SACRAMENTS: SYMBOLIZING GOD'S POWER IN THE CHURCH

We are well acquainted with the celebrant who possesses the knack of turning the poetry of liturgical symbol into prose, and with the type of catechesis that uses all the subtlety of the advertisement hoardings that line the highways. Yet even in these our "battered liturgies" (I take the phrase from David Tracy) we continue to hope in the possibility of being called again, of being surprised by texts that summon us to reckon with realities whose existence we have forgotten, we endeavour to keep the *memoria Christi* as a promise and as a historical ferment, we desire to know once again the voice of the Spirit crying out in our hearts, teaching us what we ought to pray.

It is envigorating and refreshing to read Edward Schillebeeckx on the critical role of liturgy in human history,[1] and we know that if we are to talk of the power of God symbolized in the sacraments we might well pursue that line of thought. We can no longer separate a theology of sacramental grace from the issue of how the Christian community and its liturgy stand in relation to secular power.

However we are to think about the grace and power of sacrament and about how this power stands in relation to society and history, the point of departure has to be the sacramental action and its symbols, not some theory about grace or a pre-definition of power. It is within the capacity of symbolic, metaphorical, poetic and ritual language to bring to expression our experience with radical evil and with grace-empowered hope. It is through the use of this kind of language in the sacraments that the Church avows both its encounter with evil and its sense of God's power and grace at work in the world. It is therefore this kind of expression which gives the starting-point for reflective reasoning about power and graced existence.

With this in view, there are three issues to which I want to address myself in this paper: 1) I want to note the need for a critique of sacramental and ministerial structures, if we are to speak properly of the symbols of God's power and of its activity in the community and in history. 2) I want to speak of the specific nature and reference of sacramental language, by way of what I call the retrieval of the sacramental canon, that is, of original and enduring forms of speech and prayer in the sacramental tradition of the Church. This is to speak of the role sacraments have in mediating grace. 3) I want then to indicate the path followed when we speak of God's power and grace in ways suggested by this canon rather than in abstract terms.

CRITIQUE OF STRUCTURES

In positing the importance of sacramental language, one has to start by asking how operative and free this language actually is in the celebration and in

[1]For example, Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980), pp. 810–21. See also William Hill, *The Three-Personed God*, to be published by the Catholic University of America Press; Stephen Happel, "Sacrament as Orthopraxis", CTSA *Proceedings* 35 (1980), 88–101.

the life of the Christian community. How far has attention been diverted from it to power structures, which instead of pointing to the symbols that take their place at the heart of the sacramental action draw attention to themselves. The adoption and attempted Christianization of customary social structures and cultural mores is an intrinsic part of sacramental development, which can be related theologically to an understanding that sacraments are the Church's self-expression and an expression therefore of God's presence in society. Even while acknowledging this, however, one has to be on the alert to its implications:

> The dangers of service turning into domination, of sacramental authority used to obtain political and social power . . . will continue to exist as long as the church, in its liturgy, and in its preaching, makes a claim to public status and authority, a claim from which it can no longer retreat, in spite of the possibility it involves of false interpretations and wrong developments.[2]

The development of a power structure within the Church, and of a power-related structure, occurs at the very heart of the *memoria Christi* in the Lord's Supper. It becomes dangerous when it is innocently, uncritically and rather literally accepted as of divine institution, so that the power of God is identified with the power of the ordained ministry, and indeed with a particular form of the ordained ministry. Because such a danger does exist, attention to the critical nature of sacraments in symbolizing God's power as a presence and a force in history, has to be accompanied by a critique of the power structures of the Church itself.[3] At the very moment that we say that the sacraments reveal and make present the power of God, we cannot but be struck by procedures which prevent many Christian fellowships from celebrating these same sacraments, by structures wherein the female voice is held forever silent, by regulations which deny the validity of the sign value of baked bread and discourage the faithful from an exchange of Christ's forgiveness among themselves. Have the very structures which the Church has adopted to transmit God's power become the veil whereby the power that is a force for utopian vision is hidden from sight?

The problem is not that the Church adopts social strucutres for the regulation of its inner and outer workings. It is that these structures become sacrosanct and that the power of God operative in the sacrament is equated with the power of the ordained. In fact, when we allow ourselves to be surprised by the texts and rites that continue, even if in truncated form or as maimed rites, to be proclaimed and celebrated, we note that the biblically rooted symbols that are expressive of God's power are not vertical but horizontal. By way of example, one may quote the bread broken and shared, the welcoming back of the sinner to the heart of the community, the gathering into the household of faith of one who through the help and support of that family has passed through a journey of conversion to Jesus Christ. Because those who possess official authority in the Church enter at some vital point into the process, it is all too easy to confuse the power operative in the celebration of symbolic rites with the

[2]Hans B. Meyer, "The Social Significance of Liturgy", in *Politics and Liturgy*, Concilium 92, edited by H. Schmidt and D. Power (New York: Herder & Herder, 1974), p. 50.

[3]See Mark Searle, "The Pedagogical Function of the Liturgy", *Worship* 55 (1981), 349: "The hypothesis . . . is that the liturgical renewal of the Church requires the development of critical awareness of how the liturgical event is itself compromised in order that, at a second stage, the liturgy can serve as the focus of the Church's continuing transformation."

power of these leaders, whereas it is their proper function to make space for the deployment of community symbols, to point to them in such a way that they are a revelation of God's communion with the people in their participation in human history.

