THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

SYMBOLISM IN WORSHIP: A SURVEY, I

WRITING in *La Maison-Dieu* in 1967, Fr A. Vergote of Louvain remarked that the texts and rites in which eucharistic symbolism is now embodied are not of the sort to help participants to rise above their own spontaneous psychological inclinations to enter into Christ's mysteries.[1] It is not the purpose of liturgical language to explain or hold discourse about what is happening, but to carry the participants along and absorb them in the mystery. The second Vatican Council enunciated the didactic principle that rites and signs should be simple and easy to understand.[2] Unfortunately, this often seems to be followed in such a way that ceremonies are reduced to the banality of advertisement posters, and have as much appeal as the algebraic signs indicating the equation, $x = y + z$. This is a long way from Augustine's warning that religious symbolism, though simple, is of no purpose unless it makes the mind soar above what is seen: 'to nourish and, so to speak, to breathe upon, this fire of love so that we are drawn into it and lifted up by it towards our everlasting rest, this – mark it well – is the sole purpose of any kind of symbolism'.[3]

In the issue of *La Maison-Dieu* already cited, Vergote and some of his pupils at Louvain presented the results of enquiries into the way that people perceive and respond to liturgical symbols.[4] What they discovered serves to strengthen the conviction that our worship is rarely such as to constitute a liberating feast. It is but a weak realization of how a christian community might celebrate its part in the making of history, eschatologically bent.

An immediate and practical response to this state of affairs is a more generous and authentic use of rites, signs and symbols, and more care with liturgical language. Of this one finds ample evidence in handbooks for a renewed liturgy,[5] and in liturgical magazines. It is becoming increasingly easy to admit that we really ought not to keep on using wafers and calling them bread, or using but a trickle of water in baptism, or anointing with damp swabs of cotton wool. From this admission one can be brought forward to a use of new means of communication,[6] such as audio-visual aids, or bakc

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[1] Vergote, A.: 'Regard du Psychologue sur le Symbolisme Liturgique', in *La Maison Dieu* 91 (1967), 129–151.

[2] *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, pp 34 and 50. [3] *Ep.* 55, 11, 21

[4] Fournier, G. et Dechambre, G.: 'Signification de Gestes et d'Objets pour des Enfants et des Adolescents: Résultats d'Enquêtes', in *La Maison-Dieu* 91 (1967), pp 163–172.

[5] E.g., White, James: *New Forms of Worship*, (New York, 1971); or the study of language by Daniel Stevick, *Language in Worship* (New York, 1970).

[6] On the sense of smell as part of the poetry of memory in the works of G. Bachélard, cf, Naud, J.: *Structure et Sens de Symbole* (Tournai-Montréal, 1971), pp 54–56.

to the point of wondering why ten years ago we were so quick to abandon incense – particularly when we see such things as scented candles turning up in domestic-type liturgies. If, however, the dilemma of symbolic usage is to be dealt with more adequately and lastingly, it is necessary to get a firmer grip on how symbolism, imagination and poetry play their necessary part in worship.

One writer recently remarked that the field of symbolic studies is without visible limits.[7] On the other hand, very little has been done to study the subject within the orbit of christian worship. Hence the task of sacramental theologian and liturgist – or simple pastor and harassed catechist – is the difficult one of gleaning some insights which may be of help to him in his own specific domain. The present contribution is only a slight attempt to indicate some relevant areas of consideration; it is by no means an effort to survey all the literature, a task which in itself would seem almost impossible.

I *Systematic theology*

We will begin with some reference to the problematic as it arises in systematic theology and liturgical studies. The writings of men like Odo Casel, Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner, Bernard Bro, Louis Bouyer, etc., have made it impossible to ignore the importance of the sign-activity of christian worship. Historical and philological studies over a number of decades investigated the broader scope of the words *mysterion* and *sacramentum*.[8] This permitted Frs Rahner and Schillebeeckx to work out a theology of the sacraments which took its point of departure from the notion of Church and Christ respectively as primordial sacrament.[9] This is now so widely known that it hardly needs further specific comment. What is interesting to note are the further questions which result from this approach. The most difficult is to explain how the sign activity and the efficacious causality of the sacraments are to be theoretically coordinated. Some answers have been offered by K. Rahner and W. van Roo,[10] and in articles such as one recently published by J. Appleyard,[11] but there is as yet no final solution. Aquinas had stated clearly enough that what is first signified in the sacraments is the

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[7] Lapointe, R.: 'Hermeneutics Today', in *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 2 (1972), p 134. For a simple introduction to the rather confusing terminology (signs, symbols, myths, allgories, metaphors, types etc.), cf Fawcett, T.: *The Symbolic Language of Religion* (London, 1970).

[8] The literature is immense. The work of O. Casel is seminal, and for the Latin Church J. de Ghellinck (ed.), *Pour l'Histoire du Mot Sacramentum*, (Louvain-Paris, 1924).

