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SYMBOLS OF BROTHERHOOD

Sacramentalism for beginners

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Both the title and subtitle of this booklet are borrowed from elsewhere. The first comes from Pepe Castillo who spoke a long time ago of "symbols of freedom": here I would like to show that true freedom is brotherhood. And the subtitle comes from J.R. Busto ("*Christología para empezar*"): to emphasize this booklet is not a complete treaty but only an introduction, concerned mainly with two things: to recuperate what is most essential in the theological tradition of the sacraments, stripping it of many not so necessary additions, and to underline what I believe most necessary for today and capable of giving new life to our current feeble sacramental practice.

A. SACRAMENTAL REALITY

This first part is a little more theoretical than the following: for reasons of exposition it is logically necessary to begin with it. But the reader less accustomed to theoretical considerations can begin the booklet with the second half and then come back to this. For those who do this, I resume in five statements what this first chapter attempts to set out:

1. Reality is intrinsically symbolic (it could be called "sacramental" in a very wide sense).

2. In consequence human life is riddled with meaningful events (or lay "sacraments") which, in prime and key moments, point beyond outward appearances.

3. Because of this, our relationship with God, in the most meaningful moments of our faith life, develops in a sacramental manner (in the strict sense of the word).

4. If this is so, sacraments cannot be rites with which we "buy" God. They are gifts of God to people which are received in celebrating them.

5. If this is so, the unavoidable regulation any community act requires, should not be buried in pettyfogging legalistic rubrics which, though clinging to human traditions, prevent God's will from being carried out.

1. Sacraments for people

"The essence of the sacraments consists in showing through outward signs the *hidden mystery* of God, in proclaiming to the whole world that God *shares in the drama of history* and in announcing the Invisible in the kingdom of visible things, showing the *way towards Him*". (1)

To concentrate on the words underlined in the quotation: the hidden mystery of God, who has shared and shares in the drama of history, and proclaims in it a great beyond that is invisible. When this announcement is verified through sensible signs, these signs are called sacraments, a word in which today two meanings are joined: that of *mystery* and that of *sign*.

From this text there follows a first and fundamental consequence: *the sacraments are not rites to please God and thus obtain something from Him*. This is a pagan idea of worship that persists in the minds of many Christians and which the interests of clerical power neglect to correct.

But this idea contradicts a fundamental axiom of classical theology: "sacramenta propter homines": the sacraments are for people (not for God who, according to another axiom of classical theology, "is not bound to the sacraments"). The sacraments are *symbols which express and communicate for us the deepest dimension of God's relationship with us and of our life with God.* And this is a double dimension: God is our possibility for existing ("in Him we live, move and exist"), but God has further wished to give himself to us in love and this

Love will end by triumphing and realizing itself, at least at the end of history.

2. Sacrament and rite

The fundamental difference between sacrament and rite is that the latter, even though meaning nothing to us, has the special power of rendering favour to the divinity (2), whereas the sacrament *works through its meaning* and what it symbolizes (with another classic axiom: "sacramenta significando causant"). Because, in the sacrament, the symbol is not something different from the reality symbolized, but the form in which this appears.

> Among human beings it is normal that great symbols often end up by becoming rituals: a kiss of welcome or farewell is merely a courteous rite which comes from a very expressive symbol but which has become trivialized in the rite. This has also happened frequently with the sacraments: sometimes (in more believing groups) through routine and repetition. Other times (in more pagan groups) through the presence for example in weddings and baptisms of people to whom the symbolic faith dimension of the gestures means nothing nor is of any concern; they are there only to celebrate a social event or to sport clothes (new or hired for the occasion) or to share in a good meal afterwards. This gives rise to the question whether, to recuperate the meaning of the sacraments, it would not be essential to reinstall a certain "discipline of mystery" which would permit a real living of the symbols. (3)

A final clarification: in saying sacraments work through "their meaning", is not to deny the other thesis of classical theology known as "opus operatum": the sacraments work in themselves, through *what they do.* Badly understood this thesis contributed inadvertently to the magical idea of the sacraments we have denounced. But in classical theology, *opus operatum* is not opposed to the meaning of the gesture, but to what is called *opus operantis*: this means that sacraments work through what is done in them and *not through who does it.* The meaning of the gesture or the elements used in it belong to what is being done, not to whom is doing it.

And if the sacraments are not rites alien to people, but for people and working through their meaning, then one can appreciate the truth and importance of these words of Joan Chittister: "We haven't the right to reduce the sacraments, in the name of tradition, to a routine whose security leaves people dry". (4) To counter this is what this booklet aims to achieve.

3. The plurality of God: sacramentality of reality

To do this we need to recuperate theologically the symbolic dimension of a sacrament. This is due not to any arbitrariness on the part of God or the Church, but (1) to the very nature of our reality which, in its deepest sense, is always symbolical. And (2) to the fact that God, in his absolute transcendency (which doesn't disappear in his dedication to man) *cannot be imagined by us, but only symbolized.* We can say sacraments exist because everything is more than it is and because God is as he is. This is what we shall try to explain in this section.

1) From the trinitarian (or better, *triunitarian*) nature of God, we have to say that the Plenitude

of Being makes it necessary for God to express himself fully to himself and possess himself completely in this self communication. This shows us that the complete simplicity and unity of God is not through a lack of plurality, but that in the full unity of God there is a relational difference (Father, Son and Spirit as we say in our feeble words) and, in this sense, a plurality. From this we can deduce that, if the Creator is thus, the created being also tends to express itself to itself and so is necessarily symbolic: "referential". This is seen better in the higher levels of being, such as life: to live is to express oneself and to find oneself at the same time. But it is important to note that everything *we see as real refers to something beyond itself* and that, without this reference, this something beyond, reality would have no attraction since it would lose its promise (5). From this it follows that the symbol "is the highest form of representation of one reality by another" (6).

And so, when this reference of things points to its deepest dimension, we simply speak of symbolism; the commonest example is that of an authentic sexual relationship, as symbol, expression and *also cause* of love. But when this reference points to the immersion of things in God (about which St Augustine spoke of "deeper in ourselves than our deepest self"), then we speak of sacramentalism. This is what we still have to look at in this section.

2) What we must now emphasize is that, as so often happens in the relationship between the human and the divine, *the latter occurs in the deepest dimension of the former.* Leonardo Boff was right to say that there is "a life of sacraments" because before there are some "sacraments of life": but we can even add that these are not only special and isolated moments or gestures, but that the whole nature of life and reality with us is referential, symbolic. Reality is a "living metaphor", to use a happy expression of P. Ricoeur. And it is because "being is symbolic" (Karl Rahner)

Through the mysterious interrelationship of everything, reality suggests questions, conjures up relations, points to novelties, promises goals. And the greater the quality of what attracts us, the greater the things it points us to. When Nietzsche wrote that much quoted phrase: "all pleasure is looking for eternity", he gives an example of what we are saying: reality has a certain character of open mystery, of suggested promise, if we are able to look at it not as something to be grabbed but with respect and care. For many people, to experience the boundless sea or the imposing desert gives them a feeling of immensity ("a taste of eternity" in the song of a French film on love. And it is precisely this symbolic nature of reality that makes it seem so rich to us but that, at the same time, it would be a big mistake to remain with it without trying to transcend it and reach to what it is pointing. The famous saying of Dostoievsky: "beauty will save the world", is really saying that *beauty is proof that the world is open to salvation and can be saved* in spite of its cruelty and problems.

And so this reference to something more which is such an important part of our reality (in a kiss, a piece of music, a memory, a beautiful object) becomes almost necessary when we wish to speak about God. God continues to be totally transcendent in in offering Himself for us, and has no other way of giving Himself or speaking to us than through signs (7). It is useful to remember here the title of the doctoral thesis published in 1952 by E. Schillebeeckx: "*The sacramental economy of salvation*". This title means: the saving relationship between God and man is realized in a "sacramental" manner: mysteriously symbolic.

One can see now that the example given above of the act of love is not wholly sufficient in spite of its depth, since it is too particular: a fundamental element in the theology of the

sacraments is missing, namely *the reference to history* and to the people or community. More instructive could be the example of a popular feast: if it is of any help, think of those old "communist party feasts", especially those celebrated (if it was possible to celebrate them) in clandestine situations: all the acts which make up the feast (songs, speeches, meals together...) became symbols of a tomorrow of peace, liberty, justice and joy for all, a tomorrow which proclaimed one of the deepest and most genuine longings of a human being. In this way is enacted what Victor Jara wrote in a poem: "if the singer is silent, the roses die". Sacramentality is like a light which, in the narrow and dark tunnel of our cruel history strewn with victims, points to another and different dimension.

4. Sacraments and Church

Because our reality is like this, and such is the relationship between God and man, the Church (in so far as it is Word and the entity which points to a saving relationship between God and man) has also been called "a radical sacrament": Vatican II defined it as "the sacrament of salvation". This is why I mentioned in a previous Booklet that Church does not mean "synagogue" (or an institution just for acts of worship) but "a gathering": *a people come together to make present in history the saving intervention of God in it.* This is why there are sacraments in the Church: signs which, in the midst of this cruel history, permit the celebration of "the joy and hope" and to accompany "the grief and anguish" of the men of our time (Gaudium et Spes 1); signs which spring, so to speak, from the coming together and presence of the very being of the Church in the deepest and most decisive moments of human life and belief.

