

UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

John Gardner has given us something of a minor classic in his *Grendel*, a retelling of the epic *Beowulf* from the viewpoint of the monster. In one scene, Grendel is secretly watching the priests of the tribe ritualizing before their pantheon. He remarks:

There is no conviction in the old priests' songs; there is only showmanship. No one in the Kingdom is convinced that the gods have life in them. The weak observe the rituals—take their hats off, put them on again, raise their arms, moan, intone, press their palms together—but no one harbors unreasonable expectations.¹

That cynical summary (“but no one harbors unreasonable expectations”) refers to the rituals of the uncommitted. Meanings, new or old, do not trouble the lives of these people. Their rituals perpetuate the vacuum they willingly tolerate. Because new meanings do not challenge or clarify their shared and individual experience, new commitments are not possible. Gardner has Grendel lay much of the blame on theology:

Theology does not thrive in the world of action and reaction, change: it grows on calm, like the scum on a stagnant pool. And it flourishes, it prospers, on decline. Only in a world where everything is patently being lost can a priest stir men's hearts as a poet would by maintaining that nothing is in vain.²

Before the theologian bridles at Gardner's cavalier generalization, the merits of this argument should be acknowledged. When, in fact, there has been cleavage between theory and praxis in Christianity, has it not been, in part, because the “world of action and reaction, change” had somehow been ignored?

Questions, if not examples, come from any period in the Church's history. Did the sophisticated medieval theories of sacramental causality and matter and form affect the real praxis of the Church? Did it facilitate or obstruct ecclesial commitment? Should one have expected a more credible ecclesial witness in the German Christian Church of the Thirties and Forties or even now in other countries where radical injustice gives lie to the Gospel? When do Christian expectations, in other words, become too reasonable? When do both liturgy and theology collude and offer rituals and reasons not to recommit oneself, communally and individually, to gospel demands?

A PROPOSAL ABOUT COMMITMENT

My proposal, then, is this: it is only in the process of life-cycles with their conflicts and their demands for new commitment that we can

¹J. Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p. 111. Italics mine.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

discuss the symbolization of God's gracious impact on our understanding of eschatological goals, ecclesial responsibility and the honesty of our *lex orandi*. My accompanying contention is that the human sciences have recently accumulated a rich convergence of data and reflection in this area which promises a fruitful dialogue with theology. As Coleman reminded us, this is an illuminative use of materials but cannot yet be called a collaboration with these sciences, in Lonergan's sense.³ I agree.

Yet it seems to me that "commitment" requires lengthy definitions and the scrutiny of more than one science because it is an example of "tacit knowledge," to use Polanyi's phrase. Commitment is a "joint image" of many subsidiary details which help to establish a focal target which summarizes and transforms those details. But it is the knower whose awareness is in question for it is his/her indwelling, his/her entering into the subsidiary elements which invite meaning. Thus Polanyi's axiom: "All knowing is personal knowing—participation through indwelling... an expansion of our person into a subsidiary awareness of particulars, an awareness merged with our attention to the whole and that this manner of living in the parts results in our critical appraisal of their coherence."⁴ The ideal of such knowing and meaning would be symbol as "self-giving" in which our diffuse experience is unified and symbolically embodied so as to permit "... a tacit grasp of ourselves as a whole person."⁵

I am suggesting that when we deal with commitment as a point of convergence for several human sciences, some of which employ an empirical model and others which do not and where definitions and meanings abound,⁶ Polanyi's category of "tacit knowledge" provides a starting point. It gives us a warning about the elusive dimensions of shared and individual commitment which do not submit easily to testing or to analysis. It furnishes a reminder about the implicit definitions in our symbolization processes, both social and religious. Even the professional knower's reluctant experience, after all, may block the "unreasonable expectations" of God or others.

³J. Coleman, "A Response to Andrew Greeley," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 55-71; here, 58. For a more general discussion, see D. Myers, *The Human Puzzle. Psychological Research and Christian Belief* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 3-40. Because psychology and sociology have their proper concerns and methodologies in dealing with life-cycles, D. Kimmel maintains that it would be more proper to speak of interaction when there is dialogue based on their findings; see his *Adulthood and Aging. An Interdisciplinary Development View* (New York: J. Wiley, 1974), p. v.

⁴M. Polanyi and H. Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975), pp. 44, 34-38.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 74-75. K. Rahner has labeled this the problem of "regional anthropologies" in *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978), p. 28; henceforth Rahner, 1978. For the underlying problem of experience, see *ibid.*, pp. 20-31 and his "Experience of Self and Experience of God," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 13 (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 122-32.

⁶The usage of the term "commitment" among the interested disciplines is a problem which we will return to later; see B. Payne and K. Elifson, "Commitment: A Comment on the Uses of the Term," *Review of Religious Research* 17 (1976), 209-15.

CONVERGING DEFINITIONS OF COMMITMENT

Polanyi has said that "God is a commitment involved in our rites and myths. Through our integrative, imaginative efforts we see him as a focal point that fuses into meaning all the incompatibles involved in the practice of religion."⁷ Although the term "commitment" is a prism for many definitions, there are certain ideas persistently attached to it: meaning, time, decisions, others, limits. Eschatological expectation and ecclesial bonding, whether theologically discussed or liturgically expressed, imply definitions of commitment that include such ideas. My contention is that if attended to, such ideas will inevitably present unreasonable expectations, that is, the demand for new commitment, chiseled out of the deeper meanings and changes of our shared experience.

No wonder, then, that commitment is a convergence point for theology and the human sciences. Clinical and developmental psychology continue to give much attention to all the parameters of commitment. Empirical psychology, in the last ten years, has researched and tested this concept in myriad ways. Sociology has pinpointed "commitment mechanisms" as key to certain successful communal structures. The intensive theoretical research of Erikson, Vaillant, Levinson and Gould *et al.* on life-cycles imply, I would submit, implicit dynamic models of commitment as does much of the critical social theory of the Frankfurt School.

If Gardner's accusation against theology ever obtains, it is only because the question of commitment that action and change raise has been avoided. If there is a dichotomy between theory and praxis in the Christian community, inadequate definitions of commitment must always bear some of the blame. The impressive efforts of the human sciences in the area of commitment should contest the adequacy of our theological definitions and uses of this concept. It should ask if an uncommitted *lex orandi* does indeed lead to a redemptive *lex credendi*.

In a meeting whose theme relates anthropology and theology, the problem of commitment, then, should provide us with a focus for some of our mutual concerns. (Obviously I am taking "anthropology" in its broader meaning, as dealing with central human issues.) More than that, it should urge each discipline to ask better questions of the other, rather than simply use the other's material.

RECENT RELATED STUDIES

In the recent papers presented to this Society, similar concerns have been broached from different vantage points. F. Fiorenza, in discussing "Critical Social Theory and Christology," saw the meaning of Jesus' death primarily in "... its consequential relation to his life praxis."⁸ Renewing Irenaeus' insights, the "... radical obedience of Jesus to his

⁷Polanyi and Prosch, *op cit.*, p. 156.

⁸F. Fiorenza, *CTSA Proceedings* 30 (1975), 63-110; here, 106.

self-identity with God the Father and to his fellow persons expresses not only who he is but also manifests the radical integrity of his life to the extent that he was killed for being who he was."⁹ The direct implication of such an insight is a redefinition of commitment in Initiation theology, in its moral consequences and in its liturgical expression. But such a definition of commitment could not be construed, I would argue, outside the frame of life-praxis which is contextualized in life-stages.

M. Lamb furthered this insight when he discussed theology's dialogue with other sciences. "Together they seek to disclose and transform the concrete, personal, communal, social, political and cultural life-forms within which Christians live out, or fail to live out, the meaning and values of their tradition. The objectivity of the truth of church doctrine is conditioned by the self-transcending response of genuine Christian praxis."¹⁰ The response of such praxis which only God's saving work enables is framed by the interlocking conflicts and commitments of ecclesial communities as well as their individual members. To speak of eschatological responsibility and the ecclesial grounding of sacrament, for example, without factoring in the nuanced complexity that the human sciences afford us is to prolong a split between theory and praxis.¹¹ Such a split allows theological discourse on the ecclesial aspects of redemption and of morality and yet can perpetuate a liturgical praxis whose implicit definitions of commitment can effectively contradict that discourse. The criterion involved here was proposed by Lamb in another paper: "Christian praxis is authentically incarnational and eschatological when its very commitment to a particular praxis critically opens it to all other authentic praxis."¹²

Having reviewed these concerns, we find ourselves in Lonergan's third area of meaning, *interiority*, which entails the self-appropriation of religious experience.¹³ Thus, Lonergan's well-known dictum: "Genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity."¹⁴ The ongoing result of such clarification of meaning should result in the process of conversion and "being in love," not simply as defined ("... the habitual actuation of man's capacity for self-transcendence")¹⁵ but as lived: a dialectical achievement, "authenticity as a withdrawal from unauthenticity, and the withdrawal is never complete and always precarious."¹⁶

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁰ "Theology and Praxis: A Reponse (II) to Bernard Lonergan," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 22-30; here, 26.

¹¹ E. Braxton made a similar point in relating praxis not only to the individual's responsible conduct but to the "intrinsic relationship between Christian symbol and the transformation of human society into a prefiguring of the Kingdom," in "Theology and Praxis: A Response (I) to Bernard Lonergan," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 17-21; here, 18.

¹² "Theory-Praxis Relationship in Contemporary Christian Theologies," *CTSA Proceedings* 31 (1976), 149-78; here, 172; henceforth Lamb, 1976.

¹³ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 257-59.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 292; see also p. 265.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

Precisely at this point, there is an anthropological resonance which both A. Greeley and J. Coleman alluded to in our last meeting: such a dialectical religious development cannot be discussed apart from life-cycle studies.¹⁷ This brief survey, then, is to recognize the previous contributions in the Society which facilitate my present effort.

