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THE WORKS OF MERCY

TOWARDS A LITURGICAL ETHIC OF THE EVERYDAY

Benjamin Allen Kautzer

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the possibility of an ‘everyday theology’ of those ordinary gifts of food and drink, prayer and compassion, shelter and hospitality traditionally named the ‘works of mercy.’ Drawing principally upon Roman Catholic liturgical theology, it proposes a sacramental reinterpretation of the theological deep-structure which underlies and informs their practice. At their core the works of mercy represent a liturgically shaped ethic of the everyday – ecclesial practices capable of challenging the bureaucratic institutionalisation (and elimination) of human compassion.

Part One lays the groundwork for this renewed theology of the works of mercy by surveying the relationship between liturgy and ethics in twentieth-century Catholic thought. Part Two addresses the wider theological structures which afford this sacramental ethic its theological coherence. Specifically, I take the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet as my point of departure for re-conceptualising the works of mercy from a symbolic interpretation of ethical sacramentality and a biblical theology of worship. Part Three moves beyond Chauvet’s broad ‘liturgy of the neighbour,’ offering a more constructive proposal for the works of mercy as concrete sites of sacramental intensity. Following Chauvet’s architectonic structure of Christian identity, and drawing on a diverse range of theological voices, the final chapters approach this question from the perspective of Scripture, Sacrament and Ethics.

The works of mercy are always there, lived within communities of faith as marks of Christian discipleship. In this sense, proposing an ethical ‘sacrament of mercy’ is not an attempt to tell the church something it does not already know or intimately understand. Indeed, Christianity is inconceivable without them. The theological task undertaken in this work seeks, instead, to recover a deeper awareness of this mystery – that Christ draws near in the unnoticed and the unlooked for, in the trivial and the mundane, in cups of cold water and pieces of bread.

THE WORKS OF MERCY

TOWARDS A LITURGICAL ETHIC OF THE EVERYDAY

Benjamin Allen Kautzer

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

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DECLARATION

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for a degree.

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

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FOR JO

WHOSE LOVE, ENCOURAGEMENT AND FRIENDSHIP
SUSTAINS ME IN ALL THINGS

Pascere
Potare
Vestire
Recolligere
Visitare
Redimere
Sepelire

Corrigere
Docere
Consulere
Consolari
Portare
Remittere
Orare

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: WORKS OF MERCY AND THE ETHICS OF DAILINESS

Everyday theology is faith seeking understanding of everyday life. Nothing should be easier to understand than the notion of “the everyday” for the simple reason that it is so commonplace. What is most familiar to us, however, is often the hardest thing to understand. [...] What time, the everyday, and culture have in common is that they are so familiar, so close to us — our social “skin,” as it were — that we have a hard time stepping back and examining them at a distance.¹

– Kevin J. Vanhoozer

1.1 HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

This thesis explores the possibility of an ‘everyday theology’ of those ordinary gifts of food and drink, prayer and compassion, shelter and hospitality traditionally named the ‘works of mercy.’ Within the horizon of Christian ethics, concrete acts of compassion constitute the very heart of Christian discipleship. Few acts remain more basic to ordinary Christian communities than the corporal and spiritual works of mercy: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, comforting the afflicted and praying for the living and the dead. Whilst academic theologians often allude to such practices, the tradition itself has rarely been afforded direct and sustained theological reflection. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise. As Kevin Vanhoozer reminds us, that which is most familiar often remains the most elusive, hidden in plain sight.

Karl Rahner once observed that many aspects of doctrine and practice are neither disputed nor contested, ‘which in a certain sense every Christian holds to be true as a matter of faith, which even become present to him in the awareness of his faith as manifest truths when *explicit* reference is made to them.’ Despite occasionally surfacing as matters of intentional theological analysis, these otherwise ordinary aspects of the Christian life nevertheless ‘remain for the most part too much at the *implicit* level in this awareness of his faith, are far too little thought out, play far too little part in the normal outlook and attitude which the average Christian strives to bring to bear on the realities of his faith, for them to be able to constitute an effective, formative or decisive force in the concrete practices of Christian living.’²

¹ Vanhoozer 2007, 17.

² Rahner 1971b, 51 (emphasis added).

Such is the case with the works of mercy. On the ground, they are not tangential or fringe practices within the church.³ Neither are they optional or dispensable to the Christian life. Wherever one encounters the visible church, one discovers traces of these practices always already there. In the words of Margaret McKenna, 'their embodiment is [...] constitutive of the Church, *not in theory*, but in act and in fact. They are the actual work of Christ's Spirit in God's people. They are a real liturgy, or work of the people, as the Greek word (*leitourgia*) literally indicates.'⁴ Despite their pervasiveness in practice, the works of mercy nonetheless represent a predominantly *implicit* tradition; Christians and non-Christians often presume their conceptual coherence as given.

We need to reconsider this presumptive tendency. As soon as one pauses to reflect on practices as common as visiting, welcoming, feeding, consoling, forgiving and bearing burdens, new and unresolved questions begin to emerge. What do the works of mercy actually entail? Who should perform them? To whom are they directed and why? How should they be carried out? Sidney Callahan argues that 'These simple questions need answers, but the analyses and explorations required have hardly begun.'⁵ For Christian parishes and congregations that attend to the poor, neglected and imprisoned, this apparent lack of explicit (i.e. academic) theological reflection has certainly not prevented such acts of compassionate solidarity from saturating into the very fibre of Christian institutional life. Callahan writes that 'the Catholic Church, undeterred by less than full clarity and comprehension, has, century after century, confidently listed fourteen works of mercy which the faithful are enjoined to perform in the pursuit of salvation. These acts are considered central to Christian living, even if they are vaguely defined and poorly understood.'⁶ Despite representing what James Keenan calls the hidden 'heart of Catholicism,' the tradition itself is 'powerfully rich, yet considerably lost to the modern mind.'⁷ As Callahan concludes, 'The works of mercy are an example of a carefully preserved treasure of the Catholic heritage which has been more or less left unanalyzed.'⁸

³ Isa 58:1-14; Matt 25:31-46; Luke 6:20-49; Rom 12:9-21. See Holman 2008; Longenecker 2010; Rhee 2012.

⁴ McKenna 1993, 31-65 (emphasis added).

⁵ Callahan 1992, 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Keenan 2005, 2.

⁸ Callahan 1992, 1.

1.2 THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Shifting focus from an *implicit* to a *reflexive* theology of ethical praxis demands a fundamental re-evaluation of the place of mercy in the life of the church. This thesis proposes that the theological framework within which works of mercy find their ultimate intelligibility is neither ethics nor politics, but rather *sacramentality*.⁹ At their theological depth, works of mercy are more than commendable moral gestures; they are embodied acts of worship – ordinary sites of sacramental encounter with the mediated presence of the risen Christ. My analysis finds its point of departure in a significant passage from *Deus Caritas Est*, the first encyclical of Benedict XVI:

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her *three-fold* responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.¹⁰

This remarkable text raises several points for our inquiry.

First, Benedict affords the ministry of charity equal ecclesiological weight as both word *and* sacrament. This contrasts with how much contemporary theology reduces the church's witness to a word-sacrament binary that effectively relegates the ministry of charity to a supplemental realm of 'practical theology.'¹¹ Benedict opens the possibility of articulating afresh the ways in which the diaconal practices of mercy constitute not merely what the church *does*, but what the church *is*; not its relevant *usefulness*, but its active *faithfulness*.

Second, Benedict affirms that each dimension of the church's triadic deep-structure (word-sacrament-charity) not only 'presupposes' the others, but are inherently 'inseparable.'¹² What is

⁹ For an overview discussion of 'sacramentality,' see Irwin 2000; 2002b; McPartlan 2008; Brown 2013.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI 2006, 60 (emphasis added). See Howsare 2006; Schindler 2006; Surlis 2006, 289-291; Mannion 2007; Milbank 2009, 364-370; Williams 2009.

¹¹ According to Paul Lakeland (1997), the church is called to be 'deeply involved in its world, engaged in collaborative efforts toward the amelioration and elimination of problems, and confidently oriented toward a radically open future.' Unfortunately, this is not always exemplified in practice. 'Present ecclesial structures,' Lakeland continues, 'are set up looking inward, for the most part, to the life of the faith community. Where mission and evangelism are stressed, they are promoted as ways of bringing more people into this essentially inward-looking community. The "corporal works of mercy," in which so many faith communities distinguish themselves, are almost always seen as subordinate to the "central" ministry of sacrament or word' (106).

¹² Benedict XVI 2006, 60.

the nature of this inseparability? Throughout the encyclical, Benedict suggests that word and sacrament are not merely 'related' to the works of mercy, but that the performance of the latter is inherently bound up with the theological intelligibility of the former. "'Worship" itself, Eucharistic communion,' he writes, 'includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented.'¹³ If so, the church cannot reduce works of mercy to discrete acts of philanthropic concern. Rather, the church must understand them as always already participating in a sacramental economy. This has significant implications for how one locates these practices within the life of the church as a worshipping community. Whereas most studies of the works of mercy emphasise their *ethical* significance, Benedict invites us to attend also to the possibility of these acts as a kind of *sacramental performance* within the mundane spaces of everyday life.¹⁴

Finally, this passage emphasises that these little acts of goodness express and manifest the church's very life – so much so, that the church cannot abdicate these practices to others if the church is to be faithful to her divine vocation. Because of the contemporary tendency to describe them in exclusively personalist terms, critics frequently dismiss the works of mercy as private, individualistic responses to perceived needs. I will argue that such attempts to domesticate the works of mercy to a private sphere are theologically problematic.¹⁵ By contrast, this thesis contends that works of mercy have something to contribute to the social and political witness of the church in the world.¹⁶ They do not displace other equally significant modes of political engagement, but nonetheless have a particular role to play.¹⁷

Clearly we distort the works of mercy when they become a kind of 'mere charity' bifurcated from the hard task of seeking justice and social transformation in neighbourhoods and communities. Equally, we misunderstand them when we assume that the works of mercy *alone* constitute the full scope of Christian witness in the world. Faithfully responding to these challenges involves

¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴ McKenna (1993) says much the same: 'As embodiments of God's Spirit in Christ, these "works" belong to the sacramental order. They are effective signs of God's merciful presence, which touch and transform the human experience. Their number seven symbolizes, just as in the case of the Sacraments, the infinity of expressions that God's merciful interventions can take. They constitute the saving "effectiveness" of the Church in the continuing history of this world' (31).

¹⁵ For a theological defense of the church as public and political, see Hütter 1994; Paddison 2011, 223-236; Cloke 2010, 223-242.

¹⁶ See Hauerwas 1977; Scharen 2004; Gorsky 2008; Hanvey 2008; Bourne 2009, 179-183.

¹⁷ See Bretherton 2010, 31-70; cf. Dinham 2009; Dinham & Lowndes 2009, 1-19; Cloke, May & Johnsen 2010.

recovering a sacramental vision of Christian charity beyond the languid horizon of individualistic philanthropy or social welfarism.¹⁸ When rightly understood, the works of mercy name concrete sites in which ethics, liturgy *and* politics converge. This thesis seeks to contribute to the development of this more robust theology of the works of mercy by analysing the sacramental deep-structure which underlies and informs their practice. I contend that at their core the works of mercy represent *a liturgically shaped ethic of the everyday – ecclesial practices capable of challenging the bureaucratic institutionalisation (and elimination) of human compassion*. Afforded a more appropriate theological grammar, the works of mercy might become for ordinary Christian communities a more ‘effective, formative [and] decisive force in the concrete practices of Christian living.’¹⁹

In the Christian tradition, works of mercy name a particular modality of ethical practice. Thomas Aquinas formally codified these normative caritative acts into seven *corporal* and seven *spiritual* works.²⁰

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY	SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY
feeding the hungry	admonishing sinners
giving drink to the thirsty	instructing the ignorant
clothing the naked	counselling the doubtful
welcoming the stranger	comforting the afflicted
visiting the sick	bearing wrongs patiently
ministering to prisoners	forgiving injuries
burying the dead	praying for the living & the dead

These various works are clearly mandated by Scripture.²¹ However, within the Christian tradition they are not an exhaustive list, but a representative short-hand description of those endlessly

¹⁸ Social welfarism and individualistic philanthropy function as flip sides of the same public/private or managerial/therapeutic assemblage. See Bellah et al. 1996; Budde & Brimlow 2002; Wright 2007, 127-156. For a provocative theological account of works of mercy beyond this framework, see Bell 2012, 187-213.

¹⁹ Rahner 1971b, 51.

²⁰ Aquinas 1962, II-II.32.2. For an analysis of works of mercy in the thought of Aquinas, see Porter 1989; Pope 1991; Keenan 1992; MacIntyre 2001; Leget 2003; Keaty 2005; Vodraska 2005; Wadell 2005; Floyd 2009; Ryan 2010; Clark 2011; Pope 2013; Keys 2014.

²¹ For example, **feeding the hungry** (Deut 10:18; Prov 25:21; Isa 51:7; Ezek 18:7; Sir 4:1-6; Tob, 1:17 and Matt 15:32-39; Luke 3:11; 5:34; Acts 6:1; Rom 12:20; 1 Cor 11:33-34; Jas 2:15-16), **giving drink to the thirsty** (Gen 18:4-5; 24:18-19; Prov 25:21 and Matt 10:40-42; Mark 9:40; Rom 12:20), **clothing the naked** (Gen 3:21; Deut 10:18; 24:13; Job 31:19-22; Prov 31:13, 20-21; Isa 58:7; Ezek 18:7 and Matt 5:40; 6:25, 28-31;

diverse, yet irreducibly concrete acts of compassionate care in response to another in need.²² Rather than approaching this research through a detailed analysis of a specific act of mercy (say, hospitality or visiting the sick or forgiveness), this thesis focuses instead on the tradition of ‘works of mercy’ as a whole. Taking the implicit practice of ordinary Christian communities as its point of departure, a new theological reading of the tradition of the works of mercy itself may emerge.

To this end, this research affirms Kathleen Bozzuti-Jones’ contention that ‘the works of mercy are worthy to be reclaimed, updated, rather than dismissed, for our own world because of their role in the formation of merciful people.’ It seeks to further develop her claim that we may reclaim these practices ‘not in their limited prescribed form – but at a deeper, more honest, more vulnerable, more attentive, more efficacious, more far-reaching level — allowing for diverse incarnations of the “new life” that Jesus proclaimed.’²³

The remainder of the introduction will outline the parameters of this study: first, by diagnosing the principal challenges to the development of a contemporary theology of the works of mercy; second, by identifying the key research questions these contexts provoke; and third, by outlining a constructive proposal for a new theology of the works of mercy. The introduction will then conclude by mapping out the basic structure of the thesis itself.

1.2.1 THE PROBLEM(S)

Stanley Hauerwas once famously declared that the greatest enemy of the Christian life is not militant atheism²⁴ or cultural marginalisation but rather *sentimentality*.²⁵ In the place of costly

John 19:40; Acts 9:39; Jas 2:15-16), **welcoming the stranger** (Deut 27:19; Job 31:32; Isa 58:7 and Luke 10:25-37; Rom 12:13; Col 4:10; 1 Pet 4:9; Heb 13:2), **visiting the sick** (2 Kings 8:29; Sir 7:32-35 and Matt 11:4-5; Mark 6:56; Matt 10:8; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 5:15-16; Jas 5:14-15), **ministering to prisoners** (Isa 61:1; Jer 22:3; 31:11 and Luke 4:18-19; Gal 3:28; 2 Tim 1:16; Heb 13:3), and **burying the dead** (Tob 1:21; 2:4-49; 12:12; Sir 7:32-35 and Acts 8:2; 9:37).

²² Though the traditional list of the corporal works of mercy remains closely associated with the six practices named in Matthew 25, occasional variations occurred depending on shifts in context and circumstance. For instance, ‘visiting prisoners’ has at times been reinterpreted to mean ‘ransoming the captive’ or ‘reclaiming prisoners of war’ (see Osiek 1993; Allen & Morgan 2009, 140-141; Brodman 2009, 6; Flannery 2011, 135-144). In other contexts, harbouring the shipwrecked has also been listed among the works of mercy (see Tertullian *Apology* 39; Augustine *Sermon* 260.3). In the Middle Ages, the list of fourteen works of mercy functioned as a kind of mnemonic device used by preachers as catechismal tool for instructing the laity (see Rivers 1999, 266-267). As such, these lists were not necessarily intended as a comprehensive account of Christian ethics, but rather illustrative of paradigmatic acts in response to the most basic human needs.

²³ Bozzuti-Jones 2005, 29.

²⁴ Hauerwas 2001, 526.

discipleship to a crucified Messiah, the church can be tempted to embrace the much more comfortable notion that being a Christian is really just about trying to be nice.²⁶ For Hauerwas, such ideas simply encourage Christians to imagine that ‘church is sustained by the “services” it provides or the amount of “fellowship” and “good feeling” in the congregation.’²⁷ When these become ends in themselves, something of the transformative force of the gospel melts away into the soft, warming glow of spiritual self-affirmation. ‘Sentimentality, after all,’ Hauerwas concludes, ‘is but the way our *unbelief* is lived out.’²⁸

Among the manifold practices that constitute the lived reality of the Christian confession, few are more exposed to the domesticating temptation of sentimentality than works of mercy. In contemporary British culture, friends and foes of the church frequently misrepresent the rich textures of this ancient tradition as a kind of ‘mere charity’ that seems more interested in *being nice* than participating in the eternally Triune God of love in circumstances of need, trauma and social deprivation. The very notion of Christian charity tends to provoke a host of ambiguous and largely negative connotations: a token coin in the hand of a beggar, a romanticised act of heroic or saintly generosity or a paternalistic – even intrusive – intervention into the lives of others. In this context, those within and outside the church will likely hear advocating the works of mercy as little more than a nostalgic return to a kind of Victorian ‘do-gooderism’ or a conscience-appeasing, philanthropic impulse of the social elite.

For critics of the church, appeals to personal charity succeed in masking rather than remedying the underlying social problems confronting our society.²⁹ Meeting a few felt needs, so the argument goes, may help smooth over some of the short-term incongruities of our more visible social problems, but it ultimately ignores the more difficult task of resisting the root causes that created the need for charity in the first place. According to this perspective, such charitable responses actually serve to conceal and reinforce the hidden, underlying structures of injustice

²⁵ Hauerwas 1974, 119. In *The Cross-Shattered Christ*, Hauerwas (2004a) adds, ‘I think nothing is more destructive to our ability to confess that the crucified Jesus is Lord than the sentimentality that grips so much that passes for Christianity in our day. Sentimentality is the attempt to make the gospel conform to our needs, to make Jesus Christ our “personal” savior, to make the suffering of Christ on the cross but an instant of general unavoidable suffering’ (6).

²⁶ See Long 2004, 39-54.

²⁷ Hauerwas & Willimon 1990, 120.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 120-121 (emphasis added).

²⁹ See, for example, Christopher Hitchens’ polemic *The Missionary Position* (1995).

and inequality. Stephen Pope offers a helpful summary of this perspective. He argues that such 'uncharitable' depictions of the church's work among the poor

tend to place a large distance between "justice", the demands of which are ethically binding on all morally responsible individuals, and "charity", the provision of which are described as optional and the ethical significance of which is seen as marginal if not pernicious. Justice is depicted as respecting the rights of the poor and as involving public, institutional relief; charity is described as private, and as responding to the plight of the poor with at best a kind of casual and spontaneous *noblesse oblige*, and at worst with a disdainful condescension. Seen in this light, the elitist and aristocratic mentality that exercises Christian charity through minor benevolent deeds must be replaced with a more realistic commitment to "seek peace by doing justice". Pious appeals to exercise charity and engage in half-measures like almsgiving must be supplanted by the more systematic development of just social structures in accord with an egalitarian interpretation of the requirements of distributive justice.³⁰

Mercy so described becomes uncoupled from justice and relegated to the private moral disposition of individual believers. Many academic theologians, supported economically by the system they criticise, view the works of mercy with suspicion.

In his book, *The Principle of Mercy*, the liberation theologian Jon Sobrino warns that if we desire to reclaim a theology of mercy then we must guard against the temptation to revert simplistically to traditional paradigms:

The danger is that [mercy] may seem to denote a *sheer sentiment*, without a praxis to accompany it. It may connote "works of mercy." Here the risk is that the practitioner of such works may feel exempt from the duty of analyzing the causes of the suffering that these works relieve. Mercy can connote the alleviation of individual needs but entail the risk of abandoning the transformation of structures. It may connote "parental" attitudes, but risk paternalism.³¹

Likewise, Duncan Forrester argues that far from cultivating a deeper sense of human dignity, the very act of charitable giving 'underscores the inequality between us. Charity, alms, doles-out do not establish neighbourliness, friendship or equality. Indeed, they often make things worse, especially if they are impulsive, patronizing, ill-considered.'³²

³⁰ Pope 1991, 167.

³¹ Sobrino 1994, 16 (emphasis added).

³² Forrester 2001, 3.

It is fair to say that the notion of Christian charity remains a contested paradigm within theological ethics. In the face of grave social injustices and mounting social inequalities, modest acts of compassion are held at a suspicious distance. As such, works of mercy are often assumed to have little practical relevance to the formation of a radical theopolitical Christian witness.

As a result, the church's participation in the works of mercy has atrophied through a lack of intentional engagement and theological creativity. The church no longer bears a clear sense of how these practices fit within the life of the church, who should perform them, what ends they ought to accomplish, what virtues give their performance coherence or what should visibly result in the world. This theological thinness exposes the church to various ideologies of power. What happens when, for example, the third sector language of volunteerism (i.e. one can volunteer one's time or skills) saturates into the church and becomes a *theological* framework within which works of mercy are understood? In this view, word and sacrament remain definitive for the life of faith, whereas volunteering tends to imply something praiseworthy, but optional. So understood, for Christians the works of mercy become subordinate to the philanthropic impulse – discrete acts one might *do* from time to time, but not a pattern of living fundamentally constituting the kind of person that one *is*. In essence, the language of volunteering as a theological category risks collapsing the sacramentality of the faith back into a word-sacrament binary, and reducing the works of mercy to a kind of holy supplement, an important but elective appendage to the Christian life, whose theological integrity seems grounded more in word than deed. Or, the inverse: we reduce Christian discipleship to works of justice separated from repentance and faith in Jesus and participation in the worship of the Triune God.

Here a problem confronts us. Those who reject the works of mercy as 'mere charity' rarely offer an alternative theological assessment of how to understand these practices better. On the ground, Christians continue to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, comfort the afflicted and welcome strangers into their communities. These practices may not have ceased, but theologians have largely neglected the equally important task of thinking theologically about what these acts mean, and how ordinary Christians can more faithfully perform them in light of the challenging political contexts confronting the church today. In the absence of an integral theology of the works of mercy, Christians often import inappropriate secular categories for defining their practice. Whether the framework is bureaucratic welfarism or individualistic philanthropy or 'volunteerism,' each of these perspectives dramatically shapes how charity is conceived, valued

and put into practice. Inadequate frameworks can have the adverse effect of distorting the theological coherence of the acts themselves.

In brief, Sobrino may be right that much activity carried out in the name of 'works of mercy' is deeply complicit in the kind of paternalism he calls into question. Those aspects of the tradition that neglect justice, ignore harmful structures and hide from political engagement by retreating into the safety of a domesticated private morality ought to be challenged. However, that critical evaluation need not entail the wholesale rejection of the works of mercy as such, as Sobrino seems to imply.³³

1.2.2 THE QUESTIONS

This raises the following questions. First, what might it mean to recover the works of mercy as an ethical praxis? How should we reinterpret 'mercy' in light of the Christian tradition? What is the relationship between the personal and the social, the ethical and the political, the individual and the institutional as they pertain to the works of mercy? From the perspective of 'everyday theology' what might it mean to speak of the works of mercy as tactical enactments of a 'mundane holiness'?³⁴

Second, what might it mean to speak of the works of mercy as a kind of *liturgical performance*? How might we locate the works of mercy sacramentally at the intersection between liturgy and ethics? To what extent do the works of mercy embody a liturgical deep-structure? What is the relationship between the mediated presence of Christ encountered in the bread and wine of the Eucharist and the presence of Christ encountered in those with whom we share mercy? What might it mean to speak of the works of mercy as a visible manifestation of the Christian worship in the midst of daily life?

Finally, what might it mean to reimagine the works of mercy as a liturgical modality of *political witness*? How do the works of mercy contribute to the visible flourishing of the church and the world? What role do they play in cultivating a generous politics of the common good? How do the works of mercy display an alternative performance of what it means to be a human being before God and with others? What might it mean to speak of the works of mercy as constituting the 'ordinary politics' of a radical ecclesia?

³³ For a response to Sobrino in defence of the works of mercy, see Keenan 2008, 187-200.

³⁴ Bretherton 2007, 227-252.

1.2.3 TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE THEOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

I suggest that the secular language of ‘volunteerism’ is simply inadequate in the face of such searching questions. By contrast, I contend that ‘sacramentality’ provides a far richer theological grammar for attending to the profundity of the works of mercy. This theological agenda demands an alternative approach to the relationship between worship and ethics. In an important essay, L. Edward Phillips observes, ‘If the relationship between liturgy and ethics has never been entirely neglected, recent years have seen an explosion of interest in the topic, and not just among liturgical scholars.’³⁵ The academic literature on this connection is as diverse as it is prolific, and the discussion shows no signs of abating.³⁶ For all this diversity ‘one central notion runs throughout the literature: there *is* a relationship between liturgy and ethics. Virtually no one takes the position that liturgy and ethics have nothing to do with each other.’³⁷ Discerning the *nature* of this relation, however, remains an open and contested question. Phillips suggests parsing the various approaches into three basic categories: (1) liturgy as a source for ethics, (2) liturgy as the object of ethical critique, and (3) liturgy itself as an ethic.³⁸

LITURGY AS SOURCE

First, liturgy can be a source for moral reflection or a motivation for ethical action. In this view, liturgical texts (prayers, hymns, confessions, creeds) and liturgical actions (gestures, postures, rituals, sacraments) can function as an authoritative basis for the formulation of normative ethical arguments. Liturgy becomes a resource from which to draw moral values (such as love, justice, forgiveness, peaceableness and compassion), models of virtuous practice and even alternative accounts of the good life – all of which must then be ‘applied’ in everyday life. A Sunday sermon, for instance, may explicitly exhort the faithful to participate in the task of social justice by taking part in a living wage campaign or by serving at a local foodbank. A ritual gesture like exchanging the peace might provoke Christians to consider the ethical implications of eucharistic table fellowship, and reassess the health of their own personal relationships. In either case, texts and rituals offer a kind of moral worldview through which Christians can reflect upon ethical questions. However, identifying which elements of the liturgy serve this moral function and demonstrating how they inform ethical behaviour is complicated. ‘The main problem with employing liturgy as a source for theology and ethics,’ argues Phillips, ‘is that liturgy is by nature

³⁵ Phillips 1993, 86-99.

³⁶ See the bibliographical surveys by Searle 1991, 220-235; and Laytham & Bjorlin 2013, 169-188.

³⁷ Phillips 1993, 86-87.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 87; cf. Phillips 2005, 167-169.

ambiguous. It must be scrutinized by extra-liturgical standards.³⁹ When taken as a kind of proof-text, liturgy 'seems to function in ethics on the level of supporting evidence, rather than primary source.'⁴⁰

LITURGY AS OBJECT

Liturgy can also be seen as an object of ethics, either as a means of expressing ethical ideals or, if it fails to do so, as the target of ethical critique.⁴¹ The values and moral vision celebrated in the liturgy ought to correspond with the daily lives of the faithful. Unfortunately, Christian liturgy at times promotes a 'moral' vision in sharp contradiction with the gospel itself. Feminist theologians, for example, call into question the use of exclusivist, patriarchal language and liturgical imagery that not only entrenches misogynous attitudes, but also subjugates and disempowers women within the church.⁴² Similarly, liberation theologians criticise traditional liturgies for ignoring real-life situations of oppression, injustice and systemic violence.⁴³ A pattern of worship declaring God's praises while simultaneously denying the plight of the poor is denounced as idolatrous.⁴⁴ Liberation theologians insist that justice is a 'prior condition in order for worship to be authentic, or else worship will merely perpetuate the situation of injustice, since both the oppressed and the oppressors are often ostensibly members of the Church.'⁴⁵ The contextual relationship between liturgy and ethics is never a given: true worship can be a life-giving act of ethical formation, whereas false worship that fails to 'discern the body' (1 Cor 11:29) becomes a damaging act of malformation.

Whilst each of these perspectives has made a significant contribution to contemporary sacramental theology, both 'liturgy as source' and 'liturgy as object' share a common assumption that 'liturgy and ethics occupy two distinct realms, and that a relationship must be established'

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91-94. Cf. Searle 1980; Barron 1999; Burns 2009.

⁴² For an overview, see the extensive surveys by Teresa Berger 1989; Berger 1995. See also the important work of Susan A. Ross 1991; 1993; 1998; 2002a. For a discussion, see D'Costa 2004, 263-267.

⁴³ See, for example, Avila 1981; Balasuriya 1979; Collins & Power (eds.) 1982.

⁴⁴ In the words of Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'If the worship is performed, but the works of mercy and justice are missing, then a shadow is cast over the worship, and its authenticity is brought into question. For this very same God whom we are to worship by celebrating his deeds in memorial also requires of us that, in grateful response to those deeds, we take heed of him by doing works of mercy and justice. [...] work and worship are mutually authenticating' (1983, 156-157).

⁴⁵ Phillips 1993, 92.

between them.⁴⁶ Both approaches are exposed to the temptation of liturgical reductionism in which worship becomes instrumentalised into a tool for the production of good behaviour or the establishment of a more just social order. An extrinsic juxtaposition between liturgy and ethics risks becoming ‘no more intense than that of a freedom from contradiction.’⁴⁷

LITURGY AS ETHICS

By contrast, post-liberal theologians suggest a different point of departure. In this view, liturgy and ethics are intrinsically bound up with one another as integrated dimensions of Christian worship. Liturgy is not extrinsically ‘related’ to ethics; rather, liturgy *is* social ethics. Phillips notes that for John Howard Yoder, liturgy and ethics are ‘virtually identical ways in which the Christian community lives out the gospel.’⁴⁸ The Eucharist is at once a personal participation in a corporate meal, signifying an alternative economic ethic of solidarity, and constituting the ‘body politics’ of the church as the people of God.⁴⁹ Yoder maintains that sacraments are ‘observably verifiable *ethical actions*.’⁵⁰ Stanley Hauerwas argues that the liturgy of the church provides a theological framework that encompasses the entire Christian life.⁵¹ Through liturgical enactment, the church performs the story of God’s redemptive purposes in Jesus Christ. In the sacraments in particular, Christians participate in the gifts of God and proclaim their vocation to become what they have received: the Body of Christ. Hauerwas writes,

liturgy is not a motive for social action, it is not a cause to effect. Liturgy is social action. Through liturgy we are shaped to live rightly the story of God, to become part of that story, and are thus able to recognize and respond to the saints in our midst. Once we recognize that the church is a social ethic – an ethic that is, to be sure, but a gesture – then we can appreciate how every activity of the church is a means and an opportunity for faithful service to and for the world. We believe that the gesture that is the church is nothing less than the sign of God’s salvation of the world.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁷ To borrow a turn of phrase from Rahner 1961, ‘Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace,’ 298.

⁴⁸ Phillips 1993, 94.

⁴⁹ See Yoder 1991, 33-44; 2001.

⁵⁰ Phillips 1993, 95 (emphasis added).

⁵¹ See ‘Worship, Evangelism, Ethics: On Eliminating the “And”’ in Hauerwas 2000, 86-99.

⁵² Hauerwas 1988, 107.

The liturgy is a divine pedagogy which shapes moral character, forming believers in the habits and virtues of Christian discipleship.⁵³ The faithful witness of the church in the world demonstrates the credibility of this worship.

Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells diagnose several reasons why ethics and liturgy are so frequently bifurcated, and why worship is so readily domesticated to the private sphere of pious spirituality.⁵⁴ They identify four common justifications:

- (1) Worship is about the unreal, ethics is about the real
- (2) Worship is about beauty, ethics is about the good
- (3) Worship is about the internal, ethics is about the external
- (4) Worship is about words, ethics is about action

Hauerwas and Wells flip these assertions on their head. (1) They argue that human beings are created to worship God.⁵⁵ As such, life itself is a rehearsal for *worship*, not the other way around. Liturgy provides a theological grammar for practising this real (eschatological) vocation in the everyday. (2) The separation of ‘beauty’ from ‘the good’ corresponds to a problematic distinction between ‘subjective’ worship and ‘objective’ ethics. They contend that goodness, truth and beauty are neither separable nor in direct competition: ‘For, in worship, Christians seek the God who combines all three while maintaining their overflowing abundance.’⁵⁶ (3) The internal/external dichotomy informs prevailing assumptions about private/public spheres, in which ‘ethics is political [and] worship is (or should be) apolitical.’⁵⁷ Against an anaemic vision of public life dominated by neo-liberal politics of the market-state, they argue for a ‘rival perception of politics’ itself that

⁵³ Wells 2002, 66-74; cf. Black 2000, 317-348.

⁵⁴ Hauerwas & Wells 2004, 3-12.

⁵⁵ See Schmemmann 2004, 14-15.

⁵⁶ Hauerwas & Wells 2004, 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. According to Rodney Clapp (1996, 114), such dichotomies presume what the church is and what the church does are separable by kind. In *Performing the Faith*, Hauerwas (2004b) argues that this public/private distinction is precisely ‘the social condition that creates the politics that makes intelligible the question: “what is the relation between liturgy and ethics?”’ (154). This bifurcation is predicated upon the abstract codification of ethics into the language of a pluralistic rationality – a language the church is required to learn if Christians are to act and speak in public (cf. Hauerwas 2011). When reduced to a private realm of values, the liturgy becomes little more than an instrumental motivation for ‘more important’ external tasks (see Guroian 1994, 87-100).

discerns the best use of the unlimited gifts of God, rather than the just distribution of the limited resources of the world. It regards the contrast between public and private as yet another binary distinction that misrepresents the call of the gospel and the nature of the Christian life. For example, in baptism, Christians (or those speaking on their behalf) are called to give up any sense that they “own” their bodies. So the notion of “private” makes no sense. Yet this creates a profound conception of politics, being genuinely a body, rather than a mass of discrete individuals. Worship is, or aspires to be, the manifestation of the best ordering of that body, and is thus the most significantly political – the most “ethical” – thing that Christians do.⁵⁸

(4) Finally, Hauerwas and Wells reject the portrayal of worship as commemorative stories of a long-forgotten past and ethics as active life in the present. Liturgy, they maintain, is comprised of both words *and* actions. In worship, the church does commemorate the past ‘as the theater of God’s definitive and self-revelatory actions in his world,’ but it also anticipates the future of God’s redemption. Through the sacraments, the church celebrates the salvific grace of the Father, participates in the resurrection life of the Son and is commissioned by the Spirit to live faithfully in the knowledge that, in the end, God is ultimately in charge of human history. In this way, liturgy ‘offers ethics a series of ordered practices that shape the character and assumptions of Christians, and suggest habits and models that inform every aspect of corporate life – meeting people, acknowledging fault and failure, celebrating, thanking, reading, speaking with authority, reflecting on wisdom, naming truth, registering need, bringing about reconciliation, sharing food, renewing purpose.’⁵⁹

Liturgy is not juxtaposed with the ethical praxis and political witness of discipleship. ‘It is the most significant way in which Christianity takes flesh, evolving from a set of ideas and convictions to a set of practices and a way of life.’⁶⁰ As Rodney Clapp writes, ‘Far from being a retreat from the real world, worship enables Christians to see what the real world is and equips them to live in it.’⁶¹ Both ethics *and* liturgy express the practical wisdom of the Christian tradition concerning the everyday practices which constitute the church across time.⁶² As Hauerwas concludes, ‘That is why, hopefully, it is hard to distinguish the work done in liturgy from that done in ethics. After all,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 6. See also the work of William Cavanaugh 2000; 2002; 2014, 384-402.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁶¹ Clapp 1996, 114.

⁶² Hauerwas 2004b, 156; cf. Wells 2006.

when all is said and done, liturgy and ethics are just ways to do theology, and theology, so understood, might again be construed as worship.’⁶³

ETHICS AS LITURGY (OR, THE LITURGICAL DEEP-STRUCTURE OF THE WORKS OF MERCY)

Hauerwas is surely correct in his desire to eliminate the ‘and’ artificially bifurcating liturgy from ethics.⁶⁴ Whilst sympathetic with its ethical vision, I nonetheless suggest that the post-liberal emphasis on the liturgy of the church only tells half of the story.⁶⁵ Whereas Hauerwas and Wells overcome the antinomy between liturgy and ethics by defending the ethical nature of ritual sacraments, this thesis approaches this issue from a different angle by investigating the sacramentality of concrete ethical acts. It asks, in other words, whether it is possible to turn the question the other way around and explore the liturgical deep-structure of ordinary works of mercy.

In his landmark study, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, the French Catholic theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet also maintains that liturgy and ethics are intrinsically related to one another. Like Benedict, Chauvet argues that the church’s ‘deepest nature’ is sacramentally oriented to the praise and worship of God. Liturgy and ethics name two dimensions of a wider sacramental framework constituted by Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics.⁶⁶ This approach enables Chauvet to affirm the central role of the ritual sacraments for the Christian life, and to develop a sacramental theology of ethical praxis. According to Chauvet,

ethics draws its Christian aspect from its quality of a “liturgical” response ([a] “liturgy of the neighbor”) to the initial gift of God. Consequently, just as the liturgy itself must become the object of an ethical reinterpretation to become

⁶³ Hauerwas 2000, 158.

⁶⁴ Hauerwas’ insight has inspired a range of new studies in the emerging field of ‘ecclesial ethnography,’ which have begun to explore the extent to which congregational liturgy actually shapes moral character of parishioners. See, for instance, Adams & Elliott 2000, 339–364; Healy 2000; Healy 2003, 287-308; Scharen 2004; Scharen 2005, 125-142; Whitmore 2007, 273-294; Bretherton 2012, 167-196; Ward 2012.

⁶⁵ ‘While Hauerwas refers to contemporary liturgical practice,’ Phillips (1993) writes, ‘his approach is circular: the liturgy is the on-going story which forms God’s holy people, but the people must demonstrate some degree of holiness (evidenced by charity, hospitality, and justice) in order for liturgy to be credible’ (96).

⁶⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 161-189. Interestingly, in *The Peaceable Kingdom* Hauerwas (1984) identifies similar defining ‘marks’ of Christian identity. He argues that ‘there are clear “marks” through which we know that the church is church. These marks do not guarantee the existence of the church, but are the means that God has given us to help us along the way. Thus the church is known where *the sacraments are celebrated, the word is preached, and upright lives are encouraged and lived*’ (106-107. *Emphasis added*). Chauvet does not so much clash with Benedict or Hauerwas as articulate theological connections they tend to leave unsaid.

fully Christian, so also, and conversely, an ethics which is not reinterpreted liturgically, that is to say, as a theological response to the initial grace from God — as generous as it might be — would lose its Christian identity (1. Cor 13:1-3).⁶⁷

Here, the question shifts from ‘liturgy and ethics’ to the rather more complex relationship between a *ritual* ‘liturgy of the church’ and an *existential* ‘liturgy of the neighbour.’⁶⁸ Building on Chauvet’s sacramental theology, this thesis proposes that what the Eucharist is to the liturgy of the church, so the works of mercy are to the ‘liturgy of the neighbour’ – sites of participatory intensity in God wherein we enjoy the mediated presence of Christ in our midst.

1.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1.3.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This thesis contributes to a theological analysis of the tradition of the works of mercy as a whole. It is not a work of historical theology; it does not attempt to trace the rich history of the gradual development of the works of mercy from their origins in Jewish and Christian antiquity.⁶⁹ Equally,

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁶⁸ According to Vincent Lloyd (2009), attempts to construct an account of liturgy in the ‘broadest sense’ of the word run the risk of undermining the transformative potency of the concrete liturgies of the church. Lloyd challenges the so-called ‘New Liturgists’ for appealing to rhetorically punchy yet empirically ambiguous notion of a ‘liturgical culture’ as a mean of outflanking postmodern nihilism (Catherine Pickstock) or resisting economic globalisation (William Cavanaugh). For Lloyd, the issue turns on the distinction between *liturgy* and *ritual*: ritual being a more generic term for regular patterns of behaviour invested with symbolic significance and efficacy; and liturgy, in this context, referring to the public worship of the Christian church. ‘Ritual performance may reinforce community bonds, but ritual performance never substantively alters social norms; liturgical performance may also reinforce community bonds, but liturgical performance always has the potential to substantively alter social norms’ (75). By obfuscating this difference, the New Liturgists dilute the *authoritative* nature of set liturgies, and risk recreating a simplistic insider/outsider distinction. My own proposal for a liturgical account of the works of mercy draws heavily from *both* the New Liturgists and traditional sacramental theologians. Whereas Lloyd is critical of those who would turn *from* ritual liturgies in favour of some generic liturgy of culture or life or the world, my approach seeks to retain and intensify the tension between ritual and ethical dimensions of Christian worship in ways that complicate insider/outsider distinctions. In a response to Lloyd, Cavanaugh (2014) points to the sacramental theology of Louis-Marie Chauvet, who provides a robust account of ritual performance, yet nonetheless affirms the sacramental deep-structure of particular ethical acts in the world (388-389). For a discussion of ritual and liturgy, see Chauvet 1995b, 321-376; cf. Bell 1992; Garrigan 2004; Arbuckle 2010, 81-98; Foley 2014, 143-152.

⁶⁹ Scholarly literature on the historical development of mercy, charity, compassion and justice is vast and growing at a prolific rate. On the emergence of the works of mercy in Judaism and early Christianity, see, for instance, Lampe 1966; Hands 1968; Constantelos 1968; Hengel 1974; Countryman 1979; 1980; Bird 1982; Ramsey 1982; McGuckin 1987; Hamel 1990; Winter 1994; Loewenberg 2001; Brown 2002; McGuckin 2005; Caner 2006; Finn 2006; Holman 2008; Frenkel & Lev (eds.) 2009; Brown 2012. Concerning developments in the Middle Ages, see Tierney 1959; Bossy 1985; Mollat 1986; Rubin 1987; Henderson 1994; Roberts 1996; Brodman 1998; Bougerol 2000; Brodman 2009. On the practice of charity in the Reformation and early modern periods, see McKee 1984; Lindberg 1993; Jütte 1994; Lindberg 1994. For examples of studies on

it is not an exercise in practical or pastoral theology per se. It does not attempt to survey each individual work of mercy in order to produce a 'how-to' guide for practitioners.⁷⁰ Finally, it is not an empirical analysis of how specific communities are currently embodying the works of mercy. Each of these areas continues to produce important academic work. Though informed by this research, my specific aim is to contribute to a theology of the works of mercy by recovering neglected aspects of their practice and by attending to the theological structures that determine how they are understood on the ground.

1.3.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

My theological wrestling with the works of mercy has been informed by close engagement with four Christian traditions: Evangelical, Wesleyan, Catholic and Anglican. This journey began in a vibrant non-denominational evangelical church in Southern California. This congregation was deeply formed by habits of works of mercy within its community, its neighbourhood and abroad. However, for all its practical activity, this community had no theological grammar for this work, nor any firm roots in history or tradition. Some years later, I attended a Nazarene church in a poor inner-city area of San Diego. The English-speaking congregation included an unusual mixture of students, professional and low-income families and several rough sleepers from the neighbourhood.⁷¹ Every week, the church would feed hundreds of poor and homeless people at its Saturday distribution. During the winter months, the church offered a night shelter to provide a safe and warm place of hospitality. It was here that I first encountered the tradition of the 'works of mercy' and their deep theological connection to the sacraments.⁷² I learnt to discern the relationship between the Eucharist and the breadline, and to name works of mercy as acts of

works of mercy, the development of social welfarism and the modern bureaucratic state, see Andrew 1989; Williams 1989; Himmelfarb 1991; Bremmer 1996; Critchlow & Parker 1998; Woodhead & Catto 2012.

⁷⁰ Of texts concerning the works of mercy as a theological tradition, the vast majority are more popular level studies: Blunt 1945; Callahan 1988; Eigo 1992; Eigo 1993; Keller 1997; de Jong 2003; Finley 2003; Keenan 2005; Apostoli 2011; Shea 2011; Kasper 2014.

⁷¹ In addition to the English speaking community, Mid-City Church is comprised of six other Nazarene congregations who share the church building each week, including French/Creole, Samoan, Spanish, Cambodian and Sudanese congregations.

⁷² Nazarenes, like Methodists, belong within the Wesleyan holiness tradition. John Wesley famously sought to recover the patristic and deeply Catholic conception of both the sacraments and the works of mercy. See Wesley's sermons: "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (#43) and "The Duty of Constant Communion" (#101) in Outler 1984-93. These sermons show that the Methodist Class Rules required the works of devotion, the works of mercy and participation in the 'ordinances of God' – which include the Lord's Supper. For a discussion, see Watson 1985, 39-66; Hauerwas 1998, 123-142; Maddox 2002, 59-81; Long 2005; Johnson 2007, 71-100; Rieger 2011. For a thorough bibliographical survey, see Collins 2014. I am indebted to John Wright for this connection.

worship.⁷³ Since living in the UK, I have become a member of the Church of England, and involvement in parish life has given a further perspective on the works of mercy from an Anglican perspective. As a Protestant student of Roman Catholic theology, I took up my PhD studies at the Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham. This thesis leans extensively (though not exclusively) upon the Catholic tradition. As a consequence of my engagement with these diverse traditions, this thesis takes a broadly ecumenical approach. In this regard, the spirit in which this thesis seeks to engage Christian traditions shares a similar ethos with the emerging theological agenda of Receptive Ecumenism.⁷⁴

1.4 THE STRUCTURE

The plan of this thesis is as follows:

Part One lays the groundwork for a sacramental theology of the works of mercy by surveying the relationship between liturgy and ethics in twentieth-century Catholic thought.

Chapter 2 traces key shifts in Catholic sacramental theology from the narrow confines of neo-scholasticism to a more evocative theology of ‘sacramentality.’ Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the predominant scholastic approach focused almost exclusively on the number, institution and efficacy of the seven Sacraments. As a result, it tended to keep liturgy and ethics at arm’s length, insisting that the sacramental is more or less ‘contained’ within the rigidly defined boundaries of the church’s sacred rites. In the decades preceding the Council, the possibility of an alternative sacramental vision began to emerge in the writings of thinkers such as Odo Casel, Virgil Michel, Henri de Lubac and Otto Semmelroth. Their work began to clear space for reimagining the Christian life as rooted in the ‘primordial sacramentality’ of Jesus Christ and the church. It also provoked new questions concerning the relationship between ritual and liturgy, the sites of sacramental encounter and the nature of ‘sacramentality’ itself. If Jesus is sacramentally present to the church in bread and wine, is it also possible to speak of other modes of Christ’s ‘real presence’ in the mundane spaces of everyday life? This turn to ‘sacramentality’ offered a framework for reclaiming the biblical and patristic conception of the ethical life of discipleship as an integral dimension of the church’s corporate worship. Codified in the documents of Vatican II, this perspective dramatically redefined the terms and conditions of Catholic sacramental theology. From these initial considerations, the chapter proceeds to evaluate several theological

⁷³ For an insightful reflection on life and ministry at Mid-City, see Trans 2011, 5-6.

⁷⁴ On Receptive Ecumenism, see Murray 2007, 279-301; Murray 2008.

responses. First, I explore the early development of a sacramental ethic in the writings of three conciliar theologians: Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner and Yves Congar. Second, I assess the critical contributions of liberation theology, including the work of Juan Luis Segundo, Aloysius Pieris and Gustavo Gutiérrez. In different ways, these theologians not only called into question the limits of scholastic sacramentology, but also paved the way for a sacramental interpretation of ethical praxis.

Part Two addresses the wider theological structures which afford this sacramental ethic its theological coherence. Specifically, I take the work of Louis-Marie Chauvet as my point of departure for re-conceptualising the works of mercy from the perspective of sacramentality.

Chapter 3 sketches the basic outline of Chauvet's sacramental theology. Whereas conciliar and liberation theologians remain bound to the scholastic categories they sought to question, Chauvet's postmodern approach succeeds in breaking free of scholasticism and the onto-theological metaphysics that underlies it. He proposes a symbolic account in which the dynamic interplay of Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics constitutes the 'arch-sacramentality' of Christian existence. This approach changes the focus from an extrinsic juxtaposition of sacrament and ethics to an intrinsic relation between *two modalities of liturgical praxis*: the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the neighbour. For Chauvet, worship names a sacramental economy of symbolic gift-exchange, and Christian ethics represents nothing less than a 'return-gift of thanksgiving' in response to the prevenient grace of God proclaimed in Scripture and celebrated in the Sacraments.

Chapter 4 investigates the scriptural foundations of Chauvet's 'eucharistic' ethic, and assesses its implications for the works of mercy. The notion of a 'sacramental ethic' is not a novel idea, but one with deep roots in Judaism and early Christianity. On the one hand, I evaluate Chauvet's account of the emergence of Christian ethics from the context of Jewish worship. On the other, I contend that the biblical tradition in which loving-kindness constitutes 'sacrificial' acts of worship provides strong evidence not only for the legitimacy, but also for the necessity of a sacramental theology of mercy.

Chapter 5 concludes this section by critically assessing Chauvet's proposal of Christian ethics as a 'liturgy of the neighbour.' Chauvet derives this notion from the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. This concept provides Chauvet with a shorthand description of the sacramentality of

ethics. However, I argue that Chauvet's reliance on Levinas is complicated. Acknowledging that aspects of Levinas' theology enrich and deepen Chauvet's project, I question the extent to which Levinas' philosophical presuppositions undermine the integrity of Chauvet's wider argument. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the strengths and limitations of Chauvet's work.

Part Three moves beyond Chauvet's broad 'liturgy of the neighbour' and offers a more constructive proposal for the sacramentality of the works of mercy. Following Chauvet's architectonic structure of Christian identity, the final chapters approach this question from the perspective of Scripture, Sacrament and Ethics.

Chapter 6 begins with *Scripture*, and specifically with Matthew 25:31-46. This text is arguably the most significant biblical passage concerning acts of compassion in the Christian tradition. Here, we discover that any deed of loving kindness which we offer 'to the least of these' – food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the homeless – we do unto Christ himself. In this chapter, I follow the ancient Christian reading of this text which interprets 'the least' *universally* as any person in a situation of need and takes *literally* Christ's 'real presence' in the act of mercy itself. However, this approach is not without controversy. For example, numerous biblical scholars have challenged this exegesis, and especially its 'universalist' interpretation of 'the least' of Christ's brethren. By contrast, this view contends that 'the least' is not a reference to needy persons in general, but rather to needy *disciples of Christ* – 'my brethren.' Some argue that Matthew 25 is not a *revelation* of Christ's presence in the poor, but simply a *description* of the judgment of the nations based on how the world has treated the church. Several theologians have also questioned the implications of this sacramental exegesis for the integrity of neighbourly love. By shifting the focus from the neighbour (as such) to Christ (hidden in the neighbour), it is argued, this sacramental interpretation also risks *instrumentalising* the other for the sake of one's spiritual worship. This chapter offers a response to these objections: first, by providing a theological defence of the sacramental interpretation of Matthew 25; and second, by exploring the paradoxical nature of mediation and integral relationship between love of God and neighbour. The chapter concludes with a meditation on the liturgies of church and neighbour. In the end, I contend that Scripture itself invites us to rediscover the deep connection between the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist and in the neighbour.

Chapter 7 turns to the question of *Sacrament*. The first half of the chapter focuses on the writing of a little known Anglican theologian named R. A. Lambourne. Though he published his material in the 1960s, Lambourne remains one of the few Western theologians to offer a sustained and

detailed theological proposal for the works of mercy as ‘sacrament.’ It is unfortunate that for decades his groundbreaking work in sacramental theology has received so little attention. To my knowledge, the present study represents the first critical engagement with Lambourne’s theology of mercy. I suggest several ways in which Lambourne’s provocative approach might enrich and extend Chauvet’s sacramental ethic in fruitful directions. In the second half, I return to the question of presence, absence and sacramental mediation. Drawing on a range of contemporary theologians, especially the recent work of Oliver Davies, I call into question Chauvet’s emphasis on Christ’s presence-in-absence (as distance, lack, void). Instead, Davies’ fascinating account of the ascension enables us to recover a more appropriate conceptual language for Christ’s proximity as a kind of presence-in-hiddenness. By weaving together these various theological threads we are able to discern something of the radical profundity of ordinary – even trivial – ethical acts. Lambourne and Davies encourage us to finally free our theological imagination from the artificial inhibitions of scholastic theology in order to affirm the works of mercy as genuinely sacramental acts – events of grace in which Christians encounter the hidden presence of Christ, participate in the compassionate love of God and become what they have received: the body of Christ, taken, consecrated, broken and distributed for the life of the world.

Chapter 8 concludes with a meditation on *Ethics*, and the faithful witness of two exemplars of the sacrament of mercy: Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Mother Maria Skobtsova of Paris. This chapter takes as its guiding motif an image from a sermon of John Chrysostom. Chrysostom writes that for Christians there are two altars of Christ’s presence: the altar of the Mass and the altar of the neighbour. He argues that these two altars are inseparably connected, so much so that to neglect the latter is to profane the former. Integrating Chrysostom and Chauvet together, we could say that the altar of the Mass (the Eucharist) signifies the intensive core of the liturgy of the church; just as the altar of the brother or sister (the works of mercy) constitutes the intensive core of the liturgy of the neighbour. Christian ethics is not simply sacramental in the broadest sense of the term; it is also punctuated by particular acts, encounters and events – meetings with Christ in mystery and participations in the Triune God in spirit and truth. This chapter concludes with a theological reflection on two lives which exemplified the living connection between these two altars of God. Both of these women have had a profound impact on their respective traditions (Mother Teresa for Roman Catholicism and Mother Maria for Eastern Orthodoxy). Indeed, their lives, spent in service to the poor and in devotion to Christ, give us a small window – an iconic glimpse – into the hidden depths of mercy. For when all is said and done, mercy is more than a deed. One can give all that one has to the poor, and even surrender one’s body to the flames and still gain nothing (1 Cor 13:3). Mercy is more than a deed because mercy is a way of

being-in-the-world – being-for-others – being-before-God. Through the habits of mercy one becomes merciful, and becoming merciful one is drawn ever deeper into the fathomless love of God.

1.5 CONCLUSION

In his thoughtful study, *The Beatitude of Mercy*, Terry Veling reflects upon the nature of mercy itself. He writes,

It seems that mercy is a rather silent word and perhaps – of its nature – does not draw attention to itself. Mercy is a special type of love. “It is not boastful or conceited”, St Paul says. It is not “jealous”. It does not “take pleasure in other people’s sins”. It is “always ready to excuse” (1 Cor 13:4-7). Mercy sits among the “least” and the “last”, hidden and unknown by the powers-that-be. Mercy never forces its way to gain attention, but always remains *there* nevertheless, full of import for every soul who knows that, in the end, they have little else they can rely on; there is little else that will save either their own or *our* situation – in this sense, mercy is “from age to age” (Luke 1:50). It has the greatest import for every *living* soul – if, that is, they are living and in this sense, *soulful* and *merciful*.⁷⁵

Mercy, almost by definition, adheres to the humble and the unnamed. It is not self-aggrandising, nor a language of power or policy or prescriptive legislation. It cannot be drafted, codified and enforced through bureaucratic coercion. For all its elusiveness, mercy nonetheless names one of the most profound modes of interpersonal encounter that shapes who we are as human beings. Works of mercy seem so *ordinary* and yet they are the very acts that nourish human relationships and sustain the world. Stanley Hauerwas argues that the church’s witness in the world will be one marked by ‘small achievements’ – a politics of the *radical ordinary*. ‘Radical,’ he writes, ‘is used to qualify “ordinary” as a reminder that “appropriate attention to the ongoing struggle” must be given if we are to form a common life to sustain our connections to one another.’⁷⁶ The contribution of this thesis to the wider task of developing a renewed theology of mercy is a modest one: I propose a fundamental shift in focus from ‘mere charity’ to mundane holiness, from ‘volunteerism’ to sacramentality and from a private morality to a liturgical politics of the radical ordinary. In the final analysis, the works of mercy are not a checklist of ‘nice’ things Christians do from time to time. Nor are they an ideological alternative to the politics of justice. Rather, they describe the mode of being – a *habitus*, a cruciform way of life – of a people radically

⁷⁵ Veling 2010, 24-25; cf. 2009, 215.

⁷⁶ Hauerwas 2010, 96-97. My own understanding of the significance of the ordinary has been strongly influenced by the writings of Michel de Certeau (1988).

engaged in the joyous service of even the least of these (Matt 25:40). As Hauerwas observes, 'To be a Christian is to be trained to care for one another through the building up of a common life by engaging in the time-consuming and time-creating work of the everyday.'⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Hauerwas 2007, 146.

PART I

TOWARDS A SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY OF ETHICAL PRAXIS

CHAPTER TWO

LITURGY AND ETHICS IN ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

Behold, the single love of God and of our neighbour, by what manifold sacraments and innumerable languages, and in each several language in how innumerable modes of speaking, it is bodily expressed.¹

– St Augustine

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century marked a time of profound change within Roman Catholic thought.² Nowhere has this change been more clearly demonstrated than in the renewal of sacramental theology initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). At the heart of this renewal was a shift from a narrow and juridical fixation on the number, institution and efficacy of the seven sacraments administered by the hierarchical church, to a wider and richer emphasis on the primordial mystery of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ, the manifold sites of Christ's mediated presence and the grace-saturated 'sacramentality' of Christian existence. This new perspective has had profound implications for how the church now understands the nature of its formal liturgical worship. From the start, it provoked theologians to consider again the possibility of identifying other times and places, other modes of action and other interpersonal relationships as potential sites of sacramental encounter beyond the boundaries of the ecclesial community.

This chapter traces key developments in twentieth-century catholic sacramental theology. The first section surveys initial theological explorations in 'sacramental ethics' beyond the traditional limitations of neo-scholasticism in the decades leading up to Vatican II. The second section evaluates how these themes are taken up and expanded in the seminal writings of Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner and Yves Congar. The final section examines the perspective of liberation theology. Together these various theological trajectories lay the groundwork for the possibility of reclaiming the sacramentality of the works of mercy.

¹ *Confessions* cited in Lindberg 2008, 18.

² See Metzger 1997, 122-138.

2.2 FROM SCHOLASTICISM TO SACRAMENTALITY

2.2.1 SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY PRIOR TO THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Prior to the Liturgical Movement and the Second Vatican Council, the parameters of Catholic sacramental theology were defined predominantly in terms of the 'solemn and official teachings' of the magisterium codified at the Council of Trent.³ The terms and conditions of Scholastic teaching on the sacraments were largely determined by the following doctrinal affirmations:

1. Sacraments have been instituted by Christ.
2. Sacraments are symbols of something sacred, conferring the grace they signify.
3. There are seven – and only seven – sacraments of the church.⁴
4. Baptism, confirmation and holy orders confer a character.⁵
5. God's action in the sacraments does not depend upon the intention or holiness of the minister.⁶

In this perspective, sacraments are conceived as precisely defined and carefully regulated sacred rituals. Scholastic sacramentology tended to focus on the theological implications of liturgical rubrics rather than developing a theology of worship. It emphasised the notion of 'instrumental causality,' defining grace as a quantifiable 'thing' channelled to the worshipper through the sacraments and the laity as passive recipients rather than as active agents. The sacraments were thus viewed in predominantly 'extrinsicist, objectivist and functionalist' categories.⁷ One consequence of this is that insufficient attention was given to questions concerning the mystery of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the church, the location of sacraments within the context of the liturgy, and the relationship between the sacramental life and secular praxis of the people of God.⁸ 'This one-sided, scholastically colored sacramental theology,' writes Herbert

³ Osborne 1999; cf. 1988.

⁴ These seven sacraments include: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, holy orders, matrimony, penance and anointing of the sick. For a discussion of each, see Martos 2001 and Schmaus 1975.

⁵ Osborne 1999, 174-175. 'At the time of Trent there were, and still are today, many theological views on what this character is. The major issue behind the Tridentine teaching is that these three sacraments are not to be repeated. If one attempts to describe the nature of this sacramental character in any detail, one has entered the area of theological opinion. No description of the "what" can be presented as the "official" teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.'

⁶ *Ibid.*, 167-177.

⁷ Francis 1995, 585.

⁸ Such summative descriptions may reflect typical receptions of scholastic sacramentology by contemporary theologians. However, a close reading of many scholastic doctrines reveals that matters are not always so simple. Schillebeeckx (1963), for example, in his early critical engagement with the scholastic approach,

Vorgrimler, 'endured in the Catholic Church from the Council of Trent until well into the twentieth century. It was very attached to theoretical speculation, and the author who writes that "post-Tridentine theology made no substantial productive contribution to the doctrine of the sacraments" did it no injustice.'⁹

At the turn of the twentieth century several emerging factors – including neo-scholasticism, the Liturgical Movement, ecumenism, *La Nouvelle Théologie* and advancements in the human sciences, to name a few – raised new questions about the viability of this perspective, and began to clear the ground for a new theological agenda. One of the most important impetuses towards renewal was the turn to the historical study of the sacraments and their development. Joseph Martos observes that 'up until the end of the nineteenth century the Catholic understanding of theology, worship, and scripture was fundamentally non-historical.'¹⁰ Osborne argues that the historical research on the sacraments exposed many limitations of the traditional doctrines. For one thing, the historical data clearly demonstrated that Jesus in his lifetime did not 'institute' all seven sacraments. One can make a strong case for the institution of baptism and the Eucharist. However the other five sacramental actions 'developed gradually over many centuries,' and consequently the Tridentine position needed rethinking.¹¹

Prior to the Middle Ages, Christian use of sacramental language varied greatly. The practice and theology of Christian worship was a complex and ever evolving phenomenon.¹² According to Leonardo Boff, in the oldest tradition of the church the word 'sacrament' was not restricted to certain rites but was used to describe any number of things pertaining to the sacred:

remains close to classical understandings of sacramental effectiveness. He seeks to interpret these categories in new directions, emphasising not only the objective legitimacy (validity and licitness) of the sacraments, but also arguing that their efficacy is necessarily bound up with subjective appropriation and disposition under grace of those who participate in the sacramental rites.

⁹ Vorgrimler 1992, 62.

¹⁰ Martos 2001, 103.

¹¹ Osborne 1999, 7.

¹² Ibid. 'Since the beginning of this century, many books have been written on the history of the sacraments, and, on the basis of this historical research, it is impossible today to state that the church has "always taught" that there are seven, and only seven, sacraments. For instance, prior to 1150 there was no official church teaching about "seven sacraments"' (172). According to Osborne, scholarly consensus concerning the dating of the sacraments is as follows: baptism and Eucharist (27 CE), reconciliation (150 CE), orders and anointing the sick (200 CE), [marriage] (400 CE), confirmation (1000 CE), and marriage (1150 CE). 'We have reliable historical data that church officials began to enter into the marriage celebration around 400. However, only from the time of Peter Lombard (1150) do we have a clear indication that marriage was accepted as a true sacrament in the Western church' (9). Osborne concludes, 'Today, this kind of historical material is well known. Because of this history the question immediately arises, In what way can one teach that there is a dogma of the church regarding the seven sacraments?' (173).

In the twelfth century theologians began to pinpoint seven primordial acts of the church among the hundreds of “sacraments.” St. Augustine, for example, had enumerated 304 sacraments. The new focus on seven began to appear with such theologians as Rudulfus Ardens (d. 1200), Otto of Bamberg (d. 1139), and Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1131).

These seven primordial acts are our seven sacraments today. The church officially adopted this doctrine at the Synod of Lyons in 1274 and the Council of Florence in 1439. Finally, in 1547 the Council of Trent solemnly declared: “The sacraments of the new law are seven, no more and no less.”¹³

For Boff (and indeed for the vast majority of contemporary Catholic theologians), this discovery profoundly relativised the absolutist claims of pre-Vatican II theology. But this in itself does not imply that the church was wrong to identify these seven acts as sacramental sites of profound significance.¹⁴ Instead, this perspective challenges the reductive assumption that sacramentality is somehow *exhausted* by the officially prescribed rites of the church. If it was once possible to identify sacramental practices beyond the seven (and indeed beyond liturgy of the church itself), and if the disenfranchisement of these other sacramental practices was predicated upon polemical ecclesiastical statements that were ‘more disciplinary than doctrinal,’¹⁵ then it is not only legitimate but necessary for Catholic theologians to develop a more comprehensive vocabulary of ‘sacramentality.’¹⁶ ‘The possibility that things had not always been the same in the past,’ writes Martos, ‘opened the possibility for things to be different in the future.’¹⁷

The twentieth-century renaissance of historical study demonstrated that the post-Tridentine concept of ‘sacrament’ had itself undergone substantial change over the centuries. Though rooted in patristic thought, it was not until between 1000 and 1500 CE that a technical and theological terminology concerning the sacraments became more universally accepted. According to this teaching, *sacramentum* refers to: (1) a visible sign or perceptible symbol of something invisible and sacred, (2) the invisible reality being the grace of God, and (3) the visible sign stemming from God’s own self-revelation in Jesus. From these components, medieval theologians eventually

¹³ Boff 1987, 56. Whilst it is true that Hugh of St. Victor is known for identifying seven primordial sacraments, Justo González points out that he nonetheless affirmed an expansive theology of sacramentality. ‘Since according to Hugh of St. Victor all of creation is geared toward its proper end of manifesting God and sanctifying the soul, the list of possible sacraments is endless. As a result, Hugh can refer to the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, to making the sign of the cross, and to dozens of other practices as sacraments’ (2005, 156).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56-61.

¹⁵ Osborne 1999, 173.

¹⁶ See McPartlan 2008, 219-241.

¹⁷ Martos 2001, 104.

arrived at the classic definition of sacraments as 'external signs instituted by Christ to give grace.'¹⁸

In the decades preceding the Second Vatican Council, Catholic historians were confronted with the fact that for all its theological profundity the scholastic approach to the sacraments bears little resemblance to the writings of the New Testament and the early church fathers. There certainly were 'sacramental' actions within early Christianity – for instance, baptism, the laying on of hands, the Lord's Supper and more charismatic practices like tongues or prophecy. However, no general word is used in Scripture to describe them. Later church fathers would speak of sacramental rituals as 'mysteries.' At the time of the New Testament, the term *mysterion* assumed a much broader theological meaning. In the Gospels it describes the primordial mystery of the Kingdom of God incarnated in Jesus Christ.¹⁹ For Paul, 'the mystery is God's plan for the salvation of all which has been realized in history as well as revealed in Christ's death and resurrection – the "paschal mystery" which is implanted again and again in history through the proclamation of the Word.'²⁰ This mystery unfolds in Christ's continued presence in and union with the church.²¹ Whereas later theologians came to interpret the sacraments in an increasingly restrictive manner, the biblical text affirms a profound, even cosmic, *mysterion*: '(a) God's secret purpose for the salvation of all, now revealed in Christ (e.g. Romans 2:25, 8:19-21); (b) an earthly reality expressing in a hidden way a meaning related to God's secret plan (e.g. Ephesians 5:32; Revelation 1:20, 17:5-7); (c) an historical happening with a special significance related to God's plan (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:51; 2 Thessalonians 2:7).'²²

Tracing the complex history of the development of sacramental theology throughout the Christian tradition far exceeds the scope of the present argument. The original 'sacramental' language of the church was not limited to liturgical rites and rituals. Rather, it named the salvific self-communication of God in Christ, whose redemptive presence is mediated through concrete acts, gestures, events, places and persons through the power of the Holy Spirit.

One dimension of the early Christian sacramental vision that the Western scholastic tradition largely ignored prior to the Second Vatican Council was the relationship between the mystery of

¹⁸ Osborne 1988, 7.

¹⁹ Benedict XVI 2011, 28-35.

²⁰ Forrester, McDonald & Tellini 2004, 68.

²¹ Martos, 2001, 29.

²² Forrester, McDonald & Tellini 2004, 69.

Christ proclaimed in Scripture, celebrated in worship and embodied in the ethical praxis of discipleship. Embedded deep within the New Testament and early Christianity is the shocking disclosure that the risen Christ remains present to his church not only in words and gestures of the gathered ecclesia, but also in the hungry and naked bodies of neighbours and strangers in circumstances of need: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matt 25:40). Acts of compassion and mercy practised in the world were understood by the early church as privileged means by which one can participate in sacred realities beyond immediate perception: 'Lord, when was it that we *saw* you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? (Matt 25:37).

For the early church, responding to the neighbour as a site of divine encounter was a matter of profound significance. The First Epistle of John tells us that the unfathomable mystery of the love of God is revealed and participated in through costly acts of love: 'We know love by this, that [Christ] laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help? [...] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us' (1 John 3:16-17; 4:11-12).

Likewise the Letter of James declares, 'If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill", and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?' (Jas 2:14-16). This injunction to practise mercy is not simply a moral obligation, but a religious duty: 'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress' (Jas 1:27). This association between mercy and the religious worship is not incidental. The technical cultic vocabulary of liturgy, sacrifice and priesthood found in the New Testament has much closer connection to the daily living of baptised Christians than it does to the formal rites of an ordained priesthood.²³ Explicit language of worship, sacrifice and mystery in Scripture is typically used in two ways: first in reference to Christ (as priest, sacrifice and mediator of the new covenant) and second in reference to the daily praxis of Christians lived as a participation in Christ through the Spirit.²⁴ The book of Hebrews, for instance, argues at great length that Christ alone is the great high priest and the sole and sufficient atoning sacrifice for sin. And yet, the same text also speaks of the *sacrifices* that Christians make – fruit of the lips that confess Christ's name and good works of mutual love,

²³ Cf. Daly 2009.

²⁴ Cf. Forrester, McDonald & Tellini 2004, 36-52.

hospitality and solidarity: 'such *sacrifices* are pleasing to God' (Heb 13:1-3; 15-16). The point of the text is not that mercy is somehow 'related' to sacrifice; mercy *is* sacrificial worship.

We shall return to the New Testament perspective on the works of mercy and worship in Section II. For now it is enough to highlight that prior to the Second Vatican Council little attention was given to the possibility of sacramental realities beyond the rites of the church.²⁵ Sacraments were held at arm's distance from daily living and ethical acts were defined in moral categories distinct from Christian worship. Consequently, the biblical vision of an integral connection between liturgy and ethics was left largely unexplored.

2.2.2 THE SACRAMENTAL WATERSHED OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Second Vatican Council was a watershed moment for the development of Catholic sacramental thought. Among its most significant theological breakthroughs was the recovery of the 'sacramentality' of Christ and the sacramental character of the church. In the words of *Lumen gentium*, 'the church, in Christ, is a kind of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity among all human beings' (LG 1). This paradigm shift was rooted in a theology of retrieval pioneered largely by founders of the Liturgical Renewal movement.

In Germany, the Benedictine liturgist Odo Casel (1886-1948) argued for the recovery of the patristic theology of mystery, emphasising the importance of experiential participation with the presence of God in the sacraments.²⁶ Anticipating later notions of 'sacramental encounter,' Casel's work provoked a conceptual shift from sacraments as 'sacred objects' to sacraments as *redemptive acts of God*. His work succeeded in overcoming the narrowness of the Scholastic tradition by 'bringing to light the fact that the mystery, biblically witnessed, as the presence of the divine salvation in Christ through the Church, is not to be equated with an abstract grace that is mediated in the cultic event of the sacraments. Rather, it is a sharing in the divine life, and hence

²⁵ Ibid., 70-71.

²⁶ Casel 1999. Martos (2001) notes, 'In coming to grips with this new historical information, theologians began to look for new ways to understand the liturgical sacraments. [...] For Casel, genuine participation in the sacraments meant an experiential participation in the Christian mysteries rather than a reverent attention to the rituals. He argued that through the sacraments and the yearly cycle of sacred feasts, Catholics relived the mysteries of Christ and made contact with his redeeming presence. His ideas seemed unorthodox at the time, but they began a movement toward a more experiential interpretation of the sacraments in Catholic theology' (105). Cf. Schmemmann 1975.

the becoming holy of men and women happening through the drawing of believers into the saving acts of Christ in an ecclesial celebration.²⁷

In his groundbreaking work, *Catholicism*, Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) was among the first to propose a new theology of sacramentality, arguing that 'If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him in the full and ancient meaning of the term; she really makes him present.'²⁸ This text unlocked a new horizon of theological possibility. Drawing extensively on de Lubac (and in conversation with Karl Rahner), Otto Semmelroth (1912-1979) developed this insight further in his book *The Church as Original Sacrament* – a study that was to greatly influence the liturgical documents of the Council. Here Semmelroth introduced the language of the church as the 'primordial sacrament' (*Ursakrament*) of the kingdom. The church, in his view, is not an 'eighth sacrament' enumerated along with the formal seven sacramental rites. Rather, the seven sacraments are always already rooted in the more basic sacramentality of the church.²⁹ Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner would also take up these ideas with great theological creativity.³⁰

In the United States, Virgil Michel (1888-1938) was also reshaping the landscape of Catholic sacramental theology but from the perspective of social ethics.³¹ Michel's innovative work sought to reclaim the intrinsically *social* character of the liturgy. According to Timothy Brunk, Michel was one of the first modern figures 'to make the theological connection between liturgy and the conduct of believers outside of liturgy a defining element of his program.'³² The church's ecclesial identity is constituted by the formative power of its liturgical practice. This has direct implications for Christian ethics. Drawing on papal teaching, Michel writes,

Pius X tells us that the liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit; Pius XI says that the true Christian spirit is indispensable for social

²⁷ Kilmartin 1999, 276.