> But as we have already said our human condition and the very nature of the symbolic involve a whole series of rites or a "symbolic universe" around every symbol. These rites should not degenerate into routine but rather help to enter into the very heart of the symbol, strengthening its expressiveness and its meaning. To express it in the example already given above: the sexual relationship of love carries a whole series of signs and rites (preparation, caressing, coming closer together, loving words...) which *form a world of meaning and give symbolic importance* to the act of union.
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> Well something similar happens with the sacraments: the symbol is accompanied and made up of a thousand small rites and minor metaphors. For example: the water in baptism is usually accompanied by light, salt, a white dress. The Lord's Supper is always accompanied by first listening to the Word; and often in addition by an embrace and hymns... This ritual should retain its meaning and not become a sort of recipe or magic formula to "please God". This is why in the past attempts were made to find this "very heart of the symbol" which was called the matter and form of the sacrament, that is: what makes it real and which other rites *should emphasize but never obscure.* However strange the words (matter and form), we can understand it is not good that an over-elaborate ceremony distracts attention from what is essential to the sacrament: it would be as if a signpost was so covered with decorations, colours, graffiti or designs that we forgot where we had to go or how to get there.

Something important follows from the above: *the priest in the sacraments is not a sacred administrator of magical rites*; he is rather a witness or necessary representative to guarantee the validity of the sacrament, to link it with the original Sacrament which is the whole Church.

Thus it is not the priest who marries (an expression without meaning), but the couple who administer to themselves the sacrament of marriage. Nor is it the priest who consecrates but the *whole community* with him. Nor is it the priest alone who gives absolution but in the sacrament of penance he acts as representative of the Church which reconciles the sinner with himself or herself. For purely practical reasons it is the priest who administers baptism but the Church has always recognised as valid a baptism carried out by any Christian. Also anointing the sick (to the extent it can be based on the text of the letter of St James on the sick) is described there as "a prayer *of the Church*"...etc.

5. In conclusion

We have tried in this first part to restate three theses of classical theology: that the sacraments are for people, that God is not bound by them, that the sacraments operate by "signifying" (or, are effective through showing their meaning). But we have applied these principles from a post-conciliar theology which sees the sacraments as springing from the sacramental nature of the Church itself (and from reality, we have added, in a wider sense).

In the next part we will see how all this affects in a special way decisive moments, or in the attitudes and important opinions which characterize the human life of every believer. We will find there the traditional "seven sacraments" which we will explain. With regard to the number of seven, we will not enter into discussions of the tradition which, faced with the difficulty of showing though biblical texts that Jesus expressly instituted seven sacraments, ended by adopting an argument of "theological prescription" ("it was always thus" and has now been prescribed). An argument which carries no weight since it has never been confronted with anything different. We will simply accept that in ancient tradition seven represented completeness: the addition of three which represents God to four which represents the world though the four points of the compass. It is a way of saying that the sacraments cover the whole of a believer's life.

But among these seven there are two fundamental ones. St Thomas called them the sacrament *of faith* and the sacrament *of charity* (the two most humanizing and sanctifying acts of any human life). The other five sacraments are like echoes which spring from these two. For this reason, and though we don't deny the sacramental character in its classic sense, we reserve the word sacrament for the first two (baptism and the Eucharist) to which we dedicate far more space. For the other five, we speak in this booklet of "living metaphors" (but I repeat, not for theological reasons, but only for pedagogical ones).

(It is dangerous to appoint to ecclesiastical dignities someone who has not yet acquired full charity, however many virtues may be apparent in other things.

St Bernard, In Canticum, 18, 6)

B. TWO SACRAMENTS AND FIVE LIVING METAPHORS

In the last part we said sacraments were not rites but celebrations. The question therefore arises which dominates the best-known novel of A. Camus (La Peste), which is a parable of our world: is it possible to celebrate something in a city infested by the plague? One reply to this question points out that it is at least possible to celebrate *the possibility and announcement of the end of the plague.* On this note we begin with the first two sacraments.

1. BAPTISM: SACRAMENT OF DIVINE AFFILIATION

The theology of baptism has been enormously harmed by the image, derived from the Augustinian explanation of original sin, of water as a cleansing agent, of washing. In the ancient world the chief meaning of water was not for cleaning stains but as *a sign of life and death.* The first letter of St Peter (considered by many as a catechism on baptism) rejects the image of washing and sees a symbol of Christian baptism in Noah's ark; because it was in the ark that men were saved from the flood *waters*, and they were saved "*by water*" (that is: because it was water that made the ark float in the middle of the floods: see 1 Peter 3,20-21).

Water is therefore a *basic and universal symbol of death and life*. In it one can drown (as many have); but from it also springs life (today our astronomers are searching for water on other planets as the best proof there could be or could have been life). In water one dies and from water one is reborn. This very human experience comes to symbolize in baptism that to *become a Christian is to die to a form of life contrary to God and be reborn to a life in God* (which refers not only to a life beyond our death, but also to its anticipation in our life of today).

Thus the primitive form of baptism - more exact but less practical - was by *immersion*: to submerge oneself to the point of being swallowed up, and to emerge from it revived (8).

1.1. Ritual for adults

In this context and bearing in mind that for the early Christians baptism was always for adults, we can understand the explanation St Paul gives to the Romans (9):

- by becoming baptized, *the believer dies* to the selfish form of a previous pagan life;

- and dies *caught up in* the dedicated life (= in the death) of Jesus.

- But, as Christ rose from the dead, so the baptized person *seems reborn* to a new type of life which is the life of the Risen One: the life of a "son of God" who now "was born not of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself" (John 1,13).

One dies therefore to sin and is reborn to life in the Holy Spirit of God. This is the same thing Luke puts on the lips of St Peter in the first sermon of the Christian era: "Repent and let each of you be baptized *bound to* Jesus Christ" (10) (Acts 2,38). Baptism binds the old life left behind to the new life in Christ.

Two important observations emerge from this.

a) First: all the other ceremonies connected with baptism: lighted candle, white garment ("put on the new self that has been created in God's way" as the letter to the Ephesians puts it 4,23).., have the same meaning of this contrast between renunciation and renewed recuperation. Let us consider the most durable rite which is that of the so-called "baptismal promises": these consist in a first part which is usually called "rejecting Satan", that is: doing away with a style of living centred on egoism and total self-affirmation at a price of everything and everyone. And this rejection is accompanied by a profession of faith in God who is love and gift of self (sharing of the Father, Son and Spirit) and thus life and the fount of all true life. The God in whose name the child has been baptized (see Matthew 28, 19) (11).

b) But in addition: from what has been said we can understand the meaning the forgiving of sins held in this adult baptism: *it is inseparable from a change of life.*

But what has happened ? With the disappearance of adult baptism, the expression "being baptized for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2,38) has lost its meaning; and it was necessary to hunt for "original sin" to forgive the child, so that the scriptural reference might still be valid. Original sin certainly exists: but it can only be called "sin" in a metaphorical sense and, clearly, does not require in the child any pardon to be reconciled with God. God is not an enemy of the child but loves it unconditionally from the first moment of its life.

1.2. The baptism of children

All this meaning, as vivid as it is bold and splendid, becomes enormously weakened in present-day infant baptism. I don't mean by this that adult baptism is the only possible form: the primitive church understood that serious decisions of an adult person are conditioned by infancy and the past. I am merely saying we have to see how we can restore to infant baptism its true meaning, so as to avoid this idea of original sin as if it was some mysterious stain on the life of the newly born (and so as not to seek like St Augustine the cause of this stain in the sexual pleasure joined to giving birth).

Water is very present at the birth of human life: sustained in amniotic fluid during pregnancy, the child (at its level) experiences something like death when the mother "breaks water"; and it expresses this by crying, with the appearance of a form of life which will be for it a new and higher life than the deficient life it had in its mother's womb.

Parallel to this we can say that, *in baptism, the parents give birth to a new form of life for their*

child in which it will live immersed as if in amniotic fluid. And from baptism they will be bringing up a "child of God" until the moment when it will be able to become such by itself in its human life.

In both cases (adults or children) this is the meaning of water as a symbol. But with the difference that the adult "baptizes self" and the child "is baptized", that is: in adult baptism it is the baptizing which is a decision to die to one's past life and commit oneself to the life of Christ. While in infant baptism, *the parents commit themselves to nurture this new life as the life of a child of God*. If the expression is valid, in this case it is the parents who baptize themselves as if intermediary agents to ensure the Christian life of their child.

1.3. Consequences

What we have said to far helps us see two things:

a) The little or almost no meaning of many baptisms reduced to an insignificant and senseless rite of pouring a drop of water on the child so as to indulge afterwards in celebrations with totally different criteria from those of a new life in Christ: uncontrolled consumption, ostentation, superficiality... The Church should attempt to abolish these semi-pagan forms of baptism, without contenting itself with the argument that, though them, the number of faithful is increased (it is not). And many undecided believers (who baptize the child "just in case" thinking that, though it is not true, "it won't do any harm"), should be reassured by the Church concerning the child's fate, even though deprived of baptism: the child is not a sinner nor, if it dies, will it be judged as such: it is the object of God's love even more than the love of its parents; and its only sin is a complete defencelessness before the egoism ingrained and rooted in a thousand forms of social, family and cultural practices. For this also, and given that requests for baptism mean that many have to be celebrated together (where many taking part are not believers, go to show off their clothes, take photos and chat in the church without any consideration for others), it would be good if the baptism of children could be postponed till they are two or three, when the child no longer cries for any reason and without knowing why, thus setting off all the other children present.... And yet

b) from what has been said the existence of civil forms of baptism (or secular celebrations of child birth) should not be seen as a threat by Christians but rather as a protection of the quality and meaning of Christian baptism, whether this is expressed in the hard saying of Jesus of "not casting pearls before swine" (Mathew 7,6), or whether one uses the formula of Bonhoeffer already quoted, of "an arcane discipline" needed by believers in a non-Christian world.

