

## THE "BENT WORLD": SACRAMENT AS ORTHOPRAXIS

And who tells you this is how God wants you: bowed down, begging for punishment and pardon? Who tells you He wouldn't rather see you strong and proud in spite of your despair?

Elie Wiesel, *Zalmen, or the Madness of God*

To speak of the sacraments as actions of a community is not particularly surprising to us; yet not so very long ago, analytic attention tended to be "object-centered"—an examination of metaphysical substance, matter and form. And although it is certainly true that for Aquinas such words were not irrelevant to action, the vocabulary easily became reified in less competent hands. In the interpretation of sacrament which follows, I ask that you engage in a dialogue with "work in progress." Its strategy is threefold, but I shall concentrate on the first phase of the campaign. I shall first review some issues in the philosophy of action and the nature of praxis, arguing that appeals to praxis in theology anticipate achievement of a norm called orthopraxis; then describe the character of *orthos* in this discussion as determined by the sacraments with their logic and history. The two fronts for future skirmishes will be a reinterpretation of Thomas Aquinas on the sacraments as necessities in life and remedies for sin, and finally the possibilities of reinterpreting orthopraxis linguistically as the authentic rhetoric of religious love. To win the war, or even to fight bravely, would require voluminous resources; but it should be possible in this encounter at least to polish one's gear!

### THE PRIMACY OF PRAXIS

When Maurice Blondel proposed the subject *L'Action* for his doctoral thesis in the 1800's, it was rejected. When finally completed and accepted, it was judged "obscure" as prose, but occasionally "charming" in its ideas.<sup>1</sup> Blondel believed that he had walked between an Aristotelianism which depreciated practice in favor of theory and a Kantianism which separated the practice from the cognitive by means of analysis of concrete action.<sup>2</sup> It was to be a justification of an especially Catholic mode of thought.<sup>3</sup> And although Blondel recognized that

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. by Alexander Dru and Illyd Trethowan (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964), pp. 40-41, hereafter cited as *Letter*; cf. Maurice Blondel, *L'Action*, Vol. I: *Le problème des causes secondes et le Pur Agir* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949), pp. 219-232, hereafter cited as *L'Action* I. The original *L'Action* (1893) has been reprinted (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), hereafter cited as *L'Action* (1893).

<sup>2</sup> *Lettres philosophiques*, p. 10, as cited in *Letter*, p. 47; cf. *L'Action* (1893), esp. pp. 43-322.

<sup>3</sup> *Lettres philosophiques*, p. 34, as cited in *Letter*, p. 47.

thought was a form of action,<sup>4</sup> he nonetheless preferred to place it within the wider activity of human self-expression:

We must consider our own *action*—and by this word we must understand the concrete activity of living thought which expresses to ourselves both ourselves and everything else, although we shall never become 'adequate' to the least of our ideas, and also the initiative by which our instincts, our desires, and our intentions are expressed in everything else, although our constantly renewed efforts to attain to ourselves never make us 'adequate' to ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

There is a distinct sense in which Blondel turns the Kantian autonomous subject upon its head, and argues that to be truly free requires the assistance of the Infinite Other.<sup>6</sup>

In fact in the revision of *L'Action* (1937), he saw his earlier task as an ontology of action, an attempt to argue for the existence of Pure Act and the legitimate autonomy of secondary causes:

But his rational task is especially to study *becoming* itself (*le fieri lui-même*) with all those collaborations of which we have constant need. We must realize our human destiny, our liberation, our personal and immortal life through obstacles and trials.<sup>7</sup>

This analysis, moreover, was to include "*la methode directe de verification pratique*."<sup>8</sup>

Yet the investigation remains formal, abstract, a metaphysics of action, sometimes a proreptic for concrete activity. The rational doctrine of action requires a further inventory of the "products" of action, such as religion, to complete it.<sup>9</sup>

Only practical action, the effective action of our lives, will settle for each one of us, in secret, the question of the relations between the soul and God . . . the legitimate scope of philosophical conclusions stops short at the threshold of that real operation in which alone the human act and the divine act, nature and grace, can unite. . . . Philosophy, even when it constructs a complete science of the practical, cannot touch that incommunicable knowledge which only the practical itself provides.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *L'Action* (1893), esp. pp. 116-121; *L'Action* I, 8; Blondel analyzes *theoria* (*l'action contemplative*) in *L'Action* I, 63-69.

<sup>5</sup> *Letter*, p. 181; *L'Action* (1893), pp. 40-42, 44, 122-28; 467.

<sup>6</sup> This can be seen for example, in *L'Action* (1893), p. xxiii: "Si je ne suis pas ce que je veux être, ce que je veux, non des lèvres, non en desir ou en project, mais de tout mon coeur, par toutes mes forces, dans mes actes, je ne suis pas." Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 423, 475, 491. It is crucial to state here that I do not pretend to explicate Blondel completely on these issues and the ones which follow. My primary objective is to indicate through the "use" of Blondel that philosophical studies of action are striving for analysis of "right" actions. Even in the texts cited in this paper, Blondel's position is far more nuanced than indicated.

