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The Shape of the Filipino Church to Come: A Vision of Renewal in Filipino Sacramental Worship

Michael Demetrius H. Asis

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A VISION OF RENEWAL IN
FILIPINO SACRAMENTAL WORSHIP**

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Dr. Michael Demetrius H. Asis

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Framework

This book provides a critical assessment of how worship is understood and practiced in the Philippines today. It also proposes a rather audacious vision of how we can renew our worship life, and in a way that can profoundly shape how we live our daily lives as Filipino Catholics. The general framework of the study involves the following: 1) examining the context of liturgical education, understanding, and practice today; 2) re-assessing the pedagogical paradigms behind official Church teaching through the centuries, specifically according to two current and official Church catechisms; 3) outlining major developments in sacramental theology and practice in history; and 4) proposing a vision for Church renewal in the area of worship in the Philippines today.

Going about this rather daunting task means examining first the context of teaching worship in this present time. Is worship a central aspect of our lives today? Why does there seem to be an aversion to religious rituals, particularly the Eucharist? Do the sacraments respond to a deeply felt spiritual need among the faithful? If not, do the faithful gravitate toward other religious rites, such as those of popular piety like the Rosary, etc.? Or do they altogether abandon their Catholic faith and migrate to Protestant, Evangelical, or charismatic communities that seem to offer a more vibrant version and experience of Christianity?

This book then examines the way worship, in particular the sacraments, has been presented in official Church teaching, and how this official teaching has impacted liturgical/sacramental understanding and instruction in Catholic schools and parishes today. What is the pedagogical paradigm behind official Church

documents on worship, liturgy, and sacraments? How different are the current theologies on liturgy and sacraments from official Church teaching? This second phase of the work will compare two pedagogical paradigms from two Catholic catechisms, namely, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC).

Third, the work looks at some of the major developments in sacramental theology and practice in history, from the early Christian communities of Peter and Paul to the fathers of the Church, from Augustine to Aquinas, and from the Middle Ages to Vatican II. A rather involved discussion will include Martin Luther's challenge to Catholic sacramental understanding and practice, and what we can learn from the Protestant concerns with Catholic worship.

Finally, the work proposes a vision for the renewal of Filipino worship life. What should be the priorities of the Church and formal liturgical instruction in order to teach effectively about the liturgy and sacraments? What is the crucial place of ecclesiology (the theological study of the Church) and of our understanding of ourselves as Church that should bear on our appreciation and celebration of worship in the Philippines?

Rationale

The rationale of this book is to provide a current paradigm for understanding worship—liturgy and sacramental rites—that can inspire genuine Christian discipleship in Filipino society today.

The severe gap which many of them place, inadvertently or not, between their worship and daily life continues to plague the faith life of most Filipino Catholics. The typical Filipino Catholic, it would seem, fails to interiorize the truths of the Faith in her or his life to the point at which such values are actually

lived. The Jesuit psychologist Jaime Bulatao calls this “split-level Christianity”—there is, in all of us believers, a seeming divide between what we profess in faith and how we in fact live our lives in the world. This should not be surprising at all, for Jesus himself always had to contend with all kinds of disingenuous behavior with regard to the living out of religious faith, such as hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and bigotry (Lk. 10:25–37; 18:9–14; Mt. 6:1–18).

A critical question to be asked is this: “Do our liturgical services, then, express and evoke a committed faith among the faithful, the kind that inspires active participation during services as well as faithful Christian witnessing in daily life?” Do our weekly Eucharistic celebrations evoke the kind of compassion that can move us enough to care for those most in need? Or do they simply perpetuate a spirituality that is much too focused on individual piety, one that is never conscious of, or even averse to, one’s social responsibilities?

This book makes no excuses for the rather radical views it holds regarding liturgy, its crucial place in the life of the Church, and the reform needed to advance church renewal in the Philippines. The liturgy is not about the Church’s worship life only, as if it were devoid of any real connection with the life of the community. When this happens, the liturgy takes on a life of its own, degenerating into rituals that can be performed in exactly the same way over and over again without really inspiring personal transformation in the spirit of Christ’s life. The early Christian communities performed the “breaking of the bread” in the context of remembrance, recalling and reliving the spirit of Christ’s life and sacrifice.

With all the liturgical piety and Marian devotion of many Filipino Catholics, why do we remain an essentially corrupt and morally bankrupt society? Has the Catholic faith changed and transformed us as a people? Did receiving the sacraments of initiation and confession during childhood help in initiating our

growth into the Faith? Baptism, for one, has become merely a once-in-a-lifetime event that hardly factors in our lives as adult believers today. Confession remains a mere religious requirement in grade school, one that we are just happy to be over and done with after our elementary years. The Eucharist continues to be frequented by many Catholics, yet is often cut-off from the actual life of those who participate in it.

For the early Christian communities, the liturgy was inconceivable apart from their collective memory of the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ. It was performed as a ritual expression of their lives as committed and baptized Christian believers, and from it the first Christians drew their strength and inspiration for accomplishing the mission that Christ entrusted to them. The anomaly today, however, is that the liturgy functions like a service station, merely providing comfort and relief to tired souls seeking respite from the many pressures of modern life. While Jesus himself certainly invited those who were tired and overburdened to seek solace in him (Mt. 11:28), it is to misunderstand the liturgy if all it means for us is that it is a dispenser of divine grace and consolation.

Ritualism has indeed caught up with much of popular piety and sacramental life in the Philippines; proof of this is the fact that many of the social ills that have plagued our country for so long remain entrenched in our social structures and culture. Why has our intrinsic religiosity failed in many respects to address issues of social justice, violence, dishonesty, and a minimalistic attitude in the workplace? Why have we—clerics, religious, and lay—consistently failed to interiorize the faith? Why do many clerics act like some managers, company CEOs, or swivel chair presidents of corporations who are totally removed from the conditions of their flock? Why do many clerics and religious continue to live very lavish lifestyles, especially in the face of so much destitution and hopelessness among society's poor? Are our bishops willing to leave their palaces to live among the people? Such was the great example of (then) Cardinal Bergoglio

when he decided to live in a small apartment instead of in the elegant bishop's palace, located in the suburb of Olivos in Buenos Aires, before becoming Pope Francis in 2013.¹

Jesus gives a stern warning against religious leaders who simply pay lip service to God and feign sanctity:

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called "Rabbi" by others. (Mt. 23:1-7)

"They are blind guides!" (Mt. 23:16), Jesus reminds the people, "and leading the blind, they both fall into a pit" (Mt. 15:14). Such strong words, delivered with such uncompromising ferocity, for when the will of God is at stake and set aside—the rage of Jesus is unequivocal.

The ideas proposed in this book, though they appear radical, are attempts, in fact, to recover the original experience of the nascent Church of the first century. It is true that the Church had to adapt to ever-changing times and seasons fraught with many challenges, both big and small. This does not mean, however, that we should abandon altogether the original spirit of the early Church. Community, the sharing of goods, an egalitarian way of life, a life lived in the spirit of Christ's poverty (Acts 2:44-46), a bold proclamation of the Gospel through word and witness, prayers done in remembrance of Jesus and his life—these are all hallmarks of the original Christian life of discipleship. It is in the apparent "insignificance," the "smallness,"

¹"Pope Francis," *Wikipedia*, available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Francis (accessed August 16, 2018).

of the early Church where we can find her greatness. Her humble but courageous preaching, accompanied by a fearless witnessing to Christ, attracted the multitudes which came forward in droves to be baptized in the name of Christ (Acts 2:14–41; 19:4–8).

The Church’s growing institutionalization over the centuries—establishing one structure after another, adding to the many bureaucratic layers in a hierarchically organized organization—has diluted much of the purity and power of the Gospel message. I have always maintained that much of our sacred rituals become empty displays of piety if there is no personal experience of Christ; even worse, people become disheartened and disillusioned when our ministers are embroiled in all sorts of scandal. I concede that the Church is always in need of renewal (*ecclesia semper reformanda*), and that it must always contend with human frailty and weakness, yet all efforts must be exerted to address the systemic evils facing the Church today.

Recently, for instance, in what was to become “the largest, most comprehensive report into child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church ever produced in the United States,” the allegation was made that Catholic hierarchs in Pennsylvania systematically covered up the sexual abuse of no less than 1,000 children by at least 300 priests over the past 70 years.² Original sin, to be sure, is the explanation for the pervasiveness of moral evil in the world, but it should not be an excuse for the deliberate manipulation, exploitation, and destruction of the young. What has happened to these clerics, these consecrated persons who are supposed to be *alter Christus* (another Christ) for the faithful? Trained for so long for the ministry, how can they commit unconscionable crimes that only persons with no conscience can commit? What happened to the many liturgies they participated in, Rosaries they prayed, Masses they attended and presided over?

²See Heidi Schlumpf, “Theologians, lay leaders call for mass resignations of US bishops,” *National Catholic Reporter* (August 17, 2018), available at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/theologians-lay-leaders-call-mass-resignations-us-bishops> (accessed August 21, 2018).

Were these not enough to move their hearts toward compassion for the vulnerable? Why is it that men trained for so long to do good,³ to be good, to be Christ-like, find themselves capable of evil of the most atrocious kind? And this has weakened the faith of so many in the Church; in fact, many disaffected American Catholics have, in an unprecedented move, asked for the mass resignation of all their bishops for both failing to protect the young under their care and their systematic cover-ups of seven decades of clerical sexual abuse.⁴

So where does all this bring us? To the rituals and traditions we do as a Church, and how effective they have been in cultivating genuine Christian discipleship. True, one cannot completely recover the “Christ-experience”; the institution, the structures, and the rituals were all meant to facilitate this “Christ-experience,” that is, to help us approximate how it is to

³Seminary formation takes seven to ten years on average, inside seminary walls that separate it from the world. Is this isolation from the world that seminarians are subjected to contributing in part to the development of many unhealthy attitudes toward sex and sexuality? Is the “artificial exclusive environment” something that fails to equip seminarians in formation with the life and psychological skills necessary for coping with the secular world? And if seminarians are herded in seminaries that are “set apart” from the rest of humanity until they are “released” for mission, does this not develop a sense of power, privilege, and entitlement among the ordained, protected as they are by a structure that shields them from accountability and the call for transparency, something common among many “elite” institutions? See Nicole Trahan, “The Evil of Clericalism,” *Global Sisters Report* (Aug. 31, 2018), available at <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/column/horizons/evil-clericalism-55340> (accessed September 15, 2018).

⁴Bill Mitchell, “Why the bishops should welcome invitation to resign,” *National Catholic Reporter* (Aug. 21, 2018), available at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/why-bishops-should-welcome-invitation-resign> (accessed August 22, 2018). Cf. “Statement of Catholic Theologians, Educators, Parishioners, and Lay Leaders on Clergy Sexual Abuse in the United States,” *Daily Theology* (August 17, 2018), available at <https://dailytheology.org/2018/08/17/statement-of-catholic-theologians-educators-parishioners-and-lay-leaders-on-clergy-sexual-abuse-in-the-united-states/> (accessed August 22, 2018).

encounter Christ who lived two thousand years ago. True, the farther we are from the Jesus of history, the more difficult it is to relive his memory faithfully. So it all comes down to the question, “Do our institutions, structures, and most especially our sacred rituals (sacraments) help facilitate, or at least approximate, a more or less genuine encounter with Christ that leads to authentic conversion?”

The key to answering this question is not simply a matter of determining what constitutes genuine liturgy and what does not. It is not simply a matter of deciding what rubrics apply to the performance of a particular sacred rite—how high the priest should raise the chalice during Mass, for instance, or what color to put on the mantle on Holy Week, or what prayers can and cannot be said on a particular liturgical occasion. The attention paid to rubrics, I presume, betrays a concern for a fidelity to the original spirit of these rites, that they may more or less accurately relive the events being commemorated. The problem comes when the rubrics take on a life of their own, when sacraments are performed for the sake of performing them properly, even if they are completely cut-off from the events being relived. This is the challenge to the Church of the future. How would we celebrate our worship life in our liturgies and sacraments in a way that intelligibly and clearly represents the realities being remembered, thereby affecting and moving us profoundly?

Renewing our worship life as a people, then, involves more than just paying attention to how our rituals are performed properly. It asks the very fundamental question, “Do our people go to Church at all? And if they don’t, *why not?*” Have our rituals become lifeless occasions, failing miserably to inspire genuine Christian commitment? And for the faithful who go to attend these liturgies, what is their mindset behind their participation?

Benefits of the Textbook

The primary benefit of this work is to provide an alternative approach to understanding sacramental worship, one that goes beyond the classical approach which considers the sacraments as mere vehicles that automatically dispense grace upon the mere fulfillment of certain minimum requirements.

Second, the book clearly identifies the root causes of the problem regarding the separation of worship and life by examining the following: 1) how the sacraments have been taught in our parishes and Catholic schools, from grade school to college, and 2) how liturgy and the sacraments have been presented in our official catechisms—the CCC and the CFC.

Third, the book highlights the major historical developments in sacramental theology and practice that have contributed to the current popular mindset on sacramental efficacy, i.e., how sacraments work in the individual lives of the faithful. It proposes a second look at the example of the early Christian communities to see how the inextricable connection between worship and life shaped and enriched early Christian witness and discipleship.

Finally, this work offers a radical vision for the renewal of Filipino worship life which, ironically, calls for a return to the original spirit of early Christian worship. Fourteen (14) helpful practical steps are offered to aid in the facilitation of this renewal; these include, among others, celebrating the sacraments in small Christian communities (BECs) to afford the faithful a deeply personal, possibly life-changing, ritual encounter with the Risen Christ; restructuring how and when the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist), healing (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick), and commitment (Matrimony and Holy Orders) are to be performed and celebrated; explaining and using the signs and symbols involved in liturgy and the sacraments in

a manner that faithfully re-enacts the realities or events they represent; and re-assessing the role of priests in the BECs.

Organization

Chapter I: Context. This first chapter provides the context for liturgical and sacramental education today. It examines the strengths and weaknesses of actual worship practices in the Philippines, particularly the way Filipino Catholics understand and perform the Church's liturgical and sacramental rituals. This chapter is important for establishing what needs to be done to make these practices contribute to a vibrant worship life for Filipino Catholics.

Chapter II: Sacramental Theologies through the Centuries. The second chapter gives an overview of some of the critical theological views on sacramental efficacy throughout the long history of the Church, including official Church teaching on the elements considered for the *validity* or *fruitfulness* of a sacrament: 1) the worthiness of the minister as inconsequential for the validity of a sacrament; 2) the proper intention (by the minister) for administering a valid sacrament; and 3) the proper disposition required (on the part of the recipient) for the fruitful reception of a sacrament.

Chapter III: Current Official Pedagogical Paradigms: CCC & CFC. This third chapter examines the way sacraments have been presented according to official Church teaching throughout the centuries. It highlights two official Church catechisms—namely, the CCC and the CFC—and compares their similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses as pedagogical paradigms in liturgical/sacramental instruction.

Chapter IV: Contemporary Sacramental Theologies. The fourth chapter takes a closer look at some of the developments in contemporary sacramental theologies that reflect the spirit

of the liturgical reforms envisioned by Vatican II. Taking their impetus from developments in the social sciences, particularly in the fields of psychology and sociology as well as linguistics, communications theory, and anthropological and cultural studies before and after Vatican II, these sacramental theologies explain that there are many ways to interpret these rituals, thereby “permitting them to reveal the Christian mysteries in increasing richness and depth.”⁵

Chapter V: Luther & Catholic Sacramental Theologies: Differences and Points of Convergence. This fifth chapter explains Martin Luther’s (d. 1546) challenge to Catholic sacramental understanding and practice. In disputing the Catholic Church’s teaching that sacraments work *ex opere operato* (from the work done), Luther appeals for a more interiorized approach to the sacraments, insisting that ultimately they work *ex opere operantis* (from the work of the worker), i.e., sacraments become fruitful only in faith. Without denying the intrinsic power of the sacraments to communicate grace, he emphasizes that only in faith do we truly and personally encounter the divine in the sacraments. This chapter examines, toward the end, how Lutheran sacramental theology and current Catholic sacramental theologies converge to provide grounds for crafting a contemporary Filipino theology of worship and practice.

Chapter VI: Filipino Baptismal Theology and Practice according to the CFC: A Test Case. The sixth chapter focuses on the Filipino theology and practice of Baptism and presents this as a test case for the exemplification of effective pedagogical principles in liturgical/sacramental instruction. The sacramental theology of the CFC grounds the fundamental theological insights of this exposition.

⁵Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1981; new ed. New York: Doubleday, 2002), 119.

Chapter VII: A Vision for the Renewal of Filipino Sacramental Worship. The final chapter offers an audacious vision of how Filipino worship life—liturgical and sacramental instruction and practice—can be renewed to provide an inspiring resource for Christian discipleship in the Philippines today. It also provides a set of concrete steps to realize this vision.

CHAPTER I

FILIPINO WORSHIP LIFE: THE CONTEXT FOR RENEWAL

Introduction

This first chapter describes the presumptions, predispositions, and practices of Filipino Catholics with regard to their worship life. It focuses on Filipino sacramental life, i.e., how Filipino Catholics understand and celebrate the seven sacraments of the Church, though Filipino worship life today is constituted not only by the liturgical sacraments but also by various forms of popular devotion. Of the seven sacraments, however, only Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, and Reconciliation are closely examined here, particularly given the many errors that abound in how these four are understood. Crafting a more current and renewed theology of these sacraments is therefore in order.

Exposition: The Sacramental Life of Filipino Catholics¹

Significant strides have been made in the Filipino liturgy in recent years. The popular trend in many parishes and dioceses

¹This chapter first appeared in this author's book, *Reimagining the Sacred: A Fresh Approach to Prayer, Liturgy, and the Sacraments* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012) under the title "Disfiguring the Sacred: The Context for Liturgical Renewal." Revisions to the original text have since been made for this present chapter.

of celebrating the Eucharist in the vernacular, the proper training of liturgical personnel, and the popular acceptance of Filipino liturgical music are only some of the indications that augur well for the future of Church liturgy in the Philippines; other equally significant accomplishments include the installation of Eucharistic Lay Ministers, increasing acceptance of prayer and Bible study groups, revival of perpetual Eucharistic adoration, and introduction of the *Misa ng Bayang Pilipino* (Mass of the Filipino People).² If these developments, then, are a gauge of the success of liturgical renewal in the Philippines, concrete progress has indeed been made in recent decades.³

What continues to plague the faith life of most Filipino Catholics, however, is the severe gap which many of them place, inadvertently or not, between their worship and their daily life. The typical Filipino Catholic, it would seem, fails to interiorize the truths of the Faith in her or his life so that these values are lived. The Jesuit psychologist Jaime Bulatao calls this “split-level Christianity”—there is in all of us believers a seeming divide between what we profess in faith and how we in fact live our lives in the world. This should not be surprising at all; Jesus himself always had to contend with all kinds of disingenuous behavior with regard to the living out of religious faith, such as hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and bigotry (Lk. 10:25–37; 18:9–14; Mt. 6:1–18).

²The *Misa ng Bayang Pilipino*—an indigenized form of the Roman liturgy—is a concrete attempt to incarnate Church worship in Filipino culture by using ritual and language that are familiar to the people. It aims not only to deepen a sense of cultural identity but also to promote traditional Filipino values which have nurtured the Faith for four centuries. See Anscar J. Chupungco, *Towards a Filipino Liturgy* (Manila: Benedictine Abbey, 1976), 88–89.

³Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Makati: Word & Life Publications, 1994; new ed. & enl. Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997), no. 1471. Hereafter referred to as CFC.

Do our liturgical services, then, express and evoke a committed faith among the faithful, the kind that inspires active participation during services as well as faithful Christian witnessing in daily life? Do our weekly Eucharistic celebrations move us, enough to care for those most in need? Or do they simply perpetuate a spirituality that is much too focused on an individual holiness that is never conscious of one's social responsibilities?

We now take a closer look at some of the symptoms of this separation of prayer from life as found in the actual practice of the different ritual sacraments. Focus is directed at four sacraments for which adequate liturgical education is found wanting and common misunderstandings abound. These are Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, and Reconciliation.

Baptism. Baptism continues to be one of the more popular social occasions in Philippine society. It not only fosters social relationships among friends but also reinforces the Filipino values of family solidarity and love of children. Much time is spent, therefore, on meal preparations and finalizing the actual number of godparents rather than on the much needed religious instruction that is necessary for the parents and godparents to understand the sacrament more adequately.⁴ For all practical intents and purposes, baptism has been reduced to what may be considered as the Church equivalent of a civil registration, much like securing a birth certificate as proof of Filipino citizenship. There is little if any recognition, much less appreciation, of the sacrament as a call and initiation into some form of “new life”—one that challenges one's priorities in light of the taking on of a new life in Christ—as envisioned by the current liturgical renewal.⁵

A common effect of these deficiencies is the failure of many young Catholics to mature gradually in the faith and toward a more personal commitment to Christ based on personal conviction. Misplaced priorities with regard to an understanding

⁴CFC, no. 1587.

⁵CFC, no. 1587.

of the sacrament and the consequent malformation of young persons encourage a kind of “nominal Catholicism” (Catholic in name but not in practice) which is reinforced by the fact that many young Catholics were not given the chance to personally “choose their faith.”

The sheer number of children to be baptized, moreover, proves to be the greatest hurdle in implementing adequate pre-sacramental preparation programs⁶ despite great efforts at the parish level to engage parents, godparents, and sponsors in some form of instruction. The lack of sufficiently trained lay catechetical personnel, especially critical for pre-baptismal catechesis that may demand a deeper understanding of the Faith than the ordinary catechist already possesses, aggravates the problem even further.⁷

It would seem, then, that the greatest need is in helping Filipino Catholics easily acquire a more thorough understanding of the sacramental signs, something that will hopefully set the stage for a more active celebration of the sacraments.⁸ A sustained effort at continuing catechetical instruction should be in place especially at the parish or, better yet, BEC level to foster effectively a deeper, more personal, and more participatory worship life. The responsibility for such an effort, moreover, should be focused on those tasked with the basic formation of the youth and young adults—parents, godparents, and sponsors.

⁶See Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: CBCP, 1992; reprint Pasay City: Paulines, 1998), art. no. 10, regarding pre-sacramental directives. Hereafter referred to as PCP II.

⁷See Episcopal Commission on Education and Religious Instruction, *Maturing in Christian Faith: The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1985), no. 361. Hereafter referred to as NCDP.

⁸Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), no. 59.

Given all these problems and challenges facing Filipino baptisms today, we need to rethink some of the issues that surround the actual understanding and practice of baptism in the country. While there are many social values that baptism has given to the Filipino family, has it really been helpful in producing more mature Catholics? Does infant baptism result in the kind of conversions characteristic of the catechumens in the early Church? Do we in effect produce merely nominal Catholics since most of the faithful were baptized as infants and were not able to become Christian as a matter of personal choice? Adding to that, do we really hold infant baptism to be credible given that parents and sponsors guarantee the education of the child in the faith? Does this formation in the faith happen at home, and if not, where? Does it, in fact, even happen *at all*? If ongoing education and formation in the faith is never guaranteed, does it still make sense to baptize infants into the faith? Are we not, in effect, merely producing more and more Catholics who are passive about their faith life since many of them never grew up in homes and environments where active Christian witnessing took place? And, in the absence of Christian instruction and formation at home, do parishes run enough programs that are dedicated to the formation of the Catholic faithful? Do these programs use effective pedagogical tools and methods that could attract a wide audience of parishioners? And, to supplement Christian education at the parish level, do Catholic schools provide baptized Christian believers with effective theological education?

Could we, as such, propose to recover the original Church practice of adult baptism so that we admit to the Church only those who have freely signified the intention to be admitted and have demonstrated true Christian witness with the quality of their lives? This could certainly prevent the many problems outlined above. We would not have to worry about producing nominal Catholics, and the entire Church—lay, religious, and ordained clerics—would be challenged to model genuine Christian holiness and attract converts through the witness of

their lives, and not simply rely on the institutional structure of sacramental initiation to guarantee a robust Catholic population.

Confirmation. With regard to the actual liturgical practice of Confirmation in the Philippines, the more common Church policy of administering the sacrament around the age of discretion or later seems to be appropriate, the reason being that adolescents, given their physical, mental, and psychological readiness, can already take their first steps toward a more personally chosen and appropriated faith.⁹ Yet careful preparation of *both* candidates and parents is still necessary, however, for an effective celebration of the sacrament. This is especially true in the Philippines where “social relations between families often seem to play the dominant role in the choice of godparents and sponsors for Baptism and Confirmation.”¹⁰ Here it would seem that the traditional Filipino family system adopted the Christian ritual of Baptism (and Confirmation) as a means to enlarge the family group through ritual kinship more than anything else, religious or otherwise. This so-called *compadrazgo* or *compadre* (godfather) system, formed through Baptism, Confirmation, and Marriage, extends the family alliance and forges a relationship of interdependence between the child’s parents and godparents for their mutual benefit. Indeed, prominent members of the community like public officials are popular choices for godparents.¹¹

It is natural that social structures and family alliances find expression in religious activities, especially in a deeply “religious”

⁹CFC, no. 1634.

¹⁰CFC, no. 1640.

¹¹See Isabel S. Panopio, Felicidad V. Cordero-MacDonald, & Adelisa A. Raymundo, *Sociology: Focus on the Philippines*, 3rd ed. (Quezon City: Ken Incorporated, 1994), 199. Cf. Alfredo Roces & Grace Roces, *Culture Shock! Philippines: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette* (Singapore: Times Books International, 1985; reprint 1996, 1997), 48–49. Cf. NCDP, no. 45.

country like the Philippines.¹² The *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (NCDP) suggests that in all efforts to evaluate and purify popular piety, it must be clear that much more than a mere religious practice, pattern, or belief is involved.¹³ This truth, however, should not obscure the primary “faith-meaning” of the sacraments, or the “faith-meaning” of people’s lives for that matter, which should shape the way they live. Appropriate faith norms for choosing godparents and sponsors should thus be in place.

Confirmation was originally part of the sacrament of Baptism in the early practice of the Church; the baptized back then were immediately confirmed by the bishop right after the baptismal ritual. With the influx of Christian converts immediately after the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, however, and with only a few bishops available for the post-baptismal rite of laying on of hands, the rite of anointing was effectively postponed to a later time, when a bishop was available for a future visit to the communities concerned. This resulted in the eventual separation of the rite of post-baptismal laying on of hands (now called confirmation) from baptism.