> From what has been said it is not intended to reduce baptism to a purely religious dimension. Such good and unbelievable news as our divine sonship is something that deserves to be celebrated, and the celebration should take in the corporal and material. The previous reflections are concerned that this material dimension does not drown, consume or take the place of the true dimension of baptism; that the freedom of the children of God is not replaced by a dependency on luxury stores which often create economic problems and worries for families frightened of not being up to the standards of "this world", when *what is being celebrated is precisely the denial of such standards* and the adoption of those of Christian brotherhood. In this way one can avoid the sacrament of baptism from becoming what it so often is

today: a body without a soul.

It is for families to explore possibilities in this direction (perhaps sometimes separating the Christian ceremony of baptism from a larger secular celebration which includes believers and non-believers). We now turn to the theology of baptism.

1.4. The ecclesiastical dimension of baptism

What happens when a person "puts on Christ" which is the same as accepting divine sonship ? The answer to this question is given by St Paul in his letter to the Galatians: "There are no more distinctions between male and female, slave and free, my religion and the religion of the other" (= Jew and Greek: Galatians 3,28). Equality and fraternity, the two ideals betrayed by the French revolution, spring from man's divine sonship, not from his dominion over the world (which will always be a source of difference and confrontation). Thus baptism places us in a community of brotherhood or, as we put it, marks our "entry into the Church". And in placing the child in a community of sons of God and brothers, his sharing in the "original sin" of the human race is counterbalanced.

As a community of the baptized, *the Church is a community of those who know they are sons of God*: this makes the duty of brotherhood far greater than in any other human group. It supposes that in the Church there is a "sacrament of brotherhood", as we shall see in a moment. Furthermore: this makes it theologically realistic for baptisms to be celebrated not individually but in groups, thus witnessing to the fact that it means entering the brotherly community of the sons of God that we call the Church.

> But this sort of community cannot be imposed by law and, still less, where there are many candidates for baptism since, as I have already said, it runs the risk of turning into a mass and routine celebration when it is probably advisable to have a more personal celebration. The same thing happens with an act of faith: it is just as correct to say "I believe" as "we believe"; though in this instance Rome has recently preferred reciting the act of faith in the singular so as to safeguard the complete freedom of the profession of faith. But the plural recital is still legitimate and sometimes convenient. What has to be avoided is that the baptized called "members of a community" accept this merely to please the ministers of religion responsible for them. For this group of families about to baptize their children are not sufficiently members of the community which will receive the new "child of God": it is they who need to be received and (in this sense) the ideal, today impossible, would be for the baptisms to take place during a parish assembly: this would also avoid any favouritism on the part of the minister imparting baptism.

In any case, the sacrament of sonship leads to the sacrament of brotherhood. It is not infrequent in the Church, when dealing with the baptism of an adult convert, that the celebration of the baptism is joined to the candidate receiving the Eucharist for the first time.

2. THE EUCHARIST: SACRAMENT OF BROTHERHOOD WITH CHRIST

St John ends his account of the passion by saying that when the side of Jesus was pierced with a lance, there immediately came out "blood and water" (19,34). Given the solemnity of his account and witness, and the constant symbolic meaning of the fourth gospel, some Fathers of the Church see here an allusion to the eucharist and baptism. From the heart of Jesus flows water which is the source and sign of life, with blood, expression of a life which offers itself to the end. Life received and offered is equivalent to sonship and brotherhood: a summary of God's work through Jesus Christ.

Perhaps now one can understand better the word Eucharist which etymologically means *thanksgiving*. This meaning will surprise those who look on the eucharist mainly or exclusively as an offering or sacrifice in which, rather than thanking, we obtain something. Nevertheless the New Testament repeatedly explains that the eucharist alone is an act of worship in so far as *it celebrates and gives thanks for the surpassing of every act of worship* man might attempt and which, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, are no more than "shadows".

The Catholic liturgy prays in one of its prefaces or introductions to the eucharistic prayer: "You have no need of our praise, yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift. Our prayer of thanksgiving adds nothing to your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace". Already in the second century, St Ireneus explained that the Church's offering was agreeable to God not because he needed any sacrifice of ours, but because, if we accept the gift He gives us, *we are glorified in offering it* (AH IV, 18, 1). In this sense, the eucharist is not just any act of worship, nor even the most sublime: because the worship we give in it is what we have received and for this we give thanks. This is what St Paul called "a spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12,1).

According to Ratzinger "the Christian structure of the sacrifice comes from reception joined to thanksgiving" (13). It is not therefore something we give but something we receive and give thanks for. And this is not reflected today in the "old" use of the word sacrifice, nor in the very structure of the liturgy.

2.1. The Eucharist and the life of Jesus

In the eucharist we give thanks that, though on our part we have nothing to offer God which is worthy of Him, we can offer Him the sacrificed life of Jesus: a life sacrificed to the point of death for the love of mankind and through the power of the Spirit. This sacrificed life gave rise to a basic teaching of the prophets and Jesus himself: "God wants mercy, not sacrifices", although mercy often demands of people big sacrifices (and in this ill-fated world such demands are frequent).

So in the Eucharist we offer God the Person and Life of Jesus, and we offer them to God receiving them ourselves. Person and Life which the Semitic language describes as Body and Blood. It is doctrinally established that the bread and cup (body and blood) do not break up or separate the unique reality of the Lord, but are two symbols of the same reality. The Eucharist is equally complete whether it is received under one or both species, as the Church has always taught, though receiving both species of bread and wine represents in a more visible manner the

meaning of Our Lord's sacrificed life, as we shall now point out.

2.2. Eucharist and brotherhood

This sacrificed life of Jesus is summed up in the farewell gesture He left us and ordered us to repeat. *As a recapitulation and receiving of Jesus's sacrificed life, the Eucharist is the sacrament of brotherhood just as baptism is the sacrament of sonship.*

The Church, in fact, has always described Holy Thursday, which commemorates the institution of the Eucharist, as a "day of fraternal love". And for St Paul it was very important to stress the deep unity ("bodily") of all who share in the Eucharist, precisely because in it "the bread that is shared is only one": the sacrificed person of the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 10,17). According to a well-known prayer of the second century, the early Christians celebrated in thanksgiving that just as the grains of wheat spread in the fields have been brought together to form one loaf of bread, so human beings, though separate and different, form one body thanks to the Eucharist (see Didache, 10).

Therefore, if as Christians we are not a visible and clear sign to the world of brotherhood, *something very serious is missing in our eucharistic celebrations*.

2.3. The Eucharist and hope

As a sacrament of brotherhood, the Eucharist is also a sacrament of hope in a world where brotherhood is destroyed and trampled on by sin. Indeed it is no coincidence that Jesus celebrates the Last Supper at the most desperate moment of his life, "the night on which he was betrayed" as the liturgy reminds us. Betrayed by one of his own and condemned to death by the priests, in the name of God and as a blasphemer.

It was precisely on this dark night that Jesus decided to celebrate a supper with his own. As well as taking the opportunity of the paschal meal (according to the chronology of the fourth gospel which seems the most likely) it was a special meal and the invitation to a meal is always an act of celebration. And a celebration, at a time when things look desperate, is also an act of hope.

Jesus expresses this hope and makes it real through what he did during the Supper which converted it into a memorial of his sacrificed life spent "doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil" (Acts 10,38): alleviating human suffering and spreading God's peace.

2.4. Bread and wine

So, to sum up his life, Jesus took the two basic and most universal symbols in human relations: *bread, symbol of need, and a cup of wine, symbol of joy*. The share bread is to share in human need. And to pass the cup is to communicate joy (14). This double gesture, which is profoundly

human and symbolizes so well the sacrificed life of Jesus, becomes the effective symbol - sacrament - of His real presence amongst his own, beyond those who want to finish with him and rid him from their midst.

Thanks to this act the bread and wine are "transsubstantiated" (15) into the presence of the God of Love among us: need shared and joy communicated. Catholic liturgy has always linked the transformation of the bread and wine not only to the invoking of the Spirit (epiclesis) but also to the narrative of the twofold gesture of Jesus: "he took bread and broke it...he took the cup and gave it".

The gesture of the bread is connected with the whole biblical tradition and several incidents in the life of Jesus. The story of the multiplication of bread is perhaps the gospel passage which has given rise to most testimonies, which is a strong indication of its factualness. And this scene is described by the evangelists in terms very similar to those of the Last Supper ("to take bread, give thanks, to share it"), establishing a certain continuity between the fact that in sharing the bread *is multiplied* and the believer's conviction that in sharing it *becomes Christ*: for this reason the two disciples who had lost faith, "recognised Jesus in the sharing of the bread". And the "breaking of bread" remains a deliberately ambiguous statement in the New Testament where it is not always easy to guess whether it refers to the Eucharist or sharing a meal.

The fourth gospel underlines the importance of the gesture, substituting the allusion to bread and wine (already recalled earlier in chapter 6) by a clear gesture of service which is the washing of the feet. *Without service there cannot be Eucharist* is the message of the fourth gospel, in a reaction against any unilateral emphasis on the material of bread and wine. In this upsetting of human relations which cease being relations of superiority, dominance or exclusion to become relations of equality and service, is where the bread and wine become the material for the sacrament.

2.5. The Eucharist as a transformation of human relations

For this reason, when St Paul in Corinth came up against some eucharistic celebrations taking place in an atmosphere of intolerance and inequality among the participants, he criticised those christians strongly: "when you hold these meetings, it is not the Lord's Supper you are eating" (1Cor 11,17ff). This criticism is still valid for us, whenever we look on the Eucharist as an offering of something outside of and foreign to us, something which is pleasing to God but without making us feel the need to change our lives and the relations between us. "Our correct way of thinking is what responds to our Eucharist" as St Ireneus also wrote in the second century (AH 1V, 18,5).

