

SACRAMENTS AS LITURGY OF THE CHURCH

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THE PHENOMENON of liturgy may be described as the way in which the global perception of the life of faith that impregnates and structures the lives of individual believers and their life in common is expressed in their particular way of celebrating their new life in Christ. As such, liturgy brings to the surface the mystery of the Church of Christ, in order that it may be lived more consciously and explicitly in the social dimension of the life of faith. But it is not unrelated to the daily life of faith. For the affirmation of one's fidelity to God, to self, and to others in this communal setting furnishes the support to maintain that fidelity in the whole of one's life.

When we speak of sacraments "as liturgy," this does not mean that they are ritual forms of sanctification "in liturgy" which could, absolutely speaking, be employed outside of a liturgical context. Rather, sacraments fall into the category of liturgy. In these celebrations all that goes to make up the life of faith of the Christian communion is expressed in various degrees of symbolic intensity. Consequently it is of the highest importance that sacraments, which support and maintain the identity of the Christian communion, be correctly practiced and interpreted.

What sacraments manifest and realize is the Church in its deepest being, namely the communion of life between the Father and humankind in Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which entails sharing of life of faith between those who participate in the mystery of the shared Trinitarian life. It is this understanding of sacrament that grounds the Catholic Church's self-identification as the "Church of the sacraments." Sacraments are constitutive elements of the Catholic Church to the extent that without them the Catholic Church would cease to exist. But these forms of liturgy, just as any other form of liturgy, are effective as means of a communication which supposes an active receptivity. This explains why the magisterium endeavors to foster a practice that corresponds to the nature of sacraments, and theological reflection that contributes to better understanding and renewal of practice.

On the other hand, the practice and theology of the sacraments that can claim the authority of tradition are viewed as sources of theological knowledge by Catholic systematic theologians. This helps to explain why, during the greater part of the last seven centuries, most Catholic theo-

logians have manifested little interest in a critical rethinking of the common theology of the sacraments inherited from early and high scholasticism and approved by the magisterium. The situation has become more stagnant since the 16th century. For those aspects of sacramental theology which were made the subject of definition at the Council of Trent were conceived and explicated from the background of the inherited scholastic synthesis. Through the next two centuries, whatever newness could be assigned to Catholic theology of sacraments consisted mainly in the discovery of *tendencies* in the doctrinal statements of the Council of Trent which could, on that account, be raised to a very high theological status.

For reasons which cannot be discussed here, the turning point in the history of post-Tridentine Catholic sacramental theology, which marks the beginning of the end of the narrow neo-scholastic synthesis, came in the last century. This history up to the latter part of the 20th century has yet to be written. But salient features can be mentioned.

The 19th-century achievement, the seemingly modest broadening of the notion of sacrament to include the Catholic Church, passed relatively unnoticed until the middle of the 20th century. In the meantime the application of the concept "sacramental" to all aspects of the liturgy was already underway in the first half of this century, along with the rediscovery and reception of the patristic theology of the mystery presence of Christ and his saving work in the sacraments. Since the middle of this century further developments of the understanding of the Church as sacrament, implications of the active presence of Christ in the sacraments, as well as the systematic application of newer findings of almost all branches of theology, have been forthcoming. Even a brief description of the names and special contributions of individuals, however interesting, would take us too far afield. Since this essay is not about the history of sacramental theology, it suffices to observe only that the new insights, new accents, and new starting points have paved the way for a new systematic theology of the sacraments.

The creation of a new systematic theology of the sacraments, comparable to that attained in the high scholastic period, remains as yet a project to be achieved. Nevertheless, we can ask: What is at the heart of the new orientation? What can be identified as the core of the newer approach that requires a reinterpretation of all the traditional themes of sacramental theology and their application to each of the sacraments? In short, what is a sacrament insofar as this concept is applicable *in an analogous way* to the traditional sacraments of the Church? More than one answer has been given already to this question, and they deserve serious consideration. However, my intention is not to offer a critical

assessment of representative responses. Rather, the subject of this essay is my own response.

In the following pages more recent contributions are analyzed with a view to showing why and how they contribute to a new view of the way in which the sacraments function in the Church's life of faith. These include the theology of grace as God's self-communication, Christ as primordial sacrament, the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the sacramental nature of the Church, the dialogical structure of the sacramental celebrations, the relation of faith to sacraments, and the essence of faith in its Christological dimension. These themes are not treated separately, one after the other, but integrated systematically in a presentation that begins with what is most accessible: the Church and the concrete sacramental celebrations. The Christological and pneumatological dimensions are then introduced. This paves the way for a clarification of the efficacy of the sacraments as offer of divine grace. The other aspect of the sacramental saving event follows, namely the sanctification of the subject in whose favor the celebration takes place. Finally, the existence of sacraments is explained from faith understood as participation in the mystery of Christ through the personal mission of the Holy Spirit.

SACRAMENTS AS ACTS OF THE CHURCH

The meaning of the theological statement that sacraments are acts of the Church in dependence on Christ has been conceived in two ways in modern Catholic theology. Theologians who lean on the traditional scholastic theology explain the matter as follows. The "essential rites" of sacraments are acts of Christ accomplished through his minister in the Church. They are qualified as acts of the Church because the presiding minister of the sacrament represents Christ the head of the Church, and therefore the Church of which Christ is the head. The accent is placed on the Christological dimension of sacraments, and ecclesiology enters by the back door, or is equivalently absorbed into Christology.