²⁸ De Lubac 1988, 76. In *The Splendor of the Church*, de Lubac (1999) develops these claims further: 'The Church is a mystery; that is to say that she is also a sacrament. She is "the total *locus* of the Christian sacraments," and she is herself the great sacrament which contains and vitalizes all the others. In this world she is the sacrament of Christ, as Christ Himself, in His humanity, is for us the sacrament of God' (203).

²⁹ Van Roo 1992, 82-85.

³⁰ Schillebeeckx 1963; Rahner 1963a.

³¹ See Michel 1935, 536-545; 1937; 1938. For a discussion of Michel's life and work, see Marx 1957; Franklin 1988, 194-201; Baxter 1997, 499-528; Pecklers 1998, 124-136; Scharen 2004, 19-27; Woods 2010.

³² Brunk 2007, 37.

regeneration. Hence the conclusion: The liturgy is the indispensable basis of social regeneration.³³

Michael Baxter argues that Michel's syllogism should not be read chronologically (first liturgy then social action) but (theo)logically: 'the liturgy,' writes Baxter, 'generates its own inherent logic, a logic that is inherently socially regenerative.'³⁴ Liturgy shapes and informs the nature of Christian living in the world and thus has profound social, ethical and political implications for the public witness of the church. For Michel, the parish represents the primary context of this liturgically shaped social regeneration. Baxter continues,

the parish is the "cell of the Christian life." At the center of parish life, of course, is "the sacrificial worship of the altar," but there are a host of activities that "radiate out from there," the other sacraments to be sure, yet also *the care of the needy and the poor, the practice of hospitality, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy* [...].³⁵

Michel passionately advocated for active lay participation in the liturgy. He also affirmed the sacramental profundity of Christian social ethics enacted in the secular world. 'If it is true that the liturgy has as its primary purpose the glorification of God and the sanctification of man,' he observes, 'it is also true that both this glorification and this sanctification must be realized not only in the concentrated worship of the altar, but likewise in every thought, word, and action of the day.'³⁶ His work paved the way for Catholic theology to overcome its earlier tendency to valorise 'individualistic and otherworldly dimensions of the sacraments, to see them as means of personal grace and salvation without sufficient attention to their grounding in the community or their implications for everyday life.'³⁷

Together these historical rediscoveries and theological innovations provided the raw material for a new way of thinking that would receive official sanction in core documents of the Second Vatican Council: namely, *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC), *Lumen gentium* (LG), *Apostolicam actuositatem* (AA) and *Gaudium et spes* (GS).³⁸

³³ Michel 1935, 536-45, quoted in Baxter 1997, 507.

³⁴ Baxter 1997, 507.

³⁵ Ibid., (emphasis added).

³⁶ Michel 1935-36, quoted in Brunk 2007, 39.

³⁷ Ross 1998, 175.

³⁸ Timothy Brunk provides a helpful summary of this material: 'Vatican II placed emphasis on the ethical practice of believers as spiritual worship or sacrifice (four direct references in SC 33, LG 10, LG 34, and AA 3 with an additional reference to glorifying God in the midst of people in SC 9). The texts hail the nourishing

In many ways, the documents affirm the deep connection between sacramental participation and the ethical life of Christian discipleship. *GS 43*, for example, argues that attempts to reduce the Christian life to religious duties, to the neglect of social engagement and vice versa, is incompatible with the Gospel. Splitting sacred worship from daily life ‘deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.’

The documents of the Council expand upon the priestly vocation of baptism and the sacrificial character of the worship offered by the whole people of God – both in the church and in the ordinary space of daily life. According to *LG 10*,

The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (see 1 Pet 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (see Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (see Rom 12:1).

This sacrificial offering of a life well lived speaks of something more than religious piety or secular involvement. It gestures toward a more fundamental integration. *LG 11* states that ‘It is through the sacraments *and* the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation.’³⁹ All the faithful, by virtue of their baptism, are destined for worship: ‘Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the Divine Victim to God, and *offer themselves along with it*.’⁴⁰ *LG 14* clarifies that while sacramental participation incorporates believers into the visible church, full salvific transformation also requires a certain verification or actualisation in the world through the practice of *caritas*: ‘He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the Church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church, but as it were, only in a “bodily” manner and not “in his heart.”’

or sustaining trait of the cult with respect to living moral life on a daily basis in eight places (in *SC 10*, *SC 59*, *LG 33*, *LG 42*, *AA 3*, *AA 10*, *GS 52*). In a similar vein, *SC 47* characterizes the Eucharist as a sacrament of love and a bond of charity. The text twice condemns placing trust for salvation in the sacraments alone and hence apart from any consideration of charitable action (in *LG 14* and *GS 43*) and *AA 4* exhorts believers to seek unity with Christ both within liturgical celebration and without. [...] Taken together, *LG 34* and *LG 36* imply that pursuit of the common good is precisely the kind of “holy action” that renders worship to God’ (2007, 39-40).

³⁹ Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Emphasis added. See also *LG 34*.

The texts of the Council also describe certain modes of Christian activity in the world as both an extension and fulfilment of the spiritual transformation initiated in the sacramental rituals of the church. *LG* 33 notes that the sacraments communicate and nourish charity toward God and humanity, which lay people carry out in their daily work as ‘a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself “according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal”’ (see also *AA* 3).

Finally, the documents suggest the possibility of interpreting ethical acts in pursuit of the common good as acts of worship in and of themselves (see *LG* 34, 36). The connection between liturgy and ethics is perhaps most clearly described in article 59 of *Sacrosanctum concilium*:

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to worship God. Because they are signs they also belong to the realm of instruction. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. That is why they are called sacraments of faith. They do, indeed, confer grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them is most effective in making people ready to receive this grace to their profit, to worship God duly and to practice charity.

It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that the faithful should easily understand the symbolism of the sacraments and should eagerly frequent those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life.

Sacraments ‘build up the body’; they constitute and sustain the people of God. Their instituted purpose is to orient the church to honour and glorify God *and* to equip Christians to become living acts of worship through the practice of charity. Rooted in these central claims, the documents of the Council began to map some of the basic coordinates that would set the agenda for contemporary sacramental theology.⁴¹

1. Christ as the primordial sacrament of God
2. Church as the primordial sacrament of the kingdom
3. Sacramentality beyond the sacraments
4. Manifold modalities of Christ’s presence in the church and in the world
5. Ethical dimensions of liturgical action and the liturgical deep-structure of ethical praxis
6. Ethical acts as potential sites of Christ’s proximity⁴²

⁴¹ Brunk (2007) traces within these documents not only de Lubac’s argument concerning sacramentality, but also the close link between liturgy and ethics. ‘Operating always with an eye on the proclamation of the Gospel to the people of its time,’ writes Brunk, ‘Vatican II also affirmed the legitimacy of the temporal endeavor of humanity. The Council also endorsed the value of formal public worship or time spent in individual prayer and the value of secular activity. This double endorsement is of great interest for a study of liturgy and ethics in the present day’ (10).

⁴² See O’Collins 2012.

Whilst the texts of the Council do not themselves provide a thorough or comprehensive analysis of how all of these interconnections between liturgy and the moral life hold together, they nonetheless affirm that the integrity of Christian existence in the world is somehow contingent upon the strength of this relation.

2.2.3 POPE PAUL VI AND THE MANIFOLD PRESENCES OF CHRIST

In the months following the conclusion of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI authored his encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* (1965), in which he proposed a more dynamic understanding of the real presence of Christ. ‘All of us realize,’ he writes, ‘that there is more than one way in which Christ is present in His Church’ (#35). Expanding the brief discussion of this theme in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*,⁴³ he suggests that Christ is indeed present:

when the church *gathers*
when the church *prays* (and *sings*)
when the church ***performs works of mercy***
when the church *shepherds* over the people of God
when the church *journeys* as a pilgrim people toward the heavenly kingdom
when the church *preaches* and *proclaims* the word
when the church *celebrates* the sacraments⁴⁴

Whereas most of these had already been explicitly acknowledged by the Council, Paul VI consolidates the more implicit echoes and intimations of a ‘sacramental ethic’ into a single, coherent claim: ‘[Christ] is present in the Church as she performs her *works of mercy*, not just because whatever good we do to one of His least brethren we do to Christ Himself, but also because Christ is the one who performs these works through the Church and who continually helps men [*sic*]⁴⁵ with His divine love’ (#35).⁴⁶ Paul VI affirms the orthodox Catholic doctrine that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of Christian worship and that Christ is present ‘in a still more sublime manner’ in consecrated bread and wine. However, Paul VI makes an important theological observation. This eucharistic presence ‘is called real presence not to exclude the other

⁴³ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 7.

⁴⁴ For a discussion, see Witczak 1998, 680-702.

⁴⁵ Gender specific language within cited works will be presented as originally written. However, inclusive language will be employed throughout the body of this thesis.

⁴⁶ Driscoll 1999, 56.

kinds as though they were not real, but because it is real par excellence, since it is substantial, in the sense that Christ whole and entire, God and man, becomes present' (#39). Whilst all modalities of Christ's presence are not necessarily *equivalent* in their depth and intensity, they are all *real* and *salvific* nonetheless. By applying the technical language of 'real presence' to the works of mercy, Paul VI suggests that these acts can indeed be understood as sacramental moments in the strong sense of the word.

2.3 THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW THEOLOGY OF PRIMORDIAL SACRAMENTALITY

To have one's daily life become an act of worship is the greatest human achievement.⁴⁷

– Michael Skelley, S.J.

These initial and somewhat fragmentary perspectives emerging from Vatican II offer the raw ingredients for reconceptualising the meaning of mercy and its place within the life of the church as a worshipping community. In many ways (and for various reasons) this task remains unfinished. Whereas other modes of 'real presence' have received substantial theological reflection within and beyond the Catholic Church, this sacramental interpretation of the works of mercy has not yet become a major theme in Christian ethics or sacramental theology.

Several important Catholic theologians, themselves architects of the theological shifts endorsed by Vatican II, continued to explore these connections between worship and ethics. The following sections trace key developments in the writings of several conciliar theologians (Schillebeeckx, Rahner and Congar) and liberation theologians (Segundo, Pieris and Gutiérrez).

2.3.1 EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX: CHRIST, CHURCH AND SECULAR WORSHIP

SACRAMENTALITY AND ENCOUNTER

In his groundbreaking work *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (1960), Edward Schillebeeckx helped inaugurate a paradigm shift in sacramental theology.⁴⁸ Resisting the scholastic temptation to simply secure the number, institution and efficacy of the seven

⁴⁷ Skelley 1991, 92.

⁴⁸ Schillebeeckx's *Christus, Sacrament van de Godsontmoeting* (1960) was translated in 1963 as *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. The origins of his early theological breakthroughs can be traced to Schillebeeckx's doctoral thesis *De Sacramentele Heilseconomie* (1952). For an overview of these developments in Roman Catholic sacramental theology, see Osborne 1999, 5-40; on Schillebeeckx's contribution, see Borgman 2004; Kennedy 1993; Schreiter 2002, 185-194.

sacraments administered by the hierarchical church, Schillebeeckx pursued an alternative point of departure in the very notion of 'sacramentality' itself. Just prior to Vatican II, Schillebeeckx was one of the first to argue that the entire Christian life participates in the deeper, primordial sacraments of Christ and the church. Jesus in his humanity – as 'supreme worship of the Father' and the incarnational manifestation of grace – is *the* sacrament of God.⁴⁹ As the ecclesial prolongation of the incarnation, the church in its visibility is the basic sacrament of Christ and kingdom. The church celebrates explicitly the grace of God otherwise implicit and hidden in all human life. One of Schillebeeckx's most important contributions is his insistence on the *evental* character of sacraments. Sacraments are not so much objects or things, but rather acts – personal and salvific *encounters* with Christ as mystery. The intelligibility of any particular liturgical performance depends entirely upon its grounding in this primordial sacramental horizon.

EXTRA-SACRAMENTAL BESTOWALS OF GRACE

In light of these themes, Schillebeeckx concludes *Christ the Sacrament* by considering the possibility of other sacramental sites of encounter beyond the walls of the church. The first challenge is developing a new theological vocabulary. If grace is not contained within the sacraments, but rather the sacraments are visible, public, communal participations in the redemptive activity of God in the world, how should we speak of those implicit yet real meetings with Christ in the midst of everyday life? Schillebeeckx proposes a distinction between what he calls 'sacramental' and 'extra-sacramental' bestowals of grace – that is, between 'decisive Christian acts' and 'everyday ones.'

The seven sacraments are 'culminating moments' in a Christian life when the believer responds to Christ's availability in a personal and decisive manner. Such moments bring a person's deep longing for grace to 'ecclesial manifestation.'⁵⁰ However, it is in mundane human living that the existential integrity of worship must be practised and grown to maturity. 'Therefore, the sacraments cannot be isolated from the organic unity of a whole persevering Christian life.' Schillebeeckx observes, 'The sacraments determine the objective importance of certain moments in life, to which we personally and in a religious spirit must give full value. But besides these moments which are decisive *objectively*, in the life of a religious person, there can be others which are of vital importance *subjectively*.'⁵¹ Though the administration of the seven sacraments

⁴⁹ Schillebeeckx 1963, 15, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 199-200 (emphasis added).

manifests Christ's sacramental presence *par excellence*, Schillebeeckx nonetheless concludes that: 'For all men, encounters with their fellow men are the sacrament of encounter with God.'⁵²

The Christian practice of loving-kindness towards the neighbour becomes an 'extra-sacramental' event of grace in two ways. On the one hand, in the concrete act of compassion the Christian becomes a sacramental sign of Christ's love. 'Incarnate love, the love of God transposed into brotherly love for our fellow men, is the irresistible motive of credibility for the Christian faith. It is this that confronts men with the reality of salvation in the midst of daily life. In the course of their life men can encounter grace visibly present in such a way that they cannot avoid it, but must decide for or against.'⁵³ On the other, the ethical act constitutes an event of grace because Christ himself is present in the suffering of the neighbour.

Schillebeeckx contends that Christian worship cannot be reduced 'to the narrow sense of worship as cult. Not only Jesus' prayer, not only his entire moral and religious attitude of life, but also all his apostolic activity is worship of the Father. The complete notion of worship includes all of these expressions, and all are at the same time an apostolate.'⁵⁴ It is from within this overarching sacramental framework that Schillebeeckx proposes a more integrated approach to liturgy and ethics. In a world growing impatient with shallow words and empty rituals, Christians 'must show a real love for our fellow men, and this love must truly be the sacrament of our love for God. [...] The Christian lives in the world because he lives in and with the living God; his is a redeeming presence.'⁵⁵ Sacraments signify necessary 'markers, milestones on the way, so that by living the Christian life *as a whole* we may become more and more one with Christ.'⁵⁶ From this perspective, works of mercy can become, for the believer, implicit 'extra-sacramental' acts of worship.

Despite the suggestive tone of these theological explorations, Schillebeeckx's early project ultimately remains within a fairly conventional sacramental orientation. His 'extra-sacramental bestowals of grace' are fundamentally subordinated to the seven ecclesially administered rites.

⁵² Ibid., 206.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 37 n.80.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 208. 'The Church is a visible invitation to men to accept charity, and it is precisely in this way that brotherly love can be understood to be the sacrament of contact with God – humanity and the love of God our redeemer for us are made visibly manifest in and through Christians themselves. This contact between men – acting as a visible manifestation of God's contact with man – is most meaningfully expressed in the office of the Church, that is, in the administration of the sacraments and in the Church's preaching of the word' (215).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 200.

This comes to the surface in a revealing summative analogy given towards the end of *Christ the Sacrament*. Schillebeeckx likens the sacramentality of the church to concentric circles emanating from a stone tossed into a pond: 'The ripples flow in all directions from this one central point. This point is the Church, the visible presence of Christ's grace on earth, and from it all movement can be seen to flow.' These ripples represent an explicit hierarchy of value beginning with the Eucharist and then expanding outwards in descending order to the six sacraments, the word, all human conduct which proceeds from grace, and into the entire world of humanity. Whilst word, sacraments, and charity may be 'visible realities in this world of which the Lord avails himself, using his rich fund of inspiration in the most diverse means, to orientate man existentially towards God in Jesus Christ,' they nonetheless become less potent and clearly defined the farther their circles emanate out from the church.⁵⁷ So whilst Schillebeeckx's early work laid some key foundations for conceiving the whole world as 'shot-through' with the grace of God, in the end his understanding of sacramentality is simply insufficiently sacramental when it comes to the status of ethical praxis as sacrifice, worship and praise.⁵⁸

SECULAR WORSHIP

Not long after publishing *Christ the Sacrament*, Schillebeeckx picked up this question again in *God the Future of Man* (1968). Confronted with an emerging post-war 'Christian atheism,' Schillebeeckx returned to the question of what authentic liturgy looks like in light of the existential demands of ethical practice. Are liturgy and life simply two worlds which run alongside one another in parallel disjunction? To the contrary, Schillebeeckx responds that 'from the Christian point of view, the cleavage between worldly activity and liturgical worship is a disaster, and that this gap must be bridged.'⁵⁹ The question is how?

Abandoning his earlier language of 'extra-sacramental grace,' Schillebeeckx proposes a new way forward with what he calls 'secular worship.' By 'secular' Schillebeeckx is not referring to something non-Christian, but rather to something outside the formal structures of church. Secular worship refers to a sacramental structure in the midst of the everyday. As with formal liturgical rites, Schillebeeckx insists that 'secular worship' is itself grounded in the primordial sacramentality of Jesus. However, he now takes this idea in a different direction. 'Calvary was not a Church

⁵⁷ Ibid., 215-216. For a critical assessment, see Pieris 1988, 12.

⁵⁸ Schillebeeckx's approach to the sacramentality of the world was criticised by Henri de Lubac as a problematic naturalising of grace and secularising of the church. For a discussion, see Wood 1986, 179-189; Boersma 2007, 270-272.

⁵⁹ Schillebeeckx 1969, 96.

liturgy,' writes Schillebeeckx, 'but an hour of human life, which Jesus experienced as worship. In it, our redemption is to be found. We have not been redeemed by an act of pure worship, a liturgical service – our redemption was accomplished by an act which was part of Jesus' human life, situated in history and in the world.'⁶⁰ It is precisely through this sacramentalising of history in the incarnational materiality of Jesus *in the world* that a 'new concept of worship came into being – human life itself experienced as liturgy or worship of God.'⁶¹ Schillebeeckx is clear that this 'spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1-2) takes concrete form, not as objective 'things,' but in particular acts. Hospitality, solidarity and justice are at once true sacrifices holy and pleasing to God (Isa 58; Phil 2:17, 4:18; Heb 13:16) and sites of sacramental encounter with the hidden presence of Christ in the least (Prov 19:17; Matt 25:31-46).

Secular activity is a part of the eucharistic sacrifice. Indeed, as for Jesus himself, so for the Christian, the "spiritual sacrifice" of everyday life in the world with one's fellow-men is *the* sacrifice that matters; it is in this life in the world that the Christian finds the *reality* of his living participation in the sacrifice of Christ, the sacramental form of which he may receive as nourishment in the Eucharist, as his confession in faith that secular worship is only possible by virtue of God's "new creation" in Christ.⁶²

In his later writings, Schillebeeckx suggests that such compassionate encounters arising from situations of destitution, exploitation, abandonment and despair confront us more as sacramental 'disturbances' than consolations, provoking us to responsive engagement with the plight of the oppressed.⁶³

Schillebeeckx is very clear that 'secular worship and Christian liturgy are not alternatives – they are two complementary, mutually evocative forms of the one Christianity.'⁶⁴ This mutuality determines the fundamental orientation of both. 'Without secular worship, prayer and the Church's liturgy, our speaking of and to God become simply an ideological superstructure without roots in the realities of life, and hence artificial.' He goes on to write, 'Without secular worship, the Christian Eucharist itself becomes meaningless for us.' Church liturgy 'realizes itself in love and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 99.

⁶¹ Ibid., 100.

⁶² Ibid., 114.

⁶³ See Ross 2002b, 133-148. Kevin Irwin (1992) notes that for Schillebeeckx both sacraments *and* acts of loving service are 'anticipatory signs'. He writes, 'That human history is still marred, that reconciliation is still not yet fully accomplished and that human suffering is still all too real grounds Schillebeeckx's conviction that sacraments and living the gospel life are anticipatory, effective signs of love, healing and perfect unity with God' (33).

⁶⁴ Schillebeeckx 1969, 108.

concern for our fellow-men.⁶⁵ To borrow a concept from Nicholas Wolterstorff, we could say that here Schillebeeckx's theology shifts from a rather vague *both/and* juxtaposition of liturgy and ethics in *Christ the Sacrament* to a far more radical *not/unless* framework (*not* authentic liturgy *unless* mercy and justice).⁶⁶ Instead of emanating concentric circles, this inseparability is better understood as a single sacramental *ordo* – a complex journey between church and world – an ongoing movement from eucharistic gathering to compassionate encounter and back again.⁶⁷

CARITATIVE ACTS AS SACRAMENTS OF GRACE

In a little known essay on social work and Catholic hospitals, Schillebeeckx holds many of these ideas together in a fascinating reflection on the sacramentality of compassion.⁶⁸ He argues that genuine *caritas* involves an 'inner motive' which provokes and inspires an 'outward activity' of rendering concrete assistance to another in need. 'In *caritas*, man is turned towards his fellow-man,' he writes, 'each makes the other, as a person, the object of care and disinterested service. In this *caritas*, man lives for the other in a community of personal dedication – a personal *communio*.'⁶⁹ This compassionate response is both an orientation to another person and also a turning from one's own egoistic self-absorption. Schillebeeckx continues,

He experiences his being a man as a being a man for the other and he lets this giving of himself be the offer of God's love for man. In this, the outward activity of rendering assistance is the "instrument" of our effect on the other, the *sacrament* of our effective love – that whole of meaningful and effective gestures in and through which we give ourselves to other men and thus experience and bring about the unity of love in an incarnate manner.⁷⁰

Acts of compassion which fuse the 'disposition of love' and the 'outward achievement' of mercy constitute a 'quasi-sacrament of outward service.'⁷¹ Schillebeeckx expands this language further in his discussion of healthcare: 'In Catholic care of the sick, the sick are regarded and treated as persons subject to God's prevailing personal love in which we all share. [...] It is experienced as a

⁶⁵ Ibid., 107, 108.

⁶⁶ See Wolterstorff 1991, 6-21.

⁶⁷ See Moore-Keish 2010.

⁶⁸ Schillebeeckx 1971, 199-229. On the connection between *caritas* and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, see 200-201.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 202.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 203.

gift from God himself to mankind *via* the human service of *caritas* in the care of the sick.⁷² Such acts of care are nothing less than a ‘sacrament of grace.’ When afforded its proper theological depth, mercy becomes ‘a holy sacrament through which we experience in a properly incarnate manner the unity in *caritas* between God and man and between men themselves.’⁷³

CONCLUSION

Throughout his writings, Schillebeeckx never develops a systematic sacramental ethic, nor does he offer much by way of direct theological reflection on the works of mercy themselves. However, what Schillebeeckx brings to the table is substantial. Building upon his original notion of ‘primordial sacramentality,’ he opens up new ways of integrating liturgy and ethics and thus overcoming redundant scholastic dichotomies. This lays foundations upon which to ground a sacramental theology of mercy. In the words of Timothy Brunk, ‘formal sacramental worship is for Schillebeeckx a public naming and celebrating of the graced quality of all human life – and especially those moments in which human free will disposes itself to cooperate with the grace of God in *acts of charity*. Indeed, *the promotion of justice is a kind of worship*.’⁷⁴ Whereas Schillebeeckx focused on the sacramentality of Christ, church and secular worship, Karl Rahner introduced a fresh theological grammar of grace. It is to Rahner that the next section now turns.

2.3.2 KARL RAHNER:

THE LITURGY OF THE WORLD

TOWARDS A RENEWED THEOLOGY OF SACRAMENTAL GRACE

Karl Rahner remains one of the towering figures in twentieth-century Catholic thought. Among his many contributions, his innovative work in the field of sacramental theology provoked fresh perspectives on the sacramentality of Christ, church and the world. The recovery of a new theological grammar of primordial sacramentality meant that it was no longer credible to affirm dichotomies separating church/world, grace/nature, sacred/profane, liturgy/ethics and sacrament/mercy. However, Rahner was acutely aware that simply tinkering with received neo-scholastic categories would not generate a sufficient response to the serious challenges confronting the church in the modern world. He argued for a fundamental rethinking of the

⁷² *Ibid.*, 222.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Brunk 2007, 25 (emphasis added).

theology of grace, in which the whole Christian life – both in the church and in the world – is understood as constituted by the gracious self-communication of God.⁷⁵

The importance of Rahner's writings in these areas and his influence on the Second Vatican Council is well established.⁷⁶ What has received less academic attention, however, is Rahner's contribution to the development of a Catholic 'sacramental ethic' of everyday life.⁷⁷ Building on Schillebeeckx's theology of encounter, Rahner began to reclaim the theological meaning of ordinary deeds of neighbourly love as moments of grace participating in the very love of God. He argued that the ethical praxis of Christian discipleship and the sacramental worship of Christian liturgy are but two manifestations of Christ's presence and, thus, inextricably bound up with one another.⁷⁸ Rather than focus on the ethical dimension of liturgical rites or the capacity of Christian worship to motivate right living, Rahner was one of the first to investigate what he calls the 'quasi-sacramental' structure of concrete ethical acts.⁷⁹ In this section, I will briefly sketch Rahner's theology of grace before turning to his conception of ordinary sacramentality and its implications for the development of a liturgically shaped ethic of the works of mercy.⁸⁰

AN EXTRINSIC APPROACH

In his essay, 'On the Theology of Worship,' Rahner distinguishes between two divergent understandings of God's grace within Roman Catholic theology. On the one hand, the 'extrinsic' model – what Rahner calls the old neo-scholastic perspective – establishes a rigid separation between the church and the world based on certain underlying presumptions concerning the relationship between nature and grace. In this view, the world is regarded as an essentially secular, self-sufficient realm of 'pure nature' in which the operation of supernatural grace only manifests itself as a kind of 'intervention' from without.⁸¹ This approach, argues Rahner, 'is based on the implicit assumption that grace can be an unmerited gift from God only if it becomes

⁷⁵ On Rahner's theology of grace, see Rahner 1961, 'Concerning,' 297-317; 1961, 'Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,' 319-346; 1966, 165-188. For a discussion, see Skelley 1991, 43-64.

⁷⁶ See Leijssen 1995, 201-222.

⁷⁷ Skelley 1991.

⁷⁸ Rahner 1971a, 'The Eucharist and Our Daily Lives,' 226.

⁷⁹ Rahner 1963c, 121.

⁸⁰ Drawing upon recent developments in philosophical phenomenology, existentialism and anthropology, Rahner sought a new point of departure for liturgy and ethics in an expansive theology of grace. In Skelley's view, Rahner's entire theology of worship is 'firmly rooted in his theology of grace' (1991, 18).

⁸¹ Rahner 1976, 'Considerations on the Active Role of the Person in the Sacramental Event,' 162.

present and only where it becomes present in a secular and sinful world to which it is mostly denied.⁸² Grace is not infused *within* the world, as such. It is some ‘thing’ offered *to* the world through the mediating channels of the church and her sacraments. The extrinsic model conceives of the relationship between nature and grace ‘in such a way that they appear as two layers so carefully placed that they penetrate each other as little as possible.’⁸³

Rahner argues that this dualistic theology of grace gives rise to a precarious form of instrumentalised sacramentality in which sacraments are reduced to little more than means of ‘producing’ grace in an otherwise graceless world.⁸⁴ Rather than equipping believers for the moral complexities of ordinary life, sacraments become spiritual sanctuaries *from* the everyday. In order to meet with God, the Christian must pass ‘to and fro from this secular world into a sacral sphere a “fanum” [sic] or “temple.” It is only here [...] that it is possible to achieve any real encounter with God. [...] This is achieved precisely in the sacraments and above all by holy Mass in the Eucharist.’⁸⁵ Rahner summarizes: ‘it is not the sacraments which carry the individual out into life by their power, but rather the individual himself who must carry them out and into life by his own new moral strivings to meet and so to fulfil the claims of morality which they make upon him.’⁸⁶ Parsed in this way, the sacraments become ‘all too easily thought of as religious rites which bypass the dimension of “real reality” or “real life.”’⁸⁷ It is precisely because of this break with the moral fabric of ‘real life’ that the sacraments ‘fall under suspicion of being empty ritualism.’⁸⁸

AN INTRINSIC APPROACH

For Rahner, the urgent need to challenge this neo-scholastic position requires nothing less than a ‘Copernican revolution’ in our understanding of the workings of grace in the celebration of the sacraments and in everyday life.⁸⁹ His own approach begins with the assumption that the grace of God’s self-communication has always already encompassed and permeated the secular world.

⁸² Rahner 1983b, 142.

⁸³ Rahner 1966, 167.

⁸⁴ Rahner 1983b, 142.

⁸⁵ Rahner 1976, ‘Considerations,’ 162.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 161-162. For Rahner, this ‘Copernican approach’ entails nothing less than a fundamental re-orientation of the relationship between liturgy and ethics itself, no longer conceived as isolated ritual sites of sacramental grace, but rather as a movement, a complex liturgical *ordo* ‘consisting in an intellectual and

The world is constantly and ceaselessly possessed by grace from its innermost roots, from the innermost personal centre of the spiritual subject. It is constantly and ceaselessly sustained and moved by God's self-bestowal even prior to the question (admittedly crucial) of how creaturely freedom reacts to this "enriching" of the world and of the spiritual creature as already given and "offered", the question, in other words, of whether this creaturely freedom accepts the grace to its salvation or closes itself to it to its perdition.⁹⁰

In this 'intrinsic' model, grace is not something added to an otherwise immanent realm of pure nature, nor can it be 'contained' within a sacral sphere called 'church.'⁹¹ On the contrary, God's unmerited grace is *prevenient*. It is given freely. It constitutes the horizon of human freedom as offer and gift and precedes human responsivity as its very condition. Grace 'proceeds from the innermost heart and centre of the world and of man,' writes Rahner; 'it takes place not as a special phenomenon, as one particular process *apart from* the rest of human life. Rather, it is quite simply the ultimate depths and the radical dimension of all that which the spiritual creature experiences, achieves and suffers in all those areas in which it achieves its own fullness.'⁹²

THE LITURGY OF THE WORLD

Thus, it is not simply in the liturgy of the church that humanity discovers the possibility of a transformative encounter with God. All of human history is, in fact, a cosmic theatre of God's kenotic presence and redemptive action. Rahner calls this the *liturgy of the world*: 'The world and its history are the terrible and sublime liturgy, breathing of death and sacrifice, which God celebrates and causes to be celebrated in and through human history in its freedom, this being something which he in turn sustains in grace by his sovereign disposition.'⁹³ Though the liturgy of the world encompasses the whole created order, it is nevertheless brought to its definitive and absolute fullness in the cross of Christ, for here is God's covenantal love brought to its culmination. The liturgy of the church participates in, emerges from and bears witness to this liturgy of the world.

Once the liturgy of the church is understood as taking place *within* the liturgy of the world, the sacraments can no longer 'be understood as successive individual incursions of God into a secular

spiritual movement of the sacramental event outwards to take effect in the "world", and backwards in a spiritual movement leading from the world to the sacraments.'

⁹⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁹¹ Rahner 1983b, 143.

⁹² Rahner 1976, 'Considerations,' 167.

⁹³ Ibid., 169.

world, but as “outbursts” [...] of the innermost, ever present gracious endowment of the world with God himself into history.⁹⁴ Christian sacraments are explicit and visible signs which celebrate symbolically the sacred drama of God’s redemptive love already at work within the fabric of human history.⁹⁵ The same engraced activity of God constitutes both the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the world. The main difference between them is that the liturgy of the church (and the sacraments in particular) publicly declare and visibly celebrate God’s grace otherwise implicit and unacknowledged (though nonetheless *there*) in ordinary life.

GRACE AND THE MORAL LIFE

As we saw with Schillebeeckx’s notion of ‘secular worship,’ Rahner’s attempt to locate the liturgy of the church within the wider sacramental horizon of the liturgy of the world offers a different perspective on the theological deep-structure of Christian ethics. For Rahner, all moral acts of human knowing and loving take place within the prior givenness of supernatural transcendence; every human person – sinner and justified alike – lives and moves and has his being in Jesus Christ (Acts 17:28), and bears within himself an ‘implicit awareness’ of God as his ultimate source and *telos*.⁹⁶ Thus, he writes that where and in so far as a person ‘has the concrete possibility of a morally good act, he is in fact constantly within the open horizon of transcendence towards the God of the supernatural life, whether his free act is in accord or in conflict with this prior state of his supernaturally elevated spiritual existence.’⁹⁷ This creaturely openness to the divine can become an explicit site of sacramental encounter, and thus a matter of existential transformation through specific ethical acts of neighbourly love. It is only in the deed that the love of neighbours and strangers is revealed as genuine, and it is only through genuine love of the other that human beings fully participate in the love of God.

There is no love for God that is not, in itself, already a love for neighbor; and love for God only comes to its own identity through its fulfilment in a love for neighbor. Only one who loves his or her neighbor can know who God actually is. And only one who ultimately loves God (whether he or she is reflexively aware of

⁹⁴ Rahner 1983b, 143.

⁹⁵ Rahner 1976, ‘Considerations,’ 175. Mitchell (2005c) notes that Rahner builds upon Aquinas, arguing that ‘a sacrament embodies, in ritual action, God’s victorious work of completing creation through Jesus’ cross, death, resurrection, and return in glory. And God does all this precisely within the universe, within the world and its unfolding history, within the real lives of people who grapple daily with terror and despair, who face their cancers and chemotherapies with courage, who share their hopes and joys, their wrinkles and vigils and dreams with one another’ (65).

⁹⁶ Rahner 1966, 181. For ‘it is a grace which always surrounds man, even the sinner and the unbeliever, as the inescapable setting of his existence.’

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

this or not is another matter) can manage unconditionally to abandon himself or herself to another person, and not make that person the means of his or her own self-assertion.⁹⁸

There are limitless means by which one can discover and receive the love of God. However, what means has God provided whereby we can love God in return? For Rahner, it is only through the bodily mediation of the neighbour that human beings can discover their full destiny in God: for ‘when people truly love their neighbor, they drop into and penetrate the ultimate depths of their existence, the ultimate realities of the world and creation and are – without necessarily calling it this – mysteriously encountering the God of their eternal, supernatural salvation by virtue of their love.’⁹⁹ The love of neighbour and love of God are thus radically fused together. Theologically speaking, a Christian ethical orientation towards the neighbour is not simply a matter of moral disposition; it is a ‘religious attitude’ (i.e. an embodied disposition of worship), and one which finds intensive expression in both personal and corporate practices of the works of mercy. ‘Through these deeds and sufferings considered as a gift of grace, [Christ’s] presence itself achieves a certain visible embodiment at the historical and social level. [...] It is because of this that the Lord says that he is present, though unrecognized, *whenever one man shows compassion from his heart to another.*’¹⁰⁰ For ‘The other person, who is loved, is *the sacrament in which we receive God.*’¹⁰¹

Timothy Brunk puts the matter succinctly: ‘All morally good acts, in other words, are moments of grace for the agent, i.e., moments in which the agent may receive the self-gift of God. Rahner also argues that “*any* grace-giving event has a quasi-sacramental structure.” It follows, then, that acts of love of neighbor – which are by definition morally good acts – have a quasi-sacramental structure.’¹⁰² Rahner characterises this quasi-sacramental structure as the ‘liturgy of the world.’

A EUCHARISTIC MYSTICISM OF THE EVERYDAY

Here, Rahner’s argument becomes even sharper than Schillebeeckx’s. Both agree that the ethical life of Christians bears within itself a certain sacramental deep-structure. Every moral act includes the possibility of a transformative encounter with God. However, Rahner is much more explicit

⁹⁸ Rahner 1983a, 71.

⁹⁹ Rahner 2010, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Rahner 1973, 83 (emphasis added).

¹⁰¹ Rahner 1981, 71 (emphasis added).

¹⁰² Brunk 2007, 19.

about the particular importance of works of mercy within the ethical sacramentality of everyday life. 'Christ is already in the midst of all the poor things of this earth,' writes Rahner. 'He is there, the heart of this earthly world and the secret seal of its eternal validity.'¹⁰³ Whenever mercy is practised for the sake of a neighbour in need, there one discovers the risen Christ.

He who is really compassionate loses himself, identifies himself with his brother in need, dares to commit himself to the unknown. [...] Many a man has already encountered Christ without knowing that the one with whom he was in contact was the one whose life and death had achieved for him a destiny of blessing and redemption; that by the boldness of his compassion for others he had, so to say, won a place for himself in this life and death of Christ; that he was encountering the one whom the Christians rightly call Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰⁴

Rahner underscores the fact that this sacramental language is not simply poetic: 'For in fact God has filled this situation with the immeasurable and the incalculable, that is with his own self.'¹⁰⁵

At its core, Rahner's argument is driven by a desire to break down the rigid scholastic dichotomies that have long held liturgy and ethics at arm's length. Above we explored his critique of the spatial metaphors for the relationship between grace and nature, the sacred and the profane. To understand more clearly the implications of Rahner's argument for the works of mercy, perhaps it is helpful to borrow an image from Rowan Williams. Like Rahner, Williams affirms that all creation is consecrated and saturated with the glory of God. 'Sometimes,' he writes, 'we see the sacred and the profane as if they were "territories" lying side by side. But the image I prefer is more of a layered one. At root everything is consecrated, touched by God; everything is enfolded or interwoven, as Eastern Christians might say, in the Wisdom of God. Profanity is what happens when the crust of managing and fantasy hardens over this interwoven, living reality.' Seen in this light, all the world is indeed 'engraced,' which is to say that the world is a complex reality of surface and depth. To speak of the sacred is to speak of the depth of a thing, its weightiness and profundity, its capacity to reveal something of the nature of God. For Williams, secularity (in the more conventional sense of the word) is the attempt to reduce human reality to 'a set of controlling, fantasizing "profanities" or surface reactions.' By contrast, the 'search for the sacred is not looking for holy "territory" so much as searching for what lies beneath the surface.'¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Rahner 1995, 239.

¹⁰⁴ Rahner 1971a, 'The Works of Mercy and Their Reward,' 272-273.

¹⁰⁵ Rahner 1971a, 'Works of Mercy,' 273.

¹⁰⁶ Williams 2003, 112.

Works of mercy also have 'surface' and 'depth,' as it were. On the surface there is the sheer act itself – giving food or drink or shelter or time or presence or companionship or simply a listening ear: 'what you *did* unto the least of these' (see Matt 25:31-46). As I observed in the introductory chapter, contemporary theologians have long been tempted to reduce the works of mercy to the hardened crust of individualistic philanthropy and social welfarism. I have argued that there is ethical depth to these practices because they concern the basic social fabric of human relationality. In these moments, we become vulnerably exposed to one another in our mutual need. These are indeed events of incredible substance, hidden in plain sight.

In their own ways, both Schillebeeckx and Rahner invite us to look deeper beneath the surface. For Rahner, the words of Matthew 25 'imply a mysterious identity between the Son of man and every human being. They permit us to go from the Son of man to any other man or woman in order to perceive the ultimate *depth* of his or her apparently banal, ordinary life. But they permit us also, on the other hand, to perceive something of the mystery of the Son of man in the light of the experience of the *unfathomability* of any person.'¹⁰⁷ The language of sacramentality enables us to speak of mercy at its depth. It provides a theological grammar capable of attending to the multidimensional profundity of the radically ordinary. It also provides a new way of seeing, for the 'eye of faith must see somewhat more deeply into the significance of our everyday, and must perceive in the midst of our everyday lives in their everyday-ness Jesus Christ present in his brothers and sisters.'¹⁰⁸

Of course, whenever Rahner speaks of sacramentality in general or the 'liturgy of the world' he does not intend to undermine or delegitimise the importance of the sacraments of the church, especially the Eucharist. On the contrary, the language of sacramentality provides a framework that seeks to hold together these various manifestations of Christ's 'real presence.' In contrast with the old scholastic approach which tends to isolate the Eucharist from ordinary life, Rahner argues that the church's ritual celebrations of Christ's redemption through the liturgy empower and commission Christians to go forth and seek Christ in the broken, wounded and forgotten spaces of the world.

¹⁰⁷ Rahner 1995, 156.

¹⁰⁸ Rahner 1971a, 'Eucharist,' 226.

Christians are consecrated in baptism as liturgical agents 'authorised and empowered for the task of actively co-operating in the work of the Church both interiorly and exteriorly.'¹⁰⁹ When the church gathers at the Eucharist, it celebrates the climax of this sacred drama. Yet the Eucharist also 'assigns the everyday to us as our task.' The Christian moral life in the world is renewed in its vocation to become a living sacrament, a sign of God's reign: for 'The Church carries this grace into effect and lets it appear in its *deeds*.'¹¹⁰ In the sacraments, Christians declare their assent to God's call. The credibility and authenticity of this assent is demonstrated outside the context of cultic celebration in compassion, generosity, solidarity and justice.¹¹¹

If we receive the Lord and his grace only in the sacrament, if we do not make the everyday itself a means of receiving the grace of God by accepting it in the guise in which it is mercifully presented to us of the toilsome, the drab and the everyday, then, basically speaking, our Communion will not have been brought to its full and true significance. [...] Our life and the Communion we receive constitute an enduring encounter with the hidden Lord, with deliverance from need and distress, and with the need and distress of others too which, when we help them in bearing it, delivers us ourselves. In Communion, as in the everyday activities appropriate to our various callings, we encounter the Lord only in a hidden manner, in the first case under the appearance of bread and wine, in the second in the guise in which he reveals himself to us in the neighbour whom we serve.¹¹²

CONCLUSION

From these initial arguments it is clear that Rahner is laying the groundwork for a notion of 'sacramentality' that extends far beyond the seven official sacraments of the church. His 'Copernican revolution' takes seriously the deep-structure of sacramentality itself. No longer conceived in terms of a static reception of sacramental grace through ritual practice, sacramentality gestures toward 'an intellectual and spiritual movement of the sacramental event outwards to take effect in the "world", and backwards in a spiritual movement leading from the world to the sacraments.'¹¹³ Its scope is at once cosmic and universal, and yet its (incarnational) intensity is manifest even in the humble ethical practices that punctuate the monotonous flow of the everyday. Whereas the old model envisages the church's liturgy as 'a sacred temple to which

¹⁰⁹ Rahner 1971b, 54.

¹¹⁰ Rahner 1963c, 123.

¹¹¹ Rahner 1976, 'Considerations,' 172 (emphasis added).

¹¹² Rahner 1971a, 'Eucharist,' 224-226.

¹¹³ Rahner 1976, 'Considerations,' 161-162.

believers flee for “sanctuary” from their quotidian involvement in a purely secular world,¹¹⁴ Rahner insists that the implicit sacramentality of the everyday is publicly proclaimed and explicitly celebrated in the sacraments of the church.

2.3.3 YVES CONGAR: PRIESTHOOD, SACRIFICE AND THE SACRAMENT OF THE NEIGHBOUR

WORSHIP IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

We now turn to the sacramental theology of Yves Congar.¹¹⁵ Throughout his career, Congar repeatedly challenged what he saw as the pervasive culture of clericalism within the Roman Catholic Church. In an effort to reclaim a more faithful ecclesiology grounded firmly on the priestly vocation of the entire people of God, Congar began to raise fundamental questions about the future role of lay people in the church. These ecclesial investigations propelled Congar into contentious debates concerning the clerical displacement of lay participation in the sacraments, the limits of ‘legitimate’ liturgical expression, the reduction of Christian sacrifice to the altar of the Mass and, above all, the scholastic tendency to subjugate the everyday life of the faithful to the sacral rituals of the church.¹¹⁶ In response, Congar sought to reframe the debate within a dynamic theology of worship, which became central to his theology of ministry as a whole.¹¹⁷

Whereas Rahner and Schillebeeckx attempted to re-imagine the relationship between liturgy and ethics from the perspective of systematic theology, philosophy and anthropology, Congar’s approach finds its roots in biblical exegesis and the historical development of the liturgical rites themselves. In brief, Congar contends that the ‘liturgy of the church’ and the ‘liturgy of life’ fuse together as aspects of a single *priestly* vocation, a sacramental and *sacrificial* way of life of all believers.¹¹⁸ ‘Worship is essentially a worship of living faith. It is so,’ he argues, ‘from the aspect of

¹¹⁴ Mitchell 2005c, 64.

¹¹⁵ Though often overlooked by contemporary surveys of the development of Roman Catholic sacramental theology, the impact of Congar’s contribution should not be underestimated. See Beauchesne 1990, 79-100.

¹¹⁶ According to Beauchesne (1990), Congar’s understanding of ‘worship as life lived ecclesially’ emerges from a new conception of the church that ‘holds promise for the restoration of ecclesial primacy and significance, to the Church as People of God over ecclesiastical and hierarchical structures, to the priesthood of all believers over the ordained ministry, [...] to Baptism over Orders [...] and] to an ecclesial model of mutuality that takes precedence over an ecclesiastical model of domination/submission’ (81).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹⁸ Congar (1966, 140) observes, ‘Our entire moral life, that is, all human life, may and must become worship [*un culte*], inasmuch as life expresses faith, hope and charity through which we fundamentally orient ourselves toward God. Only then are the forms of exterior and social worship (sacramental worship)

spiritual and personal sacrifice, which is none other than life offered: not a tithe or first fruits, even less exterior “things,” but my existence, my being-for-the-world, and for others. Again, it is such from its sacramental, public and properly liturgical aspect because the primary value, here, is to receive God’s gift in faith, in order to join our response: thanksgiving, the spiritual sacrifice of life, *diakonia*.¹¹⁹

THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

In his magisterial study, *Lay People in the Church*, Congar develops his theology of worship through a close exploration of the meaning of ‘priesthood’ in Scripture and early Christianity. His findings are revealing. Whilst we find the language of ‘priest’ and ‘priesthood’ scattered throughout the New Testament, these terms refer primarily to Christ himself and only subsequently to all Christian members of the household of God, but *not* to a distinctive clerical caste.¹²⁰ Through the consecration of baptism, all believers are given a share in Christ’s priesthood and are indeed declared members of Christ’s own body, a new temple, which is the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19-20).¹²¹ 1 Peter describes the baptised as ‘sprinkled ones’ and ‘living stones’ of a spiritual house – that is to say, as members of a ‘royal priesthood, a holy nation’ (2:9-10). As participants in Christ, all Christians may boldly approach the holy throne of God. Congar notes that ‘Jesus has not only gone into the true Holy of Holies, the temple not made with hands, but he has opened it to us and allows us to go in with him, freely and confidently.’ Just as Aaron and his sons received washing at their consecration (Lev 8:6), so the washing of baptism ‘allows us just as we are to enter into the true Holy of Holies with our high priest. It could not be made plainer that we are all priests in the one high priest, Jesus Christ.’¹²²

If all believers are called to a priestly service in the household of God, what does this *leitourgia* (work of the people) look like? According to the New Testament, the church’s true and faithful worship is described as a *sacrifice* offered through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, the offerings of the New Covenant differ from the Old in that they are no longer

to be considered. However, there is no break [*coupure*] between the exterior social forms of worship and the reality of personal Christian life: anthropology is isolated from neither theology nor doxological acts’ (cited in Beauchesne 1990, 79).

¹¹⁹ Congar 1968, quoted in Beauchesne 1990, 83.

¹²⁰ Congar 1965, 130-131. Congar evaluates the following passages: 1 Pet 2:4-5, 9-10; Rev 1:5-6; 20:6; 22:3-5 and Eph 2:18-22; Rom 6:13; 12:1; Heb 12:28; 13:15-16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 130-131. See Corriveau 2008, 145-66. Cf. Boersma 2009, 284.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 134.

oblations of animals, flour, oils or spice. The primordial sacrifice of the New Covenant is Christ himself freely given for the life of the world. In the paschal sacrifice of Christ on the cross, all of Israel's worship finds its climax and fulfilment. All spiritual offerings of Christians participate in Christ's self-giving as a thankful (*eucharistic*) response. 'Our entire moral life, that is, all human life, may and must become worship [*un culte*], inasmuch as life expresses faith, hope and charity through which we fundamentally orient ourselves toward God.'¹²³ When he speaks of Christian offerings as 'spiritual,' Congar does not mean something ethereal, disembodied, idealised or simply moralistic. Following St Augustine, he contends that the spiritual nature of Christian worship refers to 'the *reality* of which Judaic worship was the herald. Therefore do we characterize the corresponding priesthood by the words "spiritual real."¹²⁴ This in turn becomes the basis for Congar's sacramental theology of Christian ethics.

MERCY AND SACRIFICE

To be a holy priesthood is to make 'spiritual offerings' of prayer and praise, hospitality and works of mercy and, ultimately, of one's body and very life. As the liturgical *modus operandi* of the everyday, such embodied offerings break down any presumed division between the sacred (theology and doxology) and the profane (sociology and anthropology).¹²⁵ Congar writes,

We read of a spiritual ("pneumatic") worship, of spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:3; 1 Peter 2:5), of living, holy offerings (Romans); concretely, of a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips (Hebrews 13:15), of confession of faith (1 Peter) and of **works of mercy**, as the prophets of Israel spoke: charity, generosity, alms-deeds, and *the* work of spiritual mercy – teaching, and handing-on of saving truth by word of mouth. St Paul uses very strong "cultual" [*sic*] expressions about the ministry of the gospel that he exercised: not only *diakonia* but "liturgizer" [*sic*], sacrificing, oblation (Romans 15:16, 31). Service has passed from an offering-up of things in a material temple into the building-up of a spiritual temple in the faith of the *fideles*, wherein the living man himself freely offers himself in sacrifice. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any express reference to the worship and priesthood of the faithful in the eucharist or even in the sacraments (except for what has been said above about baptism), or in the Church's public worship.¹²⁶

As with Rahner's liturgy of the world, Congar insists that this priesthood of holiness represents the basic liturgical horizon within which the explicit sacramental celebrations of the church find their

¹²³ Congar 1966, 140, cited in Beauchesne 1990, 79.

¹²⁴ Congar 1965, 132; cf. Leithart 2003a, 10.

¹²⁵ Beauchesne 1990, 86.

¹²⁶ Congar 1965, 135.

orientation.¹²⁷ The formal sacraments do not exist to sacralise the profane. On the contrary, sacraments are always responsive rites of reception and thanksgiving: responsive to the self-manifestation of God, receptive of the gift of God's en-gracing presence already diffused within the fabric of world, and a return gift of thanksgiving refracted through costly acts of love and service. 'The Christian must not only welcome this gift from God. He owes it a response which will express itself in three acts: of joining the gift of oneself to that of God and his sacrifice to that of Jesus Christ; of returning to God his gift through thanksgiving; and of sharing or communicating God's gift through fraternal concord and *diakonia* for the benefit of the poor.'¹²⁸

For Congar, a Christian interpretation of *sacrifice* provides the hermeneutical key not only for rightly interpreting the priestly vocation of the entire people of God, but also for recovering the liturgical deep-structure of the ethical witness of the laity.¹²⁹ Like Rahner and Schillebeeckx, Congar's attempt to integrate liturgy and ethics leads him back to sacramentality and works of mercy. This should not surprise us. If it is true that works of mercy are central to Christian self-understanding, then it is reasonable to expect that they would feature significantly in the development of a sacramental ethic. According to Congar, 'in faith we find or receive the two great imperatives that determine the matter of our spiritual offerings: on the one hand, love and mercy towards our neighbour, the humble service of love, for the mystery of Christ is there present in our neighbour; on the other, thanksgiving to God, loving movement towards him, confession of faith by both praise and witness.'¹³⁰ These two gifts – these two loves – determine the shape of ethical praxis in the world.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE NEIGHBOUR

What is noteworthy about Congar's approach is the way his language singles out the works of mercy as particularly significant moments when liturgy and ethics dynamically converge. This intensive intersection occurs in seemingly mundane acts of charitable dispossession whereby Christians practise compassion and willingly 'enter the chaos of another.'¹³¹ Such moments of encounter are an invitation to enter into the mystery of God:

¹²⁷ Ibid., 168-169.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Beauchesne 1990, 100.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 81.

¹³⁰ Congar 1965, 195.

¹³¹ Keenan 2005.

it is directly connected with the mystery of our neighbour, which, lived in the spiritual experience of the Church, is set out in all its depth in the Bible and in patristic commentaries thereon. This is something other and greater than the moral duty of treating other people as brothers: it is a true “mystery”, a *sacrament of our neighbour* in the sense of a revelation, a presence, a communication of God, of Christ, in and through that neighbour. Beyond the realization of the mystery of ecclesial unity in faith and charity, there is this mystery of God’s presence in our neighbour, through whom we must go if we would know the Lord.¹³²

Congar’s language of a ‘sacrament of our neighbour’ is not intended as a *substitute* for the sacraments of the church. However, it does imply that the sacraments cannot remain faithful and acceptable offerings when they serve to buffer and safely distance the church from the wounded cries of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised.

CONCLUSION

By returning to the textures of Scripture itself, Yves Congar blazed another trail in twentieth-century Catholic theology leading, perhaps paradoxically, to the same conclusion. Liturgy and ethics can no longer be held at arm’s length, nor can they be awkwardly juxtaposed alongside one another. This inseparability is celebrated in the visible sacraments of the church, but it can also be discerned in mundane and ordinary places, through the exercise of humble and unimpressive virtues in service of the unnoticed and the forgotten. ‘A conclusion emerges from all this,’ summarises Congar, that ‘worship, the sacrifice of the faithful, and therefore the priesthood of the faithful [...] are essentially those of a life which is holy, religious, prayerful, consecrated, charitable, merciful and apostolic.’¹³³

2.4 LIBERATION THEOLOGY: POVERTY, JUSTICE AND THE CONDITIONS OF AUTHENTIC LITURGY

Having traced the fragmentary development of a sacramental ethic prior to and beyond Vatican II, and in the writings of three of the Council’s most influential theologians, we now turn to the critical perspectives of liberation theology. According to Kenan Osborne, ‘In the last part of the twentieth century, liberation theology has become a powerful part of the renewal in Roman Catholic and Protestant thought. Although sacramental theology has not been the prime focus of liberation theologians, nonetheless their emphasis on *the social and ethical dimension of life and*

¹³² Congar 1965, 229 (emphasis added).

¹³³ Quoted in Beauchesne 1990, 100.

worship has focused on the sacramental structure of the church.¹³⁴ This section explores the contributions of several key liberation theologians to questions concerning poverty, justice and the conditions of authentic liturgy.

In 1974, Juan Luis Segundo published a landmark study entitled *The Sacraments Today*, in which he argued that the sacramental life of the Catholic Church was experiencing a new crisis. The reforms of the Second Vatican Council had only received patchy implementation. Secularising pressures continued to challenge the credibility and integrity of the church's liturgical rites. All the while, a new consciousness was emerging concerning the mass scale of global poverty and social injustice. How should the church speak meaningfully about her sacraments in the face of such realities? 'Is there room for sacraments in a world that is desacralized or that is, at the very least moving in that direction?'¹³⁵ Despite the significant theological developments generated by the Council, Segundo observed that many Catholic Christians were responding to this situation by reverting to the very scholastic perspectives that Schillebeeckx, Rahner and Congar had been calling into question. Of particular concern was a creeping tendency to re-entrench the clerical policing of the boundaries of sacramental practice, to revert to a kind of quasi-magical attitude concerning sacraments and the grace they confer, and to subjugate the ethical liturgy of life to the sacerdotal liturgy of the church.¹³⁶

These problems take root in contexts where the church's sacramental theology is framed by a worldview that compartmentalises human life into sacred and profane spheres. 'Sooner or later, writes Segundo, 'every separation between the sacred and profane leads to magic. Why? Because in separating the two realms, it is the realm of the sacred that is given value. And to attain this realm with its value one logically establishes means that have no weight in the realm of the profane. For in the latter realm, [...] the only valid and effective love is that which operates in deed and in truth, rather than in word and intention.'¹³⁷ The sacraments fall prey to this 'magic-oriented tendency' when they become isolated from the concrete reality of everyday life. By contrast, Segundo argues that 'the sacraments will be valid and efficacious, as Christ intended, to the extent that they are a consciousness-raising and motivating celebration of man's liberative

¹³⁴ Osborne 1999, 27; cf. Fortuna 1992, 72. On liberation sacramental theology, see Segundo 1974; Balasuriya 1979; Avila 1981; Dussel 1982; Boff 1987; Pieris 1988; Boff & Pixley 1989; Suggate 1996, 164-186; Cavanaugh 2000; Lawler 2005, 112-113; Sobrino 2010, 11-21.

¹³⁵ Segundo 1974, 12.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 12-20.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

action in history.¹³⁸ Substantiating this assertion requires a more radical sacramentality than ‘one of strategy, of modernizing, adapting, and reforming the sacraments so that they pass almost unnoticed and are therefore accepted by the desacralized Christian of today.’¹³⁹ The urgent theological task is to ‘show that the sacraments form part of the very essence of authentic Christian existence.’ Through the sacraments the whole people of God is united and transformed into an ecclesial sacrament – ‘a visible community of human beings living in real-life contact with the rest of mankind that, through its existential actions, contains, manifests, and communicates the saving presence of Christ.’¹⁴⁰ This enables believers to receive ordinary life with thanksgiving for what it truly is: the salvific horizon of God’s liberating grace. It is only within this horizon that an ethical praxis of justice and mercy becomes truly Christian.

Aloysius Pieris, a liberation theologian from the Philippines, expands the argument further.¹⁴¹ In his view, ‘The Second Vatican Council opened the door for a comprehensive definition of what has traditionally been compartmentalized as liturgy, spirituality, and secular (that is, socio-political) commitment.’ However, like Segundo, Pieris contends that ‘an unhappy juxtaposition of old formulas and new perspectives’ has not produced a new creative fusion, but rather has succeeded in reducing this trichotomy to a triple dichotomy:

liturgy versus spirituality
spirituality versus secular involvement
secular involvement versus liturgy

These artificial distinctions widen the distance between liturgy and ethics. ‘The refusal to see all these elements as mutually inclusive dimensions of one authentic Christian life creates an insoluble circularity in all the attempts made so far to overcome any given “spiritual crisis.”’¹⁴² For Pieris, this fracture can only be overcome when the church reclaims and affirms ‘the *liturgy of life*, which is the matrix of all sacramental expressions, for it is the context of a living encounter with God in Christ.’¹⁴³ The ‘liturgy of life’ is similar to Schillebeeckx’s notion of ‘secular worship’ and Rahner’s ‘liturgy of the world.’ In all three cases, ‘liturgy’ is read in light of the prophets and the

¹³⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴¹ Pieris 1988, 3-14.

¹⁴² Ibid., 3.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 5.

New Testament as an existential fidelity to God's covenant of love. This faithfulness is something enacted, embodied in the practice of justice and mercy rather than performed in sacred ritual. But Christian faithfulness is never the initiating or sustaining or salvific force in the act. Rather, it is the faithfulness of Christ the high priest who offers himself – and in himself the whole church – as worship to the Father. Since Vatican II, the notion of 'liturgy' has undergone various changes and developments. Pieris notes that in the twentieth century, liturgy has come to mean 'the holiness of Christian life constituting the spiritual sacrifice of the self-oblation made to the Father by the whole Body of Christ united in his spirit with him who is its head (liturgy of life), and especially expressed through the sacraments, especially through the eucharist (liturgy as "source and summit").' He argues that this view 'comes very close (though not close enough) to the New Testament teaching on Christian worship.'

To use three modern concepts retrospectively, this was a (1) *sacramental* (2) *mysticism* of (3) *secular* commitment (in response to the demands of the new covenant of love), the last element being the focal point of the first two. For sacrament and mysticism are intensive moments (the one being ecclesial, the other personal) of the *life of self-sacrifice lived in accordance with the gospel*.¹⁴⁴

In this passage, Pieris makes several important connections. First he emphasises that union with Christ is a way of being in the world. The sacraments must themselves be morally formative, but more significantly they provide a theological grammar for naming the *eucharistic* quality of ethical acts in the world. Second, he introduces the notion of 'intensive moments' within both the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of life. Finally, Pieris's description of the liturgy of life as a *sacramental mysticism of secular commitment* is closely connected with the central argument of this thesis: that works of mercy constitute *a liturgical ethic of the everyday*.

A central theme among liberation theologians is that ethical praxis ('secular commitment') is not simply related to liturgy in a general sense, but is the very condition of genuine worship. Encountering the 'real presence' of Christ in the Eucharist is not sufficient for faithful Christian living before God. To treat the sacrament as such is to reduce Communion to a magical rite that can effectively absolve Christians from their true vocation to be in and for the world salt of justice and light of compassion. 'The Eucharist is the spiritual food,' writes Tissa Balasuriya, 'in so far as it leads to greater love, self-unity and communion among persons and groups. Today this requires love among persons and an effective action for justice.' She contends that 'The Mass must also lead us to a response to the suffering of the masses often caused by people who take a

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 7.

prominent part in the Eucharist. Unless there is this two-fold dimension of personal love and societal action the Eucharist can be a sacrilege.¹⁴⁵ The strength of these claims should not be underplayed.

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutiérrez argues that genuine Christian worship must become a mature imitation of the Christ through whom it offers praise to God. It is not sufficient to simply celebrate in sacrament the triumphant glorification of the exalted Christ. For Christ is present to the church not only as consolation, but also within the desolation of human suffering. Genuine worship cannot neglect to attend the broken, humiliated and crucified presence of Christ in the poor. According to Gutiérrez,

We find the Lord in our encounters with others, especially the poor, marginalized [*sic*], and exploited ones. An act of love towards them is an act of love towards God. This is why Congar speaks of “the sacrament of our neighbor,” who as a visible reality reveals to us and allows us to welcome the Lord: “But there is one thing that is privileged to be a paradoxical sign of God, in relation to which men are able to manifest their deepest commitment – our Neighbor. The Sacrament of our Neighbor!”¹⁴⁶

Following Congar, Gutiérrez argues that the neighbour cannot simply become an ‘occasion, an instrument, for becoming closer to God,’ but must be served with compassion and a real love ‘for their own sake.’ We must not forget that ‘the love for God is expressed in a true love for persons themselves.’¹⁴⁷ In these acts of attentive solidarity, we must instead learn to forget ourselves. In so doing, we may find ourselves surprised for having encountered the mystery of Christ: *Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, a stranger and invite you in?* (Matt 25:37-38).

Similarly, Clodovis Boff and Jorge Pixley speak of the poor as sacraments of God. The hungry, sick, jailed and lonely ones are revealed in Scripture as ‘the living *mediation* of the Lord, his real expression and not just an intermediary between us and him.’ God’s preferential option for the poor is affirmed in this mysterious identification. Suffering, loss and need become moments of Christ’s ‘manifestation and communication’ and ‘the setting for his revelation and dwelling.’¹⁴⁸ Boff and Pixley argue that

¹⁴⁵ Balasuriya 1979, 22; cf. Wolterstorff 1983, 156-157.

¹⁴⁶ Gutiérrez 1988, 116.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. For a suggestive theological defence of Gutiérrez’s exegesis of Matthew 25, see Watson 1993, 57-84.

¹⁴⁸ Boff & Pixley 1989, 113.

here God is challenge, not consolation; questioning, not justification. In effect, faced with the poor, human beings are called to love, service, solidarity and justice. So receiving this sacrament is bitter to the taste. Yet it remains the *only 'sacrament' absolutely necessary* for salvation. The ritual sacraments allow of exceptions, and many; this allows of none. [...] The way to God goes necessarily, for everyone without exception, through human beings — human beings in need, whether their need is of bread or the word.¹⁴⁹

Whilst most liberation theologians would affirm the necessary connection between justice and the sacraments, not all are comfortable with this notion of the 'sacrament of the neighbour.' Segundo, for example, argues that true and efficacious love of neighbour is a complex reality. He suggests that the idea of a 'sacrament of the neighbour' may appear neutral on the surface. However, it can be co-opted by oppressive ideologies that reject 'the broad historical perspective opened up to love by the great human questions of our time: hunger, poverty, domination, etc.'¹⁵⁰

Liberation theologians often resist the language of mercy or charity in their discussions of ethical praxis precisely for this reason. Pieris urges his readers to 'purge our minds of the exhibitionist model of social messianism whereby we become heroes of altruism at the expense of the poor. Far from being the subjects of their own emancipation, they remain perpetual objects of our compassion thanks to our organized charity, or instruments of our self-aggrandizement thanks to our "organized struggles."¹⁵¹ Likewise, Segundo writes,

We often find in ecclesiastical circles a great concern for the fact that large social structures do not leave any room for "Christian love." [...] They want time for counsel, almsgiving, charitable works, prayer, worship, the sacraments, etc. And it is certainly true that if human activity does not take account of the personal dimension and its intense moments of signification, intimacy, and commitment, it will often end up looking for a love that is efficacious only in terms of profit. But this threat of dehumanization should not lead us to dissociate these "intense moments" of personal life from the global process of historical liberation.¹⁵²

Interestingly, whilst Gutiérrez is critical of appeals to charity as a political ideology, he does not restrict the works of mercy to this interpretation. With Segundo, Gutiérrez affirms that it is 'necessary to avoid pitfalls of an individualistic charity. As it has been insisted in recent years, the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 114.

¹⁵⁰ Segundo 1974, 58.

¹⁵¹ Pieris 1988, 23.

¹⁵² Segundo 1974, 58-59.

neighbor is not only a person viewed individually. The term refers also to a person considered in the fabric of social relationships, to a person situated in economic, social, cultural, and racial coordinates. It likewise refers to the exploited social class, the dominated people, the marginated [sic].¹⁵³ When actual works of mercy – feeding the hungry, ransoming captives, instructing the ignorant, forgiving wrongs – are understood as risky acts of just generosity, it is possible to interpret them as personal enactments of a wider praxis of integral liberation. ‘The text of Matthew 25:31-46 speaks to us precisely of works of mercy,’ Gutiérrez writes. ‘Those who refuse to practice solidarity with others will be rejected. Those who put mercy into practice are declared blessed; they shall receive God’s love, which is always a gift. This grace, in turn, demands of them that they be merciful to others.’¹⁵⁴ Gutiérrez argues that the works of mercy matter. They are significant dimension of a spirituality of liberation, as they are significant for the actual political praxis of social transformation. But what gives them their theological depth and political force is not simply their ethical content, but their sacramental quality.

But there is something distinctive in the passage from Matthew: it reminds us that what we do to the poor we do to Christ himself. *It is this fact that gives action in behalf [sic] of the poor its decisive character and prevents it from being taken simply as an expression of the “social dimension” of faith.* No, it is much more than that; such action has an element of contemplation, of encounter with God, at the very heart of the work of love. And this encounter is not “merited” by any work; it is the gratuitous gift of the Lord. This is what the passage in question makes known to us, and in so doing it evokes our surprise (“When did we see you hungry?”).

This is a work of love that implies a gift of self and is not simply a matter of fulfilling a duty. It is a work of concrete, authentic love for the poor that is not possible apart from a certain integration into their world and apart from bonds of real friendship with those who suffer despoliation and injustice. The solidarity is not with “the poor” in the abstract but with human beings of flesh and bone. Without love and affection, without – why not say it? – tenderness, there can be no true gesture of solidarity. Where these are lacking there is an impersonality and coldness (however well intentioned and accompanied by a desire for justice) that the flesh-and-blood poor will not fail to perceive. True love exists only among equals, “for love effects a likeness between the lover and the object loved.” And this supposes an ability to approach others and respect their sensitivities.¹⁵⁵

In this way, Gutiérrez demonstrates that even within liberation theology the works of mercy cannot be reduced to mere surface-level ethical phenomenon. To do so would be to deny the

¹⁵³ Gutiérrez 1988, 116.

¹⁵⁴ Gutiérrez 1993, 32.

¹⁵⁵ Gutiérrez 1997, 104 (emphasis added).

depth of their true significance. At their core, works of mercy are modalities of Christ's presence, events of grace and even sacraments of God's compassionate concern and preferential option for the poor and the oppressed.¹⁵⁶ It is only by holding together fractured dimensions of Christian practice – be it Benedict's word-sacrament-charity elements of ecclesial identity or Pieris' sacramental-contemplative-activist dimensions of Christian spirituality – that the artificial antimony between liturgy and ethics, sacrifice and mercy can finally be overcome.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Rahner's 'liturgy of the world' traces the cosmic scope of sacramentality and demonstrates that the liturgy of the church is already embedded in a wider sacramental horizon. Schillebeeckx's emphasis on 'secular worship' shows that it is not only the liturgy that must become 'ethical,' but rather that concrete ethical practices in service of our neighbour in need – though implicit and unacknowledged – are nonetheless embodied acts of worship. Congar's focus on the priesthood of all believers emphasises that such sacramental acts of mercy are not an extrinsic add-on to the church's liturgical life. Such works of mercy are *the* basic sacrificial offerings of Christian worship. Liberation theology affirms that liturgy and ethics fuse together in concrete acts of justice and mercy.

From our brief sketch it is clear that the Second Vatican Council authorised emerging theological shifts which would come to dramatically reshape the future trajectory of liturgical theology in the twentieth century. The discovery of sacramentality as a basic point of departure for liturgical renewal opened up new ways of conceptualising the relationship between nature and grace, church and world, clergy and laity, and above all worship and ethics. Whilst the initial insights of the Council remained underdeveloped in the documents themselves, a desire to move behind and beyond the tired categories of neo-scholasticism paved the way for a new generation of thought. The provocative writings of theologians such as Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Congar not only contributed to the breakthroughs of Vatican II, but began to articulate a fresh approach to sacramental ethics.

For the purposes of the present study, what is particularly important to highlight is the impact this perspective on sacramentality has had on our ability to reconceptualise the works of mercy. Though few sacramental theologians have explicitly developed this connection, I suggest that the language of sacramentality provides a key framework within which these specific ethical practices

¹⁵⁶ See Pope 1994.

find their intelligibility. This view reminds us that we cannot simply reduce the meaning of merciful acts to a secular or purely material given, universally available and abstracted from its ecclesial context without remainder. Rather, a 'sacramental ethic' begins with the assumption that the church's works of mercy are inherently religious acts. The sacramentality proposed by Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Congar gestures towards an alternative perspective of what works of mercy are all about, how they pertain to wider questions of Christian discipleship, and where they 'fit' within the life of the church as a whole.

This takes us back to Benedict XVI's claim that the nature of the church's life is Word-Sacrament-Charity. What this chapter shows is that the language of sacramentality enables us to understand how these three marks of Christian identity relate to one another. The arguments in favour of a sacramental ethic also demonstrate that charity is not an optional supplement to either Word or Sacrament; it is a necessary dimension of Christian discipleship. All of these ideas are implicit within Benedict's claim. However, whilst the analysis of this chapter verifies and nuances Benedict's argument, there are still questions that remain unanswered. What requires further elucidation is the precise nature of this relation. How is ethics related to Word and Sacrament? Many of the theologians in this survey speak of the sacramental deep-structure of ethical acts. Can we explore this structure with greater precision? Up to this point most Catholic theologians have been content to speak of mercy as a quasi-sacramental event. Is this language sufficient? Or is it possible to say more?

PART II

CHAUVET, *WORKS OF MERCY* AND THE LITURGY OF THE NEIGHBOUR

CHAPTER THREE

THE SACRAMENTAL DEEP-STRUCTURE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

– James 1:27

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Building on the foundations of previous discussion, the following chapters provide a theological analysis of the sacramental deep-structure of Christian ethics. As we have seen, the rediscovery of a theological grammar of sacramentality has gradually influenced how Catholic theologians have interpreted the meaning of ethical praxis at its depth. However, academic discussions concerning the relationship between liturgy and ethics (and between the sacraments and the works of mercy) in the decades following the Second Vatican Council have tended to be occasional and fragmentary. Whilst many thinkers explored this trajectory with new and innovative ideas, much work remains to elucidate fully what a sacramental framework might contribute to a theology of ethical praxis.