This relationship points to something very important: at the same time as the Church celebrates the Eucharist, it is renewed and transformed by it. *The eucharist should make the Church into a* "Eucharist*"*, that is, convert it into a place where human relations are transformed from relations of domination to relations of brotherhood, from relations of slavery to relations of freedom, a place where "there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female" (Galatians 3,28). Or, as the Church itself prays in its eucharistic celebration: "a haven of truth and love, of freedom, of justice and peace so that all can find in her a reason to go on hoping" (Canon V,c): here we find the same bond between brotherhood and hope we have

already seen: hope encourages us to build brotherhood, and brotherhood is a motive for hope.

In this transformation the Church also becomes a sacrament (in sign and reality) of the presence of God among people. "Sacrament of communion" as Vatican II defined it, referring to the communion of all people with God and among themselves. The ambiguity of the word "communion" in many Latin languages, where it means both receiving the Eucharist and the highest quality in human relations, becomes an ambiguity with rich theological meaning.

For communion is not just a pious act or for personal enrichment: it is also a commitment and awareness that by it we offer our solidarity and welcome to all: this is why in the celebration of the Eucharist we give a greeting of brotherhood and wish each other peace just before receiving the Lord's Body.

Finally it is\ very important when celebrating the Eucharist not to forget that we are commemorating the Last Supper in fulfilment of Jesus's command: *in memory of him and not of our initiative.* It is important not to forget this because the number of participants prevent our eucharists today taking the form of a meal between a group of friends and brothers in Jesus Christ.

Such crowding will also require minimal control. But it would betray the Lord's command if faithfulness to the Eucharist is reduced to this "minimal control", leaving aside the most important part of the Lord's command: communion and brotherhood (see Matthew 23,23): it would be, in other words of Jesus: "straining out gnats and swallowing camels" (Matthew 23,24). The Lord described as hypocrites those who acted in this way.

This crowding also prevents the eucharistic gestures which accompany the bread and wine from being exactly the same as those of Jesus: to break the bread and pass the cup. This is why the Church allows communion in the hand so that the Eucharist can come closer to the Lord's Supper which it brings up to date: for we cannot imagine that Jesus parted the bread and put it in the mouth of the disciples. Communion in the hand is therefore not a lack of respect or a denial of Our Lord's real presence. In any case it would deny the "respect" we wish to give God but not the respect God wishes to receive from us. Such an accusation would once again deserve Jesus's description of hypocrite which we have just mentioned.

2.6. The Eucharist and the enhancement of nature

Finally the Eucharist is not only a change in human relations caught up in the Person and Life (body and blood) of Jesus which make our human relations more like the divine. There is also a material change, chosen by Our Lord in giving himself to us, in the form of bread and wine. The transubstantiation of the elements through the real presence of the Risen Christ *does not do away with the material but raises it up to God*: the New Testament defines the Risen as head not only of the whole human race but also of the "whole of creation" which is recapitulated in Christ. This changes creation, giving it a new dignity.

St Ireneus expresses this very beautifully: in the Eucharist we proclaim *the communion and unity of matter and Spirit* (IV, 18,5). God could have fed people directly, but he preferred to do this through his creation, thus incorporating it in his work. In the same way, to nourish the fulness of

our human being with this "medicine of immortality", God has chosen to use his material creation which is thus raised to become the mediator of the divine gift.

So today's transubstantiation of the bread and wine is like an anticipation of the future "transubstantiation" of our mortal bodies by sharing in the Resurrection of Jesus (St Ireneus: AH III, II, 5&6). Today, when ecological problems rightly preoccupy humanity, the Christian should know that one decisive reason for treating the material universe with respect is the meaning the Eucharist gives to all of God's creation.

To sum up: from what is said above it follows that the Eucharist doesn't end when our celebration is finished but, in a certain sense, *begins then*: because the eucharistic celebration should return us to life transformed. St Paul ends his exhortation to the Corinthians telling them that "until the Lord comes, every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming his death (1Cor. 11,26). We should also end this brief reflection like him: every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we proclaim the redemption of the world in a world that doesn't look as if it has a redemption: we proclaim a motive for celebration in a plague-ridden city (to refer again to Camus). And this means we should never give in. We should not surrender to the belief that nothing can be done to make this world a little more like God wanted it.

In this way *the true Eucharist leads to life rather than away from it.* And this could be for us a way of verifying the eucharistic quality of our celebrations.

2.7. Conclusion

From all of the above an important lesson follows with which we can end this reflection. Just as it happened in that obscure village called Nazareth in Galilee, *God's greatest gift comes to us hidden in the simplest and least obvious form*, daily bread, wine and a shared meal. For God doesn't need our showy pretensions: nor our gold, nor our silver, nor our jewels, nor our super-rich monstrances... he is only looking for our transformed hearts.

The teaching of John Paul II, often forgotten, remains fully valid: "Faced by cases of need, one cannot ignore them in favour of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship; on the contrary it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing and shelter for those who lack these things" (On Social Concern, 31). And he goes on to say *the Church cannot accept such a reversal of the hierarchy of values* in which "the 'having' of a few can be to the detriment of the 'being' of many others."

This is a simple subversive consequence of the Eucharist. For, as the prophet Samuel said: "man looks at appearances but Yahweh looks at the heart" (1Samuel 16,7). So what our eucharists need is not gold or silver but hearts ready to open up to the Lord and allow themselves to be changed by Him.

So, converted into the "flesh of the sacrament", we have water which is the source of new life, food which preserves life and wine which celebrates it. In this way the theology of the sacraments can be built around the concept of life and of God, the source and fulness of life.
In the other sacraments (which we are going to call metaphors) we will meet with the threat to life which supposes our complicity with evil, with two different paths of love as truth in life (church

ministry and marriage) and, finally, with the weakness and ending of our life which also, for the believer, is taken up in the gift of God to mankind.

> The Church is not a pyramid which culminates in Rome. The papal task to build unity is not the only purpose of "Catholicity", though it is an indispensable part of it.
>
> Urs von Balthasar, *Herder Korrespondenz,* December, 1982.

APPENDIX FOR BAPTISM AND THE EUCHARIST: TO MAKE FRUITFUL THE SYMBOLS OF SONSHIP AND BROTHERHOOD

Almost all the readers of this booklet would be able to nourish and teach well or adequately the children they lead to baptism or communion. We should give thanks for this happy possibility, but without forgetting that it takes place in a world where some ten million children die each year of hunger, and where some two hundred million pass their childhood in conditions of slavery (work, sexual or military). *This fact cannot be unconnected with the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist if we look at them through God's eyes* (though perhaps it is for many people and religious hierarchies).

I wish to point out in this appendix how the sacramental signs can become fruitful in the situation the world is in. Baptism could mean the decision to deprive a child in its feeding and care of all that is superfluous (not necessary or convenient) and dedicate it to adopting one of those children condemned to die of hunger.

This decision can be widened and already begin in the very ceremony of baptism: the parents can explain to those invited that, in the feast afterwards, they have kept back part (which could be the orchestra, the cake, the cellar...) in order to create a fund to save from death through hunger an unknown child but just as much child of God as ours. One could even invite those present to contribute something to this fund. We are aware that, though it may be little, in each parish there are easily some ten baptisms every month, and that the amount which each raises, multiplied by all the baptisms in the parish, by all the parishes in the city and by all the cities of a diocese could easily reach millions.

This is one possibility. If the reader contacts through internet a network such as www.infanciasinfronteras.org and communicates with its directors, he will certainly receive other suggestions or, at least, can find out the name and place of the baby they are going to try and save from death.

But the important thing is not only what is done but that, *when the child begins to grow, one can explain that, thanks to it and the small sacrifices which it knew nothing about in the beginning,*

life has been given to another child from the moment of its birth; that in addition to the brothers and sisters it knows, it has another brother or sister far away and unknown but true brother or sister because, child of God like him and helped by him, just as the small child in a family is helped by the older ones. A practice such as this will be basic in teaching solidarity to the newly born, as it grows up.

So much for baptism. Part of the eucharistic celebration also relates to children at the first communion feast which accompanies this sacrament. The practice described above can be repeated, but dedicated now not so much to feeding a child destined or not to die of hunger, but rather to freeing from slavery some young person about to be caught up in it as our child makes its first communion. To free a minor from working as a slave in first world multinationals which make footballs and boots for our sports and make it possible for him or her to attend school which is often impossible due to the pitiful pay which is often the only income the family has (multinationals prefer to employ children rather than their parents because they can pay them less). Once again we should remember that the amount needed would be much less than for a child in the developed world: these slave children earn around a euro a day.

In this way the first communion feast will be similar to that at baptism: moderation in dress and consumption so as to raise funds to provide education for another child.

So much for the communion of children. In the case of adults something can also be suggested, that is if they have the courage to attend the Eucharist regularly in spite of the inexpressiveness and remoteness of almost all our Sunday Masses. As you know, in the course of the year a number of special collections are made (world mission day, day against hunger, or to meet some catastrophe). It would be very fitting that our contribution, big or small, is not a last moment decision, but something that has been prepared by small offerings each Sunday we come to the Eucharist (and which could also be the result of some sacrifice: such as, for example, cutting back on on a drink or meal for those who still have the custom of doing this after Mass, or in some other way). In this way *the sacrament of brotherhood would be "made effective" every time we celebrate.*

This would be one of the best witnesses Christians could give to the reality of the sacraments. It would also be a way of making real the petition we make at each Eucharist: "that our offering be acceptable to God our Almighty Father". Clearly this acceptance by God does not depend only on our generosity, usually meagre, but that we are united to the sacrifice of the life and death of Jesus Christ. But this sacrifice will also show its effectiveness through our solidarity.