A second approach begins with the idea that the "essential rites" express the faith of the Church of which Christ is the head. Therefore these rites are attributed to Christ insofar as he is, along with the Holy Spirit, the source of the Church's activity. In the logic of this viewpoint, commonplace in modern Eastern theology, the presiding minister of the sacrament represents the Church of which Christ is the head, and therefore Christ the head of the Church. Here the ecclesiological dimension is not short-circuited; it is emphasized. This theological outlook guards against the tendency of scholastic theology toward an exclusively Christological interpretation, which was carried through in classical Reformation theology.

Today Catholic theologians are more inclined to follow the approach of Eastern theology, which signals a return to the patristic outlook. In the ancient Church the faithful of the community engaged in liturgy by recognizing the charisms of the presiding minister for witness of faith and appropriateness of the prayer. This inclusion of the community reflects a pneumatological and charismatic understanding of liturgy. Here it is not simply a matter of recognizing the spiritual gifts of the minister. Rather, the community intervenes, not in the line of the power of the minister, but in the line of charisms, thanks to which the people are enabled to praise God and express the faith of the Church.

In the high scholastic period sacraments are linked most directly to Christology. Naturally the ecclesiological aspect is introduced always. The sacraments are called *sacramenta ecclesiae*. But the notion of "church" (*ecclesia*) is employed in a more general, abstract, dogmatic sense. Here the intervention of the Church is conceived along juridical lines. The ordained minister, who has the power to represent the Church, is the focus of attention.

This point of view, which continued down to the 20th century, takes the form of this thesis: By reason of the sacramental character, the ordained priest participates in the priesthood of Christ, and so acts *in persona Christi* in all sacramental activity. For the same reason he also acts *in persona ecclesiae* in all public worship as the organ by which the Mystical Body of Christ prays and professes her faith. This Thomist thesis, in documents of the modern Roman magisterium, is often presented in this way: The priest acts in *nomine ecclesiae* in cultic acts because he first acts *in persona Christi*, the head of the Church. When referring to the general pastoral charge, however, *in nomine Christi* seems to be preferred.

The new ecclesiological turn has brought with it a new starting point for the theology of ordained ministry which sheds light on the ecclesial aspect of sacraments. It is the notion that such ministries are established for the building up of the Church. Permanent ministries include the presidency at sacramental celebrations. Ordination equips the minister to preside at sacraments in which the whole community is the integral subject. The presiding minister is like an icon, the representative of Christ. He serves as transparency for Christ with respect to the object of his ministry and in view of the charisms received from the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Body of Christ. But he is also representative of the liturgical community. As minister of Christ the high priest, and minister of the priestly people, he merits the title "priest."

At the level of the visible celebration the priest, as head of the local church, acts *in nomine ecclesiae*, since the fixed prayers approved by the

Church are a profession of faith of the Church. This is what is denoted in the liturgical celebration. But as head of the local church the priest is servant of Christ through the Spirit who creates the Church's ministries. Hence in his official capacity the priest connotes, for the eyes of faith, the activity of Christ working through the Spirit. In this sense the priest can be said to act *in persona Christi per Spiritum* and, incidentally, be described as participating in the Spirit of the priesthood of Christ. This latter idea guards against the possibility of an overdrawn identification of the priest with Christ. For the other idea, that the priest "participates in the priesthood of Christ," needs to be qualified lest the impression be given that the ministerial priest actually participates ontologically in the personal, incommunicable priesthood of the man Jesus Christ. So from different standpoints one can say either that the priest represents the Church because he first represents Christ, or represents Christ because he first represents the Church. This notion will seem contradictory only to those who are insensitive to the various levels of signification of sacramental rites.

One example of the application of this new understanding is the explanation of the function of the narrative of institution of the Eucharistic Prayer, which marks a return to the theology of the Roman Canon itself. Here the trait of prayer of the narrative of institution, inserted into the Roman Canon, is quite evident. Through the additions of *ad te Deum Patrem* and *tibi gratias agens* the narrative of institution is directed to the Father, showing the intention of the liturgical assembly to enter into the sacrificial prayer of Jesus himself.

But if the sacraments are acts of the Church, what is meant by "church"? Scholastic theology answers the question in this way: Sacraments are acts of the universal communion in the first place, and so acts of the local communion which forms a part of the universal communion. This is a logical conclusion from the more basic premise that sacraments are acts of Christ the head of the universal communion which take place through the presiding minister, his representative in the local liturgical assembly. Through the representative function of the priest the universal Church is, by her "daily intention," made a participant in the concrete local sacramental celebration.

Eastern theology, on the other hand, conceives sacramental celebrations as acts of the local communion, and representing the universal communion because acts of the local communion. This means that the local communion is not only a representative of the broader communion, but is the communion itself. The whole communion does not simply stand behind the local communion, but exists concretely in the local communion. In Catholic theology today there is a strong tendency to

favor the Eastern view, which is not foreign to the ancient Western tradition.

Support for the newer ecclesiological accent in sacramental theology is derived from the implications of the more recent explication of the institution of sacraments. We now turn to this subject.

