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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Direct Perception of God through the Sacraments in Christian Education

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This paper examines whether direct perception of the Divine occurs through the Protestant sacraments—bread, wine, and water—and what this implies for Christian education. Integrating theological, philosophical, psychological, and mystical perspectives, it explores how sacraments function beyond rational comprehension as symbolic and transformative vehicles. Theologians debate their role in mediating divine reality, philosophers and psychologists highlight the pre-rational and unconscious dimensions of symbolic meaning, and mystics affirm sacraments as pathways to ultimate reality. The study concludes that sacraments convey a profound, experiential knowledge of God, complementing verbal instruction and nurturing spiritual formation. In a time of symbolic impoverishment, renewed engagement with sacraments restores access to the deeper, creative, and transformative dimensions of faith.

Introduction

Concluding the Gifford Lectures in 1934, Dr. Edwyn Bevan said, "A man believes in God, but he will not go on believing in God if, being a rational man, he has brought the belief into connection with other knowledge about the Universe and convinced himself that it is incompatible with some bit of Reality of this he is certain."[1] He then closes by saying, "What actually causes anyone to believe in God is direct perception of the Divine."[2]

In this paper, we ask whether such a "direct perception of the Divine" occurs through symbols such as the sacraments in the Protestant Church, namely, the bread, wine, and water. If this is true, the current awakening of interest in such symbols is deeply valid for Christian education. After all, what better "education" could one ask than to truly encounter God! In fact, such an encounter is the foundation and presupposition of the whole Christian education program. It is thus quite obvious that our exploration of this problem is of the highest importance.

1 Edwyn Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1938), 385.

2 Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, 386.

Does direct perception of the Divine take place in, through, and by the sacraments? This is our question. Two presuppositions underlying our approach to the problem need to be illuminated at the outset, however. In this way, the reader can be on their guard against their controlling—we hope fruitfully—influence. The first assumption concerns the irrational powers in our faculties of judgment and perception.

It would seem to be only the most astonishing pride for us to consider our highest wisdom to be constituted by conscious reason alone. Man has hardly begun to understand the neural processes without which the simplest act of reasoning is impossible. We must therefore say that the entire possibility of logical and scientific thought rests upon a structure which was formed unconsciously, which we do not understand and cannot manufacture. Should then the finger accuse the hand of clumsiness?

Our second presupposition concerns our understanding of symbols and myth. Neither is taken to be "untrue" or "unhistorical." For us, both symbol and myth include a complex of stories or acts—some, no doubt, fact and some fantasy—which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life. As the reader can readily see, this is somewhat related but goes one step further than the first assumption. Wisdom need not necessarily be embedded in scientific, objective, materialistic fact.

With these preliminary matters out of the way, we can now turn to the symbols of bread, wine, and water in order to see if the impulse of Christian education might be grounded in their direct perception of the Divine. Our work will be divided into two major sections.

The first part will address the perception of God in and through the sacraments. This will be probed from standpoints. We shall ask theologians, philosophers, psychologists, and mystics to give their points of view. In the second thrust of the paper, we shall attempt to separate some of the by-products of this probe. Here we shall not be so careful to keep our approach clear or designated, for the main point of this section will be to show just how laden with meaning and significance the sacraments are—even in addition to or in spite of setting us into direct relationship with God. We also wish to submit the suggestion that because of this multiplicity of meaning in bread, wine, and water, there is contained some of the secret of the power of these particular symbols.

Theologians

First, let us consult the theologians. The meaning conveyed by the sacred symbols of bread, wine, and water was debated at least as early as Tertullian. With him, the word *sacramentum* took on a Christian meaning and came to replace *mysterion*, still used by the Eastern churches today. Although

not commenting extensively on the meaning conveyed by the symbols in question, Jerome also contributed to the unfortunate shift in name for the sacred symbols.