What we have in actual Catholic practice today is a rather anomalous ordering of the sacraments of initiation. Those who were baptized as infants go to confession and receive communion for the first time at around the age of seven, and are confirmed at around the age of twelve. Yet, notwithstanding the value of introducing young persons at the age of discretion into the faith,

¹²Some Christian rites and symbols, however, have been so appropriated by the wider society that they no longer admit to purely religious interpretations. This is corroborated by Reynaldo C. Iletto’s well-known study about how the *Pasyon* provided 19th century lowland Philippine society and *Tagalog* movements with a language for articulating their own values, ideals, and even hopes for political liberation. Cf. Jose Mario C. Francisco, “Christian Symbols and Rituals in Philippine Society,” *Pulso* 7 (June 1991): 16. See also Reynaldo C. Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979), 11–12.

¹³NCDP, no. 45.

one of which is so that they are not immediately taken over by secularism, how many of these young faithful grow up to be mature Catholics?

In a recent Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey, only about 40% of the total population of the country go to Sunday church service. The findings of the survey provide the following details: 1) an annual average of only 46–47% of Filipino adults have been attending church services weekly since 2013;¹⁴ 2) weekly attendance in the Catholic Church is at 37% compared to more regular church attendance among Protestants (64%), members of the *Iglesia ni Cristo* (70%), and other Christians (62%) while seven to five percent of Muslims attend their weekly services at the mosque;¹⁵ 3) 70 SWS surveys from 1991 to 2013 find that weekly church attendance among Catholics has always been the lowest among the entire Filipino populace;¹⁶ and 4) the recent survey notes that Catholics are less religious and attend church less frequently compared to the adherents of other religions.¹⁷

These figures seem to indicate that the Catholic Church does not evoke the kind of commitment that we see in other Christian denominations. I wonder if part of the problem is the way Catholics have been “sacramentalized” but never adequately “evangelized”; in other words, while most Filipino Catholics go through the sacraments of initiation (plus first confession)

¹⁴Social Weather Stations, “Fourth Quarter 2017 Social Weather Survey: Minorities of Filipino adults attend religious services weekly since 2013,” *Social Weather Stations*, March 28, 2018. Available at <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20180328121738>.

¹⁵Social Weather Stations, “9% of Catholics Sometimes Think of Leaving the Church,” *Social Weather Stations*, April 7, 2013. Available at <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20151214130743>.

¹⁶Social Weather Stations, “9% of Catholics Sometimes Think of Leaving the Church.”

¹⁷Social Weather Stations, “9% of Catholics Sometimes Think of Leaving the Church.”

as children, have these sacraments taken at an early age helped in their growth as Catholics? Were they regularly educated and formed in the family? Have their *ninongs* and *ninangs* provided them with substantial faith education and witness that inspired them to become more faithful and devout disciples of the Lord?

It would thus appear that the practice of Confirmation makes sense only when the sacrament marks the moment when the individual personally chooses her or his faith for the first time. While there certainly is value in confirming at age twelve, when the young believer is more physically, mentally, and psychologically prepared to take on the responsibilities of an adult Christian, the rite of laying on of hands should be integrated back into the sacrament of Baptism, especially given my position on the need to recover the norm of adult initiation. A separate rite of confirmation would be redundant if baptism is given to adult candidates who are already psychologically prepared to take on the mature responsibilities of a committed Christian.

The Holy Eucharist. Vatican II describes the Eucharist as “the source and summit of the whole Christian life.”¹⁸ This appears to be a fact, at first glance, in the worship life of most Filipino Catholics—churches and *capillas* (chapels) are always crowded on Sundays and Communion lines are long for the “Holy Mass,” the popular term used when referring to the Eucharistic celebration in the Philippines.¹⁹ The typical Filipino parish even organizes its many spiritual, social, educational, and youth-oriented activities around the Eucharistic liturgy. Perhaps the most familiar religious activity in Filipino society, the Mass graces every important Filipino occasion conceivable, from family reunions and social meetings to wedding and death

¹⁸Cf. *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], in *Documents of Vatican II*, no. 11.

¹⁹The term “Mass” is derived from the Latin phrase “*Itē missa est*,” which was freely translated as “Go, the Mass is ended.” This pertains to the Latin “dismissal,” the closing blessing at any ecclesiastical celebration, although the term was eventually applied only to the Eucharist.

anniversaries, political conventions, and Charismatic prayer rallies. It has become all too familiar, in fact, that for many it has simply become routine.

The use of the vernacular languages and the active participation of lay people as lectors, commentators, servers, ushers, collectors, and music ministers have turned the Eucharistic liturgy into a more participatory, active, and vibrant community celebration. The use of Sunday Mass leaflets and LCD monitors in many parishes has also made the Liturgy of the Word more accessible to the congregation, although the absence of any Eucharistic Prayer in the leaflets may inadvertently give the impression that the Mass is merely some form of Bible service.

Yet, while Filipinos do have a generally high regard for the Eucharist, many major hurdles still need to be overcome. The Catholic population has almost doubled from 27 million to 52 million since the First Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1953. There is, on average, one priest per 10,000 Catholics across the country, with many parishes having only one cleric who serves more than 20,000 people.²⁰ The Church has not been producing the number of priests it needs, even though local seminaries are full to capacity; the Catholic population is increasing much faster than the numbers of newly ordained priests who can minister to this great multitude are. Indeed, the unfortunate lack of priests to celebrate enough Masses, rather than genuine interest, could be one reason why Sunday Masses are usually fully attended. For those who do attend Mass regularly, moreover, a proper understanding seems frequently wanting. A great number, for example, participate as mere spectators to fulfill a religious obligation or simply to avoid mortal sin.²¹ Indeed, avoiding serious sin by as small a margin as can be safely managed seems to be a major religious concern for many Filipino Catholics, especially among the youth.

²⁰See PCP II, app. I, "The Contemporary Philippine Situation," 287–288.

²¹CFC, nos. 1671–1672.

Some studies indicate, however, that this minimalist, even somewhat defiant, attitude (reducing duty to the minimum amount of effort required) is apparently belied by the fact that a great number of people remain substantially attached to the Faith.²² PCP II argues that

perhaps such enduring loyalty to the faith can be explained away as sociological religiosity—one with which family solidarity has much to do. Perhaps the answer lies in the realm of values: Christianity has entered into the Filipino psyche more strongly than the term “nominal” seems to suggest, and our cultural values, defective as they may be in certain areas, have been more deeply influenced by Gospel values than we think.²³

Many parents, however, still find themselves unable to encourage a deeper appreciation of the Eucharist when queried about the necessity, reasonableness, and value of attending Mass, with a common objection being that one can pray better in private or at home. Many simply fall back on some disagreeable form of authoritarianism, usually out of utter frustration.²⁴

The patron-client social structure in Philippine society is also reflected in popular piety’s image of God in the Eucharist; pious churchgoers as such would come before God as they would before a *compadre* to ask for some special favor. Another common image is that of God as some kind of authority figure, much like that of a judge or policeman, with whom one can

²²See Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *A Study on the Effectivity of Religious Education in Terms of the Religious Knowledge and Attitudes of the Student in Catholic Schools of the Philippines*, 1979, cited by Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr., *Preparing Our Future: The Pope and the Filipino Youth* (Manila: Gift of God Publications, 1994), 3. This study notes that many young Filipino Catholics look at the Church precisely as an institution that can help them achieve a more meaningful life; hence, many believe that it is important to go to church regularly. Many Filipino youth, therefore, still find themselves very much attached to the Church, which is still perceived as one of the more credible institutions in Philippine society. See Bacani, *Preparing Our Future*, 3.

²³PCP II, app. I, “The Contemporary Philippine Situation,” 289.

²⁴CFC, no. 1672.

negotiate to avoid punishment. Such, rather childish, images of God, needless to say, give the false impression that prayer is just some magical exercise to win divine favor.²⁵

The *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC) identifies this separation of the Eucharist from the daily life of most Filipino Catholics as the most serious weakness in their understanding of worship life.²⁶ Bishop Teodoro Bacani makes this very brief, albeit insightful, analysis:

And if indeed the Eucharist is seen as divorced and isolated from the rest of our week and our everyday lives, it is impossible to experience it as apex of our Christian lives....

Unless we sincerely desire to meet God in our ordinary daily living, and unless we genuinely want to offer him our whole lives, we will hardly experience the Eucharist as a peak action of our lives.²⁷

To claim, then, that one's relationship with God can be confined only to formal, liturgical worship, without regard for God's presence in the daily business of life, is to misunderstand the Christian Faith and the Eucharist as merely a pious exercise devoid of any link with the moral demands of the Gospel.

Many of today's efforts at Church reform and renewal are directed toward the integration of Gospel and life, i.e., the message of Christ accepted as truth, lived out in daily life, and celebrated in liturgy. A personal appreciation of "ceremony" or ritual should not become a substitute, therefore, for true personal commitment of mind and heart.²⁸ Failure in this integration and genuine witnessing has its own consequences, one concrete example of which is the general indifference of many pious churchgoers to any form of social action on behalf of the poor and marginalized; indeed, if there be such an action, it is often

²⁵CFC, no. 1673.

²⁶CFC, no. 1674.

²⁷Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr., *The Eucharist and the Filipino* (Makati: Salesiana Publishers, 1987), 42-44.

²⁸NCDP, no. 327.

reduced to charitable fund-raising activities that are confined to special religious occasions such as Christmas.

There is always a radical difference between the Eucharist as sacrament of the Risen Christ's self-giving and Eucharistic celebrations that are, in fact, exploited to serve certain ideological ends or flaunted as sanctimonious displays of piety. The Eucharist should be used neither as a political platform for the "zealots" nor as a ritual to affirm pharisaical self-righteousness. The practice of giving first communion to grade school students, for instance, underlines the fact that no child should be deprived of the opportunity to meet and receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus himself often reminded his disciples to let the children come to him (Lk. 18:16; Mt. 19:14). Should this mean, however, that they should go and officially receive the sacrament of baptism right after birth? Or should efforts be focused more on their religious formation and growth within the family and immediate circles of relationships—which include their *ninongs* and *ninangs*—before they formally undergo the sacrament of initiation? It is true that perfect knowledge of the faith is not required before anyone can be baptized; an elementary knowledge will suffice. It is only later on that the child will be obliged to learn gradually the truths of the Faith.

PCP II envisions a renewed worship at the core of which is a liturgical renewal that aims to foster a deeper, more personal, and more prayerful appreciation of the Eucharist as sacrament of God's love in Christ through the Spirit. It is hoped that a loving knowledge of the Eucharist will ground the Church's efforts at a renewed and integral evangelization in the following areas: religious instruction, the social apostolate, and worship.

Reconciliation. There has been a steady decline in recent years in the number of Catholics going regularly to "Confession," as the sacrament of Reconciliation is popularly known. The most common reason cited for this decline is the widespread loss of a "sense of sin" and personal guilt, coupled with a seemingly

prevalent confusion over what is considered morally right and morally wrong. Interpreting the much discussed 1992 McCann-Erickson Philippines Survey of the Filipino youth, Bishop Bacani briefly describes this loss of a “sense of personal sin”:

What should cause us most concern ... is the survey finding that our young people’s moral values seem to have deteriorated. “Social acceptance rather than principle has become the norm for behavior,” says the survey summary. And to make things even worse, many practices that have been traditionally considered immoral and criminal are now considered socially acceptable by a significant number.²⁹

A considerable number (51%) of respondents, for instance, considered premarital sex to be acceptable. A slightly lower, but nevertheless significant, number (40%) did not see cheating in school as wrong. As for viewing pornographic materials, 44% found it acceptable to do so. What proves to be more alarming, moreover, is that 2/3 (69%–70%) of those surveyed who belong to the affluent class found the above activities acceptable and might very well engage in them. This is a distressing piece of information, especially given that most of those who belong to the affluent class are educated in some of our best Catholic institutions. Is Christian moral formation the sole task of the school, then? Is it reasonable to put the blame for the moral deterioration of many of today’s young people entirely on the Catholic school system? Do we expect the family setting, on the other hand, to be the primary school where children learn their fundamental values? Yet if adult Christians never benefited from an ongoing formation in the faith in their respective Christian communities or parishes, can we expect them to model Christian virtue for their own children at home? The parish should be organized into BECs to afford children the opportunity to grow and be nurtured in an environment where the community spirit of cooperation, like-mindedness, and empathy can begin to

²⁹Bacani, *Preparing Our Future*, 10.

inspire and shape these young persons into responsible Christian citizens and believers.

It is a cause for grave concern, of course, for both educators and parents that the norm of social acceptability takes precedence over any other norms, including absolute moral ones, for many of our young people today. The determinative question would appear to be “Is it ‘in?’” rather than “Is it morally good?” Given such a disturbing prospect, “we may be headed towards a society of conformists and moral chameleons.”³⁰

“Confession,” moreover, had become so routine and mechanical for so many that “sins” being confessed were often those learned in grade school catechesis or from lists memorized from catechisms.³¹ The genuine desire for true contrition and conversion was often superseded by the minimalist attitude of simply “going to confession” once a year to fulfill a mere religious obligation. Indeed, the NCDP raises the question of whether the common “practice of herding school children to weekly confession ever represented an authentic ideal.”³² “Doing penance” often meant “rattling off” some memorized prayers without any serious effort to address the root causes of sins habitually committed, and priestly absolution was taken as a mere magical formula that wiped away sin without modifying the penitent’s predispositions in any real way.³³

God touches us through the material conditions of our lives: people, events, signs, and symbols.³⁴ This fundamentally Catholic principle of sacramentality, however, is hardly ever fully understood and appreciated, especially by many young Filipino Catholics. This seems to be the case when one examines the real reasons behind such common questions as “Why do people have

³⁰Bacani, *Preparing Our Future*, 11.

³¹CFC, no. 1767.

³²NCDP, no. 374.

³³NCDP, no. 374.

³⁴CFC, no. 1522.

to confess to a priest who may be as sinful as anyone else?”, “Why can’t Catholics confess ‘directly’ to God?”, and “What is the use of going to confession when people know they will still commit the same sins anyway?”

What explains such a mindset? Why do many Catholics instinctively avoid any kind of encounter with a priest, especially when it has to do with confessing one’s sins? Is there a deep-seated suspicion that many of our clerics do not embody the holiness of God and are thereby deemed unworthy of dispensing forgiveness in the confessional?

In inquiring as to why the Sacrament of Reconciliation fails to be a real and personal faith experience for many, the lack of confessors is a factor that should certainly be recognized. Efforts to organize meaningful penitential services at the parish level should also be acknowledged. The *Kumpisalang Bayan* (Confessions for the People) during Lent, for one, has been gaining popularity in many local parishes.³⁵

Effective instruction on the Sacrament of Reconciliation should focus on Christ’s loving forgiveness that inspires the life-long and often arduous process of conversion. Undue emphasis on an intensely private approach to the sacrament can also be avoided by situating individual conversion within the wider call for the Church to be an *ecclesia semper reformanda*, a church in need of constant change and renewal.

³⁵These mass confessions ride on the popularity of the *Kasalang Bayan* (Mass Weddings).

CHAPTER II

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGIES THROUGH THE CENTURIES

The previous introductory chapter described the many presuppositions, perceptions, misconceptions, and misplaced priorities that many Catholic Filipinos have with regard to their actual practice of the sacraments. This second chapter looks at the extensive development of sacramental theologies throughout the long history of the Church.

Part One looks at some of the major developments in sacramental theology and practice throughout history, from the early Christian communities of Peter and Paul to the fathers of the Church, from Augustine to Aquinas and the Middle Ages. Part Two discusses the high points of official Church teaching concerning sacramental efficacy, i.e., how sacraments objectively communicate grace, and how this grace is subjectively made fruitful on the part of the recipient.

Part I: Sacramental Theologies Through the Centuries

A brief history of the word “sacrament” and its formulation is explained here, tracing the origin of the term to the Greek *mysterion* which Paul popularized in the New Testament and which he used when referring to the all-embracing divine plan of redemption that was once hidden but is now “unveiled” or revealed in Christ (Eph. 1:9–10). Other notable theologians within the tradition who also developed a sacramental theology based on the word “sacrament” were Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas.

Exposition: History and Formulation of the Word “Sacrament”

The Early Christian Community

The word “sacrament” finds its origin in the Greek word *mysterion*. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

the Greek word *mysterion* was translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. In later usage the term *sacramentum* emphasizes the visible sign of the hidden reality of salvation which was indicated by the term *mysterium*.¹

Mysterion originally referred to the *unveiling of divine secrets*. Neither the word nor the idea, however, appear in the Old Testament; rather, they found their way into the New Testament world from their origins in Greek culture, particularly in the Greek mystery cults. As far as the Greeks were concerned, *mysterion* did not necessarily refer to something cryptic, obscure, or incomprehensible like the way it is popularly conceived of today.²

One may trace the word *mysterion* from the Greek verb *muo*, which literally means “I close” or “I shut,” particularly in reference to closing one’s eyes and shutting one’s ears and lips. It can be argued that this root meaning applies well to the secrets that are revealed to those initiated into the Greek mystery cults.³ Awed by the divine presence, the initiates (*mustes*) “close their

¹Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; reprint Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994), no. 774.

²s.v. “Mystery,” in *The New Compact Bible Dictionary*, ed. Thomas Alton Bryant (London/Grand Rapids: Oliphants/Zondervan, 1967). Cf. Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 31.

³John Schanz, *Introduction to the Sacraments* (New York: Pueblo Pub. Co., 1983), 26–27.

lips” indeed, and are silent in the face of the holy.⁴ The revealed secret thus came to be known as *mysterion*.⁵

The Israelites, on the other hand, prided themselves with the claim that they were recipients of a special divine revelation by which God progressively unveiled Himself to them, God’s chosen people, by way of “signs and wonders.”⁶ This divine self-manifestation is signified and brought about through the mediation of divinely chosen and anointed figures such as Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, and the prophets; for Christians, this process of self-disclosure reaches its summit in the person of Jesus Christ, the long awaited Messiah (Cf. Heb. 1:1–3). In the gradual process of this divine self-communication, Yahweh revealed something of Himself—the “mystery” (*mysterion*) of his own identity and of his desire to draw every human being to Himself (Eph. 1:3–10).

This understanding of *mysterion* as “revealed divine secret” evidently influenced the apostle Paul’s usage of the term as he popularized it in the New Testament. He referred it to the all-embracing divine plan of salvation that was once hidden but is now “unveiled” and revealed in Christ. We thus read of the Father’s plan of salvation in the letter to the Ephesians:

Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens! God chose us in him before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love; he likewise predestined us through Christ Jesus to be his adopted [sons and daughters]—such was his will and pleasure—that all might praise the glorious favor he has bestowed on us in his beloved. (Eph. 1:3–6)

⁴Kenan Osborne, *Sacramental Theology: A General Introduction* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 21–22.

⁵Schanz, *Introduction to the Sacraments*, 27.

⁶The word “revelation” comes from the Latin word *re-velare* which literally means “lifting back the veil.” Its Greek equivalent is the word *apokalupsis* from which the English word “apocalypse” comes. See Schanz, *Introduction to the Sacraments*, 26.

The fulfillment through Christ is then presented:

It is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven; so immeasurably generous is God's favor to us. God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan he was pleased to decree in Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time: namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ's headship. (Eph. 1:7–10)⁷

The term *sacramentum* stands for a visible sign of the hidden divine plan of salvation which the term *mysterium* indicates. The great sign, indeed the great sacrament, of the mystery of God's universal saving love is in Jesus Christ—God's Word-made-flesh.⁸

Although neither *sacramentum* nor *mysterion* appear in the New Testament to refer to Christian rites,⁹ the first Christians certainly celebrated some sacred rituals.¹⁰ Foremost of these were the “breaking of bread” (1 Cor. 11:23–27) and their preaching of the word (which was sacramental since it produced a profound effect on its listeners) followed often by a ritual washing (Acts 2:37–41; 8:34–39). This baptismal washing signified one's acceptance of the apostles' message, which proclaimed that one had become united with Christ in his death and resurrection through which one died to their old, sinful life and was reborn into new life in Christ (Acts 8:12–13; 16:32–34). This marked a

⁷The Epistle to the Ephesians is interpreted today as Pauline literature, imbued with Pauline thought. See Paul J. Kobelski, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2nd ed., eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, & Roland E. Murphy (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1993), 55:2–11, pp. 883–885.

⁸St. Augustine calls Jesus the *mysterium Dei* (sacrament of God). See Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 31, 44.

⁹Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1981; new ed. 2002), 37.

¹⁰Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 37. See also Kevin W. Irwin, *The Sacraments: Historical Foundations and Liturgical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 35–37.

new beginning for many of these Christian converts. Salvation became real to them since they were being saved from a former life and in fellowship with their newly found family of believers.¹¹

The laying on of hands was another early Christian sacramental rite. It signified the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles during the Jewish feast of the Pentecost¹² (Acts 2:1–4). The inward, exuberant change that took place within the apostles could not have come from any ordinary human power but only from the Spirit of their Risen Lord (the Holy Spirit), overcoming their fears upon his and inspiring them to a courageous proclamation of—and witnessing to—the life and message of their master.¹³

The Patristic Period

The great Church leaders in the first centuries of Christianity, called the “fathers of the Church,”¹⁴ initiated the development of the sacraments into a set of richly symbolic rites.¹⁵ Post-Vatican II liturgy thus owes a number of sacramental practices to the era known as the Patristic period (from the Latin term *pater*, meaning “father”). These would include prayer texts, select Biblical readings, and the shape or form of the rituals themselves.¹⁶

The writings of the early “fathers”—Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, the Shepherd of Hermas, and the authors of the *Didache* and the

¹¹Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 35–37.

¹²*Pentecoste* (Greek for “fiftieth” day) corresponds to the Jewish feast called *Shabuoth* (the Feast of Weeks), which was a thanksgiving celebration for the wheat harvest that took place seven weeks after the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. See John F. Baldovin, “Pentecost,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, & Dermot A. Lane (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2011), 754.

¹³See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 38.

¹⁴Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 29.

¹⁵Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 30.

¹⁶Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 49.

Apostolic Tradition—were largely apologetic, i.e., they explained why the faith and the rituals used to express it were reasonable.¹⁷ Aside from teaching us that liturgy and sacraments are always communal responses to conversion to Christ that use symbols derived from creation and daily life, the earliest ecclesiastical writers provided the Church with “historical precedents for revised rites of initiation and the eucharistic prayers used today.”¹⁸

Tertullian (d. ca. 200) was probably the first to use the term *sacramentum* theologically to refer to elements of the Christian Faith, especially Baptism and the Eucharist, which contain the mysterious presence of God,¹⁹ although he did not confine its meaning to the sacraments as they are popularly conceived of today. Indeed, the *sacramental principle* has had a long historical development prior to the present understanding of *sacramentum* as sacred ritual.²⁰ The early Christians, for instance, used *sacramentum* to refer either to anything related to the sacred or to secret things, with the latter being suggestive of individuals marked out for some area of privilege and responsibility where commitment to some form of service is carried out.²¹ Liam G. Walsh explains this at length:

The oath that soldiers took on entering the service of the emperor was called a *sacramentum*. That particular use of the word evoked many of the qualities that Christians wanted to attribute to their rites, especially to the rites of initiation. Tertullian used the analogy, and it was certainly one of the reasons why he called the rites *sacramenta*. Because the emperor was thought to be divine, a commitment to fight in his service was sacred. One was marked forever by it (quite literally, sometimes, by having some image of the emperor tattooed

¹⁷Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 38.

¹⁸Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 38.

¹⁹Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 45.

²⁰See Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 22; Michael Schmaus, *The Church as Sacrament* (Kansas City/London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 20–29. Tertullian, Cyprian (d. 258), and Augustine gave the term *sacramentum* its ecclesial-theological meaning. See Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 44.

²¹Liam G. Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation: A Theology of Life, Word, and Rite*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2011), 15.

on one's person). One gained access to all sorts of privileges, as well as to responsibilities, and to the inside information that went with that. To call a Christian rite as *sacramentum* in that sense was to say that it was a commitment to the service of the true God, an entry into the company of other Christians and an initiation into the secret, sacred truth they shared about life and death and eternity.²²

Tertullian made a most significant contribution, however, in the connection he made between *sacramentum* and two Christian rituals. An early Latin translation of Scripture in the North African Church translated *mysterion* with *sacramentum*, and this gave Tertullian a basis for his usage. While he uses the term *sacramentum* for, among others, the Trinity and for salvation history,²³ “it is his use of ‘sacramentum’ for baptism and Eucharist which has proved to be so influential. In baptism and in the Eucharist, Tertullian saw the mysterious presence of God, and so the connection ‘mysterion/sacramentum’ plays no small role.”²⁴

Tertullian influenced other writers to use *sacramentum* to refer to the Christian initiation rite, which included baptismal immersion, the laying on of hands, and the partaking of the Eucharistic meal.²⁵ It then came to be used by extension as a general term for other religious rituals that included the use of water, oil, and blessings, among others.²⁶ *Mysterion* (*mysterium* in Latin), on the other hand, eventually became more associated with mysteries (e.g., Trinity, Incarnation, etc.) that were incomprehensible without faith. Thus, while Greek Christian writers by the third century were simply using *mysterion* for both faith mysteries and sacred rites, the Latin authors had the advantage of having two words/terms at their disposal, namely, *sacramentum*, to refer to Christian rituals, and *mysterium*, to

²²Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 15.

²³Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 22.

²⁴Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 22. Cf. Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 44.

²⁵Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 31.

²⁶Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 31.

refer to mysteries of the faith. Sacraments, then, came to be known as signs of the mysteries of the faith.²⁷

Augustine

The prototypical sacramental theology offered by the patristic era came from the brilliant theological mind of the bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 397–430.²⁸ Early in his ecclesiastical career, Augustine (354–430) addressed the questions raised by the Donatists, a fourth century North African movement founded by Donatus, who was then bishop of Carthage. The Donatists inquired in particular about whether or not those who renounced their faith (apostasy) under the emperor Diocletian's bitter persecution in 303 should be rebaptized. Martos explains Augustine's response:

Augustine's solution to the theological problem posed by the Donatists was as simple as it was ingenious: there must be *two* effects of baptism, one that was permanent, and one that could be lost through sin. The permanent effect was the [sacramental] seal, which all the fathers testified was indelible. The other effect was God's grace, removing sin from the soul of the baptized. Thus, if Christians sinned, what they lost was God's grace, not the seal. And if people were baptized in a heretical sect, the reason why they could not receive the grace of forgiveness was that they were still, wittingly or unwittingly, in a sinful state of separation from the church until they repented of their error. If and when they did repent, that sin would be forgiven.²⁹

²⁷Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 31.