[9] Rahner, K.: *The Church and the Sacraments* (London, 1957); Schillebeeckx, E.: *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God* (London, 1963).

[10] 'The Theology of the Symbol', in *Theological Investigations* IV (London, 1966), pp 221–252, 'The Word and the Eucharist', *ibid.*, pp 253–286. *De Sacramentis in Genere* (Rome, 1966 – 3rd edition).

[11] 'How Does a Sacrament Cause by Signifying?', in *Science et Esprit* 23 (1971), pp 167–200.

passion of Christ.[12] Nonetheless he seemed to leave himself open to the interpretation, commonly followed in the schools, that besides the presence by effect in the grace conferred there was no other presence of the mysteries than that of a pictorial representation of them.[13] No liturgist who has in any way been subject to the influence of Casel's theology of *Mysteriengegenwart* could be fully satisfied with this common explanation. Anscar Vonier, E. Masure and L. Monden, to mention the more prominent of a particular trend, applied the sacramental principle, *sacramenta causant quod significant*, to the presence of Christ's mysteries, and so opted for a sacramental or symbolic mode of presence which is more than that of mere figure or representation.[14] This idea has been taken up chiefly in the discussion of memorial in eucharistic theology, yet it still remains to give a clear explanation of what constitutes a symbolic mode of presence.

This whole question of presence and causality is also influenced by language studies, in which the work of J. L. Austin and D. Evans is thought by some to be a source of fruitful insight. J. Ladrière uses the distinction between constative and performative language to explain the action of the sacraments;[15] and this is also Appleyard's approach.[16] Appleyard joins this argumentation with Susan Langer's explanation of the symbol;[17] but more work on this needs to be done.[18]

An ontology of the symbol has been applied to sacramental theology by Karl Rahner.[19] Others have drawn upon such philosophers as Heidegger, Ricoeur, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Marcel or Ortigues to present at least the schema of an inter-personal theology of sacrament, based on the idea of the symbol as word for the other.[20] But besides looking to phenomenology, it is necessary to take account of the findings of the history of religions,[21] the contribution made available by psychology[22] and the use of symbolism in literature and the arts.[23] Only with such helps is it possible to have some

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[12] *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 60, art. 3.

[13] *Ibid.*, q. 83, art. 1.

[14] Vonier, A.: *A Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* (London, 1952 – 2nd edition); Masure, E.: *The Sacrifice of the Mystical Body* (London/Chicago, 1954); Monden, L.: 'Symbooloorzakelijkheid als eigen causaliteit van het sacrament' in *Bijdragen*, 13 (1952), pp 277–285.

[15] Ladrière, J.: 'The Language of Worship: the Performativity of Liturgical Language', in *Concilium*, February, 1973; and *Language and Belief* (Dublin, 1972).

[16] *Art. cit.*

[17] Langer, S.: *Feeling and Form* (New York, 1953).

[18] Cf. Brinkman, B.: 'On Sacramental Man I', in the *Heythrop Journal*, 13 (1972), pp 371–401, for a survey of the situation at present.

[19] Rahner, *Theological Investigations* IV, pp 229–30, n. 9.

[20] E.g. Gillan, G.: 'Expression, Discourse and Symbol', in *Worship*, 41 (1967), pp 16–31; and 'Symbol: Word for the Other', *ibid.*, pp 275–283.

[21] One should be acquainted with at least the corpus of writings by M. Eliade.

[22] Some application of jungian psychology to sacramental rites has been made by Beirnaert, L.: *Expérience Chrétienne et Psychologie* (Paris, 1964).

[23] E.g., May, R. (ed.): *Symbolism in Religion and Literature* (New York, 1960).

grasp of the role of symbolic language in man's life, and consequently some understanding of the part it plays in christian worship. It is hardly necessary to add that even while doing this, one remains conscious of the fact that in christian worship we are dealing with the unique reality of a divine word and kerygma of salvation, calling forth the response of faith.

II *Orientations from patristic studies*

In early patristic and liturgical literature, we can make note (a) of the presentation of the liturgical symbols in mystagogic catechesis;[24] (b) of all that is relevant to the symbolic mode of presence, particularly in Augustine and Origen;[25] (c) of whatever reasons we can detect which eventually led to the decline of the sense of the symbolic in the western Church.

The main purpose of the catechetical expositions of the Fathers is to show how the rites and symbols introduce the christian to a sharing in Christ's mysteries. To this effect, they explain the single rites and symbols, but with extraordinary variety and flexibility.[26] The reason for the diversity lies in the many sources from which the symbol derives, both historical and natural.