3. THE METAPHOR OF ENDORSEMENT

The coming of infant baptism as already explained, together with the undeniable absence of references to confirmation in Christian sources, lead some to believe this sacrament is a mere duplication or prolongation of baptism, in which the already baptized on reaching adulthood reaffirms the Christian commitment made by its parents on its behalf in infancy. We have already seen how adult baptism was the *end of a process* of initiation and conversion which is

absent in infant baptism. And yet the Christian initiation of the child also has to be endorsed by some responsible decision of a believer.

Hans Küng for example has been a staunch defender of this identification between confirmation and baptism. Nevertheless, and without denying the value of the arguments presented, there are indications that point in another direction. For example:

a) In the first place, an anthropological reason: all important life decisions and commitments not only need a previous process but also to be renewed and celebrated from time to time, both that they may not die out and also to strengthen and endorse them. Just as husband and wife need to proclaim their love for each other not only before marriage but also and more especially when they are already married. In this joyful renewal they become more aware that the result of an important human decision is not due merely to their efforts but is also a gift from Heaven (the "ex opere operato" we spoke about in the introduction).

b) Also the rite of confirmation contains two important differences with respect to that of baptism: for the catholic church, the "ordinary" minister of this sacrament is the *bishop* alone (16). And secondly the presence of oil and *anointing* (which reappears in the anointing of the sick).

The symbol of anointing is easier to understand: the frequent transmission of sporting programmes (and our own practice) help us understand to what point oils and creams moisture and protect the skin, strengthen tissues or relax and loosen muscles. This is another of those ancient symbols in human history. And so the Holy Spirit was described from early on as the "oil of divine anointing" which makes possible, facilitates and ennobles moral goodness (17).

c) The necessary presence of the bishop can be understood from two points of view:

On the part of the pastor it reminds him of his obligation "to know his sheep" without restricting his relationships to a few who block access to him and influence his information and his way of thinking and acting. This is very necessary today when (through the system of appointment) the majority of bishops seem rather "mercenaries who have not entered by the gate of the sheep": supporters and tokens of a central authority rather than shepherds, responsible for the unity of a community which is the people of God.

On the part of the person being confirmed, just as in baptism entry into the Church is realised through entry into a community, here the person is reminded of the obligation to know and help their pastor whose mission is not merely to impose his own particular ideas, but to ensure union in the whole community, and the representation of his faithful in the episcopal college of the so-called universal church. We return to this point when speaking about the sacrament of holy orders.

> It could be useful to compare what is said here with what happens in the celebration of this sacrament. Something is not working if boys and girls receive confirmation in a catholic school on completing their exams and then calmly give up the faith in the first or second year of university. Or if, in the school itself, and without having given up the faith, faced with the prospect of confirmation and the lack of credibility in church structures today, they say to others: "Don't do it! You don't know what you are letting yourself in for" (both stories are true).

We call confirmation the sacrament which strengthens faith and the profession of faith before the world.

(K. Rahner, Church and Sacrament)

4. THE METAPHOR OF EMBRACING THE ONE WHO RETURNS

In his work *Against Celsus* (III, 56) Origen explains that in pagan rites of initiation it is solemnly proclaimed: "let only those come forward who have clean hands and a prudent tongue". While in Christian mysteries one hears: "let the sinner, the one who has no understanding, the one who is weak in spirit, in a word, the one who is miserable approach the Kingdom of God: it belongs to him".

Indeed, in my opinion and experience, one of the things for which Christianity must most be thanked is that it gives us the capacity to recognise our own sins and wretchedness with courage, without having to deny or minimize them on the one hand or be overcome by them on the other. (And I am speaking about recognising *our own* sins: for those of others we are capable of doing this ourselves without needing any supernatural help...).

Because of human weakness and blindness, the good news of the Gospel often turns out to be an excessive demand. This can lead to a serious double danger: despair for people who recognise their impotence, or fanatical hypocrisy for those who consider themselves superior. This double danger is only avoided if sonship and brotherhood are experienced in the security of forgiveness and of being *only one more forgiven person* together with the others.

It is here that the so-called sacrament of "penance" comes in. Its purpose is to help us *live a life of faith without ever abandoning the attempt, but keeping always a healthy lack of confidence in ourselves*.

This sacrament needs a much more detailed treatment than we can give it here. We will have to limit ourselves to giving the historical data and theological outlines to help overcome its present crisis.

Two preliminary observations: first, the word penance sounds today like a "punishment", a price to pay or something like it (a chorus speaks of "sin leading to penance"). However in its origen, penance means *repentance* (from the Latin "poenitere": to know evil and *change of direction* (when it translates the Greek metanoia). This semantic excursion underlines well what has been put out of focus in the sacrament of forgiveness.

Secondly, penance is the sacrament that has changed most in the long history of the Church. This

development makes it necessary to search for the changes the sacrament of penance needs today, in order to recuperate its essential function.

4.1. Offense against the community

In the Church described in the New Testament it seems that penance didn't exist: adult baptism after conversion, together with the beginner's fervour would suggest that sins were pardoned once and for all. To fall back into sin was considered impossible or almost unforgivable: because great harm was done to the "community of the saints", to God's family. The strange episode of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts suggests this: the couple were lambasted (18) not *for their greed but for having lied to the community*: for the offense to this (to the "church") is no longer an offense "to men but to God" (Acts 5,5).

Sin is therefore an offense to the Church (and for this reason to God). And *reconciliation is primarily reconciliation with the Church* (and through her with God). However strange the just-quoted episode in Acts 5 seems today, it is a pity that in the Church we have lost this awareness of the intangibility and respect for holiness of God's people.

However reality rapidly imposed itself even in the primitive church; for a start, though the spirit is present, the flesh continues to be weak. The Church would experience that sin continued to be present within her (19), and that God's forgiveness was needed not once or twice but "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18,22). Early strictness ended by showing up the ineffectiveness of all strictness: it only meant that many people put off their baptism till the moment of death...

So a first form of penance appeared which explained how sin in itself separates a sinner from the community and forgiveness comes through reconciliation with it ("pax cum Ecclesia" as traditional theology puts it). This was illustrated with the symbol of leaving sinners for a time at the door of the church or meeting place, without going in, so that, when they were considered purified, they entered the church again and were received by it. This type of public penance was reserved for a few sins (especially: apostasy, adultery and assassination) (20).

4.2. Oral confession

This type of penance has ended by being in crisis. Not only for its severity but also, as is understandable (especially in the case of adultery), because it could give rise to jealously and feelings of revenge. Because of this, since the 6th century Irish Monks began to spread a less rigorous form of penance: in a more clerical Church, priests or the bishop were seen as "representatives" of the whole community; so it would be sufficient if it was them who oversaw exclusion from the community and reintegration in it (those who "bound and loosed" to use the language of the gospels. The time of purification (which before was spent at the door of the church before being readmitted to it) became relegated to some form of *later* purification (which today we called the "imposed penance").

In the beginning this type of reconciliation was heavily criticised and even forbidden because it was considered lax and far from the demands of the gospel. However in the end mercy overcame

excessive rigour, and so-called "oral confession" spread throughout the Church and by the 12th century was almost the only type practised. At the start the inherited awareness of the priest acting *solely as the Church's representative* was maintained, to the extent that, in the Middle Ages, there was a widespread opinion that, if no priest was available, one could confess to any Christian who in such a case supplied the representation of the community: for *the ministry of forgiveness depends not on the priest but the whole church.*

In the Council of Trent this exception was definitively abolished, and this contributed to spreading the impression that the priest absolves through a special power given him and not because he represents the church.

4.3. The legalization of forgiveness

Once this way of celebrating the sacrament was imposed, the moralists and canonists of the Middle Ages continued to regulate it to absurd extremes, classifying sins in classes, types and numbers, in order to streamline exactly what had to be said. And yet accusation was never in the beginning a type of "shameful toll" that had to be paid in order to receive forgiveness. Self-accusation stems logically from the psychology of someone genuinely sorry for what has been done and needing to communicate it so as to lighten the burden on one's conscience. Psychology recognises this need in purely secular issues. But, in saying this, it is clearly necessary to distinguish between the need which stems from *a believer's repentance before the community and God*, and the need (usually obsessive) which *comes from a neurotic guiltiness*, which is more frequent than it might seem and has little in common with Christian repentance.

Self-accusation therefore should be compared to the attitude of the prodigal son who, before asking his father for a for a minimal forgiveness (to be treated as one of his servants and no longer his son) feels himself driven to admit his sin to him. And, to his great surprise, he finds his father has already forgiven him before hearing his confession, and not in a minimal but a maximum degree. And it is precisely this which totally changes the son's psychology and conscience.

In the 4th Lateran Council (1215) the Church declared confession to be obligatory for all adults once a year; St Thomas limited this obligation to grave sins (III, 84, 5). But Lateran 4 (for juridical reasons to control the so-called "erring priests") also decreed confession should be to "*one's own* priest" (DH 812). And this, in small communities lacking the anonymity of our modern cities, became discriminatory: for to go to confession was to recognise one's mortal sin before the whole community. To avoid this the canonical norm was read as obligatory *for all*, and not just for those in mortal sin.

This widening of the obligation was easy to explain given the deviation of the sacrament into a magical rite, as we explained in the introduction, and which in the Middle Ages was already widespread: although not necessary, *confession was very convenient for the grace received in it.* (From a pedagogical point of view there was another and better justification which entered in: it is the essential need to examine oneself constantly and to be aware of the tricks of one's own psychology: to work for one's salvation "with fear and trembling", as St Paul recommended.

