Sacramentality in a Multi-Religious Context

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Introduction

A recent Statistics Canada study indicates that the number of interreligious marriages has risen from 15% in 1981 to 19% in 2006. Further 25% of all urban Canadian Catholics are married to non-Catholics. These statics illustrate the fact that Roman Catholics are entering into marriages with non-Christian in increasing number, certainly in the West. This pastoral reality requires an appropriate pastoral response, and this response will not only affect pastoral practice but I believe it will integrate several theological fields— theologies of religions, comparative theologies and sacramental theology—and make a significant contribution to the development of each.

Integration

Comparative theologies and theologies of religions have made significant contributions to the academy, to common projects for justice and peace amongst the world's religions, and to the personal development of those involved in dialogue. However, there is less reflection on how the encounter of persons of different religious beliefs affects the performance of our Catholic Christian identity in symbol and ritual, in liturgy and prayer.

Sacramental theology after Vatican II has been influenced by its contact with cognate fields in semiotics, ritual studies and cultural studies. While many leading sacramental theologians[1] affirm that the notion of sacrament is not exclusively Christian and acknowledge

[1] Two examples may found in Kenan B. Osbourne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999) "because of the presence of God in an ongoing creation, there ca be, and have been, sacramental events going on in all religions. There can be and have been sacramental events that take place whenever human individuals respond to this creative presence of God. Sacramentality cannot be restricted to a singular person, Jesus as primordial sacrament, or to a specific group of people, the church as foundational sacrament, or to a numerically limited classification of ritual sacraments." 146. Louis-Marie Chauvet, The Sacraments: *The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN, 2001) "In every religion, be it polytheistic or

that the multi-religious context for thinking about and performing sacramental rituals has been affected by the Church's encounter with non-Christian religions, little has been produced in terms of how this reality concretely affects and expands the sacramental life of Catholics today.

Interreligious marriage is a pastoral reality that calls for the integration of sacramental theology, theologies of religions, and comparative theologies. Resourcing the thought of Bernard Lonergan, and Frederick Crowe I posit that the integration of these disciplines can be rooted in a Trinitarian theology of religions. Next, I will suggest that ritual performance of identity is a privileged locus for subjective exchange. Next, I will argue for hospitality as the framework in which interreligious exchange takes place. Last, I will offer interreligious marriage as an example of where symbolic exchange in the Spirit intersects.

Theology of Religions: Trinitarian approach

Robert Doran claims, "Lonergan made it clear that the basic categories in the area of Trinity, Incarnation and grace have been determined. Sacramental theology and the theology of church, creation, redemption, revelation and praxis 'are areas in which major developments need to be done" because these are intrinsically linked to a theory of history.[2] If Doran is correct then theologies of religious diversity and sacramental theology must be anchored in a systematic understanding of the Trinity even as these will be affected by and contribute to the development of a theory of history and the meaning of doctrines related to creation, church, revelation, and praxis.

The late Frederick E. Crowe in his article "Son of God, Holy Spirit and World Religions" lays the groundwork for a Trinitarian understanding of religious diversity that has significant ramifications for thinking about sacrament in a multi-religious context. Crowe takes into account

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monotheistic, be it Christian or not, one observes a break between the ritual 'scene' and the 'scene' of ordinary life." 103.

[2] Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) note 7 209.

Lonergan's distinction between the order of discovery and the order of teaching. "[T]he principle is that what is first in our eyes is not first in itself; on the contrary, what is first in our eyes is last in itself, and what is last in our eyes is first in itself." Crowe then applies the distinction to the two divine missions:

> We have simply to reverse the order in which commonly we think of the Son and Spirit in the world. Commonly we think of God first sending the Son, and of the Spirit being sent in that context, to bring to completion the work of the Son. The thesis says that, on the contrary, God first sent the Spirit, and then sent the Son in the context of the Spirit's mission, to bring to completion- perhaps not precisely the work of the Spirit's mission, but the work which God conceived as one work to be executed in the two steps of the twofold mission of the Spirit and then the Son.[3]