AREAS OF COMMITMENT

To develop the notion of Christian commitment as "unreasonable expectation," I will propose two theses. Before doing this, however, a general working definition of commitment is needed.

M. Farley has examined the philosophical notion of commitment quite extensively.¹⁸ She correctly balanced the continuous and discontinuous elements of a free person's commitments: continuity, because commitment cannot ignore our past; discontinuity, because the new (or newly appropriated) dimensions of our experience can disconcert our past.¹⁹ Her definitions of commitment include the unknown that is yet to unfold in our lives, the need of wholistic personal response and, ultimately, in absolute commitment, the source of other commitments.²⁰ And more recently, R. Trigg, in response to Wittgenstein, has reasserted the link between belief and commitment.²¹

Jourard adds the experiential praxis dimension:

Commitment is my pledge to use my time and resources, to actualize someone's vision of a good or better world. . . . Each act of mine, thus, is the embodiment of a commitment. . . . When I reveal my commitments, other people are then in a position to help or hinder me in my efforts to actualize the valued future.²²

I will attempt to specify the parameters of a Christian commitment at the end of this paper. For the present, we have the general noetic, experiential and temporal elements for dealing with commitment more extensively. With this in mind, I would propose two theses, the first of which is:

1. *The worthwhile conflict of each life-stage with its demand for renewed and shared commitment is the locus for God's justifying action in convoking ecclesial communities and evoking our symbolized response.*

¹⁷ A. Greeley, "Sociology and Theology: Some Methodological Questions," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 32-54; here, 49; Coleman, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁸ M. Farley, "A Study in the Ethics of Commitment Within the Context of Theories of Human Love and Temporality," (Yale University, doctoral dissertation 1973 [Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1973]), pp. 231, 234.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

²¹ *Reason and Commitment* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973). See p. 75 for an example of the qualified connection between belief and action.

²² S. Jourard, "Some Notes on the Experience of Commitment," *Humanitas* 8 (1972), 5-8; here, 5.

"Worthwhile conflict" is Erik Erikson's phrase. Although one may find stages of life mentioned in such varied sources as Scripture, Thomas Aquinas or Shakespeare, in our own day the phrase usually evokes the work of Erikson among the many who have contributed to this field.²³ This theory of life-cycle and its relation to psychohistory is well known. I will, therefore, only summarize this material as a context for my immediate concern, commitment.

In studying the growing person, two related dimensions of development must be distinguished: psychosexual and psychosocial or ego development.²⁴ Erikson honors this distinction, though his psychosocial model of development is built on his psychosexual model.²⁵ He describes psychosocial growth through a series of stages, each of which demands a task or "virtue" occasioned by conflict and crisis. The effort to respond to such tasks will be challenged by a possible corresponding and negative stance (thus, "trust" will be opposed by "mistrust," for example, in the first or infant stage).

Each of these eight stages represents a period in which individual potential and communal support can help synthesize the person's resources.²⁶ Erikson is using the term "virtue" in its root meaning. It is a strength which draws together the psychosexual, psychosocial and cognitive stages as they are influenced and contextualized by sociohistorical factors.²⁷

Implied in such synthesis is a sequence which builds on previous efforts and success in achieving the task in question²⁸ (though the extent to which this can be strictly delineated in terms of age, for example, has been contested).²⁹ The overall shape of the human life-cycle is a con-

²³For an introduction into the extensive bibliographies of this field, see L. D. Cain, "Life Course and Social Structure," in R. Faris, ed., *Handbook of Modern Sociology* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), pp. 272-309; J. A. Clausen, "The Life Course of Individuals," in M. W. Riley et al. eds., *Aging in Society*, Vol. 3 (New York: Russell Sage, 1972), pp. 457-514; W. Sze, eds., *The Human Life Cycle* (New York: J. Aronson, 1975), pp. 721-25; for a general descriptive introduction to Erikson's and others' work, see Kimmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-32.

²⁴J. Loevinger, *Ego Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977), pp. 57, 77, 85, 108, 172-75, expands on the importance of this distinction in comparing Erikson's work with others. Loevinger uses psychosocial and ego development interchangeably (e.g., p. 78); while D. Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: A. Knopf, 1978), p. 323, would make more of a distinction in Erikson's work; G. E. Vaillant, *Adaptation to Life. How the Best and the Brightest Came of Age* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), p. 335 would regard them as parallel.

²⁵For a critique of this distinction in Erikson, see Loevinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-74.

²⁶E. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964), p. 138; henceforth *Insight*. The earlier statement of the stages is found in Erikson's *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950, rev. ed., 1963), pp. 247-74; henceforth *Childhood*.

²⁷D. Browning, *Generative Man: Psychoanalytic Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 161. This book continues to be one of the more perceptive treatments of Erikson's work.

²⁸For a typical statement, see E. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), pp. 93-94; henceforth *Identity*.

²⁹See, for example, Clausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 461, 505-06; for a similar effort, see Cain's discussion of Eisenstadt's "age grade," *op. cit.*, p. 280.

tinuous process, responding to the challenge of new needs as well as old and questioning one's goals and meanings.³⁰

Erikson's analysis of this staged conflict and growth in the lives of significant people, such as Luther and Ghandi, is a parallel effort. These psychohistories show "... how a person managed to keep together and to maintain a significant function in the lives of others."³¹ What is sometimes not appreciated is the threefold criterion Erikson requires for dealing with this experience. The objective autobiographical data (*facticity*) must be examined against the new sense of *reality* and the new way of being with others (*actuality*). Only out of such "threefold anchoring" does a complete and contextualized image of a person and his/her commitments emerge.³² Any honest and self-transcending symbolization of a person's needs and commitments would have to deal explicitly with these three levels of experience.

An important element marking the transition from one life-stage to another in such a story is "conflict." The dramatic connotation of the term might, however, mislead us. Erikson sees such conflicts as turning points where new instinctual needs are contested and new capacities and resources emerge.³³ The function of such thresholds seems to be a painful redefinition of self, resulting from such efforts. At the end of childhood, success in passing through the initial life-stages should issue in ego identity.³⁴ This self-esteem reflects the positive outcome of many crucial struggles to master our experience within a social context we understand.³⁵ We can continue to deal with critical changes in our life because of the underlying reassurance of essential patterns.³⁶

CONFLICT AS THEOLOGICAL REFERENCE

The systematic theologian at this point might legitimately question whether conflict is an adequate notion in the eventual development of a theology of religious commitment. Before continuing to review Erikson's work, I should like to briefly deal with this question.

Conflict is a watershed of our experience. It originates in and specifies our experience. It reveals once more the dialectical nature of

³⁰For an excellent summary of the basic characteristics of this cycle, see the work of another pioneer in this field, C. Bühler, "The General Structure of the Human Life Cycle," in C. Bühler and F. Massarik, eds., *The Course of Human Life* (New York: Springer, 1968), pp. 12-26.

³¹E. Erikson, *Dimensions of a New Identity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), p. 13; henceforth *Dimensions*.

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 78-79; also, p. 33. How this is worked out within the communal context of the individual's life is seen, e.g., in Erikson's "On the Nature of Psycho-Historical Evidence: in Search of Ghandi," *Daedalus* 97 (1968), 695-730, esp. 702, 709, 717, 723.

³³*Insight*, pp. 138-39; *Childhood*, pp. 270-71.

³⁴"... the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity... is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others," in E. Erikson's, "Growth and Crises of the Healthy Personality," *Psychological Issues*, Vol. 1, Monograph 1 (New York: International Universities Press, 1959), p. 89; henceforth "Growth."

³⁵*Ibid.*, cf. Jung's "individuation" in T. Lidz, *The Person: His and Her Development Throughout the Life Cycle* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 379.

³⁶*Insight*, pp. 95-96; *Dimensions*, p. 90.

our naively reported experience by uncovering the unassimilated areas of our lives and their implications. Paradoxically, conflict is a potential catalyst for strengthening the unity of our experience. For the very demands that conflict engenders reveals the rich potential of our past lives for our present and future tasks.

Although conflict may reveal itself as a question of choice or change at a new crossroad in our lives, it is, to use a musical analogy, a dissonance prepared for well in advance. For it seems to be the very nature of experience, properly attended to, that it provides us with questions that crescendo in intensity over intervals of our lives. (Well-known examples would be easily found in Erikson's analysis of the lives of Luther and Ghandi.)

In specifying our experience, conflict prepares the way for commitment. For conflict inevitably leads to a re-examination of our commitments. Returning to the elements offered earlier as a descriptive definition of commitment, conflict should both clarify the continuity of our experience and introduce discontinuity. Further, conflict must question the future pledge of our time and resources.

The very patterns in our lives which assure a certain regularity and direction seminally contain the promise of painful growth. (Thus, in the life of Paul the very pattern of faithfulness and zeal for the Law provide continuity even in the jarring revelation on the road to Damascus.) Through conflict, then, we can see the continuity of our lives in new depth because the unsuspected implications of those continuing patterns are revealed.

Dissonance and discontinuity are also conflict's doing. The unknown elements introduced into our lives are, in effect, a series of demands that we did not foresee and will not, at least initially, countenance. The immediate effect is the discovery of how incomplete the comprehensive symbols (religious and otherwise) of our lives are. This healthy but painful revelation can allow the "new" in our experience to be incorporated into these life-symbols and thus assure their continuing relevancy.

Finally, conflict must ask us hard questions about the pledging of our remaining time and resources. Once the underlying assumptions of our lives are challenged, we must return to basic questions that we thought had been settled, questions of personal giftedness and its meaning for others, and the complementary questions of using the space and time we have left.

Theologically, life-conflict is revelatory. In each life stage, it is specifically revelatory of God's offer of salvation within the context of mission. For the very commitment we offer God in response is never adequate in terms of our gifts and needs or God's cosmic plan. Conflict can forcefully remind us of this. (I shall return to this point later.)