²⁸Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 50.

²⁹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 44. The sacramental seal marks a Christian for life, even if she or he lapses into heresy or schism; see Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994; reprint London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 795. Indeed, the Church by tradition does not repeat three sacraments, namely, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders; see McBrien, *Catholicism*, 795. Tertullian and Augustine, among others, insist that some sacraments imprint a spiritual mark, stamp, or character on the soul. To be "touched" or "stamped" by God is a poetic metaphor that something or someone belongs to God. Some Pauline passages (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:22) speak of the experience of being filled with

St. Augustine thus gave the first technical definition of a sacrament (*sacramentum*) as a visible sign of invisible grace,³⁰ describing a sacrament as a *sacrum signum* (sacred sign) or a *verbum visibile* (visible word). He who has been a dominant influence on Western theology was the first to develop a theory of sacraments based on an interpretation of the New Testament in light of Neoplatonic philosophical thought, which distinguished between spiritual and material being and between the invisible and the visible.³¹ For Augustine, *sacramentum* is a *sacrum signum*, i.e., a sign that points to a divine reality (*res divina*) that it contains within itself. Through the sacrament's word, the unseen reality is perceived and expressed. It is the word that makes the material element to be a sacrament, hence the designation *visibile verbum* or "visible word."³²

The sacrament is thus rooted in its character to signify something other than itself.³³ It is important to remember not what a sign is but what it essentially makes present by pointing to, namely, in this case, the presence of God. Yet in order for a sign to communicate the spiritual reality that it indicates, it must bear some resemblance to what it is referring to. The objective element and the interpretative word constitute the physical, visible manifestation of the sacrament.³⁴

In the sacrament of Baptism, for example, water as an element in nature signifies both life and death. Water as drink means life; the absence of the same, or its destructive potential in typhoons and floods, brings death. Water, then, becomes an adequate symbol for participation in the life, death, and

the Spirit, that is, to be changed from within, as if one had been "touched" or "stamped" by God, making one truly different from others. See McBrien, *Catholicism*, 795, and Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 36–37.

³⁰McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

³¹See Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 24–25.

³²See Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 45, 49–50.

³³Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 23.

³⁴Schmaus, *The Church as Sacrament*, 27–28.

resurrection of Christ. The baptismal Word, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” combined with water and appropriate gestures constitute the whole sacrament.³⁵

Apart from baptism and the Eucharist, Augustine refers the term *sacrament* to many other realities based precisely on their character as sign. He claims that there is some “hidden, mysterious reality which enters into [the] human world through special signs.”³⁶ For him, “material goods are signs of higher, spiritual realities; the visible world is a sign of the eternal universe.”³⁷

Augustine faced another controversy in Pelagius (360–418), a theologian of British roots who insisted that salvation is attainable through human effort alone, even without the aid of divine grace.³⁸ The Pelagians rejected Augustine’s theory of original sin which amounted to Manichaeism, claiming that the flesh was sinful in itself. Augustine, himself a former Manichaean, countered that salvation is impossible without God’s grace, even if one had the liberty to accept or reject the same.³⁹ The baptism of infants, for instance, proves that sacraments possess an intrinsic power to confer divine grace on account of Christ acting principally through them. The objective validity of the sacrament (that grace is in fact objectively conferred), therefore, is independent of the personal holiness of the minister. This does not deny the role of the minister (and indeed of the recipient) in the fruitful or effective celebration of the sacrament; rather, it

³⁵As to everything in the world, Aristotelian philosophy distinguishes between two aspects, namely, “matter”—the sensible material—and “form”—the intelligible meaning of the “matter”; see Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 66. The writers before Augustine distinguished as well between material creation (matter) and speech (form). Sacraments, therefore, are (material) objects made intelligible by the words (e.g., prayers). See Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 54.

³⁶Osborne, *Sacramental Theology*, 23.

³⁷Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology*, 49.

³⁸McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1247.

³⁹Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 55.

simply affirms the intrinsic power of God to communicate grace wherever and whenever He wills.

Notwithstanding the confusion that such teaching could bring, that is, that sacraments work *ex opere operato* (through the ritual being performed), Augustine also asserted the role of *intention* for a sacrament to take place. Sacraments do not work automatically or magically simply when the right words are said over the prescribed ritual gestures and elements.⁴⁰ An act of faith from both minister and assembly is necessary for the sacraments to be efficacious. The minister must always intend to celebrate any sacrament in the faith and belief of the believing community. Prior to marriage or ordination, for example, the couples or priestly candidates “state their intentions” in that they willingly submit to the duties and obligations of their chosen states of life.⁴¹ Even parents and godparents state their intention of having their infants baptized in the faith of the Church. Three components, then, constitute what is required for sacraments to occur, namely, the (material) elements, words, and intention. All these have their origins in the theology of the early fathers of the Church.⁴²

Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) expounded upon the Augustinian principle that a sacrament is rooted in its character as sign. He taught that “sacraments cause grace insofar as they signify it.”⁴³ Walsh writes:

In his causal analysis [Aquinas] does not lose sight of his definition of sacrament as sign. It is in signifying that the rite causes grace (*sacramenta significando causant* [*De Veritate* 27, 4, ad 13]). God

⁴⁰Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 54.

⁴¹See Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 54.

⁴²Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 54.

⁴³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1911), III, qq. 60–65. See McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

reveals his grace in the sacrament as he gives it. Thus the sacrament gives form and finality to grace as well as giving it existence (q. 62, a. 2). This means they are signs of Christ, because he is the concrete embodiment of grace, giving it existence, form, and finality (Third Part, qq. 7–8). They are signs of the paschal mystery of his death, of the grace that comes from him into our life on earth, and of the glory he promises when he comes again (q. 60, a. 3). It is the Passion of Christ that gives the sacraments their meaning as well as their life-giving power (Third Part, q. 60, a. 5).⁴⁴

The opinion that sacraments signify more than they cause grace lasted until the Scholastic revival of the twelfth century.⁴⁵ Before Aquinas, emphasis was placed on the sign aspect of the sacraments (Augustine’s definition of sacrament as a visible sign of invisible grace). Aquinas’s great contribution to sacramental thought lay in his explanation of *how* the sacraments as *efficacious* signs cause the grace they signify.⁴⁶ Martos explains:

The sacraments were not their ultimate cause. In themselves the rites were only symbolic gestures; the ultimate cause of all sacramental effects was God alone. For the sacramental realities were supernatural powers enabling a person to receive and cooperate with grace, and the sacramental graces were God-given gifts. The sacraments were, so to speak, God’s instruments, vehicles, channels of grace.⁴⁷

For McBrien, “the twentieth-century renewal of sacramental theology is essentially a rediscovery of that Thomistic perspective.”⁴⁸ The purpose of a sign according to Aquinas is to instruct, to call to mind the reality it signifies; a sacrament, however, is not a mere sign but an *efficacious* sign of grace, i.e., a sacrament causes what it signifies. In using the sign, the faithful express from their side their faith in the unseen reality hidden beneath it.⁴⁹ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy articulates this Thomistic principle:

⁴⁴Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 29–30.

⁴⁵McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

⁴⁶McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

⁴⁷Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 68.

⁴⁸McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

⁴⁹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790–791.

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called “sacraments of faith.” They do impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them disposes the faithful most effectively to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.⁵⁰

Martos elucidates further:

Signs were instrumental causes of knowledge; through signs people came to know what others were trying to say to them. In other words, signs were instrumental causes but they were necessary because they were needed for communication. In the same way, [Aquinas] argued, sacraments were instrumental causes but they too were necessary; they were signs of sacred realities that God wanted to communicate to people for their own benefit. Without signs such as the sacraments people would not come to know or experience God’s salvation. It was a conclusion that made a great deal of sense in a world where books were scarce and few could read; for most Christians the sacramental liturgies were the main form of religious instruction.⁵¹

Irwin, however, asserts that sacraments for Aquinas cause grace but distinguishes between God as the principal cause of grace and the sacraments as instruments of grace. The sacraments were willed by God to communicate grace; in this sense, sacraments are both signs and causes for Aquinas. *Significando causant*—sacraments work by signifying. God mediates His salvation using material elements that are consistent with our nature as embodied beings given to sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.⁵² Aquinas’s teaching thus reflects the patristic theology of Augustine, which speaks of sacrament as sign. In this way, he maintains the balance between Scholastic theology’s emphasis on sacraments as causes of the grace they signify and the concept

⁵⁰*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), no. 59. Hereafter cited as SC.

⁵¹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 68.

⁵²Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 101.

of sacraments as signs that cause grace precisely according to their nature as signs.⁵³

As efficacious signs of grace, the sacraments call to mind and communicate effectively the saving presence of Christ. The members of the Church, in like manner, express their faith-response to Christ's loving and saving presence through the same. In summary, the *sacramental principle* maintains that "God touches all of humankind, and the human community as a whole responds to its experience of the divine, through a sacramental mode."⁵⁴ The seven sacramental rites of the Church thus actualize this encounter between the divine and the human. As McBrien argues,

The sacraments do not *cause* grace, in the sense that the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ is otherwise unavailable. The offer of grace is already present to the individual, to the Church, and to the human community at large in God's original self-communication.... The sacraments shape and focus that communication of grace ... [to] signify, celebrate, and effect what God is, in a sense, already doing everywhere and for all. But the sacraments also mandate and equip specific members of the human community, i.e., disciples of Jesus Christ, to be the corporate sign and instrument of God's presence and saving activity in Christ.⁵⁵

The Medieval Period

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries "saw the rediscovery of patristic theology, the organization of theology into major areas of inquiry, and the working out of an intellectual method to deal with theological problems."⁵⁶ Medieval Christianity tended to be more practical than theoretical, analytical than synthetic, such as with the concern regarding the proper administration of the sacraments.⁵⁷

⁵³Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 102.

⁵⁴McBrien, *Catholicism*, 788.

⁵⁵McBrien, *Catholicism*, 793–794.

⁵⁶Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 69.

⁵⁷Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 69.

Res et Sacramentum. The twelfth century saw the formulation of the expression *res et sacramentum* to denote the immediate effect of a sacrament, particularly the Eucharist. It was Augustine who introduced the term *res* to refer to the ultimate effect of union with Christ in the Eucharist. Berengar of Tours (d. 1088), however, denied the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist; for him, there were only two elements in the sacrament, namely, the ritual sacrament (*sacramentum*) and the ultimate effect of grace (*res*). Eleventh century theologians such as Lanfranc of Canterbury (d. 1089) and Guitmund of Aversa (d. 1095) thus sought to safeguard the reality of Christ's presence and searched for a third element. Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1142) and Peter Lombard (d. 1160) provided this definitive third formulation, namely, that *sacramentum et res* refers to the immediate effect of the sacramental action in the Eucharist—the body and blood of Christ signifying his real presence. Over the years, therefore, the sacramental rite (*sacramentum tantum*) had for its immediate effect the *sacramentum et res* (the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine) and for its ultimate effect the *res tantum* (grace of union with Christ).⁵⁸

Validity. Theology and canon law developed into separate disciplines during this time. Theology explained how sacraments functioned within the spiritual life of the believer; canon law concerned itself with how to regulate sacraments and determine their place within the institutional church.⁵⁹

The chief concern of the canonists was the proper administration of the sacraments. Since these were effective signs or instrumental causes, “care had to be taken to preserve the signs by administering the sacraments correctly, to ensure that they maintained their spiritual effectiveness.”⁶⁰ Would baptism be effective, for instance, if water was not used? Would a Mass

⁵⁸Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 81–82.

⁵⁹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 71.

⁶⁰Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 71.

still be valid for one who missed the entire Liturgy of the Word? How much of the Eucharist could one change without affecting the transubstantiation of the bread and wine? What were the essentials that had to be preserved if extreme unction was to be administered in emergency situations? What if the prescribed words in any sacrament were not said or pronounced properly?⁶¹

Such concerns had to do with the validity of the sacraments, which eventually came to depend on the fulfillment of the minimum ritual requirements.⁶² The concern for validity through proper sacramental performance thus encouraged a minimalist attitude over time, i.e., spiritual effectiveness was guaranteed merely by a proper administration of the sacraments. What got lost along the way was the experience of liturgies as vibrant, richly symbolic, and personally engaging ritual expressions of faith by which people fully experienced sacramental spiritual effects.⁶³ While Aquinas emphasized the causal nature of sacraments, the canonists focused on their proper administration.⁶⁴

The *sacramentum et res*, the immediate sacramental effect, did much to clarify many unanswered questions at the time. The preoccupation with proper “matter” (sacramental materials and gestures) and “form” (the prescribed words used in the sacraments) was for the purpose of determining the validity of any sacrament. The immediate effect, i.e., the sacramental reality (*sacramentum et res*)—the baptism seal, the characters of confirmation and Holy Orders, the marriage bond, reconciliation with the Church, the commitment of the soul to God, and the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist—is thus caused upon the valid performance of a sacrament.⁶⁵

⁶¹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 72.

⁶²Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 72.

⁶³Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 71–72.

⁶⁴Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 71.

⁶⁵Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 72–73.

This last point is crucial since a sacrament for Aquinas always offered grace but is not always received by the participant.⁶⁶ A valid sacrament, in other words, always communicates grace (*sacramentum et res*) objectively but the *res tantum*, i.e., the ultimate grace, the sacramental graces or fruits, depend on the openness of the participant. The absence of the proper disposition may hinder the communication of the ultimate grace or fruits even if the immediate grace was received.⁶⁷

A person may also receive the sacraments validly but experience the fruits much, much later, such as with an unfaithful husband who realizes over time the damage he has been causing to his marriage, or a Christian baptized at birth who experiences a deeper religious conversion much later in life. The theory of reviviscence holds that while God had always been offering his grace since the sacrament was administered, the ultimate fruits were received only upon the removal of the obstacle of sin or vice. The fruits or effects of the sacrament had therefore been revived after a period of dormancy.⁶⁸

When canon law was still in the process of development and the proper sacramental procedures had not yet been codified, “the minimalist rules for the valid administration of the sacraments, instead of being the barest acceptable standards, tended to become the norm.”⁶⁹ It thus happened that peasants, who barely understood the subtleties of canon law, were acquainted only with the sacraments as reduced to their barest essentials; they understood sacraments to cause grace rather mechanistically.⁷⁰ This is how popular piety developed—rites, for the general populace, always produced whatever they signified: baptism washes away original sin, Eucharistic consecration transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ,

⁶⁶Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 73.

⁶⁷See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 73.

⁶⁸Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 73–74.

⁶⁹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 75.

⁷⁰Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 75.

confession forgives sins, matrimony seals the marriage bond, Orders consecrates ordinary men to be priests of the Church, and so on.⁷¹

Ex Opere Operato, Ex Opere Operantis. As such, while the theology of the medieval period did not neglect the crucial importance of an active faith in determining sacramental effectiveness, its role in popular practice was reduced to fulfilling mere conditions without which the sacraments did not take place.⁷²

The scholastics of this period generally agreed that it was the rite itself, not the minister of the sacrament, that caused the grace it signified. How else could one explain the fact that returning heretics and lapsed Christians needed no rebaptism? How else could one explain that grace was in fact received even through a sinful minister administering the sacrament? The scholastics insisted, then, that the sacraments worked *ex opere operato* (“by the work done”), independent of the state of holiness of the minister.⁷³

Sacramental practice, however, suffered the worst fate imaginable during this period. Since sacraments worked *ex opere operato*, the impression given was that grace is communicated automatically, almost magically. By simply performing any sacrament according to its minimum requirements, grace is said to be communicated regardless of the personal state of holiness either of minister or participant. Hence, baptized infants were automatically washed of original sin, the confirmed received an indelible mark on their souls, married couples were bonded for life, sins confessed were immediately wiped away upon saying the priestly words of absolution, the bread and wine were suddenly

⁷¹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 75.

⁷²Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 83.

⁷³Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 69.

transformed into Christ's body and blood, and the souls of the departed who received the final rites went directly to heaven.⁷⁴

This mindset was carried over into practices of popular piety. Prayers to the Virgin Mary were guaranteed to be heard. Touching the relics of the saints could cause miraculous healings. Making a pilgrimage to Rome, or making a significant donation to the Church, could earn merit in heaven or release a soul from purgatory.⁷⁵

Later scholastic sacramental theology then introduced

an elaborate intellectual system of theological terms [matter and form, substance and accidents, nature and grace, and the like] that [unfortunately] had little or no reference to the lives that people actually led or to the religious experiences that they actually had.⁷⁶

Thus, while this is not to say that Aquinas or his better contemporaries were not often describing what they had personally experienced in their own lives, it does show that the scholastics, more than explaining their own religious experiences, wrote using the customary Aristotelian categories available during their time.⁷⁷

Right Intention. The scholastics recognized that right intention was necessary in sacramental performance. In fact, both minister and participant in any sacramental rite must have the intention of participating in it, i.e., of doing what the Church does; otherwise, the rite would be nothing but an empty ritual, and no spiritual effect could take place.⁷⁸

The scholastic efforts at codification compromised the dynamism of the Biblical understanding of sacramental liturgy, where a "reification" (becoming like a "thing" or object) of what

⁷⁴Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 80.

⁷⁵Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 80.

⁷⁶Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 76–77.

⁷⁷Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 76.

⁷⁸Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 69.

is in itself a thorough liturgical and active dynamic takes place.⁷⁹ The involvement of the minister in intending to do what the Church intends and does (Lombard) guarantees that there is no quasi-magical understanding taking place wherein sacraments work automatically. Sacraments are acts of faith done in faith in the believing community; hence, they must be “intended and intentional.”⁸⁰

Part II: Church Teaching According to Official Church Documents

Since the Middle Ages (5th–15th cent. CE), the sacraments have been taken primarily to mean *causes*, not *signs*, of *grace*.⁸¹ It mattered less if the sacraments intelligibly and effectively signified the realities they pointed to; what was more important was that they communicated grace. As long as a duly ordained minister validly administers the sacraments according to the intention of the Church, and to a properly disposed recipient who places no obstacle in the way through serious sin or lack of faith, grace is objectively, i.e., automatically, communicated.⁸²

The following citations are from documents culled from the classic reference on Church documents edited by Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*.⁸³ The introduction to its first edition acknowledges the limitations of official Church pronouncements on any issue which the Church thinks is of crucial importance:

⁷⁹Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 84.

⁸⁰Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 85.

⁸¹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

⁸²McBrien, *Catholicism*, 790.

⁸³Josef Neuner & Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th ed., rev. & enl. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996). Hereafter cited as ND.

The documents of the Church are occasional pronouncements, usually intended to meet the challenge of definite errors. The historical circumstances in which they were written called for emphasizing those elements of the faith which were being threatened. The need for emphasis, however, is by nature little conducive to a harmonious and well-poised formulation of doctrine. The formulation is the more easily selective and one-sided as the documents bear more deeply the stamp of current controversies. In the process full justice is not always done to other facets of the revealed message nor are the truths expressed always properly focused. Much less do the documents present a complete account of the Christian message. In fact, its most intimate core is rarely touched upon by them; this is taken for granted rather than explicitly stated.⁸⁴

These documents on the sacraments were thus meant to respond to very specific objections. They do not provide a thorough theological exposition on the meaning of the sacramental rites. Works such as this current one, therefore, will hopefully offer a more holistic theological discussion that may locate the sacraments within the wider context of the Church's life and mission.

The documents to be cited will focus on three issues, all in one way or the other dealing with either the *validity* or *fruitfulness* of a sacrament: 1) the worthiness of the minister as inconsequential in the validity of a sacrament; 2) the proper intention (by the minister) for administering a valid sacrament; and 3) the proper disposition required (on the part of the recipient) for the fruitful reception of a sacrament.

The Validity of the Sacrament as Independent of the Worthiness of the Minister. According to the papal bull *Inter Cunctas* of 1418,

likewise, whether he believes that a bad priest who uses the correct matter and form and has the intention of doing what the Church does, truly performs [the Eucharist], truly absolves, truly baptizes, truly confers the other sacraments.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ND, Introduction to the First Edition, XXXIII.

⁸⁵ND, no. 1304. The validity of the sacrament, then, is independent of the minister's worthiness, something which John Wycliffe (d. 1384), on the

In their zeal to offset the worldliness and unworthiness of the corrupt clergy responsible for the religious decay of their time, the Albigenians of 1180 (onwards) insisted on the worthiness of the minister (someone who is characterized by an extreme form of religious poverty) for the validity of any sacrament.⁸⁶ Innocent III's *Profession of Faith* (1208) declares thus:

Furthermore, we do not reject the sacraments which are conferred in the Church, in co-operation with the inestimable and invisible power of the Holy Spirit, even though these sacraments be administered by a sinful priest, as long as he is recognized by the Church. And we do not disparage ecclesiastical duties and blessings performed by such a one; but we accept them with benevolence, as we would those performed by the most just man. For the evil life of a bishop or a priest has no harmful effect on either the baptism of an infant or the consecration of the Eucharist or other ecclesiastical duties performed for the faithful.⁸⁷

The same profession cites the ultimate origin of the Eucharistic Sacrifice's intrinsic power to communicate grace:

With sincere hearts, we firmly and unhesitatingly believe and loyally affirm that after consecration the Sacrifice, that is, the bread and wine are the true body and the true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we believe that in the Sacrifice a good priest effects nothing more than a bad priest; because it is not by the merit of the one consecrating that the sacrifice is accomplished, but by the word of the Creator and by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁸

The fourteenth session of the Council of Trent (1551), in a strongly worded affirmation of traditional Church teaching on the sacrament of penance, defends the juridical power of priests to administer the sacrament regardless of their personal sanctity:

The Council likewise teaches that even priests who are in mortal sin exercise the office of forgiving sins as ministers of Christ through

other hand, insisted on before he was eventually condemned by the Council of Constance in 1415.

⁸⁶ND, no. 1501.

⁸⁷ND, no. 1301.

⁸⁸ND, no. 1504.

the power of the Holy Spirit conferred in ordination, and that the opinion of those who maintain that bad priests do not possess this power is wrong.⁸⁹

The document asserts the jurisdictional authority given to the ordained cleric to administer the sacrament regardless of the minister's personal holiness. Once again, it appeals to the ultimate source of the minister's power, namely, the Holy Spirit, who acts through the ordained ministers of Christ to exercise the office of forgiving sins.

The foregoing documents assert that the worthiness of the minister certainly does not determine the validity of a sacrament. Indeed, while this may have put undue emphasis on the mediatory role of the priest in the administration of the sacraments, on whether or not the priest is worthy to administer them, the Church is simply reaffirming its conviction in the sovereign power of God to communicate His grace through whatever means He deems appropriate.

The Proper Intention of the Minister. Sacramental efficacy is not compromised as long as the intention of the Church is fulfilled in the administration of the sacraments. The public decree of Pope Eugene IV (1439) makes this specific point evident in a clear exposition of sacramental theology:

All these sacraments are constituted by three elements: by things as the matter, by words as the form, and by the person of the minister conferring the sacrament with the intention of doing what the Church does. And if any one of these is lacking, the sacrament is not effected.⁹⁰

The Council of Trent's seventh session (1547) affirms this teaching of the Church—that her intention must always be carried out whenever any sacrament is performed. Its Decree on the Sacraments reads thus:

⁸⁹ND, no. 1627.

⁹⁰ND, no. 1307.

If anyone says that the intention, at least of doing what the Church does, is not required in the ministers when they are performing and conferring the sacraments, *anathema sit*.⁹¹

This Jansenist statement on sacramental validity is also explicitly condemned in Pope Alexander VIII's Decree of The Holy Office (1690), which insists that an "external intention" is not sufficient and that an "interior intention" is required on the part of the minister of the sacrament for its validity. It condemns the following statement as an error of the Jansenists:

Baptism is valid, when conferred by a minister who observes all the external rites and the form of baptizing, but interiorly within his heart resolves: I do not intend what the Church does.⁹²

Indeed, the papal bull *Inter Cunctas* of 1418, mentioned above, also asserts that as long as the correct matter and form are used and doing the intention of the Church is accomplished, a minister validly administers any sacrament.⁹³

The Proper Disposition for a Fruitful Reception of the Sacrament. In the decree *Sacra Tridentina* (1905), Pope Pius X gives a clear statement about the disposition required for a fruitful reception of the sacrament. He writes:

Frequent and daily communion, because ardently desired by Christ and the Church, must be open to all the faithful of whatever class or condition, so that none who is in the state of grace and approaches the holy table with a right intention may be turned away from it.

The right intention consists in this, that a person approach the holy table, not from routine, vanity or human motives, but because he wishes to please God, to be more closely united with him in charity, and to overcome his infirmities and defects by means of this divine remedy.

⁹¹ND, no. 1321.

⁹²ND, no. 1325.

⁹³ND, no. 1304.

Though it is extremely desirable that those who practice frequent and daily communion be free from venial sins, or at least from fully deliberate ones, and from all attachment to them, yet it is not enough that they be free from mortal sins and resolved never to sin again; with this sincere proposal, it is impossible that they should not gradually correct themselves from venial sin and from attachment to it.⁹⁴

The very spirit of the sacraments thus calls for a receptiveness that is not content with merely avoiding sin in whatever form. Right intention means a desire to be more united with God in love that, among other things, overcomes personal weakness.

The papal bull *Exsurge Domine* of 1520, on the other hand, condemns Martin Luther's teaching that sacramental efficacy does not take place for those who merely do not place an obstacle in the way.⁹⁵ It may be recalled that the Church requires two elements for the validity of a sacrament, namely, that 1) the sacrament is administered according to the intention of the Church and that 2) the recipient places no obstacle in the way of the sacrament through serious sin or lack of faith. Yet Luther's insistence on the primacy of personal faith in the sacraments effectively rejects the idea that grace is communicated by simply performing the sacrament (*ex opere operato*) as long as no obstacle is placed through serious sin by the recipient in the way of receiving its fruits. Luther believes that grace can be communicated only through the personal faith of the recipient (*ex opere operantis*). A minimalist avoiding of sin, therefore, can never be a precondition for sacramental efficacy.