Sacramentum was used to translate *mysterion* in the following passages: Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 9, 32; 1 Timothy 3:16; Revelation 1:20—all references in the Vulgate. We have called this "unfortunate" because it seems to have contributed to the popular assumption that the sacraments have a specific, literal meaning. As we shall see, this has tended to condition a conscious, rational approach to their mystery.

A second result of taking the sacraments without approaching them with an awareness of their numinous and mysterious nature has been intramural theological debates over the precise meanings and workings of bread, wine, and water. As we shall see, such an approach not only fosters needless schism but also plays a major role in closing the unconscious mind to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The first extensive speaker in this theological debate was Augustine. His view was that the Old Testament symbols of bread, wine, and water prefigured the Christian use of these elements. To him, the Christian symbols represented a visible symbol of an invisible grace. They participated in the grace of God and the apprehension of His grace by men. His view was hardened by the scholastics.

Hugo of St. Victor began this hardening by his literal, unimaginative treatment of the sacraments in the first formal treatise on the subject. He declared that the sacraments worked as medicine. Peter Lombard's views carried this idea forward and added a polarization, setting the number of the sacraments at seven. Alexander of Hales concluded this unconscious distortion of Augustine by bluntly referring to the working of the sacraments as *ex opere operato*.[3] St. Thomas reaffirmed all these ideas.

At the time of the Reformation, schism and debate quickened. Here we shall leave the Roman Catholic tradition and focus on Protestants. Their debate will be pictured as a swinging pendulum.

Ulrich Zwingli at one end of this pendulum asserted that the water of baptism is, just as the whole baptismal act, only "an initiatory sign, symbolizing although not itself affecting an inward change in those who

3 The Latin phrase *ex opere operato* literally means "from the work performed" or "by the very fact of the action being performed." In the context of Christian theology, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church, it refers to the belief that the sacraments confer grace automatically through the sacramental act itself, independent of the personal holiness or faith of the minister or recipient. In other words, the sacrament "works" because it is a valid sacramental action instituted by Christ, not because of who performs it or the disposition of the person receiving it. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992), §1128.

secure it."[4] He affirmed this in his exegesis of Matthew 3 and Romans 6. He maintained this sharp distinction between the sign and the reality to which it points because he rejected the idea that faith received anything through the symbols. He did not wish to connect the reality of the spirit with the material things. Man has everything, he declared, if he has faith. To substantiate this, he pointed to Hebrews 9.[5]

At the other end of the pendulum, the Anglicans and Lutherans, much like the Roman Catholics, declare that Acts 2:38 points to the supernatural character of baptism and therefore to the mechanical nature of the water in washing away of sins. The water then actually participates in the reality which it conveys.

Calvin, Barth, and Cullman take a more mediating position. According to Niesel, Calvin "wished to see the symbol and the reality of the sacrament strictly distinguished but not separate from each other."[6] He wanted to preserve both the uniqueness of the symbols and the spirit's special quality.

Barth also states that, on the one hand, there is a genuine symbolic power in the water itself, but that

> water and its use must first receive their special meaning. And they do not receive it because of anything given or attributed to them in a certain way by the Church. They receive it because Jesus Christ is the Lord of Nature and because he has of his own free will allowed them to serve his word and works.[7]

Yet he also says that "one must not push this symbolism too far."[8] To emphasize this, Barth points to Acts 8:14ff., which tells of the Samaritans who were baptized in the name of Jesus but did not receive the Holy Spirit:

> In this passage (together with Acts 19), an explicit warning against any view which would ascribe to the baptismal water, the ecclesiastical rite, or the part of the Church's proclamation in general, then run ever relatively independent power of action against the free enactment of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 6.11 does not say that we are washed, sanctified, and justified in baptism, but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.[9]

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4 Ulrich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 122.

5 Hebrews 9 emphasizes that through faith in Christ's once-for-all sacrifice, believers receive eternal redemption, a purified conscience, and the promised inheritance under the new covenant, demonstrating that spiritual blessings are granted to those who trust in Him.

6 Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 224.

