




Consecrated Phrases

A Latin Theological Dictionary

*Latin Expressions Commonly Found
in Theological Writings*



James T. Bretzke, S.J.

A Michael Glazier Book
 THE LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

Cover design by Ann Blattner

A Michael Glazier Book published by The Liturgical Press

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3 4 5 6 7 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bretzke, James T., 1952—

Consecrated phrases : a Latin theological dictionary : Latin expressions commonly found in theological writings / James T. Bretzke.

p. cm.

“A Michael Glazier book.”

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8146-5880-6 (alk. paper)

1. Catholic Church—Terminology.
2. Theology—Terminology.
3. Latin language—Church Latin—Glossaries, vocabularies, etc.

I. Title.

BX841.B68 1998

230'.03—dc21

97-40204
CIP

CONSECRATED PHRASES

To My Students

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Introductory Note

A *consecrated phrase* refers to an expression that is used, often in a shorthand manner, to express a certain theological position or thought, such as *ex opere operato*, that expresses a significant position of Roman Catholic sacramental theology as defined at the Council of Trent, or *finis operantis*, which refers to the importance of the intention of the person (the “agent”) in evaluating moral actions. Often these terms appear simply in a given theological text and little effort is made either to translate or to explain such terms. The aim of this dictionary is to compile, translate, and briefly explain these Latin consecrated phrases, which are found with some frequency in theological writings and canon law and which therefore may puzzle readers unfamiliar with Latin and/or the theological meaning and nuances of these terms. For example, someone familiar with Latin may be able to translate each of the words *ex opere operato* (“by the work performed”) but still be in some doubt as to precisely what this term means in theological usage. Each entry in this dictionary gives first a rather literal translation of the Latin term or phrase and then in most cases a brief gloss on the theological meaning and/or significance of the term. However, this dictionary is designed primarily for quick consultation in order to give the reader a general idea of what might otherwise be a puzzling expression. Other dictionaries or encyclopedias of theology should be consulted if one wishes a fuller theological and historical discussion of the term in question. While most of the entries contain theological, liturgical, canonical, or philosophical terms primarily from the Roman Catholic tradition, important expressions in the various Protestant traditions are also included as well as a number of common classical aphorisms, such as *In vino veritas* (“In wine there is truth”).

Latin titles of many Church documents and major works are included and are further indicated as being a title by being printed in **bold type**, such as ***Gaudium et spes***. Since document titles are derived from the opening words of the given document itself, the literal translation of a given document (“Joy and hope” in this case) does not always indicate clearly what the document concerns. In most cases an English

subtitle is supplied, which is a better guide to the nature and content of the document in question.

Entries are listed according to the form most likely to be used in the expressions themselves as found in theological writings or references. Thus the nominative singular of nouns or the infinitive form of verbs normally would not necessarily be the usual entry form. For example, the Latin word for “God” is *Deus*, yet many common expressions involving the use of “God” occur in the other grammatical cases, such as *Dei* (genitive, used in the possessive sense), *Deo* (dative or ablative, used as indirect objects and with certain prepositions), and *Deum* (accusative, used as a direct object). While efforts have been made to cross-reference the entries, given the fluidity of Latin word order not every possible grammatical form has been entered. Thus if one is looking for *non licet* (“not legal”) and cannot find this term listed under the letter “N,” one might try looking for *licet* under the letter “L” (which will yield a better result). Similarly, since word order can be easily varied in Latin one might try looking for the meaning of the phrase by taking the last word instead of the first, or some other word in the phrase. For example, if one cannot find *Amor vincit omnia* under the letter “A,” a second search under the letter “O” might produce *Omnia vincit amor* (“Love conquers all”).

Finally, some common scholarly abbreviations and terms such as *ibid.* (*ibidem*), *i.e.* (*id est*), *q.v.* (*quod vide* [“which see”]), and the like are also included.

Most of the entries contained in this dictionary have come from my own reading of various theological texts, and thus the dictionary makes no pretensions to be exhaustive and complete. I would be grateful if readers suggest other entries for this dictionary, especially for items that are used in theological writings and left untranslated in the given text. Finally, recognizing the basic truth of the adage *errare humanum est* (“to err is human”), I would also be grateful if one comes across typographical or grammatical errors as well as any other inaccuracies or unclear and misleading definitions in these listings.