Crowe draws on the later Lonergan's Trinitarian analogy drawn from the experience of a couple in love. A couple may "fall" in love but take a long time to "declare" or "avow" their love and further to "consummate" that love; the "falling" is the gift of God's self to humanity in the Holy Spirit, the "declaring" is the public self-giving of the Son in the Incarnation, and the "consummation" the final self-giving of the Father.[4] As the first and foundational divine gift to all humanity, the Holy Spirit is "the source and ground of all" subsequent gifts including the declaration and consummation of divine love[5] and that the Son and the father are also present in the gift of the Spirit, the mutually uniting gift of Father and Son.

From the Christian perspective, such a Trinitarian approach to religious diversity requires a positive approach to the religions of the world because it supposes that their positive moments

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[3] Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit and World Religions" *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) 325.

[4] Frederick Crowe, "The God who falls in Love with all of us, and hastens to give the Holy Spirit, is the God who is in a hurry. But the same God is strangely slow to declare that Love for us, to send the Word in human form and manifest the divine Love. There is the enormously long praeparatio evangelica." "Son of God, Holy Spirit and World Religions" 340.

[5] Beer, "Meaning in Relation to the Trinity" 11.

is the fruit of the Spirit, though these moments are partial and in need of the completion to hear the Gospel message.[6]

This approach to the world's religions is consistent with the orientations of the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of John Paul II. *Ad Gentes 4* states, "Doubtless, the Holy Spirit was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified." In his 1986 encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* John Paul writes about the universal and historical gift of the Holy Spirit, "We need to go further back, to embrace the whole of the action of the Holy Spirit even before Christ-from the beginning, throughout the world…For this action has been exercised, in every place and at every time, indeed in every individual, according to the eternal plan of salvation" (53). The universal presence and activity of the Spirit in "society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" is echoed in *Redemptoris missio*.

The gift of God's love is at the same time "universalized" and "historicized." It is universal because according to Lonergan it "is offered to all men [sic]," and "It is not conditioned by human knowledge; rather it is the cause that leads man to seek knowledge of God. It is not restricted to any stage or section of human culture but rather is the principle that introduces a dimension of other-worldliness into any culture."[7] The gift is historicized through religious conversion that occurs on the highest level of human operations, transvaluing our values with real effects in our experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. The gift itself while trans-cultural **"is apprehended in as many different manners as different cultures."** For Lonergan, religions have a unique and important role to receive, encourage, foster, interpret, guide and express the experience and meaning of divine love given in history. "There is," says

[6] Frederick E. Crowe, "Son of God, Holy Spirit and the World's Religion,"324-35.
[7] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 283.

Lonergan, "a personal entrance of God himself into history, a communication of God to his people, the advent of God's word into the world of religious expression."[8]

Part II: Symbol and Exchange

"Symbols," states Stephen Happel are "peculiarly apt carriers of meaning of religious experience because they always announce, even impose upon the viewer or hearer a 'plus,' the splendor or majesty that reveals itself in things."[9] "Symbols mean the expression of affective life, a combination of intellect and will which can occur in a single act or word. Symbol discloses a previously unknown interior reality."[10] Thus, symbol unites the cognitive and affective, moving the unspoken and unmediated gift of God's love given and received to self-revelation and self-gift as response.[11] The communication of affective meaning carried through symbol is the basic mode we enter into relationship with God and others.