Conflict is also revelatory of our radical sin which betrays itself in each life stage in our life style and value system. This flawed character of our lives would allow us to quietly refuse any expanded demand for mission and self-gift. Without such conflict, our minimal notions of

"state of grace" would permit us to treasure both our stagnant commitments to God's work and our glib rituals.

Conflict, then, is a revelatory wedge, revealing in our life-processes, the limited horizons we too easily assign both to God and to ourselves and the fragility of symbols that demand nothing further of us. Commitment is the direct beneficiary of conflict that is attended to.

But conflict, historically and psychologically, is always embedded in a communal context, at least implicitly. We can be crushed by conflict as well as renewed by it. A crucial factor will be the quality of interaction which allows us to sustain the pain of reassessments, change and recommitment in our lives.

Liberation and political theologies are accustomed to dealing with the social dimension of this process. I seems to me, however, we have yet to draw out the ecclesial corollaries of revelatory conflict, symbolized in interacting life-stages. In other words, to develop a comprehensive theological notion of commitment, we must recognize the responsibility of special ecclesial core-groups and larger communities to facilitate the life-passages of individuals for the sake of all and, therefore, to take seriously the commitment symbols (sacramental and otherwise) that sometimes are too easily celebrated.

ERIKSON'S COMMITMENT

In brief, the individual synthesis at each life-stage is bought at the price of new commitment that conflict has engendered. This is most apparent in Erikson's later stages where each needed virtue requires further commitment.³⁷ Without ever giving a specific definition of commitment, certain elements are implied, I would suggest, throughout Erikson's usage.

Commitment is the key to "vigorous meaning" at all stages of life.³⁸ Commitment values and indeed presupposes the social interplay of life cycles.³⁹ Commitment permits us to deal with "expectable realities" rather than fantasy.⁴⁰ Even play becomes a ritual of commitment because it prepares us for future choices prompted by future roles and visions.⁴¹ Any sense of identity will be characterized by "enough rebellious commitment" to carry us out of the self-serving guilt of previous stages.⁴² Ultimately, commitment will be tested by the need for Erik-

³⁷ For example, fidelity as "... the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradiction of value systems," (*Insight*, p. 125); intimacy as "... the capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliation and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments," (*Childhood*, p. 263); see also Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 194; generativity as "... widening concern," knowing how to care for what we create," (*Insight*, p. 131); Browning, *op. cit.*, p. 195; for some recent qualifications on this stage by Erikson, see his *Toys and Reasons, Stages in the Ritualization of Experience* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 59; henceforth *Toys*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114; *Childhood*, p. 268.

⁴⁰ *Insight*, p. 119.

⁴¹ *Toys*, p. 78; for a discussion of Erikson's work on ritual, play and life cycle prior to *Toys*, see Browning, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-07.

⁴² *Dimensions*, pp. 72-73.

son's final virtue, wisdom, "... the detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself."⁴³

A working definition of Eriksonian commitment can perhaps be derived from his description of true change: "... a matter of worthwhile conflict, for it leads through the painful consciousness of one's position to a new conscience in that position."⁴⁴ *Commitment, then, is a process which engages our whole person in responsive mutuality and widening responsibility.* It represents the outcome of successful therapy and the test of our current awareness of reality. A fully functioning person could not be adequately described from any therapeutic model without including commitment as an essential element.⁴⁵ The accompanying responsibility is, as the root indicates, a response out of our gathered resources to our own and others' needs and gifts.

So far, we have seen that Erikson's treatment of life experience at each stage suggests a complex and evolving definition commitment. This definition carefully balances the social and personal aspects of the growing person's commitment at each stage.

CONTINUATION OF ERIKSON'S WORK

Among the many current efforts to develop Erikson's broad insights, Levinson's and Vaillant's work are particularly germane to my subject. Levinson is more concerned with the overall life-structures, a direct continuation of Erikson's work,⁴⁶ while Vaillant traces the coping mechanisms which mark degrees of maturation. But in these complementary researches, the unifying theme is once again that of worthwhile conflict and its underlying demand for commitment. While appreciating the rich and varied insights in the work of both of these men, I will limit myself to the question of commitment.

Levinson, in searching for the design of each person's life, highlights the crucial choices they must make, for the tasks of each life-stage challenge our presumptive meanings.⁴⁷ The transition period between life-stages affords us the time to accomplish these tasks and to make these choices.⁴⁸ The process of modifying our life-structures will not only touch all our roles and relationships. Such discontinuities and

⁴³ *Insight*, p. 133; see also *Growth*, p. 98.

⁴⁴ *Insight*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ For example, C. Rogers, "Freedom and Commitment," in *Freedom to Learn* (Columbus: C.E. Merrill, 1969), pp. 259-75, esp. 275-74; J. Bugenthal, *The Search for Authenticity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), pp. 334-43; R. Hunter has compared the notion of personal commitment in Freud and Rogers with that of Pannenberg in "The Act of Personal Commitment. An Interdisciplinary Heuristic Inquiry Formulating a Psychological Theory and Theological Interpretation of Person Committing Acts, Based Principally on Psychoanalytic Theory and the Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1974).

⁴⁶ See note 24 and Levinson's distinctions, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-20; 323. Both Vaillant's and Levinson's studies deal with a very restricted group (generally of a specific socio-economic and cultural level); for some recent work done on women, family development, etc., see *ibid.*, p. 345, notes 8-10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49. "Task" is being employed throughout in a broader sense than "role."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19; 52-61.

demands will call for a profound reappraisal of our shared meanings shaped in time.⁴⁹

In complementary fashion, Vaillant, in his analysis of the lives of a specific group of men over a thirty-year period, traces similar crucial adaptations to life.⁵⁰ On the scale from immature to mature adaptation, the ability to recommit their lives in view of others' as well as their own needs, is conditioned on a widening and more realistic self-definition. While Vaillant emphasizes the importance of the cultural context in such lives, he returns to Erikson's "generativity" and its alternative, "stagnation" as a summary test: the lives of the majority "... followed Erikson's script: to fail at generativity is to risk stagnation."⁵¹ The moral dimension of such choice, change and commitment is obvious. Erikson himself has dealt with this implication. He sees not only mutuality but active choice, as summed up in the prayer of St. Francis, as an outcome of dealing with the developmental challenges of any life-cycle.⁵² Both Vaillant⁵³ and Loevinger⁵⁴ have also acknowledged this moral dimension in their references to Kohlberg's research on the development of conscience.⁵⁵ (I shall return to this dimension a little later.)

The work of Levinson, Vaillant *et al.* nuances and expands on Erikson's (and others') insights. If anything, their conclusions reinforce the awareness of how pervasive our implicit definitions of commitment are and implicitly question how immature adaptations in life could ever result in more responsible commitment.

COMMUNAL CONTEXT OF COMMITMENT

Throughout the life-stage discussion, expressions such as "shared experience," the "cultural" or "sociohistorical" have implied the so-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-35; 86, 199; for somewhat different perspectives, see, E. Weisskopf-Joelson, "Meaning as an Integrating Factor," in C. Bühler and F. Massarik, eds., *The Course of Human Life* (New York: Springer, 1968), pp. 359-83; R. Kuhlen, "Developmental Changes in Motivation During the Adult Years," in B. Neugarten, ed., *Middle Age and Aging* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968), pp. 115-36; B. Neugarten, "Adult Psychology: Toward a Psychology of the Life Cycle," *ibid.*, pp. 137-47.

⁵⁰ When Vaillant, then, says, "Progression in the life cycle necessitates growth and change; but crisis is the exception, not the rule," (*op. cit.*, p. 223), he is employing a more dramatic definition of "crisis." I am suggesting that both researchers, though working out of parallel but different concerns, see "worthwhile conflict" as a key factor in the process of change. In general, R. Gould's work would also honor this factor as pivotal; see his "The Phases of Adult Life: A Study in Developmental Psychology," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 129 (1972), 33-43 and *Transformations, Growth and Change in Adult Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), pp. 41, 327-29.

⁵¹ Vaillant, *op. cit.*, p. 228; also his "Natural History of Male Psychological Health," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 33 (1976), 535-45.

⁵² "The Golden Rule and the Cycle of Life," in R. White, ed., *The Study of Lives* (New York: Atherton, 1963), pp. 413-38.

⁵³ Vaillant, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-43.

⁵⁴ Loevinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27; 408-12.

⁵⁵ This should obviously not be confused with the typical life-study connections between "religion" and age (e.g., Kimmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 357, 452-53; Cain, *op. cit.*, p. 293; Lidz, *op. cit.*, p. 532; Vaillant, 1977, pp. 231, 340, etc.). In fact, Vaillant's comment, "Church attendance proved quite unrelated to mental health," is a redundant reminder for anyone in pastoral ministry (*ibid.*, p. 281).

cial dimension of commitment. Hans Mol and others have dealt extensively with this question within a sociology of religion.⁵⁶ I have a more modest concern here.

R. M. Kanter, in studying the "commitment mechanisms" of successful utopian religious communities, provides a description of shared commitment that complements the other areas we have discussed:

The search for community is also a quest for direction and purpose in a collective anchoring of the individual life. Investment of self in community, acceptance of its authority and willingness to support its values, is dependent in part on the extent to which group life can offer identity, personal meaning and opportunities to grow in terms of standards and guiding principles that the member feels are expressive of his own inner being. . . .⁵⁷

Kanter's "commitment mechanism" gives importance to the dynamic nature of religious bonding in contrast to other approaches.⁵⁸ These mechanisms are the ways a religious community invites a member to detachment from other values and attachment to the group's values (for example, sacrifice, investment, communion).⁵⁹ Kanter would argue that there is a direct correlation between these mechanisms and the vitality of a community.⁶⁰

Although not explicitly dealt with, Kanter's mechanisms take for granted the individual's staged conflicts and committed solutions which are anchored in the communal values and their expressive rituals. In fact, I find an interesting parallel with V. Turner's liminal groups where the community's renewal depends on the passage of some to invite the recommitment of all.⁶¹ Liminality invites the community to reassess the

⁵⁶ *Identity and the Sacred* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), esp. pp. 216-32.