4.4. The integrity of self-accusation

Shortly after and without much knowledge of all this history, the Council of Trent decreed it necessary by divine right to accuse oneself of all the sins one could remember, including the circumstances which change their type... (see DH 1707). This is another point that is questioned today and deserves some treatment here, however brief.

When Trent speaks of the "need for confession", it is superimposing a double form of language which only the Council's decrees enable one to distinguish: one the one hand confession *in general*, as a sacrament, and on the other, *the private form of confession* as it was then practised. In addition, this Council (as its decrees show) used the expression "divine right" in three or four different senses: what is expressly said in Scripture; what necessarily follows from it, and what comes from the practise of the Church or the teaching of the Fathers and Councils (21).

So, the need for "numerical and specific" confession is of divine right in a wide sense (or "secundum quid" to use the Council's language), which leaves an area for movement on the part of church authority in determining the sins that must be submitted to the penitential rite. Especially when one takes up St Paul's distinction between sin as an inner attitude (*hamartia* in St Paul's letters) or merely as an external act (*paraptoma* in the Pauline language), and, with the Apostle, the essence of sin lies more in the first element than in the second. Origen, for example, also taught the gravity of sin is measured more by *how it is rooted in the individual* than by the act itself, though this latter is more open to classification and subdivisions (22).

Because it is something deeply personal, sin (like the person) can never be completely objectivised. The scholastic classification of acts, numbers and types can help objectivise it just as much as falsifying it. And resistence to self-accusation can in some cases be the sign of a lack of genuine repentance, while in others, however complete it may seem, it doesn't stem from a real conversion and, therefore, *something essential* to the "matter" of the sacrament is lacking (we are thinking, for example, of confessions so that one can be seen receiving communion at Easter or at some feast or pilgrimage). So complex is our psychology and this is why we should be grateful that today the lack of social pressure avoids these problems, though it raises others we must address.

4.5. Mistaken views

Today we meet with at least two negative effects from all the development described above:

a) on the one hand it has distorted the image of the sacrament which ceased being *a celebration of God's unconditional forgiveness* ("omnipotence made tenderness" according to J.B. Bertrán's poem) which, for its undeserved gratuity, is what most moves us to change, as we said of the prodigal son. And it *came to be the purchase of a reticent forgiveness* by a God who was Judge rather than Father.

But God's forgiveness is something that has to be received (and celebrating it is the way of receiving it): it cannot be bought.

In this context, the gospel power of "retaining" sins (John 20, 23) "leaves" the church community (where it was in the primitive church) and becomes *a personal power* of the priest. This was

defended because penance is a "judgement"; but forgetting that (as L.A.Schökel explained in his classes) judgement should be understood according to the biblical meaning of the term (*rib* in Hebrew) and not the juridical Roman meaning. This means: it is a judgement in which God is always right *to forgive,* and not a lawsuit on the penitent's merits or lack of them (23).

b) Another negative effect which has become general is the mechanical repetition of confession "to receive more grace". In the end this should face a crisis because it has replaced the joy given as a present by the boring routine of sterile repetition. Trent taught subtly that internal sins "sometimes harm the soul more seriously and are more dangerous than those committed openly" (DH 1680): but the "sometimes" was forgotten and confession became a sort of conversation which could analyse, guide or console the penitent, but it was not really a sacramental celebration of God's forgiveness (24).

This crisis, brought on by routine, a mistaken view of self-accusation and the minute obsession with sexual accusations (when social sins remain so hugely vague) was leading to a wider crisis of the sacrament as a whole, similar to that which took place in the first centuries when the current form of celebration was beginning to appear.

For what makes sexuality the habitual matter for confession, after Trent there was a clear move away from the teaching of classic morality when it was explained that, for a mortal sin, there was needed "objectively serious matter, full awareness in the mind and full consent in freedom". In the case of sexuality it was taken for granted that the matter was always objectively serious, and full knowledge and consent was supposed in every Christian, just as bravery is supposed in a soldier... This was the cause of a thousand torments and scruples which have provoked the present reaction which, as often happens in historical processes, has gone to the other extreme.

It will only be possible to escape from this crisis if the church authority ceases being afraid and allows experiments and a search for formulas which combine both *the celebration of God's Mercy and the need not to abuse that mercy.* If creativity is hindered and the crisis not overcome, the situation will be serious for the whole church community: for the attempt to live as a Christian, without a clear awareness of being forgiven and nothing more than that, ends by encouraging both hypocrisy and a lax conscience.

4.6. Conclusion

We have already said there is no more room and that this sacrament would need much more. But we should recall something that was said in the Introduction: in the matter of the sacraments in years past one found too often the argument which was called "theological prescription": if during centuries it has been done like this without protest, it is a sign that this is the will of Jesus Christ. But as Karl Rahner declared years ago, there are several points on which this argument cannot be defended (25): silence can sometimes be a reply but at other times it only means that the question has not been asked.

What is important now is to underline the need to work hard so that the sacrament of reconciliation recovers and shows clearly two things: that *forgiveness is a gratuitous gift from God and not something "earned" by humans. And that the communal dimension of sin and forgiveness should be much more emphasised.*

We are never permitted to forget what catholic tradition has always emphasised to the scandal of all fundamentalists: malitia non aprehensa non contrahitur (malice not conceived cannot be imputed). A personal fault... can only be committed consciously.

(K. Rahner, Writings... III, 231)

5. THE METAPHOR OF THE HANDS

In a poem already mentioned J. Bautista Bertrán says: "priestly hands / what call has changed you / what force has transfigured you ?"...

In truth: the sacrament of orders can be called the sacrament of the hands in two senses: the hands are laid on the candidate (and this for most of classical theology was "the matter" of the sacrament); but also the hands of the candidate are anointed.

The imposition of hands is *a symbol of being sent*, of a mission entrusted (26). The anointing of the hands makes the mission more specific: hands work, present, transmit, sometimes soothe and accompany others (the hand on the shoulder, or the child or sick person led by the hand). Hands which a poem of J.L. Blanco Vega asks the Lord to change into "a constructive tool, to cure the fever to possess, and to open up for the good of my brothers".

The priest is thus sent to create and support a community of sons and brothers, to be responsible for the faith and charity of these men and women. The priesthood is therefore a "*church* ministry" (27).

Therefore theology should avoid both the word priest, as well as its definition as "another Christ" (*alter Christus*). The first in obedience to the New Testament which never describes ministers of the Church as priests but seeks to describe them more in lay names (supervisors, carers, those sent...). And this deliberately: as an expression of the basic Christian truth, that "there is only one mediator or bridge (pontiff) between men and God". Although the word priest could have a valid meaning, derived and occasional, its primary presence and overwhelming daily use hides and denies both the *uniqueness of Christ's priesthood* and the sharing in this priesthood *of the whole people of God*. This is very serious.

As for the second expression, "alter Christus", it gives to the priesthood the dignity of the Risen One without making it pass through Jesus's renunciation of his divine dignity as expressed in the well-known hymn in the Letter to the Philippians (2,6ff). In the Old Testament the anointing of kings was done to pass on a power, while in the New Testament it is for service (in this context the expression "another Jesus" would be more correct): "I am among you as one who serves" Jesus had said. But we note that already in the Old Testament power was given to "have pity on the poor and feeble, and save the lives of those in need;.. Redeem their lives from exploitation and outrage" (Psalm 72). Believers and all people learnt from experience the hard lesson that the powers of this world are not

in fact to break the exploiter; nor even religious powers: for some times they are appointed by the former, and at others have to come to terms with it...

The hasty identification of the priest as "another Christ" has been the source of an insurmountable ecclesiastical clericalism and an idea of the ministry as a source of privileges.

Nor is the priesthood a "ministry of cult" or, at any rate, it is a ministry of *the only spiritual cult recognised in the New Testament* and which is the offering of one's own life. Its mission is better defined with simple words such a "pastor" o "curate" which comes from "care": love as the creative service in a community. In marriage union leads to mutual service: here service to the community leads to deep union with it.

In this context celibacy in the ministry can have an undeniable meaning and symbolic richness; but it cannot be imposed denying communities the much more basic right to the Eucharist. Further, those who insist on its imposition do not understand the terrible degrees of loneliness some ministers have to undergo in certain situations. This, if it doesn't degenerate into unfaithfulness, can be perverted through compensations of careerism. And it is hard to know which of the deformations is worse: it seems almost sacrilegious that in some places an "ecclesiastical career" is still spoken of.

In this context, the undeniable respect many ordinary people are wont to have for the priest should not be seen as expressing a higher "dignity" (because both have no more dignity then the sublime one of being God's children). " However much a man is worth, he will never have a higher value than that of being God's son" we might say in parody of Mairena de A. Machado. This respect stems, or should stem, from an understanding gratitude towards him who doesn't want to be lord but servant.

> There is no space to deal here with the episcopal dimension of this sacrament. Vatican II taught with some originality that episcopal consecration was a sacrament. It seems clear that, with this, the Council did not want to add another sacrament to the list of seven, but rather complete the theology of the sacrament of orders: this holds that in the Church there is one ministry which is the "apostolate" (etymologically: *the sending*) (28). And it is significant that, while the consecration of a bishop has a sacramental character, the "coronation" of the pope doesn't: *the bishop receives his mission from the sacrament and not from the pope*; and he, though head of the apostolic college, is one bishop more (just as Peter was one apostle more): "bishop of Rome, but not of Cologne or Breslau" (29). It is from this we should understand his ministry which Vatican II (following Trent on this) marked as "announcing the Gospel as one of its principal tasks" (LG 25). One wonders why, in naming bishops, the search is mainly for doctors in canon law...