This section explores the possibility of a more systematic account of sacramental ethics. To this end, I draw primarily on the work of the French Roman Catholic theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet. I have chosen to engage with Chauvet's work at length for several reasons. Chauvet is emerging as one of the most significant sacramental theologians of the early twenty-first century.¹ In Kevin Irwin's estimation, 'Chauvet will exercise in the next decades the same kind of wide-ranging and theologically profound influence which the early Schillebeeckx wielded about the sacraments from the early 1960s on.'² According to Joyce Zimmermann, 'Chauvet's has been the most comprehensive and systematic work published to date with primarily a post-critical approach to sacramental theology.'³

¹ For a bibliography of Chauvet's published works, see Bordeyne & Morrill 2008, 225-229 and Brunk 2007, 245-248. Secondary literature on Chauvet has proliferated in recent years. For an overview, see Vazhappilly 2011, 46-85. Recently published monographs on Chauvet's work include: Brunk 2007; Townshend 2009; Hancock 2010; Ambrose 2012; Broadbent 2012; Beaton 2014.

² Irwin 2001, 49.

³ Zimmermann 1999, 91.

In addition, Chauvet's work is firmly grounded in the tradition of Roman Catholic sacramental thought. Chauvet offers a critical engagement with the sacramental theology emerging from Vatican II and beyond. Integrating recent interdisciplinary breakthroughs in postmodern philosophy, semiotics, anthropology, and psychology, Chauvet takes up the agenda initiated by the Council with fresh eyes, and radically redefines the very terms and conditions of contemporary sacramental theology. His work has broad ecumenical appeal⁴ and is beginning to reorient the fundamental sacramental questions across Christian traditions.⁵

At the heart of Chauvet's project is an attempt to understand the sacramental structure of Christian existence itself. Like Benedict XVI, Chauvet places particular emphasis on the intrinsic sacramentality of Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics. Whereas Benedict is more or less content simply to name these three marks of the church, Chauvet not only explores the nature of their relationship, but he also evaluates the sacramentality of this architectonic structure and its implications for the development of a coherent Christian ethic. Chauvet's work thus provides a sophisticated theological framework within which to locate the works of mercy.

In what follows, **Chapter 3** begins by locating Chauvet on the map of twentieth-century Catholic theology. It then sketches the basic outline of Chauvet's theological project and assesses his proposal for a sacramental ethic of Christian discipleship. **Chapter 4** focuses on the place of works of mercy within Chauvet's understanding of Christian ethics as a 'return-gift' of thanksgiving. It does so by evaluating his account of liturgy and ethics in biblical theology and the extent to which works of mercy can be understood as 'sacrificial' acts of worship. **Chapter 5** explores the relationship between the 'liturgy of the church' and the 'liturgy of the neighbour.' I suggest that Chauvet's work lays the foundation for reconstructing a sacramental theology of the works of mercy. The question is whether Chauvet takes his own argumentation to its necessary conclusion.

⁴ See Fuchs 20001, 58-68.

⁵ The significance of Chauvet's impact on the next generation of sacramental theologians is evidenced by the number of recently published PhD dissertations directly engaging with his work. The following is not an exhaustive list: Fortuna 1989; Michels 1996; Pivarnik 1998; Chapel 1999; Ambrose 2001; Vu Chi Hy 2004; Duffy 2005; Blankenhorn 2006; Brereton 2006; Brunk 2006; Townshend 2006; Chengintyadan 2007; Trinidad 2007; Sauer 2007; Beaton 2009; Hancock 2010; Mudd 2010; Fugikawa 2011; Schreiner 2012; DelVitto 2013; Vnuk 2013; Durham 2014.

3.2 LOCATING CHAUVET IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CATHOLIC THOUGHT

The rediscovery of a sacramental language of mystery, presence and encounter has revolutionised Catholic theology. The creative ambiguity of a general ‘sacramentality’ is appealing because it blurs rigid distinctions and challenges inherited scholastic dichotomies. This language opens up new ways of understanding the ritual sacraments of the church, but it also provokes new questions about the liturgical fabric of Christian existence.

Chauvet argues that the best insights of twentieth-century theology have provoked ‘an increased desire to uncover the *marks* proper to Christian identity, among which the sacraments, of course, occupy a fundamental position. Today, however, we are profoundly conscious of the fact that the sacraments are far from constituting the sum total of Christian life; for example, they should not elbow aside Scripture or eclipse ethical engagement. We are determined,’ he continues, ‘to hold the sacraments in their rightful place – but also to demand that they *occupy* this place fully: neither the unique center of Christian life nor a mere appendage to it.’ The primary task, as he sees it, is not to produce another account of the sacraments and then relate this to other elements of the faith. Rather, the task is to attend to a new ‘*theology of the sacramental*, that is, a theology which opens up a *sacramental reinterpretation*, initially modest but ultimately global in its potential extension, of what it means to *lead a Christian life*.⁶

What Chauvet proposes is nothing short of a ‘*foundational theology of sacramentality*’ itself.⁷ Chauvet contrasts his own theological agenda to three dominant models of sacramental grace: (1) the objectivist scholastic model, (2) an opposite subjectivist model and (3) the model proposed by Vatican II.

3.2.1 THE OBJECTIVIST MODEL

Like Schillebeeckx and Rahner, Chauvet is critical of the scholastic sacramental theology prior to the Second Vatican Council. As we have seen, sacraments in this perspective are defined as visible signs instituted by Christ to ‘produce and increase grace in our souls.’⁸ The overwhelming emphasis is placed on the objective efficacy of the sign. The key images used to describe sacraments include:

⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Chauvet 2001, xiv.

instrument	a quasi-automatic production of grace understood as a 'product-which-is-an-object'
remedy	a more or less 'magic potion to restore spiritual health'
channel	a narrow 'pipe' through which grace would 'flow'
germ	a more organic image, yet still restricted to the idea of depositing some 'thing' in the 'soul' ⁹

Chauvet writes, 'God sanctifies and saves human beings through the sacraments; these are primary *means* of salvation. In return, humans can make of their whole daily lives a "spiritual offering" (see Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15-16; 1 Pet 2:4-10) which they present to the glory of God in the sacraments; these are then *signs* of salvation, that is to say, of God's grace present in daily life.'¹⁰ The following diagram depicts the overall pattern of this model.



The primary movement is of God's self-revelation in the sacraments. Human response in daily living may be important, but it is not of the same order.

Chauvet intensifies earlier critiques of the objectivist model by systematically deconstructing the theological and philosophical presuppositions upon which it is grounded. Drawing on Martin Heidegger, he argues that scholastic sacramental theology rests on an underlying onto-theological metaphysic in which a static conception of sign, cause, outcome (*ousia*) and being has come to displace a more dynamic, relational emphasis on symbol, gift, process (*genesis*) and becoming.¹¹ The objectivist schema 'construes language as instrumental, as second to being, such that language also always has an external referent (reality), other than and distinct from itself.'¹² By contrast, Chauvet argues that human beings do not simply possess and use language as a tool, but

⁹ Ibid., xiv-xv.

¹⁰ Ibid., xvi.

¹¹ Mitchell (2005a) summarises Chauvet's critique of onto-theological metaphysics in the following arguments: (1) metaphysics is impatient with process; (2) in Chauvet's formula, metaphysics sees 'the Infinite' as 'the enemy'; (3) metaphysics is thus inspired by a fundamental urge to eliminate becoming in favour of stability; (4) metaphysics tends to be radically reductive, binding presence to 'causality' and collapsing the gratuity of divine gift to a circuit of cause, debt and obligation; (5) metaphysics is not only reductive, it is also anthropomorphic and utilitarian; (6) metaphysics ignores – and even resents – the fact that there are no exemptions from the human conditions of desire, language, embodiment and history; (7) as a consequence, it neglects the very fabric of relational reciprocity and reversibility that characterises human subjects (137-140).

¹² D'Costa 2004, 267.

are actually born into an inherited language, a culture, a symbolic world of meaning. Human beings only ever come to know the 'world' and to become relational subjects within it through the symbolic mediation of communication. Thus 'we should conceive the sacraments, not as intermediaries between God and humankind, but as "expressive" mediations of the Church and the believer, in the mode of and within language' itself.¹³

In the objectivist model, the symbolic mediation of language, history and the body is seen as something to be controlled, objectified and ultimately overcome. 'The instrumentalist scheme of language,' writes Chauvet, 'walks hand in hand with the most characteristic dualisms which we have inherited from the dominant metaphysical tradition: visible/invisible; body/soul; internal/external; in-process-of-becoming/essence. This scheme is controlled by the desire to seize the "thing" in an *immediate* way, to be fully present to oneself, to be totally transparent to others.'¹⁴ All of this tends toward a productionist – even utilitarian – logic that reduces grace to a calculable 'object' and sacraments into manageable instruments of its distribution.¹⁵

For Chauvet this sacramental theology tends to reify the power of the priest and pacify the laity. As Schillebeeckx has demonstrated, it also ignores the *evental* nature of sacraments as sites of encounter, and thus neglects the existential reality of human subjects. The objectivist model assumes an overly individualistic stance that does not account for the ecclesial dimensions of mission. Finally, this model tends to separate the ethical praxis of Christian discipleship from the liturgy of the church.

3.2.2 THE SUBJECTIVIST MODEL

The second is a subjectivist model of the sacraments. This approach manifests in different ways across Christian traditions. Whereas the objectivist model reinforces the centrality of a hierarchical church, the subjectivist model tends to emerge as a reaction against the church as an

¹³ Chauvet 1995b, 412.

¹⁴ Chauvet 2001, 6.

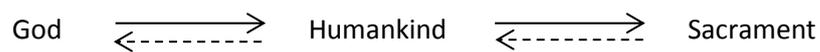
¹⁵ Chauvet 1995b, 25-26. 'The insistence on objectivity works at the expense of the consideration of the concrete subject. Of course, piety and a good intention are required of the subject so that the sacrament may be received in a truly fruitful manner. But this requirement belongs only to the *bene esse* ("well-being") of the sacrament, and not to its *esse* ("being") itself. [...] From the viewpoint of the sacramental nature, the consideration of the subject is reduced to the *simple condition sine qua non* of not putting an obstacle (such as mortal sin or a canonical sanction) to the reception of grace which comes down through the sacramental channel. The sacrament is thus treated from the very outset as an *instrument at our disposal*, as an "ob-ject" God has placed before" (*ob-jecere*) the human subject to "produce" the graces which the subject needs' (411-412).

institution. Seeking to downplay the role of ritual mediation by emphasising a more immediate relation between God and humanity, it takes as its theological point of departure the ‘sacrament’ of Jesus Christ.

For some, the subjectivist position approaches sacramentality from ‘below,’ that is, ‘from an anthropological demand to reintroduce lived human experience into the sacraments.’¹⁶ Many of the liberationists, for example, argue that the reign of God extends far beyond the church and that sacramental grace is always already present to human beings in the midst of everyday life. The sacraments are seen less as operative means of producing grace than as revelatory signs celebrating a salvation already given. ‘They are essentially ecclesial acts of recognition (therefore joyful and festive) *of* what God has done and acts of gratitude *for* what God has done in the believers’ lives.’¹⁷ What is of central importance is not ritual liturgy, but an ethical praxis of mercy and justice. In its more extreme versions, a subjectivist view from below can go so far as to actually absorb the church into the reign of God in the world.

For others (more typically Protestants), the subjectivist model begins instead from ‘above.’ Citing the sacramental theology of Karl Barth, Chauvet notes that God in God’s absolute otherness cannot be approached through human categories. Rather, the theological starting point must be ‘God’s claim upon humankind, a claim that is so transcendent and free it may never be mediated by any human action, even that of the Church through the sacraments.’¹⁸ Consequently, the function of the sacraments is limited to “recognising,” “proclaiming,” “attesting,” “reflecting,” “following” the antecedent and gratuitous gift of justification and sanctification of humans by God.¹⁹ Rejecting any notion of sacraments as instruments of salvation, this view describes sacraments as ‘a purely human action responding to the word and action of God.’

The subjectivist model (both from ‘below’ and from ‘above’) can be described as follows:



¹⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 416.

¹⁷ Chauvet 2001, xix.

¹⁸ Chauvet 1995b, 416.

¹⁹ Chauvet 2001, xx.

The emphasis is on God's direct encounter with humanity to the extent that 'sacraments are made an optional extra,' something to be drawn upon when needed.²⁰ Phillip Tovey points out that this subjective turn away from sacraments is problematic for Chauvet because 'there never was a Church that was non-sacramental. Sacraments are part of the Church's matrix.'²¹

Whilst these subjective approaches helpfully emphasise the positive sacramentality of grace beyond the church and her ritual sacraments, and of the sacramental nature of Christian ethics, they run the risk of collapsing the liturgy of the church into the liturgy of the world. This might clear space for conceiving a beautifully diffuse sacramentality, but it does not enable us to understand the nature of (and relation between) particular moments of sacramental intensity in the church and in everyday life.

At a deeper lever, this subjective flight from ritual sacraments is not a solution to the problems associated with the objectivist model. For Chauvet, this evasion actually exposes the extent to which both models are determined by the same metaphysical presuppositions. Both are contrary sides of the same onto-theological coin. He writes,

Whereas "essentialist objectivism" was powered by the scheme of "*production*," "existential subjectivism" is powered by that of "*translation*": instead of being considered as instruments for the production of grace yet to be received, the sacraments are considered as instruments for the translation of grace already given. They remain in both cases instruments by which the substrate-subject (*subjectum*) sets in front of itself (*objectum*) its subjective experience in order to "express" it. The nature of the expressive mediation is completely ignored here.²²

Overemphasising conscious intention and verification through action in the Christian vocation to 'become what one celebrates', risks foundering in an *exacerbation of subjectivity* which could ultimately jeopardise the very sacramentality it seeks to save.²³

²⁰ Tovey 2004, 21.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Chauvet 1995b, 419. 'Theological existentialism postulates a *central subjective consciousness* which supposedly is in immediate possession of its human experiences and then translates them exteriorly in the sacraments as signs of gratitude toward God and does this out of obedience to the command of Jesus Christ. In this perspective, the sacraments are understood not as linguistic mediations which allow the real to become human or meaningful, but as instruments for the translation of an already-evident human reality or as the festive and ecclesial clothing with which one may dress the real' (424).

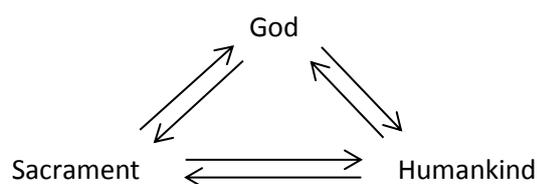
²³ Ibid., 417.

3.2.3 THE VATICAN II MODEL

Whilst Chauvet takes issue with both of these sacramental models, he is much more sympathetic with the kind of approach initially proposed by the Second Vatican Council, which he sees as an attempt to mediate between the objective and subjective poles and restore equilibrium to Roman Catholic theology. The Council sought to move beyond the objectivist position by affirming the primordial sacramentality of Christ, but it also resisted the ambiguities of the subjective position by insisting on the necessary sacramentality of the church. Rejecting an old Christendom mentality, the Council recognised that the church is not co-extensive with the world and that the reign of God extends far beyond the ecclesial community: 'it cannot understand itself except in osmosis with the World of which it is part and with the reign which, like the small mustard seed, grows slowly in this world or, like leaven, works invisibly in the dough of humanity.'²⁴ The church is only a *sacrament* of the kingdom in the world, not the kingdom itself.²⁵

But the church *is* the sacrament of the reign of God. As Rahner makes clear, the church is a visible sign that makes explicit in its public liturgy, ministry and mission the redemptive intentions of God for the whole world. The Council is open to a diffuse notion of sacramentality, but the church 'must show the marks of its being a sign of the reign.'²⁶ For Chauvet, the ritual sacraments are both means *and* signs of salvation; they are significant (but not exhaustive) marks of Christian identity.

The Vatican II model can be visualised as follows:



'The *exterior* arrows,' writes Chauvet, 'show (a) that God is not bound by the sacraments (or the Church as such) to save humankind, and thus that the reign is larger than the Church; (b) that the sacraments are the summits of Christian life, the revealing expressions of the action of God's grace in the life of human beings; (c) that they are humankind's acts of thanksgiving towards God

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 413.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Chauvet 2001, xxii.

[...].²⁷ This affirms the important insights of the subjectivist view. ‘The *interior* arrows,’ he continues, ‘show (a) that God is the operating subject of the sacraments; (b) that the sacraments are the “sources” of the everyday life of Christians, a life where the sacraments must be “verified”; (c) that this everyday life becomes a “liturgy” which gives glory to God.’²⁸ Equally, by emphasising the efficacy of the sacraments as events in which *God* acts through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, the interior circuit seeks to retain the strengths of the objectivist view as well.

The attractiveness of the Council’s approach is that it refuses to be trapped into an artificial ‘either/or’ binary by attempting to incorporate ‘the models of God, humankind, and sacrament as intrinsically interconnected.’²⁹ In the previous chapters, I discussed at length the creative possibilities this framework opens up for understanding liturgy and ethics. Chauvet grounds his own project within this agenda. Whilst he affirms the basic impulses of the Council, he argues that the major theological developments of the twentieth century did not go far enough. The Vatican II model may have attempted to balance the objectivist and subjectivist positions. However, it does not attend to the fact that both of these models are constrained by the same metaphysical presumptions.

By shifting the focus from the metaphysical to the symbolic, Chauvet offers a fundamentally different point of departure for re-conceptualising sacramentality. This framework will enable us to recover a more faithful way of speaking about the liturgical deep-structure of the works of mercy.

3.3 SYMBOL AND SACRAMENT: A NEW THEOLOGY OF SACRAMENTALITY

3.3.1 FROM METAPHYSICS TO THE SYMBOLIC

In his magnum opus, *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet proposes an ambitious theological agenda: to rethink the whole of Christian identity from the perspective of what he calls a ‘fundamental sacramentality’ of symbolic mediation.³⁰ For Chauvet the principal task of sacramental theology is no longer justifying *whether* the church should have sacraments. Nor, in his view, is it helpful to

²⁷ Chauvet 1995b, 415.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Irwin 2001, 52.

³⁰ Chauvet 1995b, 1.

pursue the scholastic preoccupation with specifying precisely how sacraments ‘work’ to produce grace.

By contrast, Chauvet proposes a fundamental shift in terrain from metaphysical causality to a symbolic milieu. From the very start, the church has been a communal way of life constituted by sacraments. Theologically speaking, the entire horizon of Christian faith is *‘always-already inscribed in the order of the sacramental.’*³¹ To start from the post-metaphysical interpretation of sacramentality is to start in the givenness of the act of the sacraments themselves (i.e. this is a question of history as much as phenomenology, *how is the sacramental actually lived out in the life of the church*); philosophically, it is to say all our explanations about causality are but an attempt to circumnavigate the fact that in sacramental life we are not so much produced but discover ourselves as already begun in God’s goodness.

Rejecting the instrumental and ‘productionist’ root metaphors of ‘sign’ and ‘cause’ of onto-theological metaphysics, Chauvet argues for a more relational perspective grounded in language, subjectivity and the symbolic. He attempts to show that just as human beings become *subjects* capable of conceiving, celebrating and acting within a complex world of symbolic meaning through *language*, so persons become *believing subjects* (i.e. Christians) by entering, abiding and living within a ‘world’ called *church* through the symbolic mediation of *sacramental liturgy*. In other words, church itself represents a sacramentally constituted symbolic order with its own matrix of language, knowledge, meaning, ritual, and praxis. It is within this polyvalent milieu that the believing subject is born and through which Christian subjectivity is given a body in the world.³²

The sacraments represent one element alongside Scripture and ethics, which comprise the defining shape of Christian identity. They are *‘symbolic figures allowing us entrance into, and empowerment to live out’* what Chauvet calls *‘the arch-sacramentality which is the very essence of Christian existence.’*³³ In order to understand sacraments or ethics – let alone the nature of their relation – it is first necessary to unpack the meaning of the ‘arch-sacramentality’ that constitutes the language of faith itself.

³¹ Ibid., 155.

³² Ibid., 178-180.

³³ Ibid., 2.

3.3.2 THE SYMBOLIC ORDER

Drawing heavily upon contemporary (mostly French) philosophy, anthropology, and psychology, Chauvet argues that human subjects have no direct, unmediated access to objective reality. We can only encounter, perceive and make sense of the world through the mediation of language, culture and the corporality of our own bodies. Language is best understood not primarily as something that we create and use, but rather as something that creates and forms us as persons. In an important book published around the time of Chauvet's *Symbol and Sacrament*, Michael Lawler observes,

Every person is born naked into the world but no person is born into a naked world. All of us are born into a world replete with symbols and meanings, a world in which ethical values and principles, religious doctrines, political ideals, family values and the rules of social organization are all mapped out for us. To become useful members of that world we must learn its symbols and its meanings, and we must maintain those symbols and those meanings to maintain the world. We learn the necessary symbols and meanings, of course, in the complex process subsumed under the heading of socialization, and as we learn them we learn also who and what we are within the world in which we live. The viability of both the world and the self mediated by meaning depends on the extent to which that self remains in conversation with both the symbols and those other selves who share them publicly with us.³⁴

This helpfully elucidates Chauvet's position. Instead of speaking of language as an instrument, Chauvet describes language as 'the *milieu* in which the subject becomes subject.' In his view,

This milieu is to be regarded as a sort of womb. This term has the advantage of bringing us back to the fetal condition; from the time of pregnancy, the child is enclosed in a maternal womb which is not only biological but already cultural since the mother (modern psychology insists on this point) already speaks to her baby, shares with it, consciously and especially unconsciously, her emotions and feelings, and begins, most often without realizing it, to transmit to it the cultural heritage of the group, the mother tongue to begin with.³⁵

Contrary to the reductive assumptions of onto-theology, the symbolic mediation of language, culture and physical bodies is not some kind of husk that must be removed in order to reveal the true essence of human existence underneath. On the contrary, this symbolic system *is* what constitutes the depth of our humanity. The same goes for Christian identity, which is similarly structured by a unique symbolic order. This means that 'faith cannot be lived in any other way,

³⁴ Lawler 1987, 20.

³⁵ Chauvet 2001, 7-8.

including what is most spiritual in it, than *in the mediation of the body*, the body of a society, of a desire, of a tradition, of a history, of an institution, and so on. What is most spiritual always takes place in the most corporeal.³⁶ The symbolic order is incarnational all the way down.

As a general principle, symbolic mediation is necessary for human beings to communicate, relate to one another and to make sense of the world. Without it, human reality 'would be left to its raw factualness and would be only a chaos or a meaningless jumble.'³⁷ It is also ordered. Anthropologists have taught us much about how the basic building blocks structure a symbolic system and inform the internal coherence of a culture.

In order for the subject to reach and retain its status of subject, it must build reality into a "world," that is to say, a signifying whole in which every element, whether material (tree, wind, house) or social (relatives, clothing, cooking, work, leisure) is integrated into a system of *knowledge* (of the world and of society), *gratitude* (code of good manners, mythical and ritual code ruling relationships with deities and ancestors), and *ethical behaviour* (values serving as norms of conduct). [...] By these means, the universe and events form a coherent whole which is called "the symbolic order." Subjects can orient themselves by it because each thing can find its own signifying place.³⁸

For Chauvet, this account of the symbolic order as an integrated system of knowledge, gratitude and ethics provides a much more useful framework for reimagining the sacramentality of Christian identity.³⁹ If that is true of humans in general (philosophically and anthropologically speaking), what does it mean for the *believing* subject – an agent in the Christian community called the church – to dwell within the language of the faith and to live and act within a symbolic system constituted by word and sacrament?

To attain their identity as Christians, they must be part of the symbolic order proper to the church. This symbolic womb, within which each person is born as Christian through initiation, is unique. Of course this symbolic order is rooted in the general culture, but it reconfigures it, that is to say, it brings the culture new directions, so new that Christians understand the meaning of their own lives differently from atheists or Muslims. One becomes a Christian only by adopting the "mother tongue" of the church. Sacraments are an important element of this tongue. However, they are only one element among others.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ibid., xii.

³⁷ Ibid., 13.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ For an interesting parallel, see Worgul 2008, 108-119.

⁴⁰ Chauvet 2001, 17.

By shifting the terms of the debate, Chauvet radically reconfigures the theological possibilities of sacramentality. Instead of viewing sacramentality as a subset of *the sacraments* which must then be applied to other 'quasi-sacramental' aspects of Christian existence, Chauvet sees the whole Christian life as inherently belonging within a wider sacramental order.⁴¹ This way of putting the matter renders unintelligible the extrinsicist assumption that a (sacramental) liturgy must be related to an essentially non-sacramental ethic. On the contrary, both sacraments and ethics are intertwined elements of the 'mother tongue' of the church. Liturgy and ethics are both intrinsically sacramental. The key question is what is the nature of their mutual inseparability?

3.4 WORD-SACRAMENT-ETHICS: THE STRUCTURE OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Among Chauvet's most valuable insights is his discovery that the deep-structure of Christian subjectivity unfolds as a series of connections between three distinct yet mutually defining elements: Scripture (the level of cognition), Sacrament (the level of thanksgiving), and Ethics (the level of action).⁴² This tripod represents levels of mediation – the mother tongue – through which the church's faith is negotiated. Taken together, these three give the sacramental system its structural coherence.

3.4.1 AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

Following Claude Levi-Strauss, Chauvet approaches Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics from the perspective of structuralism and cultural anthropology. As noted above, every culture (understood in the broadest sense) is defined by particular ways of conceiving, celebrating and living within a world of symbolic meaning. 'The discursive logic of the *sign*, the identifying challenge of the *symbol*, the world-transforming power of the *praxis* (to the benefit of everyone): these three elements coalesce and form a structure.'⁴³ Chauvet begins to cluster these ideas together:

⁴¹ See Devolder 2001, 35-39.

⁴² Chauvet 1995b, 160.

⁴³ Ibid., 180. 'If we widen the perspective, we see that the relation between Scriptures, Sacrament, and Ethics is superposed on a probably fundamental anthropological structure which we have named "knowledge," "gratitude," and "action." For the human subject cannot live as subject without at once thinking the world (the logic of theoretical reason at work especially in philosophy and science), singing the world (the aesthetic value of poetry, music and the feast, whether religious or not), and acting in the world (ethics, not technique—as indispensable as this may be in other respects—constituting the essential human mode of action). It goes without saying that this anthropological structure is reconfigured, and so "converted," when it is taken up by Christian faith' (Chauvet 2001, 31.).

SCRIPTURE	SACRAMENT	ETHICS
Sign	Symbol	Praxis
Cognition	Recognition	Action
Conceiving a World	Celebrating a World	Living in a World

The structure of *Christian* identity thus ‘turns out to be the restatement, albeit a new one, of this fundamental anthropological structure.’⁴⁴ A theological anthropology of Christian identity rests upon three paradigmatic marks of the church: Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics.⁴⁵

3.4.2 THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

Under the paradigm ‘**Scripture**,’ Chauvet classifies ‘everything that pertains to the *knowledge* of God’s mystery revealed in Jesus Christ.’ It refers to the story of God’s redemptive activity in human history, especially to the ‘founding event’ of life, death and resurrection of Christ. ‘It thus applies not only to the Scriptures themselves, but to everything pertaining to the understanding of revelation: basic catechetical instruction and the present-day propositions concerning the ongoing formation of Christians, as well as the corpus of patristic, medieval, and contemporary theologies.’⁴⁶ All of these bear witness to a historically *past* gift of God ‘where God extends God’s grace [...] in the *historical and henceforth glorious body of Christ*.’⁴⁷ This knowledge is an indispensable, yet insufficient condition for someone to become a Christian.

The second element, ‘**Sacrament**,’ refers to the idea of *recognition* of Christ’s gift as ‘for us’; ‘it is a question of living symbolically what one is attempting to understand theologically.’⁴⁸ Under this paradigm, Chauvet places ‘everything that has to do with the celebration of the Triune God in the *liturgy*.’ Sacrament in this broad sense refers to the manifold ways in which the past story of the gift of God’s saving love is encountered and existentially received in the present. Through ritual enactment, especially the sacramental rites of baptism and Eucharist, the church enters into and performs the narrative drama of Jesus’ risen life.⁴⁹ In so doing, *this* story becomes *our* story. Such

⁴⁴ Chauvet 1995b, 180.

⁴⁵ Chauvet 2001, 29.

⁴⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 178.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁴⁹ Chauvet 2001, 30. ‘It is through these two sacraments that every person is initiated into the mystery of Christ, that is, becomes a member of his living “body.” Eucharist is the summit of the initiation because it is through participation in Christ’s eucharistic body that one is fully integrated into the ecclesial body.’

rituals represent 'the symbolic place of the on-going transition between Scripture and Ethics, from the letter to the body.'⁵⁰ As doxology in ritual form, sacraments include 'everything that pertains to the thankfulness which the church expresses to God.'⁵¹

Sacramental theologians have been more or less content with these two elements, allowing word and sacrament to congeal into a closed circuit: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. However, for Chauvet a third element 'Ethics' (*lex vivendi*) cannot be separated without profoundly compromising the integrity of sacramentality. Broadly speaking, 'Ethics' refers to the living conduct by which 'Christians testify to the gospel by their actions.'⁵² Chauvet acknowledges that this is a 'rather large extension' of his model.⁵³ It necessarily involves the personal, existential response of each believer to the gift of God's mercy. That said, it also names the corporate socio-political engagement of the church for the poor and the oppressed and against structures of fear, violence, exploitation and injustice. Theologically, the church's ethical praxis never precedes the gift of God's mercy, nor is it a necessary precondition for the reception of grace. Rather, at its core ethics is inherently responsive to a givenness that is its very ground. It is perhaps best understood as a praxis of embodied gratitude in which what is celebrated ritually is then enacted in the concrete spaces of everyday life.⁵⁴ Chauvet explains that 'the *sacramental rendering-thanks* seeks to be enfolded in the *living-in-grace* among brothers and sisters. This ethical dimension is not simply an extrinsic consequence of the Eucharistic process; it belongs to it as an *intrinsic* element.' Not only is the liturgy contingent upon ethics for its authenticity, but 'it is precisely ethics that must become authentically "Eucharistic." Grace is always bestowed as a task; and the sacramental body, as an injunction to give to the Risen One this body made of the world that he requires of us.'⁵⁵ Having become one body by partaking of the sacramental bread, Christians are then sent into the world as Christ's ecclesial body, the church, to bear witness to the gospel in word and deed, faithfulness and mercy.

What Chauvet develops here begins to clarify Benedict's comments about how the three responsibilities constituting the church's 'deepest nature' presuppose each other and are inseparable. First, 'Would not the *Scriptures* be a dead letter if they were not attested as the

⁵⁰ Chauvet 1995b, 265.

⁵¹ Chauvet 2001, 30.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵³ Chauvet 1995b, 179.

⁵⁴ Chauvet 2001, 31.

⁵⁵ Chauvet 1995b, 277-278.

Word of God for us today, preeminently in the Church's liturgical proclamation, and if they did not urge the subjects who receive them to a certain kind of ethical practice?' Second, 'Of what value would the liturgical and *sacramental* celebrations be if they were not the living memory of the person whom the Scriptures attest as the crucified God and if they did not enjoin their participants to become concretely, by the practice of *agape*, what they have celebrated and received?' Third, 'Who would think of describing any ethics as "Christian" (whose scope, moreover, is the same as that of any human ethic of individual or collective service to others) if it were not lived out as a response to the love first directed toward us by God, including the gift of his only Son (John 3:16), which the Scriptures reveal to us, and if it did not return to the theological vitality of its source in the reception of this first gift in the sacraments?'⁵⁶ There can be no question that Chauvet sees Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics as intrinsically bound up with one another, each playing a specific role within the sacramental economy of Christian existence.

3.4.3 THE THREEFOLD BODY OF CHRIST

Becoming a believing subject involves far more than an intellectual assent to a series of theological propositions or the faithful performance of certain ritual gestures. For Chauvet, becoming a Christian ultimately involves an existential encounter in which one is transformed by the living presence of the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is not a one-off event, a single moment of ontological change. Rather, it is an ongoing process, a permanent task of maturing and flourishing into the likeness of Christ. To be a Christian is to become a member of Christ's body. Here, Chauvet integrates a further theological layer of interpretation to his triadic structure. This threefold pattern of Christian identity also corresponds to the threefold body of Christ.⁵⁷ In Scripture, we discover the *historical body* of Christ (crucified and risen). In sacraments, we encounter and participate in the *sacramental body* of Christ in bread and wine. Through the waters of baptism, we are made members of Christ's household; at the table of the Lord's Supper, we are gathered into one body because we all partake of the one bread. In the ethical praxis of the everyday, we act as Christ's *ecclesial body* in the world. A vital

⁵⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 177. Cf. Brunk 2007. 'The *story* of God's gift of salvation, especially when celebrated sacramentally, allows believers to *recognize* themselves in their status of brothers and sisters of one another in Christ and sons and daughters of God in that same Christ. In turn, this receiving-of-self in the sacramental event points toward the living in charity for others that was and is an essential element of who Christ is for us. This intrinsic relationship among the three elements leads Chauvet to argue that Christians must not rely exclusively on the *story*, or the *sacrament*, or the *living-in-charity* as indicators of Christian identity. All three dimensions must come into play' (83).

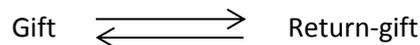
⁵⁷ Here Chauvet builds on the scholarship of Henri de Lubac 2006; see Brunk 2008, 262-264.

Christian identity is one that is healthily suspended in the creative yet challenging tensions between these three elements.

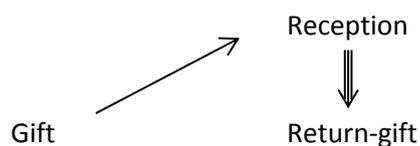
3.4.4 SYMBOLIC GIFT-EXCHANGE AND SACRAMENTAL GRACE

By now, it should be clear that Chauvet is not proposing a rigid or reductive structural blueprint for the Christian life. He is attempting to plot the dynamic coordinates within which to ground Christian action in the world. To this end, he proposes one more interpretive lens: namely, the symbolic gift-exchange of sacramental grace.⁵⁸ Drawing upon the anthropological theories of Marcel Mauss, Chauvet contends that the architectonic interrelationship between Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics is best understood as a continual process of gift-reception-return.

Mauss famously argued that in many traditional societies, complex modes of ‘symbolic exchange’ create and sustain whole networks of social relations. The efficacy of such exchanges is not predicated upon the value of the goods in question, but rather on the social bonds of mutual obligation which the gift invokes. Because symbolic exchange operates outside the order of value, it operates according to fundamentally different principles than the utilitarian logic of market exchange. A market exchange is effectively a barter system in which the primary concern is the object(s) being exchanged or purchased.



By contrast, a symbolic exchange ‘is more and other than what the objects are in themselves. One is here outside or beyond the regime of usefulness and immediacy. Rather, the principle which rules here is one of *super-abundance*. *The true objects being exchanged are the subjects themselves.*⁵⁹ In a symbolic exchange, a gift sets in motion an indefinite cycle of reciprocal bond of obligatory generosity.



⁵⁸ See also Power 1998.

⁵⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 106.

Chauvet notes that the double arrow from reception to return-gift 'indicates an *implication*, therefore an obligation. This means that there is "reception" (of the gift as gift) only by the obligatory implication of a return-gift. In other words, the return-gift is the mark of the reception.'⁶⁰ A gift can only ever be received as a gift through a thankful response, which itself is demonstrated through a further giving in return.⁶¹

As insightful as these models are for elucidating certain modes of interpersonal exchange, Chauvet is much more interested in what they have to tell us about the *theological* dynamics of sacramental grace.⁶²

As we have seen, one of the problems with the metaphysical approach to grace is that it tends to objectify grace as some 'thing' to be received from God. In this regard, the instrumentalist model of grace replicates the logic of a market exchange. Because Chauvet sees grace not as a thing, but as a relationship (what God offers for the sake of the world is nothing less than Godself), he argues that the non-utilitarian notion of symbolic exchange brings us closer to the mark of what the graciousness and gratuity of God is all about. Grace is *gratuitous* beyond ordinary categories of 'usefulness' or 'value'. It cannot be earned, nor can it be grasped, controlled or contained. For grace is 'the communication of the gratuitous gift of God, entrance into the mystery of Christ's Passover. And this communication, this entrance can be perfectly achieved without justice being done to the "values" of human activity.'⁶³ Grace is also *gracious* in that it is free of charge. 'The grace of the sacraments,' writes Chauvet, 'must be regarded less as "something" (as spiritualized as it might be) than as a process of "receiving oneself" as daughter or son, as sister or brother in Christ through the Spirit.'⁶⁴

Taken together, the various elements of the structure of Christian identity can be depicted as follows:

⁶⁰ Chauvet 2001, 122.

⁶¹ See Mauss 2002.

⁶² See Power 1992, 288-297; Vincie 2009, 128.

⁶³ Chauvet 2001, 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

SCRIPTURE	SACRAMENT	ETHICS
Gift	Reception	Return-Gift
Sign	Symbol	Praxis
Cognition	Recognition	Action
Conceiving a World	Celebrating a World	Living in a World
Past	Present	Future
Historical Body of Christ	Sacramental Body of Christ	Ecclesial Body of Christ
<i>Lex Orandi</i>	<i>Lex Credendi</i>	<i>Lex Vivendi</i>

3.5 THE RETURN-GIFT: A SACRAMENTAL ETHIC OF THANKSGIVING

Whilst Mauss' paradigm is not without its difficulties, what this discourse opens is a fresh perspective of sacramental grace beyond the received categories of the scholastic tradition.⁶⁵ To illustrate how gift, identity, grace and ethics might relate to one another, consider Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:21-35). In this text, Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a king wanting to settle his account with his servants. One unfortunate servant owed the king an insurmountable debt of ten thousand talents – a single talent being worth more than fifteen years' wages for a labourer. To satisfy the debt, the man – with his wife, children and all their possessions – were to be sold. But the servant fell on his knees, pleading for more time. The king took pity on the servant and did more than was asked: he released him and completely forgave his debts. As this servant walked away, he met one of his fellow slaves who happened to owe him only a few hundred denarii. Seizing the man by the throat, the servant demanded that he pay his debt immediately. His fellow slave pleaded for mercy, but the first servant refused and 'went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt' (18:30). When news of this reached the king, he summoned the servant and said, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?' (18:32-33).

⁶⁵ In an important essay, Daniel Pilario (2000) critiques Chauvet's use of Mauss' anthropology of the gift. In Pilario's estimation, Mauss' positivist approach is predicated upon problematic presuppositions concerning the purity of gift-exchange. Pilario argues that these anthropological gift economies are not inherently free from the violence of capitalist exchange. He also challenges the extent to which Chauvet's position is equipped to challenge symbolic violence. To this end, he suggests rereading Chauvet's work through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu. He contends that Bourdieu's more nuanced and dynamic account of praxis attends to the ambiguities and blindspots of gift-exchange in ways that Mauss cannot (80-96). For an insightful response to Pilario's critique, see Brunk 2007, 119-131.

In the parable, the gift can be seen as the mercy the king extends to the first servant. This gift was not a market exchange. It was not merited or warranted. On the contrary, it was a generosity beyond value – sheer gratuity, given freely from the start. The emphasis of the story, however, is less on the gift itself than what it might mean to receive and abide within it. The servant misunderstood the nature of what he had been given. He did not receive the king's generosity with gratitude or thanksgiving. Instead, he reduced it to a mere object – a balanced ledger. He saw his freedom simply as a freedom *from* his debts, not as a freedom *for* a new way of life now opened before him. His chance encounter with his fellow-slave could have been an occasion for him to practice the mercy he had been given, to become what he was declared to be – truly free. But he refused to offer a 'return-gift' of mercy – of the gift re-enacted and generosity extended. He failed to grasp that he had been given far more than clemency (as a thing); he had received a new *identity*, and with it, a new vocation: to be merciful just as the king was merciful unto him.

For Chauvet, Mauss' account of symbolic gift-exchange provides one way of conceptualising what it means to enter and *live* the sacramental grace of God. As in the parable, the redemptive love of God proclaimed in Scripture precedes and exceeds human capacity for 'exchange.' There is no human response capable of balancing the ledger. In the parable, the servant received his freedom in a ritual event of word-actions whereby the king formally forgives the debt. In that moment the man is truly free.

Chauvet argues that a paradox at the heart of the Christian faith is that a gift must be freely received, and the only way for human beings to receive and be transformed by the gracious love of God is through a return-gift of love to one's neighbour. In John's gospel, Jesus speaks of this process in terms of vines and branches: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. [...] No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. [...] If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love [...] My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you' (John 15:1-12). As the Scriptures bear witness, Christ, the true vine, is the gratuitous source from which life flows; yet for life to be received, one must *remain* in the life-giver. For John, the primary locus of this 'remaining' is neither a mere confession of faith nor an internal existential experience, but an extending outwards of grace, that is, the re-giving of the gifts of charity. Paradoxically, the gift of grace is only received through the modality of openness and giving again.

This ethical response of neighbourly love can never itself be the ground of the gift; we are declared branches of the vine and not by any merit of our own: "remember that it is not you that

support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18). Likewise, the response can never be merely passive absorption into *agape*, for it manifests itself in the desire of the other and the active practice of love. David Bentley Hart writes, ‘Such a desire is the only blessing worth receiving, because it extends desire and love even to those who think themselves undesired and unloved, and because it remembers and calls back those who would otherwise be forgotten.’⁶⁶

The unanticipated strangeness of the divine economy of the gift is that ‘the giving of the gift and the return of the gift are accomplished at once, and then assured by further giving.’⁶⁷ Refusing to give again what has been received is a denial of the gift itself. It severs the branch from the life of the vine and ‘such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned’ (John 15:6). Our responsive re-giving of gifts, our performance of love towards others, is precisely the means of our abiding and reflecting the giving and re-giving life of God. It is especially significant for my present argument that Chauvet sees this sacramental return-gift of ethical care exemplified in such concrete acts as feeding the hungry, forgiving wrongs, visiting the sick, and comforting those afflicted.

This discussion of root-metaphors of grace is important because grace is at the very core of any theology of sacramentality. To speak of a sacramental structure of Christian existence is to speak of a way of being in the world, being with others and being before God that is determined by the vivifying presence of Christ’s love. For Chauvet, the arch-sacramentality of Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics is more than a structure; it is a symbolic system of gift and grace. In this schema, the primordial gift of God in Christ is revealed in Scripture and is ritually received in the sacraments. However, whilst the gift is free, it exists for the sake of a restored relation, a communion. As such, it bears within itself an implication. It is not possible to rightly receive the grace of God and remain unchanged. To receive mercy is to become merciful. God’s prevenient love and mercy come as a gift, but to abide in this love is to respond in kind.⁶⁸ In other words, ‘reception’ is only a true reception to the extent that the Christian responds with a return-gift of praise and thanksgiving manifested in justice, liberation, mercy, and forgiveness. Ethics is not simply a moral appendage tacked onto worship – as if worship were simply an *instrument* for the *production* of good behaviour. On the contrary, Chauvet’s work presupposes the *not/unless* perspective resonant with Wolterstorff:

⁶⁶ Hart 2003, 265.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁸ See Balthasar 2004, 110-113.

without the return-gift of an *ethical* practice by which the subject “verifies” what it has received in the sacrament, Christian identity would be still born. [...] Consequently, just as the liturgy itself must become the object of an ethical reinterpretation to become fully Christian, so also, and conversely, an ethics which is not reinterpreted liturgically, that is to say, as a theological response to the initial grace from God – as generous as it might be – would lose its Christian identity (1 Cor 13.1-3).⁶⁹

This analysis enables us to understand that when Chauvet speaks of the relationship between liturgy and ethics he is referring to far more than a shallow juxtaposition. Christian ethics is simply not thinkable in isolation from word and sacrament. Likewise – and this is important to remember – word and sacrament are equally unintelligible when bifurcated from the ministry of charity. It is true that a permanent temptation is simply to fixate on any one of these elements. Indeed, far too many of the theological dead-ends within sacramental theology stem from tipping this balance in one direction to the exclusion of another.⁷⁰

Chauvet argues that an overemphasis on ‘Christ-in-the-*Scriptures*’ can collapse into a closed system of *religious knowledge*, or fundamentalism, that ultimately undermines the symbolic otherness of the risen Christ and the unmanageability of God. This is a particularly Protestant temptation.

On the other hand, an overvaluation of the principle ‘Christ-in-the-*Sacraments*’ – more typical of Roman Catholicism – can engender an unhelpful belief in a kind of ‘sacramental magic.’ This is especially evident when a shallow interpretation of the doctrine *ex opere operato* (‘in virtue of the action’) is uncritically fused to a ‘scheme of cause-and-effect and to a representation of the sacraments as channels or, even more, as containers of grace or else as instruments for the injection of a germ.’⁷¹

Of course, it is equally possible to subjugate both of these elements to a kind of moral activism that ‘so exaggerates the value of ethical activity as a criterion for authentic Christian truth that the principle “Christ-in-the-*Brothers-and-Sisters*” no longer permits Christ to be recognized in his radical otherness.’⁷² This trans-confessional temptation can take a *political* form in which the social action of the gospel is seen to advance the kingdom of God on earth in such a way that

⁶⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 281. Emphasis original.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 273-177.

⁷¹ Ibid., 175.

⁷² Ibid.

orthodoxy is over-determined by orthopraxy. It can also manifest in a more emotive, *charismatic* form in which a mystical service of the neighbour for the love of Christ so reifies the immediacy of Christ's presence that the very act of ethical care is reduced to a simple 'pretext for condescending generosity toward others, an alibi to make us feel good about ourselves.'⁷³

Whilst these temptations can take numerous forms, they each represent a certain desire to escape the critical distance of symbolic mediation in pursuit of an immediate and objectifiable divine presence, a presence that we can handle, possess, contain and ultimately control. By contrast, the profundity of Chauvet's approach is not in *dissolving* the tension between liturgy and ethics, but rather in *preserving* it.⁷⁴ Only a kind of 'unity-in-tension' between Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics can sustain a healthy and vibrant life of faith. For it is in the tensive space suspended between these poles that we learn to let go of our desire for an imaginary self-presence and idolatrous identification with God. Through the liturgy, we learn instead to consent to the necessity of symbolic mediation and thus awaken to the presence of the absence of the risen Christ. The 'unity-in-tension' decentres and liberates the self by giving 'Christians room for "play" by allowing individuals to breathe freely within the faith of the church, instead of submitting them to the uniform model of one ideology.'⁷⁵ For Chauvet, this alone is the path to mature discipleship. Thus, we can see that Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics do indeed 'presuppose each other and are inseparable' precisely to the extent that they constitute the sacramentality of Christian identity itself.⁷⁶

3.6 CONCLUSION

The significance of Chauvet's project is that he is able to overcome the antinomy between liturgy and ethics, first by revealing the nature of their inseparability (no authentic liturgy that is not verified in ethical dispossession; no ethical praxis that is not oriented towards the worship of God in thanksgiving), and second by locating each as two interlocking moments within a wider

⁷³ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 228-229. 'It is easy to simply let oneself forget the evangelical *tension* between ritual practice and ethical practice and, overly confident in the ritual (as well as hierarchical and dogmatic) system of the institution, act as if the rites were natural to Christianity. Was the Church really that healthy when in all serenity it overdid sacramentalization? And is it really that unhealthy, as one sometimes hears today, because it conducts its ritual practice in a manner that some find less comfortable? Is it not this uncomfortable tension between the sacramental pole of the institution and the ethical pole of verification that holds the Church evangelically upright and in good health under "the law of the Spirit"?' Cf. Mongrain 2006, 132-134.

⁷⁵ Chauvet 2001, 41.

⁷⁶ See Giraud 2003, 102-132.

sacramental whole. From the perspective of Chauvet's theology of the gift, ethics is never itself the point of departure or the founding event; nor can our moral striving somehow ground the life of faith and build the kingdom of God based on human accomplishment in the world. Rather, all ethical activity of justice and mercy, compassion and solidarity (at both a personal and collective level) is structured as a 'return-gift' fundamentally responsive to the prevenient grace of God's salvific initiative. Significantly, this ethical return is not an optional or 'voluntary' supplement. It is the very condition of the possibility of authentic worship, which is to say of authentic Christian existence *before-God* and *for-others*.

In this manner, Chauvet provides a dynamic theological framework within which the works of mercy find their intelligibility. Conceived as a *eucharistic* modality of embodied gratitude, these costly acts of receptive generosity with others in a place of vulnerability, alienation or destitution not only define the irreducible core of cruciform discipleship; they also determine the very heart of what it means for the church to be a worshipping community. For the *sacramental rendering-thanks* celebrated and symbolically enacted in the liturgy itself

seeks to be enfolded in the *living-in-grace* among brothers and sisters. This ethical dimension is not simply an extrinsic consequence of the Eucharistic process; it belongs to it as an *intrinsic* element. [...] it is precisely ethics that must become authentically "Eucharistic." Grace is always bestowed as a task; and the sacramental body, as an injunction to give to the Risen One this body made of the world that he requires of us. We here verify concretely what we said before: *it belongs to grace, in its very graciousness, to integrate into itself the free human response.*⁷⁷

Chauvet argues that this triadic sacramental deep-structure is not something artificially superimposed from outside, but emerges from within the liturgical rituals of the church itself. To borrow a turn of phrase from Stanley Hauerwas, we could say that for Chauvet 'liturgy is not a motive for social action, it is not a cause to effect. Liturgy *is* social action. Through liturgy we are shaped to live rightly the story of God, to become part of that story, and are thus able to recognize and respond to the saints in our midst.'⁷⁸

This raises an important point for our argument. How does 'unity-in-tension' take shape in a 'sacramental ethics'? What difference does it make to structure ethics as a 'return-gift'? And

⁷⁷ Chauvet 1995b, 277-278.

⁷⁸ Hauerwas 1988, 107.

more at the heart of the matter, what does this enable us to say about the liturgical deep-structure of the works of mercy?

CHAPTER FOUR

LITURGY AND ETHICS, MERCY AND SACRIFICE IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

– Matthew 9:13

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter sketched several aspects of Chauvet's sacramental ethic. It began with a broad theological account of sacramentality and the symbolic order. From this point of departure, Chauvet is able to speak of the sacramentality of Christian existence itself and the various structural elements that constitute a distinctively Christian identity within the symbolic 'world' of the church. Liturgy and ethics are inextricably fused as two inherently sacramental dimensions of a single doxological *ordo*.

Symbol and Sacrament is not an ethical treatise, but a systematic theological reflection on the sacraments of the church. Chauvet's primary reason for discussing the arch-sacramentality of Christian existence and the relationship between Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics is to name the richly textured, multi-layered milieu within which the *sacraments* make sense. This underlying structure provides Chauvet a fresh vantage point from which to reimagine the theological richness of liturgical rites such as baptism and the Eucharist in all their sacramental intensity. Of course, sacred rituals are only part of the drama of a Christian life faithfully oriented to the worship of God. In his analysis of Christian ethics, Chauvet does not provide a comprehensive moral theology. Nor does he claim to offer the last word on the difficult relation between ritual and praxis. Nonetheless, what Chauvet contributes to these matters is substantial and worthy of serious theological engagement.

'Between "life" and "cult," between "prophecy" and "priesthood," between the "intention" and the "institution," there exists *an authentic evangelical tension,*' which runs to the very heart of Christian worship. The challenge this raises is how to avoid the temptation to oppose acts like the works of mercy (ethical practice) and sacraments (ritual practice) 'without yielding to the reverse temptation to reduce the tension that must remain between them.'¹ Holding the two together in the balance requires a nuanced approach. As we have seen, Chauvet negotiates this tension by

¹ Chauvet 1995b, 228.

identifying these poles as components of a dynamic symbolic gift exchange. In this sense, works of mercy can be understood as concrete 'return-gifts' of thanksgiving verifying what has been ritually received in the sacraments. Rooted in ancient soil of Judaism and early Christianity, this tension opens a way of interpreting deeds of loving-kindness as the stuff of life *and* cult, as prophetic deeds *and* priestly modes of sacrificial offering. Conceptualising works of mercy in this way enables us to push the question a bit farther. To what extent are acts of compassion (in and of themselves) eventual sites of sacramental encounter with Christ in the neighbour in need? To what extent are works of mercy acts of worship?

Having surveyed the general sacramentality of Christian ethics in relation to the liturgy of the church, this chapter seeks to tease out the 'sacramental' nature of concrete ethical acts in their own right. In particular, I trace the origins of Chauvet's sacramental ethics to Jewish and early Christian worship, and explore the relationship between sacrifice and mercy in biblical theology.

4.2 SACRIFICE AND MERCY IN JEWISH WORSHIP

Chauvet begins his analysis of Christian ethics by tracing this reciprocal 'unity-in-tension' to its source in the historical-prophetic tradition of early Jewish worship. In contrast with the timeless myths of pagan religions, Judaism is grounded in the firm conviction that the God who created all things intervenes *in history*. By making a dramatic break with the nonbiblical notion of time as an infinitely recurrent 'spiral' or 'cosmic cycle,' the Bible introduces a linear conception of time punctuated by 'events perceived as moments of the *advent of unexpected newness*.'² For Israel, time is experienced as narrative – as a story of God's redemption. This representation of time as 'history' invokes a prophetic anticipation of God's eschatological future. 'Biblical time,' writes Chauvet, 'is most appropriately thought of [...] as that of the *historical Perhaps* and thus as that of the *symbolic Other* in connection with human liberty snatched thereby from *Anake* or blind *Fatum*; it is a risky time, but capable by this very fact of giving birth to the unheard-of, instead of simply reproducing the always-expected of the eternal recurrence of the Same.'³ God does not simply set creation in motion; God acts in the world, calling into being and sustaining a covenant people for the sake of the world. To be Israel is to become an agent in this story in the present by living faithfully under the future promises of God's law.

² Ibid., 229.

³ Ibid., 231.

This has profound implications for the nature of Jewish (and thus Christian) worship. 'It is precisely to the degree that its identity is founded on its relation to a God who has entered history that Israel, in its cult, is sent back to its responsibility within history, and more precisely to its responsibility towards others.'⁴

According to Chauvet, the deep-structure of Jewish worship is best understood as a *cultic memorial*, paradigmatically displayed in the Passover.⁵ The root word in the Old Testament for memorial is זכר ZKR ('remember'), which is translated in the Septuagint by *mnemosunon* or *anamnesis*. It represents a particular mode of ritualised collective memory that involves 'the insertion of those who are remembering into the very event the celebration commemorates.'⁶ This anamnestic liturgy 'shapes Israel's identity precisely because it is centered on the act of collectively remembering God's interruption of the people's lives to assign them a role in God's plan.'⁷

The Passover is a ritual memorial through which Israel remembers, year by year, the liberating action of God in the founding event of the Exodus and 'reminds' God of his covenant promises to make Israel a blessing for the nations. On the seventh day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, Moses commands the people: 'You shall tell your children on that day, "It is because of what the LORD did for *me* when *I* came out of Egypt"' (Exodus 13:8). Chauvet observes that according to the Mishna: 'In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he personally has gone forth from Egypt.'⁸ Through ritual re-enactment, every generation is taught to locate itself in the Exodus event. The symbolic feast today is a real participation in the original Passover, just as the ritual of abiding in tents during the Feast of Booths is part of the process through which each generation *becomes Israel* by taking up its own sojourn in the wilderness.

A memorial is not a nostalgic *memorization* of static events of a time irreversibly past. It is a *commemoration* – an act of communal memory in which 'a people or group regenerates itself.'⁹ Through such ritual activities, the biblical story becomes 'our' story. 'The memory of the past thus makes the present move; it puts back on their feet, in view of a new beginning, those who are

⁴ Ibid., 231.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁷ Mongrain 2006, 134.

⁸ Mishnah Pesahim 10.5, cited in Chauvet 1995b, 232.

⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 233.

prostrate in the silence and oppression of exile.’¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann describes this as the ‘world-making’ capacity of liturgical performance.¹¹

4.2.1 LITURGY, ETHICS AND THE ‘CRISIS IN RITUAL’

This historical-prophetic memorial is essential for understanding the ethical orientation of Jewish liturgy. Authentic worship of God in prayer, sacrifice and liturgy demands something more than cultic offering. It also demands that Israel live its given identity by participating in and, indeed, *imitating* God’s liberating activity for the poor and the oppressed. Caring for widows, orphans and aliens with justice and mercy is basic to Israel’s self-identity precisely because ‘you were aliens in the land of Egypt’ (cf. Ex 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19). By ritually re-enacting the Exodus, the people are called to assume the mantle of ethical responsibility that this identity requires.¹²

Chauvet explores this dynamic by analysing the firstfruits rite of Deuteronomy 26:1-11. The pattern of this rite reveals what it might mean for Israel to receive the Land not as an object but as a continual gift of God’s promise. Israel ‘enters authentically into the land’ through a ‘symbolic act of dispossession.’¹³

A (vv. 1-2) – HISTORY TO BE LIVED

Israelites are given a ritual prescription using the collective ‘you’ to offer firstfruits of the harvest to the LORD: ‘you shall take some of the fruit ...’

B (vv. 3-4) – RITUAL TO BE PERFORMED

Israelites then give the offering to the priests using the singular ‘I’ to declare their intention: ‘Today I declare to the LORD ...’

¹⁰ Ibid. In *The Sacraments*, Chauvet (2001) notes that the memorial structure of the Exodus is formative for both Judaism and Christianity. ‘The trial of the Exodus, ritually relived every year by every generation, is bearer of the promise of a new exodus – which Christians will see realized eschatologically in Christ’s passover: the memorial of his own victorious suffering is for them the gage of a personal and collective future which will be not only “otherwise” in this world [...] but also entirely “other” in the joy of contemplating God’ (56). For an exploration of the firstfruits ritual in Christianity, see Bradshaw 1993, 30-41. Bradshaw notes, ‘In early times it came to be used for the financial support of religious leaders and for the charitable relief of the poor. In later Christian times with intercession for the material and spiritual benefit of those offering them’ (40).

¹¹ Brueggemann 1988, see especially chapter 1.

¹² Chauvet 2001, 54.

¹³ Chauvet 1995b, 236.

C (vv. 5-9) – *MEMORIAL-CONFESSION OF FAITH*

At the centre of the ritual, Israelites make a confession of faith, locating their present offering in the past story of the Exodus using the anamnestic ‘we’ of the memorial: ‘When the Egyptians treated us harshly [...] we cried to the LORD ...’

B’ (vv. 10-11) – *RITUAL TO BE PERFORMED*

Israelites give their offering to the LORD using words in the singular ‘I’: ‘So now I bring the first of the fruit ...’

A’ (v. 11) – *HISTORY TO BE LIVED*

Israelites are then given an ethical prescription using the collective ‘you’ to share these gifts with the poor and dispossessed: ‘Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens [...] shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you ...’

The heart of the rite is the memorial, which is flanked by two parallel rituals in which the firstfruits are given to the priests and then presented to the LORD. The linguistic shift from ‘we’ (past) to ‘I’ (present) to ‘you’ (future) signifies the symbolic process whereby Israel’s identity is ‘brought forth in the very act of enunciating itself.’ This represents for Chauvet the symbolic movement from Scripture (the original *gift* of the land) to Sacrament (the ritual *reception* of the gift in the present) to Ethics (the *return-gift* of the firstfruits to the Levites and the aliens that stands as a task yet to be accomplished). Chauvet argues that the force of this whole text moves towards the final verse.

This verse enjoins on the people an ethics of sharing with those who have no possessions and/or no land. These are, by vocation and at the very heart of Israel, “the Levites” and, by necessity and outside Israel, “the aliens.” This means that making a ritual offering to God is not sufficient in itself; Israel does not acquit itself by dint of ritual sacrifices, as the prophets have repeated often enough.¹⁴

On the contrary, ‘Recognition of God and thankfulness toward God shown by the offering of the symbolic representatives of the land can be true only if they are verified in recognition of the poor: it is in the ethical practice of sharing that the liturgy of Israel is thus accomplished.’¹⁵

This strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of liturgy in Judaism provokes what Chauvet calls a permanent ‘crisis in ritual.’ Unlike pagan religions, Israel cannot rest in the safe comfort of its sacred rites as ends in themselves. It is not sufficient to offer unblemished sacrifices, to maintain

¹⁴ Chauvet 2001, 58.

¹⁵ Chauvet 1995b, 238.

the priestly integrity of the cultic system, or even to sustain the ritual purity of the Temple.¹⁶ Israel is a people called to be holy. As such, true worship involves both sacrifice and mercy.

Though evidenced within Judaism from the beginning, this 'crisis in ritual' becomes intensified in the prophetic critique of cultic formalism.¹⁷ The prophets maintained that cultic devotion (liturgies, prayers, fasts, priestly sacrifices, and so forth) without a vigilant ethical concern for the lowly and the marginalised is empty and invalid. The prophets 'all castigate a cult where God is given only lip service. They all demand that the heart be in harmony with what the cult expresses and that the latter lead to the practice of what is right and just – justice and judgment are the two foundations of the throne of God (Ps 89:14 and 97:2) – toward the widow, orphan, and stranger.'¹⁸ Cultic worship bifurcated from justice and mercy is idolatry. We can infer from this negative criticism something about the ways in which liturgy and cult ought to function under normal, healthy conditions. The critique is given because Israel has drifted from its vocation.¹⁹ Far from rejecting or condemning Israel's cultic sacrifice as such, the prophets sought to call the people *back* to faithful practice.²⁰ The very fact that Israel must *live its liturgy* means that worship that is 'pleasing to God' must remain 'in a constant state of crisis.'²¹

4.2.2 MERCY AS SACRIFICE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In his shorter book *The Sacraments*, Chauvet adds an additional comment that is worth emphasising. He writes that prophets typically assumed a 'yes/but' integration of ritual and ethical praxis: Temple sacrifice? Yes, 'but in view of the "sacrifice of the lips" to God and the sacrifice of justice and mercy to others.' Chauvet then argues that this intensification of the 'crisis

¹⁶ See Jer 7:4. Cf. Moberly 2008, 18-33.

¹⁷ See, for example, Amos 5:21-27; Hos 6:6 (cf. Matt 9:13; 12:7); Isa 1:10-17; Jer 7:1-28, Mic 6:6-8, Ps 50:12-15 and 51:18-19; Sir 34:24-35:4.

¹⁸ Chauvet 1995b, 238-239.

¹⁹ Cf. Prov 15:8; 21:27; Isa 1:10-17; Jer 6:20; 7:21-23; Mal 1:10-14; Ps 49:7-15.

²⁰ Cf. Daly 2009, 33-34; Ferguson 1980, 1156.

²¹ Chauvet 2001, 59. Chauvet (1995b) acknowledges that the connections between the prophets and worship are 'complex.' In contrast with traditional Protestant exegesis, he argues that the prophetic critique does not entail either the rejection or the 'spiritualization' of ritual in worship. The prophets were naming and developing the critical ethical orientation always-already there Israel's liturgy. He writes, 'The ritual memory of the liberation from slavery in Egypt? Yes, but in view of the liberation of the slaves every seventh year. Circumcision of the flesh? Yes, but in view of the circumcision of the heart. The offering of the firstfruits? Yes, but in view of respecting the goods of others, of sharing with the most destitute, of showing respect for workers ... Sacrifices? Yes, but in view of the sacrifice of the lips toward God and of acts of kindness toward others' (239).

in ritual' opens up a new theological possibility: 'the pure and simple *substitution* of human good deeds for sacrifice:

“The one who keeps the law makes many offerings;
one who heeds the commandments makes an offering of well-being.
The one who returns a kindness offers choice flour,
and *one who gives alms sacrifices a thank offering*” (Sir 35:1-4).²²

According to this passage, almsgiving (i.e. works of mercy) is defined not simply as a necessary condition for authentic sacrifice, but as *an alternative mode of sacrificial offering itself*. The biblical concept of almsgiving as sacrifice, which began to emerge around the exilic period, has profound implications for our argument concerning the sacramentality of the works of mercy. It is unfortunate that Chauvet adds no further comments or analysis. Before turning to the development of these matters in early Christianity, it is important to unpack this concept in a bit more detail.

In recent years several biblical scholars have pioneered new research into the origins and development of this theological motif.²³ In his study, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, Roman Garrison surveys the emergence of the works of mercy and its connection to sin and atonement in Scripture.²⁴ Building on the work of Franz Rosenthal,²⁵ Garrison shows how in the later texts of the Hebrew Bible the term *sedakah* ('righteousness') gradually became a synonym for works of mercy. This linguistic shift enabled later Judaism to identify charitable deeds as cultic acts of worship offered not at the altar of the Temple, but on the 'altar' of the neighbour.

'The Prophets,' Garrison observes, 'lay much of the theological groundwork for the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving. Good works, notably charity, demonstrate the individual's personal righteousness and these determine whether he is "acceptable" to the Lord. A failure to uphold the rights of the poor and to meet their needs is a sin provoking the severe wrath of Yahweh.'²⁶ The connection between mercy and righteousness runs deep in Scripture, for the poor themselves are often identified as God's own people. 'This view originates in the self-understanding of Israel,

²² Chauvet 2001, 58 (emphasis added).

²³ See, for example, Williams 1929, 97-120; Ferguson 1980, 1151-1189; Bird 1982, 144-169; Garrison 1993; Finlan 2004; Klawans 2005; Ottenheim 2008, 485-506; Anderson 2009; Hays 2009, 260-280; Downs 2011, 493-517; Halbertal 2012.

²⁴ Garrison 1993, 46-59.

²⁵ Rosenthal 1950, 411-430.

²⁶ Garrison 1993, 49.

interpreting her own pilgrimage as that of an orphan, a slave, whom the LORD rescued from Egypt (Deut 24:17-18; Ezek 16:3-5). Scripture frequently describes Yahweh as the God of the poor (Ps 68:5, 10; 109:21-22, 31; 140:12; Isa 41:17). This provides the primary theological foundation for Jewish charity.²⁷ For instance, Job is considered blameless and just for his abundant generosity to the poor (Job 29:12-16; 31:16-23). The Psalms connect upright and blessed living with those who care for the needy: 'It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. [...] They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever' (Ps 112:5, 9). Likewise Proverbs affirms the theological significance of almsgiving.²⁸ Garrison writes,

Like the other sections of the Hebrew Scripture, Proverbs promises a reward for those who show kindness to the needy. Charity to the destitute is reckoned *as if it were done for the Lord Himself* (11:25; 14:21b, 31b; 19:17; 22:9; 28:27a). Conversely, those who abuse the needy mock their maker and bring judgment upon themselves (14:31a; 17:5; 28:27b).²⁹

Proverbs 14:31 and 19:17 are of particular significance: 'Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy poor honour Him' (14:31); 'Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full' (19:17). According to Gary Anderson, the point of these texts is clear: 'what one does toward the poor registers directly with God. [...] Just as an altar was a direct conduit of sacrifices to the heavenly realm, so was the hand of the impoverished soul seeking charity.'³⁰

The book of Daniel 'contains one of the earliest uses of "righteousness" to refer to charity, and the clearest passage to support redemptive almsgiving in the Hebrew Scripture.' In chapter 4, Daniel warns Nebuchadnezzar that if he does not repent he will face punishment for his sins against Israel: 'O King, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be

²⁷ Ibid., 46.

²⁸ Garrison (1993) summarises the approach of Proverbs into three categories: '(1) the command to give or the assumption that the righteous will be generous; (2) the promise of reward for those who give; and (3) the warning that failure to provide for the poor will be punished' (50).

²⁹ Ibid., 50-51 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Anderson 2009, 140.

a lengthening of your tranquillity' (Dan 4:27). The parallelism of this passage makes clear that practicing righteousness is 'synonymous' with showing mercy.³¹

In a series of significant publications, Gary Anderson contends that the connection between righteousness and almsgiving and, later, sacrifice becomes the biblical framework for the sacramentality of the works of mercy.³² There is a theological conviction deeply embedded within biblical tradition that 'one could meet God in the face of the poor.' In other words, 'Charity was, to put it briefly, *a sacramental act*. That is, an act that established a contact point between the believer and God.'³³ For Anderson, the key developments that give rise to this sacramental interpretation of charity can be found in the books of Tobit and Sirach.

Violently removed from the land and forced into exile, the people of Israel struggled to affirm and maintain their identity as captives in a foreign land. The traumatic experience of exile induced several significant developments of Israel's understanding of worship. With no Temple, no priestly rituals, no altar upon which to offer sacrifice to God, how could Israel live faithfully before God? Anderson persuasively shows that it is in this context that almsgiving and the works of mercy emerge as alternative forms of cultic (albeit non-ritual) worship.

The book of Tobit is a Jewish novella or short historical fiction that tells the story of a man and his family living in Assyrian captivity.³⁴ Tobit describes himself as one who has 'walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life. I performed many acts of charity for my kindred and my people who had gone with me in exile to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians' (1:3). When he was in the land of Israel, Tobit was distinguished for his faithfulness to make sacrifices at the Temple, to keep the festivals, to offer firstfruits (as prescribed in Deut 26), to distribute his tithe 'to the orphans and widows and to the converts who had attached themselves to Israel' (1:5-9). But now that he has gone into exile, his righteous piety assumes a different form. Tobit finds

³¹ Garrison 1993, 51. Cf. Rosenthal 1950, 427-428; Satlow 2010, 262-264. Gary Anderson offers a more helpful translation of the passage: 'Therefore, O King, may my advice be acceptable to you: Redeem your sins by almsgiving (*šidqâ*) and your iniquities by generosity to the poor (*miḥan 'ānāyîn*); then your serenity may be extended' (2009, 139).

³² Anderson 2007; 2009; 2011, 91-98; 2012, 121-131; 2013.

³³ Anderson 2013, 7-8 (emphasis added).

³⁴ Scholars note that despite the complexity of its genre and diasporic social setting, the book of Tobit's theological positions concerning the sacrificial nature of almsgiving becomes a mainstream position with later Jewish tradition. For more detailed analysis of almsgiving and sacrifice in the Book of Tobit, see Harris 1929, 315-319; Di Lella 1979, 380-389; Fitzmyer 2002; Bauckham 2006, 140-164; Ottenheim 2008, 485-506; Macatangay 2011; Anderson, 2013; Macatangay 2013, 69-84.

favour with the Assyrian king. Though he assumes a position in the royal courts, he continues to devote himself to acts of mercy: 'In the days of Shalmaneser I performed many acts of charity to my kindred, those of my tribe. I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it' (1:16-17). Joseph Fitzmyer describes Tobit as 'a model practitioner of corporal works of mercy.'³⁵

The virtue of acting charitably remains one of the key themes throughout the book. In chapter 4, Tobit exhorts his son, Tobias, to pursue the righteous path of wisdom:

Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. Indeed, almsgiving, for all who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High. [...] Give some of your food to the hungry, and some of you clothing to the naked. Give all your surplus as alms, and do not let your eye begrudge your giving of alms (Tob 4:7b-11, 16).

This text makes clear that the connection between works of mercy and sacrifice is profound. God will turn his face to those who turn their face to another in need. To speak of compassionate care as an offering in the *presence* of the Most High suggests that the site of charitable exchange has become a holy meeting place of encounter. Practical deeds of loving-kindness – feeding, clothing, burying the dead – are sacrifices in the strong (sacramental) sense of the word, and not simply a poetic metaphor or a 'spiritualised' repudiation of Israel's liturgy. As Anderson observes,

To call almsgiving a *gift* in the sight of God calls to mind an offering or sacrifice that one might bring to the temple. Indeed, the Greek term *dōron* regularly translates the Hebrew term for a donation to the altar, *qōrbān*. And the reason one brings a *qōrbān*, according to the book of Leviticus, is to put it on the altar in the presence of God. In other words, Tobit is suggesting that placing coins in the hand of a beggar is like putting a sacrifice on the altar – for both the hand and the altar provide direct access to God.³⁶

Thus, Tobit's charity is intimately connected to his religious devotion to God.³⁷ 'The point seems clear: sacrifices in the land of Israel have now been replaced by almsgiving and other acts of

³⁵ Fitzmyer 2002, 119.

³⁶ Anderson 2009, 148.

³⁷ Fitzmyer 2002, 103.

charity.³⁸ For Anderson, it represents not an alternative *to* sacrifice, but rather an alternative *mode of* sacrificial worship, thanksgiving and atonement for sin. These texts would become the foundation for early Christian interpretation of the works of mercy.