<sup>7</sup> *L'Action*, I, 223; translations from the French texts are my own.

<sup>8</sup> M. Blondel, *L'Action* Vol. II: *L'Action humaine et les conditions de son aboutissement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), pp. 26-27, hereafter cited as *L'Action* II. Cf. *L'Action* (1893), pp. xi-xiii, 469-70.

<sup>9</sup> *L'Action*, II, 400, *Letter*, p. 182.

<sup>10</sup> *Letter*, pp. 163-4; cf. *L'Action* (1893), pp. 44, 487; one can see an alternate placing of concrete action in the center of thought, for example, in Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophy of God and Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1973), pp. 12-13, 17-18, 40, 50-59,

There is an incipient ambiguity here by which the efficacy of thought is somehow detached from concrete praxis:

The function of philosophy is to determine the content of thought and the postulates of action, without providing us with that being of which it studies the notion, without containing that life of which it analyzes the requirements, without sufficing for that of which it defines the sufficient conditions, without realizing, making real, that of which it must say that it necessarily conceives of it as real.<sup>11</sup>

Even though thought has its origins within action and returns to it for its resolution, it has no criteria of its own for determining valid action. "In the transcendence of immanent thought and action it finds an internal principle of absolute judgment."<sup>12</sup> The intrinsic necessity of thought is found in the logic of the will. The products of the will may be analyzed, but they must be counted as the indirect testimony of the constantly escaping velocity of the *Volonté voulante*.<sup>13</sup> The dialectic of performance and concept which animates Blondel's method is not applied uniformly;<sup>14</sup> the human will appears somewhat transphenomenal, unreachable by theory.<sup>15</sup>

The problematic weapons in this battle with Kant have produced, on the one hand, certain post-scholastic theologians who see in Blondel a progenitor of their criticism of the social praxis of the Catholic community;<sup>16</sup> and on the other hand, a Rahner who argues that the Ultimate Mystery (the unity of theory and practice) is an "incomprehensible," ever-receding, ever-enveloping Horizon of the Absolute Future, toward which Christian churches move without "certain" programs to implement.<sup>17</sup>

Thus one has a philosophy of action which at once provides a basis for liberating praxis in the Catholic community, and at the same time a

in which Lonergan relates philosophy of God and systematic theology through their common data of religious conversion.

<sup>11</sup> *Letter*, p. 182; *L'Action* (1893), p. 470.

<sup>12</sup> *Letter*, p. 183.

<sup>13</sup> *L'Action* (1893), pp. ix, xx, 22, 104; and *L'Action* II, 32: "Il y a en effet une inclination fondamentale, une aspiration infuse, une volonté voulante qu'on a justement nommée *voluntas ut natura*; et, parce que ce vouloir implicite ne se développe vers sa fin suprême qu'en se partialisant à travers des biens transitoires et finis, il y a aussi une volonté voulue, une volonté élicite et explicite qui peut abuser de son libre arbitre, se mettre en conflit avec l'élan dont elle procède, demeurer en deça de son but et, en se condamnant elle-même par cet illogisme et cette défaillance, vouloir infiniment le fini."

<sup>14</sup> See Coreth's dissatisfaction with Blondel's dialectic in *Metaphysics*, ed. and trans. by Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pp. 48-50.

<sup>15</sup> This is a remark of Lobbkowitz's concerning Kant in *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> For a representative position, see K. Rahner, "Marxist Utopia and the Christian Future of Man," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, trans. by Karl H. and Boniface Krüger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969), pp. 64-65; on the incomprehensibility of God, see *idem*, "An Investigation of the Incomprehensibility of God in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVI, trans. by David Morland (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 244-54.

declaration of non-programmatic waiting.<sup>18</sup> Although this problem may be due to the origin of all nineteenth century discourse about theory and praxis in the doctrine of an identical God,<sup>19</sup> it is just as likely that the appeal to praxis as stated here is ambivalent in itself. For if one argues in theology for the primacy of praxis without including theory as the self-understanding of practice, then critics will assert that the normative ideational character of the gospel has been compromised. The problem in Blondel's treatment is that his religious anthropology seems to correlate theory and practice through a theoretic mediation of the Ideal or through an unanalyzable "action" beyond criticism.<sup>20</sup> While he states that action is the proper field of reflection, thinking remains on "this side of" action. In theology, one may have thereby overturned an emphasis on orthodoxy as the matter of philosophical system, as the primary concern of verification, and as the standard by which individual conversion is judged, education is offered, or community is formed—only to put in its place a particular religious *status quo* as the norm for past and future ecclesiastical life.

There remain embedded in the discussion two meanings for the primacy of action. What for Blondel is normative is the ongoing movement of action itself, the *Volonté voulante*, not the individual incarnations of choice; but the ultimate norm is *Pur Agir* which governs the teleology of human action. The process of discerning the normative in actions, therefore, requires extricating the motion of *Pur Agir* from the actions of *Volonté voulue*, a somewhat perilous venture.

If the critical character of praxis emerged from praxis itself, then the critical nature of theory would at least parallel, and at its best, emerge from the other elements of human praxis.<sup>21</sup> Theological and philosophical positions which correlate practice and theory can become thoroughly critical through the mediation of praxis, if praxis itself contains the moments of criticism.