I would like to express my gratitude first and foremost to John Wright, S.J., who has read, corrected, and made many helpful suggestions to virtually the entire manuscript. I would also like to thank several others who have given helpful input to this dictionary, especially John Donahue, S.J., Mary Ann Donovan, S.C., and Michael Hilbert, S.J. Their input has improved this dictionary greatly; its remaining errors, deficiencies, and infelicities of idiom remain my own responsibility. A final note of thanks to Thomas Buckley, S.J., who suggested that the traditional expression “consecrated phrases” would serve well as the title for this dictionary.

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A

A:

From, away from, after, by, because of

Common Latin preposition.

A capella:

In the chapel (mode)

Refers to music that is sung without accompaniment, such as plain chant or Gregorian chant.

A cruce salus:

Salvation comes from the cross

Salvation comes from Christ's death on the cross; therefore, for human individuals this salvation comes from belief in Christianity. See also *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.

A divinis:

From the holy

Refers to the ecclesiastical penalty of suspension ("*suspension a divinis*"), in which a cleric is forbidden by his competent ecclesiastical authority (such as his bishop) from exercising the powers

of orders, for example, presiding at the Eucharist, hearing confessions, and administering the other sacraments.

A fortiori:

With stronger reason

Common expression, used in the sense of "all the more." For example, if someone should prepare the readings assigned for a given class, then *a fortiori* (all the more) should that person prepare for the exam at the end of the semester.

A posteriori:

From that which comes after (the effect)

For example, reasoning *a posteriori* is inductive reasoning, working back from the observed experiential effects to the formulation of a generalization or principle understood to express causality. Compare *a priori* for the opposite approach.

A priori:

From that which comes before (the principle or cause)

For example, reasoning *a priori* is deductive reasoning, working from a general principle forward to judgment of consequences assumed from the given principle. Compare *a posteriori* for the opposite approach. *A priori* can also refer to that which precedes or is independent of sense experience, whereas *a posteriori* refers to that which is dependent upon or follows from sense experience.

A quo:

From which/whom

A tergo:

From behind

Usually refers to the position in sexual intercourse in which the male lies behind the female.

Ab:

From, away from, after, by, because of

Common Latin preposition.

Ab extra:

From outside

Something that comes from outside of the entity under discussion. For example, artificial insemination by donor (AID) is said to be fecundation *ab extra* and is therefore condemned in the traditional Roman Catholic view, since it involves the introduction of a third party into the procreative process.

Ab intra:

From the inside

For example, the insider's role in an event or process is *ab intra*. The opposite of *ab extra*.

Ab initio:

From the beginning

Ab ovo:

From the egg

From the very beginning, that is, a thoroughgoing analysis and/or construction.

Absolvitur ambulando:

Wandering absolved (penitent)

Refers to the early Christian practice of undertaking a pilgrimage as part of one's penance for the absolution of sins. This expression seems to be derived from the philosophical phrase *solvitur ambulando* ("solved walking"), which indicated the instance of walking as an instance that would resolve Zeno's paradox against the possibility of local motion.

Abusus non tollit usum:

Abuse does not abolish use

The fact that a thing may be abused or improperly used from a moral point of view does not justify its destruction, non-use, or non-application. Thus the presence of medical equipment in an abortion clinic (which equipment could be used for a variety of legitimate purposes) would not of itself morally justify the destruction of such equipment in that particular location. In the same vein, the fact that a certain right might be abused by some would not justify its being withheld from others.

Accidens:

Accident

Important concept in scholastic philosophy and theology that refers to a non-essential property, attribute, or quality of a given entity. An "accident" is something

that can only exist in another being and therefore cannot exist by and of itself. That which can exist in and of itself is called a substance. In regard to the being in which an “accident” belongs or pertains, the “accident” is not necessary for the entity’s existence as that particular entity. For example, hair color is an “accident” of a human person and not part of a human being’s “essence” as a human being; even those who are totally bald are still considered to be human beings totally and essentially. See also *Essentia*, *In se*, *Per accidens*, *Per se*, and *Suppositum*.

Acta:

Acts

Usually understood as the formal records or proceedings of something like a convention, meeting, council, or court case. See below for some common examples.

Acta apostolicae sedis:

Acts of the Apostolic See

Commonly abbreviated in scholarly references as *AAS*. The *Acta apostolicae sedis* is the official publication of the Vatican that contains important documents, such as encyclicals, letters, and addresses of the pope as well as decrees and decisions of the various congregations of the Roman Curia. The first volume appeared in 1909, and issues come out on a monthly basis.

Acta causae:

Acts of the case

The records or proceedings and relevant materials of a court case or canonical action.

