

CONTEMPORARY SACRAMENTAL THEORY: AN ANALYSIS OF
THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION IN ROMAN CATHOLIC
SACRAMENTAL THEORY SINCE THE SECOND
VATICAN COUNCIL

Marie Thérèse Lise Payette-Falls

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ABSTRACT

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Marie Payette-Falls

This dissertation examines the writings of European and North American Catholic sacramental theologians during the period immediately following the Second Vatican Council. It attempts to summarize and analyze their major concerns. The goal is to paint an accurate picture of the approach being taken today toward "sacramentality" and the "sacraments" and to explore the major concerns of modern Catholic theologians.

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. Each one looks at a particular aspect of the contemporary sacramental theology and reflects current theological opinion. Chapter One states the historical context in which post-Vatican II sacramental theology finds itself today. Chapter Two directs the reader's attention to the specific theological method needed in developing a sacramental theology for our age. Chapter Three presents a new vision of sacramentality and situates the familiar sacraments within this vision: it describes the sacramental process within which sacramental rituals find themselves. Chapter Four examines the three components which characterize sacramental theology: Christ, the Church, and the Human Person (both as symbolic and ritual being). Chapter Five presents a descriptive theological definition of the sacraments which summarizes the insights

drawn from each previous chapter.

The dissertation concludes (Chapter Six) that the contemporary sacramental theology, which results from bringing together what I consider the best of each theologian's presentation is of vital importance to the Roman Catholic Church in a period of cultural and ecclesial crisis and renewal. It offers Catholics a solution to the current sacramental crisis by presenting a meaningful, holistic, dynamic, unified, existential, pastoral, and practical interpretation of sacramentality as a whole and of the sacraments as these function within this larger sacramental reality. It provides an answer to the two questions which all Christians and sacramental theologians are continually asking themselves: "what and why are the sacraments?" And finally, by providing sacramental practice with a sound theoretical basis, it ensures the future of the Christian community.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the writings of contemporary European and North American Roman Catholic sacramental theologians during the period immediately following the Second Vatican Council. Moreover, it attempts to summarize and present a detailed analysis of their major concerns. This investigation does not consider current developments taking place in Latin America, Africa and Asia in the area of sacramental theology, not because these are less important but rather because much of the material written during the post-conciliar period focuses on the sacramental expression of the faith of Roman Catholics living in the modern industrialized world. Furthermore, it examines the writings of Roman Catholics in particular because, at the present time, contemporary sacramental theology seems to be a predominantly Roman Catholic concern. Finally, the study focuses on the post-conciliar period since, for Roman Catholics, this is generally considered as a major turning-point in the theological and pastoral life of the Church. In the particular area of the sacraments, the Second Vatican Council, and specifically the Constitution on the Liturgy, has inaugurated a new phase in the sacramental expression of Christian faith. This is why contemporary sacramental theologians use Vatican II as the springboard for their theological investigation.

After a close examination of these writings, two points stand out as particularly important. First, Roman Catholic theologians agree that there is a persistent difficulty regarding the meaning,

importance, and role of sacramentality in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. This fact is observable not only in theological circles but in the pastoral life of the Church as well, more specifically in the area of sacramental ritual action. "The pastoral ministry of the sacraments is at present going through a difficult period, and for many the crisis comes as an unexpected disillusionment."¹ Thus current theological discussion of Roman Catholic sacramental theology is indicative of a deeper pastoral problem and is motivated by a strong pastoral concern. Hence its emphasis is pastoral rather than doctrinal.

Secondly, Catholic theologians point out that, although the general mood today within both society and the Church is one of crisis, it is also one of renewal. Consequently, in the spirit of the liturgical reforms inaugurated at the Second Vatican Council, these theologians who see the necessity of giving sacramental expression to faith present their readers with some interesting ideas as to what sacramental theology should consist in if it is to continue to be relevant for Christians today. They realize that they must go beyond what is already demanded by the conciliar renewal. As Christians, they realize that the sacramental ritual expression of faith no longer meets the needs and challenges of everyday cultural and religious life. Furthermore they are no longer comfortable with the somewhat catechetical theological basis for this liturgical practice. Hence

¹Raymond Vaillancourt, Toward a Renewal of Sacramental Theology, transl. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press (1977), 1979), p. I.

they are looking to resolve the current sacramental crisis not only by renewing ritual practice but by revising their entire sacramental theology. This is based on the realization that classical sacramental theology is no longer able to respond to the issues posed by contemporary (Christian) man, issues which are stated in a language borrowed from the behavioral and human sciences.² In other words, the nominalist-juridical-ontological-non-historical mentality of many Counter-Reformation theologians finds few echoes in modern consciousness.³

Within the present context of crisis and renewal, sacramental theologians are searching for the exact nature and significance of sacramentality and of the sacraments in the Christian's life of faith and for the meaning, importance and role of sacramentality in the life of the Church. Motivated by a pastoral concern to renew an ailing sacramental theology, these theologians have dealt with several important themes which I shall present in the chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter One looks at the historical context in which post-Vatican II sacramental theology finds itself today. Chapter Two directs the reader's attention to the specific theological method needed in developing a sacramental theology for our age, Chapter Three

²Donald Keefe, "Toward a Renewal of Sacramental Theology," Thomist 44 (July 1980): 357.

³Ibid.

presents a new vision of sacramentality and situates the familiar sacraments within this vision: it describes the sacramental process within which sacramental rituals find themselves. The aim of this chapter is to show that harmony exists between grace that is always present and effective from within and that of a sacramental sign posited from without at a particular point in time. Chapter Four examines the three components which characterize sacramental theology: Christ, the Church, and the Human Person (both as symbolic and ritual being). Finally, Chapter Five presents a descriptive theological definition of the sacraments which summarizes the insights drawn from each previous chapter.

The purpose of this study is to paint an accurate and general picture of the contemporary approach being taken toward the "sacraments" and "sacramentality" and to explore the major theses put forth thusfar by modern Roman Catholic theologians. I am particularly concerned with what contemporary sacramental theologians are saying; what they have failed to say; what are the truly innovative or distinctive points of their presentations; and what weaknesses can be singled out in these presentations. Moreover, as a result of their conclusions, the findings of this thesis will help to show what future orientation sacramental theology will have to take.

In reading this study, it will help if the reader keeps in mind that, although no one article or book is the same, one desire seems to permeate every page and is best expressed by Joseph Martos in his book Doors to the Sacred. As Martos notes, sacramental theology should

be the cutting edge of the Christian theological enterprise since it is the situation in which theological reflection draws immediately from the people's religious activity for its own development and verification, and where theological clarification of Christian creed finds practical expression and enters into the historical growth of the Church's faith.⁴ Hence, we are aided by current theological investigation to take the long step in understanding a most important part of Christianity: the sacramentalism of Christian faith.⁵

⁴Joseph Martos, Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981), p. XI.

⁵Ibid., p. XIII.

CHAPTER 1

ROMAN CATHOLIC SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY AND THE CULTURAL- HISTORICAL AND ECCLESIAL CONTEXTS IN WHICH IT FINDS ITSELF

1.0 Introduction

Because Christianity is an historical religion it is imperative that the search for the meaning of the sacraments in the life of the contemporary Christian, and in particular the Roman Catholic, be preceded by an examination of the new cultural-historical context in which contemporary sacramental theology now finds itself. Equally important is that this sacramental theology be situated within the more precise post-Vatican II ecclesial context.

At the present time, modern industrialized culture of both western Europe and North America and the Roman Catholic Church are going through a difficult period of transition, characterized by numerous changes and shifts. The transformations which both of these realities are experiencing have had a direct impact on the Christian's understanding of both sacramentality as a whole and of the seven individual sacraments, and therefore on the Christian's vision of what contemporary sacramental theology should or should not be. The newly emerging culture is particularly important since its presuppositions are the vehicle through which contemporary theology in particular will take shape.¹ Furthermore it is all the more important when one considers

¹George Worgul, From Magic to Metaphor (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 19.

that the Christian community is none other than a culture within a culture. This is why, in looking for a contemporary vision of sacramentality as a whole and of the sacraments in particular, modern Roman Catholic theologians are forced to take a closer look at contemporary Western culture for answers. In addition they are obliged to pay closer attention to recent developments which have occurred within the Church itself and which, like those in culture, have inevitably led this Church to question its somewhat antiquated sacramental theology.

Motivated by these concerns and by the desire to understand better the sacramental theology which is now emerging, a great many contemporary writers have sought to precede their attempts at renewing their understanding of sacramental reality by examining the beliefs, social institutions and patterns of behavior characteristic of contemporary culture and by taking a closer look at the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council, particularly as these have affected the liturgy. In particular, these writers discuss recent developments both outside and inside the Roman Catholic Church which, over the past two decades, have not only forced the reexamination of certain beliefs and practices but have had a direct impact on our understanding of the sacramental dimension of Christian faith.

The contents of the present chapter are based in part on George Worgul's description of the present cultural-historical and ecclesial climates which he, as Raymond Vaillancourt, defines in terms of crisis.

And yet while "future historians may well have no choice than to label the twentieth century as 'in an age of crisis'"², Worgul limits his theological investigation to the last two decades (1960-80) since it is during this time interval that both culture and the Church are radically transformed. And with this in mind he describes the crisis situation within both culture and the Roman Catholic Church, especially as this affects sacramental rituals.

What is distinctive about Worgul's presentation is that, while many authors simply choose to describe the sacramental crisis spanning the last two decades, few, as Worgul, undertake a serious exposition and clarification of its cause. For, in his search for a contemporary vision of the sacraments, Worgul begins by undertaking the long neglected task of identifying the reason for the contemporary sacramental demise which is most visible in ritual. This is based on the notion that "if the origins of our sacramental crisis can be better understood, perhaps a solution to its turbulence can be proposed and a more adequate theology designed."³

Worgul's conclusion is that external and internal factors have given birth to the sacramental crisis in the midst of which Christians now find themselves. Externally, human history has entered a new cultural age with equally new and different presuppositions about the

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 3.

meaning, purpose and style of life.⁴ This cultural shift has brought about the erosion of the structures of the cultural-philosophical system upon which the former classical theology of the sacraments was based. Consequently, not only is it difficult to sustain questions and objections raised against the previous sacramental synthesis but the discipline itself is perceived as being in a state of confusion if not outright chaos.⁵ Internally, theoreticians and practitioners within the Church have recognized and accommodated themselves to this cultural shift and, as a result of this, have attempted to rebuild a sacramental theology which is based on new cultural presuppositions. This positive endeavour requires a certain gradual abandonment and dismantling of the former sacramental synthesis yet, rather than doing just that, the Second Vatican Council, through its liturgical reforms, has replaced this synthesis and, in so doing, has only intensified the existing feeling of confusion and chaos. In the final analysis, it is only by undertaking a closer examination of these external and internal factors that we can pinpoint the areas where our efforts at reconstructing a sacramental theology can be valuably spent.⁶

1.1 External Causes: The Cultural Crisis

Historically speaking, North American and European Roman Catholics who are members of both the secular and Christian communities

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 4.

are living in a transition period or "middle time"⁷ characterized by a shift from one type of culture to another. More precisely they are "living simultaneously through the dying process of a past culture and the gestation period of a new self-understanding of humankind that will be expressed in a new culture."⁸ In essence, they are situated between the prescript of a past age (classical culture) and the foreword to a new age (contemporary culture). In order to better grasp the significance of this cultural shift one should perhaps take a closer look at "culture" in general and subsequently focus on both classical and contemporary culture in particular.

Worgul affirms that culture is to be understood as including two fundamental elements. First, it is "a perception of reality by social groups expressed in and through its social institutions and patterns of behavior."⁹ Second, culture is essentially dependent on certain unconscious "principles" or "beliefs" (which he also refers to as the building blocks of culture)¹⁰, "which ground and sustain what is expressed in a conscious fashion in social institutions and patterns of behavior."¹¹ And it is this second element which, according to

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 4.

⁹Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 6.

¹¹Ibid., p. 5.

Worgul, is more significant than the first, especially if one attempts to comprehend the present cultural crisis and the specific sacramental crisis. What is important is that a change in cultural presuppositions or in the social institutions which bring them to conscious expression and integration will generate the first stages of a process which could lead to the formation of a new culture on both the unconscious and conscious levels.¹²

Culture as such can be viewed from two distinct poles, familiarly known as classical and contemporary. Classical culture on the one hand follows a pattern of deductive reasoning and hence moves from the universal and the absolute to the particular, from the general to the specific and also holds that reality is permanent or fixed, that the "essence" of a reality never changes.¹³ Contemporary culture on the other hand follows a pattern of inductive reasoning, and hence is concerned with the particular and the specific, while at the same time envisioning reality as dynamic and evolving.¹⁴

Given the fact that both classical and contemporary culture are diametrically opposed in the way they view life in general, and religious life in particular, it is not hard to see why the present period in which we are living is seen as one of crisis!

¹²Ibid., p. 6.

¹³Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 7-8.

The experience of turmoil and crisis in all of cultural life, including religious life, is arising from the shift in "first principles" as humankind completes the journey from classical to contemporary culture.¹⁵

The predominant cause, therefore, of our contemporary sacramental crisis is to be found in large measure outside the Church, i.e., in culture. And this external cause is, for the contemporary sacramental crisis, nothing other than the "change in cultural presuppositions, with a concurrent transformation of social institutions and patterns of behavior."¹⁶ This is only true if the Church, whether it admits it or not, is perceived as participating in culture which, today, is in a state of crisis. And this is possible only because, "at one and the same time, the ecclesial community is a product of revelation and culture, of the divine and the human."¹⁷ Consequently, not only do religions possess no magical immunization from the contemporary contagia for crisis but, in a like manner, the churches also have their "crisis of faith" and their "crisis of membership".¹⁸

Based on this all-important premise that the Christian community is a particular culture within a larger, more general culture, one can then understand why, upon the transformation and death of certain cultural elements, religious doctrines and beliefs expressed through

¹⁵Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁸Ibid.

them require new expression if their "substance" is to survive.¹⁹ Therefore, according to Worgul, if the unconscious beliefs of the culture change, and if as a consequence this classical culture's institutions are abandoned by the emerging contemporary culture because they are inconsistent with the unconscious presuppositions of this new culture²⁰, then the Christian community or culture, as part of the general culture, is the first to recognize a threat to its ritual and hence sacramental-symbolic life. And in a broader context, it acknowledges an equally important threat to its sacramental theology. This is based on the fact that ritual is the nodal point of both religious communities and cultures: not only is it closely aligned with the unconscious presuppositions of a culture but it is at the same time the heart of the ecclesial community, as it makes visible, by its very act of symbolizing, the sacramentality of all creation. And this is why, in recent times, ecclesial communities, in particular the Roman Catholic and Anglican, have turned to their worship patterns and religious rituals first when they attempt to express their beliefs in the context of a new culture.

Sacramental theology and culture are indissolubly linked and a shift in the presuppositions of a given culture entails a similar shift in the Christian culture's beliefs, and hence in its sacramental theology; and because Christianity is so tied to the particular culture

¹⁹Ibid., p. 10.

²⁰Ibid., p. 8.

in which it finds itself it is also affected by any change or crisis which this culture might experience. Thus, the present cultural shift entails an equally significant shift within the Church itself, as it leaves behind a "classical sacramental theology" and moves toward a "contemporary sacramental theology". The Church today "finds itself caught in tension between an old sacramental consciousness that has not yet disappeared and a new sacramental consciousness that is only in its early stages of gestation."²¹ The Church, like culture, now finds itself in a period of transition and it is this shift which Quebec theologian Vaillancourt describes in his book Toward a Renewal of Sacramental Theology. In effect he complements Worgul's presentation by defining the situation in which the Roman Catholic Church finds itself as a result of cultural crisis. In particular he shows that the Church is entering a third and new phase of the sacramental expression of its faith. Finally, Vaillancourt's point is that the Church has gone through three historical phases in which sacramental theory and practice have been heavily influenced by its cultural environment.

The present phase according to Vaillancourt follows two very crucial stages, the first beginning with the "first Christian communities and ending at the Middle Ages. This first phase is best described as a passage from sacramentality to sacramental rite, and emphasizes

²¹Peter Fink, "Investigating the Sacrament of Penance," Worship 54 (May 1980): 207.

the sacramental nature of the Church and the life people concretely live. A reflective sense of being Church exists in these early Christian centuries; and it is in this context that rituals are understood as expressions of the Church and its life in Christ.²² It is also during this period that St. Augustine speaks of the sacraments, which take place in the Church, as sacred signs or symbolic activities of something which is a mystery. As visible signs, sacraments are indicative of a hidden reality and symbolize God's love for humanity. According to this general definition, and to the fact that all creation is a sign of God, anything in the world is able to be considered sacramental.

The second phase according to Vaillancourt is characterized by the development of a technical concept of the sacraments which results in a new type of sacramental theology and life. In support of this is a period of systematization, of ritualism and rubricism, as well as of reductionism wherein "...in the process of analyzing them (the sacraments), the mystery was stripped to what some thought were the bare essentials. Then these essentials were put in the concrete of laws and rubrics."²³

During this second phase sacramental theology presents a narrow view of sacrament which reduces it to the rite of celebration itself.

²²Tad Guzie, The Book of Sacramental Basics (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 46.

²³William Bausch, A New Look at the Sacraments (West Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1977), p. 7.

and does not bring it into focus with the view of the Church as Sacrament.²⁴ It is during this time that the sense of being Church wanes and the Church comes to be defined in legalistic and institutional terms.²⁵ The sacramental dimension of the Church is reduced to mechanical sacramental rites which, as exclusively sacramental, produce grace (seen here as something) in an individual (rather than ecclesial) context.²⁶ Sacraments are "things" which you "go to church" (the building) to "receive".²⁷ They are looked upon as isolated and reduced rites you watch rather than as celebrating actions between God and human persons. Furthermore, theological discussion on the sacraments centers on matter in conjunction with form whereby the outward structure of the sacraments is set in opposition to its inward structure. Stress is put on validity and liceity as well as on causality.

Much of medieval theology places great weight on the presence of the Lord at the moment of the sacramental celebration. It sees God's initiative towards the individual as linked with the Church's sacramental system so intimately that grace is liable not to happen

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Guzie, p. 46.

²⁶ Vaillancourt, pp. 20-21.

²⁷ Guzie, p. 33.

for a person unless a sacrament is received. It also holds that we are all sinners and that we come to the celebration of sacraments in order to receive something we do not possess, i.e., God's grace.²⁸

Sacraments in this view are also looked upon as possessions rather than gifts and as such as causes of grace, preserves of the sacred specialist who dispenses them and no longer the property of the Christian community at large. The sacraments are something the specialist gives out, not mysteries celebrated by the community over which he presides.²⁹ Here the priesthood slips from being ministerial to becoming a caste system; a servant becomes a master; a celebrant becomes a dispenser.³⁰

Finally, it is during this second period that people tend to verbalize rather than to do; that the sacraments become separated from life. Basic body instincts are over-intellectualized, a process which finds completion by the arrival of the technological society and which is marked by the decline of symbolism.

Therefore a more restricted usage of "sacrament" prevails in the Roman Catholic Church in the West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, years which have long been remembered for scholasticism and Thomas Aquinas, and for the Council of Lyons which officially taught that the sacraments in the Catholic Church corresponded to seven

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Bausch, p. 8.

³⁰ Ibid.

specific rites or ritual actions. And inadequate as this medieval theology was, for it failed to adequately explain the central fact of symbolism, it has dominated later thinking about sacraments. It is therefore during the Middle Ages characterized by a "thing mentality", that the sacraments of the Church emerged in the forms that they would retain until the mid-twentieth century: their number was fixed at seven, their practice became more uniform, and their general theology established.³¹ Furthermore, the sacramental theology which was formulated during this time is what is commonly referred to as "classical sacramental theology".

Phase three coincides with the period described by Worgul as the "time between the last breath of the old age and the birth cry of the new age"³², yet it deals specifically with the sacraments and with what is occurring in the Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council. It goes beyond the causes of the sacramental crisis and presents an actual description of numerous shifts which have taken place in theology in general and in sacramental theology in particular as a result of this situation.

In agreement with Worgul, I have indicated that modern Christians are presently in the midst of a shift, from classical to contemporary theology, which is spawned by an equally significant cultural shift. In a like manner Christians are experiencing a crisis in sacramental theology which finds its origins in a deeper crisis of culture.

³¹ Martos, p. 68.

³² Worgul, p. 7.

Furthermore, I have tried to show that "classical" (sacramental) theology emerges during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially with Thomas Aquinas and has until recently held considerable sway in the Roman Catholic Church.³³ In light of these observations it became obvious why, for Roman Catholics, Vatican II marks the end of one era and the beginning of another.

Before the Council, a narrow conception of Scholasticism was a very strong force within the Roman Catholic Church; after the Council, more Catholics adopted new ways of thinking and talking about beliefs. Even more interesting was the fact that, already prior to Vatican II, Scholasticism was no longer being viewed as the unifying force in Roman Catholic theology. Not only was it challenged intellectually by modern philosophies and ideologies but by the biblical renewal as well. These two major movements paved the way for the liturgical reform of Vatican II which called for a thorough reexamination of the Church's liturgy and an updating of its sacramental practices. Hence the shift from Tridentine Roman Catholicism and doctrine to a more experiential, pastoral and practical interpretation of the sacraments in Roman Catholic theology marks the beginning of a third historical phase.

What characterizes this period is the awareness that the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, traditional since the Middle Ages, are not co-extensive with sacramental reality in its entirety. The sacramental action of the Church is seen as greater than that of

³³ Thomas Marsh, "Theology 9: Sacrament as Sign," Furrow 22 (October 1971): 622.

the celebration, both in its institutional and pastoral activity.³⁴ Vaillancourt describes this third and newest phase toward which Vatican II is directing Catholics as in part a return to the first.³⁵ The narrow medieval perception of the sacramental rite as exclusively sacramental is being abandoned for a broader notion of sacramentality. This third phase recaptures the view of the Church as sacrament, of Christ as the symbolic presence of God's self-giving love and mercy and hence of all reality, now perceived by the faithful as "in Christ".

Today the idea of being Church has become the starting-point for all sound sacramental theology. In this perspective, our rituals are sacramental because we the Church, with Christ, are the core sacrament, celebrating in many ritual forms the grace and love of God.³⁶

Therefore, this third phase is characterized by the undermining of the classical theological framework which proves inadequate in answering questions now asked by modern Christians: classical sacramental theology no longer is seen as a valuable instrument for critique, guidance and understanding. The modern sacramental theology now being envisioned represents a return to the best of the scholastic presentation and to the Patristic values formerly ignored.

What emerges as a result of Vaillancourt's investigation is the

³⁴Vaillancourt, p. 24.

³⁵Ibid., p. 27.

³⁶Guzie, p. 46.

realization that in each of its historical phases the liturgy has been heavily influenced by its cultural environment. In fact, in the previous two phases, both sacramental theology and sacramental life were authentic expressions of the culture of that period, and of a Church that was able to make that culture its own and carve out a place for itself in it. The fact that they can no longer do so is indicative of a crisis situation and of a need for a change.

Finally along these same lines, the work of French liturgist P.M. Gy helps us acknowledge the more specific relationship that exists between sacramental theory and practice and the socio-historical evolution of the human situations on which deal the sacraments. In other words, sacramental theory and practice is affected by variations in socio-historical situations and, if we choose to relate human life and history with the sacraments, we must consider the fact that different socio-historical situations along with cultures potentially call for a different interpretation of "sacrament", although this interpretation, without having absolute value, must still be verified in light of the gospel. Furthermore Gy also helps us see that only an evolutionary understanding of the Church in its relation to the variable world and sacraments will do if it is to be part of the ongoing process of history.³⁷

³⁷ Pierre-Marie Gy, "Problèmes de théologie sacramentaire," La Maison Dieu 110 (1972): 130.