Implications of Modern View of Institution of Sacraments

This modern Catholic theory of institution of sacraments represents not only a new accent but a different way of conceiving institution as compared with that of Catholic theology of the post-Tridentine period.

It has been the common position of Catholic theology from the 16th century to modern times that the teaching of the Council of Trent on the subject of institution of the sacraments implies immediate institution of the *substantia sacramentorum* by Christ by a juridical act. This means that, in the case of all sacraments, Christ instituted at least the specific sacramental grace to be signified. The only basic difference of opinion concerned whether Christ instituted the essential rites of all sacraments: the essential words and symbolic actions. Therefore it was assumed that sacraments were given to the Church by a word of the historical Jesus during his earthly life, or in some cases by the risen Lord before his ascension.

The thesis that all sacraments are grounded on a special revelation made by Jesus Christ to the apostles was made equivalently a canon within canon 1 of Trent's *sessio* 7, which defined that the seven sacraments were instituted by "Jesus Christ our Lord." While this theory corresponds to a part of the traditional scholastic theology of the 13th century, it is not supported by the tradition of the united Church of the first millennium. Also, there is no proof from the acts of Trent that the council intended to condemn a Franciscan theory about mediate institution of confirmation and the sacrament of the sick. Moreover, in the light of the findings of modern scriptural exegesis, and the modern historical investigation of the development of these sacraments, the theory of immediate institution by a historical word of Jesus Christ meets with insuperable difficulties.

Historical-critical exegesis has at least shown how difficult it is to prove that the earliest communities based the institution of the Eucharist on a juridical command of the historical Jesus. In the case of baptism the classical text, Mt 28:19-20, contains the promise of the risen Lord to be present to the Church until the end of time, a promise of his personal presence associated with the mandate to baptize. In this case mandate and promise, which constitute institution, can hardly be reduced to a historical institutional word, a kind of juridical act of the earthly Jesus.

Therefore this raises the question about the requirement of such historical words in the case of other sacraments. In addition, the idea of the promise of the risen Lord to be actively present to his Church points to a deeper understanding of the sacramental nature of all essential activities of the Church. The quality of ecclesial blessings with which the Church associates the mediation of grace must be raised, also by those Reformation theologians who have overcome the juridical concept of institution.

What we know of the history of the practice of the seven sacraments clearly favors a newer approach to the institution question. However, a detailed consideration of this subject is precluded here. Only some brief remarks on systematic theological grounds for excluding the thesis of immediate institution, in the scholastic sense, can be introduced.

It is much more credible to situate the origin of the sacraments in that phase of the economy of salvation in which, through the mission of the Holy Spirit, the disciples accepted through faith their incorporation into the Church of the risen Lord. In this salvation-history perspective it is the Church that comes before her essential acts. The Church of the apostles was conscious that she was the completion of what Jesus had begun during his public ministry, and charged with the mission of extending the saving work of Jesus to all humanity. Naturally the Church found in the ministry of the historical Jesus ways of expressing her mystery as the abiding presence of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work in space and time. In the remembrance of Jesus' words and works, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and at different times and places, the Church discovered appropriate ways to manifest and realize herself as the Body of Christ (baptism-confirmation and Eucharist) and to establish ministry of leadership in a way that corresponds to the sacramental nature of the Church (orders), ways that are fitting and necessary for the life of faith of the individual (penance, sacrament of the sick) and for individuals entering into the married state (matrimony).

As a rule, modern Catholic theology formulates the question of the institution of sacraments by Christ from the background of the Augustinian concept of sacrament as visible form of invisible grace. In this sense Christ himself is the prototype of sacrament. The Church, on the other hand, is sacrament as fruit of salvation: the social situation of the abiding presence of Jesus Christ. As such, the Church is the place where salvation is offered to humanity in a visible way, in the scope of the community of the new people of God. Sacraments are, therefore, to be understood as ways in which the Church actualizes herself as a sacramental reality.

Whoever accepts the understanding of Christ as primordial sacrament, and the Church as a kind of root sacrament from which spring various

sacramental acts, will not find it necessary to search for a word of the historical Jesus to secure the institution of all sacraments. Rather, it will suffice to know that the Church is the sign of salvation, the historical form of appearance of the permanence of God's promise of self in Jesus Christ.

This new view overcomes the weakness of the theory that only those activities can be qualified as sacraments for which an explicit mandate in Scripture is found. At the same time it highlights the promise of the presence of the risen Lord as the grounds for sacramental status of various forms of blessings. Finally, it secures the rightful place of ecclesiology between Christology and sacraments in a systematic theology.

Sacraments as Self-Actualizations of the Church

According to the modern insight into the manner of institution, sacraments are ways by which the Church, under the influence of the Spirit, fulfils her mission in obedience to Christ by being true to her nature. Individual sacraments, as functions of the life of the Church herself, actualize the sacramental reality of the Church. But the Church actualizes herself by expressing her nature as community of faith. The Church, as sign of the unity of God with humanity and the social instrument of that unity, expresses herself by actualizing her life of faith in preaching, liturgy, and service of the neighbor. Always it is the one life of faith that is actualized, although this happens in ways that are peculiar to service of the neighbor, preaching, and liturgy.

In the sacraments, which are a form of liturgy, the life of faith of the ecclesial communion is represented. In these celebrations the community reflects her awareness of being the community of salvation and organ of communication of salvation to the world. This self-awareness is manifested very explicitly by the expression of confidence that the community's worship of God is acceptable, and that the petition for grace is assured of a hearing because of the divine promise.