⁵⁷ *Commitment and Community. Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1972), p. 73; see also, pp. 66-70. For a good comparison of H. S. Becker's seminal position, see his "Notes on the Concept of Commitment," *American Journal of Sociology* 66 (1960), 32-40 and that of Kanter; see J. V. Downton, "The Determinants of Commitment," *Humanitas* 8 (1972), 55-78.

⁵⁸ For example, that of R. Stark and C. Glock, *American Piety: The Nature of Religious Commitment* (Berkeley: University of California, 1968); C. Glock, "On the Study of Religious Commitment," *Religious Education*, research suppl. 57 (1962), 98-110; for a critique of this approach, see Payne and Elifson, *op. cit.*, and Mol, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁵⁹ For an exhaustive treatment, see Kanter, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-125.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138; also pertinent are her remarks on the two pulls in social life (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*) pp. 148-54. I have not dealt directly with the empirical research on commitment in this paper, though C. A. Kiesler's remarks would seem to be supportive; see *The Psychology of Commitment. Experiments Linking Behavior to Belief* (New York: Academic, 1971), pp. 125-26, 139. Other empirical research that I have found particularly helpful include: S. Duval and R. Wicklund, *A Theory of Objective Self Awareness* (New York: Academic Press, 1972); C. A. Kiesler and R. Roth, M. Pallak, "Avoidance and Reinterpretation of Commitment and its Implications," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 30 (1974), 705-15; R. Halverson and M. Pallak, "Commitment, Ego-Involvement, and Resistance to Attack," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 14 (1978), 1-12; B. Staw and F. Fox, "Escalation: The Determinants of Commitment to a Chosen Course of Action," *Human Relations* 30 (1977), 431-50.

⁶¹ I have dealt with Turner's ideas in another context in "Communitas: A Test for Team Ministry," *Worship* 48 (1974), 566-79; henceforth Duffy, 1974. Cain's remarks on Van Gennep's rites of passage are from a different concern (*op. cit.*, pp. 278-79). Mol's critique of Turner seems to misconstrue the process dimension of liminality (*op. cit.*, p. 243).

vitality of its meaning at the same time that it urges more responsible self-definition on individual members.

Summing up, we might say that Kanter has explicated some of the life-stage concerns of Erikson and others. Whether one concentrates on the psychological or the sociological, the personal or interpersonal aspects of staged growth, the constant is the dynamic element of change and consequent recommitment. Moreover, this dynamic element can be studied because it is inevitably symbolized on many levels of our shared lives.

We find ourselves, then, at the first point of convergence in our study of commitment and its symbols. The core of human endeavor and the testing point of redemptive need meet here. For it is difficult to be sanguine about the ability, much less the willingness, of most of us to continue to welcome recommitment in the flawed contexts of our lives. The Christian believes that it is only God's gracious work in us that deprives us of our excuses in the face of his demand for our renewed commitment.

JUSTIFICATION AND COMMITMENT

For the Christian, justification is the root of all ultimate commitment and responsibility. (In using the term "justification," I am prescind from its polemical sixteenth century contexts which still seem to be partially with us.) In view of the recent exegetical retrieval of the term, I understand justification as the symbol which describes God's totally gratuitous "work" (*ergon*) which restores us ("new creation") and calls us to be his covenant people. Implicit in such a definition are both ecclesial and eschatological consequences. Trent's description of justification as the continuing root of all faith (and thus, of all sacrament) is understandable only within this larger biblical definition.

But where is the response to justification symbolized more obviously than in the *lex orandi*, in worship, in sacrament? (I have developed this point elsewhere.)⁶² If our shared and individual sin is necessarily played out within life-stages, where else could God's justifying work confront us? Are not the transitional conflicts themselves revelatory of God's demands and the residual irresponsibility that prefers self-justification to mission? If our life-stages limn out our deeper needs, they also presuppose our gifted resources. The new stage derives new meaning from wider self- and other-definition. God's justification certainly does not enable us to respond outside such a context.

The *lex orandi*, then, symbolizes our response to God's gracious work in us, both ecclesially and individually.⁶³ For the uncovering of our deepest needs and charisms within the dynamic context of a life-process

⁶²"Justification and Sacrament," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (accepted for a forthcoming issue).

⁶³I have made a case for the implied mutuality of presence in the *lex orandi* in "Of Reluctant Celebrants and Reliable Symbols," *The Heythrop Journal* 18 (1977), 165-79; more recently, S. Terrien has examined the underlying biblical notion of presence in *The Elusive Presence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

is always associated with a similar revelation of the needs and charisms of others. Our response in the *lex orandi* is shaped by this revelation which once more teaches us mission, i.e., to be sent on account of the others. Here is the basic ecclesiology of the *lex orandi*. It would not be a symbol of God's action if it did not enable us for responsible mission, the Christian test of commitment, at the same time as it healed our need. Our flawed responses to such demands of God must somehow be already revelatory of a Kingdom not yet visible enough among us. Those responses must implicate us in God's eschatological goals and ecclesial mission.

Thus, for the Christian, a "new conscience," engendered by resolved life-stage conflicts, could never be disassociated from such ecclesial tasks. And could there be any salvation for a Christian, at least, outside such ecclesial and eschatological implications? *Lex orandi* can only become a proleptic symbol for us when it reveals and re-educates us to the meaning of God's future out of our present. The success of such worship is tested by the new ecclesial commitment it requires of us for the sake of the Kingdom.

SACRAMENT AND COMMITMENT

Sacrament, within the Christian tradition, is a privileged expression of *lex orandi*. A careful reading of the classic studies on the development of the term "sacrament" by de Ghelincq, van den Eynde and others only reminds us that long before causality theories of sacramental grace, the notion of committed pledge was key.⁶⁴ Even the most articulate defenders of a dispositive causality explanation of sacramental grace were at pains to point out that the sacramental message was not "You receive grace" but "You are a member of the Church."⁶⁵ The sacramental function of commitment to ecclesial mission while obscured in both theory and praxis was never completely lost in the Church.

In fact, I suspect that the parable and sacrament followed much the same muting process from an eschatological to moralizing key in the early Church. The retrieval of both parable and sacrament, with their unsettling call for commitment, will require a new openness to limit-experience as well as limit-expressions (to use Ricoeur's terminology). He sees Jesus' words discerning the core of ordinary experience.⁶⁶ Describing the "disclosing" quality of such religious language, Ricoeur says it "... dislocates our project of making a whole of our lives ... a

⁶⁴J. de Ghelincq *et al.*, *Pour l'Histoire du Mot "Sacramentum," I. Les Antécédents* (Louvain: Spicilegium Sacrum Louvaniense, 1924), esp. pp. 145-47, 311; D. Van den Eynde, *Les Définitions des Sacrements pendant la première période de la théologie scolastique (1050-1240)* (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1950), esp. pp. 4, 138-39; also of interest, D. Michaélidès, 'Sacramentum' chez Tertullien (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1970).

⁶⁵For example, B. Leeming, *Principles of Sacramental Theology* (Westminster: Newman, 1960²), p. 330.

⁶⁶P. Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975), 29-148; here, 123. Precisely at this juncture he would accept Ramsey's coupling of "odd discernment" and "total commitment" (*ibid.*, 123-24).

project which St. Paul identifies with 'self-glorification' . . .'⁶⁷ Sacrament and parable, as such disclosure models, would invite and enable us to pass through a process of orientation, disorientation, reorientation and where else but in our life-stages.

This disclosure and discernment necessarily deals with the same experience we have discussed in life-stages. Justification is a process of each life-stage in which its enabling insight permits us to call out to God in our disclosed need and better founded praise (*lex orandi*) and to be healed as we heal with our discerned gifts. This is the conative function of sacrament as symbol: an orientation toward action is always entailed.⁶⁸ But this action is the result of transformed experience and redirected commitment. This action, rooted in God's gracious work in us, is ecclesially framed and eschatologically oriented. This action is the response and responsibility engendered by committed sacraments.

When, however, we only pay lip service in theory and praxis to the demand for such action, then where is the sacrament that effects what it signifies? And is it surprising that we can have so much sacrament and so little commitment? Nor can it be argued that this denies God's hidden action in the lives of individuals. We did not need sacraments for that. (St. Thomas Aquinas' reminder is sufficient here: *Virtus divina non est alligata sacramentis* [ST III, 73, 6 at 1].) The tradition of *lex orandi* and sacrament is rooted firmly in ecclesial mission. Christian commitment is a question of fused purpose of many people gifted for mission out of their shared experience.

To summarize: long before Erikson, willing Christians and Christian communities have been invited to understand their lived experience and its consequences in terms of God's enabling call to be sent and to build the Kingdom. This justifying call is a powerful symbol. Expressed as *lex orandi*, it is constantly revelatory at the center of our life-stages. Like all conative symbols, our *lex orandi* empowers us to frame our worthwhile conflict in terms of more adequately perceived need of others and of a more focused and deepened commitment.

THE CATECHUMENAL MODEL

The strongest argument I know of to support such a definition of Christian commitment is found in the structure of the catechumenate. As an active and effective way of forming committed Christians, the catechumenate was historically short-lived. But a careful examination of that structure suggests that the Church was using "commitment mechanisms" long before other disciplines were talking about them.

In its classical form the cautious admission to and the lengthy duration of the catechumenate was required because of the nature of the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 125; for a complementary development, see his "Parole et Symbole," *Revue de Sciences Religieuses* 49 (1975), 142-61.

⁶⁸ I am following R. May's usage here ("The Significance of Symbols," in R. May, ed., *Symbolism in Religion and Literature* (New York: Braziller, 1960), pp. 11-49; here, pp. 16-17, 45). (I am grateful to my colleague, E. Dobbin, for this reference.) The word "action" is being used in the ordinary sense as distinguished from Habermas' distinction between "action" and "discourse" to be discussed later.

process: a reassessment and realignment of commitments in terms of the Gospel. The typical lists of unacceptable occupations were a practical example of this (as in *The Apostolic Tradition*). Even the theme of the "Two Ways" (the *Didache*) in early catechetical literature certainly represents more than moral teaching, in the narrow sense of the term.⁶⁹ Candidates are invited to confront the life-crisis that is inevitable when radically different values, meanings and a sense of time become the testing points of their experience at a given life-stage.

