitype of baptism the OBP shows how God in a wonderful manner made use of water in the symbolization of the passage from death to life which was to be brought out in a unique manner in the rite of baptism in its relation to the paschal mystery of Christ. Thus, the waters of Genesis which manifested the victory of God over evil and the birth of creation, the waters of the deluge which spelt 'the end of vice and the beginning of virtue', the waters of the Red Sea which were used to assure the passover of God's chosen people from slavery to freedom, the waters of the Jordan at Christ's baptism over which the Holy Spirit hovered just as he did at the dawn of creation and the water that flowed from the side of the crucified and

⁹² *De Sacramentis*, I, 15; ed. B. BOTTE, Ed. du Cerf, Paris, 1961, p.68.

⁹³ cfr. OBP., pp. 28-29, nn. 53-54.

⁹⁴ cfr. for example, I Cor. 10, 1-5; Jude, 5; Rom. 4, 23-25; I Pet. 3, 19-21; II Pet. 2, 5; Jn. 7, 38; I Cor. 10, 4-5.

⁹⁵ Cfr. Didymus Alex., 39, 693; St. Cyril Jerus., *de Bapt.*, 33, 433; St. Ambrose, *de Sacra.*, I, 11-24; (ed. B. BOTTE, op. cit., 57-61); Idem, *de Myst.*, 8, 27; (ed. B. BOTTE, op. cit., 110-116); St. Augustine, *Serm.*, 258, 2; 226. PL 38, 1195; 1099; Idem, *de Cat. Rudibus*, 20, 34. PL 40, 335; St. Hilary *de Myst.*, I, 1; PLS I, 247; St. Gregory Nyssa, *de Bapt.*, PG 46, 420; etc.,

dead Christ, all become subjects of excellent catecheses to show how God made use of water to effect the insertion of mankind into his mystery of salvation.⁹⁶ Finally, the minister begs God at the epiclesis, *the invocation of God upon the baptismal waters*, 'that the power of the Holy Spirit may descend into this richness of the fount. . . . so that all who are buried with Christ through baptism in death may rise again with him to life'.⁹⁷ Thus, once again three important truths are affirmed: (i) the salvation of man is effected by God; (ii) in virtue of the paschal mystery of Christ; (iii) through a sacramental re-presentation of Christ's death and resurrection in baptism.

As we had pointed out earlier on p. 19, man's response to the divine invitation to salvation, is concretely expressed through the renunciation of evil and the profession of faith.⁹⁸ The Word of God is not something dead. It is neither exclusively relegated to events of the past nor fossilized in biblical books and manuscripts. Surmounting the barriers of time and space that once formed its setting, the Word of God continues to live in the Church as something eminently dynamic and effective through which salvation is at every moment being offered to mankind in the community of God's people. And it is to this invitation of God to salvation that man responds imitating in himself the paschal mystery of Christ through a renunciation of evil (death) and an adhesion to Christ in faith (life). In its very opening words the OBP had stated that 'Through the sacraments of christian initiation men freed from the powers of darkness, dead, buried and resurrected together with Christ, receive the Spirit of the adoption of sons and along with the rest of the people of God celebrate the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ';⁹⁹ and the prayer of the exorcism had begged God to make his divine power present so that Satan might be vanquished and the postulants to baptism might pass over from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God,¹⁰⁰ and now the postulants are called upon to make the victory of God actual in themselves through renouncing evil

⁹⁶ cfr. OBP., pp. 28-29, n. 54. For an exposition of biblical typology in its relation to baptism, cfr. A. HAMMAN, op. cit., pp. 72 and 88-94., and J. DANIELOU, op. cit., pp. 70-114.

⁹⁷ OBP., p. 29, n. 54.

⁹⁸ cfr. OBP., pp. 30-31, nn. 56-59.

⁹⁹ OBP., p. 7, n. 1.

¹⁰⁰ cfr. OBP., p. 27, n. 49.

and adhering to him. Since we are dealing with the baptism of infants here, the personal actualization of the paschal mystery of Christ in their own lives will commence from the moment they begin to differentiate between good and evil. But right now, since salvation is offered to them in and through the people of God, it is the entire community of believers who professes its faith in God, in virtue of which salvation is offered to the infants and in virtue of which they are baptized.