Pope Pius XII's encyclical letter on the sacred liturgy, *Mediator Dei* (1947), shifts its emphasis on how the sacraments can have their proper effect. The document reads as such:

It is certainly true that the sacraments and the Mass possess an intrinsic efficacy, because they are actions of Christ himself transmitting and distributing the grace of the divine Head to the members of the mystical body. But to have their proper effect they

⁹⁴ND, no. 1209/1-4.

⁹⁵ND, no. 1309.

require our souls also to be in the right dispositions. This is why St. Paul warns us in regard to the Eucharist: “Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup” [1 Cor. 11:28].... For it must be borne in mind that the members of his body are living members, endowed with intellect and will; therefore they must deliberately set their lips to this source of grace, absorb and assimilate this food of life, and uproot from themselves anything that may obscure its efficacy. So the work of our redemption, though in itself something independent of our will, really calls for an interior effort from our souls if we are to attain eternal salvation.⁹⁶

Thus, while the encyclical properly acknowledges the source of sacramental efficacy in Christ, this divine initiative can only initiate personal transformation once the recipient, in active faith, responds to and interiorizes the spirit of the sacrament, making oneself worthy of the sacramental encounter with the presence of the Risen Christ.

The threefold purpose of the sacraments, i.e., human sanctification, the building up of the community of faith, and the worship of God, is finally delineated in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The idea, moreover, that sacraments not only presuppose but also nourish and express faith is also put forward. The document reads, in part:

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify human beings, to build up the Body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs, they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it; that is why they are called “sacraments of faith”. They do impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs, and should frequent with great eagerness those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ND, no. 1332.

⁹⁷ND, no. 1335.

While the document presupposes, almost in passing, the long Church tradition that upholds the intrinsic efficacy of the sacraments, it goes on to emphasize in a longer statement what is required to make any sacramental celebration truly fruitful for the recipient. It is presumed that any effective celebration—through the active participation of listening, understanding, and interiorizing—prepares the recipient to reap the fruits thereof, i.e., a personal, transformative sacramental encounter with the Risen Christ.

CHAPTER III

LITURGICAL-SACRAMENTAL EDUCATION ACCORDING TO THE CCC AND CFC: EXPOSITION AND CRITIQUE¹

Introduction

The second chapter provided an overview of key sacramental theologies over the centuries, theologies that culminate today in current official teaching on liturgy and sacraments from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC). This third chapter discusses the basic paradigm behind today's popular liturgical mindset as exemplified by the CCC and compares that pattern of liturgical instruction and understanding with the initial efforts toward the renewal of liturgical education as embodied in the CFC.

Exposition

There are many general and specific issues pertaining to liturgy and worship in the universal catechism, particularly the

¹Originally published in Chapter 2, "Disfiguring the Sacred," under the title "Liturgical-Sacramental Education According to the CCC and CFC," in Michael Demetrius H. Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred: A Fresh Approach to Prayer, Liturgy, and the Sacraments* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012), 58–67.

first published draft of the CCC, that merit close attention.² This chapter will limit itself to matters and concerns that have to do directly with liturgical and sacramental catechesis and practice today.

The CCC in its final edition discusses liturgical catechesis in Part Two, “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery,” which contains two sections: “The Sacramental Economy” and “The Seven Sacraments.” Preceding them is a brief, albeit rich, introduction on the meaning of liturgy, an introduction that reflects the liturgical reform of Vatican II which places the sacraments squarely in the context of the Church’s liturgical life.³ Yet while this second part of the universal catechism can be rightfully praised for its content, its separation from Part Four—on “Christian Prayer”—is deemed pedagogically unsound. If the liturgy is the *official prayer* of the Church, it would be an error to separate Catholic prayer from the liturgy.⁴ Moreover, given the predisposition of many Filipino Catholics toward privatistic and ritualistic faith practice, this separation of sacramental content from prayer unfortunately reinforces the inability of

²Commentators have observed, for instance, that the CCC’s treatment of the liturgy is more Eastern than Western, as though it was written in Constantinople rather than in Rome. Catholics brought up in the Western tradition might find this section confusing as the treatment of the seven sacraments and their historical development reverts to Tridentine theology rather than to the more participatory thrust of Vatican II. The meal aspect of the Eucharist, for example, is not mentioned at all, and the treatment of liturgical signs and symbols takes a more cognitive rather than performative approach. See Peter E. Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 95–108 and David N. Power, “The Sacraments in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 109–125.

³Catherine Dooley, “Liturgical Catechesis in the Catechism of the Catholic Church,” in *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Traditional Themes and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Berard L. Marthaler (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 89.

⁴See *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), no. 7. Hereafter cited as SC.

many Catholics to identify and experience the sacraments as prayer realities *in themselves* that are necessarily ecclesial by their very nature.

The CFC, on the other hand, locates its exposition on the sacraments within an introductory chapter on “Catholic Prayer and Worship.” This arrangement demonstrates how the ritual sacraments themselves constitute the ecclesial prayer of the Church in various forms and how they manifest the Church’s official worship of God in Christ through the Spirit. These CFC chapters on prayer, worship, and sacraments come immediately, moreover, after the chapters on the Holy Spirit and the Church, respectively, to bring out clearly the threefold action of the Holy Spirit who 1) incorporates the faithful into the Church, 2) vivifies their sacramental life, and 3) prepares them in the present for the eternal life to come.⁵

A more important issue, however, is how “sacrament” should be defined. The CCC does so as follows:

The sacraments are symbolic actions instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which the divine life is bestowed upon us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and confer the graces appropriate to each sacrament. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the right attitude and in the right spirit.⁶

⁵Joseph Roche, “Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC & CFC,” in *A Companion to CFC: A Collection of Essays on the History, Features and Use of Our National Catechism* by Joseph Roche & Leonardo Legaspi (Manila: ECCCE Word and Life, 1998), 98. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], in *Documents of Vatican II*, no. 7 (hereafter cited as LG). The Holy Spirit, in comparison with the soul’s functions in the human body, gives life, unifies, and moves the whole body.

⁶Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; reprint Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994), no. 1131. Hereafter cited as CCC.

This definition admirably recalls the relationship between the necessity of the “right attitude,” on the one hand, and of worship, on the other, in celebrating the sacraments, a relationship that is articulated in Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:⁷ liturgy presupposes faith, on the one hand, and expresses, nourishes, and deepens it, on the other.⁸ Yet some sacramental theologians observe that the CCC’s definition of “sacrament” makes the life of grace, along with its efficacious bestowal on the life of the individual, paradigmatic of any understanding of “sacrament.”⁹ Fink explains that this is due in large part to the universal catechism’s failure to emphasize the centrality of the Church as sacrament, an ecclesiological principle that was given a central place in Vatican II.¹⁰ He writes:

The church as sacrament does appear in the catechism, but almost in passing and without the same centrality. The catechism prefers to use the term in regard to the economy of salvation as it unfolds in the time of the church.... The sacraments emerge in this treatment without their fundamental rooting in the church as sacrament; they become vehicles of grace available in and through the ministry of the church rather than acts of public worship “performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus, that is, by the Head and his members” (SC, no. 7).¹¹

Fink finds this obvious shift away from the inclusive language of Vatican II disturbing since the Council spoke of the whole Church as the primary agent in sacramental worship, thereby emphasizing the essential *ecclesial* dimension of Christian worship. To speak of the laity merely as recipients of sacraments is a regression from the more participatory liturgical and ecclesial vision of Vatican II.¹²

⁷See Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 96.

⁸SC, no. 59. It should be noted, however, that the CCC definition of “sacrament” *does not explicitly mention faith*.

⁹See Power, “The Sacraments in the Catechism,” 111.

¹⁰See SC, no. 5. Cf. LG, no. 1 and *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], in *Documents of Vatican II*, no. 42.

¹¹See Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 98.

¹²Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 98.

Prominent ecclesologist Avery Dulles notes the same inadequate treatment of the Church as sacrament in the catechism.¹³ The ecclesial and paschal foundations of sacraments, so strongly asserted in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, do not seem to be sufficient ground, therefore, for the liturgy and sacraments.

In the specific situation of the Philippines, moreover, the CFC concedes that this idea of the Church as “sacrament” may sound alien to many Filipino Catholics. The obvious reason for this is that people have been accustomed to thinking of “sacrament” in terms of the seven ritual sacraments such as baptism, confession, the Mass, etc.¹⁴ The pedagogical value in speaking of the Church as “sacrament” may not be too obvious, at least in the Philippines.

The CCC’s understanding of “sacrament” thus illustrates a shift away from the ecclesial dimension of the liturgy that was so strongly emphasized in Vatican II. Peter Fink continues:

Stress is given to the reception of sacraments rather than to their enactment by the church in assembly. Stress is also given to the church as the place where sacraments are celebrated rather than to the people who celebrate. What seems to dominate is an older image of sacraments as “vehicles of grace” entrusted to the church rather than as actions of people that express and manifest the nature of the true church.¹⁵

In a radical departure, however, from the 1917 Code of Canon Law which listed the sacraments under the heading “*de rebus* (on things),” the CCC describes the sacraments as ever-living, life-giving “powers that come forth” from the Body of Christ, actions of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church, and

¹³See Avery Dulles, “The Church in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 84–92.

¹⁴Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Makati: Word & Life Publications, 1994; new ed. & enl. Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997), no. 1367. Hereafter cited as CFC.

¹⁵Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 100. Cf. SC, no. 2.

“masterworks of God” in the new covenant.¹⁶ This biblical approach, notes Regis A. Duffy, “offers a much richer context for appreciating the theological and historical development of [the] sacraments...”¹⁷ Indeed, the 1983 Revised Code of Canon Law offers a definition of sacraments that is more consistent with the liturgical reform of Vatican II—canon 840 defines the sacraments as actions of Christ and of the Church that signify and express both faith and worship. They not only bring about human sanctification but also contribute effectively to achieving ecclesial unity. It is also significant, moreover, that the Revised Code uses the term “celebration” instead of “administration / reception” in the “performance” of the sacraments. It retains the language of sacraments as means of grace according to the former Code even as it emphasizes them equally as ecclesial celebrations of worship.¹⁸ Both the individual and ecclesial aspects of sacraments are thus affirmed.

The CFC, for its part, refrains from approaching the issue from a purely academic perspective and does not enter into a debate as to whether or not an instrumentalist understanding of “sacrament” should be adopted. Rather, it simply proposes a substantial modification of the traditional formula, defining the sacraments as sensible signs, instituted by Christ, to give grace.¹⁹

In its exposition of the different sacraments, the CCC follows a general pattern where it answers very basic questions such as the following: What is celebrated? Who celebrates and

¹⁶See CCC, no. 1116.

¹⁷Regis A. Duffy, “The Sacramental Economy,” in *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ed. Michael J. Walsh (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 234. The treatment of the CCC for each of the sacraments in terms of what they are called, who celebrates them, how they are celebrated, who receives them, and so on may be considered as an equivalent of so-called “matter/form definitions.”

¹⁸Wilfredo C. Paguio, *Notes on Sacraments and Sacramentals According to the Revised Code of Canon Law*, eds. Nestor Rebono, Johnny Zulueta, & Ma. Erlinda Cabilin (Pasay: Saint Paul Publications, 1991), 1:17.

¹⁹Roche, “Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC & CFC,” 98.

who receives? How, when, and where is a particular sacrament celebrated? Such an approach has the great advantage of clarity, yet it “can tend toward a certain nominalism, relative to people’s mind-set today.”²⁰ Note, however, that the commentators on the universal catechism cited in this work do not make this observation; they simply identify the general format used by the universal catechism in its treatment of each sacrament.²¹

The CFC’s pattern of exposition, while presenting the essential information about the ritual sacraments, is in view of achieving a more realistic, integrated, and personal understanding of the sacraments and of their importance in living out the Christian Faith.²² It is in keeping with the fundamental principle in religious education of *existential relevance*, which has the intrinsic objective of motivating and relating to the actual life situation of the intended audience, above and beyond simply presenting factual information. Such an approach is a concrete step in trying to improve Catholic religion courses which have often been criticized for being much too focused on memorized head knowledge, all while failing to inspire students to live out the Gospel more faithfully in their lives.

The CCC in general uses the analogy of human growth as a broad framework for understanding the sacraments.

²⁰Roche, “Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC & CFC,” 98–99. Nominalism is a medieval philosophical idea that denies the reality of universal principles. Every substance, then, may be reduced to an individual reality. See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., rev. & enl. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994; reprint London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 1246.

²¹Power, however, notes that this procedure, together with the catechism’s efforts at addressing contemporary issues, is pursued within the classical scholastic framework. He laments that this may very well be a lost opportunity for developing a truly contemporary mystagogy, that is, the Church practice that based instruction about the sacraments on their celebration. See Power, “The Sacraments in the Catechism,” 114. Cf. Catherine Dooley, “Liturgical Catechesis: Mystagogy, Marriage or Misnomer?” *Worship* 66, no. 5 (September 1992): 386–397.

²²Roche, “Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC & CFC,” 99.

The *Baltimore Catechism* also uses such a framework. Both catechisms present parallels between the seven sacraments and significant stages of human life, i.e., birth/baptism, coming of age/confirmation, the need for nourishment/Eucharist, the need for healing/penance and anointing, and taking on crucial social responsibilities/marriage and orders. It is an analogy that is traced back to St. Thomas Aquinas, who taught that “spiritual life has a certain conformity with the life of the body: just as other corporeal things have a certain likeness to things spiritual.”²³ The purpose of such an arrangement is to show how all the sacraments form an organic whole in which each has its own constitutive and vital place.²⁴ As such, divided into sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist), of healing (penance and anointing of the sick), and at the service of communion (marriage and holy orders), the sacraments can indeed be seen as corresponding to and touching the many significant levels of human life and development in general.

A number of professional liturgists and sacramental theologians, however, have expressed their misgivings about this CCC arrangement. Dooley, for example, argues as follows:

The Catechism states that there are other ways of ordering the sacraments than this threefold division and affirms that the “eucharist, the sacrament of sacraments, holds an unique place in this whole and all other sacraments are ordered to it as their end” (CCC, no. 1211). Yet the only place in which there is a full treatment of the eucharist is in the section on the sacraments of initiation. In the light of the whole of Book Two, the analogy of human growth as an organizing framework stunts the organic approach to the sacraments as ecclesial sacraments, actions of the church, “the sacrament of Christ’s action, at work through the mission of the Holy Spirit” (CCC, no. 1118), and gives the impression that the sacraments are all equal. The New Testament is clear that baptism and eucharist are fundamental to the whole sacramental system and that the other sacraments draw their

²³Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1911), III, 65, 1.

²⁴Dooley, “Liturgical Catechesis in the Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 88.

meaning from their relationship to baptism and eucharist. Using the analogy of human growth counters the rich description of the common elements of sacraments in paragraphs 1113 to 1130 of the CCC.²⁵

While Power speculates that the CCC's sacramental system, based as it is on the analogy with human development, "is deemed to afford adequate intelligibility and justification for the number seven and a way of explaining the effects of each sacrament in particular,"²⁶ Aidan Kavanagh, for his part, raises some very strong objections to this CCC ordering of the sacraments and insists on the primacy of Baptism and the Eucharist over the others. Pastoral practice loses intelligibility otherwise, and degenerates into the confusing sequence of baptism, penance, first communion, religious instruction, and confirmation. Such an ordering is not only pastorally counterproductive but also, at worst, "unrecognizable in the tradition, in the reforms, or in both the 1917 and the revised 1983 Codes of Canon Law."²⁷

The expert opinions of these liturgists and theologians, while theoretically sound, *seemingly fail nevertheless to recognize the actual manner by which most Catholics imbibe and live out the teachings of their faith.*²⁸ The analogy of the sacraments with human growth is drawn from pastoral practice; what is weak is the theorizing on the "pure nature" of Baptism and the Eucharist—no one has exercised *that* in real faith life. The context of today's Filipino Catholic, i.e., a worship life centered on popular piety and a passive, often uncritical, "reception" of the sacraments (celebrated gradually according to the natural process of human growth), all the more calls for a liturgical catechesis that relates closely to the natural maturing process of human life and personal deepening. This form of instruction would likewise

²⁵Dooley, "Liturgical Catechesis in the Catechism of the Catholic Church," 88–89.

²⁶Power, "The Sacraments in the Catechism," 110.

²⁷See Aidan Kavanagh, "Theological Principles for Sacramental Catechesis," *The Living Light* 23 (June 1987): 317.

²⁸Roche, "Notable Qualities of the Content of the CCC & CFC," 99.

have to explain effectively the existential meaning of the many signs, symbols, rites, and rituals that characterize much of the Filipino Catholic's worship-sacramental life.

Thus, while today's liturgical renewal focuses on the centrality of the Eucharist among the seven sacraments, a more effective liturgical catechesis would seem to suggest a treatment of the Eucharist that places it in the center, that is, after Baptism and Confirmation,²⁹ and before the sacraments of healing and vocation. This arrangement provides an opportunity to have the Eucharist gradually introduced to Christian initiates, and to have them, in turn, gradually initiated into the Eucharist, all according to the normal pattern of human growth and maturity in faith. Indeed, the traditional paradigm of liturgical instruction has always presented a more mechanical and objectified view of the sacraments that, though valuable for its clarity, encourages a purely cognitive knowledge of these rituals, thereby ignoring the concrete and subjective situation of the faithful who celebrate them.

²⁹There are good reasons for confirming around the age of discretion, and even for postponing it further to young adulthood. It is the adolescents who begin to move away from childhood and toward a more personally chosen faith. Cf. CFC, no. 1634.

CHAPTER IV

CONTEMPORARY SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGIES

Introduction

The third chapter compared the approaches of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC) to the sacraments. The CCC exemplifies the more metaphysical approach to sacramental celebration and life, whereas the CFC offers a more holistic take, mindful of the place of the participant's active faith in performing the sacraments within the community of believers.

This fourth chapter explores some of the current sacramental theologies coming upon the heels of Vatican II. Together with Martin Luther's sacramental theology in Chapter Five, these current insights and ideas are essential for grounding a more personal and holistic theology of Filipino sacramental worship today.

Exposition

The reform of Catholic worship life today essentially rests on the effort to relieve ourselves of the mechanistic and legalistic mindset concerning sacramental efficacy that has been in place since the Council of Trent.¹ Cut-off from the original realities

¹See Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Ligouri: Ligouri Publications, 2014), 120.

they represent, sacraments degenerated into rituals that magically communicate grace. Contemporary theologians thus attempt to go beyond a merely canonical approach to the sacraments. They try to explain the traditional teaching on the sacraments to recapture the realities described therein and attempt to link them to contemporary human experience.²

The list of contemporary sacramental theologies is extremely diverse. We will focus only on five, namely, sacraments as Signs of Grace, Encounters with Christ, Symbolic Actions of the Church, Symbols of Human Meaning, and Transformations of Human Reality.³

Sacraments as Signs of Grace. Catholic theology has always regarded sacraments as causes of grace, the reason being that this notion was challenged by the Protestant reformers. The counter-reformation thus emphasized the effectiveness of the sacraments more than their sign-bearing qualities. Nevertheless, the Church has always described sacraments as signs—of grace, Christ, divine love, life, faith, church, and spiritual transformation.⁴ This helps clarify the principle of *ex opere operato*, that is, that the effectiveness of a sacrament, as a sign of the divine at work in it, is independent of the holiness of the minister and/or recipient.⁵ Despite its limitations, i.e., that sacraments are signs of metaphysical realities that have not yet been experienced (e.g., baptism as a sign of washing away original sin, penance as a sign of God's forgiveness, marriage as a sign of the indissoluble bond between the couple, etc.), this theological effort was a first step toward rethinking their meaning.⁶

²See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 120.

³See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 121–130. Martos also mentions sacraments as liturgical acts and sacraments as interpreted by process, charismatic, liberationist, and postmodern theologies. We focus on the five approaches mentioned above for the purposes of this book.

⁴See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 121.

⁵Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 121.

⁶Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 121.

Sacraments as Encounters with Christ.⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx developed a theology of the sacraments that was both faithful to traditional Thomistic insights on sacramental efficacy and “free of the minimalistic tendency of late scholasticism.”⁸ His genius lies in his attempt to bridge the original religious experience within the sacramental ritual with contemporary philosophical existentialism.⁹ As will be discussed in chapter five, Schillebeeckx tried to speak of sacraments in personal terms, not instrumentalist ones. He likens the sacramental experience to an existential encounter with Christ.

Schillebeeckx’s classic and highly influential *magnum opus*, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*,¹⁰ articulates the paradigmatic shift in contemporary liturgical-sacramental theology in the sixties, i.e., from an understanding of sacraments as mere instruments of grace to being saving, symbolic, personal encounters with the Risen Christ. While reaffirming the traditional emphasis on the objective effectivity of the sacraments based on Christ, his monumental work emphasizes equally the subjective aspect of any effective sacramental celebration, namely, the personal dispositions of the faithful that are necessary for it to be fruitful.

Together with Karl Rahner in his *The Church and the Sacraments*,¹¹ Schillebeeckx was instrumental in showing that

⁷See Michael Demetrius H. Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred: A Fresh Approach to Prayer, Liturgy, and the Sacraments* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012) and Michael Demetrius H. Asis, *The Filipino Church at the Crossroads* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc., 2016).

⁸Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 121.

⁹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 121.

¹⁰Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

¹¹Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963). For a more contemporary treatment of Rahner’s sacramental theology, see chap. 8 of his *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

Catholicism could develop a theology of the sacraments that was free of the minimalistic tendency of late scholasticism while remaining faithful to traditional sacramental theology in the tradition of St. Thomas Aquinas.¹² Underlying the sacramental theology of both authors is a philosophical and theological interpretation of symbolism;¹³ understood phenomenologically, any reality that persons encounter is a symbolic reality in that its outward appearance (the phenomenon) is a sign (a symbol) of what it really is (its existential being). For both Schillebeeckx and Rahner, the ritual sacraments are acts of the Church through which the Risen Christ continues to embody his real existence in history.¹⁴ They concretize and realize, given the disposition of faith in those who celebrate them, the reality of the Church as *fundamental sacrament* in Christ through which a personal, living encounter with the Risen Christ and, in him, with the Father through the Spirit is carried out.

Schillebeeckx's sacramental theology proceeds from his fundamental ecclesiology and, needless to say, Christology. He argues that there is no basis for an encounter between God and humanity apart from the *sacramental principle* (that anything material can potentially embody the invisible divine presence). Christ is the *great sacrament* of God in whose humanity God addresses humankind. The Church, in turn, is the *sacrament* of Christ. The essence of the Church, therefore, is to be the principal *sign* and *sacrament* of salvation. This leads to an important mission for the Church—to give credible witness to the presence of Christ and of God within the human community.¹⁵

Sacraments as Symbolic Actions of the Church.

Notwithstanding the similar position he shares with Schillebeeckx with regard to sacramental theology, Rahner adopts an expressly

¹²Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 141.

¹³Joseph Martos, *The Catholic Sacraments* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 129.

¹⁴Martos, *The Catholic Sacraments*, 133.

¹⁵Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament*, 47–48.

phenomenological approach in his treatments of the sacraments. He begins with the premise that all human life is symbolic activity.¹⁶ We express ourselves—our being—through what we do. A painter expresses himself through his work of art, a dancer through his dance. Yet there are times when we express—symbolize—more than just our being but also our becoming. Hence a boy who trains regularly to be a good basketball player may eventually grow up to be one. This is the moment of self-transcendence, when *being* evolves into *becoming*.

This phenomenon of self-transcendence is a fact of human existence for Rahner, one that traditional theology would call *grace*.¹⁷ More than a special gift bestowed on a believer that could empower heroic acts of virtue, for instance, grace “had to be present for people to believe and worship a God they did not see.”¹⁸ Jesus in this sense was full of “grace”—from his birth to his suffering, death, and resurrection, he exemplified this grace-full self-transcendence, continually embodying “who he was and who he was becoming.”¹⁹ Christ is God’s sacrament, an undeniable sign of what could be humanly possible with God’s grace, for he is not only, as God’s perfect son, the unique incarnation of God but our personal redeemer as well.²⁰ Christ’s community of faithful yet imperfect disciples, then, becomes Christ’s *sacrament*. It becomes a source of salvation in that it introduces Christ, and the life of self-transcendence he initiated, to the world. Christ in effect established a “sacramental church,” symbolizing and manifesting itself through ritual actions by which it continues to express both itself and what it could ultimately become.²¹ Christ in this sense “instituted” all the sacraments insofar as they all signify and make real an aspect of Christ’s public ministry which the Church continues.

¹⁶Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 124.

¹⁷Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 124.

¹⁸Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 125.

¹⁹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 125.

²⁰Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 125.

²¹Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 126.

Sacraments as Symbols of Human Meaning. Traditional sacramental theology has always emphasized the sacraments in themselves, i.e., how they are acts of Christ or of the Church. Yet if sacraments are to be intelligible signs that can effectively make available the spiritual realities they signify, “they must be planned and performed with an eye toward their effect on those who will participate in them.”²² Here we have, for the first time, a theology of the sacraments that explicitly recognizes the crucial place of the participant in the performance of the rite.

While Schillebeeckx certainly provided a paradigmatic shift in sacramental theology when he spoke of sacraments as ritual, personal encounters with Christ, this theology of sacraments as symbols of human meaning goes further by saying that sacraments make us more intensely aware of the spiritual realities that they represent, particularly since they not only take place during the significant moments in human life—birth, coming of age, needing sustenance, healing and forgiveness, taking on a life commitment—but may also be associated with certain secular rituals such as various forms of initiation rites (baptism, confirmation) or special meal occasions and banquets (Eucharist). Sacraments as a result may represent fundamental human values such as fidelity (marriage), service (holy orders), personal conversion (reconciliation), adult responsibility (confirmation), the need to belong (baptism), the need for healing and renewal (anointing), or a sense of community (Eucharist).²³

Sacraments as Transformations of Human Reality. This theology asserts that reality is experienced according to the meaning we give to it. The meaning we assign, consciously or otherwise, to experience shapes the way we look at ourselves and reality.²⁴ Someone who looks at life with the eyes of faith, for instance, looks at it differently from someone who chooses

²²Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 128.

