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FROM THE SIGN TO THE MYSTERY: DEVELOPING A FRUITFUL LITURGICAL CATECHESIS

"... what we have loved,
Others will love,
and we will teach them how"
(William Wordsworth)¹

1. The Touchstone

The touchstone for how well catechesis is being carried out will always be liturgical catechesis – how faithfully our catechesis draws from and feeds into the liturgy and the sacraments; and, above all, the Eucharist. "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the font from which all her power flows."² The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, commenting on this sentence from the Second Vatican Council, draws the conclusion: "It is therefore the privileged place for catechizing the People of God."³

Strikingly, the *Catechism* also describes the Eucharist as "the sum and summary of our faith"⁴ and uses an image from St Irenaeus to insist on how catechesis in the Church must always take its bearings from this point: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."⁵ Irenaeus' image is redolent with meaning, evoking the musi-

¹ W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind. An autobiographical Poem*, London: Edward Moxon, 1850, 371.

² Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (hereafter SC) 2.

³ "Ea locus est praecipuus catechesis populi Dei." CCC 1074. The *editio typica* of the *Catholicus Catholicae Ecclesiae* (hereafter CCC) was published on 15 August 1997 (English revised edition, London: Burns & Oates, 1999).

⁴ CCC 1327.

⁵ "Nostra autem consonans est sententia Eucharistiae, et Eucharistia rursus confirmat sententiam nostrum." St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 4, 18, 5: PG 7/1, 1028. *Consonans* indicates a sounding together, a harmonizing.

cal concept of a catechesis that harmonizes the faith through a careful attentiveness to its Eucharistic structure and content.

If we turn to John Paul II's classic Exhortation on catechesis, *Catechesi tradendae*, we can see there that an insistence on the presentation of the content of the faith in its integrity is also directly associated with the liturgy. He wrote:

"In order that the sacrificial offering of his or her faith (cf Phil. 2,17) should be perfect, the person who becomes a disciple of Christ has the right to receive 'the word of faith' (Rom 10,8) not in mutilated, falsified or diminished form but whole and entire, in all its rigor and vigor. Unfaithfulness on some point to the integrity of the message means a dangerous weakening of catechesis and putting at risk the results that Christ and the ecclesial community have a right to expect from it."⁶

We can notice in this interesting passage that the key rationale for providing the content of the faith "whole and entire" is because the liturgical reach of the saving Gospel into the life of the members of the Christian community is otherwise put at risk. Catechesis is given "in all its rigor and vigor" so that the *sacrificial offering* of one's faith can be made perfectly. That phrase immediately reminds us, of course, of the central liturgical act of the Christian life in the Eucharist. Catechesis is given "whole and entire", then, so that one can participate fruitfully as a member of Christ's Body in the Eucharist.

The inseparable connection between that which is believed and proclaimed on the one hand and celebrated on the other is expressed in the famous Latin tag, *lex orandi, lex credendi*:⁷ the law of prayer is the law of belief. We can understand this both as an affirmation that the liturgy, in its prayers and expressions, holds and transmits the richness of the precious deposit of the Church's faith,⁸ and also that what is celebrated in the liturgy is that which is proclaimed in the Creed.

The content is one and the same: the *mystery of Christ*. It is this mystery – and in particular, "the Paschal mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of salvation"⁹ "that the Church proclaims" and that she "celebrates in her liturgy"¹⁰. There is one single mystery, then, that is both proclaimed and celebrated. It is important to note that this does not mean that we invite a confusion between liturgy and catechesis. On the contrary: each has its own "form" of transmission of the one mystery. In fact, each dimension of the Christian life has its own form

⁶ St John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi tradendae* (hereafter CT) 30.

⁷ See CCC 1124.

⁸ See, for example, Josef A. Jungmann, "The Pastoral Idea in the History of the Liturgy", *Worship* 30, no.10 (November 1956), 608-622.

⁹ CCC 1067.

¹⁰ CCC 1068.

of transmission of the one mystery of Christ: there is a doctrinal form, a liturgical form, a prayerful form, and the form of love – the transmission of the Christian faith in life. Catechesis provides us with a unique and invaluable form of transmission: faithfully acknowledging and taking into account the other forms of transmission, it has the role of providing an organic, unified and systematic articulation of the whole faith; catechesis is the school of the transmission of the mysteries of the faith *as a whole* in this sense. Through its work of proclamation, announcement and explanation, it introduces each of the forms, serves each, allowing each its own character without confusing itself with any of the forms. Catechesis “echoes” the whole.

The catechetical work of the Church, then, does not proceed in isolation from any of the dimensions of the Church’s life and activity. But it is especially closely united to the sacred liturgy of the Church. The most immediate context for catechesis is, then, the liturgy itself – this is the sacred arena in which sacramental grace is given and the work of salvation is communicated. This is where the Blessed Trinity acts for our salvation.¹¹

2. The Central Focus: A Liturgical Anthropology

Given that liturgical and sacramental catechesis is so crucial to the overall work of catechesis, how should we undertake this task? The central question for a liturgical catechesis is, as John Paul II indicated, that of *liturgical fruitfulness*. The catechesis we give will want to inspire in others a recognition of what Peter Chrysologus wrote: “O immense dignity of the Christian’s priesthood! Man has become both victim and priest for himself! He does not seek that which he should immolate outside himself, but bears his offering with and in his own person!”¹² Liturgical catechesis will be given in such a way that the one who receives it can clearly see and make his or her own in an intensely *personal* way the relationship between Christ’s life and offering and that of their own. The central question for a liturgical catechesis, then, must be how to accomplish this anthropological fruitfulness. It is the point to which Chenu drew attention in his article of 1974, “Pour une Anthropologie Sacramentelle”, “Les deux mots ‘anthropo-

¹¹ Cf. “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of men.” (CT 23).