It may help to illustrate this point further by way of one example, one where perhaps more than anywhere the shackles placed on God's power in the process of development are obvious, and where the communal task and reality of the church community have been subordinated to individual and personal necessity (however legitimate this concern continues to be). This is the example of binding and loosing, as practised in the sacrament of penance, which, as we know, moved from an expression and action of community support and reconciliation to a private act consummated between confessor and penitent. Two points can be made about this. First of all, the entire procedure had originally to do with God's forgiveness as this was mediated to the sinner through the community of disciples. Secondly, the ritual of binding and loosing is not itself the act and symbol of forgiveness, but represents church actions which place the penitent within the situation where he or she is first excluded from a community of reconciliation and then when converted placed anew within its sphere, where God's peace and forgiveness are shared among the members of the discipleship. The ultimate symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation is the one table of the Lord's body and blood shared among the many. The actions of binding and loosing either prevent or allow access to this ecclesial reality, and as a result underline and point to the aspect of this action whereby it expresses the overcoming of sin and its alienations. Binding and loosing point to the reality of the Lord's table as a place of reconciliation, but in fact they themselves have become identified as the primary symbols of forgiveness, thus drawing excessive attention to the power of the presiding bishop (and later presbyter), as well as to acts of this minister which are performed without reference to the community reality or to the ecclesial reality of the Eucharist.

In brief, instead of pointing to the shared table as the place of reconciliation, the exercise of priestly power overshadowed it to become known as itself the mediation of grace and forgiveness. Before this identification took place, and even during the period when the process became more private and individualistic, the role of the minister was seen to be a support to the penitent in the course of conversion, and a witness to the operation of God's grace in the penitent's heart, testimony to the fact that to be real grace has to be witnessed and shared.

The example of penitential practice serves to illustrate a transition from a situation in which the symbols of God's power and grace are primarily communitarian, to a situation in which the focus is on acts of institutional authority. Acts whose purpose it is to point to and probe the core symbols of power in the Church are themselves turned into representational symbols of it. It is for this reason that a critique of the structures of power in the Church is needed in order to liberate and set into relief those symbols which are of primary significance and which show grace to be a shared reality in the Church, underscoring the power of God's people to be a critical and prophetic force in society.

This is one of the areas where the overflow of recent studies on popular religion, or religiosity, takes on significance. For all the justice in the criticism that such religion can be magical and superstitious, it remains true that the

people, often indeed the least sophisticated among them, remain in touch with the sense of God's power in their midst and in their chosen ways of expresing that presence. Hence they emphasize feasts and processions and pilgrimages and rites of passage, wherein the vitality of their own lives comes into touch with the sacred and vice versa. The tragedy of liturgical history and of ministerial developments is that popular religion has remained marginal to liturgy and the people's way of praying dubbed non-liturgical. In other words, a necessary dialectic between the hierarchical and the popular has been too frequently bypassed, and in the process the nature of church office and of its role in the community has been inadequately conceived.

A good starting-point from which to rethink church office is provided by the ways in which some recent authors employ sociological theory to explain the development of ministry and structure in early Christian times.[4] Historical-critical studies of the New Testament show that no clearly defined structures can be said to have originated in apostolic times and that ministry in its most powerful forms is not necessarily tied to office. This being the case, it has to be asked what role office does play in the Church and how it relates both to the ministry of the office-holder and to a wider ministry. Furthermore, how can this be explained in a way that no false opposition is set up between office and charism, between structure and Spirit.

When sociologists set to interpreting the discernible facts of early church development, they bring attention to the transfer of *charisma* (understood in a sociological sense) from persons to a body of writings and to office. There is no need here to examine the details of this interpretation. Suffice to mention that the transfer of *charisma* to office does not preclude its continuing appearance in individual persons, whether office-holders or not. The main point of interest is the notion itself of *charisma*. When employed of persons and their activities, the term designates the ease with which a leader commands a following, as well as the readiness on the part of the people to assent to such authority. Two main reasons are given for this. The first is that these persons are in touch with the core symbols and myths and values of a tradition and are able to translate them into vital and practical terms for the society or community to which they address themselves. The second reason is that a charismatic leadership serves the coherence and common identity of a people, relating them to an interpretation of the symbolic and axiological tradition.

In this interpretation of leadership, it is clear that the traditions do not belong to the leader but to the people. The leader allows the symbols to stand forth, to receive vital expression and interpretation. The leader makes room for the symbols to become operative among the people as sources of life and community.

In the Church, as in any human society, there seems to have been a gradual process whereby this *charisma* transferred operatively from persons to office, in the sense that the church members looked more to office and office-holders for an interpretation of symbols and of tradition than to individual persons, possessed of personal gifts of leadership and interpretation. This is a necessary way in which in God's name the Christian community had to provide

[4]For the literature and some suggestions as to its usage in theology, see David N. Power, "The Basis for Official Ministry in the Church", *The Jurist* 41 (1981), pp. 329–31.

for apostolic continuity, and it was eventually crowned with the development of a sacramental induction into office through the laying-on of hands. However, it is a process which of its nature does risk sterility and has in ways succumbed to the risk. This sterility sets in when the symbols of God's life in the Church are identified with the office, so that the office, meant to serve, becomes in effect the primary means of keeping unity and tradition and the primary source of power. It would seem that this can be avoided only if office is at regular intervals, if not always, filled by persons with charismatic ability, who can break out of traditional moulds and address new situations; if a dialectic is kept between the official and the popular; and if enough room is left for communities to come up with variations on the types and rules of office generally in use. This latter point has taken on significant proportions of late through the phenomenon often classed as the emergence of basic Christian communities, in face of which theologians like Edward Schillebeeckx point to the diagnostic and dynamic role of these bodies in giving rise to new forms of leadership and office.[5] Of course, one of the principal points made by Schillebeeckx is that many of these communities are peculiarly alert to the reality of God's power in the experience of suffering and resurrection, so that they are alive to elements in the Church's memory of Jesus Christ, and in its tradition, which are vital to the expression of the power that comes in Jesus Christ and through his Spirit.