²³See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 127–128.

²⁴See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 128.

to see it otherwise, and so it is with other meaningful human experiences such as birth, success, failure, love, pain, suffering, and death. As such, “the purpose of the sacraments is to transform the meaning of those fundamental human experiences.”²⁵

In the light of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, which have transformed the essential meaning of human life, birth is not just about becoming part of a family; in baptism, it is also dying to other interpretations of life and rising to a life invested not only with human value but also redemptive meaning.²⁶ Coming of age is not just about taking on adult responsibilities; in Confirmation, it is an intentional and dynamic living out of the Gospel mandate to promote God’s reign in the world. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confession is not just a personal acknowledgement of one’s sins but also a reaching out to others in a spirit of healing and forgiveness. For the Anointing of the Sick, sickness is not just a form of suffering but also an opportunity for the community to be in solidarity with the infirm. Marriage is not just a celebration of human love; in Matrimony, it is also a reflection of Christ’s self-sacrificing love for his people. Ordination, in turn, is a ministry of service, not servitude. And the many banquets we celebrate are not just meal celebrations but also experiences of community in honor of Him who has become bread broken for all of us in the Eucharist. Christian discipleship is a summons toward a new way of life; the sacraments intensify that Christian experience, making present the redemptive significance of Christ.²⁷

²⁵Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 128.

²⁶See Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 130.

²⁷Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 130.

Conclusion

Contemporary sacramental and liturgical theology has slowly been veering away from the mechanistic and legalistic approach of Trent, which contributed greatly to a minimalistic practice of the sacraments. Indeed, a holistic treatment of the sacraments that was meant to edify the faith of the faithful was not the priority of the institutional Church at that time. Its chief concern was to defend whatever tenet of the faith was being attacked (in this case, the sacraments). Many of the Tridentine interpretations of the sacraments, therefore, were largely in response to the objections of the Protestant Reformers.

The more mechanistic approach to sacramental life and worship in the West since the Middle Ages (5th–15th centuries) may also be explained in part by the long period of time that elapsed between Christ's life and the medieval era. Since the "Christ-event" was already a distant memory, the Church recalled the crucial events in the life of Christ without as much vigor and enthusiasm as the disciples did when they were conducting their own rituals of remembrance. Thus, to perpetuate the Church's encounter with the Risen Lord, and to guarantee that this encounter does take place, the Church developed a sacramental system that took on a more elaborate pattern over time. This evolved, however, into something that paid more attention to the mechanics of the sacraments, e.g., how the sacraments were validly administered and received, what the minimum requirements were for a valid administration and reception, and the like. Nevertheless, the system that eventually developed provided a measure of stability for the Church as it remembered the life, death, and resurrection of its Risen Lord and as it awaited for his eventual return at the *parousia*.²⁸

²⁸See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., rev. & enl. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994; reprint London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 612.

Many conflicts and internal dissensions had also racked the growing Christian churches during the time of St. Paul. The liturgy itself was not spared from internal tension (1 Cor. 11:20–22). Factionalism (1 Cor. 1:10–16; 11:16–22; 12:4–31; 13:1–13), competitiveness (2 Cor. 11:4–5, 22–24; Gal. 3:1–3), discrimination (1 Cor. 11:17–22), and the struggle for power were all unfortunate realities Paul had to deal with both in the Church and in the young communities he established (Gal. 2:11–21). Were these signs that the Risen Lord had not become a reality in their lives? What explains the apparent discrepancy between the community's sacred rituals and their lives, especially given that the early Christians were just a generation away from the historical Christ? Was the conversion of many to Christ's movement not well-founded in the first place? Were the converts simply going through the motions of being associated with a new community that was beginning to enjoy a certain degree of popularity? Were the rituals themselves completely cut off from the reality or realities that they were supposed to represent?

Unnecessary embellishments and excesses have indeed marred the spirit of genuine liturgy, notwithstanding the very pious intentions behind these changes, throughout the history of the Church. These are the same questions and problems we face as a church today.

CHAPTER V

LUTHER AND CATHOLIC SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGIES

Introduction

The previous section, in an attempt to go beyond and rectify some of the limitations of medieval scholastic sacramental theologies, presented the post-Vatican II developments in current sacramental theology. This fifth chapter reviews and re-appraises Luther's challenge to Catholic sacramental thinking and practice. It ends by finding converging points between Lutheran and contemporary Catholic sacramental theologies.

Exposition

PART I: *SOLA FIDE*

Luther's Challenge to Catholic Sacramental Understanding and Practice

If we are saved by the “works” that we do—sacraments, prayers, devotions, pilgrimages, indulgences, doing actions that amount to nothing except a presumptuous, semi-Pelagian excessive confidence in human freedom and its capacity to merit salvation without the aid of divine grace, then Luther was right: *sola fide*. It is only by faith that we are justified.¹

¹Justification is the event by which God makes us holy or righteous (just) through the action of Jesus. The immediate effect of justification is

If we are “saved” by simply going through the motions of performing any sacrament without interiorizing its spirit, without understanding the meaning of the sacrament performed and living it out in daily life, then Luther was right: *sola fide*. It is only by faith that we are justified.

If by sacraments the Church means ritual signs that automatically confer grace simply by being performed, unmindful of the minister’s or recipient’s personal holiness, or simply by placing no obstacle such as mortal sin in its way, then Luther was right: *sola fide*. It is only by faith that we are justified.

If sacraments simply work *ex opere operato*, i.e., from the work done, or if grace is conferred simply by performing the ritual, then Luther was right: *sola fide*. It is only by faith that we are justified.

The Long Search for the Certainty of Salvation

Luther worked out his theology of justification based on his own search for the certainty of salvation. His pessimism toward the human being’s inherent inability to work out her or his own salvation through so-called “works” comes from an intense personal experience of his own utter frailty; indeed, he would always fail to achieve holiness on his own. A hopelessly scrupulous man, Luther would go to daily confession, for instance, and still feel inadequately forgiven or relieved. He realized that nothing in his human power could give him peace. Like Augustine, he was a tortured soul in his quest to achieve personal sanctification and, ultimately, salvation.

Luther’s long, futile search for liberation from the damnation of sin ended in 1513 when he, as professor of exegesis holding the chair of Biblical theology at the University

holiness (sanctification) while the ultimate effect is salvation. See Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., rev. & enl. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 1243.

of Wittenberg, experienced a cathartic illumination that ended his long drawn-out spiritual crisis. Reflecting on Paul's Letter to the Romans, verses 1:17 and 3:28, he realized that we are justified not through the "works" that we do but through faith in Jesus. Paul's letter reads thus:

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "but the righteous man shall live by faith."

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Indeed, "justification by faith keeps us from falling for the lie that we can earn heaven [through sheer effort]. There is no ritual, no sacrament, no deed that can make us worthy of the righteousness of Christ. It is only by His grace, in response to our faith, that God has credited to us the holiness of His Son."²

Indulgences

Luther's pursuit of the absolute certainty of salvation took place amid some of the dark episodes in the Catholic Church's history. Avarice, simony, ecclesiastical corruption in relation to appointments to high offices, pilgrimages of all forms, a superstitious cult of relics of the saints, and a magical view of sacramental causality in the Eucharist put undue emphasis on the role of the human being in the work of salvation.³ Yet it was the sale of indulgences that proved to be the most flagrant example of the Church's deterioration. Bokenkotter explains:

In 1343 Pope Clement VI officially sanctioned the view that Christ and the saints had left a treasury of merits that other members of the Church could draw on for the remission of the temporal punishment due to their sins. One obtained a share in these merits by means of a Church indulgence—usually granted by the Pope in exchange

²"Why is justification by faith such an important doctrine?" Available at <https://www.gotquestions.org/justification-by-faith.html> (accessed March 2, 2018).

³Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, rev. ed. (New York: Image Books, 1979), 222–223.

for some good work, often a donation of money, performed by the recipients. Official doctrine always insisted on the need for an accompanying interior repentance on the part of the recipient too.⁴

Eventually, indulgences could even be applied to the souls in purgatory through the merits or “donations” of their more saintly fellows here on earth.

All this, needless to say, certainly opened the floodgates to abuse by the unscrupulous, who could “present an indulgence as a quasi-automatic and easy means of salvation.”⁵ The indulgence that revolted Luther in particular was the one that involved the rebuilding of St. Peter’s Basilica. It was, in fact, a deal concocted between the Fugger bank, the Roman Curia, and the ambitious twenty three-year-old Albert, archbishop of Mainz, who hoped to pay, through the agreement, a great amount of taxes to the Curia for the dispensation he needed to hold three dioceses—Mainz, Maldeburg, and Halberstadt.

It was a certain Dominican by the name of Johann Tetzel, however, who epitomized the repulsive fraudulence of indulgences. Drop a few coins, Tetzel preached to his gaping crowds, and you can save the souls of your friends and relatives from the fires of purgatory!⁶

Do Sacraments Work *ex opere operato*?

Luther felt at first that these Church abuses warranted no revolutionary action until he was convinced that the Gospel itself was at stake, and that the Church was turning its back on Jesus’s Gospel by teaching that our “good works” could buy our way into heaven. For one whose spiritual journey involved the deeply personal response of faith, any suggestion that our “works” could automatically confer grace simply by performing

⁴Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 223.

⁵Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 224.

⁶Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 224.

them comes as the ultimate scandal. Indeed, while this *ex opere operato* approach simply affirms the divine power of grace working in any sacrament, it does seem to encourage the idea that simply performing the sacrament according to its minimum requirements, i.e., doing it according to the intention of the Church and placing no obstacle to it through mortal sin, can already communicate grace.

A classical Tridentine understanding indicates that the minimum requirement for sacramental efficacy, aside from administering the sacrament according to the intention of the Church, demands that no obstacle is placed before its proper reception. This was ordinarily taken to mean that a recipient must be in a state of grace (i.e., not in a state of mortal sin) before receiving the sacrament, for such constitutes the “proper disposition” required for the sacramental celebration. Yet for adults, on the one hand, “*placing no obstacle*” before receiving the sacrament *certainly means much more than avoiding mortal sin*; it means having an *active faith*. “The interior religious state of one who receives a sacrament,” prominent Belgian Catholic theologian Schillebeeckx explains, “is not merely a disposition that exists prior to or apart from the sacrament; it enters into the very nature of the fruitful sacrament.” One, therefore, may celebrate a sacrament validly, that is, if it is done according to the intention of the Church and no obstacle is placed through sin, but only by an active faith does the recipient effectively, i.e., meaningfully and fruitfully, celebrate it. The obvious condition of infants, on the other hand, does not place any obstacle for a reception of the sacrament. The Tridentine teaching on sacramental efficacy, which appears to suggest that placing no obstacle for the celebration of a sacrament simply meant avoiding mortal sin—an obviously minimum requirement—was thus intended to address both adult and infant baptisms in a single formula.⁷

⁷Michael Demetrius H. Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred: A Fresh Approach to Prayer, Liturgy, and the Sacraments* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications,

What was passed off, therefore, as a minimum requirement for the validity of the sacrament eventually became the *de facto only* requirement, it would seem, for both a valid *and* fruitful celebration. This encouraged a rather legalistic and minimalist approach to sacraments. As an example, an infant receives the grace of baptism “legalistically” if at least the “minimum” requirement is guaranteed, i.e., the sacrament is done according to the intention of the Church and no obstacle such as mortal sin is placed before its reception. Thus, the family of the infant speaks on its behalf and manifests to do the intention of the Church for her or him while the obvious condition of the infant prevents it from placing any obstacle in the form of sin before the sacrament. It is, indeed, a *valid* reception of the sacrament; the so-called *fruitfulness* of the sacrament, however, will depend on whether or not the infant, when she or he is old enough, will exercise an *active, personally chosen faith* as the sacrament so requires.⁸

The Critical Role of an Active Faith in Sacramental Efficacy

It is not enough that a sacrament be merely completed or performed; it must also be used in faith.⁹ Placing no obstacle in the way of the sacrament or simply having the desire for it is not enough. Such an offer from God “must be grasped and accepted

2012), 139. Cf. Edward H. Schillebeeckx, “The Sacraments: An Encounter with God,” *Theology Digest* 7 (Spring 1960): 121.

⁸In an apparent departure, however, from his fundamental position that sacraments can only work *ex opere operantis*, i.e., through the faith of the recipient, Luther takes the faith of the infant for granted since biblically Jesus would always say to let the children come to him (Lk. 18:15–17; Mt. 19:13–15). Infant faith was also obvious at least in the infant John the Baptist, “who in joy leapt in the womb” (Lk. 1:39–42) of his mother Elizabeth upon the arrival of Mary who was then pregnant with Jesus.

⁹Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 256.

in a personal act of faith.”¹⁰ Indeed, while a sacrament is valid in itself since God acts through it, it is faith that accepts it, and it “contributes nothing to a man’s salvation without faith.”¹¹ The sacrament thus precedes faith, and is given by God to which a personal response of faith must be given.¹²

The Filipino Sacramental Practice of the Faith

The practice of the faith in the Philippines is centered around rites of popular piety. Examples of this Filipino religiosity include devotions to Christ, Mary, and the saints. Yet while they engender very positive values and virtues, the rites of popular piety, as the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) observes, should not be allowed to degenerate into magic and superstition. The challenge is to make Filipino religiosity more personal and confront the wider social issues of poverty, injustice, and social structural evil.¹³

Filipino sacramental life, on the other hand, focuses on a mechanical and metaphysical understanding of sacraments, i.e., sacraments work automatically as long as the minimum requirements are fulfilled. Yet while this makes the celebration *canonically valid* and affirms the intrinsic power of divine grace, an *active faith* is still required in making any sacramental celebration *personally meaningful, effective, and fruitful*.

A common critique of Filipino Catholics is that they are “sacramentalized” but not “evangelized.” They feel more at home with the veneration of images (e.g., the *Sto. Niño*, Black Nazarene, and Virgin Mary) and relics of saints yet they never interiorize

¹⁰Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 348–350.

¹¹Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348.

¹²Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 351–352.

¹³Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay City: Paulines, 1998), nos. 173 and 175. Hereafter cited as PCP II.

the Gospel in their lives. Fr. Jaime Bulatao, the famed Filipino Jesuit psychologist, calls this “split-level Christianity,” i.e., that there is in the Filipino Catholic a certain “split,” a gnawing divide, between her or his worship life and daily life. PCP II, in fact, declares that we cannot worship God in our churches and shrines while neglecting Him in the daily business of life.¹⁴ This, I think, is at the heart of Luther’s indictment of Catholic sacramental life.

A certain inadequacy of faith is thus demonstrated in both Filipino popular religiosity and sacramental life. An authentically personal faith in Christ will find itself wanting in a religiosity that tends toward the superstitious, on the one hand, and a sacramental life that is anchored on the belief that grace communicated is automatically received, on the other. True faith fosters a genuine love of God, interiority in our prayers and devotions, and commitment to neighbor. Luther writes:

We therefore conclude with Paul that we are justified by faith in Christ alone, apart from law and works. But after a man is Justified by faith and now possesses Christ by faith and knows that He is righteousness and life, he will certainly *not be idle*, but as a good tree he will bring forth good fruits. For the believer has the Holy Spirit; where He is, He does not allow a man to be idle, but incites him to all the exercises of piety, to love God, to patience in afflictions, to prayer, thanksgiving, and the showing of love toward all. Faith constantly vivifies, justifies, does not remain idle, but is incarnated...¹⁵

Luther’s insistence on performing the sacraments worthily is, in this author’s estimation, a plea for authenticity and interiority in our actions. Canon twelve of the Council of Trent does assert the opposite, i.e., that the lack of virtue of the one administering the sacrament cannot be a barrier to the reception

¹⁴PCP II, no. 168.

¹⁵Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Dr. Martin Luther’s Works: Critical Collected Edition)*, 18 vols. (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1930–85), XL, i., 265, 8f., 29ff.; 426, ii., 42f., 6., cited in Edmund J. Fortuna, *The Theology of Man and Grace: Commentary* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1966), 216.

of grace. Indeed, “who would decide, on what basis and how could one tell,”¹⁶ if a sacrament was worthily administered? Nevertheless, in deferring to God’s overwhelming power to communicate grace, the responsibility of ministers was inadvertently minimized, even if it was never countenanced.¹⁷

Faith is so critical in the sacraments, in fact, that it may exist even in the absence, i.e., unavailability, of the sacraments or when the recipient is denied them. Luther argues:

You can believe even though you are not baptized, for baptism is nothing more than an external sign which reminds us of the divine promise. For wherever the gospel is, there is also baptism and everything that a Christian man needs.¹⁸

McBrien, too, makes a fairly similar point when he says:

Thus, everybody does not strictly “need” baptism to become a child of God and an heir of heaven. Every human person, by reason of birth and of God’s universal offer of grace, is already called to be a child of God and an heir of heaven.¹⁹

He argues that grace is not confined to the sacraments. God’s grace is already in the world as part of God’s self-disclosure; all the sacraments do is “signify, celebrate, and effect what God is, in a sense, already doing everywhere and for all.”²⁰ Thus, while McBrien believes that sacraments highlight the grace that is already present in the world, Luther specifies this grace as the Gospel of Christ proclaimed and lived out in the world.

¹⁶Kevin W. Irwin, *The Sacraments: Historical Foundations and Liturgical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 125.

¹⁷Irwin, *The Sacraments*, 125.

¹⁸Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 349.

¹⁹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 794.

²⁰McBrien, *Catholicism*, 801.

PART II

Luther and Contemporary Catholic
Sacramental Theologies: Points of Convergence

If “religion is above all a saving dialogue between man and the living God ... this means that religion is therefore essentially a personal relation of man to God, of person to person; a personal encounter or a personal communing with God.”²¹ Luther, for his part, speaks of sacrament, like the “word” itself, as “God’s *personal encounter with man*.”²²

Unfortunately, this concept of religion as a saving personal encounter with God has not always been clearly emphasized in Catholic theology and sacramental practice. The result has often been “a one-sided view that tends to depersonalize the sacramental encounter between God and man, to regard it as nothing more than a cause-effect relationship.”²³ It is a view consistent with the medieval one, which discusses ritual sacraments “not in concrete and experiential terms but primarily in abstract and metaphysical terms.”²⁴ Luther himself, in fact, complained about “the defective nominalist theology he was trained in.”²⁵ Caught up with terms and concepts, nominalism rejects universal principles in favor of individual realities such as individual acts. It generates both an ethical individualism and legalism that, in turn, encourage a moral minimalism which, for its part, reduces moral responsibility to the bare minimum²⁶—a gross misunderstanding, no doubt, of the moral demands of the Christian Catholic Faith. Luther would react so vehemently

²¹Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), 3–4.

²²Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348–349.

²³Schillebeeckx, “The Sacraments: An Encounter with God,” 117.

²⁴Joseph Martos, “Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later,” *Ministry & Liturgy* 29, no. 2 (March 2002): 9.

²⁵Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, 218.

²⁶McBrien, *Catholicism*, 904–905.

against such a state of affairs.²⁷ A great number of Filipino Catholics, for example, participate in the Eucharist as spectators merely to fulfill a religious obligation or simply to avoid mortal sin.²⁸ Indeed, avoiding serious sin by as small a margin as can be safely managed seems to be a major, if not the only, religious concern of many Filipino Catholics.

This righteousness-centered theology that earned salvation through one's pious ritual actions was something that ran completely counter to Luther's experience. Faith for him is essentially "not the decision to assent to a proposition but a fundamental reorientation and redirection of life."²⁹ Since faith finds its source and core in God's forgiving grace,³⁰ the choice of faith takes place within the context of a *relationship of grace*.³¹ This counters Aquinas's position that faith is essentially an act of the intellect, particularly a *thinking with assent*, though Aquinas would clarify that faith does not end with "propositions but in the realities themselves."³² This means that the use of reason does not end with an understanding of God but with the reality of God. Information in faith is never cut off from reality.³³

Luther believes that our good works do not determine our relationship with God. Instead, they flow from faith "as day follows night, as good fruit comes from a good tree. Where there are no works, there is no faith..."³⁴ The believer's perennial temptation is to turn works into "a new form of slavery" in contrast to the

²⁷McBrien, *Catholicism*, 905.

²⁸Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*, new ed., enl. (Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997), nos. 1671–1672. Hereafter cited as CFC.

²⁹John Dillenberger, "An Introduction to Martin Luther," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* by Martin Luther, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), xxviii.

³⁰Dillenberger, "An Introduction to Martin Luther," xxviii.

³¹Dillenberger, "An Introduction to Martin Luther," xxviii.

³²McBrien, *Catholicism*, 35.

³³McBrien, *Catholicism*, 35.

³⁴Dillenberger, "An Introduction to Martin Luther," xxix.

freedom promised by Christ in the Gospel.³⁵ Works done with genuine faith will always point to God, not to the self.

Luther declares, therefore, that all works done apart from faith are nothing but truly wicked and damnable.³⁶ They may on the surface be good in themselves or “better than other courses of action,” but they effect nothing in relation to one’s standing before God.³⁷ Dillenberger expounds on this:

On that level [of our status before God], everything is a matter of relationship, a relationship into which man enters by virtue of God’s unaccountable activity. Confronted by God, man cannot depend on a combination of works and faith, or faith and works, but only on faith not without works or of faith active in love. The Christian is to live and struggle, to be a Christ to his neighbour, and above all to trust God.³⁸

Schillebeeckx, following Luther’s lead, thus introduced a radical shift in a current Catholic interpretation of liturgical-sacramental theology, a shift that greatly modified the earlier paradigm which was “forged by Scholastic theology and maintained well into this century.”³⁹ He spoke of sacraments not as mere instruments of grace but as *personal encounters* in worship with God in Jesus. “The sacraments are not things,” Schillebeeckx argues, “but rather personal living encounters with the glorified Jesus and, in him, with the living God.”⁴⁰

It is not sufficient, therefore, to understand the sacraments simply as rituals through which grace is automatically communicated and received as long as they are validly administered and received, as was the case in the old Scholastic paradigm. This fixation on valid sacramental administration and

³⁵Dillenberger, “An Introduction to Martin Luther,” xxix.

³⁶Dillenberger, “An Introduction to Martin Luther,” xxix.

³⁷Dillenberger, “An Introduction to Martin Luther,” xxix.

³⁸Dillenberger, “An Introduction to Martin Luther,” xxix.

³⁹See Peter E. Fink, *Worship: Praying the Sacraments* (Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1991), 140.

⁴⁰Schillebeeckx, “The Sacraments: An Encounter with God,” 119.

reception, while clear on the intrinsic, objective efficacy of the sacraments, tends to *ignore the experiential, subjective disposition of faith that is needed to make a sacrament not only objectively valid but also ultimately effective*. The error of later scholasticism—“the assumption that sacraments always and everywhere, in each concrete instance, make present what they represent”⁴¹—may thus be explained by the objective, essentialist, and metaphysical language common at that time.⁴² It is simply not true that the sacraments were considered to be fruitful “and could be performed in exactly the same way over and over again” as long as the minimum requirements for validity were fulfilled.⁴³

Vehicles of Grace or Encounters of Faith?

The *most crucial* issue has to do with how “sacrament” should be defined. While Luther and Schillebeeckx focus on the need for personal faith engagement to make the sacraments fruitful, the universal Roman catechism, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), simply reflects the Council of Trent’s definition with the following:

The sacraments are symbolic actions instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which the divine life is bestowed upon us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and confer the graces appropriate to each sacrament. The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the right attitude and in the right spirit.⁴⁴

This understanding of “sacrament,” as Fink argued earlier, demonstrates a radical departure from the communal context

⁴¹Joseph Martos, “Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later,” *Ministry & Liturgy* 29, no. 3 (April 2002): 10.

⁴²Martos, “Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later” (April 2002), 10.

⁴³Martos, “Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later” (April 2002), 10.

⁴⁴Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; reprint Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994), no. 1131. Hereafter cited as CCC.

of the liturgy that was strongly emphasized in Vatican II.⁴⁵ While it does mention that a “right attitude” must accompany any sacramental participation, it does not explicitly mention “faith” as that necessary predisposition. The CCC’s definition of “sacrament” thus makes the *efficacious bestowal of grace* on the individual to be the essential component in any understanding of “sacrament.”⁴⁶ Truly, Luther himself would oppose any idea of Catholic sacramental efficacy that borders on the mechanical, almost magical, bestowal of grace.

Fink explains that this absolute focus on objective sacramental efficacy is a result of the CCC’s inability to acknowledge the critical importance of the Vatican II principle that the Church is a sacrament. The sacraments simply become vehicles of grace rather than ecclesial acts performed by the entire Body of Christ.⁴⁷ Luther, though, would reject any suggestion that the Church was a fundamentally sacramental agent; his more egalitarian concept of church would be dismissive of any mediatory role. Yet the notion of the Church as “sacrament” does not actually subscribe to the idea that the Church is simply an agent of sacramental efficaciousness through its ministerial priesthood, but rather that the *entire* Church can fulfill a priestly ministry and embody divine grace.

To portray the laity as mere recipients of sacramental grace is certainly a radical shift away from the ecclesial vision of Vatican II, which calls for a more participatory Church in its liturgical

⁴⁵Peter E. Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 100. Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), no. 2 (hereafter cited as SC).

⁴⁶See David N. Power, “The Sacraments in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 111.

⁴⁷See SC, no. 5. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], in *Documents of Vatican II*, no. 1 and *Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], in *Documents of Vatican II*, no. 42. See also Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 98.

practice.⁴⁸ In both its liturgical worship and service to society, the Church is a participant, not a mere spectator, in the ongoing disclosure of the divine presence in history. Luther himself spoke of the “priesthood of all believers,” which, by implication, rejects the necessary mediatorship assigned to the ministerial priesthood, yet not because ordained ministers are completely unnecessary; rather, it is so that “in the community of the Church all [men and women are] priests to one another, that is, occasions for and messengers of grace and support.”⁴⁹ He was so stung by the many ecclesiastical abuses which for him were tantamount to forsaking the Gospel of Christ that he dismissed as unacceptable the claim that access to God is controlled by a hierarchical priesthood.⁵⁰ Catholic catechesis has since given equal emphasis, therefore, to the “universal priesthood of the baptized.”⁵¹ There is only a functional distinction, and no ontological one, between the priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. The ordained ministry enjoys no special status; there are no longer higher and lower callings. The minister, the cobbler, and the magistrate may equally pursue a path to holiness as does the monk.⁵² There are no special vocations; only specific responses to the one divine call.