The many Old Testament typologies, and the many events recalled from the life and ministry of Christ, show the rich past on which the symbols draw. On the other hand, they have incorporated the use of natural symbols, such as fire, water, bread, wine, nakedness, oil, light and darkness, blood, milk and honey, marriage and ascension. Though placed in a new context, these do not lose any of the evocative power which they possess from the way they are imbedded in the human consciousness. On the contrary, this serves to interpenetrate the whole of human life with christian meaning.[27]

It is a curious thing that much of this natural symbolism was taken over in the description of mystical phenomena and is found in the writings of such persons as John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich and Francis of Assisi. A number of studies have been made of these descriptions, which are relevant to the meaning of the symbols when they are used in liturgy.[28]

With the mystagogic catecheses we are already in the fourth and fifth

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[24] A useful collection of texts has been made by Yarnold, E.: *The Awe Inspiring Rites of Initiation* (Slough, 1971).

[25] On Augustine, cf. Camelot, Th.: 'Réalisme et Symbolisme dans la doctrine eucharistique de saint Augustin', in *Revue de Science Philosophique et Theologique*, 31 (1947), pp 394–410; Couturier, C.: 'Sacramentum et Mysterium dans l'oeuvre de Saint Augustin', in *Etudes Augustiniennes* (ed. H. Rondet, Paris, 1953), pp 163–274; van der Meer, F.: *Augustine the Bishop* (London/New York, 1961). On Origen, cf. von Balthasar, H.: 'Le Mystère d'Origène', in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 26 (1936), pp 513–562; and 27 (1937), pp 38–64; *Parole et Mystère chez Origène*, (Paris, 1957); Crouzel, H.: *Origène et la Connaissance Mystique* (Toulouse, 1961).

[26] For example, the baptismal immersion is death and rebirth, struggle with Satan, re-entry into the womb, illumination, purification.

[27] Cf Beirnaert, *op. cit.*

[28] E.g., Leclerq, E.: *Le Cantique des Créatures ou les Symboles de l'Union* (Paris, 1970); Morel, G.: *Le Sens de l'Existence selon Saint Jean de la Croix*, 3 vols (Paris, 1960).

centuries of the christian era. It is highly probable that the ceremonies had become far more complex by that time than they were originally.[29] There is also a tendency on the part of the commentators to dramatize them, or else to see in them a kind of drama acted out by the ministers and other participants. This is particularly true of Theodore of Mopsuestia, in whom we find comments such as the following on the presentation of the offerings at the eucharist: 'By means of the signs we must see Christ being led away to his passion and again later when he is stretched out on the altar to be immolated for us'.[30] This is the kind of dramatic explanation of the rites which became common in the latin west with Amalar of Metz.[31]

Is the tendency to drama to be judged a loss of symbolic sense, or is it a way of keeping it alive in changing circumstances? Drama is in its own way part of symbolic construction; it allows for new discovery of meaning and the catharsis of conversion to a new frame of feeling. But there is a difference to be noted in the more strictly poetic and in the dramatic mode of entering into a past reality. The poetic is much more concerned about how the present reality is affected by its relation to the past. It is an expression of what may be called a feeling about the 'now'. Christian imagery which stresses the lordship of Christ is of this nature. It is in the nature of an invitation to transcendent thought, to an appreciation of man's present reality in its relation to the eternal Logos, who revealed himself and the Father in the incarnation. The dramatic presentation also has an effect on the person and his mode of life; but it is of a different sort to the poetic image and symbol. It invites the participant or the spectator to relive the events of the past, to pass through the trials and victories which Christ and his disciples experienced in the flesh. When christian people could no longer grasp the more subtle significance of different symbols, or were less responsive to the images and events evoked by them, a more effective way of drawing them into Christ's passion was by the *peripeteia* inherent in drama.[32]

Augustine's most lasting influence on western sacramental theology came from his discussion of heretical and infant baptism. In neither of these cases is the subject very likely to appreciate or enter into the symbolism employed. Consequently, when his statements about the effect of these ministrations became somehow normative for sacramental theology, there was an inevitable cleavage between the operative and the symbolic or sign function of the sacrament. Yet what Augustine had to say about the function of sign and symbol probably deserves far more attention in the working out of a sacramental theology than it is often given in that area of investigation.

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[29] Cf. Neunheuser, B.: 'Erwaegungen zur aeltesten Taufliturgie', in *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, (ed. P. Granfield – J. Jungmann), vol 2, (Muenster, 1970), pp 709–723.

[30] Yarnold, *op.cit.*, p 227.

[31] *Liber Officialis* (ed. I. M. Hanssens, Città del Vaticano, 1948).

[32] Cf. Hardison, O. B.: *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1965).

For Augustine, Origen and many of the Fathers, what they said about the symbolic has to be appreciated against the background of their neo-platonism and of their ideas about Christ's presence in his Church. For them, sanctification has to do with that deification of man which consists in the knowledge of God through the knowledge of the Logos who has revealed himself in the flesh. The sacramental structure is essential to salvation and christian existence, since it means the possibility of knowing the Logos through the revelatory signs of the scriptures and through the mystery of the *ekklesia*. Within this perspective, the efficaciousness of symbols as signs is not just to illustrate allegorically what is done. It is to bring to contemplation of the truth, and hence to union with God, and in him with all things; or, as Augustine says, to the *fruitio Dei et se invicem in Deo*.