1.2 Internal Causes

1.2.1 The Positive Value of the Liturgical Renewal of Vatican II: the other Side of the Crisis

Contemporary theological scholarship has negatively evaluated the classical synthesis underpinning catechetical traditions because of its cross-disciplinary research and reflection. Within the Roman Catholic Church itself, the Second Vatican Council's statement on liturgical renewal and its concomitant revision of sacramental ritual practice has inspired in a positive way a renewal of the once normative classical sacramental theology. As Vaillancourt tells us, Vatican II in effect came to grips with the entire sacramental reality of the Church through the revision and renewal of rituals. It did not elaborate a new theological synthesis of the sacraments but provided a document on liturgy and revised all sacramental rituals. This had a major impact on the sacramental order. And it turned the great values and tendencies of the contemporary person into the basis for a sacramental expression of Christian faith and, in so doing, prepared the Church for its third and present phase.³⁸

Certain undeniable values were promoted by the liturgical renewal as this found expression in the revision of the sacramental rites, in the norms for celebrating these rites, and in pastoral practice relating to the sacramental life.³⁹

³⁸Vaillancourt, p. 2.

³⁹Ibid., p. 1.

More specifically, the values in question can be subsumed under the following headings: authenticity of expression and connection with human life; participation and communion; creativity and spontaneity; importance of the word of God; importance of meaning.⁴⁰

1.2.1.1. Authenticity of Expression and Connection with Life

The conciliar renewal discerned the need of the human being to bring both one's being and one's personality to fulfillment through self-expression. Hence "the entire renewal of the liturgy and of the rituals relates to this need for true and authentic self-expression."⁴¹ The Christian liturgy thus becomes a locus of vital self-expression and, as a result, there is a close connection between sacramental expression and the life of both of the people of God generally and of each participant in particular:

The rituals clearly show a concern to meet the vital needs of the people, to link up with their daily experience, and to foster the authentic expression of their lives in their entirety, within the perspective of faith.⁴²

1.2.1.2. Participation and Communion

Vital self-expression within the perspectives of faith requires participation and community. And the renewal pointed out quite specific means of effecting communion and participation: it promoted the use of the vernacular; opened the possibility of adaptation and

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 2.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

choice in regard to prayers and biblical texts. In sum, the renewal enabled pastors to develop a liturgy which would appeal to what is deepest and most vital in the Christian.⁴³

1.2.1.3. Creativity and Spontaneity

The "new" tendency to creativity and spontaneity represents a break with tradition, several centuries old, of ritualism. "We might say that Vatican II has, paradoxically, replaced the rubric of ritualism with the rubric of spontaneity and creativity."⁴⁴ Spontaneity and creativity refer to the "use of living symbols that are perceived as natural and do not require learned explanations to be understood by the human mind and heart."⁴⁵

Spontaneity involves more than just the permission to use alternate ways of carrying out a rite: "it implies, above all, an accord between symbol and those who make use of it in order to express the inexpressible."⁴⁶ This means that no symbol, and hence no sacrament, can be forced on anyone and that furthermore, certain symbols can even be rejected if they fail to correspond to the conception of the western world that is generally held by the Christian living in this world, or if they do not fit in with the life of the community.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

Creativity, on the other hand, is self-explanatory. What is important, however, is that although the Council stated a number of principles that fostered such creativity, it made it quite clear that such principles should be applied gradually. Failure to do so would simply usher in a crisis, a situation which I shall describe shortly.

1.2.1.4. The Importance of the Word of God

The general norms of the Constitution on the Liturgy gave a great deal of importance to the place of the word of God in the liturgy of the sacraments and to the ultimate connection between rites and words. The significance of the document stems from the fact that it gave a privileged place to the word of God in the celebration.⁴⁷

1.2.1.5. The Importance of Meaning

The entire renewal, both that which was advocated in the Constitution on the Liturgy and that which was being inaugurated by the new rituals, located sacramental life within a definite universe of meaning. It thus rendered the Christian people less susceptible to the temptation of giving the sacramental rites a magical interpretation.

All want meaningful celebrations that can evoke a maximum of significance from the actual experience of people, and on the basis of this experience, reveal to them what they themselves are, what they are called to be, and what God is for them.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

The question of "meaning" is an all-important one during our present time of crisis: it is in fact illustrative of a crucial shift which is taking place in our understanding of sacramental reality:

Why the sacraments? Why does the Church use these symbolic actions to express its faith and its relationship to God? What is the significance of this sacramental activity? What "power" does it contain?⁴⁹

It has therefore become indispensable to invent once again a language that is intelligible to our contemporaries, and that expresses the dynamism of the sacraments in its fullness. Seen from this point of view, the present crisis can be perceived as beneficial in that it raises basic questions of meaning and induces us to pursue the aggiornamento in greater depth⁵⁰: "In any future pastoral ministry of the sacraments, we cannot be content with the "how", but must push on to the "why"."⁵¹ This positive aspect of the crisis will be dealt with in the third chapter of this thesis which discusses the contemporary "meaning" now attributed to both "sacramentality" and "sacraments" by present-day sacramental theologians.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. I.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. II.

⁵¹ Ibid.

1.2.2 The Gap between Sacramental Theory and Practice:
the Limitations of the Liturgical Renewal

By promoting certain important values in the liturgical renewal, the Second Vatican Council was a positive force in the overall renewal taking place within the Church. And yet at the same time it also created an internal crisis: the negative impact it had on the sacramental order could be attributed to the absence of a concrete statement outlining a new sacramental theology which resulted in a serious gap between Church theory and practice.

Tad Guzie's recent book entitled The Book of Sacramental Basics (1981), which is also written with the renewal flowing from Vatican II in mind, grasps the mood of the present post-conciliar context when he notes the following. While it is indeed true that Vatican II has brought forth many new things, new ways of understanding and celebrating faith, it is equally true that it takes time for the old and the new to come together comfortably. This is why we, today, seem to stand with one foot planted in each camp.

This seems to also describe where we stand with the sacraments, as we move into the last quarter of the twentieth century. All our rites have been rewritten, but we bring to them a mixture of attitudes flowing from two different schools of thought.⁵²

⁵²Guzie, pp. 1, 2.

While the liturgical renewal has been brewing in theological circles for many years prior to the Council, it is often reduced to what transpired as a result of Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy since it is under the impetus of this document that the sacramental ritual action of the Church underwent significant and much-needed changes. And yet this very same document left untouched the actual sacramental theology or theory, on which such sacramental ritual action was based. Hence, while the theoreticians and practitioners within the Church recognized and accommodated themselves to the cultural shift or crisis by introducing liturgical reforms, they inadvertently intensified the feeling of confusion and chaos which already prevailed. And this faltering pastoral rush to bandage the wounds of the Church with the new Church theory and practice recorded the final elements of the Church's contribution to its own sacramental crisis.⁵³

The absence of a revised sacramental theology created an ambiguous situation where rituals, despite new directions, often reflected the dual mentalities of both the pastors and the Christian community. Pastors, motivated by the liturgical renewal, were concretely changing the liturgy and sacramental practices and yet, despite the values promoted in the Constitution on the Liturgy, the celebrating liturgical assembly still continued to be motivated by a catechetically inspired

⁵³Worgul, p. 16.

understanding of sacrament, and was unable to cope with these practical changes. In the absence of any contemporary sacramental theology, sacramental rituals lost their meaning. Hence there not only ensued a crisis in practice (sacramental ritual action) but in theory as well (sacramental theology in general). Thus the Church itself precipitated and initiated its own sacramental crisis⁵⁴, bringing about a decline of faith and membership which itself is only compounded by the present cultural crisis characterized by a shift in the basic beliefs underlying the existing culture. This only proves the point made by the American Franciscan ecclesiologist Kenan Osborne, that although

...the contemporary liturgical renewal in the Roman Catholic Church has centered rightfully in the renewal of the various sacraments (but) no liturgical renewal occurs without a renewed sacramental theology.⁵⁵

In view of the fact that the Christian consciousness is in the process of resituating the sacramental dimension of Christian existence itself⁵⁶, the contemporary theological task must be to restore coherence to sacramental theology, and to integrate sacramental theology into the whole of a renewed theology and sacramental practice: in order to avoid a further crisis the theologian must discover a

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 11.

⁵⁵Kenan Osborne, "Methodology and the Christian Sacraments," Worship 48 (November 1974): 536.

⁵⁶Vaillancourt, p. 30.

"new sacramental theology", undergirding the liturgical reform.⁵⁷

Contemporary theologians and pastors should see new pastoral practice in line with meaning and hence in connection with life. They must give sacramental reality a concrete form capable of stimulating the faith of our contemporaries, by enabling them to express it in a truly adequate way.⁵⁸ And yet in so doing they must not forget to penetrate the basic intuition at work in the classical questions of sacramental theology, in order to incorporate these into a new synthesis.⁵⁹

1.2.3 The Lack of Historical Consciousness

For Martos the unsettled state of current sacramental practice is not the only internal cause of the present crisis in sacramental theology. Certainly, one other important reason is the tardy and minimal application of historical study to this area of Christian life and faith. Historical consciousness has not only been a hallmark of modern thought but has had a major impact on behavioral studies as well.⁶⁰ Yet up to now, little has been done to provide a coherent historical picture of Christian sacramental thought.⁶¹

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 34.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 33

⁶⁰Martos, p. XI.

⁶¹Ibid.

And while other theologians deal indirectly with this question, Martos makes it the subject of his first book, Doors to the Sacred, in which he presents a comprehensive and excellent historical study of sacramental theology in general and of the seven sacramental rituals in particular.

One point which Martos makes and which is central to his argument stands out as being particularly important for our present discussion. Basically, he shows us that a religious experience, and in particular a sacramental experience, is a human and therefore an historical experience, and, as a result, it has its place in a work of history and can be an historical fact.⁶² And although this might seem obvious enough, according to Martos, it is only until recently that the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of the seven sacraments was largely independent of historical facts, be this intentional or not.

Christianity always regarded itself as an historical religion based on factual events, and Catholicism in particular prided itself on its centuries of continued tradition.⁶³ Yet until the end of the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic understanding of theology, worship and Scripture was fundamentally non-historical. This was based on the belief that truths of faith were changeless and unaffected by history. In such a context sacramental rituals themselves were assumed

⁶²Ibid., p. 7.

⁶³Ibid., p. 134.

to have remained substantially unchanged for nineteen hundred years, even though there is no direct evidence that this was actually so.⁶⁴ It seems more likely than not that many important facts lay buried in Vatican libraries and archives and thus remained unknown.

It soon became apparent that things had not always been the same in the past, which opened the possibility for things to be different in the future.⁶⁵ Hence historical research in the nineteenth century made Roman Catholics begin to reevaluate the possibility of historical change and by the twentieth century the majority believed that many of the Catholic Church's beliefs and practices had indeed undergone certain changes. Roman Catholics now believed that the Church was entitled to modify ecclesiastical regulations and adapt its forms of worship to the customs of different peoples as long as nothing else was altered.⁶⁶ Roman Catholics also admitted a certain amount of doctrinal development, yet considered it to be an evolution from less to more perfect formulations of Christian doctrines.⁶⁷ Hence historical differences in sacramental theology were regarded as stages in evolution from a lower to a higher, more perfect form, of the Church's understanding of its sacramental rituals and consequently, historical accounts on sacraments were written from this terminal point of view.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Twentieth-century historical studies began to suggest that such a model for interpreting changes in the Church's beliefs and practices was inadequate.⁶⁹ And it is within this context that Martos proposes a model which takes into account historical facts and acknowledges the validity of previous traditions yet allows for the possibility of going beyond those traditions.⁷⁰ Not only does it account for the internal evolution of sacramental theory and practice but it also remains open to further interpretation by believers and theologians.

Basically this model shows that ideas and experiences, thinking and doing, theory and practice, mutually influence each other over the course of time. More specifically, with regard to the sacraments, the sacramental experiences of Christians in one period of history generate a sacramental theology which in turn influences the sacramental experiences of Christians in a later period, when this process repeats itself⁷¹, although in real life this is not nearly as neat and simple. Yet when applied to the Church and its current sacramental crisis, our understanding of this process is somewhat clearer. First, we are conscious of the fact that sacramental rituals as we experience them today and which still, despite liturgical reforms, are based on classical sacramental theology, prove to be inadequate sacramental expression of Christian faith and life. As a consequence, this generates

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 6.

a new sacramental theology, as proposed in this thesis, and subsequently new sacramental rituals. This will influence the sacramental experiences of future Christians and thereby generate a new sacramental theology.

Traces of Martos' model can be found in the writings of Gy, Donald Keefe, Vaillancourt, to mention but a few. And what seems to emerge is the obvious yet oft neglected conclusion: that, because Christianity is indissolubly tied to human life, history, and culture, sacramental theology and practice should reflect this newfound consciousness of history and historical change. For if the Church is in history and the world and there is no consciousness of this basic intuition then does this not dilute the Roman Catholic confidence in the sacramental immanence of Christ in the world of our daily encounter?⁷²

What is important is that, because sacramental theology has not always been the same in the past, this makes it possible for things to be different in the future. Such a renewed consciousness of history and of historical change makes us see that our understanding of sacramentality can be broadened in a way that makes it encompass more than simply the seven liturgical rites by applying it not only to Christ and the Church but to all creation. It means that by opening the door onto a modern interpretation of history in which the past is not absolutized and each era is permitted its own insights we can now

⁷²Keefe, p. 357.

realize that the Middle Ages are no longer the golden age of religious understanding: that the insights of one era should not be normative for all ages.⁷³ It means that we can in a way go back to before the Middle Ages for a renewed understanding of the sacraments which covers not only the past twenty centuries but can be open to developments in future centuries as well.⁷⁴

1.3. Concluding Remarks

Of the many Roman Catholic theologians whose works have been published over the past two decades, only a handful bear witness to the present cultural-historical and ecclesial context in which sacramental theology now finds itself. Yet all seem to agree that during the difficult period of cultural and ecclesial transition, which Worgul and Vaillancourt describe in great detail, the sacramental crisis in the Church seems to be symptomatic of a more serious problem: a crisis of faith and membership externally spawned by the contemporary crisis of culture, and internally compounded by the Church's creation of a confusing gap in its theory and practice⁷⁵, as well as by its lack of historical consciousness. However, only Worgul enriches this view by adding that, while these are external and internal causes of the crisis, the crisis itself is located in the ecclesial root metaphor, observable in the ritual arena. For if a crisis is recognized in

⁷³Guzie, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁴Martos, p. 7.

⁷⁵Worgul, p. 230.

Christian sacraments, attention should be directed to the root metaphor of Christianity - the Paschal Mystery (the Death-Resurrection-Ascension of the Word of God, Christ Jesus) - as the real locus of this crisis.⁷⁶ The sacramental crisis reaches the very heart of Christianity for it indicates that the basis for the Christian world view or root metaphor is being called into question. It suggests that people are increasingly abandoning the Christian root metaphor as the key reality which brings meaning to their experience of life. It also suggests a decline in membership which implies fragile faith.⁷⁷ And such a lack of adherence to the Christian root metaphor is linked to its inadequate ritual expression. Hence the crisis is indeed located in rituals which are hindering the Christian root metaphor. Furthermore this metaphor, which is supposed to give ultimate meaning to life (as the Christian culture's unique world view) is itself being challenged by alternate world views and its power to resolve the binary oppositions of life is being questioned.⁷⁸

In the final analysis, knowing the real crisis and attempting to resolve it are important steps toward ensuring that the Christian community has a future in history. In essence the survival of this community is contingent upon the quality of its sacramental life. And

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 227.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 229.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 230.

since this is currently in a state of turmoil, efforts must be made, within the context of post-conciliar renewal, at revising the Church's sacramental theology, which has proved inadequate to this point.

Left unresolved the present crisis can only worsen and eventually lead to destruction of the Christian community. Yet, once resolved, this Church can once again actively and wholeheartedly participate in its sacramental life, made meaningful and real by being totally renewed.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

2.0 Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrates that significant changes have taken place within the Roman Catholic Church mainly as a result of the shift from a classical to a contemporary perception of culture, and of the liturgical reforms inaugurated at the Second Vatican Council. Within this transitional period, a period of crisis and yet of renewal, theologians have begun searching for a contemporary vision of the sacraments, one which meets head on the demands of contemporary western culture. Yet even before theological reflection per se begins, these theologians must fight the battle of method for

The contemporary theological enterprise requires that one clearly articulate the path one will pursue in research and reflection and clarify any presuppositions which accompany this endeavour.¹

Motivated by this concern several of the sacramental theologians whose work has been examined confront the issue of theological method. Based on their findings, I propose to show the nature of the present orientation and character of theological method in general and, more particularly, as it is applied to the study of the sacraments. First,

¹Worgul, p. 22.

I will explore the meaning of the general term "method" as well as theological method as a whole, and subsequently examine the method proposed by the various authors who seek to employ such a framework in contemporary sacramental theology.

2.1 What is Method: A Look at how the Theologian "does" Theology

Bernard Lonergan, in Method in Theology, articulates the deeper and more important dimensions of method, often simplistically defined as "a set of procedures or rules":

A method is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results. There is a method, then, where there are distinct operations, where each operation is related to the others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be indefinitely repeated, and where the fruits of such repetition are, not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive.²

In more simplified terms, method can be understood as "a recurring process or pattern which yields continual insight and advancement of knowledge and results";³ and it is a "framework for creative collaboration."⁴

Method "is not a process which exists independent of the methodologist or researcher, but actually arises from and is continually

²Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology (New York: Herder, 1972), p. 4.

³Worgul, p. 23.

⁴Ibid.

grounded in his or her mental operations."⁵ These mental operations, which can take place simultaneously or in temporal spans, consist in the fourfold process of human knowledge and can be summarized under four headings: experience; understanding; judgement; and decision. Hence while the methodological pattern or process is understood to flow from the field or area under investigation, it reflects the basic pattern of human thought.⁶ Thus, like Husserl, says Worgul, Lonergan acknowledges the influence of the knower on the subject known.⁷

In the general context of method, theology like any other discipline is basically something that happens within individuals, and which they experience: the objective and subjective worlds do not exist in a dichotomous relationship. Theologians, like scientists, appropriate what they already are and reflect on themselves. And by turning their attention to the subject, the personal experience of knowing and loving, they point to the transcendental anthropological method. As Karl Rahner also demonstrates, this method is used to investigate the conditions of possibility for our very act of knowing, and is applicable to any other form of study. In an almost pre-philosophical sense, a transcendental line of inquiry, regardless of the particular subject matter in which it is applied, is present when and to the extent that it raises the question of the conditions in which knowledge of a specific

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., pp. 23-24.

⁷Ibid., p. 28.

subject is possible in the knowing subject himself.⁸ In any act of cognition it is not only the object known but also the subject knowing that is involved. Hence the mutual interconnection and inter-conditioning process between the subject knowing and the object known precisely as known and knowable are in themselves the object of transcendental inquiry. And knowledge on the part of the knowing subject himself is always at the same time a knowledge of the metaphysical (and in an objective sense transcendental) structure of the object in itself.

Lonergan writes that the goal of any method is to "draw closer to the truth of any reality under investigation and to allow the correlation of knowledge within different functional specializations".⁹ More particularly, he sees the work of theological reflection as spread out over these eight steps. Thus, in order to study any question(s) theologians must progress from one step to another, in the order in which these are set out: research, interpretation, historical perspective, dialectic; foundations, doctrines, systematics, communications.

The first four steps comprise what Lonergan calls stage I. These take place in every individual, in a flowing movement, no matter what topic he/she chooses to study. But in Christian theology, some-

⁸Karl Rahner, "Reflections on Methodology in Theology," Theological Investigations II (1970): 87. (hereafter cited as "Reflections")

⁹Worgul, p. 24.

thing happens mid-way, which Lonergan designates as a "conversion experience". This experience is particularly important since it brings about a radical shift in horizon, horizons being perspective points from which one looks at a reality. This conversion is a personal act of faith and this shift in consciousness influences all the thoughts and actions of theologians. Faith then plays a very crucial role in their reflection. And though this shift most likely occurs prior to the very first step, it is prescinded and thus, takes place at a higher level of consciousness whereby theologians go back over the same process, this time orienting their reflection towards the future and not the past. This particular point will be elaborated shortly.

2.2 The Methodological Shift

Today we are conscious of the fact that a significant shift is taking place in the modern Roman Catholic's understanding of the Christian sacraments. Equally significant are the changes occurring now in the area of theological methodology which has an explicit bearing on sacramental theology. Therefore we must first examine contemporary theological methodology in general and then turn our attention to the specific method needed in developing a sacramental theology for our age.

In the many articles exploring his transcendental, anthropological method for doing theology, Rahner shows how this particular methodology, like its counterparts, is conditioned by a new methodological context

which has been strongly reinforced in post-conciliar times. And such a new situation provides current Roman Catholic theology with its starting-point. Philosophical and theological pluralism now constitutes the context in which individual theologians must perform their tasks and which demands that they engage in a direct dialogue with modern natural and social science. In the concrete situation determined by the cultural, intellectual, social, and natural sciences, it is a science, no longer mediated by philosophy which constitutes theology's partner-in-dialogue. Furthermore, for the first time in the history of theological thought, theology is not only conditioned by history, but is also aware of being so unavoidably conditioned. This means that the teaching offices of bishops and popes and all theologians are placed in a totally new situation. And it is to this new situation, which is also composed of plural (philosophies and) theologies, that the Church's official statements and the theologians' findings are addressed.

2.2.1 Theological Method: Inductive Reasoning

Generally speaking the articles and books written in Roman Catholic theological circles during the past sixteen years illustrate a shift from one form of methodology to another. And the methodological starting-point for all theological investigation is based on a different type of reasoning, which is characteristic of our present culture.

Modern theologians begin by looking at the particular, the individual, the concrete, and move toward the general, the universal, the abstract:

they follow a pattern of inductive as opposed to deductive reasoning. And this shift will have direct bearing on the entire theological enterprise, including anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramental theology.

2.2.2 Theological Method: Existential and Historical

Another characteristic of the contemporary Christian methodology can be found at the heart of David Tracy's methodological vision as well as in Maurice Blondel's method of immanence, so ably summarized in Worgul's chapter on theological method. Important for our present purpose is the point that theologians must today begin by describing what appears in human experience in an attempt to detect a dimension of life which can be called the "religious dimension". They must uncover the areas of human existence which could be labelled "sacramental".¹⁰ Secondly, they must explore the theological dimension of the sacraments by constructing a system which will allow an integrated vision. This dimension will correspond to an analysis of Christian texts and lead to a correlation of the theological elements with the anthropological results.¹¹ Furthermore they must critically confront their own tradition through history and hermeneutics.¹² In other words,

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 32-33.

¹¹Ibid., p. 33.

¹²Ibid.

Christian theologians must confront God's revealing word with their understanding of their existence in the world; they must examine what appears in concrete human existence in particular and confront their own tradition with it so as to reformulate ailing sacramental theological principles: they must theologially interpret collected anthropological data. Not only must they begin with culture but they must also construct a theological synthesis in terms of this emerging culture's presuppositions or beliefs. In From Magic to Metaphor, Worgul demonstrates this methodological approach by showing how theologians first begin with the human situation, the "immanent", and attempt to demonstrate that the theological claims about sacraments "fit" the data which emerges from an anthropological analysis of human ritual behavior.¹³ Worgul truly believes that for contemporary Christians this is the only way to render human ritual, and hence all Christian sacramental ritual action, intelligible and meaningful in their lives.