¹² *Discorso* 108, PL 52, 499-500.

logie’ et ‘sacramentelle’ sont indissociables l’un de l’autre non seulement au plan du methods – ce serait déjà précieux – mais constatativement [...] la sacramentalité se réfère à l’être humain.”¹³ This must still be our focus. We are aiming to provide a convincing and compelling *liturgical anthropology* as central to our catechesis.¹⁴

Peter Chrysologus went on to say, by way of further explanation and encouragement, “Be, O man, both sacrifice and priest [...] make your heart an altar.”¹⁵ It is an invitation and exhortation that we find taken up in *The Temple*, the collection of poems by the Anglican divine, George Herbert.¹⁶ Herbert’s poems draw links between the simple parish church in which he served and the liturgies that took place there, and the “temple” of the human person, each liturgical or architectural feature mirroring aspects of a Christian anthropology. Thus he aligns liturgy, building and person in poems such as *The Church Porch*, *Baptism*, *The Altar*, *The Sacrifice*, *The Church-floore* and *Church Music*. His poem, *The Altar*, is typical of the collection:

A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears,
Made of a heart and cemented with tears;
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workman’s tool hath touch’d the same.
A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow’r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame

¹³ Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., “Pour une Anthropologie Sacramentelle”, *La Maison-Dieu*, 199, 1974, 85-100, at 87.

¹⁴ For the importance of developing such an anthropology, from the perspective of Orthodox ethical decision-making, see H. Tristram Engelhardt, “Sin and Bioethics: Why a Liturgical Anthropology is Foundational”, *Christian Ethics*, 11 (2005) 221-239, and “Orthodox Christian Bioethics: Some Foundational Differences from Western Christian Bioethics”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* (November 2011) vol. 24 no. 4, 487-499. For an earlier relevant discussion see also G. Wainwright, “Eucharist and/as Ethics”, *Worship* 62 (1988) 123-138.

¹⁵ *Discorso* 108, PL 52, 499-500.

¹⁶ *The Works of George Herbert in Verse and Prose*, London: George Routledge and Co, 1854. For a bibliography on Herbert, both literary and historical, and for details of the parish church, see www.GeorgeHerbert.org.uk

To praise thy name.
That if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
Oh, let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctify this ALTAR to be thine.

Christ is the High Priest, the *leitourgos*,¹⁷ after whose Image all priesthood and sacrifices are made. Our altar, sacrifice and offering in life are an overflow from that one true Self-offering that was made once and for all. Herbert prays that the Lord's "blessed sacrifice" may be his also, that it would sanctify the altar of his heart, broken and stony and needing the grace only God can provide to "cut" and "frame" it. In asking for a catechetical focus to provide a convincing liturgical anthropology, then, we are not arguing for an anthropocentricity in catechesis: rather, we are seeking a liturgical catechesis that is theocentric while uncovering the true nature of the person in relation to this.¹⁸

We know the challenges facing us in developing such a catechesis. In 1964, Romano Guardini wrote his famous open letter to Johannes Wagner, in which he asked how we could help people to recapture the reality of "the liturgical act", a recapturing that entails "a spiritual inwardness" and involves the whole person, "body as well as spirit [...] so that an 'epiphany' may take place".¹⁹ The "epiphany", as we have noted, will be such that it involves an awakening to the central reality of the liturgy itself and at the same time a self-awakening to the realization of one's own identity as fundamentally liturgical.

¹⁷ Cf. *Heb* 8:2.

¹⁸ Ratzinger laments anthropocentrism as the catechetical "order of the day" in his "Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Optimism of the Redeemed", *Communio* 20, Fall 1993, 471. The *General Directory for Catechesis* speaks of the need for a "double fidelity" in catechesis: fidelity to God and fidelity to man (*GDC* 145, 149). Commenting on this "double fidelity", Caroline Farey notes that "Fidelity to God is commonly understood as fidelity to the Christian message while fidelity to man is commonly seen to be achieved by the use of methodologies attuned to the concrete personal circumstances of those being catechized. Although this understanding of the phrase is not false it can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on one's philosophy of education, and one's understanding of Christology and anthropology. In fact, of course, fidelity to man is achieved *through* fidelity to the Son of God incarnate because God's revelation in Christ is for man's sake, 'it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly become clear' (*Gaudium et spes* 22)." (*A Metaphysical Investigation of the Anthropological Implications of the Phrase: "Ipse enim, Filius Dei, incarnatione sua cum omni homine quodammodo se univit"*, Roma: Lateran, 2008, 36-37).

¹⁹ "A Letter from Romano Guardini", *Herder Correspondence*, August 1964, 237-238

3. A Pedagogy of Steps

Such an "awakening" suggests a well-known biblical story from the Book of Genesis, that of Jacob's dream of a ladder reaching from heaven to earth, after which he woke to the realization, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it."²⁰ This account has been widely used in the Tradition of the Church, in fact, to discuss the life of prayer and, by extension, the central prayer of the Church, the liturgy.²¹ The story beautifully encapsulates the main themes that are of interest to us in this question of how to develop catechesis that draws its life from the liturgy. Let us remind ourselves of the passage:

Jacob left Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, »I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you.« Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, »Surely the LORD is in this place; and I did not know it.« And he was afraid, and said, How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

This passage helps us to focus upon three goals for our liturgical catechesis, bearing in mind this attentiveness to the explicit development of a liturgical anthropology.

In the first instance, as the place of divine Presence, we seek to inculcate a visionary experience of the liturgy and sacraments, a realization that "the LORD

²⁰ *Gen* 28:16. For a short discussion of this passage, see Petroc Willey, "Liturgical Catechesis: Living on Jacob's Ladder", *The Catechetical Review* Vol. 1.4, October 2016.

²¹ The Catechism refers us to one of these treatments, to Guigo the Carthusian's *Scala claustralium*, which is an extended meditation upon Jacob's ladder (see CCC 2654). Among more modern writers in the field of spirituality, the image of Jacob's ladder is especially prominent in the work of Francis de Sales. "It appears in one form or another and casts its light on all of his various writings." (Alexander T. Pocetto, O.S.F.S., "The Image of Jacob's Ladder in the Writings of St. Francis de Sales", <http://web1.desales.edu/assets/salesian/PDF/PocettoJacobsLadder.pdf>).

is in this place". In the second instance, as the place of God's encounter with us *par excellence*, we seek to foster the understanding that the liturgy centrally concerns God's personal dialogue with us, that He stands "above us" to speak with us in deeds and words. Finally, we foster an understanding of the truth that the lives of those who have been thus encountered by the Lord in the liturgy manifest in their lives the fruits of His faithfulness, of His continued transforming presence, enshrined in the liturgy, accompanying us throughout life: "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you."