Acta Romana (Societatis Iesu):

Roman Acts of the Society of Jesus

Collection of official documents of the Society of Jesus, issued on an annual basis. Letters of the superior general to the whole society as well as other important talks and documents are contained in this collection.

Acta sanctorum:

Acts [deeds] of the Saints

Usually refers to a collection of the lives of the martyrs and saints, especially the series of scholarly works undertaken by the Bollandists.

Actus essendi:

Act of being

Refers to the fact of being. See also *Esse*, *Essentia*, and *Suppositum*.

Actus hominis:

Act of a human person (*without a moral dimension*)

Classical scholastic expression, usually translated as “act of man,” which used to make a distinction from *actus humanus* (*q.v.*), or “human act.” Therefore, it is difficult to translate this term into inclusive language. The *actus hominis* refers to an action performed by a human person but which may in itself have no moral significance because it does not involve the use of moral reason, intention, and will. Digesting food or growing fingernails are examples of an *actus hominis*. While they are clearly activities related to a human person, they have no moral dimension. This distinction can also be helpful in assessing moral responsibility (or lack thereof) in cases that at first glance may seem to involve more personal responsibility. For example, if my brakes fail (through no fault of my own) and my car hits a

pedestrian I am not morally guilty of a crime, as this would be an *actus hominis* and not an *actus humanus*. See *Actus humanus*, below.

Actus humanus:

Act of the human person (act *with* a moral dimension)

Distinguished from *actus hominis* (q.v.), the *actus humanus* refers to the moral dimension and responsibility for one's actions. The use of deliberative reason that aims at a moral purpose proper to the human person provides the key to making an act a genuine *actus humanus* and thus a "moral" act. See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 1, a. 3, for his discussion of this point. See *Actus hominis* above.

Actus judicialis:

Judicial act

Refers to an act performed by a judge in a trial or proceeding. See also *Actus juridicus*.

Actus juridicus:

Juridic act

Refers to a formal legal act that has some effect, such as a formal decree of nullity in a marriage case. See also *Actus judicialis*.

Actus naturae:

Natural act

Traditional moral norm, based on a physicalist paradigm, which held that an act (e.g., a sexual act) must be performed in a "natural" way in order to be considered moral. See also *Natura actus* and *Actus personae*.

Actus non facit reum, nisi mens sit rea:

The act itself does not constitute a crime, unless the intent be criminal

This maxim notes the importance of bad intention for a morally bad action. Thus an action that may appear bad or evil in itself, if it lacks a bad intention or was in fact done from a good intention, would not be judged to be criminal, that is, bad in its totality. See also *Fontes moralitatis*.

Actus personae:

Act of the person

Consideration of the moral nature of an act in terms of how it relates to the whole of the human person. This development is especially important in sexual ethics, as it moves away from physicalist conceptions of evaluation of conjugal acts (cf. *actus naturae* and *natura actus*). *Gaudium et spes*, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, uses this understanding of *actus personae* in its teaching on marriage (see *GS* 51).

Ad:

To, toward, at, near, for, as far as

Common Latin preposition.

Ad absurdum:

To (the point of) absurdity

Taking an argument to its extreme point as a means of discrediting the argument itself. See also *reductio ad absurdum*.

Ad arbitrium:

By one's will

Something done of one's own free will or by one's own authority. Similar to *arbitrio suo*. See also *Liberum arbitrium*.

Ad astra per aspera:

Through adversity to the stars

Aphorism that indicates that only through trials and tribulations will one succeed to a worthwhile goal.

Ad experimentum:

For an experiment

Usually refers to something given provisional approval on an experimental basis, such as a new liturgical rite, in order to gauge how well the matter in question will function in actual practice. For example, the various Eucharistic Prayers for Masses for Children were first introduced in the United States *ad experimentum* and then after a period of trial were given final and definitive approval to be used on a regular basis.

Ad gentes:

To the peoples

Vatican II's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (1965).

Ad hoc:

For this (purpose, reason)

An *ad hoc* solution is one devised for a particular individual situation and need not be understood as establishing a general norm or precedent. In the same way, an *ad hoc* committee is one established for a particular need or project and would go out of existence once that project had been completed (in distinction to a standing committee).

Ad hominem:

Against the person

A fallacious though common type of argumentation in which the opponent's character, etc. are attacked rather than

the merits of the opposing argument. An example would be labeling and summarily dismissing the arguments of moralists with whom one disagrees as "dissenters" or "traditionalists" rather than considering and answering the arguments themselves. See also *Ad rem*.

Ad infinitum:

To infinity

Refers to something done or held forever, endlessly, and can also be used to indicate an exaggeration of detail. See also *Ad nauseam*.