Hidden in the nervous judgments made on the inclusion of the social sciences in theology, lodged in the imprecations and fulminations of ecclesiastical positions which correlate theory and practice through right thought and correct doctrine alone is a request that praxis or experience in theology achieve a normative self-understanding and a fear that it will or cannot.<sup>22</sup> The neo-orthodox formulations of theology

<sup>18</sup> Although both Rahner and Blondel think of this as a "positive" and "assertive" posture, see "Marxist Utopia," Vol. VI, p. 64; and *L'Action*, II, 400.

<sup>19</sup> See the perceptive remarks of Georg Picht, "Die Dialektik von Theorie und Praxis und der Glaube," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 70, 1, (1973), esp. 110-119.

<sup>20</sup> See for the formulations which follow, Matthew Lamb, "The Theory-praxis relationship in Contemporary Christian Theologies," *CTSA Proceedings* 31 (1976), 149-78; for its usefulness, see William Shea, "Matthew Lamb's Five Models and the Interpretation of John Dewey's Pragmatism" *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 125-41.

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, see the recent lecture (April, 1980) of P. Ricoeur, "The Status of *Vorstellung* in Hegel's *Philosophy of Religion*" given at Boston University, Institute for Nineteenth Century Studies, to be published in the forthcoming proceedings of the Institute.

<sup>22</sup> For a positive argument for sociology and theology to engage, see Gary J. Quinn and James D. Davidson, "Theology: Sociology = Orthodoxy: Orthopraxis," *Theology Today*



which include social sciences or art and its criticism in theology see these disciplines as questions requiring the answers of religion and theology.<sup>23</sup> From their perspective, a broad appeal to praxis without intrinsic norm threatens to include not only indelicate expressions, but possibly sinful behavior as normative material in the present redefinition of theology. This would collapse the evangelical call into common babble and God's judgment on the human situation into a human critique of God. This problem must be taken seriously.

It can be helpfully investigated, not by capitulating to the request for privileged, non-dialectically mediated sources of faith (whether magisterium, Scriptures, or Spirit-experiences), but by allowing analysis of behavior to achieve some sense of its own normative status as social science and by specifying within religious discourse the orthopraxis which defines praxis. For just as there are theologians who prefer to see the relationship between culture and theology as a series of questions followed by religious answers, so too there are sociologists who understand their discipline as "value-free," disinterested, non-normative analysis of the human situation providing data applicable by any ideology.<sup>24</sup>

But this assumes that the teleology toward value and the implicit interests of human behavior leave no trace in praxis itself; it is to leave untransformed the Kantian problematic of teleological judgment and the critique of the cultural artifact.<sup>25</sup> It ignores that fundamental contribution which Blondel makes to this discussion—that action itself contains, however dialectically mediated, a teleology of its own. So just as for Schillebeeckx, the concept has its own implicit dynamism, and for Lonergan, questions intended the transcendent,<sup>26</sup> so the products of culture, the imaginative artifacts of human meaning are inscribed with an impetus toward value, a force redescriptive of the world, and a concrete set of elements operating human development. Both theology and the social sciences in reflecting upon and within praxis must become normative and prescriptive; they emerge from and construct praxis. Immanent within each discipline is the invariant imperative orthopraxis

32 (January 1976), 345-52; for a "neutralist" position, see Liliane Voyé, "Sociologie et religion. Pour clarifier les relations entre sociologues et théologiens," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 10 (1979), 305-23; and the excellent remarks of John Coleman, "A Response to Andrew Greeley," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 55-71; for a characteristic position of Fritz Buri, see "The Reorientation of Theology in the Light of the Challenge from Sociology," trans. by Charles D. Hardwick, *JAAR* 40 (September 1972), 304-15.

<sup>23</sup>I am using "neo-orthodox" in David Tracy's sense in *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 27-31.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Voyé, "Sociologie et religion," pp. 311ff.; and the critique of Gregory Baum, "The Impact of Sociology on Catholic Theology," *CTSA Proceedings* 30 (1975), 1-29.

<sup>25</sup>So the purposiveness (*Zweckmässigkeit*) of aesthetic judgment as the example of teleological judgment is ultimately subjective in origin and tied to "interest," see I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1968), pp. 54-56, 218-22.

<sup>26</sup>E. Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, Vol. II, trans. by N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 157-206; B. H. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1972), pp. 101ff.

of human intelligence and love, which appears upon occasion in the text/action we call a classic.<sup>27</sup> In Christian discourse such normative praxis is sacrament; it is the critical praxis of our religious life.