Sacraments are not to be construed as derived from a special revelation of the historical Jesus, nor are they primarily a means of handing on revelation. Rather, they are the social expression of the response of faith to the word of revelation: the word of promise of the presence of the risen Lord and the Spirit of God to the community, and in the community for the "many" called to share in salvation. In brief, the "sacraments of faith" are a form of the answering self-offering of the Church to God bound up with her prayer of petition and accompanying symbolic actions, made for the salvation of individuals.

Sacraments manifest and realize the Church as community for God (doxological communion) and for humanity (organ of sanctification). In

the sacraments the response in faith to the word of revelation, the word of promise, can only be that of the self-offering of the community to receive the promise of salvation, and to petition for the sanctification of those in whose favor the celebration takes place. Even when the so-called essential form of the sacraments is not expressed as a petition, but as an authoritative pronouncement that grace is being offered, the formula should be understood as an expression of the Church's desire for the subject in whose favor the celebration takes place. As act of the Church, really distinguished though unseparated from that of Christ, what else could it be?

SACRAMENTS AS ACTS OF CHRIST

For the eyes of faith, what is connoted by the sacramental celebration of the Church is the activity of Christ. In short, the sacramental celebrations serve, for the eyes of faith, as transparency for what Christ is doing together with the Church, united to but distinguished from the ecclesial communion.

Christ is united to the Church, not identified with the Church. Hence the acts of the Church cannot be identified simply as acts of Christ. Rather, the acts of the Church are ways in which there is the possibility for the members of the Church to be united with the activity of Christ under the conditions of history. Despite the distinction, however, Scripture, as well as the whole authentic tradition, affirms a unique immediacy of Christ to the Church. This is implied in the language of head and body, or spouse and bride. But what is the ground for this unique immediacy of Christ to the Church, and the distance between Christ and the Church?

The turn in Catholic theology to a more personal concept of grace has brought with it a clearer response to this question. The Holy Spirit is now more explicitly identified as the bond of unity between Christ and the Church. In other words, the immediacy of Christ to the individual believers, and through them in the community as such, is not that of the immediacy of two persons to one another through a third person who stands between them. The Holy Spirit is not a bridge between Christ and the Church.

When we think about the immediacy of Christ's presence to believers, and through them in the community, the tendency to a Monophysitic and Nestorian conception must be avoided. On the one hand, an immediacy must be maintained without this implying the absorption of believers into Christ by overdrawn identity. On the other hand, the distance between Christ and believers must be affirmed, but not at the cost of denial of immediacy. The correct perspective is given by the introduction

of pneumatology. The Holy Spirit, whom Christ possesses in fulness, was sent by him from the Father to form believers into the Church. Hence the same Spirit in Christ and in the communion of believers enables the immediacy of Christ to believers, and yet an immediacy that is mediated.

Because of the immediacy of Christ to the Church in the one Spirit, and because the Church is the body of which Christ is the head, what the Church does serves as transparency for what Christ does in and through the Church. What the Church is inspired to do by the Spirit, who always refers the Church to Christ her head, corresponds to what Christ is doing in and through the Church. If the Church in the sacramental celebration is revealed as the worshiping community, adding her appeal to God for the benefit of the one in whose favor the celebration takes place, then Christ himself is revealed as the one who worships the Father and petitions for the sanctification of the subject of the sacrament.

When we move from below, as it were, from the activity of the Church, to gain some understanding of how the corresponding activity of Christ is to be conceived, a valuable insight is furnished that helps to correct a one-sided view of Christ as sacrament of the Father's love for humanity, sacrament of sanctification. The Church can be described, as we have seen, as sacrament of the redeemed human love of the Father (sacrament of glorification) and as social instrument of salvation: the sacrament of the redeemed human love of all the children of the one Father (sacrament of sanctification).

Since the Church is "in Christ" this kind of sacrament, manifesting and realizing the mission of Christ in and through history, we have to think about Christ as sacrament in this twofold way. In the sacramental celebrations of the Church, Christ is revealed for the eyes of faith as sacrament of the divine-human love of the Father (glorification) and sacrament of the divine-human love of humanity (sanctification). In other words, Christ is revealed as he revealed himself during his earthly mission: worshiper of the Father in the first place, and lover of humanity for the sake of the Father.

It is not to be overlooked that this way of conceiving the active presence of Christ in the sacraments is reminiscent of the old Greek patristic theology which locates the mystery of the sacraments in the presence of the saving acts of Christ. This theology has a good name in Catholic theology today. But the question of how this presence is to be understood is disputed. One answer is given in the last part of this essay.

Because of the unity between Christ and the Church, the mediated immediacy made possible by the one Spirit of Christ, the sacramental celebrations of the Church, root sacrament, are efficacious signs of Christ, primordial sacrament in both senses. This said, however, there still

remains the further question: Does this suffice to describe how the liturgical activity of the ecclesial communion is personally associated with the active presence of Christ and his saving mysteries? A response to this question, too, is given in the last section of this essay. In the meantime we turn to the traditional theme of the efficacy of sacraments.