7 Karl Barth, *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 20.

8 Barth, *Teaching of the Church*, 19.

9 Barth, 22–26.

Barth, like Calvin, is against the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans because they see baptism as a causative means by which forgiveness of sins is imparted to men.

Cullmann, however, places a little more emphasis on the mystery of the sign by referring to Acts 2.38: "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (NRSV). Thus, while, on the one hand, he declares that these symbols are different from all other symbols in that, through the Holy Spirit, they rest in the real presence of Christ conveyed to us, he still rejects the Roman and Lutheran positions. He does this for two reasons. First, he asserts that to Christ in the sign would be to violate the glory of Jesus Christ, who really overcame the world. Second, he rejects the idea of a natural, physical assimilation of the life-giving reality of the sacraments by the community.[10]

When we turn to the symbols of the Lord's Supper, we find the same difference of opinions. The Roman Catholics with their doctrine of "transubstantiation,"[11] the Lutherans with their "consubstantiation,"[12] and the Anglicans with the idea of the "real presence"[13] understand the signs as participating in the realities to which they point to the extent of being virtually transformed. Zwingli, meanwhile, as in his attitude toward the baptismal water, accepts the elements only as signs which do not participate in the reality they seek to express. Calvin once again takes a more mediating position in the arguments from Scripture.

In this case, the confusion seems to arise about the meaning of the verb "is" in the phrase "This is my body." Here again, we can only note the element of uncertainty. A. J. B. Higgins is quite definite in his assertions that the bread and wine are not the actual body and blood of Christ: "The word 'is' which would not be expressed in Aramaic must signify 'means,' 'represents,' or 'stands for.'"[14]

Bultmann, however, notes that this interpretation is not necessarily correct. In fact, he states that "it is clear that in earliest Christianity the sacrament was by no means a symbol, but a miracle-working rite most strikingly shown for

10 Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 224.

11 A Christian theological doctrine, taught by the Roman Catholic Church, asserting that during the Eucharist the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ, while retaining the appearance of bread and wine.

12 A Christian theological doctrine, primarily associated with Lutheranism, teaching that during the Eucharist the body and blood of Christ coexist with the bread and wine, rather than replacing them.

13 The doctrine that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist, though the exact manner of this presence is considered a divine mystery and is not defined in terms of physical transformation, allowing a range of interpretations within Anglican theology.

14 A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), 51.

the sacrament of the Eucharist."[15] Bultmann then goes on to say that neither Paul nor the other early missionaries introduced the sacrament in his name. Yet the truth is that this meaning did exist.

Let us now summarize this debate among the theologians and draw some conclusions regarding our original question about the direct perception of deity through the sacraments.

Three distinct points of view seem evident. First, men such as Zwingli argue that the sacraments are not necessary to perceive God, since faith is what makes them effective. Faith, therefore, is the saving factor, and the sacraments are only memorials of this Event. Second, the Roman Catholics perceive God directly through the mystery of "transubstantiation," when Christ is crucified once again in the mass.[16] Protestants hold a third point of view, differing from Zwingli, that God in Christ is not sacrificed again, nor is he strictly present in the symbol of bread and wine, but that his spiritual presence is somehow mingled with the elements. To perceive God in Christ through this medium, then, would be much like discerning the presence of electricity in light.

Our conclusion is that the theologians hold in common that God can be perceived in Christ, although whether this can be done through the sacraments and how it is done remain mysteries. That this can be done is much more worked out in the sacraments of bread and wine than in baptism with water. Perhaps this latter sacrament opens the way for direct perception of God through the Holy Spirit. To discuss this, however, would lead us too far astray from our main query.

Philosophers

We must instead turn to the philosophers' debate about our question. Do they find the direct perception of God in the sacraments?

In an effort to separate some strands of thought on this path to understanding the sacred symbols, we shall adopt the current fashion of first pointing out that, generally speaking, there are two tendencies in philosophy today: the positivistic-linguistic and the existential. As we shall see, even in such a short essay as this, our distinction will break down, although the general truth of such categories is at least fruitful as a starting point.