The goals of suffusing our liturgical catechesis with a sense of *vision*, developing an awareness of God's ceaseless *dialogue and encounter* with us, and providing a call to a *sacrificial offering* of ourselves grounded in His faithfulness to us, require an accompanying pedagogy to be considered. It is a pedagogy again suggested by this image of the ladder in Jacob's dream. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Church's most recent authoritative guide to her perennial pedagogy for catechesis,²² proposes the pedagogy for a liturgical catechesis in the following way: "from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the 'sacraments' to the 'mysteries'."²³

The Catechism here helpfully presents the essence of a liturgical catechesis as consisting in three related and ascending steps, or stages: from the visible to the invisible; from the sign to the thing signified, and from the sacraments to the mysteries. A catechesis "ascending the ladder" in this fashion will allow us to live from the "voice of the Lord" whom we encounter in the liturgy and to predicate our lives and sacrificial offering of ourselves on His faithful accompaniment.

²² Thus, the Apostolic Letter, *Fidei Depositum*, describes the Catechism as a "sure and authentic reference text for teaching catholic doctrine", for "docenda doctrina catholica", and means us to understand by this the normative nature of the Catechism for "teaching" in terms of both its content and of its pedagogy. Eugene Kevane demonstrates that, in writers such as Cicero and Quintilian, "doctrina" originally covered not only the content of what was taught, but also the process of teaching and handing on this content. See E.Kevane, "Translatio imperii: Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and the Classical *Paideia*", *Studia Patristica* XIV, 458. For a discussion of this with regard to the Catechism, see P. Willey, "The Catechism and the New Evangelization", in P. Grogan and K.Kim (eds), *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 209-220.

²³ CCC 1075.

The adoption of the narrative of Jacob's ladder as our core pedagogy, taken together with the conception of catechetical steps, or stages, also has three further advantages. In the first instance it is coherent with the baptismal catechumenal model, the paradigm for all catechesis, reminding us that effective catechesis is "always done in steps".²⁴ The *General Directory for Catechesis* advises us that the Church, "while ever containing in herself the fullness of the means of salvation, always operates 'by slow stages' (*Ad Gentes* 6)".²⁵

In the second place, it focuses us firmly on the necessary Christocentricity as the heart of catechesis.²⁶ Jacob's vision is fulfilled in Christ, who tells Nathaniel: "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."²⁷ Christ, then, reveals Himself to be the ladder between heaven and earth upon which the angels ascend and descend. A liturgical "catechesis of the ladder" centres on the mystery of Christ who unites heaven and earth. This point is vital in overcoming any incipient and mistaken gnostic "ascent" from the visible that sought to leave it behind for the sake of gaining the invisible. The feet of the ladder in the liturgical pedagogy must be firmly placed on the earth, in order that the head of the ladder reach securely into heaven. Christ is the *whole* ladder and all of the steps taken in the liturgical catechesis given seek to achieve their fruitfulness through the embrace of the *whole* Christ, present in *all* of the steps, and through the recognition of an authentic anthropology that unites "heaven and earth", what is "visible and invisible".²⁸

Finally, the conception of these steps, or stages, reminds us of the need to build a certain order into our catechesis, putting foundational realities in place for the sake of our participation in the "mysteries". Here we can remind ourselves of St. John Paul II's presentation of what he described as three indispensable philosophical requirements for catechesis²⁹ – and thus for any authentic liturgical catechesis, also. We can think of these requirements as certain foundational elements that need to be put in place for the reception of a full and fruit-

²⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *The General Directory for Catechesis* (hereafter *GDC*) 1997, 90; *RCIA* 6-7. Here we connect strongly with the presentation of Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, in his *Handbook of Adult Baptism: liturgy and preaching in the catechumenate* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2002).

²⁵ *GDC* 47.

²⁶ See *CT* 5; *GDC* 98-100; *CCC* 425-429.

²⁷ *Jn* 1:51.

²⁸ See *CCC* 325-327.

²⁹ See John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Fides et ratio* (hereafter *FR*), 80-82.

ful liturgical catechesis. There are broad intellectual and cultural conditions that are necessary for the fostering of faith, for while the dogmatic truths handed on in the catechetical mission are themselves strong roots from which a Catholic culture grows and thrives, this growth can only take place in a healthy soil and environment. These foundational elements are primarily philosophical and anthropological in character. To the extent to which they are lacking or inadequate, the catechesis provided on liturgy and the sacraments suffers the fate of the seed in the parable that falls on rocky soil: having no depth of earth for its roots, it withers away.³⁰

Regarding these requirements for the proclamation of the Word, John Paul first of all sees the need for what he calls a "sapiential dimension" in one's worldview – that is, the appreciation of there being an overarching purpose and meaning in life; secondly, he asks for the recovery of the conviction that the mind can arrive at knowledge of "the very being" of the objects it knows,³¹ and thirdly he argues that the communication of the faith requires a philosophy of "genuinely metaphysical range". He sums up these three requirements in the following way: "We face a great challenge [...] to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent."³² If John Paul was writing in a liturgical rather than philosophical mode at this point, he might have characterized the challenge being faced as the move from *sacramentum* to *mysterium*, and we can perhaps legitimately sum up a comparable set of requirements for a liturgical catechesis by saying that, for such a catechesis to be received, hearers need to be confident that we inhabit a universe which has *purpose* and in which there is *mystery* that can be *known* through *signs*. Such foundations are needed precisely for the sake of the exalted vision of the person and created being that needs to be supported.

³⁰ See *Mk* 4:3-8.

³¹ Significantly, while insisting on philosophical foundations, John Paul does not commit us to a particular philosophical position at this point. He refers the reader to both St Thomas' *Summa Theologica* I, 16, 1 and St Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaemeron* 3,8,1 (see *FR*, 82 n. 99). The difference between the two epistemologies would generally be considered to be the extent to which they embrace Augustine's view on Divine Illumination, subscribing to Augustine's Platonism. For an interesting challenge to the usual identification of St Bonaventure as the more Augustinian of the two, see Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011 (and note also the comments on Schumacher's view of Thomas by Bernhard Blankenhorn, O.P. in "Aquinas and Augustinian Illumination", *Nova et Vetera*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2012), 713, n. 51).

³² *FR* 83.