But if Holy Orders is a sacrament of mission and being sent with the main responsibility of announcing the Gospel, it must be added that, in the heart of Christianity, the mission includes a very serious duty well expressed by St Paul: on the one hand those sent carry their treasure in "earthenware jars" 2 Cor 4, 7). And even more serious: the one sent has to announce the madness and scandal of a "crucified Messiah" (1 Cor 1, 23). In having to announce a scandal, there is a great danger in confusing this "primary scandal" with other scandals nothing to do with it and which only come through the weakness of their carriers. To confuse, as Berdiaeff put it, "the dignity of Christianity with the indignity of Christians". Or as the present pope has developed it more carefully in one of his best books:

> *"The primary indefeasible scandal… often encountered throughout history through the secondary scandal of the preachers of the faith, is not an essential element of Christianity but*

readily allows itself to coincide with it, and is glad to take on the stance of martyrdom, when in reality, it is just a victim of its own narrow-mindedness"...

And Ratzinger goes on to offer the following examples that are worthy of reflection:

A secondary scandal of its own making and therefore, it is wrong , under the pretext of defending God's rights, to only defend a particular social situation and the positions of power that have been conquered within it. A secondary scandal of its own making and therefore it is wrong, under the pretext of protecting the invariability of the faith to only defend one's own outdated methods, and not the very faith that existed for so long in various forms… the form that was created one day with the justified intention of being modern in its time, but which has now become stale and so cannot assert any claim of eternity. A secondary scandal of its own making and therefore, it is also wrong, under the pretext of asserting the totality of the truth, to perpetuate the writing of lines in school that were imposed at one time, but that are now in need of revision and a new approach, to meet the true requirements of these formative years. Anyone who looks back at the history of the Church will find many secondary scandals like these: not all the "non possumus" aspects that were valiantly upheld were borne because of the unalterable limits of the truth; many of them were only one aspect of the very will that was precisely opposed to the call of God."

But the danger is that this secondary scandal time and again becomes identified with the primary one, thus making it inaccessible, hiding the genuinely Christian requirements and their seriousness behind the pretensions of their messengers (30).

To these strong words we can add another secondary scandal which directly affects this sacrament and deeply contradicts God's will: *to confer a bishopric as a form of promotion and personal dignity.* As happens for example with the episcopal consecration of members of the Roman Curia ("sending" them hypocritically to a church that doesn't exist), but in reality to put them at the same level of the universal episcopate over which they assume in the name of the pope a dignity they don't have.

6. THE METAPHOR OF THE KISS

When it is not a mere rite of greeting or farewell, the kiss is the *expression of union in the full sense*: between lovers or between fathers and sons. English is graphic in its ambiguity when people sometimes say: "I will smother you with kisses". There is also some truth in the popular custom, on coming out from a wedding ceremony, to shout "Let them kiss". Beyond a possible erotic intention, one can see the desire that the unconditional "yes" the couple have just exchanged be made visible in a symbolic manner.

This is why we chose the metaphor of a kiss to describe marriage, the sacrament of union to which all love aspires and which reflects the implicit or explicit desire of every human being for full union with God. We should be more aware that the elevation of marriage to a sacrament supposes considerable boldness because:

a) Speaking vertically it ties in with the typical boldness of biblical tradition (alone in so far as I

know in the whole religious spectrum of humanity) in using married love as *an expression of the relationship between God and his people and the whole human race.* Without being unaware of the enormous failures and even offenses that a marriage relationship sometimes brings with it; but converting them rather into a token of the stubbornness of God's love, forgiving and faithful (31). Let us just recall the words of the third Isaiah: "Like a young man marrying a virgin, so will he who createdt you wed you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will you God rejoice in you (Isaiah 62, 5). This unheard of faith is what enabled the Song of Songs (singer of singers according to the semitic form of the superlative), a simple erotic poem like hundreds of others in human literature, to be reread (without losing its first meaning) as a parable of the possible relationship of the human being with God.

b) Speaking horizontally, constituting marriage a sacrament implies a transformation of human sexuality in order to get the best possible out of it; *the transition from the pleasure of possession to the pleasure of gift,* and the conversion of the love which tends to be "possession" into the call to a love as mutual service. The sinful patriarchal nature of our society (more clearly: male chauvinism) has often prevented this from being seen in all clarity.

It is worth adding that, seen in this light, it is clear that marriage is not for "every Tom, Dick and Harry", nor much less. It is a project to convert the deep human experience of "flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones" (Genesis 2, 23) into the sign (sacrament) of the alliance and love of God where, once again, as in the Eucharist, the very depths of human experience are raised to the divine. It is a utopian goal (as so many others in Christian life) because of the characteristics of the Love it aims to symbolize: a total and irrevocable gift. To the extent that perhaps the Church should give more space even within itself to the purely civil wedding or, at least to what Eastern Christians call the "discipline of mercy", when through juvenile immaturity and local flippancy, things don't work out well. And this to preserve the seriousness of getting married "within the Church" and prevent it from becoming a mere marriage within a church because it is more beautiful, has better music or more room... To get married within the Church should lead to a different type of celebration, not less festive but more profound: and if something is opposed to getting married "within" the Church, it is not a civil marriage but a "Harrods type" of marriage.

c) And finally because all the changes in sexual morality have led also to a *revolutionary change in the family*: the idea of the family not as a place of refuge but as a small - or first - church (*domestic church*). The family today has become to be much valued in face of the uprooting and lack of protection all around us due to economic neoliberalism. But if we look on the family merely as a refuge, we meet with the surprising attitude of Jesus towards the family: apparently incomprehensibly detached from it. And I say apparently because it was not a question of Jesus denying or belittling it, but of extending the family circle to include all men and women. "Not to love father or mother more than Him" was for Jesus equivalent to considering that "anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother" (Luke 14, 26 & Matthew 12, 48-49).

Which means that the rich "carnal" experience of fatherhood-motherhood and of brotherhood *is not something to be closed in on itself, but to be opened up to all people* (especially the most humble): the family as a domestic church cannot be a ghetto but must remain open to the impossible demand of being a universal church: the immense family of all the men, women, sons and daughters of God.

Marriage can be compared to the alliance between Christ and the Church but, in addition, it helps the Church itself... in its historic dimension... give witness to the fact that Christ has definitively wedded humanity.

(K. Rahner, Church and sacraments)

7. THE METAPHOR OF THE NIGHT

Vatican II, partly to avoid the accusation the Church was presenting a Christianity highly centered on death, changed the name of "extreme unction" to the "anointing *of the sick*". Even appreciating that then the objection could have carried weight, I am now convinced that today it doesn't, and that the true meaning of anointing has much to do with one of the most serious moments (less obvious today because of modern medicine) of human life: death and the importance of facing it realistically. It is good to change the colour black for purple, but this does not mean forgetting the blackness of death, but a change in its meaning.

So, although we preserve the name anointing of the sick, we need to distinguish between two types of illness: that which is an accident or passing problem, and that which is a threat or warning, through which one can see the end of life, and all that this end means for the sick person and those who love him or her. Anointing refers only to this second type of illness: whether or not it is the last anointing ("*extreme* unction"). And though the arrival of death can be postponed by the body or medicine, what should not be postponed is facing it realistically.

The hour of farewell brings home a fundamental observation: life is not mine, it is a gift; and what have I done with this gift ? But this question is not just a matter of what I have achieved. The Christian reply is that the meaning of this gift is surrender or submission in trust. If life, in its provisional and precarious nature, is a gift from Love, the *trusting surrender to this Love changes the meaning of death* and allows one to see it not as a leap into nothing, but as a departure for a better and fuller life. With all the worries and pains of birth, but also with all its promises and hopes.

The anointing finds its meaning here: it doesn't intend to substitute medicine in some magical manner, to see if the health of the sick person returns (32), but to prepare and encourage to die as a Christian, just as confirmation encourages living as a Christian. The classic ritual calls for the anointing of all the senses of the sick person, praying that "though this anointing the Lord will forgive your sins" (of sight, hearing...). This vision is somewhat narrow, because it is evident that, for the leap into the beyond, we need the merciful welcome of the All Powerful "who exercises his power in forgiving and having mercy" (as catholic liturgy prays so magnificently).

But this view remains incomplete since the anointing has a much wider meaning: it is a question of facilitating the most risky step a human being has to take. It means trying to overcome and change the tacit fear of death that our culture denies and suppresses and which a person has to suffer in silence, feeling guilty and not daring to confess it.

One can continue calling the anointing extreme, but not because it points to a final end but rather to a

final beginning, not because it is linked to death but because it converts this into resurrection and changes the final farewell into a “see you” in the Father’s arms.

In this way, all that death holds of a dark night, and its anticipation in old age, in the loss of strength and quality of life, in the hundreds of shocks and illnesses that precede it, in the inexorable passage of time showing itself in decadence and exhaustion, all this can paradoxically be sung in one of the most beautiful verses in Spanish poetry: that in which the believer, convinced of walking in the night “which was awaiting me / which I knew well / partly where no one appeared”, dares to cry out in faith: “Oh night which you guide! - Oh lovable night, more than the dawn - On night which you join - Lover with the loved one - the loved one transformed into the Lover”.

In truth: that death has completely changed its meaning is something that deserves to be celebrated and symbolized. “The night is almost over, it will be daylight soon” (Romans, 13, 12).

Christ was not a priest but a layman. Considered from the point of view of the Jews, he didn’t possess any legal ministry.

