

WORSHIP AS A GRAMMAR OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Once upon a time the priests would come and hold Mass in the Detour's chapel, giving us hope: "Hang on just a little longer." They'd tell us not to worry, that heaven was ours, that on earth we should live humbly but that in the kingdom of heaven we would be happy. . . . Then all of a sudden the priests began to change. . . . Now Mass is a serious affair, ever since the priests began to open our eyes and ears. One of them would always repeat to us: "To get to heaven, first we must struggle to create a paradise on earth."

Manlio Argueta, *One Day of Life*, El Salvador, 1980

Elias Canetti describes preconciliar Catholicism as deliberate, calm and spacious.¹ The spaciousness is due to its great age and to its aversion for, and suspicion of, crowds. As a social commentator, Canetti notices the defenses that Catholicism has marshalled against the sudden outbreak of the open crowd. The stiff rituals, Latin and a latinized rhetoric, the individualism of listening to the word and receiving communion—all isolate individuals and nullify the contagious energy of crowds. "Communion links the recipient with the vast, invisible church, but detaches him [or her] from those actually present." The church weakens and blurs the differentiating elements in people's lives, replacing them with something distant and mysteriously communal. Even the heavenly host is imagined as immobile and immutable, frozen at the moment of adoring obeisance. Ritual mirrors this goal. Processions order progress through a possibly unruly crowd; they establish the ecclesiastical hierarchy, separating laity from clergy, one member of the hierarchy subordinated to another. Their "aim is to arouse communal 'veneration' among the faithful."

Canetti's description of, and implicit judgment upon, the social fears of Catholicism must be addressed by our analysis of liturgy. According to Canetti, public worship stultifies and depotentiates. There is one master; all the rest are slaves. From within Canetti's hermeneutic of suspicion, the community has developed in ritual an affective and cognitive grammar infected by dominance and submission. Processions, incense toward honored persons, ranked seating, reserved offices, stiff vestments—all were part of a controlling elite frightened by the crowd.

I have used the words grammar and language to categorize these social concerns. To do so assumes that the structural dynamics of social and political power can be analyzed, explained, and even overturned by attending to the language operative in Christian worship. Taking notice of the politics of language is only the most recent part of the linguistic turn in relation to the theology of the sacraments.

¹The remarks in the following two paragraphs are taken from Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Seabury, 1978) 154-58.

Though we cannot say that the role of words has been neglected in classical theologies of the sacraments, we must recognize that notions of language, poetic speech, rhetoric and communication have only progressively entered into contemporary discussions of liturgy. Thomas Aquinas located the sacraments within the category of signs precisely because these signs were a communication with the holy.² Properly these devices for communicating with God were God's communication to us of divine grace.³ Signs for Aquinas were necessary as part of the sensible nature of human communication; but they were required only for the time between the fall and glory. Had Adam not sinned, we might not have needed a sensible substrate to our communication and we certainly would not have needed sacraments.⁴ Words were dispensable tools and the sacraments a remedy for the sinful way we use such equipment.

Contemporary thinking about sacraments assumes a quite different position—that language is the primary reality.⁵ By language we understand communication or attempts at communication in the interplay of gestures, words, and silence.⁶ Communication is not first a matter of offering information or opinions, but a common opening in which speakers differentiate themselves. "In discourse Being-with becomes 'explicitly' shared. . . ."⁷

In what follows, I will first indicate in typological fashion how various contemporary theories of language have been used to interpret the sacraments. Secondly, I will focus upon the hermeneutics of language found in Paul Ricoeur and, by focusing upon the liturgical theology of David Power, point to some of the problems his philosophy creates for the theology of the sacraments. Finally, I shall return to the transformative dimension of a sacramental rhetoric and its place in the political, economic, and social world.

²*Summa Theologiae*, III, 60, 1 corp in *Summa Theologiae. The Sacraments*, ed. David Bourke (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

³*Ibid.*, S.T., III, 60, 2 corp.

⁴*Ibid.*, S.T., III, 60, 4, ad 2um; 61, 1-2, esp. 2, ad 1um.

⁵Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 203-10; hereafter *Being and Time*; *idem*, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 57-156; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975) 345-447, hereafter *Truth and Method*; and Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972).

⁶See the description of language and its relationship to the sacraments in Garrett Barden, "The Speaking of Sacrament: Some Reflections on Ritual and Language," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 40 (1973) 38-49; Roy Wagner, "Ritual as Communication: Order, Meaning, and Secrecy in Melanesian Initiation Rites," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13 (1984) 143-55; for the multiple levels of silence, see Bernard P. Dauenhauer, *Silence: The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980); and the very helpful proposal of John W. M. Verhaar, *Some Relations between Perception, Speech and Thought: A Contribution toward the Phenomenology of Speech* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1963) and his survey, "Language and Theological Method," *Continuum* 7 (1969) 3-29; and Schubert M. Ogden, "Linguistic Analysis and Theology," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 33 (1977) 318-25.

⁷Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 205.

I

Classical theology of the sacraments began to disintegrate as an accepted whole when biblical, historical and patristic research established that worship had changed significantly in ritual behavior, verbal expression and theological justification. The readjustments of the classic language by Casel's notion of Mystery-presence, Rahner's notions of symbol and the church, and Schillebeeckx's interpretation of the sacraments in terms of phenomenological intersubjectivity⁸ established a link with Aquinas, included biblical and historical moments in their descriptions, re-located the liturgical actions within an ecclesiology, and provided a framework for including anthropology, psychology, affective development, and interpersonal communication within sacramental life. It was their work and that of historical scholars such as Yves Congar or Henri de Lubac that backed Catholic rethinking of the sacraments. This development was given powerful impetus by the widening of the notion of sacrament that the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (1964) of Vatican II used when speaking of the church.⁹

Rahner developed a theology of the symbol and of what he called the "exhibitive" or effective word¹⁰ and Schillebeeckx explicitly studied various schools of language analysis,¹¹ but both continued to count on the weight of cognitional theory and an abstract ontology to support their thinking. Neither treats language as an extrinsic tool for interior mental acts, but neither has turned methodologically to language as the primary place for their theological discussions.

The use of language theory in relation to the sacraments has divided roughly into four camps that do not fall into successive phases: Anglo-American linguistic analysis; literary criticism; the empirical analyses of anthropology, sociolinguistics and sociology of language; and the phenomenology of language. The place of deconstructionist interpretations of language is still unclear.¹² There is a fifth group

⁸Odo Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium* 1st ed., 1932; Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," *Theological Investigations* 4 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966) 221-52; *idem*, *The Church and the Sacraments*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967); and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

⁹*Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1975) 350; note how this is experienced as a negative development in Guisepe Colombo, "Dove va la Theologia Sacramentaria?," *La Scuola Cattolica* 102 (1974) esp. 677-87 who sees this whole tradition as an "inflation." See Peter E. Fink, "Three Languages of Christian Sacraments," *Worship* 52 (1978) 561-75.

¹⁰Karl Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," *Theological Investigations* 4 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), 253-86; and *idem*, "What is a Sacrament?," *Theological Investigations* 14 (New York: Seabury, 1976) 137.

¹¹Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Interpretation of Faith*, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974) 20-44.

¹²I shall deal explicitly with deconstructionism in a later essay; for the time being, see the remarks of Charles Winquist, "Body, Text, and Imagination," in *Deconstruction and Theology*, ed. Thomas J. J. Altizer et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 34-57, and Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 115, 149-69; and David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 55-60, hereafter *Plurality and Ambiguity*.

that concerns itself with the politics of language, but I shall return to that issue for the final portion of my paper.

1. *Linguistic Analysis.* With the third phase of linguistic analysis in Ramsey, Austin and Searle, theologians described the sacraments as self-involving speech acts or performative speech.¹³ Judicial convictions, grading, advising or warning, apologizing, cursing, and promising all qualify as speech acts. When we say them, something happens. They studied the personal and social conditions for the effectiveness of such speech and argued for their relationship to religious speech acts such as the sacraments. When two people choose to marry, their avowal of consent actually marries them. Scientific speech about God was therefore different than speech to God.¹⁴ A. P. Martinich explicitly substituted for Aristotelian hylo-morphism a theoretical framework based upon performative language. He re-defined sacraments as "institutional illocutionary speech act with a distinct perlocutionary force,"¹⁵ where an illocutionary act is putting a sentence to use and a perlocutionary force, the effective power upon hearers.¹⁶ He then analyzed the multiple conditions under which religious performative speech could be validly enacted. The conviction of thinkers such as Martinich was that speech act theory could begin to qualify the human dimensions of instrumental causality.

2. *Social Sciences.* The empirical thrust of speech act theory met the fieldwork promoted by anthropology, linguistics, sociology of language and sociolinguistics.¹⁷ Social scientists studied what actually occurred in language, especially in

¹³See B. R. Brinkman's negative remarks in "On Sacramental Man: I Language Patterning," *Heythrop Journal* 13 (1972) 398-401 and *idem*, "'Sacramental Man' and Speech Acts Again," *Heythrop Journal* XVI (1975), 418-20; and the positive use by Mark Searle, "The Uses of Liturgical Language," *Liturgy* 4 (1985) 15-19.