The Ecclesial dimension of Baptism in its relation to the Paschal Mystery of Christ

The ecclesial dimension of the sacrament of baptism in its relation to the paschal mystery of Christ is an important one and the OBP draws our attention to it in various places.¹⁰¹ By baptism one is incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ, one 'puts on Christ' as we saw in the Word of God. From the side of Christ from which flowed forth the waters that brought salvation to candidates to baptism,¹⁰² 'came forth also the wondrous sacrament which is the whole Church'.¹⁰³ Baptism thus becomes 'the sacrament whereby men are incorporated into the Church' and 'the bond of sacramental unity existing between all those who are signed with it'.¹⁰⁴ From a liturgico-pastoral point of view therefore 'the people of God, that is the Church, represented in the local community, has an important role to play both in the baptism of infants as in that of adults'¹⁰⁵ serving as it does to give expression to the theology of the Mystical Body of Christ and to the doctrine of salvation in community.

'This incorporation as adherence in faith to the sacred community of the Lord, in which the "protestatio fidei" is from the first not the enunciation of an individual and private view of the world, but the proclamation of acceptance of the Church's belief, adherence to a belief already there and manifestly exercised in the Church, is not only one effect in fact of baptism, but is itself a sacrament, a sign of the other effects of the grace of baptism. To be incorporated into the Church is,

¹⁰¹ cfr. OBP., p. 9, nn. 7 and 9; p. 15, n. 4; p. 16, n. 5; p. 17, nn. 9-10; p. 23, n. 32; p. 25, n. 47; p. 30, nn. 56-59.

¹⁰² cfr. OBP., p. 29, n. 54.

¹⁰³ cfr. *Const. on the Sacred Liturgy*, (W. ABBOTT, op. cit.) n. 5.

¹⁰⁴ OBP., p. 8, n. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15, n. 4.

therefore "sacramentum et res" in this sacrament of Christian initiation'.¹⁰⁶ The OBP provides us with two formulae for the renunciation of evil. The first one contains terms (e.g. 'his works', 'all his pomps',¹⁰⁷ whose meaning does not seem to be too clear to modern minds. The second formula is to be preferred as it neatly expresses the truth that in order to be reborn in Christ the candidate must be prepared to renounce not only sin itself but also all that leads to it, namely, the occasions of sin and the very author of sin, Satan. There is no shadow of a condemnation in this second formula (as seemingly in the first one) because the positive counterpart (adhesion to God, rebirth in Christ) to renouncing something is at once mentioned: 'Do you renounce sin, order to live according to the liberty of the children of God?' To this query the Christian community represented by the infants' parents answer renouncing all evil. Afterwards at the very fount of salvation in which the infants will mystically die and be buried with Christ to rise again to life with him, the parents profess their faith in the Father who saves and adopts us in his Son, in the Son who died for us so that we might live, and in the Holy Spirit who raises us to the adopted sonship of God. The minister then asks the parents and god-parents yet once more as to whether they wish their progeny to be baptized in order to impress upon the minds of all present the nature of the august mystery about to be re-presented.

And now comes the moment of *the baptism* itself when the infants will be immersed (or will have water poured over their heads) in the baptismal font to signify their death to sin and life to God.¹⁰⁸ At least since the 3rd century¹⁰⁹ baptism was solemnly administered in the Church during the Easter vigil services to bring out the close relation that existed between these two salvific events. The OBP earnestly re-

¹⁰⁶ K. RAHNER, *The Church and the Sacraments*, Burns & Oates, London, 1967, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰⁷ The meaning of these terms (especially that of the second one) has its background the pagan customs in vogue during Christian antiquity — cfr. L. BOUYER, *Christian Initiation*, op. cit., p. 65., A. NOCENT, op. cit., pp. 201f., J. DANIELOU, op. cit., pp. 28ff., VIGILIAE CHRISTIANAE, 1 (1947) 13ff.

¹⁰⁸ cfr. OBP., pp. 31-31, n. 60.