EFFICACY OF THE SACRAMENTS AS ACTS OF CHURCH AND CHRIST

The sacramental celebration, the symbolic action and accompanying verbal formula, represents objectively the faith of the Church in God's promise of fidelity to His people. God's promise is represented in word and act as unbreakable—a free promise bound up with the placing of the sacramental celebration in accord with the sense of the Church.

Concretely, this promise is represented in the liturgy in the form of the prayer of the Church made to the Father through the incarnate Son in the Holy Spirit, with absolute confidence in God's fidelity. In other words, what is represented in the sacramental celebration is the confident response to the promise which the Lord gave to the Church of absolute certainty of a hearing when the community of faith prays in the name of Jesus. The absolute certainty of a hearing when the prayer is made in the name of Jesus implies that the prayer is integrated into the prayer of the one *mediator who is always heard*.

On the ground of the prayer of the Church, made in union with that of Christ, and the promise given with the establishment of the Church as organ of salvation, the sacramental action can be said to have its effect, i.e. it serves as transparency for the action of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit offering salvation to the one in whose favor the celebration takes place. The prayer of the Church through, with, and in Christ to the Father for the Holy Spirit is the way in which the offer of salvation is given visibility. The response of the Church is not the offer of salvation but the way in which the offer is proclaimed in the Church.

The offer of salvation is the precondition for the response. In other words, it is an offer that informs the prayerful response as its vital source. But if the community responds to the offer of sacramental grace by her petition for the particular subject, how does the subject in whose favor the celebration takes place participate in the sacramental event of communication of grace?

INCLUSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT IN THE OPUS OPERATUM

In the celebration of a sacrament the participants of a liturgical assembly, as the concrete realization of the communion of those on whom Christ bestows himself and who share in the life of faith with one another, are inserted in the *opus operatum*. They are in the "work worked" insofar

as they make the sacramental prayer their own and identify with the sacramental action. The same can be said about the subject in whose favor the celebration takes place, on the ground of that person's active whole faith.

This favored subject of the celebration is drawn into the upward movement of the prayer of the Church and thereby into the self-offering of the communion, which has as its goal the active reception of God's self-communication. The sacramental celebration has an anabatic orientation in its external form. Through it the assembly responds to realize itself as worshipping community at prayer on behalf of an individual. The subject for whom the sacrament is celebrated can do no less than engage in this movement, agree with the prayer of the Church, and respond freely by offering self to receive the meaning of life from the divine source.

The response of faith of the individual, the *fides qua creditur*, is not merely a presupposition for obtaining a needed grace. It is also the free acceptance of God's grace. God's turning toward human beings is always at work enabling the possibility of the basic attitude of love and self-surrender to become a reality. Where the possible basic attitude of love becomes a reality through the response of faith, the event of sanctification, of communion with God, is realized.

The act of faith by which one accepts the promise recalled in the sacrament under the form of confident prayer of the Church is the realization of the promise of God's self-communication. It is not as though the faith of the individual stands in relation to the sacrament as forerunner to a fulfilment.

The sacrament is not something objectively presented to be accepted by faith. The relation of faith to sacrament should not be conceived on the model of faith understood as the ability to assent to a doctrine of the Church. Faith as the acceptance of the liturgical announcement of the divine presence *pro me* has a place in the celebration of a sacrament. But the relation between faith and sacrament does not stop here. Much less does the faith of the individual stand before the sacrament merely to hear a word that promises God's saving presence will be found in the particular situation of life symbolically represented. Sacraments are not, in the first place, a form of preaching of the word of God, and the activity of the faith cannot be reduced to the acceptance of God's grace by hearing that word, together with the confident expectation of divine help in daily life. Rather, the sacrament is a form of worship of God.

This does not mean, however, that the sacrament provides the opportunity for the subject merely to express thanksgiving for what God has already done. The purpose of sacraments is not to provide the occasion

for affirming in the liturgical assembly, by a delayed reaction, what has already come to pass. The understanding of communal worship behind this interpretation, which reduces worship to the fulfilment of a natural-law obligation to give due honor to God, forms part of the tradition of scholastic and Reformation theology. It has provided a major obstacle in the quest for a new theology of sacraments in both traditions.

The act of worship is not to be conceived in the first place along juridical lines as the way of fulfilling a natural-law obligation, but as the way in which God's grace is accepted. Sacraments, as acts of worship, enable the communion and the individual subject to accept God's offer of self-communication. In the sacrament the communion is, as it were, in the background, supporting the principal actor, the subject for whom the celebration is held. The communion has the role of supplying the context in which the subject is enabled to respond to God's offer of grace. Hence the celebration of the sacrament appears to be a means of grace in the sense of a means of disposing the subject for the full acceptance of the grace being offered and symbolically represented.

From this consideration a tentative response can be given to the question: Why do sacraments exist? Faith as the act of acceptance of God's self-communication, the realization of the basic attitude of self-offering to God to receive the meaning of one's life from God, is given the opportunity for an offering that embraces the whole person in an especially intensive and extensive way because of the expressiveness of the sacramental celebration. But the idea that sacraments exist because faith exists needs to be deepened, as will be seen. For now, a word is in order concerning the specific efficacy of sacraments, the specific sacramental grace associated with each sacrament.