Cyprian and the North African church's strong position on apostasy cannot be separated, for example, from the commitment expectations of the community. Even the later custom of postponement of baptism was prompted by the very commitment demands on baptism and its corollary, second penance. Berntsen has recently made a good case for the classical catechumenate of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia as a shaping of the religious affections and thus, of the covenanted, committed purpose of the candidate for initiation.⁷⁰

From an anthropological viewpoint, such a catechumenate structure would be a classic example of Turner's liminality or what I have described elsewhere as "musical chairs."⁷¹ In evoking the candidate's commitment to the Gospel, the Christian community had to be contested by it. For liminality is not only the threshold over which candidates must pass into a new stage of the community's widened expectation. It is also the dynamic response of the community, reassessing old roles and shaping new resources. Candidates' new commitments will contest the older and perhaps too narrow commitments of the baptized. The new resources of the candidates will question what new roles and gifts are needed of the older members. Such rites of passage while not strictly aligned to chronological ages cannot be divorced from life stages.

A FIRST SUMMARY

I do not wish to overstate my case. I simply submit that worthwhile conflict and consequence commitment is more than a question of psychological congruence for theology. God's continuing salvific action in us is the radical cause of the conflicts which question our deepest

⁶⁹Nor does the possible later addition of this material to the original text (as J-P Audet, *La Didaché, instruction des Apôtres* [Paris: Gabalda, 1958], pp. 58-62, has argued) militate against this position. In fact, this development seems to be a late New Testament theme; see D. Hill, "On Suffering and Baptism in I Peter," *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976), 181-89.

⁷⁰J. Berntsen, "Christians Affections and the Catechumenate," *Worship* 52 (1978), 194-210: the same concerns might help to solve the problem that R. Murray deals with in "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974), 59-80.

⁷¹See Duffy, 1974. I am not at all convinced by the arguments that A. Scheer brings forth to substantiate his assumption that the initiation of adults at Easter did not take place during the celebration and in the presence of the community in "Is the Easter Vigil a Rite of Passage?" in D. Power and L. Maldonado, eds., *Liturgy and Human Passage*, Concilium 112, (New York: Seabury, 1979), 50-62; henceforth *Concilium* 112.

motivations and meanings. Sacrament is one symbolized expression of such action and our communal and individual response. Commitment to evangelical mission tests the effectiveness of such symbols for us. Privatizing tendencies in sacramental praxis and theory shortcircuit the renewal of Christian community because it obstructs a primary means of that renewal: continuing initiatory liminality for all members. The sum total of privatized commitments does not add up to ecclesial commitment.

The second thesis I would propose is this:

2. *The praxis of the Church is symbolized in part in its committed and thus, responsible lex orandi. But uncommitted sacraments are an obstacle to the purpose and goal of God's justification.*

In his discussion of the third meaning of symbol, G. Baum rightly insists that imagination has a role in recreating the world in which we live. Revealed symbols also structure our imagination so that faith may deal with our experience and transform our world.⁷² And yet, historically it seems that often enough ecclesial praxis has allowed symbol to become the victim of privatized meanings and a rationale for institutional sclerosis.⁷³ Praxis is indeed a symbol-profile or, as Coleman phrased it, a crucial test of vision.⁷⁴ *Lex orandi*, by definition, involves evangelical commitment but one that is tested time and again in praxis.⁷⁵

ACTION AND DISCOURSE

This is why I find Habermas' ongoing work so pertinent. Indeed, as W. Lowe pointed out, critical theory is not a rounded theory but "... a tactic—a sort of interim ethic, a way of waiting without idols in a time of eschatological postponement."⁷⁶ One of Habermas' concerns is symbolic interaction whose norms spell out the "... reciprocal expectations about behavior."⁷⁷ Because we live in a world that tolerates systematic distortion of communications, the question of communicative competence arises.⁷⁸ A crucial distinction is made at this juncture between

⁷² *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist, 1975), pp. 242-45; also, R. Hart, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 274-311 for a systematic approach, and H. D. Duncan, *Symbols in Society* (London: Oxford, 1968) p. 48. For a broader anthropological treatment, I have found R. Firth's, *Symbols Public and Private* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1973), quite useful.

⁷³ F. Schupp's judgment is much harsher: "... als solche schrittweise Liquidation der transformierenden Praxis Jesu. . ." in *Glaube—Kultur—Symbol. Versuch einer Kritischen Theorie sakramentaler Praxis* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1974), p. 20.

⁷⁴ J. Coleman, "Vision and Praxis in American Theology," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976), 3-40; here, 6-7. This is why a theologian can sometimes learn more from the sessions of Trent on the "use and abuse" of individual sacraments than from the dogmatic sessions.

⁷⁵ I am using the fifth possibility that Lamb discussed (1976, 171).

⁷⁶ "Psychoanalysis and Humanism. The Permutation of Method," 1978 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, p. 27. (Mimeographed.)

⁷⁷ J. Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1970), p. 92.

⁷⁸ Lamb, 1975, p. 174, n. 83 referred to the underlying problem of Habermas' use of the psychoanalytic model. In addition to his references I have found the following helpful:

action which naively assumes a background consensus and discourse where the validity of that consensus is called into question.⁷⁹ Theory cannot, Habermas argues, support the "... risky decisions of strategic action." But the participants of practical discourse "... are the only ones who can know what risks they are willing to undergo, and with what expectations."⁸⁰ The process of being willing thus to participate and be emancipated, Habermas labels "enlightenment." Even within the restrictions of his chosen psychoanalytic model, he can say: "... in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants."⁸¹ (As his critics have pointed out, Habermas presupposes an ideal speech community which can only be anticipated.)⁸²

Our interests parallel those of Habermas in this area. Distorted sacramental praxis is inevitably the result of distorted, or at least naive, communication. Sacramental action may assume a consensus of the participants about eschatological and ecclesial concerns. But Habermas is right. Commitment can only come out of a discourse that reveals its demands and concurrently strengthens its participants. And this process does indeed presuppose not so much an ideal speech community as communal intersubjective meanings. Taylor asserts that such meanings are constitutive of community, of celebration and of feelings. Convergence builds on such common meaning and shared values.⁸³ The dialectic of Word and Sacrament ideally is the optimum ecclesial expression of such discourse and its corollary, committed participation.

To continue with the therapeutic model for a moment, healing communication is premised on the possibility of a dialectical discourse with retrieved experience and more adequate symbolization played out against a current life-stage.⁸⁴ Shared or intersubjective meanings are the

R. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1978), p. 261, n. 37; P. Connerton (also ed.), *Critical Sociology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 30-32; T. A. McCarthy, "A Theory of Communicative Competence," *Philosophy of Social Sciences* 3 (1973), 135-56 (also excerpted in Connerton, pp. 470-97); A. Wellmer, "Communications and Emancipation: Reflections on the Linguistic Turn in Critical Theory," in J. O'Neill, ed., *On Critical Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 231-63.

⁷⁹J. Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), pp. 16-18; henceforth *Theory*.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸²Bernstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-13. An important influence on the psychoanalytic dimensions of Habermas' work seems to be the thought of A. Lorenzer. In the latter's "Symbols and Stereotypes," (in Connerton, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-52) he makes an insightful distinction between stereotypes (unconscious level) and symbols (conscious level) that bears further investigation for sacrament.

⁸³C. Taylor, "Interpretation and the Science of Man," *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971), 1-32; 35-45. (Also excerpted in Connerton, pp. 153-93.)

⁸⁴Loevinger properly asserts that new ego growth is a therapeutic assumption for which there is little evidence of an empirical kind (*op. cit.*, p. 427). Yet her system does resemble that of Erikson (*ibid.*, pp. 426, 429), involving a transformation of structures. Since she also accepts Ricoeur's "teleology of the subject" (*ibid.*, p. 431), Loevinger would then presumably accept the symbolization processes associated with such structures. Lowe's contribution is important here: he situates the mixed method of humanistic psychology and the mixed discourse of Freudian psychoanalysis "on the boundary of the transcendental realm" (*op. cit.*, pp. 33-34).

direct result of such a process (for example, in the virtues of Erikson's last stages). Both Kohlberg's moral stages and J. Fowler's parallel faith stages are further delineations of this process.⁸⁵ A theological question suggests itself at this point: could there be appropriated symbolization possible (*ex opere operantis*) outside of such dialectic?

ONTOGENY OF RITUALIZATION

We rejoice Erikson at this point. Life-stages cannot be understood, he argues, apart from an accompanying ontogeny of ritualization.⁸⁶ In other words, it would be difficult to conceive of worthwhile conflict and underlying reciprocal needs that did not issue in enlarged symbols. In a description that Turner would appreciate, Erikson describes ritual in terms of "... a deepened communality, a proven ceremonial form, and a timeless quality from which all participants emerge with a sense of awe and purification."⁸⁷ When indeed static rituals satisfactorily sum up our life stance, it is only because "... the playfulness of the stages has gone out of them."⁸⁸ Future tasks, on the other hand, shaped out of a heightened present awareness, would come from re-ritualization, the gift of a new and more communal life-context.⁸⁹ But such reshaping of our rituals are not the result of liturgical committees but of dialectical discourse with God's Word and Sacrament.