Just as God's entry into the world of meaning is carried through intersubjectivity, art, symbols, deeds, and word, so too does the "the dynamic state of being in love [have a similar] character of response." The character of response to the gift of God's love is complex and includes not only the cognitive drive to know the source of the gift but first and foremost *gratitude* for the gracious (given without regard to value) and gratuitous (freely given without reason) gift.[12] The response takes place in the framework of what Louis-Marie Chauvet terms "symbolic exchange." Unlike market exchange, symbolic exchange is not utilitarian; there is no exchange of value (e.g. currency exchange). What is vital is not what is exchanged but the very

[8] *Method,* 119.
[9] Stephen Happel, "The Sacraments: Symbols that redirect Our Desires," in *The Desires of the Human Heart, An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Vernon Gregson (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988) 245.
[10] Happel, "The Sacraments: Symbols that redirect Our Desires," 243.
[11] Stephen Happel, Sacrament: Symbol of Conversion 278
[12] These are Chauvet's distinctions.

fact of exchanging… to the fact of recognizing another person as a partner and being recognized by this person"[13] This recognition mutually affirms identities.

The gift of God's love given is "always an embodied experience. It involves the developing expressions of our own incarnate history. Like human love, it requires expression for visibility. Our first articulation occurs within the symbolic body we inhabit as part of our personal identity."[14] According to Nathan Mitchell, this identity, personal and collective, is not self-generated or self-bestowed but is received as gift from God.[15] For example, the church's identity as sacrament of salvation does not mean that it produces or bestows the salvation itself but symbolically represents the reality in which is participates as bestowed upon it by Jesus Christ.

The identity bestowed by the gift of the Spirit puts people and communities at the "disposal" of the Spirit through our "submission" to her.[16] As such the Spirit enters into our personal and collective histories to performs gestures that are not from us, to speak words that are not our own, to receive elements that we have not chosen. [17] God discloses something about God's self in the self-giving that gives us an identity as beloved of God. Muslim ritual theorist Talal Asad reminds us that symbol is also something that was stamped onto a tablet, before it was broken and distributed to various parties in order to be placed side by side in the future for mutual recognition. Symbol stamps the object, or in this case subject, into a "readable sign, the mark by which something is known."[18]

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[13] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (The Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN, 2001) 123.
[14] Happel, "The Sacraments: Symbols that redirect Our Desires," 242.
[15] Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006) 37.
[16] Mitchell, 38.
[17] Mitchell, 38.
[18] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion, Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 70.

Symbol, according to Chauvet "allows all persons to *situate themselves as subjects* in their relation with other subjects or with the world of these other subjects (…) or with their own world."[19] Through symbolic exchange subjects mutually recognize and construct the self and the other through their relationship and through the performance of identities embodied in ritual practices. Ritual is both a signifying behavior and at the same time a program for cultivating certain dispositions.[20] Ritual communicates and cultivates identity.

Since ritual is an anthropological and theological reality it can be very significant in intercultural and interreligious encounters. Through ritual people of different religions share experiences and experience 'vicariously' what has happened to another; as Bernard Cooke and Garry Macy write, "what has become meaningful to another can become meaningful to me. And the symbols of that meaning can be shared commonly."[21] Ritual helps participants see the world *together* in a certain way through symbol.[22]

Normally Roman Catholic sacraments take place within the ecclesial context. Through what Lonergan terms "self-mediation" they enable the Christian to "find out for oneself what one can make of oneself, when one decides for oneself what one is to be, when one lives in fidelity to one's self-discovery and decision."[23] Mutual self-mediation extends self-mediation in the free sharing of one's self-discovery and commitment with another. "It is known by others if and when one chooses to reveal it, and revealing it is an act of confidence, of intimacy, of letting down one's defenses, of entrusting oneself to another… We are open to the influence of others,

[19] Chauvet, 73.
[20] Asad, 58.
[21] Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy. *Christian Symbol and Ritual* (Oxford: oxford University Press, 2005) 10.
[22] Cooke and Macy, 14.
[23] Bernard Lonergan, "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer" in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958-1964*, vol. 6 of Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 172.