#### SACRAMENT AS THE ACHIEVEMENT OF NORM FOR ORTHOPRAXIS

That Christian religious practice has determined orthodoxy is an undeniable datum, for example, in the genesis of the triune creed from baptismal practice.<sup>28</sup> Bernard Häring can remark:

In receiving the signs of the covenant with the Church, we respond, enabled and authorized by them, with the Church and through the Church, to Christ and with Him. Thus we accept in gratitude the grace and the law of the covenant as direction for our whole life. Faith, therefore, includes orthopraxis as well as orthodoxy.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Schillebeeckx can claim that praxis is an "inner element" of the principle of verification,<sup>30</sup> and David Hollenbach asserts: "the Roman Catholic sacramental principle suggests that the normative structure of Christian experience and Christian imagination is concretely expressed in symbolic actions of the Church's sacramental life."<sup>31</sup>

Although this method of appealing to the personal or communitarian praxis of the thinker can be a way of leniently redefining heterodoxy,<sup>32</sup> praxis in the verification of religion may be simply so much

<sup>27</sup>Here I wish to note Matthew Arnold's use of this word which, although avowedly non-metaphysical, has the merit of originating in an English-language context and when provided with an ontological explication, offers a dialogue with H. G. Gadamer. Compare Matthew Arnold, "Preface to Poems," 1853; "The Study of Poetry," in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Lionel Trilling (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 185-202, 259-331, and *idem*, *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Appreciation of the Bible* (London: Macmillan, 1903), pp. 33-35, 39, 312-339; and H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. by Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 176-77, esp. 253-358.

<sup>28</sup>E. Schillebeeckx, *The Understanding of Faith*, trans. by N. D. Smith (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974), p. 68; hereafter cited as *Understanding of Faith*; or for more interesting examples, see Albert Houssiau, "Pratique, vérité et situation. Propos sur la théologie sacramentaire," *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 10 (1979), 40-50, esp. 42-44; hereafter cited as "Pratique."

<sup>29</sup>Bernard Häring, *The Sacraments in a Secular Age* (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1976), pp. 117-18.

<sup>30</sup>Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, p. 59.

<sup>31</sup>David Hollenbach, "A Prophetic Church and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination," in *The Faith that does Justice*, ed. by John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist, 1977), p. 251.

<sup>32</sup>See the classic of Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. by the team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) and the controversy it created, pp. 141-316; the vague "definitions" of heresy in the Middle Ages lead one to believe that the saying: "Ereticum esse constat qui Romane ecclesie non concordat" may not have been altogether inaccurate (*Registrum Gregorii VII*, edited by Erich Casper, in MGH, *Epistolae*, 2[Berolini, 1920-23], p. 504 as cited in Stanislaw Trawkowski, "Entre L'Orthodoxie et L'Hérésie: *Vita Apostolica* et le problème de las Désobéissance," p. 166, in W. Lourdaux and D. Verhelst, *The Concept of Heresy in the Middle Ages* [11th-13th c.], [Leuven: University Press, 1976]). The entire volume is useful. For a contemporary

common sense. "Check the truth of what they say by means of what they do!" So Schillebeeckx can say of Paul Van Buren: "Van Buren's life will or will not show whether he accepts according to truth, anything unique and absolute in Christ, despite the faulty conceptualization of his conviction."<sup>33</sup> But where in this has the notion of *orthos* disappeared? What does it mean to say that certain human actions are "right and correct action," a unity of the true and the good? We are not speaking simply of a possibility, a "virtual world" announced by rite,<sup>34</sup> a position dependent upon neo-Kantian theories of art, but rather of rituals which are in themselves correct behavior.

To say that sacraments are orthopraxis maintains that they are their own norm; that their structural operations affect the participants and that they achieve what they signify. Sacraments are self-justifying behavior, i.e., they are not in need of another ground than their own self-revealing action. They are "tautegorical," as Coleridge said of Christian language.<sup>35</sup> To give oneself to the progressive actions of sacrament is to be transformed according to the gestures employed, the objects used, the stories told.<sup>36</sup>

But the only truly self-justifying actions would in fact be divine. That is why openness to these signs is openness to God's formative action and the origin of our moral praxis.<sup>37</sup> Unpacked for structure, process and goal, sacraments are the concrete norms of orthopraxis. Sacrament is the normative intersection of existential, transcendental and political horizons.<sup>38</sup>

position, see K. Rahner, "What is Heresy?," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. V, trans. by Karl-H. Krüger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), pp. 468-512; and *idem*, "Heresies in the Church Today?" *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XII, trans. by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1974), pp. 117-41.

<sup>33</sup> Schillebeeckx *Understanding of Faith*, p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> An extremely fine article is flawed in regard to this important ontological character of art-symbol. See Charles C. Hefling, Jr., "Liturgy and Myth: A Theological Approach Based on the Methodology of Bernard Lonergan," *Anglican Theological Review* 61 (1979), 217-18.

<sup>35</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971, reprint of 1840 edition), p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> This coheres with the usage of the term orthopraxy gained in nineteenth-century medicine. Henry Heather Bigg, in an attempt to codify therapy of human deformities (especially skeletal), coined the word as a practical science. His book (*Orthopraxy: The Mechanical Treatment of Deformities, Debilities, and Deficiencies of the Human Frame* [London: Churchill, 1869]) describes a science (rule and method) for providing "relief or removal of deformities, . . . both congenital and accidental, of the human frame" (p. 1). It is accomplished however, by mechanisms, not through surgery (pp. 45-46). Giving oneself to the therapist was a way of escaping further "degeneration" of muscles and skeleton (p. 47). He saw his position as mediating between utter pragmatic empiricists in medicine and the "transcendental anatomists" (p. 163), those who believed that human deformities could be treated by a trial and error method, and those who postulated an *a priori* "normal" human frame! Orthopraxy therefore provided strength for deficiencies and support for weak musculature, as well as the removal of deformities (p. 10). As I shall indicate, sacrament functions as a similar developmental, corrective religious norm.