¹⁴John MacQuarrie, *God-Talk: An Examination of the Language and Logic of Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 11-78; and Ian T. Ramsay, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), hereafter *Religious Language*; Jerome Gellman notes that our language about God is learned within ritual procedures in "Religion as Language," *Religious Studies* 21 (1985), esp. 162-65.

¹⁵A. P. Martinich, "Sacraments and Speech Acts," *Heythrop Journal* XVI (1975) 103-94.

¹⁶John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 25.

¹⁷For some recent work, see Geoffrey W. Beattie, "Language and Nonverbal Communication—The Essential Synthesis?" *Linguistics* 19 (1981) 1165-83; Ward H. Goodenough (ed.), *Culture, Language and Society* 2nd ed. (Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings Publ. Co., 1981); Judith T. Irvine, "Status and Style in Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985), 557-81; Robert Layton, *The Anthropology of Art* (London: Granada Publ. Co., 1981) esp. 37-85; Jacques Legrand, "Classes et Rapport Sociaux dans la Détermination du Langage," *La Pensée* 80, No. 209, 22-35; D. G. Little, "Language and Communication Studies," *Hermathena* 82, No. 132, 39-46; Thomas Luckmann, *The Sociology of Language* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), esp. 32-46; *idem*, "Language in Society," *International Social Science Journal* 36 (1984) 5-20; Els Oksaar, "Quo Vadis, Psycholinguistics?: Psycholinguistics, Language and Changing Social Structures," *Linguistics* 151 (1975) 41-58; David Parkin, "Political Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13 (1984) 345-65; Sue Taylor Parker, "A Social-Technological Model

intercultural situations. But what "actually happened" in languages became more problematic. Whatever suspicion social scientists had about the abstract conceptualizations found in philosophies of language, they began to question the ability of their disciplines to deliver "neutral" descriptions of the facts of language. They found themselves wondering what political and social norms were operative in their descriptions of field events, in their explanations of rituals, and in their theories about such work.¹⁸ Intertwined with this problem was the question of the relationship of orality to literacy in pre-literate and post-literate cultures.¹⁹ Scientists began to recognize that their psycho-social analyses of the origins of language were influenced by normative anthropologies that described speech arising as a result either of competition or collaboration.

As a result, recent theological interest in Turner, Geertz, Luckman, Fowler, Kohlberg, and Goffman has shifted the study of sacramental rituals, narratives, and the language of worship in three ways:²⁰ 1) there is now a greater concern for empirically descriptive accuracy, for a study of what has actually occurred in sacramental actions and words, without assuming that the "ritual text" is any more than an ideal type; 2) there is a recognition of the role of transition or threshold that sacramental language plays in the development of a personal grammar of values and beliefs; and 3) ritual studies now can raise questions of cultural normativity and linguistic domination as an important liturgical issue. So John Bossy has studied the sacramental practice of late medieval and early modern European popular piety for its performed structures and Margaret Mary Kelleher has developed an empirical grid for analyzing the ritual morphemes and mythemes of contemporary worship.²¹

for the Evolution of Language," *Current Anthropology* 26 (1985) 617-626; for a survey of anthropological issues in liturgical theology, see R. Kevin Seasoltz, "Anthropology and Liturgical Theology: Searching for a Compatible Methodology," *Liturgy and Human Passage*, ed. David Power and Luis Maldonado (Edinburgh: Clark, 1979) 3-13 and Michael G. Lawler, "Christian Rituals: An Essay in Sacramental Symbolism," *Horizons* 7 (1980) 7-35.

¹⁸See the standard Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Françoise Helgorsky, "La Notion de Norme en Linguistique," *Français Moderne* 50 (1982) 1-14; *idem*, "Norme et Histoire," *Français Moderne* 50 (1982) 15-41; Jean-Baptiste Marcellesi, "De la Crise de la Linguistique à la Linguistique de la Crise: La Sociolinguistique," *La Pensée* 80, No. 209, 4-21; and Geneva Smitherman, "Language and Liberation," *Journal of Negro Education* 52 (1982) 15-23.

¹⁹Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982); *idem*, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), esp. 233-81.

²⁰For a defense of ritual in this context, see Roger Grainger, *The Language of Ritual* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974); for a survey of these issues and the relevant bibliography, see my article, "Speaking from Experience: Worship and the Social Sciences," in *Alternative Futures for Worship, vol 2: Baptism and Confirmation* ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987) 171-88.

²¹John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); and *idem*, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200-1700," *Past and Present*, no.

3. *Literary Criticism.* At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge argued for the analogies between poetic symbols and religious speech; Matthew Arnold reiterated them in the non-metaphysical context of the Victorian age.²² These concerns have continued into this century through the work of literary critics and writers on aesthetics. Writers whose work tends to be relatively unknown in theological circles have developed the transforming character of lyrics, narratives, tragedy, and irony.²³ J. Robert Barth has argued that symbolic language is sacramental language since both are an articulation of mystery.²⁴ John Appleyard explicitly tested the language of instrumental causality against that articulated by philosophers and critics about poetic symbol.²⁵ The use of water in baptism, for example, is artful, enclosed in a font, defined by gestures of pouring or immersion, specified by narratives of death and rebirth, and so forth. And William Van Roo has examined at some length the way in which contemporary theories of art and symbol can apply to Christian theology and sacramental life.²⁶ Though he believes that artistic creativity, its products, and contemporary philosophies of artistic symbol can contribute to our understanding of the sacraments, there remain, "beyond analogy," a unique "presence and influence of Christ and of the whole Church in every actuation of a Christian sacrament."²⁷ So for Van Roo, the notion of instrumental causality in classical theology preserves a kind of divine operation distinct, perhaps even alongside of, the symbolic dimensions of bread, water, oil or the giving and receiving of consent.

4. *Phenomenology of language.* The more philosophical concerns of literary critics and theologians have found a helpful partner in conversation with conti-

100 (1983), or for a more limited context, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 288-356 and Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Liturgy: An ecclesial Act of Meaning," *Worship* 59 (1985) 482-97.

²²For intelligent interpretations of this discussion, see Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) and Bernard M. G. Reardon, *From Coleridge to Gore: a Century of Religious Thought in Britain* (London: Longman, 1971); see the continuation of this discussion in a philosophical and literary context in Tilottama Rajan, "The Supplement of Reading," *New Literary History* 17 (1986) 573-94.

²³See for example, Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974); Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984); *idem*, *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968).

²⁴J. Robert Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination: Coleridge and the Romantic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

²⁵John A. Appleyard, "How the Sacraments Cause by Signifying," *Science et Esprit* 23 (1971), esp. 181-200.

²⁶See William A. Van Roo, *Man the Symbolizer* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1981) on the cognitive dimensions of symbol and art; hereafter *Man the Symbolizer*.

²⁷William A. Van Roo, "Symbol in Art and Sacrament," *Studia Anselmiana* #64 (Rome: Editrice Anselmiana, 1974) 167.

mental phenomenology of language. Cassirer on language and symbol,²⁸ Merleau-Ponty's early work on language and the voices of silence,²⁹ Gadamer's development of Huizinga on play in language,³⁰ and Ricoeur on symbol, metaphor, and narrative have provided theoretic support for critics locating the sacraments within the realm of the aesthetic.³¹ Ricoeur's explicit appeal to Anglo-American literary critics such as Eliot, Beardsley and Wheelwright has helped to bridge the insular ignorance that has regularly beset such discussions. Moreover, Roland Barthes' interest in the pleasure of the text,³² Julia Kristeva's on the role of desire in linguistic expression,³³ and Ricoeur's recovery of the hermeneutical dimension in the Freudian psychoanalytic process³⁴ has pushed the erotic, affectively heuristic or pedagogical function of liturgy into prominence.³⁵

We may easily take the symbol of bread in the Eucharist and interpret it from many of the perspectives outlined here. Bread is not silent even before we provide it with an envelope of speech. It is already a performative word by virtue of its shape, texture, color, size and weight. Someone has made it, perhaps artfully, perhaps simply as a function of a task performed. Someone was paid for the bread. And it emerged from a specific social class. The gestures we use to bring it to the

²⁸See Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. Ralph Mannheim, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), and the comments of William A. Van Roo, "Symbol according to Cassirer and Langer," *Gregorianum* (1972) 487-530, 615-73.

²⁹Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" and "On the Phenomenology of Language," in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McLeary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 39-97.

³⁰Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 91-150.

³¹Since I will treat Ricoeur extensively below, I note only here the five essays on "Language and Hermeneutics" collected in Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart (ed.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: an Anthology of his Work* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 96-166, hereafter *Philosophy of Ricoeur*. The essays are the following: "Existence and Hermeneutics," "Structure, Word, and Event," "Creativity in Language," "Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics," and "Explanation and Understanding."

³²See the collection of essays, Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) and *idem*, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); see Susan Feagin, "Some Pleasures of Imagination," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984) 41-55.

³³Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) and the comments of Marc Eli Blanchard, *Description: Sign, Self, Desire: Critical Theory in the Wake of Semiotics* (New York: Mouton, 1980).

³⁴For an introduction, see Reagan and Stewart (ed.), "A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud," and "The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings," *Philosophy of Ricoeur*, 168-210; and Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), hereafter FP; for a fine interpretation of Ricoeur on Freud, see Alphonse de Waelhens, "La Force du Langage et le Langage de la Force," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 63 (1965) 591-612.