SACRAMENTAL CANON: SACRAMENT AS TEXT FOR A COMMUNITY

The critique of church structures is but a preliminary to the recovery of the full sacramental canon, to which question this paper is now addressed.

At the end of a study on *God the Father*, Robert Hamerton-Kelly remarks:

> We have tried to show what the symbol "Father" reveals of history as the manifestation of God. Our investigations have shown that it identifies those forces in history which liberate the self from irrational bondage and make possible a free and responsible selfhood . . . Properly understood, therefore, the biblical symbol "Father" means . . . freedom not bondage, responsibility not dependence, adulthood not infantilism."[6]

What Kelly's study shows is that the use of the symbol Father to expression Jesus's relation to God, and then that of his disciples, is the fruit of history and lived experience. It is a long history and a complex experience, in the course of which it was necessary, in generation after generation, to wrestle with the various possible and actual meanings of this term as associated with human experience, individual and social, and transferred thence to God in a religious context, until the point at which it can be said to have a completely unique sense in the New Testament. None of the old meanings were left completely behind, but had to be assimilated to the new meaning, often perhaps by way of a negation which was the only route to positive affirmation.

The name Father in the New Testament is directly pertinent to anything that has to be said about God's power, but even if we address directly the symbols or images of power much the same has to be said of them as of *Abba*. It is only by coming to grips with the various cosmic and human ways in which

[5]Edward Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 76–80.

[6]Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), p. 121.

power is experienced and formulated that it is possible to come to the symbols of power that are used in reference to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. One can never speak of power in a Christian context without being as attentive to what is negated of it in this context as to what is positively affirmed.

It is in virtue of the sacramental tradition of the Church that it remains constantly possible for the Christian people to remember that history in which God's power is revealed, and constantly possible to come anew to the understanding of its images, over against the whole range of real and possible experiences of power that occur in human life and in human history. Therein lies the importance of what I intend by raising the issue of the sacramental canon, as much a part of Christian tradition as the scriptural canon and intimately bound up with it—and in its own way as ambiguous and difficult to grasp. In other words, the celebration of the sacraments is done in virtue of a tradition of celebration which can be compared to the scriptural canon and which was determined in its form by much the same kind of process of church reception.

We are not simply treating here of the old issue of the divine institution of the sacraments, or of matter and form, or of the number of the sacraments. In fact, raising the issue implies that it is necessary to go beyond, or perhaps beneath, these questions and to ask what forms of celebration, inclusive of word and ritual, are vital to sacrament and thus form the basis for a theological reflection on what they signify about the Church and about history.

When early Christian literature uses terms such as *sacramentum* or *leitourgia,* they are inclusive terms which pertain to a total celebration and are not restricted, as in the later scholastic use of *sacramentum,* to some part of the celebration. Leo the Great, to take but one example, used *sacramentum* in a very comprehensive way, including under it the event remembered, its gospel proclamation in the liturgy, the memorial thanksgiving, the prayer of the people, and the presence of the mystery in the daily life of the people by way of an imitation of Christ, made possible by participation in the celebration.[7] As far as the liturgy is concerned, the festal cycle and the gospel proclamation proper to feasts were as much constitutive parts of the *sacramentum* as were the eucharistic prayer and the elements of bread and wine.

To probe this notion further I will have recourse to the work of Harvey Guthrie on the *todah,* from which I take this quotation:

> The thesis of this book . . . is that, variegated and complex as were the early Church and early Christianity, there was a norm, a *kanon,* by which the earliest Church, like ancient Israel, measured the adequacy of witnesses to its faith. That norm was not one having primarily to do with conceptual content as such. That norm was, rather, one based on liturgical form, on cultic action, on what the Church knew and experienced and was involved in as it identified itself in worship. It was a norm rooted in the liturgy elicited by and appropriated as praise for God's revealing and saving involvement with a people in history. That form, that action, that norm was *eucharistia* which, like *todah* in ancient Israel, was thankful recital in the context of liturgical action in which the human community involved participated with God in the enjoyment of a sacrifice.[8]

Guthrie here seems to be using the word *kanon* in the sense of a living

[7]See M. de Soos, *Le Mystère Liturgique d'après Saint Léon le Grand* (Münster: Aschendorf, 1958).

[8]Harvey H. Guthrie, *Theology as Thanksgiving: From Israel's Psalms to the Church's Eucharist* (New York: Seabury, 1981), p. 181.

context of celebration and thanksgiving. Witness to the faith was to be heard and tested in this context and its contribution to this kind of orthopraxis is what constitutes its orthodoxy. There is here, of course, some kind of play on the word orthodoxy. In using the idea of canon in this paper, I do not simply wish to stick to Guthrie's sense of the word, but to add that from tradition we can discover the right forms of celebration which therefore constitute a kind of textual canon, similar to the canon of the Scriptures. As it is now increasingly recognized that in the interpretation of the Scriptures the knowledge of forms complements content to give the meaning, so too for an interpretation of the liturgical tradition the knowledge of prayer forms and ritual forms is necessary. Narrative, thanksgiving, supplication, lamentation, ethical exhortation, and specific types of ritual action such as bread breaking and bread sharing constitute this kind of sacramental canon. The sacramental tradition and its current celebration cannot be properly understood without reference to them.

What happens in sacrament, or what is given and received in a sacrament, can be so much the prevailing theological and catechetical question that not enough attention is given to sacraments as texts, even though it is clearly pertinent to the celebration of a sacrament that a community be confronted, challenged and called to thought, by this text. In modern linguistic terms, it is not enough to look on sacramental celebration and diction as illocutionary, i.e. as acts "consisting in the accomplishment of a specific linguistic operation: for example, affirmation, description, interrogation, thanks, promising, ordering, asking, approving, recommending, deciding, and so on."[9] While it must rightly be said that these things constitute the liturgical action, the action's interpretation requires some elements of the distancing that is called for in the interpretation and appropriation of what is said in the Scriptures.