<sup>37</sup> Häring, *Sacraments*, p. 127-8.

<sup>38</sup> See F. Fiorenza's remarks, "Political Theology as Foundational Theology," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 146-47.

## THE LOGIC OF SACRAMENT AS ORTHOPRAXIS

This final point has been made by certain Latin American theologians with some vehemence. They see in the sacramental life of the Church a program for human action.<sup>39</sup> Where Gutierrez capitalizes upon the conciliar Church as sacrament,<sup>40</sup> denouncing inhuman abuses and announcing that no human act can remain unrelated to Christ, Segundo argues that, without this mediation of the community,<sup>41</sup> the leap to the ideal world in sacraments would be magic.<sup>42</sup> To locate formative Christian praxis in the sacraments is not uncontroversial, for it centers the discussion of the "rightness" of praxis in the very realm which some thinkers find both alienated and alienating.<sup>43</sup> For each, conscious or unconscious fictive engagement is contrasted with the involvement or witness in everyday life which is crucial to self-correcting praxis.<sup>44</sup> One must "live the meaning of the chalice," as Boff states: "the pride of the cup is in the drink, its humility in the serving."<sup>45</sup> These theological successors to the masters of suspicion raise the question not only of the "place" of the norm (from critical theory to self-critical praxis), but the possibility of *orthos*, of norm, at all.<sup>46</sup> Our examination of sacrament as orthopraxis would need to consider what *de facto* changes take place in participants.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Juan-Luis Segundo, *The Sacraments Today*, trans. by J. Drury, Vol. 4 in series *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1974), pp. 68-75.

<sup>40</sup>Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, pp. 255-85.

<sup>41</sup>Segundo, *Sacraments*, pp. 6; 51, n. 9.

<sup>42</sup>This can be seen in Alfred T. Hennelly's study of Segundo's theology in *Theologies in Conflict: The Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), pp. 96ff.

<sup>43</sup>See Segundo, *Sacraments*, pp. 6, 40-41, 59, 99; Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, trans. by P. Hughes (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), pp. 206-207, 223; Jan Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, trans. by J. Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1978), pp. 299-304; Ronaldo Munoz, "The Historical Vocation of the Church," in *Frontiers of Theology in Latin America*, ed. by Rosino Gibellini, trans. by J. Drury (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979), p. 158; and Segundo Galilea, "Liberation Theology and New Tasks Facing Christians," in *Frontiers*, p. 177; and their philosophical forbears, Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. by G. Eliot (New York: Harper 1957), pp. 236-246; the similar remarks in his *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, trans. by R. Manheim (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 210-17. See *Marx and Engels on Religion*, introd. by Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), esp. pp. 22, 40-41, 203, 328-29. The critique of rites as authorities seems already to have been accomplished by Luther, *Marx and Engels*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>44</sup>See Segundo, *Sacraments*, p. 63; Jose Miguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 99. Ricoeur's recent interest in the role of "witness" in philosophy is important for this discussion; see P. Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977), 27-37, and *idem*, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," *Anglican Theological Review* 61 (1979), 435-61, although reservations about the "formal" character of the subjectivity engaged remain.

<sup>45</sup>Boff, *Liberator*, p. 224.

<sup>46</sup>Miguez-Bonino, *Doing Theology*, p. 91.

<sup>47</sup>So the analyses of Andrew Greeley's National Opinion Research Center, as reported for example in "Sociology and Theology: Some Methodological Questions," *CTSA Proceedings* 32 (1977), 31-54, or in the French context, "Religion populaire et reforme liturgique," *Maison-Dieu* 122 (1975), 7-193, would be essential.



Schillebeeckx has remarked that it is possible to dispute "what may be called *orthos* in our praxis,"<sup>48</sup> but proposing a threefold temporal scheme will permit us to recover our own praxis of sacrament and the theoretic tradition simultaneously. *Orthos* in the case of sacrament means emancipatory praxis (e.g., genres: gestural blessings, prayer), rememorative creativity (e.g., genre: gospel), and prescriptive achievement (e.g., genre: homiletic exhortation).<sup>49</sup> Both past and future are contained in the emancipatory praxis of the present ritual. I shall concentrate upon this latter mode. For the subversive character of memory and its continuing transformative power in the chartering experiences, we can refer to J. B. Metz.<sup>50</sup> For the prescriptive character of sacramental behavior, we need only think of the examples of "firm purpose of amendment" in the sacrament of reconciliation and the theoretic remarks of Albert J. Houssiau concerning the unity of the juridical and applicative character of sacramental praxis.<sup>51</sup> This prescriptive character of sacramental action, its promise of a utopian *Mitsein*<sup>52</sup> has always been central to Christian discourse.<sup>53</sup>