To view the sacraments as being congruent with human experience and to analyze thoroughly the anthropological dimension of the sacraments is to move toward a more engaged theological anthropology.¹⁴ Theological anthropology shows that anthropocentricity and theo-

¹³ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁴ Bruno Brinkman, "On Sacramental Man: V The Way of Sacramental Operationalism," Heythrop Journal 14 (1973): 410.

centricity in theology are not opposites but are strictly one and the same thing, yet seen from two different sides. Similarly, this anthropological focus in theology is not opposed to or in competition with Christology and hence with Ecclesiology: Christian anthropology is only able to fulfil its whole purpose if it understands the human person as the potentia obedientialis for the "hypostatic union", while the idea of the God-man needs proof of a transcendental orientation in the person's being and history under grace.¹⁵ Rahner's Christological and theological anthropology interprets human existence as rooted in the person and work of Jesus who, because of the hypostatic union, is the fulfillment of the human person's obediental potency, the supreme actualization of what this person is as spirit. And theological anthropology, having mystery as its horizon, as the incomprehensible ground of existence, in effect introduces the question of God in relation to human existence.

Into the prevailing situation of tension between the traditional doctrine and scepticism of it, a theological anthropology must be introduced. Hence, reflecting the perspective of the writings under study, Rahner shows how the starting-point for theological investigation is not a scientific system but concrete human person whose mystery no science can fathom. Yet it is not the person as an abstraction but as he/she lives and moves in his/her concrete human situation and in

¹⁵ Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology," Theological Investigations 9 (1967): 28-29.

his/her daily routine: it is shared human existence. The point here is not to give new knowledge about the human person but to articulate on the level of conceptual discourse what he/she already knows on the experiential level. Such a philosophy of human existence is called anthropology. And yet this method is more than philosophical/meta-physical (wherein Christ is absent) but it is a theological anthropology in that it proposes these observations concerning human experience, as the formal and most fundamental presuppositions of Christianity about the human person. The starting-point of this method is human experience, the person as a whole, as both human and Christian. This is what is meant by "existential".

Both Rahner and Worgul underline the basic problem which concerns Christianity's place in today's world. Many persons today feel that numerous theological statements are just forms of mythology and that they can no longer seriously believe in them. Although Rahner points out that this is ultimately false, he still shows that there are real reasons behind this impression, and he traces the modern person's difficulties to a common formal structure: theological statements are not formulated in such a way that people can see how what is meant by them is connected with their understanding of themselves, as witnessed to in their own experience. Rahner's basic attitude is much like his contemporaries': by contrast with the ancient cosmocentrism, it is anthropocentric (and thereby theocentric and Christocentric), it is transcendental as well as personalist, and takes a person's historicity

and existence seriously. What is significant is that this "transcendental anthropological theology" is intended to serve a kerygmatic function, so that the harmony of Christianity with the mentality of the present time can come into the open. And he, like the other Roman Catholic thinkers, imposes the following task on theologians: to deal with the content of theology in a strictly scientific way and at the same time face the question "How can this be said to the person in the street?" Only continued, creative, critical research following the initiative of these theologians will lead toward a solution. Only an anthropologically oriented theology will provide an answer.

In his article "Pour une anthropologie sacramentelle", the famous French systematic theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu analyzes the anthropological dimension of the sacraments as well as the current emphasis on the importance of dialogue between theology and the social and human sciences. In essence Chenu simply reiterates a common thread in many of the articles on which I have focused; namely that the task of theologians is to "parler humainement des valeurs divines".¹⁶ And this is based on the realization that "plus la théologie est théologie, plus les sciences humaines seront humaines"; "plus Dieu est Dieu, plus l'homme est homme."¹⁷ This implies that the words

¹⁶ Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Pour une anthropologie sacramentelle," La Maison Dieu 119 (1974): 85.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

"anthropological", defined by Chenu as "la science de l'homme" and "sacramental" are indissociable one from the other, not only methodologically but constitutively as well:

Nous ne pouvons engager le sacrement qu'en consubstantialité avec l'homme...(car) la sacramentalité se réfère à l'être humain. La régulation du sacrement, de la vie sacramentaire, dans la distribution, dans l'exercice, le fonctionnement, les ritualisations, n'est pas à chercher en Dieu mais dans l'homme.¹⁸

A similar reasoning is made by Bruno Brinkman:

...if the sacramentalism of Christian life is to be recommended to the secularist or unbeliever (and to the believer as well) then it must be shown to be a human as well as a divine way of communication.¹⁹

Under the impulse of a growing anthropological concern and as a result of emphasizing human experience as a starting-point for theologizing about sacramentality in general and sacraments in particular, we are today witnessing to an important shift from the "splendid isolation" of theology and other sciences to a greater openness to these sciences, especially the human sciences (psychology, sociology, and anthropology).²⁰ For as Chenu tells us:

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁹Brinkman, "On Sacramental Man: I Language Patterning," Heythrop Journal 13 (October 1972): 371.

²⁰Worgul, p. XI.

Plus la théologie est théologie, plus les sciences humaines auront titre à y intervenir... C'est de quoi apaiser les craintes de certains de mes confrères sociologues qui craignent que les théologiens ne récupèrent, au sens²¹ péjoratif du terme, les sciences humaines et leurs résultats, en les manipulant.²¹

Most important here therefore is that, in order to renew sacramental theology, contemporary theologians as members of the hermeneutical and worship community will look first of all to human experience, through the human sciences, and to a faith-inspired salvation-historical view of creation, as well as to a dynamic view of revelation, and transpose their findings onto current outmoded or unintelligible ritual practices and challenge their outdated theological basis accordingly.

.2.3 The Phenomenological-Christological Method of Sacramental Theology: An Inductive-Existential-Historical Method.

We can firmly state that, in theological efforts to understand the religious phenomenon of the sacraments, one's methodology is of the utmost importance. Yet, as Osborne points out

...it would seem, however, that no one method can lead to a satisfying grasp of the issue, due to the fact that the sacraments themselves are highly complex, involving a number of dynamics from various dimensions of both human and divine life.²²

²¹Chenu, pp. 87-88.

²²Osborne, p. 537.

Furthermore, a thorough reading of the many current writings which form the basis of my research as well as a closer examination of the work of Vaillancourt, Worgul, Chenu, Osborne and Keefe, leads me to suggest that the greater portion of today's theologians who are concerned with discovering a contemporary Roman Catholic sacramental theology advocate a combination of two methodological approaches. They in effect single out two necessary elements for special emphasis in a renewed understanding of Christian sacraments by proposing a methodology that incorporates both phenomenology (i.e., the study of human experience via anthropology, psychology, sociology, and philosophy) and Christology (as well as ecclesiology). This amounts to combining the previously described anthropological and theological dimensions of the sacraments:

It is clear that two elements necessarily comprise the content of any contemporary investigation into sacramental theology: those which are anthropological and those which are theological.²³

The first methodological approach to the sacraments studies human phenomena as a hermeneutical process for understanding sacramental theology: hence it is a phenomenological approach, i.e., "an interdisciplinary method leading to an initial understanding of Christian sacraments."²⁴ And this phenomenological focus highlights

²³Worgul, p. 33.

²⁴Osborne, p. 549.

the sacramental nature of all reality.²⁵

The second approach consists in the adoption of the hermeneutical process of Christology to understand sacramental theology: hence it is a Christological-ecclesiological approach, i.e., "an intratheological method leading to an initial understanding of Christian sacraments."²⁶ And this Christological focus maintains that an understanding of the activity of God in the sacraments is impossible without a complete comprehension of what God has actually done in Christ Jesus, whose humanity is the core of sacramental theology.²⁷ Furthermore this Christological sacramental theology necessarily entails an ecclesial counterpart.

In the final analysis, the basic framework for any theological study of the Christian sacraments in the present period of theological and liturgical renewal, both in theory and in practice, "must lead us ever closer to this incarnate center Jesus Christ and to the Church while at the same time speaking more meaningfully to their human participants of Christ and human phenomenon."²⁸

This dual method thus singles out three main elements of any sacramental theology, which Vaillancourt calls "actants", i.e., the human person, Christ, and the Church. These actants, which are prerequisites for any understanding of the sacraments, correspond to three

²⁵Worgul, p. 34.

²⁶Osborne, p. 549.

²⁷Worgul, p. 34..

²⁸Osborne, p. 549.

theological disciplines - Anthropology, Christology, and Ecclesiology - all of which have undergone a renewal as a result of Vatican II.

From the council there emerges a new understanding of human experience and a historical, dynamic, unified and optimistic vision of the human person²⁹; of Christ as primordial sacrament; and of the Church as basic sacrament. In light of this, therefore, the task of contemporary theologians is to offer a new sacramental theology that will be once again consistent with these other major theological disciplines and that will be capable of preserving elements of our ecclesial heritage.³⁰

The fact that sacramental theologians are now calling for a dual methodology is based on the following observations. The classical theology of the sacraments and of the Church, or the ontological method of classical theology, is no longer able to respond to the issues posed by the contemporary mind, stated as they are in a language borrowed from the modern disciplines of history, psychology, sociology and hermeneutics.³¹ This ontological understanding of scholastic theology and the nominalist-juridical-ontological mentality of the Counter-Reformation finds few echoes in modern man's consciousness which sees their notions of reality as charged with a non-historical or ontic naiveté.³²

²⁹Vaillancourt, pp. 47-51.

³⁰Ibid., p. IV.

³¹Keefe, p. 357.

³²Ibid.

And yet the crises of Roman Catholic theology will not be transcended simply by recourse to regnant disciplines heretofore neglected.³³ For equally true is the existence of the naiveté of the contemporary socio-historical hermeneutic or of the false autonomy of scientific methods.

In the final analysis therefore, both methods, when taken alone, prove to be inadequate frameworks for a contemporary sacramental theology. Furthermore to insist on maintaining such a dichotomous relationship ultimately proves to be a fruitless endeavour. Rather both theological and scientific disciplines should work together in the hopes of solving the current dilemma. This is possible when the order of dynamic revelation is seen as the order of the sacraments.

Because all disciplines are concerned with the historical realism of the sacraments, we must integrate a new consciousness of history into this dual method which can be defined as inductive, existential, and historical (as opposed to deductive, metaphysical, ontological). Hence the first issue to be faced in any attempt to renew sacramental theology is that of discovering the sacramental meaning of history and of historical existence and consciousness.³⁴ The basis for doing so is neither an omnipotent methodology of criticism or an uninviting obedience to tradition but involves transcending and negating all potential dichotomies by the presence of Christ and his

³³Ibid., p. 359.

³⁴Ibid., p. 362.

Church. Historical consciousness, ontological realism, and sacramental worship are at one with this existence in Christ and cannot be isolated from it for this is the event of Creation in Christ, at once historical, ontological, and sacramental.³⁵

In the final analysis, it is in revelation that this methodological dichotomy is overcome:

Whether we theologize under the aegis of ontology, sociology, history, or whatever mode of synthesis, we are engaged in a task of understanding revelation given in Christ, a task whose principle is that we don't subordinate that truth to any one methodological criterion....³⁶

What is crucial here is that we can no longer isolate God from humanity, history and the world as such isolation is contradicted by the a priori of Christian theology, the Good News given us in Christ.³⁷ Thus for Roman Catholic theologians interested in the sacraments, history is time concretely qualified by the immanence of Christ; and qualified history is simply the sacramental order, eschatological symbolic temporal existence of a community of sacramental worship or of a hermeneutical circle (which is thus salvation-historical). That our existence is thus significant is a matter of faith. Consequently the actual relationship of theologians to the community composing the

³⁵Ibid., p. 364.

³⁶Ibid., p. 358.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 358-359.

theological hermeneutical circle is constitutive of their theological understanding of sacramental reality, and of Good Creation. And the optimism of faith in the Lord of history founds the sacramental hermeneutical circle of Good Creation as all dichotomies are overcome in the mystery of the Incarnation and in the Christian Root Metaphor.

Creation is therefore "Creation in Christ", God's immanence in humanity and the world: not only is it no longer ambivalent but it now takes on an eschatological dimension.³⁸ As a result of this new perception of creation as well as of revelation, not only are two methods combined but, in a sense, all the behavioral sciences which make up the phenomenological approach become, for believing theologians (who have experienced conversion in a Lonerganian sense), theologies.

Hence whether we theologize with insights drawn from anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, and literary criticism, law, ontology, or whatever heuristic device, it is with this Creation, specified and qualified as in Christo, that we are concerned, for there is no other.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid., p. 359.

³⁹ Keefe, p. 369.

The presupposition which grounds all our investigation is that contemporary sacramental theology is "a theology of Creation in Christ"⁴⁰. Such a theology requires that the principal fact of absolute dependence upon the Son's immanence in his creation as its intrinsic formal and existential cause be the objective ground of all our theological hypotheses and so of all systematization.⁴¹ By accepting this Truth we turn away from the false autonomy of scientific methods, and convert them from their own autonomous rationality to an openness upon the Mystery which they cannot control but from which they can learn. It is through this conversion to the "real" (Good Creation) that they become theologies.⁴² In our search for a new methodological framework we also turn away from the splendid isolation of theology in relation to these scientific disciplines and in so doing, we reject any attempt to isolate the sacraments. For Christians who have a keen sense of the Christic value of the concrete world in which they live should not suffer from the isolation of having to leave their secular life behind in order to find God in a sacramental celebration that takes place in a completely different world.

To perceive this Good Creation in Christ demands faith. We must remember that the theologians are just that because they are part of hermeneutical and worship community. They need faith to go past the purely human, to perceive the transforming power of Christ affecting

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

the world and the human element, and to experience reality as sacramental.

2.4 Concluding Remarks

The new methodological context for sacramental theology is one of philosophical and theological pluralism and of dialogue with modern non-theological disciplines, in particular the human sciences. Within this context theology also acknowledges that it is historically conditioned.

Under the impulse of these changes, theological methodology during the post-conciliar period can be characterized as anthropocentric or existential; theological and Christocentric; transcendental and personal; historical; and inductive. Most important is that the starting-point for all theological investigation is theological-anthropological in nature: it is the person, both human and Christian, in his/her particular, concrete, historical situation. Subsequently, this emphasis on human experience as the starting-point for theologizing in general signals an equally significant shift from the isolation of theology in reference to other intellectual disciplines, to dialogue with the human sciences in particular.

With this in mind, theologians begin by examining concrete human experience in order not only to detect the "sacramental" dimension of life but in effect to arrive at a clearer understanding of Christian sacraments. They then confront their tradition with

what they observe in human existence and culture in an attempt to reformulate ailing theological principles. This same methodological approach, which theologically interprets what the human person already knows on an experiential level (anthropological data) is characteristic of contemporary sacramental theology. Because sacramental theological method follows the same pattern as theological method in general, it too calls for a combination of anthropology (phenomenology) and theology (Christology; ecclesiology).

Not only do these presuppositions ground all theological investigation into the sacraments, but in addition, contemporary sacramental theology is also a theology of Creation in Christ. Furthermore, the order of dynamic revelation is at one with the order of the sacraments, and this consciousness of the sacramental meaning of history and of historical existence conditions all contemporary theological reflection. The perception that the sacramental order and history, qualified by Christ's immanence, are one and the same is the result of faith alone. This brings us to the final yet crucial point: that the relationship of theologians to the Christian community is constitutive of their understanding of sacramental reality and of Good Creation and that the personal act of faith or conversion experience plays a crucial role in their reflection. Furthermore, the acceptance through faith of the truth of dynamic revelation, of Creation in Christ and of God's immanence in humanity and the world, makes it possible for all human sciences to become theologies.

This is then the path contemporary Roman Catholic theologians are pursuing in their research and reflection on sacramentality in general and sacraments in particular; and these are the pre-suppositions which have accompanied their quest for a contemporary sacramental theology which can adequately respond to the needs of the modern Roman Catholic living in the industrialized Western world.

CHAPTER 3

THE SACRAMENTAL PROCESS

3.0 Introduction

In The Book of Sacramental Basics, Guzie notes that "the particular genius of Catholicism consists in this: celebration, not doctrine, which lies at the heart of religion."¹ In light of this the resolution of the current crisis, which is unfolding in the ritual arena, becomes even more urgent.

It is clear that "liturgical worship itself is already becoming a basic problem for many people."² In the first place, Christians find that their present experience of sacramental rituals is an empty one mainly because, in their present form, these rituals fail to adequately express the Christian world view which gives meaning to ordinary life experience. Secondly, Christians no longer feel comfortable with a "Christian life more or less identified with a "practice" of the faith in which liturgical worship (sacramental rituals) runs parallel to a life which is fully immersed in the world."³

¹ Guzie, p. 134.

² Edward Schillebeeckx, God, the Future of Man (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), p. 94.

³ Ibid., p. 95.

The solution to the "sacramental crisis" therefore involves more than just the revision of liturgical practice and the abandonment, by Christians, of the narrow and reductionist view of the sacraments which emerged during the Middle Ages. It involves the development of new attitudes toward the entire sacramental process, attitudes which cannot be reformed merely by external changes or by changes in the elements of the rituals. It involves the conscious realization that the principal effect of the medieval view of the sacraments has been the dévaluation of the rest of sacramentality. More precisely, that the entire sacramental reality has been reduced to the ritual moment of celebration and that the entire reality of worship has been identified with Church liturgy.

Hence the resolution of today's crisis depends on the ability of theologians to present a renewed sacramental theology that corresponds to the person's actual lived experience and that not only opposes a view of religion - and thus of Christianity - which runs parallel to the created world but which also rejects a view of the sacraments which is based on a two-zone theory of Creation.

Religion in general and the sacraments in particular do not deal with some otherworldly realm nor with some new kind of human experience. They deal with making human reality truly human by anchoring it to God and bringing humanity to its full potential in Christ.⁴

⁴Bausch, p. 17.

Furthermore, contemporary sacramental theologians should integrate the sacraments into the larger sacramental process and resituate the Church's liturgical worship within the broader reality of Christian secular worship, the liturgy of the world. In other words, theologians must present a global vision of the sacramental economy and, at the same time, give to each sacrament its proper consistency, its situation, and hence its value.

The starting-point for this theological investigation of the sacramental process is the ordinary lived experience of the human person in a world qualified by God's immanence or constant sacramental presence mediated to him through the Incarnate Christ, the Ursakrament. In other words, the renewed vision of sacramentality is based on the premise stated in chapter two: that the order of the sacraments is the order of dynamic revelation, which involves both the communication of a response to a person (as opposed to the noetic communication of facts about God), and produces a concept of faith as personal response within the context of a relationship.⁵ Therefore the dynamic aspect of revelation involves personal contact with the self-giving God who is the power operative in all the world, in all created agents and activities, transforming man who enters into a personal relationship with him.⁶ And this dynamism manifests itself in the sacramental order.

⁵ Another name for this relationship between God and man is "grace". In fact grace is nothing but the self-communicating God, acting freely in history.

⁶ James Mulligan, "God's Action Immanent in the World of the Sacraments," Catholic Theological Society Annual Proceedings (CTSAP) 23 (1968): 164.

The present chapter will attempt to present a broader understanding of sacramentality along with the new definition of "sacrament" which results from such a change. Using the double methodology suggested in chapter two, it will highlight the sacramental nature of reality. And then it will point to the unique quality of Christian sacramentality by demonstrating that a proper understanding of God's activity in the Christian sacraments is contingent upon a complete comprehension of what God has done in Christ Jesus, who continues to be present to us in the Church through his Spirit. The ultimate aim of the chapter will be to reflect the present-day task of sacramental theology by showing that harmony exists between grace which is always present and effective from within and that of a sacramental sign posited from without at a particular point in time.⁷

3.1 The Christian Perception of the Sacramental Universe

The major world religions have common features in their view concerning God and concerning the human quest for God. But not all religions are agreed on the nature of this world, particularly the relationship of the forces of good and evil as we experience them in this world.⁸

⁷Rahner, "How to receive a Sacrament and mean it," Theology Digest 19 (Fall 1971): 230. (hereafter cited as "How to receive")

⁸Guzie, p. 71.

For Christians rooted in the Jewish tradition, faith is the attitude which they bring to their perception of the world around them.⁹ Moreover religion is not an escape from this world but is a definite, qualified manner of being in this world and journeying in it.¹⁰ Biblical religion is "horizontal", "looking to our life and time and history, our journeying from past to present and into a future yet to be created."¹¹ God is found "in the midst of this world, in history, in our story, in our time, and in all the ambiguities of ordinary existence."¹² Furthermore biblical religion presents "man in the world as God's good creation, deprived of glory by his sinfulness, but reborn in Christ as a "new creature", who is no longer doomed and who lives in a world liberated from the enslaving spirits of the world, of all kinds, both old and new."¹³ Thus Christians inherit the basic optimism of the Hebrew view of creation and life: "...our religion is rooted in the ancient Hebrew view which

⁹Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 72.

¹¹Ibid., p. 74.

¹²Ibid., p. 73.

¹³Schillebeeckx, p. 99.

saw Creation as good, and the human person as created in the image of the Creator."¹⁴ And yet Christians realize that their uniqueness stems from their Christic consciousness of the mystery of the person's humanization and the world's transformation and redemption.

Contemporary sacramental theologians must recapture the optimism of grace and the primacy of the mystery of love over that of evil. In order to do so they must restore to the Church, both in theory and in practice, the concept of sacramental process which not only recognizes the Christian's "horizontal" journey toward God but which also legitimizes the use of "sacrament" and "sacramentalism" in a wider context than that of the merely ecclesiastical.¹⁵ Then they must show that the starting-point for the sacramental process is God's love present in all created agents and activities and that, as a consequence the ritual or sacramental moment, which is the culmination of this process, celebrates this ever-present love.¹⁶ Christopher Kiesling and Rahner are two examples of theologians who have abandoned the classical two-zone theory of the world for the recognition of the divine presence in all of life and consequently of the sacramentality of all created agents and activities.

¹⁴Guzie, p. 119.

¹⁵Brinkman, "On Sacramental Man: I," p. 371.

¹⁶Guzie, p. 85.

Kiesling defines sacramentality as "God's self-gift and transcendent action made present in all things"¹⁷ and for all people. He calls Christians to recognize the intimacy of God's presence to his creatures as well as his transcendence and to see God as the depth dimension of human experience¹⁸, the creative and redemptive mystery within the process of humanization itself, immanently present and active now in all of life and in the lives of all. In so doing he makes it possible for Christians to speak of the "sacrality" of what they usually call the "secular", of the "sacramentality of all created agents and activities"¹⁹, where ordinary life in the world is the locus of the divine presence.

In a similar fashion, Rahner speaks of immediate or sanctifying grace which is found everywhere whenever one is not cut off from God. Rahner's understanding is based on the premise that there is only one history of the world²⁰ and that the world is permanently graced at its root, even before personal faith acceptance. Immediate, invisible

¹⁷ Christopher Kiesling, "Paradigms of Sacramentality," Worship 44 (July 1970): 423. (hereafter cited as "Paradigms")

¹⁸ Donald Gray, "Sacramental Consciousness-Raising," Worship 46 (March 1972): 131.

¹⁹ Kiesling, "How many Sacraments?" Worship 44 (May 1970): 432.