Thus it would seem faithful to the thought of the Fathers to say that the symbolic mode of Christ's presence in his mysteries is connected with the knowledge which is contemplation. Contemplation is made possible by memory, or the evocation of a memory whereby the human spirit through experimental encounter with the symbol glimpses a reality of which in its basic nature it partakes. The grounding of symbolic knowledge and encounter with the truth is man's deification through grace, or the sealing of the soul by the divine Spirit, bringing configuration to Christ in his death and resurrection. For Augustine in particular, to arrive at contemplation of eternal verities one must go back in memory to one's own beginnings. As a manichean, he had sought his pre-existence in a world of darkness, and as a neo-platonist he was tempted to seek it in the world of ideas. As a christian, however, believing in creation out of nothing, he became aware of the contingency of his existence, of the nothingness out of which he came. To confront this nothingness, he placed himself before the Word of God, without whom nothing was made and in whose image he knew himself to be made. In other words, to go back to one's beginnings in memory is to go back to the Logos. Since this same Logos spoke in history from the very creation of the world and in the fulness of time in Christ, the recollection of the Logos in whose image the self is made is also the memory of world history in which he spoke, or was uttered. The memorialization of the pasch in worship and the memory of one's own beginnings therefore tend to coincide, since the contemplation of the Word in history is also the contemplation of the Word in whose image man is made.

Against such a background, it becomes clear why *anamnesis* is accompanied by *epiclesis*. It is the action of the Spirit in the soul which makes knowing by memorial possible. The Church celebrates as a body, but each person must discover the truth in himself and is aided in this by the personal mediation of the Spirit. At the same time, pure subjectivism is avoided because this takes place over against the incarnation of the Word and the expression of the Word in the symbols of scripture and sacrament.

Approached from this angle, the sacraments can be said to unite in one action: (a) the action of the Church, or of the Spirit in the Church *(epiclesis)*,

whereby she commemorates Christ's pasch *(anamnesis)* in eucharist, baptism, feast, etc.; (b) the use of material things, such as bread, wine, oil, water, as well as of actions such as immersion, eating, exorcism, touching, which become the *typos*, *symbol*, *eikon* etc., of divine mysteries; (c) the action of faith, resulting from the sealing of the soul by the Spirit, which in the symbols perceives the divine mysteries and adheres to them. This is the illumination which takes place in the sacraments. It is not just a seeing the symbols or the picture in them in an allegorical sense, but the determination of a new range of vision.

From all of this one might very well get the impression that there is no difference between the presence of the Word in the scriptures and his presence in the sacramental rites. The answer to the difficulty lies in the fact that the liturgy is a celebration of the body which is the Church, and it is the place in which those who believe in Christ become his Body through a unified sharing in his mysteries. Henri de Lubac has shown that the term *corpus mysticum* in early and medieval christianity meant the eucharist.[33] It was customary to distinguish between the glorified body of Christ, numerically the same with the body taken from the Virgin, the eucharistic body and the body which is the Church. The eucharist as a symbol mediated between the historic Christ, now glorified in heaven through his mysteries, and the Church. It allowed the latter a share in Christ's truth in such a way as to be one body with him. This could be expressed in terms of symbolic presence as follows. The historic Christ is symbolically present in the eucharist as that which is to be participated. The church is likewise symbolically present, as that which participates. The symbolic mode of presence is distinct from the historic or spatio-temporal mode, since it is a presence of participation, a presence whereby two realities are conjoined in one body through the participation of one in the reality of the other.

The liturgy is the action whereby the Church becomes Church as such, or the body becomes body as such. Its primary import is not that it is the way for individual sanctification, or the means of personal contemplation, but that it is the welding together into the one body of Christ of all those created in his image and sanctified in his Spirit.

This seems to be in outline the position of the greek Fathers and akin to that of Augustine in much of what he wrote. It is a position which was gradually eaten into by problems arising from concern about the realism implied in affirming the presence of Christ's body in the eucharist, about the validity of sacraments received by those out of grace, and about the efficacy of infant baptism, conferred not in the faith of the child but in the faith of the Church. The berengarian controversy marks the complete dissolution of this thought in the west. From then on, it became customary to distinguish presence *in veritate* and presence *in figura*. The former was reserved to describe the presence of Christ's historic body in the eucharist and the latter applied

[33] *Corpus Mysticum: l'Eucharistie et l'Eglise au Moyen Age* (Paris, 1944).

to the presence of the mysteries. From these indeed there came the virtue whereby the sacraments sanctify; but they themselves could not be said to be present in any way other than that in which Cicero is present in his portrait or picture.