But the concrete judgments about the present, the truth achieved in use of sacramental actions, remain the problem.<sup>54</sup> One might say, of course, that if the memory were lived as subversive of the inhumane *status quo* and the future were anticipated in sacramental action as a communitarian transcendence, then the "present" would take care of itself. Indeed the question is the nature of social temporality; but that does not answer the question; it merely relocates it. The issue is in knowing that the "sacraments give us the reality still more than they make us desire it [that they] realize this conversion that they announce."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Schillebeeckx, *Understanding of Faith*, p. 132; for helpful definitions (Praxis = human activity which transforms agent; poiesis = human activity which alters objects; orthopraxis = human action which leads to "perfection of Man in his concrete existential situation"), see Raimundo Pannikar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross-cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist, 1979), esp. pp. 195-203; for a popular presentation, cf. Richard P. McBrien, *Who is a Catholic?* (Denville, New Jersey: Dimension, 1971), pp. 82-86.

<sup>49</sup>Here the criticism by Kenneth Schmitz of Hans Urs von Balthasar in "Divine Initiative and Christian Praxis," *Communio* (USA) 5 (1978), 44-52, is helpful, esp. pp. 50-52.

<sup>50</sup>See J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. by D. Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980), pp. 65-67; 109-15, 184-218.

<sup>51</sup>Häring, *Sacraments*, pp. 95ff.; and Houssiau, "Pratique," pp. 40-43.

<sup>52</sup>Houssiau, "Pratique," p. 46; cf. my article, "The Structures of our Utopian *Mitsein* (Life-together)," *Concilium* 123, 3 (1979), 92-101.

<sup>53</sup>See Augustine, *In Johan.*, tract. 26.31: "Believers know the body of Christ, if they neglect not to be the body of Christ. . . . Let him be embodied, that he may be made to live. . . . Let him cleave to the body, live for God by God: now let him labor on earth, that thereafter he may reign in heaven."

<sup>54</sup>Houssiau's descriptions remain within the "applicative" moment of hermeneutics; see Houssiau, "Pratique," pp. 47-50.

<sup>55</sup>Bernard Bro, *The Spirituality of the Sacraments*, trans. by T. DuBois (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 226. This issue of temporality seems the center of the disagreement between K. Rahner and W. Van Roo; see William A. Van Roo, "Reflections on Karl Rahner's *Kirche und Sakramente*," *Gregorianum* 44 (1963), 465-500. Van Roo is concerned that the rite will lose its normative "instrumental" mediation.

To understand how participation in the praxis of sacrament effects change requires some discussion of what needs changing, and how the change is effected, i.e., an anthropology which includes a discussion of sin, a soteriological Christology which describes the originative moment of change, and a full-blown generative grammar and vocabulary of the individual sacraments. Obviously I do not plan even to outline such projects. What I do wish to highlight, however, is one description of the "reign of sin," particularly its social dimension, and the remedy for that sin in the images of the "Law of the Cross".

Bernard Lonergan has argued that the root of distortion in the human project is in the lack of integration between our rational judgments and our biological desires.<sup>56</sup> This in turn produces an egoism of individual bias which fulfills only spontaneous needs and desires irrespective of value.<sup>57</sup> Group bias appears when the intersubjective resolutions of the good of order produce tribal parochialism and resistance to public change due to vested interest. Lonergan describes the outcome as a cycle of decline.<sup>58</sup> But this bias can become an institutional corruption in the economy, politics and technological means of production; the practice of the community appears suspect; and whole worlds of meaning are denied (interiority, theory, the sacred) or are manipulated for venal purposes.<sup>59</sup> Intersubjectivity emerges as the dialectic of master and slave, and competition or seduction the mode of intercourse with one's brothers and sisters.

The response to such perverted human situations cannot be theory alone, or it will be ignored; nor a homily for interior conversion, since the realm of subjectivity is denied. Only concrete orthopraxis, carried in gestures, images and words and appropriated in conversion, will transform the participant.<sup>60</sup> Appropriation will consist in an initial "willing suspension of disbelief" and progressive engagement in gestural and verbal response. "Sacrament acts by its own power, but its effect is in direct relation to the expectation and the disposition it raises up in us."<sup>61</sup> It will in effect allow one to "imitate Christ," "construct one's history on the model of Christ."<sup>62</sup> There is a present liberation proper to Christians which is realized in sacramental orthopraxis.

The liberating praxis which is in evidence in Christian sacrament is not to be measured quantitatively, not according to the "building"

<sup>56</sup>Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, 1967), pp. 174-75, 191-96, 597; hereafter cited *Insight*; for this entire discussion, see William Loewe, "Lonergan and the 'Law of the Cross': A Universalist View of Salvation," *Anglican Theological Review* 49 (1977), 166-67, and *idem*, "Dialectics of Sin: Lonergan's *Insight* and the Critical Theory of Max Horkheimer," *Anglican Theological Review* 61 (1979), 227-28. For an important contribution to this discussion, see Robert Doran, "Psychic Conversion," *The Thomist* 41 (1977), 200-36.