²⁰ Rahner, "How to receive," p. 230. This means that the recipient of a sacrament may already have the grace that a sacrament gives.

grace is the holiness of all that is profane: it is not parallel to the rest of life but is its ultimate depth and has attained its clearest manifestation in Jesus of Nazareth who, as mediator, makes grace visible.²¹

Both Kiesling and Rahner make it clear that Christians can no longer set up a dichotomy between grace and nature, supernatural and natural, divine and human, religious and secular. Rather, attention should focus on graced nature and existence, sacramental presence and divine activity in and through the entire creative process, the sacramentality of all of life and of the holy that permeates all of life and all creatures. Hence contemporary Christians must preserve "la dimension épiphanique du monde", la dimension épiphanique de la création, c'est-à-dire son aptitude à manifester la présence de Dieu récapitulée en Jésus Christ."²²

Chenu draws the all-important conclusion:

Au lieu que soit uniquement l'incarnation qui est source sacramentelle, c'est aussi déjà le cosmos lui-même, et l'unité se rétablit avec la création, qui est en quelque sorte encore en cours et où je suis partenaire de Dieu.²³

²¹Ibid., p. 229.

²²Chenu, p. 99.

²³Ibid.

Theodore Runyon develops this point in greater detail. In his article "The World as Original Sacrament" (1980), he demonstrates that, if the cosmos itself is in a way, the source of sacramentality, then it can only mean that, in the same way, the world is the Ursakrament.

In essence, Runyon's thesis is based on his perception that the other visions of Ursakrament wrongly subsume the material world under the category of the human. One such example is John Carmody's statement that

God has decided that the principal way in which grace is to be communicated in the world is to be in material reality since he has done this once before in Jesus Christ, the Ursakrament. Once and for all God's love has been given and received and because of the incarnational principle, human realities are carriers of grace.²⁴

For Runyon, because mediation through things as well as through people and events is qualitatively different, the sacrament joins together three realities rather than two, i.e., the human, the divine

²⁴ John Carmody, "The Realm of Christian Life," in A World of Grace, ed. Leo O'Donovan (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1980), p. 144. Other examples of "Ursakrament" are Otto Semmelroth's "The Church as the Original Sacrament"; Rahner's view of Christ as the Ursakrament and the Church as the Grundsakrament; or again Schillebeeckx's "Christ as 'the one and only saving primordial Sacrament...', the one and only 'sacrament of God'". (T. Runyon, "The World as the Original Sacrament," Worship 54 (November 1980): 497.) N.B. my italics (material, human).

AND the material world. In the sacrament

...a part of the material world becomes a sign, a means to act out, express and participate in the divine-human relationship. Thus the material world has always been implicated in the sacramental event.²⁵

Although everything which belongs to humanity is experienced as the sacramental manifestation of God's presence²⁶, the world is also the object of redemption and the recreation of the cosmos is effected in Christ Jesus (i.e., the redemptive work of Christ), in whose hands the sacrament is presented to humankind as the world in its original eschatological form: it is the gift of the loving creator Father revealed in Jesus Christ and the object of God's redeeming and transforming activity.²⁷

This enables Christians to look at Creation with new eyes. As observed in Genesis I, in the hands of the Creator the world was itself the first or original sacrament, the first use of the material to communicate and facilitate the divine-human relation. And while Christ remains the sacramental means to reconcile a fallen humanity,

²⁵Runyon, p. 495.

²⁶Schillebeeckx, p. 111.

²⁷Runyon, p. 498.

...his giving of freedom through bread and wine to humankind is prefigured in the Creator's bestowal of freedom to his creatures as in Genesis I ... The original, visible sign of God's grace is the world he entrusts to our care ... In, with, and through it he gives us himself as our Father.²⁸

Unfortunately today human beings simply have difficulty in viewing the world in its original sacramental form: they cannot envisage it as the continuing "gift of the Father's unfailing grace."²⁹

The sacramentality of all created agents and their activities is not apparent to all men, and this for two reasons: the range of human intelligence in its usual functioning does not penetrate to that dimension of reality; and by sin men project their own self-centered values upon reality so that they live in a world of illusion rather than the world as it really is from the hands of the Creator.³⁰

And more times than not the Church has been of little help in this regard because it has fostered a timid, truncated sacramentalism by continuing to etherealize or trivialize the Kingdom and prevent it from exercising its critical and transforming power.³¹ Yet God does not leave human beings locked within the confines of human intelligence and sin but his spirit inspires in them faith, hope and love which allows

²⁸Ibid., pp. 500-501. N.B. my italics (humankind, creatures).

²⁹Ibid., p. 502.

³⁰Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 423.

³¹Runyon, p. 503.

them not only to achieve personal communion with the living God but also to see the real world in depth, i.e., as sacramental.³²

When Runyon talks of taking away the heavy reliance upon the Incarnation (understood in a way which ties material and human realities together) as the source or foundation of sacramentality and focusing on the world or cosmos as the original sacrament he shows how, in grouping the material under the human, one's understanding can change. Based on a Low Christology, Creation, not the Incarnate Christ, is the original sacrament in the sense that it is the first use of matter to communicate divine reality and facilitate the divine-human relationship. Yet it can only be recognized as the source of sacramentality because it is recreated and redeemed by Christ Jesus. Only faith in Christ can lead to the awareness of the sacramentality of all Creation. Hence this Christic consciousness precludes any view of the world as original sacrament.

What all authors agree upon is that an understanding of the activity of God in the sacraments is impossible without a complete comprehension of what God has actually done in Christ Jesus and in this sense, he is the Ursakrament. Not only do we see in Jesus' life the fullness of both humanity and of divine presence, which is the Incarnation, but likewise we derive our understanding of the relationship between God and the material world in which humans live. The

³²Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 423.

essence of the Incarnation is that the divine and the human are united and that salvation amounts to the full humanization of persons, as exemplified by the Incarnate Jesus. As Bernard Cooke points out,

Incarnation is the mystery of God seeking familiarity, even identification, with human beings; the Word-made-flesh in no way held himself aloof from the ordinary concerns of men and women.³³

Moreover, Cooke's holistic perspective demonstrates the radical affirmation of the human and the material:

What is really involved is not a movement from the sacred to the secular, but a profound sacralization of what might be considered the realm of the secular.³⁴

The purpose of this entire discussion of the Incarnation is to point to an essential element in the sacramental view of life: that God, the holy, is present and communicable in the stuff of people's lives, that the Incarnation points to the startling reality of God seeking intimacy with humans, not concerned for their imperfections save to heal them with his love. Even more, God may be said to rely upon the material, and in particular the human, to make himself present to us. Hence God uses all created agents and activities as

³³ Bernard Cooke, Ministry to Word and Sacraments (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 652.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 636.

vehicles of his self-gift and transformative action.

God's grace to man is essentially incarnational, and intimate wedding of divine and created agents and activities, undivided, unseparated, yet neither confused with one another nor changed into the one or the other.³⁵

The purpose of God's presence is his offer of salvation through Jesus Christ, and the building of the divine-human community, which is the Kingdom of God.

All agents and actions...are sacramental in the sense of being effective symbols of a sacred reality - God's giving of himself and his transforming action - as it is justifying and sanctifying men.³⁶

Christ Jesus is perceived by Christians as transforming Creation. He is, in Worgul's terms, the root metaphor of the Christian culture for, from the moment of the Christ-event, and for those who believe, the world is somehow qualitatively different: it is sacramental. In such a perspective the Roman Catholic Church is the community of Christic remembering, of raised-consciousness, which continues Jesus' ministerial activity, a ministry that is focused on the Kingdom, and actualizes its own sacramental nature in specific rituals traditionally called "sacraments" by the Church. And, as Cooke states, these sacramental rituals grow out of, and serve to express, this way of being in and perceiving the world as Christians.³⁷

³⁵ Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 424.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cooke, p. 636.

3.2 The Sacraments in a Sacramental Universe

By extending the parameters of sacramentality, contemporary sacramental theologians necessarily broaden the familiar meaning of "sacrament" and of "sacramental liturgy or worship". Sacraments are no longer limited to the ritual moment of their celebration and, similarly, liturgy or worship is no longer reduced to that which takes place within the Church. And yet it remains to be shown just exactly what kind of new interpretation of the familiar sacraments and Church liturgy emerges from the previous analysis of the sacramentality of all Creation.

Although Edward Schillebeeckx, in God, the Future of Man (1971) presents Christians with several significant observations regarding the relationship between secular worship (understood by Rahner as the "liturgy of the world") and Church liturgy, it is Kiesling, in an article entitled "Paradigms of Sacramentality" who best resolves the ambiguity of the co-existence of the sacramental universe and the particular sacraments.

I have briefly examined how humans, in Judaism, Islam and Christianity go beyond the ordinary range of human reason and break through the illusory world of sin to discern God and the sacramental quality of reality by their faith in God who is the Creator of the Universe "which is good, radically sacred, derived from Him at each

moment, and ordered by him to man's fulfillment in personal communion with him".³⁸ Kiesling adds that God accomplishes this through the use of particular agents and their activities in extraordinary ways which reveal to humans that all created agents and activities are sacramental.³⁹ Men and women must articulate the religious experience of the sacramentality of all created agents and activities, and must express this articulation not only in theoretical knowledge but more fundamentally in institutionalized actions. Furthermore they must institutionalize specific agents and activities as paradigms of the sacramentality of all created agents and activities:⁴⁰

Which agents and activities men set up as religious rites, and thus as paradigmatic of universal sacramentality, is conditioned by the initial events, persons, and institutions which gave birth to a particular religious faith and its discernment of the sacramentality of all Creation. It is conditioned also by the cultural history of the people.⁴¹

Religious faiths frequently set up as paradigmatic agents and activities those which are involved in critical moments of life - birth, entrance into adulthood, serious violations of the ideals of the

³⁸Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 424.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 425.

⁴¹Ibid.

community, marriage, threats to community cohesion, sickness, and death.⁴² These selected agents and activities are paradigmatically sacramental because they heighten the awareness of the sacramentality of all created agents and activities of less critical moments. In the Christian context, the universal and collective history of all mankind reaches its culmination in Jesus Christ, and, like him, the sacraments are paradigms, exemplars making more intensely present the self-giving love of God (grace) which already exists. They are the "paradigms of the sacredness of the secular as the vehicle of God's self-giving and transforming action."⁴³

The uniqueness of the familiar sacraments lies therefore in their being paradigmatically rather than exclusively sacramental. Moreover, it is the following four traits which, when taken together, set these sacraments apart as paradigms of the sacramentality of all things. First, a sacrament in the paradigmatic sense, is an explicit phenomenon of God's grace incarnate and its consequences for the individual. Secondly, it is a climactic moment or highpoint of God's self-gift to an individual and his/her response. Thirdly, it is a phenomenon of personalized grace. And finally, it is public and is recognized by the Christian community as a paradigm of the universal sacramentality.⁴⁴ Kiesling also adds that the familiar sacraments are involved with the critical moments of the human lifecycle.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 426.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 430.

Schillebeeckx develops these traits when he talks of secular worship and Church liturgy. His presentation is based on the realization that Christians no longer have to flee the world in order to enter into the Church's liturgy (sacramental rituals) since faith affirms that human life in the world is ultimately meaningful and worth living, thanks to Jesus, the Christ.⁴⁵ For Schillebeeckx, secularity is secular liturgy "by virtue of the Christian's faith in Jesus, the Christ, who made all things new."⁴⁶ Christian secular worship is simply Christian life in the world experienced as liturgy or worship of God (i.e., the glorification of his name; praise and thanksgiving) and is only possible by virtue of God's "new creation in Christ"⁴⁷ which was accomplished on the basis of his dying to and through the "old world".⁴⁸ What this in fact means is that Christian worship, like sacramentality, is not limited only to an ecclesial ritual moment but is (Christian) life as well. In the situation in which Christianity finds itself in the world today, Christian commitment to the ordering of human society here and now and Christian opposition to all injustice that disrupts peace among humans must be experienced as that secular worship required by the biblical essence

⁴⁵Schillebeeckx, p. 102.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 99, 144.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 102.

of Christianity, which makes no distinction between the secular and the "sacral"; secular life itself must be a "spiritual worship".⁴⁹

J.D. Crichton follows a similar line of reasoning. Within the context of salvation-history (the record of divine initiative or of God's self-disclosure in historical events), he defines worship or Christian liturgy primarily as a faith-response to God that can only be made in Jesus Christ (through the power of the Spirit) who is the definite "yes" to the Father and in whom our worship is grounded.⁵⁰ Because Christ embodies the supreme and necessary response to the Father, humans can now make their response of faith by giving glory to God both in their daily Christian lives and in the various liturgies of the Christian Church.⁵¹ Worship is basically response and the entrance in communion with God, in divine life and love that constitute the Trinity and the sacramental celebration is a specific ecclesial response to God's call in Christ, "a response which involves words and gestures, vocal and silent."⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 101, 102.

⁵⁰ J.D. Crichton, "A Theology of Worship," in The Study of Liturgy, pp. 3-29. Edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainright, Edward Yarnold (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 9.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵² Bausch, p. 5.

In the final analysis, it is clear from the writings of Crichton, Kiesling and Schillebeeckx that, as part of a larger sacramental process, sacraments are neither "instead of" nor "apart from" life and faith.⁵³ They are not extrinsic to the world but are actions of grace in the world, perceived therein by someone who has experienced how God has always sanctified his/her life and that of the world.

3.2.1 Sacraments: Explicit Phenomena of God's Grace Incarnate and its Consequences for the Individual

Schillebeeckx and Kiesling are among the many theologians who demonstrate that, within the broader context of worship and sacramentality, Church liturgy and sacramental rituals retain a very important function. Schillebeeckx concludes that Christians need Church liturgy since, as soon as they accept "secular worship" as Christian they must do justice to the fullness of this reality (which is precisely a gift, from God), and express or articulate this affirmation in praise and thanksgiving: "A grateful awareness of the event from which we are living is decisive for the reality of such a (Christian) life."⁵⁴ As L.B. Gilkey notes, the role of the sacrament (and of word) is not so much to insert divine activity into nature and ordinary lives, as it is to bring the primordial relationship

⁵³ New Catholic Encyclopedia, s.v. "Worship, Communal," by R. Kress, p. 723.

⁵⁴ Schillebeeckx, p. 106.

forth in awareness and to give it the shape, power and foundation of Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ This view is shared by Kiesling: Christians articulate in their lives both theoretically and behaviorally this insight, given to everyone through Jesus Christ, into the sacramentality of all created agents and activities: that in ordinary human existence God is at work transforming everyone into his children. And in so doing certain agents and activities are conceived and exercised as paradigmatic of this sacramentality of all Creation.

Cooke arrives at the same conclusion. Individuals always strive to meet a God who is present and real to them and they achieve this first by faith. Yet because the Christian community or Church is sacramental in its whole being, the Christian is empowered to profess this faith sacramentally in Christian liturgy.⁵⁶ And it is in this symbolic liturgical action that faith is expressed and concretized. Thus the formal expression of Christian sacramentality takes place in the community's liturgical celebrations. In other words, "sacraments are understandable as the objectification in the natural material order of the revealed faith relationship between God and man."⁵⁷

⁵⁵L.B. Gilkey, "Symbols, Meaning and the Divine Presence," Theological Studies 35 (June 1974): 260-261.

⁵⁶Cooke, p. 644.

⁵⁷Mulligan, p. 165.

Donald Gray shares Cooke's point of view when he notes that, as part of the world, sacramental rituals are word-events which actualize in liturgical celebration something that already exists in the world; they manifest the holiness or sacramentality of "secular" existence, and are appearances of that salvation which penetrates a person's existence and his/her world.⁵⁸

Finally, Gilkey notes that liturgical worship must bring to awareness and to celebration the universal presence of the divine and shape that awareness into Christian form. And through shaping a person's natural existence by sacrament and word, it must elicit gratitude, contrition, recommitment, and transformation of this natural existence.⁵⁹

Secular worship and Church liturgy are therefore not alternatives. They are two complementary, mutually evocative forms of the one Christianity.⁶⁰

The Church's liturgy is a mission to secular worship, the real service of one's fellow-men in the concretely existential situation of every individual and of the whole of mankind in the world situation of the twentieth century.⁶¹

⁵⁸Gray, p. 138.

⁵⁹Gilkey, p. 257.

⁶⁰Schillebeeckx, p. 108.

⁶¹Ibid.

Church liturgy can be defined as the epiphany of secular worship:

The Church and her liturgy are the world, with its secular worship, at that profound level on which the world utters its own mystery in a conscious and mature confession: that mystery from which and in which it lives, thanks to Christ, and thus fulfills and realizes itself precisely as Christ's world; in which man too gives thanks (and praise) for his Christian life in the world which moves freely towards the eternal kingdom of God:⁶²

As Rahner points out, Christian sacramental liturgy is, for the person who approaches it in a state of faith and love⁶³, a miniature sign of the world's liturgy, a world in which Christ himself belongs. It is "...the symbolic manifestation of the death and immolation liturgy of the world and the liturgy of the Son or the Cross is the culmination of the liturgy of the world."⁶⁴ This liturgy of the world is clarified and brought to reflex awareness only if a person comes to it from the existential liturgy of faith, the right-lived

⁶²Ibid., p. 109; "and praise" is my addition.

⁶³Rahner, "The Mass and the World," The Tablet 8 (March 13, 1971): 268. (hereafter cited as "Mass and World")

⁶⁴Rahner, "Considerations on the Active Role of the Person in the Sacramental Event," Theological Investigations 14: 161. (hereafter cited as "Considerations")

history of the world. In a similar fashion, Cooke notes that the entirety of Christian living is a continuous act of worship and sacramental rituals are especially formalized expressions of that worship.⁶⁵ As Crichton adds, the liturgy is the concrete and manifold expression of God's presence among his people now.⁶⁶ More particularly it is the place or moment where the Christian meets Christ in the fullness of his redeeming activity. In the liturgy, Christians actualize a past event through symbols and represent the Paschal Mystery so that Christ's saving power can be made available to the worshippers here and now; so that Christ can become a person's contemporary.⁶⁷

In conclusion, Cooke, Crichton, Gilkey, Gray, Mulligan, Rahner and Schillebeeckx demonstrate Kiesling's first point: that, in the sacramental universe, the proper function of the sacrament, as paradigm, is to bring to explicit, public expression or conscious awareness at appropriate points, the divine presence in all of life.

Sacraments spring from, express and lead to the divine depths of human life and must be perceived in the context of a believing experience...The sacraments constitute the manifestation of the holiness and reformed state of the secular dimension of human life and of the world.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Cooke, p. 645.

⁶⁶ Crichton, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁸ Rahner, "Considerations," pp. 169, 171.

The "grace of the sacrament" is ultimately tied up with consciousness⁶⁹, what happens in the world as saving act of God and redeemed freedom of the person is here manifested in full consciousness and celebrated in solemn worship. So it is when Thomas Aquinas tells us that a sacrament is a "signum commemorativum, exhibitivum, et prognosticum" for everything that happens in salvation-history from beginning to end⁷⁰; that the celebration of the sacraments adds nothing to the world but celebrates what is already within it; that the sacraments do not bring about something that was absent but proclaim and enable us to own a love that is already present to humans in the grace-filled depths of their lives which is part of the great drama of the world.⁷¹

⁶⁹An illustration of what Tad Guzie means by "consciousness" is the following definition of Baptism.

To be baptized is not to enter the world of grace, because the grace and love of God is already there; it is freely offered to all, and it surrounds the existence of everyone who is born into this world. But to be initiated into the family of Jesus is another matter. It is the acceptance of a very particular grace; it is a matter of entering into a conscious process in which the business of dying and rising becomes the pattern for one's life-style. (The Book of Sacramental Basics, p. 99.)

⁷⁰Rahner, "How to receive," p. 231.

⁷¹Rahner, "Mass and World," pp. 267-268.

3.2.2 Sacraments: Climactic Moments or Highpoints of God's Self-Gift to an Individual and his Response

While the flow of this presentation has been a horizontal one, from God present and active in daily lives to his powerful proclamation in community ritual it should be clear that the difference between one proclamation and the other is not one of kind, but perhaps of intensity, and that, within the sacramental process, the ritual moment is the climactic moment or highpoint.

In the course of the ages the Fathers and doctors of the Roman Catholic Church have singled out a specific group of actions as sacramental par excellence because they communicate grace in a highly special and intensified way. Thus, although the whole plan of salvation is sacramental, the sacraments are the most central events in the present stage of salvation since they are situations of salvation proclaimed as filled with God's loving presence, and in a sense are only a heightened form of what in general is obtained in faith and religious knowledge.⁷² What we celebrate in the charged time of celebration is God acting in our lives. This is confirmed by Schillebeeckx: Church, liturgy is communal thanksgiving and homage in such a way that reality is intensified and the accomplishment of the person's mode of existence in the sign of Christ's resurrection is enhanced in it.

⁷²Brinkman, "On Sacramental Man: III The Socially Operational Way," Heythrop Journal 14 (1973): 182.

Liturgy is but an intense expression of the daily worship lives of believers.

3.2.3 Sacrament: A Phenomenon of Personalized Grace

In the Church's liturgy, God's grace is made publicly apparent and the promise is made true now to the individual, in the celebrating community. The sacrament declares God's self-gift to and transformation of this individual: in a paradigmatic sense "...the finger of God's grace touches this one person."⁷³

3.2.4 Sacrament: Public Recognition by the Community as Paradigms of Universal Sacramentality

The reason for maintaining specific ritual actions involves far more than just the fact that they have been recognized by the Church in the past. Rather, they must continue to be publicly recognized by the Christian community in the present as paradigms of universal sacramentality.

Rahner relates this to the qualitative distinction between the unofficial, quasi-sacramental acts and the official sacramental acts.

⁷³Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 430. N.B. my italics (one).

...any grace-giving event has a quasi-sacramental structure and shares in Christ's character as both divine and human. But when the Church in her official, organized, public capacity precisely as the source of redemptive grace meets the individual in the actual accomplishment of her nature, there we have sacraments in the proper sense, and they can be seen to be the essential functions that bring into activity the very essence of the Church herself.⁷⁴

He thus distinguishes between the non- or quasi-sacramental supernatural activity⁷⁵ or an existential salvific act and the ecclesial salvific acts or special moments. This distinction is based on a qualitative difference in the sign itself, as seen by its origin, for only the signs which the Church has infallibly recognized as connected with Christ's irrevocable offer of his grace are sacraments.⁷⁶ In other words there exists a qualitative difference among the historico-spatio-temporal phenomena that manifest the saving action of God in the individual and the community which the Christian community continues to publicly recognize.

⁷⁴ Rahner, The Church and the Sacraments, Quaest. Disp. 9 (Montréal: Palm Publishers, 1963), p. 22. (hereafter cited as Church and Sacraments).

⁷⁵ "quasi-sacramental" refers to the broad Augustinian notion that the entire history of salvation is sacramental and that it is correct to say that ALL Christian actions are sacramental, that they can become the vehicle for participation in divine life. Bernard Cooke notes that this broader notion of "sacrament" as essentially an "event making present" allows us to apply the term, if only analogously, to various human experiences that are Christianized in a sacrament by applying to them the transforming meaning of Christ's death and resurrection, for example, the sacramentalizing of sexual intercourse and human love between two married people.

⁷⁶ G. McCool, ed., A Rahner Reader (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 279.

3.2.5 Sacraments and the Critical Moments of the Human Lifecycle

Finally, the sacraments channel by and through the individual the effects of Christ's atonement to every major phase of a Christian's life, from birth to death.⁷⁷ They are "...les moyens différenciés permettant à l'institution salvifique qu'est l'Eglise, de sanctifier le Chrétien au long des phases de sa vie."⁷⁸ Therefore, "Christian sacraments" are nothing but the transformation or Christianization of the meaning of men's and women's most basic human experiences: they are the ceremonialization of the key moments of the human lifecycle for into them Christ pours the new meaning of his own self-as-gift-of-life. Hence the sacraments depend on the substratum of human experience for their very existence. This point is already made by Thomas Aquinas who speaks of sacramentalizing life's important moments. As Chenu remarks:

⁷⁷ Musurillo, p. 272.