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15 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1951), 135.

16 Here Berryman reflects a common misunderstanding regarding Roman Catholic teaching on Eucharist. Before the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), Catholic teaching on the Eucharist was often presented in a scholastic, Latin-based theology (e.g., using terms like "transubstantiation," "sacrificial offering," and "mass"). Many Protestant theologians at the time misinterpreted Catholic teaching, thinking that the church taught that the Mass "re-sacrifices" Christ each time and that the Eucharist is mere ritual magic—a literal transformation that somehow repeats or replaces the historical crucifixion. According to Catholic theology, transubstantiation means that during the Mass, the bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ while retaining the appearances (or "accidents") of bread and wine. This is a real, substantial presence of Christ, but it is not a new sacrifice.

In the positivistic-linguistic strand, we must say immediately that they lack an appreciation for, or are methodologically prevented from apprehending, such symbols as the sacraments. Walter Kaufmann points this up when he says, "These men (Bentham, Mill or Russell) have shown no more concern with the aesthetic or religious experience than Berkley and Hume, Moore, Broad, and Ryle."[17]

An American with much the same dry spirit and high respect for reason as displayed by these British dons is Alfred North Whitehead. He addresses the question of symbolism in at least one essay, "Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect." Whitehead's thesis is that language and algebra are more "fundamental" means of conveying meaning than religious symbols. Objects such as chairs and tables are even more fundamental than words and algebra.[18]

Whitehead does not think that symbols are good carriers of meaning or power, since they stand for something else. One should be more exact, more precise, and rational. One needs to cite specifically what he perceives. Whitehead says,

> [This] symbolic reference holds between two components in a complex experience, each intrinsically capable of direct recognition. Any lack of such conscious analytical recognition is the fault of the defect in mentality on the part of a comparatively low-grade percipient.[19]

A student of Whitehead, Susanne K. Langer, also approaches the problems of philosophy from the standpoint of positivism and language, opening up possibilities in symbolic truth by seeing in them the power of transformation. In her book *Philosophy in a New Key*, Mrs. Langer shows that the nondiscursive symbol can better reveal impulsive, instinctive, sentient life than the more confining symbol system of language. Purely expressive action produces grunts and groans, while only long habit and rational control can fix these instincts into words.[20] She therefore distinguishes between symbolic incarnation and literal-minded commonsense symbol systems.

The main point here is this: "Symbolization is pre-rationative, but not pre-rational. It is the starting point of all intellection in the human sense and is more general than thinking, fancying, or taking action."[21] "The springs of European thought have run dry . . . [but] the force that governs that (this age is still the force of mind, the impulse toward symbolic formulation,

17 Walter Kaufman, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 33.

18 Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 534.

19 Whitehead, *Symbolism*, 137.

20 Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 134.

21 Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 46.

expression, and understanding of experience)."[22] What Mrs. Langer feels that she has rediscovered is that symbols lie at the edge of the unknown. The transformation into the beginning of understanding begins with symbols and ends with logical analysis. Both forms are valid expressions of "truth" or meaning, and neither can be robbed from us; otherwise, we shall either lose our flashes of insight or work them out until they have lost their power.

We must now abruptly change our heading and move into the field we have called "existentialism." Although this classification has lost its meaning through overuse, we are using it here merely as a rubric to indicate a philosophical attitude more interested in crisis and the irrational aspect of man.

The first example we shall take is that of Sartre, and one that seems to immediately explode our dualistic view of today's philosophical world. Nevertheless, in his *The Psychology of Imagination*, Sartre has some observations that are applicable to the discovery of God in the sacraments. From this, we can see what his attitude toward the sacraments would be.