Ad libitum:

At one's pleasure/choice

In theological usage this phrase is found in liturgical books, such as the *ordo* (q.v.), indicating that no particular Mass text is prescribed for a certain day (such as a feast or non-optional memorial) and therefore that the choice of the Mass text celebrated is up to the presider, who is to take into consideration the spiritual needs of the faithful in making the appropriate choice. The English expression *ad lib*, which means to speak extemporaneously, comes from the abbreviation of this Latin phrase.

Ad limina (apostolorum):

To the threshold (of the apostles)

To the highest ecclesiastical authority, that is, to the successor of Peter, the head of the apostles (namely, the pope). More commonly this phrase is used in the expression "*ad limina* visit," which designates the required visit a bishop must make once every five years to Rome, during which he meets with the Holy Father one-on-one (for about fifteen minutes) and during which occasion

other meetings are arranged with the various Vatican offices (such as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). *Ad limina* visits are normally organized geographically and linguistically. Therefore, a number of bishops from the same country, ecclesiastical province, or geographical region within a country generally make the *ad limina* visit to Rome at the same time.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam
(A.M.D.G.):

For the greater glory of God

Motto of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) and a principle of apostolic discernment in which one is to choose that which would give God the greater glory. This principle is often referred to as the *magis* (q.v.).

Ad multos annos:

For many years

Common form of congratulatory greeting, for example, for birthdays, used in circles in which Latin might be known (such as communities of religious).

Ad nauseam:

To (the point of) nausea

Something done or repeated endlessly to the point in which it causes or provokes extreme boredom or revulsion. See also *Ad infinitum*.

Ad quem:

For/to which/whom

Ad rem:

To the thing (at hand)

A relevant observation, application, argument, etc. An *ad rem* argument would

contrast with one that was *ad hominem* (q.v.).

Ad vitam:

For life

Used generally to refer to the election or appointment of someone to a post for life (such as pope or superior general of the Society of Jesus) to indicate a job or assignment that has no set time or term limit. Justices of the United States Supreme Court serve *ad vitam* once their nomination has been confirmed by the Senate.

Adsum:

I am here

Formal reply to a roll-call type summons, similar to responding “present” in English. In the ordination rite in the Latin Church, when the candidate’s name is called the reply in Latin is *adsum*, though in contemporary English this is usually rendered as “I am ready and willing.”

Aeterni Patris:

(Of the) Eternal Father

Encyclical (1879) of Pope Leo XIII mandating the study of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, which led to a (forced) revival of scholastic philosophy and theology in seminaries.

Agere contra:

To act against

Principle in spirituality, especially Ignatian spirituality, of overcoming some aversion or reluctance by acting directly against said difficulty. For example, if one has an aversion to serving by way of manual labor, following the principle of *agere*

contra one would directly involve oneself in just such labor in order to overcome the aversion and gain greater freedom.

Agere sequitur (esse):

Action follows being

Important metaphysical and moral principle in which one's moral duties and possibilities are grounded in one's being. Thus the moral "ought" is founded on the "is," the given reality of the individual. This principle indicates the inseparable connection among ontology, obligation, and ethics. See also *Operari sequitur esse*.

Agere sequitur credere:

Action follows belief

We act according to what we believe (ourselves to be).

Agnus Dei:

Lamb of God

First words of the prayer recited by the whole congregation in the Liturgy of the Eucharist following the recitation of the *Pater Noster* (q.v.) and before reception of Holy Communion. The entire prayer is *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis* ("Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us" [said twice]) and concludes with *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem* ("Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace").

Aliqualiter:

In some manner

Refers to something unspecified or not specified in an entirely precisely stated fashion.

Alter Christus:

Another Christ

Theological expression that the priest acts for the Christian community, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, as *alter Christus*, "another Christ." See also *In persona Christi*.

A.M.D.G.

See *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*

Ama et quod vis fac:

Love and do what you will

See *Dilige et quod vis fac*.

Amicus curiae:

Friend of the court

Refers to one who is not party to a certain litigation but who is invited to give advice or render a legal opinion on the matter before the court, for example, in the form of an *amicus curiae* brief. An example might be a legal brief outlining some expert testimony in an area or aspect involved in the case, such as a scientific report on the effects of secondhand smoke in a lawsuit against smoking in public places.

Amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei:

The love of self (that leads) even to contempt of God

Expression of St. Augustine of Hippo, which can be interpreted as the basic dynamic involved in a negative (or bad) fundamental option stance. See also *Amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui*.

Amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui:

The love of God (that leads) even to contempt of self

Expression of St. Augustine of Hippo, which can be interpreted as the basic dynamic involved in a positive (or good) stance toward God as the one who gives the individual a genuine sense of perspective about his or her moral goodness by relating this to God's infinite goodness and love. In a certain sense this same idea is also related to St. Ignatius of Loyola's First Principle and Foundation, and the Three Degrees of Humility found in his *Spiritual Exercises*.

Amor vincit omnia:

Love conquers all

A play on Virgil's expression *Labor vincit omnia* ("Labor conquers all," *q.v.*), used by Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales* and widely used ever since. True love will prevail ultimately against all adversities.

Amplexus reservatus:

Reserved (held) embrace

Practice of penile insertion in the vagina followed by withdrawal before ejaculation. Since the man did not ejaculate in this practice, unlike *coitus interruptus* (*q.v.*) its morality was debated over the centuries among moral theologians and several argued for its ethical acceptability. The Holy Office (institutional precursor to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) eventually issued a *monitum* (*q.v.*) in 1952 that warned theologians not to "describe, praise, and urge *amplexus reservatus*." See also *Copula dimidiata*.

Analysis fidei:

Analysis of faith

Theological theme that describes the structure and process of faith and con-

siders the reasons and motives that lead the individual to faith in God, as revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

Anathema sit/Anathema sint:

Let him/her be anathema

(accursed)/Let them be anathema

Traditional formulaic phrase appended to formal doctrinal definitions: "But if anyone presumes to contradict this our definition—which God forbid—*anathema sit*." This particular example is taken from the definition of papal infallibility contained in *Pastor aeternus*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican I (*DS* 3074–5). Thus such a defined doctrine must be accepted by all the faithful. For an explanation of *DS* see *Enchiridion symbolorum definitum et declarationem*.

Angelus:

The angel

Refers to the prayer in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary that is traditionally recited at morning, midday, and evening (or sometimes just at midday). The opening lines are *Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae. Et concepti de Spiritu Sancto* (The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary. And she conceived by the Holy Spirit). A Hail Mary (*Ave Maria, q.v.*) would then be recited, after which the next verses of the prayer would be said. During the Easter season instead of the *Angelus* the *Regina Coeli* (*q.v.*) is said.

Anima/animus:

Soul

Latin has two very similar words for "soul," *anima* and *animus*. *Anima* (feminine noun) refers to the soul as the prin-

ciple of life. The Latin Vulgate's translation of the opening words of Mary's song of praise uses this word to render "My soul praises the Lord": *Magnificat anima mea Dominum* (Luke 1:46). *Animus* (masculine noun) also refers to "soul" but connotes the soul as the principle of intellect and/or feeling. Thus one can speak of having a certain *animus*, or bad feeling, toward another person.

Anima Christi:

Soul of Christ

Opening words of a medieval prayer to Jesus Christ, which was much loved by St. Ignatius of Loyola and is usually found in the beginning of his *Spiritual Exercises*.

Anima naturaliter Christiana:

The soul is naturally (by its nature)
Christian

Expression of Tertullian (d. ca. A.D. 220) which holds that the human soul is endowed with a certain natural knowledge of God, which, though it can be obscured, can never be completely obliterated. Thus the soul has a natural inclination toward God. See also *Potentia obedientialis*.

Anno Domini:

In the year of the Lord

Usually abbreviated A.D. and refers to the division of the centuries before (B.C.) and after the birth of Christ. "A.D." refers to the common era after Christ's birth.

Annuario Pontificio:

Pontifical Annual

The Roman Catholic official yearbook, published annually, which gives the names of all the official Vatican organizations along with their members, as well as the names of all the bishops and their dioceses in the world.

Ante:

Before, prior

Common Latin adverb and preposition. Care should be taken that *ante* not be confused with *anti* (which denotes negation or contrariety).

Ante bellum:

Before the war

In the United States this expression traditionally refers to the period before the American Civil War (1861–5) and is usually used in reference to the American South.

Apologia pro vita sua:

An apology (defense, explanation)
for one's life

Though this expression can be used generically, in theology it often refers to John Henry Cardinal Newman's 1864 book of the same title in which he gave the reasons for his conversion from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. "Apologetics" was also a traditional theological course in which one studied how to defend or present the Christian faith to non-believers. Though the contemporary word "apology" comes from the same Latin root, the usual meaning of asking forgiveness for some offense is not at all related to these other uses of *apologia*.

Apostolica signatura:

Apostolic signatura