This should be apparent from a proper understanding of ritual and its role in human community. It is a false grasp of ritual to think that its importance lies only, or even primarily, in what it does at the actual moment of its enactment. Indeed, it is quite impossible for persons or communities to move at the precise moment of celebration through whatever passage is expressed, or to assent to whatever truth is conveyed, in a meaningful ritual. It is the persuasion that rituals ought to have immediate and impressionable effects that militates most against their efficacy in human life. Ritual is part of a tradition, a way in which something is handed on. It is important on account of the patterns which it weaves, or for what it says about the meanings, values and identities whereby people live together in community. Its appropriation belongs to a longer span than its duration as a celebration requires. It needs interpretation of the text. The practice of mystagogical catechesis in the Church is addressed to this need, and it is probable that Augustine's exclusion of the repetition of some sacraments reflects the persuasion that the *verbum fidei* transmitted through them may always be recaptured. For that matter, the scholastic doctrine about the reviviscence of sacraments can be related to the enduring presence of a ritual meaning even beyond its celebration, so that the theory is more than a subterfuge intended to uphold the persuasion that grace is always sacramental.

[9]Jean Ladrière, "The Performativity of Liturgical Language", in *The Expression and Experience of Faith*, Concilium 82, edited by H. Schmidt and D. Power (New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), p. 53.

In linguistic terms, one could say that the liturgical act is illocutionary, i.e. that it expresses a community's relation to a world, but that it is not necessarily perlocutionary, i.e. it does not necessarily have an immediate effect in those addressed, or at least that this effect does not describe the place which a ritual or sacrament has in a community. Sacrament's primarly role is to express the relation of a community in any given cultural situation to the reality of salvation which comes to it from God in Jesus Christ. It states this in such a way, and in such forms, that it is comparable to a work of art which opens up virtual possibilities of affective relation to a world of meaning for those who view it. This is also why sacraments as expressions of a tradition are comparable to a text, waiting to be appropriated. They open up worlds, visions of reality, modes of participation, but time may be necessary to appropriate what is signified.

A good example to illustrate this would be the hope that is promised to the bereaved in the celebration of death. Grief is often too strong for the participants to assent to the hope, but the ritual may be remembered and appropriated subsequently. Similarly, in mystagogical catechesis people were, and are, invited to look back to the rites of entry into the mystery of the Church, to find in recalling them the reality of the world in which they were invited to live when becoming formally and sacramentally members of Christ's body.

This is not to say that what happens in the here and the now of the sacramental celebration is unimportant or insignificant, but rather to suggest an approach which may help to understand what exactly this is. What goes on may well be described in this sentence of Paul Ricoeur about a text: "To understand a text is to interpolate among the predicates of our situation all the significations that make a *Welt* out of our *Umwelt*"[10] In other words, the sacramental celebration is a mixture of the interlocutionary and the poetic, it is the relating of that about which we speak, or hear spoken, to the situational here and now, thus rendering possible a new appropriation of what is signified in the traditional symbols and forms and texts. Drawing together the tradition and the present, sacraments express the presence of Christ's mystery within the institutional framework and through the cultural forms and actual symbols of the assembled gathering.

There are often attempts to make sacramental action ostensive and descriptive. This occurs, for example, in ways of describing the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist or of describing the removal of original sin in baptism which loose the tensiveness of symbol. The language proper to sacrament, however, shares the effacement of the ostensive and descriptive which is proper to poetic texts. Consequently, it contains "a power of reference to aspects of our being in the world that cannot be said in a direct descriptive way, but only alluded to, thanks to the referential values of metaphoric and, in general, symbolic experssions."[11]

This interplay between a spatio-temporal designation of God's power at work in the here and now on the one side, and the reference to a world which is properly expressed in the poetic and symbolic on the other, is what is at the

[10]Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian, 1976), p. 37.

[11]*Ibid.*

core of remembering past events as here and now represented. Understanding of the self, individual and collective, is mediated through the remembrance of past events. One understands the world that is celebrated and the self, at one and the same time, in one and the same act of remembering. Thus the remembrance of a past event becomes a force in life, pointing to the future, for the simple reason that any here and now community takes cognizance both of itself and of the world opened up, through the remembering. The keeping of this world as something transcendent, as something that breaks the limits of time and space while uniting in one every time and every place, this is possible only because of the poetic language of sacrament which is always distinguishable from the ostensive moments of the rite that tie the here and now into this world. The intersection of the two sorts of language means that the ostensive, while indeed indicative of God's power at work, has to be understood as the expression of an energy, a hope, an aspiration to a world of which the sacrament speaks as offer, as future opportunity.

All this is to work out some of the implications in the order of expression of the double sense of sacramental canon noted above. In the first place, to speak of a canon is to say that there are given patterns of expression in sacramental action, to which the Christian tradition must remain forever faithful, even in the process of cultural development. In the second place, to speak thus is to say with Harvey Guthrie that the belief and ethic of a Christian community, its sense of identity in any given time or place, in face of whatever ethical and cultural issues, are subject to the living control of *eucharistia*. Identity and belief and ethical stance are Christian to the extent that they are those of a people who find that their innermost being and their relationships to reality are expressed in the celebratory remembrance of Jesus Christ, that they are those of a people who identify themselves in worship.