¹⁰⁹ Tertullian (cir. 160-220) mentions the Easter eve celebration and Pentecost as the solemn times for baptism; However, he also adds that 'every Lord's day, every hour, every time' is really 'suitable for baptism' — *De baptismo*, 19.

commends the same practice saying: 'In order to show the paschal character of baptism, it is recommended that the sacrament be celebrated during the Paschal vigil or on Sunday' (the weekly commemoration of the day of the Lord).¹¹⁰ In former times candidates to baptism used to leave aside all their garments before descending into the baptismal waters thus giving vivid expression to the rich symbolism contained in this gesture. St. Paul, as we have already seen, was very fond of this figure of speech as it served to bring out the important theological content of the metaphor. For, in baptism one renounced sin and adhered to Christ, one 'put off the old man with his deeds and put on the new, one that is being renewed unto perfect knowledge according to the image of his Creator'.¹¹¹ Discerning the sophisticated mentality of the times in which we live however the OBP has wisely kept silent on this particular point with regard to the laying off of garments. Immersion very aptly brings out the paschal nature of the sacrament of baptism, for the one who is immersed in the waters to rise again has the mystery enacted in him clearly focussed: he dies with Christ, is buried with him and also rises with him to a new life of divine sonship. The triple immersion or infusion is not demanded by the New Testament. We come across it perhaps for the first time in the *Didaché*¹¹² and from then on it became a customary practice in the Church apparently as a ritual confession in the salvific intervention of the Blessed Trinity at the moment of baptism. Certain Fathers of the Church like St. Cyril of Jerusalem and the Pseudo-Denys see in this rite a symbol of the three days passed by Christ in the tomb.¹¹³

In order to understand the mystery re-enacted in the sacrament of baptism we ought to distinguish two things here: the essential sign and the secondary symbol, that is, the insertion into the paschal mystery of Christ through baptism, and the purification from sin and the grace of adoption that the immersion and emersion symbolize. The Fathers of the Church had time and again strongly insisted upon the fact that although baptism is a symbolical re-presentation of the death and resurrection of Christ, the salvation granted by God to the baptized is an

¹¹⁰ OBP., p. 17, n. 9. cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 12, n. 28; p. 23, n. 32.

¹¹¹ Col. 3, 10-11; cfr. also Rom. 13, 14; Eph. 4, 23; Gal. 3, 27.

¹¹² *Didaché*, 7, 1.

¹¹³ cfr. A. HAMMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

absolutely indubitable fact. In words that have now become well-known St. Cyril of Jerusalem said: 'Baptism is the antitype (the re-presentation, the image, the replica) of the passion of Christ. That was why St. Paul said... we have been baptized in his death. We have been buried with him in baptism... There has taken place in us the imitation of his passion and death, but in as far as salvation is concerned it is not the image but the reality that has been produced in us'.¹¹⁴ The baptismal font is considered as 'the maternal womb of the Church' in which children of God are conceived and brought forth to a new life through the power of the Holy Spirit. 'The water is a womb for him who is born but it is the grace of the Spirit in it that forms the baptized in view of a new birth, a total transformation . . . He (the baptized) becomes quite another being. From a mortal, corrupt and changeable being, he becomes an immortal, incorruptible and unchangeable one. He is completely transformed into another being by the power of Him who has fashioned him'.¹¹⁵

The exalted dignity to which the newly-baptized have been raised by God 'who freed (them) from sin and regenerated (them) through water and the Holy Spirit'¹¹⁶ is indicated by *the anointing with holy chrism, the white garments they are clothed in, and the paschal candle*. The anointing with holy chrism had a functional and a spiritual value. Practically considered when rubbed vigorously it had served to warm the bodies that had been somewhat chilled through contact with water;¹¹⁷ whereas its spiritual value lay in the fact that following biblical tradition it served to bring out the fact that the newly baptized now participated in the priesthood and kingship of Christ.¹¹⁸ It is important that this anointing not be mistaken for the single anointing performed after baptism through which the sacrament of confirmation was administered in the East.¹¹⁹ The white garments with which the newly-baptized infants are clothed and the paschal candle that is given them signify the pure state of their souls filled as they are with the presence of the Holy Trinity and clothed as they are with Christ, the new man.

¹¹⁴ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.*, 20, 7; Pg 33, 1084.

¹¹⁵ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Hom.*, 14, 9.

¹¹⁶ OBP., p. 32, n. 62.