The lack of adequate foundations would mean that the capacity to lift one's "gaze to the heights"³³ is undermined. The roots need to strike deep in order to sustain a strong growth that can "rise to the truth of being"³⁴. The feet of the ladder need to be set securely for the sake of its stability.

4. Reaching the Goals

Let us turn, then, to the goals of our liturgical catechesis and examine how these may be pursued according to the pedagogy of steps proposed in the Catechism. In essence, the first step towards our goals consists in establishing the existence of the ladder uniting the visible and the invisible, in both the created order and between created and divine being, including the reality of God's manifestation in visible creation. The second step focuses on the concept of signs and gaining a recognition of their signification, again both in the created order (natural, human, social, and cultural) and reaching into the plan of God. In this step we introduce the notion of the divine "perspective", moving from the words, signs and symbols we employ to the Word and divine gaze that comes "from above", from that Reality in which our signs poorly participate. Only with the third step do we offer a full presentation on the divine presence and action in the liturgy and sacraments in the light of the Incarnation.

We see here another significant advantage of conceptualising liturgical catechesis as a series of steps; for it allows us to make vitally important distinctions regarding the actions of divine Being and created being in the liturgy. Just as the Church's catechesis has suffered from the *separation* of the sacraments from a wider understanding of sacramentality, so also it has suffered from the opposite tendency, to *conflate* teaching on the sacraments and on the reality of sacramental grace with a wider teaching on the "sacramental imagination" and the experience of God's gratuitous manifestations in the created order. A catechesis in steps allows us both to connect and to distinguish these aspects more clearly, so that our hearers can grasp the full import of the reality of sacramental life and grace.

³³ See *FR* 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

4.1 Understanding and Vision

The first step in a liturgical and sacramental catechesis with regard to this goal is, in the words of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, to enable people to see that visible things are "endowed with invisible realities"³⁵. We teach the art of seeing the invisible in the visible. The understanding and vision we seek to foster does not ordinarily begin with Christ's presence in the sacraments, though it will find a fitting climax in such a gaze and appreciation. It is rather God's pervasive glory manifested in the created order as a whole to which we draw attention as we seek to discern the invisible in the visible. Such a vision is in principle accessible to everyone, even though the "celestial light" "comes and goes".³⁶ Nonetheless,

We are not free
To say we see not, for the glory comes
Nightly and daily like a flowing sea.³⁷

There are two key elements we present in the catechesis for this initial stage in order to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work of preparation of the person. The first is the catechesis we give on the created world and its capacity to manifest divine glory. The second is the catechesis we provide on the human person, whom we present as a microcosm of the universe, in whom the visible and invisible orders of creation are united.³⁸ The human person, a spiritual-material composite, is a microcosm of creation, a "ladder of being" stretching up to the created heavens, and embracing the depths of the material world.³⁹ Our catechesis on the human person can show how the invisible realities of thought and will and love are made visible through the body. As a microcosm of the created world

³⁵ SC 2.

³⁶ "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, T.Hutchinson (ed), London: Oxford University Press 1936, 460, ll.4,10.

³⁷ C.H.Turner, "The Lattice at Sunrise", in V.Meynell (ed), *An Anthology of Nature Poetry*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1941, 24.

³⁸ So CCC 327. Adam Cooper explores the microcosm theme in *The Body in Saint Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁹ This is a prominent theme, of course, in John Paul's theology of the body: the human body "is capable of making visible what is invisible ... It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God" (*Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, M.Waldstein trans., Boston: Pauline Books, 2006, 203).

the human person can sum up and represent the created world in worship: when any one of us worships, the world in miniature gives praise to God. We teach the human person as a "ladder of being" within the creation.

We recall that the primary point to which John Paul II drew our attention, in considering the foundations required for the Word of God, was the need for a "sapiential dimension" to be affirmed. In other words, our first foundation is the confirmation that the universe is filled with purpose and meaning, an ordered whole and the work of Divine Wisdom. John Paul states, "I wish to reaffirm strongly the conviction that the human being can come to a unified and organic intellectual vision [...] The segmentation of knowledge, with its splintered approach to truth and consequent fragmentation, keeps people today from coming to an interior unity."⁴⁰ Our interior unity depends upon the real unity present in the order of Being itself, ultimately in the conviction that the created order is the product of Uncreated, intelligent Spirit.

St Paul, as we know, taught that God may be known from the things of the world: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made."⁴¹ We proclaim, and present the argument, therefore, that we can come to *know* the existence of the invisible, eternal God from the visible world. We also teach that visible created reality allows us to *perceive* God's "eternal power and deity" in his creation. As the psalmist sang,

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night declares knowledge.⁴²

The "glory of God" spoken of by the psalmist that is perceived in creation is not God himself in his essence, but rather his manifestation, his radiance. "Glory" is expressed by the Hebrew concept *kābôd* which in turn is translated in the Septuagint by the Greek *doxa*. This term is used in the Scriptures of God's manifestation in nature, in the human person, in salvation history and in the sanctuary.⁴³ In our catechesis, then, we speak of a knowledge of God that can be had through the visible and also a vision of the invisible God's radiance there.

⁴⁰ FR 85.

⁴¹ Rom 1:20.

⁴² Ps 19:1-2.

⁴³ For details see S.Aalen, "Glory, Honour", in C.Brown (ed), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1976, 2: 44-52.

Through these elements of our catechesis we are seeking to awaken both an awareness of the truth of God's invisible reality and also wonder at the capacity of created being to manifest the invisible. This initial step is an absolute requirement if our liturgical and sacramental catechesis is to be fruitful.⁴⁴

We can consider the memorable comment by the mystic and poet William Blake:

'What,' it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.⁴⁵

The understanding and vision we seek to offer, then, is of God in the created order, whereby the finite order discloses the divine underlying Presence. It is a vision of the sacramentality of creation as a whole, of the "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all"⁴⁶. We are ultimately seeking to provide a catechesis characterized by what the Christian mystic Thomas Traherne described as "the taste and tincture of another education"⁴⁷. In his work, Traherne speaks repeatedly of his vision of the inner nature of things "which appeared like the King's Daughter, all glorious within".