THE POWER OF GOD: CELEBRATION GIVES RISE TO THOUGHT

What has been said about the sacramental canon is addressed to the issue of the kind of language used in sacrament. Now it is time to suggest that it is by attention to this language that it is possible to think grace, to see it as the power of God present in human life through the memory of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is useful at this stage to adopt some kind of distinction between knowing and thinking in the sense at least of trying to avoid conceptualist or essentialist definitions of grace. An awareness of our graced existence as a life lived under God's saving power is projected in the first place by the imagination. Thinking grace is a matter of pursuing the lines of thought suggested by this imaginative projection, which follows the arrows indicated by a full sacramental celebration, employing symbols and the forms of language of the canon. Liturgy can be said to be a heuristic transformation, demanding by the very modes of its expressivity the crisis of the religious imagination for its truth to be grasped. There is no way of thinking about the power of God present in the Church and in history without confronting the many faces of power known to humanity, and without breaking asunder the predication of some of these images to God's mode of being in order that the truth of God's lordship in Christ may show forth.

To follow out the suggestion that we think grace or power in ways suggested by the forms of language used in sacrament, and since sacraments

are the *memoria passionis et resurrectionis Christi,* the first question that can be asked is, what root metaphor is suggested by liturgy for all recall of Christ?

Some brief explanation of terms as here employed is first necessary. By metaphor is intended the transfer of a name, at first startling, from one order of reality to another and by this movement to express and reveal new meaning. Thus to call the passion a victory, or a satisfaction, or a sacrifice, is to take a name from another order of reality to unfold meaning found in the passion. A metaphor is a root metaphor when it provides the basis or core of a fuller construct. It may provide the core of all story telling, as when the descent into Hades is used in Syriac literature as the foundation of all that is said about the Lord's death. It may also provide the foundation for a system of thought, as when Anselm adopts the metaphor of satisfaction from the penitential system to build up an explanation in theory of the value of Christ's death for our redemption. The root metaphor may also serve as the key to a complex set of operations, as when *transitus* or passage, being used to express the meaning of Christ's death also becomes the key to notions about Christian spirituality and about sacramental practice.

Historically, most light is shed on the question about the root metaphor or liturgy for the recall of Christ's mysteries by studies on the celebration of the paschal feast in the early Church. These studies are important not only for the liturgical cycle: they are good indications of what images and meaning were at the heart of all liturgy and sacrament.[12] These historical studies point to two different understandings of the paschal commemoration, the one centering around the image *pascha/passio*, the other around the image *pascha/transitus*.

As summarized by one author, "the *pascha-passio* tradition points more explicitly and directly to the suffering Lord who, precisely in and through suffering, reaches resurrection. It is precisely death which contains the germ of life . . . it is precisely on the cross that victory is manifested," whereas "the *pascha-transitus* tradition understands the resurrection as the anti-pole of death, and one has to achieve this *transitus* in order to truly share in the saving mystery of the Lord."[13] It is apparently the *pascha-passio* tradition which is the older and the *transitus* notion owes much to moralizing and to the cultural needs of a people for whom a process of conversion and models for it were a necessity. Indeed, *pascha-passio* bears much more of the character of the linguistic twist of metaphor than does *transitus*. Whereas in the latter, the death and life symbolism is taken rather literally, or at least as illustrative; in the former, the process of life coming after death is turned into one whereby life comes in death. Victory is had not in the power given to one who was dead and is raised up, but comes in death's own power.

The tendency to follow the paradigm of passage in sacramental practice and in sacramental theology is of long standing. Given the development of the Church as a religious organization, and given its role in nurturing and nourishing faith through the seasons of human life, this is understandable. It is a ten-

[12]See Raniero Cantalamessa, *La Pasqua nella Chiesa Antica* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1978); G. Kretschmar, "Christliches Pascha im 2. Jahrhundert und im Ausbildung der christlichen Theologie", *Recherches de Sciences Religieuses* 60 (1972), 287–323; Anthonius Scheer, "Is the Easter Vigil a Rite of Passage?" in *Liturgy and Human Passage,* Concilium 112, edited by L. Maldonado and D. Power (New York: Seabury, 1979), pp. 50–62.

[13]Scheer, *art. cit.*, pp. 56–57.

dency which is corroborated by the cosmic and biotic roots of ritual in human community and society. Sacraments do indeed use images, language and symbols that are expressive of the human desire for hierophany, the search for the sacred in the cosmic and in the rhythym of life-passages, the hallowing of life in sacred places and at sacred times, its ordering through the confiding of self to the providential divinities which control such matters. In retaining this kind of expression, sacrament integrates an instinctive and natural approach to the holy, which gives priority to rite over word. It is one which expresses a dramatic struggle with chaotic forces, the intersection of the earthly and the heavenly. It allows for the fact that bodily belonging and perception precede any naming or knowing that is possible to humanity.

In retaining the cosmic and biotic roots of ritual, and images of a divine power manifested in nature and in humanity's subjection to nature, Jewish and Christian sacraments remind us that our mode of dwelling on the earth and of living out history, has to respect these forces and to be attuned to them in our communion with God. They allow in this way for an expression of an innate sense of the uncontrollable elements in life, of the fear of desecration, of restrictions on freedom, of an abiding sense of disharmony from which we seek liberation lest we fall into chaos. The images of God as royal monarch or lord of creation, holding other deities in subjection, correspond to these cosmic and biotic roots of sacrament.

At the same time, Jewish and Christian liturgy bring about a reversal of the relation between rite and word, by giving priority to the latter, even while retaining or incorporating traditional ritual elements. Revelation is given not in the numinous, not in hierophanies, but in the Word. Word, however, would not make its point were it not for the numinous and the hierophanic which are its counterpoint, or even counter-position. Word puts cosmic religion into disarray, it desacralizes nature, gives names precedence over images, defies apocalyptic tendencies by denying the presence of signs in the heavens, and introduces a new logic of the sacred in modes of discourse that are narrative, prophetic, parabolic and eschatological, to which response is not simply a hymn that expresses wonder and awe, but a song of praise. In brief, one can think the religious dimensions of the human situation and of its liberation through divine power from the way in which symbols of the sacred are brought into dialectice with the iconoclastic forms of proclamation.[14] The freedom of the word and the imagination of metaphor allow a share in God's freedom, so that humanity is not completely bound by hierarchical and natural forces, even while respecting them. The images of creative word and of spirit are determinative of the way in which Christian sacrament invites obedience to divine power and allows its participants to dwell on the earth and to take a part in God-given history.