⁷⁸ Gustave Martelet, "De la sacramentalité propre à l'Eglise," Nouvelle Revue Théologique 95 (1973): 26.

St. Thomas, selon une idée naturiste, part des épisodes de la croissance vitale de l'homme individuel et collectif. Là où l'homme s'humanise il faut un rite, depuis la naissance, qui est le premier acte, jusqu'à la mort. A chaque pivot d'humanisation il y a un sacrement, qui est là pour diviniser.⁷⁹

3.2.6 Resolving an Ecumenical Problem

Many theologians, like Kiesling, continue to maintain that seven paradigms of sacramentality most adequately express the sacramentality of all agents and activities, given their ultimate connection with the critical moments of a person's life. Yet the number of sacraments is not fixed for all times, as is clear from a brief look at the past.

...the numbering of the seven sacraments did not come out of reflection on biblical data or the life of the early church. It came from the actual liturgical practice of the medieval church and observation of what was universal in practice, with some influence from the fitting symbolism of the number seven.⁸⁰

Guzie concludes that this Roman Catholic "bias" stems from the theologian's attempt to "count" the sacraments rather than see them in terms of "categories". Given the past history of Protestant-Roman

⁷⁹Chenu, p. 89.

⁸⁰Guzie, p. 42.

Catholic conflict on the number of familiar sacraments, is not the latter alternative the more ecumenical one?⁸¹

Rahner is one of those theologians who "categorizes" the sacraments. While these are the sacramental acts of the Church in the process of self-realization, they are also the ceremonialization of the key moments in the human lifecycle which consist in: initiation (baptism and confirmation); calling (holy orders and marriage); forgiveness (penance and anointing of the sick). The eucharist is at the center of Christian life, and is the sacrament for all times and all needs. It is the central event of the Church which here reaches its highest degree of self-actualization.⁸² Guzie pursues a similar line of reasoning: breaking (the eucharist) is at the center of this circle because it is the festive action which is at the heart of the Church's life.⁸³ The other sacraments are arranged around this central act of thanksgiving and always relate to it: initiation (baptism and confirmation); healing (penance and anointing of the sick); ministry (holy orders and marriage).

⁸¹The Catholic Church is not the only confession to maintain seven familiar sacraments. The Anglican and Orthodox churches also share this point of view. The "categorization" of the sacraments does not eliminate the seven sacraments but rather the conflict which is associated with them. By categorizing the familiar sacraments rather than counting them, Christians realize that there need be no conflict at all.

⁸²Rahner, Church and Sacraments, p. 84.

⁸³Guzie, p. 16.

In a more ecumenical vein, the Group of Les Dombes (Le Groupe des Dombes), a French-language ecumenical/interconfessional joint working group of Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians, offers a slight variation of Rahner's and Guzie's presentations when it presents the eucharist and baptism as the primordial sacraments with the other sacramental acts or celebrations hierarchically ordered around them.⁸⁴ This view is shared by Kiesling:

...the five sacraments are implied in the two sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. These two sacraments, baptism and eucharist, therefore, are sufficient to express the sacramentality of all human life.⁸⁵

The Group of Les Dombes points to the presence of seven sacraments in the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican confessions which are part of a hierarchy of sacraments, the first and second being the eucharist and baptism. They also discuss the position of the Reform Churches wherein eucharist and baptism are "sacraments" and the remaining five are "sacramental acts". Moreover they show that estimates as to the number of sacraments have varied in time and

⁸⁴ The group was founded in 1937 by Paul Couturier who is known especially for having promoted the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Working out of the Trappist monastery of Dombes in Ain (France) this modest institution has persevered without setback and, after 35 years, is still more alive than ever.

⁸⁵ Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 428.

correlatively, that history shows that such estimates are linked to the exact meaning given to the term.⁸⁶ Hence to the extent that it may be possible, though difficult to eliminate the loaded term "sacraments", the Group proposes a terminology based on the perceived existence of a point of convergence: it suggests a vocabulary which associates unity and difference, for example, "primordial sacraments" for baptism and eucharist, and "sacramental acts" for celebrations which are hierarchically ordered around the former two.

The value of such a view is that it can provide an interesting solution to the perennial question as to whether the number of sacraments is limited to two or seven. And in so doing, it lays the foundation for further ecumenical discussion and for a reconciliation of the Christian churches as to the number of familiar sacraments.

This suggestion does not rule out the opportune use of a common term which would cover the traditional seven sacraments. However

...le texte fait clairement comprendre...
qu'il est plus important d'être d'accord
sur la hiérarchie des sacrements que de se
battre sur leur nombre... Il vaut mieux
proclamer: "Nous avons tous baptême et
eucharistie" que de clamer: "Ils ne croient
pas que la confirmation est un sacrement."
Le texte va jusqu'à proposer un vocabulaire
différent...⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Group of Les Dombes, "The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments," One in Christ 16 (March 1980): no. 27. (hereafter cited as "Spirit, Church, Sacraments")

⁸⁷ Le Groupe des Dombes, "L'Esprit-Saint, l'Eglise et les sacrements," Documentation Catholique 77 (4 mai 1980): 422. (hereafter cited as "Esprit, Eglise, Sacrements")

Although Kiesling considers that the word of God (i.e., the Bible, the oral traditions behind it, and the words of God's Spokesperson behind them)⁸⁸ may be added to the list of paradigms (being paradigmatic of the sacramentality of all human speech and communication), he nonetheless shares the same concerns as The Group of Les Dombes. In the final analysis what is important is that

The word of God and the sacraments have a special place in Christian tradition, not because they alone incarnate and manifest God's self-donation and gracious transforming action, but because, incarnating and manifesting them, they open Christians to all created agents and actions as vehicles of God's gift of self and transformation of man.⁸⁹

This is of ecumenical consequence: Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches ought not to bicker about whether there are seven or two sacraments, but ought to stress this fundamental insight of Christian faith:

The number of sacraments held by the various Christian churches is of secondary importance if their followers recognize the fundamental truth of the sacramentality of all created agents and actions revealed in Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Kiesling, "Paradigms," p. 427.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 427-428.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 429.

3.2.7 Altering the Number of Sacraments in Practice

A final question remains as to whether there could be paradigmatic sacraments other than, or in addition to, the familiar sacraments. The answer brings us back to the sacramental crisis which, as I have established, is in the ritual arena.

As I attempted to show earlier the acceptance of the particular seven or two familiar sacraments proceeds from a person's natural inclination to articulate experience by expressing it in patterns of behavior and theory consistent with his/her culture and history. So, in theory, it is possible that Christians should alter their sacraments; but is this necessary? Theoretically, do not the familiar sacraments prove more than adequate for their purpose? And, if the familiar sacraments fail in their purpose, is it not because of the (ritual) form which they presently have or because of the faulty use of them in celebration?⁹¹

If experientially people do not find the familiar sacraments enlightening their situation, that is because the form of the sacraments or the way in which they are celebrated prevents them from doing so. The problem is not with the seven or two sacraments, but with the rites in which they are embodied and the manner in which the rites are carried out.⁹²

⁹¹Ibid., p. 430.

⁹²Ibid. N.B. *my italics* (rites).

This point is also made by The Group of Les Dombes whose hope it is that, ultimately, the Church should stop quarelling over words and, on the basis of their conclusions, infuse new spiritual and theological life into practices common to all Christian churches.

To be meaningful, therefore, sacramental liturgy will have to express the sacred quality of the "secular" and celebrate the divine presence which permeates an individual's ordinary existence, and yet which at the same time is obscured in the "secular" world.

Martos tells us that the familiar sacraments will probably not continue to hold the central place they once held in Roman Catholic life and theology. Furthermore Roman Catholics will no longer be as dependent on these familiar sacraments as they once were, and even Roman Catholic theologians will put less emphasis on them as they once did.⁹³ On the other hand, it seems unlikely that the particular sacraments will disappear from Roman Catholicism for besides reaffirming the connection between the Church today and the Church of the past, the familiar sacramental rituals continue to sacramentalize the significant moments in the lives of Catholics and allow them to keep in touch with the sacred realities that lie at the heart of their faith by being paradigms of universal sacramentality.

⁹³ Martos, p. 530.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

Contemporary sacramental theology presents Christians with a broader perception of the sacramentality of the universe in which Creation, the world and the human person, and consequently the sacraments take on a new meaning. Despite the apparent paradox Christian sacraments can no longer be tied to a two-zone theory of Creation but rather to a more unified vision, first presented in Scripture, in which all Creation is permeated by God's presence, is graced at its root and therefore is sacramental.

Christians maintain that there is only one (salvation) history of the world. As such they possess a new and transforming consciousness of the universe and a Christic consciousness of the mystery of a person's humanization. Only faith in Christ can lead to an awareness of the sacramentality of all Creation; only a Christic consciousness can lead Christians to perceive the qualitatively different world as the source of sacramentality; only through faith can Christians finally acknowledge that sacramental theology is in fact a theology of Good Creation in Christ.

Inevitably, a renewed understanding of Creation and of the world brings with it a revised understanding of sacraments. The most significant feature of this new understanding is that for the believing Christian the sacraments do not add anything to the world but celebrate and bring to a conscious and visible level of expression the grace that already exists in the world. In the same way that sacraments

intensify an already existing presence, Christian or Church liturgy is a specific highpoint of the constant presence and activity of God in human life and in the world; and liturgy as a whole is no longer a response to God's special presence through liturgical action but to God, present as the ultimacy that grounds our entire life in and out of the Church. Within the sacramental process itself, the sacramental rites of the Church must reflect this "horizontal" theology in which the moment of sacramental celebration is a culminating moment that comes after a certain process has been experienced and lived.⁹⁴

Yet it is not enough just to deal with the spiritual movement of the world toward the sacramental moment since equally important is the spiritual movement outward from the sacramental action to its effect in the world. The sacraments are part of a sacramental process which not only begins with the world of experience but which also has an effect in the world. Hence, Christians should realize that the great challenge today is

...to convert sacred bread into real bread;
liturgical peace into political peace; worship
of the Creator into reverence for Creation and
Christian communal praying into authentic
communal fellowship.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Guzie, p. 79.

⁹⁵Raimundo Panikkar, "Man as Ritual Being," Chicago Studies 16 (1977): 27.

Throughout the centuries the Roman Catholic Church has posited that seven familiar sacramental rituals best express the sacramentality that already exists in Creation. What distinguishes contemporary sacramental theology from classical sacramental theology is that these seven actions are paradigmatically rather than exclusively sacramental, and that this is what makes them unique.

Kiesling's interpretation of the sacraments in relation to the sacramental quality of reality is therefore the only one advocated in this thesis: the sacraments are specific, paradigmatic agents and activities. They are publicly recognized and explicit phenomena of personalized grace which have been institutionalized by humans and which heighten the awareness of the sacramentality of all created agents and activities of less critical moments. Not only do they ceremonialize the key moments in the human lifecycle but also they are the sacraments of the Church in the process of its self-realization.

Despite the efforts of Rahner and Guzie at categorizing the sacraments, I must conclude that Kiesling and The Group of Les Dombes best resolve the apparent ambiguity generated from the co-existence of the sacramental universe and the seven Roman Catholic sacraments. Their attempts to resolve the issue of the number of sacraments by proposing that baptism and the eucharist be understood as "primordial sacraments" with the remaining five "sacramental acts" hierarchically ordered around them is equally significant. Moreover this view has important ecumenical consequences. Yet, given that the number of

sacraments has varied throughout the Church's history, what is even more important is that all Christians, whether they profess that there are two or seven sacraments, discern and sufficiently express the sacramentality of ALL created agents and activities.

In the final analysis, sacramental theology will be of great value if, as a result of the sacramental process proposed in this chapter, significant changes ensue in practice, enabling the familiar sacraments to achieve their purpose. And this will only occur through the revision of the ritual forms in which the sacramentality of all created agents and activities is most intensely expressed.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Guzie shows how, in several of the new rites, RCIA and the Rite of Penance, many changes have taken place. For example, Baptism, marriage, penance, etc., have been re-examined and are now spoken of as processes which culminate in a particular baptismal, marital, penitential rite. This has important consequences for those especially who want to reintroduce the catechumenate.

CHAPTER 4

THE THREE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: CHRIST, CHURCH, AND THE HUMAN PERSON

4.0 . Introduction

As I have already attempted to establish in chapter two, the search of contemporary sacramental theologians should also be sensitive to the three theological disciplines of Christology, ecclesiology, and anthropology and, in particular to the renewed understanding of Christ, of Church and of the human person which has resulted from the Second Vatican Council. For, as Vaillancourt points out, the conciliar liturgical renewal has had a significant impact on these three essential components of the sacramental order which he also calls "actants".

Because the interplay between these three actants, which closely resembles that between the human sciences and theology, will play a necessary part in resolving the current crisis, sacramental theology must do two things. First, it should lay special stress on the Christological and ecclesiological aspects proper to the sacraments which are but prolongations of the sacramentality of Christ and the Church.¹ Sacramental theology should also give greater attention to

¹ Vaillancourt, p. 64.

the human person and situate the sacraments within the whole range of symbolic actions and of the ritual celebrations of events of human life, be they secular or religious.² This chapter attempts to explore these two objectives in greater detail and hopes to present an accurate picture of the essential components which make up the contemporary sacramental theological enterprise.

4.1 Christology After the Conciliar Renewal: Christ,

Present-day Christology is more existential and closer to the experience of the first witnesses of Jesus. Furthermore it is more exegetical and takes cognizance of an evolutionary vision over and against one which separates creation and redemption.³ It is a low Christology which starts with the humanity of Jesus and then moves on to his divinity, from sign to reality signified. Moreover it is only within the context of the humanness of Jesus that the sacramentality of the Church takes on meaning and only within the context of the twofold sacraments of the humanness of Christ and the Church that individual sacraments find their significance and function.⁴

Because the meaning of the term sacrament extends beyond the framework of the celebration it is possible to call the very person of Jesus Christ the "sacrament of God". In fact the sacramentality

² Ibid., p. 65.

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ Osborne, p. 544.

of Christ is the sine qua non of understanding the sacraments for the liturgical and sacramental renewal.⁵ Christ is the context in which the sacraments find their meaning. The sacraments originate in Christ (since sacramentalization or Christianization consists in applying to experience the transformative meaning of Christ's death and resurrection) and, in this sense, Christ Jesus is the original sacrament, the sign or symbol of God's self-communication to us, i.e., the sacrament of the encounter with God for all who have faith in him. He is the primal sacrament or living sign, the actual historical presence in the world of the eschatologically triumphant mercy of God and in him the universal and collective history of all humankind enters into a final, eschatological and irrevocable stage.⁶ God's transforming self-gift is then made present through Christ's mediation, as the mediating of God's presence to humans (in the Spirit) is what constitutes sacramentality.⁷

Jesus is the paradigmatic instance of the incarnational form of God's creative omnipresence and continues this redemptive activity; and again this is why Christ is the eschatological bringer of salvation, the great and original sacrament, the sign and symbol of God's self-communication to his creatures.⁸ As a symbol of God for humankind,

⁵Ibid., p. 542.

⁶Rahner, Church and Sacraments, p. 14.

⁷Cooke, p. 640.

⁸Gray, p. 134.

Jesus is both the sign and reality signified, representing the dual movement of God reaching out to humankind (divine initiative) and humankind's responding to God's offer (human response in faith).⁹

And as the sacrament of the Father, Christ not only reveals but also communicates his Father's love and hence makes effective among humans the self-giving of God, who calls and urges them to respond in faith and love through the word and sacrament of the liturgy.¹⁰ Furthermore, Jesus is the principal sacramental encounter with God for all who have faith.¹¹

Jesus as sacrament is both revelation and embodiment of revelation: in the sacrament Christ Jesus takes the initiative in revealing himself and what God and the human person are, for according to the incarnational principle, Jesus is the sacrament of God's self-gift to the person and the sacrament of this person's reciprocal self-gift.¹² In this sense, Christ Jesus is a corporative person: for God he represents humankind and for humankind he represents the totality of God. Therefore the goal of the sacraments should be seen in continuity with the threefold revelatory mission of Jesus: it should seek the covenant of God with the human person (divine initiative),

⁹Worgul, p. 133.

¹⁰Crichton, p. 11.

¹¹Dombes, "Spirit, Church, Sacraments," no. 68.

¹²Cooke, p. 640.

to meet God and enter into union with him, and the community of persons among themselves (human response).¹³

Jesus as sacrament demonstrates the necessity of the personal assent of the believer, and that subsequently a sacrament is a faith-event or experience. Moreover he demonstrates that the influence of the sacramental action is not exhausted in the moment of the celebration and hence that this sacramental moment is part of a larger sacramental process. Yet Christ also manifests himself through his Spirit present in the world, through the word proclaimed and lived in various manners; and he speaks through the Church and manifests himself in ritual action. I will examine the first two manifestations at this time and conclude the chapter with a section on sacramental rituals.

4.2 Pneumatology: the Active Role of Christ's Spirit in the Sacraments

Edward Kilmartin observes that sacraments are "essential engagements with Jesus Christ in the Spirit within the community of believers."¹⁴

¹³ Vaillancourt, p. 108.

¹⁴ E. Kilmartin, "A Modern Approach to the Word of God and Sacraments of Christ. Perspectives and Principles," in The Sacraments: God's Love and Mercy Actualized, pp. 59-109, ed. Francis A. Eigo, Proceedings of the Theology Institute of Villanova University, vol. XI (Villanova: Villanova University, 1979), p. 63. N.B. my italics (in the Spirit).

In a similar vein, The Group of Les Dombes concludes its definition of the sacraments with the following: "The sacraments are celebrated in the ecclesial community...as effective encounters with God who gives himself to us by the presence of his Son and in the power of his Spirit."¹⁵

The point which both statements make is a very important one: that between Christology and ecclesiology is the oft forgotten yet equally significant pneumatology. The general failure to include the Holy Spirit in definitions of "sacrament" accounts for the prevailing tendency to over-emphasize the Christological dimension of the Church and its sacraments. Thus in order to correct this imbalance sacramental theologians must integrate the role of the Spirit in their explanation of the relationship between Christ, the Church and the sacraments.

The Group of Les Dombes in its statement L'Esprit-Saint, l'Eglise et les Sacrements takes special care in highlighting the pneumatological element that still remains poorly integrated in modern Roman Catholic sacramental theology and practice; it pays great attention to the activity of the Spirit orienting the whole community in liturgical action. In fact the object of the document is that it contribute to the elucidation of the notion of "sacrament" by discerning the link between the Holy Spirit and the Church's sacramental action.

¹⁵ Dombes, "Spirit, Church, Sacraments," no. 27. N.B. my italics (in the power of his Spirit).

As the title of the document suggests, the text itself reflects the fundamental perspective that there exists an indispensable link between Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church and the sacraments. Christ's Spirit is the principle of the sacraments. In fact the Holy Spirit is closely tied to Christ and sacramental action for the Church exists in the Spirit or not at all. Likewise the mission of Christ is inseparable from that of the Spirit, a theme taken up by The Group 1965 where "il est, en particulier, fondamental d'élaborer la pneumatologie en étroite connexion avec tous les aspects de la Christologie."¹⁶ Yet, although inspired by the development of both the Christological and pneumatological aspects of the Church and its liturgy at the Second Vatican Council and the movement of theological renewal represented by a reaffirmation of the role of the Spirit (as the source of continuity between Jesus and the believers), the document fails to clearly illustrate that the Spirit is indeed Christ's Spirit, and thus to develop a sacramental theology which is truly faithful to the Spirit Christology of the Johanne gospel (over and against a Logos Christology). The Group had previously studied the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in 1965 and that of the Church in 1969 with the intention of remaining faithful to scriptural perspectives. In its present endeavour this

¹⁶ Dombes, Vers une même foi eucharistique? Accord entre catholiques et protestants. (Taizé, France: Les Presses de Taizé, 1973), p. 54.

goal is achieved implicitly and simply needs a bit of refining in terms of its outward expression.

Because the Spirit is the source of continuity between Jesus and the believers Christology and ecclesiology can no longer be separated from pneumatology. And because of their acknowledged interrelatedness the Church can now be seen as the continuation of the unction of the Spirit (versus the Incarnation of the Logos), its structure being grounded in the Spirit. In addition renewed stress must be placed on the epiclesis which plays a necessary and important part in the sacramental celebration.

4.3 Ecclesiology after the Conciliar Renewal: the Church

4.3.1 The Indissoluble Unity of Christ and the Church

The ecclesiology presented here is, like all ecclesiologies, an extension and development of Christology. And just as there exists an indispensable link between contemporary Christology and ecclesiology, there also exists a similar relationship between ecclesiology and sacramental theology; the Church and the sacraments. Thus it is imperative to examine the post-conciliar understanding of the Church as it relates first, to the perception of Christ as sacrament and secondly, to the sacraments as Christians know them.

In an article entitled "De la sacramentalité propre à l'Eglise" (1973), Gustave Marthelet develops the point that both the Church and Christ are inseparably united.

L'Eglise, dans son fond, est à ce point le fait même du Christ, qu'on ne la connaît pas sans discerner en elle le Seul qui fonde, dans la foi, sa valeur et son prix. Réciproquement d'ailleurs, on ne connaît pas réellement le Christ, sans découvrir en lui Celui qui est capable de se donner l'Eglise et de se la garder en la donnant au monde.¹⁷

Thus, "...on ne peut pas connaître cette Eglise, croire en elle, l'aimer, en vivre, sans découvrir en elle aussi l'actualité même du Christ."¹⁸

According to Martelet it is precisely this type of indissoluble union, in the Spirit, between Christ and his Church, which the notion of sacramentality evokes.¹⁹

On ne coïncide avec elle en ce monde qu'en reconnaissant qu'elle ne tient...ni par elle, ni par nous, mais par le Christ qui la veut, qui la fait sacrement de Lui-même, toujours à purifier mais jamais aboli.²⁰

This is corroborated by The Group of Les Dombes according to whom the Church is a living sign in Christ in his Spirit for the world.²¹

Bausch arrives at the same conclusion: the Church is the sacrament

¹⁷ Martelet, Gustave. "De la sacramentalité propre à l'Eglise" Nouvelle Revue Théologique 95 (1973): 36.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

²¹ Dombes, "Spirit, Church, Sacraments," no. 103.

of Jesus, his continuation in time and space. "Jesus is the human face of God and the Church is the historical face of Jesus."²²

All three statements highlight two very important elements of contemporary sacramental ecclesiology: that there exists a necessary relationship between the Church and Christ (in the Spirit) and the world; and that the image which best represents this relationship is that of the Church as sacrament or living sign. In essence, these statements introduce new perspectives that influence the way the sacraments are approached and understood.

4.3.2 The Church as Sacrament

Taking up the thrust of an older tradition, the text Lumen gentium of Vatican II states that "...the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament - a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men - ..."²³ It acknowledges that the same incarnational logic that makes us speak of Christ as sacrament leads contemporary humans to speak about the Church as sacrament or living sign in an analogous sense. And yet, as Martelet is quick to point out, this is not a novel idea. Earlier references to the Church as sacrament can be found in Cyprian's writings in which the Church is "... l'infrangible sacrement de l'unité."²⁴ Earlier in 1953 Henri de Lubac

²²Bäusch, p. 20.