This account takes us back to Chauvet and the book of Sirach.³⁹ As we have seen, this text also affirms the real connection between almsgiving and sacrifice (mercy and sacrament).⁴⁰ However, its author, Ben Sira, lived during the time when the Temple was still operational. He was a strong advocate for the liturgical rites of the sacrificial system. By contrast with Tobit, Sirach does not develop a sacrificial interpretation of the works of mercy in order to replace a ritual practice no longer possible. According to Anderson, Ben Sira nonetheless provides ‘vivid testimony that charity and sacrifice were comparable deeds.’⁴¹ What is more, the text teaches that ‘the acts of charity toward the poor became the equivalent of temple sacrifice even while the temple was standing.’⁴²

Jacob Milgrom, one of the most significant Jewish scholars of ritual sacrifice, observes that ‘the system of sacrifice provided a metaphor, a method, for the Israelites to reach God, responding to the deep psychological, emotional, and religious needs of the people.’ The Hebrew term for ‘sacrifice’ derives from the root verb meaning ‘to bring near.’ A sacrifice is therefore ‘that kind of offering that enables us to approach God. The word “sacrifice” comes from the Latin word meaning “to make sacred.” The quintessential act of sacrifice is the transcendence of property from the common to the sacred realm, so making it a gift for God.’⁴³ Ben Sira applies this technical sacrificial terminology to the works of mercy, interweaving the ritual and ethical modes of activity into a seamless, complex praxis.

³⁸ Anderson 2009, 171. Anderson (2013) notes how in Tobit 12:8-9 the tradition biblical triad of *sacrifice*, fasting and prayer is transformed to *alms*, fasting and prayer. ‘And as if to make the point that almsgiving is the replacement for sacrifice, Raphael asserts that almsgiving is superior to fasting and prayer just as sacrifice was the highest form of service to God while the temple was standing, and that almsgiving atones for sin, a function that it shares with sacrifice alone’ (143).

³⁹ Sirach is also known as Ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus.

⁴⁰ Almsgiving is a prominent theme in Sirach. For example, 4.3-5; 7.10b; 29.9-13; 35.9-10; 40.17, 24. For a discussion, see Olyan 1987, 261-286; Hayward 1991, 22-34; Skehan & Di Lella 1995, 417-419; Morla Asensio 1998, 151-178; Murphy 1998, 261-270; Gregory 2010.

⁴¹ Anderson 2013, 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴³ Milgrom 2000, 17.

Fear the LORD and honour the priest,
and give him his portion as you have been commanded:
the first fruits, the guilt offering, the gift of the shoulders,
the sacrifice of sanctification, and the first fruits of the holy things.

Stretch out your hand to the poor,
so that your blessing may be complete.
Give graciously to all the living;
do not withhold kindness even from the dead.
Do not avoid those who weep,
but mourn with those who mourn.
Do not hesitate to visit the sick,
because for such deeds you will be loved' (Sir 7:31-35).

Here, Ben Sira recapitulates the pattern of the firstfruits offering, to share the sacrifice with the priest (i.e. Levites) and the poor (i.e. aliens). Anderson notes that these are two classes of people 'through which one can demonstrate one's reverence for God.'⁴⁴ One *draws near* to the LORD through the ritual offering of the liturgy and one also *draws near* through the ethical offering of the liturgy of the neighbour. This notion resonates with Chauvet's claim that the ethical return-gift accomplishes what the liturgy celebrates: 'Only with both priest and poor in view, Ben Sira teaches, may "your blessing be complete."⁴⁵

Elsewhere, Ben Sira critiques miserly stinginess and greedy injustice, associating instead generosity to the poor with worthy offerings to God (Sir 14:8-11).⁴⁶ Echoing the prophetic tradition, he forcefully denounces as worthless the sacrifices of those who abuse the poor:

If one sacrifices ill-gotten goods, the offering is blemished;
the gifts of the lawless are not acceptable.

[...]

Like one who kills a son before his father's eyes
is the person who offers a sacrifice from the property of the poor.
The bread of the needy is the life of the poor;
whoever deprives them of it is a murderer (Sir 34:21-25).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Anderson 2013, 20.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁶ 'The miser is an evil person;
he turns away and disregards people.
The eye of the greedy person is not satisfied with his share;
greedy injustice withers the soul.
A miser begrudges bread,
and it is lacking at his table.
My child, treat yourself well, according to your means,
and *present worthy offerings to the LORD*' (14:8-11).

By contrast, Ben Sira promotes almsgiving as a sacrifice of praise, a thank offering before the LORD (35:1-4). Interestingly, the verses cited by Chauvet are located in a longer discourse concerning the liturgical paradigm of firstfruit offering. Ben Sira exhorts his readers ‘not to stint the first fruits of your hands’ but to be generous, giving ‘as generously as you can afford.’ We recall that the firstfruits are presented to the LORD but distributed to the poor. It is in this context that Ben Sira concludes his exhortation:

[The LORD] will not ignore the supplication of the orphan,
or the widow when she pours out her complaint.
Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek
as she cries out against the one who causes them to fall?
The one whose service is pleasing to the LORD will be accepted,
and his prayer will reach to the clouds (Sir 35:17-20).

In summary, Anderson contends that the ‘crisis in ritual’ inherent in Jewish liturgy is the soil that facilitated the emergence a new theological conception of the works of mercy. As a consequence, within Judaism ‘ethics’ is not just an abstract horizon of human action that is somehow rendered ‘sacramental.’ Rather, several long-established Jewish traditions identify particular ethical practices in which one might encounter the presence of the living God through the face of another. ‘By the close of the biblical period,’ concludes Anderson, ‘service to the poor had become *the* privileged way to serve God.’⁴⁸

So when Chauvet somewhat vaguely gestures to ‘the pure and simple substitution of human good deeds for sacrifice,’ what is actually transpiring in these biblical passages is a far more radical intensification of the theological meaning of works of mercy as acts of worship. This provides some initial evidence that when we speak of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as ‘sacramental’ events in which both giver and recipient *draw near* to the presence of Christ, this is not an arbitrary designation. When one attends to their roots in biblical Judaism one discovers that the works of mercy are always already defined by the unity-in-tension of liturgy and ethics.

⁴⁷ Chauvet (1995b) picks up this passage to argue that, for Christians as well as for Jews, a liturgy that is intended to symbolise the gratuitous gift of creation can become a profane symbol of *de-creation* if corrupted by the stains of injustice: ‘As a consequence, bread cannot become Eucharist under just any condition. It is not Eucharist when, taken away by an unjust economic system from the poor who have produced it, it has become a symbol of “de-creation.” To offer God such bread kneaded with the death of the poor is murder and sacrilege (see Sir 34:24-25). To partake of such bread in Communion is “to eat one’s own condemnation”: for in effect, how could one discern in it the body of the Lord (see 1 Cor 11:17-34)?’ (358-359).

⁴⁸ Anderson 2013, 18.

Below, we will return to the question of how New Testament writers developed the notion of mercy as sacrifice. But first, let us return to Chauvet's account of how the liturgical deep-structure of Jewish liturgy is carried forward and recalibrated within Christianity.

4.3 SACRIFICE AND MERCY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

4.3.1 A NEW CULT

Chauvet argues that Christianity inherits from Judaism the same symbolic structure of gift-reception-return, the same prophetic-historical 'crisis in ritual' and the same underlying liturgical unity-in-tension of sacrament and ethics. The distinction between the two religious traditions is not at the symbolic or moral level. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus repeatedly locates himself within the great prophetic tradition of the Old Testament in his own critique of the 'cultic formalism' of his contemporaries.⁴⁹ Jesus lived in a cultural milieu in which prophetic Judaism and philosophic Hellenism were beginning to converge in their critique of ritual sacrifice.⁵⁰ Jesus is not innovative in his critique of empty sacrifice, the corruption of the Temple, or the legalism of the Scribes and Pharisees. Even his summation of the Law into the commandment to love God and neighbour is firmly rooted in the Jewish tradition.

And yet, 'the Christian cult is simply *of another order* than the Jewish cult whose heir it is.'⁵¹ The key difference between Christianity and Judaism, Chauvet maintains, is rather *theological*; it concerns the messianic status of Jesus himself. In his proclamation of the kingdom and in his elusive and enigmatic critique of the Temple, Jesus' words and deeds gesture towards the imminent in-breaking of '*a new status for worship as such.*'⁵²

'The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God

⁴⁹ See Hos 6:6, quoted in Matt 9:13 and 12:7; Isa 29:13, quoted in Mark 7:6-7 and Matt 15:8-9; Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11, quoted in Matt 21:13 (Chauvet 2001, 59).

⁵⁰ This is most evident in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, a Jew devoted to the Law and Temple sacrifice but also profoundly influenced by Greek culture. According to Philo, writes Chauvet (2001): 'although God prescribed these sacrifices, it is not because God needs them (*Special Laws*, 1.293) but because God wants to increase our piety toward God (*Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 123). In this perspective, it is the sacrifice "of thanksgiving" which has the first place among all other forms of sacrifice. But its ritual performance in the Temple has value in God's eyes only if it expresses, in thanksgiving, the offering of the good disposition of the heart, which surpasses all sacrifices (*Special Laws*, 1.271-272). For the apex of the sacrifices is the spiritual offering of the soul united with God (*On Exodus*, 2.71-72)' (59).

⁵¹ Chauvet 1995b, 250.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 247.

is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth' (John 4:21-24).⁵³

Kevin Mongrain suggests that the question hinges on how Chauvet interprets 'the conjunction "and" in Jesus' announcement of a new cultic order of worship in spirit *and* truth? In other words, what is the connection between the anti-idolatrous institutionally learned ignorance of "worship in *spirit*" and the unity-in-tension of cult and ethics in "worship in *truth*"?'⁵⁴ Jews affirm that the Law is a gift of God and that the faithful practice of the religious cult requires both purity of heart and the ethical return-gift of thanksgiving. However, justification is through the 'eucharistic' (i.e. thankful) exercise of the 'works' of the Law. For Christians, by contrast, 'thanksgiving is *Christ himself*, and no longer their own faithful execution of the Law or the uprightness of their grateful hearts. The very principle of justification is different from what it is in Judaism: it is identified with Christ, the unique subject who has fully accomplished the Law, inscribed as it was by the Spirit in his innermost being.'⁵⁵

This *theological* shift demands the complete 'rereading of the whole religious system, a rereading imposed by the confession that Jesus is the Christ. Thus, all rests on Easter and Pentecost. In a word, the difference is *eschatological*.'⁵⁶

4.3.2 A NEW CULTIC STATUS

The New Testament metaphor for this newness is what Chauvet calls the 'Easter tear.' This is symbolised in the tearing apart of the heavens at Jesus' baptism, which permitted the Spirit to descend upon him (Mark 1:9-11; cf. Isa 63:11-64:1); the tearing of old wineskins of the Law by the new wine of the Gospel (Mark 2:21-22); the rending of the high priest's garments during Jesus' trial at Jesus' words: 'I am' (Mark 14:61-63); and, most dramatically, in the tearing in two ('from top to bottom') of the Temple curtain at the moment of Jesus' death on the cross (Luke 23:45).⁵⁷ Chauvet writes,

⁵³ For a fascinating analysis of Chauvet's theology in light of this passage, see Mongrain 2006, 137-142.

⁵⁴ Mongrain 2006, 138.

⁵⁵ Chauvet 1995b, 251.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 250. Elsewhere Chauvet (2001) notes, 'This is precisely what Paul emphasized in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians: the justification through which the reconciliation of God with humanity takes place has a principle not the good works that humans accomplish but God's gratuitous work in Jesus Christ. [...] The Christian newness is not to be sought anywhere else than in this new reading of the Scriptures; they are "fulfilled" in the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit' (62-63).

⁵⁷ On the theological symbolism of the temple curtain, see Young 1973, 325-338; Green 1994, 495-515; Gurtner 2007.

the Holy of Holies is thereafter empty; the temple of the presence of God is now the body of the Risen One (John) or the community of the faithful (Paul). By both the tearing of the heavens and the tearing of the Temple curtain a new status for cult, inaugurated by the paschal [*sic*] and Pentecostal fulfilment of the promise, is theologically expressed. In Jesus, Christ and Lord, the religious fabric of Judaism has been torn. Something radically new has arisen *within it*, what one will finally call “the redemption of the world.”⁵⁸

For Chauvet, all of Christian worship is fundamentally reoriented around this new gift of God’s loving grace in Christ given in accordance to the Scriptures to fulfil God’s covenantal promises to Israel. ‘Jesus has finally sealed, in his Pasch, and especially in its culmination, the gift of the Spirit, this new covenant announced by Jeremiah and Ezekiel and consisting in God’s writing God’s law directly on the human heart (Jer 31:33) and in the gift of God’s own Spirit (Ezek 36:26-27).’ In Christ the future eschatological redemption of all things has already been inaugurated. ‘Thus, we no longer have to lift ourselves toward God through the performance of good works, ritual or moral, or through the intermediary of a priestly caste, but we have to welcome salvation *in our historical existence* as a gift of grace: in effect, we are all “now justified by his grace ... through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:24).’⁵⁹

The newness of the ‘Easter tear’ opens up the way to worship the Father. One passage in the book of Hebrews combines these themes in particularly interesting way.

[S]ince we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us *through the curtain* (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us *approach* with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. (Heb 10:19b-25a)

In this passage, technical ritual language and cultic categories of Jewish liturgy continue to be invoked, but with an important difference. The torn curtain is now linked explicitly with Christ’s body torn on the cross. The water and blood of his wounds have opened access to the most Holy Place: ‘For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth “the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church”’ (*Sacrosanctum concilium* 5).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Chauvet 1995b, 248-249 (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Michael Nelson for this insight.

Consecrated by Christ, the great high priest, and covered by his paschal sacrifice, Christians *draw near* to the presence of God. But this sacramental approach also comes with an exhortation to abide in this presence through love and good works.⁶¹

As with the Jews, Christian worship is thus defined in terms of Temple, altar, priesthood and sacrifice. However, 'Christians have no other Temple than the glorified body of Jesus, no other altar than his cross, no other priest and sacrifice than his very person: *Christ is their only possible liturgy*.'⁶² The implication of God's self-revelation in Christ is that the cultic status is not simply reformed – say, by sewing a new patch to mend the tear in an old garment (Matt 9:16) – but is radically transformed. 'Because from now on,' concludes Chauvet, 'God directly rejoins God's people – the Gentiles as well as the Jews – in the risen Christ and by the gift of the Spirit, and no longer through the twofold institution of salvation that was the Law and the Temple (sacrifices and a priestly caste).' Instead, '*the primary worship of Christians is welcoming in their daily lives this grace of God through theological faith and charity*.'⁶³ In the words of Rowan Williams, 'the effect of Christ's sacrifice is precisely to make us "liturgical" beings, capable of offering ourselves, our praises and our symbolic gifts to a God who we know will receive us in Christ.'⁶⁴

Whilst Chauvet's language of 'oldness' and 'newness' may appear problematic, Mongrain emphasises that Chauvet is not advocating a reductive view of Judaism. On the contrary,

Chauvet is at pains to make clear that his Pauline distinction between the "oldness" of the law and the "newness" of Christ and Spirit is not a crude form of supersessionism in the sense that Christian religious identity has totally

⁶¹ Robert Gordon (2000) highlights the progression in this passage from *faith* (from sprinkled hearts), to *hope* (from the faithfulness of Christ) to *love* (for one another). Significantly the author of Hebrews speaks of these three responses in an explicitly sacrificial and cultic framework of 'drawing near to God'. Gordon observes, 'Love, the primary Christian virtue, is not encouraged as some mere abstraction but is associated with good deeds. It is probably the author's intention to suggest that if love is to have meaning it must be incarnated in the "good deeds" that other New Testament writers also advocate as a necessary concomitant of Christian faith (e.g. Mt 5.15; Acts 9.36; 1 Tim 5.10, 25; Titus 2.14; 3.8, 14; 1 Pet 2.12)' (119-120).

⁶² Chauvet 1995b, 250.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

⁶⁴ Williams (1982) continues, 'Because of the cross we are now directed Godwards "brought close" (in the root sense of the Semitic *QRB* words) or offered to the Father: what we are is redefined in sacrificial terms – broadly understood. The whole of our worshipping activity is an expression of the reconciliation in the mortal flesh of Christ between God and his creatures. We bring ourselves near to the altar of the cross as we come and offer our gifts – and we are encouraged to do so because the way is open through the flesh of Christ – and are brought to the Father as we claim the fruition of the covenant proclaimed in the paschal event. Through the Spirit's work, the covenant is 'renewed' in us, in our re-entry into the 'sanctuary' of Calvary' (27).

invalidated and replaced without remainder Jewish religious identity. Rather, the Pauline distinction of “oldness” and “newness” is an assertion about Christian religious identity and its perpetual state of unity-in-tension with the ongoing reality of Jewish religious identity.⁶⁵

‘Oldness’ does not refer to the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures nor even the Law as such. Rather, it designates a religious attitude – a ‘smothering’ captivity to the ‘letter’ which can take hold in Christian tradition as well. As Mongrain points out, ‘The “newness” therefore was even present in Israel and Jewish religion prior to the coming of Christ.’ Because ‘newness’ is not the New Testament or even the church but only Christ and the Spirit, Christians are themselves ‘always in danger of reducing the gospel to the oldness of a document in which the Spirit would be extinguished, of a ritual that would again become a “good deed” and a “means of salvation,” of a corps of ministers who would be priestly intermediaries between humans and God.’⁶⁶ Clearly this is a difficult and complex matter. In Mongrain’s view, Chauvet’s position ‘certainly renders discussions of Jewish and Christian identity more rather than less difficult.’⁶⁷ This is a strength and not a weakness, for in the context of this debate the biggest dangers lurk in seductively simplistic oppositions.

4.3.3 THE SACRAMENT OF MERCY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The distinction that Chauvet names here is important for our attempt to locate works of mercy as a sacramental praxis within the unity-in-tension of liturgy and ethics. By the time of Jesus, Jewish writers are already describing works of mercy as an alternative modality of sacrificial offering. To what extent is this sacrificial ethic of mercy picked up and recalibrated in other writings of the New Testament?

In his book *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice*, Robert J. Daly categorises the New Testament texts concerning sacrifice into three basic groups: (1) the sacrifice of Christ, (2) Christians as the new Temple, and (3) the sacrifices of Christians.⁶⁸ Chauvet turns to texts of this third category to assess the origins of sacramental ethics in early Christianity.

⁶⁵ Mongrain 2006, 141.

⁶⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 287.

⁶⁷ Mongrain 2006, 141. For a provocative discussion of sacrifice and supersessionism, see Klawans 2005 and 2002, 1-17.

⁶⁸ Daly 1978, 82.

Chauvet begins by pointing out that whilst the New Testament text employs the technical cultic vocabulary of the Old Testament – *latreia, leitourgia, thusia, prosphora, hierus, naos, thusiasterion*, etc. – these terms are never actually used to describe the ritual liturgies of Christians or the ministers who preside over them.⁶⁹ Rather, this language is applied primarily to *Christ*, ‘to underscore that he brought the Temple worship (especially the sacrifices and the priesthood) to its fulfilment and that, having fulfilled it, he abolished it’; and subsequently, ‘the *daily life* of Christians, provided it is united to Christ by faith and love, to characterize it as becoming through him a “spiritual sacrifice,” that is, in the Spirit, “pleasing to God.”’⁷⁰ In the words of Everett Ferguson, ‘The death of Christ continued to be interpreted by Christians as a sacrifice replacing the sacrificial system of the Jewish law and temple. [...] Since atoning sacrifice was effected by Christ, Christian sacrifices were seen largely as *thank offerings* or else as enabling one to share in the sacrifice of Christ.’⁷¹

Chauvet surveys a litany of New Testament passages that demonstrate the centrality of the ethical life of discipleship for early Christian worship as a whole. Chauvet’s analysis is rich in detail and theological insight. However, Chauvet is not writing with the intention of elucidating the sacramentality of the works of mercy in particular. Thus whilst much of his discussion identifies the important biblical passages, he does not always sufficiently explain what these texts say about the status of the practices of charity. In the following pages, I will assess some of the key texts identified by Chauvet but will attempt to supplement his initial comments with a more thorough analysis of their import for the works of mercy. I suggest that just under the surface of Chauvet’s biblical exegesis one can discern a strongly sacrificial/sacramental account of mercy as a central dimension of the priestly character of ordinary Christian existence.⁷²

Romans 12:1 Paul urges the church, ‘by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice [θυσίαν ζῶσαν], holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship [λογικὴν

⁶⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 254.

⁷⁰ Chauvet 2001, 61. Chauvet’s qualified use of ‘spiritual sacrifice’ is particularly important. When he uses the language of ‘spiritualization,’ he does not intend something either immaterial or ‘merely metaphorical.’ On the contrary, one of Chauvet’s most striking insights is that ‘What is most spiritual always takes place in the most corporeal’ (xii). The moral life becomes a living act of worship only through ‘the indwelling of the Spirit of the risen Christ.’ For ‘The very existence of Christians, being the place where the book of the Spirit is written, thus becomes a living word revealing Christ. The place of the theological is the anthropological. The most spiritual is given in the most bodily’ (64-65). So when he qualifies ‘spiritual sacrifices’ as meaning *in the Spirit*, perhaps it is better to speak of these offerings as pneumatic sacrifices, or en-spirited offerings made ‘through Christ’ (Heb 13:15) by the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁷¹ Ferguson 1980, 1163.

⁷² The following analysis draws upon Chauvet 1995b, 254-257.

λατρείαν].⁷³ Fusing Greek and Jewish concepts, Paul's somatic imagery concerns the offering of the entire person, one's very self. Whereas many interpreters have been tempted to read 'spiritual worship' as an immaterial or interior religious disposition, James Dunn argues that 'What is in view is the *physical embodiment* of the individual's consecration *in the concrete realities of daily life*. It is as *soma*, part of the world and within the world that the believer offers worship.'⁷⁴ What does this 'physical embodiment' look like for Paul? As we read a few verses later: 'Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers' (12:9-13). Flanking the charge to 'serve the Lord' with ethical injunctions to serve the neighbour in works of mercy is not an incidental juxtaposition. As Dunn continues, '*Paul saw this commitment of daily life as the Christians equivalent to the priestly service of the Jerusalem cult*. His exhortation is to the effect that *each* believer is to be engaged in the priestly act of sacrifice; but that it is to be carried out on the altar of everyday relationships.'⁷⁵

Ernst Käsemann (whose work Chauvet cites) represents the once popular view that Romans 12:1 calls for a 'de-sacralising of worship' by the absolute convergence of liturgy into ethics.⁷⁶ Stephen Barton agrees that, for Paul, liturgy and ethics cannot be bifurcated from one another, yet against Käsemann he rightly argues that neither can liturgy simply be reduced to ethical action or pedagogical formation. Paul's use of cultic terminology in a 'concentrated metaphorical fashion' involves not the subversion of the cult, but rather '*its extension and re-appropriation*.'⁷⁷ Barton's interpretation resonates with Chauvet's view that faithful worship cannot stand upon ethical leg of the 'tripod' alone, but must remain in the tension these elements create together.⁷⁸

⁷³ For a discussion of this text, see Cranfield 1965; Käsemann 1969, 188-195; Roetzel 1986, 410-419; Betz 1989, 55-72; Thompson 1997, 121-132; Barton 2002, 25-39; Viagulamuthu 2002; Wannewetsch 2002, 197-220; Dunn 2006, 105-106; Kiuchi 2006, 251-261; Kruse 2012, 461-462.

⁷⁴ Dunn 2006, 105 (emphasis added). Cf. Dunn 2010, 45-46. For a critique of the 'spiritualising' interpretations, see Roetzel 1986, 415-418: 'Paul's intent is not to separate "spiritual" worship from "earthly" or inner experience from outer. He aims to sacralize everyday conduct, and thus to remove the barrier between world and "spiritual" behavior for those in Christ' (416). See also Thompson 1997, 121-132.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁶ Käsemann 1969, 191-192.

⁷⁷ Barton 2002, 27. Cf. Cranfield 1965.

⁷⁸ Thompson (1997) argues that Paul does not attempt to reduce liturgy to ethics, nor does he intend Rom 12:1 to exhaust the meaning of worship: 'The apostle urges a way of life as a whole, *identified* as a right-minded worship or service. In doing so, he no doubt expands our understanding of what kind of worship God values. True worship is inseparably connected with Christian behavior in general. But it is a logical fallacy to conclude from this text that he redefines worship as, or reduces worship to, Christian ethics – any

2 Corinthians 9:11-14 A significant aspect of Paul's ministry is the financial collection he organised among Christians across the Roman Empire to assist the church in Jerusalem suffering during at time of famine (Acts 11:28-30). This collection is a major theme of Paul's letters and a paradigmatic expression of what Chauvet calls the 'charity between brothers and sisters.' It represents one of the ways in which acts of mercy assumed a more social, collective form in the early church. Chauvet notes that not only was the collection gathered during the Sunday assemblies 'on the first day of every week' (1 Cor 16:1-2), but it is described by Paul as 'a *leitourgia* ("liturgy") which causes an overflowing of "eucharists" ("thanksgivings") to God.'⁷⁹

In a recent study of this theme in 2 Corinthians, David Downs emphasises that the collection is more than a liturgical gesture in a vague or abstract manner. On the contrary, Paul is clear that this corporate act of care is an act of worship to God. Downs writes,

Although one intention of this gift was, undoubtedly, the material relief of impoverished believers in Jerusalem, the collection in Paul's letters is portrayed primarily, and especially through the use of several cultic metaphors, as an act of corporate worship that will result in thanksgiving and praise, not to human benefactors [...] but rather to God, the one through whom all human benefaction is ultimately possible.⁸⁰

Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI observes that 'The value that Paul attributes to this gesture of sharing is so great that he seldom calls it merely a "collection". Rather, for him it is "service", "blessing", "gift", "grace", even "liturgy" (cf. 2 Cor. 9).'⁸¹ Benedict sees this attribution of cultic terminology to an ethical act of charity as a symbolic illustration of the fundamental dynamics of early Christian worship. By affording an 'almost sacramental value'⁸² to the collection, Paul reveals that 'on the one hand, it is a liturgical act or "service" offered by every community to God, and, on the other, it is a loving action made for people. Love for the poor and the divine liturgy go hand in hand; *love for the poor is liturgy*.'⁸³

more than Hosea's commendation of love and knowledge over sacrificial offerings (Hos 6:6) proves that the prophet was calling for an absolute end to form and ritual' (127).

⁷⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 255.

⁸⁰ Downs 2008, 121.

⁸¹ Benedict XVI 2008, 39.

⁸² Johnson 2011, 102.

⁸³ Benedict XVI 2008, 39-40 (emphasis added).

Philippians 4:18 and Ephesians 5:2 In his letter to the Philippians, Paul also describes the gift of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem as ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας ('fragrant offering') and θυσίαν ('sacrifice') acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil 4:18).⁸⁴ In so doing, Paul locates this merciful service even deeper within the theological symbolism of Jewish sacrifice.⁸⁵ What is most significant about this text is that Paul also uses precisely the same language in Ephesians 5:2 to describe Christ's death on the cross as θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ εἰς ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας ('a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God').⁸⁶ The context in which Paul embeds this cultic language makes this connection between the ethical praxis of believers and the sacrifice of Christ abundantly clear:

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be *imitators of God*, as beloved children, and *live in love*, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a *fragrant offering and sacrifice to God* (Eph 4:31-5:2).

As an *imitatio Christi*, the church's sacrifices of mercy participate and are caught up in the aromatic sacrifice of Christ's own self-giving.⁸⁷ In his treatise *On the Lord's Prayer*, Cyprian emphasises this link between mercy and sacrifice in Philippians 4:18: 'When one has pity on the poor, he lends to God (cf. Prov 19:17); and he who gives to the least gives to God (cf. Matt 25:31-46) – *he sacrifices spiritually to God an odour of a sweet smell*.'⁸⁸ In 2 Corinthians, Paul adds another layer of meaning by referring to Christians themselves as 'the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life' (2:15). In concrete acts of love, we are called to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice in the Son (Rom 12:1) who has been sacrificed for all. His is the primordial sacrifice and our offering is joined, co-mingled with his. We offer

⁸⁴ On the collection in Philippians, see Fee 1995, 276; Fee 1988, 75-88; Fowl 2002, 45-58; Hansen 2009, 323-324; Heyman 2007, 95-160; Hooker 2000, 469-549; Peterman 1997; Reumann 1993, 438-457.

⁸⁵ For the technical language of 'fragrant offering,' see Gen 8:21; Exod 29:18; Lev 1:9, 13, 17. Regarding the phrase 'acceptable sacrifice,' Walter Hansen (2009) observes, 'The second phrase, *an acceptable sacrifice*, is a well-known expression in religious language. The word *sacrifice* served as the common term in the Old Testament for offerings of grain or animals to God. The psalmist recognizes that "the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit" (Ps 51:17). Paul describes the expressions of the Philippians' faith as *the sacrifice and service coming from your faith* (2:17). By describing their gifts as an acceptable sacrifice, he puts their gifts in the category of the sacred offerings acceptable to God' (323-324).

⁸⁶ Silva 2005, 207-208.

⁸⁷ Hoehner (2002) notes that 'Out of the forty-six times the expression "fragrant aroma" is found in the OT, twenty-nine times (twenty-five times in the canonical books) it is this exact prepositional phrase as in the present verse. In other words, Paul is capturing the OT sense of a sacrifice that is acceptable to God' (651). See also Bruce 1984, 369; MacDonald 2000, 311.

⁸⁸ Cyprian, 'On the Lord's Prayer,' IV.33 in Ferguson 1980, 1186.

ourselves as drink offerings (Phil 2:17; 2 Tim 4:6) or grain offerings or as ‘salted sacrifices’ (Mark 9:49; cf. Levi 2:13) on the perfect and complete sacrifice of Christ. By so participating in Christ do our sacrifices carry his fragrance.⁸⁹ Thus the public, ‘processional’ liturgy (2:14) of Christian service in everyday life is not only pleasing to God, but also a life-giving witness for the world.⁹⁰

Acts 10:1-4 In Luke-Acts, the ongoing connections between works of mercy and sacrifice in the Jewish tradition are intentionally carried forward and developed within early Christianity. Although Chauvet neglects to mention it in his survey of New Testament texts, Acts 10 makes this connection explicit. Acts 10 tells the story of Cornelius. A Roman centurion of the Italian Cohort, Cornelius is described by Luke as ‘a devout man who feared God with all his household’ (10:1-2). According to the text, Cornelius ‘gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God’ (10:3).⁹¹ One day an angel of God appears to Cornelius in a vision and says, ‘Your prayers and your alms have *ascended as a memorial* [*mnemosynon*] before God’ (10:4). Having ‘remembered’ the sacrifice of Cornelius, God instructs him to send for Peter, thus inaugurating the church’s mission to the Gentiles.

As we have seen, a *memorial* is a particular mode of sacrificial worship. John Elliot notes that the memorial ‘has cultic overtones recalling the sacrifices of the Temple offered “as a memorial” (before God) (Lev 2:1-3; cf. 2:9; 5:12; 6:15).’⁹² This passage implies the same ‘substitution’ that Chauvet identified in Ben Sira. In Elliot’s words, ‘Deeds of mercy (alms) and prayer now take the place of Temple sacrifice as the sign of union with God.’⁹³ Max Thurian makes a similar point: ‘In

⁸⁹ I am indebted to Peter Leithart for this insight. Cf. Hooker 2000, 514.

⁹⁰ Oliver Davies (2001) offers a helpful discussion of the ‘attractiveness’ of a Christian praxis of mercy and compassion as a witness of Christ within the world. He writes, ‘The essential attractiveness of Christ and of Christianity resides in the same “loving mercy” or *splanghna* which binds the church together, in the Pauline theology of the “heart” and “mutual love.” Whereas for the church this is a conscious participation in the compassionate love of Christ which serves as the ground for its unity, outside the ecclesial community it is inchoately perceived as an attractiveness or deepening which is made present in so far as the members of the church with whom non-Christians come into contact themselves perform the compassion of Christ towards others. The iconic beauty of the authentic Christian life is itself founded on the prior movement of a divine kenosis, opening up new depths of existence, in which the individual Christian participates and which he or she is called upon to manifest and perform’ (220).

⁹¹ Hamm (2004) makes a persuasive case that the phrase ‘prayed constantly’ is better translated ‘prayed *regularly*’ – that is, in conjunction with the Jewish *Tamid* liturgy of prayer. This service took place at the three o’clock (i.e. the ninth hour). The implication of this is that Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, has his vision during the time of temple sacrifice and prayer (50-52). For Luke Timothy Johnson this suggests that the whole narrative is already framed in a cultic context (Johnson 1992, 182).

⁹² Elliot 1991, 106. Cf. Carpinelli 1999, 74-91; Hays 2010, 234-237.

⁹³ *Ibid.* Nicholas Wolterstorff (1983) emphasises the significance of ‘memorial theology’ for Christian worship, citing the provocative connection between the ethical memorial of mercy and liturgical memorial

traditional spirituality the memorial-oblation had thus become a symbol of prayer and of charity and alms, a sign of charity, were understood to be the equivalent of liturgical sacrifice. Charity and liturgy were thus united in the same symbol and memorial. Charity, like prayer, ascends as a memorial before God, like the liturgical oblation and like the thank offering.⁹⁴

Hebrews The book of Hebrews contains the most extensive treatment of the status of Christian sacrifice in the New Testament. It is widely acknowledged that the dominant theme in Hebrews is ‘the “once and for all” (*ephapax*) of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ (7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10; see Rom 6:10; 1 Pet 3:18).’⁹⁵ Hebrews announces that Christ, as the great high priest and the final atoning sacrifice for sins, brought the Temple, the law and the sacrificial system of Judaism to its climactic fulfilment. He abolishes the shadow in order to establish the reality. ‘It is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’ (10:9b-10).⁹⁶ According to Chauvet, ‘Hebrews attempts a Christological reading in exclusively priestly terms. Priesthood, however, applies only to Christ.’ Christ is the ‘[e]ternal, exclusive, untransmissible’ priestly mediator of the new covenant (7:24; 9:15). However, the theological *newness* of Jesus and the Spirit does not remove the notion of priesthood from Christian worship. On the contrary, it reconfigures and extends its implications. Christ, the perfect offering (5:9), does not sanctify only those who ‘minister’ in the church, but rather consecrates all of the faithful to priestly vocation. Chauvet writes, ‘those who are sanctified by Christ are at the same time “made priests” by him; their *teleiosis* is their participation in his own consecration.’⁹⁷ All Christians are designated as ‘*proserchomenoi*, “those in procession” who “advance toward God,” more exactly toward the celestial sanctuary that Christ, the unique High Priest, has opened to them.’⁹⁸ Christian worship involves nothing less than participating *in* the priesthood of Christ, ‘drawing near’ to the presence of God *through* the mediation of Christ, and offering one’s own fragrant

of the Eucharist (‘Do this as my memorial’ [Luke 22:19]). He goes on to write, ‘this very same God whom we are to worship by celebrating his deeds in memorial also requires of us that, in grateful response to those deeds, we take heed of him by doing works of mercy and justice’ (156).

⁹⁴ Thurian 1961b, 16-17.

⁹⁵ Tillard 2001, 84.

⁹⁶ Cf. Ferguson 1980. ‘What corresponded to the temple ceremony for Christians was the work of Christ (Heb 9:11-14). Christ is the high priest, superior in every way to the priests under the law (Heb 7:15-28), and serves in the true tabernacle, the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:1; 9:11-12). He is not only priest, but also victim, offering himself as the perfect sacrifice (Heb 8:3; 9:12-14, 25-28; 10:1-14). Christ thus prepared the way (Heb 6:20) so that his people could follow him boldly, with free access into the presence of God (Heb 9:9, 14; 10:19-22). Christians, forming the temple or house of God (Heb 3:6; 10:21; cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16), worship God in Spirit (Heb 9:14; 10:23-25; cf. John 4:24)’ (1163).

⁹⁷ Chauvet 1995b, 255. On the priestly baptism of all believers, see Leithart 2003b.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

sacrifices of thanksgiving *upon* the sacrifice of Christ. ‘The life of the Christian community,’ he concludes, ‘is thus presented as a long priestly liturgy.’⁹⁹

What does it mean to practice this priesthood of all believers? In the final chapter of Hebrews, the author exhorts his fellow Christians:

Let mutual love [φιλαδελφία] continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. [...] Through him, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share [κοινωνία] what you have, for such sacrifices [θυσία] are pleasing to God (13:15-16).¹⁰⁰

This passage reveals the two primary modes of Christian priestly activity: (1) the profession of faith in thanksgiving for the grace of God in Christ (cf. Ps 50:14, 23; Hos 14:2), and (2) good works and mutual aid among the community of faith (cf. Isa 58:3-10; Sir 35:3-4). We encounter in the text ‘the same liturgical-sacramental vein apropos the concrete exercise of charity among brothers and sisters through the sharing we found earlier in the collection taken up by Paul.’¹⁰¹ Again, the sacrifice of ‘works of mercy’¹⁰² is only offered *through Christ*. As such, these acts of generosity, hospitality, and solidarity are not of the same order as the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. They are a responsive return-gift of *thanksgiving* that participates in the redemptive work of Christ. Empowered for risky acts of love through the agency of the Spirit, Christians ‘go to Him outside the camp’ (13:11), bearing the abuses Christ suffered, and caring for those He died to save.¹⁰³ In the words of Miroslav Volf, ‘The sacrifice of praise and the sacrifice of good works are two fundamental aspects of the Christian way of being-in-the world. They are at the same time

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See Hughes 1987, 583-585; Luter 1988, 335-344; Attridge 1989, 399-401; Long 1997, 145; Gordon 2000; Koester 2001, 571-578, 416; Hamm 2004, 50-52; Eberhart 2005, 37-64; Gelardini 2005; Johnson 2006; Heyman 2007, 109-110; Mitchell 2007, 304-305; Long 2011, 233; Swetnam 2011, 159-174.

¹⁰¹ Chauvet 1995b, 256.

¹⁰² Long 1997, 145.

¹⁰³ Gordon 2000, 168-170. ‘Here the concept of worship is extended to include the doing of good and the sharing of one’s possessions, which things are said to be “pleasing to God” in the manner of the sacrifices laid down in the Old Testament priestly law. [...] [I]n that sense the assertion “we have an altar” (v. 10) is both illustrated and justified. Christians may be “outside the camp,” our author implies, but they are not to imagine that they cannot engage in the worship and service of God. On the contrary, they may satisfy a criterion of great importance for the author – the pleasing of God (cf. 11:5-6; 12:28; 13:21)’ (171).

the two constitutive elements of Christian worship: authentic Christian worship takes place in a rhythm of adoration and action.¹⁰⁴

As Tillard notes, this passage has deep resonances with Matthew 25:31-46, where Jesus reveals that the mercy shown towards even ‘the least of these’ is received as unto Christ himself. In Hebrews 6:10 the author writes that ‘God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake [lit. *towards his name*] in serving the saints.’ Luke Timothy Johnson notes that the phrase ‘towards his name’ is simply another way of saying ‘towards God himself.’¹⁰⁵ He also highlights the *memorial* undertones of this passage: God will ‘remember’ the labour they reveal and the love [ἀγάπης] they demonstrate towards himself in their diaconal service to their brothers and sisters. In other words, ‘The love of God and love of neighbor are here linked, as the author states that the way in which they have demonstrated their love for the name of God has been, and continues to be, the service they show to the saints.’¹⁰⁶

1 Peter 2:5 Chauvet concludes his survey of New Testament by turning to the notion that the Christian community has been built into a ‘spiritual house.’ In 1 Peter we read,

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house [οἶκος πνευματικός], to be a holy priesthood [ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον], to offer spiritual sacrifices [πνευματικὰς θυσίας] acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [...] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet 2:4-5, 9).

In Tillard’s estimation, ‘This passage is without doubt one of the most important of the New Testament.’¹⁰⁷ Peter depicts the church as the new temple. As indicated elsewhere, the language of *spiritual* house does not imply a purely interior and disembodied reality. The very *bodies* of believers are at stake here. Rather, the church is a *pneumatic* house – ‘one indwelt by the Spirit of God.’¹⁰⁸ The living stones (cf. Rom 12:1) signifying each and every Christian are gathered together

¹⁰⁴ Volf 1993, 208.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson 2006, 166. ‘Here that love has been demonstrated *eis to onoma autou* (‘for his name’), meaning God. The use of ‘name’ (*onoma*) for Christ or God is frequent in early Christianity [...]. Although Hebrews uses *onoma* for the dignity that Jesus has inherited through his exaltation to God’s right hand (1:4), it otherwise applies the term to God (2:12; 3:15), as it does here.’

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Tillard 2001, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Best 1969, 293.

into Christ and crafted into an ecclesial sanctuary filled with the vivifying breath of the Father (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 12:27; Eph 2:21-22). In the dense symbolic imagery of this passage, all Christians are identified as priests called to offer *pneumatic* worship – sacrifices of adoration and action, in spirit and in truth. David Hill argues that when 1 Peter mentions spiritual worship, it is not speaking primarily of baptismal or eucharistic rites but is attempting to name ‘the totality of Christian living which ought to glorify God’ (2:12).¹⁰⁹ With Chauvet, Hill argues that 1 Peter’s emphasis on holiness which ‘reveals itself in the midst of ordinary life’ is not to diminish, exclude or repudiate the sacramental rituals of instated by Christ. Rather the ritual and the ethical are held together as a unity-in-tension.

Tillard notes that in 1 Peter the ideal life in Christ is marked by ‘compassion, love of sisters and brothers, mercy, humility, refusal to render evil for evil or insult for insult, blessing (3:8-9), mutual submission, unity of spirit. And since what matters above all is the constant love for one another (4:8; see 1:22; 3:8), the author reminds readers of the duty of hospitality (4:9) and mutual service (4:10).’¹¹⁰ All of these virtues, dispositions, habits, practices and concrete acts of loving kindness together constitute a new way of being in the world. The liberating grace of God makes this new life possible. It is nurtured and matured in the process of belonging together in community.

For Tillard, as for Chauvet, Christian existence is storied by Scripture. One is initiated into this story and assumes a new identity in Christ through the sacraments. In all these biblical texts, there can be no question that this new identity is not given as a possession, but as a task and a vocation. ‘Baptismal life, thus translated into relationships of mutual love and service,’ he writes, ‘is in fact the life of “the holy priestly community,” of the “spiritual house” where spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God through Jesus Christ are offered.’¹¹¹ This ‘translation’ is evidence of the fact that Christian worship carries forward the ‘crisis in ritual.’ If the ‘totality of Christian living,’ as Hill puts it, is ‘sacramental’ at the level of Scripture and Sacrament, what we find in 1 Peter is that the *pneumatic* sacrifice of the works of mercy constitute the ‘sacramentality’ of ethical discipleship. For ‘these sacrifices are not primarily liturgical cultic actions but the existential acts of the holy life of this community. Its communion comes fundamentally from the Spirit, and it serves God in the daily actions of its members.’¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Hill 1982, 61. Cf. Morrill 2010, 12-13.

¹¹⁰ Tillard 2001, 21.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 23.

4.4 SACRAMENTALITY IN TENSION

The purpose of Chauvet's more cursory analysis of these New Testament texts is to demonstrate: (1) that the notion of a 'sacramental ethic' has material roots in Scripture; (2) that the unity-in-tension of Judaism's 'crisis in ritual' is in fact carried forward into Christianity; (3) that the newness of the 'Easter tear' profoundly reconfigures the theological meaning of ethical sacrifice; (4) that ultimately the primary shape of Christian sacrifice is a responsive 'eucharistic' (i.e. thankful) participation in the primordial sacrifice of Christ. Ethical acts are acts of worship before God. All of this provides a rich theological foundation for our investigation. By moving beyond Chauvet's exegesis to engage with a wider range of contemporary biblical scholarship, I have sought to demonstrate that not only are these New Testament passages 'relevant' to a sacramental ethic, but they also focus on the works of mercy in particular.

The same could be said of the development of these theological concepts in the apostolic fathers of the second century. Chauvet sketches the work of the *Didache*, Irenaeus, Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr and others.¹¹³ He argues that the technical vocabulary for worship continues to be used to describe the salvific sacrifice of Christ and the ethical sacrifice of Christians in Christ.

The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE had a radical impact on how these ideas developed in both Judaism and Christianity. The traumatic events of 70 CE, more than any other, intensified the anti-sacrificial pole of the 'crisis in ritual.' The loss of Temple, altar and priesthood brought the sacrificial system to an abrupt end.¹¹⁴ Jacob Neusner demonstrates that Rabbinic Judaism was born out of the ash and rubble of the destroyed Temple. In the absence of the cult, it became necessary to recover and reimagine alternative forms of worship. 'Rabbinic Judaism claimed that it was possible to serve God not only through sacrifice, but also through study of Torah. There is a priest in charge of the life of the community – but a new priest, the rabbi. The old sin offerings still may be carried out, through deeds of loving kindness.'¹¹⁵ Christopher Hays retells the story of the response to 70 CE.

¹¹³ See Chauvet 1995b, 257-259. For an overview of this material, see Ferguson 1980, 1166-1189.

¹¹⁴ On the implications of the destruction of the Temple for Jewish understanding of sacrifice and charity, see Baumgarten 1953; Clark 1960; Guttman 1967; Young 1973; Schüssler Fiorenza 1976; Knohl 1996; Klawans 2005; Quarles 2005; Assis 2009; Goodman 2009, 202-213; Satlow 2010; Gilders 2011.

¹¹⁵ Neusner 1974, 12-13. Cf. Garrison 1993, 56-59.

After the Temple fell, Rabbi Joshua cried out, “Woe to us, for this house that lies in ruins, the place where atonement was made.” But Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai responded to him, “My son, do not be grieved; we have another means of atonement which is as effective, and that is, the practice of loving-kindness, as it is stated, *for I desire loving-kindness and not sacrifice* [Hos 6:6].¹¹⁶

As we have seen, the theological foundations for these ideas were already operative within Judaism long before the destruction of the Temple. Nonetheless, a profound shift did take place during this time. In his survey, Everett Ferguson identifies the emergence of at least seven non-ritual modes of spiritual sacrifice: (1) reading and study of the law, (2) repentance, (3) prayer, (4) works of charity, (5) fasting, (6) suffering, (7) attitudes of the heart.¹¹⁷ Among these, however, works of mercy became increasingly central to Jewish worship and identity, to the extent that the Rabbis would eventually conclude: ‘The giving of alms and works of charity are equal in value to all of the commandments in the Torah.’¹¹⁸ What is more, almsgiving eventually becomes *the* commandment.¹¹⁹

The loss of the temple also impacted Christianity, but in different ways. As the previous section shows, from the very start the New Testament introduces a critical reorientation of Jewish liturgical categories. The shift in cultic vocabulary is consistent in the New Testament. Likewise, the ‘unanimous witness’ of the apostolic church affirms the Christological and pneumatological implications of the Easter-Pentecost event. For Chauvet, this demonstrates that the distinction is not ultimately contingent upon the status of the Jerusalem Temple, but runs much deeper to ‘the *very level* of the eschatological tear.’

The inescapable conclusion, we would argue, is an undeniable *anti-sacrificial and anti-priestly subversion*. [...] From now on, the new priesthood is the priesthood of the people of God. The temple of the new covenant is formed by the body of Christians, living stones fitted together by the Holy Spirit over the cornerstone that is Christ himself. And the sacred work, the cult, the sacrifice that is pleasing to God, is the confession of faith lived in the agape of sharing in service to the poorest, of reconciliation, and of mercy.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Hays 2009, 272-273.

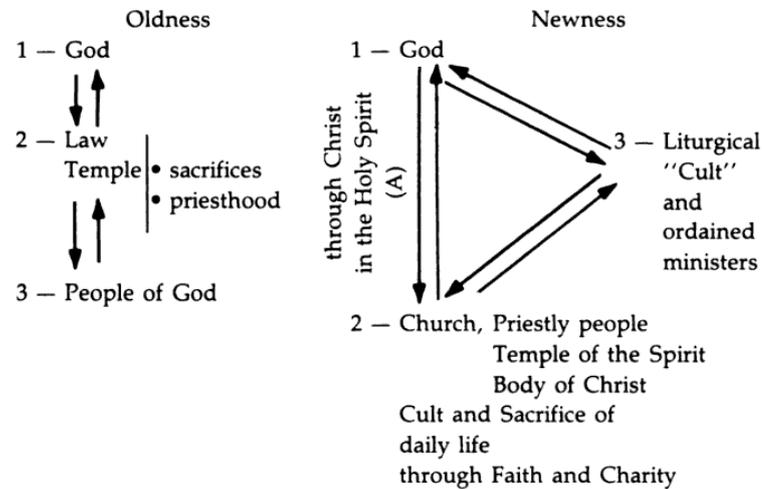
¹¹⁷ Ferguson 1980, 1160-1162.

¹¹⁸ T. Peah, 4.19, cited in Anderson 2009, 14.

¹¹⁹ Anderson 2009, 174.

¹²⁰ Chauvet 1995b, 260. Chauvet is, of course, cognisant of the turn towards an increasingly hierarchical priestly caste and so forth within Christianity in the centuries that follow. He states that ‘the door was left open for a possible retrieval of this vocabulary of the sacred by Christianity. But this later development should not lessen the theological import of this event: the status of “priesthood” and “sacrifice” is new with the very newness of *Jesus Christ* and of the fulfilment of the promise by the *gift of the Spirit*.’

This is the theological point of departure to which Christian theology must always return. The integrity and coherence of the entire Christian faith rests upon how one understands Christ and the Spirit. The difference can be visualised in the following diagram:¹²¹



In Christianity, neither Law nor Temple (with its priests and ritual sacrifices) functions as an intermediary. In the outer circuit of the diagram, the liturgical cult (Sacrament) acts 'as a *symbolic revealer* of what enables human life to be authentically Christian, that is to say, the priestly act of an entire people making their very lives the prime place of their "spiritual" worship.' In the inner circuit the cult acts 'as a *symbolic operator* making possible this priestly and sacrificial act that is "pleasing to God" through Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit.'¹²² Thus, far from being marginal or superfluous, the symbolic practice of Sacrament is precisely what 'comes from' and 'sends us back to' ethics.

In other words, Chauvet's strong emphasis on the ethical dimension of worship and its tense relation to cultic ritual 'does not bear *in any way on sacredness as such, but only raises questions about its status.*' It does not deny the sacred; it turns it around. Faith in Christ 'indicates what *kind of relation* is established in Christianity between religious and sacred manifestations and everyday ethical behavior: a *critical* relation, for faith turns this sacredness around in order to assume it in a Christian way [...]. It qualifies the sacred with a critical exponent that directs it back toward *sacramental ethics.*'¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid., 253.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 262.

4.5 IRENAEUS, AUGUSTINE AND THE 'ANTI-SACRIFICE' OF ETHICS

Having argued at length that the dominant biblical category for Jewish and Christian worship is sacrifice, Chauvet acknowledges this idea is deeply ambiguous and should be carefully understood. As noted above, Chauvet begins with the transformative *newness* of Christ and the Spirit. The sacrifice of Jesus brought to fulfilment the priestly and sacrificial system of old covenant. His death marked nothing less than the completion of the Jewish cult, 'sacrificing of the sacrifices.'¹²⁴ As both high priest and perfect sacrifice, Christ's self-giving love offers direct access to the Father. Through the Spirit humanity is invited into a new relationship with the Father – not a servile relation, but a filial one. '*It is in giving thanks, in giving back to God God's own Grace, Christ given in sacrament, that we are given back to ourselves, that is, placed or replaced in our status of sons and daughters and thus reconciled.*'¹²⁵

For Christians, this eucharistic return-gift of adoration and action is characterised by the *tension* between cult and ethics that cannot be reduced to a simple opposition, which offers 'either a sacrificial regimen with ethical abdication or an ethical regimen of responsibility.' By contrast, the newness of Christian sacramentality demands a different theological grammar beyond the old binary discourse of 'sacrifice' and 'non-sacrifice.'¹²⁶ To this end, Chauvet proposes a third term to describe Christian worship: '*anti-sacrifice.*'¹²⁷ Of this he writes, 'The anti-sacrificial regimen to which the gospel calls us *rests* upon the sacrificial, but it does so to *turn it around* and thereby to redirect ritual practice, the symbolic point of passage that structures Christian identity, back toward ethical practice, the place where the ritual practice is verified.'¹²⁸ This 'anti-sacrifice' paradigm is thus essential for understanding the connection between the Eucharist and the ethical practice of Christian discipleship. To clarify this connection, Chauvet turns to Irenaeus and

¹²⁴ Ibid., 298.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 311.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 290. "'Sacrifice," writes Chauvet, 'is a term that has a bad reputation in many Christian circles. Among the terms belonging to traditional Catholic vocabulary, it is without doubt one of the most *suspect* today. All by itself it calls up symbolically an entire "world," a world of a past not all that remote when, through the medium of the catechism and the Christian model proposed there, it functioned as the cardinal notion of the Church-as-institution.'

¹²⁷ Ibid., 307. Chauvet's theology of sacrifice is informed by a critical engagement with René Girard (see *Symbol and Sacrament*, 303-310). For a discussion, see Ambrose 2001, 279-296; Vondey 2008, 54-56; Kirwan 2009.

¹²⁸ Chauvet's argument that the Christian 'anti-sacrificial' system 'rests upon the sacrificial' has interesting resonances with the work of Jonathan Klawans. See Klawans 2005, 213-246 and 2011, 106-117. On the limits of Girard's theory of sacrifice, see Klawans 2005, 17-48.

Augustine. It is here that we discover the extent to which Chauvet's sacramental ethic is inextricably bound up with the works of mercy.

4.5.1 IRENAEUS

In his classic work *Adversus Omnes Haereses*, Irenaeus argues that whilst there continue to be sacrifices in the church just as there were among the Jewish people, the sacrificial system has been essentially and irreversibly changed.¹²⁹ Chauvet observes that for Irenaeus, the Christian oblation 'is the major teaching moment where we learn to make our own the very attitude of Jesus, that is, to pass from the Adamic attitudes of slaves, imaginatively considering the divine power as booty to be plundered, to the attitude of *sons and daughters*, content to allow God alone to be God and to acknowledge ourselves as God's creatures, the gracious fruit of God's paternal love.'¹³⁰

Sacrifices offered to God in the freedom of Christ are not given in order to meet some fictive need in God. Rather, they are means by which we declare *our* dependent need for God. The offering is not one of compulsion or coercion or guilt. It is a *response* to the grace and love of God. 'For it is by recognizing that of ourselves we have nothing to offer,' continues Chauvet, 'and that we can offer nothing to God that does not come from God as a gift [...] that we cease to be "sterile and ungrateful"; from being "*a-charistoi*," we become "*eu-charistoi*." We turn from being ungrateful to being gracious; and becoming gracious toward God requires that we become gracious toward others.'¹³¹ With identities come vocations; to be a child of God is to undergo a permanent process of letting God be God and to discover oneself matured into gratitude.

Chauvet identifies in Irenaeus a profound theological insight about the purpose and implication of Christian sacrifice. In the Eucharist, Christians learn to receive the gracious gift of God with gratitude and to respond to God's generosity with thanks and praise.¹³² But to recognise what God is doing for us in the Son, 'is to be urged *to be toward others as God is toward us*.' Chauvet concludes by noting how Irenaeus teaches that 'the sacrifice that is pleasing to God is nothing else but, in imitation of Christ, *obedience to God's word* and the practice of *justice and mercy toward*

¹²⁹ Irenaeus 1885.

¹³⁰ Chauvet 1995b, 311.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹³² Tillard 2001, 114.

others. Such is the anti-sacrificial pasch which, in communion with the Pasch of Christ, the Eucharist presents to us symbolically and enjoins us to live out ethically.’¹³³

From Chauvet’s initial reading of Irenaeus, it is clear that ‘ethics’ in the broad sense represents a sacramental horizon within which Christians become a *eucharistic people* through loving service. Chauvet pushes this a bit further by identifying true sacrifice with ‘the practice of *justice and mercy*.’ However, naming this general connection is the extent of Chauvet’s analysis. A second look at the original passage in Irenaeus reveals something much more interesting. It is worth quoting at length:

Now we make offering to Him, not as though He stood in need of it, but rendering thanks for His gift, and thus sanctifying what has been created. For even as God does not need our possessions, so do we need to offer something to God; as Solomon says: “*He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the LORD.*” [Prov 19:17] For God, who stands in need of nothing, takes our *good works* to Himself for this purpose, that He may grant us a recompense of His own good things, as our Lord says: “*Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you. For I was an hungered, naked, and ye clothed Me; sick, and ye visited Me; in prison, and ye came to Me.*” [Matt 25:34-35] As, therefore, He does not stand in need of these [services], yet does desire that we should render them for our own benefit, lest we be unfruitful; so did the Word give to the people that very precept as to the making of oblations, although He stood in no need of them, that they might learn to serve God: thus is it, therefore, also His will that we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission.

The altar, then, is in heaven (for towards that place are our prayers and oblations directed); the temple likewise [is there], as John says in the Apocalypse, “And the temple of God was opened:” the tabernacle also: “For, behold,” He says, “the tabernacle of God, in which He will dwell with men.” [Rev 21:19]¹³⁴

Of what does the ethical return-gift consist? How is this sacrifice given? In what sense can we understand it as received by God? Read in context, when Irenaeus speaks of the offerings Christians make ‘to God,’ he has the works of mercy specifically in mind. According to Gary Anderson, Irenaeus interprets Proverbs 19:17 as ‘a dramatic act of loving condescension on the part of God.’ In himself, God lacks nothing, and yet He makes himself available to us using ‘the altar and the waiting hand of the poor person as a means of approaching him.’¹³⁵ Whereas Chauvet glosses over many of these details, Anderson emphasises that in this passage Irenaeus

¹³³ Chauvet 1995b, 312.

¹³⁴ Irenaeus 1885, *Against Heresies*, 4.18.6. For a discussion, see Williams 1982, 9-12; and Tillard 2001, 113-114.

¹³⁵ Anderson 2009, 165; cf. 2013, 150-151.

combines (1) sacrificial oblation, (2) almsgiving as a loan to God (Prov 19:17), and (3) the depiction of the last judgment (Matt 25:31-46) in order to affirm the sacramentality of the merciful act.¹³⁶ God is present in Christ and Christ is present in the poor. Therefore, to give to the poor is to lend to the LORD. Anderson concludes:

Irenaeus thinks of this “loan” not as a financial matter but as *a liturgical act*. Placing an offering on the altar is like putting money in the hands of a poor person. Just as God did not need the sacrifice of animals in the temple but desired that we give them to Him for our own benefit, so God does not need the alms we give but demands them from us in order that we might have some concrete means of displaying reverence.¹³⁷

This analysis clearly shows that, for Irenaeus at least, the works of mercy are considered sacramental acts within the liturgy of the neighbour. What of Augustine?

4.5.2 AUGUSTINE

Chauvet concludes his account of sacramental ethics by looking at key passages from Augustine’s *City of God* 10.5-6.¹³⁸ Like Irenaeus, Augustine argues that God has no need of human offerings. On the contrary, sacrifices are offered to God for human benefit. For Augustine, the eucharistic *sacramentum* is the ‘*visible sacrifice, that is, the sacrament or sacred sign of the invisible sacrifice.*’¹³⁹ This ‘invisible sacrifice’ is nothing less than ‘the obedience and love with which Christ delivered himself over to the Father and to humankind, offering with himself all humanity whose brother he had become.’¹⁴⁰ The Eucharist is a visible participation of the true sacrificial self-giving of Christ on the cross. However, in communion with Christ, this true sacrifice also includes ‘*our own lives given to others through the exercise of mercy.*’¹⁴¹ Building on Augustine, Chauvet contends that the church itself is ultimately offered to God through Jesus Christ; her many

¹³⁶ Ibid. Gregory (2010) observes that ‘After Irenaeus the association of Prov 19:17 and Matt 25:31-46, whether for Christological or ethical purposes, is an exegetical commonplace’ (211-212).

¹³⁷ Ibid., 166 (emphasis added).

¹³⁸ For a discussion of mercy and sacrifice in Augustine, see Grabowski 1957, 29-63; Fitzgerald 1989, 445-459; Gordon 1993, 290-297; Ramsay 1993, 226-259; Cameron 1999, 290-296; Fitzgerald 1999, 557-561; Von Heyking 2001; Brown 2002; Leithart 2003a, 5-28; Williams 2004, 17-27; McCarthy 2005, 23-48; Finn 2006; Hofer 2008, 285-300; Louth 2008, 291-304; Allen & Morgan 2009, 119-170; Gregory 2010; Leithart 2010, 326-331; Ayres 2012, 416-428.

¹³⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 312.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 313.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 313.

members are declared one body from the one bread. 'The sacramental sacrifice is that of "the whole Christ" (*Christus totus*), Head and Body.'¹⁴²

From these brief comments, it is clear that Chauvet's reading of Augustine already lays the groundwork for a sacramental interpretation of Christian charity. Whilst Chauvet acknowledges the significance of this sacrificial 'exercise of mercy,' he does not follow Augustine's work to its logical conclusion.

Augustine begins by surveying various philosophical critiques of sacrifice in search of a more adequate language to describe faithful worship (10.1). Augustine notes that typical Latin terminology – *latreia*, *cultus*, *religio*, *eusebius*, *servitus* – can refer to either human service or divine worship. Works of mercy are listed as acts of 'piety' (*eusebeia*) for another in need, but are considered religious acts when practised for God's sake. He writes, 'in common speech, the word [*eusebia*] frequently refers to *works of mercy*; and I suppose that this usage has come about because God especially commands the performance of such works, and declares that He is pleased with them instead of, or in preference to, sacrifices.'¹⁴³

As the book progresses, Augustine develops this connection between mercy and sacrifice. In 10.3, he argues that Christians owe service [*latreia*] to God either through 'certain sacraments or performed within our own selves.' Christians (individually and as the church) constitute the true temple of God; the heart of each believer becomes an altar when it rises to God, and Christ is the High Priest interceding on behalf of the church:

We sacrifice bleeding victims to Him when we strive for His truth even unto blood. We offer to Him the sweetest incense when we burn in His sight with godly and holy love, and when we devote and render to Him ourselves and His gifts in us. [...] We offer to Him upon the altar of our hearts the sacrifice of humility and praise, kindled by the fire of love. [Ps 50:16-17]

The heart of worship is loving God with all one's heart, mind and strength. 'We ought to be led to this good by those who love us,' Augustine argues, 'and we ought to lead those whom we love to it.' By knowing oneself as eternally constituted in Love, and by loving the neighbour as oneself, one draws near to God. For 'we approach Him through love, so that, when we reach Him, we may rest in Him, blessed because made perfect by the attainment of our end.' To love the neighbour in

¹⁴² Ibid. Cf. D'Costa 2004, 268-269.

¹⁴³ Augustine 1998, *City of God*, 10.1 (emphasis added). See Gregory 2010, 269-270.

God: 'This is the worship [*cultus*] of God; this is true religion [*religio*]; this right piety [*pietas*]; this the service [*seruitus*] which is due to God alone.'

In 10.5, Augustine compares the sacrifice of neighbourly love with the Jewish sacrificial system of the old covenant.¹⁴⁴ He argues that the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament are types and figures symbolising the true worship that God requires.¹⁴⁵ According to the Psalmist, God does not desire the burnt offerings, but rather the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart (Ps 51:16-19). For Augustine, ritual sacrifice is a 'visible sacrament or sacred sign of an invisible sacrifice.' The message of the Psalms and the Prophets is that 'God does not require these sacrifices as such, but that He does require the sacrifices which they symbolise,' to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Under the old covenant, the worshipper could not draw near to God's holy presence, but had to rely on an animal substitute and the mediation of the priests. Christ is the Lamb that was slain and the High Priest of the new covenant. In Christ, the worshipper can now 'draw near' to God by offering *himself/herself* as a living sacrifice, enjoined with the sacrifice of Christ.¹⁴⁶ This self-offering for the sake of another is performed in works of mercy:

In the Epistle dedicated to the Hebrews, the apostle says, "To do good and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." [Heb 13:16] And so, where it is written, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice," [Hos 6:6; Matt 9:13, 12:7] nothing else is meant than that one kind of sacrifice is preferred to another; for that which all men call a sacrifice is only a symbol of the true sacrifice. Moreover, *mercy is the true sacrifice* [...]. All the divine commandments, therefore, which we read concerning the many kinds of sacrifice offered in the ministry of the tabernacle or the temple, are to be interpreted symbolically, *as referring to love of God and neighbour*.¹⁴⁷

The good works of Hebrews 13:16 refer to a merciful praxis of generosity, hospitality and solidarity. Here, works of mercy are not mere piety, nor are they a symbolic gesture or figurative type. On the contrary, Augustine contends that when offered *through Christ* (Heb 13:15) to the glory of God the Father, works of mercy are acts of worship – the true sacrifices of the new covenant.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Augustine 1998, *City of God*, 20.24.

¹⁴⁵ Leithart 2003a, 10.

¹⁴⁶ I am indebted to Peter J. Leithart for this insight.

¹⁴⁷ Augustine 1998, *City of God*, 10.5.

This point brings the argument to its culmination. ‘A true sacrifice,’ Augustine writes, ‘is every work done in order that we may draw near to God in holy fellowship’ (10.6). Therefore, a deed of loving kindness cannot be considered a sacrificial act of worship by definition, but only to the extent that it is offered with one’s body and soul as a ‘living sacrifice’ (Rom 12:1-2) for God’s sake. Augustine thus states that

true sacrifices are *works of mercy* shown to ourselves or to our neighbours, and done with reference to God; and since works of mercy have no object other than to set us free from misery and thereby make us blessed [...] it surely follows that the whole of the redeemed City – that is, the congregation and fellowship of the saints – is offered to God as a universal sacrifice for us through the great High Priest Who, in His Passion, offered even Himself for us in the form of a servant, so that we might be the body of so great a Head.¹⁴⁸

All Christians are given the vocation of priests to worship God in sacrifices of mercy – given materially to ‘the least of these’ (Matt 25), but received spiritually as unto Christ himself (cf. *City of God* 20.24). As Lewis Ayres observes, ‘our “sacrifices” are not subsequent to Christ’s self-sacrifice: rather, our sacrifices gain their effective reality from the fact that they are sacrifices that flow from Christ’s incorporation of Christians into his own life and sacrifice (and then into his resurrection).’¹⁴⁹ For Augustine, this sacrifice of mercy is intrinsically bound up with Christ’s sacrificial offering of the church itself in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. ‘This is the sacrifice of Christians: “We, being many, are one body in Christ.” [Rom 12:5] And this is also, as the faithful know, the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, by which she demonstrates that she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God.’¹⁵⁰ Many readers of Augustine interpret this passage as an affirmation of eucharistic sacrifice. Whilst this theme is certainly present in book 10, Augustine’s primary focus is on the works of mercy as sacrificial acts of worship. In a discussion of the final judgment in *City of God* 20.24, Augustine returns to this relationship between mercy and sacrifice. He underscores the centrality of this

¹⁴⁸ In his *Flesh of the Church*, Tillard (2001) unpacks the densely concentrated sacrificial imagery embedded in this passage: ‘In the “sacrament of the altar” the various “sacrifices” are thus together in osmosis. All of them are embraced by the sacramental presence of the paschal sacrifice which Christ offered “once for all” and in which all the forms of his own sacrifice found their fulfilment: “Sacrifice of good deeds and mutual help,” “spiritual sacrifice of a holy life,” “sacrifice of praise,” “sacrifice of the lips,” particularly sacrifice of one’s own life. Then, in virtue of their entering into the power of the paschal sacrifice of communion of Christ, the hearts and words of those whom the synaxis assembles form a unique and radically indivisible “sacrifice,” that of the church, body and head’ (124).

¹⁴⁹ Ayres 2012, 424; cf. Leithart 2010, 329-300.

¹⁵⁰ Augustine 1998, *City of God*, 10.6. Ayres (2012) adds, ‘The sacrifice offered on the Christian altar is the church, because the community of Christians, the body of Christians, has been incorporated into Christ’ (424). See also Bradley 1995, 150; Bell 2002, 353.

point, writing, 'works of mercy are the sacrifices with which God is well pleased, as I remember having said in the tenth book of this work.' He then concludes,

In these works of mercy the righteous make a covenant with God, because they do them for the sake of the promises contained in His new covenant. Thus, when the saints have been gathered unto Him and placed at His right hand in the last judgment, Christ will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat."

Chauvet is certainly right to locate his sacramental ethic in the theological writings of Irenaeus and Augustine, who, despite their differences, 'meet in their doctrine of the Eucharist. Both present it as the great *pedagogy* where humans "*learn to serve God*" (Irenaeus), where the Church, the body whose head is Christ, "*learns to offer itself through him*" (Augustine).¹⁵¹ Whilst he demonstrates that 'the twofold commandment of love toward God and toward neighbor [...] is the "true sacrifice," the most important liturgy which we learn from the Eucharistic anti-sacrifice,' Chauvet does not give adequate attention to the sacramental role of the works of mercy as concrete acts that fuse liturgy and ethics as one.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The newness of the Easter tear inaugurates what Rahner calls the 'liturgy of the world' – a reversal of the sacred that no longer maintains the sacralising separation of the holy, but rather involves the sanctification of the profane. The 'sacred' is not a *sphere* of religious activity (spatially understood), but rather a *dimension* of human experience of divine grace at its depth. As a consequence, 'the prime location of liturgy or sacrifice for Christians is the ethics of everyday life sanctified by theological faith and charity.'¹⁵² This is not a desacralised Christianity in which the symbolic drama of sacramental ritual is somehow drained of its significance. On the contrary, Chauvet's entire approach affirms to the end the permanent, irreducible and 'vital' tension that alone enables faith to flourish and mature.

The tension between liturgy and ethics which we have noted in Judaism is, as it were, doubled in Christianity. It is tempting to assuage the discomfort by either absorbing the liturgy in ethics ("What does Mass matter? The important thing is charity") or ethics in the liturgy ("I'm square with God: I go to Mass every Sunday and go to confession regularly"). In both cases, one becomes a "dualist" Christian

¹⁵¹ Chauvet 1995b, 314.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 262.

who separates the sacraments from the lived experience. However, the good health of faith depends precisely on this discomfort. This is to say that the tension is not to be abolished but managed. Its proper management requires, as we have seen, a twofold rereading: a liturgical rereading of ethics, which shows that the life of faith and love is a “spiritual offering,” and an ethical rereading of the liturgy, because the grace received in the sacraments is given as a task to accomplish, as one prayer after communion expresses: “Make us become what we have celebrated and received.” Without the liturgy, ethics can be most generous but is in danger of losing its Christian identity of response to the prior commitment to God. Without ethics, sacramental practice is bound to become ossified and to verge on magic. It is the sacrament that gives ethics the power to become a “spiritual sacrifice”; it is ethics that gives the sacrament the means of “veri-fying” its fruitfulness.¹⁵³

Herein we discern the significance of this ‘arch-sacramentality’ of the Christian life. For Chauvet, a mature faith must cultivate an ecclesial *habitus* of tension-dwelling. In their own ways, Scripture, Sacrament and Ethics combine to eliminate the safety of complacency. Only at the intersection of this theological tension is living faith matured.

In an insightful reflection on Chauvet’s theological project, Nathan Mitchell observes:

Christian liturgy can no longer be reduced to rules and rubrics; indeed, it must be “verified” in “real” time and space, in flesh and blood, in human *lives*. A wiser person once said that “Bread is always about *bodies*; and bodies are always about *justice*.” If the “Paschal mystery” is our starting point, then Eucharist can never be separated from ethics: the “*liturgy of the church*” can never be divorced from the “liturgy of the neighbor.” We must always leave Sunday Mass ready to feed the hungry, to satisfy the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to visit the imprisoned, and to seek justice for the oppressed.¹⁵⁴

Mitchell identifies the crux of the matter. The integrity of Christian worship is contingent on a permanent crisis in which its ritual always remains ‘in tension’ with the ethical demands of faithful discipleship.

Throughout this section as a whole, we have been exploring at length Chauvet’s account of fundamental sacramentality, the triadic deep-structure of Christian existence and the possibility of a sacramental ethic of mercy. This chapter has attempted to locate Chauvet’s ethical theology in the world of Scripture, and in doing so, it has sought to ground the works of mercy firmly within the sacrificial categories of Jewish and early Christian worship. However, in order to understand

¹⁵³ Chauvet 2001, 65.