In brief, ecclesial praxis and its sacramental expression do reveal both God's action (*ex opere operato*) and, for better or worse, the assumptions of our own communicative competence. Sacramental action becomes naive and even deceptive when it does not lead us back to a dialectical discourse which prophetic parables and action words demand. I know of no theological principle which maintains that this be done outside of life-contexts and their specification in life stages. Those who would argue that this denigrates God's gratuitous action in us must operate out of a static theology of creation and redemption that is nowhere evidenced in God's Word. Those who would argue out of an efficacy of sacraments position that such an *ex opere operantis* dimen-

⁸⁵H. Peukert (*Wissenschaftstheorie—Handlungstheorie—Fundamentale Theologie* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1976], pp. 241-42), has called for an enlarging of the interaction competence model by the work of Kohlberg. I would add that of J. Fowler and S. Keen, as currently summarized in their *Mapping Faith's Structures. A Developmental Overview* (scheduled to be published by Word Books, Texas). Fowler, in turn, has broadened his schema by comparison with R. Selman's role-taking categories in *The Developmental Conceptions of Interpersonal Relations*, publication of the Harvard-Judge Baker Social Reasoning Project, Vols. I/II (December, 1974), and "Social-Cognitive Understanding," in R. Lickona, ed., *Moral Development and Behavior* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976).

⁸⁶For an earlier statement, see E. Erikson, "The Development of Ritualization," in D.R. Cutler, ed., *The Religious Situation 1968* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), pp. 711-33; also Browning, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-07.

⁸⁷Erikson, *Toys*, p. 78.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 117. It is important to reiterate the larger social contexts which are always at least implied in Erikson's discussions.

sion is unnecessary, seem to be the same theologians who understand *lex orandi lex credendi* in the manual theology tradition.⁹⁰

TWO LIFE-STAGE EXAMPLES

To concretize briefly this discussion of dialectical discourse and its symbols in two age-groups of this North American continent: young adult and older Christians. What would a praxis profile reveal about the liminal character of their sacramental motivation and commitment?⁹¹ Would it be inaccurate, for example, to suggest that there is a dichotomy between a sometimes sophisticated post-Vatican II catechetical model, within which many young adult Christians have been trained, and current sacramental praxis? This praxis may encourage a narrow moral ethic or a liberal permissiveness but, in neither case, a deeper commitment, rooted in the young adult's transitional life-stage and its need for mission. One accurate test of sacrament would be the increasing need such a young adult might experience for participation in Christian core groups where prayer and sharing of God's Word, contextualized within the pressures and demands of their life-stage, would be a continuation of larger liturgical celebrations. Are we to believe that this is an elitist notion of Christian commitment?

For Christians, entering their final life-stages, are sacraments to be a substitute for unevoked commitments? If the Christian community can do no more for their elderly than afford ill-conceived consolation and a Christian version of the Senior Citizens' club, then what is being said about the sacramental rites of passage of that community? Where is the transformed intimacy and generativity, even if not fully appropriated, which would impel the older Christian to have a deeper sense of mission which the ecclesial community would practically employ?⁹²

A final question about the interaction of these two groups that usually remain isolated from one another in our American culture. If the sacramental praxis of the Christian community should enable all its

⁹⁰ Any careful study of sacramental efficacy (such as P. Pourrat's classic *Theology of the Sacraments* [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1924], pp. 93-203) only underlines the fact that the *ex opere operantis*, as historically treated, is only a disguised *ex opere operato* argument, resituated within the context of the "worthiness" of the sacramental minister. While this aspect of the justification question is legitimate, it does not represent a realistic development or solution to the question we are treating. (See also note 65.)

⁹¹ In this respect, the work of R. Stark and C. Glock, *op. cit.*, (1968), is of no help, not only because of the commitment definition (see note 6) but because a developmental frame is nowhere in evidence. J. D. Davidson's enlarged version of the Glock model ("Glock's Model of Religious Commitment: Assessing Some Different Approaches and Results," *Review of Religious Research* 16 [1975], 83-93) does not help us. For a somewhat broadened effort, see C. Coleman, W. Toomey, R. Woodland, "Cognition, Belief and Behavior: A Study of Commitment to a Religious Institution," *Religious Education* 70 (1975), 676-89. (See note 55 for the passing references to religion in Lidz, Vaillant, Gould, etc.)

⁹² For Background, see Sze, *op. cit.*, pp. 575-717 and M. F. Lowenthal and C. Haven, "Interaction and Adaptation: Intimacy as a Critical Variable," in B. Neugarten, ed., *Middle Age and Aging*, pp. 390-400. An example from middle adulthood, with the same implications, would be "mentoring" (see Levinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-101; 251-54).

members to be catechumenal, that is, mutually to evoke the gifts needed for the mission of the community, why is this interaction between these age-groups so little in evidence in so many Christian communities? I submit that these are legitimate examples of the type of questions that sacramental praxis must pose.

"WORTHY RECEPTION" AND PRAXIS

What has been the one test of commitment for a responsible *lex orandi*? Has it not been the conditions for "the worthy reception of a sacrament?" These conditions revolved around definitions of a "state of grace," in turn, premised on moral commitments. The underlying problem of such conditions is not their quality as much as their narrow and often non-ecclesial nature. Without intending to, such conditions could foster a self-serving interiority which, in effect, would debilitate the very meaning of justification and mission.⁹³

One symptom of the limited nature of such conditions for "worthy reception" is found in the implicit definition of "sacrament" as such. In H. Weber's fine study of the connection between "sacrament" and "morality" in early nineteenth-century German theology, for example, the predictable views of sacrament as "means to a moral action," "object of specific duties," "basis of moral life," etc. are everywhere in evidence.⁹⁴ Such understandings operate in an ecclesial vacuum because the person, gifted for mission in a specific life context, liminally interacting with others, is virtually ignored. From such a position we can demand "avoidance of sin" as a condition for certain sacraments without asking for a more comprehensive gospel commitment. (Although I much appreciate the recent work of moral theologians such as C. Curran, F. Burri, H. Schultze *et al.* in the area of commitment and responsibility,⁹⁵ I would argue that such informed views do not yet represent the current praxis of the Christian community nor have they as yet influenced sacramental expression.⁹⁶ Furthermore, as I have been suggesting

⁹³ See Schupp's strong comments here (*op. cit.*, pp. 262-63); I have already discussed the problem of "fruitful sacrament" in "At Table with Jesus," *Villanova Theological Institute Proceedings*, 1978, *God's Love and Mercy Actualized* (Villanova: Villanova University, 1979) (pagination not yet available).

⁹⁴ *Sakrament und Sittlichkeit* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1966), p. 416. There are interesting exceptions however: Hirscher, (*op. cit.*, pp. 171-218) and Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-46.

⁹⁵ C. Curran, "Responsibility in Moral Thought: Centrality, Foundations and Implications for Ecclesiology," *Jurist* 31 (1971), 113-42; F. Buri, *Theologie der Verantwortung*, G. Hauff, ed. (Stuttgart: P. Haupt, 1971); H. Schultze, "Konkret Humanität. Gottes Gebieten im Wandel der Gesellschaft," *Kerygma und Dogma* 21 (1974), 181-98; in a broader context, A. Jäger, "Zur 'Theologie der Verantwortung'," *Theologisches Zeitschrift* 30 (1974), 27-35; for an earlier but undeveloped approach, B. Héaring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. III (Westminster: Newman, 1966), pp. 579-82; his later approach (sacrament as conversion) is more developed in *Free and Faithful in Christ* Vol. I., (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 430-45.

⁹⁶ Thus, F. Carney, in discussing his second level of accountability in Christian morality can say: "Although some few men may understand themselves to have made commitments of this sort by virtue of their becoming Christian, the church . . . does not

throughout this discussion, moral categories cannot be expected to present all dimensions of symbolized commitment.)

"Worthy reception" of sacraments or "active participation," to use Vatican II's phrase, is, first of all, a question of our experience, dialectically understood. Symbol is both a necessary part of such understanding and the key to active recommitment. For symbol does not simply reflect the rituals of our current life-stage but insists on their larger meaning. Only such meaning can invite a review of responsibility within the larger forum of others' needs as well as our own. Only such responsibility, in turn, can assure the honesty of our symbols.

The corollary of this discussion is not a new call for sacramental rigorism à la Tertullian. Nor is it to deny the continuing mystery of God's action among us. It is, however, a question of our too reasonable expectations in our *lex orandi*. When Rahner, for example, specifies a sacrament as present "... when an essential self-actualization of the Church becomes effective in a concrete and decisive situation in some person's life,"⁹⁷ his theory is quite accurate. But it is sacramental praxis which must deal with the blurred complexity of "some person's life" or the mission of that Church will suffer.

A CURRENT QUESTION OF PRAXIS

Within the recent praxis of the Church, I should like to briefly comment on one example that involves such a "concrete and decisive situation": infant baptism in the current African Church. In 1965, Rome was asked by the African bishops about the praxis of the baptism of infants whose parents gave no sign of even minimal Christian commitment. While generally repeating the classical norms in the case of practicing Christian parents, Rome answered in 1970 that there must be assurances of some minimal awareness of their responsibilities as Christian parents and some guarantees of a Christian context for raising their children. Otherwise, baptism could not be given at that time. Some pastoral alternatives were then suggested.⁹⁸ This response is interesting, not only in its implications for the doctrine of original sin, but for our present discussion of commitment.

Initiation is entrance into an ecclesial community and the responsibility for that process is also mediated through an ecclesial community.⁹⁹ In

expect the generality of its members to hold this understanding" (in "Christian Moral Accountability," *The Journal of Religion* 53 [1973], 309-29).

⁹⁷Rahner, 1978, p. 419; the same would have to be said for his *ex opere operantis* definition on p. 414. In the same vein, see E. Schillebeeckx's treatment of a fruitful sacrament in *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 133-35 and K. McNamara, "The Church, Sacrament of Christ," in D. O'Callaghan, ed., *Sacraments. The Gestures of Christ* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), pp. 76-90; here, pp. 87-89.

⁹⁸The complete documentation with a commentary by L. Ligier will be found in *Notitiae* 61 (1971), 64-73.