(J. Ratzinger, El nuevo pueblo de Dios)

CONCLUSION: GRATUITY AND STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

> Water, bread, wine, oil, the embrace, the forgiving, the night... These are all realities of our daily life which are both trivial yet capable of carrying such deep a meaning as the God of Jesus Christ can give himself and make himself present through them. Thus we can say of each of these realities converted into symbols what St Paul said of human love: "this is an enormous mystery" (Ephesians 5, 32).

There is no room for thousands of more technical questions about sacramental theology. The purpose of these pages was only to purify all the merely ritual or magical ideas so that believers can experience of the sacraments in a richer way. But to facilitate such an experience today would require greater creativity and a series of reforms that church authority is frightened to tackle, we don't know whether because it continues to believe that people are for the sacraments and not the reverse, or because it confuses, as Ratzinger said, lazy routine with God's will. In either case, a more "sacramental" approach to the spirituality of the sacraments will help to support better the life of a believer with regard to the double basic Christian experience: the *experience of gratuity which comes from the gift of divine sonship, and the deep conviction of the need for justice and equality among people which responds to our fraternal condition.*

With a renewed sacramentalism what we said about the Church in an earlier booklet in this same collection (121) could become more visible: the Church is not an institution for ritual (or "synagogue"), but *a community which God sends to serve in love human history* with faith in Jesus Christ and the proclamation of his gospel. So neither are the sacraments mere ritual acts separated from life, but signs that in the midst of this hard history it is possible to celebrate the joys and hopes or share the anxieties and pains of people's journey through time.

NOTES

1. I don't remember from where I copied this text with its reference to J. Ratzinger, *Introducción al cristianismo,* p. 118. The reference is not exact: I don't know if I was mistaken in copying it or if the error came from my source.

2. With some irony we can add that a classic ritual of old fashioned piety was an "Our Father to St Anthony" to find something lost.

3. The discipline of mystery is an expression from ancient Christianity that D. Bonhoeffer recovered during the Nazi persecution: it seeks to protect the meaning of the religious reserving it to believers so that it avoids becoming trivial (for example, with commercial connections).

4. Joan Chitister, *La Regla de San Benito,* p. 153.

5. This has been adopted well by the world of publicity which converts an infinity of objects of little importance into promises of something greater. Without it now mattering if these promises are almost always deceiving.

6. See K. Rahner, *Escritos de teología,* IV, pp. 288 and 289.

7. It can be good to remember that the early professions of faith (that today we call "credos") were called "symbols" in the past: it was a way of showing that the credos, rather than looking inwards, *pointed to* "something beyond" themselves. This is why St Thomas was able to write that the act of faith did not end in a declaration (as many catholics seem to believe today) but in a Reality.

8. I cannot avoid recalling the expression "this is life", heard from friends and said by myself coming out from a good plunge in some swimming pool on a hot day. "This is life" is what baptism also wishes to tell us.

9. See chapter 6 of the Letter to the Romans, especially verse 4.

10. "Bound" is the translation Juan Mateos gives to the expression to baptise "in the name of", so as not to lose the dense meaning on the word name, in Semitic language.

11. This text from Matthew clears up a logical discussion that took place in the early church on whether one should baptise in the name of Jesus Christ or in the name of God (Trinity) revealed in Jesus Christ.

12. Note that this is affirmed by the Letter after saying, in the previous verse, that we have been "*buried*" in Christ.

13. "Is the Eucharist as sacrifice ?", in *Concilium* 24 (1967). A few lines before he had written: "christian worship cannot consist in offering its own gifts because, from its very nature, it is the acceptance of Christ's saving work, offered to us one time."

14. The deep human affinity of bread and wine already appears in Genesis when it explains that Melchizidek offered Abraham "bread and wine" as an expression of welcome and blessing on return from a battle (Genesis 14, 18). The author of the Letter to the Hebrews did not overlook this detail, when speaking about the unity of Christ's priesthood (Hebrews 7, 1ff).

15. I use this word in a deliberately allusive and imprecise sense. If it is a transubstantiation or a "transubstantivation" as Zubiri taught, is a highly technical question we are not concerned with here. Though we can show that the modern mentality no longer understands the old distinction between substance and accidents: we understand that the substance is no more than the combination of qualities (colour, taste, weight, extension and, in any case, the chemical componants.

16. The priesthood can do this in the eastern churches; and in the catholic church only with episcopal

delegation.

17. Also in baptism there can be an anointing, but it is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament.

18. It is important to emphasize it is not Peter who kills them or condemns them to death, but that "when he heard this Ananias fell down dead."

19. Let us remember she will end up by being called "the chaste prostitute".

20. P. Johnson quotes an surprising thesis of St Ambrosius based in Origen to explain that, in the exceptional case of a private confession, the confessors could not absolve but only pray and give advice. (*Historia del cristianismo*, p. 310). But he doesn't give any reference to sources.

21. See the repeated expressions: "the Church always understood" or "from this one makes common cause", "having always been recommended by the most holy and ancient fathers (DH 1679-83), phrases which are not always exact from an historical point of view. See what we say further on in note 28.

22. For all this part I refer to Ricardo Franco: *La confesión en el Concilio de Trento: exégesis e interpretación.* In: "El sacramento de la penitencia. XXX semana española de teología", Madrid 1972. Pp. 303-316.

23. The expression "to give absolution" (or "I absolve you") seem in this context to be little in accord with the gospels: since it converts the celebration into a "granting" of forgiveness. Jesus never said "I forgive you your sins" (and he was the only one who could have said it) but God forgives you (with the classic Hebrew passive used to refer to God).

24. Joking, but not without a pinch of truth, I have recounted many times that the crisis in the sacrament of confession began on the day when a nun went to confession and accused herself as follows: "I accuse myself of the same I accused myself of last week and the same I will accuse myself of next week"...

25. See in *Sacramentum Mundi* the word "magisterio".

26. In confirmation there is also an initial imposition of hands because, in reality, every christian is someone sent. This sending is what is strengthened and almost made absolute in holy orders.

27. I refer to my book: *Hombres de la Comunidad. Apuntes sobre el ministerio ecclesial*. For a time I had the intention of completing these notes with a comparative study of the decree of Trent and the agreed text of the christian churches known as the Document of Lima. But I now doubt if this will ever be possible.

28. In line with what we said in note 21 about the lack of historical information on Trent, it is known how Vatican II modified a Tridentine canon which spoke of "a hierarchy instituted by divine disposition which consists of bishops priests and deacons" (DH 1776); and spoke of "an ecclesiastical ministry of divine institution exercised in different categories by those who, from long ago, were called bishops, priests and deacons" (LG 28). What is of divine right is the ecclesiastical ministry and not its venerable subsequent configuration.

29. DH 3113. This was declared by the German bishops in a letter addressed to Chancellor Bismark, after Vatican I, and approved by Pius IX.

30. *El nuevo pueblo de Dios*, pp. 351-352. My underlining.

31. Read the relevant chapters of Jeremiah 2, Hosea 2 or Ezekiel 16.

32. The old catechism did not succeed in renouncing this position and explained that extreme unction was also "to give health to the body if convenient".

SOME INDICATIONS FOR GROUP SHARING

This booklet, as the author says, does not pretend to be a treaty on the sacraments, but an introduction... It aims to recover fundamental and forgotten points of theological tradition, taking a step forward. The ecclesiology of Vatican II is the basis for each of its propositions.

The reader should ask if he or she has walked this path with confidence and what ways open up to reanimate sacramental life.

1. Our human condition and the very nature of the symbolic imply a whole range of rites, and a "symbolic universe" around each symbol. The rites should not degenerate into routine but help to enter into the very heart of each symbol, strengthening its expression and capacity for meaning.

If not, as Gérard Fourez says, the sacraments are "imprisoned" and their liberating power has difficulty in showing itself in our technical society, allergic to rites and symbolic language.

To help free us let us ask ourselves:

- What signs carry an meaningful message for modern man?

- How do you think they should be lived to free them from imprisonment, and make them capable of expressing the conflicts, contradictions and hopes of individual and collective existence?

- Do you have any experience of the symbols being a privileged place where God shows himself? Can you record them and share them?

2. Such good and unbelievable news as our divine sonship is something that deserves to be celebrated, and this celebration should be expressed bodily and materially. Baptism makes us into a community of brothers and sisters or, as is often said, marks our "entry into the Church". So:

- Can we see this in our normal celebrations of baptism?

- How do you think the community of those who know they are sons and daughters of God should welcome, celebrate and help the parents to live this faith experience?

- What should be improved in our celebrations of baptism ? Do you think the suggestions made in the booklet can change our mentality and make us more brothers and sisters?

3. To break the bread is equivalent to sharing human need. And to pass on the cup is equivalent to communicating joy. This double gesture which is deeply human and symbolizes so well the offered life of Jesus, becomes the effective symbol - sacrament - of his real presence among his own.

- What does “sharing” human need suggest to you?

- Do you believe the bread and wine are “transubstantiated” into what is the mysterious presence of God among us?

- Do you experience this in your ordinary participation in the Eucharist?

4. The booklet mentions five everyday metaphors: that of endorsing the faith, of embracing the one who returns, of the hands, of the kiss, of the night... They are accurate and real expressions of the “sacramentality of life” and uncover for us the depth of the sacraments: Confirmation, Forgiveness, Service to the Community, Marriage as sacrament of the union sought by all love, and the surrender in trust which can change the meaning of Death.

- We could reflect on each of the metaphors suggested to enter into their meaning and share the Christian way of celebrating them by transcending the joys and fears, the pleasures and shadows of our human existence.

- What has this booklet meant to you in general? How has your view of the sacraments changed?