The active participation of the subject in whose favor the sacrament is celebrated signals the present commitment to following the demands of the gospel as this relates to particular situations of the life of faith that is symbolized. Therefore sacraments are a form of practice of the life of faith. At the same time, sacraments proclaim that the commitment to this life of faith is not without the necessary divine support. Hence the turning to God by the community of faith to receive from God for itself and for the particular member featured in the celebration is not merely the expression of a desire based on the experience of human weakness. First and foremost it is a confession of the way in which God represents self in relation to the earthly community of believers, i.e. as promise. This turning of God to human beings is the offer of grace here and now. For promise is the form in which God comes now, and not simply how God will communicate self in the kingdom beyond history.

The promise of God to provide the help needed to meet the demands

of the situation of the life of faith that is celebrated in the sacrament is already experienced as grounding the present commitment of the subject. It is this experience that ultimately grounds scholastic theology's thesis concerning the specific grace of the sacrament.

According to scholastic theology, the grace of the sacrament is not simply a self-communication of God without relation to the daily life of faith. Rather, it is a self-communication (*gratia sanctificans*) which carries with it a specific sacramental grace (*gratia propria*) proper to each sacrament, proportionate to the purpose of each sacrament. But scholastic theology also teaches that the bestowal of this special grace is conditioned by, and proportioned to, the active participation of the individual in the sacrament by faith. This implies that the effect proper to the sacrament is extended to daily life in the measure of the activity of the faith of the individual.

THE MYSTERY OF THE FAITH OF CHRISTIANS

The faith of Christians, the *fides qua creditur*, has its source in the spiritual presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit. For this faith is the form of life in which the hidden Christ is grasped by the Christian in the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that Christ becomes the principle of one's life. The idea that Christ is active in the individual and by extension in the corporate life of believers introduces the theme of the mystery presence of Christ as Savior. It is the great merit of Dom Odo Casel to have recaptured the authentic tradition of the Church concerning the presence of Christ and his saving acts in the whole range of life of faith, in its individual and corporate dimensions.

When this subject is taken up in relation to sacraments of the Church, a distinction between the two modes of presence is frequently introduced that favors the liturgical mode. It is said that Christ's presence is realized "especially" in the sacraments, or that the sacraments are the "most intense" form of this presence, etc. This view often comes as a surprise to believers. For everyone knows that the most important presence for the individual is Christ's presence in the individual by faith, and the most intense experience of this presence may occur in private prayer and not in liturgy. This seemingly exaggerated description of the liturgical mode of presence is often justified by referring to the expressiveness of the liturgical mode of this presence.

Are the sacraments not a form of ecclesial expression of the divine promise that the sphere of possibilities of the basic human attitudes, assumed by the incarnate Word, are filled with the saving work of God in Christ drawing believers to God's self? And are they not grounded on the unshakable belief that Christ is actively present in the Spirit enabling

the assent of faith in accord with his promise to be with his Church? There is, however, a further question to be asked in a systematic theological analysis which has to do with the Christological dimension of the assent of faith itself.

It is taken for granted in Catholic theology that the principle of understanding is the relation of one aspect of the economy of salvation to all the others—and not only the fact of the relation but the ground for the relation. If the mystery of Christ is intimately related to the *fides qua*, so that it is somehow the source of activity of the faith and somehow actualized in that activity, how is one to explain that the one is there in the other?

The answer to this question furnishes the answer to another question: Why are the sacraments a special mode of presence of the mystery of Christ that not only serves the individual's faith but also, and in the first place, enables full integration of believers into the mystery of Christ?

When the relationship of Christian faith to the mystery of Christ is discussed, the question of the faith of Christ himself should be introduced. The mystery of Christ is, on the one hand, the incarnation of the Son of the Father as the final, never to be surpassed expression of the Father's fidelity to His covenant with humanity. But the mystery of Christ also embraces the response of the incarnate Son to the fidelity of the Father.

As the consequence of this incarnation, there follows the incarnation of the Son's knowledge of and love for the Father. In his humanity the Son knows and loves the Father in the way that all humanity finds God and holds to God. Through the objective content of his consciousness he experiences his basic orientation to the Father, which yields knowledge of his special relation to the Father and the mystery of the Father's special love for him. This gives birth to his all-consuming love of the Father, the characteristic trait of Jesus according to the New Testament. The state of having this knowledge and love, which is called the life of faith, expresses itself in acts of the life of faith. By his human acts of faith the man Jesus responds to his own mystery, which is the mystery of the fidelity of the Father to His covenant with humanity.

The uniqueness of this man's life of faith in its twofold dimension is based on the fact that the personal principle is the unique Son of the Father. But he knows and loves in his humanity in virtue of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In the power of the Holy Spirit he knows by faith what he knows by divine knowledge in the inner-Trinitarian life; he loves in his humanity the only object of his love in the inner-Trinitarian life, i.e. the Father. It may also be added, for the sake of completeness, that because his love of the Father is incarnated in his humanity, it follows that the response of Jesus' love for the Father is

unique as distinguished from the love for the Father of those who have received the grace of Christ. This uniqueness consists in the "incarnation" of the substantial love of the Son for the Father in Christ's human love, i.e. the Holy Spirit.

The response of this man to the Father for what the Father has accomplished in him is the one acceptable response. It is a personal, incommunicable response of faith of his unique humanity for himself in the first place, but also for the "many." It has universal meaning because it is the response of the personality of God in his humanity: the response of the perfect man, which summarizes in itself and grounds the response of faith of all humanity.

