CHRISTIAN LITURGY

I. THEOLOGY

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Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice

I. Systematic Theology of Liturgy

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Sheed & Ward

Sheed & Ward is a service of National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company, Inc.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 87-61262

Published by: Sheed & Ward
115 E. Armour Blvd. P.O. Box 414292
Kansas City, MO 64141-0281

To order, call: (800) 333-7373

Contents

PART I

The Modern Context: The Theological And Anthropological Dimensions Of The Liturgy

The first part of this book provides an overview of some of the valuable contributions of modern theology and the human sciences toward the deepening of the understanding and pastoral practice of the worship of the Church. It serves as an introduction to a systematic theology of liturgy, which is set in the context of the history of salvation (Part II). The mystery of the Christian liturgy is the theme of Part III. The concluding section (Part IV) formulates a theology of the seven sacraments of the Church in dialogue with the central insights of the traditional theology and dogmatic teaching of the churches of the East and West.

Chapter 1 of this introduction describes key aspects of the history of theological reflection on the liturgy, and it identifies basic concepts which determine the modern approach of systematic theologians to all aspects of liturgy. Chapter 2 reviews the contributions of the human sciences to the understanding and practice of Christian worship and, at the same time, indicates their limitations.

Chapter 1
History Of The Theology Of The Sacraments: Salient Features

The ancient churches of the East and West, as well as high church elements of the Reformation churches, agree on the number of the chief liturgical rites of the Church of Christ. In the traditional enumeration of the Western churches, they are: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, sacraments of reconciliation and of the sick, orders (diaconate, presbyterate, episcopate), and matrimony. These rites play analogous roles in the life of the Christian community. No one rite can serve the purpose of the others. While a certain resemblance exists between them, there are still greater differences. However, all relate to the one economy of salvation. Hence a Christian interpretation of the chief rites must take into account the peculiar function of each, as well as their ordering to one another.

A systematic elaboration of the meaning of the central liturgical celebrations of the Church, attuned to the level of maturity of Christians at various stages of development, has an important pastoral function. It furnishes the kind of knowledge that enables more active, fully conscious

participation, as well as commitment to what is being celebrated. But it is also pastorally useful to have at hand a theological synthesis that identifies common aspects of the rites and, from this starting point, develops general principles applicable to them all.

This more comprehensive theology of the sacraments is possible, provided that theologians do not make the blunder of attempting to construct their syntheses on premises which are foreign to the rites themselves. Rather, a theology of the sacraments should derive from reflection on the forms of celebration of each rite. Once theological explanations of individual sacraments have been sufficiently developed, the more abstract, systematic ordering of general principles can be undertaken.

The credit for the initial attempts to develop a systematic theology of general principles, applicable to the chief rites of the Church, belongs to Western theologians. The historical roots of "Principles of Sacramental Theology" (*De sacramentis in genere*) go back to St. Augustine of Hippo. He taught the Western churches that these rites should be included under the category of the *sacramenta* of the economy of salvation. His understanding of *sacramentum* as a holy sign (*sacrum signum*) of a saving grace (*res sacramenti*) was taken over by early scholastic theology. The word became a technical term for the chief rites of the Church with the birth of systematic treatises on the subject. Twelfth-century scholastic theologians applied it to all the major rites in order to indicate their analogous roles. At the same time, these theologians developed principles which could be predicated of all of them.

Theologians of the high scholastic period of the thirteenth century consolidated the earlier findings, and contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of the theology of the sacraments. By the end of that century the main lines of *De sacramentis in genere*, as well as the theology of particular sacraments, was well established. A common systematic approach was found in all Catholic schools of theology. The authority of this system was so great that the official teaching of the magisterium of the Western churches, and its preaching, became more and more determined by the language and content of school theology. This had the effect of constraining theologians to work within a system which was the creation of school theology itself.

Further limitations on the space required for creative reflection on the sacraments was occasioned by the sixteenth-century reaction of the Reformers to the traditional Catholic sacramental theology. The Council of Trent, attempting to answer objections to Catholic doctrine, touched on a variety of aspects of classical sacramental theology. But it never intended to present a complete exposition of the late medieval teaching, much less of the high scholastic synthesis. The procedure was always the same: a list of objectionable positions of Reformation theologians was drawn up on the subject of individual sacraments, and on general principles of sacramental theology. Those opposed to traditional Catholic belief were rejected.