⁹⁹G. Fitzer, "Taufe—Gemeinschaft—Mission," *Verborum Veritas. Festschrift für G. Stählin zum 70. Geburtstag*. (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1970), pp. 263-77. Ligier's distinction between the African statement's "faith of the community" and the Roman

our earlier discussion of the catechumenate, I proposed a model for initiation commitment as a liminal process, dynamically involving the different life-stages of all the members of such a community. The ability of the initiating community to evoke the new as well as the old charisms (Kanter's "commitment mechanisms") of its individual members is not, after all, a superficial nicety of Pauline ecclesiology. Paul presumably speaks out of an imperfect but experienced praxis in this matter.

Yet, infant baptism, without even the minimal signs of commitment on the part of parents, becomes a *cul de sac* in praxis. The theoretical results as well as the pastoral liabilities of such a praxis are obvious enough. K. Lehmann has called this the "anthropological situation of infants" where faith and sacrament of the parents are not aligned. He forcefully cites Erikson's analysis of Luther's case: "the child has faith if the community *seriously intends* his baptism."¹⁰⁰ Lehmann arrives at a demand similar to the one I have been making: "This leads legitimately to a more demanding testing (*schärferen Prüfung*) of admission to the sacraments without an extreme rigorism having the last word. The spiritual-communal situation of presence demands ever more of Christians a decision for personal responsible witness of their faith, so that the ordinary sacramental praxis needs a thorough renewal of the personal faith-ethos and with it also, of a formative change (*Gestaltwandel*)."¹⁰¹

The presumed faith commitment of a "universal Church" was never a substitute in Augustine for the faith of a local ecclesial community.¹⁰² Even in Rome's minimal definition of commitment in the current African situation, we find a traditional restatement, more honored in theory than in praxis. The credible renewal of any Christian community is a catechumenal process which pivots on the presumed and yet untapped resources at different life stages of all Christians, interacting in more than ritual ways or congruent orthodoxy.¹⁰³

THE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS AND COMMITMENT

The identification process is a continuing test of how an ecclesial community and its individual members appropriate God's justification and its evocation of our committed service and praise. Early in this paper, I cited F. Fiorenza's description of Christ's identity in terms of his life-praxis. His prophetic action-words and his parables were powerful reflections of that life-praxis.

document's "faith of the Church" seems to imply the latter phrase as corrective (*op. cit.*, 72). If that is his intention, I would find such a dichotomy not only theologically questionable but an untenable position in praxis.

¹⁰⁰ *Gegenwart des Glaubens*. (Mainz: M. Grünewald, 1974), pp. 223-25. The citation is from Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958). Italics mine.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁰² The problem of "character" in sacrament either in Augustine or in Rahner does not solve our current commitment question since it is, I would argue, a static category as presented.

¹⁰³ A second example would be the question of commitment implied in eucharistic reciprocity among different confessional Christian communities in the norms of the diocese of Strasbourg, France. I have commented on this in "At Table with Jesus" (see note 93).

For Paul, the perduring initiating process can be summed up in a similar identification process: *as Christ, so we* (Rom 6: 5-11). This is not an allegory but a Pauline metaphor that certainly merits Ricoeur's label of a "limit experience." Beasley-Murray has pointed out that the Pauline message is not that we lie in a grave like Christ but that we lie in Christ's grave.¹⁰⁴ The "unreasonable expectation" of such a transformation is that the Christian's prophetic action-words and his/her parables will also eventually be powerful reflections of their life-praxis and somehow proleptically symbolize the inbreaking Kingdom of God.

If this is indeed the radical character of initiation, then the process of commitment is clear: as Christ, so the Christian's and the community's identity is gradually clarified in a life praxis that contests the radical evil of our shared life contexts. The enabled resources for such life conflicts cannot be found outside life-cycles inextricably allied to that of others. In some imperfect way the communal and individual Christian identity must qualify them to "be worthy to be killed" for such witness, as Christ was. If such an evolving understanding of discipleship seems utopian in either praxis or theory, then is not our justification theology self-serving and our sacramental system illusory?¹⁰⁵

I believe, quite the contrary, that the worthwhile conflicts of our lives provides a realistic basis for commitment praxis of the ecclesial community and its symbols. For it gives new depth to the traditional understanding of sacrament as "medicinal." Limit-experiences are God's invitation to be healed as we heal. Rahner carefully phrased a similar dialectic: "In really religious acts, man does not only fulfill what is most truly his own, his spiritual, personal and grace-endowed individuality; through these acts he also acquires a decisive significance in the salvation of others."¹⁰⁶ (In fact, such commitment is similar to Rahner's description of "witness" as a growth process, unconditional and related to matrydom.)¹⁰⁷

SOME CONCLUSIONS

When Max Horkheimer decided to allow a reissue of early essays from *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, he prefaced the collection with a pertinent warning: "Men of good will want to draw conclusions for political action from critical theory. Yet there is no fixed method for doing this; this only universal prescription is that one must have insight

¹⁰⁴G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 130; similarly, G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 75).

¹⁰⁵Again, Schupp is to the point on our speech about Jesus: "Dass die von ihm erlernte Sprache jedoch verlangt, auch, 'über' den Tod, was eben nicht heisst, über ihn deskriptiv hinaus, zu reden, stellt gerade an diesem Grenzfall heraus, dass es 'über' den Menschen auch eine andere Sprache geben soll, die nicht die Sprache von 'Tatsachen' ist. Diese Sprache ist jedoch nicht willkürlich und darf nicht willkürlich sein" (*op. cit.*, p. 251).

¹⁰⁶*The Christian Commitment* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), p. 89; also, pp. 86-92.

¹⁰⁷"Theological Observations on the Concept of 'Witness,'" *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 13 (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 152-68; here, pp. 155, n. 3, 159, 165.

into one's own responsibility."¹⁰⁸ I am sensitive to that warning as I attempt to draw some theological conclusions from our current understanding of life-stages and their conflicts, from their liminal, communal context and from their symbolic expression within a Christian community. I will propose three tentative conclusions:

1. *Sacraments must deal with the "surplus of meaning" (Ricoeur) of our shared experience and refocus it "for the sake of the many" (huper pollōn).* Commitment is the turning point of symbol for it redefines our participating presence. In effect, commitment provides a symbol-profile, that is, the enlarged demand for new meaning and its potential consequences in our lives. (Thus, the loss of meaning in the life of a forty-five year old person is a life-stage crisis which limns out the need for new meaning as well as the personal and communal resources for such a response.)

But how does commitment provide "vigorous meaning" by means of symbol? It introduces a dialectical process in which new life demands on our resources are contested by self-serving first readings of our experience. Commitment, through symbol, is in search of a more realistic specification or focusing of our ambiguous experience as seen in our life-praxis. S. Langer expressed a similar thought in relating life-symbols and sacrament: it reflects "... the serious thought of people's imaginative insight into life."¹⁰⁹

Symbol, then, must offer more than a sterile ideation process. Its focus is adjusted to a life-stage context which allows the new to emerge from the old. Paradoxically, it is the deeper need of this life-stage which dialectically prepares for the flexibility required for new commitment. This is why Ricoeur's dictum is so true: symbol does indeed move us to thought and we will be surprised by the "surplus of meaning" it conatively gifts us with.

The symbol-profile actively intensifies our symbolized perception of our life-praxis and the expanded choices it allows. (Inferentially, the quality of time of that particular life-stage is also being called into question.) Part of the symbol-profile communicates our community's new awareness of its needs and our gifts. (For example, the earliest development of the theological meaning of the Eucharist from eschatological meal to meal-sacrifice in the Judeo-Christian community might, I suspect, reflect, in part, this communal dimension of symbol-profile.) Often enough, it is the privilege of the community to provide the limit-expression of this process (e.g., "Let he who is holy, come..." in the *Didache*).

On the personal level, symbol-profile deals with the current boundaries of our presence and its manifestations in our life-praxis. For presence is a question of our gathered resources, rooted in our understanding of our experience and symbolized in myriad ways. Our presence to the Other and its symbols are conditioned on the current meaning

¹⁰⁸ *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. v.

¹⁰⁹ *Philosophy in a New Key. A Study of Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976³), p. 157.

we assign our experience. But it is the redemptive character of symbol that it affords us a limit-experience which is always a question of re-focusing of meaning, conatively symbolized. And it is this limit-experience which allows us to re-enter our symbolic world with more committed mutuality, with new appreciation of the need for generativity and being "on account of the others." (Thus, to return to the example of our forty-five year old person: in literally "appropriating" a sacrament, it is his/her life-stage context which focuses both the need and resources that spell out the current meaning of commitment for his/her life-praxis.)

Sacrament is effective because it both presents the ultimate root of symbol, God's presence, and allows our fragmented presence to be contested and healed in that symbolic contact. Moreover, the ecclesial and mission dimension of sacrament dynamically relates our need and resources to that of others. To be committed ("to go with the others") will cost us a better founded praise of God who has thus empowered us to committed presence, based on a second, more accurate reading of our experience and his action in it. Symbolized praise of God that does not eventually elicit deeper communal and personal commitment is both questionable and deceptive.

Such committed sacramental praise would be a reversal of the historical muting process of parable and sacrament from eschatological to simply moralizing message. For eschatology can have no impact on our lives if it does not question the difference between our rituals and God's symbols, if it does not challenge the circumscribed meaning we give our future because we fear commitment's demands that might be made on our present. Commitment shapes out eschatology in our lives and sacrament is a privileged symbol of that process.

Fruitful participation in sacrament and its context, our life-praxis, is the scene of God's prevenient and justifying action. Without such belief, we would be mindless in our hope, irresponsible in our symbols. It is from God's justifying action that we learn the continuing "surplus of meaning" in our shared experience.¹¹⁰ Fruitful participation cannot be disassociated, I have argued, from the clarification of this meaning. Otherwise, we are left with the "scattered metaphors" that promise no future.