¹⁵⁴ Nathan Mitchell, cited in Gómez 2004, 7-8.

fully the implications of Chauvet's theology for the works of mercy, we must attend at last to the tense relationship between these two interpenetrating dimensions of Christian worship: the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the neighbour.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LITURGY OF THE NEIGHBOUR

The justice rendered to the Other, my neighbour, gives me an unsurpassable proximity to God. It is as intimate as the prayer and liturgy which, without justice, are nothing.¹

– Emmanuel Levinas

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The eucharistic horizon of ethical praxis constitutes the church's 'liturgy of the neighbour' – a suggestive phrase Chauvet borrows from Emmanuel Levinas.² This language underscores the fact that the Christian moral life is not some extrinsic element designed to supplement the church's life of prayer. Moving beyond Karl Rahner's 'liturgy of the world' and Edward Schillebeeckx's 'secular worship,' Chauvet identifies the fusion of love of God and love of neighbour in concrete acts of ethical dispossession as a critical moment *within* the church's overall worship of God.

The grace of God announced in the Word and celebrated in the Sacraments comes as both gift and task. The vocation to worship *as a way of life* necessarily enjoins the church to new forms of enacted corporality. Chauvet is emphatic that this liturgical ethics cannot be grounded in a kind of self-congratulatory moral superiority. It is rooted 'in the action of God in Jesus and particularly in the gift of the Spirit. Indeed, it is due to the indwelling of the Spirit of the risen Christ that daily life is called to become a living parable of God.'³ In other words, for all the significance that Chauvet affords to sacramental rituals, he nonetheless contends that the 'liturgy of the neighbour' belongs at the heart of Christian worship.⁴

This chapter evaluates Chauvet's proposal that the sacramental ethic of the church emerges from the dynamic interplay between the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the neighbour. First, I explore how Chauvet understands the relationship between these two liturgical modalities. Second, I critically assess his dependence upon the philosophical theology of Levinas, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of this association. Finally, I raise a series of questions concerning the

¹ Levinas 1991, 18.

² For a discussion, see Bloechl 2000b.

³ Chauvet 2001, 64.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

limits of Chauvet's project as a point of departure for developing a sacramental theology of the works of mercy.

5.2 *LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI, LEX VIVENDI*

For Chauvet, ethics signifies an agapeic sharing between brothers and sisters that, in eschatological perspective, participates in the very agape of God. From this perspective, practical ethics becomes a living liturgy to the extent that it is rooted in the sacraments through the Spirit. The reception and celebration of God's gift of grace in the sacraments issues forth in a renewed vocation in the daily lives of Christians. 'What makes [ethics] Christian,' he contends, 'is not its "matter" but the "form" which is given it by love understood as a response to God's love, which came first (1 Cor 13).'⁵ The liturgy of the neighbour represents a kind of enacted doxology caught up in the redemptive gift of grace through a disposition of gratitude and a praxis of ethical dispossession: 'Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you' (Luke 6:37-38).

Through this modality – both an *attitude* of openness and a *habitus* of charity – the truth of the sacrament is 'carried through' and given a body in the world. This is at once a work God asks of *Christians* – that they visit the sick, clothe the naked, offer hospitality – and a work *God* alone 'makes possible' in Christ and through the Spirit. 'God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, *you* will abound in every good work' (2 Cor 9:8).⁶ In other words, the liturgy of the neighbour is firmly grounded in the gratuitous generosity of God.

It is no longer a question of "climbing" towards God by the strength of one's wrists, that is, by fulfilling the works of the Law; it is a question of welcoming by faith God who has "come down" by the Spirit of the Risen One to draw in the hearts, that is, the life, of human beings. Consequently, it is this *dailiness* of life, when lived in faith and love, which through the Spirit becomes the primary place of the "liturgy" or the "spiritual sacrifice" to the glory of God.⁷

Reflecting on Chauvet, Kevin Irwin argues that the liturgy of the neighbour expands the traditional formula – *lex orandi, lex credendi* – to involve a new dimension the ethical life (*lex vivendi*). This third liturgical dimension presumes that the world is already saturated with the prevenient grace of God. Thus *the* key concept for overcoming extrinsicism in liturgy and ethics is the principle of

⁵ Chauvet 2001, 41-42.

⁶ See Barclay & Gathercole 2006.

⁷ Chauvet 2001, 63.

sacramentality.⁸ ‘In an “either ... or” framework,’ he writes, ‘sacraments offer escapes from the world and send us back to it charged to work more adequately in it for the cause of God’s kingdom. In a sacramental world, it is the world itself that is, in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, “charged with the grandeur of God.”’⁹

This sacramentality constitutes the prior horizon underlying both *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*.¹⁰ Through these practices the church is gathered, called into being as a priestly people and charged with her mission to bear witness to the gospel in a broken world that has been reconciled to God through the cross of Christ. The church’s activities of prayer and proclamation ‘return us to this graced world. The celebrations of liturgy and sacraments are integral to and integrating of the Christian life lived in a sacramental world.’¹¹ However we might describe the internal relation between theological reflection and liturgical prayer, Irwin insists that both derive their intelligibility from the liturgy of the world.

Irwin argues that in addition to the enacted rites as the ‘place’ wherein we experience liturgy’s *lex orandi*, we must also attend to the fact that ‘enacted rites lead to *shaping values* among worshipers that are congruent with the liturgy and to *living life* in accord with what we celebrate — *lex vivendi*.’¹² In other words, *lex orandi*, *lex credendi* rightly ordered in the context of enacted

⁸ Irwin 2002b, 197. ‘The key that unlocks and unleashes the depth and value of any liturgy and all sacramental celebration is *sacramentality*. Liturgy and sacraments presume a sacramental worldview.’ Cf. Irwin 2000, 174-177.

⁹ Ibid., 204, quoting Hopkins’ poem ‘God’s Grandeur.’ Irwin 2002a, 721-733. ‘A second meaning of *lex agendi* concerns the living out of the implications of liturgy. This influence of liturgy on life is an aspect of liturgical participation traditionally understood to be constitutive of the act of worship. This may be called a *liturgical spirituality* where the act of engaging in liturgical prayer is seen to have implications for the living of the Christian life (i.e., the life of virtue)’ (726).

¹⁰ Ibid. Whilst emphasising the positive contribution of the post-conciliar emphasis of Christ and church as ‘primordial sacraments,’ Irwin nonetheless argues that this rather opaque application of the term ‘sacrament’ has in practice often been deployed, first, simply to intensify the distinction between church and world and, second, to reify the primacy of the seven sacraments to the exclusion of equally ‘strong moments’ of God’s self-disclosure in everyday life. As a result, he insists that ‘*sacramentality* is a better term to describe the foundation for celebrating liturgy and sacraments, rather than to assert (with hermeneutical and rhetorical ease?) that Jesus and the church are “sacraments.” Prior to God’s blessings sending us forth from sacraments to do God’s work on earth is the prior theological substratum of sacramentality, namely, that there is a deep and rich continuity between what we do in human life before and after engaging in sacraments which grounds both the rituals themselves and how we name these rituals as sacraments’ (201-202).

¹¹ Ibid., 198-199.

¹² Irwin 1997, 66.

rituals invariably produce something new: *lex vivendi*, or what Irwin elsewhere calls ‘a liturgical ethic.’¹³

The congruence between liturgy and ethics verifies the authenticity of Christian worship.¹⁴ Yet a ‘liturgical ethic’ does not simply flow from the liturgy of the church. Rather, the liturgy ‘draws on our experience of God in all of life’ and ritually reorients our hearts, minds and bodies through communal participation in God’s self-giving.¹⁵ These sacramental rites initiate the church into the eschatological reality of God’s salvific activity in human history. They announce the new reality already accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and yet also stand as anticipatory signs of hope in a world that still awaits (with deep groaning) its redemptive fulfilment (Rom 8:19-25). The eschatological tension inherent in the liturgy itself provides the most fitting grounding for a liturgical ethic. As Irwin explains,

it is eschatology that grounds the ethical dimension of liturgy by linking liturgy with life here and now, particularly in linking liturgy with social justice, mission, service, and love. Because even this graced world is imperfect and because the kingdom manifest in liturgy is not yet fully realized in all of life, the liturgy implies and requires that those who participate in liturgy seek to extend the kingdom’s manifestation here and now through actions that conform with the liturgy, itself understood as the enactment of the kingdom.¹⁶

Unfortunately, Irwin does not describe in detail the *content* of this liturgical ethic. However, he does offer a few suggestive clues that point us in the direction of the works of mercy. For instance, when tracing some of the historical precedents of the church’s eucharistic *lex vivendi*, Irwin identifies the diaconal practice of ‘collecting gifts for the poor and distributing to those in need’ as a paradigmatic illustration of this liturgical/ethical congruence.¹⁷ More pointedly, in his

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Irwin 1994, 331.

¹⁵ Irwin 2002b, 208-209. ‘The function of sacramental liturgy is less to bring to the world what we have experienced in the liturgy (as important as that truly is) than it is to underscore how what we do in liturgy derives from the world and everyday life, the liturgical ritualization of which helps us order our lives and our world once more in God’s image and likeness. Sacraments are less doors to the sacred than they are the experience of the sacred in human life.’

¹⁶ Ibid., 332.

¹⁷ Irwin 1997, 72. The offertory procession of the eucharistic liturgy provides yet another important example of the ways in which worship and ethics are ritually integrated within the traditional rites of the church. See Kilmartin 1990, 658-659; Pickstock 1998, 242-243; Stevenson 2002, 337-338; Long & York 2003, 332-345; Johnson 2011, 102. For a more historical perspective, see McKee 1984; Bossy 1985, 66-72; McKee 1989; Olson 1989; Reinburg 1992, 532-542; Lindberg 1994, 177-191; Caner 2006; Chapell 2009, 52-53. For a fascinating analysis of the separation between the works of mercy and the eucharistic liturgy of the church in Christian tradition, see Pirozzi 1997; 1998.

essay 'Toward a Theological Anthropology of Sacraments,' he argues that a bold account of eucharistic presence does not detract from – but actually points towards – other 'strong moments' of God's self-disclosure in acts of compassion. 'The priority and paradigmatic quality of Christian sacraments [...] should not be interpreted as eclipsing other ways of coming to experience and know God. This argument does not neglect the reality that the Lord is present where individuals engage in *lectio divina* or other spiritual reading, or when the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the homeless are housed, or the poor have the gospel preached to them.'¹⁸ This seems to imply that the *lex vivendi* is more than just a synthesis of the ethical implications of enacted rituals. As practices which are oriented towards paradoxically mundane places of 'sacramental' encounter, the works of mercy represent key aspects of what Ion Bria calls the 'liturgy after the liturgy.'¹⁹ However, such a liturgical ethic of justice and mercy will only be authentic, Irwin insists, 'if it draws believing communities more and more fully into the mystery of Christ as personally and communally experienced in liturgy, the very experience of what sustains hope in the midst of the fragility of human life.'²⁰

Nathan Mitchell argues that the *lex agendi* introduces a necessary critical tension into our understanding of liturgical practice:

the deeper question is not whether faith controls worship, or vice versa, but whether either of them can be verified in the absence of a *lex agendi* (a rule of action of behavior), an ethical imperative that flows from the Christian's encounter with a God who is radically "un-God-like," a God who, in the cross of Jesus and in the bodies of the "poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned," has become everything we believe a God is *not*. The ethical imperative implied by the phrase *lex agendi* breaks apart our comfortable "faith and worship" duo by introducing that subversive element of *indeterminacy*.²¹

5.3 BEYOND LEVINAS: GIFT EXCHANGE AND ALTERITY

Having sketched the basic outline of Chauvet's account of the 'liturgy of the neighbour,' we are now in a position to assess its underlying theological and philosophical presuppositions. As we have seen, Chauvet's larger project aims to develop an account of sacramentality beyond the totalising paradigms of metaphysical onto-theology. Precisely because he sees sacramentality as

¹⁸ Irwin 1992, 42.

¹⁹ Cf. Bria 1996.

²⁰ Irwin 1994, 334.

²¹ Mitchell 2006, 39.

the symbolic milieu encompassing the *whole* of Christian identity, Chauvet also seeks out new ways of conceptualising ethical relations beyond metaphysical categories. To this end, Chauvet appeals to philosophical theology of Emmanuel Levinas.

Levinas sharply opposes any tendency to fixate upon *Being* ('impersonal, anonymous, violent reducer of otherness to the totality of the same') and, by contrast, proposes the *Other* as the fundamental point of departure for ethics and philosophy itself ('pure eruption and rupture bursting, through the "Face," the unifying pretensions and the ultimately totalitarian essence of the Greek *logos*').²² It is from Levinas that Chauvet derives his language of the 'liturgy of the neighbour.'²³ Curiously, Chauvet does not provide an account of Levinas' interpretation of this phrase, nor does he explain in much detail his own view of what the 'liturgy of the neighbour' actually entails. He simply asserts the intelligibility of Levinas' paradigm as a shorthand description of Christian ethics as a eucharistic return-gift of ethical dispossession, a thankful response to the prevenient grace of God. Unfortunately, matters are more complicated than Chauvet's silence suggests. In order to determine the viability of Chauvet's sacramental ethics, it is necessary to examine more closely Levinas' ethic of the neighbour, his theology of liturgy and his philosophy of the gift.

5.3.1 THE NEIGHBOUR: LEVINASIAN ETHICS

According to Levinas, the irreducibly personal relation with the neighbour – the other facing me – is the primal site of alterity and the beginning of ethics. Prior to any philosophical theory or ethical dialogue, indeed prior to any explicit intentionality or knowledge, the disruptive encounter with the face of the other catches me off guard and reveals a latent yet inherent responsibility for the neighbour. The direct, bodily confrontation with the radical otherness of another human person always already fractures delusions of self-centred egoism, thereby demanding response and provoking action. 'The Other becomes my neighbour,' writes Levinas, 'precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.'²⁴ The other awakens within me an awareness of my indebtedness and I can no longer innocently turn and walk away from this wounded and wounding gaze. Because the other obliges my ethical response irrespective of any possible future reciprocity in turn, Levinas contends that the paradigmatic neighbour is the widow, orphan and stranger – for the

²² Chauvet 1995b, 46.

²³ *Ibid.*, 238 and 2001, 58. See also Mitchell 2005b, 59-67.

²⁴ Levinas 1989, 83.

countenance of the weak, exposed, naked and destitute exacts generosity without guarantee of compensation. Thus, for Levinas, an ethic of the neighbour is always initiated in a radically asymmetrical disposition of compassion – a suffering concern structured *for-the-other*²⁵ – and a praxis of mercy through which I take upon myself the ‘fate of the other’ in costly acts of pure gratuity.²⁶

Levinas speaks of the other as one who comes to me as an intrusive face. Yet Levinas reminds us that this intrusion can also be refused. I can turn away from this face, avert my gaze and blindly render the other faceless and anonymous and so flee from my responsibility. The self-containment of the buffered ego (*for-itself*) sustains the ‘safety’ of this violent distancing by reducing of the other to the totality of the Same.²⁷ The ethical task is to resist this reductive temptation by tending and attending to the other with compassion, by throwing one’s lot in with the poor, the used and the disempowered, by re-posturing oneself *for-the-other* and in so doing risk to ‘re-envisage’ the world.²⁸

Whilst the face-to-face encounter is the beginning of ethics, Levinas argues that human sociality is never limited to a strict binary between the self and the other. There is always a third party who is also my other, my neighbour.²⁹ The presence of multiple faces raises a new moral dilemma: which of these two takes precedence in my response? To whom do I direct my concern? ‘Is not one the persecutor of the other?’ asks Levinas. ‘Must not human beings, who are incomparable, be

²⁵ See Levinas 1989, 88-125.

²⁶ Levinas 2001, 165.

²⁷ In his book, *The Shape of Living*, David Ford (1997) argues that this encounter with the face of the other can be a troubling and overwhelming experience, one that we often try to avoid and keep at bay with distractedness. We easily avert our gaze and put up boundaries to secure our buffered selves from such intrusions. He writes, ‘It is easy to think that these intrusive faces are accidents, unfortunate people who disrupt “normal” life. But in fact they go to the heart of who we are. This is because each person and each group has boundaries, and one of the easiest ways of making boundaries is by exclusion. We usually define ourselves over and against other people.’ Those outside our field of vision – ‘the destitute, refugees, displaced, or persecuted’ – are rendered ‘faceless’ by our refusals. Yet the biblical injunction to compassion inverts such exclusions (Deut 10:12-13, 18-19). The ‘criterion of the vulnerable’ is to guide ethical practice and determine the shape of Christian hospitality. Ford continues, ‘This does not mean that the faces of our family, friends, and others in our community are excluded. But it does ask what other faces are there too. Who are the others in our inner drama? To whom else are we responsible? Can we risk the boundaries of our heart being overwhelmed by the needy once we pay them compassionate attention? Do we glimpse the astonishing truth that, before this God, the way we treat outsiders may be the single most important factor in the quality of our core community of insiders?’ (43-44). For an extensive theological engagement with Levinas, see Ford 1999, 17-104.

²⁸ See O’Siadhail 1995, 26, quoted in Ford 1997, 41-42.

²⁹ Levinas 2001, 214. For a substantial Christian engagement with these themes, see Veling 2010.

compared?³⁰ Confronted with the impossibility of this ethical multiplicity, Levinas argues that the personalism of mercy must necessarily engender a subsequent social ethic of justice – that is, of judgment, weighing, comparison and ultimately decision.³¹ And yet however far the juridical apparatus of justice may shift away from the concrete site of particular others, there can ultimately be no justice without mercy. For not only is justice itself ‘born of charity’ (i.e. of the relation with the neighbour), but ‘love must always watch over justice,’³² constantly (re)turning the abstract and often bureaucratic proceduralism of the law to the unplumbable mystery of the human face.³³ It does so because the primacy of the command to love the neighbour remains absolute; the transgressive responsivity of mercy – the ethical appeal of this other – always calls the calculating systems of justice to account.

5.3.2 THE LITURGY: LEVINASIAN THEOLOGY

In these brief remarks, we begin to discern the basic shape of Levinas’ ethic of the *neighbour*.³⁴ What then does he mean when he speaks of this ethical responsibility as *liturgy*? Broadly speaking, Levinas develops his understanding of liturgy along two very different trajectories. On the one hand, he explores a theological conception of ethics as a modality of *worship* and, on the other, he posits a more philosophical view of ethics as a *gift of service*.³⁵

Throughout his theological and Talmudic writings, Levinas seems, at first glance, to presume a fairly traditional understanding of liturgy as a religious community gathered for prayers, reading sacred Scriptures, singing hymns and so forth.³⁶ However, Levinas is quick to point out that as non-negotiable as these aspects of Jewish spiritual devotion may be, traditional liturgy is not the privileged means whereby humanity draws near to the presence of God. Instead Levinas looks again to the place of the neighbour. The neighbour is not merely a matter of ethical concern but represents a site of infinite religious profundity. For in the countenance of the other we encounter a rupture, an opening to the mystery of divine self-disclosure: the transcendent

³⁰ Ibid., 166.

³¹ Ibid., 214.

³² Ibid., 168-169.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For a sharp theological critique of Levinas’ understanding of the neighbour, see Hart 2003, 75-92. For a more measured analysis, see Davies 2001, 29-36.

³⁵ Purcell 2006, 138.

³⁶ See, for example, Levinas’ essay ‘Model of the West’ (1994b, 13-33).

'proximity of God in the countenance of my fellowman.'³⁷ In Levinas' language, God approaches humanity and 'passes by,' as it were, leaving a fragile 'trace' of the divine in the face of the other.³⁸ This conception of the neighbour already implies a kind of ethical sacramentality. In his important study, *Levinas and Theology*, Michael Purcell observes:

Theologically, one might be tempted to proceed in a deductive manner in which the theoretical structure is a movement from God to the neighbour, and then the practical implications of that movement, a "theology from above." However, "the entire spirit of the Jewish Bible" is otherwise and reverses this; the relationship with the neighbour is achieved in the practice of social justice which the Law commands, and it is the relationship with the neighbour which opens on to the divine.³⁹

By subordinating a direct relation the divine (God-human) to the mediation of the neighbour (human-God), Levinas is able to point to the practices of mercy and justice as basic liturgical acts: 'The Justice rendered to the Other, my neighbour, gives me an unsurpassable proximity to God. It is as intimate as the prayer and liturgy which, without justice, are nothing.'⁴⁰ This asymmetric ethical comportment is not only first philosophy, it is also 'the first religious service, the first prayer, the first liturgy, the religion out of which God could first have come to mind and the word "God" have made its entry into language and into good philosophy.'⁴¹ Levinas even goes so far as to conclude that 'this liturgy is not placed as a cult beside "works" and ethics. It is ethics itself.'⁴²

³⁷ Levinas 1998a, 50. Morgan (2007) writes, 'It is as if there are moments in human existence when the divine encounters the human and yet "departs" at the same instant, and in departing, the divine leaves behind a "trace" of itself. That trace resides in the face of the other person to whom we are related; it is a trace of a divine presence that is in fact a divine absence, an *illeity*, and its effect is to leave behind a residue of its overwhelming power, of its infinity, a residue that is manifest in the other person's face, her vulnerability that in virtue of being the site of the divine trace is also her demandingness. It is God's "having passed by via the other's face" that gives the other person's presence to me its obligatoriness, its ethical force' (193-194).

³⁸ Wrestling with the biblical language of God's proximal association with the poor and the powerless, Levinas raises a provocative question: 'Can the God who humbles Himself to "dwell with the contrite and the humble" (Isaiah 57:15), the God "of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan," the God manifesting Himself in the world through His covenant with that which is excluded from the world – can He, in His excessiveness, become a present in the time of the world?' By way of a response, Levinas (1998a) argues that in order to conceptualise God's 'presence' without delimiting his infinite alterity, one must speak of God's distancing proximity, that is, of the presence of an absence. 'The conceptual figure delineated by the ambiguity – or enigma – of this anachronism in which an entrance follows the withdrawal and which, consequently, has never been contained in my time and is thus immemorial – is what we call trace' (49-50).

³⁹ Purcell 2006, 39. For an alternative account of this notion, see Sanders 1996.

⁴⁰ Levinas 1991, 18.

⁴¹ Levinas 1998b, 150-151. See Bloechl 2000a.

⁴² Levinas 2003, 28.

As we see developed in Chauvet, Levinas theologically locates his liturgy of the neighbour in biblical and Talmudic exegesis of the prophets. In particular, Levinas appeals to a key passage from the Prophet Isaiah:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. (Isa 58:6-9a)

This passage unambiguously depicts the works of mercy as true acts of fasting, as alternative forms of corporal worship. They do not *replace* the need for liturgical rites and prayer, but they do constitute the authentic condition of their practice. Though it might seem paradoxical that ‘little acts of goodness’⁴³ extended to the other constitute the epicentre of liturgical devotion, Levinas reminds us that the Hebrew Scriptures also bear witness to God’s *kenosis*, the conjunction of elevation and descent, of the greatness of humility or the humility of greatness, of the God who in one breath speaks the world into existence and in another bends down in response to human misery and even to *inhabit* the suffering of the poor and the lowly ones.⁴⁴ He writes,

the positive way of being concerned with God [...] comes precisely from the alterity of man [...]. The obligation of responding to the unique, and thus of loving. Love beyond all sensitivity, thought of the one and only. The love of God in the love of one's neighbor. This original ethical signifying of the face would thus signify – without any metaphor or figure of speech, in its rigorously proper meaning – the transcendence of a God not objectified in the face in which he speaks; a God who does not “take on body,” but who approaches precisely through this relay to the neighbor – binding men among one another with obligation, each one answering for the lives of all the others.⁴⁵

⁴³ Levinas 2001, 217.

⁴⁴ Levinas 1994a, 114-132.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 170-171.

For Levinas, this fusion of loves (Deut 6:4; Lev 19:18) is 'fundamental to the Judaic faith, in which the relation to God is inseparable from the Torah; that is, inseparable from the recognition of the other person. The relation to God is already ethics; or as *Isaiah 58* would have it, the proximity to God, devotion itself, is already devotion to the other man.'⁴⁶

The relation with the Infinite is not a knowledge, but a proximity, preserving the excessiveness of the uncontainable which grazes the surface; it is Desire, that is, precisely a thought thinking infinitely more than it thinks. To solicit a thought thinking more than it thinks, the Infinite cannot incarnate itself in a Desirable, cannot, being infinite, enclose itself in an end. It solicits through a face. A Thou is inserted between the I and the absolute He. It is not history's present that is the enigmatic interval of a humiliated and transcendent God, but the face of the Other. And we will then understand the unusual meaning — or the meaning that becomes unusual and surprising again as soon as we forget the murmur of our sermons — we will understand the amazing meaning of Jeremiah 22:16: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; ... Was not this to know me? saith the LORD."⁴⁷

Levinas' prophetic 'liturgy of the neighbour' provides a rich and complex resource from which Chauvet draws much inspiration. In several key texts, Levinas expands this analysis by drawing explicit connections between the liturgy of the neighbour, Christian sacramentality and the works of mercy. In an interview published in *Is It Righteous to Be?* Levinas is asked, 'Concretely, how is the responsibility for the other translated?' To which he replies, 'The other concerns me in all his material misery. It is a matter, eventually, of nourishing him, of clothing him. It is exactly the biblical assertion: Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, give shelter to the shelterless.'⁴⁸ He then goes on to describe his own engagement with Christian theology and draws particular attention to the significance of Matthew 25:

I was led to Matthew 25, where the people are astonished to hear that they have abandoned and persecuted God. They eventually find out that while they were sending the poor away, they were actually sending God himself away. I always said later on, after I became acquainted with the concept of the Eucharist, that the authentic Eucharist is actually in the moment when the other comes to face me. The personality of the divine is *there*, more so than in the bread and wine. But I have read this in the Old Testament. In *Isaiah 58*, the people are said to seek "to know God's ways," "to draw near to him" (v. 2). God, though, will only approach when the people help the poor, feed the hungry (v. 7). This is just the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁴⁷ Levinas 1998a, 50.

⁴⁸ Levinas 2001, 52.

opposite, then, of a closed-off world, and if I may, this is a personal understanding of Christ.⁴⁹

These two passages – Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 – are the most significant biblical texts for the theological development of the works of mercy. It is not incidental that Levinas employs them to elucidate what the liturgy of the neighbour looks like in ‘concrete translation.’⁵⁰ To account for God’s *kenotic* identification with the suffering of the other, Levinas goes so far as to describe this ethical site using sacramental categories of transubstantiation. What we discover in Matthew’s Gospel, argues Levinas, ‘It is not a metaphor; it is not only extremely important, it is literally true. I’m not saying that the other is God, but that in his or her Face I hear the Word of God [...] it is the way the word of God reverberates.’⁵¹ Whilst I would challenge Levinas’ attempt to set these two modes of Christ’s presence over and against one another in mutual exclusivity, it is crucial to note that the liturgy of the neighbour is unequivocally a site wherein the ethical and the sacramental fuse together.⁵² Reflecting on Levinas’ exegesis, Renée van Riessen concludes that ‘the [biblical] texts make clear that God’s “true present” can be experienced first and foremost in the poor and oppressed. *The works of mercy, in which the hungry are fed and the thirsty are given drink, thus assumes the character of a sacramental act.* [...] This makes for an intrinsic connection between ethics and religion.’⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., 255-256. Cf. Levinas 1994a, 145-146; and Levinas 1998a, 94.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the extent to which Chauvet develops a distinctively ‘Levinasian’ interpretation of Matt 25, see Mitchell 2006, 40-41.

⁵¹ Levinas 1998a, 94.

⁵² Cf. Levinas 1989, 204.

⁵³ Van Riessen 2007, 3-4 (emphasis added). Van Riessen points out that ‘The notion of “divine comedy” has a biblical origin too. Levinas supports it by quoting and interpreting Isaiah 58, a text which revolves around the question: what is the proper way of fasting? Is it religious fasting? Or does God prefer a different way of fasting: liberating the oppressed, breaking bread for the hungry, admitting vagrants into your home, clothing the naked? Levinas sees the change of perspective found in this text — from religious devotion to ethical dedication — as fundamental to the Jewish religious experience’ (243). Levinas seems very close to the Christian tradition on his insistence that true devotion to God is itself devotion to the plight of the poor and the oppressed, the neighbour facing me (cf. James 1:27). That being said, it is questionable to suggest that the full solution is a ‘change of perspective’ that moves away ‘*from* religious devotion *to* ethical dedication.’ Putting the matter this way retains an unhelpful dichotomy between the religious and the ethical. Chauvet (1995b) is certainly right to maintain that the Jewish insistence on the mutually constitutive integration of ethics into cultic devotion is what brought about a ‘crisis in ritual’ (238-239). Citing Levinas, Chauvet points to the prophetic literature as the most provocative expression of this crisis. However, what is at stake in this ‘change of perspective’ is not some movement away from the sacramental as such, but rather its essential reinterpretation. The ethical dedication and the religious devotion become inextricably fused together (238-239). Perhaps the key difference between Levinas and Chauvet on this point is Chauvet’s insistence on this ‘*yes, but ...*’ paradigm mentioned earlier as a post-critical, deep integration of ethics and liturgy.

5.3.3 THE GIFT: LEVINASIAN PHILOSOPHY

This theological approach has much to offer Chauvet's project. What of the philosophical presumptions upon which Levinas grounds his analysis? Philosophically speaking, when Levinas uses the language of liturgy he has in mind an orientation, an existential modality of action inherently structured for-the-other.⁵⁴ It is this *leitourgia* – 'public work' or 'service' – that informs the asymmetrical *ordo* of the neighbour. Levinas describes this liturgical work as a '*movement of the Same toward the Other that never returns to the Same.*'⁵⁵ Intensifying Martin Buber's dialogic relationality, he argues that liturgical work demands a 'radical generosity' beyond the confines of reciprocal exchange.⁵⁶ To posit the neighbouring relation as a mutual giving, in his view, subjugates the otherness of the neighbour to the totalising horizon of measured calculation. Liturgy, therefore, is not and cannot be a simple exchange. Rather, it involves a heteronymous movement from the self towards an absolute other and thus a willingness to put myself at a loss by divesting myself without the hope of a profitable return.⁵⁷ In many ways anticipating Derrida's analysis of the pure gift, Levinas goes so far as to say that liturgical work necessitates even '*ingratitude* from the Other. Because gratitude would in fact be a return of the movement to its origin.'⁵⁸ As Purcell points out, in this radical approach to the *gift* of service I cannot even anticipate that the recipient will acknowledge the gift as gift, for to do so would be 'to expect the completion of the economic cycle of giving and receiving, and so fall back into a self-assured subjectivity which not only annuls the gift as gift but thwarts the liturgical orientation of the gift as a movement of the same towards the other without hope of return.'⁵⁹

Like Chauvet, Levinas locates his liturgy of the neighbour within a philosophical theology of the gift. However, there is a striking and fundamental difference. For Chauvet, the liturgy of the neighbour constitutes a particular moment within a wider sacramental order of symbolic gift-exchange *by definition*. Ethics as such *is* a return-gift of thanksgiving that completes and reinitiates the cycle of sacramental donation. In other words, Chauvet's use of the liturgy of the neighbour personifies the very gesture of return that Levinas' philosophical account of 'pure gift'

⁵⁴ Levinas 2003, 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Levinas (1991) notes that 'to devote himself to service with no thought of reward, to accept a burden carried out at his own expense, a form of conduct involving both risks and perks. This is the original and incontestable meaning of the Greek word liturgy' (xiv).

⁵⁷ See Drabinski 2001, 157.

⁵⁸ Levinas 2003, 26-27.

⁵⁹ Purcell 2006, 144.

flatly rejects.⁶⁰ Levinas insists that any semblance of reciprocity taints and compromises the validity of the gift, whereas Chauvet argues that a thankful return is the very condition for the possibility of a gift being received *as a gift* in the first place. Chauvet states his position clearly:

every gift obligates; there is no reception of anything *as a gift* which does not require some return-gift as a sign of gratitude, at the very least a “thank you” or some facial expression. Which is to say that by the very structure of the exchange, the gratuitousness of the gift *carries the obligation of the return-gift of a response*. Therefore, theologically, grace requires not only this initial gratuitousness on which everything else depends but also the *graciousness of the whole circuit*, and especially of the return-gift. This graciousness qualifies the return-gift as beyond-price, without calculation — in short, as a response of love. *Even the return gift of our human response belongs to the theologically Christian concept of “grace.”*⁶¹

This contradiction raises a serious problem for Chauvet’s liturgy of the neighbour. But Chauvet does not attend to the details of Levinas’ position and silently papers over this divergence. What is at stake in this difference?

John Milbank argues that Levinas’ refusal of the return-gift is based on the faulty assumption that every mode of reciprocity necessarily implies a contractual, capitalist exchange.⁶² This narrow view of the gift forces Levinas to posit a somewhat bizarre and counterintuitive notion of ‘pure giving’ that is radicalised to the point of hyperbolic impossibility. Because the ethical gift can never secure its purity, the consummation of its reception is permanently deferred.⁶³

⁶⁰ Cf. Ward 2005, 79.

⁶¹ Chauvet 1995b, 108-109.

⁶² Milbank 2003, 138-161; 2008, 444-447; 2001, 335-391. For a response to Milbank’s critique, see Bahler 2014, 516-539.

⁶³ See Bernasconi 1997, 256-273. Bernasconi makes the case that Derrida represents a certain radicalisation of Levinas here. ‘It is not the case that Derrida is trying to rule out or exclude that on which Levinas relies. Derrida is in fact better understood as expressing in more dramatic terms what follows from what Levinas says in “The Trace of the Other” and which Levinas confirms elsewhere, that the gift is impossible within the order of being and occurs only as an “interruption” of that order. [...] The logic of the “without” (*sans*) that both Levinas and Derrida share is an interruptive logic in which what interrupts the order of being is “impossible, unthinkable, unsayable” from within that realm. When Levinas writes that “the gift is *not*,” he is saying that the gift is not an event in being. Exchange, circulation and rationality are interrupted by the gift. The pure gift, if there is any, must be a gift without obligation or duty, in order to differentiate it from exchange. The question now becomes that of how Levinas and Derrida both think this interruption of the order of being from beyond being to which the “without” points. The way in which Derrida’s account of the interruption might still be thought of as a challenge to Levinas’ account can best be illustrated by taking up the discussion of almsgiving that provides the central example of *Given Time*’ (257-260).

Appealing to Mauss' insight regarding the reciprocal structure of *symbolic* exchange, Milbank offers an alternative theological account of the donative structure of grace. He argues that even the stranger is welcome as a neighbour through 'a universal offering in the expectation or at least hope of receiving back not a price due to us, but others themselves in their counter-gifts, because we aim for reciprocity, for community, and not for a barren and sterile self-sacrifice (which [...] is the alternative of *both* nihilists *and* Levinasian moralizers who take capitalist exchange to be the definitive form of exchange).'⁶⁴ For Milbank, the ethical can only truly be conceived as a mutual and unending gift-exchange, where *every* moral action, word or gesture always-already presumes (1) a prior givenness (for we are not the ground of our own being); (2) an absolute surrender to trust, an 'utter exposure' of 'faith in the arrival of the divine gift, which is grace'⁶⁵ (for we cannot *guarantee* the efficacy of our actions); and (3) an anticipatory enactment of an eschatological hope in the resurrection of Christ (for our gifts participate in Christ's eucharistic sacrifice of crucifixion and glory by the power of the Spirit). Whereas Levinas and Derrida preclude the arrival of receptive gratitude, Milbank argues that life itself is born of ethical dispossession. To become a person in communion with others, one must act in the freedom and non-binding excess of ethical exchanges beyond calculation precisely in 'the surprisingness and unpredictability of gift and counter-gift, or their character in space as *asymmetrical reciprocity*, and their character in time as *non-identical repetition*.'⁶⁶

God is at once the pure giver, gift and giving; given for our good and not for the purposes of satisfying any need in God. As such, any 'return' of God's own gift we might offer back is never for God's benefit, but rather for the sake of our incorporation into and conformity towards God's intrinsic dynamic of pure giving. Equally, whilst our 'returns' of God's good gift to God *are* certainly in our interest (in the sense that they conform us to and are already incorporated within – however imperfectly – the dynamic of God's giving), we cannot sensibly perform them in the hope of receiving some divine reward. Because God's giving precedes all possible response, our 'return' is already part of God's own self-donation – enfolding our acts of love into the movement of God's initiating generosity. When viewed in this light, our giving 'return' to God in

⁶⁴ Milbank 2003, 169.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 148, 154.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 156. 'In the eucharistic liturgy, humanity enters in advance into the divine Sabbath, the eschatological banquet and the cosmic nuptial, into the realm where once again we can entirely trust our every act as good precisely because we know that it will not merely follow our intention but be transformed and given back to us in a different and surprising mode' (161). For a discussion, see Leithart 2014.

the person of our neighbour does not, when in proper harmony with its source, require any return from the neighbour: virtue really is its own reward.⁶⁷

From this, it is safe to conclude that the relationship between Chauvet's Levinasian 'liturgy of the neighbour' and his Maussian theory of symbolic gift-exchange is complex.⁶⁸ On the one hand, Levinas' liturgical ethic of the neighbour has significant implications for how one might locate the works of mercy within the ethical horizon of Christian worship. On the other hand, it is clear that Chauvet only follows Levinas' work to an extent. Though he does not *explicitly* distance himself from Levinas' understanding of the gift, in practice Chauvet pursues a strikingly similar path to Milbank in advocating the necessity of grace and the ethical reciprocity. In terms of the works of mercy, Milbank's analysis of the gift resists the kind of calculated 'mere charity' masterfully deconstructed by Levinas and Derrida.⁶⁹ However, far from conceding the impossibility of the gift, both Milbank and Chauvet clear theological space for re-framing the works of mercy as an engraced praxis of receptive generosity.

5.4 BEYOND CHAUVET: LITURGICAL EXTENSIVITY

For all the strengths of Chauvet's sacramental theology (and there are many), there are several important dimensions of his liturgy of the neighbour that lack sufficient development. As we have seen, Chauvet interprets the basic structure of Christian existence (Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics) in fairly sweeping terms. It might be more precise to describe these general paradigms as modes of liturgical 'extensivity' or diffused 'spread-out-ness' – to adopt a conceptual framework from Daniel Hardy.⁷⁰ In this way, we can think of sacramentality as an 'extensive' horizon within which particular sites of sacramental 'intensity' can emerge. Understood in this light, what we have been calling the 'liturgy of the church' signifies a kind of extensivity encompassing all sorts of things: words, gestures, sounds, colours, smells, tastes, prayers, sacraments, processions, buildings, actions, people, and so forth.⁷¹ However, within this liturgical 'spread-out-ness' the sacraments themselves, especially the Eucharist, name those particular counterpoint moments of 'intensity' or 'personal encounter' and 'communion' with the risen Christ.

⁶⁷ I am indebted to Paul Murray for these insights.

⁶⁸ See Pilario 2000, 80-96.

⁶⁹ See Derrida 1992 and 1995.

⁷⁰ Hardy 2001, 109-113. Cf. Godzieba, Boeve & Saracino 2006, 792.

⁷¹ For a fascinating analysis of the interplay between liturgical 'extensivity' and sacramental 'intensity' in the liturgy of the church, see Chauvet 1995a, 29-39.

This use of extensity in sacramental theology since the early 1960s has proven incredibly effective in challenging scholastic reductionism, attending more fully to the phenomenological milieu of actual embedded liturgical situations and, of course, exploring some of the wider structural relationships between liturgy and ethics. That said, sacramental extensity (or sacramentality as such) taken in isolation inevitably tends toward abstraction, arbitrariness and varying degrees of theological incoherence. Nowhere is this more evident than in discussions of the liturgy of the neighbour. Whether it is called secular worship, the liturgy of the world, the sacrament of the brother/sister or simply the liturgy of life, such phrases by definition denote a liturgical and ethical extensity. However, unlike the liturgy of the church, the liturgy of the neighbour is rarely afforded corresponding sites of sacramental intensity.

For example, in *Christ the Sacrament*, Schillebeeckx succumbs to this abstraction when he writes of ‘the Christian life itself as sacrament of the encounter with God’ and that ‘[f]or *all men*, encounters with their fellow men are the sacrament of encounter with God.’⁷² Chauvet’s claim that ‘ethics’ refers literally to ‘all that pertains to *action* in the name of the gospel,’ is equally vague.⁷³ Whilst Chauvet dedicates several hundred pages to the question of how the sacraments constitute intensive moments within the liturgy of the church, his ‘liturgy of the neighbour’ functions less as a detailed analysis of particular ethical practices and more as a kind of shorthand encapsulating the whole ethical horizon of the Christian life. It may be possible to describe life as a liturgy (in the broadest sense of the term), but this language does not adequately account for the sacramentality of concrete acts in the midst of everyday life. As we noted in the first chapter, traditional Catholic theology tends to limit such intensive moments of sacramental encounter to the liturgy of the church. Theological proposals for a ‘liturgy *after* the liturgy’ are suggestive and provocative but ultimately insubstantial when denied analogous accounts of sacramental intensity. Considering the importance Chauvet places on the inherent dependence of word and sacrament on ethics, this ambiguity becomes problematic.

We can see the potential problems with unfettered extensity more clearly in the hyperbolic sacramental theology of Leonardo Boff. In his provocative book, *Sacraments of Life, Life of the Sacraments*, Boff firmly challenges scholastic reductionism, writing that ‘the seven sacraments do not swallow up all the sacramental richness of the church. Everything the church does has a sacramental density because the church is fundamentally a sacrament. [...] Anything can be a

⁷² Schillebeeckx 1963, 200, 206 (emphasis added).

⁷³ Chauvet 2001, 31.

sacramental vehicle of divine grace.⁷⁴ In his book, he shows the seriousness of his assertion that literally everything and anything can be considered sacramental: for example, Boff describes the family mug, his father's cigarette butt, homemade bread, a Christmas candle, an autobiography, a schoolteacher, a promised word as 'sacraments.' For Boff, 'sacramentality' is a generic concept separable from any particular sacramental symbol or sign. He deploys this language in a purely extensive manner.

Whilst we have much to learn from Boff's work, it does demonstrate what can happen when sacramentality becomes unhinged from its moorings. As William Cavanaugh puts it, 'this attempt to re-enchant the secular world, however, only leaves the world more bereft of God. If God always stands "behind" signs, then signs become interchangeable, and God never truly saturates any particular sign.'⁷⁵ I take this recurring ambiguity as a signal that sacramental theologians overall have not yet fully come to terms with what ethical sacramentality demands of our thinking.

5.5 IN SEARCH OF THE WORKS OF MERCY

For all his complex analysis of ethics, Chauvet does not spend sufficient time articulating what the 'sacraments' of the liturgy of the neighbour might entail. As a result, there is a real temptation to reduce ethics to a horizon of sacramental extensity. That said, I would argue that this oversight does not mean his project would be hostile to such a proposition by definition. On the contrary, the internal trajectory of Chauvet's argument is intrinsically oriented towards the possibility that certain modes of ethical praxis are sacramental in more definitive ways. Indeed, over the course of this chapter we have repeatedly detected various hints and intimations that all point towards the works of mercy as paradigmatic expressions of sacramental ethics.

5.5.1 ETHICAL CATEGORIES

First, one can trace echoes of this connection in the theological terminology Chauvet uses to describe Christian ethics itself. In the broadest sense, ethics concerns moral action in the world. Yet Chauvet typically refers to this activity as 'the practice of justice and mercy.'⁷⁶ He also speaks

⁷⁴ Boff 1987, 5. One does wonder to what extent Boff's text would have benefitted from a more careful distinction between sacrament in particular and metaphor or symbol more generally.

⁷⁵ Cavanaugh 2000, 13-14. Bernd Wannewetsch (2009) also calls into question the pure extensity of Boff's sacramental theology (44). For a critical response, see Tau 2011, 15-32.

⁷⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 260, 280, 312, 313, 316; Chauvet 2001, 138, 144.

of ethics as 'liberation,'⁷⁷ 'forgiveness,'⁷⁸ 'reconciliation'⁷⁹ and 'acts of kindness toward others.'⁸⁰ The moral life is embodied in the concrete sharing of material goods with others⁸¹ and, specifically, in sharing with the poorest, the most destitute, and 'those who have nothing.'⁸² Within the household of faith, ethics is described as a *habitus* of charity⁸³ and agape⁸⁴ – a *living-in-grace* 'between brothers and sisters.'⁸⁵ The ethical acts Chauvet has in mind involve a costly 'self-giving' to others.⁸⁶ And for Christians, this kenotic 'ethic of service' must always be understood as incorporating both individual and interpersonal dimensions of 'moral praxis' and the collective dimension of 'social praxis.'⁸⁷

5.5.2 BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

Second, one can also identify the subtle presence of the works of mercy in Chauvet's exegesis of the Old and New Testaments. Nearly all of the passages he cites concerning the relationship between liturgy and ethics have a direct connection to the works of mercy. Hebrews 13:16, for example, does not speak about 'ethics in general' as a sacrifice holy and pleasing to God, but rather 'good works' defined in terms of mutual love, hospitality to strangers, and visiting prisoners. Whilst Chauvet does not often discuss such connections in detail, it is clear from contemporary biblical scholarship that one cannot understand 'ethical sacrifice' in Scripture without also discussing the works of mercy.

⁷⁷ Chauvet 2001, 138.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁷⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 260; Chauvet 2001, 138.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 165, 166, 285.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 236, 239, 260; Chauvet 2001, 149.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 177, 277; Chauvet 2001, 144.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 277, 313.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 177, 179; Chauvet 2001, 138. To what extent is 'ethics' ultimately a constrictive category for framing the discussion of the works of mercy? While undoubtedly moral acts, works of mercy are more akin to the manifestation and expression of the truthful way of life that is the form of Christ. Over-emphasising the category of 'ethics' risks clouding their epiphanic and symbolic character. I am indebted to Alistair Roberts for this insight.

5.5.3 PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

Third, Chauvet builds on these biblical foundations to develop a sacramental theology of ethical sacrifice in conversation with a wide range of patristic sources. Drawing primarily upon Irenaeus and Augustine, he proposes that the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the neighbour together constitute two *eucharistic* dimensions of a single pattern of worship. ‘The grace of the Eucharist,’ he writes, ‘is finally our own becoming *eucharistic people*, that is, our becoming sons and daughters for God and brothers and sisters for others, in communion with the Son and Brother whose memory we celebrate here. [...] The practice of the twofold commandment of love toward God and toward neighbour, with its socio-political implications, is the “true sacrifice,” the most important liturgy which we learn from the Eucharistic anti-sacrifice.’⁸⁸ On the surface, Chauvet seems to be commending a fairly broad sacramental ethic. And yet, once again, a closer inspection of Chauvet’s sources reveals that the works of mercy belong at the core of this ‘Eucharistic anti-sacrifice’ as well.

5.5.4 THE WASHING OF FEET

Fourth, even Chauvet’s attempt to locate the horizon of ethics under the sacramental symbol of the washing of feet (John 13:1-20) ultimately points in the direction of the works of mercy.⁸⁹ When discussing this section of the Fourth Gospel, Chauvet suggests that John’s intentional substitution of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet for the institution narrative of the Last Supper reveals something significant about the sacramentality of Christian ethics.⁹⁰

Returning to the table, Jesus concludes his deeply symbolical act of service with the exhortation: ‘I have set you an example that you should do *as (kathos)* I have done for you’ (John 13:15).⁹¹ Drawing on the work of Léon-Dufour, Chauvet shows that *kathos* is a particularly strong term that implies more than simply a process of imitation. It is ‘causal rather than exemplary’ and thus

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 314-315.

⁸⁹ For a general discussion of the washing of feet in biblical theology see Dunn 1970, 247-252; Segovia 1982, 31-51; Moloney 1998, 370-381; Bauckham 1999, 411-430; Lincoln 2005, 367-375; Elowsky 2007. For an assessment of the sacramentality of the foot washing, see Richter 1990, 120-123; Thomas 1991; Duke 1995, 398-400, 402; Vanier 1998; Old 2002; Thompson 2003, 258-276; Nation 2004, 441-452.

⁹⁰ Luke 22:27 may also hint at this event. See Bauckham 1999, 424-425.

⁹¹ According to Tillard (2001), this washing of feet attests to the ‘connection between Eucharist and service of the poor.’ He writes, ‘Disciples must make their own Christ’s service of “washing the feet,” a *diakonia* (service) which belongs with the *leitourgia* (ministry) of the Father’s plan’ (87, 89).

conveys the notion that ‘in acting this way, I give you the power to act in the same way.’⁹² This corresponds with the traditional interpretation of the washing of feet as both *exemplum* and *sacramentum*.⁹³

As a *sacramentum*, the exhortation to ‘do as I have done for you’ refers to the ritual washing of feet within the liturgy of the church. This physical washing was an important aspect of Christian worship from the beginning.⁹⁴ Though it did not ultimately assume official status among the seven official sacraments, nonetheless this ritual practice is best understood as having been instituted by Christ.⁹⁵ This washing, typically carried out on Maundy Thursday during Lent, symbolically enfold the church into the identity of Jesus’ humble service, his *kenosis*.

As an *exemplum*, ‘do as I have done for you’ (13:15) does not refer simply to a physical, but also to the lived existential praxis of servant love: ‘Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another’ (13:34b). This ethical ‘washing’ takes place not in the liturgy of the church, but in the

⁹² Chauvet 1995b, 261. Andrew Lincoln (2005) demonstrates that *kathos* bears a particular theological significance in John’s gospel: *just as* Jesus lives because of the Father, so believers live because of Jesus (6:57); *just as* Jesus does not belong to this world, so believers do not belong to this world (17:14, 16); *just as* Jesus is one with the Father, so believers are to be one (17:11, 22); *just as* the Father has sent the Son, so Jesus sends the disciples into the world (cf. 17:18; 20:21). Likewise with John 13, *just as* Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, so they are to wash one another’s feet (372).

⁹³ According to Lincoln (2005), the disciples are charged with a ‘mandatory repetition’ of the pattern of Jesus’ life. However, he argues that ‘this will always be a non-identical repetition, which cannot have precisely the same significance for them as it had for him. The transformation of values enacted by Jesus in the footwashing and in the laying down of his life, to which this act points, is to distinguish the lives of his followers.’ The difference is that the disciples are to follow Jesus’ action of washing of feet in two modes: first through a literal ritual repetition, and second through a symbolic ethical repetition. He notes that, ‘imitation of the reversal of values symbolized in Jesus’ act is clearly not *limited* to washing the feet of another. For his disciples to treat the actual washing of feet as the only thing commanded by Jesus would be to miss the point, but for them to see that the instruction was about the overall pattern of humble service and then to neglect the specific demonstrations of this in footwashings would be equally uncomprehending’ (372. Emphasis added). These two liturgical modes – the ritual and the ethical – together constitute a coherent, non-identical repetition of Jesus’ act of loving service.

⁹⁴ See Thomas 1991.

⁹⁵ Chauvet (1995b) describes the sacraments as both ‘instituted’ and ‘instituting.’ He writes, ‘Sacraments as instituted are the *instituting* mediation of [Christian] identity’ (409). Elsewhere he adds, ‘Identity is the subject existentially; it touches on what is most “real” in the subject. This is why to say that the Church comes into its identity as Church of Christ in the act where it carries out the memorial of Jesus as its Lord, where it does so by involving itself completely in its visibility as an institutional and traditional body is to say that it is engaged in this act of accomplishing its very essence. And its essence is nothing else, primordially, than its communion with the Father through Christ in the Spirit. The sacraments institute the Church because they effect this relation of communion [...]. Therefore the task at hand is to theologially think of the sacraments as events of grace’ (409).

liturgy of the neighbour. Chauvet writes, 'To wash one another's feet is to live existentially the memory of Christ that the Eucharist makes us live ritually.'⁹⁶

Jesus is not simply talking about washing each other's feet in ritual performance. He is also pointing towards another mode of ethical action symbolised by his gesture in the upper room. What this washing also signifies is the enacted love between the disciples – the humble, mutual service in word and deed practised in everyday life.

In his book, *To Act According to the Gospel*, Léon-Dufour compares and contrasts the synoptic account of the Last Supper with its emphasis on the Eucharist with the Johannine focus on the footwashing. These two instituted sacramental acts each beckon the disciples to inhabit the dangerous memory of the risen Christ. For Léon-Dufour, the footwashing is not just one act among others. It signifies one of the essential modalities of symbolic-ethical action within the church. 'If the Eucharist makes the church, *the example of footwashing remains the foundational act by which the church is constituted.*'⁹⁷ In light of this bold claim, the connection between the footwashing and the works of mercy in Christian theology becomes particularly significant. Chauvet is right to locate his sacramental ethics under the symbol of the footwashing. What he does not acknowledge, however, is the extent to which the footwashing already signifies the ethic of mercy in Christian tradition.

Augustine, for example, notes that the literal practice of footwashing is a common sign of humility and hospitality. In his *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, Augustine observes that in addition to the moral interpretation of the passage, we discover theological and sacramental dimensions as well. By washing the feet of the disciples who were already washed and clean, Jesus 'instituted a sign' to demonstrate that while all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Jesus himself 'thereafter washes away [our iniquity] by interceding for us, when we pray the Father, who is in heaven, to forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.' If Christ's forgiveness is symbolised in the washing of feet, then conversely Christians practise what Jesus symbolised through acts of reconciliation and intercession – that is, through spiritual works of mercy:

For what else does the Lord apparently intimate in the profound significance of this sacramental sign [...]? Let us therefore forgive one another his faults, and pray for one another's faults, and thus in a manner be washing one another's

⁹⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 261.

⁹⁷ Léon-Dufour 2005, 128 (emphasis added).

feet. It is our part, by His grace, to be supplying the service of love and humility: it is His to hear us, and to cleanse us from all the pollution of our sins through Christ, and in Christ; so that what we forgive even to others, that is, loose on earth, maybe loosed in heaven.⁹⁸

In other words, Augustine exhorts Christians to wash one another's feet through reconciling acts of forgiveness and intercession.⁹⁹

If Augustine makes a link between the *spiritual* works and the footwashing, Chrysostom does the same but with reference to the *corporal* works. In his *Commentary on John*, Chrysostom observes that Jesus' precept to wash one another's feet was 'recorded not merely with reference to the washing of feet, but also with regard to all the other things in which he gave us His example.' This includes especially welcoming a pitiable and wretched person. '[W]e are also commanded, if we make a banquet, to welcome to it the lame and the halt; and if we do a work of mercy we have been enjoined to show mercy to the least important and most ordinary. "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren," He said, "you did it for me."¹⁰⁰

Similarly, Gregory Nazianzen develops this connection between the symbol of footwashing and the practise of mercy. Reflecting on the life his brother, Basil the Great, Gregory recalls a time of severe famine in Caesarea. As food supplies dwindled, the situation in the city grew increasingly desperate. In his capacity as bishop, Basil urgently set about to mobilise the wealthy to respond to the crisis by opening their storehouses so that the vulnerable poor would not starve to death. Gregory writes, 'By his word and exhortations [Basil] opened up the storehouses of the rich and brought to realization the words of Scripture: he dealt bread to the hungry and he satisfied the poor with bread, and he fed them in famine and "he has filled the hungry with good things."¹⁰¹ In addition to petitioning the wealthy, Basil himself participated in the relief work on the frontlines of the crisis.

He set before them caldrons of pea soup and our salted meats, the sustenance of the poor. Then, imitating the ministry of Christ, who, girded with a towel, did not

⁹⁸ Augustine 1994, *Tractate on the Gospel of John*, 58.4-5.

⁹⁹ In his *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, Augustine (1996) clearly identifies forgiveness and prayer as kind of spiritual almsgiving. He writes, 'Not only, then, the man who gives food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the stranger, shelter to the fugitive, who visits the sick and the imprisoned, ransoms the captive, assists the weak, leads the blind, comforts the sorrowful, heals the sick, puts the wanderer on the right path, gives advice to the perplexed, and supplies the wants of the needy — not this man only, but the man who pardons the sinner also gives alms' (84-85).

¹⁰⁰ John Chrysostom 1959, 149-150.

distain to wash the feet of His disciples, and employing his own servants or, rather, his fellow slaves and co-workers in this labour, [Basil] ministered to the bodies and the souls of the needy, combining marks of respect with the necessary refreshment, thus affording them relief in two ways.¹⁰¹

Basil's works of mercy are afforded their sacramental connection with the ministry of Christ under the symbol of the footwashing.

It is Thomas Aquinas who ultimately draws the various threads of Christian tradition together into a more systematic reflection. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Aquinas addresses the gospel precept to wash one another's feet. With Augustine he acknowledges that 'everyone should wash the feet of others, either in a physical or a spiritual way' – the former being preferable to the latter.¹⁰² In addition to these, Aquinas offers a third option: 'We can also say that by this action our Lord pointed out *all the works of mercy*. For one who gives bread to the hungry washes his feet, as does one who practices hospitality or gives food to one in need; and so on for the other works. "Contribute to the needs of the saints" (Rom 12:13).'¹⁰³ In this rather remarkable text, Aquinas shows beyond question the deep association between this image and the practice of mercy. As Frederick Bauerschmidt points out, 'This action of washing feet is for Aquinas a kind of summing up of the total practice of Jesus that we are called to imitate.' The church is 'called to a comprehensive imitation of Jesus' example in the upper room, obeying not only his command to receive him through sacramental eating, but also his command to "wash each other's feet." Or, to put it in terms that are more familiar to us but would probably puzzle Thomas himself (since for him worship is an act of justice), the visible markers of the community of disciples are not only ritual ones but also ethical ones.'¹⁰⁴

In *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet appeals to the washing of feet in order to demonstrate the profound connection between 'ritual memory' and 'existential memory.' This symbolic gesture illustrates that 'the *ritual* memory of Jesus' death and resurrection is not Christian unless it is verified in an *existential* memory whose place is none other than the believers' bodies.'¹⁰⁵ Across the Christian tradition, however, the footwashing is not simply a placeholder for 'ethics' in general. It

¹⁰¹ Gregory Nazianzen 1953, 58.

¹⁰² Aquinas 2010, 20.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁴ Bauerschmidt 2005, 303-304.

¹⁰⁵ Chauvet 1995b, 260-261.

signifies the works of mercy in particular. The following diagram depicts the twofold sacramentality of the footwashing:

Liturgy of the Church	>	<i>Sacramentum</i>	>	Literal / Ritual	>	Washing of Feet
Liturgy of the Neighbour	>	<i>Exemplum</i>	>	Existential / Ethical	>	Works of Mercy

The practice of the footwashing bears within itself this double sacramental valance: (1) a *ritual mode* that performs the sacramental symbolism of the physical washing as a sign of Christ's passion and a symbol of his sacrificial love; and (2) an *existential mode* that enacts in daily life what the ritual washing symbolises: namely, the kenotic compassion of Christ poured out in service to even the least among us (cf. Phil 2:1-5). In the Maundy Thursday liturgy of the Anglican tradition, the following prayer is given immediately after the conclusion of the footwashing:

Lord Jesus Christ,
 you have taught us
 that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters
 we do also for you: [Matt 25:40]
 give us the will to be the servant of others
 as you were the servant of all,
 and gave up your life and died for us,
 but are alive and reign, now and for ever. Amen.

When the ritual mode is held together with the ethical mode in a creative tension, then the washing of feet becomes a prophetic symbolic action, an 'enacted parable.' In the words of Megan McKenna, 'Liturgy is a celebration of resurrection, of the presence of the risen Lord, and a hint of God's coming in glory again. It is service, *another way of washing feet*, of bending before one another, of committing ourselves to the practice of the corporal works of mercy, of suffering with and for one another.'¹⁰⁶ As Christ washes our feet, so we wash one another's feet through works of mercy; in washing one another, we minister to Christ in that person and, in so doing, find ourselves caught up in a spiralling circuit of grace.

5.6 WORKS OF MERCY: A SACRAMENTAL 'SOMETHING'?

The evidence of the previous section indicates that the trajectory of Chauvet's argument is in many ways primed to shift gears from a diffuse sacramentality of the liturgy of the neighbour to a more robust account of sacramental encounter. A close analysis of Chauvet's theological ethics

¹⁰⁶ McKenna 2003, 262 (emphasis added).

suggests that the obvious point of departure for such a venture would be a praxis of justice and mercy.

Throughout his work, Chauvet returns to particular ethical acts which seem to have a special place in his liturgy of the neighbour. In his exegesis of Acts 2:42-47, Chauvet emphasises the broad movement of the early church from the sacramental gathering at table to the ethical return-gift of Christian witness. For Chauvet, ethics takes shape the embodied practices of care within the ecclesia, that is, in the 'charity for brothers and sisters.' This *koinonia* is both 'a sign of the realization of the messianic community' and 'a testimony rendered to the risen Christ.' Chauvet locates acts of justice, mercy, solidarity and compassion within this context, and ascribes them a particular significance. He writes,

Such an ethic of "to each as any had need" (Acts 4:35; see 2:45) seems, for the author of Acts, to constitute one of the principal dimensions of missionary witness: the announcement of the risen Messiah requires *the concrete sign of the realization of the messianic community*, specifically, sharing with the most destitute among the brothers and sisters. Moreover, is not the brother or sister, according to the theology of Acts 9:5 ("I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting") or of Acts 5:14 (where the expression "added to the Lord" seems to suggest [...] "a sort of identification between the Lord and his own") a kind of "sacrament" of the Risen One (see also the theology of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-46)?¹⁰⁷

For the sake of the present thesis, this paragraph is one of the most significant in *Symbol and Sacrament*. Chauvet argues that the question of the practical care of the socially marginalised is not only a matter of individual ethical behaviour but is also central to the mission and political witness of the church as a whole. Here Chauvet moves on to what, for me, is the central claim: 'is not the brother or sister [...] a kind of "sacrament" of the Risen One?' This passage identifies the destitute brother or sister as a 'sacrament,' but what Chauvet means by this is not entirely clear. *What sort* of identification does Chauvet suggest is happening between the Lord and the least? What does Chauvet mean when he speaks of the merciful relation to the brother or sister as a 'kind' of sacrament? Why does he put 'sacrament' here in quotation marks? Could Chauvet's reference to Matthew 25 in this context imply that the site of the sacramental connectivity is none other than the concrete practice of the works of mercy?

In *The Sacraments*, Chauvet makes an equally significant claim. In the same paragraph in which he explores the footwashing in John's Gospel, he concludes by stating that the matter of the

¹⁰⁷ Chauvet 1995b, 166.

Johannine *kathos* 'is not a question of simply imitating Jesus in an external way: it is he who gives his disciples the power to act as he acts; it is he "who performs in his disciples the service that is their distinguishing mark." *There is something sacramental about their ethics of service inasmuch as it carries the gift that Jesus made of himself.*'¹⁰⁸ Here again, Chauvet appears to be drawing close to a matter of immense theological importance, and yet, as if in a final moment of hesitation, he stops short. Why the hesitation? Why the qualifications? Elsewhere, Chauvet is unambiguously clear about the status of the liturgy of the neighbour as a whole: 'the *prime location* of liturgy or sacrifice for Christians is the ethics of everyday life by theological faith and charity.'¹⁰⁹ Chauvet rightly identifies the liturgy of the neighbour as a sacramental horizon. Here he describes the everyday as a *location* for the practice of charity and mercy. And yet with regard to Christian ethics as such, Chauvet does not explain what this sacramental 'something' entails. It is equally unclear how practices like feeding the hungry, visiting the sick or imprisoned, and welcoming strangers ought to function (theologically speaking) *within* the liturgy of the neighbour itself.

5.7 CONCLUSION

These points of hesitation lead us to conclude that while Chauvet sets up a brilliant theological framework for describing the basic sacramentality of Christian ethics, his account of the liturgy of the neighbour is simply insufficiently sacramental. This resonates with Kenan Osborne's observation that 'What Chauvet says about liturgy and ethics is powerful, but it is only the beginning.'¹¹⁰ What Chauvet does offer us is a new way to conceptualise the relationship between liturgy and ethics as a unity-in-tension located within a wider sacramental milieu of Christian identity. As a return-gift, ethics is always already inseparably bound to a more complex movement of worship of God. Chauvet's elucidation of the relationship between Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics functions as a kind of theological ground-clearing exercise. For our purposes, his project opens up imaginative space for the emergence of a fresh approach to the works of mercy. Chauvet may not provide the definitive answer to our present argument, but his work does lead us to the right kinds of provocative and controversial questions: If Christian ethics is an existential mode of sacramental corporeality, where then are these moments of intensity to be found within the liturgy of the neighbour? In what kind of ethical act might we discover 'strong moments' of God's self-disclosure? What would it mean for us to speak more concretely of the works of mercy,

¹⁰⁸ Chauvet 2001, 27 (emphasis added).

¹⁰⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 262 (emphasis added). Cf. Chauvet 2001, 63.

¹¹⁰ Osborne 1999, 164.

not as a mere sacramental 'something,' but as intensive sites of encounter with the hidden presence of the risen Christ? It is to these questions that we now turn.

PART III

THE SACRAMENTALITY OF MERCY

CHAPTER SIX

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25 AND THE MEDIATED PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Let us take care of Christ, then, while there is still time; let us minister to Christ's needs, let us give Christ nourishment, let us clothe Christ, let us gather Christ in, let us show Christ honour [...] Since the Lord of all things "desires mercy and not sacrifice," and since "a compassionate heart is worth more than tens of thousands of fat rams," let us give this gift to him through the needy.¹

– St. Gregory Nazianzen

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we read that '*The Eucharist commits us to the poor. To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, his brethren*' (n. 1397). Taking seriously the scriptural claims of Proverbs 19:17 ('whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD) and Matthew 25:31-46 ('what you did unto the least of these brothers of mine, you did unto me') demands a thorough theological exploration of the nature of Christ's veiled presence in/among the lowly, marginalised, poor and dispossessed. The following three chapters supplement Chauvet's provocative account of the liturgy of the neighbour with a constructive theological analysis of the sacramentality of mercy. My primary aim is to explore the ways in which the Eucharist and works of mercy are inextricably linked to one another as corresponding sites of sacramental encounter.

Whilst Chauvet explores the essence of 'sacramentality' in general (and within this the possibility of a sacramental ethic), the primary thrust of his project in *Symbol and Sacrament* concerns the sacred rites of the liturgy of the church. As we have seen, Chauvet's account of the liturgy of the neighbour lacks sufficient theological concreteness. The 'Ethics' paradigm of his sacramental structure represents a liturgical horizon that includes 'every kind of *action* Christians perform in the world insofar as this is a testimony given to the gospel of the Crucified-Risen One.'² Despite affirming that the ethics of everyday life is 'the prime location of liturgy or sacrifice for Christians,'³ Chauvet does not give an adequate account of the particular events of grace which punctuate the liturgy of the neighbour. He occasionally hints at the possibility of a 'sacrifice of mercy' which seems to parallel the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass. Unfortunately he leaves

¹ Gregory Nazianzen *Oration* 14.5, quoted in Daley 1999, 458.

² Chauvet 1995b, 179.

³ *Ibid.*, 262.

these suggestions underdeveloped. As a result, the picture from Chauvet looks something like this:

The (Arch-)Sacramentality of Christian Existence	<u>Scripture</u> Gift				
	<u>Sacrament</u> Reception	Liturgy of the Church	Sacramental Extensivity of Ritual Performance	Eucharistic Sacrifice Altar of the Mass	Seven Sacraments as Intensive Sites of Sacramental Encounter
	<u>Ethics</u> Return-gift	Liturgy of the Neighbour	Sacramental Extensivity of Ethical Praxis	<i>Sacrifice of Mercy Altar of the Poor</i>	<i>Works of Mercy as Intensive Sites of Sacramental Encounter</i>

Chauvet may offer many profound theological reflections on the sacramental structure of the church as a whole, but, in the end, his liturgy of the neighbour is left bereft of any ‘altared’ sites of sacramental intensity.

This section seeks to move beyond the unbounded extensivity of Chauvet’s sacramental ‘something’ by exploring in greater depth the sacramentality of works of mercy in the midst of everyday life. **Chapter 6 (Scripture)** begins this task by establishing the biblical foundations for a sacramental interpretation of the works of mercy based on Matthew 25:31-46. In close conversation with R. A. Lambourne and Oliver Davies, **Chapter 7 (Sacrament)** defends the bold claim that works of mercy are sacraments – events of grace in which Christians encounter the hidden presence of Christ in the world. Finally, **Chapter 8 (Ethics)** assesses the connection between the Eucharist and the works of mercy in the lives and work of two influential twentieth-century witnesses: Mother Teresa and Mother Maria Skobtsova. In different ways, both of these women sought to reclaim the liturgical profundity of the ethically mundane. In doing so, they also demonstrate the true significance of the works of mercy within the ministry of the church and for the life of the world.

6.2 MATTHEW 25: A LITERAL IDENTIFICATION?

At the end of our life, we shall be judged by love.

– St John of the Cross

Matthew 25:31-46 remains one of the most significant passages in the New Testament for the Christian tradition of the works of mercy.⁴ Not only does the text enumerate six of the seven corporal works, but it also describes with startling clarity Christ's radical identification with the poor. The importance of this text for this chapter merits quoting it in full:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

This dramatic scene – a cross between an apocalyptic parable⁵ and an eschatological vision of judgment⁶ – depicts the nations gathering before the glorious throne of the Son of Man. Despite its cosmic setting, the King's judgment does not concern the rise and fall of nations or empires or

⁴ For an overview of the literature on Matt 25:31-46, see Gray 1989; Stanton 1992; Leverett 2007; Luz 2005.

⁵ Via 1987, 79-100

⁶ Cope 1969, 34-36; Donahue 1986, 3-31; Davies & Allison 1997, 418; Luz 2005, 264.

the grand affairs of human history. Rather, the fault line that splits the world on this day of days is nothing less than humble, unassuming and radically ordinary practices of mercy. At the heart of the mystery of the world we discover basic gestures of hospitable welcome to strangers, a cup of cold water for another who thirsts, or simply the gift of attentive presence at a hospital bedside.⁷ What once seemed trivial and unnoticed is here transfigured by the unfathomable mystery of Christ's proximity. The theological implications of this passage have fired the church's social imagination throughout the two thousand years of its history.⁸

In the 1960s, the New Testament scholar C. E. B. Cranfield began to explore the possibility of a sacramental exegesis of this passage. He argues that the eschatological context is particularly significant for understanding the nature of Jesus' self-disclosure. Between the Ascension and the coming Parousia, Christ's historical, bodily presence has been withdrawn from sight 'to the right hand of the Father,' and the Spirit of Pentecost has been poured out upon the church. What this passage reveals, however, is that Christ has not 'left' his church alone, but continues to be present in the world in various ways. The great mystery disclosed in this passage, Cranfield observes, is that 'in the present time the Lord Jesus Christ is not only at the right hand of the Father, but also comes to us again and again not only in the *Word and Sacraments*, but also in *the flesh and blood of our fellow men in their need and distress* — in the flesh and blood of individual men and women and children in their wretchedness.'⁹ On this basis, Cranfield contends that the works of mercy are analogous with Scripture and the Eucharist as modes of sacramental presence:

there is a real presence of the exalted Christ in the persons of His brethren in their need and distress comparable with His real presence in the Word and Sacraments, that as truly as He is present mysteriously and hiddenly, in his freedom and lordship, in the Holy Scriptures read and heard, by means of broken human words, and in the Holy Supper by means of bread and wine, so truly is He

⁷ Cf. Skelley 1991, 192.

⁸ According to Gary Anderson (2013), this strong identification between Christ and the poor is central to early Christianity. 'By far the most important text for the early church is found in Matthew 25.' He continues, 'Two points should be gleaned from this text: first, charity to [the] poor has the power to deliver one from eternal damnation [...], and second, charity acquires such power because one meets Christ through this concrete action of showing mercy. For early Christians this was not just a metaphor; the church proclaimed that one actually encountered the presence of God in the poor' (6). He underscores the point again a few pages later: 'One should not undervalue the literal sense of Matthew 25:31-46 for the early church' (11). Cf. Davies & Allison 1997, 430-432.

⁹ Cranfield 1961, 278. For a similar theological reflection on the 'location' of the *ascended* Christ, see Oliver Davies 2010b, 183-193. For discussion of Davies' work, see Chapter 7 below.

present mysteriously and hiddenly, in His freedom and lordship, in our daily life by means of our fellow men who need our assistance.¹⁰

In a provocative discussion of the eucharistic theology of Mother Teresa, Stephen Bullivant proposes a similar interpretation. According to Mother Teresa, Christ's cruciform identification with 'the least of these' is not some poetic metaphor: it is literally true. Jesus comes to meet us, she writes, 'in the hungry, the naked, the lonely, the alcoholic, the drug addict, the prostitute, the street beggars. He may come to you or me in a father who is alone, in a mother, in a brother, or in a sister. If we reject them, if we do not go out to meet them, we reject Jesus himself.'¹¹ Christ is truly there in the midst of human suffering; risky acts of love really do participate in God's redemptive economy of grace. In the words of Benedict XVI, 'Jesus assumes the persona of those in need (*Personam induit Iesus indigentium*): that is, the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the naked, the sick, those in prison. [...] Love of God and love of neighbour are thus forged together: in the least we meet Jesus himself and in Jesus we meet God (*in minimis ipsum Iesum et in Iesu Deum invenimus*).'¹²

This sacramental interpretation rests on three basic assumptions: (1) it presupposes a 'universalist' interpretation of the 'least of these' as referring to all persons who are in need; (2) it emphasises the role of the works of mercy as 'sacramental' acts in everyday life; (3) it affirms a literal interpretation of Christ's identification with the 'least' in acts of compassion.¹³ When read from this perspective, the passage becomes a significant resource for reclaiming the works of mercy as caritative events in which one encounters the 'real presence' of Christ through the bodily mediation of the neighbour.