In the post-Reformation period, these same doctrinal issues remained alive because the Reformers were not satisfied with the Tridentine decisions. In this situation Catholic theologians turned their attention to the exposition of the teaching of Trent, and to a defense based on whatever support could be mustered from the sources of Christian tradition. For the most part, the structure and content of treatises on sacramental theology were dictated by the Reformation agenda. These tracts had a characteristically apologetic bent, were often marred by a polemical tone, and employed anachronistic interpretations of proof texts drawn from Scripture and other sources of theology. Moreover, the absence of a critical edition of the *Acta* of the Council of Trent made the task of establishing the correct interpretation of the conciliar decrees extremely difficult in many cases. At the same time, this lacuna contributed to the development and cultivation of narrow, literal interpretations of conciliar decrees that have since proven not to correspond to the intention of the fathers of the council.

Two other characteristics of Catholic theology, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, are noteworthy. First, despite intramural differences between various schools, the systematic treatment of theological themes was remarkably alike. Second, Catholic theological circles showed little sensitivity to the limitations of the scholastic methodology. On the contrary, they displayed excessive optimism concerning their basically uniform treatment of all aspects of the revealed truth. The sacramental theology of the last four centuries is a good example of this.

However, the history of theology makes clear that theological reflection is always conditioned by a variety of cultural and historical circumstances. At one time, the questions provoked by a particular

religious experience may so highlight certain aspects of revealed truth that others, which previously received attention, are neglected. A new age, on the other hand, may rediscover these forgotten truths, make its own special contribution and, at the same time, overlook many valuable insights of the immediate past.

The process of thinking through the meaning of revealed truth has not always resulted in new gains on all fronts. Sometimes it has taken place at the cost of considerable loss of ground in areas of vital importance. But this should not come as a surprise. The principle of intelligibility in Christian theology is the relationship of one aspect of the economy of salvation to all the others. A systematic theology of any of the revealed truths, by its very nature, intends to take account of all the factors which contribute to the understanding of the single truth under analysis. However, it is difficult to imagine that any theologian, or school of theology, could command such a grasp of the real content of the whole of Christian revelation as to be able to formulate a completely satisfactory, contemporary theology of any aspect of this revealed truth.

The formulation of a theology of the chief rites of the Church is particularly difficult. These rites are the expression, in practice, of all that goes to make up the life of faith. Hence it is no wonder that the attempts of the past to develop a comprehensive exposition of their meaning have always failed to reach the desired goal. History teaches us that we must not expect too much from the contemporary work of systematic theologians. However, history also teaches us that a sacramental theology can be developed which corresponds to the particular spiritual needs of an age, provided the theologian is attuned to the cultural and historical context and asks the right questions.

I.
Salient Features of Scholastic Theology of the Sacraments

The birth of scholastic theology can be traced back to the eleventh-century controversy over the relationship of the Eucharistic bread and wine to the risen body of Christ. The systematic tracts, "Concerning the Body of the Lord," occasioned by this debate were linked to similar treatises on the other "major sacrament," baptism, in the early twelfth century. This nucleus formed the basis of early scholastic systematic theology of the sacraments. The introduction, "Concerning the Sacra-

ments in General," gathered together principles that could be applied to all sacraments. In this latter tract theologians attempted to get at the heart of the problem: What constitutes a chief rite of the Church? As a result of their efforts, this commonly accepted brief description emerged: A sacrament is a sign instituted by Christ to confer the grace which it signifies. But the full meaning intended by formulas of this type can only be grasped by reading the treatises in which they are found. For example, Hugo of St. Victor (d.1141) employs a succinct definition of sacrament, set in the context of his particular understanding of the history of salvation. He begins with the question: Since sacraments are intended for human beings, what is the actual situation of humanity in the history of salvation? Only by supplying a response to this question could he make sense out of the role of sacraments in the life of faith.

The early scholastics, as well as those of the high scholastic period of the thirteenth century, had great powers of synthesis. They used them in the attempt to shed more light on the significance of sacraments in relation to the whole economy of salvation. These theologians recognized that an adequate grasp of the principal rites of the Church could only be achieved by situating them within God's activity in history, and in relation to the human condition of sinfulness. Above all, the sacraments had to be linked to the incarnation and life of Jesus Christ, as well as to the Church of which he is the Head.

Sacraments were understood as "efficacious signs of grace," a concept derived from the liturgical experience of being graced. They were treasured as the outstanding medium by which the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, bestows and deepens the new life of faith. However, another part of the whole tradition, grounded in the same liturgical experience, teaches that sacraments are efficacious in the measure of the grateful response of the subjects, made possible by the gift of faith. Consequently, scholastic theology was challenged with the task of explaining how the divine initiative and the response of faith come together, and are related in the celebration of a sacrament. The synthesis, achieved by the twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians, is impressive. Despite its limitations, this systematic theology of the sacraments was not equaled in the late medieval period, nor in the following centuries down to the modern era.