To help a person to see what is "all glorious within" is to propose a path of formation: "Every body does not see alike [...] As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers."⁴⁸ This, then, is what is needed as a first foun-

⁴⁴ As argued by Catherine Dooley, for example, in "From the Visible to the Invisible: Mystagogy in the Catechism of the Catholic Church," *The Living Light* 31, no.3 (Spring 1995), 29-35.

⁴⁵ William Blake, 'A Vision of the Last Judgement', in K.Raine (intro), *William Blake: Poems and Prophecies*, London: David Campbell Publishers 1991, 418. Even though Blake is heterodox we are given here a vivid presentation of the visible universe patterned on invisible realities. In his biography of Blake, Peter Ackroyd makes the point that in certain respects Blake comes close to a sacramental and incarnational understanding: "He was creating words as objects, intimately related to the Catholic and sacramental sense of the 'Word' and 'the Word made flesh'; it represents a universe of emblematic discourse established upon the signatures and correspondences of the material and spiritual worlds." (*Blake*, London: Vintage, 1999, 144).

⁴⁶ Eph 4:6. See the discussion in G.De Schriver, "Experiencing the sacramental character of existence", *Questions Liturgiques*, 75 (1994) 12-27, at 13-15.

⁴⁷ *Centuries*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, III, 36.

⁴⁸ "Letter to the Revd Dr Trusler, Aug. 23 1799", in David V.Erdman (ed), *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, New York: An Anchor Press Book, 1988, 702.

dational element in any liturgical and sacramental catechesis, for unless we provide this broader vision for those whom we catechize we are asking them to experience God's presence and action in the liturgy and the sacraments in a universe devoid of his glory. And this cannot be done. It leaves the Church's celebrations as isolated, strange events in an alien world, in a "flat", materialistic universe where there is no possibility of our movement beyond the material and the visible.⁴⁹ For a mind inhabiting a closed materialistic universe the repeated "showing" of the visible liturgical signs and elements produces only *ennui*, for things are not seen as opening to the invisible. In this situation, repeated teaching about the sacraments is akin to coming closer to a blind person with an object, and saying "see!" each time. The object is shown, the description is heard; but what is needed is not to repeat the showing and the word again and again but for sight to be restored. And for the restoration of sight what is needed is in the first place is the understanding that the universe is filled with the glory of God and, concurrent with this, an understanding of the human person as him or herself embracing and uniting the visible and the invisible. Only if the human person is created with the capacity for such a vision can we provide a formation to bring this out. We catechize on the two together, this anthropological catechesis complementing and completing our understanding of the order of creation. Plotinus, writing against the gnostics of his time, argued with respect to God that, "If He is absent from the Universe, He is absent from yourselves, and you can have nothing to tell about Him or about the powers that come after Him."⁵⁰ Where the universe is seen as a "flat" reality, rather than as reflecting the glory of God, the human person as *ens religiosum* can gain no traction since we are microcosms of this universe. But with the appreciation of the person as a microcosm of a spiritual-material universe, vision can take shape. As Wordsworth put it,

With an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.⁵¹

⁴⁹ As G.K.Chesterton aptly put it, "if the cosmos of the materialist is the real cosmos, it is not much of a cosmos. The thing has shrunk." (*Orthodoxy*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Co, 1908), 13-14.

⁵⁰ The argument comes in the Second *Ennead* within his chapter against the gnostics: II, 9, 16, 25. See Stephen McKenna, trans., *Plotinus, Psychic and Physical Treatises, Comprising the Second and Third Enneads* (London: P. L. Warner, 1921).

⁵¹ "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798", *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, T.Hutchinson (ed), London: Oxford University Press 1936, 164, II, 47-49.

4.2 Dialogue and Encounter

Once we have presented a clear teaching on the coherence and unity of the cosmos, hierarchically ordered, manifesting God's glory, as a radiance focused especially in the human person, the microcosm of the created order, we have securely laid the first foundation needed for a liturgical catechesis. We might say that we have followed the recommendation of the Duchess to Alice in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, "Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves."⁵² The catechesis we give on the sapiential dimension takes care of the "sense" – and it does so precisely by taking care of the *senses*, taking seriously the capacity of the visible world to unveil invisible realities. The catechesis we deliver reflects on the full range and richness of being in this hierarchical universe, all the levels of visible and invisible being. This first step thus fosters an appreciation of the visible created realities that we meet in the liturgy and the sacraments as things that stand apart from us, bathed in glory. It is from this initial point of respect for the capacity of the visible creation to reveal the invisible that we can then take our second step, of learning to appreciate the character of created realities as signs. In this second stage we inculcate a love for the visible *as sign*, thereby helping to dislodge the instinct of the hungry ego to draw all meaning around itself and to make itself – rather than the Lord – the integrating point of life.

The second step is also especially related to the second goal we discerned, that of highlighting the reality of God's prevenient movement towards us for the sake of dialogue and encounter. "This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being."⁵³ This goal focuses our attention on the *personal* character of the Invisible and the corresponding *freedom* and initiative associated with this.

Created realities, then, not only provide the basis for understanding the existence of the invisible world and its manifestation; as signs, they also engage our *imagination* and our *desire* so that by these two means in particular we may move from the sign to that which is signified. We catechize to assist in the appreciation of created realities as gifts, as signs of love, so that those thus catechized can direct their desire towards God as the Creator and Giver of Being.

⁵² Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1865), "The Mock Turtle's Story", 133.

⁵³ Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et spes* 19.

In this relationship between signs and that which is signified, the ladder between earth and heaven again has its feet firmly planted on the ground since it is precisely because of our love for the sign that our desire is engaged for that which is signified by it. "Think, my brethren, what His beauty is", urged St Augustine. "All those beautiful things which you see, which you love, He made. If these are beautiful, what is He Himself? If these are great, how great is He? Therefore from these things which we love here, let us the more long for Him [...]"⁵⁴

Created realities engage our desire when they are perceived as a set of signs; they also provide us with what we need to grasp imaginatively something of the living spiritual realities that encounter and transform us in the liturgy and sacraments – all the more so since the "natural signs" in the cosmos around us have been taken up into the history of the Chosen People and of the Incarnate Son of God. As the Catechism teaches,

A sacramental celebration is woven from signs and symbols. In keeping with the divine pedagogy of salvation, their meaning is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, specified by the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the person and work of Christ.⁵⁵

We harness imagination and desire to the extent that we forge the link between the sign and that which is signified. We can make these links, bringing the material and spiritual realms together, because they really *are* so related. The universe has levels of being, in which the lower levels participate in the higher. The material and the spiritual realms both participate in being, and do so analogously.