¹⁰ Ibid. Cranfield notes Matthew's use of *diakonia*: 'Lord, when was it that we saw you [...] and did not minister [δικονήσαμέν] to you?' (25:44). Drawing a connection between this passage and the permanent diaconal ministry of the church, Cranfield argues that the works of mercy belong at the heart of Christian discipleship: '*diakonia*, the service of the needy and afflicted, ought to be of central importance in the life of every congregation. [...] To suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ is pleased with a congregation's public worship, however beautifully and solemnly it be executed, if the congregation is all the time neglecting Him as He comes to it in the persons of the distressed is clearly illusion. [...] What our text suggests is surely rather a diligent and continual service, a never ceasing to be on the watch for opportunities to service the afflicted' (279).

¹¹ Mother Teresa 2001, 50.

¹² Benedict XVI 2006, 40 as quoted by Bullivant 2012, 152-153. Bullivant adds: 'Note the strength of the claim made in Benedict's Latin *editio typical* (*induo* means "to assume," "to put on," or "to cover oneself"), compared to its enervated, official English translation: "Jesus identifies himself with those in need"' (152).

¹³ See Bullivant 2012, 149-179.

Bullivant notes that according to the classical definition, a sacrament is ‘a visible form of an invisible grace’ in which Christ is present in all sacraments ‘at least insofar as they embody his actions.’¹⁴ Acts of mercy, he suggests, can be read as ‘sacramental’ to the extent that they bear within themselves the ‘invisible grace’ of God’s self-disclosure.¹⁵ Drawing primarily upon neo-scholastic sacramental categories, Bullivant stresses that the Eucharist is unique among the sacraments of the church. Christ is present in bread and wine by ‘the power of transubstantiation,’ whereas ‘in the other sacraments Christ is present only in virtue of his redemptive *act* sacramentally embodied.’¹⁶ The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian existence, a foretaste of the eschatological redemption and an anticipatory participation in the eternal life of God. In light of this high affirmation of the Eucharist, Bullivant observes that ‘it is all the more striking that Teresa should correlate Christ *sub specie panis* with Christ *sub specie minimi*, that is “Jesus in His distressing guise.”’¹⁷ Works of mercy are thus ‘quasi-sacramental’ for Bullivant, not because they are morally commendable, but because they constitute for Christians a meeting with the same Lord who is present in the breaking of bread.¹⁸

6.3 CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS

In recent years, numerous biblical scholars have called this ‘universalist’ line of interpretation into question.¹⁹ They have argued that the phrase in 25:40 describing the ‘least of these’ as *my brethren* does not refer to the poor and needy in general, but rather to *particular* members of the Christian community – that is, to disciples, leaders, teachers and/or apostolic messengers of the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁵ Unfortunately Bullivant’s commitment to dated categories of scholastic sacramentology prevents him from affirming the possibility that works of mercy might be sacramental in the strong (albeit non-ritual) sense. Instead, he writes, ‘This sacramental, indeed Eucharistic, interpretation of Mt 25:40 must not, however, be taken too far. Specifically, it should not be taken to imply that the graced encounter with one of the Mt 25’s *minimi* is itself a sacrament in the full and proper sense of the term.’ Bullivant’s objections are largely indicative of his theological agenda (exploring the salvation of atheists). For the purpose of this thesis, I consider the works of mercy to be an ethical praxis of Christian discipleship, and thus ‘visible acts of the church’ which ‘presuppose faith.’ As such, the only outstanding objection Bullivant proposes is a somewhat simplistic juridical appeal to the Council of Trent: ‘Finally, and most obviously, there are only seven sacraments of the Church. One ought not speak, therefore, of any “sacrament of the *minimi*” or “sacrament of one’s neighbour,” unless in a figurative or analogical sense’ (2012, 167). By contrast, I contend that the rigid boundaries of scholastic sacramentology are part of the problem, not the solution. Bullivant’s error is his assumption that a sacrament of mercy would somehow compete with or detract from the sacramental rites of the church, when in fact the integral relation between ritual and ethical sacramentality is far more complex and theologically compelling than his interpretation allows.

¹⁶ Schillebeeckx 1963, 72 quoted in Bullivant 2012, 166.

¹⁷ Bullivant 2012, 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 162. Cf. Kammer 1991, 133.

¹⁹ Cf. Stanton 1992; Leverett 2007.

Gospel.²⁰ Graham Stanton, for example, acknowledges that ‘C.E.B. Cranfield has written movingly about the Real Presence of the Risen Christ in the poor as comparable with the presence of Christ in Scripture and sacrament.’ Theologically speaking, Stanton is inclined to agree with him. He writes,

As an exegete, however, I must consider the possibility that the evangelist’s intentions and the ways the first recipients are likely to have understood this passage may have been very different. [...] If my interpretation of these two key phrases is correct, non-Christian nations are to be judged on the basis of what they have done (or not done) to *followers of Jesus*. They should have welcomed the “brothers of the Son of man, however insignificant,” for in so doing they would have welcomed the Son of man himself.²¹

This exegetical perspective complicates commonly held assumptions about Christ’s presence, but it also influences how we understand *who* the needy ones are and *whose* task it is to perform the works of mercy in the first place.

John Donahue identifies five common arguments in favour of this ‘particularist’ reading: (1) in the NT the word *adelphos* (brother) generally refers to a compatriot or coreligionist and is never applied to an unconverted Gentile. (2) In Matthew specifically, *adelphos* is used to describe those who respond to the gospel or simply the disciples of Jesus. (3) The term for the *minimi* (‘little ones’) is used in reference to ‘vulnerable members of the Christian community,’ thus ‘the least of the brethren of Jesus would be Christians most in need.’ (4) The Son of Man’s identification with the least is interpreted in the context of Jesus’ saying that the sender is present in the messenger – ‘he who receives you receives me’ (Matt 10:40). (5) In context, the pericope concludes a discourse to the disciples and concerns other key themes of discipleship.²² In addition, J. Ramsey Michaels argues that the acts of mercy delineated in Matthew 25 name the hardships suffered by the *apostles* in their various ministries to the Gentiles, and thus signify merciful service to suffering Christian missionaries – *the least of Christ’s brethren*.²³

²⁰ The ‘universalist’ perspective claims that ‘the least’ represent the poor as such; whereas the ‘particularist’ perspective maintains that the author of Matthew had specific persons in mind: the disciples, apostles, missionaries, Jewish Christians, or some other group of Christians within the church. For an analysis of the debate, see Luz 2005, 267-274. On the question of authorial intent, see Leverett 2007, 219-299. For a theological defence of the particularist position, see Harink 2009, 96-97.

²¹ Stanton 1992, 209-10, 219. For a response to Stanton (and Sherman Gray), see Cranfield 1998, 125-135.

²² Donahue 1986, 25.

²³ Michaels 1965, 27-37. Donahue (1986) provides a helpful summary, noting that ‘All the sufferings of the “least of the brethren” in Mt 25:31-46 are mentioned by Paul: **hunger** (1 Cor 4:11), **thirst** (1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor

This perspective fundamentally shifts the meaning of the passage in question. So understood, the emphasis of the text no longer concerns how Christians ought to respond to the poor, but rather how the world ought to respond to the church. Whilst a rigidly ‘particularist’ position may resonate with the idea of the church as a ‘sacrament of Christ’ to the world, it is unclear what it offers to a sacramental reading of works of mercy.²⁴ Indeed, some scholars have gone so far as to argue that this revised interpretation means that Matthew 25 ‘cannot provide a legitimate basis for Christian concern for the poor and needy of the world’; and that such a reading ‘violates the text by eisegesis.’²⁵

This debate is far from settled. Its implications for the present study merit further discussion. Many advocates of the particularist view tend to dismiss alternative theological interpretations out of hand, insisting that theirs is the *only* legitimate reading of Matthew 25. Is this narrow exegetical approach necessary? Or is there space for other perspectives? When all is said and done, must we concede that the single most important biblical text concerning works of mercy is actually not addressed as an *exhortation* to Christians at all, but rather a *description* of God’s judgment the world on the basis of its treatment of the church?

6.4 IN DEFENCE OF THE SACRAMENTAL INTERPRETATION

In what follows, I contend that matters are not as black and white as some scholars suggest. There is no question that ‘particularist’ position represents a valid and informed reading of the text.²⁶ It is certainly possible that in its original context, this passage was indicative of a ‘churchy, sectarian’ ethic, which did ‘not represent a significant advance in ethical thinking over the ethics of the Judaism of its day,’ in the words of Lamar Cope.²⁷ Undoubtedly, scholars have proposed substantial arguments for rethinking the ‘universalist’ approach – the ‘default’ interpretation in modern times. On the other hand, it is far less obvious that the particularist view somehow displaces and delegitimises all other interpretive possibilities by definition.²⁸ Despite the

11:27), living as a **stranger** or an **itinerant** (1 Cor 4:11, “we are homeless”), **naked** (1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 11:27), **sick** (*esthenesa*; cf. 1 Cor 4:10, “We are weak, “ *astheneis*), **imprisonment** (2 Cor 11:23; Phlm 1:9) (27).

²⁴ See Schillebeeckx 1963, 206-207.

²⁵ Cope 1969, 44. Emphasis original. Cf. Kynes 1991, 150.

²⁶ For a critical overview, see Watson 1993, 63-66.

²⁷ Cope 1969, 44.

²⁸ Davies & Allison, for example, are ‘not persuaded’ (1997, 429). They demonstrate that the concept of God’s presence in the poor exists in the Old Testament and early Jewish tradition. ‘What is new in Matthew,’ they argue, ‘is neither this idea nor the particular deeds of mercy but the identification of the needy with Jesus the Son of man. This novel identification – another aspect of the messianic secret – is,

hesitations of some biblical scholars, I suggest that a more complex, multi-layered interpretation is not only plausible, but also preferable – and this for reasons that are not always taken into consideration.²⁹

6.4.1 IDEOLOGY, POWER AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In an important essay on the hermeneutics of Matthew 25, Francis Watson argues that it is time to rethink the terms and conditions of the exegetical debate.³⁰ In his view, protracted scholarly handwringing over the ‘identity crisis’ of the *minimi* is an unhelpful approach.³¹ Closing down valid interpretations based on artificial (and sometimes dubious) grounds, risks obfuscating rather than clarifying the theological possibilities of the text. Watson contends that ‘within the historical-critical paradigm, this [particularist] conclusion is moderately plausible, although not compelling; and, in making the treatment of the Christian community the criterion of judgment, the outcome is that this text becomes theologically worthless.’³²

By contrast, he offers a determinatively *theological exegesis* of the passage, read through the lens of liberation theology. Taking Gustavo Gutiérrez’s idea of ‘the sacrament of the neighbour’³³ as his point of departure, Watson explores the possibility of an alternative paradigm for biblical interpretation, which ‘integrate[s] the project of human solidarity more securely within Christian identity and praxis.’³⁴

however, left unexplained’ (430). See also Via 1987, 92. Heil (1998) suggests that the passage demands a double reading in which the disciples are (1) urged to behave like the righteous sheep by caring for the needy, and (2) encouraged to pursue a path of humility ‘by becoming needy least ones in their mission of bringing the kingdom to the world’ (13).

²⁹ Bullivant (2012) acknowledges the exegetical problems with the universal view. Whilst he offers a few comments in response, the legitimacy of his approach seems to rest largely on an appeal to the dogmatic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church: ‘I concede that this interpretation may not represent the evangelist’s authorial intention – although this position is by no means foreclosed. I accept also that it does not represent the overwhelming witness of the tradition. Nevertheless, this interpretation [...] is firmly embedded within the Church’s polyphonic tradition. I maintain that this reading is a permissible and orthodox one’ (153). Though I agree with Bullivant’s conclusion, I am not convinced that he adequately justifies his approach.

³⁰ Watson 1993, 57-88.

³¹ See Donahue 1986, 8.

³² Watson 1993, 64.

³³ See Gutiérrez 1988, 116. As noted in earlier, Gutiérrez’s ‘sacrament of the neighbour’ borrows heavily from the writings of Yves Congar.

³⁴ Watson 1993, 62. Watson clarifies that ‘if liberation theology is indeed a “theology,” and if Christian praxis is one of its points of reference, then exegesis from within this perspective must be oriented towards relevant theological issues and should abandon the false modesty which insists that matters of theology are outside the competence of biblical scholarship. What I envisage, in other words, is an exegetical practice

In his view, biblical scholars of the historical-critical persuasion have been unjustly dismissive of the kind of ethical, political and sacramental exegesis proposed by theologians such as Gutiérrez (and also Schillebeeckx, Rahner and Congar).³⁵ Watson observes that, broadly speaking, the biblical studies guild has tended to marginalise liberation theology for a variety of reasons. Facing the living reality of poverty, hunger, crime, and spiralling social and economic inequality, liberationists are often unconcerned with idiosyncratic textual puzzles and other First World problems prevalent among Western biblical scholars. In a context of physical oppression, seeking the face of God in the homeless, the naked, the jailed is not an academic pastime. Liberation theology has thus not gone out of its way to accommodate itself to the norms of Western biblical studies.

Whereas Western biblical scholars tend to operate in highly professionalised, autonomous and affluent contexts, liberation theologians typically work ‘from below’ in popular socio-political readings of Scripture common among ‘base communities’ of ordinary poor people – labourers, factory workers, immigrants, caregivers and so forth. ‘Few Western exegetes,’ contends Watson, ‘have any experience at all of the poor and oppressed. Their only non-academic point of reference is typically a pietistic, apolitical Bible-reading stemming from the socially and economically secure middle classes to which they themselves also belong.’³⁶

Watson traces a tendency within biblical studies to separate a ‘pietistic tradition of private, “devotional” bible-reading’ from a more secular tradition of public, academic biblical scholarship. The seemingly contradictory traditions represent two sides of an ideological public/private dichotomy. This bifurcation functions to legitimise the hegemony of specialist, ‘objective’ and nonreligious study of the Bible on the one hand, and to domesticate other modes of scriptural engagement to the apolitical realm of the private sphere on the other.³⁷ In a world so divided,

able to make eclectic though critical use of a variety of interpretive strategies, deriving its coherence not from any methodological purity but from its orientation towards the political-theological task’ (62). It is precisely this eclectic reorientation that enables Watson to explore the theological and sacramental depth of Matt 25.

³⁵ Watson published his essay back in 1993. Over the last twenty years, the scene has shifted dramatically and there is now far more constructive engagement with liberation theology within biblical studies. Incidentally, there also appears to be less of an emphasis on the ‘particularist’ interpretation of Matt 25 as the only ‘legitimate’ reading. For an overview of liberation theology within contemporary biblical scholarship, see Rowland & Corner 1989; Sugirtharajah 2001; Sugirtharajah 2002; West 2007, 159-182; De Wit & West 2008; Schüssler Fiorenza 2009.

³⁶ Watson 1993, 59.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-60. Oliver Davies (2011) makes a similar observation: ‘In the context of an educated theological perspective on the world, it may be [...] that we have robust and authoritative accounts of how Christ is

liberation theology is viewed with suspicion as popular and subjective, and is thus deemed inappropriate as genuinely 'public' reading of Scripture within the academy. Such attempts to preserve the methodological purity of the guild are implicated in much wider dynamics of power and control. 'The theology of liberation might well be understood, at least within a First World context, as the systematic, uncompromising exposure and rejection of this privatizing of religious commitment.'³⁸ Liberation theology offers a reading of Matthew 25 that has the potential to be 'public' in a manner transgressive to the domesticating categories of secular modernity. The attempt to reject such exegesis based on the 'allegedly universal criterion' of historical-critical study says more about dynamics of power than it does about attentiveness to Scripture.³⁹

In this way, Watson clears space for the development of multivalent interpretations capable of attending to the complex layers of theological meaning within the biblical text. Moving beyond the narrow confines of the identity debate, Watson defends the legitimacy of the sacramental interpretation. He writes,

The text as it stands is clearly open to the kind of reading represented by Gutiérrez. There is nothing in its wording, its literal sense, that forbids such a reading, and much that encourages it. The opposite reading is also a possible reading: the hypothesis of the unifying authorial intention cannot be excluded, and it may indeed lead to insight into the world of the Matthean community. In so far as it attempts to exclude the theological reading, however, by representing itself as what the text "really" means, it oversteps the limits of its own competence. It also exposes itself to criticism of its ideological stance: for its effect is to reinforce the privatization of religious commitment and the subjection of religion to a secularizing discourse within the public sphere.⁴⁰

Watson is clear that the historical-critical and the literal-theological position are both viable interpretations. One cannot exclude the other by definition. This tension is indicative of the inherent *ambiguity* of the Matthean text itself. Gutiérrez does not take up this ambiguity in order to solve a riddle; rather, he wrestles with the text in an effort to relocate Christian praxis within the world of the Scripture.⁴¹ Regarding the identity of *minimi*, Watson is content to bracket the

truly present in his Church (in Eucharistic theology) but very little account, perhaps even no account at all, of how Christ is truly present in those who are vulnerable of Matthew 25. [...] It is easy, for instance, to place the exalted and eschatological Christ of Matthew 25 in the domain of faith rather than theology, and so give this Christ less status in an educated theological environment' (3).

³⁸ Ibid., 60.

³⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁴¹ Ibid.

debate altogether and simply affirm what the text itself says: 'All we know is that they are victims of deprivation and injustice and that they are universally present to be either assisted or neglected by all peoples of the world, at every time and in every place. [...] no other distinguishing characteristic is given, and no other is needed.'⁴²

Overall, his more nuanced stance not only challenges the rash dismissal of the sacramental interpretation, but it also opens further insights into the nature of mercy and the hiddenness of Christ. The works of mercy become sites of epiphanic disclosure. In them Christ reveals the extent of his radical solidarity with those who suffer.

The king's solidarity with the oppressed is so complete that he can speak of himself as suffering their oppression, and yet the effect of the epiphany of his brothers and sisters is to divert the attention that has so far been focused on his majestic form on to them. They are the solution to the riddle the king has propounded; they are the key to the mystery of the judgment; they are the key to the mystery of the world itself. *The treatment received by the poor lies at the heart of the riddle of the world.*⁴³

Watson charts the development of similar epiphanic moments throughout Matthew's Gospel in which Jesus' messianic identity is gradually revealed to his disciples. If the implied readers of the gospel are assumed to be fellow Christians who would share Peter's confession in Matthew 18 ('You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'), then the culminating revelation of the Son of Man as king and judge signifies an even more dramatic reversal: 'for the scandalous message of this text is that the distinction between righteous and unrighteous is unrelated to the distinction between church and world, and that the final criterion will be the Christ secretly present among the oppressed rather than the Christ openly acknowledged within the community.'⁴⁴ As a result, the text radically subverts traditional religious distinctions between inside and outside and between those who appear righteous (declaring 'Lord, Lord'; cf. Matt 7:21) and those who without a word tend to the suffering bodies of the least. 'The heathen may act not so much as "anonymous Christians" but as servants of the anonymous Christ.'⁴⁵

⁴² Ibid., 69 (emphasis added).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 70-71.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 71.

In the Scriptures proclaimed and in the words of the liturgy, Christian readers of Matthew's Gospel have already received this future eschatological epiphany in the present. This revelation comes as a new vocation for Christians to seek out and serve Christ in his *minimi*.

6.4.2 WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR? REPEATING THE LAWYER'S FALLACY

When all is said and done, we find ourselves confronted with the difficult reality that the identity of 'the least' is irreducibly *ambiguous*, and the hiddenness of Christ's presence inexplicably *mysterious*. There is no obvious answer that satisfies all questions, nor one interpretation which excludes all others. There are no easy distinctions between inside and outside, neighbours and strangers, church and world that can establish for us the discernible limits of ethical responsibility.

All we are left with is the text itself.⁴⁶

This takes us back to where we began. Is this ambiguity an oversight on the part of the author and thus a puzzle meant to be solved? Are there definitive answers simply waiting to be discovered? Or could it be that in this instance the ambiguity matters – and that perhaps the silence has something to tell us? What if this is one of those difficult questions that Jesus intended to leave unanswered?

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is repeatedly challenged to codify the ethical boundaries of neighbourly love. Matthew records an incident in which a lawyer from among the Pharisees sought to 'test' Jesus by asking him to identify the greatest commandment. Jesus replies by holding together the love of God (Deut 6:5) and the love of neighbour (Lev 19:18), declaring that 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' (Matt 22:40).⁴⁷ This proclamation is foundational for all of Christian theology. And yet, Jesus does not tell us how these two loves relate to one another, nor does he specify what neighbourly love might entail.

⁴⁶ Watson (1993) makes a similar point: 'What if, as we tell him what he should have said to make his meaning clearer, [Matthew] simply refers us back to the text with the words, "What I have written, I have written"?' (66).

⁴⁷ Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; cf. Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8. In Mark's Gospel, the tone is less argumentative. Here a Scribe approves of Jesus' answer and adds that to love God with one's whole being and to love the neighbour as oneself 'is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.' To which Jesus responds, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' (Mark 12:33-34).

Significantly, the text says nothing at all about the *identity* of the neighbour in question. It simply says: love.⁴⁸

In the Sermon on the Mount, we catch a glimpse of the radical demands of this love: 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven' (Matt 5:43-45). In this passage, Jesus calls into question the received 'wisdom' that sought to limit, legislate, manage and control the boundaries of *agape*. Genuine love not only extends from insiders to 'outsiders'; it fundamentally transgresses these distinctions, commanding love even of *enemies*.⁴⁹ 'For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?' (Matt 5:46-47).⁵⁰

In the Gospel of Luke, this question of *identity* finally comes to a head in the parable of the Good Samaritan.⁵¹ Again, a certain lawyer stood up to 'test' Jesus, but this time concerning the conditions for inheriting eternal life. Jesus turns the question, and here it is the lawyer who replies with the twofold commandment to love God and neighbour (Luke 10:25-26). Whilst Jesus

⁴⁸ At a glance, the context of Lev 19:17-18 which Jesus quotes seems to imply that 'neighbour' is a category of kinship, and thus that this love be a form of communion with one's own. The parallelism in verse 17 has 'one of your kin' in the first line as a qualifier of 'your neighbour' in the second. Likewise, in verse 18, 'any of your people' is used to qualify 'your neighbour as your self.' However, Lev 19:34 complicates matters by applying the same language to outsiders and resident aliens: 'you shall love the *alien* as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.' Which of these meanings Jesus intends is left unsaid.

⁴⁹ Davies & Allison (1997) contend that Jesus' teaching on neighbourly love raises questions for a strictly 'particularist' interpretation of Matt 25. They write, 'can we [...] believe that Matthew thought "all the nations" would have the opportunity to succour needy Christians? Is not the identification of the needy with all in distress more consistent with the command to ignore distinctions between *insiders and outsiders* and with Jesus' injunction to *love even enemies*?' By contrast, they prefer "'Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" requires no qualification' (429. Emphasis added).

⁵⁰ In Rom 12, Paul's account of Jesus' ethic of love dances seamlessly between inside and outside, sharing and hospitality. In one moment he says: 'we, who are many, are one body in Christ' (5); 'love one another with mutual affection' (10a); 'outdo one another in showing honour' (10b); 'contribute to the needs of the saints' (13); and 'live in harmony with one another' (16). In the next, 'extend hospitality to strangers' (13); 'bless those who persecute you' (14); 'associate with the lowly' (16); 'live peaceably with all' (18); and 'if your *enemies* are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink' (20).

⁵¹ After Matt 25, the parable of the Good Samaritan is the most important biblical texts concerning the works of mercy in the Christian tradition. Among the many studies of this passage, see, for example: McDonald 1966, 21-37; Trudinger 1976, 160-163; Fitzmyer 1981-85, 876-890; O'Donovan 1989, 39-58; Nolland 1993, 578-598; Bock 2000, 1018-1036; McFarland 2001, 57-66; Roukema 2004, 56-74; Bailey 2008, 284-297; Snodgrass 2008, 338-361; Walker 2008, 3-15; Zimmermann 2008, 269-292; Longenecker 2009, 422-447.

is content with this response, the lawyer is not. In an effort to 'justify himself,' he presses Jesus with the question on everybody's mind: *who exactly is my neighbour?* (10:29).

On the surface, the lawyer's question seems reasonable enough. In isolation, 'the neighbour' could mean anything. Is Jesus proposing a kind of 'particularist' neighbour? Or a 'universalist' one, perhaps? We do not know for sure. His language is *elusive*; its meaning is *ambiguous*. If this loving is a matter of eternal consequence, surely it would be helpful to know *the identity* of the ones to be loved. Yet the lawyer's question is not neutral. His efforts to 'justify himself' expose a desire to explain away the tension in order to set some 'reasonable limits' on Jesus' command. At its core, his question 'is really an attempt to say there is such a person as a "non-neighbour."' As Darrell Bock writes, 'Jesus rejects all attempts to shrink the scope of responsibility. The lawyer is looking for the *minimum* obedience required, but Jesus requires *total* obedience. That the lawyer seeks the minimum shows that something is wrong in approaching God on human terms and not on God's. Jesus refuses to allow this limitation.'⁵²

Instead of answering the lawyer's question, he tells a parable. A Jewish traveller is ambushed by bandits, ruthlessly beaten, stripped naked and left for dead in a ditch somewhere along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. A priest comes along, and after him a Levite, but both pass him by. Finally, a Samaritan (that is, an outsider, unclean and despised), sees the man, binds and dresses his wounds, and takes him to an inn to care for him without charge (10:30-35). The question Jesus poses to the lawyer is not who belongs to an abstract category called 'the neighbour,' but rather which one has *acted as a neighbour* to the wounded man in the ditch? In saying 'go and do likewise' (10:37), Jesus makes clear that the point is not to go and find neighbours 'out there,' but rather to choose to *be* a neighbour to the one you happen upon, even if he is a Samaritan.

The transgressive evasiveness of Jesus' rhetoric of the neighbour is pertinent to our discussion of the identity dialogue of Matthew 25. This passage does not reveal the identity of 'the least,' just as Jesus refuses to define the identity of the neighbour. Indeed, this ambiguity is not given as a puzzle to be solved or accidental oversight to be amended, but rather as a theological tension to be *lived*. Like those named sheep and the goats in the narrative, Christ does not inform us of the precise boundaries delimiting where we may or may not encounter him in our daily lives.⁵³ But

⁵² Bock 2000, 1029.

⁵³ See Via 1987, 92.

unlike the sheep and the goats, we readers of the text know in advance of the eschaton that Christ *does in fact draw near* in acts of mercy. Charged with this knowledge, Christians are exhorted to be vigilant, perceptive and ready to respond to the suffering of another in need who we discover along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho.⁵⁴ In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

Neighbourliness is not a quality in other people; it is simply their claim on ourselves. Every moment and every situation challenges us to action and to obedience. We have literally no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbour or not. We must get into action and obey – we must behave like a neighbour to him. But perhaps this shocks you. Perhaps you still think you ought to think out beforehand and know what you ought to do. To that there is only one answer. You can only learn what obedience is by obeying. It is no use asking questions; for it is only through obedience that you come to learn the truth.⁵⁵

Whether as an academic interest of biblical scholarship or otherwise, I suggest that the fruitless quest to ‘overcome’ this ambiguity by defining the *minimi* ultimately repeats the lawyer’s fallacy. For in seeking to ‘justify itself,’ it fails to grasp the radical profundity of Christ’s *agape*.

6.4.3 HOSPITALITY AND SHARING: REIMAGINING THE BOUNDARIES OF MERCY

What implications does this sacramental interpretation have for our understanding of the practise of mercy within early Christianity? Christine Pohl has written extensively on the significance of Matthew 25 for the Christian practise of welcoming the stranger.⁵⁶ She states that this text alone ‘has been the most important passage for the entire tradition of Christian hospitality. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” resounds throughout the ancient texts, and contemporary practitioners of hospitality refer to this text more often than to any other passage.’⁵⁷ For Pohl, the ethical and theological dimensions of Matthew 25 cannot be treated in isolation. From the beginning, ‘the passage has often been interpreted and applied in ways that are broader than its immediate context.’ She writes that this text

⁵⁴ So writes Mother Teresa (2001), ‘The important thing is not to do a lot or to do everything. The important thing is to be ready for anything, at all times; to be convinced that when serving the poor, we really serve God’ (50).

⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer 1995, 78.

⁵⁶ See Pohl 1999, 20-23; 67-69. The recent renaissance in the study of hospitality in the Christian tradition has clearly demonstrated the importance of hospitable concern for those outside the Christian community. See, for example, Prusak 1976, 89-126; Ignatieff 1984; Greer 1986; Volf 1996; Hobbs 2001, 3-30; Koenig 2001; Pohl 2002, 34-43; Bretherton 2006; Knight 2006; Sutherland 2006; Newman 2007; Pohl 2007, 27-36; Rossi 2009, 120-130.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

converges with other biblical passages to produce a more particular statement of responsibility for responding to needy persons and a more universal statement of Jesus' identification with those in need. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), which widens understandings of responsibility to the neighbor, and Jesus' teaching on including one's enemies in the circle of love (e.g., Matt 5:39-44, Luke 6:27-31), have tended to broaden interpretations of "the least of these" in Christian practice. Responsibility may begin with the "household of faith" but it extends to all who need help" (Gal 6:10). Whoever "the least of these" are, they are persons in need of human care.⁵⁸

Jesus' ethic of neighbourly love *decentres* Christian identity and redefines the boundaries of the Christian community. This takes the form of a generous *praxis of sharing* between brothers and sisters within the household of faith. Yet this sharing cannot become a closed circuit of care, but must always remain open to the other – the outsider. This openness takes the form of a radical *praxis of hospitality*.⁵⁹ The ethical life of the church is held in the tension between these two orientations.⁶⁰ Sharing and hospitality are not optional for Christians, nor are they simply morally commendable acts that could just as easily be abdicated to others. On the contrary, together they constitute the integral fabric of Christian discipleship. In the words of John W. Wright,

The practices of sharing economic goods among believers and being hospitable to strangers is the context for understanding the church's commitment to the poor, the sick and the jailed — those whom society relegates to its margins. [...] The poor are not a problem to be solved outside the church. The baptized poor *are* the church with whom God calls all believers into solidarity and care; the unbaptized poor are strangers to whom the church practices hospitality. The poor and the marginalized come as a gift, enabling the church to witness that God's

⁵⁸ Ibid., 22-23; cf. Bretherton 2006, 131.

⁵⁹ As Chauvet (1995b) points out, this twofold pattern is central to the sacramental ethics of both Christianity and Judaism. The paradigm of the firstfruits offering shows this dual emphasis on sharing (with the Levites) and hospitality (towards the aliens) (Deut 26:1-11).

⁶⁰ The principle Greek term for hospitality, φιλοξενία, 'combines the general word for love or affection for people who are connected by kinship or faith (*phileo*), and the word for stranger (*xenos*).'⁶⁰ This clarifies the close link between hospitality and the stranger. The tension between inside and outside is bound up within the word itself.

Rom 12:13 'Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality [φιλοξενίαν] to strangers.'

1 Pet 4:9 'Be hospitable [φιλόξενοι] to one another without complaining.'

Heb 13:2 'Do not neglect to show hospitality [φιλοξενίας] to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.'

Matt 25:38 'When was it that we saw you a stranger [ξένον] and welcomed [συνηγάγομεν] you?'

In some contexts a stranger may refer to an unknown person in general; in others to other Christians in need of assistance. 'In fact, it is not clear that hospitality between these two groups was distinguished at all. The believer's responsibility moved outward from fellow Christians to the world (Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 3:12)' (Pohl 1999, 31). Thus the ambiguity we have been naming in connection to the Matthean 'identity crisis' reflects a broader aspect of early Christian ethical praxis.

abundant grace overcomes economic barriers that the society constructs to protect the self-interest of others.⁶¹

To become a disciple is to assume a new identity in Christ. This cruciform identity is ultimately incompatible with bounded and buffered habits of self-centredness. By contrast, mature discipleship is exemplified in gestures of openness, hospitality, generosity and expectancy – in short, in a person who is ever ready to welcome Christ in a stranger who comes along. ‘By suggesting not only that God welcomes the needy and disadvantaged, but that God is actually welcomed in these people,’ writes Pohl, ‘the passages press Christians to include those most likely to be overlooked.’⁶² Works of mercy are concrete habits of care that sustain healthy interdependent relationships of communion within the church. But they are also disruptive events in which the church responds to the cry of a suffering world. ‘The place of the church is with the wounded one lying in the ditch along the roadside,’ writes Jon Sobrino,

whether or not this victim is to be found physically and geographically within intraecclesial space. The place of the church is with “the other,” and with the most radical otherness of that other – his suffering – especially when that suffering is massive, cruel, and unjust. [...] When the church emerges from within itself, to set off down the road where the wounded lie, then is when it genuinely de-centers itself and thereby comes to resemble Jesus in something absolutely fundamental.⁶³

For Christians, works of mercy do not simply involve acts of care and maintenance within the church; they also demand an attentive engagement with those who are outside. Whatever their exegesis of ‘the least,’ early Christians were renowned for their works of mercy to strangers and neighbours alike.⁶⁴ This is not a coincidence. This radical ethic of welcome is intrinsically bound up with weighty matters of the Gospel: namely, the question of neighbourly love – loving beyond

⁶¹ Wright 2007, 148.

⁶² Pohl 1999, 23. On this point, see also Davies & Allison 1997: ‘Is not the identification of the needy with all in distress more consistent with the command to ignore distinctions between insiders and outsiders and with Jesus’ injunction to love even enemies?’ (429).

⁶³ Sobrino 1994, 21-22.

⁶⁴ Pohl 1999, 33. Rodney Stark (1996) cites the famous ancient account of the Roman Emperor Julian’s campaign to institute pagan charities in an effort to match Christian benevolence. Frustrated yet impressed by the benevolent character of Christians, Julian gives an interesting outside view on the nature of early Christian ethical witness. He emphasises their ‘benevolence toward strangers and care for the graves of the dead.’ And in another letter he states, ‘I think that when the poor happen to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galileans observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence.’ He adds, ‘The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us’ (83-84). This shows that Christian practice was not limited to fellow Christians, but that seeking out the lowliest and the least was an active dimension of Christian witness.

borders, at great risk, at profound cost, even for one's enemies ... loving to the end. This is the heart of God's redemptive self-revelation: in Christ God welcomes us to sit and eat with him. In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as 'a gracious *host*, welcoming children and prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners into his presence. Such welcome startled and annoyed those who generally viewed themselves as the preferred guests at the gatherings.'⁶⁵ At the same time, 'Jesus, God incarnate, is also portrayed as a vulnerable guest and needy stranger, one who "came to his own home" and often received no welcome (John 1:11). [...] Jesus experienced the vulnerability of the homeless infant, the child refugee, the adult with no place to lay his head, the despised convict.'⁶⁶ This is the message of Matthew 25: through a merciful act of generous hospitality one welcomes the Son of Man, and in mercy one is drawn into the welcoming embrace of the Father.

6.5 LOVING THE NEIGHBOUR IN GOD

To be fully human and to be fully moral is to respond to that which demands our response – the other, attended to with love.⁶⁷

– Janet Martin Soskice

The previous discussion focused on the question of the identity of the neighbour. This section explores the relationship between the works of mercy, neighbourly love and sacramental worship. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus declares: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt 22:34-40; cf. Mark 12:28-31). Throughout the history of Christian thought, the complex interrelationship between these two loves has been the source of much theological reflection and debate.⁶⁸ One of the most important theological insights of Matthew 25 is the identification of the works of mercy as paradigmatic acts in which this love of neighbour (ethics) and love of God (worship) converge.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid., 16-17. See Mitchell 2003, 88-89.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁷ Soskice 1992, 67.

⁶⁸ Amongst the voluminous studies on the theology of *caritas*, see, for example, Brady 2003; Jackson 2003; Lindberg 2008.

⁶⁹ The complex meaning of *caritas* in biblical tradition holds all of these ideas together in a rich theological tension. As Lindberg (2008) summarises: '*Caritas* expresses the incomprehensible benevolence of God for humankind: "See what *caritatem* the Father has given us" (1 John 3:1; cf. 3:16; 4:9, 16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4). *Caritas* sums up the entire Christian ethic, the law and the prophets, because the only thing demanded of the Christian is the two loves, the love of God and the love of others. *Caritas* is the compassionate and benevolent love for the poor; it is patience, mildness, unselfish (1 Cor. 13:4); it is dedicated to serve others (Gal. 5:13); it is mutual support (Eph. 4:2); it is the gift of the life that configures human love on the love of God (1 John 3:16)' (17).

A sacramental interpretation of Matthew 25 which places special emphasis on encountering and serving Christ *through* the bodily mediation of the neighbour, raises important theological questions that merit close attention. If acts of loving-kindness are *ultimately* received as unto Christ, and if the love they express finds its final *telos* in God, what is the relationship between mercy and the neighbour in need? Are we to love the neighbour as such or for God's sake? If the neighbour is in some way the bearer of the hidden presence of Christ, do works of mercy become means of 'using' the neighbour in order to minister to Christ, and in doing so, reduce the neighbour to an 'instrument' of grace or simply the 'occasion' of one's own quest for spiritual self-actualisation?

6.5.1 LOVING: FOR GOD'S SAKE

The brunt of such criticisms is often directed at the theology of St Augustine. Baer notes that in his *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine 'introduces the famous distinction between things to be "enjoyed" (*frui*) and things to be "used" (*uti*). One "enjoys" (*fruitur*) that which is loved for its own sake, and one "uses" (*utitur*) that which is loved for the sake of something else. God alone is for *fruitio*, and the neighbor is a thing for *usus*.'⁷⁰ Critics of Augustine frequently interpret this language of enjoyment and use, means and ends, as 'an instrumental order within the project of the loving subject,' in the words of Oliver O'Donovan. On this reading, 'love for the neighbour should be regarded as an instrumental pursuit by which one intends to attain the beatitude of an immediate love for God.'⁷¹

I will leave to more capable hands the question of whether or not Augustine stands guilty as charged.⁷² For my purposes, it is sufficient to acknowledge that such 'instrumental' views of

⁷⁰ Baer 1996, 47.

⁷¹ O'Donovan 1982, 361. For an overview of the debate, see Canning 1993; Canning 1998, 319-325; O'Donovan 1980; Soskice 1992, 64-66.

⁷² In his essay, 'Jesus Is My Neighbor,' Thomas Breidenthal (1998, 489-503) points out that similar concerns have also been raised by Hannah Arendt. According to Arendt, Augustine's efforts to fuse love of God and neighbour in works of mercy ultimately undermine the strength of neighbourly love itself. Such a strong identification, contends Arendt, encourages us to draw our attention away from *this* neighbour in all her concrete particularity and attend instead to the hiddenness of Christ 'behind' the neighbour. Such an attitude refuses to treat the neighbour as an end in herself, but simply instrumentalises charity to the spiritual benefit of the donor. Breidenthal summarises Arendt's argument as follows:

if God has become my neighbor, then love of God has outsmarted love of neighbor on its home turf. The claim of Jesus is greater than all other human claims (he died for me, and rises as my judge), so to love him as neighbor is to be drawn away from all other human loves, except as they serve and repeat the love of Jesus. But since Jesus-my-neighbor is also God, the love of Jesus as neighbor effects the absorption of neighborlove into the love of God. (491)

caritas also raise serious questions for a sacramental interpretation of the works of mercy as *acts of worship*. If the neighbour becomes only an ‘excuse’ for loving God – to put it somewhat crassly – then to what extent can one say that the neighbour is held as a subject worthy of compassionate attention in his or her own right?

Karl Barth, for one, writes a blistering critique of the instrumentalisation of *caritas* in his *Church Dogmatics*. He argues that reducing authentic compassionate care to a philanthropic gesture of ‘mere charity’ fundamentally compromises the integrity of Christian witness in the world. He states,

There is a form of love – mere charity – in which we do not love at all; in which we do not see or have in mind the other man to whom it is directed; in which we do not and will not notice his weal or woe; in which we merely imagine him as the object of the love which we have to exercise, and in this way master and use him. Our only desire is to practice and unfold our own love, to demonstrate it to him and to others and to God and above all to ourselves, to find for ourselves self-expression in this sublime form.⁷³

For Barth, this is quite simply a betrayal of love. The neighbour is not really loved at all, but rather becomes the projection of self-oriented desire. ‘There is thus a form of love,’ he continues, ‘in which, however sacrificially it is practised, the other is not seized by a human hand but by a cold instrument, or even by a paw with sheathed talons, and therefore genuinely isolated and frozen and estranged and oppressed and humiliated, so that he feels that he is trampled under the feet of the one who is supposed to love him, and cannot react with gratitude.’ For Barth the deepest tragedy of this ‘mere charity’ is the frequency with which it takes hold within *Christian* communities themselves.⁷⁴

Turning to Augustine’s exegesis of Matt 25 and the *totus Christus*, Bridenthal defends Augustine’s position, arguing that Christ’s incarnate presence in the neighbour does not ‘stand between neighbor and neighbor, since it is the relation to the neighbor that is reckoned as relation to Jesus, not the other way around. Engagement with the neighbor opens the door to engagement with Jesus; by implication, engagement with Jesus catapults on into further engagement with other neighbors’ (497). Christ’s kenotic presence in the least is not out of some ‘lack’ in God, but the ‘radical availability’ of his ‘abundant life.’ ‘Jesus’ servant power,’ concludes Bridenthal, ‘is exhibited in his followers whenever they imitate the servanthood of Christ through *works of mercy* [...]. That is to say, to follow Jesus is not an impossibility, because the attempt to repeat his acts of mercy immediately renders one Christ’s minister, achieving good works in his name’ (498. Emphasis added). For a further discussion, see Gregory 2001, 155-172; and Kampowski 2008.

⁷³ Barth 2009, IV/2, 440

⁷⁴ Barth 2009, IV/2, 440. For an insightful engagement with Barth’s theological ethic of Christian charity, see Simon 2004, 143-158. Having explored Barth’s critique of ‘mere charity,’ Simon offers the following description of Barth’s positive account of *caritas*: ‘Barth tells us that we practice genuine Christian love when our love has its basis in a free response to a “mighty act of the Holy Ghost for whom we can only pray, whose presence and action can only cause grateful astonishment even to those who are active in love,

In a similar manner, Karl Rahner argues that the works of mercy can become a source of ‘deepest embarrassment’ for Christians. Any act of charity seems to be caught in an unavoidable dilemma of a gift reduced either to a wounding condescension towards the poor on the one hand, or a self-congratulatory pride towards oneself on the other.

The condescension involved in such love may be terrible, but so too is the attitude of mind which refuses to “receive anything in charity”, the claim to be able to help one’s self – this is a still more terrible pride. Are not both kinds of pride together at one in their spirit of mortal enmity, by which giver and recipient are divided, and do not both together represent the one single state of need of sinful creaturehood? Who can give without showing himself proud in the very act of giving? Who can receive without losing his dignity in the very act of receiving, without having his resentment kindled?⁷⁵

How does one give without pride and without abusing the giver? How does one practice the works of mercy as an act of worship before God without thereby instrumentalising the neighbour?

With regard to the first, Rahner responds that the only way to give without condescension is to acknowledge one’s own vulnerability, one’s own interdependence upon others, one’s own ultimate status as a beggar of God.⁷⁶ He writes, ‘one, therefore, who never for one moment loses sight of the fact that he himself is the subject of charity in the most basic, absolute and all-encompassing sense, so that it is not that which is his own which he gives to others but that which he has received.’ It is possible to be merciful, ‘without at the same time becoming frightful, when and to the extent that he is conscious of being himself the object of compassionate love.’⁷⁷ Rahner maintains that ‘Only he who is loved with the love of Agape can be charitable in a spirit of Agape. Only he who has attained to this attitude of humility which consists [...] in receiving his

let alone others” (IV/2, 785). God’s love for us [...] is an **electing love** that seeks us out while we are defiant enemies. God’s love for us is a **purifying love**, cleansing us from the sin that alienates us from God. God’s love us a **creative love** that transforms us from “those who cannot and will not love (for [we] are sinners)” into people “who do actually love” (776-777). Actually loving is like coming out of the dark cave in which we hoard and safeguard our unregenerate self’ (147. Emphasis added). For a discussion of Simon’s essay, see Webster 2004, 159-164.

⁷⁵ Rahner 1971a, ‘Works of Mercy,’ 269-270.

⁷⁶ For a profound and challenging treatment of this theme, see Johnson 2007.

⁷⁷ Rahner 1971a, ‘Works of Mercy,’ 270.

own self as a gift of love from God, only he who makes this humility the basic fact of his whole existence will avoid becoming proud in the exercise of his charity.⁷⁸

6.5.2 LOVING: FOR THE SAKE OF THE NEIGHBOUR

Concerning the 'use' of the neighbour for the worship of God, Rahner argues that love of God and love of neighbour are inseparably one. Any human loving that would seek to honour God:

must always be a question of real love and that it is therefore not just a matter of fulfilling a commandment which guards and defends the other against our brutal egoism; "love for God's sake" – to be precise – does not mean love of God alone in the "material" of our neighbour merely seen as an opportunity for pure love of God, but really means *the love of our neighbour himself*, a love empowered by God to attain its ultimate radicality and a love which really terminates and rests in our neighbour.⁷⁹

This insight concerning the love of the neighbour emerges from a close engagement with the text of Matthew 25 itself. When the King announces their heavenly reward for their works of mercy towards Christ, the righteous are (presumably) pleased with this verdict, and yet are clearly perplexed: 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' (25:37-39). Judging by this response, it is clear that the righteous did not know that Christ was present in 'the least of these,' nor did they originally perform the works of mercy with an explicit intention of ministering to Christ in the gesture. They simply performed the work of mercy for the sake of the neighbour in need.

For Christian readers of Matthew's Gospel, this passage creates is an interesting dilemma. Unlike the characters in the narrative, we the readers are told *in advance* of things hidden 'from the foundation of the world' (25:34). We have overheard the secret. The passage reveals the eschatological weight of seemingly mundane ethical acts. We now know about Christ's hidden presence in the poor. From the beginning, Christian exegetes have interpreted this passage not simply as a 'description' of an eschatological future yet to come, but as an urgent exhortation to action in the present: *to go forth and serve Christ in the bodies of the poor*. The frequency with which Matthew 25 is employed within the sermonic literature of the Christian tradition suggests

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Rahner 1969, 244. Cf. Gutiérrez 1988, 112-116.

that it is not only right and fitting but even necessary to bear this passage in mind when practicing charity.⁸⁰ If Christians are to perform the works of mercy in the light of this revelation, what implications does this have for genuine love of the poor as such?

6.5.3 CULTIVATING FORGETFUL ATTENTIVENESS

The passage itself demands of us a paradoxical praxis of *forgetful attentiveness*. As Rahner states, Christ is only truly served when our love is given to the neighbour in all their concrete particularity. The incarnational logic of this paradox is that the more this love is directed at this person in his or her uniqueness, the more it is received by Christ in his universality. For it is not despite the bodily presence of the neighbour that one encounters Christ, it is precisely in the physicality of their need that Christ is present in the midst.⁸¹ Linda Woodhead describes neighbourly love as a mode of attentiveness. We only truly love the neighbour when we love the neighbour in God. However, we can only ever love the neighbour when we do so for the sake of that neighbour.

‘Attention,’ she writes, ‘is an opening up of oneself to the value of the object of attention.’⁸² Thus neighbour-love as a mode of attentiveness represents ‘an active desire for the well-being of the neighbour, and for communion with him or her, *based on a recognition of the neighbour’s unique worth*.’⁸³ Loving the neighbour as an act of worship demands an intensive degree of attentiveness, so much so that by focusing one’s gaze on this particular person one effectively brackets or ‘forgets’ the hidden presence of Christ altogether. This is a difficult notion, but one that is wonderfully captured by Kevin Hughes, who warns that a non-attentive ‘love’ of the poor simply as ‘proxies for Christ would seem to erase their particular character, to blot out their face and

⁸⁰ Cf. Luz 2005, 274ff. Commenting on Luz, Frederick Bruner notes that, ‘it is not “obvious” that Christ hides himself — *and lets himself be experienced*— in little people; we must be *told* this truth, repeatedly, from the outside, by texts like this. Thus Jesus *inside this text* is the source of power, giving human beings new eyes to see and new hearts to experience Jesus in the poor. *The real presence of Jesus in the biblical text* is the source of the power that enables hearers of the text to stand before the world judge. In sum, there are more ways to experience Christ than we may have thought. There is such a thing as the Sacrament of the Neighbor (Gustavo Gutiérrez), and this sacramental real presence in the poor has socially powerful consequences for Christian faith and ethics’ (583).

⁸¹ So writes Hans Urs von Balthasar (1967): ‘Charity is not discovering Christ “behind” the brother, “representing” him in a kind of hide and seek game, still less to love Christ “in the place of” the brother, so that there would be an indistinct to and fro between the two subjects. It suffices for him to love the brother together with Christ; then he will love him with a love that ascends towards the Father, seeing, too, through the hidden and disfigured face of the brother the original of all this disfigurement – for love’ (148).

⁸² Woodhead 1992, 48. For a discussion, see Keeling 1992, 62-63. See also, Soskice 1992, 59-72.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56. For Woodhead, this recognition ‘represents a clear refusal to accept the traditional analysis’s desire to base neighbour-love on anything other than the neighbour’s irreplaceable particularity’ (58).

superimpose the face of Christ upon it. And, as such, it lends itself to the egoic possessive pursuit of the love of Christ, simply mediated through the face of the other.’ However, if

the love of the poor is self-dispossessive gift—I give unselfconsciously, not because the poor are Christ but because my *imitatio Christi* compels me to give myself freely and completely to the poor simply as they are in need—then I am loving Christ in the poor. I am Christ loving Christ, because Christ is found in the poor precisely through his kenotic self-gift, and I echo the movement of divine love in my own self-emptying. But if faith is just that—“the assurance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), then it is faith itself that creates the possibility of imagining the two as one—however imperfectly we manage to do so. If we are to do so at all, it will be done performatively, not theoretically. If so, then presence of the poor themselves will be the test of our mystical intimacy with God. If worship and divine intimacy does not live in this “breathing” relationship with mercy and charity, then it is false.⁸⁴

A great strength of Chauvet’s approach, for example, is his willingness to acknowledge the ambiguity and tensions inherent within the practices of the Christian faith. Ethics is necessary to preserve the theological and spiritual health of both Scripture and Sacrament. Removing one jeopardises the others. Focus too exclusively on ethics, and one ends up succumbing to an activism or neo-moralism. We could say the same of the practise of the works of mercy. These too are theologically ambiguous acts. They can, if practiced poorly, be condescending, paternalistic and short sighted. Theologically, they can become means of instrumentalising the poor. However, a robust and faithful practise of the works of mercy is rooted in a compassionate attentiveness to the particularity of the other. It seeks to cultivate the other’s flourishing in the context of healthy, interdependent relationships. In all this, works of mercy rightly understood are, at their depth, acts of worship. However, this is not a question of reductively loving God *through* a neighbour, but rather of humbly loving *this neighbour* ‘in’ God.

6.6 CRUCIFORM ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN ONE

If we take the promises of Christ’s presence seriously, we must talk about a brotherhood of believers and a brotherhood of the least of his brethren with Christ.⁸⁵

– Jürgen Moltmann

⁸⁴ Hughes 2009, 104-105.

⁸⁵ Moltmann 1993, 128-129.

6.6.1 DISCERNING THE BODIES OF CHRIST

A serious engagement with Matthew 25 requires a fundamental recalibration in sacramental theology. Viewed from the perspective of sacramentality, even simple, radically ordinary ethical acts can become moments of grace – windows into the deepest dimensions of creaturely existence with others and before God. Equally, viewed from the perspective of the works of mercy, the sacraments of the church also assume new layers of meaning. As Chauvet writes, ‘The liturgy is *the powerful pedagogy where we learn to consent to the presence of the absence of God, who obliges us to give him a body in the world*, thereby giving the sacraments their plenitude in the “liturgy of the neighbour” and giving the ritual memory of Jesus Christ its plenitude in our existential memory.’⁸⁶ When separated from the concrete praxis of justice and mercy, compassion and solidarity, the sacraments lose their theological coherence and risk becoming little more than vain words and empty gestures. As St Paul reminds us, ‘All who eat and drink without *discerning the body*, eat and drink judgment against themselves’ (1 Cor 11:29). What does this discernment entail?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul rebukes the church in Corinth for celebrating the Eucharist in a context of injustice, division and exclusion, as if the honour due to Christ’s *sacramental* body bore no connection to the (mis)treatment of his *ecclesial* body.

When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? (1 Cor 11:18, 21-22).⁸⁷

According to Robert Song, the Corinthians failed to understand the nature of the unity they celebrate. ‘Communion is fundamentally participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, before it is the fellowship of the Church: it is through Christ’s death that we are reconciled to God, and thence we find reconciliation with one another (cf. Eph 2:13-14).’⁸⁸ It is Christ, not the church, who hosts the eucharistic feast; Christians are constituted as members of Christ’s body by participating as guests at his banquet. For Song, the hospitality of the Eucharist calls into question

⁸⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 265.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of this passage in Chauvet (1995b), see 552-553. ‘*Bread cannot become Eucharist under just any condition.* [...] To pretend to eat the body of Christ unto life, when in fact this bread, taken from the mouths of the poor, is the bearer of death, is to condemn oneself. The theological economy of the sacramental cult is inseparable from the social economy of labor.’ See also Schüssler Fiorenza 1982, 3-12.

⁸⁸ Song 2004, 391-392.

social and economic injustices that threaten to fracture the body. It also challenges paternalistic attitudes of 'mere charity' between rich and poor,

in which "those less fortunate than ourselves" become the target of philanthropic efforts, whether these take the form of financial giving, social action, political campaigning, or whatever – activities which are liable to insinuate attitudes of self-righteousness and condescension on the part of the donor, matched by resentment should the recipient show insufficient gratitude.⁸⁹

By contrast, the Eucharist invites its participants to a communion of mutual belonging between brothers and sisters. Gathered at this table, every member of the body has roles and gifts. The plight of one part affects the whole (1 Cor 12:26). 'Set within the sacramental context of Christ as the ground of social solidarity,' concludes Song, 'this notion of charity preserve[s] the idea of love as a form of mutuality shared by all, and not just as the prerogative of the powerful.'⁹⁰

In his wonderfully provocative book, *A Banqueter's Guide to the All-Night Soup Kitchen of the Kingdom of God*, Patrick T. McCormick draws an even tighter connection between the Eucharist and the works of mercy. He describes them as two 'anamnetic' sites of encountering Christ's body:

the Eucharist is a feast of remembrance, an *anamnesis* that opens us up to the dangerous memories of a Christ who stands with, embraces, and becomes one of the poor — who takes on the mortal and frail flesh of the hungry, sick, naked, homeless, dispossessed and disappeared. In the Eucharist we are called to remember all the blessings we have received from God and all the ways in which neighbors, strangers, even enemies — indeed all other creatures — are part of this blessing. We are also called to remember all the ties and duties that bind us to others. Injustice begins with forgetting, with forgetting the faces and the cries of the poor. In the Eucharist we are called to re-member ourselves to those we have forgotten, for we cannot remember Christ and forget the poor.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 392.

⁹⁰ Ibid. Song recommends several practices that exemplify eucharistic hospitality: shared meals, fasting, almsgiving and also wider initiatives like fair trade or the Jubilee Debt Campaign. His reflections on the works of mercy are of particular relevance. He writes, 'If hospitality is central to the Church's definitive mode of being, the spontaneous generosity shown in almsgiving also needs to be reclaimed. Almsgiving has fallen into disrepute because of its association with the idea that addressing poverty is a matter of patronizing and arbitrary "charity" rather than "justice." Yet it is misunderstood if it is regarded as inadequate social service. Rather, it is fundamentally about friendship and personal encounter between rich and poor. Indeed, because it is about the call to fellowship, for Christians it comes before the setting up of social-security systems, and forms the context within which more elaborate forms of social care are to be understood' (394).

⁹¹ McCormick 2004, xi.

For McCormick, ‘discerning the body’ demands a particular mode of perception – an optics of discipleship – whereby the church attends to the mediated proximity of Christ. This equips the church to a new level of attentiveness: ‘seeing Christ present in the bread broken and shared, in the whole community formed and sustained by that sharing, and in the bodies of the sick, suffering, hungry, naked, imprisoned, and dying.’⁹² This cannot be a kind of telescopic discernment in which the suffering of others is viewed from a safe distance. Rather, this seeing demands concrete involvement in response.⁹³ ‘We know that we are the Body of Christ when we honor all the members of Christ’s body and show special care for those bodies of Christ crying out in pain and suffering. This is the sort of body we pray to be transformed into, asking that we may become for others the Body of Christ.’⁹⁴

6.6.2 UBI CHRISTUS, IBI ECCLESIA (WHERE CHRIST IS, THERE THE CHURCH IS)

Finally, in his meditations on the mediated ‘presences’ of Christ, Jürgen Moltmann attempts to explore the relationship between the church and the poor, the glorified and crucified body of Christ. He observes, ‘Up to now the ecclesiological significance of Matthew 25:31-46 has hardly been perceived.’⁹⁵ At the heart of the New Testament, Moltmann detects a parallel Christological identification: first, with the apostolic mission of the believers – ‘whoever hears you hears me’ (John 12:44); and second, with the least of Christ’s brethren – ‘whoever visits them visits me’ (Matt 25:36). He asks whether the church can ‘exist in the truth and presence of Christ if it does not link this mission and this expectation together and, acting in the presence of the exalted one, seek the fellowship of the crucified one in the poor?’⁹⁶

This is one of the driving questions at the heart of any sacramental theology of mercy. Moltmann is clear that in the Eucharist the exalted Christ is present to his church in sacramental intensity. What is more, he argues that amidst this missional sending into the world the crucified Christ confronts us in the bodily mediation of the neighbour. Thus, this double brotherhood of Christ results in a double sacramentality. If the church were to take seriously the implications of the exalted *and* crucified presence, ‘Then the church with its mission would be present where Christ

⁹² Ibid., 73-74.

⁹³ See, for example, Forrester 2005, 118.

⁹⁴ McCormick 2004, 74.

⁹⁵ Moltmann 1993, 127.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

awaits it, amid the downtrodden, the sick and the captives. The apostolate says what the church is. The least of Christ's brethren say where the church belongs.'⁹⁷

6.7 CONCLUSION

In *Symbol and Sacrament*, Chauvet argues that Christian ethics constitutes a liturgical horizon of sacramental possibility. However, just at the moment when he could have made an explicit connection between Christ's presence in the Eucharist and his presence in the least of these, Chauvet retreats to a frustratingly vague appeal to works of mercy as a sacramental 'something.' Chauvet does give us a hint as to how this theological question might be fruitfully pursued beyond his own project. Having asked the question, 'is not the brother or sister [...] a kind of "sacrament" of the Risen One?' Chauvet adds the following in a parenthetical note: 'see also *the theology of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31-46*.'⁹⁸ Chauvet does not unpack this suggestion any further; it simply lingers as a suggestive possibility that something more could (and perhaps *should*) be said about the matter.

This chapter has endeavoured to say 'something more' about the sacramentality of mercy in light of a theological exegesis of Matthew 25. On a close reading, we discover that this passage contains far more than Chauvet's language allows: that even the most trivial, ordinary gestures of compassionate care can become moments of sacramental encounter with Christ as mystery. Works of mercy so described are not exclusive sites of sacramentality within the liturgy of the neighbour, but they are unique. Unlike abstract notions currently in vogue amongst liturgical scholars (e.g. a sacrament of the neighbour or brother/sister or poor or simply the other), the works of mercy are not a set of ethical acts selected at random. On the contrary, they represent a concrete and visible *habitus* of neighbourly love, identified throughout Scripture as a particular modality of sacrificial worship 'instituted' by Christ under the sacramental sign of the washing of feet and revealed in Matthew 25 as the very sites of Christ's hidden incarnational proximity. Works of mercy are, to paraphrase Kevin Irwin, 'strong moments of God's self-disclosure.'⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 129. Reflecting on these themes in Moltmann, Nicholas Adams (2004) writes, 'It is for this reason that the church does not minister to the poor: the church *is* the poor. And for the same reasons, the church is not a church *for* the people. It is the church *of* the people. And politics, accordingly, is participation in God's life' (239-240). On the church of the poor, see Francis 2014, 21-39.

⁹⁸ Chauvet 1995b, 166 (emphasis added).

⁹⁹ Irwin 2002b, 198.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SACRAMENT: FROM SACRAMENTAL ‘SOMETHING’ TO SACRAMENTAL ENCOUNTER

You cannot claim to worship Jesus in the tabernacle if you do not pity Jesus in the slum. [...] You have your Mass, you have your altars, you have begun to get your tabernacles. Now go out into the highways and hedges, and look for Jesus in the ragged and the naked, in the oppressed and the sweated, in those who have lost hope, and in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus in them; and when you have found Him, gird yourself with His towel of fellowship and wash His feet in the person of His brethren.¹

– Bishop Frank Weston

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In his classic work, *The Nature of Doctrine*, George Lindbeck proposes that the theological doctrines which frame belief and practice within the Christian tradition are best understood not as formal propositions or expressive symbols, but rather as a semiotic system of meaning – a kind of ‘language’ or ‘theological grammar’ for the intelligibility of faith. Doctrines provide grammatical rules, paradigms and shared points of reference for the negotiation of meaning over time within the church.² Conceived in this way, the deep theological affirmations of the tradition ‘can be spoken in many different ways, while still retaining the framework of basic Christian belief and experience.’³

This thesis has sought to reconfigure the works of mercy from the perspective of a specific type of ‘theological grammar’ called sacramentality. Beginning with *Symbol and Sacrament*, Part II explored Louis-Marie Chauvet’s proposal for a paradigm shift in sacramental theology from the language of scholastic metaphysics to that of the symbolic order. Chauvet’s ambitious agenda ‘constitutes a *fundamental revision of the terms with which we approach the problem*’ of liturgy, ethics and the life of discipleship.⁴ As such, his project offers a new point of departure for the development of a sacramental ethic of mercy.

¹ Weston 1923, 34-35. For a discussion of Weston, see Chapman 2007, 199-222.

² Lindbeck 1984, 73-90. Lindbeck notes that ‘it is the *framework* and the *medium* within which Christians know and experience, rather than what they experience or think they know, that retains continuity and unity down through the centuries’ (84. Emphasis added).

³ Davies 2013, 65-66.

⁴ Chauvet 1995b, 2.

Having established the *scriptural* context of Matthew 25, this chapter returns to this question of *sacramentality*. The first section takes up the work of R. A. Lambourne as a corrective to Chauvet's extensive liturgy of the neighbour by analysing the relationship between works of mercy and the Eucharist. The second section considers the question of sacramental presence and absence, manifestation and hiddenness, in ritual gestures and ethical deeds. The third section explores Oliver Davies' theology of the ascension and sacramental materialism as a corrective to Chauvet's overemphasis on the presence-of-the-*absence* of Christ. Davies intensifies Lambourne's argument by suggesting mercy and Eucharist signify two *disruptive* modes of the ascended Christ's incarnational hiddenness within the fabric of the world. Taken together, Chauvet, Lambourne and Davies provide firm foundations for reclaiming a robust sacramental theology of mercy beyond the anaemic categories of neo-scholasticism.

7.2 R. A. LAMBOURNE AND THE SACRAMENT OF MERCY

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. [...] whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

– Matthew 10:40, 42

7.2.1 REDISCOVERING *COMMUNITY, CHURCH AND HEALING*

In an important but largely forgotten book, *Community, Church and Healing*, the Anglican physician theologian R. A. Lambourne (1917-1972) provides a rich theological reflection on the relationship between the practice of modern medicine and the caring ministries of the church.⁵ Taking up the imagery of wound and healing as root metaphors for Christian theology, his work seeks to 'explore the hypothesis, that sin and sickness are symptoms of communal disorder, are experienced by the community, and yield to therapeutic measures designed to improve the community considered as an organic whole.'⁶ Lambourne devotes his attention primarily to those concrete acts of mercy and healing practised by the Christian community as means of announcing and enacting the healing ministry of Christ.

What makes Lambourne's book so unusual (and of particular significance to the present study) is that he develops a theological interpretation of acts of mercy and healing, not primarily in terms of medical ethics or philosophical theology or moral doctrine, but rather from the perspective of

⁵ Lambourne 1963.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

sacramental theology. The local church ‘remembers’ and ‘recapitulates’ the public healing work of Christ himself

by acts of mercy and healing done to the sick and suffering in its neighbourhood, and thereby make Christ “really present” in the community. “Really present,” because we must take seriously Christ’s real humanity in his healing ministry, and also his definite assurances of his presence when mercy and healing is done in his name. Therefore, it is reasoned that within the local church’s ministry to the sick the ordinary deed of mercy and healing such as changing a wet bed, running to the chemist for medicine, injecting penicillin, or making intercessory prayer, becomes an occasion of grace – a true sacrament.⁷

Inspired by the Liturgical Movement, Lambourne attempts to articulate an idea of fundamental importance. ‘The theological question,’ writes Lambourne, ‘is whether we can accept acts of mercy and healing as true sacraments within a sacramental theology which, whilst preserving the distinction between Christ’s sacraments and a general sacramental attitude to life, does not confine those sacraments to either the two or seven.’⁸

Lambourne wrote *Community, Church and Healing* in 1963, the same year as the first English translations of Edward Schillebeeckx’s *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* and Karl Rahner’s *The Church and the Sacraments*. In an earlier essay published in *Theology* (1961), Lambourne had already identified the core components of his thesis. Later generations of sacramental theologians never picked up Lambourne’s work, perhaps owing to its medical focus. However, this does not diminish the fact that the conclusions he proposes are as radical and profound as those of his Roman Catholic contemporaries. Whereas Schillebeeckx and Rahner only gradually began to clarify the potential significance of their sacramental breakthroughs for the field of Christian ethics, Lambourne tackled these questions directly from the start. As Schillebeeckx established the theoretical foundations for a new sacramentality of Christ and church, and Rahner for a sacramentality of the world, so Lambourne provides a new theological grammar for articulating the sacramentality of the works of mercy.

These insights did not emerge from abstract theologising, but rather from Lambourne’s own experience as a Christian physician. He recounts numerous occasions during his work as a general practitioner (GP) of being dragged out of bed in the middle of the night, exhausted and with nothing but feelings of ‘resentment’ in his heart. He writes,

⁷ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁸ Lambourne 1961, 357.

it happened that on several occasions I rebuked my disinclination to give proper attention to some unattractive person and to make a thorough examination. I rebuked myself with the remembrance of Christ's word "Ye did it unto me," and then it suddenly seemed that Christ was really and literally present under my hands in the form of the sick person. I saw him and I touched him. That experience in a life troubled by frequent doubts and many failings inspired the incarnational and sacramental theology of this book.⁹

His work contains an innovative theological exploration of the works of mercy as sacramental acts of Christian discipleship. It is to these matters that we now turn.

7.2.2 THE PRIMORDIAL COMPASSION OF JESUS

For Lambourne, the church's 'sacramental' ministry of mercy and healing finds its roots in the life and praxis of Jesus Christ. At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus stood up in the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth and read out from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD. (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isa 61:1-2; 58:6)

These words revealed the nature of Jesus' messianic vocation. The dramatic acts that followed – healing, feeding, forgiving, instructing, consoling, restoring, revealing, raising life from the grave – all bore witness to the good news that Jesus proclaimed. His deeds *enacted* the proximal inbreaking of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). Lambourne argues that

those who witnessed the healing work of Jesus were not being called to observe only good deeds and moral excellence, shown in "wondrous works," but were being confronted with the claim of Jesus that he was the Messiah, and that this was the Rule of God come amongst them. These are the "signs of the times," and as such, are not merely descriptive of what "the times" are like, but are part of what is happening today, and of what will be the basis of the world tomorrow. They are "effective signs" bringing in what they announce.¹⁰

Jesus' healing works of mercy are far more than exemplary ethical gestures. They are better understood as 'acted parables' in which Jesus 'at one and the same time *proclaims* the coming of

⁹ Lambourne 1963, viii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

the Kingdom, *portrays* what the Kingdom is like, and actually *initiates* and spreads the Kingdom.¹¹ In these moments, Jesus' simple acts of compassion are transfigured into prophetic acts and effective signs of the inaugurated reign of God.¹² Adapting later sacramental terminology, we might say that Jesus' works of mercy constitute the 'primordial sacraments' of the compassion of God. Consequently, the church's praxis of healing and mercy is 'sacramental' to the extent that it participates in and 'stem[s] from one Incarnate Lord.'¹³

7.2.3 THE CUP OF COLD WATER

At the heart of the eucharistic liturgy is an enacted symbolic *anamnesis*: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22.19). To say that the meal is celebrated 'in remembrance' of Christ does not mean a mere cognitive 'recollection' – a harkening back to the dusty memories of a distant past. On the contrary, a sacrificial *anamnesis* involves the 'recapitulation' of a founding event, a 'reparticipation' in its reality in the present.¹⁴ Lambourne observes,

the remembrance of Christ in the sacraments is not only the remembrance of his passion and death, but of the whole life offered, for [...] the sacrifice of blood in Semitic thought is the sacrifice not of a death, but of a life. So then the remembrance of Christ's healing works is a sacramental act, an effective sign which establishes a union between the participants and God.¹⁵

For Lambourne, Christ's teachings concretely express the intimate connection between anamnestic communion and the works of mercy. Two images are of particular significance. The first is, unsurprisingly, Matthew 25:31-46, in which Christ reveals his radical 'co-inherence' with all who suffer. This is not a matter of metaphorical poetics, but of somatic identification and incarnational

¹¹ Ibid., 39.

¹² Ibid., 41.

¹³ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴ Ibid., 83. Cf. Chauvet 1995b, 231-234; 275-276. For a discussion, see Morrill 2000 and 2008, 137-152.

¹⁵ Ibid., 84. In support of this interpretation, Lambourne cites Max Thurian (1961b). Interestingly, Thurian not only discusses the anamnesis of the Eucharist, but also the memorial offering of compassionate care. He writes, 'In traditional spirituality the memorial-oblation had thus become a symbol of prayer and of charity, and alms, a sign of charity, were understood to be the equivalent of a liturgical sacrifice. Charity and liturgy were thus united in the same symbol and memorial. Charity, like prayer, ascends as a memorial before God, like the liturgical oblation and like the thank offering' (16). Thurian goes on to conclude that 'Eucharist and daily life are but one: the Eucharist allows life to be expressed under the form of praise, charity and sacrifice; daily life itself is brought into the Eucharist and provides it with "matter" to sanctify, to vivify and to bless for the welfare of all' (18).

presence. ‘The words here are not “it is *as if* you had done it unto me” or “it is *like* having done it to me” but “ye did it unto me.” Nothing could be more explicit and emphatic.’¹⁶

The second image – ‘similarly emphatic, if not quite so explicit’ – also derives from Matthew’s Gospel:

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward, and he who receives a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives to one of these little ones even **a cup of cold water** because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward (Matt 10:40-42).¹⁷

These passages do not describe the works of mercy practised in the name of Christ in dramatic or heroic language, but as simple cups of cold water and pieces of bread. They may not appear to be the stuff of earthquakes and miracles, but they reveal a profound mystery of faith. In ‘the very least of these,’ the paradoxical logic of incarnation is carried forward into the mundane triviality of everyday life. As Christ emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, born in human likeness in a forgotten backwater town of an imperial empire, he also humbled himself and became obedient, even to death on a tree.¹⁸ The manifestation of things hidden since the foundation of the world is that Christ continues to draw near, not in the radiance of glory, but in the *kenosis* of mercy, in the ignobility of human wretchedness, woundedness and poverty. In the words of Richard Kearney,

For too long theology and metaphysics have identified the divine with the most all-powerful of Beings. Sovereign, Self-sufficient substances. Transcendental Forms. First and Final Causes. Immutable essences. But in the process, we tended to turn our backs on the “God of little things,” the holiness of this and that. Too often we forgot the fact that God is manifest in the least ones calling for a cup of cold water, asking to be fed, clothed, cared for, heard, loved. We ignored the face of the desert stranger who comes in the middle of the night and wrestles with us until we open our eyes and see face-to-face: *Prosopon*. We stopped hearing God in “a shout in the street.”¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁷ The topical nature of Lambourne’s study led him to narrow his interpretation of these texts to acts directly associated with the healing ministry of the church (i.e. ‘I was sick and you visited me’). However, when read on their own terms it is clear that the intended scope of both of these passages is much wider. A more accurate interpretation would suggest including the full range of the works of mercy. To illustrate the point, see Chrysostom 1888, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 50.4-5.