As noted in Chapter 3 of this book, moreover, Canon 840 of the 1983 Revised Code of Canon Law defines the sacraments in a way that is consistent with Vatican II liturgical reform. These rituals are actions of Christ and of the Church that signify and express both ecclesial faith and worship. The Revised Code also uses noticeably the term “celebration” rather than

⁴⁸Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 98.

⁴⁹Dillenberger, “An Introduction to Martin Luther,” xxxiii.

⁵⁰Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present*, vol. 2 (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 53.

⁵¹See CCC, no. 1546. Cf. CFC, nos. 1959–1961.

⁵²Dillenberger, “An Introduction to Martin Luther,” xxxiii. Cf. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 53.

“administration/reception” in “performing” the sacraments.⁵³ The language of sacraments as means of grace is thus retained, but equal emphasis is given to them as ecclesial celebrations of worship.⁵⁴

The instructive merit of speaking of the Church as “sacrament” may not be too evident, however, since Catholics have always associated the term “sacrament” with the seven ritual sacraments.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, many Christians today, both Catholic and otherwise, appreciate the notion of the Church as a community of faith or the People of God. This communitarian model approximates the non-hierarchical view of the Church which Luther strongly promoted and which reflects the spirit of the entire Church as a sacrament, i.e., a community capable *in its entirety* of signifying and realizing the grace-ful divine presence.

Signs or Symbols?

Stressing the notion of sacraments as “saving symbolic actions”—i.e., signs that, when performed in faith, make present a spiritual reality—helps to address the common misconception that God’s presence is confined to the material and mechanical elements of any sacramental rite, as if isolated from their proper relationship with other components such as words, gestures, and actions. Luther, in fact, explains that a sign or symbol in itself is not yet a sacrament; indeed, any visible act can naturally point to some invisible reality. “The decisive element in the sacrament,” he argues, “is accordingly the word of promise. The sacrament is

⁵³Some great works of art, texts, or the classics, for instance, disclose their meaning only in their performance. Only by bringing them into play can these great works express ever-new meanings and facilitate self-discovery. See Nicholas Lash, “Performing the Scriptures: Interpretation through Living,” *Furrow* 33, no. 8 (August 1982): 470–471.

⁵⁴Wilfredo C. Paguio, *Notes on Sacraments and Sacramentals According to the Revised Code of Canon Law*, eds. Nestor Rebono, Johnny Zulueta, & Ma. Erlinda Cabilin (Pasay: Saint Paul Publications, 1991), 1:17.

⁵⁵CFC, no. 1367.

nothing without the word.”⁵⁶ What truly “sanctifies” us is *not the mechanical administration* of the material elements themselves (water, oil, etc.) but the *active engagement* of these in faith within the total symbolic action (of word and various ritual gestures) of the sacramental rite.⁵⁷ As mentioned above, God’s offer of grace—God’s personal encounter with human persons—“must be grasped in a personal act of faith.... God’s works do not exclude but rather demand faith, for without faith they could not be grasped.”⁵⁸ Luther elaborates thus:

When one deals with words and promises, one needs faith even between men on earth.... Now, as we can plainly see, God deals with us in no other way than by his holy word and sacraments, which are like signs or seals of his words. The very thing necessary, then, is faith in these words and signs, for when God speaks and gives signs, man must fully and wholeheartedly believe that what he says and signifies is true. Since every sacrament contains a divine word and promise in which God offers and pledges us his grace, it is truly not enough to “put away the obstacles” as they call it, but there must be an unwavering, unshaken faith in the heart which receives the promise and sign and does not doubt that what God promises and signifies is indeed so. Hence to seek the efficacy of the sacrament apart from the promise and without faith is to labor in vain and find condemnation.⁵⁹

Sacramental effectivity, therefore, is not only contingent upon faith but also upon a “faith-ful” imagination and performance. A more symbolic approach to, and knowledge of, the sacraments can thus enable us to go beyond the purely mechanical and material aspects of the rituals and see the truly saving divine realities that the sacramental symbols are trying to communicate. The sacraments are not mere signs that

⁵⁶Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 345–346.

⁵⁷CFC, no. 1523.

⁵⁸Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348–349.

⁵⁹Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar, 1883-), 6, 533; 7, 321, 323, cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348–349. Cf. American Edition of Luther’s Works (Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1955-), 32, 15; 36, 67, cited in Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 348–349.

mechanically point to some invisible reality; they are symbols that not only point to but also embody that reality, especially in their actual “faith-ful” performance and celebration through the power of God’s Spirit.

Properly understood as “symbolic actions,” the ritual sacraments are signs that objectively effect a spiritual reality (the presence of God, in this case) by signifying it. Luther, though, would take exception to this idea of *opus gratum opere operato* (a work that is acceptable by virtue of the work having been performed), insisting that no work of itself pleases God, especially when they who perform it prove themselves unworthy.⁶⁰ Yet the sacraments *do in fact objectively, i.e., in and of themselves, communicate grace*, the Risen Christ’s presence in the Spirit, communion with the Church, etc.; whether or not these spiritual realities *do in fact become subjectively effective* depends on the level of committed faith involvement that one brings to the sacramental celebrations. Accomplishing our prayers and devotions in and of themselves does not necessarily mean we have done our whole duty. Faith in Christ, with his saints, and with one another must be properly exercised and made stronger. “This purpose of Christ the blind worshipers do not perceive,” Luther observes, “and in their devoutness they go on daily saying and hearing mass, but they remain the same; indeed every day they become worse but do not perceive it.”⁶¹

⁶⁰Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 256. Luther would mention pious churchgoers in particular who do not do what the sacrament indicates, i.e., a personal change exercised through love. They become so blind that they do nothing but “fear and honour Christ there present with their prayers and devotions.” See Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 255.

⁶¹Lull, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 255.

Conclusion

In disputing the teaching of the Catholic Church that sacraments work *ex opere operato* (from the work done), Martin Luther appealed for a more interiorized approach to the sacraments, insisting that they ultimately work *ex opere operantis* (from the work of the worker), i.e., sacraments become fruitful only in faith. Without denying the intrinsic power of the sacraments to communicate grace, he emphasized that only in faith do we truly personally encounter the divine in the sacraments.

Thanks to the challenges of Luther, our Catholic Church has taken stock of itself, initiating Church reform and renewal in the sixties at Vatican II, in the nineties at our own PCP II, and in various episcopal conferences worldwide, among others. Catholic liturgies have become more vibrant; we, for one, have recovered our love for the Word of God as Bible study groups have sprouted everywhere. Our priests have been giving better homilies (although there is still room for more improvement), Filipino liturgical music has infused life into many of our church celebrations, and we now have more Eucharistic celebrations that are better planned and organized.

We have tempered our own devotions as well. The Church, for instance, has been trying to become more Christ-centered as of late. I still remember the many saint figures that were lined up in our sanctuaries when I was growing up; today, you see only the figures of Christ, Mary, and the patron saint inside a typical parish church. Church Marian devotion, while still the most popular in the Philippines, has deferred to a catechesis and general Catholic consciousness that is more Christ-centered. Lastly, that there are many former Catholics who now call themselves “Christians” is, I think, a continuing summons to be more centered on Christ when we carry out our many prayers, devotions, and other practices that give expression to our professed Catholic faith.

Many parishes have also recovered their sense of being community, of truly being God's people. Various transparochial and covenanted communities have multiplied, and we have gradually realized that key to church renewal today is to retrieve this sense of community, much like how it was in the many small communities that St. Paul established in Asia Minor and Europe in the mid-30s to mid-50s AD.

We have also tried to keep our Church leaders honest. Indeed, many Catholics will no longer stand for clerical duplicity and abuse. Financial and sexual scandals in the Church are already beginning to be openly discussed, and we are starting to demand inspiring leadership and integrity from our clerics.

All Christians—whether Catholic, Protestant, etc.—continue to be challenged by a faith that expresses itself in hope and in love. This is true especially for the many who find themselves in the peripheries. We are challenged today to identify the structural roots of poverty, corruption, and injustice, and to finally address the culture of violence and death that continues to haunt modern-day Filipino society. Faith in Christ calls for such a timely commitment.

CHAPTER VI

BAPTISM AS CHRISTIAN INITIATION ACCORDING TO THE *CATECHISM FOR FILIPINO CATHOLICS*: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS TODAY¹

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed Martin Luther's objections to what he perceived to be weaknesses in medieval Catholic sacramental theologies. His emphasis on the need for an active faith in sacramental performance reinforces current Catholic theology's focus on the principle that sacraments ultimately work *ex opere operantis*, that is, that grace received (*res tantum*) can only be possible through the acceptance of faith. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the points of agreement between Luther and current Catholic sacramental theologies.

This sixth chapter explores some of the pedagogical implications of teaching baptism as Christian initiation according to the more personal, non-metaphysical sacramental approach of the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics*. It presents itself as a test case for the author's proposed sacramental theology which could ground the renewal of Filipino worship life.

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Exposition

Given today's prevailing outlook that baptism automatically washes away sin if the rite is administered correctly, there are five topics that need to be highlighted and explained in any pre-baptismal instruction or catechesis:

- 1) Christ's baptism as confirmation of his identity and call to inaugurate the Kingdom of God;
- 2) Christ as the truly "baptized one" who is "deeply immersed" in God, including an explanation of how this idea is actually replicated and lived out in the faith of the family who represents the child in the case of infant baptisms;
- 3) the shift in focus from water washing away original sin to the Holy Spirit freeing us from sin;
- 4) water's life-sustaining and destructive qualities which symbolize Christ's passage from death to life, along with our own participation in this paschal mystery; and
- 5) baptism into Christ as baptism into his body, the Church, since the struggle with both our individual sins and the sins of the world is always a collective task in view and fulfillment of Christ's threefold mission as prophet, priest, and king in furthering God's reign in the world.

These topics highlight the fact that baptism, like any other sacrament, works not only through the intrinsic power of the sacraments to communicate grace but also, and more importantly,

through the active and intentional engagement in faith and holiness of both recipients and ministers, an engagement which makes the sacraments not only *canonically valid* but also *existentially fruitful and effective*.

The Apostolic Tradition and Christian Initiation Today

Christian initiation has undergone many changes since the beginning of the early Church. Mark Searle's *Christening: The Making of Christians* recalls how a "sense of urgency" surrounded the accounts of the earliest baptisms by the apostles. Whether it was the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–39), Cornelius's family (Acts 10:47–48), or Peter's jailer (Acts 16:30–33), the urgency of the situation necessitated keeping instruction to a minimum.² It was important for the apostles to initiate as many followers as possible into the new life of baptism given their belief in the imminent return of the Risen Christ and in the coming of his reign. Many baptisms were even performed almost spontaneously whenever the situation demanded it.

As the Church expanded, however, and as the Second Coming no longer seemed to be imminent, there came a need to standardize baptismal preparation and instruction. Among the documents that elaborate on the initiation process are the *Didache* (AD 100) and the *Apostolic Tradition* (AD 225). This rather rigorous procedure of pre-baptismal preparation is described by McBrien as follows:

The [*Apostolic Tradition*] describes a demanding system, normally lasting three years, of evangelization, moral formation, and gradual insertion of the candidates into the liturgical life of the community. After a final period of examination and intense prayer and fasting, the catechumens were initiated with the oil of exorcism, the profession

²Mark Searle, *Christening: The Making of Christians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1980), 3.

of faith, water baptism by immersion, a postbaptismal imposition of hands, and anointing by the bishop.³

The stringent rules were meant to ensure the authenticity of the conversion experience, “to guard against pagan infiltration in an age of persecution.”⁴ This is because the *Apostolic Tradition* gives us the first documentary evidence that not everyone was eligible for admission to the community of faith.⁵ The entire initiation process, for one, had to be kept secret since the Church community had to be protected from outside persecution. So-called sponsors (reputable community members), who guaranteed the integrity of the candidate’s desire to become a Christian,⁶ had to introduce the candidate to the teachers of the community. Certain occupations that were incompatible with Christianity, like those involved in the worship of false gods or of the emperor, also had to be given up.⁷

When Christian persecution ceased under Constantine, however, it was no longer necessary for the Church to retain the rigid system. The original spirit and practice of the initiation rites, which put a premium on the catechumens’ personal conversion, active participation of the Church in their doctrinal and moral formation, and effective symbols used in the rite itself (baptismal fonts for full water immersion, candles, oil, white garments, etc.),

³Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., rev. & enl. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994; reprint London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 810.

⁴Julia Upton, “Baptism,” in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, Dermot A. Lane (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1991), 78.

⁵Upton, “Baptism,” 78.

⁶Paul F. Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 602; cf. Daniel B. Stevick, “History of Baptism,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 92.

⁷Stevick, “History of Baptism,” 92. Rendering military service as soldiers, for instance, can be acceptable only as long as killing and taking the military oath of allegiance to the emperor are rejected. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 157.

waned dramatically over the course of time. By the late fourth and fifth centuries, a theology of baptism developed that wove “together various strands of New Testament and classic patristic theologies.”⁸ The involved process described in the *Apostolic Tradition* was greatly simplified, and the number of converts grew since the Christian Church was no longer under persecution and instead enjoyed a certain official recognition. Yet, as McBrien notes, “the catechumenate also went into decline between the fourth and sixth centuries, losing its distinctive character as a step taken in faith.”⁹ Several reasons can be cited for this.

First, the decline came as a result of Rome’s conversion to Christianity under Constantine in the fourth century. The end of Christian persecutions marked the great influx of converts who wanted to be officially part of the new dispensation in the Constantinian church. In its enthusiasm to welcome new members, however, the Church was not always able to prepare candidates in as demanding a fashion as was customary.¹⁰

Second, there was a shift in the understanding of baptism. The stress was now placed more on the metaphysical baptismal seal through performance of the rites than on the necessary external conversion in faith. With the relaxation of the catechumenate, baptism shifted from “a ritualization of a prior experience to a means of effecting that experience.”¹¹ The rite ceased to be an expression of conversion, and was instead staged to elicit that experience in the candidate by employing “highly theatrical features designed to produce an intense and lasting psychological impression on the candidates and to bring about a change in their lives.”¹² What resulted over time was a predisposition to focus on the invisible, metaphysical baptismal seal that was bestowed by God through the performance of the

⁸McBrien, *Catholicism*, 812.

⁹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 812.

¹⁰McBrien, *Catholicism*, 810. Cf. Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” 604.

¹¹Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” 604.

¹²Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” 604.

rites, though at the expense of the necessity of personal faith and the visible, external transformation of character demonstrated in the catechumenate.¹³ As a consequence, the candidate gradually became a passive recipient in the process rather than be an active participant in it.¹⁴

Lastly, the conversion of Rome to Christianity eased the pressure among many to enter the Church as adults. This effectively made infants the normal candidates for baptism.¹⁵ Coupled with Augustine's teaching on original sin in the fifth century, which called for the necessity of faith and baptism to guarantee salvation, baptisms could no longer be delayed, for the infants of the faithful would not go to heaven should they die early.¹⁶ This transition from adult to infant baptism, then, effectively separated baptism from confirmation and the Eucharist.¹⁷

What is thus lacking from a metaphysical baptismal understanding, and also from the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) practiced today, is the emphasis of the *Apostolic Tradition* and the *Didache* on the process of *personal conversion*. Both stress the external emphasis on character and indispensable *involvement of the Church* in the formation process as necessary conditions for the *effectiveness* of the sacrament. Both avoid an oversimplistic understanding of faith as simply "placing no obstacle" to the reception of the sacrament by merely avoiding

¹³Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 604.

¹⁴Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 604.

¹⁵Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 605. The fear of failing to obtain salvation, prevalent in the fifth century as a result of Augustine's teaching on original sin, which in itself called for the necessity of faith and baptism to affirm God's grace to save, led to the widespread desire to baptize babies as soon as possible so that they would not risk dying unbaptized and losing salvation forever. See Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 605 and McBrien, *Catholicism*, 187.

¹⁶Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 605.

¹⁷Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 604–605.

sin, which can make the sacramental celebration canonically valid but not necessarily existentially effective.¹⁸

Except in cases of adult conversion, the by then universal practice of infant baptism led to the complete end of adult baptism in the Middle Ages. Reformers in the sixteenth century called Anabaptists, however, insisted on re-baptism (“ana”-baptism) for those baptized as infants, arguing that Christianity was an adult religion which demanded a “believer’s baptism” for those who wanted to be a part of it.¹⁹ In response to the Anabaptist challenge, the Council of Trent (convened from 1545–1563) reaffirmed the medieval practice of infant baptism more strongly than ever.²⁰

To the Protestant charge that sacraments do not communicate grace but only promise it, “the Council of Trent insisted on the intrinsic grace-giving power of the sacraments.”²¹ While there is need for the proper disposition (faith) in celebrating the sacraments, the sacred rites possess “*in themselves* a saving power that comes from the death of Christ.”²² When properly performed by a minister who has the fundamental intention of accomplishing the intention of the Church, a sacrament has the power to communicate grace *ex opere operato* (“from the work done”). It possesses the intrinsic power of grace when the essential elements of the rite are carried out because of the power of Christ who acts through it, not because of the personal faith of the recipient or holiness of the minister.²³ Asis makes a further clarification regarding sacramental efficacy:

¹⁸Michael Demetrius H. Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred: A Fresh Approach to Prayer, Liturgy, and the Sacraments* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012), 139. See also Edward H. Schillebeeckx, “The Sacraments: An Encounter with God,” *Theology Digest* 7 (Spring 1960): 121.

¹⁹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 812. Cf. Upton, “Baptism,” 79.

²⁰Upton, “Baptism,” 79.

²¹Bernard Cooke, “Sacraments,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 1118.

²²Cooke, “Sacraments,” 1118.

²³McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1239. Cf. Cooke, “Sacraments,” 1119.

A classical Tridentine understanding of sacramental efficacy indicates that, aside from administering the sacrament according to the intention of the Church, the minimum required for its efficacy demands that no obstacle is placed before its proper reception. This was ordinarily taken to mean that a recipient must be in a state of grace (not in a state of mortal sin) before receiving the sacrament. Such constitutes the “proper disposition” required for a celebration of the sacrament. But for adults, on the one hand, “placing no obstacle” certainly means much more than avoiding mortal sin before receiving the sacrament. It means an *active faith*. “The interior religious state of one who receives a sacrament,” Schillebeeckx explains, “is not merely a disposition that exists prior to or apart from the sacrament; it enters into the very nature of the fruitful sacrament.” One may, therefore, celebrate a sacrament validly, that is, if it is done according to the intention of the Church and if no obstacle is placed through sin, but only by an active faith does the recipient effectively, i.e., meaningfully and fruitfully, celebrate the sacrament. The obvious condition of infants, on the other hand, does indeed place no obstacle for a reception of the sacrament. The Tridentine teaching on sacramental efficacy, which appears to suggest that placing no obstacle simply meant avoiding mortal sin for the celebration of a sacrament, was intended to address both adult and infant baptisms in a single formula.²⁴

Unfortunately, a phrase that simply affirms the intrinsic power of divine grace (*ex opere operato*) has often been taken to mean that sacraments work their grace automatically, independent of the personal dispositions of the recipients. This was clearly not the intended interpretation of Trent regarding sacramental efficacy.²⁵ In fact, a complementary Tridentine principle that is never given equal emphasis is that sacraments work *ex opere operantis* (from the work of the worker). This affirms that grace is communicated and received not only through the prayer of the Church but also and necessarily by the personal dispositions of faith and holiness of both recipients and ministers.²⁶ This second Tridentine principle guarantees not only

²⁴Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 139. Cf. Schillebeeckx, “The Sacraments: An Encounter with God,” 121.

²⁵Cooke, “Sacraments,” 1119.

²⁶McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1239.

canonical validity but also, and more importantly, the personal fruitfulness and effectiveness of sacraments.

Nothing much changed in terms of official sacramental teaching or popular sacramental practice between the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and Vatican II (1962–1965). In fact, the word “faith” never appeared in any of the 1947 catechism’s sixteen lessons on the sacraments.²⁷ Vatican II, of course, did much both to arouse a deepened interest in the role of sacramental liturgies in Christian life and to inspire a development of sacramental and liturgical theologies.²⁸

The mindset unwittingly encouraged by the Council of Trent’s statement on sacramental efficacy, however, which appeared to be concerned mainly with how administering a rite can be canonically valid, is what prevents a more authentic experience of baptism today as a process of genuine initiation. Several historical developments certainly helped in shaping this pervasive outlook—the institutionalization of the early Church, Augustinian theology, the shift to infant baptism, increased focus on the ritual, and the Council of Trent’s stress on the efficacy of ritual have all culminated in a preoccupation with canonical validity to the neglect of what is also necessary: personal commitment to faith and its transformation of the individual. This metaphysical understanding ultimately does not “reflect on how the rite could be a humanly satisfying, word-enlightened experience of the work of salvation.”²⁹

It is crucial to point out the inadequacies of understanding “sacrament” as merely being effected through its canonical ritual. Such limited comprehension, though, has sadly become

²⁷McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1239.

²⁸Cooke, “Sacraments,” 1119. See also *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: America Press, 1966), no. 2. Hereafter cited as SC.

²⁹Liam G. Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation: A Theology of Life, Word, and Rite*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and Mundelein: Hillenbrand Books, 2011), 109–110.

entrenched in Catholic consciousness, and has continued to maintain a legalistic approach to sacramental life that ignores its very spirit (i.e., a ritual encounter with Christ in faith). Sacraments have often been understood as mere vehicles of grace that can be administered in exactly the same way, again and again, as long as the minimum requirements are fulfilled.³⁰ The necessity of faith in both minister and candidate to facilitate the sacrament is lost in this approach, along with an appreciation of sacraments as possible vehicles of grace for actively changing individuals and enriching their lives in faith.

This situation is due to the tendency among ecclesiastical writers since the Middle Ages to discuss sacraments not in personal terms but in primarily abstract and metaphysical ones.³¹ Chauvet, writing on sacramental efficacy, remarks, “The insistence on the objective efficacy of the sacraments is done at the expense of the concrete existential subjects, who are not taken into account.”³² The focus has been on the metaphysical grace that is transferred through the ritual act of baptism, a focus which has neglected the physical and spiritual presence of the individual recipient of the sacrament.

This metaphysical sacramental understanding, however, does give the basis for the practice of baptizing infants, which is necessary since their salvation is effected more by divine grace than by their actual personal *active* faith.³³ Nevertheless, it does give the *impression* that infant baptism is a sufficient basis for salvation since it has already objectively won our

³⁰See Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 107. Cf. Joseph Martos, “Opening a Door to the Sacred 20 Years Later,” *Ministry & Liturgy* 29, no. 3 (April 2002): 9–10.

³¹Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 106.

³²Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), xv.

³³We say, however, that infant candidates for baptism are baptized into the faith of the Church and are represented by their parents who make an act of faith, i.e., they request for and accept baptism on behalf of their children.

salvation and the forgiveness of our sins by divine grace. This narrow understanding sadly removes the responsibility of Christian adults to engage in an active life of justice and faith. The “legalistic approach” has thus been criticized for reducing sacramental celebration to form—canonically valid but not necessarily existentially effective.³⁴

A minimalist approach to the sacraments, while holding the advantage of clarity, inclines toward a rather metaphysical *understanding* that makes the efficacious *bestowal* of grace on the life of the individual the chief consideration.³⁵ It does not provide an opportunity for engaging in a life of grace—the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for instance, defines sacraments merely as efficacious signs of grace, symbolic actions entrusted to the Church through which the divine life is bestowed.³⁶ This established critique of the official catechism for its inadequate treatment of the sacraments within their ecclesial context is exemplified by Peter E. Fink, who observes that what is completely missing is the view of sacraments as *ecclesial* actions by which the Church expresses and manifests its nature as Church.³⁷ This is so even as the official definition does acknowledge that “[sacraments] bear fruit in those who receive them with the right attitude and in the right spirit,”³⁸ for “right attitude and right spirit” certainly presume being not only in a “state of grace” but also and ultimately in a state of solidarity with the community in all

³⁴Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 139. See also Schillebeeckx, “The Sacraments: An Encounter with God,” 121.

³⁵David N. Power, “The Sacraments in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 111.

³⁶See Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994; reprint Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994), no. 1131. Hereafter cited as CCC.

³⁷Peter E. Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” in *The Universal Catechism Reader*, 100. Cf. SC, no. 2.

³⁸Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 100.

its life and affairs. Surely our ongoing formation in faith is being accomplished *in, by, and for the Church*.

To ignore the *ecclesial orientation* of all sacramental worship, therefore, by describing the laity as “mere recipients” of sacramental grace is a regression from Vatican II’s more participatory liturgical and ecclesial vision.³⁹ The *ecclesial aspect* of Christian worship is consistent with the idea, for instance, that the baptized community finds the occasion through baptismal initiation not only to be involved in the formation of the candidates but also *to renew and deepen its own baptismal faith*. The sacrament of baptism is not simply a vehicle of grace for the baptized individual, nor is the Church simply a place where baptism and the other sacraments take place. Sacraments are *ritual actions of the faithful to express themselves as Church*.⁴⁰

Christian Initiation for Baptized Christians Today: Pedagogical Implications

The inadequate understanding of sacramental efficacy in the West is exemplified in the Filipino understanding and practice of the sacraments. Baptism, for instance, is a highly regarded sacred ritual among Filipinos, and also one of the more popular social occasions in Philippine society, underlying the importance Filipinos place on family and children. There is disparity, however, between the authentic theology of baptism as a call to a new life in Christ and the way by which the sacrament is actually understood and practiced in the Philippines today.

First, the immediate family becomes preoccupied with meal preparations and the selection of godparents instead of

³⁹Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 98. See SC, no. 7.