²³Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (Lumen Gentium), no. 1 in Documents of Vatican II, pp. 350-426, ed. Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1975).

²⁴Ibid.

spoke of the Church in the following manner: "L'Eglise est ici-bas le sacrement de Jésus-Christ, comme Jésus-Christ lui-même est pour nous, dans son humanité, le sacrement de Dieu."²⁵

During the post-conciliar period the Church, as the sacrament, sign and instrument of salvation, is viewed as a principal point of reference for all sacramental action and activity. It is the divine-human community and the goal that finalizes the Incarnation. As a community of Christic remembering and raised consciousness which springs from faith in the resurrection it is in Martelet's view a sign among the nations of what is taking place in the human person's social life.²⁶

Couverte de scories, parfois défigurée, contestable souvent et plus encore contestée, elle ne subsiste dans le monde qu'en vertu d'un charisme continu de mort et de résurrection qui est en elle l'oeuvre directe de l'Esprit.²⁷

The Church is therefore the basic sacrament of the world's salvation and must offer itself as a means whereby people can acquire a new vision of their life or their situation which Christian experience alone can provide. The Church fulfills its vocation by leading humans to recognize the loving self-gift of God in human reality; by revealing to the world the meaning of existence, the universe and history (as in

²⁵H. de Lubac, Méditations sur l'Eglise (Paris: Aubier, 1953), p. 175.

²⁶Gray, p. 137.

²⁷Martelet, p. 36.

Christ); by leading humans into the realm of meaning they cannot enter alone. The Church is the Grundsakrament, the basic sacrament of the Christ-event for all humans: it is a sacrament of the sacrament.²⁸ And only when the Church is seen as a basic sacrament of Christ do individual sacraments become theologically and liturgically credible.²⁹

4.3.3 The Church as Sacrament versus the Church as the People of God

While not scriptural in origin the conciliar formula of "Church as sacrament" is of certain value and is as equally illuminating as that of the Church as the People of God.

By referring to the Church as the sacrament of Christ, Martelet in effect lends precision to the conciliar formula with which he began his investigation.

Certes, c'est bien dans le Christ, mais c'est dès lors aussi par lui et pour lui que l'Eglise possède dans l'Esprit cette sacramentalité dont parle le concile...C'est du mystère du Christ et, de quelque manière, de lui seul, que l'Eglise témoigne, de lui seul qu'elle doit nous éduquer à dépendre et à vivre...Le vrai fondement et le seul Message entièrement original demeurent, dans l'Eglise, le Seigneur lui-même par qui l'homme est sauvé et sans lequel l'Eglise ne serait plus qu'un corps pour ainsi dire désaffecté.³⁰

²⁸Osborne, p. 538.

²⁹Ibid., p. 542.

³⁰Martelet, p. 42. N.B. my *italics* (dans, par, pour).

The sacramentality proper to the Church subsequently designates

...le coeur le plus secret du mystère de l'Eglise, l'objet réel de notre foi et par là même le contenu le plus irremplaçable de la mission qui définit l'Eglise en son ensemble et chacun des chrétiens en particulier.³¹

4.3.4 Understanding the Church as Sacrament in Contemporary Sacramental Theology

Sacraments are not only Christological but ecclesiological as well.

Thus contemporary sacramental theology presupposes an ecclesiology which: represents the Church chiefly in terms of its primordial relation to Christ, the Ursakrament and therefore gives greater attention to its sacramental nature; gives greater attention to the special sacramental actions by which it fulfills its nature; lays greater stress on the Church's pastoral (as opposed to doctrinal) activity; maintains that the awareness of the Church as an agent in the sacramental celebration is of primary importance in the current liturgical renewal and efforts being made by the churches to find themselves in today's world; lays stress on the ecclesial and communal aspects of sacramental actions.

³¹ Ibid., p. 42.

Elle suggère de façon très profonde la fonction, le rôle, la mission, il faudrait dire, la compétence spécifique de l'Eglise dans le mystère du Christ..., elle aide à situer aussi l'Eglise dans le rapport qu'elle a avec le monde..., elle permet aux chrétiens eux-mêmes de préciser en quoi consiste la sainteté propre à l'Eglise.³²

In an attempt to demonstrate why the model of the Church as sacrament as opposed to the Church as the People of God is chosen for contemporary sacramental theology, Martelet develops the following argument. If it is true that the scriptural notion of People of God defines, more than any other, the insertion of the Church in the world, and its multiform homogeneity with this world, the more theological definition of the Church as sacrament underlines to a greater degree "...ce qui relève dans l'Eglise, de l'eschatologie historiquement signifiée."³³ With this in mind the holiness of the Church is a vocation and program: it is a promise of a life which commands and postulates a constant becoming and a permanent spiritual reform. "Bref, la sainteté de l'Eglise en tant que sacrement implique la sanctification de l'Eglise comme Peuple de Dieu."³⁴ The sacramentality which defines the Church attaches it to the sphere of the Resurrected Christ. It designates the fact that Christ himself founds and spiritually assists the Church so that, by the Church, he can, until the end of time, signify himself

³²Ibid., pp. 26-27.

³³Ibid., p. 28.

³⁴Ibid., p. 29.

publicly to the world.

...corps social expressif, témoin de la
Résurrection assisté de l'Esprit, l'Eglise
ne peut parler, quelle qu'en soit la manière,
que Celui qui la fait sacrement, ou alors
il faut consentir à se taire.³⁵

Viewed in relation to Christ, the Church is the abiding promulgation of his grace-giving presence in the world: the Church is the continuance, the contemporary presence and sign of the real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence of God's salvific will in the world (in Christ's Spirit). As sacrament, the Church makes the Risen Christ redemptively present to humankind. Viewed in relation to the sacraments, the Church is the primal and fundamental sacrament; the symbolic presence similar in structure to the Incarnation, of the eschatological redemptive grace in Christ, a presence in which the sign and what is signified are united. This is why the sacrament in the ordinary sense is an instance of the fullest actualization of the Church's essence as the saving presence of Christ's grace for the individual.³⁶

As sacrament, the Church therefore is God's last enduring contact with his people: it is a community intended to continue Christ's life

³⁵ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁶ Rahner, Church and Sacraments, p. 24.

on earth, communicate by means of ritual forms and symbols he inaugurated on earth, and watch and pray until his final coming.³⁷

Because the Church is redefined in terms of significance, it can no longer be viewed as a spectator, nor as the place where a sacramental rite occurs. Rather, as Guzie tells us, the model of the Church as sacrament recaptures the Christian's awareness of being Church and, in so doing, demonstrates that the Church is the subject performing the sacramental rite; the principal agent of the rite. Sacraments are actions which the believers perform; they are not things which they receive. They are active participants, not passive recipients.³⁸

Within the context of the sacramentality of Christ and the Church the sacraments are viewed as symbols of individual aspects of the Christ-event and the Church-event for the upbuilding and unifying of the Christian community. "The sacraments are the actions of the Church which is the action of Christ who is the act of the Father's love."³⁹ Because the continued existence of the Church depends upon its ability to constantly fulfill its nature, symbolic expression becomes an essential factor in its survival.

³⁷ Herbert Musurillo, "Sacramental Symbolism and the Mysterion of the Early Church," Worship 39 (1965): 267.

³⁸ Guzie, p. 32.

³⁹ Bausch, p. 20.

Finally, ecclesiology as a constituent factor of sacramental theology is characterized by a return to a patristic view of the sacraments as communal (ecclesial) rather than individual events: as the activity-of-the-Church-in-action. Even before this, Paul, in his theology of "co-existence" tells Christians that sacraments "happen not to the individual but to the assembly of the Lord's body."⁴⁰ A sacrament is a real experience of the Church rather than a passing ritual moment⁴¹: it is an expression of the entire community as opposed to a rite administered by a single man to a single believer. And yet, the whole dialectic person as individual-person as Church member is found in the sacraments, for, although they take place in the Church, they represent the most individual, historical and salvific results for men and women in their individual history of salvation.

In sum, the new vision of the sacraments as the activity-of-the-Church-in-action as opposed to isolated actions, as prolongations and particular embodiments of the great sign of the Church, is illustrative of the third and present phase in which Christian sacramental theology finds itself. In essence, the rediscovery of the Church's sacramental nature and vocation leads to one of the more significant insights of present day sacramental theology: that, because every action of the Church is sacramental, the sacramental celebrations can no longer be

⁴⁰ Guzie, p. 60.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 103.

envisioned as co-extensive with sacramental reality in its entirety; that sacramentality is not restricted to the ritual moment but is as broad as life.

This shift in emphasis from sacramental rite to the Church as sacrament raises new problems: it expands the framework of sacramentality, thus allowing a certain ambiguity to exist (i.e., the simultaneous existence of seven sacramental actions and of the sacramentality of every action of the Church). Yet, as I have shown, this shift can also be advantageous if it is interpreted as the Church and all of life, in the seven sacraments, giving a privileged place to certain situations and actions in which it fulfills in a special way its vocation to be a sacrament. Hence the advantages of such an unlimited scope of sacramental activity outweigh the disadvantages, especially if we consider Kiesling's view.

4.4 Jesus, the Church, Sacraments and Word

Before turning to the third component of contemporary sacramental theology, an additional point must be made regarding post-conciliar Christology and ecclesiology.

Although the renewal of sacramental theology presupposes a renewed understanding of Christ and the Church as sacraments, it also presumes that an indispensable link exists between sacrament and word. Hence, on the basis of this relationship, it follows that contemporary Christology and ecclesiology must incorporate a renewed understanding

of Christ and the Church in terms of Word and that sacramental theology must do the same.

4.4.1 Jesus: Word of God and Sacrament

In his book Ministry to Word and Sacraments, Cooke illustrates the current desire to relate word and sacrament, and reinterprets the sacramentality of Christ in terms of Word. Hence he talks of Jesus as embodied Word of the Father.⁴² In so doing he shows that contemporary sacramental theology can start with a theology of the Word of God, Jesus, as the paradigm for all further sacramental affirmations regarding the Church and the individual sacraments.⁴³

The special characteristic of God's word proclaimed in and through the Church is suggested as the contemporary point of departure for a theology of the sacraments which is meaningful for today's Christian. The Word of God is therefore viewed as the proper context for understanding the Church and its sacraments. Jesus is, as Word of God, the word-event, the incarnation of God's word and the sacramental and historical medium for the Father's self-communication to mankind.⁴⁴

⁴²Cooke, p. 640.

⁴³Worgul, p. 196.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 131.

4.4.2 Church and Word

The Christological starting-point leads to ecclesiological affirmations. Together with the Spirit, the Church is the continuation of the sacramental historical Jesus in the world. Not only is the Spirit Church founded on God's Word, Jesus; it is also Christ's presence in history and is a continued speaking of that word in history. The Church is the proclaimer of the word, and the sacraments are concrete expressions of this proclamation: the Church speaks and performs the word and makes it visible in sacramental action.

4.4.3 Word and Sacrament

Current theological investigation into the meaning of the sacraments restores the emphasis on the dynamic element of proclamation and revelation of the Word in our understanding of sacramental theology and life.⁴⁵ It abandons once-and-for-all the dichotomous view of the Church's activity and regards the proclamation of the word and the celebration of certain community and individual actions as forming a single embodiment of the Church's sacramental activity.⁴⁶ In fact, word and sacrament remain as two sides of the same sacramental coin.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Vaillancourt, p. 95.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Bausch, p. 22.

Scripture and liturgical ceremony form...one conjoined reality of the Church giving expression to its own sacramental function of making Christ redemptively present to men and women throughout history. The ritual actions that have come to be named "sacraments" because they speak in special fashion of the mystery of Christ continuing to transform human experience by his death and resurrection are "word of God" in the fullest sense.⁴⁸

The word is therefore an essential part of the sacramental process. In fact, the fundamental essence of sacrament, according to Rahner, consists in Word. The sacrament is not only a symbolic action but is a visible word, celebrated in faith. And this is of great ecumenical consequence. Sacraments are special word-events or word acts; they are "the scripture words in pantomime"⁴⁹; they are living words of faith which carry out what the word proclaims. As ritual proclamations, sacraments are the highest expression of the manifestive, eventful Word of God, Jesus, in the Church.⁵⁰ As ecclesial manifestations of the word, they fulfill the essence of the Church.

Since there are three essential components in sacramental theology, I must add to the preceding presentation of Christ, the Spirit, and the Church an examination of the current vision of the human person and must situate the sacraments within the framework of this person's symbolic and ritual activity, both secular and religious. This then is the second objective of this chapter.

⁴⁸ Cooke, p. 323.

⁴⁹ Bausch, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Rahner, "What is a Sacrament?" Worship 47 (1973): 283.
(hereafter cited as "Sacrament")

4.5 Anthropology after the Conciliar Renewal: The Human Person

Sacraments are anchored deep in the person's nature. They are human events and actions and, as human phenomena, they are intrinsically anthropological. The same is true of the Church as Grundsakrament and of Christ as Ursakrament since Christ, the Church, and the human person are interwoven.

According to Vaillancourt, Christian consciousness is in the process of establishing for itself a new conception of the human person which will profoundly affect sacramental theology and the pastoral ministry of the sacraments.⁵¹ I am referring to the new directions that have been taken in the anthropology of Vatican II. The Council proposes an historical, dynamic, unified, and optimistic view of the person, the image of God.⁵² This vision entails several important consequences for a theological concept of salvation which, in turn, affects our understanding of the sacraments.

4.5.1 Sacraments and the Salvation of the Human Person

As we have already seen in the second chapter on methodology, the development of the modern sciences coupled with the person's new-found consciousness of the values inherent in himself/herself and in nature brings about a new vision of the relationship between the

⁵¹ Vaillancourt, p. 47.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 48-50.

spiritual and the temporal; the natural and the supernatural. This in turn is illustrative of the present-day shift from ecclesiocentrism or a two-zone theory of the world, to an acknowledgement of the cohesion, autonomy and truth proper to earthly values.⁵³ In setting aside any opposition between earthly and otherearthly values and by reaffirming the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom, Vatican II makes it clear that the world and the Church are no longer thought of as radically opposed but rather as moving together toward the Kingdom. This leads to a new concept of salvation which is seen as connected with the great concerns of the day and which evokes the idea of individuals in their totality and fullness as they are made in God's image. The contemporary interpretation of salvation which flows from the consciousness Christians now have of themselves in relation to others leads to a view that, to be Christian is ultimately to be human.⁵⁴ Hence salvation is the complete fulfillment of persons by harmonious relations with themselves, the environment, others and God and is an ever constant, eschatological process.⁵⁵ It is the totality and plenitude of self-fulfillment and Christian faith intervenes to broaden the perspectives of these individuals.

Within the context of an anthropological renewal this new Christian consciousness of salvation has several major implications for sacramental

⁵³Ibid., p. 57.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 56.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 59.

theology. In the first place, sacraments are no longer viewed as the particular ritual actions which "give grace", which is something to be accumulated. Rather, sacraments acquire a new function and role in the fulfillment and attainment of a person's salvation: Christians are the evolutionary-eschatological image of God and sacraments function to make known or present to them the image of God which they are called upon to realize in themselves and to help them achieve realization.⁵⁶ Sacraments tell Christians what they are and called to become and are not limited to the moment of celebration. And, like salvation, they embrace individuals in their existential totality and concrete situation. Yet sacraments are not merely private means or individual ways of salvation but they also sanctify Christians by bringing them together since "human growth and perfection is both as corporate as it is personal."⁵⁷ The mystery of grace is the true mystery of both communal and personal authenticity and freedom.⁵⁸

4.5.2 Symbolic and Ritual Action

In our secularized culture, sacramental rites are the object of a new kind of protest which is having an impact on confessional

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁷ Worgul, p. XIII.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

reservations about sacraments.⁵⁹ Because of the form in which they are experienced, the common perception is that sacraments are programmed rites, repetitive and kept in tow by Church authorities. However this perception is in part contradicted by the rediscovery of the meaning of human and Christian symbolic and ritual action.⁶⁰

Hence, not only must Christian sacramental action be situated within the context of a person's salvation or self-fulfillment but it must also be situated within the wider context of symbolic action in general and the secular and religious ritual action of human persons in which they celebrate the important events of their lives.

4.5.2.1 Symbolic Action: The Human Person as Symbol Maker

The crisis of (sacramental) rituals which (Christian) people are currently experiencing implies a serious poverty of symbols. Yet the theology of the sacraments began by acknowledging that sacraments are symbols and this is where our own age has had to return.⁶¹ Based on the premise that symbolism is a person's only means of communication, contemporary sacramental theology presupposes that symbols play a crucial role in human life in general (social or cultural symbols) and

⁵⁹Dombes, "Spirit, Church and Sacraments," no. 33.

⁶⁰I say "in part" because we have already seen that it is also contradicted by post-conciliar anthropology and the resulting understanding of salvation.

⁶¹Guzie, p. 46.

in sacramental life in particular (religious or Christian symbols).⁶²

Therefore symbolic interpretation exists on two levels: human symbolism and faith symbolism. Christian sacramental symbolism is based on the human symbolism shared by all humankind: it is the faith-inspired reading of the human situation.⁶³ Because humans are symbol-making animals, all their activity is symbolic. Within the Christian context, it is expressive of faith and grace: it is an efficacious symbol of God's saving grace in Christ and is therefore "sacramental".

"Sacramentality" therefore consists in the symbolic communication of the divine present in the everyday life world, and not in a somehow separate "religious" world. Consequently, the individual sacraments are redefined as "symbols" rather than as "instruments". This point will be developed in greater detail in the final chapter of the dissertation. What is important to remember at this time is that, whether the divine is active in the life world or is present in a specific liturgical action, this presence is "hidden" within finite media-symbols.⁶⁴

Of themselves sacraments do not exist since as media-symbols they can only be symbols of something else. What does exist is Christ, the Church, and the human person, all of whom perform actions that have sacramental-symbolic value. The factor that enables us to discover a

⁶² Gilkey, p. 249.

⁶³ Vaillancourt, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

sacramental dimension in objects and actions, and in events and persons is precisely Christian sacramental symbolism. The sacramental meaning of reality therefore is its symbolic, second meaning; the capacity of things, events and human persons to point to a meaning beyond themselves.⁶⁵ "A symbol is something that points to a reality different from itself and makes it present without being identical to it."⁶⁶

In addition, there exists three levels of symbolic mediation.⁶⁷ First off, all creation is a finite medium or symbol of the divine: creation only becomes its true self as it becomes the vehicle or medium for inward grace, reflecting and so revealing its presence.⁶⁸ Secondly, the presence of the divine can be found in and through special revelatory events and persons and is communicated through symbols to the continuing community (which is founded upon a special presence).⁶⁹ Finally, in the Christian tradition, the most important

⁶⁵ Vaillancourt, p. 69.

⁶⁶ Worgul, p. 41.

⁶⁷ Mediation is the agency by which God's transforming self-gift is made present to humans. For example, Christ as sacrament (symbol) makes his Father present and does so most formally in those symbolic activities that have been traditionally called sacraments.

⁶⁸ Gilkey, p. 256.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 259.

symbols are composed of communal acts and elements (sacraments) and spoken and reflected words (word).⁷⁰ And unless the symbols of our tradition in word and sacrament are brought into relation to the ultimate that permeates ordinary life, unless traditional symbols reawaken in us their role of symbols of divine activity, there is no experience of the holy and hence, the sacramental crisis continues.

In the final analysis we live in a sacramental universe whose many signs of the presence and activities of Christ represent various degrees of Christian sacramental symbolism, one of which is sacramental ritual action, the third level of symbolic mediation.

4.5.2.2 Ritual Action: The Human Person as Ritual Being

The starting-point for all our questions and inquiries is a pastoral concern, one which sees the present-day crisis taking place in the ritual arena. And it is to this arena that we now turn.

Sacraments are symbolic ritual signs and we, as humans, are a ritual people although we no longer see this today. Rituals and symbols no longer mean anything to us for we have lost common understanding and agreement as to their meaning and we find ourselves incapable of seeing through them to the mystery beyond.⁷¹ We find it

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Bausch, p. 23.

difficult if not impossible to sense in ritual in general and sacramental ritual in particular any kind of touchstone with God. Yet if religion is to "succeed", if we are to have a sense about the sacrament, its rituals must possess the power to shake us in our deepest insides and pull us into the mystery of God's presence in the world.⁷² Thus, since sacraments involve symbols and rituals, it would seem that we must first be educated to an understanding and appreciation of ritual itself.⁷³

For Raimundo Panikkar humans no longer see themselves as symbol makers and ritual beings. Yet it is to a significant degree in and through ritual, not by reason or will or body alone, that they reach the ultimate goal of their existence.⁷⁴ "Man is a ritual being. He is prompted by his own psychology to spell out in symbol his beliefs and the truths he lives by."⁷⁵ He sees contemporary humans as they reflect on their own situation, seeing how disoriented they are as to the meaning of their life and civilization. And he sees this despair as a probable result of the present crisis of rituals and symbols, a crisis which is due to the unsuccessful attempt of human beings to live and cope out of purely intellectual intuitions. Panikkar tells us that the crisis begins with the shift to "literacy" at which time

⁷²Ibid., pp. 25-26.

⁷³Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁴Panikkar, "Man as Ritual Being," p. 28.

⁷⁵Bausch, p. 115.

ritual drops to a second order.⁷⁶ Humans no longer believe that active participation in the symbolic power of ritual, embodied in liturgical participation in community life and in the power of images, brings salvation and happiness.⁷⁶ Rather, they believe that it is the power of the mind which puts them in contact with the transcendent and is an organ for the transcendent. The intellect and praxis/ritual action are not the same, the latter being mere substitutes for real knowledge.⁷⁷

Because the mind in fact has no saving power and is thus ineffective, humans now realize that they cannot live without rituals. As long as they live in time and space, ritual is needed to maintain the link with the transcendent. So says Guzie:

Christian faith did not begin with concepts and meanings which people then went on to find rituals for. The rituals came first, because there was no better way to say it all.⁷⁸

First, ritual is an intermediary, a mediator. Secondly, it is an expression which belongs to the human race and hence must be down to earth and close to life. And because it is an integral part of human existence it cannot be created nor can it be manipulated. Thirdly, the realm of ritual is of the unmanifest, invisible and transcendent; it leads beyond the immediate goal of an isolated action. Fourthly, it is primarily symbolical as opposed to conceptual, doctrinal or

⁷⁶ Panikkar, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Guzie, p. 134.

pedagogical.⁷⁹ And it is a symbol only for those who recognize it as such. As a symbolic act, ritual expresses the inbuilt ontological human desire for "God", the ultimate urge for happiness, the striving for salvation, liberation or wholeness.⁸⁰ It is in and through ritual that humans can step toward the transcendent, fulfill their life and attain "salvation". Thus, once the symbolic, ritual acts of the liturgy no longer reveal what they are intended to disclose, they cease to be living symbols. Finally, the continued existence of a secular or religious group and of living tradition depends on ritual and its constant repetition.

The solution to the present crisis is the rediscovery of the central place and function of ritual; an integrative human-symbolic activity by means of which a person walks toward the transcendent, discovers the value of life and collaborates in the construction, reconstruction, redemption or re-creation of the world.⁸¹ Ritual is a human existential and is central to the shaping of a person's life and directing the destiny of the cosmos. Thus it is not a mere appendix to his/her life, nor is it a means of escape from life but is an intensification of it. In the final analysis the crisis Christians face today goes beyond the scope of merely a crisis of techniques of worship or means of celebrating but is in effect a crisis of life itself.⁸²

⁷⁹ Panikkar, p. 13, pp. 23-24.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸² Ibid., p. 19.