¹⁸ Cf. Philippians 2:5-11.

¹⁹ Kearney 2006, 11. See also Kearney 2004, 236; Manolopoulos 2009, 142; Zimmermann 2009, 124.

This image of the ‘cup of cold water’ is Lambourne’s central motif for describing the sacrament of mercy. In these acts, we discover ‘effective signs’ of the compassion of God, and are invited to enter into the divine self-donation of Christ through the humble gifts we extend to one another.²⁰

Whilst the explicitness of Lambourne approach is unusual, the basic thrust of his argument has deep roots in the history of Christian thought. The provocative innovation that Lambourne brings to the table is his insistence that the works of mercy should indeed be regarded as ‘sacraments’ in the full sense of the word. In order to legitimise this claim, Lambourne sketches the parallel resonances or ‘intimated approximations’ between the Eucharist and Christ’s healing ministry. He contends that there is a deep and profound connection between the sacramental ‘institution’ of the cup of cold water and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

EUCCHARIST	ACTS OF HEALING	WORKS OF MERCY ²¹
<i>(1) The dominical command</i>		
‘Do this’	‘Heal the sick and say ...’	‘Wash one another’s feet ‘ ‘As I loved ... so love one another’ ‘Go and do likewise’
<i>(2) The remembrance of what was uniquely given</i>		
The remembrance of Christ’s whole life offered on the Cross	The remembrance of Christ’s whole life offered to the sick and suffering	The remembrance of Christ’s whole life offered in compassion to the poor and suffering
<i>(3) The real presence</i>		
‘This is my body’ ‘This is my blood’	‘Ye did it unto me’ ‘Whoever receiveth ... receiveth me’	‘Ye did it unto me’ ‘Whoever receiveth ... receiveth me’
<i>(4) The eschatological reference</i>		
The Great Supper	The healing of all nations	The judgment of all nations
<i>(5) The sacrifice</i>		
The offertory: the congregation offer themselves and their everyday lives in Christ with Christ	The sick visitor offers self in the church in Christ through sacrificial acts of service	The merciful one offers self in the church in Christ through sacrificial acts of service

²⁰ Lambourne 1963, 89.

²¹ In the first two columns Lambourne summarises the parallels between the Eucharist and acts of healing in the NT. The third column on the right demonstrates how this same analysis might fruitfully be expanded to include the works of mercy as a whole.

(6) The grace conferred to those who receive them rightly

Sanctification, though still sinners; Not just an imputation; Even now, but not yet	Healing, yet suffering remains; Not just an imputation; Even now, but not yet	Caring, yet suffering remains; Not just an imputation; Even now, but not yet
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These resonances are suggestive. They provide further evidence that naming the works of mercy as the sacraments of the liturgy of the neighbour is no arbitrary designation. There is something unique about this kind of action. In addition, they describe parallel intensities of presence. As Lambourne observes, ‘There is no question of degrees of presence according to the “spiritual” or “ecclesiastical” nature of what is done in the “name” of Jesus. He comes with “a cup of cold water” as he comes with prayer or celebration of the Holy Communion.’²² The Eucharist and the sacrament of mercy and healing are both ‘parts of one body and there can be no question of competition between them’; they either ‘thrive together or not at all.’²³

7.2.4 ‘OCCASIONS OF GRACE’: WORKS OF MERCY AS SACRAMENT

It is on this basis that Lambourne offers a more technical definition of mercy as sacramental act and doxological event:

[A]cts of mercy, the giving of “a cup of cold water only”, are **effective signs** of a union of Christ with men and women within his Whole Body, and thus the dispositive cause of the participant's salvation. In this sacrament, in traditional terms, the **sacrament alone** (*sacramentum tantum*) is the outward, visible merciful act, the **reality and the sacrament** (*res et tantum*) is Christ in his Whole Body doing the act, and the **reality alone** (*res tantum*) is the actual union effected by Christ with the participants of the act; the grace of which union can be appropriated by the participants.²⁴

The concrete, visible act of mercy – feeding the hungry, comforting the afflicted, sheltering the homeless, forgiving wrongs – represents the sacramental sign, both signifying and constituting a profound encounter with Christ and a grace-saturated participation in the love of God. It is in the eventual horizon of the act itself that the cup of cold water becomes an *effective sign*, in which the ‘sacrifice of mercy’ is caught up in the self-donation of Christ through the Spirit.²⁵

²² Lambourne 1963, 117.

²³ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁴ Lambourne 1961, 357 (emphasis added). Whilst Lambourne applies this definition to those acts of compassion specifically concerned with ministering and healing the sick, the language more appropriate describes the works of mercy as a whole.

²⁵ In his search for sacramental grammar for acts of mercy, Lambourne (1963) makes it clear that he is not asserting that *any* merciful act is a Christian sacrament. His emphasis is on those works of mercy of mercy

For Lambourne, the 'Whole Body' does not refer to the church as such, but to 'the society through which, and within which, Christ unites himself with men and women.'²⁶ These acts of kindness generate new networks of agapeic relationality at the porous intersection of church and world. As such, the sacrament of mercy constitutes what we might call a movement from *Christ* to *Christ*; that is, Christ-in-the-church to Christ-in-the-world. 'The Whole Body sets the sacraments within social limits which are wider than the Church but not exclusive of the Church.'²⁷ Within the wide horizon of the everyday, the works of mercy 'declare and make visible and present the mystical union of God in Christ with his Church and the sufferer.'²⁸ 'The Church is fed in this sacrament by the world, as the world by the Church.'²⁹

7.2.5 POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

Lambourne is one of the few contemporary theologians to think these ideas through to their full conclusion. His project opens up fascinating new trajectories into previously uncharted territory of ethical sacramentality. Innovative explorations which renegotiated the ambiguous boundaries of inherited theological discourse inevitably provoke challenging questions. For example, some traditional interpretation of the sacraments not only requires explicit priestly consecration, but also set forms and set words – all of which seem to be missing from the 'sacrament of mercy.' If works of mercy cannot satisfy the basic doctrinal categories, is it legitimate to speak of them as 'sacraments' at all? Or must such sacramental language regress to the level of suggestive poetical analogy?

PRIESTLY CONSECRATION

Prior to the liturgical renewal movements of the twentieth century, the sacraments were so closely associated with ordained ministry that it became difficult, if not scandalous, to conceive of a fully sacramental act performed in the absence of a priest. However, the sacrament of mercy is

intentionally practised by Christians 'in Christ's name.' Nor does he suggest that a sacrament of mercy should in any way replace or diminish the formal sacraments of the church. Like the Eucharist, merciful acts name specific means of grace through which the presence of the living Christ is made manifest. However, these sacramental moments should be understood as intensive and *paradigmatic* rather than exclusive or exhaustive, for Christ does not limit 'his coming to men to heal, and to save, to either Holy Communion, or to merciful and healing acts, or to any other listed situations' (80-81).

²⁶ Here Lambourne anticipates in interesting ways Rahner's description of the church as a sacrament of the world.

²⁷ Lambourne 1961, 357.

²⁸ Lambourne 1963, 89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 88. Cf. Lambourne 1961, 360.

neither clerical nor secular, but rather belongs to the priestly vocation of the entire people of God.³⁰ 'Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a *holy priesthood*, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet 2:5).³¹ As we have already demonstrated at length, the cultic language of priestly worship in the New Testament does not refer primarily to the formal, sacerdotal rituals of ordained clergy, but rather to the ethical praxis of Christian discipleship.³² Works of mercy are acts of worship. This is not a simplistic moral 'spiritualisation' of sacrifice. It is the 'sacrificialisation' of the ordinary.³³ The early church developed and radicalised this idea by suggesting that administering the sacrament of mercy, as it were, is a definitive dimension of the priesthood of all believers. St John Chrysostom, for example, writes that when an ordinary lay Christian feeds the hungry, visits the sick or gives drink to the thirsty, 'you have become a priest of Christ, giving with your own hand, not flesh but bread, not blood, but a cup of cold water.'³⁴

It would be a theological category mistake to reduce the practise of 'liturgy' to the official ministry of the clergy within the ecclesial assembly. It is the *leitourgia*, 'the whole action and work of the Body of Christ, the people of God, the local church fellowship, when it offers, in Christ, its whole life as a sacrifice to God.' Both lay and ordained share in the priesthood of Christ. The whole church's liturgical *ordo* of eucharistic gathering *and* missional sending constitutes two intertwined dimensions of a single, complex act of worship: 'a continual going out of Christians *from worship* within the church building *to continue worship* in acts of love in the local scene.'³⁵ This sacrificial offering of the church's very life is not a moral accomplishment – a meritorious gift designed to

³⁰ Lambourne 1963, 76-77. Lambourne rightly associates the sacrament of mercy with the priesthood of all believers. However, his interpretation becomes problematic when he attempts to draw an overly literal parallel between the ministry of the priest and the professional ministry of care for the sick. For Lambourne, the ministry of healing is not a common vocation of all Christians, but is a special 'representative' ministry *on behalf of* the priesthood of all believers. 'When the person is called and commissioned to do this in Holy Communion we call him a minister of religion. When the person is called and commissioned to do this to the sick we call him a Christian doctor or nurse or by a similar name' (77). By reducing its practise to the medical professional, Lambourne inadvertently replicates the very 'clericalising' temptation he seeks to avoid. This temptation can be resisted, I suggest, by shifting the focus from medicine to the works of mercy, and from a 'representative' priesthood to the priesthood of baptism.

³¹ See Tillard 2001, 22-23; Morrill 2010, 13.

³² Congar 2010, 87.

³³ Klawans 2002, 1-17.

³⁴ Chrysostom 1888, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, 45. According to Mitchell (2006), 'The point here is not that baptized laypersons and ordained ministers have "competing" priesthoods. It is a mistake to interpret the "royal priesthood" of the laity by using the sacrament of holy orders as a model.' Baptism is not an 'ordination'; neither is priesthood a metaphor for ministry. Rather, baptism is a participation in *Christ's priesthood* which empowers and equips all Christians for liturgy (248).

³⁵ Lambourne 1963, 112 (emphasis added).

provoke God's favour – but rather a responsive participation in the sheer gratuity of the Triune God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts Christians to become 'imitators of God' and to 'walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, *a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*' (Eph 5:1-2). Sanctified by the Spirit, the whole church is drawn into in 'the offering of Christ.' For it is only *through Christ* that she continually offers up her sacrifice of praise to God in the 'fruit of lips that acknowledge his name' and the sacrifice of works of mercy and hospitable sharing (Heb 13:15-16). Herein we encounter the 'paradoxical fact that the local church insofar as it is a fellowship of love, *becomes so by being what it is* in acts of love to the sick and troubled amongst them. The union of love between men and God, already the work of God, must yet be apprehended, accepted, received, by acts of faith-love in which men and women risk themselves by sacrificing themselves, deliberately identifying themselves with the predicaments of others.'³⁶ In receiving-by-giving, the priesthood of all believers offers as its return-gift of thanks and praise nothing less than its living faith activated, energised and working through love (Gal 5:6).

SET FORMS AND SET WORDS

What of the objection that genuine sacraments require 'set forms' and 'set words'? Ethical acts of mercy and healing, performed within the ever-changing milieu of everyday life, are necessarily diverse in their character. Even the fourteen corporal and spiritual works of mercy represent a shorthand description of a complex cluster of compassionate practices which will inevitably assume different forms, depending on the context. However, this diversity of expression need not 'disqualify' them as a sacramental ethic.

To begin with, Christ's own merciful and healing acts (what I have referred to as the primordial sacraments of the compassion of God) were similarly diverse and yet reflected 'one consistent human activity, namely, his self-sacrificing compassion for others.'³⁷ Furthermore, not all formal sacraments of the church have a clearly defined form. In marriage, for example, the wedding service ritually consecrates the couple as husband and wife. However, the rite does not contain the full sacrament of marriage, which necessarily includes the lived reality of the physical, emotional and spiritual bond of love between the married couple. The wedding rite is a 'sacramental memorial' of the love between Christ and his church. As Lambourne points out, this

³⁶ Ibid., 118-119 (emphasis added).

³⁷ Ibid., 77.

love is 'translated into diverse actions and so is the love for husband and wife. There is then no unanswerable objection over the matter of "form."'”³⁸

Regarding set words, the New Testament does contain clear dominical texts which could easily lend themselves to this purpose.³⁹ Lambourne goes so far as to propose a formal liturgical script: *We give and receive this cup of cold water in remembrance of Christ's promises, that he by faith may be present in us, and we in him.*⁴⁰ Of course, Lambourne readily acknowledges that it would be both practically and pastorally impossible to pronounce such words with each act of mercy. Likewise, it is worth bearing in mind that in his earthly ministry Jesus also did not always 'interpret with words the effective signs at the moment of their accomplishment.' More often than not, the act of healing or forgiveness itself would enact and proclaim 'the nature of the reality in which the witnesses have participated.'⁴¹ Both the action and the words of the sacrament of mercy are explicitly given in the New Testament 'as clearly as for Baptism and the Eucharist.' Just as 'the Gospels do not suggest that Christ's merciful works and his proclamation of what he is doing proceeded in strict alternation,' neither must the sacrament of mercy coincide with their dominical words.⁴²

At the conclusion of most Anglican liturgies, the priest commissions the gathered congregation to its mission in the world, saying: 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.' In effect, these words send the church from the table of the Lord's presence to seek him in the midst of the world. Where else does one attend to Christ more definitively than in humble service to the neighbour? Lambourne concludes, 'the impossibility of invariably pronouncing set words at the time of the

³⁸ Ibid., 78.

³⁹ Lambourne proposes the follow texts: 'The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you'; 'Ye did it unto me'; or 'Receiveth me.' To these we could also add: 'Wash one another's feet' (John 13:14) 'As I have loved you, so love one another' (John 13:34); or 'Go and do likewise' (Luke 10:37).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid. 'Thus the impossibility of invariably pronouncing set words at the time of the giving of the cup of cold water, does not necessarily disqualify it from being accepted as a sacrament, for the public pronouncements of the Church and of the doers of the acts of mercy, that these same acts are works of Christ, supplies the necessary form' (78-79). In his exegesis of Deut 26, Chauvet identifies in the liturgy of the Jewish rite of the first fruits offering a clear depiction of the relationship between Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics (1995b, 234-239). In this passage, the 'dominical words' which consecrate this gift for ethical distribution are announced and performed in the liturgical rite. The fulfilment of the ritual occurs later in the liturgy of the neighbour when the 'first fruits of the land' are actually distributed to the Levites (the dispossessed within Israel) and the aliens (the dispossessed outside Israel). This gives some insight into how we might conceptualise the sequential delay between the so-called dominical words of the sacrament of mercy announced at various places in the liturgy of the church and their material consummation in the practical enactment of the works of mercy in the midst of everyday life.

giving of the cup of cold water, does not necessarily disqualify it from being accepted as a sacrament, for the public pronouncements of the Church and of the doers of the acts of mercy, that these same acts are works of Christ, supplies the necessary form.⁴³

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENTS?

What Lambourne offers in response to these challenges is instructive and helpful. Yet, his interpretation requires careful consideration. Lambourne is a creative thinker who sought to reimagine the rigid legal categories of scholastic sacramentology. Despite having written prior to many of the seminal breakthroughs of twentieth-century theology, Lambourne nonetheless anticipates many of these developments in his efforts to rediscover genuine sites of sacramentality beyond the walls of the church. For all its creative energy, however, Lambourne's project remains constrained by the same sacramental categories he seeks to renegotiate. Unlike Edward Schillebeeckx and Karl Rahner, whose works propose a radical re-conception of the nature of sacramentality itself, Lambourne sought to work within the given categories of sacramental tradition. His approach consists primarily in trying to identify what we might call the 'dynamic equivalents' between the formal sacraments of the church and the works of mercy. This methodology is not without its merits. As we have seen, there are indeed many deep and profound resonances between these ritual sacraments (and especially the Eucharist) and acts of compassion. The problem with 'translating' the ritual sacramentality of the church into the ethical sacramentality of the neighbour, however, is that it risks reducing both modes of sacramental practise to the same plane of meaning.⁴⁴ Whilst affirming that mercy and Eucharist represent separate sites of sacramental intensity and distinct moments of encounter with the same risen Christ, lingering ambiguities in Lambourne's work tend to obfuscate the proper relationship between 'ritual memory' and 'existential memory' and thus risk undermining the mutual theological intelligibility of both sacraments.

By seeking to 'apply' such technical ritual terminology to acts of healing and mercy, Lambourne risks conflating the liturgy of the church with the liturgy of the neighbour. That said, reclaiming diverse sacramental actions beyond the formal rites of the church does call into question the tendency to simply revert to a single mode and structure. Such reductionism implies judging the sacramental legitimacy of mercy almost exclusively in light of the juridical (scholastic) definitions of the seven sacraments. Fears that a sacrament of mercy could somehow diminish or even

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

⁴⁴ Vanhoozer 2005, 320.

replace the Eucharist, for example, betray a narrow theological imagination in which there can only be one modality of sacramental action, itself predicated on a competitive reduction of divine grace.⁴⁵

If there is one thing that we have learned from Chauvet, it is this: whilst the liturgies of church and neighbour are fundamentally inseparable and intrinsically bound up with one another, they are nonetheless distinct in terms of their *function* within the symbolic order of Christian identity, their *orientation* and their *horizon* of action. The liturgy of the church is constituted by formal and regular ritual gestures performed within the doxological milieu of the ecclesial assembly. By contrast, the liturgy of the neighbour concerns informal, improvised ethical acts embodied in the ordinary setting of everyday life. In the liturgy of the church, Christians celebrate the grace of God's redemption and the gift of their identity in Christ in the mode of symbolic *reception*. In the liturgy of the neighbour, Christians respond and 'verify' this received identity in the mode of an ethical *return-gift* of thanksgiving.

Because these two liturgies function at different registers of the Christian life, the corresponding moments of sacramental intensity at their core should be understood as related but not necessarily univocal. Despite the limits of the sacramental categories available at the time, Lambourne largely succeeds in overcoming this reductive temptation. He argues instead for a critical application of traditional language of sacramental theology that reflects the fact that 'we are dealing with two closely related sacraments, ultimately inseparable because they stem from one Incarnate Lord. Yet they are two separate sacraments, necessarily done in different ways and times and places, by the same necessity which distinguished a healing miracle in Galilee from the crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem; a glorious necessity, because it exhibited the fullness of the work of God in Christ.'⁴⁶ The pressing question for our inquiry, therefore, is not whether the Eucharist and the works of mercy are sacraments *in precisely the same way*, but rather the extent to which they constitute equivalent sites of sacramental encounter with the same Christ in their respective horizons of human life. In the liturgy of the church, Christians encounter in bread and wine the mediated presence of the risen and exalted Christ. In the liturgy of the neighbour, the church encounters Christ crucified in the needy, the confused, the oppressed and the poor.⁴⁷ 'The

⁴⁵ See Lambourne 1963, 80.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁷ See Forrester 2005, 118.

communion with God in the hand that touches the leper,' writes Lambourne, 'is at one with the communion of God in the hand that breaks bread in the Upper Room.'⁴⁸

7.2.6 WORSHIP IN THE EVERYDAY

This leads us to a final objection. When all is said and done, does this 'sacrament of mercy' simply restate what Christians universally recognise: namely, that the church must go out from its liturgical services and involve itself in the world?⁴⁹ We encountered this same difficulty with the extensive spread-out-ness of Chauvet's liturgy of the neighbour. As we observed, Chauvet's fairly thin account of ethical praxis and his underdeveloped notion of 'verification' threatened to collapse the liturgy of the church to 'motivation' and the liturgy of the neighbour to 'application.' This is precisely why Lambourne's argument is so important. By integrating Lambourne and Chauvet together, it becomes clear that within the liturgy of the neighbour itself, 'there is a much wider extension in space and time of the Real Presence than we usually visualize.'⁵⁰ The whole work of the church (*leitourgia*) becomes an embodied way of being in the world – an incarnational modality of *being-with-others* and *being-before-God*. This *leitourgia* is itself constituted by profound events of compassionate care – strong moments of God's self-disclosure. As Lambourne writes,

the Eucharist is not just given to the Church, so that the Church may be strengthened by it to do good works and benefit the world. Rather the world, in the Whole Body, receives *in the merciful act of Christians* the body and blood, and experiences a union with Christ. [...] We may then see the permanent character imposed as the ineradicable experience of the Real Presence of Christ, a face to face meeting effected by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of mercy, the Eucharist, or other sacrament; which together with the personal response completes an event which leaves the person and, through him, the Whole Body permanently changed. Thus the work done extends indefinitely, and every man meets Christ to blessing and judgment.⁵¹

What Lambourne offers is significant for several reasons. Like Chauvet, he affirms that the church is always already a sacramental reality. Whilst he does not speak about a symbolic order of Christian identity as such, he does maintain that Christians become the body of Christ in and through the sacraments. In addition, he maintains that formal ritual liturgies do not exhaust the

⁴⁸ Lambourne 1963, 75.

⁴⁹ Lambourne 1961, 360.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 361 (emphasis added).

sacramentality of the church, for her vocation as a worshipping community extends far beyond the walls of the gathered assembly into the difficult and messy reality of ordinary human living. Whereas Chauvet only gestures towards the amorphous possibility that the works of mercy might have ‘something sacramental’ about them, Lambourne tackles head on the question of what exactly this ‘something’ might entail.

What Lambourne has written is an incredible achievement, far ahead of its time. As with any innovative breakthrough in Christian theology, the first word is rarely the last. I contend that the central thrust of Lambourne’s sacramental theology is not only correct, but essential for understanding the works of mercy at their theological depth.

7.3 MEETING CHRIST IN THE LITURGY OF THE NEIGHBOUR

The corporality constitutive of human beings is the place of God.⁵²
– Louis-Marie Chauvet

At the very moment when we turn our attention from mediation to look towards God’s real presence itself, with the shedding of the mediation God himself also vanishes into nothing.⁵³
– Edward Schillebeeckx

Lambourne’s ‘sacrament of mercy’ makes a significant contribution to Chauvet’s vision of the liturgy of the neighbour. He articulates much of what Chauvet leaves unsaid, sounding the depths of ethical sacramentality. And yet for all its profundity, Lambourne’s project remains dependent upon the scholastic sacramental ‘grammar’ of his time – a fairly inflexible grammar of sign, instrument and cause. In order to integrate fully Lambourne’s ‘sacrament of mercy’ and Chauvet’s ‘liturgy of the neighbour’ into a coherent theological position, it is necessary to recalibrate Lambourne’s most important insights in light of recent developments in contemporary sacramental theology.

7.3.1 GRACE

Central to the ‘theological grammar’ of sacramentality is the language of grace, presence and encounter. Both Lambourne and Chauvet share the conviction that sacramental acts are ‘occasions of grace.’⁵⁴ For Lambourne, the concept of sacrament involves the ‘instituting of a saving relationship with men and God through Christ.’ ‘For faith,’ he argues, ‘is not an assent to a

⁵² Chauvet 1995b, 531.

⁵³ Schillebeeckx 1977, 816.

⁵⁴ Lambourne 1963, vii; Chauvet 1995b, 443.

proposition, nor a withdrawal of reason, but a committal of the reasonable self to a relationship with God through Christ, so that the healing works of Christ are effective signs, instituted by him, offering a particular form of union with him which gives grace to those who receive it rightly.⁵⁵

For Chauvet, sacramental acts are symbolic participations in the gracious and gratuitous initiative of God's self-communication. Sacraments are relational 'events of grace' in which one receives from God not a 'something,' but one's very self-identity as son or daughter.⁵⁶ The grace of God is a mystery '*irreducible* to any explanations.' Its most salient biblical image is that of *manna* in the wilderness. Like *manna*, 'grace is of an entirely different order from that of value or empirical verifiability. Its very name is a question: *Man hu?* Its name is "What is this?" Its consistency seems to be that of a "something" which has all the traits of "nothing": something "as fine as frost on the ground" which melts in the sun.' Contrary to all logic of acquisition and value, 'those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage.' Those who disobeyed the Lord's command by attempting to hoard *manna* for the future 'saw that "it bred worms and became foul" (Ex 16:9-21).'⁵⁷ Similarly, grace comes as a question. No one can earn, measure, hoard or contain it. Grace is not, strictly speaking, an object at all. Grace names a *relation* – a gift of God's self and of the self in God through a symbolic mediation of inexhaustible meaning.

From this perspective, Chauvet would question Lambourne's description of sacraments as effective signs that 'give grace.' Irrespective of the meaning afforded to the word, Chauvet contends that it is a category mistake to say that 'God (subject) gives grace (object).' To a certain extent, such linguistic assemblages are unavoidable. 'But even though one cannot do without grammar,' he writes, 'one can learn to be distrustful of the constructions it puts together.'⁵⁸ If grace is not a 'thing' one can possess, then neither are sacraments instrumental causes which channel grace into the life of the believer. To speak of grace as a question is to affirm its nature as a non-thing, a non-value, a self-giving.⁵⁹

How might this account of grace resonate with Lambourne's claim that works of mercy are occasions of grace? In Matthew 25, the logic of a grace beyond value is displayed in the king's

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83; Lambourne 1961, 361.

⁵⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 443.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁸ Chauvet 2001, 88.

⁵⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 45.

generosity of an inheritance prepared 'from the foundation of the world' for those whose lives are marked, not by impressive accolades, but by insignificant deeds of loving kindness. The eschatological force of the text discloses the eternal significance of the ethically mundane. Ordinary practices become offerings made in the hidden presence of the exalted Christ in response to the suffering need of the least of Christ's brethren. Seen in this light, acts of mercy are indeed salvific participations in God's eschatological economy of grace. Through caritative acts of ethical dispossession, the righteous enter into the blessing of the Father and receive their inheritance as sons and daughters.

When one locates works of mercy within Chauvet's liturgy of the neighbour, it becomes easier to discern their nature as a return-gift of thanksgiving, en-graced responses to the prevenient gift of God. Yet 'the gratitude we offer to God is not absorbed by God, but rather breaks against the rock of the divine self-sufficiency, redounding to our benefit,' in the words of Robert Barron. 'It is precisely because God has no need of our praise that our act of gratitude is a gift and not a poison; it is precisely because God's plenitude cannot be increased that our prayer intensifies rather than compromises our participation in the loop of grace.'⁶⁰

7.3.2 ENCOUNTER

In language resonant with Pope Paul VI's *Mysterium Fidei*, Lambourne describes acts of mercy and healing as 'a sacrament of the *real presence* of Christ.'⁶¹ Not only does this language provoke a close association between works of mercy and the Eucharist, but it emphasises Christ's (literal yet ineffable) veiled presence in gifts of food and drink, shelter and hospitality. Although Lambourne does not have access to Schillebeeckx's theology of sacramental encounter, he nonetheless gets close to this idea when he describes the 'mode' of Christ's presence 'in the suffering-mercy-healing situation where he is present as reconciler of man with man and man with God. He is present in each and all of these situations by his Incarnation, for he was made not only man, but also he was made Man.'⁶² The sacrament of mercy represents, for Lambourne, 'a particular form of union [...] a saving relationship with men and God in Christ.'⁶³

⁶⁰ Barron 2007, 234.

⁶¹ Lambourne 1963, 81 (emphasis added).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 83.

In *Christ the Sacrament*, Schillebeeckx proposes that 'At the heart of all ecclesial sacramentality is obviously the encounter itself with God in and through the sacramental encounter with Christ in his Church: sacramental grace.'⁶⁴ Here, sacramental grace is nothing less than a dynamic, personal meeting with Christ as mystery. If we are to follow Lambourne's claim that Christ is, indeed, present in works of mercy, what is the relationship between Christ's presence in bread and wine and in the suffering bodies of the poor and the oppressed? What might it mean to speak of mercy as a site of a sacramental encounter with the Risen One within the liturgy of the neighbour?

Whilst Lambourne is largely silent about the nature of divine encounter in acts of mercy, he does describe these practices as an 'ineradicable experience of the Real Presence of Christ, a *face to face meeting*, effected by the Holy Spirit.'⁶⁵ Admittedly, in his early work Schillebeeckx does not go nearly as far as Lambourne with regard to the sacramentality of mercy. Yet he does make a similar point about the nature of sacramental encounter itself. Opting for a more subjectivist interpretation, Schillebeeckx proposes: 'To encounter Christ is [...] to encounter God. Sacramental grace is this personal communion with God. *It is an immediate encounter with him, not an indirect meeting through creation.*'⁶⁶ Whilst there is much to affirm in both Lambourne and Schillebeeckx, this notion of sacraments as *immediate* or 'face to face' encounters is not without its limitations.

7.3.3 MEDIATION

As we have seen, Chauvet strongly opposes such appeals to unencumbered immediacy. If there is one lesson to learn from the symbolic sacramentality of Christian existence, it is that there is no authentic and mature faith outside mediation. The risen Christ constitutes the church in the Holy Spirit *through* the incarnational materiality of words, gestures, texts and symbols, and in the physicality of water, bread, wine and human bodies. To live sacramentally is to resist this temptation for an immediacy beyond mediation. Chauvet writes, 'the faith requires a *renunciation of a direct line*, one could say a gnostic line to Jesus Christ. It is impossible to truly recognize the Lord Jesus as living without giving up this illusory quest [...] which irresistibly leads us to desire to see, touch, find, that is, finally to prove, Jesus.'⁶⁷ On the morning of the resurrection, the women and the disciples rushed to the tomb. What did they expect to find if not the corpse of Jesus marred by the wounds of his death? They were looking for something they could handle, touch,

⁶⁴ Schillebeeckx 1963, 179.

⁶⁵ Lambourne 1961, 361.

⁶⁶ Schillebeeckx 1963, 180 (emphasis added).

⁶⁷ Chauvet 1995b, 172-173.

verify and understand. What they encountered that morning, however, was not a dead body at all, but the terrifying glory of an empty tomb. The gospel narrative teaches us that the path to mature faith in the risen and living Christ – an Easter faith – requires letting go of this ‘necrotic’ desire to objectify Jesus.⁶⁸

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, all Christians must learn that ‘Faith begins precisely with such a *renunciation of the immediacy* of the see/know and with the assent to the mediation of the church.’⁶⁹ Faith must consent to the fact that the risen and ascended Christ is present to the church through the symbolic mediation of the Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics.

In this time of the Church, the Lord is no longer visible. Luke insists on this point: resurrected, Jesus is the “Living One” – a divine title – he lives in God, as the account of the ascension clearly emphasizes. However, the *Absent One* is present in his “sacrament” which is the Church: the Church rereading the Scriptures with him in mind, the Church repeating his gestures in memory of him, the Church living the sharing between brothers and sisters in his name. *It is in these forms of witness by the Church that Jesus takes on a body and allows himself to be encountered.*⁷⁰

7.3.4 DISTANCE: PRESENCE-IN-ABSENCE

The liturgy of the church repeatedly announces ‘Christ is here’ and that ‘his Spirit is with us.’ Chauvet affirms that Christ is indeed ‘here’ in the *assembly gathered*, in the *Scriptures* proclaimed as his Word, in the *Eucharist* in memory of him. However, viewed from the perspective of symbolic mediation, the coming-into-presence of Christ in the sacramental event is simultaneously the advent of Christ’s presence-in-*absence*. ‘He is here, not like a “thing,” but in the gift of his life and his coming-into-presence. The *ad-esse* [*being-for, being-present-at-hand*] of a presence is of a different order from the simple *esse* [*being*] of a mere thing.’⁷¹ The duality of procession and recession is seen in the self-revelation of God’s glory ‘crossed out’ in the face of the Crucified, and recapitulated in each liturgical event. The materiality of sacramental rituals

⁶⁸ Chauvet 2001, 40. ‘Focused on this imaginary “point of fixation,” Christians manipulate God, Christ, or the gospel, assign to it its fixed place, reduce it to their ideologies, codes of analysis, and convictions. Christians make of the gospel the mirror of their own desires (especially “spiritual” ones). They convert the gospel instead of allowing it to convert them. Thus God becomes an “idol”; thus they change Christ back into a corpse instead of letting him be “the living.” These are as many ways of getting a hold on Christ.’

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁰ Chauvet 1995b, 163 (emphasis added).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 407.

establishes a critical distance in which the believers learn to discern between the call of Christ and the trappings of their own desire for certitude or control.⁷²

The incarnational logic of mediation is significant for understanding any sacramental presence, whether in the liturgy of the church or in the liturgy of the neighbour. First, by insisting on the mediated encounter with Christ in Scripture, Sacrament and acts of compassion, Chauvet seeks to move beyond the 'magical' tendencies of objective presence and the arbitrary relativism of subjective encounter.⁷³

Second, because the exalted and ascended Christ is no longer immediately present in the visibility of his historical body, his continued presence is mediated to us by the Holy Spirit in the sacramental act itself. 'The "here" of the Eucharistic presence, in its signifying, empirical materiality, refers us to the "here" of the faith, duly instituted and duly inscribed *somewhere*. It refers us back to the body – that is, to the historical, social, economic, and cultural determinations, even to the most individual determinations of our desire – as the place where the truth of our faith will come about.'⁷⁴ Expanding Chauvet's language, we could say that in an act of mercy the presence of Christ is also 'here' but not in an 'immediate' manner. This hidden presence is *inscribed* in material bodies, in suffering, distress, anxiety and need. The act of generosity itself becomes an 'open space' of God's proximity.

Third, the language of mediation names the 'where' of Christ's presence, but it does so in a manner that seeks to preserve the ungraspable mystery of God's otherness: 'It is by holding us in this "mature proximity to absence" that we receive the word of God as a call and learn to become believers.'⁷⁵ In the context of the works of mercy, we can say that Christ's presence-in-absence is also the condition for the possibility of a genuinely caritative encounter with the neighbour. For a gesture of care to truly become a work of mercy (i.e. authentic compassion, true *caritas*), it must be practised with an attentive regard for the neighbour. The depth of Christ's identification with the 'least of these' is such that it is only by attending to the other at the depth of their particularity (in the absence of Christ's presence, as it were) that the act becomes sacramentally transformative. In other words, this focus on presence-in-absence of Christ can actually preserve

⁷² For a discussion of the metaphysics of presence and absence in Chauvet, see Mitchell 2005a, 130-151.

⁷³ Chauvet discusses at length the presence-of-the-absence of Christ in Scripture and Sacrament, but leaves the question of ethical acts undeveloped. See Osborne 1999, 164; Bordeyne 2008, 119-136.

⁷⁴ Chauvet 1995b, 405.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

the otherness of the *neighbour* as the primary object of compassionate regard. In the words of von Balthasar, 'The Christian encounters Christ *in* the neighbour, not beyond him or above him; and only in this way does the encounter correspond to the incarnate and suffering love of the one who calls himself "Son of God" without the article (John 5:27), and who is the nearest to us in all those who are near.'⁷⁶ It signifies, as Levinas would say, the trace of the divine in the face of the other.⁷⁷

Fourth, Christ's presence as *absence* creates a tensive space at the heart of sacramental encounter within which the believing subject learns to take his or her stand as a son or daughter in grace. For Chauvet, the paradigmatic symbol of Christ's eucharistic presence is not in the loaf of bread itself – 'a *closed*, dense reality, without a break'⁷⁸ – but at the moment of the fracture when the bread is broken and distributed. In this symbolic gesture, the bread is revealed in its essence as food, as meal, as 'bread-for-sharing' but also *theologically* as the cruciform tearing of Christ's flesh on the cross: 'The breaking of bread, inasmuch as it is a sharing between members and for their unity of one body broken for all, sacramentally manifests the indissoluble bond with Christ and with others which it joins sym-bolically [*sic*].'⁷⁹

Of the Eucharist, Augustine famously writes, 'Be what you see and receive what you are.'⁸⁰ According to Chauvet, Augustine's symbolic language 'demands that Christians give Christ, through their ethical practise, this body of humanity implied by their reception of his Eucharistic body.'⁸¹ The eucharistic altar and the altar of the neighbour are intrinsically bound up with one another: 'It is indeed the risen *Christ* himself who is received in Communion; but he is received for what he *is*, that is, *gift* from God's very self, only when he is joined to his *ecclesial* body.'⁸² In a provocative reflection on this line from Augustine, Margaret McKenna muses that

⁷⁶ Balthasar 2004, 114.

⁷⁷ See Levinas 1998a, 49-50. Rowan Williams (2000) offers a slightly different angle: 'Recognizing the other as other without the immediate impulse to make them the same involves recognizing the incompleteness of the world I think I can manage and moving into the world which I may not be able to manage so well, but which has more depth of reality. And that must be to move closer to God' (62).

⁷⁸ Chauvet 1995b, 406.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 407.

⁸⁰ Augustine 1993, *Sermon* 272.

⁸¹ Chauvet 1995b, 407.

⁸² *Ibid.*

We are the leftovers of God's feasting. We are a meal shared, bread blessed and broken, wine drunk together, passed around. We become what we eat, and others feed on us, just as we feed on God. Liturgy is a celebration of resurrection, of the presence of the risen Lord, and a hint of God's coming in glory again. It is service, another way of washing feet, of bending before one another, of committing ourselves to the practice of the corporal works of mercy, of suffering with and for one another. It is memory — "Do this." Like the woman in the gospel, we too will be remembered for what we do for the poor, for those facing suffering and death, for God. It is thanksgiving. Eucharist means gratitude poured out, given away, yet it always returned to us, a lifestyle of bending before God and one another because of the incarnation and all that God does for us. It makes the story come true. It is the telling of the truth that constitutes who we are and our relationships in the Trinity and in community; it reconstitutes us in forgiveness and mercy.⁸³

Practicing the works of mercy as a *habitus* of responsive generosity is both an imitation of and a participation in Christ. Living mercifully, one becomes like the Merciful One; embodying compassion in thanksgiving, one becomes a eucharistic gift for others.

7.3.5 PROXIMITY: MEDIATED IMMEDIACY

Whilst Chauvet is certainly right to call into question the *immediacy* of Christ's presence in sacramental acts, his own emphasis on absence, distance, openness and void raises questions of its own. Graham Ward argues, for example, that despite his attempt to shift the conversation from metaphysics to the symbolic, Chauvet remains tied to a 'metaphysics of presence (and absence)' that undermines his ability to identify the polyvalent complexity of sacramental encounter. By appealing to metaphysics *or* its crossing, writes Ward, 'we are framing theological accounts of what it is to be something, what it is to understand creation as governed by Christ and sustained by the Godhead, by metaphysical accounts which have reified and commodified presence and the present.' Although Chauvet's project explicitly aims to outflank the necrotic temptation of immediacy, the philosophical paradigms he employs have themselves 'perpetuated various atomisms (ontological, material, social) that open up nihilistic spaces, and function within various dualistic matrices which are ultimately gnostic.'⁸⁴ By contrast, Ward argues that sacramental activity, especially the Eucharist, 'is implicated in various modes of figuration (of the past and of the future); its understanding of presence is always manifold and excessive to the present and sanctifies the various representations it is necessarily involved in because they are also, simultaneously, various embodiments.' A strong account of sacramental

⁸³ McKenna 2003, 262.

⁸⁴ Ward 2000, 169-170.

presence, understood on its own terms, demands the renunciation of 'reification, fetishisation, dualisms, atomisms and absences (the lacks, the deferments, the mournings and the arbitrary violences) which characterise modernity's (and postmodernity's) preoccupation with seizing the present as such.'⁸⁵ If the sacramental presence of Christ is neither a simple immediacy nor a complex absence, how then should we speak about it?

In his later work, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, Schillebeeckx declares that 'Christianity without God is the end of all Christianity. True, one can never avoid mediation, but *in* this mediation God himself really comes near to us in salvation. Here the initiative is utterly his.'⁸⁶ In this text, Schillebeeckx amends his earlier account of presence and offers a fruitful way beyond the impasse. Whereas Chauvet emphasises presence-in-absence, Schillebeeckx prefers to speak of Christ as *present* to the church in mediation. Mediation matters, but what matters more is that through the mediation of corporeal materiality, Christ comes-into-presence within the horizon of human history.⁸⁷ 'It is not that we could now do without this mediation, but in the mediation the accent now lies on the God who is immediately near in it, since this is a *divine* absolute nearness.'⁸⁸ Schillebeeckx describes this sacramental nearness as '*mediated immediacy*.'⁸⁹ What does this seemingly paradoxical notion involve?

Schillebeeckx concedes that believers have no direct, unmediated relationship with God. From a human perspective, there is no escaping our material embodiment. All human knowing takes place through language, with bodies, among others, in shared worlds of culture and meaning: 'Between God and our awareness of God looms the insuperable barrier of the historical, human

⁸⁵ For Ward (2000), Eucharistic presence is polyvalent and multidimensional, transcending simple binaries of presence and absence. It involves the *present* (temporality) *presence* (proximity) of God's *present* (gift). 'For the eucharist participates in a temporal plenitude that gathers up and rehearses the past, while drawing upon the futural expectations and significations of the act in the present. In the same way as the Last Supper is both an enactment of the Passover Meal and rehearsal for the sacrifice on Calvary; so the eucharist is both an enactment of the Last Supper (and therefore a figuring of the Passover), a participation in the atoning sacrifice of Calvary, and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet at the eschatological wedding' (171).

⁸⁶ Schillebeeckx 1977, 814.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 810-811. 'The experience of creation, a historically variable experience of fortuitousness and contingency, seems to me to be the permanent breeding ground for any experience of the saving nearness of God, and also for example the special experience that is to be found in Jesus and in the liturgy. Liturgy *presupposes* this fundamental symbolic experience and intensifies it. [...] We cannot suddenly experience God in the church's liturgy if we can no longer see him anywhere outside the church.'

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 815.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 809.

and natural world of creation, the constitutive symbol of the real presence of God for us.⁹⁰ Viewed from God's perspective, however, it is clear that God has an unmediated relationship with humanity. 'What we have here,' argues Schillebeeckx, 'is not an inter-subjective relationship between two persons – two mortal men – but a mutual relationship between a finite person and his absolute origin, the infinite God. And that has an effect on our relationship to God. In other words, we are confronted with a unique instance, an instance in which the immediacy does not do away with the mediation but in fact constitutes it.'⁹¹

Schillebeeckx's 'mediated immediacy' enables us to re-conceptualise the relationship between grace, presence and encounter in sacramental action. Chauvet's fixation on mediation leads him to valorise artificially any notions of absence, which in turn compromises a strong sacramental interpretation of Matthew 25. By contrast, Schillebeeckx's approach affirms the absolute freedom of God's initiative and remains expectant, open to the proximity of Christ – Immanuel (*God with us*). For God in Christ 'makes himself directly and creatively present in the medium, that is, *in ourselves, our neighbors, the world and history*. This is the deepest immediacy that I know.'⁹² This idea that the mediation *produces* immediacy is significant for our earlier discussion of the love of God and neighbour in the merciful act. It is not that Christ's immediacy overwhelms the neighbour, but rather one's relationship with *this* neighbour becomes a meeting place of the deepest kind of immediacy, that is, 'the absolute or divine manner of the real presence of God.'⁹³

In order to understand the full implications of this theological debate over the nature of sacramental presence for Chauvet's liturgy of the neighbour and Lambourne's sacrament of mercy, it is necessary to return to the question of the relationship between the real presence – the 'mediated immediacy' – of Christ in the Eucharist *and* in caritative acts of ethical dispossession.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., (emphasis added).

⁹³ Ibid.

7.4 THE DISRUPTIVE PRESENCE OF THE ASCENDED CHRIST

Here at the extreme of human truth, we encounter Jesus Christ – the Compassion of God – as the one who goes before and who is already present to us, if unfathomably, in the compassionate act.⁹⁴

– Oliver Davies

7.4.1 OLIVER DAVIES AND TRANSFORMATION THEOLOGY

Whilst the basic connection between the Eucharist and acts of mercy has deep roots in Christian tradition (and within Roman Catholicism in particular), insufficient theological attention has been given to the complex dynamics of presence and absence, proximity and difference that determine the theological intelligibility of sacramental encounter itself. It is one thing to affirm, as a matter of faith, the reality of Christ's presence in bread and wine and in the distressing guise of the poor. However, articulating the nature of this presence, let alone the subtle distinctions between the ritual sacramentality of the liturgy of the church and the ethical sacramentality of the liturgy of the neighbour, continues to demand fresh theological reflection.

For over a decade, Oliver Davies has attempted to recover a 'transformational theology' of the disruptive presence of the risen and ascended Christ within human history. In a cluster of recent publications,⁹⁵ Davies offers an innovative theological analysis of sacramental encounter – in bread and wine but also 'in the "crowded spaces" of the power and powerlessness in our world.'⁹⁶ His work represents a serious theological engagement with the sacramentality of the works of mercy.

With Chauvet, Davies affirms that the risen Christ continues to draw near to his church incarnationally, through the concrete materiality of sacramental mediation.⁹⁷ With Schillebeeckx, he also maintains that incarnational mediation signals 'a divine *presence in hiddenness*, rather

⁹⁴ Davies 2001, 23.

⁹⁵ See Davies 2000, 112-125; 2001; 2004; 2007, 195-214; 2009, 75-93; 2010a, 161-179; 2010b, 183-193; 2013; 2014, 159-176; Davies, Janz & Sedmak 2007.

⁹⁶ Davies 2013, 59.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 61. 'In the sacramental order of Catholic tradition, the Church itself lives from the hidden, transformative presence of God: at baptism, the Holy Spirit is hidden in the water; in the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ is hidden in the bread and wine and in the human minister Christ is hidden as true priest and true minister of the sacraments. Our own participatory acknowledgement of the transformational power of God in all these cases is itself part of the Church's rites. Christian liturgical identity is founded precisely on our capacity in the Spirit to recognize that God is not absent but is rather efficaciously present in exactly these ways.'

than a divine absence.⁹⁸ The permanent task for Christians is ‘to distinguish hidden presence from absence in the interstices of our living.’⁹⁹ From a theological perspective, the task of discerning the presence of Christ requires stepping back from the technical minutiae of the sacramental debates in order to explore the foundational questions upon which these positions rest. For Davies, the necessary point of departure for exploring the deep connection between Eucharist and mercy is not sacramentality as such, but rather *Christology*. The primary question is not *how Christ’s presence is mediated in sacramental rites and caritative acts*, but the more basic (and far less obvious) question: *Where is Jesus Christ?*

7.4.2 THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST: BETWEEN ASCENSION AND PAROUSIA

This is arguably the fundamental question of early Christianity: ‘It may be that it was in asking this question, in the light of the empty tomb, that the community around Jesus became what we would today call the Church.’¹⁰⁰ As we have seen, Chauvet argues that the ‘founding event’ of the resurrection of Jesus (Easter) and the sending of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) represent the eschatological in-breaking of God’s redemptive *newness*. The symbol of the ‘Easter tear’ signifies a transformational opening to a new way of being *in Christ* through the Spirit of the living God – an opening constituted by Christ’s withdrawal.¹⁰¹ For Chauvet, the ‘time of the Church’ commenced between these two events at the moment of the *ascension*. According to the book of Acts, the risen Jesus announces the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples and commissions them to bear witness to the gospel ‘to the ends of the earth.’ Having spoken these words, ‘he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight’ (1:6-11). Peter later declares that ‘God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins’ (5:31-32).¹⁰² As the exalted one, Jesus is no longer visible but lives in God. For Chauvet, this means that the ascended Christ is no longer present to his church in the same historical modality of his pre-exalted body. Instead, ‘the *Absent One* is present in his “sacrament”

⁹⁸ See Davies 2013, 3; 2010b, 183-193.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 59 (emphasis added). Davies acknowledges that dialectic between absence and presence is a dimension of any theological account of Christ’s relation to the church. He writes, ‘This absence in presence and presence in absence of the body of Christ sets up an irreducible tension of mystical longing, an eros of faith, which lies at the heart of Christian existence.’ Davies’ (2001) argument, in subtle contrast with Chauvet, is that this is a dialectic of relational proximity, not of a distancing withdrawal (222-223).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹⁰¹ Chauvet 1995b, 247-254.

¹⁰² Cf. Acts 7:56; Matt 26:64; Mark 14:62; 16:19; Luke 9:31, 51; 24:51; John 1:18; 3:18; 6:62; 14:2; 20:17; Rom 8:34; 10:6; 2 Cor 12:2; Eph 1:20; 4:7-13; Phil 2:9; 3:14; Col 3:1; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; 4:14; 6:19f.; 7:26; 8:4; 9:11; 9:24; 1 Pet; 3:21; Rev 11:12; 12:5. For a discussion, see Farrow 1999.

which is the Church' through the mediation of Scripture, ritual gestures 'in memory of him,' and the ethical sharing of brothers and sisters 'in his name.'¹⁰³ Chauvet's sacramental theology of presence-in-*absence* emerges from a particular reading of Christ's ascension.

Davies comes at the question from another angle. Far from indicating the risen Christ's withdrawal from space and time, the ascension describes Christ's exaltation and glorification as Lord of heaven *and* earth – as the one in whom all things live, move and have their being (Acts 17:28), and the one through whom God has reconciled the world unto God's self (2 Cor 5:19). For the early church, Christ (in his universality) may have been withdrawn from sight, but he nonetheless remains 'local,' so to speak, within the material fabric of creation. According to ancient cosmology, heaven and earth were both considered part of the created order. Christ's presence 'in heaven' provided 'the condition for the possibility that the Church could recognise his presence also on earth, as he had assured the Church he would be present "with" them "to the end of the age" [Matt 28:20] and would be present to them in the form of the vulnerable, the sick and the poor [Matt 25].'¹⁰⁴

In other words, Christ's presence – whether in the Eucharist or in the works of mercy – 'is not self-sustaining but is rather the mediatory making present of Jesus Christ in the fullness of his divinity and continuing transformed humanity.'¹⁰⁵ The ascension does not signify distance or absence, but the *intensification of presence*.¹⁰⁶ For the same *logos* through whom God spoke creation into being, the same *sophia* through whom the universe holds together, the same eternal Son who assumed creaturely flesh for the redemption of the world, the same Jesus who was crucified and resurrected, is the same ascended Christ who now 'occupies space and time in accordance with his continuing, transformed or glorified humanity.'¹⁰⁷

Christ (in his universality) is not visible to human perception, but he nonetheless draws near to us in *history*, in the concrete materiality of human life. We personally encounter his disruptive and transformative presence 'through calling, commissioning and vocation. This is an experience which comes to us in the Spirit, through the Church.' And whilst this experience does not have the revelatory character of St Paul's encounter with the ascended Christ 'in the primordial integrity of

¹⁰³ Chauvet 1995b, 163.

¹⁰⁴ Davies 2013, 63.

¹⁰⁵ Davies 2010b, 186.

¹⁰⁶ Davies 2013, 61.

¹⁰⁷ See John 1:1-3; Eph 1:20-23; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:1-3; Davies 2010b, 185.

his full bodily life, or heavenly “locality”,’ it nonetheless ‘remains a properly historical presence for us, as it was for St Paul, in that it is active and requires our own responsive reception in active obedience to the command of God made present to us in Christ, through the Spirit and the Church, within the particularity of our daily living.’¹⁰⁸

Holding together this complex set of ideas, Davies concludes,

With the removal from sight of the body of Jesus, the Church understands *by the power of the Holy Spirit* that the locus of his continuing life is in heaven itself. This is a reframing of the “where” question and it contrasts, for instance, with the post-resurrection, pre-exaltation appearances of Christ. With the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Church affirms where Christ is by the power of the Spirit in an affirmation which combines two interrelated principles: that Christ is now Lord of all things, “visible and invisible,” and that he is now present among his people and especially among the poor and the vulnerable as “hidden” in them. This suggests furthermore that it is the Spirit who prompts us to be oriented towards Christ in the “crowded spaces” of the world. Our asking of the “where” question on this account then is already within the power of the risen and exalted Christ and thus is already transformational.¹⁰⁹

In many ways, the doctrinal affirmations concerning the ascension provided a basis upon which the early church was able to develop a sacramental theology of mediated presence. It also provided a theological and philosophical framework within which to give a literal (and thus deeply pastoral) interpretation of Christ’s identification with the poor in Matthew 25. Between the ascension and the parousia, Christ’s presence is in the mode of hiddenness. As such, Christ’s glorification does not entail absence, distance or void. It describes the *transfiguration of Jesus’ resurrected body* and the transformation of those whose lives are ‘hidden with Christ in God’ (Col 3:3). The salvific reality of Christ’s proximity is a ‘mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints’; namely, ‘*Christ in you, the hope of glory*’ (Col 1:26, 27b).

7.4.3 COSMOLOGICAL CRISIS AND THE ERASURE OF PRESENCE

Christians today find great difficulty with the doctrine of the ascension. The problem is not necessarily due to Christological claims concerning the universality of Christ. Nor is it a resistance to ideas of presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, *per se*. Rather, the difficulty is rooted in the fact that the ancient cosmological categories that inform pre-modern discussions of the

¹⁰⁸ Davies 2010b, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Davies 2013, 85.

ascension are no longer credible in light of modern scientific discoveries. The arrival of the Copernican universe in the sixteenth century marked 'the beginning of the end' of the pre-modern conception of heaven as a material extension *up above*, 'at the highest point within the finite [...] universe of space and time.'¹¹⁰ The shift towards a modern view of the cosmos precipitated equally radical recalibrations of theological paradigms. '[W]ithout heaven within the finite universe of space and time,' writes Davies, 'the real or "local" body of Jesus inevitably became a figure, a metaphor, something that could therefore not be properly imagined or felt but only fantastically represented.' The loss of a coherent cosmology threatens the theological intelligibility of the universal Christ. Without a sense of continuity between Christ's exalted reality and his presence-in-hiddenness in church and in history, all that remains of presence is *absence*. Chauvet's notion of a sacramental mediation of absence represents a highly sophisticated theological accommodation to this problem.

Like Schillebeeckx, Davies contends that mediation necessarily involves the mediating of *something*. The spectre of nihilism surrounding this metaphysical/symbolic dialectic of presence and absence raises some significant problems for sacramental theology. For our purposes, it has direct implications for our ability to affirm, as Lambourne does, Christ's 'real presence' in acts of mercy. According to Davies, 'if we cannot say that Jesus is in heaven in the same superlative way [the early Church] meant it, then it is probably also the case that we cannot mean quite what they meant when they spoke of his parallel presence among the poor.'¹¹¹ Equally, 'If we have no robust theological account of the Christ who is mediated, which is to say namely the Christ who is wounded, risen *and* exalted, then is there not a risk that what was classically understood to be mediatory of the presence of Christ becomes instead his substitution?'¹¹²

Chauvet warns of the theological danger inherent in the desire for a direct, immediate, unmediated erasure of otherness – the necrotic temptation to reduce the living Christ to a body that can be touched, managed and comprehended. Whilst fully conceding this point, Davies also warns of a theological danger at the other end of the spectrum: distance, absence, otherness and the erasure of presence. Here the desire to accommodate for this loss manifests as an attempt to discover substitutes for Christ. This kind of 'substitutionary' theology takes several forms.

¹¹⁰ Davies 2008, 314.

¹¹¹ Davies 2013, 5.

¹¹² Davies 2011, 3.

First of all, 'If Jesus is "absent" in his living humanity, for instance, then *the Spirit* may come to be seen as the autonomous immediacy of the divine presence of our lives, and so effectively as *replacing* Christ.'¹¹³ In a similar manner, *Scripture* can become an alternative point of authority and certitude that abstracts the biblical text and creates an artificial opposition to God's agency in history (a risk more prevalent within Protestantism). For Roman Catholics, the *Eucharist* itself can be elevated as *the* ritualised place of Real Presence and direct encounter with God in the world of space and time. However, the belief that Christ's sacramental proximity is somehow exclusively contained in the Eucharist signifies absence not fullness of presence.¹¹⁴ Shifting from the Eucharist as *mediation* to *substitution* perpetuates the assumption that we cannot actually encounter Christ within history, within the ordinary spaces of daily living. This, in turn, 'sets up a profound tension between Eucharist and rite as the site of Christ's primary presence in the world and the world itself with all its complex and detailed social and political problematics. Eucharist begins to seem an alternative to world in this view, rather than the disclosure of the truth of the world, as the place of incarnation.'¹¹⁵

In short, "'Substitutionary" theologies resist theological recognition of Christ as commissioning in the midst of life.'¹¹⁶ They closely parallel Chauvet's 'necrotic temptations' in which the danger lies in tipping the tripod of Christian identity (Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics) in favour of one element to the exclusion of the others, which he describes as the 'illusory and fatal capture of the Living One.'¹¹⁷ If Davies' analysis is right, however, then it is reasonable to suggest that Chauvet's own project is itself at risk, not of capturing Christ, but of *excluding* him. Chauvet's fixation on the importance of absence raises the question of whether Chauvet's symbolic order of sacramentality has itself become a substitute for the 'Absent One.'

7.4.4 RECLAIMING THE ASCENSION

Without a robust account of the ascended Christ, the very idea of 'sacramental presence' – in the church, in the Eucharist, in works of mercy – tends to shift from the 'mediated immediacy' of

¹¹³ Davies 2013, 89 (emphasis added). This can take the form of a Pentecostalism that isolates and reifies the 'demonstrable charismata of the Spirit' from 'loving discipleship in the power and powerlessness of the Christian life,' or as a theology in which the Spirit mediates a *past* Christ as opposed to a present, living Christ. 'Here Christ's sacrifice is not made present to us in the living Christ, in and through the Holy Spirit, but is rather recalled by us, subjectively, at the Spirit's prompting' (89-90).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 91; 2010b, 187.

¹¹⁵ Davies 2010b, 187.

¹¹⁶ Davies 2013, 92.

¹¹⁷ Chauvet 1995b, 174.

Christ's transformative proximity in history to hallow 'substitutes' for a Christ no longer in the midst of the world. Backed into this corner, it is not surprising that Christians struggle to articulate 'how Christ can still share our space and time, in the living fullness of his humanity and divinity.'¹¹⁸

It is here that Davies offers his own constructive proposal, arguing that 'a retrieval of the doctrine of the ascension is long overdue.' In order to reimagine theologically what it might mean to encounter the living Christ (and thus to be drawn into a transformative relation with the Son through the Spirit), and what it might mean for Christ to be present in human action in such a way that one is caught up *in Christ* before God, requires us to recover a deeper understanding of the reality and the universality of the exalted Christ. 'The ascension needs to be grasped as a fundamentally different mode of Christ's presence in the world.'¹¹⁹

According to Davies, 'We do not need its ancient cosmology of height, exaltation and ascending, but we do need its faith conviction that Jesus Christ remains within space and time, or in continuity with what we generally understand as space and time, in the final fullness of his – transformed – humanity and divinity.'¹²⁰ We are currently witnessing the unfolding of a new cosmological revolution of scientific discovery.¹²¹ The basic categories of the modern, positivist, enlightenment worldview are being radically reconceptualised. For Davies, this holds open an invitation to explore new ways of framing the core doctrinal affirmations of the faith:

Jesus Christ had not gone away but only withdrawn from sight: that he was, in fact, hidden from us by the great distance of "heaven above" from "earth below." We do not calculate that divide in terms of distance as the pre-moderns naturally did, according to their cosmology, but the principle remains the same. Now that his human body no longer conceals him, following his full glorification, the body is withdrawn from our senses until he "comes again," and he is hidden within the material, historical world. And if Jesus is still present in space and time, then he can still disrupt us, as living bodies do, and as St Paul was 'disrupted' on the road to Damascus. [...] It is this very distinctive disruption which is the particular form of Christian discipleship, as the reception or living out of doctrine in a life which is repeatedly transformed by the disruptive life of the "ascended" Christ. Disruption is the mode in which the disciple discovers the historical Christ.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Davies 2013, 5.

¹¹⁹ Davies 2010b, 187.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

¹²¹ For a discussion of contemporary shifts in scientific cosmology, see Davies 2013, 11-16, and also chapter 2, 'Theology in the World: A Reorientation of Theology,' 33-57.

¹²² Davies 2010b, 188.

Theologically, the ascension affirms both the reality and the universality of Christ. 'To say that he is real is to say that he transcends any cultural construction or image of him we may have and that he exists outside the parameters of those communities who confess his name.' We cannot grasp or contain Christ within the categories of human understanding. 'He is real in the sense that he transcends the experience we have of him, and indeed all possible experiences that we might have of him.'¹²³ Moving beyond Chauvet, Davies writes, 'To say that he is universal is simply to say that Christ is alive in a way that means he is unlimited by space and time. He is present of course in his particularity, [...] his identifiability, but is not constrained by space and time. As Lord of space and time, Christ is in space and time, but is not himself subject to it.'¹²⁴

On this basis, we return to Davies' original question: Where is the universal Christ 'in the crowded spaces of our turbulent world?'¹²⁵ The most obvious answer to this question seems to be 'everywhere.' However, to say that something is everywhere is to say that it is present *nowhere* in particular. This kind of diffuse presence, a bit like a generic 'sacramentality of the world,' cannot account for the concrete places in which we encounter Christ 'in the situational reality of our own life as one who commissions and calls.'¹²⁶ By contrast, Davies proposes that Christ's universal proximity affirms that

he is present at the point of the world's becoming: where it becomes *this* world and not another. This in turn would imply that he is present at the place of our most radical creaturely freedom: precisely at the point where our free human agency is most realized in the flow of time and causation. This would further imply that these are times – moments of *kairos* – when the divine agency in him can shape the human agency in us, through the advent of the Holy Spirit: bringing our human freedom into a perfecting convergence with divine freedom, or the loving sovereignty of God.¹²⁷

In short, a renewed theology of the ascension provides a new point of departure for understanding concrete sites of sacramental presence both in the liturgy of the church and the liturgy of the world: (1) it separates the primary *Christological* affirmations from secondary *cosmological* frameworks; (2) it recovers the reality and universality of the exalted Christ as the Lord in/over history; (3) it affirms Christ's cosmic presence-in-hiddenness within the fabric of the

¹²³ Davies 2013, 5.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

world; (4) it shifts the meaning of sacraments from accommodating 'substitutions' for Christ's absence to transformative mediations of his concealed presence; (5) it opens the possibility of naming Christ's disruptive presence-in-hiddenness in works of mercy as genuine site of sacramental encounter amidst the 'crowded spaces' of everyday life.

7.4.5 A EUCHARISTIC HERMENEUTIC OF DISCERNMENT

Reducing the Eucharist to a substitution for an absent Christ creates a rift between 'the meaning of worship and the meaning of caritative acts in the Christian life.' When worship is contained in 'tradition' as narrative, rite and memory (the liturgy of the church), the sacraments become disjointed from 'history' as the actuality of events and the place in which human lives are embodied, disrupted and transformed (the liturgy of the neighbour). Schillebeeckx observes that the ordinary spaces of everyday life constitute 'the breeding ground for any experience of the saving nearness of God.' Confining the intensive sites of Christ's presence to the church and her liturgies effectively strips the world of its sacramentality. 'We cannot suddenly experience God in the church's liturgy if we can no longer see him anywhere outside the church.'¹²⁸

The doctrine of the ascension points to the continuing incarnational presence of Christ as the Lord of history. As such, Christ cannot be 'contained' by material acts, symbols, gestures or words, but neither can sacramental acts simply stand in as a 'substitute' for his proximity. Instead, the ascension makes it possible to recover 'a proper mediatory understanding of the Eucharist' in which the symbolic truly participates in the reality of Christ's risen life. Offered with thanksgiving in 'memory of him,' these physical gifts of bread and wine become for us the mystery of the world's redemption: the 'mediated immediacy' of the saving nearness of God. Rightly understood, the liturgy of the church can no longer be buffered from the messy complexity of ordinary life. Rather, as the assembly gathered at table in his name, Christians are commissioned to seek out this same Christ in the broken places of the world.

The Eucharist is a symbolic act in which the heights of Christ's glory are celebrated and the depths of his cruciform love are dramatically displayed. As Karl Rahner would say, it declares explicitly the otherwise implicit truth at the heart of the world. It thus represents an epiphanic pedagogy of Christ's nearness. For Davies, the Eucharist provides the church with a 'hermeneutics of

¹²⁸ Schillebeeckx 1977, 810-811. Davies (2013) observes, 'Eucharist is the Church's celebration of the victory of God in Christ in history. It is constituted in the power of Easter. Eucharistic theology needs to reflect that relation if there is not to be the risk that the historical Christ whose being raised to life in history we celebrate at Easter is not to become a distinctively unhistorical and "cultic" Christ of modernity' (91).

discernment' – a way of *seeing* through the Spirit 'the actuality of Christ's presence in hiddenness to us in materiality.' By attending to Christ at the eucharistic altar, Christians are charged with the vocation to tend to the altar of the neighbour. 'We "see" him in the Eucharistic elements, as truly present in the bread and wine. If the Eucharist is no longer asked to substitute for the living embodied Christ who has "departed" from the world, then it can begin to instruct us on where and how he is to be found in the world and in the actuality of human historical life.'¹²⁹ Such an incarnational theology of sacramental encounter opens up the possibility of a 'new relation between Eucharist and the caritative act.' It demands that Christian theology 'bring Eucharist and practical love back to their original complementarity' as sites of sacramental intensity within the 'crowded spaces' of the world.¹³⁰

7.5 PRAXIS, WORSHIP AND THE RADICAL ORDINARY

The everyday and Communion are two factors which constitute an everyday encounter with the veiled and hidden Lord, who is visible only to the eye of faith. Now this eye must see somewhat more deeply into the significance of our everyday, and must perceive in the midst of our everyday lives in their everyday-ness Jesus Christ present in brothers and sisters.¹³¹

– Karl Rahner

This brings us back to the central theme of this chapter: the sacramentality of the works of mercy. Davies observes that contemporary Western academic theology has developed 'robust and authoritative accounts of how Christ is truly present in his church (in Eucharistic theology) but very little account, perhaps even no account at all, of how Christ is truly present in those who are vulnerable of Mt 25.' Whilst Christ's presence in the least is central to many forms of Christian spirituality, pastoral theology or practical care for the poor and the marginalised, this idea has tended to be sequestered to the marginal 'domain of faith rather than theology.'¹³² Davies' project seeks to make up for this deficit by giving a rigorous theological reflection on the nature of Christ's hidden presence in acts of mercy. This is not a matter of metaphorical poetics but a literal truth rendered all the more significant in light of the theology of the ascension. 'The eschatological framework of exaltation and Pentecost,' he writes, 'together with the eschatological presence of Christ on earth among the vulnerable and needy, of Matthew 25,

¹²⁹ Davies 2010b, 189-190.

¹³⁰ Davies 2000, 191.

¹³¹ Rahner 1971a, 'Eucharist,' 226.

¹³² Davies 2011, 3.

affirms that exaltation and Lordship on the one hand, and the “this-worldiness” of Christ among the poor on the other, *are one and the same thing*.¹³³

Matthew 25 provides the hermeneutical key for identifying the paradigmatic acts of Christ’s sacramental proximity within the everyday. Just as the ‘Eucharistic body of Mt 26:26-29 mediates to us Christ’s current or ascended embodiment liturgically and cosmically, under the accent of the divinity and New Creation,’ so do the ‘bodies of those in need, in whom Christ is present to us, of Mt 25:34-46 mediate the ascended body under the accent of its humanity and particularity: that which is shared with us.’¹³⁴ Though their sacramental modalities differ, both Eucharist and mercy constitute corresponding sites of encounters with the ‘mediated immediacy’ of Christ. In the words of Karl Rahner, ‘we encounter the Lord only in a hidden manner, in the first case under the appearance of bread and wine, in the second in the guise in which he reveals himself to us in the neighbour whom we serve.’¹³⁵ For ‘the same Lord who bids us do one, bids us do the other,’ to borrow from Lambourne.¹³⁶

Like the Eucharist, the Scripture informs the church’s ‘hermeneutics’ of discernment. Matthew 25 reveals the hidden depths of human relationality before God; this ‘is not an invitation to us primarily to see the world differently, however, but rather to recognise and to understand that in the Christian acts we do, and are called to do, Christ himself moves in the Spirit that is within us and the world itself is made new.’¹³⁷ In other words, the epiphanic disclosure of Christ’s proximity to the poor is not a matter that is best approached in abstraction at a distance. Its depth and profundity is revealed through the practise of mercy itself. Davies writes,

In the moment we act, and freely accept the burden of shaping history in responsibility to the other or others, we are constituted in discipleship and, as disciples, we begin to recognise the one we follow. [...] We recognise him in the

¹³³ Davies 2013, 85-86 (emphasis added).

¹³⁴ Davies 2008, 329. ‘And there are further mediations which appear in Church tradition, in addition to the non-Eucharistic sacraments. There is the presence of Christ among those “who are gathered in my name” of Mt 18:20, and Christ’s promised presence to his Church to “the end of the age” of Mt 28:20. There are the mediations of Christ’s presence in the Word as preached, and in the biblical text as received and performed. There are multiple mediations in Christian arts and culture. But however “mediated,” the ascended body always remains directly active or effective.’ Cf. Moltmann 1993.

¹³⁵ Rahner 1971a, ‘Eucharist,’ 226.

¹³⁶ Lambourne 1963, 80. According to Boff and Pixley (1989), ‘This is why, in the great tradition of the church, the celebration of the eucharist has always incorporated expressions of love for the poor, just as the work for the poor as the altar as its centre, beginning and end’ (114).

¹³⁷ Davies 2013, 85-86.

act, as bodies recognise each other, across cultures and traditions, and across even time, when one of the bodies is both human and divine. We recognize him in the embodied act itself, where we meet him as the one who has acted before us but uniquely in a way that crosses time.¹³⁸

An act of mercy is a compassionate response to the plight of another in need. There is always risk and struggle involved in coming alongside and entering into another's place of vulnerability, sharing in another's woundedness or suffering. Through such costly acts of love, we become 'material cause for the sake of another through the Holy Spirit' and embody some of the most intensive dimensions of our humanity. In this kind of deep compassion, one becomes a living sacrifice, a self-offering for the sake of other, that seeks to nurture wholeness, healing, dignified personhood, restored communion.¹³⁹ It is in the midst of profoundly human encounters with concrete neighbours that we find ourselves brought 'face-to-face,' as it were, with the disruptive presence-in-hiddenness of the risen Christ.¹⁴⁰ As we imitate his own servant-hearted generosity, Christ draws near to us 'as gift in the actuality and intimacy in our own everyday existence, as the universal Christ who summons and calls.'¹⁴¹

If Christ dwells among those who are hungry and sick, homeless and dispossessed, Davies argues that he is present in a particular way in the act itself. 'He is not so much in them, as in the situation of their need.'¹⁴² Compassion is risky because it demands that we step out and respond to circumstances that are often complex, bewildering and disorienting. There are no guarantees that a generous deed will have its intended effect and bear good fruit. In loving another person in their moment of need, one enters a world of contingency, uncertainty and vulnerability.¹⁴³

As our own embodiment in history becomes sacrificial, as we approach the closure and finality of decision to act in the difficult openness of unresolved

¹³⁸ Davies 2009, 91.

¹³⁹ Davies 2013, 189-190; 2009, 91.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20. 'Matthew 25 already tells us that Christ will be among the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged. But he is among them in a particular way. He is not so much in them, as in the situation of their need' (2009, 91).

¹⁴² Davies 2009, 91.

¹⁴³ See Rahner 1995, 167. 'According to the witness of scripture, one can only truly love God and Jesus in the measure that one really loves the concrete neighbour. If one loves the neighbour truly, without reservation and at the risk of one's whole existence, then such love is already, expressly or unreflectively, a breakthrough to the very reality in which God and human beings are irrevocably one, in which God guarantees the possibility and the happy outcome of the risk of human love. And in this reality, God does not allow it just to be a risk that falls through in the end, but makes it possible in this unity for human beings to love God himself humanly in a human being.'

intellect and will, as we enter the actuality of life where history is made, and do so in poverty as a refugee, stripped of our possessions and consolations: as we do this, so too do we begin to recognise with the knowledge of the body, the presence of another body very close to us, holding and supporting us, even in the precise moment of act, or risk. That is the body of Jesus, not to be seen or felt, but nevertheless to be known and recognised. It is a body which communicates across time precisely in its sacrificial acting, once and for all in history, which was the giving of life for all others, in loving obedience to the divine command, to do the Father's will.¹⁴⁴

'I have been crucified with Christ,' declares St Paul, 'and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.' (Gal 2:19). To act in compassion is in some sense to act 'in Christ' and for Christ to inhabit the act by the Spirit.¹⁴⁵ Works of mercy not only respond to the grace upon which they are rooted, but they are energised and sustained by the continuation of that grace. An act of mercy becomes a *means of grace* when infused by the Spirit as a participation in God's love. In the words of Ivan Illich, this enfleshment of *caritas* through the works of mercy 'prolongs the incarnation.'¹⁴⁶ When we respond, forgive or tend to another in need, the divine agape is revealed even in the radical ordinary. It is made present, enfleshed and extended out, forming bonds of reciprocity between the giver and the receiver. As we 'administer' God's grace in our service to others (1 Pet 4:10), we encounter the deepest levels of our social life.¹⁴⁷ 'Here at the extreme of human truth,' concludes Davies, 'we encounter Jesus Christ – the Compassion of God – as the one who goes before and who is already present to us, if unfathomably, in the compassionate act'¹⁴⁸; for 'the act of compassion opens us to an horizon of encounter with God in personal form.'¹⁴⁹

7.6 CONCLUSION

In light of all of this, Davies' work strongly affirms Lambourne's insight that works of mercy are 'occasions of grace' and acts of encounter with the real presence of the hidden Christ. For Davies, however, 'real presence' is nothing less than the 'mediated immediacy' of the exalted and glorified Christ himself through the Spirit. It is the presence-in-hiddenness of the one who calls and commissions, who disrupts and transforms. Davies describes the Eucharist and the works of mercy as 'the primary ecclesial mediations, the one liturgical and the other caritative,' of this

¹⁴⁴ Davies 2009, 91-92.