III *The need for symbolic language*

The french philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, has often stressed the need to inhabit language more fully if we are to make of it a medium of self-expression and growth. This is necessary if we are to overcome the tendency to reduce symbol to sign or allegory, to make of imaginative and poetic language nothing else than a way of illustrating what is already known or a pure preliminary to theoretic consciousness. According to Ricoeur, the need for this special language arises out of its importance for existential decision, not just as directed to specific projects but as ordering one's dominant objective and horizon.[34] What man experiences in face of such decision is the tension between freedom and limitation of freedom. It is because of this tension that Ricoeur posits in his philosophy of the will the centrality of the problem of evil and of the symbolism of evil. To be able to deal with 'fault' is essential to creative freedom. Hence the examination of evil and its symbols is not just one example of symbols and their use, but provides that aspect of human experience in which we find the very basis for the need of symbolic language.

Man first experiences the limitation of his freedom in the intrusion of the involuntary which comes from being a body. This determines the in-put for decision, sets limits to movement and demands consent to act within these limits. Yet freedom cannot be content to acquiesce to the necessity of nature and the limits of the body. From this there comes the paradox: freedom is limited, but freedom drives beyond limitation.

It is in the drive towards transcendence that man encounters his second experience of the involuntary. He realizes that he is somehow given to evil, that he is fragile and fallible, and indeed not only capable of sinning but actually a sinner. Yet even though sin is man's own wayward action, paradoxically it is also true that evil comes from something outside the self. This constitutes the real problem of evil.

The effort to find an explanation for the existence of evil can be crippling. Man is caught between justifying his own action and justifying God, since he wants to put the blame neither here nor there. In fact, no theoretic system can fully explain the origins of evil. Symbolic language intervenes precisely as a way whereby man can live in the universe in which evil exists, both acquiescing to the limits which are imposed upon his freedom but striving to pass beyond these limits. It provides and communicates attitudes towards

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[34] Most important for a study of Paul Ricoeur is the three-volume work *Philosophie de la Volonté*, published under the titles: *Le Volontaire et L'Involontaire* (Paris, 1950); *Finitude et Culpabilité*, I: *L'Homme Faillible*; II: *La Symbolique du Mal* (Paris, 1960). Also of interest is the collection of essays *Le Conflit des Interprétations* (Paris, 1969).

the question of evil and the dialectic of freedom and slavery, rather than theoretic solutions to the problem. It enables man to relate to the given as it actually exists, and to make this the starting-point of his life, freed from the need to query or justify its existence. Yet it does not suppress throught, since believing requires understanding. As Ricoeur puts it, symbols give rise to thought. However, because of the starting-point which is accepted through the consent to live within the symbolic pattern, in his reflections man can put aside the irrelevant questions about the origins of evil and seek the intelligibility of the order in which he actually lives.

Exorcism is an excellent example of the symbolization of evil and its conquest. It first of all identifies the presence of evil: for example, in sickness, in the cosmos, in society, in the powers of the world. It then personifies evil in the figure of Satan and the demons, and proffers a divine force by which these demonic powers can be subdued. Cursing one's enemies and praying against them is another form of ridding oneself of evil. One's ill fortune is attributed to these enemies, who are in this case made the personification of evil, and God is counted upon to come to one's aid. By such ways, while man is called upon to recognize his own responsibility, it is also indicated that evil is a 'there anyhow' reality. It is part of a world in which man lives and a factor with which he must cope. What counts is the assurance that God's power holds the force in check and enables man to make his way graciously through the maze wherein evil lurks.

In the history of catholic liturgy a look at exorcisms reveals the realities in face of which man sensed his restriction and slavery. Likewise the prayers against enemies show in what historic situations he felt most likely to be overpowered by forces stronger than himself. In the *Pontificale Romano-Germanicum* of the tenth century, there are exorcisms for the healing of persons afflicted by dread and inexplicable diseases, exorcisms for use in granaries, mills, kitchens and fields.[35] One also finds prayers for the protection of cities against pagan invaders, the blessing of swords to be used in war against them, and the strange ceremony of testing the truth of judicial enquiry through the immersion of some limb of the accused in boiling water. There is a whole world conjured up in such a collection of prayers, and it is not hard to see where there lurked the fears and worries of medieval man.

That such action has to be taken against evil, and man freed from its crippling effects, is a vital part of christian symbolism, since the christian kerygma is essentially one of salvation. That is not however to say that the same forms of prayer and the same images can continue to be pressed into service. Against what evils do we need protection today? Can we personify evil as a measure of strengthening ourselves against it? If so, what form does this personification take? Is evil to be sloughed off by imprecations against its personified form, or rather by the catharsis of parable?

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[35] *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du Dixième Siècle* (ed. C. Vogel – R. Elze), 2 vols (Città del Vaticano, 1963).