<sup>57</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 218-22; Loewe, "Dialectics of Sin," 229-30.

<sup>58</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 226, 231; Loewe, "Dialectics of Sin," 229-32.

<sup>59</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 226-32; Loewe, "Dialectics of Sin," 232-35.

<sup>60</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, pp. 723-4; Loewe, "Law of the Cross," 167-68.

<sup>61</sup>Bro, *Spirituality*, p. 226.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. J. B. Metz, *Followers of Christ*, trans. by Thomas Linton (New York: Paulist, 1978), esp. pp. 22-44; Bro, *Spirituality*, p. 63.

which architects plan; but neither is it unavailable in the public forum.<sup>63</sup> For the faith, hope and charity which effectively transform the cycle of evil in our public lives are an acceptance of the "Law of the Cross" in which the acceptance of death out of love incrementally transforms the community.<sup>64</sup> This acceptance is accomplished precisely in the praxis of nutritional, purifying, promising, affirming, confirming gestures of sacrament. The willingness to undergo the ritual praxis is the offering of oneself to transformation by an other (the community and God). The dialogical, narrative, exhortative and celebratory genres in the rites will achieve their goal.<sup>65</sup>

#### AGENDA, OR INCONCLUSIVE ANTICIPATIONS

If this general argumentation is sound, two further moves would be needed to validate its approach, the first in relation to the traditional Catholic sacramental theology of Aquinas and the other a reinterpretation of emancipatory praxis as authentic rhetoric. Let me say some few anticipatory ideas about the direction of my investigations.

Aquinas argues that sacraments are in the genus of signs as all know; for *signa, sensibilia* are the connatural way in which human beings achieve knowledge of the unknown, the intelligible.<sup>66</sup> Certain signs are designated by God through the historical tradition of the Church as *sanctificans*. These signs specify the grace of Christ through whom we are sanctified; indeed, he is their author, the institutor of these specific signs.<sup>67</sup> Thus although the signs of sacramental action have "natural" meaning, they receive their redemptive signification (i.e., their super-natural, grace-ful meaning) through their relationship to Christ's passion, death and resurrection. The sacraments are therefore a remedy for human sinfulness, a medicine for wounded flesh.<sup>68</sup> They are presentational signs of justification.

When Aquinas argues the necessity of the sacraments, although there is some evidence of what I would call residual Platonism<sup>69</sup>, the emphasis is primarily upon the *rectitudo* which needs to occur in the present world.<sup>70</sup> In the state of innocence, the sensible bodily elements were in complete integration with the higher spiritual faculties. The

<sup>63</sup> Bro, *Spirituality*, p. 244.

<sup>64</sup> See Loewe, "Law of the Cross," 172-73.

<sup>65</sup> Thus to discuss the *de facto* mediation of rite would require inter-disciplinary studies (genetic and dialectic) of the formal genres operative in the rituals of a community. To discern their continuing identity as normative would require a similar diachronic study, for example, most obviously with the sacrament of penance, whose public forms and political consequences are signally manifold.

<sup>66</sup> S. T. III, 60, 2, corp; 60, 4, corp. 61, 1, corp.

<sup>67</sup> S. T. III, 60, corp; 60, 5, ad 2um.

<sup>68</sup> S. T. III, 60, 6, corp.

<sup>69</sup> "Homo in statu innocentiae gratia indegebat: non tamen ut consequeretur gratiam per aliqua sensibilia signa, sed spiritualiter et invisibiliter" (S. T. III, 61, 2, ad 1um) or "res sensibiles, prout in sua natura considerantur, non pertinent ad cultum vel regnum Dei, sed solum secundum quod sunt signa spiritualium rerum, in quibus regnum Dei consistit." (S. T. III, 60, 4, ad 2um.).

<sup>70</sup> S. T. III, 61, 2, corp.

*sensibilia* were not experienced in Eden as morally ambiguous.<sup>71</sup> Through original sin, human nature is warped, bent, corrupted such that the experience of this world's images is always broken. So to avoid superstition, the illegitimate focusing upon broken images, to offer a remedy applied to the wound itself, God provided corporeal signs as spiritual medicine.<sup>72</sup> Although we know by means of signs, it is the peculiar state of historical humanity which requires *these* supernatural signs of salvation. We do not sin without our bodies; we would be incapable of receiving the divine except through some corporeal activity. In innocence, signs would have been transparent to divine presence; in our sin, the cosmos itself is wounded.

Now my point is this: Aquinas requires transparent signs, self-authenticating actions, to contest the omnipresence of the sinful ones. Sacraments are an authentic praxis, the presence of divine salvation, in a world which can only hope for what it cannot deliver for itself. The effect of sharing in these actions is the *res et sacramentum* (first) which lays permanent existential claim to the individual and objects involved, such that their very identities are changed. One does not re-baptize, re-confirm, re-ordain, or re-consecrate eucharistic bread and wine. Entry into the *sensibilia*, the *signa*, radically alters one's way of being in the world—in the present.<sup>73</sup> The specification of that claim is made in the words which determine the particular intent of the gestures or signs.<sup>74</sup> For Aquinas, sacraments of the New Dispensation are orthopraxis.