³⁵See Theodore W. Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," *Journal of Religion* 62 (1982) 111-127; and Mark Searle, "Liturgy as Metaphor," *Worship* 55 (1981) 98-120; and *idem*, "The Pedagogical Function of the Liturgy," *Worship* 55 (1981) 332-59.

altar and the rituals we use to bless it contribute to its multiple symbolic meanings. The poetic narrative of Jesus's institution gives this bread a particular history and a metaphoric use. Analysis of what believers do with this bread, the ways in which eating it is constitutive of the assembly, contribute to a reflective sense of meaning. Comparison with other community-gathering rites in other religious cultures specifies its Christian sense. Literary criticism of the developing liturgical texts and homilies about the service give us a sense of what believers intended by their actions. Philosophies of language and analyses of human desire can help us validate what the bread refers to.

Without doubt, the study of language has enriched the theology of the sacraments. And this brief survey of work about language and the sacraments does not even speak of the specifically confessional analyses that have developed from post-Bultmannian hermeneutics of the Word or Anglo-Catholic metaphysical analyses of instrumental causality. In effect, the linguistic turn has permitted the theology of the sacraments to shift from a classicist concern for the abstract nature of its mediation to thought about the historical and personal causes that give the sacraments their ecclesial life as "instruments" of divine action. Rather than a sentimental appeal to a "theology of encounter," the analysis of the various levels of sacramental language has permitted a certain thickness of personal and social motivation to appear. That this introduction of human subjectivity, history and practice into the theologies of the sacrament does create some difficulties can best be seen by looking at one of the major contributors to the discussion—Paul Ricoeur.

II

Catholic theologians working toward a new synthesis in the theology of the sacraments have found support for their concerns in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. First, Ricoeur's conviction that there are primordial, pre-theoretic, affective and cognitive dimensions to symbols seems to provide philosophical evidence for their belief in the efficacy of rituals (*ex opere operato*, character, instrumental causality).³⁶ Secondly, Ricoeur's understanding of the ways that symbols operate between biology and thought, desire and language, and ideology and utopia seem to have proven helpful to those who wish to see the sacraments as powerful negotiators of transition in human life.³⁷ Third, Ricoeur's categorization of linguistic genres such as prophecy, hymns, law, narrative and wisdom literature does locate thanksgiving, prayer and worship among other forms of divine disclosure.³⁸ Fourth, his refusal to capitulate either to reductions of human language to

³⁶See Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1982) 392-403, hereafter *Cult and Controversy*; and the problems that Van Roo has in *Man the Symbolizer*, 9-11.

³⁷Regis Duffy, *Real Presence: Worship, Sacraments, and Commitment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) 53-54, 76, hereafter *Real Presence*; and Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy*, 398.

³⁸Paul Ricoeur, "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977) 1-37; for a critique of the heavily "narrative" quality of this approach, see Ronald L. Grimes, "Of Words the Speaker, of Deeds the Doer," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986) 1-17 and my remarks in "Sacrament: Symbol of Conversion," in Matthew Lamb (ed.), *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1981) 275-90.

structuralist semiotics or to nostalgic romanticist obscurantism seems to reinforce the interdependence of worship and theology.³⁹ Fifth, Ricoeur's lengthy study of Freud on the divestiture of the ego has contributed to an understanding of penitential practice and the liturgical lament.⁴⁰ Finally, Ricoeur's insistence upon the role of testimony and decision in the appropriation of a text seems to promote the relationships among worship, theology and spirituality.⁴¹ In short, whether it is the origins of the sacraments, the processes by which they operate, or the goals toward which they tend, it has been difficult to ignore the influence of Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology.

Many no doubt noticed the subjunctive mood in my prose. The extensive appeal to Ricoeur's thought also raises some questions. I should like to point to three. First, when the sacraments are described as symbols, working the ways metaphors work, has sufficient attention been paid to the nature of metaphoric reference? If sacraments are metaphors, to what do metaphors refer? Second, if the participants in sacramental action are like symbol-makers, like poets, what kind of subjects are speaking? Can we clarify the anthropological language that informs Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor? And thirdly, if sacramental language is to be compared to poetic speech, how are they different? What makes religious language specifically religious? These questions concerning metaphoric disclosure, the subject, and the specificity of religious language are a detour in the best Ricoeurian fashion that will be necessary to arrive at his influence upon the theology of the sacraments.

1. *Metaphoric reference.* Ricoeur's turn to metaphor emerged from his comparative study of the symbolic myths of evil.⁴² The experience of defilement and sin produces a set of symbols and myths about the origins of evil. Dramatic narratives of chaos, a fall, the tragic hero, and the exiled soul establish a typology in which humanity faces the question of evil. The language of evil as a stain, a captivity, or an infection cedes to an "inward" position in which "freedom . . . en-

³⁹Van Roo, *Man the Symbolizer*, 108.

⁴⁰See Colman Grabert, "The Rite of Penance/Reconciliation: Christian Existence in a Reconciled Humanity," in Nathan Mitchell, *The Rite of Penance: Commentaries, Background and Directions* (Washington, DC: The Liturgical Conference, 1978) 104-22; for this discussion in another context, see Roy Schafer, "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) 29-53.

⁴¹Duffy, *Real Presence*, 76; David N. Power, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of the Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984) 190-96, hereafter, *Riches*.

⁴²Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) esp. 3-24, 347-57, hereafter SE; and *idem*, "The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection," *Philosophy of Ricoeur*, 36-58. My interpretation of Ricoeur and his work is indebted to conversations with my graduate students in the School of Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America, particularly Camille Zaidan, "Ricoeur's Conception of Language and its Implications for Foundational Theology: An Analytic Study of his Works on Language from 1959 to 1975" (S.T.D. Dissertation, 1980) and Brian Mahaney, "The Religious Dimension of the Narrative and its Relation to the Appropriation of the Self with an Application to Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*" (Ph.D. Dissertation, 1987).

slaves itself, affects itself, and infects itself by its own choice."⁴³ Each story therefore offers some mode of release from the problem of a will that is captive or impotent. The symbols of redemption (Orphic gnosticism, Adamic eschatology, suffering understanding) have their counterparts in symbols of sin.

These narratives claim that something new emerges because of their telling. They maintain that there is some wholeness on the other side of, despite, or within the fragmentation that affects human identity. The thinker who renders these symbols into existential concepts⁴⁴ must follow the indications of the symbols and be informed by their language. These textual narratives make claims to do something by their form as well as their content. Ricoeur postulates that the metaphor, with its claims to newness, might be a helpful parallel—an entry into the transforming nature of texts and of symbols.

Ricoeur distinguishes between symbol and metaphor since both offer double-meanings. Symbols have non-semantic opacity negotiating the boundaries between desire and culture.⁴⁵ Symbols are rooted in the biological realm where "force and form coincide."⁴⁶ The "power" that is operative here does not "pass over completely into the articulation of meaning."⁴⁷ The cosmic, oneiric, and erotic non-rational dimensions of symbols precede the meaning evoked by metaphors. No matter how imbued we are with poetic metaphors, our dreams seem more powerful to us. We should think of the paradoxical dimensions of symbols such as the cleansing, vivifying, and simultaneously destructive qualities of water, the contrasts and transitions of light and darkness.

Metaphors, on the other hand, are a "free invention of discourse," unbound (though not unrelated) to the cosmos.⁴⁸ To imagine a metaphor, to "metaphorize," is to awaken predicative resemblances. "Love is the unfamiliar Name/Behind the hands that wove/The intolerable shirt of flame/Which human power cannot remove."⁴⁹ "Metaphors are just the linguistic surface of symbols."⁵⁰ With root metaphors and archetypes (or metaphoric networks as Ricoeur prefers to call them), Ricoeur establishes a spectrum of preverbal and verbal discourse that antecedes

⁴³SE, 152.

⁴⁴Ibid. 357.

⁴⁵Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University, 1976) 57, hereafter IT; the non-verbal characteristics of art are not particularly addressed by Ricoeur, though he wishes to include the iconic dimension in metaphor; see, for example, James A. W. Heffernan, "Resemblance, Significance, and Metaphor in the Visual Arts," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44 (1985) 167-180; see a similar criticism in liturgical theology by Don E. Saliers, "Symbol in Liturgy: Tracing the Hidden Languages," *Worship* 58 (1984) 37-48.

⁴⁶Ibid. 59.

⁴⁷Ibid. 61.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," *Four Quartets in The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958) 144.

⁵⁰IT, 69.

our ability to think 'about' the world.⁵¹ We know more than we think we know. Indeed, symbols and living metaphors always contain a surplus of meaning.⁵² So the polysemantic complexities of love, name, and shirt of flame as a living metaphor continue to provoke us by their impertinent juxtaposition of affection, pain, mythic tragedy, and salvation.

Metaphors refer; they are "about something" outside language, but only by indirection. They do not refer the way scientific speech refers to something. The "truth-value" of metaphors is ascertained only by recognizing the suspension of ordinary reference. Ricoeur speaks of the split-reference that metaphors have.⁵³ Metaphoric predication makes literal nonsense (Mark is a bear), but eminent sense if the literal reference is abolished, suspended, exploded, and a "deeper" paradoxical reference emerges.⁵⁴ Metaphor is a deliberate category-mistake, a poet's insistence that the tension between a subject and a predicate (Mark as bear) can disclose a truer world than more ordinary description (dark-haired, aggressive, doleful, etc.). It reveals a world which both is and is not simultaneously, "the tension between 'same' and 'other' . . . marked by the relational copula."⁵⁵ This world is vital, a possibility, a disclosure in front of the text, a challenge to appropriate and assimilate the meanings proposed in the metaphor.