¹⁴⁵ Davies 2013, 19-21.

¹⁴⁶ Illich & Cayley 2005, 207.

¹⁴⁷ See Milbank 2008, 119-161.

¹⁴⁸ Davies 2001, 23.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

transformational proximity. He writes, ‘the ascended body always retains the power to “disrupt us,” [...] pushing urgently and disruptively into the “everyday” of our ordinary lives.’ This disruption ‘is a sign of the Church, perhaps its primary sign. *For disruption is the way in which the ascended body claims us for its own.*’¹⁵⁰

Schillebeeckx describes sacramental encounter in the wounds and sufferings of humanity as rupture, disruption and ‘contrast experience.’ For here we do not enter a comfortable space of Christ’s power or beauty or glory, but rather what Jon Sobrino calls the scarring wounds of crucified humanity.¹⁵¹ Chrysostom gives a vivid depiction of Christ’s cruciform identification with the poor:

I was naked on the cross for you; or if not this, I am now naked through the poor. I was then bound for you, and still am so for you, that whether moved by the former ground or the latter, you might be minded to show some pity. I fasted for you, again I am hungry for you. I was thirsty when hanging on the cross, I am thirsty also through the poor, that by the former as also by the latter I may draw you to myself, and make you charitable to your own salvation.¹⁵²

Mercy calls the church to a cruciform sacramentality of compassionate encounter. It is a confrontation with reality: the reality of suffering, exploitation, injustice, prejudice; the reality of systems, structures, ideologies; the reality of a sin-soaked, wounded and wounding world; and the irreducible reality of those caught in the midst – human persons bearing the very image and likeness of God. These realities disrupt and call the church into question, as does the recognition that in the midst of this suffering Christ dwells (cf. Heb 13:1-3, 12-16).

Risky gestures of compassion and solidarity, mercy and justice practised in Christ’s name are more than surface-level material deeds; they are profound acts of self-giving for the sake of the other in the presence of the living God. With Chauvet (and Augustine), Davies maintains that through such ‘sacrifices’ of mercy Christians ‘become like the Eucharistic elements. For the very moment of our act, or embodiment of love, becomes the manner of Christ’s hiddenness within materiality, and thus a mode of his presence in the world, as Lord of space and time.’¹⁵³ In the constant liturgical

¹⁵⁰ Davies 2008, ‘The Interrupted Body,’ 329; 2001, 157.

¹⁵¹ Sobrino 1994.

¹⁵² Quoted in Brändle 2008, 136.

¹⁵³ Davies 2010b, 191; see Chauvet 1995b, 314-315.

procession of gathering and sending between the two altared sites of worship, both Eucharist and works of mercy open up for Christians

the possibility of an ecclesial “seeing” through the Spirit, when we can discern him in us and ourselves in him. Then we can discover, in the mind of the Church, that the same Jesus Christ lives for us as real presence in hiddenness in both Eucharist and caritative acts, both of which are mediations of his living or “ascended” embodiment as sacrifice. And so, while the act itself remains individual in its responsibility, the meaning of the act is the Lordship of Christ as sacrifice which we receive and celebrate in the Eucharist.¹⁵⁴

Works of mercy constitute paradigmatic expressions of the church’s ‘Eucharistic’ ethic. For these acts are sacrifices given for the sake of the neighbour, which participate ‘in Christ’ – the fundamental ground and depth of the act itself. For Davies, this liturgical theology of works of mercy not only substantiates the sacramentality of Christian ethics, but also offers ‘a particularly strong account of the priesthood of all believers, which is grounded in the Priesthood of Christ himself.’¹⁵⁵ All Christians are called to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). As Chauvet has taught us, the church’s primary place of liturgy or sacrifice is the ethics of everyday life.¹⁵⁶ This ordinary ethic ‘gives privilege of place to the exercise of justice and mercy where we have recognized the “liturgy of the neighbor,” a spiritual sacrifice making effective in daily life this *multi unum corpus in Christo* (“the many are one body in Christ”) symbolized by the “sacrament of the altar” (Augustine). Ethics of “living-in-grace,” primarily with regard to those whom humans have reduced to the state of slaves, is the place of verification, the *veritas*, of the filial “giving thanks” of the Eucharist.’¹⁵⁷ Lambourne lays the foundation for articulating the sacramental depth of this liturgy of the neighbour. Holding the deep insights of Chauvet and Lambourne, Davies concludes by observing that a robust theology of the works of mercy ‘has always to be a theology of the ordinary. And yet this is the ordinary as construed theologically as the site of our potential encounter with Christ. [...] [T]he moment of faith that we call “love” is fundamentally mysterious within the everyday and is, for the Christian, fundamentally bound up with what we mean by “God.”’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Davies 2010b, 191-192; cf. 2000, 124-125.

¹⁵⁵ Davies 2011, 12. ‘It is a theology of the priesthood of Christ, acting through us, his *doulos* or servant in Pauline terms, which looks [...] to the Holy Spirit who transforms space and time in such a way as to make us proximate to the exalted Christ and he to us: such as to make him acting in us and we acting in him.’

¹⁵⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 262.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 535.

¹⁵⁸ Davies 2013, 21-22.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ETHICS: LIVING BETWEEN THE ALTARS OF GOD

The temple of our afflicted neighbour's body is more holy than the altar of stone on which you celebrate the holy sacrifice. You are able to contemplate this altar everywhere, in the street and in the open squares.

– St John Chrysostom

If we claim to retain the sacrament of the altar, we cannot forgo or forget the sacrament of the neighbour — a fundamental condition for realizing God's Word in the world, within the life and mission of the Church.¹⁵⁹

– Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In his philosophical meditations on the Gospel of John, the French philosopher Michel Henry observes: 'The genius of the Christian ethic is to point out in the simplest of ordinary lives, accessible to all and comprehensible by all, the concrete conditions in which the extraordinary event is produced by which the ego's life will be changed into God's.'¹⁶⁰ Building on the more systematic reflections of the scriptural foundations and sacramental deep-structure of mercy, this chapter shifts perspectives by examining the lives of two twentieth-century exemplars of the works of mercy: Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Mother Maria Skobtsova of Paris. In their witness and ceaseless devotion to the poor, these two women embodied something of the 'concrete conditions' of engraced transformation of which Henry speaks. Within the popular imagination of the church, it is often ordinary yet faithful men and women, whose lives are marked by the habits of compassion, who most clearly demonstrate the rich theological connection between liturgy and ethics, sacramentality and mercy. Mother Teresa and Mother Maria give us an image of what a mature, costly and radical liturgy of the neighbour might look like in practise.

Before exploring their stories, this chapter begins with a reflection on an ancient advocate of the sacramentality of mercy: John Chrysostom. The imagery Chrysostom develops for describing worship and ethics becomes the rich soil in which both Mother Teresa and Mother Maria ground their theology of compassion. Through his words, we find their lives thrown into sharp relief.

¹⁵⁹ Bartholomew I 2011, 275-287.

¹⁶⁰ Henry 2003, 166.

8.2 TWO ALTARS AND TWO LITURGIES

In his 20th homily on 2 Corinthians, Chrysostom describes Christian worship as oriented around two closely connected altars, two sites of encounter with the risen Christ: the altar of the Eucharist and the altar of the neighbour.¹⁶¹ The first signifies the gathering of the church as one in Christ through bread and wine – a thanksgiving for the ‘unspeakable gift’ of God (2 Cor 9:15). The second signifies the sending of the church on its journey to live the identity it has received in service to Christ through the bodies of the poor. Chrysostom deploys a complex array of images to describe this ordinary ‘liturgy.’ Attending to the *altar* [θυσίαστηριον] of the neighbour with *sacrifices* [θυσίας] of alms and good works is a *priestly* [ἱερευς] vocation. ‘For the merciful man is not arrayed in a vest reaching to the feet,’ writes Chrysostom, ‘nor does he carry about bells, nor wear a crown; but he is wrapped in the robe of loving-kindness, a holier than the sacred vestment; and is anointed with oil, not composed of material elements, but produced by the Spirit.’¹⁶² Through the practise of charity, the merciful person acts like a priest entering the sanctuary of God’s presence; the caritative service to the poor becomes a ‘holy of holies’ whose altar is not hidden behind a veil but ‘stands in public view.’ One practises a deed of loving-kindness for the sake of the poor, but the true ‘sacrifice’ is ultimately received as unto God.

This altar is made of Christ’s members themselves, and the body of that Lord becomes your altar. Venerate it: you sacrifice the victim on the flesh of the Lord. This altar is more awesome than the one we use here, not just more than the one used in ancient time [in the Old Testament]. No, do not object. This altar is awesome because of the sacrifice laid upon it; that, the one made of alms, is even more so, not just because of the alms, but because it is the very sacrifice which makes the other awesome. Again, this altar, only stone, becomes holy because Christ’s body touches it, but that is holy because it is itself Christ’s body. So that altar is more awesome, sisters and brothers, than the one you are standing beside.¹⁶³

These altars thus signify two modes of Christ’s presence to the church. J.-M.-R. Tillard writes, ‘The Eucharist, which creates the ecclesial body, “builds” the altar on which the sacrifice that pleases

¹⁶¹ Chrysostom 1889, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, 20 quoted in Tillard 2001, 69-70, 84. For a discussion of liturgy and ethics in Chrysostom, see Murphy 1972, 52-57; Florovsky 1975, 79-87; Bria 1978, 90; Greeley 1982, 1163-1168; Harakas 1990, 191-192; Leyerle 1994, 29-47; Holman 2001, 61-62; Finn 2006, 181-182; Abou Mrad 2008, 249; Walsh 2008, 176-186; Allen, Bronwen & Mayer (eds.) 2009; Holman 2009, 21; Holman 2010, 31-49; Costanzo 2013.

¹⁶² Chrysostom 1889, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, 20.3.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

God is celebrated. The poor are the most sacred part of the altar “made” by the Eucharist.¹⁶⁴ For Chrysostom the altar ‘made of alms’ is more glorious than the former temple:

You honour this [eucharistic] altar because it receives Christ’s body. But those who are themselves the body of Christ you treat with contempt and ignore as they die. You can see that altar everywhere, lying in the lanes and market places, and every hour of the day you can sacrifice upon it; for there too is sacrifice performed. And as the priest stands invoking the Spirit, so you also invoke the Spirit, not by speech *but by deeds* because nothing so kindles and sustains the fire of the Spirit as this oil poured out in abundance.¹⁶⁵

One can infer from the tone of Chrysostom’s sermon that his listeners had not understood the depth of this connection, lavishing resources on the Eucharist while neglecting the plight of the needy even among their fellow believers. Chrysostom’s point is clear: ‘the one Christ is celebrated on the two altars in a necessarily conjoined way.’ To neglect the latter is to profane the former.¹⁶⁶ The Eucharist forms the ecclesial body, but the people of God are to live this identity in the world. This entails serving and honouring Christ (Matt 25:31-46) by the ‘good deeds’ which are ‘pleasing to God’ (Heb 13:16). ‘On the altar of the ecclesial body, and especially on the most worthy part, which is the poor, Christ himself becomes the object of the liturgy of the sacrifice.’¹⁶⁷

Chrysostom’s evocative imagery captures the essential argument this thesis seeks to advance – namely, that the Eucharist and the works of mercy are inextricably linked as two corresponding ‘altars’ of Christian worship. Building on the theology of Chauvet, the previous chapters proposed that the triadic sacramental deep-structure of Christian existence is constituted by two inseparable and mutually defining modalities of worship: the ‘liturgy of the church’ (ritual sacrament) and the ‘liturgy of the neighbour’ (ethical praxis). These two liturgies represent distinct yet deeply integrated horizons of liturgical extensity – milieus within which particular acts

¹⁶⁴ Tillard 2001, 70.

¹⁶⁵ Chrysostom 1889, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*, 20. Chrysostom concludes his sermon by describing in some detail the metaphorical association between almsgiving and temple sacrifice. The sacrifice is the deed itself, whereas the ‘smoke’ and ‘sweet savour’ of the altar signifies the ‘praise and thanksgiving’ of the church, which ascends beyond the heavens ‘even to the throne of the King’ (see Acts 10:4). Sacrificial acts of kindness are made in silence without lofty liturgical words, for the ‘work speaks.’

¹⁶⁶ Concerning this ‘not/unless’ dynamic, Tillard (2001) writes, ‘Chrysostom sometimes seems to assert – beyond certain very strong oratorical locutions – that the union with Christ effected by the eucharistic communion remains fruitless if it does not result in concern for the poor and does not translate the equality “before God” shown at the table of the Lord into actual behavior. The Eucharist is the sacrament that renders the faithful so completely “one with Christ” that they must reach the point where they make their own, and relieve as if it were their own, the suffering of the whole body’ (72).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

of worship take place in their concrete particularity. At their heart, we discover paradigmatic sites of sacramental intensity – the altared places of Christ’s proximity. What the Eucharist is to the liturgy of the church, so works of mercy are to the liturgy of the neighbour: engrafted events of encounter with the ‘mediated immediacy’ of the risen Christ.

Robert Barron argues that in order to fully understand ‘the essence of the Christian moral life, it is not sufficient to remain, in the modern mode, at the level of abstract exposition and rational calculus. Nor is it sufficient to remain, in the classical manner, at the level of natural moral excellence.’ By contrast, he maintains that it is in the lives of the saints – whose practise has been fashioned between these two altars of God – that we are able to discern ‘the good life in its densely textured facticity; we see the dynamics of grace on iconic display. [...] We can see the form of Christian ethics only by looking, finally, at those lives that exemplify it across time and in the face of obstacles.’¹⁶⁸ We now turn to two such ‘iconic displays’ of mercy as a cruciform way of life.

8.3 MOTHER TERESA MEETING CHRIST IN THE DISTRESSING GUISE OF THE POOR

Our lives are woven with Jesus in the Eucharist, and the faith and the love that come from the Eucharist enable us to see him in the distressing disguise of the poor, and so there is but one love of Jesus, as there is but one person in the poor – Jesus.¹⁶⁹

– Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa (1910-1997) is one of the most well-known practitioners of Christian charity in living memory. For over fifty years, she lived and worked in the squalid slums of Calcutta, serving amongst the poorest of the poor in abject conditions of human suffering. She committed her life to the direct, radical, face-to-face practise of the works of mercy among the sick and the dying, the abandoned and untouchables in India. Whilst her own vocation did not lead her to confront

¹⁶⁸ Barron 2007, 279.

¹⁶⁹ Mother Teresa 1996a, 35-36.

the structural causes of social deprivation,¹⁷⁰ her life nonetheless remains a profound witness to the dignifying love of God and the irreducible worth of every human person.¹⁷¹

Having served as a novitiate with the Loreto Sisters in Darjeeling and Calcutta, in 1946 Teresa experienced what she describes as a 'call within her calling'¹⁷² to leave the convent and 'renounce everything in order to follow Christ in the poor suburbs, to serve among the poorest poor.'¹⁷³ In response to this new vocation, she founded the Order of Missionaries of Charity in 1950, whose core mission of compassion is: 'seeking out in towns and villages all over the world even amid squalid surroundings the poorest, the abandoned, the sick, the infirm, the leprosy patients, the dying, the desperate, the lost, the outcasts; taking care of them, rendering help to them, visiting them assiduously, living Christ's love for them, and awakening their response to his great love.'¹⁷⁴ In the last decades of her life, Teresa accepted various awards in recognition of her service to humanity, including the Nobel Peace Prize (1979) and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1985), 'using these occasions to raise the consciousness of the world concerning the plight of the poor and the responsibility of the wealthy nations.'¹⁷⁵

Teresa was not an academic, nor do her writings attempt to provide a complex or sophisticated theology. Yet, her everyday experiences became the raw material for deep theological reflection about the significance of mercy for the Christian life. At the heart of her 'vernacular theology'¹⁷⁶ we find a bold synergy between the real presence of Christ at the eucharistic altar with the real presence of Christ in the midst of human suffering and need: 'In Holy Communion we have Christ under the appearance of bread. In our work we find him under the appearance of flesh and blood. It is *the same* Christ.'¹⁷⁷ For Teresa, this is the essence of the works of mercy: to seek the face of Jesus in even the least of these (Matt 25:40).

¹⁷⁰ Mother Teresa 1997, 69. 'If someone feels that God wants from him a transformation of social structures, that's an issue between him and his God. We all have the duty to serve God where we feel called. I feel called to help individuals, to love each human being. I never think in terms of crowds in general but in terms of persons. Were I to think about crowds, I would never begin anything. It is the person that matters. I believe in person-to-person encounters.'

¹⁷¹ For an account of Mother Teresa's life, see Spink 2011.

¹⁷² Mother Teresa 1997, 195.

¹⁷³ Mother Teresa 2001, 12, 30.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁵ Barron 2007, 340.

¹⁷⁶ See Graham, Walton & Ward 2005, 200-229.

¹⁷⁷ Mother Teresa 2001, 100. (emphasis added).

This sacramental reading of Matthew 25 is crucial in understanding Teresa's entire ministry. For her, the passage speaks of Christ's universal identification with every person who suffers need. This identification is not a kind of affinity or solidarity, but the actual presence of the living Christ. She writes, 'we take *literally*: "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me."' ¹⁷⁸ And also, 'We should not serve the poor like *they were* Jesus. We should serve them *because they are Jesus*.' ¹⁷⁹ Elsewhere she states, 'Actually we are touching Christ's body in the poor. In the poor it is the hungry Christ that we are feeding, it is the naked Christ that we are clothing, it is the homeless Christ that we are giving shelter.' ¹⁸⁰ To serve the poor is to serve Christ himself. ¹⁸¹

By describing acts of mercy as moments of sacramental encounter, however, Teresa in no way intends to trivialise or sentimentalise the suffering of the poor. She had made her own home in the slums. There she witnessed first-hand the darkness and brutality of severe destitution. She admits that it is not easy to see Christ in the taunts of drunks, the aggression of addicts, or the abusive outbursts of those bearing chronic pain. It is difficult work tending open sores, washing filthy bodies, burying young children. 'To those who admire my courage,' she writes, 'I have to tell them that I would not have any if I were not convinced that each time I touch the body of a leper, a body that reeks with a foul stench, I touch Christ's body, the same Christ I receive in the Eucharist.' ¹⁸²

Teresa tells the story of a young nun who had recently arrived at her community. 'According to our rule, the very next day after joining our society, the postulants must go to the home for the dying destitute in Calcutta. Before this sister went, I told her, "You saw the priest during the Mass, with what love, with what delicate care he touched the body of Christ. Make sure you do the same thing when you get to the home, because Jesus is there in a distressing guise."' After several hours, the young woman returned 'with such a beautiful smile on her face.' She explained, 'They brought a man from the street who had fallen into a drain and had been there for some time. He was covered with maggots and dirt and wounds. And though I found it very difficult, I cleaned

¹⁷⁸ Mother Teresa 1997, 115 (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁹ Mother Teresa 1996b, 30. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁰ Mother Teresa 2001, 46.

¹⁸¹ Bullivant (2012) observes that this literal interpretation of Matt 25 'is not merely her own personal conviction, but is the guiding principle of her Order' (162). See also Wilcken 2007, 330-338.

¹⁸² Mother Teresa 1996b, 105.

him, and I knew I was touching the body of Christ!’¹⁸³ Tending to Christ in the least of these is not a sentimental spirituality, but a costly and exacting love called ‘bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things’ (1 Cor 13:7). Even in the scarred wounds of broken humanity, Jesus is present, but it is a *crucified presence* – Christ in the *distressing guise of poverty*.¹⁸⁴

For Teresa, Matthew 25 concerns the dignity of every human person before God. The following words of Rowan Williams capture the heart of her ministry: ‘[T]here are no superfluous people, no “spare” people in the human world. All are needed for the good of all. Human failure is tragic and terrible because it means that some unique and unrepeatable aspect of God’s purpose has been allowed to vanish.’ No one is useless, worthless, expendable or forgettable for Christ draws near even to those at the edge of existence. ‘It means therefore that a human person is worth extravagant and lasting commitment. A human being deserves complete attention and care whether rich or poor, whether they will live for a day or for six decades.’¹⁸⁵

This sacramental interpretation of mercy is firmly rooted in Teresa’s eucharistic spirituality. In her view, the Christian life is nurtured and matured between two altared places of divine encounter: first, at the heart of the church’s liturgy in the Eucharist, and second, in the broken bodies of the poor. On the one hand, ‘The Eucharist is the sacrament of prayer, the fountain and summit of Christian life.’¹⁸⁶ She writes, ‘Our life is linked to the Eucharist.’¹⁸⁷ She also speaks of the Mass as ‘the spiritual food that sustains me, without which I could not get through one single day or hour in my life.’¹⁸⁸ However, the Eucharist is always bound up in an encounter with Christ in the everyday: ‘If we really understand the Eucharist, if we really center our lives on Jesus’ body and blood, if we nourish our lives with the bread of the Eucharist, it will be easy for us to see Christ in

¹⁸³ Mother Teresa 2001, 48. Reflecting on this narrative, Daniel Izuzquiza (2009) observes, ‘Someone might think that this kind of vision stems from the devout idealism typical of a naive novice. Nothing would be further from reality. Mother Teresa’s radical life and her daily experience led her to express a tangible realism, such as when she recognizes that “sometimes it is more difficult to work with street people than with the people in our homes for the dying, because the dying are peaceful and waiting; they are ready to go to God. You can touch the sick and believe, or you can touch the leper and believer, that is the body of Christ you are touching, but it is much more difficult, when these people are drunk or shouting, to think that this is Jesus in that distressing disguise. How clean and loving our hands must be to be able to bring that compassion to them!” For this very reason,’ Izuzquiza concludes, ‘Mother Teresa says, it is necessary to come back again and again to the source of compassion, to the contemplation of the same Lord Jesus who purifies our sight and our whole life’ (206).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

¹⁸⁵ Williams 2007.

¹⁸⁶ Mother Teresa 2001, 104-105.

¹⁸⁷ Mother Teresa 1997, 115.

¹⁸⁸ Mother Teresa 2001, 53; see also 101.

that hungry one next door, the one lying in the gutter, that alcoholic man we shun, our husband or our wife, or our restless child. For in them, we will recognize the distressing disguises of the poor: Jesus in our midst.¹⁸⁹

For Teresa, the Eucharist provides a concrete and visible expression of God's incarnate love in Christ,¹⁹⁰ but 'if we are unable to see Christ under the appearance of bread, neither shall we discover him under the humble appearance of the emaciated bodies of the poor.'¹⁹¹ Significantly, she argues that this works both ways: for the 'Eucharist is incomplete if it does not lead us to service and love for the poor. [...] To be able to work, to be able to see, to be able to love, we need this Eucharistic union.'¹⁹² In the end, these two encounters are mutually inseparable dimensions of a single act of devotion, lived before God: 'The Eucharist and the poor are nothing more than the same love of God. To be able to see and love Jesus in the poor, we must be one with Christ through a life of deep prayer.'¹⁹³

8.4 MOTHER MARIA SKOBTSOVA

THE LITURGY AFTER THE LITURGY

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

– Philippians 1:21

Who [...] can differentiate the worldly from the heavenly in the human soul, who can tell where the image of God ends and the heaviness of human flesh begins! In communing with the world in the person of each individual human being, we know that we are communing with the image of God, and, contemplating that image, we touch the Archetype — we commune with God.¹⁹⁴

– Mother Maria Skobtsova

Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891-1945) was a Russian Orthodox nun who dedicated her heart and soul to the practise of the works of mercy in Paris during the dark and violent years of the Nazi occupation. Mother Maria was not a typical nun. Her good friend Olivier Clément describes her

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 106. 'My great love is Jesus in the Eucharist, in Holy Communion. There I meet him, I receive him, I love him; then I rediscover him and serve him in the poorest of the poor' (102).

¹⁹⁰ Mother Teresa 1997, 117. 'Christ made Himself the Bread of Life. He wanted to give Himself to us in a very special way, in a simple, tangible way, because it is hard for human beings to love a God whom they cannot see.'

¹⁹¹ Mother Teresa 2001, 101.

¹⁹² Mother Teresa 1997, 116.

¹⁹³ Mother Teresa 2001, 103.

¹⁹⁴ Skobtsova 2003, 79.

life as 'one long scandal.'¹⁹⁵ She was a former socialist revolutionary, poet, avant-garde theologian, activist and icon painter. 'Her revolutionary sympathies and her love for the Jews shocked not only rightist Russian emigrants but also many young Orthodox Christians who longed for an order that was complete, organic and sacred.'¹⁹⁶ She was twice married and divorced and a mother of three children (two of whom died at an early age). She smoked, did not dress properly, did not always attend the Divine Liturgy and 'enjoyed the company of drunkards, ex-convicts and the homeless.'¹⁹⁷ She was also a brilliant theologian, a saint and a martyr whose hospitality and compassion left a mark on all who knew her. Taking her name after Mary of Egypt, a converted prostitute,¹⁹⁸ Mother Maria lived her vocation as nun without a convent by making her home among the poor and the dispossessed and practising what she called 'monasticism in the world.'¹⁹⁹ She loved people at great risk and at profound cost, even to the very end. She was executed 1945 in a German concentration camp for her efforts to rescue the Jews.

Mother Maria was part of the Russian emigrant community in diaspora in France. In the 1920s, she was a prominent figure in Orthodox intellectual circles, alongside theologians such as Nikolai Bordyaev, Paul Endokimov, George Fedotov, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Sergei Bulgakov (her confessor). She spent her first years in France writing, teaching, organising and doing social work with the poor and marginalised. In 1932, with the blessing of Metropolitan Evlogy, she made her monastic profession to serve God by giving herself 'unreservedly to social service.'²⁰⁰ Like Mother Teresa, she did not seek a cloistered existence, but took the world as her monastery and served her poor sisters and brothers as iconic sacraments of God. She spent the next twelve years before her arrest ministering amongst the city's paupers, tramps and vagabonds; caring for poor mothers and children in her neighbourhoods; and visiting the sick and mentally disturbed. According to Michael Plekon, 'Her monastic day consisted of prayer in church but more so the works of loving-kindness for the suffering and forgotten: scavenging for food at bakeries and markets, cooking, listening to her residents' troubles, trying to find them jobs and lodging, and forays in the evenings to cafés in search of the homeless and desperate.'²⁰¹ In 1935, Mother Maria co-founded Orthodox Action and established several houses of hospitality for refugees, homeless and other

¹⁹⁵ Clément 2003, 7.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Bauerová 2014, 296.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 297.

¹⁹⁹ Skobtsova 2003, 90-103.

²⁰⁰ Forest 2003. 23.

²⁰¹ Plekon 2005, 319.

vulnerable people in Villa de Saxe, Rue Lourmel and Noisy-le-Grand. 'In every one of these hostels the chapel, the altar, the Eucharist were at the heart of the work of service of the neighbor.'²⁰²

Whilst the plight of the poor was already serious, the situation grew desperate during the years of Nazi occupation. Paris itself became a great prison, and poverty, hunger, hopelessness and fear intensified. Mother Maria had the opportunity to flee the city, but she refused to abandon those she was called to serve. With the help of Fr Dimitri Klepinine, she provided assistance to the Jewish people: food, protective shelter and also baptismal certificates. In July 1942, the Vichy Government conducted mass arrests of 12,884 registered Jews as part of the Nazi's 'solution' to the 'Jewish problem.' Of these, 6,900 (two-thirds of them children) were held in the Vélodrome d'Hiver sports stadium for five days before being deported to Auschwitz.²⁰³ 'Mother Maria had often thought her monastic robe a godsend in aiding her work,' writes Jim Forest. 'Now it opened the way for her to enter the stadium. Here she worked for three days trying to comfort the children and their parents, distributing what food she could bring in, even managing to rescue a number of children by enlisting the aid of garbage collectors and smuggling them out in trash bins.'²⁰⁴

In February 1943, Mother Maria, Fr Dimitri and her son Yuri were arrested by the Gestapo. The two men were sent to camps and soon died from dysentery, pneumonia and slave labour. 'Mother Maria, prisoner 19263, was sent in a sealed cattle truck from Compiègne to Ravensbrück camp in Germany, where she endured for two years, an achievement in part explained by her long experience of ascetic life.'²⁰⁵ Even at the edge of death, she continued to serve her fellow prisoners in what ways she could. It is said that Mother Maria's final act was to volunteer to take the place of another woman being sent to the gas chambers. She died on 31 March 1945, just weeks before the liberation of the camp by Allied Forces.

Mother Maria lived a life formed in the costly habits of cruciform love. In her theological writings, she often observes that neighbourly love demands a complex response of mercy and justice on both personal and structural levels.²⁰⁶ And yet, love cannot be reduced to social programmes or

²⁰² Ibid., 318.

²⁰³ Forest 2003, 32-33.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 34.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁰⁶ On the one hand, Skobtsova (2003) contends that 'personal charity is as necessary and justified as the broadest social work.' However, she also insists that Christians are 'called to organize a better life for

gestures of philanthropic largess. For Christians, works of mercy are a sacramental way of being in the world. For Mother Maria, Matthew 25:31-46 remained her primary theological framework for radical Christian discipleship. 'The way to God,' she writes,

lies through love of people. At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead I shall be asked, Did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners. That is all I shall be asked. About every poor, hungry and imprisoned person the Savior says "I": "I was hungry and thirsty, I was sick and in prison."²⁰⁷

Like Mother Teresa, Mother Maria interprets the 'least of these' as a universal description of every person in need. She takes *literally* the 'I' of Christ's radical identification with human suffering.²⁰⁸

There is not, nor can there be, any doubt but that in giving ourselves to another in love – to the poor, the sick, the prisoner – we will encounter in that person Christ Himself, face to face. [...] He will call some to eternal life because they showed Him love in the person of each unfortunate and miserable individual, while others He will send away from Himself because their hearts were without love, because they did not help Him in the person of his suffering human brethren in whom He revealed Himself to them.²⁰⁹

As sites of sacramental encounter, works of mercy signify concrete acts in which the love of God and neighbour visibly converge. To love an individual in the name of humanity alone 'leads us into the blind alley of an anti-Christian humanism' and to the rejection of the depth of this *person* eternally loved by God. However, to love God without loving human beings, to attend the church's liturgy without tending the image of God in the neighbour, is condemned; 'for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen' (1 John 4:20).²¹⁰ These are two dimensions of the same love: 'Destroy either one of them and you destroy truth as a whole.'²¹¹

workers, to provide for the old, to build hospitals, care for children, fight against exploitation, injustice, want, lawlessness. In principle the value is completely the same, whether he acts on an individual or a social level; what matters is that his social work be based on love for his neighbor' (54).

²⁰⁷ Skobtsova, quoted in Forest 2003, 30.

²⁰⁸ Forest 2003, 21. See also Plekon 2009, 403; Benevich 2000, 1-19.

²⁰⁹ Skobtsova 2003, 176.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

‘Christ gave us the firm and true teaching that we meet Him in every poor and unhappy man,’ she writes. He is indeed present ‘in a humiliated way’ in the neighbour. However, to genuinely love the neighbour in God one cannot do so for the sake of receiving some eternal benefit for oneself. We extend compassion to another

not because we will be rewarded, but because we are aflame with this sacrificial love of Christ and in it we are united with Him, with His suffering on the Cross, and we suffer not for the sake of our purification and salvation, but for the sake of this poor and unhappy man whose suffering is alleviated by ours. One cannot love sacrificially in one’s own name, but only in the name of Christ, in the name of the image of God that is revealed to us in man.²¹²

In an essay entitled ‘The Mysticism of Human Communion’ (1937), Mother Maria argues, ‘Christ’s love does not know how to measure and divide, does not know how to spare itself. Neither did Christ teach the apostles to be sparing and cautious in love – and He could not have taught them that, because He included them in the communion of the eucharistic sacrifice, made them into the Body of Christ – and thereby gave them up to be immolated for the world.’²¹³ Genuine works of mercy are risky acts of love – risky because compassion involves nothing less than entering the vulnerability of another’s pain. There is a profound connection between Christ’s kenotic self-offering for the sake of the world and a Christian act of mercy offered in the name of Christ for the sake of another person. Mother Maria experienced this connection in her daily work and in her contemplative activism. Her houses of hospitality become symbolic affirmations that the same Christ who is present in bread and wine also draws near in the poor.

Drawing on the imagery of St John Chrysostom, she argues that the ethical life of Christian discipleship participates in Christ’s eucharistic sacrifice as a ‘liturgy after the liturgy,’ or a ‘liturgy outside the church building,’²¹⁴ in which the works of mercy become an offering before God on the living altar of the neighbour.²¹⁵ She writes,

the liturgy outside the church is our sacrificial ministry in the church of the world, adorned with living icons of God, our common ministry, an all-human sacrificial offering of love, the great act of our God-manly union, the united prayerful breath

²¹² Ibid., 49.

²¹³ Ibid., 78-79.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 81; Plekon 2009, 403.

²¹⁵ Plekon 2009, 403.

of our God-manly spirit. In this liturgical communion with people, we partake of a communion with God.²¹⁶

Years of ministry in rough neighbourhoods taught Mother Maria that it is not always easy to see another human being as the very icon of God worthy of honour and veneration. 'We may get a disturbing neighbor in the same apartment,' for example, 'or an all-too-merry drinking companion, or a capricious and slow-witted student, or obnoxious ladies, or seedy old codgers, and so on, and relations with them will only weary us physically, annoy us inwardly, deaden us spiritually.'²¹⁷ However, encountering the poverty in others can also reveal the poverty in one's own soul. It is only by facing the disturbing truth of one's brokenness that it is possible to understand the depths of divine mercy one is called to live. 'If our approach to the world is correct and spiritual, we will not have only to give to it from our spiritual poverty, but we will receive infinitely more from the face of Christ that lives in it, from our communion with Christ, from the consciousness of being a part of Christ's body.'²¹⁸

8.5 LIVING BETWEEN THE ALTARS OF GOD

Though writing from Roman Catholic and Orthodox perspectives, Mother Teresa and Mother Maria both gesture towards a new way of thinking about liturgy, ethics and the place of the works of mercy in the Christian life. For both women, the sacramental liturgy of the church is the foundation of their spiritual and ethical vocation in the world. However, they insist that the liturgy does not end at the conclusion of a Sunday service, but rather continues in a new modality in the ordinary rhythms of everyday life. For here too the real presence of Christ is encountered in the neighbour.

Mother Teresa lived this connection between the Eucharist and the poor in her ministry in the slums. James Howell describes her as a 'living exegesis' of Matthew 25.²¹⁹ Similarly, Mother Maria has had a formative impact on subsequent generations of Orthodox theologians. Boris Bobrinsky observes that 'in the wake of Mother Maria Skobtsova voices that are more and more numerous are being raised to recall the urgency of brotherly love and of the diaconal dimension of the

²¹⁶ Skobtsova 2003, 81.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 82.

²¹⁹ Howell 2003, 105. 'As she fed the hungry, bandaged lepers, and clothed the naked, many agnostics found it helpful to consider that *Jesus* was like Mother Teresa' (emphasis added).

Eucharist itself.²²⁰ This ‘cigarette-smoking beggar nun’ – as she became known in her Parisian neighbourhoods – practised this sacramental ethic in her ‘monasticism in the world.’

Echoing the language of Chrysostom, another Orthodox theologian, Anastasios Yannoulatos, writes,

Each of the faithful is called upon to continue a personal “liturgy” on the secret altar of his own heart, to realize a living proclamation of the good news “for the sake of the whole world.” Without this continuation the liturgy remains incomplete. ... The sacrifice of the eucharist must be extended in personal sacrifices for the people in need, the brothers for whom Christ died. ... The continuation of liturgy in life means a continuous liberation from the powers of the evil that are working inside us, a continual reorientation and openness to insights and efforts aimed at liberating human persons from all demonic structures of injustice, exploitation, agony, loneliness, and at creating real communion of persons in love.²²¹

By advocating a ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ resonant with Chauvet’s liturgy of the neighbour, Mother Teresa and Mother Maria remind us that far more can and should be said about the sacramentality of daily living. This something more is mercy.

8.6 CONCLUSION

The previous three chapters explored the sacramentality of mercy from the perspective of Chauvet’s triadic theology of Christian existence and his two liturgical horizons of Christian worship. By tracing the *scriptural* (Chapter 6), *sacramental* (Chapter 7) and *ethical* (chapter 8) dimensions of the works of mercy, I have sought to demonstrate that these acts belong at the very heart of Chauvet’s liturgy of the neighbour – and that they do so in a rather particular way. For these humble acts of sharing and hospitality are nothing less than eucharistic events of grace within the mundane patterns of daily life.

Whilst this basic connection between mercy and Eucharist runs deep in the social imagination of the Christian tradition, it is rarely afforded this degree of sustained theological reflection. Numerous theologians have touched upon the profundity of *caritas* with a word, a line, a suggestive comment. More often than not, however, acts of compassion are taken as a practical given and the precise nature of their theological deep-structure left unexplored. By contrast,

²²⁰ Bobrinsky 2003, 28-29.

²²¹ Yannoulatos, quoted in Bria 1996, 20.

thinkers like Schillebeeckx, Rahner, Congar and Chauvet have in various ways been reaching, feeling along in the shadows towards a reality of immense theological significance. A few voices like Lambourne and Davies stand out for tackling the question directly with intellectual creativity and theological insight. But in the end, it is the lived experience of men and women like Mother Teresa and Mother Maria that most definitively exemplify the practical fusion of doxological thanksgiving and ethical praxis. For here one discovers the true profundity of mercy – not in sophisticated theories or academic arguments – but in the one context where it most fully reveals itself: in redemptive moments of authentic communion when a human being takes a risky stance of compassion for the sake of another.

The works of mercy are always there, lived within communities of faith as marks of Christian discipleship. In this sense, proposing an ethical ‘sacrament of mercy’ is not an attempt to tell the church something it does not already know or intimately understand. Indeed, Christianity is inconceivable without them. The theological task undertaken in this work is modest: to simply recover a deeper awareness of this mystery – that Christ draws near in the unnoticed and the unlooked for, in the trivial and the mundane, in cups of cold water and pieces of bread.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Living and loving out loud is a beautiful thing.¹
– Cornel West

Works of mercy [are] the social policy that Jesus has given his people for the renewal of the world.
– Stanley Hauerwas²

9.1 TOWARDS A LITURGICAL ETHIC OF THE EVERYDAY

This study has endeavoured to rediscover something of the theological depth of those ordinary ethical gestures of generosity, compassion and solidarity that constitute the moral fabric of Christian discipleship. More specifically, it has sought to contribute to the development of a more robust theology of the works of mercy from the perspective of sacramentality. To this end, my aim has been to demonstrate that, at their core, the works of mercy represent nothing less than a *liturgically shaped ethic of the everyday*.

In this final chapter, I first evaluate the central argument and key findings of this study, second offer a summative theological proposal for the sacramentality of the works of mercy, and third conclude by suggesting several possible trajectories this thesis opens up for future research.

9.2 OVERVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

In the opening pages of **Chapter 1**, I observed that the works of mercy continue to inform the lived reality of faith in congregations and parishes, and especially among those actively serving among the poor and neglected in innumerable contexts of human need. Their theological significance, however, is often misunderstood (or simply overlooked) within the church and academy alike. As a consequence, Christians often struggle to locate these acts, let alone identify the particular role they might play within the sacramental economy of the church. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that as soon as explicit theological reflection is cast in the direction of this otherwise implicit mode of ethical praxis, new questions inevitably arise: ‘What does it mean for us,’ he asks, ‘that the hungry, the poor, the sick, the homeless, and the imprisoned represent Christ? How should the works of mercy constitute the criteria for Christian salvation? What does

¹ West 2009, 261.

² Hauerwas 2006, 212.

it mean that the works of mercy are not secondary beliefs and practices of Christian communities, but, instead, constitute their identity?’³ In the absence of clearly articulated theological frameworks within which to grapple with such questions, Christian communities risk defaulting to secular paradigms such as ‘social welfarism’ or ‘individualistic philanthropy.’ Difficulties emerge, as we have seen, when the language of ‘volunteerism’ so saturates into the church’s self-understanding that it becomes a kind of theological grammar which affords the works of mercy their ultimate (un)intelligibility.⁴ For here, mercy is all too easily disjointed from Word and Sacrament, and becomes either privatised as an edifying spiritual extra and/or abdicated to the professional expertise of others.⁵

By contrast, both Benedict XVI and Chauvet remind us that the theological coherence of Christian discipleship is compromised when the ministry of charity is divorced from its ecclesial and sacramental context. For Benedict, the twofold commandment to love God and neighbour does not refer to two distinct modes of human activity, the former called ‘worship’ and the latter ‘ethics.’ On the contrary, he insists that these loves fuse together as a complex, yet unified participation in the Triune God. This communion is itself grounded in the ‘sacramental “mysticism”’ of the Eucharist. ‘Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus’ teaching on love.’ He continues,

The transition which [Jesus] makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment [...], and his grounding the whole life of faith in this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality – something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship and *ethos* are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God’s *agape*.

In these encounters, concludes Benedict, ‘the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart.’⁶ Not only are the corporal and spiritual works of mercy ‘part of the fundamental structure of the Church,’ but from the beginning of Christianity they ‘became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and

³ Schüssler Fiorenza 1992, 33.

⁴ In his essay, Schüssler Fiorenza (1992) identifies five major shifts which threaten to compromise the theological integrity of the works of mercy in the modern world: (1) the bureaucratisation of social policy, (2) the professionalisation of social services, (3) the monetarisation of social welfare, (4) the turn to social work and therapeutic client-centeredness, and (5) the colonialisation of what Jürgen Habermas calls the ‘life-world’ (54-58).

⁵ See Bell 2012, 187-214.

⁶ Benedict XVI 2006, 38.

the proclamation of the Word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and need of every kind is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the gospel.’⁷ For Benedict, sacramentality provides a richer theological lens through which to discern the true depth of caritative acts of mercy and justice.

The principal aim of this work has been to take Benedict’s claims seriously as a new point of departure for constructing a ‘sacramental theology’ of the works of mercy. The central argument of this thesis has developed as follows:

Part One established the background for our inquiry by surveying the emergence of a ‘sacramental ethic’ in twentieth-century Roman Catholic theology. To this end, **Chapter 2** reviewed the writings of several theologians before and after the Second Vatican Council and considered how significant conceptual innovations in sacramental theology paved the way for a renewed understanding of the relationship between liturgy and ritual, worship and ethics beyond fixed boundaries of the seven ritual sacraments of the church.

Part Two turned from these initial experiments in sacramental ethics to the more comprehensive theological project of Louis-Marie Chauvet. Here I argued that Chauvet’s sacramental approach not only provides a liturgical framework for Christian ethics as a whole, but it also offers a sacramental grammar for recovering the works of mercy as sacrificial acts of worship at the heart of the ‘liturgy of the neighbour.’ In **Chapter 3**, I situated Chauvet’s work in light of the theological trajectories discussed in Chapter 2. Outflanking the problematic metaphysics of scholastic sacramentology through a postmodern turn to the symbolic, Chauvet provides a nuanced account of the sacramentality of Christian existence itself. He contends that Scripture-Sacrament-Ethics are not simply ‘marks’ of Christian identity, but elements which coalesce into a basic anthropological structure (cognition/recognition/action) and a dynamic ‘economy’ of symbolic gift-exchange (gift/reception/return-gift). Chauvet’s theology of sacramentality enables us to reconceptualise the multivalent *ordo* of Christian worship as a dynamic interplay of ecclesial gathering and missional sending.⁸ Christians are regularly gathered as ‘one body’ through the sacramental rites celebrated in the ‘liturgy of the church.’ And yet the church is also commissioned to live this ecclesial identity in the midst of everyday life. This responsive sending does not ‘conclude’ the liturgy as such, but rather signifies its culmination. For in this ‘liturgy *after*

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ See also Moore-Keish 2010, 246-256 and Edgardh 2008, 505-518.

the liturgy,' the doxological affirmations of the church are performed and 'veri-fied' as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving, and inscribed on the bodies of believers through risky acts of ethical dispossession. Viewed from the perspective of sacramentality, both the ritual 'liturgy of the church' and the existential 'liturgy of the neighbour' constitute a single ecclesial offering of worship before God. In this way, ethics becomes a *eucharistic* praxis of gratitude offered in the self-giving of Christ through the vivifying power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4 traced Chauvet's sacramental ethic to its roots in Jewish and early Christian worship. I sought to substantiate Chauvet's general claim that ethical praxis is a return-gift of thanksgiving. Drawing on a range of biblical and theological traditions, I endeavoured to show that the works of mercy represent paradigmatic 'sacramental' acts in the midst of everyday life. This is not an arbitrary designation. On the contrary, these particular deeds of loving kindness – feeding, sheltering, visiting, comforting, forgiving, instructing, praying – have long been recognised as sacrificial acts of worship. This has direct implications for how the church should understand these acts in the present.

Chapter 5 examined the theological and philosophical foundations of Chauvet's 'liturgy of the neighbour.' I critically assessed Chauvet's use of Levinas, arguing that Levinas' Derridean account of the gift is sharply opposed to the Maussian interpretation preferred by Chauvet. That being said, Levinas' work underscores – what for my purposes is – the most important argument Chauvet leaves undeveloped: namely, the sacramentality of the works of mercy themselves. Not only does Levinas locate the works of mercy of Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 at the core of the liturgy of the neighbour, but he also argues that these acts correspond to the Eucharist as parallel sites of sacramental encounter – traces of God's proximity in the face of the other. Chauvet's failure to attend to these connections is indicative of a pervasive weakness throughout his sacramental theology. In essence, whilst Chauvet's liturgy of the neighbour brilliantly describes the liturgical *extensity* of Christian ethics, it fails to account for corresponding moments of sacramental *intensity* in ordinary life. When commenting on the works of mercy explicitly, Chauvet comes close to making such an affirmation. However, at the last moment he hesitates and reverts to unhelpfully vague descriptions of the works of mercy as 'a kind of "sacrament" of the Risen One.'⁹ In the end, he simply asserts that 'There is *something sacramental* about their ethics of service inasmuch as it carries the gift that Jesus made of himself.'¹⁰ I concluded the chapter by showing

⁹ Chauvet 1995b, 166.

¹⁰ Chauvet 2001, 27 (emphasis added).

that, despite his hesitancy, the inner logic of his own project is consistently oriented towards a much stronger sacramental interpretation of the works of mercy than he provides himself.

Part Three built on these foundations in order to give a more explicit account of the sacramentality of mercy. Following the basic architectonics of Chauvet's sacramental theology, **Chapter 6** sought to establish the *scriptural* basis for a sacramental interpretation of Matthew 25 by addressing common objections raised by biblical scholars and contemporary theologians. I argued that it is exegetically legitimate and theologically justified to take Christ's identification with 'the least of these' as a literal association with those suffering conditions of want and need. As Moltmann observes, 'If we take the promises of Christ's presence seriously, we must talk about a brotherhood of believers and a brotherhood of the least of his brethren with Christ. "He who hears you hears me" – "He who visits them, visits me."'”¹¹

In **Chapter 7**, I turned to the *sacramental* theology of R. A. Lambourne and Oliver Davies. These two theologians provide a fresh and creative theological account of the mercy and compassion as acts of worship. Lambourne's provocative thesis sought to break free from the rigid categories of scholastic sacramentology. His work succeeds in clearing space for an innovative account of the works of mercy as sacraments in the strong sense of the word. Like Levinas, he draws a direct parallel between the 'real presence' of Christ in works of mercy and the Eucharist. Lambourne, however, does so with a close eye to both Scripture and the Christian tradition. If Lambourne revealed the possibility of a sacramental ethic of mercy some fifty years ago, Davies' recent work demonstrates the theological potency of this concept for the future trajectory of contemporary sacramental theology. Of particular significance to the present study is Davies' sophisticated account of the ascension and his treatment of Christ's sacramental 'presence-in-hiddenness' both in the materiality of bread and wine and in caritative acts of compassion.

Lambourne and Davies provide an important corrective to Chauvet's work. First of all, Lambourne gives a theological account of the role of the works of mercy within the liturgy of the neighbour. When combined with Chauvet's larger account of the sacramentality of Christian existence, this enables us to locate the works of mercy within the sacramental economy of the church as a whole. Secondly, Davies offers a far richer account of 'sacramental presence' than does Chauvet. In his desire to preserve the otherness of the symbolic order and the ungraspable mystery of God's difference, Chauvet ends up describing sacramental 'presence' as the presence-of-the-

¹¹ Moltmann 1993, 128-129.

absence of Christ. As a consequence, this absence signifies a kind of distance or void. As such, 'presence' loses the salvific charge of *mediation* and is reduced to an empty withdrawal, which itself invites what Davies calls 'substitutionary' theologies of sacramental presence. By contrast, Davies argues that Christ is really present to his church. With Chauvet, he agrees that this is not a modality of presence that can be grasped, controlled or contained. Against Chauvet, he contends that Christ is present-in-hiddenness. To speak of presence is to affirm the mediated immediacy (Schillebeeckx) of Christ's proximity. Significantly, Davies does not argue that this presence-in-hiddenness is equally diffused throughout all of creation. On the contrary, he insists that there are particular places of epiphanic disclosure – moments of revelation – events of grace. Bringing the argument full circle, I affirm with Davies that the works of mercy may not be *exhaustive* sites of such encounter, yet they do seem to signify quintessential acts in which one 'draws near' to the presence of God by willingly 'entering the chaos' of another's suffering.¹²

Chapter 8 concluded with an *ethical* discussion of the implications of the sacrament of mercy for the lived reality of faith. In particular, I considered the life and works of Mother Teresa and Mother Maria Skobtsova. Both of these women held firm to the conviction that the love of God and neighbour are one, that the Eucharist and acts of compassion constitute two dimensions – two altars – of Christian worship, and that the works of mercy are nothing less than a cruciform way of life. Their witness exemplifies the theological themes which run through the heart of this thesis. Mother Teresa has become a living icon of the sacrament of mercy within the popular imagination of several generations of Christian practitioners. Though less well-known, Mother Maria not only lived the works of mercy but also provided a rich sacramental theology deeply resonant with the basic connections I have attempted to make throughout this thesis.

On the basis of the preceding analysis, I can now offer a more conclusive proposal for the sacramentality of mercy.

9.3 WORKS OF MERCY AS SACRAMENT

At their theological depth, the works of mercy constitute a liturgical ethic of the everyday. This thesis has sought to unpack the meaning of this claim in light of Chauvet's liturgy of the neighbour, Lambourne's sacrament of mercy and Davies' theology of presence. Together, these concepts provide a coherent theological framework for locating the works of mercy within the

¹² Keenan 2005, xiii.

church as a worshipping community. In the following pages, I will explore what I consider to be five core dimensions of the sacramentality of mercy: act, encounter, event, participation and transformation.

9.3.1 ACT

WORKS OF MERCY AS SACRAMENTAL ACTS OF WORSHIP

A key insight of twentieth-century liturgical theology is that sacraments are not primarily ‘objects’ or ‘things’ but *actions*.¹³ Within the liturgy of the church, sacramental action is simultaneously oriented toward *God* (in praise, confession, petition, worship, thanksgiving) and toward *the people of God* (in reading, preaching, absolving, greeting, blessing).¹⁴ At one level, these acts are performed by the gathered assembly in the name of Christ. At a deeper theological level, however, the principal agent in sacramental action is *God*, whose self-giving always already ‘precedes and undergirds our action.’¹⁵ Human agency is responsive to God’s initiative, empowered by God’s Spirit, and offered in God’s Son.

Works of mercy represent a multivalent modality of sacramental action. On the *surface*, works of mercy are simply those visible caritative acts enacted in compassionate response to another in need: food given to the hungry, shelter to the homeless, hospitable welcome to a stranger. Works of mercy are fundamentally concerned with personal, face-to-face actions between human subjects: as you *did it* to one of the least of these (Matt 25:40). At their theological *depth*, however, works of mercy constitute an ecclesial mode of liturgical action. In the New Testament, these practices are described in the cultic terminology of sacrificial worship as *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *koinonia*. All three of these words signify a twofold orientation: toward the neighbour (horizontal, ethics) and toward God (vertical, worship) – as you did it to one of the *least of these* (others), you did it to *me* (Other).

In other words, works of mercy are at once risky acts of love for the sake of the flourishing of a concrete neighbour and a modality of sacramental encounter with the presence-in-hiddenness of

¹³ Jungmann 1966, 1-2. See Wolterstorff 1991, 7-8 and also 1996, 103-122.

¹⁴ Wolterstorff 1991, 8.

¹⁵ Léon-Dufour 2005, 96. ‘The fact that God encounters us should not be understood to mean that God alone is active in regard to us who remain passive. It is God, after all, who makes us moral beings. There is such an authentic human action, because it is *at the same time* the action of God. Such is the paradox of our “action.” Catholic teaching likes to promote the role of grace, which transforms human action. I prefer to retain the language of the Orthodox, who for their part speak of *synergy* when it comes to our religious action’ (90-91).

Christ in the unique particularity of that neighbour. As *leitourgia*, they signify both divine service before-God *and* public service for-others – a work of the people or ‘liturgy of the neighbour.’¹⁶ As *diakonia*, they represent incarnational acts of worship *and* a kenotic ethic of servant-hearted compassion symbolised by the washing of feet.¹⁷ And as *koinonia*, they participate in a relational communion with Christ through the Spirit *and* nurture the intrapersonal communion of friendship, solidarity and love with other persons.¹⁸

Lambourne intensifies this notion of mercy as sacramental act by proposing a systematic reinterpretation according to technical sacramental categories. He describes acts of mercy as *instituted by Jesus* in the cup of cold water (and the washing of feet) as *effective signs* of union with Christ and thus a *dispositive cause* of salvation.¹⁹ He argues that the ‘sacrament alone’ (*sacramentum tantum*) is the surface level caritative act; the ‘reality and the sacrament’ (*res et tantum*) is Christ in his whole body (*totus Christus*) as the true agent of the action; and the ‘reality alone’ (*res tantum*) is the communion with the hidden Christ effected by the Spirit in the act of mercy itself.²⁰ The works of mercy thus participate in the *grace* of God’s self-giving proximity.²¹ Lambourne’s quest for dynamic equivalents between ritual and ethical modes of sacramentality may not persuade all critics. However, one need not follow this approach to the letter in order to affirm the works of mercy as acts of worship.

Throughout the Christian tradition, deeds of loving kindness are variously described as sacrificial offerings of the priestly people of God. In biblical and early Christian theology, works of mercy are

¹⁶ Ward 2009, 182-183; cf. Ward 2006, 29-49.

¹⁷ Kinnamon (1986) argues that ‘service (*diakonia*), including the sharing of one’s resources, can also be “sacramental.” Insofar as service reveals God’s presence or points towards the living reality of Christ the servant, it is a direct extension of the church’s sacramental life. Insofar as it glorifies God and gives thanks for what God has done and is doing on behalf of the world, it may be called “eucharistic.” Service is sacramental, in short, when the work God is doing becomes visible through it. It is sacramental when people are served, not when we try to serve them. The emphasis is not on our efforts or generosity but on our efforts succeeding beyond itself’ (376-377).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 373. ‘As used by the apostle [Paul], *koinonia* has two particular meanings: (a) participation in (fellowship or communion with) Christ, and (b) mutual participation in (fellowship or communion with) the community of believers. Such fellowship with Christ [...] is experienced most directly in the sacramental life of the church, and especially in the Eucharist. [...] The entire New Testament reinforces this idea that our sacramental sharing in Christ should always lead to mutual sharing with members of the community. [...] This connection between “the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the brother” [...] is inescapable, a fact that Paul underlines by using the same word (*koinonia*) to explain the meaning of the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:16) and to describe the significance of aiding the church in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26).’

¹⁹ See Bullivant 2012, 149-179.

²⁰ Lambourne 1961, 357-358.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 357.

among the most significant sacrifices that all Christians make before God. This ‘sacrifice of mercy’ is not offered on its own, as it were, but is co-mingled and united with the primordial self-offering of Jesus Christ. As Schillebeeckx writes,

the “spiritual sacrifice” of everyday life in the world with one’s fellow-men is *the* sacrifice that matters; it is in this life in the world that the Christian finds the *reality* of his living participation in the sacrifice of Christ, the sacramental form of which he may receive as nourishment in the Eucharist, as his confession in faith that secular worship is only possible by virtue of God’s “new creation” in Christ.²²

Christ is the sacrifice. He is *present* in the sacrifice of mercy and also *presents* the church’s thanksgiving before God. United in Christ’s own self-gift, the works of mercy become an acceptable sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. One implication of this is that ethical acts are defined as *responsive* to the prevenient gift of God. To become truly Christian, this response of mercy must become a mode of embodied gratitude – a return-gift of thanksgiving, a sacrifice of praise. So practised, works of mercy become a cruciform way of ‘embodying sacred kingdom.’²³

All of these frameworks coalesce to make the same basic point: works of mercy are acts of worship. As Mother Maria observes, ‘The liturgy outside the church is our sacrificial ministry in the church of the world, adorned with living icons of God, our common ministry, an all-human sacrificial offering of love, the great act of our God-manly union, the united prayerful breath of God-manly spirit [...] and it seems to me that *this mysticism of human communion is the only authentic basis for any external Christian activity.*’²⁴

9.3.2 ENCOUNTER

WORKS OF MERCY AS INTENSIVE SITES OF SACRAMENTAL ENCOUNTER

The sacramental action of mercy is oriented toward an ethical encounter with the concrete neighbour and, refracted through this communion, with the hidden presence of Christ. Oliver Davies refers to the intrapersonal encounter as the ‘*phenomenological* reduction of compassion.’²⁵ Compassion is a complex moral act of putting oneself at risk for the sake of another person. ‘In compassion we see another’s distress (cognition), we *feel moved* by it

²² Schillebeeckx 1969, 114.

²³ Holman 2010, 43.

²⁴ Skobtsova 2003, 81-82.

²⁵ Davies 2001, 24-46. Davies’ phenomenological analysis seeks to uncover ‘the intentional structure of compassion as a modality of consciousness’ (19).

(affectively) and we *actively seek to remedy* it (volition).’ Works of mercy are not simply discrete acts, but an ‘other-centred intentionality’ that becomes incarnate in a material, bodily response to a wounded cry of suffering.²⁶ Such acts can become epiphanic moments, disclosing the nature of personhood itself as constituted by the mutual reciprocity between the self and the other. This ethical self-giving can precipitate an openness to an even deeper revelation: ‘we are made aware of the fundamental determination of our own existence as a self that is grounded in its relation to the finite other, in which relation it discovers the further horizon of possibility as the encounter with an Other both infinite and personal.’²⁷ Davies calls this second mode of sacramental encounter the ‘*theological* reduction of compassion.’²⁸ The path to a loving communion with God runs through the neighbour. The theological grammar of compassion reminds us that ‘we can only think about God in depth, and draw near to him in understanding when we re-enact within ourselves the conditions of his own being, which is to say dispossession of the self for the sake of the other.’²⁹ In radically ordinary acts of mercy, ‘we encounter Jesus Christ – the Compassion of God – as the one who goes before and who is already present to us, if unfathomably, in the compassionate act.’³⁰

As we have seen, Matthew 25 reveals works of mercy as paradigmatic sites of encounter with the risen Christ. ‘[S]tanding with the poor, which includes feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned, is the privileged place for us to find and come to know Jesus. In theological terms, the poor, whether good or bad, rude or gracious, beautiful or ugly, are *sacraments* for us,’ writes Fred Kammer. ‘[T]he poor are blessed encounters with Christ Jesus who has hidden himself in their midst, wrapping himself in their hunger, nakedness, pain, and suffering.’³¹ This sacramental encounter is not consolation but disruption, for here we are met by a cross-shattered Christ in the cruciform suffering of the poor. As Boff and Pixley write,

faced with the poor, human beings are called to love, service, solidarity and justice. So receiving this sacrament is bitter to the taste. Yet it remains the *only* ‘*sacrament*’ *absolutely necessary* for salvation. The ritual sacraments allow

²⁶ Ibid., 17-18 (emphasis added). See also, Nussbaum 2001. For a provocative discussion of this theme, see O’Connell 2009.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Ibid., 232-253.

²⁹ Ibid., 253.

³⁰ Ibid., 23.

³¹ Kammer 1991, 133 (emphasis added). ‘Saints like Vincent dePaul, Louise de Marillac, and Peter Claver understood this and taught it to their followers. Teresa of Calcutta has taught the same lesson to a new generation of followers.’

of exceptions, and many; this allows of none. It is also the *absolutely universal 'sacrament'* of salvation. The way to God goes necessarily, for everyone without exception, through human beings — human beings in need, whether their need is of bread or the word.³²

Compassionate action in response to this disruptive presence cannot be authentically practised at a distance. Mercy implicates the giver in the situation of another's need.

As concrete acts in which love of neighbour and God converge, works of mercy constitute what Alexander Schmemmann calls the 'possible impossibility' of sacramental encounter:

Christian love is the "possible impossibility" to see Christ in another person, whoever he or she is, and whom God, in His eternal mysterious plan, has decided to introduce again into my life, be it only for a few moments, not as an occasion for a "good deed" or an exercise in philanthropy, but as the beginning of an eternal companionship in God's power. [...] If God loves every human being, it is because he alone knows the priceless and absolutely unique treasure, the "soul" or "person" he gave every human being. Christian love then is the participation in that divine knowledge and the gift of that divine love.³³

At the heart of the liturgy of the neighbour are these intensive moments of encounter, in which Christians are called to attend to one another in Christ. The works of mercy are not just morally commendable acts; they are not a heightened form of philanthropic concern. Rather, works of mercy are an invitation to tend the depths of human personhood with receptive generosity and, in doing so, to discover the abiding presence of the living God.

9.3.3 EVENT

WORKS OF MERCY AS SALVIFIC EVENTS OF GRACE WITHIN THE EVERYDAY

In various ways, the theologians discussed throughout in this project – Schillebeeckx, Rahner, Congar, Chauvet, Lambourne, Davies, etc. – have all attempted to describe ordinary 'events of grace' within the mundane patterns of daily living. All of these thinkers call into question the bifurcation of the world into separate spheres: sacred/secular, holy/profane, church/world, liturgy/ethics. They also challenge the instrumentalisation of sacramental action and the reduction of grace to an 'object' to be caused, channelled or produced. As Chauvet writes, grace is not a thing, but a new relational identity in Christ through the Spirit. It is a gift of God's self and a gift of the self in God, in which believing subjects are no longer considered servants of a master

³² Boff & Pixley 1989, 114. For a comparative analysis of Boff and Chauvet, see Fortuna 1992, 71-91.

³³ Schmemmann 1990, 22-23.

but children of the Father: sons and daughters before God, sisters or brothers for one another. The grace received and celebrated in the sacramental rites of the liturgy of the church is not given as a possession to be contained, but 'as a task to be accomplished' within the liturgy of the neighbour.³⁴ Of course, works of mercy are not the only ways of practising grace.³⁵ However, for Christians they remain defining moments in which 'the *sacramental rendering-thanks* seeks to be enfolded in the *living-in-grace* among brothers and sisters.'³⁶ In these acts of love for the neighbour 'the paternity of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Spirit are rendered effective in our world.'³⁷

9.3.4 PARTICIPATION

WORKS OF MERCY AS PARTICIPATIONS IN THE SELF-GIVING OF CHRIST AND 'DOXOLOGICAL' ANTICIPATIONS OF THE FUTURE REIGN OF GOD'S REDEMPTION

As 'events of grace' and 'sites of encounter,' the works of mercy signify a compassionate response to the suffering of another. However, from a theological perspective, it is perhaps more fitting to describe mercy as a participation in *God's* loving response to the suffering one. According to Graham Ward, Christian action is 'a *praxis* that participates in a divine *poiēsis* that has soteriological and eschatological import.'³⁸ Divine *poiēsis* refers to God's way of creating, sustaining and redeeming the world. '*Poiēsis* bears a transcendent charge, an ontological weight of bringing something into being, of genesis.' To act in God's *poiēsis* is to welcome God's reign, allowing God's future to disrupt and reconfigure our lives in the present. As sacrificial acts caught up in the self-giving of Christ through the Spirit, works of mercy can become what Schillebeeckx calls 'anticipatory, mediating signs of salvation, that is, healed and reconciled life.'³⁹

³⁴ Chauvet 1995b, 440.

³⁵ See Power 1992, 292-293.

³⁶ Chauvet 1995b, 277.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 442-443.

³⁸ Ward 2009, 201. The scene in Matt 25 indicates something of the *eschatological* and *soteriological* force of these actions. Luke Bretherton (2008) captures the implications of this for our understanding of mercy as an anticipation of God's future: 'Thus, we are to act in order to maintain, restore and fulfill the creation order but we should not expect its fullness now and recognise all our attempts to live out the kingdom are touched by sin. Yet to feed the destitute, to give a voice to the voiceless, to reconcile enemies, to comfort the afflicted or to bring physical healing is to taste the meal that Christ hosts. To discern the concrete ways in which such things are prohibited from happening is to be hungry and thirsty for the Messianic banquet. As Christians we are to live as those anticipating the kingdom of God, as those who are anticipating the new creation now' (164-165).

³⁹ Schillebeeckx 1977, 836. Reflecting on Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*, Cyrus Olsen (2008) writes, 'When we enter into [the] newness [of Christ], in our neighbour, in works of mercy, in the Eucharist, we enter into a living event of love that calls for our active participation [...]. An encounter with Christ establishes a relationship that can be aptly described, in the words of the very early Rahner, as the "religious event

Thus to speak of works of mercy as a ‘participation’ in Christ and an ‘anticipation’ of the kingdom is to hold to Jesus’ words to his disciples: ‘Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me’ (John 15:4).⁴⁰ To act mercifully is to act ‘in Christ,’ and for Christ, by the Spirit, to inhabit the act. Luke Bretherton describes this ethical habitus of abiding as ‘mundane holiness,’ for ‘it is in the mundane practicalities of life that the apocalypse is made manifest. For the most part, encounter with God and the bursting out of the new creation occur not in some special spiritual zone but through and amid the vicissitudes, conflicts and contingency of our everyday life.’⁴¹

9.3.5 TRANSFORMATION

WORKS OF MERCY AS A TRANSFORMATIVE PRAXIS OF DISCIPLESHIP

As sacramental acts that participate in the redemptive love of God, works of mercy are intimately bound up with questions of Christian identity. Far from being a kind of voluntary activity that Christians can take or leave as they see fit, these ethical acts are a formative habitus that defines the very core of Christian discipleship. As Christ poured himself out in risky acts of compassion for those at the very edges of social existence – children, prostitutes, sinners, failures, drunkards, bankers, lepers, the lame, the blind, the poor, the untouchables – as he made even the least of these the defining pattern of his own life, so he calls and commissions those who claim to bear his name to live as he has loved. To become a disciple of Jesus is to allow one’s life to be disrupted, decentred, and transformed. To follow Christ is to become merciful. Oliver Davies writes, ‘Jesus is the kenosis of God, given to us as love, whom we receive in a parallel motion of kenotic love as recognition-affirmation and obedient following, or discipleship.’⁴² Christian discipleship is a non-identical repetition of this kenotic dispossession, for one only receives and enters the newness of grace through the act of giving again. To speak of a reception-as-giving is another way of saying that discipleship is only truly Christian when lived as an expression of thanksgiving. There are innumerable ways in which the love of God can be encountered in this life. However, the means by which God has enabled humanity to love in return is through the bodily mediation of the neighbour.

itself.” Wrapped into the heart of the Trinity, we are enrolled in the divine service wherein our transformation from glory into glory (2 Cor 3:18) requires a dynamic turning away from ourselves toward the face of Christ in the unity of contemplation and action’ (20-21).

⁴⁰ See Ward 2009, 184.

⁴¹ Bretherton 2007, 235-236.

⁴² Davies 2001, 223.

In the deflection of love, the kenotic space that opens up between ourselves and Christ is inhabited by the presences of innumerable others [...]. This self-risking opening to others is itself a condition of faith as a coming into relation with the self-risking opening of God to his creation. To this extent therefore compassion, like joy, is a participation of the self in the incarnation, and the becoming visible in us of God's love for the world.⁴³

Ethical dispossession is the way of discipleship and the sacrifice of mercy is the priestly vocation of the people of God. To risk oneself for the sake of another is to become merciful. To offer one's life as a thankful response to God's grace is to become eucharistic.⁴⁴ For at the altar of the Eucharist, we receive a new identity in Christ.

9.4 FUTURE AREAS OF RESEARCH

Taken together, this thesis has attempted to analyse the sacramental deep-structure of Christian charity. Far from being the last word, I see this project as constructing a theological foundation upon which to build what we might call a multi-dimensional theology of the works of mercy. It seeks to contribute to a wider theological conversation which is only just beginning concerning the empirical status of the works of mercy in the contemporary church, and also the possibility of reimagining the nature of their practise as a public witness to the gospel, as exemplifications of the good life, and as a costly praxis of radical solidarity and just generosity enacted for the life of the world.

As a basic starting point for this endeavour, I suggest that the sacramental horizon recovered in this thesis invites additional theological research in at least the following four areas:

- (1) The works of mercy as *liturgical performance*
- (2) The works of mercy as *ethical praxis*
- (3) The works of mercy as *political witness*
- (4) The works of mercy and *the radical ordinary*

Drawing ethical, liturgical and political theologies into interdisciplinary dialogue under the broader category of sacramentality would enable us to give a much more robust account of the significance of the works of mercy within the life of the church.

⁴³ Davies 2001, 223-224.

⁴⁴ Chauvet 1995b, 314-315.

9.5 CONCLUSION

Mercy is the primary and ultimate, the first and the last, of human reactions. It is that in terms of which all dimensions of the human being acquire meaning and without which nothing else attains to human status. In this mercy, the human being is perfected, becomes whole.⁴⁵

– Jon Sobrino

In the end, what these humble practices of compassion invoke is quite simply an invitation to *abide*. As Jesus says to his disciples, ‘I am the vine; you are the branches. [...] No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. [...] If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love [...]. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you’ (John 15.1-12). As the Scriptures bear witness Christ, the true vine, is the gratuitous source from which life flows; yet for life to be received, one must *remain* in the life-giver. The primary locus of this remaining is neither a mere confession of faith nor an internal existential experience, but in the extending outwards of grace – that is, in the re-giving of the gifts of mercy. Paradoxically, the gift of grace is only ever truly received through the modality of openness and giving again.

In the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar, each one of us, in our unique and concrete particularity,

becomes the bearer of God’s call, the Sacrament of the word of God as it comes to me. This Sacrament is dispensed in daily life, not in the church; in conversation, not during a sermon. It is administered not in prayer and meditation, but in situations where prayer shows that it is genuine and where meditation results in the apostolate. There it will be decided whether I have really heard God’s word in my prayer, whether I have received his Body and Blood in church effectively. And the decision is made in the right way, if it is evident that I am willing to give my neighbor the bread and wine of the word and of my own life.⁴⁶

This sacramental praxis of mercy is nothing less than a *habitus* of inhabitation – participating in the Father’s grace through one’s own kenotic dispossession for the sake of another – imitating the mercy of the Son through an ethical return-gift of thanksgiving – encountering the Spirit of the living God through the bodily mediation of the neighbour.

⁴⁵ Sobrino 1993, 233-256.

⁴⁶ Balthasar 1967, 150. Likewise, Benedict XVI (2006) writes, ‘Practical activity will always be insufficient unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift’ (87).

Pascere
Potare
Vestire
Recolligere
Visitare
Redimere
Sepelire

Corrigere
Docere
Consulere
Consolari
Portare
Remittere
Orare

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