⁴⁰Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 100. See SC, no. 2.

with religious instruction for parents and godparents.⁴¹ Baptism is thus “reduced to what may be considered as the Church equivalent of a civil registration, much like securing a birth certificate as proof of Filipino citizenship.”⁴² The result is that many baptized Filipinos become Catholic more in name than in practice, a condition termed nominal Catholicism.⁴³

Another cause for the lack of necessary religious instruction prior to baptism is the imbalance between the sheer number of children to be baptized and the number of available ministers.⁴⁴ The problem is also aggravated by the lack of adequately trained lay catechetical staff, a concern that is particularly important since pre-sacramental baptismal catechesis demands a more accurate and “deeper understanding of the Faith than the ordinary catechist already possesses.”⁴⁵

It appears that the greatest need, then, is in helping Filipino Catholics better understand the sacraments, and in encouraging more participation not only in the baptismal rite but also in those other sacraments that nurture Christian life.⁴⁶ A deeper, more personal, and more active worship life may be achieved when a sustained effort at ongoing catechetical education is in place at the parish, particularly at the level of the Basic Ecclesial Community

⁴¹Fink, “The Liturgy and Eucharist in the Catechism,” 47–48. See Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Makati: Word & Life Publications, 1994; new ed., enl. Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1997), no. 1587. Hereafter cited as CFC.

⁴²Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 48.

⁴³Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 48. CFC, no. 1588.

⁴⁴See Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: CBCP, 1992; reprint Pasay City: Paulines, 1998), Decrees, Art. no. 10 regarding pre-sacramental directives.

⁴⁵Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 48. See Episcopal Commission on Education and Religious Instruction, *Maturing in Christian Faith: The National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publications, 1985), no. 361.

⁴⁶See SC, no. 59; also Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 49.

(BEC). The responsibility for this continuing catechetical effort, moreover, should be placed squarely on the shoulders of those who are tasked with the basic formation of the youth and young adults: parents, godparents, and sponsors.⁴⁷ They, however, need the support of trained catechetical staff.

Unique to my proposal are five topics that need to be highlighted by the liturgical instructor in any *actual content presentation* on baptism. These topics are neither emphasized nor mentioned at all in many pre-baptismal seminars yet they need to be stressed since they approximate the most important elements of the ancient initiation process in the *Apostolic Tradition*. These five topics are:

- 1) Christ's baptism as confirmation of his identity and call to inaugurate the Kingdom of God;
- 2) Christ as the truly "baptized one" who is "deeply immersed" in God, including an explanation of how this idea is actually replicated and lived out in the faith of the family who represents the child in the case of infant baptisms;
- 3) the shift in focus from water washing away original sin to the Holy Spirit freeing us from sin;
- 4) water's life-sustaining and destructive qualities recounted in Exodus 14, which adequately symbolize Christ's passage from death to life, along with our own participation in his paschal mystery; and
- 5) baptism into Christ as baptism into his body, the Church, since the struggle with

⁴⁷Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred*, 49.

both our individual sins and the sins of the world is always a collective task in view and fulfillment of Christ's threefold mission as prophet, priest, and king in furthering God's reign in the world.

First, the sacrament of baptism recalls John's baptism of Christ in the river Jordan (Mt. 3:13–17; Mk. 1:9–11; Jn. 1:32–34). This event signifies the affirmation of Jesus as God's "beloved" in whom the divine favor rests (Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11). The instructor can point out that this confirmation of Christ gave him a deep sense of his identity as being uniquely related to God, his *Abba*, in a profoundly special way. This divine endorsement prepared Jesus for mission; it equipped him with the knowledge that he was "set apart" from the rest of humanity to fulfill a special mission from his *Father*: the mission of inaugurating *God's reign* on earth. This is a point lost in much of baptismal catechesis today, for what is often communicated is that baptism simply empowers us to become children of God. Indeed, while there is routine mention of the participation of the baptized in the threefold mission of Christ (as prophet, priest, and king), there is no emphasis given to the *unique identity* that baptism affords the candidate. This unique identity should be a source of profound self-affirmation as well as of strength and deep inspiration for the baptized as they go about their mission as Christians in the world.

Second, the main element in baptism is water. Instruction should be able to explain the many deep meanings that this primary element holds in relation to our lives as Christians. The first point to emphasize is that Christ is the truly "baptized one"—completely immersed in God, his Father, whose presence completely and perfectly fills Christ's humanity."⁴⁸ This underlines a very important point—that a baptized Christian requires a "deep immersion" in God. Personal conversion may have marked the ancient baptismal rite but today's situation is radically different:

⁴⁸CFC, nos. 1604 and 1606.

the general practice is infant baptism, and only adults who have been converted to Christianity are baptized on Easter Sunday. We undeniably hold, in infant baptism, that the baby is being baptized into the “faith of the Church,” and that it is the infant’s family who responds in faith during the actual sacramental rite. The involvement of the family in the rite is crucial, therefore, as it represents the Church community requesting, on behalf of the child, for admission into Christ’s body of believers.

Pre-baptismal instruction should thus explain the demands of “deep immersion in God.” Family members should be asked about their own personal relationship with God: Does this relationship exist in the first place? Do they simply identify with the many who consider themselves “nominal Catholics”—Catholics in name and not in life? Do they consider themselves qualified to represent the faith of the child by their presence in the preparation for, as well as in, the rite itself, and by asserting their own faith-commitment in Christ and in the values he represents (i.e., deep faith in God, the witness of a virtuous life, and preferential care for the poor and marginalized)? These questions are rarely asked during the usual twenty-minute pre-baptismal instructions or, in the absence of such, during the homily in the baptismal rite itself. These questions, however, along with the communal celebration of the baptismal rite itself, could afford the family and the believing community an opportunity to reaffirm their faith and recommit themselves to Christ.

The powerful symbolism that “immersion in water” brings is also diminished dramatically by the mere pouring of a few drops on the candidate’s forehead. Immersion in water signifies the radical “plunging” into the depths of Christ’s life, suffering, death, rising to life, and the change effected by it. Pouring water on the forehead does nothing but reinforce the centuries-old mindset that baptism automatically, almost magically, washes away sin.

Third, the image of “deep immersion” in God shifts the focus of the baptismal objective away from water “washing away original sin” to water “symbolizing and effecting a cleansing from all sin and rebirth to new life in the Spirit.”⁴⁹ Indeed, that original sin is a “black mark” on the soul to be washed away by the baptismal water is a misconception ingrained in the Filipino religious consciousness that is admittedly very difficult to correct. Deep immersion in God as represented by Christ’s life is a recognition of the Holy Spirit’s presence in him, “descending on him like a dove” (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Jn. 1:32). Liturgical education must thus insist that “it is the Holy Spirit that frees us from sin.”⁵⁰ To overcome sin in our lives and the sinful condition into which we are all born requires our *oneness* with Christ in whom the Holy Spirit dwells by his special relationship with God.

By becoming more and more like Christ, in other words, we become more and more centered on others and increasingly less centered on ourselves (sin). This requires a lifelong commitment and a reliance on the life of the Spirit within us. God “saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Ti. 3:5). Once again, pouring water on the forehead as an instrument for “washing away” sin shifts the focus away from union with Christ in the Spirit and lifelong commitment and onto the “magical” properties of baptismal water and belief in a once-only cleansing from sin. To overcome sin is to live in and by the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. Baptism does wash away sin, but not in some mystical fashion; it washes away sin because it signifies the coming of the Holy Spirit which overshadows us so that we may confront all evil and sin in our lives and in the world.

Fourth, “deep immersion” in water reminds us of water’s ambivalent quality, that it is both life-giving and destructive. Liturgical instruction should explain effectively the meaning of the baptismal symbols, primarily water. Water as drink means

⁴⁹CFC, no. 1602; CCC, no. 1263.

⁵⁰CFC, no. 1602.

life, water as flood means death; this point is certainly not lost in the iconic image of the Exodus deliverance through the water of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:1–31). The ambivalent quality of water, especially in the image of Exodus 14, may be used to explain a common theme in Scripture: the passage from death to life (Is. 26:19–21; Ez. 37:1–14; Dn. 12:2–3; Eph. 2:1–6; 1 Jn. 3:14; Jn. 5:24, 11:25–26).

This ancient image of “passage from the old to the new” is lost when water is merely poured on the infant’s forehead to signify the “washing away of original sin.” The symbol obviously fails to demonstrate and recover the powerful reality of the “passage from death to life” and of one’s union with Christ, particularly in his “passage from death to resurrection” (1 Cor. 15:3–5). Pre-baptism instruction in general stresses the second, positive aspect of rising from water and neglects the more somber aspect of dying with Christ through submersion in water.⁵¹ Even the fonts in use today merely recall the ancient baptismal fonts where full baptismal immersion was possible. Often shaped in the form of a cross, these fonts usually had three downward-leading steps to symbolize the Trinity. Descent into the fontal waters signified being “buried with [Christ] through baptism into death” (Rom. 6:4). The destructiveness of water is thus recalled by the experience of submersion, a drowning of the old self of sin, while ascent from the water signifies our being raised “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, [that] we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:4). Both death and life are required to “count [ourselves] dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). Union with Christ, therefore, means taking on his *entire life* in us, a life of constant outpouring of self for others which reached its summit in the sacrifice of his own life. This *paschal pilgrimage* is at the heart

⁵¹In our 1996 course on *Sacraments of Initiation*, the late Fr. Jim Meehan, S.J. brought us all to Mary the Queen Parish in Greenhills and showed us the baptistery containing what was perhaps the last existing baptismal font in the Philippines where full immersions could be done.

of the Christian life, the rhythm of the Christian commitment, where the way to life is death to self.

Unfortunately, while baptismal fonts of this kind might do well to recover the ancient Church's baptismal practice, much financial resources and planning are needed, particularly for redesigning actual church structures to accommodate the construction of fonts that capture and recover the essence of ancient baptismal rituals, ones that effectively signify the *paschal journey* of the baptized with Christ in the company of the baptized community.

Finally, to be “deeply immersed” in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is to be “deeply immersed” in the life of the Church, Christ's body of faithful but imperfect believers. Our struggle with sin is never a lonely one, never a fight we take on alone—liturgical instruction cannot emphasize this enough. We need the support of the faith community when we wrestle with our personal sins and society's more structural sins. The ancient Church, in fact, often had to witness to their faith in Christ in the midst of persecution and rejection (Mt. 5:12; Jn. 15:18, 20; Rom. 8:35; 1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Cor 12:10; 2 Tim. 3:12). That is why they had to stay together, finding support, encouragement, and strength in one another.

One can always emphasize in classroom instruction that the Church exists for sinners, not saints, and that baptism, like any other sacrament, “is not something just passively received.”⁵² It demands an active living out of the baptismal vows throughout the life of faith of the baptized.⁵³ Personal conversion as such is not magically produced by the sacrament. “Baptism [merely] offers the initial grace, a new relationship with Christ in the Spirit, within the Christian community,”⁵⁴ but its lasting effectivity depends on the *continuing cooperation in faith* of the baptized

⁵²CFC, no. 1613.

⁵³CFC, no. 1613.

⁵⁴CFC, no. 1613.

with God.⁵⁵ Like any other sacrament, baptism is a gift as well as a process. As Paul writes to the Ephesians,

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22–24)

He then exhorts the Hebrews:

Let us lay aside everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And persevere in running the race that lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. (Heb. 12:1–2)

The Church is always Christ's body where we ideally should find healing, forgiveness, inspiration, and restoration. The Church community's mission, in witness to Christ's cause of furthering the reign of God in the world, is to share in Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly functions: the prophetic function is to always read the "signs of the times" and interpret them in light of the Gospel; the priestly function is to live a life of holiness through prayer and the Church liturgy; and the kingly function is to live a faith that does justice and gives service to the poor and disadvantaged.⁵⁶ Yet while the RCIA has recovered much of the ecclesial dimension of baptism, the general understanding and practice of baptism in the Philippines is still inclined toward a rather individualistic and privatistic living out of the sacrament. Such is true, in fact, not just for baptism but for all the sacraments. The exodus of many Catholics, moreover, to so-called "born-again," evangelical churches indicates a yearning for a more personally meaningful baptismal experience where the sacrament comes as a result of a personally chosen faith, rather than as something imposed by virtue of one's birth into a Catholic family. Like any other sacrament, baptism marks the beginning, not the end, of a Christian's journey in the world.

⁵⁵CFC, no. 1613.

⁵⁶CFC, no. 1608.

Practical Concerns

There are special cases, however, that call for special steps. The pastoral worker rarely has that ideal candidate for initiation, that is, the committed adult who is the theologian's usual subject of reflection.⁵⁷ Other factors that the pastoral worker, catechist, liturgist, or pastor needs to consider include the age of the candidate as well as the sequence of, and time-interval between, different sacraments.⁵⁸ Is the sacrament yet to be received? Or was it already received?

If the sacrament is yet to be received, as is frequent with infants, instruction must focus on the immediate family. A baptismal catechetical program must be in place on the parish level for families (parents and godparents) of infant candidates, and it must be designed to last for at least two days to address and process thoroughly the faith situation of the family. Baptismal instruction that takes place only during the homily of the actual baptismal ritual (fifteen minutes, at most) is obviously not enough for communicating all of the fundamental ideas in the sacrament that need to be stressed, not to mention the time needed for these ideas to be reflected on and interiorized.

If the sacrament has already been received, instruction must focus on gratitude for, and reaffirmation of, the gifts received in baptism, and on anticipation for the next initiation sacrament—Eucharist or confirmation, whichever comes first. The intricacies that may present themselves thus appeal for a keen sense of the dynamic relationship between the initiation sacraments.⁵⁹

Bradshaw believes that there are three categories of candidates that present special problems.⁶⁰ The first are those who have already been fully initiated but have completely failed

⁵⁷Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 390.

⁵⁸Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 390.

⁵⁹Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 390.

⁶⁰Bradshaw, "Christian Initiation," 609.

to attain a genuine spiritual conversion in their lives. While they are in many ways not unlike those who have never received any of the sacraments, to allow their reentry into a baptismal process together with regular catechumens may confuse the initial experience of conversion with that of the ongoing renewal of faith that is expected of all Christians. Instead, a well thought-out reconciliation liturgy may respond to the needs of this specific group, one that revitalizes their understanding of their baptism and centers on “the process of recognition, reformation, and reconciliation which characterized it” in ancient times.⁶¹ This revitalized reconciliation liturgy can be the culminating event of a spiritual retreat of two to three days where the candidates are recognized as potential future members of the community. It can encourage an experience of conversion and reformation through prayerful meditation and reflection on the input given by retreat facilitators. The candidates can also be encouraged to share their religious experiences with other candidates as well as finally be welcomed into, or reconciled with, the community. Such may constitute an appropriate preparation for this group in providing them with a deeper appreciation of, and existential encounter with, the mysteries of faith attached to the baptismal sacrament.

The second are those who, like most children, have already been baptized but have not yet been confirmed and have not yet received holy communion. Since their initiation is incomplete, they may be included appropriately in certain parts, processes, and rites of the RCIA. Additional, optional rites may also be provided for this group. Their numbers should not interfere, however, with the distinctive character of the RCIA as centered on baptism. There must be a clear distinction between how baptism is reaffirmed for these incompletely initiated candidates, on the one hand, and how it is celebrated for the catechumens who are, in fact, being baptized, on the other.⁶² Walsh describes the

⁶¹Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” 609–610.

⁶²Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” 610.

catechetical requisites for this particular group; his explanations are worth quoting at length:

When children who have reached the age of discretion are being fully initiated (*RCIA*, Part II, nn. 242–306, 1306–3691), the catechetical requirements for maintaining the unity of initiation will be the same as for adults, although there will be obvious pedagogical adjustments. When children have already been baptized in infancy the catechesis of initiation will be directed to confirmation. The theological concern would be that this catechesis should also be a retrospective catechesis of baptism. It is being given at the stage of life during which the promises made on behalf of the child at baptism have to be put to it clearly and a personal acceptance of baptism [must be] included in the acceptance of confirmation. The catechesis will also need to make it clear how the Eucharist completes initiation and will prepare the one being confirmed to enter fully into the mystery of the Eucharist. However, account has to be taken of the fact that in the common practice of the Latin Church the first catechesis of those baptized in infancy will not be preparing them for confirmation but for their first Eucharistic communion. Theology is bound to point out the anomalies of this practice. It cannot but encourage pastoral choices to change it, by having children confirmed before their First Communion. Where the common practice is maintained, theology will at least urge that the catechesis for First Communion includes a retrospective catechesis of baptism and inculcates a sense of and desire for confirmation.⁶³

Here in the Philippines, the common sequence of baptism-communion-confirmation is maintained, although the ideal is certainly to preserve the original, logical sequence of baptism-confirmation-communion which accounts for the candidate's gradual initiation into the Christian community. Should confirmation, then, be given at a much later age compared to the current practice of giving it to candidates at age twelve? This would necessitate that the Eucharist be given to them after confirmation, at an age later than twelve years old; indeed, children at the age of twelve are not yet disposed or prepared to be mature Christians. Giving confirmation at a much later age, say at fifteen or sixteen, is just about right when expecting a more

⁶³Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 390–391.

mature appreciation of the baptismal gifts, as well as a ratification of these gifts in confirmation, from these candidates. This will certainly further delay the receiving of communion, yet it is done to discourage a nominal form of Catholicism where sacraments are merely “received” but never understood, interiorized, and lived out in daily life.

According to Walsh’s strong recommendation above, the pre-sacramental catechesis will need to make it clear how the Eucharist completes initiation. The catechetical instruction will also prepare the one being confirmed to enter fully into the mystery of the Eucharist. In other words, the pastoral worker, through training, needs to develop the understanding that is necessary for making the Eucharist the core of all sacramental instruction. The Eucharist needs to be understood and appreciated in relation to the initial baptismal conversion while confirmation needs to be understood as the deepening and strengthening of this baptismal experience in preparation for the Eucharist. Everything taught about the baptismal call, along with the candidates’ commissioning in confirmation, must look forward to both the “self-donation with and for others” that is the Eucharist and the eternal life in the Kingdom which it anticipates and sacramentalizes.⁶⁴ If baptism is the first stage of initiation, marking the experience of conversion, and confirmation is the completion of baptism in that through it the baptismal promises are ratified by the candidate, then the Eucharist marks the candidate’s full initiation and entry into Christ’s body, the Church, where the candidate receives the body of Christ in communion to signify and bring about this profound union with Christ through his body, the Church.

Finally, there are those who have been baptized as non-Catholics but are seeking admission into the Church. A separate baptismal catechetical program, patterned after the RCIA period for the catechumenate, can be used in such cases. The preparation

⁶⁴Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 391.

of these often adult candidates, however, should be mindful of the rich traditions of the non-Catholic churches, particularly their commitment to the written Word of God in Scripture. There are no hard-and-fast rules for these candidates. Cases will have to be studied individually to discern which part of the initiatory process is appropriate for each.⁶⁵

“Looking at the past type of catechetical instruction,” a constant reflection on the initiation sacraments, whatever the age of the candidates, is necessary, along with a willingness to adapt them pastorally to best suit the understanding and situation of individual recipients. The liturgical year provides a framework—a catechumenate experience during Lent and a reenactment of the baptismal experience during the Easter vigil both recall confirmation by extending the giving of the Spirit at Easter into the Pentecost celebration. The post-Easter liturgy offers a context for a “retrospective, mystagogical catechesis of initiation,” while at the center of the liturgical year is the Easter Eucharist, which re-enacts a vivid elaboration on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. This offers a catechesis on how the Eucharist perfects our baptism in Christ and confirmation in the Spirit by fully initiating us into the Spirit-filled Body of Christ. The Eucharist thus becomes the sacramental source and summit of all Christian life.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Baptism remains to be the primary religious experience of the sacred because it is a ritual through which we gain entry into a community that proclaims a sacred meaning to life, thereby opening the way to experiences of the divine in childhood,

⁶⁵Bradshaw, “Christian Initiation,” 610.

⁶⁶Walsh, *Sacraments of Initiation*, 391. See also *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], in *Documents of Vatican II*, no. 11. Cf. CCC, no. 1324.

adolescence, and adulthood. This is the sequence of initiation into the community of believers that the early Church followed through the rituals described in the *Didache* (AD 100) and especially in the *Apostolic Tradition* (AD 225). For those who attend baptismal ceremonies today, particularly the parents, sponsors, guests, and witnesses, the ritual may well disclose dimensions of their faith that remain hidden at times, and can also deepen their sense of commitment through their active engagement in it.⁶⁷ It is sad, then, that baptism has often been understood and practiced while bereft of any genuine understanding of its meaning and mission. The popular belief instead is that baptism, like any other sacrament, works by giving grace automatically, independent of the personal faith and holiness of the recipient or minister. This misunderstanding came about partly through the Council of Trent's emphasis on "washing away" sin, an emphasis that is widespread in the Philippines today. As such, what should complete our understanding that sacraments offer grace *ex opere operato* (through the work done), making them *canonically valid*, is the complementary adage that sacraments work *ex opere operantis* (through the work of the worker), making them *personally effective*. It urgently needs to be taught, both to those preparing for baptism and those preparing to have their children baptized, that sacraments communicate grace not only by the intention and prayer of the Church but also, and necessarily, by the personal faith and disposition of both recipient (including parents and godparents) and minister.⁶⁸

The task of the religious educator, amid the challenges of secularization, moral relativism, and inadequate religious instruction in the Philippines today, is to help the faithful understand and interiorize the values and virtues being demanded of us in baptism. Based on this fundamental

⁶⁷Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1981; new ed. New York: Doubleday, 2002; new ed. Ligouri: Ligouri Publications, 2014), 206.

⁶⁸McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1239.

theological premise, liturgical instruction must be able to underscore the following insights:

First, the baptismal rite is a baptism or an “immersion in Christ” which signifies our complete interiorizing and taking on of the life of Christ, along with our understanding of and participation in his distinctive identity and call to be a “beloved Son of God” tasked with making the kingdom of God a reality in the world.

Second, baptism not only signifies and communicates grace; it reveals something fundamental about the Church.⁶⁹ Baptism makes us one with Christ in his paschal mystery within the Spirit-filled community through which we overcome sin and evil in our lives since it is in being like Christ, the truly “baptized one” who is fully immersed in his Father’s love, and supported by the Church that we struggle successfully against sin and evil in the world.⁷⁰ The more we become like Christ, the less we become centered on ourselves.

In baptism, the Church reveals itself to itself and to the rest of humanity principally as the body of Christ, a community of Christ’s faithful yet imperfect disciples who are in need of constant purification; only secondarily is it an institutional structure.⁷¹ Our saving solidarity with Christ’s paschal mystery, our being at once both a forgiving community and a community in need of forgiveness, and our baptizing and being baptized “by water and the Spirit” anoint us as a “holy people ... [marked] with the chrism of salvation” to be like Christ—prophet, priest, and king unto “everlasting life” (Rite of Baptism).⁷²

Third, our baptism, like Christ’s, *inaugurates* us into mission for the sake of the community—both the Church and the

⁶⁹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 815.

⁷⁰CFC, nos. 1602–1603.

⁷¹McBrien, *Catholicism*, 816.

⁷²McBrien, *Catholicism*, 816.

entire human family (Mt. 3:13–17; Lk. 3:21–22).⁷³ Our baptism empowers us to participate in Christ's own baptism, a baptism that affirms our identity in solidarity with sinful humanity and *initiates us into mission* in the Church and in the world.⁷⁴

Paul's Letter to the Romans captures well the idea of baptism as death to an old way of life and rebirth into a new one:

We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives for God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom. 6:1–14)

This brief study offers the theology that is necessary for revitalizing and renewing the baptized faithful of the Philippine Church. It expresses the call to live a life of holiness through baptism in Christ by immersing ourselves in his death and resurrection and by actively engaging in his mission to bring about the reign of God. Indeed, while catechizing the faithful on their baptismal responsibilities and calling will not bring about a

⁷³McBrien, *Catholicism*, 816.

⁷⁴McBrien, *Catholicism*, 816.

complete reform of the many problems besetting the Church in the Philippines, it will be a step nevertheless toward cooperating with and activating the grace that is bestowed through baptism.

CHAPTER VII

A PROPOSED VISION FOR THE REFORM OF FILIPINO SACRAMENTAL WORSHIP

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed baptism according to the principles of a more personalistic, non-metaphysical sacramental theology as exemplified in the CFC. It also proposed a new way of understanding baptism that may provide the key to renewing our experience of the other liturgical and sacramental rituals of the Church.

This final chapter offers a radical vision of how Filipino worship life should be understood and lived out. Critical in this sacramental renewal is a new way of understanding ourselves as church, of which “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.”¹

Exposition

This book makes no excuses for the rather radical views it holds regarding liturgy, its crucial place in the life of the Church, and the reform needed to advance Church renewal in the Philippines.

¹*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], in *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbot (New York: America Press, 1966), no. 10. Hereafter cited as SC.

The liturgy is not only about the Church's worship life, as if this were devoid of any real connection with the life of the community. When this happens, the liturgy takes on a life of its own, degenerating into rituals that can be performed in exactly the same way over and over again without really inspiring personal transformation in the spirit of Christ's life. The early Christian communities performed the "breaking of the bread" in the context of remembrance—recalling and reliving the spirit of Christ's life and sacrifice.

The Church today, unfortunately, is separated from the Christ event by two millennia. This brings with it the difficulty and challenge of making Christ believably real in the lives of the Christian community. The institutionalization of the Church over the centuries was meant to perpetuate the memory of Christ, especially as the Church had to deal with the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem. Structures had to be put in place, and ministries and offices had to be established to respond to the various needs and challenges facing the ever-expanding Church.

The liturgy itself, for one, became increasingly more elaborate as a result of the Church's romanization. Completely cut-off by time from the direct experience of Christ and his first disciples, the Church needed to be creative in sustaining the fervor and commitment of the believing community as it confronted a myriad of problems in the world, all while anticipating the return of Christ in the *parousia*.

The meal aspect of the original Eucharist has virtually disappeared, making way for a more official and formal ritual that is characteristic of many Eucharistic celebrations today. Readings, for instance, now have to be interpreted in light of the assembly's given context as the experience of the first apostles has since become a distant memory.

Liturgical music, however, has always been part of liturgical celebrations ever since "psalm-singing [began] in the synagogues

of the first Christians.”² Music engages the imagination and helps in transporting the assembly to the world of Christ and his contemporaries, i.e., to a world that cannot be accessed otherwise. Ultimately, music can help facilitate a “moving experience of liturgy”³ that can enable us to experience the transcendent.

The crucial question facing us today is this: “With all the liturgical piety and Marian devotion of many Filipino Catholics, why do we remain an essentially corrupt and morally bankrupt society?” Baptism has become a mere once-in-a-lifetime event that hardly factors in our lives as adult believers today. Confession remains to be a mere religious requirement in grade school that one is just happy to be over and done with. The Eucharist continues to be frequented by many Catholics but is often cut-off from the actual life of the participants concerned. Has the Catholic faith changed and transformed us as a people? Did receiving the sacraments of initiation and confession during childhood help in facilitating our growth into the faith?