How are we transported from the nonsensical literal reference to the authentic, deeper meaning? The inner operator that gets us from one point to the other is "feeling" (*le sentiment*).⁵⁶ The ordinary "logical and established frontiers of language" are "obliterated" such that we are continually disoriented by a living metaphor.⁵⁷ The "disconnection" of the customary reference elevates feeling to a possibility, an affective fiction that works on us.⁵⁸ Mood has a heuristic function; "Feeling has an ontological status different from relationship at a distance; it makes for participating in things."⁵⁹

The juxtaposition of poetic subject and predicate provokes readers and listeners into letting go of the usual references and postulates a new world. The po-

⁵¹IT, 64; Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) 244, hereafter RM.

⁵²IT, 45.

⁵³IT, 67-68, 87-88; RM, 229-56.

⁵⁴RM, 245-55. I am indebted to Mark Higgins, one of my graduate students, for drawing my attention to the violence in Ricoeur's description of metaphoric reference. His observations on the ways in which symbols, metaphors, and narratives transact force have been important in this interpretation. Paul DuMouchel is also struggling with similar problems in "Paul Ricoeur: La Tension de la Verité," *Esprit* 73 (1983) 46-55.

⁵⁵RM, 256.

⁵⁶Paul Ricoeur, *La Metaphore Vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) 309; and his reiteration of the ontological character of feeling in "The Power of Speech: Science and Poetry," *Philosophy Today* 29 (1985) 68-69; see the use of Ricoeur (and others) in Peter McCormick, "Feelings and Fictions," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1985) 375-83.

⁵⁷RM, 196-97.

⁵⁸Ibid. 245.

⁵⁹Ibid. 246.

etic textures of the world and the poetic schemata of interior life mirror one another, "proclaiming the reciprocity of the inner and the outer."⁶⁰ The linguisticity of feeling is evident. Desire speaks, as Ricoeur says in his interpretation of Freud, out of the unfulfilled character of its own quest.⁶¹ "Speech (*la parole*) is the instrument of the hermeneia or 'interpretation' that symbols exercise with respect to fantasies, even before symbols are themselves interpreted by the exegetes."⁶² Poetic feeling proposes a redescribed world, a place where "creation and revelation coincide."⁶³ A metaphoric text opens up a world in front of itself by means of its non-ostensive references.⁶⁴ Reality, the state of affairs of the world (as both subject and object), is disclosed as metaphoric. There is a "metaphorical sense of the verb 'to be' itself" in which the tension between identity and difference is preserved.⁶⁵

2. *Speakers of metaphor.* By subject in this context, I do not mean those who author metaphors. Ricoeur is not interested in the process of textual production or the intentions of the author.⁶⁶ The readers or listeners who take up metaphors must appropriate the world of the text by divesting themselves of their presuppositions. They are to dispossess their egoistic and narcissistic egos. One gains a new self through the text. The reader is enlarged by receiving a new mode of being from the metaphoric proposal. To be able to appreciate what might be meant by the pain and glory of love in Eliot's poem requires letting go of sentimentalized and even non-religious prejudices that may impede one's appropriation of the text. The being-in-the-world disclosed by metaphor then reveals a subject who transcends. . . . By taking the style of metaphoric statements, readers reconfigure themselves to the world announced by the text. The possible world shows a hypothetical subject only concretized in the actual appropriation of a text by specific readers.

Entrance into the hermeneutical circle requires an initial guess while a closer reading of a text involves using explanatory techniques that can validate the initial hypothesis.⁶⁷ Throughout the process of interpretation, the attitude of the reader must be one of obedient listening to an injunction that starts from the text. Without concretizing the virtual world by creating new ostensive references for those lost in the text's distance from its origin, the reader would be living in a "worldless entity."⁶⁸ One discovers the text's "existential bearings."⁶⁹ Agreeing with Freud that subjects are not in charge of their own houses and that a certain humiliation of the ego must occur, Ricoeur sees the work of dispossession of the ego as ac-

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹FP, 503, fn. 17.

⁶²Ibid. 544.

⁶³RM, 146.

⁶⁴IT, 94.

⁶⁵RM, 248.

⁶⁶IT, 29-30.

⁶⁷Ibid. 71-88.

⁶⁸Ibid. 81.

⁶⁹Ibid. 86.

completed in the assumption of the possibilities of the text.⁷⁰ "To 'make one's own' what was previously 'foreign' remains the ultimate aim of all hermeneutics."⁷¹

Making something "one's own" requires testimony or witness.⁷² Testimony is first of all encoded in a text; the stance that backs a particular position originates the need for interpretation. Interpretation, on the other hand, requires witness of the reader. It is part of the outcome of taking upon oneself the world disclosed in metaphoric discourse.⁷³ The witness of the reader alone overcomes the "infinite regress" into relativism or perspectivism.⁷⁴ The action of testifying to what one has seen or heard counts as a judgment "beyond the mere recording of facts."⁷⁵ Judgment about what is true or false in a text demands the reader's participation through witness.

The emphasis upon decision and choice in relationship to textual possibilities pushes us farther into Ricoeur's anthropology. It is the text that demands a decision, a possibility only revealed by the text—but decision reveals a world available only beyond or outside the text. The subjectivity of the reader (and of the author, one presumes) is only possible as a dimension of the text itself. There is no absolute ego sovereignly determining the meaning of texts. The subjects are displayed in the space revealed by the text.

The linguistic anthropology operative here requires far more work on the interrelationships among desire, will and rationality—far more work than can be discussed here. But there are several important aspects for us to notice. First, the existential "core" of human identity is unfulfilled desire. The self is never certain, whether in having, possessing or being.⁷⁶ Pleasures, whether of the flesh or the mind are at best temporary repose. The fragile intentionality of our feelings is only filled in the courage to act. We overcome the struggle between the infinite restlessness of desire and the desire for a specific object of desire only in decision,

⁷⁰FP, 182-86, 420-30; and Paul Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 191.

⁷¹IT, 91.

⁷²Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 119-154, hereafter, "Hermeneutics of Testimony."

⁷³"Hermeneutics of Testimony," 143-144.

⁷⁴Ibid., 144; for a positive reading of this, see John Van Den Hengel, "Faith and Ideology in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur," *Eglise et Théologie* 14 (1983) 63-89.

⁷⁵Ibid., 124; one should note the parallels to Bultmann's theology of the word here; for example, in as introductory a text as Rudolph Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958) 40, 49-52, 80, 83-85; and Ricoeur's "Preface to Bultmann," in *Essays in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 49-72; for a more favorable reading of Ricoeur on judgment, see Jean-Luc Petit, "Hermeneutique et Semantique chez Paul Ricoeur," *Archives de Philosophie* 48 (1985) 575-590.

⁷⁶Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man: Philosophy of Will*, trans. Charles Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967) 191-202, hereafter FM.

witness for. . . . When we forget the symbolic nature of that object, then we have entered "forgetting, the birth of the idol, of servitude and passional suffering."⁷⁷

Second, the "conatus" or striving that is at the heart of human desire is an opaque force struggling to speak, to be rational. Yet because the function of feeling is to connect, it sets up a differentiation between the instantaneous perfection of pleasure and the order of the spirit or mind. "It seems, then, that 'conflict' is a function of [our] most primordial nature; the object is synthesis; the self is conflict."⁷⁸ Feeling indicates to us that we are divided beings, that any mediations of this rupture are "only intentional, aimed at in a thing or in a task."⁷⁹ Feeling is directed toward a goal that it cannot produce on its own. The objects it encounters, the texts it reads therefore awaken both the desire for more and the possibility of knowing itself as struggle. All mediations of the subject are on their way toward another mediation. Thus symbols and living metaphors have their "surplus of meaning" in the striving that conflicts the human heart.

Ricoeur identifies this inherent conflict of feeling and its intentionality as human fallibility, and he distinguishes it from fault or guilt by noting that it is an occasion, a point of least resistance through which evil can enter.⁸⁰ But the distinction between possibility and actualization seem unclear here, since it is only through what is fallen that we can speak of the possibility of the occasion that permits it. The difficulty of qualifying the nature of transcendent references (whether God, the subject, or evil) becomes apparent. To what kind of subject do metaphors refer?

There is some answer to this question in Ricoeur's analysis of Augustine on temporality.⁸¹ Ricoeur interprets Augustine on the nature of time to be describing the mind's distention of itself into a threefold present of past, present, and future. Expectation, memory and attention are simply the temporality of mind extending itself. Our minds (or souls) are not passive, allowing temporal moments to "run through" them. There is the active operation of running through memory or anticipating the future which Ricoeur (with Augustine) calls "intention." If distention is the non-coincidence of the past, present, and future, intention is the unifying activity of mind. Ricoeur's position is that one entails the other in Augustine. The slippage that finds its way into the center of human time—between the present and the future, the present of the past and the present of the present is a discordance that emerges "again and again out of the very concordance of the intentions of expectation, attention, and memory."⁸²

In comparison with eternity, human time is felt as a lack where the soul, "deprived of the stillness of the eternal present, is torn asunder."⁸³ The experience of

⁷⁷FM, 200.