How this affects the gospel memory of Jesus Christ's suffering can best be dealth with by concrete example, namely, by reference to the place that the image and symbol of sacrifice retain in Christian discourse.[15] Sacrifice is not a

[14]Valuable insights may be found in Paul Ricoeur, "Manifestation et Proclamation", *Archivio di Filosofia, Il Sacro* (Padova, 1974), pp. 56–76.

[15]See Robert Daly, *Christian Sacrifice: the Judeo-Christian Background before Origen* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 1978); Tibor Horvath, *The Sacrificial Interpretation of Jesus' Achievement in the New Testament* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1979).

univocal concept, nor a rite which has univocal meaning. It is a historical practice, and hence possesses a history, which is that of human beings seeking to interpret and work out their relation to the sacred and to the demonic forces of evil which assail them. In practice sacrifical ritual is often undifferentiated as to its significance. Its historical origins[16] belong in cosmic religion, in the bringing of order to feared chaos, by the control or even suppression of the forms of life which threaten what is deemed to be the sacred or divine order. One cannot account for sacrifice without taking note of the violence that is inherent to its history and this is an aspect of it which cannot be left aside when the image is used in Judeo-Christian history, in favour of a rather more innocuous generic meaning of gift or life shared in communion.[17] The moment of negation in the assimilation of the imagery or practice into Judeo-Christian history is essential to its significance therein, as is perhaps brought very clearly to evidence in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac.[18]

It is, however, in the retention of sacrifice in the Jewish commemoration of historical events that we see best what is being done to the meaning of this kind of ritual.[19] Though the ritual is retained in various forms, priority is given to word and proclamation over symbol and manifestation. Consequently, because remembrance is the heart of the festival, mercy prevails over propitiation, and the forces of justice and of respect for life in society are proclaimed as what brings order and peace, and the ritual which controls order by the suppression of dangerous life-forces has to be accommodated to this proclamation. The Gospel, of course, excludes sacrifice completely and transfers the images of ritual to the Christian people and to the death of Christ in testimony to the Father's mercy and love. In this transfer of image there is an even stronger dialectic between rite and word, between the cosmic and the historical, than in the Jewish remembrance of historical events, and I do not think that we can come to grips with the use of sacrificial terms in the Christian tradition without taking account of this dialectic. This is important to the images of power that we inherit, since sacrifice does have to do with the acknowledgment of the forces that dispose of human life. The cumulative effect of the dialectic in Christian discourse, related to what has already been said about the root metaphor used in the memory of Christ's death, seems to be the message that the power of life, and power over the evil that threatens life, are found in one's own way of encountering death, not in enforcing the death of another or in any other violent control of life forces. Furthermore, freedom and hope are to be found in the charity without distinction and recrimination that is practised in a table-fellowship, not in the placation of some superior force, at whatever cost of life or human potential.

The forms of proclamation which thus set off the gospel message against ritualistic significance are narrative and prophecy, and these need to remain at

[16]The studies are many, but I would like to refer in particular to the articles by Antoine Vergote and René Bureau in the book *Mort Pour Nos Péchés: Recherches Pluridisciplinaires sur la Signification Rédemptrice de la Mort du Christ* (Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1976).

[17]The book by René Girard has stirred up much useful comment: see René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1979).

[18]See the treatment by Daly, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–86, with the literature there noted.

[19]See G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 250–72.

the heart of sacramental celebration, lest we slip back into the dominance of ritual and cosmic religion, refusing the crisis of the religious imagination which sacrament exacts. Grace which has to be spoken of in the form of remembered historical events is a grace whose force is felt in history and which can be described only in reference to history. There is also a unifying effect to narrative, for while it brings forth possible meanings and projects out of a memory of the past it likewise reveals the existence of a unifying force which is the basis of every historical manifestation, and which gathers all historical events together into one transcendental, meta-historical unity. Narrative blends together all events in a flow of history by its use of key metaphors, master images and typical events, thus constructing a tradition wherein one can perceive the moves that are made in a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity of meaning.

Fortunately, liturgical renewal and historical studies have made the churches more aware of the narrative core of sacrament and at least to some extent of it prophetic potential. However, it seems to me that Christian sacrament falls short of adequately representing God's grace and power in history if it does not assimilate the events that took place after the New Testament period into its memory and narrative. This is not totally absent from liturgical history, for the acts of the martyrs have on occasion been read in the liturgy,[20] and outside the liturgy there is the tradition of the *vitae sanctorum et sanctarum*. Eucharistic prefaces in the past have incorporated the memory of more recent events[21] and in the new sacramentary there are some rather quaint but lifeless narrative elements from global portrayals of pastors and virgins. By and large, however, sacramental celebration fails to weave the lives of real and memorable, even if unremembered, people into the history of the *totus Christus*.

To truly symbolize God's power among the elect and in history, some more active remembering needs to take place, a sort of remembering which is itself redemptive. History after all needs to be redeemed from its all too frequent forgetting of the poor and simple, of those whose suffering is ignored or suppressed even from memory. If we agree with J. B. Metz[22] that our Western bourgeois culture has eliminated from memory all those whose lives do not fit into the ideals of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, where is the Christian community to retrieve these if not at the heart of its liturgical celebration of the divine power, which is itself subjected to a forgetting when the lives of the suffering are forgotten? Mary's *Magnificat* is something of a model for sacramental remembering, since it echoes the voices of the powerless while proclaiming God's reversal of human judgments.