This is one specific area wherein we may be enlightened by the uses of modern literature. There we get many a clue to the ways in which the evil weighing heavily on man is identified. We might very tritely say that it is war, or hate, or egoism; but a poem like T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* carries the breath of the aimlessness and triviality of human existence which underlies such troubles. There is a delicate but painful feeling of the bottom dropping out of things in Yeats's poem *For Anne Gregory*.[36] If personification there is to be, it is probably not of the demonic sort but of the kind found in W. H. Auden's personification of the seven capital sins, in his war poem *Whose Side Am I Supposed To Be On*, or in Eliot's figure of *The Hollow Men*.[37] The evil which modern man feels around him, in spite of all the misery, bloodshed and famine it brings, is not of the sort to be glorified with the magnitude of demonic force, a power of this world, challenger to God in the holy place. It is more man's own inner impotency, the hollowness of which he is conscious, and the aimlessness of the existence in which he is caught up. It is more the evil of non-being than that of a mighty being like Satan. This might seem to be denied by the current spate of devil worship, if it were not for the fact that this might well represent man's looking for a force to respect; whereas often he feels that there is no force, only its vague absence.[38]

Because of its connection with decision and freedom, we can see why it can be said that 'symbolic meaning regards the affective orientation of men to their dual project for themselves and society'.[39] Precisely because it affects decision and gives a pattern for action, a symbol is not just an image of an already constituted reality; rather it constitutes the reality of which it is the symbol. It brings man to the effective freedom which enables him to act – and also incidentally to tackle theoretical problems with the insights gleaned from experience, and with equanimity of mind.

The efficacy of symbols in this respect may be illustrated from the realm of dreams. Freud uncovered the role of dreams in assisting the neurotic to face reality, but he tended to confine his explanation to this category of persons and to base it exclusively on the sexual urges. What has since been realized is that dreams play their part in assisting every person towards healthy living, as part of spontaneous adjustment to life and its problems

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[36] Anne Gregory wants to dye her hair, so as to be loved for herself alone and not her hair; she receives this answer: 'I heard an old religious man / But yesternight declare / That he had found a text to prove / That only God, my dear / Could love you for yourself alone / And not your yellow hair'.

[37] For an interesting study of modern literature, cf Moeller, Ch.: *Littérature du XX Siècle et Christianisme* (Paris, 1953–1957), 3 vols.

[38] It would be interesting to consider excommunication from the Church, not only as banishment of an evil member, but as exclusion from the community of collective evil. Cf Mary Douglas on witchcraft accusations – 'The Problem of Evil', in *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York, 1970), pp 107–124.

[39] Cf Barden, G.: 'Modalities of Consciousness', in *Philosophical Studies* 19 (1970), pp 11–54.

or questions. It is in a similar way that symbols serve to restore the equilibrium of life, in individuals and communities.

Dogma has been wont to give us definitions of our sacraments and state the effects which come from them. What may not be sufficiently appreciated is that the dogmatic definitions speak for the meaning of the sacraments in certain situations, in response to given questions and in face of a given experience. They are the statements of meaning as grasped in one particular set of circumstances, granted that there is also the preoccupation to keep continuity with past tradition and past expressions of meaning. In another situation and in terms of another living experience, the meaning may be differently expressed because differently grasped. It is in the very nature of a sacrament as symbol that it be open to this expansion and specification of meaning.

Let us take the example of the Eucharist. It has obviously been rather differently celebrated and explained at different periods of church history. The differences cannot be explained simply by saying that some ages preserved the truth of the Eucharist better than others. The distinctive ways of living the eucharistic reality are to be understood rather in terms of the lived experience of the christian's relation to God, Christ and the Church. It was this that the Eucharist allowed him to express and order, in accord with a life-project which sprang from christian faith.

In much early church literature, we find that what prevailed was the sense of the Eucharist as sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. This attitude has its basis in what the New Testament says about life in Christ as a sacrifice of obedience to the gospel and of thanksgiving to God. The sacrifices of the law sought access to God unavailingly. This access has been given in Christ; and those united with him and in him find in the Eucharist a way of expressing their praise and hope.

When Anselm of Canterbury sought to explain the sacrifice of Christ's death, he used the analogate of the satisfaction imposed in the sacrament of penance. This corresponded very well to what was then man's sense of God, and easily found expression in the current approach to celebration of the Eucharist. The experience of God was that of a God of justice whose honour required the tribute of his Son's death, and the offering of the Mass fitted into the same orbit of felt reality. Consequently, eucharistic symbolism expressed awesome reverence and fearful tribute; and this changed the whole measure of eucharistic practice.

If today more stress is put on the Eucharist as community action, meal and sacrament of reconciliation, this is because man's experience emphasizes the desire for solidarity, the need to break the barriers of hate and separation and to combat the forces of depersonalization and disunification at work in our world. What the eucharist as sacrament of Christ's presence in his Church allows man to express is the hope that he may overcome the evil and attain to the desired future of a transformed world.