4.5.2.3 The Rediscovery of Ritual

The rediscovery of the importance, function and meaning of ritual is significant for the vitality of individual-personal and corporate secular existence and for religions as well. According to psychology, sociology, and anthropology it is at the nerve center of human life since it communicates and sustains a particular culture's world-view or root metaphor. And because Christian sacraments exhibit all the characteristics of ritual in general, they cannot be extrinsic to Christian faith but should be considered normal as well as necessary for Christian culture and central to the continued life of faith.⁸³

Contemporary sacramental theology presumes that ritual is indigenous to both human and Christian cultural life: sacraments fulfill in Christian culture the same symbolic function ritual performs in culture as a whole.⁸⁴ Furthermore, ritual is important for both the life of the individual and of the community.

In light of this sacramental theology should turn to the human sciences as the source for its theological reflection. For the value and importance of the sacraments attain increased stature when contextualized by an anthropological understanding of ritual. More specifically the lines of convergence on the meaning and significance

⁸³ Worgul, p. 224.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 228.

of ritual for individuals and communities via psychology, sociology, anthropology and philosophy are of utmost importance for a proper understanding and evaluation of Christian rituals called sacraments.⁸⁵

4.5.2.4 The Anthropological Foundation of Rituals called "Sacraments" by the Church: Ritual in General

Psychological research attests to the absolute necessity of ritual for healthy personal development and mature integration. Ritual is at the basis of what it means to be human and plays an essential role in the formation and development of the human personality.⁸⁶ It is also an expression of a primordial existential urge for integration with the whole that transcends and transfigures it.⁸⁷ It opens the possibility for the individual as well as the community to resolve the experienced fragmentary and bi-polar oppositions which define human existence. And hence it is not immature and escapist behavior but is an attempt by the power of human transcendence to discover the possible meaning of life.⁸⁸ It not only articulates what it means to be human but functions to bring about humanness.

Sociology and anthropology issue an equal claim for the indispensable role of ritual in cultural and social existence, as community health and stability are parallel to individual development

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 47.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 64.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 67.

and wholeness.⁸⁹ In light of this, ritual is understood as an interpretative behavior that has social effects: it has an indispensable role not only in personal existence but in cultural and social existence as well. It is a "given" of human existence: it is an a priori necessity for the existence and sustenance of a cultural group's or social unit's life. It permeates all three dimensions of culture - language, patterns of behavior, and social structures⁹⁰ - and is one of the fundamental structures of the social being.⁹¹ Ritual is also the medium for the fundamental root metaphor or world-view of a particular culture.⁹² And repetition of a ritual serves to reinforce the "belief system" of this particular social community within the individual.⁹³

Hence we must reject any interpretation of ritual as a secondary or insignificant feature within human existence for without it, there is no human society and with impoverished ritual, the human community becomes weakened, fragile, and disarrayed.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 105.

⁹⁰ Brinkman, "On Sacramental Man: V," p. 104.

⁹¹ R. Didier, "Des sacrements, pourquoi? Enjeux anthropologiques et théologiques." La Maison Dieu 119 (1974): 38.

⁹² Worgul, p. 184.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 105.

Ritual is a commentator explaining the meaning of life as lived by various social groups in their dialogue with time, space and history. It speaks of humanity and preserves its origins, expresses its stability and affirms its creativity and dynamism for change and development.⁹⁵

Contemporary philosophical reflection adds support and insight to the importance of ritual and symbolism in the unfolding of individual and collective existence. Since Kant, it has turned to the investigation of the two elements which ground ritual co-existence: the subject (human existence as co-existence) and transcendence (recognition of the origin or basis of human transcendence; the act or power of transcendence).

Co-existence and transcendence are two major themes in any attempt to reconstruct a sacramental theology commensurate with previously stated anthropological data. They are intrinsic to human existence, a fact which only enhances the possibility of developing a sacramental theology which is true to contemporary life. Ritual is the key vehicle that allows both human co-existence and transcendence to be transformed from ideas to reality, from potential to actualization.⁹⁶

It is safe to conclude then that ritual expresses two fundamental needs of humans. First, it is a private moment in which humans become aware of the real sources of their lives, of what they are beyond their

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 117.

daily routines and of what gives them meaning. Secondly, it develops humans as social entities and integrates them more fully into the body to which they belong.⁹⁷ For Christians, this means that in the liturgical celebration there is first of all a vertical movement, the outgoing of humans to God, as well as a horizontal movement, the celebration of the Church, the worshipping community. As Didier notes, Christian ritual is above all

...l'agir symbolique concret, plus ou moins programmé, par lequel l'homme est intégré dans une église, s'identifie comme croyant, et par lequel l'église elle-même prend son identité dans la société globale.⁹⁸

In the final analysis a theology of the sacraments constructed without reference and docility to the behavioral sciences is blind to a source of great insight and nourishment. All behavioral sciences identify a drive in human existence for meaning in the face of an inconsistent world, a constant quest for identity, harmony and wholeness. Ritual is ever present in this context as a medium, tool and potential cause of these life-sustaining goals and is indigenous to everyone and every culture. It is the unspoken creed interpreting human experience.⁹⁹

The theologian's concern should be to demonstrate that Christians perform behavior described as normal by behavioral sciences in their

⁹⁷Vaillancourt, p. 104.

⁹⁸Didier, p. 39.

⁹⁹Worgul, p. 121.

sacramental rituals; that religious ritual behavior is as normal for Christians as ritual behavior is for everyone. Christian culture should follow the same psychological, sociological, anthropological and philosophical lines as any culture and differ from other sciences not because of the presence of ritual but because of the truth status claimed for its interpretation of the meaning and style of life. In other words, while sacraments, as Christian religious rituals, follow the norms, structures, and functions of rituals in general, they are also specified within the particularity of a Christian world-view.

4.5.2.5 Sacraments: Christian Religious Rituals

Root metaphors are at the nerve center of cultural life and ritual is an indispensable instrument for their social transmission and expression. And if rituals express the world-view of a particular culture, the same can be said of the Christian sacraments, since these follow the operations and functions of all ritual. The unique center of Christianity is its root metaphor, Christ's death and resurrection. The sacraments continually express and reinforce this Christian world-view and, in so doing, bring all reality under the paradigmatic Christ.¹⁰⁰ They actualize the Paschal Mystery which is inaccessible to rational thinking in the here and now of history. And through the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 198.

repetition of Christian rituals this distinctive world-view is further reinforced and the "unfinished business" of concretely fulfilling its exigencies can be taken up again and again.¹⁰¹

Ritual is not just an occasion of catechism or a pastoral gathering or a simple confirmation of a faith experience for it does something, and this is why we can say that Christians need rituals and therefore sacraments to live faith. Ritual is essential and meaningful for Christian existence because it is expressive of the fundamental ecclesial root metaphor of Christianity which it makes more intensely present for those who believe. Meaningful participation through ritual in any culture's root metaphor or world hypothesis presumes belief, be it preconscious or thematized; in Christian terms, this is faith, both personal and communal/corporate.¹⁰²

In addition to being expressive of the Christian root metaphor, sacramental rituals, like the Church and worship, can also be seen in terms of consciousness-raising. This means that when contemporary Christians abandon ecclesial sacramentality they are not abandoned by God since he continues to be creatively and redemptively present in the very sacramentality of life itself. Rather, in abandoning worship and hence rituals, Christians always run the risk of a diminished consciousness and forgetfulness. All images and rituals of the Christian

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 228.

tradition are intended to orient believers toward the saeculum and to afford them clues for an interpretation of contemporary divine activity there. Men and women need these clues today and renewed liturgy must provide them.

Until recently, Christian religious life was viewed as an intriguing and peculiar combination of old and new. And a tension persisted among Christians who thought of themselves as of and yet not of this world. Now relief is found in ritual, performed in the world and all with worldly ingredients and yet not of the world. For in today's pluralistic world the issue is ritual/orthopraxis, not doctrinal/orthodoxy. And Christians will react positively to a set of symbols that are central to their lives and perform a cosmotheandric liturgy around the central figure of Christ.

4.6 Concluding Remarks

The contemporary sacramental theology which is envisaged by today's Catholic writers acknowledges the preeminent importance of Christ (and his Spirit), of Church and of the human person in its investigation of the meaning of the sacraments. It points out that the sacraments are intrinsically Christological (and hence pneumatological), ecclesiological, and anthropological since the realities of Christ, of Church and of the human person are inseparably united.

Sacraments exist because Christ, the Church and the human person exist symbolically. Hence contemporary sacramental theology must

also recognize that it needs to incorporate into its investigation the current rediscovery of both symbolism and of the central place and function of ritual in cultural and hence Christian religious life.

Despite these findings, contemporary sacramental theology still remains incomplete. For in the final analysis, the findings, along with the conclusions of the previous three chapters, must all be incorporated into a final descriptive theological definition of "sacrament", to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 5

A DESCRIPTIVE THEOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF SACRAMENT

5.0 Introduction

It is safe to conclude from this examination of contemporary sacramental-theological literature that Roman Catholic theology has undergone more changes in the past three decades than in the previous four centuries.¹ In taking a step toward redefining the religious significance of the sacraments, Roman Catholic theologians have been unburdening themselves of mechanistic and legalistic attitudes which dominate the modern treatment of sacraments. In a sense, theologians have been trying to get behind traditional words used to explain the sacraments and to recapture experiences which gave rise to those explanations. They have been trying to get beneath the verbal meaning in the sacraments to experienced meaning, in the hopes of putting this meaning into new words.

The purpose of this chapter is to find the words which best express what the sacraments are for contemporary post-conciliar Catholics. And because my previous analysis remains incomplete, I will complement it by presenting numerous interpretations of "sacrament" on the basis of which I will formulate a descriptive theological definition of "sacrament" that will best represent the interests and

¹Martos, p. 139.

positions of contemporary sacramental theologians, and that encompasses all the changes which have come about during the post-conciliar process of reform.

5.1 Contemporary Interpretations

In order to fully comprehend the many contemporary interpretations of the sacraments which at present make up the current body of sacramental literature, it might be useful to briefly take a look at the definitions put forth by Augustine and Aquinas whose influence is present in the very definitions I am considering in this chapter.

5.1.1 Augustine and Aquinas

Augustine's definition of sacraments as signs of grace, of a sacred reality, marks the first step in rethinking the meaning of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments and is the basis for our contemporary understanding of the sacramental universe.² Furthermore the contemporary renewal is in part a return to this insight only as it is combined with Aquinas' definition of sacraments as commemorative, demonstrative, and prefigurative signs, a definition which highlights the three temporal dimensions and which presumes that these signs are seven in number.

²Ibid., p. 140.

5.1.2 Sacraments as Encounters with Christ: Edward Schillebeeckx

Although Schillebeeckx's writings on the sacraments are a product of the 1950s and 1960s, his conclusions are still important for contemporary sacramental theology. As Martos notes:

More than any other person Schillebeeckx was instrumental in showing that Catholicism could develop a theology of the sacraments which was both faithful to the insights of Thomas Aquinas and free of the minimalistic tendency of late scholasticism. Like Aquinas he attempted to recapture the religious experience within the sacramental ritual and then to speak about that experience in philosophical terms, but the basic terms he chose came not from Aristotelian philosophy but from contemporary existentialism.³

Schillebeeckx suggests that the closest equivalent to what happens in a sacramental experience is an existential encounter between persons in which they discover something of the mystery that the other person is. According to this model the essence of any sacrament is the encounter with Christ, made available to Catholics through ecclesial rites.⁴ Schillebeeckx traces the seven traditional sacraments to the Church, which is the sacrament of Christ, and to Christ himself, who is the sacrament of God. As official signs and acts of the Church, they are also signs and acts of Christ. They signify the redemptive action of Christ in the world, and it is the power of God's grace which is effectively communicated through them.⁵

³Ibid., p. 141.

⁴Ibid., p. 143.

⁵Ibid., p. 142.

5.1.3 Sacraments as Symbolic Actions of the Church: Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner briefly defines sacraments as symbolic actions of the Church. Human existence is symbolic activity⁶ and grace, as self-transcendence is a matter of going beyond what one already has become.⁷ Christ is in one sense the source and in another sense the sacrament or sign of continual self-transcendence. Those who accept Christ as their savior and live as he did become in turn sacraments to others. The Church was and continues to be a sacrament, a sign of Christ and a channel of grace in the world.⁸ And during the course of history it came to adopt seven ritual signs of God's grace which are symbolic activities in the sense already described because when they are performed the community collectively expresses what it is and what it is becoming more fully. These sacramental rituals are intensified expressions of the Church's sacramental nature and are signs and means of grace to those who enter deeply into them through faith⁹: they represent instances of the fullest actualization of the Church's essence as the saving presence of Christ's grace for the individual.¹⁰ They are signs of the self-transcendence that God makes possible and are the

⁶Ibid., pp. 143-144.

⁷Ibid., p. 145.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Rahner, Church and Sacraments, p. 26.

means of acknowledging, experiencing and incorporating grace in daily life.¹¹

Christ instituted the sacramental Church and, since sacramental ritual actions symbolize the grace of complete self-transcendence which Christ made possible, Christ can be said to have instituted everything that the sacraments signify and make available to others.¹²

5.1.4 Sacraments as Symbols of Human (Sacred) Meaning

Influenced by "secular theology" of the late 1960s and early 1970s some proponents of a more experiential approach to the Roman Catholic sacraments have given them a more humanistic interpretation as well.¹³ Since Vatican II has been faced with the task of explaining Christianity to a new generation of Roman Catholics without the aid of the old catechism, one of the ways that it has explained the sacraments has been to relate them to basic human experiences (celebration, forgiveness, sharing, etc.).¹⁴

We have already seen that the starting-point for a more humanistic theology is not a two-zone theory of Christianity but amounts to a simplification of the notion that reality is not neatly divided into

¹¹Martos, pp. 145-146.

¹²Ibid., p. 146.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

two parts, one natural and the other supernatural; and that grace is therefore everywhere in human experience.¹⁵ This new understanding has been careful to preserve the sense of the sacred about the sacraments: considered as symbols of sacred meaning, the sacraments are still regarded as "doors to an experiential awareness of what is meaningful and precious, and in that sense sacred, in human life."¹⁶

In this perspective Roman Catholic sacraments are often viewed as symbolic representations of basic human meanings and values. They are calls to be more fully human, and to live up to the ideals that the rites represent. They are ritual affirmations of basic human needs and desires. Thus the purpose of the sacraments is to open our eyes to see what is always there in our life experience.¹⁷

Sacraments also have a social significance: they are symbolic statements of what the community believes it is and hopes to be, and in this sense they are signs of the faith of the Church. The traditional seven sacraments also take place at significant moments in an individual's life in the community.¹⁸

On the one hand this approach has led to greater freedom and experimentation with rituals. On the other hand it has led to a more

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

intensive effort to explain the symbolic meaning that can be found in authorized rituals, for many of the sacraments employ symbolic objects, gestures, and words whose meaning is unknown or unclear to contemporary Roman Catholics. If sacraments are to be effective signs, Roman Catholics have to learn to read sign language.¹⁹

5.1.5 Sacraments as Transformations of Human Reality: Bernard Cooke

Although Bernard Cooke's definition is similar to that of Schillebeeckx and Rahner, it is more clearly experiential in content. Subsequently the key notion of this definition is that meaning is constitutive of human reality and that the purpose of the sacraments is to transform the meaning of fundamental human experiences.²⁰

Christians point to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as definitive for revealing what the experience of being human is all about for he was the man in whom God spoke the ultimate word about the "meaning" of human life. In the consciousness of his life Jesus transformed the meaning of human existence and thereby transformed the very reality of that existence. He was for his followers a sacrament.²¹ Jesus Christ in the transformation of his own human reality reinterpreted what it means to be human, making that transformation and reinterpretation available to others for all time. This new depth of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 149.

meaning that Jesus discovered has entered into human history and has made a permanent change in the reality of our existence. He has opened the way to a new, resurrected life which still lies open to any person who enters it in faith. And the Church which traces its existence to the first experiences of the disciples of Jesus has always lived with the sacramental means of transforming the meaning and reality of life.²²

What the believers discover in their sacramental experience was and is made available to them through Christ. The life of Jesus provided both the historical starting-point and the existential meaning of Christian sacraments.²³ Hence the sacraments are the "Church's doors into a new realm of human meaning, a transforming meaning made available to all by the life, death and resurrection of Christ."²⁴

5.1.6 Sacraments as Symbolic Activities of Christ, of Church and of the Human Person

For Vaillancourt, the sacramental activity of Christ, the Church and the human person simultaneously proclaims, actualizes and celebrates.

²²Ibid.; Transforming is also sacramentalizing, Christianizing, transignifying, etc.

²³Ibid., p. 150; Martos defines sacraments as "doors to the sacred" (realm of meaning).

²⁴Ibid.

the presence and action of God in human life.²⁵ And like Christ's, the Church's sacramental action has three special functions: the Christian sacrament reveals the mystery of God and the meaning of the person's life; actualizes this mystery and meaning, and celebrates them.²⁶ Interwoven with these three functions are the three dimensions of the sacraments: they are commemorative, demonstrative, and participative signs.

The revelation of God and the individual is concrete, dynamic, and transformative.²⁷ It signifies the action of the Church, the action of Christ and privileged occasions for the human person.

Christian sacramentality has to do with visibility at the level of being and action: the being and activity of the Church, Jesus and the individual. And Christian sacraments are the expression of Christ, of the Church and of the human person in their being and activity.²⁸ They actualize the Paschal Mystery and render it present in a person's life.²⁹ Actualization, therefore, is but the unfolding of the revelation/proclamation aspect of sacramentality.

²⁵Vaillancourt, p. 112.

²⁶Ibid., p. 121.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., p. 122.

²⁹Bausch, p. 117.

Finally, the liturgical celebration is a form of proclamation and a locus of realization and actualization. It is not co-extensive with sacramental reality and hence is extended in time. In other words it is an ongoing reality or process which is not limited to a sacramental rite and which must be in close contact with the concrete life of the people.

5.1.7 The Group of Les Dombes

In its document on the sacraments, The Group of Les Dombes contributes to the elucidation of the notion of sacrament by discerning the link between the Holy Spirit and the Church's sacramentality.

The document gives a lengthy definition of "sacrament" which has sought to bring together the best of historical teaching on sacraments from ancient to modern times while at the same time expressing the basic option that permeates the text.

The sacraments are actions by which the God of Jesus Christ commits and pledges this Word and promises within the New Covenant which he has contracted on his people's behalf by the Easter event of his Son. Through the sacraments his People once again touch this mysterious reality in which the same God who once intervened in human history now comes to them, veiled by signs, yet accessible through their transparency, to assure them of his presence and to live with and in them as their ally. The sacraments are celebrated in the ecclesial community, the partner who obeys the Savior's Word in faith, as effective encounters with God who gives himself to us by the presence of his Son and in the power of his Spirit.³⁰

³⁰ Dombes, "Spirit, Church and Sacraments," no. 25.

This definition is developed according to the two sides of the covenant between God and his people: the initiative of God the Father who sent his Son to accomplish the event of our salvation and who acts in the constant power of his Spirit AND the response of the believer situated in the ecclesial community which celebrates the sacraments in faith and obedience. The sacramental reality is founded in Scripture, in the economy of the covenant which is structured in three moments: the founding event; the actualization of this event in celebrations which commemorate it; and active orientation toward the future and the definitive accomplishment of God's gift.

The whole plan of salvation is therefore sacramental because sacraments which originate in Christ serve a similar function as did the covenant for Israel. They are the central events in the present stage of salvation, the fulfillment of all the events of God among the Israelites and the confirmation of the event of the Incarnation. They correspond to the second moment of the covenant as they consist in the actualization of the saving acts performed by Jesus and are a living memorial of them.³¹ They are God's love and mercy actualized.

Finally the sacraments are the common celebration of the Christ event - which always consists in symbolic words and actions - and introduce humans into the Trinitarian communion, as shown in the structure of every developed sacramental celebration which usually consists of thanksgiving to the Father, memorial to the Son's actions and invocation of the Spirit or epiclesis.

³¹ Ibid., no. 128.

In short, the sacrament, in which Christ makes God present to us in the Spirit, is a visible word and symbolic act celebrated in faith with the specific function of setting the seal of the covenant concluded between God and his people upon a community or individual. It is not an isolated action within the Church but is the activity-of-the-Church-in-action.

The document can be summarized in the following simplified way. After a brief historical overview we are provided with a rather long yet comprehensive definition of "sacrament", situated within a tri-partite covenantal framework of divine initiative and human response in which the Church is the place of the covenant and the living sign of the Spirit (of Christ) for the world. The Word of God (in the Spirit) is an ecclesial word and is indissolubly linked to the sacraments of Christ (in the Spirit) which are ecclesial celebrations of faith or community actions. Also implied here is the function and faith of the participants - as part of a common priesthood - in the liturgical or sacramental celebration, be they the community of the faithful or the ordained ministers.

5.1.8 Tad Guzie

Guzie proposes a definition of sacrament which takes into account a critical assimilation of the past together with the experience of the Church today.

A sacrament is a festive action in which Christians assemble to celebrate their lived experience and to call to heart their common story. The action is a symbol of God's care for us in Christ. Enacting the symbol brings us closer to one another in the Church to the Lord who is there for us.³²

The first part of this definition is a summary of the cycle of human life experience-story-festivity or celebration which is basic to the Christian's understanding of the sacramental process. "The rhythm that makes life human is the process by which we live, name and frame our (Christian) experience."³³ Guzie believes that the problem with today's Roman Catholic understanding of sacramental rituals is that festivity is detached from its natural human cycle; that it is not in touch with our daily lived experience and story. Legalism and magic are the fruits of a sacrament becoming detached from its natural cycle.³⁴

The second part of this definition describes the effect of the sacraments which do two things: celebrating the sacraments brings to conscious awareness the grace which is already present in the world and brings us closer to one another in the Church and to Christ who is always present to us.

³²Guzie, p. 53. I would substitute action for moment; love for care and add "to the Lord who is always there for us."

³³Ibid., p. 23.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 19-20.

5.1.9 George Worgul

Worgul's definition of "sacrament" is more faithful to Scripture, the Church Fathers and human experience and closely resembles the one proposed by Vaillancourt. It reconstructs a sacramental theology which focuses on human experience (the human person), Christ and the Church, the three actants of any sacramental theology.

The sacraments are "symbols arising from the ministry of Christ and continued in and through the Church, which when received in faith are encounters with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."³⁵ This definition is also a variation on the catechetical "sacrament as an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace," which has an exclusive meaning to modern Roman Catholics yet, which contains the four main elements of any proposed definition: sign, intuition by Christ, give and grace.³⁶ These key elements are restated in the following fashion: sign-symbol; relation to Christ; effectiveness of power; what is effected or produced. This difference is not only a semantic difference but one that lies at the heart of what a sacrament is. By opting for new words, Worgul aims at correcting misconceptions which fester in unknowing minds.³⁷ Hence, his aim is much like The Group of Les Dombes who also propose a new vocabulary which is more ecumenical and sensitive to contemporary misconceptions.

³⁵Worgul, p. 123.

³⁶Worgul, "What is a Sacrament?" U.S. Catholic 42 (January 1977): 29. (hereafter cited as "What Sacrament?")

³⁷Ibid.