We have already mentioned that the doctrinal synthesis of the Council of Trent on the subject of sacraments lacked the fullness of a true systematic treatise. The Reformers had criticized many of the traditionally unassailable doctrinal positions relating to this aspect of the life of faith. Accordingly, Trent was forced to take a stand on several important issues. These included the number of the sacraments instituted by Christ, and the relation between sacramental celebrations and the bestowal of the grace signified by them. Post-Reformation Catholic theology was greatly influenced by the limited doctrinal teaching of Trent and, therefore, by the Reformation critique which dictated the subject matter of the conciliar decrees. This is not the place to discuss, in detail, the neoscholastic theology of the sacraments. Only those peculiar traits can be mentioned which determined the more common Catholic understanding of the chief rites of the Church up through the first few decades of the twentieth century.

This school theology describes sacraments by the model of objective means of grace, instrumental causes of grace, confided to the Church by Christ. While sacraments are portrayed as signs and causes of the grace, the sign function is relegated to a marginal place. It serves to distinguish one sacrament from the others, and to awaken in the recipient the appropriate response to the particular grace offered in each sacrament. Hence the problem of explaining how sacraments cause grace is situated at the level of an analogy with instruments of art, and not with that of the instrumentality of signs. Within this conceptual framework no consensus was possible, among Catholic theologians, on the subject of causality of sacraments; for theological reflection on the "physical causality" of sacraments turned to philosophical principles far removed from the concrete liturgical celebrations.

The connection between Church and sacraments is also very weak in the neoscholastic system. The sacraments are not identified precisely as acts of the Church itself, but rather as acts of the minister of Christ. Since the minister represents Christ, the head of the Church, he can also be said to represent the Church. Here again, as in the case of the analysis of the sign and causal functions of the sacraments, this school of theology could do no better than establish an extrinsic link between the community of believers, as such, and sacraments. In other words, the sacraments are depicted as ministerial acts of the priest, who is minister of the Church and acts as a representative of Christ in the administra-

tion of sacraments. Therefore, sacraments appear to be means of grace located within the sphere of the Church, but not precisely acts of the Church.

It is especially noteworthy that this theology treats the sacraments almost exclusively from the standpoint of their mystery dimension, that is, under the aspect of the divine movement toward believers. The anabatic dimension, the aspect of worship or the movement of the liturgical assembly toward God, is confined to the liturgical prayer and symbolic action surrounding the "essential sacramental gestures and the accompanying formulas."

Typically, this theology only affords a marginal consideration of the role of Christ, his activity in the liturgy, except in the case of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Even less attention is paid to the role of the Holy Spirit. The latter characteristic is due to the traditional Catholic scholastic teaching that the sanctifying work of the Trinity is common to all three persons, except for the case of the incarnation in which the humanity of Jesus is assumed by the Word in hypostatic union. The texts of Scripture as well as the teachings of the Fathers of the Church which speak of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, are interpreted to mean that the Spirit is sanctifier only by way of "appropriation," that is to say, because the work of sanctification accords with the name "spirit."

The absence of pneumatology, the theology of the Holy Spirit, in Western systematic theology had a profound influence on the understanding of the nature of sacramental grace. Nevertheless, other presuppositions more directly contributed to an infra-personal concept of this reality. Sacramental grace, the grace proper to each sacrament, is conceived in neoscholasticism as including sanctifying grace. This latter grace, a supernatural entity, is described as a divinely bestowed disposition that qualifies the recipient of the sacrament for union with uncreated grace, that is, the indwelling Trinity. After the Council of Trent, Catholic theology, following the lead of an earlier tendency, developed the distinction between created grace (supernatural elevating grace) and uncreated grace (God's self-communication). This was done in such a way that a certain disjunction was either postulated or presupposed between the two realities of grace. In other words, the simultaneous presence of both graces in the soul of the just person was considered to be a fact. However, absolutely speaking, the presence of the dispositive

grace did not imply the presence of the uncreated grace. Rather, the uncreated grace was perceived as more or less the complement of the created grace.

II.
Twentieth Century Catholic Theology of the Sacraments

Twentieth-century Catholic theology continues to recognize the valuable contributions of the scholastic treatises on principles of sacramental theology. At the same time, modern scholarly researches in the fields of biblical exegesis, history of dogma, liturgy, systematic theology, and the human sciences have brought to light the limitations of this theological synthesis. They have demonstrated the need for a thorough rethinking of the traditional outlook. Some of the major contributions to the renewal of sacramental theology made prior to, or shortly after, the completion of the Second Vatican Council, are described below.