In making this move to the thing signified, we are seeking to help people gain the notion of another kind of perspective. Ultimately, the spiritual realities signified are not those of an anonymous force, but are rather the loving gaze and saving acts of the Persons of the Trinity. In this step we are helping people to understand the importance of gaining the *divine perspective* on creation and on our own lives. Through the signs and symbols of words and acts, and especially through the proclamation of the Word, intrinsic to the liturgical celebrations, God's vision of His world is uncovered.

A strong catechesis, using metaphor, helps people to make that move from the sign to that which is signified and ultimately to the divine perspective. Because its normal habitat is metaphor, the American poet Robert Frost believed

⁵⁴ *En. In Ps. 84:9*, in P. Schaff (ed), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 8, J.E. Tweed (trans), Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

⁵⁵ CCC 1145.

that poetry is the natural teacher of belief. "Education by poetry is education by metaphor", he wrote; and "unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor, you are not safe anywhere. Because you are not at ease with its figurative values: you don't know the metaphor in its strength and its weakness"⁵⁶. Thus he claimed, "The person who gets close enough to poetry, he is going to know more about the word belief than anyone else knows, even in religion nowadays."⁵⁷ Metaphor enables one to connect the seen and unseen worlds, the material and the spiritual, the sign and the thing signified. Frost uses the image of a child swinging on the branches of a birch tree to describe this movement between the two:

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.⁵⁸

The branch holds together the sign and the signified. Used well, a liturgical and sacramental catechesis lifts us to heaven and sets us back down – and as we shall see, we are set down differently after the encounter with heaven.

Precisely because the human person is intrinsically liturgical, finding his or her harmonious fulfillment in relation to the liturgy and the sacramental grace made available there, a fundamental misunderstanding can arise with regard to the relationship between the person and the liturgy: the liturgical signs can be mistakenly "turned back" onto ourselves, the participants in the liturgy, as though we were the point of reference for the meaning and significance of these signs. The embodiment of the human person is conceived as having no reference point either in nature or transcendentally, but is rather locked into the cultural, historical, material and social context. The liturgy is then understood as the "space" carrying the meanings of the individuals and communities who worship there – and of course, there are an indefinite number of variations in how these "embodiments" are expressed; and so liturgy, to be authentic, must take on these different and emerging forms all the time.

⁵⁶ R.Frost, "Education by Poetry: A Meditative Monologue", in J.G.Hepburn and R.A.Grenberg (eds), *Modern Essays: A Rhetorical Approach*, New York: Macmillan, 1962, 203, 206. "I have wanted in late years to go further and further", he wrote, "in making metaphor the whole of thinking" (204).

⁵⁷ Frost, *ibid.*, 211.

⁵⁸ R.Frost, "Birches", *Complete Poems*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1951, 145.

But this has the effect of turning the liturgy into a place of self-worship. A catechesis that teaches liturgical signs in a self-referential way betrays the deepest instinct of the human person as a worshipping being. Whenever elements of the Mystery of Christ are taught as reifications of the disciples' experiences,⁵⁹ or liturgical celebrations are taken primarily as signifying the achievements and projects of the local community,⁶⁰ the liturgy, rather than being a place of integration through the receiving of Christ's work and a responding self-gift, enabling self-transcendence, becomes the enclosed arena where we are finally locked into our own concerns and creativity.⁶¹ The liturgy is treated merely as a mirror in which the community celebrates itself, its praxis and its beliefs.

The reconciliation of the stubbornly objective meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments with the subjectivity of the unique human subject in his or her con-

⁵⁹ See, as an example, the RCIA text that presents as a fundamental principle: "LIFE EXPERIENCE – our own, that of other people, especially that of Jesus – IS THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL." (K. O'Riordan, *God for Grown Ups: Discovering Christ Today in the Catholic Church*, Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications, 1995, 7).

⁶⁰ Michael Warren, for example, echoing Marshall McLuhan's famous statement that "the medium is the message", insists: "At some level the community is the message." ("Catechesis: An Enriching Category for Religious Education," *Sourcebook for Modern Catechetics*, vol. 1, Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1983, 384, originally published in *Religious Education* 76, no.2, March–April 1981). For an excellent analysis of Warren's reconceptualization of liturgical catechesis as essentially a consciousness-raising exercise in which the community celebrates its beliefs and identity, see J.C.Pauley, *On the Necessity of Rediscovering the Theological Orientation of Liturgical Catechesis: An Analysis and Application of the relevant Writings of Josef A. Jungmann SJ and Cipriano Vagaggini OSB*, Ph.D. Thesis, Mundelein, Illinois, May 2014, 120-130. Pauley also provides a careful analysis of the "consistent ambiguity" (139) in the writings of Thomas Groome on liturgy with regard to the place of liturgical symbols and the ways in which these are taken to represent the human person for the sake of "adequate" sacramental practices, concluding that for Groome "The primary question [then,] for liturgy, is whether liturgy's symbolic language is conducive to the self-revelation of the community." (141 and see 130-142)

⁶¹ Views that isolate catechetics from its transcendent source tend to be accompanied by epistemological positions that deny the ability of the human person to know objective reality. For example, Groome adopts Heidegger's view that "language is the house of Being": see M.Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, 63, cited in *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, New York: Harper and Row 1981, 4. The perennial realist philosophy, to which John Paul II is appealing, insists, by comparison, on the priority of "being" to thought and to language (cf FR 82).

crete situation is possible precisely because Christ, who is "himself [...] the meaning of all these signs"⁶², is also the Image in whom every person is made and is called to be remade.⁶³ The signs find their "objective" fulfillment and reconciliation in the divine Person of the Son. And this does not evacuate the possibilities of meaning from the human subject. On the contrary, each created person discovers him or herself in this encounter with the divine Image. Because of this Christological understanding of the person, the catechist can know that the signs that find their integration in Christ also have a point of coherence, in a unique way for each person, in every person made and remade "in" the Image who is Christ.