⁷⁸Ibid. 201.

⁷⁹Ibid. 216.

⁸⁰Ibid. 221.

⁸¹Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) 5-30, hereafter TN I.

⁸²TN I, 21.

⁸³Ibid. 27.

human time is dispersal. We are radically contingent beings, fallible in every respect. In Ricoeur's interpretation of Augustine, only the divine Word elevates time, gives it direction and unites the dis-ease of distention. The prayerful narrative that is the *Confessions* is the language that enables us to appropriate this divine-human dialectic.⁸⁴

Ricoeur's interpretation of Augustine does not reduce the experience of temporality to discord and the work of narrative to concord. Distention and intention "mutually confront each other at the heart of our most authentic experience."⁸⁵ "Plots themselves coordinate distention and intention."⁸⁶ The work of the productive imagination "emplots," grasping together (as in an extended metaphor) the incidents into story; it extracts configuration from succession.⁸⁷ Narrative language discloses to us the conflicted stories of our own subjectivities.

3. *The Specificity of Religious Language.* If language discloses to us our fundamentally conflicted egos, then what of religious language? Ricoeur argues that first-level religious language is a poetic language that is modified by intensification, transgression and "going to the limit."⁸⁸ These procedures are "limit-expressions", not unlike Ian Ramsey's qualifiers in God-talk.⁸⁹ Thus what was true of metaphor and narrative will be even more the case with religious language.

Ricoeur uses the parable as his primary example. Through intensified language and especially through extravagant actions, words and gestures, the parable overturns the expectations of readers for their world and proposes another way of being. What parent would be foolish enough not only to divide the family substance and give it to a wastrel child, but then welcome the child back with a feast? What employer gives everyone the same wage no matter how hard or how long the employees work? Who is the merchant who will sell everything to buy one gem?

Ricoeur remarks that there is an eccentricity in parabolic behavior that shocks us. They reorient us by first disorienting us. They are paradoxical, i.e. they consist of two opposed affirmations.⁹⁰ They reinforce the proverbial contrasts: losing is gaining, dying is growing, enemies are friends. Never can the parables become a technique for getting from here to there, a descriptive (or even analogical) blueprint on how to live. By virtue of their oddness in the ordinary world, parables leave us with an injunction to make a whole of our existence beyond the point of the rupture with the ordinary. But this prescription cannot be filled. Characterist-

⁸⁴Ibid. 29-30.

⁸⁵Ibid. 72.

⁸⁶Ibid. 73.

⁸⁷Ibid. 66.

⁸⁸Paul Ricoeur, "Biblical Hermeneutics," *Semeia* 4 (1975) 107, hereafter *Semeia*; see the use of Ricoeur in George E. Tracy, "Limit Language: A Deeper Heritage," *Worship* 50 (1976) 206-213.

⁸⁹*Semeia*, 118-19; and Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 55-102.

⁹⁰*Semeia*, 113.

ically, Ricoeur compares this project with "self-glorification," or in short "salvation by works."⁹¹

To what does religious language refer? Christian language has as its primary referent the reign of God—not, however, as a specific "already-out-there-now-real" object that can be apprehended irrespective of believers.⁹² Rather the reign of God constantly insinuates a "still more" that cannot be exhausted. No matter what the wastrel son is described as doing in the parable of the Prodigal, the father will always wait upon his return and welcome him with an embrace. This astonishing eruption of the unheard (note: not the unseen) as an aspect of our ordinary language is what religious language discloses—but without objectifying it into concepts. Objectification would be idolatry. Only the indirect languages of symbol, parable, and narrative can present the unconditioned, since they show us the limit, not as a concept or a fact, but as an act.⁹³

What makes religious language different from poetic metaphors in other linguistic forms of life? The reign of God claims totality—total redescription of the ordinary state of affairs and total commitment on the part of its participants. To overhear the injunction of the Christian texts requires "going to the limit" with the texts' disclosure of the whole. As a result, the ultimate referent of Christian language is not the divine realm, but "human reality in its wholeness."⁹⁴ This possible world can be described as a religious dimension to Karl Jaspers' limit-experiences—suffering, guilt, hatred, death, creativity and joy. The extraordinary dimension of ordinary experience is what is announced by Christian religious language. Only there do we "encounter" the infinite.⁹⁵

The task of religious discourse is to evoke the divine presence; beyond that possibility and its possible actualization in the readers' or listeners' lives, there can be no judgments made about actions, texts or gestures. Christian language calls for limit-concepts on the other side of the disorientation, but they must be imaginative products, not positive statements about the reign of God.⁹⁶ The language of theology will always be a border-line speech, conscious of its own paradoxical metaphoricality.

Ricoeur's hermeneutical phenomenology poses many questions for us. When we ask what is brought to speech, to what does metaphor refer, we must answer

⁹¹Ibid. 125; underlying Ricoeur's position (as David Tracy notes in passing (*The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* [New York: Crossroad, 1981] 221-222, fn. 26) is a Reformed theological "emphasis." I believe that it is more than an emphasis; rather it is a governing theological and philosophical position about the nature of the Word. See how easily it coheres with a reformed systematics such as Pierre Gisel's *La Création: Essai sur la Liberté et la Nécessité, l'Histoire et la Loi, l'Homme, le Mal et Dieu* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1980), esp. 27ff., 236, 264, and his article "Paul Ricoeur: Discourse between Speech and Language," *Philosophy Today* 21 (1977), where he describes existence as "primordial grounding discontinuity."

⁹²Ibid. 122.

⁹³Ibid. 142-43.

⁹⁴Ibid. 127.

⁹⁵Ibid. 109.

⁹⁶Ibid. 143.

that the text reveals a virtual world, a possibility that is potentially present. It only appears as actual when appropriated by interpreters. As a result, the values or truths spoken by a text are present as an imperative, an "ought" available for decision. One ought to desire the wisdom available in Eliot's assertion that the fire and the rose are one.

This position about the language of texts creates and expresses a divided subject and a paradoxical world. The subject is caught between the need to let go of old symbolic or metaphoric constructions and the demand to assume the new possibilities of the text. Readers struggle between failure to be themselves and the possibility of being other, not just in a finite distance by virtue of partial embodiment of the goal, but through a constant dissatisfaction with the ego for which they are culpable if they do not entertain new possibilities. The world that is revealed is just as conflicted. Metaphor always tells us how the world might be if . . . ; it does not speak a partial, heuristic judgment about the world's presence. The world both is and is not what metaphor says it is.

Religious language, therefore, is equally ambiguous and unresolved. As poetic, it is intensified, extravagant, and paradoxical; its process orients us by first destroying and annihilating our ordinary sense of things. What it reveals are subjects who need to be obedient to the command of the word and a world that is and is not what metaphor describes. As "religious," it claims a totality—a total revision of, or eschatological proviso on, the things of this world and a complete commitment on the part of human beings. Religious language works only to convert us. What we need to do is to witness over and over again into a secular, non-sacral reality. In a sense, since the encounter with the wholly other is metaphorically produced through the extravagant, all that it can tell us is that the extraordinary is the locus of the transcendent. This impertinence in the world is evidence for both the creative human subject and the divine presence.

But how does the interpreter tell the difference? If almost all of the criteria for the nature of Christian speech are simply those of the poetic and the only language for speaking conceptually "about" the reign of God is metaphoric, then what distinguishes human freedom from divine activity? If within the imaginative language of temporality there is disclosed a world of subjects that is feeling, conflict and the effort to exist, then is this the nature of the divine as well? Because there are no criteria or conditions for making a judgment, that something is or is not the case, however heuristically, however partially, the language for transcendence becomes muddled.

III

The ambiguities and benefits of thinking about the sacraments through Ricoeur's philosophy of language can be illustrated in the work of David Power. In recent years, Power has developed Ricoeur's terms and relations to clarify important questions for liturgical theology. Power's recent book, *Unsearchable Riches*, can be a convenient pivot for my remarks about sacramental reference, sacramental subjects, and the specific contribution of the sacraments.⁹⁷

Power begins his study with an acute awareness of the broken world in which we now live.⁹⁸ We exist in a state of crisis where symbols are the primary lighting rods for the fissures within society. The broken center of these symbols indicates a collapse of the traditional premises for creating social harmony. As a prime example, Power shows us the ways in which the Irish Republic, founded in 1921, based its identity upon the heritage of the Celt, the Gaelic language, and the Catholic faith. Subsequent developments have made it clear that these metaphors no longer establish cultural unity. As a result of this clash of symbol systems within contemporary national identities and between cultures, some search for an imposed uniformity, while others yearn for a private *laissez-faire* diversity (and sometimes the two are held in the same psyche).

Christian worship is caught in this conflict of symbols. Reimposed hegemonies (whether of texts, doctrines, or patriarchal social order), the diversity of cultures, the quest for a new sacralism, and convictions about the gospel's mission to the poor and oppressed jostle together in Christian circles without a common choreography. Taking a cue from Ricoeur's *The Symbolism of Evil*, Power locates the importance of liturgical symbols within an incipient comparative symbolics of contemporary social evils. Power's argument is like Ricoeur's—that the resolution of the current social ills will require an authentic set of symbols, not just a new competitive system of concepts. Power wagers that the Christian liturgy can be recovered (and therefore reinterpreted) in such a way that its symbols empower a new cultural synthesis.