> Thought takes the image form when it wishes to be intuitive, when it wants to ground its affirmations on the vision of an object. In that case it tries to make the object appear before it. But this attempt in which all thought risks being bogged down is always a defeat; the objects become affected with the character of unreality. . . . Love, hate, desire, will . . . become . . . quasi-love, quasi-hate, etc., since the observation of the unreal object is a quasi-observation.[23]

Thus, we see that we cannot sit here and think or even conjure up an image of wine, bread, or water and pretend to understand it. To break the moment of the encounter with the sacrament would be to become engaged once more in phenomenology, and this mode of thinking does not penetrate the surface of existence. This, however, does not make Sartre take another course in his thinking because he has concluded in advance that "man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life."[24]

22 Langer, 246.

23 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. Graham Wallas (New York: Philosophical Library, 1940), 174.

24 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), 32.

We can conclude, for Sartre, then, that there is no direct perception of God in the sacraments. In fact, he feels that he must "brush aside the phenomenon of auto-symbolism, which is so uncertain and difficult to investigate."[25] To dodge such considerations, we feel, is to ignore a partially open door into the sacred symbols.

Another philosopher of existence, yet one vastly more concerned with symbols—indeed, the sacraments—is Paul Tillich. His theistic, and perhaps even Idealistic, orientation makes him much more aware of the power of irrational symbols, such as the sacraments. He feels that "man's ultimate concern must be expressed symbolically because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate."[26] He goes on in *The Dynamics of Faith* to point out six characteristics of symbols: they point beyond themselves, participate in that to which they point, open up levels of reality otherwise closed for us, open up dimensions of our soul corresponding to these dimensions in reality, cannot be produced intentionally, and grow and die.[27]

We must now hasten to sum up this debate among the philosophers. As in the theologians' debate, we see little agreement. In this case, there seem to be four main points of view.

First, symbols convey only vague representations of reality, and they are therefore only of secondary importance because of this generality. Second, symbols convey rough ideas, but this is very important. Mrs. Langer seems to disagree with her teacher, Whitehead, whose ideas are from the first point of view. Newly born ideas from the imagination are needed to fill in for worn-out concepts of existence. Rational analysis and clarification work on these rough-hewn visions until they also grow old and die.

The third point of view is evident in Sartre's work, and he concludes that the question is too difficult. One, by definition, must stick to phenomenology in his thinking; thus, penetration into Reality, even through the sacraments, is impossible for the conscious mind.

Last, Tillich closes the discussion with a positive note. Symbols are our only means of expressing "Ultimate Reality."[28] It would therefore seem that our only path into the realm of Ultimate Reality would be through these same symbols, the sacraments.

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25 Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 174.

26 Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 41.

27 Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 41.

28 For Tillich, "Ultimate Reality" refers to the ground of being itself—the source and depth of all existence. It is not a being among beings but the "Being-itself" that gives meaning, coherence, and existence to everything else. Faith involves the ultimate concern for this reality, recognizing it as the foundation of life and existence. See Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 3–5.

Psychologists

Now we shall turn to a third great debate. This time we shall listen to the psychologists. Still, the question is concerning the direct perception of God through the sacraments.

We shall begin with Freud because he, along with J. J. Bachofen, opened up the way out of the nineteenth-century impasse into new understandings of the sacraments and myth. In the past century, one was faced with the alternative that a symbol or myth was either a prescientific, naïve picture of the world and history, which at best was the product of a poetic imagination, or one had to believe with the orthodox that the tale or symbol was literally historical or concretely real.

Freud, the more famous of these two pioneers, helped the understanding of myth by inaugurating an understanding of symbolic language based on his interpretation of dreams.[29] Bachofen, meanwhile, saw myth in its religious and psychological, as well as historical, context.[30] Since this latter view is picked up again by Jung, we shall develop it when we hear his side of the debate.

First, though, we shall listen to Freud. He felt that a "censor" protects us from feelings and wishes which can motivate our actions but which we never become aware of. These are kept out of our consciousness for several reasons, the most important being the fear of losing the approval of our parents and friends. Repression of these strivings, however, does not mean they cease to exist, as they find expression in numerous forms. One of the back doors through which these irrational strivings enter is that of symbolism, but in dreams and in religious or literary and dramatic symbols.[31]

In 1912, with the publication of *Symbols of Transformation*, C. G. Jung split from this school of Freud. For Jung, the "libido" was not primarily sexual but was identified with psychic energy as a whole, originating in the unconscious and appearing in the consciousness as symbols. A second divergence in theory which is also specifically related to our search, is that the source for these symbols lies not only in the individual's unconscious, but in what Jung called the "collective unconscious."[32]

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29 Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010), discusses the role of symbolic language in myth through the analysis of dreams.