In Jesus Christ both the incarnation of the fidelity of God and the perfect human response of faith come together. He is, in himself, the substantial covenant between God and humanity. Hence he anticipates in himself the new people of God. It is only by a participation in this mystery of Christ that one participates in the covenant between the Father and humanity. This means that Christ is not an intermediary instance between the Father and humanity. He is not a mediator who stands between God and sinful humanity as a kind of superior Moses. If Christ can be said to be the "mediator between God and humanity," he is this in himself as the sacrament of the divine-human love of the Father (glorification) and the sacrament of the divine-human love of humanity (sanctification).

The Christian participation in this substantial covenant takes place through a response of faith that is, in a certain sense, a participation in the faith of Christ. But this should not be conceived either as a mere subjective remembrance or as an ontological sharing that removes the difference. Here again the tendency to a Nestorian or Monophysitic view must be avoided. We can speak of a participation in the response of faith of Christ. In this way the believer grasps the faith of Christ and is thereby united to the incarnate Son, and in him with the Father. What explains both the immediacy of the believer to Christ and the distance is the Holy Spirit. As bond of unity between Christ and the believer, the Spirit provides the pneumatological link.

This participation in Christ's response of faith is given as the enduring gift in history to the Church. For the Church is the enduring communion of those who participate in Christ's response of faith to the Father, and thereby are united to Christ and share in the fidelity of the Father worked in him. The Church came into existence through the mission of the Holy Spirit, who formed the disciples into the communion. But this forging of the bond of communion was conditioned by their free response to the gift of faith bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Through their free response the

faith of the Church became historically accessible to others, and for all time.

The faith of the Church, just as that of the individual believer, stands in relation to the faith of Christ in two ways. It is a participation in Christ's response of faith, because the risen Lord is actually present in the Church realizing his relationality as the "man for others" to the faith of the Church. But there is also a pneumatological grounding that accounts for the intimate relation of the faith of the Church to that of Christ. The immediacy of the faith of the ecclesial communion to Christ is a mediated immediacy, in the sense that the Holy Spirit whom Christ possesses in fulness is shared with the communion. In the power of the Spirit the communion as such is enabled to respond to the object of Christ's act of faith, and really attain that object, i.e. the mystery of the incarnate fidelity of the Father.

The ecclesial communion participates in the mystery of the substantial covenant of God with humanity, the mystery of Christ, extended in history through the mission of the Spirit. The way in which the ecclesial communion manifests her mystery and realizes what is already possessed is by the witness of faith. For the life of faith of the ecclesial communion is not something different from the mystery of Christ, but the way of participation in that mystery.

The communal acts of faith of believers in the liturgical assembly are, as acts of the believing communion, the actualization of participation in the mystery of Christ. They are ways by which believers, as church, confess faith before God, or rather the abiding way in which the ecclesial communion, as mystery of Christ, confesses faith before God. Hence the faith of the Church does not stand before the mystery of Christ as a first step, and after the liturgical representation of the mystery, in an act of acceptance. And the mystery of Christ is not something that is represented in the midst of the communal acts of faith; it is represented by the communal acts themselves.

In the sacraments what is manifested and realized is the mystery of the Church, which is the mystery of participation in the response of the faith of Christ. It may be said that the sacraments are the place where the Church as communion meets the Father in the faith of Christ. But this does not mean that the mystery of Christ and his saving work is represented in the sacraments to be responded to in a second act by the community of faith. The sacramental celebration, as act of the faith of the Church, is itself the manifestation and actualization of the mystery of Christ.

Sacraments are ways in which the communion of believers expresses its common faith. As ritual acts of the faith of the Church, sacraments

are acts of worship. The heart of this worship is prayer, the indispensable performative form of the worship of the believing Church. Through this activity the mystery of the Father's love for humanity, represented in the mystery of Christ himself, is now represented as the participation of the liturgical community in this central event of salvation history. In other words, the believing community is shown to be the abiding historical presence of this mystery.

It can be said that sacraments exist because faith exists. But sacraments do not simply provide the opportunity for the individual, and the community as such, to respond to the sacrament conceived as a "model" exhibitiv word of God in the Church. Rather, the sacraments exist because the faith of the individual, and of the community as such, needs to express itself in these "model" ways of worship that correspond to the mystery of the faith and the Church's nature as the historical realization of the mystery of Christ's faith, which is the mystery of the covenant between the Father and humanity.

Naturally, the believing response of each member of the liturgical assembly is necessary for an active participation in the faith of the Church. In this way believers are united to the faith of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and so made sharers in, or more deeply inserted into, the mystery of the substantial covenant between the Father and humanity, as sons and daughters in the one unique Son.

SUMMARY

The modern Catholic orientation in the theology of sacrament as described here is an example of "reception" of the scholastic synthesis within a broader horizon of Scripture and the traditions of the universal communion of churches. The relativizing of the long-standing scholastic theology implies an understanding of the history of doctrine which starts from a view that was explicitly formulated by Vincent of Lérins in the fifth century, neglected in the post-Tridentine Catholic theology, and revived in the 19th century by John Henry Newman and others. According to this view, there is a progressive development of dogma in the direction of greater clarity. However, modern research into the history of doctrine has shown convincingly that epochal changes in culture and accompanying historical circumstances bring with them changes in the understanding of the faith. From the theological point of view, what remains constant is the object of faith (what is believed) and the corresponding act of faith. But the formulation changes in accord with the contemporary way of conceiving reality.