The imagination of hope is well described as thinking beyond the claims of reason, and that could also serve as a good description of the prophetic discourse whereby narrative is completed. Narrative tells us what forces from the past carry us into the future, prophecy asks how this may seem. It is a kind of resistance to the claims of reason to bring happiness and good fortune and is highly sensitive to the oppressive tendencies of reason and system and ideol-

[20]See B. de Gaiffre, "La Lecture des Actes des Martyrs dan la Prieŕe Liturgique en Occident", *Analecta Bollandiana* 72 (1954), 134–66.

[21]See the remarks of Rafael Avial, *Worship and Politics* (New York: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1981), pp. 61–62.

[22]On this issue, see the paper by Stephen Happel, "Sacrament as Orthopraxis," in *CTSA Proceedings*, 35(1980), 88–101.

ogy.[23] It expresses the sense that regeneration and release from multiple alienations can come about only by recognizing a divine force and freedom whose promises are couched in the images of utopia. "The regeneration of freedom," says Paul Ricoeur, "is inseparable from the movement by which the figures of hope are liberated from the idols of the market-place."[24]

There have been many investigations of late into the literary form of parable. By way of some kind of analogy, I would like to point to a parabolic element in sacramental ritual which goes well with the sense of prophecy, for it locates the experience of the sacred in new places and suggests forms in which the critical power of God is at work in human affairs. A key to this line of thought can be found in recent studies on the origins of the Lord's Supper which show how far community practices actually became integral to the symbols of the Lord's presence.[25] The common table of Christian communities and the collection for the poor were at one and the same time ethical practices of response to the Gospel and signs of the Lord's presence, necessary to the sacramental reality of the Supper. In linguistic terms, one could say that the ostensive reference to the here and now was actually part of the symbol, or the action referred to as verifying the symbolism was in fact an integral part of the symbolism.

The community side of the sacramental action, the community ethic manifested in practice, contributes the parabolic element, for it is in its ordinary daily activity according to the Gospel that it provides factors that are integrated into the sacramental symbolism. It provides the authentic symbols of God's healing power in a table, a touching, an anointing, a receiving, a supporting. These are then necessary counterparts to the more cosmic and historical images of the sacrament. These everyday factors of life in community are in contrast with all tendencies to look for God or for redemption in the hierophanic. The sacred is located instead in the ordinary, subverting the penchant to look for it in the extraordinary. Bread and wine are the symbols of shared life, not blood. The home where people gather is the sacred place, not the temple. The time for gathering is any time and any day, not seasonal or cyclic times. The cultic figure is a servant, not a priest. The Lord presides not at a festive banquet, but at the daily board of fellowship.

It is also here, more than in the case of cosmic and historical images, that the issue of acculturation arises. This is because sacrament needs to make appeal to the common modes of expressing the sacred in the ordinary, to the interpersonal of the daily, to the bodily feeling of being at home, to recognizable ways of sharing at table and of greeting, to ways of being in a place and in the body. If people cannot use their own language in these matters, then the sense of the parabolic, of the divine in the ordinary, is never communicated and everything in sacrament seems foreign and extraordinary. The ploy of conjoining

[23]See Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[24]Paul Ricoeur, "Freedom in the Light of Hope", in Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, edited with an introduction by Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 180.

[25]See Charles Perrot, "L'Eucharistie dan le Nouveau Testament", *La Maison-Dieu* 137 (1979/1), 109–25: Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Tablesharing and the Celebration of the Eucharist", in *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* Concilium 152, edited by M. Collins and D. Power (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), pp. 3–12.

the awesome with the daily, of positing reverence for neighbor together with reverence for the divine, then fails.[26]

The last thing of which to remind ourselves in speaking of sacramental language and it representation of power, is that *eucharistia* is the principal form of sacramental prayer, the most important expression that the people give to their hearing of God's redemptive word and to the knowledge of his healing presence. Indeed, it is God present in the people as Spirit which erupts in *eucharistia*. This is true not only of the Lord's Supper but of every sacramental action, even if in recent reforms it has not always been adequately reinstated as such.

There is room for discussion about the precise nature of this prayer, about how praise and thanksgiving and doxology are each defined and how they interrelate. That discussion can be left aside here, in favour of a more general use of the term doxology. Whatever the answer to more specific questions, what is most important is that doxology is the prayer in which the community speaks concretely before God of the real newness that comes to it and redefines its being in the world.[27] It is proclamation, in which the holy is made known in the mouth of the people.

Doxology is a stripping of the self of all modes of discourse and expression that seek to have control over the sacred, that resort to power structures or to imaging instead of to naming. It responds to what is appropriate to the God who is revealed in historical events, and whose revelatory word is testimony to what is revealed in them. It is close to what Paul Ricoeur writes about the appropriation of meaning:

> If the reference of the text is the project of a world, then it is not the reader who primarily projects himself. The reader rather is enlarged in his capacity of self-projection by receiving a new mode of being . . . Appropriation ceases to appear as a kind of possession, as a way of taking a hold of things; instead it implies a moment of dispossession of the egoistic and narcissistic ego . . . [29]

If doxology is interpreted along these lines, what the Christian tradition signifies when it posits an act of praise and thanksgiving as the central sacramental prayer, is that this is the act which emanates from the acknowledgement that by becoming one with the history proclaimed, by entering the world opened up, the community itself is transformed and becomes the dwelling place of God's power. Its existence is graced by reason of the memorial and partakes not only in what is present or past, but also in what is future. "The last energizing reality," writes Walter Brueggemann, "is a doxology, in which the singers focus on this free One and in the act of song appropriate the freedom of God as their freedom."[30] This he says of the great song of Moses, which he calls the "most eloquent, liberating and liberated song in Israel."[31]

[26]For important reflections on this issue, see André Aubry, "The Feast of Peoples and the Explosion of Society—Popular Practice and Liturgical Practice," in *The Times of Celebration*, Concilium 142, edited by D. Power (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), pp. 55–64.