Fruitful participation in sacrament, founded in God's promise in Christ, brings us back to a "reservoir of meaning... yet to be spoken."¹¹¹ Symbols, as Ricoeur has so often reminded us, "... plunge their roots into the durable constellations of life, feeling and the universe."¹¹² Sacraments, *ex opere operantis*, must do no less. This position does not represent a new and insensitive pastoral rigorism but a

¹¹⁰I assume here that P. Ricoeur's "surplus of meaning of metaphors" is rooted in the staged description of experience outlined earlier in this paper (*Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* [Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976], p. 45).

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 65; again, I am extending Ricoeur's concerns in a way that is consonant, I believe, with his interest in Christian symbol and the psychoanalytical model he continually refers to.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 64. The reflections of D. Power are quite pertinent here in his "The Odyssey of Man in Christ," *Concilium* 112, pp. 100-11.

respect for the responsibility that committed symbol demands. Furthermore, it is the only real safeguard against the privatizing and reifying tendencies of sacramental praxis. Such tendencies historically have always debilitated ecclesial praxis and eschatological goals within Christian communities.

Fruitful participation, if it is not to be naive, must engender hope out of, and not despite, our experience. Such hope, an expression of God's new creation in us, is truly, as Ricoeur has said, "an excess of meaning."¹¹³ For not only does it expose our irresponsible and half-hearted involvement in God's new creation, it gives us the surprising courage to reframe our commitments.¹¹⁴ But such committed "surplus of meaning" will inevitably bring us back to the meaning of others for our sacramental praxis.

Without such meaning, the poor will always be too much with us. For contemporary poverty is not only a question of social injustice but of the alienated void and the lack of meaning that so many Christians and non-Christians experience. Habermas' remarks on "alienated leisure" provide one example.¹¹⁵ Hegel suggests another which is still relevant today:

When the gospel is no longer preached to the poor, when the salt has become dumb, and all the fundamental rites are accepted in silence, then the people, for whose permanently limited reason truth can only exist in the representational image, no longer know to find aid for their inner needs.¹¹⁶

2. *The service (administration) that each sacrament demands is not adequately explained by essentially negative formulations. Rather a responsibility for the ministry of sacrament draws its direction from the need to clarify the "surplus of meaning" on communal and individual levels.* It is an accurate generalization, I believe, that ever since the Donatist heresy, we have been so preoccupied with defending the validity of sacrament despite unworthy ministers that we have been satisfied with minimal definitions of fruitful ministry of those same sacraments. (This closely parallels the minimalism of a theology of fruitful participation in sacraments.) Inevitably books on spirituality or good pastoral praxis took up the slack but often enough in doubtful and pietistic ways.¹¹⁷

The underlying question of any development in this area is to what extent the dialectical discourse is seen as part of the fruitful ministry of

¹¹³"Freedom in the Light of Hope," in D. Ihde, ed., *The Conflict of Interpretations*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 402-24; here, p. 411.

¹¹⁴Ricoeur correctly pinpoints the true evil (against which hope is posited) as "fraudulency in the work of totalization" *op. cit.*, p. 423. This "surplus of meaning" argues against the position of C. D. Batson *et al*, in *Commitment without Ideology* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1973), pp. 183-89, that existential commitment is to growth process and therefore against a set of beliefs. When *lex orandi lex credendi* is truly evolved and practiced, their position is unnecessary and unfocused.

¹¹⁵Habermas, *Theory*, pp. 195-96.

¹¹⁶As cited by Habermas, *Theory*, p. 190.

¹¹⁷For an overall discussion, see B. Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacrament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

any sacrament. After all, the traditional doctrine of sacramental ministry emphasizes the privileged role of ministerial cooperation: a facilitation of the ongoing communicative competence of God's Word/Sacrament among us.¹¹⁸

Such ministry, then, is presumably prophetic for it is not only more than the sum total of its ministerial parts; it is truly God's two-edged sword cleaving apart our glib and self-justifying hermeneutics so that we might return to committed mission. Here is the meaning of *ex opere operato* that informs a theology of sacramental ministry and its impact on praxis. This is to say much more than "the Mass of a holy priest is to be preferred over that of an unworthy one even though the Mass is the same." Such statements have proven to be a theological *cul de sac*.

But to be prophetic, such ministry must be shaped by ecclesial responsibility and not simply by an ecclesiology in search of some responsibility. Liminality and "commitment mechanisms" afford us praxis examples of how passages to new communal and individual commitment are enabled by the shared work of both the candidates and the initiated. This does not blur the distinction between general and special ministries but rather specifies it in praxis terms. For discourse cannot occur except where cooperation, informed by needy experience, brings us to the roles we would not have otherwise assumed.

Examples in ecclesial praxis abound: prophetic circles in early Christian communities, the role of widows as a ministry in a later period, the *libelli pacis* when used responsibly in persecuted communities of Cyprian's Africa.¹¹⁹ Such ecclesial responsibility is not, for example, exemplified by the interested but uncommitted spectatorship of a Sunday congregation staring at an initiation celebrated within a Eucharist. It is precisely against such irresponsible participation that Augustine pleads in saying: "... the whole Church begets each and all of the baptized" (*Epist.* 98:5).

When ministers, communal or individual, think they can "give sacraments" without entering into them, do we see this as a necessary if unwarranted evil to protect efficacy of sacrament? Are we not rather dealing with inefficacy of interaction?¹²⁰

The origin of the notion of "faculties" to celebrate a particular sacrament, after all, lies in the theological principle of accountability for and discerned charism in "serving" (*ministrare*) a sacrament. The role of such a celebrant/minister of any sacrament is to clarify the symbol, both by self-investment in its action and enabling others to be disposed for the limit-experience of God's presence. Is this principle respected,

¹¹⁸ My approach would complement the communications theory model of A. Ganoczy in *Einführung in Katholische Sakramentenlehre* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), pp. 106-35.

¹¹⁹ A less certain but more dramatic example might be the question of initiation celibacy; see Murray, *op. cit.*

¹²⁰ P. Eicher approaches the same point in a somewhat different fashion in "Administered Revelation: The Official Church and Revelation," in E. Schillebeeckx and B. Van Iersel, eds., *Revelation and Experience* (Concilium 113) (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 3-17.

for example, when all priests are, as a rule, given faculties to preach and, on the other hand, when some lay Christians whose theological education and Gospel life perhaps equally or better qualify them are not allowed to preach? Is this principle honored when a couple is presumed able to celebrate marriage because they (1) have no canonical impediments; (2) have assisted at some form of marriage preparation; and (3) "want to be married in a church?" If we say that the minister of a sacrament must "intend what the Church intends," do we not specify the commitment that the Church "unreasonably expects" of such servants of God's mysteries?

3. *Conditions for fruitful reception of a sacrament come out of a definition of Christian commitment and include the question of fused purpose of many people gifted for mission out of their shared experience.* The demands that come out of Christian commitment are not rigoristic or unrealistic. Rather they are based on a keen appreciation for the flawed but gifted profile of Christians and a hope which is more than the sum total of those same Christians. Secondly, such demands are not exclusively communal or social. (I am uncomfortable with certain tendencies in South American liberation theology which seem to presume that the individual's life-stages are simply co-extensive with social change and, therefore, implicitly treat commitment only in social categories.)

Such fruitful participation is sensitive to individual and communal differences and not only in terms of ritual adaptation. Historical and socio-cultural differences must be acknowledge in praxis. Augustine's church differed significantly from Cyprian's in both ways. In our own day, not only the incipient nature of commitment studies but their socio-cultural complexity should sensitize us to these crucial differences. Thus, age is often enough an easy but poor indicator for sacramental readiness. "Vigorous meaning" in a person's life while more complex to discern respects the socio-cultural differences and the honesty of symbols. If this seems vague, perhaps it only indicates that our never-in-doubt matter-and-form mentalities generate many of our current praxis problems. To initiate more compassionate marriage tribunal praxis, for example, without questioning the commitment assumptions of its underlying sacramental theology is to avoid an important theological task that an Augustine would have welcomed.

In sum, our life experience, with its conflicts, must renew our symbols of presence to God and others. But there is no real presence that does not demand commitment. Commitment must test the honest awareness we have of that life experience and thus, the quality of that presence. Biblical symbols for the Kingdom of God attempt to describe the mutual presence of God and his people at the end of time. These people were strengthened by God in stages of time to bear the pain and the liberation of disclosure symbols which invited them literally "to go with the others" (*committere*) once more.

Ultimately, commitment tests any theological praxis or theory that claims to explain that which we, as yet, have no full experience of: God's

redemption in Christ and our participation in it. Commitment suggests some questions to the theological community.

For example, what "illumination" in the patristic sense of the word can Christological models afford us when they do not include the conflict and commitment patterns that make any life (including that of Jesus) truly human?¹²¹ Do our current moral theologies systematically reflect enough the "unreasonable expectations" of the Gospel as contextualized in our life-cycles? Do our current ecclesiologicals talk of discipleship but, in reality, reasonably demand only membership? Are sacramental theologians content with the quality and precision of commitment that Rahner's and Schillebeeckx's sacramental models (or, for that matter, more recent process models) demand? In the development of practical theology, to what extent must conflict and commitment specify experience and its use in interaction models.¹²²

In other words, I am suggesting that there must be committed witnesses to the shared impact our theologies, ministries and sacraments have had for this age. Otherwise, why would we bridle at John Gardner's searing comments on theology if, after all, we ourselves are the Grendels commenting on the praxis we see and tolerate which, in effect, harbors no unreasonable expectations?¹²³

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¹²¹R. Schreier arrives at the same type of Christological question through the innovative aspects of experience in "The Specification of Experience and the Language of Revelation," *ibid.* (Concilium 113), pp. 57-65, here, p. 62.

¹²²I would enter into dialogue at this point with E. Herms, *Theologie—eine Erfahrungswissenschaft* (Munich: M. Grünewald, 1978).

¹²³I should like to thank those friends whose questions and discussions have helped me to clarify the ideas in this paper: D. Browning, J. Coriden, E. Dobbin, A. Ganoczy, E. Kilmartin, K. Osborne, M. Scanlon, R. Zerfass.