Finally, a further shift must be made by means of a linguistic signature in contemporary philosophy and theology. This discussion of praxis, orthopraxis, and sacrament must be transposed into a new key which would locate the discussion in the nature of authentic rhetoric and the power of aesthetic creativity. In another place I have argued that this authentic rhetoric of religious love belongs to foundational theology.<sup>75</sup> Here I wish to indicate how rhetoric may be understood as emancipatory praxis.

A useful place, but not the only place, to begin is Marxian aesthetics, since its ordinary emphasis on interpretation is the dependence of art-objects upon and their interpretation by social, historical and economic conditions. Frederic Jameson has recently concluded an essay with a summation of such contemporary literature and criticism stating that this aesthetics conveys "the sense of a hermeneutic rela-

<sup>71</sup>This coheres with K. Rahner's interpretation of *concupiscentia* in "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, trans. by Cornelius Ernst (Baltimore: Helicon, 1965), esp. pp. 358-69, 371-74; and is surely cognate with Lonergan's notion of the origin of the reign of sin, see above, footnote 50.

<sup>72</sup>"Quaedam spirituales medicinae, quae adhibentur contra vulnera peccati" (S. T. III, 61, sed. contr.: 63, 1, corp.).

<sup>73</sup>S. T. III, 63, 1, corp. Just how the *remedium contra peccata* and the "Perfection of the soul which pertains to Christian cult" are related remains problematic. Aquinas resolves the problem by calling the second a *potentia*, what I have named an existential claim by God on the individual.

<sup>74</sup>S. T. III, 60, 6, corp. and ad lum.

<sup>75</sup>"Sacrament: Symbol of Conversion," in *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Rev. Bernard Lonergan, S.J.* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, forthcoming).



tionship to the past which is able to grasp its own present as history only on condition it manages to keep the idea of the future, and of radical and Utopian transformation, alive."<sup>76</sup> At the center of Marxian discussions of literature remains the issue of temporality with which we have been dealing through this study of orthopraxis and sacrament.

Where cultural artifacts are now reproduced by mass technology, the repetition of sacrament is at once identical with itself and different in each situation.<sup>77</sup> Where memory in a bourgeois culture can become bathetic nostalgia or the technocratic transformation of traditional objects into commodities (the past as saleable!), sacrament offers a charter memory which is subversive/converting. Where the fundamental issue is the estrangement between the artisan and the artifact due to the interventions of capital and management, sacrament is a participatory praxis in which there is a unity of speaker, object and discourse. George Steiner remarks:

... the technical forms of the theater correspond more than those of any other *genre* to the needs and means of the emergent mass-societies. The theater can subvert the barriers of estrangement which divide the writer from the audience, from the community at large. In the playhouse, man is both himself and his neighbour.<sup>78</sup>

The possibilities and actualities of identification with even a hostile other, the catharsis by which art becomes an enacted criticism of life, the search for a language of inner attitudes presented as social forms of life:<sup>79</sup> all these are articulated in the orthopraxis of sacrament. An honest dialogue could yield the authentic rhetoric for which our world seeks.

#### SUMMARY

This description of research has argued (1) that praxis is primary in the determination of Christian meaning; (2) that this appeal to praxis is actually to critical praxis: orthopraxis; (3) that the determining figure for orthopraxis is sacrament; (4) that the logic of those sacraments is emancipatory praxis, rememorative creativity and prescriptive achievement; (5) that the logic of emancipatory praxis in the present requires an investigation of the sinful distortions of experience and the "Law of the Cross" which is its remedy; and (6) that the orthopraxis of sacrament is the enactment of this "Law," by its dialogical, narrative, exhortative and hymnic aspects. I have further indicated that this interpretation

<sup>76</sup>Frederic Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History* XI,1 (1979), 73; See also Hayden White's contribution ("Literature and Social Action: Reflections on the Reflection Theory of Literary Art") to an entire issue dedicated to the problem of literature, history, and social action; *New Literary History* XI, 2 (1980), 363-80.

<sup>77</sup>The remarks which follow are dependent upon George Steiner, *Language and Silence. Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), esp. pp. 321-31.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 392; see the remarks of Louis Althusser, "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht. Notes on a Materialist Theatre," in *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 131-51.

<sup>79</sup>Steiner, *Language and Silence*, pp. 343, 352.

would require comparison and contrast with the classical notions of sacrament found in Thomas Aquinas, and transposition into a linguistic mode of non-alienated, non-estranging authentic rhetoric, which would accomplish what it speaks, speak without the distortion of sin and thus be transparent to its Speaker. Such an analysis would give evidence for a hopeful human condition in which the ideal of veracity, emancipation and agape would be realized in the world of ordinary discourse. The orthopraxis of sacrament engages that hope and brings it into being, such that we can honestly say that "the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."<sup>80</sup>

STEPHEN HAPPEL

*St. Meinrad School of Theology*

<sup>80</sup>The title and final words of the essay are taken from Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem: "God's Grandeur," *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (New York: OUP, 1961), p. 70.