Power's approach assumes several of Ricoeur's basic positions. He argues that symbols are products of the imagination, that they have a polysemantic surplus of meaning, that they involve the affective dimension of existence, and that they contain both non-verbal and verbal elements. Christian liturgy, therefore, is located in the world of the poetic.⁹⁹ It is constructed by religious artists within our ordinary world to evoke multiple levels of experience. Its embodiment in both ritual and word creates a dialectic between the manifestation of the numinous in non-verbal elements such as places, times, things, and actions and the proclamatory demands of narratives, myths, parables, prophecies and proverbs.

For Power, worship works the way that symbols and metaphors work for Ricoeur.¹⁰⁰ So Power compares ritual to play, parable, and narrative as metaphoric process. As formalized play, ritual establishes through bodily movement a con-

⁹⁷David Power, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo, 1984), hereafter UR. I take Power's work because it is influential and a substantive, systematic contribution to contemporary attempts to rethink the theology of the sacraments. I also take it as paradigmatic of some of the problems theologians face in this discussion. See, for example, David Klemm, "'This is my Body': Hermeneutics and Eucharistic Language," *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (1982) 293-321 and Susan A. Ross, "The Aesthetic and the Sacramental," *Worship* 59 (1985) 2-17.

⁹⁸UR, 5-34.

⁹⁹Ibid. 21; see also his "Unripe Grapes: The Critical Function of Liturgical Theology," *Worship* 52 (1978) 386-399, hereafter "Unripe Grapes;" and his "Cult to Culture: The Liturgical Foundation of Theology," *Worship* 54 (1980) 482-95.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. 130-39.

nection with the social group and the cosmos. It can be both a reflection of social roles and an exploration of new ones. Christian sacraments, however, build upon ritual through their tradition proclaiming the story of Jesus of Nazareth. The introduction of verbal symbols into ritual transforms the experience of worship. The metaphoric words used in worship express aspects of experience unavailable to philosophic, conceptual thought, especially permitting it to face the limit-situation of evil. The Christian vocabulary and grammar inherent in the gesture of Jesus' sacrifice become the linguistic paradigm for the Christian sacraments.

Jesus' self-sacrificing love is the root-metaphor for Christians, the narrative that transforms.¹⁰¹ It configures the past through memory and anticipates a future in which the community of love exists as a discipleship of equals. The sacraments are not a historicization of past events (memorial as repetitive copy) but the memory of an unsettling life whose meanings do not easily confirm present prejudices. For the sake of the future, the sacramental narratives redirect our lives toward a new world.

The sacraments can do this because they function the way metaphors do. They are a semantic impertinence; like the parables, they shock us into recognizing some new imaginative possibility, a world to be lived in by believers. The tension that appears in sacramental sentences breaks open a new meaning that can be appropriated.

1. *Sacramental Reference.* Power brings us to the stage at which the metaphoric process reveals a new world, the possibility of a Christian religious world proclaimed by sacramental words and gestures. The parabolic shock destroys the old self and the old world and awakens a new vision of the whole. So Power emphasizes the divestment of the ego that is required for the sake of taking on a new symbolic disclosure. This appears in the avowal of sin and the necessary wager or existential self-involvement to be able to "inhabit fully the language of symbol."¹⁰² This process can be seen in the need to let go of the God-as-father fantasy to appropriate God as symbol.¹⁰³ "Biblical revelation denies the Father of whom we expect everything and who questions our right to independence, responsibility, and free choice, and so in fact frustrates desire. Also denied is the Father of a mutual contract, which is the first fantasy with which we try to replace the other."¹⁰⁴ The "Abba" metaphor of the New Testament community, remembering Jesus' own language, hears God graciously granting "independent selfhood and a covenantal relationship."¹⁰⁵

2. *Sacramental Subjects.* If the avowal of the sacramental symbols requires a mourning of the old self, a humbling of one's ego and acceptance of salvation from another, it also proposes a new reality in one's world with others. By destructuring and refashioning meanings in the same way as metaphors, the sacraments force us to move from seeing our experience as merely physical to cherishing its di-

¹⁰¹Ibid. 154-58.

¹⁰²Ibid. 144.

¹⁰³Ibid. 158-64.

¹⁰⁴Ibid. 163.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

mension of ultimacy.¹⁰⁶ So the first referents of sacramental metaphors are to the data and things of life, but as potentially transformed by their envelopment in the narratives of Christ. Second, the symbols move us from a purely utilitarian grasp of life to values as relational. Liturgy "espouses ways of relating to the earth itself which forbid us to make the use of anything material a pure means to an end."¹⁰⁷ Third, Christian symbols challenge us to move from the outer chatter to the silence of interiority. Finally, Christian symbols insist that we move to the imaginative from our too easy idolatry of images.

This last movement requires some further explication. The imagination for Power demands a break with the ordinary ways of estimating reality. Breaking with prejudices of self, other or God, we are called to reevaluate our very sense of "otherness."¹⁰⁸ Only by moving from self-absorption and narcissism can we find genuine self-possession; only by risking communion with other traditions can we establish a more comprehensive society; only by acknowledging the non-identity, the difference between the world and the divine can we reach an authentic sense of ultimacy. "Being in love without measure means being ready to be caught up into this quest for the other in a total self-renunciation, leaving behind whatever is alien to the call that is followed."¹⁰⁹

3. *The Specific Contribution of the Sacraments.* Power explains this final assertion about sacramental symbolism by appealing to the notions of symbolic causality in the Schillebeeckx and Rahner.¹¹⁰ Rahner's and Schillebeeckx's notions of symbol, though somewhat different, argue from a doctrinal and philosophical premise about divine revelation as a self-communication in the mode of bodiliness. "The symbol participates in the reality symbolized as the form in which that reality manifests itself and comes to be."¹¹¹ Only through symbolic manifestation do human beings come to know and love themselves. So instead of a somewhat extrinsicist instrumentality of sacraments in the classical theology, we have an argument that God is present in self-expressive and self-communicating symbols, a participant in the symbols of divine creativity.¹¹²

Power qualifies this now classic set of interpretations in two ways. Philosophically, he develops the analogy of an artwork and applies the creativity implicitly encoded in the work to the Christian sacraments.¹¹³ Theologically, he notes

¹⁰⁶Ibid. 185.

¹⁰⁷Ibid. 189.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. 192.

¹⁰⁹Ibid. 193.

¹¹⁰Ibid. 196-206; Powers notes in "Unripe Grapes," that "The question of their truth, of their relation to the mystery of being, is one which imagination of itself cannot answer and which demands a metaphysics" (p. 397). I am pointing to the way in which the use of Ricoeur's work in worship and the sacraments may prohibit answers to that question. Moreover, as I shall say below, it is necessary to develop a thoroughgoing empirical grounding for any metaphysics of art and symbol. See Power's earlier remarks in "Symbolism in Worship IV," *The Way* 15 (1975) 137-46.

¹¹¹Ibid. 199.

¹¹²Ibid. 200.

¹¹³Ibid. 203-206.

how the participative presence of Christian symbols can be amplified by including some of the concerns of a Spirit christology in which the full meaning of the Spirit comes to term in the incarnation of the Logos.

To what specific future world do these sacramental symbols call us?¹¹⁴ First, it is a world in which ideology, superior force, and domination are relativized, bounded by the gracious redemption offered by God. Here we remember the powerless, the oppressed, and the social systems where there is an unholy distribution of power. The sacraments as metaphors require us to seek salvation from grace and not by works. Secondly, things are not turned into tools, ready-at-hand, but they are celebrated and contemplated. This is done through the avowal of a poverty of spirit that dispossesses us of our casual use of riches and social status. Finally, sacramental symbols give us hope, "the imagination of the impossible."

4. *Questions and Comments.* Power's use of Ricoeur is paradigmatic in its application of his thought to both liturgical methodology and to the nature of the sacraments. Ricoeur provides a methodological justification for the location of sacramental life in terms of symbols and the poetic. A comparative study of symbols, like the *Symbolism of Evil*, permits cross-cultural phenomenological interpretation that reaches for some normative judgment about a symbol system that is adequate to contemporary life. Ricoeur's understanding of metaphor and narrative as never a copy, as a semantic impertinence in the present, and as always in the process of redescribing a possible world seems fruitful. The emphasis upon witness, avowal, and self-involvement points to the (at least) minimal openness to faith required of those who expect to participate in the world that sacramental symbols offer. Ricoeur's interpretation of Freud on the therapeutic character of "telling one's story" and the humiliation of the ego could permit a recovery of authentic self-denial and ascetic mourning required to face the shock of encountering grace. So in terms of both method and content. Ricoeur seems an important partner for conversation.

Yet Power's appeal to Ricoeur on the reference of the sacraments shows up a major difficulty that may in fact undercut the whole enterprise. As I have noted, the referents for metaphor in Ricoeur's thought are subjects who are fundamentally conflicted in temporality, caught between desire and the imperatives to duty and between inauthentic knowledge and a virtual reality proposed by metaphors. The religious world disclosed is paradoxical, extravagant, impertinently overturning all prior registrations of the ultimate as idolatry. It is a wholly other God who is revealed, always relativizing the projects we set for ourselves.