Because of its origin, the eucharistic ritual is always that of communion

in the death and resurrection of Christ. How this is felt and how it influences life and existential decision depends on how salvation and its need is experienced: that is, in face of what ills, towards the construction of what reality, in search of what transcendence. It follows, needless to say, that a style of eucharistic celebration which fitted another experience will say nothing to enable man to find christian meaning in his current reality.

IV *Symbols as expression of faith*

Taking what has been said from another angle, one could say that symbolic language can and needs to be made the vehicle for the tradition of meaningful and meaning-giving events. The transmission, however, has to be done in such a way as to speak of the felt experience and reality of those to whom the speech is addressed and for whose usage it is designed.

Fundamental to an understanding of this point is the link which Ricoeur makes between symbol and myth. The symbol gives an analogical meaning which is spontaneously formed and immediately significant. Thus stain suggests personal defilement; guilt, accusation by another; water, either threat or renewal; exile, alienation; bread and wine, human life lived out of the fruits and the toil of this earth. The myth is the putting together in narrative form of several symbols, so as to suggest a pattern of meaning. For example, while exile is a primary symbol of human alienation, the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise connects it with a given interpretation of sin. Since it is the purpose of the myth to bring about a totality and unity of meaning, it has to be in narrative form; for only in this way can the many primary symbols be made coherent with one another, and give true pattern and integration of experience to those who are challenged by the symbols to decision.

While Ricoeur talks in the first instance about pure myths, what he says is relevant to the mythic expression which brings out the meaning of historic events, such as are the Exodus and the Pasch for judeo-christian religious tradition. Like all historic events, these too can be known only by interpretation. As the interpretation in this case is sacred, symbolic language introduces elements into the narration which cannot be empirically verified or rationally conceived. While there is a spatio-temporal dimension in these evens which can be critically verified through scrutiny of the evidence, they cannot be verified *qua* sacred. This interpretation can be known and accepted only through belief in the interpretation itself. Thus critical methods can never provide us with evidence which leads to the fact of the Incarnation or of the Resurrection. As interpretation and meaning of the empirically observable and historically verifiable realities of Jesus's life and death, and of that of his disciples, these are necessarily objects of faith. They are a meaning to which one commits oneself as a basis to the human enterprise, when it seeks to respond to the call of the transcendent. The language of interpretation is symbolic rather than dogmatic, because it asks us to accept a given

which cannot be verified or justified by enquiry, and because it translates a meaning whose potentialities are open rather than clearly defined.

An event, either sacred or profane, to which symbolic interpretation is given for the sake of succeeding generations can be called a paradigmatic event. As R. Hart explains in his book, *Unfinished Man and the Imagination*, while they belong in time, these events are somehow lifted out of time, and depicted as events which keep on happening.[40] This can be done because in themselves they established a fund of ontological potency out of which succeeding generations were to live, in one mode or another of appropriation. Applied generically to sacred and profane events, such is the nature of the Exodus, the October Revolution, the taking of the Bastille, the Declaration of American Independence and the death and resurrection of Christ. The fund of potency or the virtualities opened up regard in the first place the people as people. They also regard the individual in his own personal becoming, as member of that people.

Hart makes some very pertinent comments on the way of commemorating paradigmatic events, which are highly relevant to the memorial of Christ's mysteries. To remain paradigmatic, he remarks, the ritual of their commemoration must not reduce them to the purely conventional, with a clearly definable and exemplary or conformist meaning. In that case, what is stressed is structure and conformity, and there is little prospect of instilling life-ventures with new dramatic power. Hart compares our modern way of celebrating traditional feasts, such as Christmas, with the songs and gatherings which honour such episodes as Selma in the american struggle for civil rights, or persons such as Martin Luther King. The ritual, both secular and sacred, now attendant on Christmas only serves to maintain a society in which the element of good-will is accepted as a stabilizing force. It covers over and to a degree suppresses the more violent and exploitative instincts of modern society. Harking back to Selma, Martin Luther King, or May 1968 in France, is much more potentially forceful, more likely to induce desire and draw forth creative power.

Another line of thought which Hart pursues makes us pause in face of the stripping of the liturgical calendar which has taken place over the last decade. The intention has been the honourable one of restoring Christ and his mysteries to a central place in worship. Has the actual effect been that of making him more remote and unattainable?

As Hart remarks, a people, secular or religious, cannot content itself with the commemoration of only one paradigmatic event. It needs to know how the potential of the original event has been brought to creativity in further events, thus opening up even newer potencies. Thus the jews found new

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[40] Hart, Ray L.: *Unfinished Man and the Imagination* (New York, 1968). Although the book does not speak explicitly of symbols and says but little directly of worship, its treatment of the part of imagination in revelation is of the greatest importance for an understanding of the use of symbolic language in ritual.

occasion for celebration in many episodes of their history, even though they always harked back to the primordial event of the Exodus. Taking their point of departure in the Exodus, they were able to interpret their entire history with all its actualities as the history of God with them. The christian people lives in the constant commemoration of Christ's mysteries. It also needs other feasts which honour saints and recall historic occasions. This is not for the sake of the detail in the life or the occurrence, nor to replace Christ. It is to find how, in other persons and at other times, the meaning-giving event of Christ has given shape, form and possibility to man's potential.