30 Johann Jakob Bachofen is often understood as treating myth not merely as a historical artifact but as a religious and psychological expression of early cultures, interpreting symbols and narratives as records of the inner life and evolution of societies; see Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), intro. and commentary on myth as expressing symbolic and cultural development.

31 In chaps. 2–7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud develops the concepts of repression, the psychic "censor," and the emergence of repressed wishes through symbolic expression in dreams and cultural forms such as religion and literature.

32 C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), §§190–197; Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 9, pt. 1 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), §§3–7.

The collective unconscious is not some kind of transcendental ghost permeating all human beings; as men born today in New York and those born four thousand years ago in Hohe Adaro have the same bone formation, respiration, circulation, digestion, and nervous system, so too does the psychic system. Assuming that thoughts, feelings, ideas, and images are either parts of the human body or functions thereof, or at least activities shaped by the same process, one would expect to find the same collective or common character when thoughts and images are allowed to develop without conscious interference as in dreams and spontaneous symbols.[33]

Not unreasonably, Jung has transposed the current medical idea of "health"—unconscious physical processes working without special interferences—into psychological terms. He believes that the psychiatrist heals most effectively when he helps the mental processes that are similarly unconscious, formative, healing, and common to all men. This led him to trust and respect the "wisdom" of the psychological unconscious, just as physicians trust the ingenious "wisdom" of the unconscious body.[34] The general implication of Jung's theory is that the great collective myths and symbols in some way represent the healing and formative work of man's unconscious psychological processes, which he must learn to trust, respect, and aid in his conscious thought and action.[35]

A third tendency in this brilliant and penetrating surge of thinking in the debate of the psychologists is that of Erich Fromm. In *The Forgotten Language*, he sums up the situation by referring to dream interpretation:

> Three approaches to the understanding of dreams have been presented so far. First, the Freudian view, which says that all dreams are expressions of irrational and asocial nature of man. Second, Jung's interpretation, which says that dreams are revelations of unconscious wisdom transcending the individual. Third, the view that dreams express any kind of mental activity and are expressive of our irrational strivings as well as of our reason and morality, that they express both the worst and the best in ourselves.[36]

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33 Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, §§88–96, 152–157; see also C. G. Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), §§325–329.

34 C. G. Jung, *The Practice of Psychotherapy*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), §§3–15, 52–60; see also Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1933), 27–48.

35 This interpretation draws on Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, in which myths and symbols are expressions of archetypes shared across humanity and serve a compensatory and healing function within the psyche. Jung argues that conscious engagement with these symbolic forms enables integration between conscious and unconscious processes, a central aim of individuation. See Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*; and Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, vol. 11 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

36 This interpretation draws on Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, in which myths and symbols are expressions of archetypes shared across humanity and serve a compensatory and healing function within the psyche. See Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*; and Jung, *Psychology and Religion*.

This last view is of course Fromm speaking about himself.

The meanings conveyed by the sacraments then seem to come from inside of us, say the psychologists, except for Jung, who holds that the source is the collective unconscious. We conclude our attention to this debate by suggesting that statements about the unconscious are not scientifically arrived at and veer more toward philosophical speculation and assumption. We would therefore say that this mystery land may just as well be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit as well as our materialistically grounded unconscious. If this is true—it will never be proved, although case studies could be used to document such a view—Zwingli would be correct in saying that we do not use the sacraments except as memorials. Such memorials would be useful in calling into consciousness the archetypes of salvation lying in the unconscious. They would work by projection, but they would not strictly be necessary for the direct perception of God. This could be done through the Holy Spirit working in and through the unconscious mind and expressing itself through symbols such as the sacraments. On the other hand, the more Reformed view of the sacraments working through the Holy Spirit to cause faith might just as well express the same idea. But, finally, the Roman Catholics may have the most helpful view from the standpoint of symbolic therapy. They just say that it works, and the sacraments are absolutely the Power of God made manifest in the water or in the body and blood of Christ.