and others are open to influence from us."[24] A key distinction between self-mediation and mutual self-mediation is that revelation and reciprocity of identity give specific meaning to 'encounter.' When encounter with the religious other results in reciprocal mutual growth then there is mutual self-mediation.[25] Hence, Fred Lawrence comments, "self-mediation occurs as mutual self-mediation" when "we attain our sense of selves through others' sense of us."[26]

Mutual self-mediation through symbolic exchange is a privileged practice reflecting the reality that God's gift of "being-in-love is properly itself, not in the isolated individual, but only in a plurality of persons that disclose their love to one another."[27] Lonergan "was aware …that sacramental activity was in the realm of human self-making" through mutual self mediation.[28]

Marriage

Unlike previous eras, non-Catholics parties who agree to marry in a Catholic liturgy are not required to suspend their religious identity but are encouraged to maintain their identity.[29] The post-Vatican II approach to interreligious marriage encourages respect for the religious identity of the non-Catholic party. Since the active participation of the bride, groom and assembly is encouraged, the pastoral notes/prenotanda of the 1979 Canadian Marriage Ritual advises against a Eucharistic celebration between a Catholic and non-Christian (33) and explicitly reminds pastors to be sensitive to the non-Christian party, without, of course, compromising doctrine (34).

The Second Vatican Council and the 1983 Code of Canon Law employ convent language to speak of marriage. Through marriage a new type of relationship emerges and the ritual should

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[24] Lonergan, "The Mediation of Christ in Prayer" 174-175.
[25] Frederick E. Crowe, "'The Spirit and I' at Prayer" in *Developing the Lonergan Legacy*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 300.
[26] Fred Lawrence, "Lonergan's Postmodern Subject, Neither Substance nor Cartesian Ego," in In Deference ed. Jim Kanaris and Mark Doorley (Albany: Suny Press, 2004) 115.
[27] Lonergan, Method 283.
[28] Happel, "The Sacraments: Symbols that redirect Our Desires," 247.
[29] Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000) 164.

reflect this. Two persons are not melded into one but each human vocation is realized through marital love. Interestingly, 2 of the 6 challenges named in the pastoral guidelines for Muslim-Catholic marriages of the Archdiocese of Montreal have to do with preserving religious identity: 1) that each partner (Christian and Muslim) continues in his/her faith life and to help the other grow in his or her faith; 2) each person affirms religious belief by committing one's self to one's religion and becoming a living model for dialogue.[30]

Since the pastoral notes and canon 1127.3 of the Code of Canon Law call for only one religious ceremony instead of one in each tradition, then it behooves Catholics to re-think what it means to welcome non-Christians to participate in a Catholic marriage ritual.

Prayer and liturgy

In his explication of the meaning of the 1986 Assisi Day of Prayer John Paul II stated "every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person…the unity…comes from the fact that every man and woman is capable of praying, that is, of submitting oneself totally to God and of recognizing oneself to be poor in front of him."[31] People of all religions pray, in their unique way, because of the gift of the Spirit that prays within us.

In the encounter of people of different religions there are three broad categories of prayer described by the 1996 joint consultation of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue. First, multi-religious prayer occurs when each faith community individually makes a contribution to a service in which participants respectfully witness to one another's prayer. The famous Days of Prayer at Assisi are examples of such

[30] Archdiocese de Montreal, *Accompagner le demande de mariage*.
[31] John Paul II, "Address To the Roman Curia," December 22, 1986. This sentiment is echoed by Jacques Dupuis who says, "Authentic prayer is always a sign that God… has undertaken the initiative of a personal approach to human beings in self-revelation and has been welcomed by these human beings in faith. Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002)* 240.

prayer. Second, interreligious prayer occurs when members of different faith communities come together to prepare and participate in a common service that each participant can claim as his/her own. A danger in this type of prayer is that what is distinct and different may be suppressed or glossed-over in order to avoid tension and promote harmony and inclusivity.