A. Grace

Neoscholasticism conceives humanity as coming forth from God in an act of creation, a purely gratuitous gift. As created being, humanity is ordered to a destiny that corresponds to its corporeal and spiritual perfections. This humanity could have been granted the fate of an eternal, natural bliss, without frustrating the act of God by which it was created. However God intervened, in a second act, to confer on humanity a supernatural finality. To accomplish this, God bestowed a created grace as an addition. Thereby humanity was elevated to a new level of existence, disposed for a participation in the divine life of the Trinity.

Both the so-called conservative and progressive wings of modern Catholic theology severely criticize this theological outlook, insofar as it postulates the real existence of humanity, closed in on itself and granted a natural finality. The idea that humanity ever existed in a state of pure nature, and had a corresponding nature destiny, is reckoned to be without historical foundation. This does not mean, however, that the supernatural destiny of humanity corresponds to the exigencies of human nature as such. It does mean that God determined created humanity from the outset, by a purely gratuitous act, for a fate that transcends the human condition. Consequently, recent Catholic theology affirms that grace, by which humanity is elevated to a supernatural destiny, was conferred from the beginning of the existence of humanity. This divine

grace, the self-communication of God, in the Spirit, is always and everywhere present to human beings, orientating them toward personal communion with the divine Trinity. Grace-events, which occur at definite moments in time and space, are instances of the acceptance of God's self-communication by the historical, free acts of human beings. From this point of view, actual graces are explained as the dynamic aspect of the divine saving presence seeking to evoke the free response of humankind. These actual graces are called "only sufficient" insofar as they meet with rejection on the part of the free person. They are called "efficacious" insofar as they meet with acceptance. In other words, actual graces are not described as "sufficient" or "efficacious" from the viewpoint of the divine initiative, but from the standpoint of the openness of the human person to God's loving invitation.

The modern Catholic understanding of grace, an instance of the recovery of a neglected or forgotten truth, has important consequences for the theology of the grace-event of the sacramental celebrations. Sacraments do not appear to be isolated instances of God's saving actions in space and time. Rather, they are understood as special moments of an activity occurring always and everywhere, when human beings respond to God in accord with their understanding of the true meaning of their existence. Sacraments supply the special context in which God's self communication can be more fully accepted.

B. Faith and Sacraments

Neoscholastic theology describes sacramental celebrations as events in which something is offered for consumption to more or less passive subjects. The sacrament is "administered" by the presiding minister to the "recipient." The necessary conditions for a fruitful reception of the sacrament, by an apt subject, are the intention to receive the grace signified and the habitual dispositions which correspond to the purpose of the particular sacrament. Thus the subject of a sacrament is depicted as having less than an active role in the communication of grace.

The rethinking of the relationship between faith and sacrament has led in modern times to a more personalistic approach to the "recipient" of a sacrament. It is now more clearly seen that the active response of the subject is an intregral part of the liturgical action. On it depends the grace-event of the celebration. In other words, the personal offer of grace by the Father, through Christ in the Spirit, requires a corresponding personal response on the part of the adult subject. This way of ex-

plaining the matter of efficacy of the sacraments corresponds to the orientation of the whole liturgical tradition. Moreover it offsets a possible misunderstanding that sacraments automatically confer grace on those who are habitually disposed to receive that grace.

C. Church and Sacraments

The modern stress on the importance of the active participation of the subjects of sacramental celebrations has contributed to a new view of the relationship between Church and sacraments. In the neoscholastic outlook, sacraments are seen as special gifts confided to the Church and administered by the qualified minister in the name of Christ. More precisely, they are described as acts of the competent representative of Christ, which take place *within* the Church. Consequently, the Church is understood to be the dispenser of sacraments, through its ministers who are authorized by Christ. From this point of view, it is not altogether clear why sacraments, absolutely speaking, could not have been entrusted to some other institution.

Modern Catholic theology provides the reason why sacraments can only be celebrated in the Church. Returning to the patristic understanding of the relation between Church and sacraments, Catholic theology has recovered the truth that sacraments are acts of the Church itself, not merely acts which, by Christ's will, take place only in the Church. The Church can be said to dispense sacraments. But this means that these celebrations are acts by which the Church actualizes itself as agent of Christ. In short, sacraments are acts that flow from the very nature of the Church.

D. Christ

Modern Catholic theology has brought to the foreground, in a new way, the central message of the Christian tradition: the permanent, active presence of the risen Lord and his saving work in the whole scope of the life of the Church. Neoscholastic theology stressed the personal presence and activity of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, with special attention given to Christ's unique mode of presence in the Eucharistic species. Current Catholic theology displays a greater awareness of the personal and active presence of Christ in all liturgical activity. The recovery of this neglected truth has brought with it a new consciousness of the mystery dimension of each and every aspect of a liturgical celebration. Christ's active presence is associated