Mysticism

Let us now turn to the fourth discussion, which we shall listen to concerning the direct perception of God through the sacraments. This will be the debate among those interested in comparative mysticism. Here we shall find more agreement than in previous debates. A common front is held out by such men as Tagore, Otto, Coomaraswamy, and Suzuki in calling Christian theology too provincial and partially trapped by its own method.[37] Philosophy, they also hold, is too rationally aloof. Psychology, however, does give us some insight into the inner workings of our lives, but it, too, is at times plagued by the totem of scientific method. For these men, the *philosophia perennis* is the clue to the Event of the direct perception of God, and this Event need not be tied to any time, culture, or special symbol system.[38]

But let us be clearer about what we mean by mysticism. So often this term is taken to indicate persons who have retreated from the world into a purely subjective frame of mind. To adapt some words which Coomaraswamy

37 Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 34.

38 *Philosophia perennis* (Latin for "perennial philosophy") is a term used to describe a timeless, universal wisdom or truth found at the heart of all major religious and spiritual traditions. It suggests that beneath the surface differences of cultures, doctrines, and rituals, there is a core metaphysical and ethical insight about reality, humanity, and the divine that is eternal and unchanging.

uses in specific reference to Hinduism, however, "It would be hardly an exaggeration to say that a faithful account of [mysticism] might well be given in the form of categorical denial of most of the statements that have been made about it."[39] After breaking open our minds with such words, Coomaraswamy then proceeds to unfold the Event of mysticism in Hinduism and Buddhism.

More related to our specific interests here, it is just to point out that the great mystics of East and West have not just withdrawn into their subjective sense extravagances. Eckhart, Sankara, and Buddha would serve to document this point.[40] These three men all possessed a unique blend of theological acumen, meditative insight, imagination, and thoroughness.

Neither can we call the finest examples of this tradition irresponsible. Concern with one's fellow man is evident in all three cases, and all would agree that students or seekers of the Way should work with a guide or teacher in order to avoid excess in their search.

What then does the mystic of the *philosophia perennis* have to say about the direct perception of the Divine through the sacraments? Their answer might come in one of two ways.

One's frantic and frustrating pursuit or flight from the ever-receding or ever-hounding goals of pleasure and pain can be stilled by the Event or realization of the Quiet and the ceasing of desire in the One. This can be accomplished by following the directly stated principles of discipline contained in Zen manuals, the Sufis' teaching, or the writings of such men as Eckhart.

The other way is to come to the realization of the great Quiet, or Atman, or peace that assuages all understanding, through meditation on myths. This second path is what we are concerned with here because symbols and the sacraments might be roughly included under such a heading. We will let Coomaraswamy make our point for us:

> It is one of the prime errors of historical and rational analysis to suppose that the "truth" and "original form" of a legend can be separated from its miraculous elements. It is in the marvels themselves that the truth inheres: "Wonder"—for this is no other than the very beginning philosophy, and in the same way Aristotle, who adds, "So that the lover of myths which are a compact of wonders, is by the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be stated in words."[41]

39 Amanda K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 3.

40 Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, ed. D. T. Suzuki (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 165–215.

41 Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, 3.

By extension of this line of thinking, we find insight into the mystic's attitude toward the sacraments. Through these sacred symbols, we face the deepest realities in life. Here is one way we can become one with God and thus experience the Event of mysticism. It is important to note that this is one of the ways this can be accomplished, and that, from the standpoint of comparative mysticism, the *philosophia perennis*, no single exclusive symbol system or set of sacraments holds the key to such an Event.