A third category of prayer is "Coherent inter-religious prayer" which is "a thematic and critical conjoining of prayers, or other appropriate input, from the contributing religions,…The intention is one of attaining a sense of coherence, of mutuality, and reciprocal components." The document goes on to suggest that in coherent interreligious prayer "some sense of greater wholeness may emerge; an intuition of a larger context, a wider or deeper sphere wherein a unifying spirit is at work, may be discerned; again without prejudice to the particular sensibilities of any of the contributing religions, yet acknowledged and affirmed by all as authentic to the occasion."[32] It is within this third category of interreligious prayer that I situate interreligious marriage liturgies.

Hospitality

The marriage liturgy of a Catholic and non-Christian can be a site where the particular religious identities given by the Holy Spirit can be mutually revealed and exchanged. For coherent interreligious prayer to develop the Church must become a site of hospitality. The concept of hostility, argues Elizabeth Newman, should not be confused with its popular contemporary expressions. It is not a Disneyland nice-ness that is unable to speak truth; it is not privatized bourgeois (Martha Stewart) entertaining; it is not a market driven exchange; it is not unbridled or limitless inclusivity; and it is not homeless but it is extended from a definite social,

[32] Douglas Pratt, Parameters for Interreligious Prayer: Some Considerations, http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd31-03.html, accessed June 3, 2012.

cultural, historical, and physical location.[33] Hospitality is "a host's willing and gracious reception of a guest into safe and friendly space."[34] There is no neutral place from which to extend hospitality. It is, according to Jessica Wrobleski and in contrast to Derrida's "pure" or absolute" hospitality, always conditional; there are "thresholds of possibility, limits and conditions that allow hospitality to be what it is."[35]

The development of the host-guest relationship entails establishing boundaries that are fluid and that shift perhaps beyond the host-guest relationship even to the eventual "reception of the guest as community member[s]." Relationships and identities expressed through symbolic ritual carry and communicate affective meaning and reflect their fluid and penetrable nature. Interreligious hospitality and prayer are based upon the guest host-dynamic of openness and welcome for the other and marked by "a tension between the desire to offer an unconditional welcome... and the limiting conditions that make a particular welcome possible…Hospitality appreciates the needs and the gifts—the vulnerabilities and the strengths—that both host and guest bring to their relationship."[36]

Interreligious marriage rituals hosted by the Catholic Christian party are sensitive to boundaries that result from different identities, values and beliefs. Boundaries and limits are determined in particular circumstances and by specific celebrations. They make it possible to confront differences in the way hosts and guests are present to one another as well as the manner in which one offers one's values, gifts, opinions and weaknesses and vulnerabilities to the other. Interreligious hospitality and prayer make room for another to articulate one's religious experience and beliefs— not to change the other but to create space for mutual transformation.

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[33] Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality, Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007) 22-33.
[34] Jessica Wrobleski, *The Limits of Hospitality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012) xi
[35] Wrobleski, xi.
[36] Wrobleski, 31-32.

Practices of hospitality cultivate receptivity to the same Spirit that stamps the identity of the religiously other. In making space for others Christians practice making space for God and vice versa. The encounters are transformative because of the unifying and vivifying Spirit of relationality that acts through the embodied prayer of religious people: our bodies individual and corporate cultivate the habit of hospitality as an imitation of and participation in "the mutually giving and receiving of the persons of the Trinity."[37]

Conclusion

Sacramentality is a wide and ambiguous a concept, and today I have just offered some initial reflections on what this could mean in a multi-religious context. Resourcing Lonergan's thought in conversation with contemporary sacramental theologians, I hope I have demonstrated that the multi-religious context is moving us beyond thinking of only seven sacraments, beyond even the confines of the church, beyond the mission of the Son to include both missions in the one divine economy that extends throughout creation and across humanity. Lonergan contributes to an understanding of sacramentality rooted in the Trinity's active presence in history that gives us identity and direction, that moves us to express our gratitude for God's gift of self and to mutual reveal to other the wonderful things God makes of us.

[37] Wrobleski, 51.