¹¹⁷ cfr. A. HAMMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 71, and 85.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, cfr. also OBP., p. 32, n. 62.

¹¹⁹ cfr. A. NOCENT, *op. cit.*, pp. 238ff., and 244ff.

The Eschatological dimension of Baptism in its relation to the Paschal Mystery of Christ

Furthermore, there is yet another dimension of the actualization of the paschal mystery in the lives of the infants that is strongly insisted upon here, and this is the eschatological dimension of baptism. The passover from death to life which the infants have participated in along with Christ is not a 'fait accompli' in the sense that there is nothing more to be looked forward to. The re-presentation of the paschal mystery in them has given them a new life, and life is dynamic. The new status of divine sonship therefore imposes upon them the duty of living according to that exalted calling. It imposes upon them the duty of re-living the paschal mystery of Christ at every moment of their lives, of dying to sin and living to God constantly 'until Christ be fully formed' in their souls.¹²⁰ 'Therefore, if you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, your life, shall appear, then you too will appear with him in glory'.¹²¹

The prayers accompanying these complementary rites insist upon the eschatological dimension of the paschal mystery of Christ, praying that the newly baptized 'may remain unto eternal life members of Christ the priest, prophet and king',¹²² that 'assisted by the word and example of their neighbour, (they may) preserve the white garment which has been a sign of their dignity spotless unto life eternal',¹²³ and that guided by their elders and co-members of the Mystical Body of Christ they 'may constantly walk as children of the light, and persevering in the faith may go forth to meet the Lord coming with all his saints in heavenly glory'.¹²⁴ Through baptism the infants have 'put on Christ' and have received the Holy Spirit it is true. However, there is yet another participation in the presence of God, yet a deeper sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ to which they are both invited and entitled to. This will

¹²⁰ cfr. Gal. 4, 20.

¹²¹ Col. 3, 1-4; cfr. also Eph. 2, 5-6.

¹²² OBP., p. 32, n. 62.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 32, n. 63.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 33, n. 64.

occur when they receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of confirmation and signify in a more profound manner their union with Christ in his Mystical Body through the reception of his Sacred Body in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.¹²⁵ This day has been a joyful one not only for the newly-baptized who have been snatched away from the hands of Satan and aggregated to the holy people of God through their passover but also for the entire christian community which rejoices at the growth of the Kingdom of God. The happiness experienced at this renewed triumph of the paschal mystery of Christ is given full expression to in a joyous hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God who has once again remembered his people and has done such wonderful things ('mirabilia Dei') for them.¹²⁶

CONCLUSION

Seen in this light the sacrament of baptism becomes the ritual setting in which God once more intervenes in the history of his people to bring them salvation. The same benevolent God who in times past worked so many wonders on behalf of his beloved ones comes to the aid of his people once again to help them through the sacrament of baptism to pass over from the slavery of Satan to the expansive liberty of his children. Not only baptism but each one of the sacraments thus continues in the new dispensation the salvific action of the 'mirabilia Dei' formerly manifested in the history of the old dispensation. 'Throughout the course of time Christ begets the Church, washes it, sanctifies, calls, chooses and redeems it, through genuine and authentic prefigurations: the sleep of Adam, the deluge of Noe, the benediction of Melchisedech and the justification of Abraham. Thus after the creation of the world had been prefigured that which was to have been accomplished in Christ'.¹²⁷ In this way with the coming of Christ and the dawn of the messianic era we see how the wonderful plan conceived by God for the salvation of mankind has been realized. Christ is the new Adam who has opened the gates of paradise once again to mankind through his paschal mystery. While sleeping the sleep of death on the cross

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34, n. 68.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34, n. 67; p. 35, n. 71.

¹²⁷ St. Hilary, *de Myst.*, I, 1. PLS I, 247.

came forth from his open side the new Eve through the sacrament of blood and water,¹²⁸ the sacrament of baptism which is the efficacious sign of a new creation and of a gloriously triumphant return to the paradise of the New Jerusalem.

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¹²⁸ cfr. St. Augustine, *Cont. Faust. man.*; 12, 16. PL 42, 263; *Enn. in Ps.* 126, 7. PL 37, 1672; *In Joan.* 15, 8. PL 35, 1513; *De Civ. Dei*, 22, 17; PL 41, 778-779.