The modern Catholic approach to the theology of sacraments represents a break in the way of conceptualizing the meaning of the sacraments

that is characteristic of scholastic theology. This new way of understanding sacrament, explicated in this essay, can be more briefly formulated by showing how it reinterprets the scholastic reduction of the sacrament to this formula: a sacrament is an outward sign of the inward working of the grace signified, instituted by Jesus Christ.

The reinterpretation of the short formula requires that the sacraments as *outward signs* be understood as ecclesial symbolic actions, communicative actions of the communion, interpreted by the word of God or the promise of God. But an additional qualification is needed: the word of God is expressed in the form of prayer. Hence it is more precise to say: a sacrament is an ecclesiastical symbolic action animated by prayer, which expresses the love of God (prayer of worship) and love of humanity (prayer of petition). Through this activity the Church manifests the twofold sense in which she can be called a sacrament.

Second, there is need to explicate the notion that the outward sign serves as transparency for the *inward working of the grace signified*. At this juncture the question of the nature of grace must be raised. Since saving grace is nothing else than the self-communication of God, by definition it is not filtered through any creaturely agent. This means that the sacrament can only be understood in relation to the offer of this grace of "divinization" as the historical form in which God's offer of grace is made visible, graspable, so that the believer might be able to accept this offer in the freedom of faith. But the offer of grace is made in relation to a particular situation of the life of faith. The acceptance, in faith, is lived out as the practice of faith in the celebrative way of the liturgy. This implies the commitment of the subject to do the same in daily life, but it also implies the sustained help of God which made possible the liturgical commitment.

Third, there is the matter of the outward sign being *instituted by Christ*. This notion is best understood as affirming the grounding of sacraments on the whole Christ-event, and more precisely the sacraments as action of the Church actualizing herself as sacrament of salvation in dependence on Christ, who is the primordial sacrament. Only if this latter idea is included in the definition of sacrament can one avoid a distorted view of how the sacraments, as acts of the Church, are outward signs of the inward working of grace. For if the Church surely is included in the *opus operatum* of the sacrament without being the source of the grace of the sacrament, the reason why the sacrament is a sign of grace is based on the Christological dimension. In short, taking what was said about the sacrament being a symbolic act of the Church expressive of her twofold orientation and linking this with the twofold orientation of the risen Lord, this partial definition of sacrament follows: the sacrament

is an ecclesial symbolic action of the Church animated by prayer of adoration and petition which is at the same time the efficacious sign of Jesus Christ's divine-human love of God and his divine-human love of humanity.

The major missing elements in the foregoing description of the sacrament are the mystery presence of the saving acts of Christ and the pneumatological dimension. The sacraments manifest and realize the Church as the mystery of participation in the faith of Jesus Christ, i.e. in the mystery of the covenant between God and humanity. They are efficacious signs of Christ's divine-human love of God and of humanity because they are the witness of faith before God of the mystery of the Church, which is the mystery of participation in the faith of Jesus Christ. But saying all this does not yet name the source of the unity between Christ and the Church in the sacraments.

The unity between the ecclesial witness of faith before God and the active presence of the risen Lord and his redemptive work—his response of faith for himself and for humanity—is grounded on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the bond of unity, mediating the immediacy of the ecclesial communion to Christ in such a way that they remain unconfused and unseparated.

The same ecclesial Spirit is actively present in the individual in whose favor the celebration is undertaken. In the power of the Spirit this individual is drawn up into the movement of worship. In other words, this individual is in the *opus operatum* of the faith of the Church and by that fact grasps the faith of Christ, which is the mystery of the *opus operatum* of the Church.

The encounter with the risen Lord as sacrament of the divine-human love of the Father is also an encounter with him as sacrament of the divine-human love of humanity. It is a sanctifying encounter because of what that love for humanity signifies: the self-communication of the Father through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is not only the source of the faith enabling acceptance of the gift, but also the gift itself.

This new orientation in sacramental theology reflects the general approach of Catholic theology in modern times. It differs from the scholastic approach, which concentrates on the intensive study of specific themes by reducing the perspectival fields. This type of concentration resulted in important gains, but it also led to loss of contact with the place of the subject under consideration in the whole of the economy of salvation. Twentieth-century Catholic theology is attempting a new type of concentration, one that takes into account the whole field of theological reflection. One example is the concentration on the category of sacrament

as a basic structure of all aspects of the economy of salvation.

When the notion of sacrament, as applied to the seven sacraments of the Church, is situated in this comprehensive view, the result will necessarily include the elements that make up the heart of the newer orientation discussed in this essay. As yet, this orientation has only just begun to affect the official Catholic theology and practice of the sacraments. This is understandable. Changes do not take place overnight when it is a question of long-standing theory and practice. It may be expected, however, that the progressive renewal of theology will enrich practice. On the other hand, it is also to be anticipated that the renewal of the so-called renewed practice of the Catholic liturgies of the sacraments will communicate an experiential knowledge that contributes to a deepening of the systematic theology of the sacraments. For it is axiomatic that theory determines practice, and practice determines theory.