Through the steps belonging to this goal, then, as the culmination of this encounter and dialogue through signs, we arrive at the divine encountering of the soul in the liturgy. *Love*, the final poem in George Herbert's seventeenth-century collection, beautifully captures the intimacy of the encounter between God and the person in both ordinary life and in the sacramental life to which our catechesis points.

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.

I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.

And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.

You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

The poem captures the whole sweep of the sacraments of initiation, from the opening moment at the threshold to the final consuming of the Lord's "meat".

⁶² CCC 1151.

⁶³ Col 1:15, cf CCC 1701.

From the "first entrance in" through the gateway of Baptism to being seated at the table of the Lord in the Eucharist, we see here the soul moving towards union with the divine Lover.

Presented in the form of a dialogue between the Lord and the individual soul, the poem expresses both the persistence and the delicacy of the Lord's invitation. Characterized simply as Love, God invites, questions, draws closer, gently overcomes objections, reminds the soul of Love's double rights, through creation and redemption, and firmly insists on the priority of grace – Love's desire is for the soul to be docile in receiving the food He has to offer. From the person's side, there is a deep sense of unworthiness expressed from the start – "my soul drew back, / Guilty of dust and sin." The soul knows itself to be "unkind, ungrateful" and this sense of sin deters it from seeking intimacy. Yet in the end the reminder of the freedom with which Love carried this sin, bearing the consequences, allows the soul to approach and finally to eat.

Our catechesis on the sacraments aims at communicating something of the beauty of the encounter with God which is expressed here in this poem, with the accompanying sense of trusting delight that is so quietly but powerfully symbolized by that final moment of settling and eating.

4.3 The Fruitful Christian life

We teach, then, a liturgical anthropology. The human person, made to live "in Christ",⁶⁴ is by nature a "liturgical" creature, turned towards an encounter with Christ in the liturgy. The encounter with the mystery of Christ in the liturgy is the *integrating* point of the Christian life, but it is not the *whole* of that life. In the Church's liturgical and sacramental activity the members of Christ's Body participate in Christ's mysteries – in his life – in a way that is both real in itself, in a sacramental and liturgical mode, and also points beyond itself to a sharing in the life of grace, the life of God, beyond the sacraments – ultimately in the final reality of heaven.

The Catechism draws our attention to the fact that the word "liturgy" refers "not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity"⁶⁵. Just as the liturgy gathers creed, commandment and personal prayer into a unified place, so the liturgy is also naturally turned

⁶⁴ See, for example, *Phil.* 1:21; *Col.* 1:13-14; 3:3.

⁶⁵ CCC 1070. The Catechism refers us to *Lk* 1:23; *Acts* 13:2; *Rom* 15:16, 27; *2 Cor* 9:12; *Phil* 2:14-17, 25,30.

outwards towards these same dimensions of the Christian life of which it now becomes the source. The movement is one of breathing in and breathing out.

For this third goal, enabling the baptized to situate themselves – as participants even now in the divine nature, and oriented towards a heavenly life – a liturgical catechesis, focused on anthropology, first teaches Christ, who is himself the “mystery of God”,⁶⁶ the “mystery of salvation”.⁶⁷ The divine Person of the Word, eternal and infinite, assumed human nature, the microcosm of the created world; this human nature which he assumed had the character of a “sacrament”, so that through this sacramental sharing every person might come to participate in his divine life, his mysteries.⁶⁸ The shape and nature of the Christian life, of “life in Christ”, therefore, is that of participation by grace in the mysteries of Christ’s own life, the life of One of the Trinity.⁶⁹

In order to orientate ourselves effectively towards this third goal for our liturgical catechesis we also move towards that third step, from the “sacraments” to the “mysteries”. At the heart of this third step is the catechesis we provide on the encounter with Christ: this is the “summit” towards which the activity of the Church is directed. Cipriano Vagaggini writes of this as the “maximum vital encounter between man and God in Christ”.⁷⁰ The primary purpose of liturgy is to make present this saving encounter between God and the human person in Christ.

The way we catechize on this encounter with Christ in the liturgy and sacraments is crucial. It is not that we are called upon to describe some kind of experience, but rather to catechize on the reality of the God’s action. We present liturgy and the sacraments as the “dramatic” arena⁷¹ within which God’s acts take the form of what has been called “ritual performativity”.⁷² In other words,

the ritualized action brings about the states of affairs being enacted. The action brings about such effects, not because of any magical qualities in the dramatic script; or in the natural elements that are used, but because the Persons of the Blessed Trinity act in the liturgy and the sacraments. The catechesis we provide needs to speak directly to this divine action of the Persons, stressing the reality and the primacy of God’s action. It is not only that we touch the mystery of Christ, the *mysterium* through the *sacramentum*; more importantly, Christ, in his mysteries, touches us. *He* takes the lead. He engages us.

As we move from the encounter with God’s action in the liturgy, we are not unchanged: those who have received this catechesis and have participated in the mysteries have had their eyes opened to the manifestation of the invisible glory of God in creation and in their own bodies; have put on “the mind of Christ”,⁷³ having been lifted from the sign to that which is signified.

A central passage from the Scriptures for understanding the relationship between the liturgy and life has always been Romans 12,1, where St Paul appeals to his hearers to present their bodies as a “living sacrifice”.⁷⁴ This is to be their “spiritual worship”.⁷⁵ The term normally translated as “spiritual” here is taken from the Greek *logos*. The worship offered by Christians in their lives is that of a “living sacrifice”, an offering of themselves that is made possible because of their communion with the mystery of Christ who is the Logos. The Eucharistic reference in this notion of “living sacrifice” is unmistakable. The Holy Spirit conforms Christians more perfectly to Christ’s own sacrifice so that his life can become the pattern of their own. It is noteworthy that the *epiclesis* in the earliest text of a Mass formulary that we have, from Hippolytus’ Apostolic Tradition, is a petition for the Holy Spirit to come upon the holy Church of God, for the fruitfulness of the sacrifice in the members of the Church.⁷⁶

⁶⁶ St Augustine, *Ep.* 187, 11,34: *PL* 33, 846.

⁶⁷ CCC 774.

⁶⁸ See CCC 515, 526, 774.

⁶⁹ See CCC 519-521.

⁷⁰ C. Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy*, Leonard J. Doyle and W.A. Jurgens (trans.) Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1976, 513.