[27]See Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–79.

[28]See Edmund Schlink, *The Coming Christ and the Coming Church* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), pp. 18–22.

[29]*Interpretation Theory*, p. 92.

[30]*Op. cit.*, p. 25.

[31]*Ibid.*

Finally, then, the power of God mediated through sacrament is located in the cry and in the doxology of the suffering who have known God in freedom, of those whose voice is suppressed by political and religious structures, but which is liberated in the appropriation of God's freedom, which ever remains inaccessible to power structures and is found only in the memory of suffering and in the hope of emancipation. This cry is the voice of the Spirit alive in those who remember, who struggle with the many faces of power in the name of freedom, and who address God in doxology in the name of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

"Sacramentality is the ability within the life-process to announce the presence of the divine."[32] In addressing the question of how God's power is symbolized and represented in sacraments, what has been probed is how the sacrament in its various forms of speech and expression reveals the presence of God through Christ in history. This does fall short of examining ontological questions, but it seems necessary to attend to this expressivity in order to be able to think anew the ontological questions.[33] God's salvific presence in the world, God's saving power, is made known in the ways in which Jesus is remembered as savior, lord and Christ. Creation itself, whose divine reality is originally expressed in cosmic and life-pattern symbols, is in sacrament, re-thought in the faith of redemption, for in redemption humanity is placed in a new and indeed more fundamental relationship to God.

The ultimate manifestation of the world's relation to God, the root metaphor for sacramental action, is the cry "abba" spoken in death by Jesus in the knowledge of glory, and repeated by the voiceless of the world who in Christ's Spirit know that freedom and power are found in the experience that in abandonment, God never abandons. Not only is this the power given in redemption, but it is expressive of humanity's ultimate creatureliness, when this is meaningfully appropriated as relation to the initiatives of God in history, as an awareness of the *Deus intimior intimo meo,* whose power is revealed in the power of those who are called in the freedom of God's children.

The focal meaning of this understanding of sacrament as disclosure is provided by a Spirit Christology and a Spirit ecclesiology. The presence of God in the world as Spirit is disclosed in the self-emptying of Jesus, the one who in weakness assumes, takes up, all the memory of human suffering, and before God affirms that this is the power that offers a future, this is where God dwells at the heart of the world. In being the ritual memorial of Jesus, and of all the forgiven to whom his cry gives voice, the sacrament provides an important moment of negation in the move from symbol to metaphor, where the mythic image of Jesus as God's wisdom is predicated of the self-emptying of his death.[34] The power of God and the wisdom of God, symbolized in the cosmic

[32]Kenan B. Osborne, "Jesus as Human Expression of the Divine Presence: Toward a New Incarnation of the Sacraments," in *The Sacraments: God's Love and Mercy Actualized,* edited by F. A. Eigo (Villanova; Villanova U.P., 1979), p. 45.

[33]See Louis Dupré's remarks about Schillebeeckx's approach to fundamental metaphysical problems in Louis Dupré, "Experience and Interpretation: A Philosophical Reflection on Schillebeeckx's *Jesus* and *Christ*", *Theological Studies* 43 (1982), 47–48.

[34]See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament", in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity,* edited by R. L. Wilkin (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 17–42.

images of the potentate, are revealed when named in weakness, in human folly. The power which sacrament discloses is one which comes when in faith and hope a people share in that weakness, and bring its memory to speech, in wonder at the cosmic, in grief over the silencing of God, in praise of divine fidelity, in the hope of the Spirit and the Logos that hold out the promise of a future.

As indicated at the beginning of the paper, the sacramental action as explained here is that of the community, and all sacramental theology needs to develop along such lines. What is often termed the representative role of the minister has to be demystified in order that the actions of the community stand forth. The ordained minister serves the community by keeping it in touch with its own symbols and traditions. There is no good reason, it would seem, why the minister would be said to act "*in persona Christi*" except inasmuch as any prayer said in the name of the Church is a prayer of Christ,[35] since the Church is church only in him. By and large, the intention of this paper has been to assert that an understanding of sacrament is derived from the total sacramental action and that it is in the knowledge of the communion of the baptized in Christ and the Spirit that God's power in history is disclosed. It is through this community that God becomes a critical agent in human society, because of the memory which it constantly renews and enlarges in celebration, and because of the awareness of "power tensions," to which sacrament's interplay of word and rite alerts it.

By referring to how symbols are distorted, I have suggested the dislocation of power in the Church from community to priest, and thus allowed for the retrieval of community as subject. By reference to the sacramental canon, I have allowed for all the appropriate modes of sacramental expression, and thus for the expression of what is specific to the Christian images of God's power present and operative in the world. By reference to the nature of ritual and sacrament as text, I have explained the difference between what sacrament immediately brings about and its appropriation as grace in the life of persons and of communities. By way of reference to the parabolic that is inherent in sacramental signs, I have suggested a relation of sacramental celebration to ethical practice.

Sacraments present a world requiring appropriation, and relate it to the here and now. They are a disclosure of God's presence in the world and invite Christian communities to submit themselves to the revelation of that power and presence. Sacraments as celebrations must be subjected to a critique, and the criteria of right celebration are the 'orthodoxy' of right prayer in keeping with the full canon of tradition, as well as the 'orthopraxis' of the community ethic, inspired by the memory of Jesus Christ. To receive the disclosure, to be empowered by it, to think grace, to appropriate what is proclaimed, one must pursue the full range of sacrament's symbolic and poetic language.

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[35]See Edward Kilmartin, "A Modern Approach to the Word of God and Sacraments of Christ: Perspectives and Principles", in F. A. Eigo, *The Sacraments*, pp. 92–93.