Performed as a ritual expression of their lives as committed and baptized Christian believers, the liturgy in the early Christian communities was inconceivable apart from their collective memory of the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ. It was from the liturgy that the first Christians drew their strength and inspiration for accomplishing the mission Christ entrusted to them. The anomaly today, however, is that the liturgy functions like a service station—it merely provides comfort and relief for tired souls seeking respite from the many pressures of modern life. As such, while Jesus himself certainly invited those who were tired and overburdened to seek solace in him (Mt. 11:28), it is to misunderstand the liturgy if all it means for us is as a dispenser of divine grace and consolation.

²Edward J. McKenna, “Music Ministries,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 852.

³McKenna, “Music Ministries,” 854.

Church renewal can never take place, therefore, without the building of small Christian communities. It is in these basic ecclesial communities (BECs) that Christ is encountered in a deeply personal way. There relationships are forged and friendships are made while a collective sense of responsibility binds each individual community together. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) describes the BECs as a new way of being Church:

[The BECs] are small communities of Christians, usually of families who gather together around the Word of God and the Eucharist. These communities are united to their pastors but are ministered to regularly by lay leaders. The members know each other by name, and share not only the Word of God and the Eucharist but also their concerns both material and spiritual. They have a strong sense of belongingness and of responsibility for one another.⁴

It is in the context of BECs that liturgy can take a central place since it may become the main formative ground for true Christian discipleship and witness, one around which a community can be organized. Amado L. Picardal writes in his thorough study of the BECs:

Ever since the early period of the Church, the Eucharist has always been the celebration of the local Christian community. The Eucharist was celebrated by the community whose members lived in communion—they were united by the bond of common faith and they were of one heart and mind. They knew one another, they considered each other as brothers and sisters in the faith, they shared with each other their goods.... The Eucharist presupposes an existing community. It is only after the community that has been formed, that the members can come together and sit at the table of the Lord to celebrate his paschal mystery and thus deepen their community experience.... The Eucharist celebrates the *koinonia* that is already lived in the community—the unity of mind and heart, the unity in faith, the sharing of goods, etc. The Eucharist becomes an

⁴Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: CBCP, 1992; reprint Pasay City: Paulines, 1998), no. 138. Hereafter cited as PCP II.

empty ritual if this *communion* is not experienced and concretely lived in the community.⁵

There is no other moment when the Church is very much itself than when it celebrates the Eucharist.⁶ While it also builds community, the Eucharist is a gathering that celebrates the community that has already been formed. This insight is key to Church renewal. Our parish priests, instead of being preoccupied with building one edifice after another to guarantee their legacy, should build communities at the grassroots or *barangay* level where the people experience the Church as a community, and where the Eucharist is no longer a merely private devotion but a true experience of being a community ritually remembering and reliving the paschal mystery of Christ. The parish should thus be organized and formed as a community of communities.⁷

One is afforded the opportunity in the liturgy to reimagine and interiorize the spirit of Christ's life which culminates in the paschal mystery. It is crucial, therefore, that the signs and symbols used in the liturgy embody the realities signified in a realistic way. Pouring drops of water on an infant's forehead, for instance, does not do justice to the reality of accurately depicting Christ's dying and rising. The actual gesture or movement of "dying" and "rising" must be in the actual ritual. Drops of water on the candidate's forehead merely reinforce the idea that grace is simply—somewhat magically—bestowed and passively received without any sort of cooperation required on the part of the candidate. While baptismal grace is certainly communicated as long as the minimum requirements—doing the intention of

⁵Amado L. Picardal, *Journeying Towards a New Way of Being Church* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc., 2016), 363–364.

⁶Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, 3rd ed., rev. & enl. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994; reprint London: Geoffrey Chapman, 2000), 830, citing Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963), 84.

⁷Picardal, *Journeying Towards a New Way of Being Church*, 364.

the Church and placing no obstacle through serious sin—are fulfilled, the experience of the rite as a community is still crucial.

It is true that a typical Filipino baptism involves community—the family, close friends, and relatives of the candidate. These, however, make up the clan, not the actual community in which the family of the baptized candidate live and settle. The family-centeredness of Filipinos is certainly a prized cultural value, yet it has also been a scourge to national life—families have become obstacles to social development and reform, for instance, judging from the way political dynasties have run this country. PCP II speaks of how family-centeredness, while a sound cultural Filipino value, has become too “particularistic,” i.e., much too focused on the welfare of small social groups (the extended family, the clan) at the expense of addressing the more pressing social ills that continue to plague modern Filipino society.⁸ One must bear in mind that Christ himself described his own family not in terms of their blood relations with him but as those who in fact do the will of God in their lives (Mt. 12:48–50).

Christ himself always questioned the practice of performing any ritual only for the sake of performing it. When questioned, for instance, as to why his disciples did not wash their hands before eating, Jesus asserted that it is not the ritual of washing before eating that makes a person clean or unclean; it is the heart of the person, of what is within, that makes one clean or not (Mt. 15:10–20; Mk. 7:1–23). Here Christ makes an indictment of any attitude that considers rituals as automatically communicating grace simply by performing them.

This is a crucial point that is relevant for Filipino worship life. The religious piety of Filipino Catholics is well-known, with much of that piety expressed in devotions of many forms. Yet while Filipino pious devotions are heartfelt religious exercises, they tend toward religious individualism. And for the 40% of

⁸See PCP II, no. 21.

Filipino churchgoers who frequent most of the sacraments, sacramental life is characterized by ritualism, that is, the sacraments are performed for the sake of performing them. As long as the minimum requirements are fulfilled, the sacraments are believed to communicate grace automatically. These official Church rituals thus degenerate into merely religious obligations; indeed, it is believed that mere participation in these rituals, even with no interior understanding and appreciation, is enough to guarantee that grace is communicated.

What can be done, then, to renew our Filipino worship life? What are the necessary steps for ensuring that our worship life as Filipino Catholics expresses our being Church, especially in a society pleading for much authentic Christian witnessing amid the perennial problems of widespread poverty, injustice, violence, and conflict?

1.) The ideal context for Filipino worship renewal is made up of the BECs. Unless people experience Christ and the Church in a deeply personal way, they will always be attracted to other groups—e.g., Evangelical and various Protestant churches—or, worse, lapse into nominalism and indifference. It is fortunate, then, that many have joined Catholic charismatic groups or covenanted communities in search of a more personal experience of Christ; these groups, however, tend to be inward-looking and lack the social consciousness that is necessary for addressing the greater social maladies plaguing modern-day Filipino society.

2.) Performing the sacraments in the BECs is a particular challenge for parish priests. In fact, the essence of being a priest cannot be realized apart from his deep connection with his community (i.e., his parish as a community of small communities). Karl Rahner, the leading Catholic theologian of the twentieth century, once envisioned the Church of the future; a review of his *The Shape of the Church to Come* has this to say regarding his vision of the role of the priest-in-community:

The priest retains his important place (p. 58), but he must be prepared to work more and more in a declericalized church, i.e. a church in which the office-holders in joyous humility allow for the fact that the Spirit breathes where he will and that he has not arranged an exclusive and permanent tenancy with them (pp. 56–60). What is meant by declericalization may become clearer if one remembers that the church of the future, in contrast to the pattern followed in a more recent past, is expected to grow from below, from groups of those who have come to believe as a result of their own free, personal decision (p. 111). In such cases the priest need not be celibate, if the right choice for a particular congregation at a particular time would be a leader who is married or free to marry (pp. 110, 51). As the “legitimate leader” of a local Christian community, this priest would also be that community’s eucharistic leader (p. 113). It is not impossible, in the light of such a new secular situation, that a woman could be considered just as much as a man for such a leadership and therefore could be admitted to the priestly office (p. 114).⁹

Rahner explains that this is precisely the case among so-called “basic communities” that have been formed at the grassroots through “free and spontaneous initiatives,” in contrast with more institutionalized church structures that can be found in parishes.¹⁰

⁹Raoul Dederen, “Karl Rahner’s *The Shape of the Church to Come*: A Review Article,” available at <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1355&context=auss> (accessed August 13, 2018).

¹⁰Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, trans. & intro. Edward Quinn (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 108–109. A so-called “declericalization” of the Church becomes all the more urgent in light of recent scandals involving the sexual abuse of minors (and adults) by priests and Church hierarchs such as bishops and cardinals, along with the apparently systematic cover-up of these crimes by the same church officials at the expense of the victims themselves. There is an impassioned call from both hierarchs and lay people for strong lay involvement not only in investigating these cases but also, and more importantly, in the governance of the Church itself. A hierarchical church structure tends to protect erring clergy from accountability and transparency whereas a more “democratized” church, where church governance and leadership are determined not by power but by charisma taking place in the context of Church as community, whether by lay or clergy and not as hierarchy, may substantially address the problems of the current crisis. A new way of being Church, in other words, is being called upon to untangle the

3.) Baptism, confirmation, confession, matrimony, Holy Orders, anointing of the sick, and the Eucharist are better performed in the context of BECs. We must disabuse ourselves of our parish-centered mindset that relegates the celebration of the sacraments to the parish center, where the sacramental celebrations simply become family affairs in which the entire community is not involved. Many engaged couples, for instance, decide to wed outside their respective parish communities. The people who witness their solemn vows are mostly family and relatives, close friends, and associates from work, a group that does constitute a “community” but is not the same community where the couple will in fact settle. Distance from this “community” means it will fail to provide a support group to the couple that is ideally and realistically accessible. Much stress, in fact, is inflicted on modern-day couples since a support group is not immediately there to lend its much-needed counsel and encouragement. Couples are almost pushed to fend for themselves, as it were, especially in times of marital crises.

4.) Infants can go through some kind of ritual of initiation if only to welcome them formally into the Christian community. As a gesture of faith allegiance in Christ, however, baptism should

web of current dysfunctions in the Church. See Christine Schenk, “Leonardo Boff’s model of charism offers road map out of clericalism,” *National Catholic Reporter* (September 15, 2018), available at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/simply-spirit/leonardo-boffs-model-charism-offers-road-map-out-clericalism> (accessed September 16, 2018). See also Emma Green, “Catholics are desperate for tangible reforms on clergy sex abuse,” *The Atlantic* (August 22, 2018), available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/catholic-church-sex-abuse/568078/> (accessed September 15, 2018); Ed Langlois, “Archbishop Sample ‘shaken to core,’ calls for lay-run abuse investigation,” *National Catholic Reporter* (August 25, 2018), available at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/archbishop-sample-shaken-core-calls-lay-run-abuse-investigation> (accessed September 15, 2018); and Michael J. O’Loughlin, “Albany bishop says laypeople should investigate misconduct by U.S. bishops,” *America* (August 6, 2018), available at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/06/albany-bishop-says-laypeople-should-investigate-misconduct-us-bishops> (accessed September 16, 2018).

only be performed by adults who signify a profound conversion in Christ. This affords the baptized adult with the opportunity to “own” the faith and live it out in a manner that may inspire others.

5.) Confirmation, needless to say, can be dropped as a sacrament since it was part of the original post-baptismal rite to begin with. Baptism already signifies the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the candidate since union with Christ in the baptismal rite means that the candidate, like Christ, is filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation with regard to adults who have already been baptized is no longer necessary as well since they have already freely chosen their faith, thereby signifying their commitment to witness actively to it.

6.) First Communion, Confession, and Confirmation should not be performed in schools whenever possible. Many Catholic school CLE teachers have complained that the focus is on the ideal behavior that students should display during the actual performance of these rites and not on whether or not the students themselves in fact understand the rites they are to go through. What can you expect from grade schoolers aged nine to twelve with regard to their understanding of the sacraments? The Eucharist, Confession, and Confirmation presume an “existential and deep personal encounter with Christ.” This exact experience is too much to ask from these young kids. Religion should never be imposed; indeed, many young students grow up resenting their Catholic faith since it imposes religious obligations that hardly touch their lives. The Church must wait for the appropriate time when these young students will discover the beauty and richness of their faith—a condition ideal for initiation into the sacraments. Such an appropriate time may not come at all, it is true, but then let it be so. In the end, it is better to have a few committed Catholics who have truly interiorized their faith than have nominal ones in great numbers but who are found wanting in their witnessing to the faith.

7.) Confession must be done through “Reconciliation Services” that involve the community, ideally in the BECs; where BECs are not available, Catholic schools should provide the sacrament to students who are at a level not lower than senior high school (students aged fifteen to sixteen have a more realistic and clearer notion of sin). Moreover, since private confessions are discouraged, a reconciliation service can give the students a more social idea of sin, namely, as not simply an individual transgression against God but also as that which may be destructive to the welfare of the community. Indeed, much of today’s moral deterioration in Philippine society may be attributed to a very individualistic notion of sin. Confession simply becomes a vehicle for cleansing one’s own sins at the expense of an awareness of the destructive social consequences of individual *and* social sin.

8.) First Communion should be made available to senior high school students only after they have had their first true confession. Students who have not been baptized should not be required, of course, to avail of First Communion. What if all the students have not been baptized? We do not celebrate First Communion, then. First Communion, like in the early Church, presumes the process of the *catechumenate*—a long period (at least three years) of catechetical and moral preparation. This is a challenge to families, especially in the BECs, to become authentic witnesses to the faith so that they may inspire their children to aspire for full Christian discipleship. Without such a witnessing, children who are forced to perform the sacraments at an early age tend to grow up to be nominal or lapsed Catholics. Once again, sacramental grace is communicated most effectively not through a merely canonically valid sacramental celebration but through one’s personal engagement with the sacrament in faith.

9.) Holy Orders, as Karl Rahner suggests, must be community-based, with communities being able to decide on who can lead them as pastors, celibate or otherwise. Both lay women and men (married or celibate) can be these local

pastors; as long as they can lead their communities as effective spiritual leaders, they should be allowed to be ordained by their communities through the diocesan bishop. This will guarantee that apostolic succession in the wider sense¹¹ is not sacrificed. Celibacy as such should not be a non-negotiable requirement for the priesthood. It is a gift—either one has it or one does not. While one may be a candidate for the priesthood if one has received that gift, one should not be deprived of the opportunity to lead one’s community as an ordained minister only because one does not have it.

10.) The Anointing of the Sick is most meaningful when the entire community is involved since the purpose of the sacrament is to re-integrate the infirm into the community. Sickness separates a person from the Church the way sin separates an individual from the life of the community. Representatives of the community should thus make themselves available for the sick and the dying who are confined in hospitals.

11.) The Church in the Philippines must adopt Anscar Chupungco’s *Misa ng Bayang Pilipino* (MBP) in its celebration of the Eucharist. The MBP is an indigenized, inculturated version of the Eucharist that integrates Filipino customs and gestures in the celebration of the Mass. Readers of the Word, for instance, make the “*mano* gesture” (taking the hand of the priest and placing it on one’s forehead to ask for the priest’s blessing in the same way children do the gesture to ask for the blessing of their elders). The priest also takes communion after the rest of the congregation has received the Body of Christ, echoing the Filipino practice in which household owners hosting a banquet partake of the food only after the guests have eaten their meal.

12.) There must be room for some flexibility in the celebration of the Eucharist. For instance, “discerning liturgical

¹¹Apostolic succession, in the wider sense, refers to the process by which the whole Church continues in faithful witness to the proclamation and service of the Apostles. See McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1234.

planning might recognize that a strong gospel call to repentance might suggest that a 'penitential rite' would be more considerably appropriate and effective after the homily."¹² A strong gospel call to forgiveness, on the other hand, may be followed immediately by the Sign of Peace. Visuals should be made available, too, when reading the Word, especially the Gospel; indeed, homilies with PowerPoint presentations have proven to be effective proclamations of the Gospel in some parishes.¹³

13.) The signs and symbols used in any sacrament must be truly "perceptible to the senses."¹⁴ Signs used in baptism, for instance, must be effective in depicting one's participation in, and union with, Christ's dying and rising (the Paschal Mystery). Present-day baptismal fonts are not effective signs, then, that are perceptible to the senses in this regard. They cannot facilitate an effective participation in the Paschal Mystery since the impression given with their use is that grace is communicated automatically through drops of water sprinkled on the forehead of the infant. Each parish church must at least invest in creating *baptistries*, sunken receptacles used for baptism which can enact

¹²See Michael Demetrius H. Asis, *Reimagining the Sacred: A Fresh Approach to Prayer, Liturgy, and the Sacraments* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2012), 117. See also Mary E. McGann, "Timely Wisdom, Prophetic Challenge: Rediscovering Clarence R. J. Rivers' Vision of Effective Worship," *Worship* 76 (2002): 2–24.

¹³This was the case at Sta. Maria della Strada Parish in Pansol, Quezon City. The former parish priest, Fr. Nelson Orqueta, was well known for his thought-provoking homilies aided by PowerPoint presentations, which began with popular historical quotes or images of historical figures, poets, and prominent persons. He connected these to the Gospel story and would ask thought-provoking questions of the congregation, forcing people to reflect on their own lives and priorities in relation to the Gospel. He would also often use a Church document to ground his homily in official Church teaching. Fr. Orqueta then ends with a summons to the congregation to live the Gospel as personified by the witness of the personalities he had mentioned at the beginning of his homily or as stipulated by the Gospel itself. My son Miguel, a fifteen-year-old who does not look forward to Sunday Masses, would often attend enthusiastically whenever Fr. Orqueta was presiding.

¹⁴SC, no. 7.

total immersion, thereby demonstrating clearly and effectively the adult candidate's "dying" and "rising" with Christ in his Paschal Mystery.

Conclusion

The ideas I have proposed in this book would appear radical insofar as they audaciously call for a renewal of long-established Church traditions in Catholic worship life. Infant baptisms, confirmations for nine-year-olds, first communion and confessions for children, Holy Orders for men who undergo only seminary training, and marital unions officiated outside a couple's parish community have all been taken for granted as traditional religious practices in the Catholic Church. Sadly, though, this sacramental system has failed to inspire a vibrant life of genuine Christian discipleship among many Filipino Catholics. Catechetical instruction, CLE classes, and theology courses, for their part, can only do so much. If an existential, deep, and real encounter with Christ has never been a part of one's life, Christian instruction, however well-meaning it may be, will always fail to inspire genuine Christian discipleship.

A case in point would be meaningful high school retreats that have inspired, at least for a short period of time, a more enthusiastic and vigorous witnessing to the faith. These well-planned retreats are not simply about encountering Christ but doing so *in community*. Time and again, we hear of retreats that address broken relationships not only among classmates but also between children and their own families of origin. These retreats, it would appear, respond to a deep hunger for acceptance and belongingness. Yet is this not also the case for many Catholics who shift to more charismatic forms of Christianity, even to Evangelical groups?

The key is the experience of *community*, and in communities small enough to be venues for deeply interpersonal relationships. Christ himself traveled with a small group of friends and followers during his ministry (Lk. 8:1–3) and asked people he had healed to return to their communities to let them marvel at God’s gift of healing and forgiveness (Mk. 5:18–20, Lk. 8:39). St. Paul, the great missionary to the gentiles who was responsible for the spread of Christianity beyond the confines of Israel, established communities in Asia Minor and Europe in the mid-30s to mid-50s CE and was always addressing regional conflicts (1 Cor. 1:10; 12:4–11; 13; Eph. 4:1–6), admonishing his converts to remain faithful to the resurrected Christ (Rom. 6:1–23; 2 Thess. 2:13–17; 2 Tim. 3:14–17), and exhorting his followers to remain steadfast in their faith in Christ in the face of terrible adversity (Rom. 7:35–39; 2 Tim. 3:1–13).

The faithful need to see and experience their priests as true pastors and shepherds. Pope Francis would exhort his priests time and again to have the smell of their flock, to be “shepherds with the smell of their sheep.”¹⁵ Clerics who are otherwise degenerate into managers, intermediaries, and collectors of antiquities because they do not put their own skin and heart on the line.¹⁶

Worship is not simply about prayers done in Church or in the quiet of our homes; rather, it is a profound consciousness of and deep gratitude toward God moving in one’s life. The Pope thus envisions the Church’s mission as recovering the simplicity of the Gospels and not being stymied by an obsessive preoccupation with rules and rubrics. Francis, in an eloquent plea, writes in his first encyclical:

¹⁵Carol Glatz, “Pope Francis: Priests should be ‘shepherds living with the smell of the sheep,’” *The Catholic Telegraph* (March 28, 2013), available at <https://www.thecatholictelegraph.com/pope-francis-priests-should-be-shepherds-living-with-the-smell-of-the-sheep/13439> (accessed August 15, 2018).

¹⁶Glatz, “Pope Francis: Priests should be ‘shepherds living with the smell of the sheep.’”

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (Mk. 6:37).¹⁷

Renewing our worship life as a people involves how we see ourselves as Church, as a community of Christ's faithful disciples. Are we taken up by so much materialism that we relegate worship to just one day in our busy routine? What will it take to make our worship life a constitutive part of our lives? How can we renew our sacramental life in a way that may impact how we practice our traditions and question the many evil structures in the Church that have destroyed much of the life of the faithful? The prophet Micah says in a famous exhortation:

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:7–8.)

Caught up in their own obsession with rules and external piety, Jesus at one point addressed his critics, saying, "It is mercy I desire, not sacrifice" (Mt. 9:1–13). Our rituals certainly

¹⁷Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World], no. 27. Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed August 15, 2018).

disintegrate into mindless pious exercises whenever they are cut off from that which constitutes the real living sacrifice pleasing to God—commitment to our neighbor (Rom. 12:1).

EPILOGUE¹

THE SHAPE OF THE FILIPINO CHURCH TO COME

Growing up in the Betis district of Guagua, Pampanga, a boy at the tender age of four once believed that Jesus was not present if the vigil lamp was not burning in the tabernacle. This heart-warming story consumed, in many ways, much of Bishop David's life and ministry, i.e., to carry the torch of Christ and lighten the dark corners of the world, sometimes as a lone beacon in the wilderness of darkness and despair. Otherwise, Jesus would never be present.

Ordained in 1983, Bishop Pablo Virgilio S. David spent much of his earlier ministry in formation work as well as in various capacities as Director of the Philosophy Department (1984–1986), Dean of the Graduate School of Theology (1992–1996), and Spiritual Director (1996–2000) and Director of Formation (2000–2006) of the Theology Department at the Mother of Good Counsel Seminary in San Fernando, Pampanga.

Earning a licentiate and doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Catholic University of Louvain (1986–1991), Bishop David's lifelong passion for the Word made him organize local cable programs on Scripture, regular Biblical sharing groups and recollections for priests and lay formators, and the like. It was

¹Based on the citation written by the author for Bishop Pablo Virgilio S. David, D.D., on the occasion of the latter's reception of the *Bukas Palad* Award at the 2019 Ateneo de Manila Traditional University Awards, held on September 10, 2019 (pp. 34–37 of the program). The award is given to religious and clergy who embody the prophetic role of the Church today in service especially of society's poor and marginalized.

his single-minded commitment to the *prophetic* Word, however, that marked Bishop David for life.

Appointed by Pope Francis in 2015 as the new bishop of the diocese of Caloocan, Bishop David was welcomed by his new flock, with great expectation, as a man of compassion whose love for the poor was unparalleled. Incensed by the slaughter of mostly poor citizens in the bloody campaign against the drug menace, he lamented and howled with prophetic indignation over the seeming indifference to the plight of those addicted and trapped in substance abuse. Seen more as victims of their desperate struggle against unspeakable poverty, these people were not to be singled out for systematic execution but rather for rehabilitation.

As he established various rehabilitation programs and support groups for the victims and offered comfort to their grieving families in countless funeral Masses, Bishop David also sought to renew the Church from within, tainted as it was by much bureaucratic corruption and various scandals. He organized his diocese into small Christian communities or mission stations that refocused popular piety toward the works of justice and charity, brought together the charisms of different religious congregations and lay volunteers, and presided over countless Masses in the streets to provide an apostolate of “presence” to the marginalized and unchurched faithful of Caloocan. The poor have now begun to feel, in their collective sense of isolation and misery and amid their travails, the solidarity of a Church that has been much too removed since from their intolerable conditions.

St. Paul once wrote to the Church at Philippi that “Christ did not consider equality with God something to be aspired for; rather, [Christ] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men; and humbled himself by becoming obedient to death” (Phil. 2:6–8). Bishop David’s apostolate of “presence” can only come with this emptying of self, this *kenosis*, that hears the desperate poor as they cry to the heavens for justice.

Bishop David, himself the object of virulent verbal attacks that even threaten his life, remains undeterred as he speaks fearlessly for the voiceless, conscious that the call of martyrdom may always be a heartbeat away. He remains undaunted by the death threats; in his words, “witnessing to the Gospel, to the truth, may cost me my life.... As shepherd of Caloocan, it is my sworn duty to protect the flock entrusted to me by the Lord, even to the death.” Our mission, Bishop David exhorts, is not simply to shake the dust off of our feet as we enter the sanctuary, or wear our mandated colors and wave the flags of our mandated organizations. It is to go where no one dared trudge before, to the peripheries and margins of society, to wear the smell of the sheep and offer the compassionate embrace of the Father.

That four-year-old boy never left Bishop David, whose love for the poor is as all-consuming as the vigil lamp that lights Christ’s presence in the tabernacle, making certain that this light is never extinguished in our lives, parishes, local communities, mission stations, street Masses, Bible sharing groups, rehabilitation centers, acts of popular piety, and corporal acts of mercy.

“The boy indeed is father to the man.”²

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). In Christ, we have been “anointed to announce the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4:18–19).

As St. John wrote toward the end of his Gospel, “When you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands,

²Simran Khurana, “Wordsworth’s ‘The Child Is Father of the Man,’” *ThoughtCo.* (February 11, 2020), 1. Available at <https://www.thoughtco.com/child-is-the-father-of-man-3975052> (accessed September 19, 2019).

and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (Jn. 21:18).

For his extraordinary understanding of the prophetic role of the Church in today’s world and his dedicated service rendered especially to the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, the sick, the suffering-in faith, justice, and love, all in service of the Kingdom of God, Most Rev. Pablo Virgilio S. David, D.D., Bishop of Calocan, verily inspires the true Filipino Church to come.

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