⁷¹ For a discussion of the relationship between liturgical space and time in such “theodrama”, and especially for this relationship in the liturgy of the Eucharist, see D. Hickley, “Time and Architecture in the Early Church”, *Sobornost* Vo.5, no.6 (Winter-Spring 1968), 406-422.

⁷² See Adam Cooper, *Holy Eros: A Liturgical Theology of the Body*, Kettering: Angelico Press, 2014 31-35. Drawing especially on the work of Steven Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through Liturgy and Architecture* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), Cooper examines the ways in which God’s acts take place within a “ritual topography” (35-40).

⁷³ 1 Cor. 2:16.

⁷⁴ In Greek, “*θυσίαν ζώσαν*” (in Latin, “*hostiam viventem*”). As we noted earlier, John Paul II, in *Catechesi tradendae*, picks up this language of a living sacrifice and relates it to the quality of catechesis that is available in the Church in CT 30. The emphasis here is placed on the importance of developing a catechesis that is “whole and entire”. And as we have seen, catechesis achieves its integrity and unity precisely when it is centred upon the liturgy. This in turn enables the person to be conformed more perfectly to Christ so that Christ’s own Paschal Mystery may be realised in the life of that person.

⁷⁵ In Greek, “*λογικὴν λατρείαν*”, while in Latin, “*rationabile obsequium*”.

⁷⁶ For a brief discussion of the prayer see J. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, University of Notre Dame Press 1960, 64-73. See also CCC 1109.

From this catechesis on Christ's encounter with us in the liturgy, then, we move to these transforming effects on the person who is the "sum and summary" of creation, God's divine power flowing through the sacraments. If metaphor is an intensification of simile, sacraments can be thought of as the fulfillment of metaphor since that which is signified now perfects and fills the sign with its Life. We speak of visible water manifesting the glory of God, his power, majesty and purity; flowing water signifying cleansing; and now in the Sacrament of Baptism the matter, the actions and words, carry the very cleansing salvation signified: in the sacraments, the human person, including the material level, is filled with grace, carrying the energy and reality of the spiritual grace signified.

The transformation of matter in the sacramental economy is beautifully expressed by the Orkney poet, Edwin Muir:

So from the ground we felt that virtue branch
Through all our veins till we were whole, our wrists
As fresh and pure as water from a well,
Our hands made new to handle holy things,
The source of all our seeing rinsed and cleansed
Till earth and light and water entering there
Gave back to us the clear unfallen world.⁷⁷

Muir speaks here of even the "source" of his vision being "rinsed and cleansed", and of hands made new so that they could "handle holy things". The communion in holy things sanctifies God's holy people.⁷⁸

The vision and understanding achieved, and the grace-filled encounter and dialogue, point us, then, towards a fruitfulness in our living out of what we "hear, contemplate and do in the celebration"⁷⁹. But even so, the meaning of the signs and symbols do not find their terminus in our earthly acts of charity and solidarity, however impressive. Signification reaches its end only in that final yielding of ourselves to the Mystery of Everlasting Love in whom all signs and sacraments find their meaning.⁸⁰ The sacraments are given to us so that our lives may be turned towards that final encounter with Christ when the sacraments themselves will be fulfilled in the Realities they communicate under a veil.

⁷⁷ "The Transfiguration", *Collected Poems*, London: Faber and Faber, 1960, 199.

⁷⁸ Cf CCC 948.

⁷⁹ CCC 1101.

⁸⁰ For a stimulating discussion of the philosophical mysticism of St Thomas who can help us into such a vision, see F. Lynch, "A Philosopher for Our Time: Aquinas and Critical Reason", *Nova et Vetera*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2012), 757-774.

Knut Wenzel

AUS INTIMER UNENDLICHKEIT

ZUM *BLAUEN CHRISTUS* VON ROLAND PETER
LITZENBURGER

Wo anfangen, wo haltmachen, wo ankommen. Eine Folge von Fragen als Kette von Aussagen. Die Theologie, die Dogmatik zumal, habe es mit Antworten zu tun, nicht mit Fragen: So hätten es manche gern. Sie meinen dies aber nicht im Sinn einer phänomenologisch-hermeneutischen Kultur, einer personalen Disposition der Responsorik, in der jede Aussage schon Antwort auf die uneinholbar vorausgehende Frage ist,¹ sie verstehen solche dogmatische Antwort als „Ansage“, als doktrinale Setzung. Da wird die Doktrin monumental und ist bestenfalls noch museal zu besichtigen, nämlich als tot.

Keineswegs aber entspricht es dem Wesen der dogmatischen Aussage, Antwort im Sinn einer Vorgabe zu sein. Vielmehr sammelt sie nach allgemein-antikem Verständnis sowohl in der juristischen wie der medizinischen und eben auch der theologischen Dogmatik im Nachgang prekäres Erfahrungswissen ein und systematisiert es, was nur heißt: setzt es in einen sinnvollen, also (idealtypisch) sowohl bedeutungsvollen als auch vernünftigen Zusammenhang zueinander. Die Herausbildung solchen Wissens, der dessen Strittigkeit, Ungesichertheit, Alternativität eingetragen ist, beginnt nicht erst mit der Formulierung der dogmatischen Aussage und hört mit ihr nicht auf. Streng genommen bildet die dogmatische Aussage selbst kein Wissen, hält es nur fest. Zum dogmatisch aufbewahrten Wissen gehört aber dessen Kritik – dessen Fraglichkeit, Ungesichertheit, Bestreitung. Eine dogmatische Aussage, die diese nicht mit überliefert, präsentiert eine verkürzte, deformierte Version des ihr zur Überlieferung aufgegebenen Wissens. Ein solcherart vorgelegtes theologisches Wissen ist aber unglaublich. Ein um seine Fraglichkeit reduziertes theologisches Wissen als in welchem Verbindlichkeitsgrad immer zu glauben vorzulegen ist illegitim.

Dass es einmal für möglich, ja für verpflichtend gehalten wurde, den christlichen Glauben in seiner inhaltlichen und formalen Bestimmung auf den Begriff zu bringen, der die Identität dieses Glaubens in seiner formalen Struktur als *fides*

¹ Vgl. hierzu B. Waldenfels, *Antwortregister*, Frankfurt 1994.