5.1.9.1 Sign-Symbol

Sacraments are public and communal symbolic signs and are natural to human existence. They are "supercharged realities which have the power and depth to disclose a reality by actually making it present."³⁸ The sacraments differ from other symbols only in the reality they signify, not in their being symbols.³⁹ Symbols are efficacious of what they symbolize⁴⁰ and, in the case of the sacraments, this reality is God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴¹

Sacramental efficacy is therefore symbolic causality: the efficacy of the sacrament is that of intrinsic symbol. Sacraments as symbols have a manifold reference to their founder, to ritual tradition in the Church in which this symbolic gesture arose and to the individual member who is raised to a new corporate life.⁴² And sacramental causality is rooted in the nature of that Church as the essential and primal symbol of grace inseparable from what is symbolized (grace).⁴³

³⁸Worgul, From Magic to Metaphor, p. 41. (hereafter cited as From Magic)

³⁹Guzie, p. 50.

⁴⁰Worgul, From Magic, p. 124.

⁴¹Worgul, "What Sacrament?", p. 30.

⁴²Musurillo, p. 273.

⁴³Rahner, Church and Sacraments, p. 38.

...One cannot sketch a correct reflection on a sacrament without devoting maximum attention to deciphering signs and symbols drawn from daily life which Christ, the poet of the world and savior of humanity, wished to take in hand and charge with a new meaning in order to render himself present among his own and communicate to them his life, strength and joy.⁴⁴

Sacraments are then human gestures through and in which Christ communicates salvation which comes from God.⁴⁵ They are ritual, symbolic actions by which Christians dramatize their participation in the saving work of Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ They are signs which give visible expression and actuality to Christ's presence and redemptive action in his community (the Church) and to the prayerful response of the community. They are also signs of the mutual communication of Christ and his Church. And as signs they are composed of word (of God and of the Church) i.e., everything said in the course of the celebration, and complex symbolic actions.⁴⁷

5.1.9.2 Sacraments and the Ministry of Jesus: Institution

Like many other contemporary theologians, Worgul abandons a literal definition of "institution" and bases his new definition on critical

⁴⁴ Rouillard, p. 56.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁶ Musurillo, p. 267.

⁴⁷ Marsh, p. 630.

biblical and historical scholarship. "The sacraments are not inventions but conclusions from what was found in the Church's tradition and Scripture."⁴⁸ Yet while sacraments are grounded and arise from Jesus' ministry, many Catholics erroneously believe that Jesus exactly established each of the seven sacraments and such confusion seems to arise from a narrow understanding of "institution".⁴⁹

Originally the word "sacrament" referred to the Roman custom of making an oath of allegiance and it never lost this meaning entirely. In Scripture however, "sacrament" meant "mystery". Here it had a very broad meaning referring to God's plan and activity, revealed in Christ, for our salvation. This wide-ranging word embraced all the ways that God did and does reach out to us in the world and particularly that world revealed in Christ.⁵⁰

A closer look at Scripture makes us realize that the sacraments as we know them have a derivative form and association with the so-called Jewish sacraments. And yet while they are to be found in spirit in the Scripture, their numbering and defining were to be left to the Church of a later, more analytical age.⁵¹ Hence it is obvious that the seven sacraments were not handed down as is personally from Jesus himself.

⁴⁸Bausch, p. 3.

⁴⁹Worgul, "What Sacrament?", p. 30.

⁵⁰Bausch, p. 3.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Christian sacraments are derived therefore from the Jewish symbols of the Old Testament. And so, the first Christians inherited a vast complex of sacred signs and rituals, which conveyed in some way the mystery of God. Yet over a period of time the Church came to understand that there were special celebrations in the life of the community called sacraments. And in the thirteenth century, these sacraments were limited to the seven we now know, each of which is bound to an aspect of Jesus' ministry. What happened was that among all the ancient signs and rituals, blessings and gestures, seven in time became the most important and the most authentic because they had within themselves Christ's own dynamism. The Church, under the Spirit, came to recognize this and so drew out of its tradition those elements which best described and evoked the work of Jesus.⁵² These expressed in heightened form Jesus' saving work since they were and essentially are related to each other by their power to unfold certain aspects of Jesus' ministry. Each of these sacraments is tied to Jesus as basic and primordial sacrament and all sacraments arise from him. And the Church, in celebrating the sacraments, continues his ministry.⁵³

Jesus therefore instituted the sacraments in the sense of laying down the guidelines or principles in an open-ended fashion, leaving the exact form and expression to historical development and evolution.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid., p. 4.

⁵³Worgul, From Magic, p. 125.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 124.

In fact he did not primarily institute sacraments but a community or Church. He implicitly instituted the sacraments in explicitly instituting the Church.

More specifically Cooke sees the institution of the sacraments within the context of the Last Supper. For it is here that Jesus transforms the whole context of human life and life-giving by combining the symbols of giving life-food and human body and pours into them his own gift-of-self-as-source-of-life and hence a new meaning. Therefore the most basic structures of meaning in human experience are Christianized and the Christian sacramental system is instituted.⁵⁵ This amounts to a basic ontological transformation (i.e., Christianization; sanctification; conversion; transfiguration; transubstantiation; consecration; sacramentalization) of the person or community due to Christ's presence.⁵⁶ And this is why the eucharist is the sacrament par excellence.

5.1.9.3 Effectiveness: The End of Mechanistic Sacramental Theology - Faith

The sacraments are signs of God's ever-present activity in Jesus not only for those celebrating them but also for those beyond the group. They are "outward signs of what is indeed promised to all who live a

⁵⁵ Cooke, p. 637.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 639.

full human life of love, forgiveness and service."⁵⁷ Yet since the sacraments arise from the ministry of Jesus and are continuations of that mystery, they are only effective for those who come to believe in Jesus, the Christ.⁵⁸ For to be effective, sacraments demand faith, a faith which is active and attentive involvement, a personal and total commitment to the living God that involves all dimensions of the human person; and if faith is absent, then sacraments border on, if not enter, the realm of magic.⁵⁹ Hence the faith of the community and of the individual is the matrix providing the locus of Christ's presence.⁶⁰

The causality of the sacraments is qualified by the term "encounter", which illustrates the necessary shift from the physicalistic-mechanistic to the humanistic-personalistic paradigm for it suggests self-gift, active involvement and creative love.⁶¹ Hence sacramental causality refers to the dynamic interchange between Christ and the ritual participants who believe in him. Faith, the gift of the Risen Lord, is the ultimate basis for sacramental causality.⁶² It is precisely faith, in Jesus, which supplies the meaning of the action being

⁵⁷Bausch, p. 18.

⁵⁸Worgul, "What Sacrament?", p. 30.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Cooke, p. 645.

⁶¹Worgul, From Magic, p. 127.

⁶²Ibid.

performed in the ritual. And faith, membership and grace are intrinsically related to form the central dimensions of Christian sacraments.

5.1.9.4 Final Effect: What the Sacraments Cause

Sacraments give grace yet a poor choice of models has misdirected the average person's understanding of grace and today, these remain buried in people's unconscious, going unquestioned, even unknown.⁶³ Grace, in these old models, is something, a physical and quantitative reality, and this model encourages a passive attitude toward the sacraments. Yet the contemporary personalistic model encourages activity and participation and speaks of grace as someone, as a relational, qualitative reality, the living dynamic and personal God himself, Father, Son and Spirit. "In our time it is no longer possible to speak relevantly about the grace of the sacraments except in relational terms."⁶⁴

In the sacraments, the personal God gives himself as loving Father, brother in our humanity and a spirit longing for communion. When we accept his offer (an action or response on our part) we accept a personal interrelationship with another living person. Grace in this perspective is not quantitative but is a deepening, and intensifying

⁶³Worgul, "What Sacrament?", p. 31.

⁶⁴Guzie, p. 59.

love with a person. It is another name for the relationship between God and ourselves. By being people who are grace-filled (with the living God) we live in greater conformity to the Gospel of the Father's Son through the guidance of the Spirit.⁶⁵

Therefore the issue of grace is of concern for every Christian tradition and the ultimate question for these insofar as it offers an answer to humankind's quest for ultimate meaning in this life and after death.⁶⁶ The present concept of grace can be verified by contemporary humans who start with everyday experience and try to avoid all individual narrowness in their way of thinking about grace.

Grace is God himself (Father, Son, Spirit) dwelling within an individual. It is both individual and communal, immediate (invisible) and mediated (visible) (wherein the incarnation is the definitive mode of God's participation in the human world).⁶⁷ The continued mediation of grace is bound to humankind in general and Church fellowship in particular which is the constant mediation of "invisible" grace by being the visible manifestation and presence of the now "invisible" Christ.⁶⁸ It is a qualitative rather than a quantitative relationship between the

⁶⁵Worgul, "What Sacrament?", p. 31.

⁶⁶Worgul, From Magic, p. 181.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 160.

⁶⁸Ibid.

individual and God in his historical manifestation as Father, Son and Spirit. It is the living God freely coming and offering himself to humans.⁶⁹ God's offer of love, his totally free gift, is uncreated grace and its effect on us, our relationship to the Father, Son, and Spirit is created grace. It is individual and communal as humans are uniquely loved by God within the corporate solidarity of humankind in general and the Christian community in particular.⁷⁰ Grace and Church are co-existential expressions of the one reality of God's self-gift as offered invitation and realized participation in Trinitarian life.⁷¹

5.1.9.5 A Sacramental Model: Celebration

For Worgul, "celebration" is the new revised sacramental model.

Briefly celebration is

...a communal activity by which the community manifests, symbolizes, and makes more intensely present to their individual selves and members of the community the reality of a joyful, consoling, enriching and fulfilling reality event.⁷²

The basis for any celebration is the reality event whose meaning is unfolded in the celebration. Furthermore celebrations are rituals

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 181-182.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 181.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Worgul, "Celebrations: Models for Sacraments," Chicago Studies 16 (1977): 310. (hereafter cited as "Celebrations")

repeated in a definite time pattern or cycle and through repetition, the community maintains its bond with the reality event and sustains the identity between members of the community.⁷³

Apart from being fully temporal, celebrations also include a process of personalization and are grounded in a dual movement of internalization-externalization (they are individual as well as communal).

The celebration model renders faith and worship dominant principles. Sacraments are encounters with the living God if faith is present and will be a celebration to the extent that the participants worship.⁷⁴ And the crux of sacramental faith and worship lies in the acceptance or rejection of the Christian root metaphor as paradigmatic for any interpretation of reality and concrete life in society.⁷⁵

This is the major disadvantage not only of the model but also of the entire revised sacramental theology as such: that it is utterly dependent on faith. Yet, on the other hand, retorts Worgul, the model restores the full dimensions of temporality to the sacraments which tie

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 314.

⁷⁵Worgul, From Magic, p. 220.

them to human history: they commemorate the past, unfold salvation in the present, and point the community to the future.⁷⁶ Sacraments are community ritual activities; they are ecclesial in nature while including the active role of individuals who comprise the community. Celebrations are human behavior and operate in human symbolic activity. And finally, in the model the presence of God operates in a fashion consistent with the presence of the reality-event in any true celebration.

5.1.9.6 Liturgical Celebrants

A Christian celebration calls for the services of the entire ecclesia or assembly. This view that all are celebrants necessarily implies a change in our perception of the role of the ordained minister in the liturgical celebration.

The point of departure for the sacramental celebration is that its community is ministerial and its ministry is communal. The celebration of the sacraments by the Church relates the community, ordained ministry and the world, implying both a distinction and mutual solidarity. Sacraments are actions of the whole Church as celebrant although some have special functions.⁷⁷

⁷⁶Worgul, "Celebrations," p. 315.

⁷⁷Cooke, p. 645.

Because all are celebrants, the whole membership of the community is the first agent of the celebration. However, the ordained minister has a special role of leading, preaching, presiding and uniting all in self-offering with Christ.⁷⁸ And the people act and offer through and with him. This role or function is therefore one of mediation and sacramental unification. He is a sacrament and his function is sacramental as he makes present by his very symbolizing.⁷⁹ He is a specialized expression of the sacramentality of Christ's self-giving in a eucharistic community which he makes more intensely present. As liturgical leader he Christianizes (attaches a Christ-meaning-to) bread and wine, transignifies them into food and drink and makes possible the reciprocal self-gift to Christ and the community.⁸⁰ He is a sign of Christ's presence (representing Christ), not of his absence (replacing Christ): he is a sacrament, not an instrument.

For Kilmartin and Cooke, for whom the Church is fundamentally a sacrament, the community is its way of existing as the sacrament of Christ. In such a context the ordained minister exists to bring the common priesthood to its fullest expression, as its intensified or specialized expression. He has a special representative function making

⁷⁸ Grichton, p. 22.

⁷⁹ Cooke, p. 647.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 648.

Christ's saving action more intensely present, especially in the Eucharist. But he is not the unique mediator between God and the faithful for only Christ is. As a result, since all are active in the celebration, his mission is to preside over the celebrating community, not take its place.

5.2 Concluding Remarks: A Descriptive Theological Definition of Sacrament

Amidst the diversity of definitions presented in this chapter there is a recurrent theme and a definite trend. The theme underlying all others is that sacraments are the Church's doors to an experiential awareness of a new realm of human, now sacred, meaning; a transforming meaning made available to all by Christ's life, death and resurrection and yet perceived as such only by those who have faith. The basic trend is toward a more experiential account of the sacraments: sacraments are ritual moments or word-events in a much larger sacramental process which begins with the world of experience and which has an effect on this world. Finally every understanding of "sacrament" contained in this chapter is the product of a "horizontal" theology in which one begins with God's presence in daily life as experienced by one who believes, and moves on, horizontally, to his powerful proclamation and symbolic present in communal sacramental ritual.

It is within this framework that I wish to present a descriptive theological definition of sacrament that summarizes the many insights drawn from the numerous definitions cited in this chapter. And yet while somewhat detailed in appearance, it makes no pretense of being complete.

Essentially Christian sacraments should be understood as paradigms of the sacredness of the secular, of God's self-gift and transforming action which is always present in nature and the ordinary lives of people. Through their faith in Jesus Christ, Christians realize that secularity is secular liturgy; that Jesus Christ has, through his life, death and resurrection, transformed the meaning of both Creation and human life. This is why he is called the Christian root metaphor. The life of Christians in the world is qualitatively different and is experienced as worship or liturgy because it is Christianized, transformed and hence sacramentalized by Jesus Christ.

By definition, worship is response and entrance into a faith relationship with God. Consequently, life, as worship, is a response and the liturgy or worship of the Church or the Church's sacramental activity, is a specific ecclesial response to God's call in Christ. The Church's worship is hence the context or locus in which Christ and the believers are rendered mutually present to each other through the Spirit and so communicate with one another through the word of preaching and sacraments, the liturgical anamnesis of the believing community, and offer acceptable worship to God.

Secular worship and Church liturgy are complementary forms of Christianity. Ecclesial worship is but an especially formalized and conscious expression of the continuous act of worship which is Christian life and is but a heightened form of the grace which Christians obtain

in faith. In other words, the religious experience of the sacramentality of all agents and activities is expressed, actualized, articulated, concretized, objectified or brought to conscious awareness in particular sacramental rituals which take place within the Church.

A closer examination of sacraments leads one to conclude that sacraments, which are paradigms, have certain important features. Sacraments are evocative mysteries of salvation foreshadowed in Israel's history and brought to fulfilment in Jesus (who is the new Israel), and effected here and now in the Church.⁸¹ Seen from the perspective of Christ and Church as Sacrament, they are symbolic rituals of the ecclesial community which signify the redemptive action of Christ in the world; seen from the perspective of Jesus as Word, they are ritual proclamations of the Word Jesus by the Church. In both cases, they make present the saving actions of the Now-God in Christ.⁸² Secondly, they are grounded in and arise from Jesus' three-fold ministry and are continued in and through the Church as intensified expressions of its sacramental nature. Thirdly, they are festive moments celebrated in faith. And finally, they are effective communal and individual encounters with God the Father, who gives himself to us by the presence of his Son and in the power of his Spirit, and are thus grace-filled events. Although everyone within the Church celebrates

⁸¹Bausch, p. 13.

⁸²Ibid.

the sacraments, some liturgical celebrants retain special functions of mediation and sacramental unification. They lead and preside over the liturgy and are themselves sacraments.

Any definition of sacrament should be developed according to the two sides of the covenant - divine initiative and the response of the individual believer as Church member who celebrates - and presuppose that what is expressed or encountered in sacrament is Jesus Christ, the root metaphor, who is both God's self-gift and humankind's acceptance. In addition, it should presuppose that, like the covenant, the sacraments are structured in three moments, past, present and future.

Sacraments as we traditionally know them were chosen because they were and are involved in the critical moments of human life, from birth to death. For Roman Catholics, because of their connection with these moments, the sacraments are seven in number. And since Protestants "count" two sacraments, there seems to be an apparent ecumenical crisis. Today this apparent conflict is resolved by "categorizing" the sacraments: for example, initiation; forgiveness or healing; calling or ministry; eucharist or, even better, by showing that baptism and eucharist are sacraments par excellence and that the other remaining five sacramental acts are implied in these two. Above all, there is no crisis if all Christian communities perceive these "sacraments" as paradigmatic of the sacramentality that pervades all of God's creation.

After having examined a great many definitions of Christian "sacrament", I conclude that it is almost impossible to arrive at THE

"perfect" definition, one which is all-inclusive yet brief, linguistically precise yet simple, and above all, ecumenical. And yet this realization does not denote failure. Rather it demonstrates that what is ultimately most important is that Christians be able to situate their familiar sacraments within a wider sacramental process and thus render them meaningful in their lives. It also shows that, in the absence of one "perfect" definition Christians can make do with a summary of the essential characteristics of a "sacrament"; with a descriptive definition of sacrament. In the final analysis, this chapter, as it relates to all that precedes it, helps us answer the two questions asked by those who wish to get to the heart of Christianity: Why and what are the sacraments?

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most significant feature of this dissertation is that it offers Catholics a solution to the current sacramental crisis by presenting a meaningful, holistic, dynamic, unified, existential, pastoral, and practical interpretation of sacramentality as a whole and of the sacraments as these function within this larger sacramental reality. It provides an answer to the two questions which all Christians and sacramental theologians are continually asking: "What and why are the sacraments?". And finally by providing sacramental practice with a sound theoretical basis, it ensures the future of the Christian community.

This dissertation has demonstrated that, during the past twenty years, significant shifts have occurred in both North American and European culture and Church and that these shifts have had a considerable impact on sacramental theology. More specifically, a major transition has occurred in the Christian's experience of culture, Church, and consequently, of sacraments: knowingly or unknowingly, Christians have moved from a classical to a contemporary culture/theology/sacramental theology.

One of the signs of this transition has been the attempt to revise sacramental ritual practice without revising sacramental theory, which, until the Second Vatican Council, was the product of a narrow

view of scholasticism. In particular, Vatican II, correctly realizing the inadequacy of the traditional medieval view of sacramentality and of the sacraments, proceeded to remodel practice without remodeling theory. The ensuing confusion among believing Catholics simply led sacramental theologians to the realization that this discrepancy could be remedied by introducing a new sacramental theology.

Catholic theologians have been trying to formulate a sound theoretical basis which would underlie current sacramental practice, making it susceptible to revision once again. As Christians living in a period of both cultural and ecclesial crisis and change, they are quick to point out that Catholics have had their emotions ritually and liturgically starved for too long and that a contributing factor to this ailing sacramental ritual life has been the absence of a solid theoretical basis. The drastic decline in both faith and active Church membership is indicative of the depth and seriousness of the sacramental crisis which is visible in often meaningless and confusing ritual practice. By appearing, more often than not, as a bizarre combination of old and new, these ritual forms, for which Christians can find no adequate theological explanation, have led Christians to abandon the sacramental life of the Church as a whole and, more drastically, to challenge the very basis of Christianity, its root metaphor, and even to abandon the Christian world-view altogether.

It is obvious then that, if Church membership continues to decline and the current crisis goes unresolved, the future of the Church can

be placed in serious doubt. Moved by this concern, theologians are looking for a solution, and I believe they have succeeded. Faced with the sacramental crisis, they are no longer asking "how" but "why" the sacraments? Why does the Church use these symbolic actions to express its faith and its relationship to God? What is the significance of sacramental activity? What is sacramentality? For only by answering these questions and others does the resolution of the current crisis seem at all possible.

In order to make it possible for Christians to participate meaningfully in the sacramental expression of their faith, which they must perceive as essential, Catholic sacramental theologians have spent the past two decades (at least) in search of a truly meaningful, ecumenical and "real" sacramental theology which deals with cultural-historical and ecclesial issues and which is sensitive to the person's human as well as his/her religious life (which, in Christ, are one and the same). This new sacramental consciousness is characterized by a more unified vision of Creation and a dynamic view of revelation; by a renewed Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and anthropology; by a new historical-existential-inductive/phenomenological-Christological method and consequently by an ongoing dialogue between theology and the human sciences. In essence it is based on a different universe of meaning from which there emerges a new understanding of sacramentality and of the sacraments as these function within this broader sacramental reality. Emphasis is placed on the human person in his/her actual

lived historical-existential situation as the starting-point for theologizing about the sacraments.

With the help of phenomenology (or the human sciences), theologians come better prepared to confront their outmoded classical tradition and revise it accordingly. By abandoning the narrow medieval sacramental theology, theologians not only point to the future but they recapture the best of the past as well. Not only do they recapture the best of the scholastic presentation but they return to the sources and recapture the broader and more universal interpretation of sacramentality characteristic of scripture, of the first Christian communities, of the Church Fathers.

It is obvious then that, for the longest time, Catholics have been crying out for a new sacramental theology, but with no apparent success. Perceiving the importance of answering their cries, contemporary sacramental theologians have responded with some excellent and very accessible statements, the bulk of which have been analyzed in this dissertation. Yet, while comprehensive in its present form, the sacramental theology which results from this analysis accomplishes little if it remains hidden in periodical literature and theological books accessible only to a small number of Catholics. Hence, several things remain to be done.

First, Christians must be made aware of the changes which have taken place in the area of Catholic sacramental theology since the mid-1960s. More specifically, the sacramental theology which results

from bringing together what I consider to be the best of each theologian's presentation should be made available to all Christians. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged by Church leaders as a significant contribution to the sacramental life of the Church and motivate them to present Catholics with some form of statement dealing with sacramental theology. This statement will likely provide answers to the many questions preoccupying Christians today and make it easier to pursue the necessary ecumenical discussions. It is hoped that it will lead to a subsequent revision of the ritual forms which give it expression.

Secondly, pastoral guidelines must be set up. The absence of concrete pastoral suggestions continues to make it difficult for Christians to see what ritual forms best express sacramental theory. This must be made clearer. Specific guidelines must be proposed that would relate sacramental theory and practice into one coherent whole.

Thirdly, if contemporary sacramental theology is to be truly representative of Catholicism, then more input must be collected from Catholic theologians in Latin America, Africa and Asia, reflecting other cultural and ecclesial concerns.

Finally, not only must sacramental theory and practice be revised but the attitudes of the people must undergo an equally necessary transformation also. Hence attempts must be made at reawakening in all Christians the awareness of the need of giving sacramental

expression to their faith. This most difficult task will only be accomplished with much time and patience.

What is ultimately important is that the contemporary sacramental theology outlined in this dissertation is of vital importance to the Catholic Church. Because it is so important, it must be made readily available to all Christians living during a very difficult yet challenging time. Much will be lost if it remains confined to theological circles. Furthermore, if sacramental rituals are to be at all meaningful, they must constantly reflect this theological basis and give it concrete expression. And yet Christians must never forget that this theology, like that which they associate with the Middle Ages, is not immutable but is subject to constant change. Only by acknowledging this fundamental principle can Christians avoid another "Golden Age" and, consequently, another sacramental crisis!

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