Now this is homiletically very appealing. Indeed, I think that I may be accused of having preached it in more than one classroom from time to time. But is it sufficient to explain the nature of Christian sacramental life? Is it possible to distinguish anything other than human agents in the sacramental disclosure? It does not seem so by Ricoeur's philosophy. Power implicitly recognizes this when he adds to Ricoeur's understanding the philosophical and doctrinal language of Schillebeeckx and Rahner. But the symbolic causality of these two theologians fits with Ricoeur's philosophy in their emphasis upon the mysterious other (Rahner) or the resurrected spirit-filled Christ (Schillebeeckx) as agents. What I (with David Tracy)

¹¹⁴Ibid. 172-216.

would call the neo-orthodoxy of Schillebeeckx and Rahner—the emphasis upon the non-identity between the divine and the human—comfortably connects with the (perhaps) mystifying efficacy of words in Ricoeur. Ricoeur's ontology describes through metaphor a reality that is struggle, conflict, and agony. Narratives express the dialectical non-identity of disintention and intention at the heart of human experience. Power's completion of this ontology with the symbolic presence of mysterious grace is no doubt a position from faith, but it also makes the divine a solution to the intrinsically broken nature of humanity. This is surely why Power emphasizes the proclamatory word in his theology of the sacraments. The word operates dialectically to judge and criticize the present situation; it dominates the gestures of ritual.

The process by which metaphors and sacraments work therefore becomes suspect in these explanations. If metaphors abolish, annihilate and destroy the old self and the old world, and there is the assumption of the new, the violence of this force is strangely incompatible with Ricoeur's emphasis upon the "non-violent appeal" of the poetic. Moreover, it leaves the participants in art and sacrament constantly bereft of any ties in the old world. We must always recognize that any construction that we make "on the other side" of the destruction will appear not just as incomplete, but inauthentic. All new metaphoric or conceptual positions will need to be destroyed in their turn with no residue worth recovering.

It is worth noting some of the political implications of this position on the world that metaphors create. Human temporality turns into capricious acts of willing without either the continuity that can achieve subjective identity or the normative indications that might lead one toward a socially more just or loving world. The sacraments can simply appear as linguistic moralisms, scolding us for not being good and demanding that we change. It becomes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish this art-form from ideological propaganda or indoctrination.

The use of Ricoeur in the theology of the sacraments proves both too much and too little. Ricoeur's interpretation of symbol and metaphor argues that all words are a possible transcendent coming to speech, a clearing space for being-as-word. If this is the case, there is no need to distinguish a specifically sacramental activity since religious words, actions, and gestures simply duplicate or are subsumed by what is available through metaphors in general. For Ricoeur, metaphors claim cognitive reference through the ontological force of feeling. We reconfigure our affect through appropriation of their virtual world. For Power, the sacraments inform us cognitively of a total claim and tell us about a reality that is totally other than the present embodiment. In a Ricoeurian view of the sacraments, they become like any artwork, one among the many symbols that give evidence for the reality of a human freedom that transcends the contingencies of situated language.

Using Ricoeur's philosophy in relation to the Christian sacraments also proves to be not enough. It puts off their redescriptive ability into a virtual shadow world that can be actualized only by the concrete immediacy of personal witness and self-involvement. Metaphors tell us what might be; decisions operate in the present. In contrast, the classical language of instrumental causality, however inadequately realized, attempted to explain through Aristotelian categories 'how' a present change occurred in human beings when God's salvific action was operative. If we continue to compare the sacraments to works of art, then we must think

through more clearly the transformative power of the poetic. It must appear as more than a virtual possibility. To that set of questions, I will now briefly turn.

IV

1. *Artwork as socially transformative.* My argument with Ricoeur and with Power's use of Ricoeur is that for both, the socially transformative power of art and of the sacraments is a deferred reality. As a virtual world dependent upon the explicit decision of the participant, it fails to take account of the way that art can "trick us" into sharing its vision for the world. This "shared vision" is true both of the subject who is experiencing the art and of the artwork itself. Sometimes seduced by the pleasure of an artful sound, movement, or sight, we become a part of the world we have temporarily entered. I would need to examine this experience and its ontological ramifications at some length to validate these assertions, but I can make a few points to contrast my position with that of Ricoeur and Power. First, we look at our experience of art; second at its levels of meaning; third at the way in which it conveys the truth; fourth, at the levels of participation required, and finally at its modes of transformation.

a. *There is no neutral art.*¹¹⁵Part of the reason that images, symbols, and metaphors seem so socially dangerous to people and in need of control is that there are no neutral images. Our past experience tells us that some images can draw us heuristically toward ultimate mystery and some images can pull us into our own narcissism fixing us inside a claustrophobic closet with no exit.

Images function in many ways, of course—1) as part of the perceptual, a sensitive flow of consciousness, 2) as factors in discerning some partially known unknown, and 3) as abstractly designated signals, constructed to indicate the import of some particular image. As vehicles of affective life, images are crucial in our self-communication—in dreams, art, and love.

Artistic symbols are an elemental patterning of human experience, an embodied, non-conceptual expression of values. The artwork exits from the everyday biological patterns of experience such that for those willing to participate there is the ecstasy of operating in a transformed world. Art establishes a 'free' space, a playful realm in which participants can try out a new-found meaning and value. Art teaches not by the intrusion of a moral; but rather by fascinating participants with the values proposed.

Art leaves us in an open realm where it guides us either toward self-transcendence or toward narcissist fixation. Part of our experience of art is that it is "taking us somewhere." Art can contribute to overcome what Lonergan calls the

¹¹⁵For a helpful interpretation of partisanship in literary criticism and the political character of art, see Edward W. Said, "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1982) 1-26, though the entire issue is relevant to this discussion; the fascinating book by W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Steven Mailloux, "Rhetorical Hermeneutics," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985) 620-41; see also my "Whether Sacraments Liberate Communities: Some Reflections upon Image as an Agent in Achieving Freedom," *Lonergan Workshop V*, ed. Fred Lawrence and Charles C. Hefling, Jr. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) 197-217.

"longer cycle of decline," a world in which the surd is dominant, though not victorious, where the prejudices of the group against intelligent inquiry and self-sacrificing love are operative, where there is need for conversion. On the other hand, dynamic images can please, disclosing values of truth and justice at the sensitive level, work within our ordinary world of linguistic discourse, persuading, cajoling, satirizing—using all of the tropes of rhetoric to convince people to enter the world disclosed.

b. Symbols carry all levels of meaning. Artistic symbols are not just a glut on our sensitive palate. The shock of recognition that occurs when an artwork 'clicks' for us is neither arbitrary nor peculiarly arcane in origin. A work of art contains sometimes explicitly, more often globally, a range of cognitive, affective, and conative levels from experience to judgment.

To examine the structural dynamics of all the ways in which art conveys meaning would require other studies, but what we must understand here is that within the artwork itself there are multiple aspects or levels of meaning that are actualized. Let us take dance or music as an example. The participants (whether dancers, musicians or audience) are engaged in performing a work of art that contains intellectual, emotional, and moral dimensions in its exercise that are implicit and can be explicated by the interpreter. Some may function in the work of art at a reflective, some at a pre-reflective level. But they operate as part of the whole that is conveying meaning.

c. Art tells us the way the world is and can be. The shock of recognition that occurs in a work of art is the agreement by the participant that the conditions for an aesthetic judgment have been fulfilled. This art work tells the truth. It is a virtually unconditioned judgment in that the interpreter recognizes that unless further conditions appear, all the relevant existential, intellectual and evaluative questions have been satisfied. And they have been satisfied at precisely an embodied level, the level of pleasureable "resting in" the artwork. The aesthetic judgment operative in a work of art is heuristic in this way; it discloses some true aspect of being without claiming absolute truth for itself. Embodied at a sensitive level, the symbol allows the participant to experience sensibly the ongoing quest for the true and the good.

Because the aesthetic judgment implicit in the work of art is exploratory, it can also announce what the world might be like were any further appropriate conditions to be fulfilled. The art work leads participants through the foreground by means of an intelligent, though non-conceptual affect and sensibility into a horizon that may even exceed the artifact itself. In this sense, a work of art discloses a world that both is and is not yet. As Ernst Bloch said: "The self-identity of a work of art 'is' not yet manifest."¹¹⁶

This already-not yet character of art permits an imaginative possibility to emerge that overlaps with the foreground of the work. Indeed part of the truth of any work of art will be its continued ability to establish a world according to the conditions set forth in the work. It becomes possible to say that a work of art shows us this particular vision for the world and not another. Tolstoy's vision of mar-

¹¹⁶Ernst Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder, 1970) 96.

riage is not John Updike's and the proposals that are made for the world from their art are neither neutral nor the same.

d. Art claims differing levels of participation. Because art operates at many levels, it also requires various kinds of participation.¹¹⁷ There must first be that 'willing suspension of disbelief' of which the romantics spoke; but that is only a first step. It may, however, be enough to get us to try the experience of the work. "Try it; you'll like it" we say. "Don't be judgmental; let yourself go." In encouraging someone to experience a work of art, we are anticipating that they will become enough a part of the piece to entertain the world that it enacts and proposes.