In the symbolic language of the ritual which commemorates the Christ-event, the christian community expresses its faith in God. What makes the difference between the faith which responds to the christian kerygma and the response to myth of any sort is a matter much discussed.[41] Ricoeur stresses the need to commit oneself to the myth and its symbol system, to accept to live within it and modify attitudes and behaviour accordingly. Otherwise, one remains a detached observer who does not really inhabit this world and cannot grasp its meaning.[42] In some respects, this can already be said to be the act of faith, since it is the readiness to allow one's life be determined by what the mythic world expresses. It leads to an *orthopraxis*, by which man begins to fashion his existence in response to a spoken word, proferring a totality of meaning.[43]

For Vergote, what makes the christian kerygma pass out of and beyond the realm of the pure myth is that it is the substantial Word.[44] What is contained in myth is personalized in kerygma, it is made the word of the Other and so makes of the hearer a subject, whose existence is recognized and given by the Other who addresses him. In Christ, the other-other relationship which is revealed is the Son-Father relationship. As incarnate meaning, this is the meaning given to the quests about origins and destiny which are found in all mythic discourse. The quest of myth is personalized, because Christ reveals in his own relationship to the Father that *orthopraxis* is a Son-Father relationship to the Other of the sacred or transcendent.

This relationship is lived and made known in the event of the death and resurrection. It is not, however, nude fact which is affirmed, but event pregnant with meaning and possibility. In other words, what we know in faith is the event which brings to being one potentiality, and in this very bringing to being opens the way to future possibilities. What we know are the enfleshed realities of the reciprocal address: 'Thou art my beloved Son'

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[41] Cf Castelli, E. (ed.): *Mito e Fede: Colloquio Internazionale indetto dall' Istituto di Studi Filosofici e dal Centro Int. di Studi Umanistici* (Rome, 1966); french edition *Mythe et Foi* (Paris, 1966). The entire collection of the acts of this *colloquio* for the decade 1961–1971 is of interest: it is published under the general title *Studi sulla Demitizzazione.*

[42] On this point, cf the final chapter in *La Symbolique du Mal.*

[43] On faith as *orthopraxis*, cf Panikkar, R.: 'La Foi dimension constitutive de l'homme', in Castelli, *op.cit.*, pp 17–28 (french edition).

[44] *Mythe, croyance aliénée et foi théologale; ibid.*, pp 161–176.

and 'Abba, Father', together with the fact that 'he was not ashamed to call us brethren'; for 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son'.

Since it is into this movement that we are caught by faith, of the symbols used in each of the sacraments it must be asked what is their meaning in this totality of kerygmatic discourse. Never must we make the mistake of objectifying the symbols, of turning them into mere indications or signs or allegories, illustrating an already known reality. They are a language of relationship and creation, putting those who use them into a relationship and a meaningful potentiality.

Take the example of baptism to illustrate what is implied in the use of symbolic language as a response to kerygma. It is not possible to live in the symbolic world of baptism, nor to be greatly influenced by it, if the sign of baptism is read only as a cleansing from original sin, or if the only thing attended to in grasping the power of the sign is the cleasing effect of water. The symbols of illumination, filiation, immersion, rebirth, burial and ascension, are all ways offered to us whereby to express and speak imaginatively and discerningly of a new-founded relationship to the Father, which also implies a new relationship to the self, to the world and to mother Church. The neophyte moves through the language of the rite to a personal re-fashioning in a new commitment. The totality and unity of the meaning of the signs comes from the fact that they all take their meaning from the pasch, paradigm of the Son-Father relationship. The reality of Christ's pasch is contained in the symbols, not as objectified in a sign, nor as present in its own individual spatio-temporal being. The symbol constitutes the reality, which is the joining-point, the bringing together as one person, of the Word which is spoken in the pasch, and of those to whom this Word is addressed. The baptized thus partake of the meaningful relationship which is itself the meaning discernible in Christ's mysteries, and constitutes their ultimate reality. Introduced into a sharing in this relationship in response to God's Word, and assimilating this Word in the language of symbol, the baptized are committed to live in that universe of meaning in which God is known as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a conversion, involving a new horizon, new values and new motivations: in short, a totally new way of life, the meaning of which is never exhausted and the potentialities of which are always new.[45]

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[45] A further contribution will say more about the components of the religious symbol and the nature of imaginative discourse in worship. It will also touch on the ontology of the symbol.