The spectrum of affective, cognitive, and conative participation depends upon the history of the participant and upon the history of the work of art itself. If as Gadamer points out, a work of art has created its own history of interpretation in a culture, then we will encounter it with some conditions already fulfilled.¹¹⁸ For example, nineteenth century impressionist paintings function in the cultural history of the United States in such a way that entry into their particular vision of the world is easier than it was for the French academic painters of a century and a half ago.

Part of the participation is clearly the witness of which Ricoeur speaks. The participant takes on the world proposed by the work, testifies existentially to its truth and furthers the conditions in the world that may make such an envisaged world possible. The artwork itself becomes the guide, however. The indications in a painting or a symphony direct the desires and judgments of the participant. If the interpreter is an intellectually differentiated person, he or she may be able to articulate the beliefs that emerge from the artwork. The musician who understands the sonata form can contribute to an understanding and judgment about why the particular piece of music evokes, invites or persuades to this particular way of being in the world. It is also conceivable that should this intelligence inform a musician's affect and skill, she or he might also play the music more brilliantly.

e. Art transforms us incrementally. Because the artwork gradually engages its participants, it slowly transforms the world at large. Each time one reads Joyce's *Ulysses*, one discovers further realms of meaning and further possibilities for the world. One works for the conditions that will permit the emergence of the world one has experienced in the art work into the wider world.

Interpretation of the text may produce a sense of the discontinuities between the past and present, a sense of the fissures that operated between classes, between sexes, or among nations. Art works do not always reveal harmony, nor do they always disclose unity. The concrete modes of production can be analyzed as part of the conditions that permitted this particular work of art. If there remains the transforming world-view, if the fissures are not the total explanation of the piece, then there may remain an artwork with its transforming world. One can continue to analyze into what further horizons the art work is calling one. And in the greatest works of art, the kind we call classics, there remains the mysterious, though

¹¹⁷See my "The 'Bent World': Sacrament as Orthopraxis," *Proceedings of the CTSA* 35 (1980) 88-101.

¹¹⁸Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 267-341.

inescapable, sense that no matter how many times we see them, hear them, or touch them, they will continue to disclose further worlds in which we can live.

2. *The sacraments as socially transformative.* David Power has used Ricoeur's work to show us how the sacraments can be understood as socially transformative. I would agree, but as should be clear by now, I have questions to raise about the ontology that animates Ricoeur's positions on language and art. The schematic remarks above should lead toward a more empirically based philosophy of art that helps to explain some of the very elements in art that Ricoeur describes. Just as art leads us into a new world gradually through its participative structures, so sacrament is not only a contrasting, overturning metaphor for our daily lives. They seduce us by their sights and sounds into participation; they confirm what is good, building upon it, and they overturn what is idolatrous and narcissist.

Although the sacraments use poetic images and symbols of earth and sky, they are an epistemic rhetoric, a way of knowing that involves the establishment of an audience.¹¹⁹ Some of the structures of a work of art, therefore, apply to the Christian sacraments, but only in the context of the larger issues of rhetoric.

a. *The sacraments are symbols of freedom.* The Christian sacraments are not neutral images in a perpetual flow. They lead us toward self-transcendence. As vehicles of meaning, they embody in their ritual activity as well as in the stories that dialectically reinforce that behavior the self-sacrificing death and exaltation of Christ. They are an elemental patterning of sensibility. For example, a comparison can be made of the meaning between the eating and drinking that is paradigmatic of Christian Eucharist and the sitting (*zazen*) that is the root-metaphor of Zen.¹²⁰ The natural, social, economic and political symbolism of eating and drinking gains a specific history in Jesus of Nazareth's assumption of its values in his own life. By our sharing in that food, we enter a free space in which we try out the truths and values disclosed in table friendship among sinners, equals before a forgiving God.

b. *The sacraments are carriers of all levels of meaning.*¹²¹ The sacraments are not things, but actions; not texts to be performed, but participative events. As such, they embody a whole range of cognitive, affective, and conative elements that convey the meaning of Christ. Affectively, they negotiate the awe and dread that faces the divine; cognitively, they declare certain dimensions of ultimacy; constitutively they function to establish and pass on a religious tradition. Those who participate in them are moving toward grace and away from sin.

¹¹⁹Among the many works on contemporary rhetoric, see Celeste Condit Railsback, "Beyond Rhetorical Relativism: A Structural Material Model of Truth and Objective Reality," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69 (1983) 170-86; Robert L. Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Central States Speech Journal* 18 (1967) 9-17; and *idem*, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic: Ten Years Later," *Central States Speech Journal* 27 (1976) 258-66.

¹²⁰Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1982) 87-113.

¹²¹For a fuller exposition, see my "The Sacraments: Symbols that Redirect our Desires," in *Desires of the Human Spirit*, ed. Vernon Gregson (New York: Paulist, forthcoming).

The "we" that operates in sacramental life is quite distinct, for example. Ritualized language limits our ordinary open-ended conversation and demands asceticism. When as a congregation we allow one among us to speak to God in our name, we are permitting and encouraging a collaborative endeavor that is quite extraordinary in our world. We do not trust politicians; we go for second opinions from doctors; and we think our society over-litigated because of lawyers. But in the sacraments, some of us can say "we" without much hesitation. The free space opened for us by the absolute horizon of God's mystery enables us to develop a partial, though real common language. This collaborative dialogue becomes the locus for God's dialogue with us.

c. The sacraments declare the way the world is and the way it can be. There is a certain shock of recognition when as participants in the sacraments we know their truth. We can rest in the world created by the sacramental actions and words. We know we are "at home." This is the case if the relevant existential, intellectual and evaluative questions about our relationship with God's world have been satisfied.

The sacraments are not the arrival of reign of God, but they are its partial appearance. As partial, they also declare in a utopian fashion what the world and our relationship with God would look like if. . . . The sacraments have their own narrative structure, pedagogically leading us toward the truth and the good of Christ. In the foreground, we see sinners congregating, loving one another; at the absolute horizon, we see the possibility of a community of self-sacrificing lovers. Part of the truth of the sacraments continues to be their ability to create the conditions in our world that make their celebration a reality.

d. There are many levels of participation in the sacraments. The minimalist entry into sacramental life was described classically as "doing what the church intends" and "not placing an obstacle" in the way of divine action.¹²² The maximalist condition was to say that unless explicitly converting faith and the appropriate ecclesiastical doctrines were adhered to, one could not participate. If we are to grant the sacraments their layers of multiple meaning and efficacy, then we must say that there is a wide spectrum of participation between the minimal and maximal positions. Some may entertain the sacraments with only a modest suspension of disbelief; others may be in contemplative and mystical communion with God. The symbols permit multiple levels of participative entry.

Some witness to the sacramental event is required. One's own transformation is one of the necessary conditions for participation, however minimal. For those who witness to the truth discovered in the sacraments, there is the work of furthering the conditions of sacramental life in the world. If the person who participates is an intellectually differentiated person, she or he may be able to articulate the Christian beliefs or doctrines that emerge from the world of the sacraments. That person's responsibility may be to explain to others why the sacraments work as they do.

e. The sacraments work incrementally to transform us. Since the sacraments gradually engage us from our youth through old age, from the obtuseness of our sin and ignorance to the clarity of grace and the gifts of understanding and wis-

¹²²*Summa Theologiae*, III, 64, 8-10; III, 68, 7-9.

dom, they can change the world at large slowly. We return to the Eucharist not only because it tells us about a world that could be ours, but because by celebrating that Eucharist, we become the world we would like to be. The more open we are to a new reading of the text of the Eucharist, the more we will participate in that world's emergence.

Part of the reason the sacraments work incrementally is that they also reflect the distortions of our ordinary communication. They do not always reveal our harmony or our unity. Sometimes the disparity between the goal and our modest embodiment is greater than their identity. So we need to analyze the concrete modes of production that have affected our sacramental expression. We can look at the lack of women's presence in presbyteral roles in Roman Catholic worship and ask why? We can ask whether daily concelebration in male monastic houses is motivated by community affection or stipends? We can look at the illuminated books of hours and devotional texts from the late middle ages and analyze the social, political and economic conditions that limited reading to a small elite. The fissures that mark our sacramental disabilities should invite us toward sorrow, a mourning for an old personal and communal self that must be let go to take on further embodiment of Christian freedom.

Contemporary Christian worship cannot operate from an outdated aesthetics that either nostalgically consecrates the past as past or understands art as self-referential—a sacraments for sacraments sake aesthetics. Nor should the sacraments be turned into tools for an ideology of right or left wing propaganda. The objective of contemporary sacramental theology should be to create dialogically honest communities, where there is systemically undistorted communication, honest dialogue and conversation, communal judgment and non-violent persuasion.

Richard Bernstein quotes Wittgenstein as saying: "The way of solving the problem you see in life is to live in a way that will make what is problematic disappear."¹²³ It is my contention that participation in the Christian sacraments allows us to live, however, gradually, however momentarily, the linguistic history we would like to make for ourselves—and that by taking up the symbolic presence of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in a ritual fashion, we become the history that we and God make for the world.

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¹²³Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 273 as cited in Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 1983) xv. I am indebted in my formulation of certain ideas in this essay to conversations with my colleague Professor James Robertson Price III.