Conclusions

Now, having heard these four debates, what must we conclude concerning the direct perception of God through the sacraments? Is it the Christian God, the One of the mystics, our personal or collective unconscious, or just our foggy thinking that is encountered in the Lord's Supper or Baptism?

The root of each one of these points of view contributes to the formulation of an answer. This is because each path to salvation that we have examined admits that its roots are watered by creative mystery. We must say, therefore, that no single debate has proved conclusive, nor has any single point of view overwhelmed us with its exclusive truth. Rather, each way of seeing life points deeply into the unknown forces of our human existence, which are known only by their pressures on us.

Since we can know these deepest pressures only by their manifestations described as "fruits of the Spirit," aesthetic impressions, transformation, obsessions, or the Event of union with the One, it is beyond our capacity to pontificate on what lies behind these pressures. We can only know that the vast creative and destructive powers in life reign eternally within us and about us.

That which is conveyed by the sacraments then is "reality," the deepest kind of knowledge there is about the inner life. The sacraments participate in the energy transformation that links our consciousness of this reality and our unconsciousness of it.

We have abundantly seen that the sacraments convey much more than a theological description, a philosophical analysis, or a psychological system. They convey the Event, a state of being, a valid existence, a transformed way of living that touches the realized Self, the One.

The present course of Christian education, then, is valid and most exciting when it stresses the value of symbols and especially the sacraments. In these "irrational" ways come the deep rivers of life, which fill with meaning the more rational words we spend most of our time using to teach with.

What, then, is the future of this movement? We will conclude by presenting observations, from Jung and from Émile Cailliet, about the causes of our present crisis in symbolism. The first is that of Jung:

> The history of the development of Protestantism is one of chronic iconoclasm. One wall after another fell. And the work of destruction was not too difficult, either, when once the authority of the church had been shattered. We all know how, in large things as in small, in general as well as in particular, piece after piece collapsed and how the alarming impoverishment of symbolism that is not the condition of life came about. The power of the church has gone with that loss of symbolism.[42]

Jung, then, on the same pages continues to lay out his blunt and clear position on impoverished Protestantism. Although the shattering of icons is not a bad thing, the dogmatic symbol reinforced by a powerful authority in the church did protect a person from direct experience of God, as long as he did not mischievously or rebelliously expose himself to it. Now, however, we are faced with a situation thrust upon us. Because of the failure of authority and the symbols of Christendom in the West, we are thrust by this "dreadful freedom" upon our own unconscious—an unpleasant thing that may be avoided as long as we possess living symbol-figures in which all that is inner and unknown is projected.[43] Jung feels that this condition is something new in the history of the race: "Only an unparalleled impoverishment in symbolism could enable us to rediscover the gods as psychic factors, which is to say, archetypes of the unconscious."[44]

Correlated to these ideas, Gilbert Cope, in his book *Symbolism in the Bible and the Church*, points out that the very fact that books are being written to explain symbols and the sacraments of the church shows just how much they have lost their power.[45]

Cailliet offers a penetrating understanding of the historical situation in which our present crisis unfolds, and then draws conclusions from a parallel historical situation:

> It appears that Western man has been thinking thus far within two great cosmological frames of reference, namely, the Aristotelian and Newtonian. Further, it would seem that from the second one is now slowly proceeding into a third, that is, the framework of relativity and quanta. It should also be pointed out that each transition involved a cultural crisis.[46]

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42 C. G. Jung, *The Integration of the Personality* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939), 61.

43 Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, §28.

44 Jung, *Integration of the Personality*, 61.

45 Gilbert Cope, *Symbolism in the Bible and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 259.

46 Émile Cailliet, *The Christian Approach to Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 168.

This may give us some insight into the current "neo-movement" which returns to the "neo-movement" of the Reformation. Then, the sixteenth-century theologians were also busy seeking out the Bible once more. Both of these situations were crises where the cosmological frames of reference began to dissolve. Both may therefore suggest to us a thinly concealed yet compulsive security demand, driving us into all manner of seeking comfort in earlier formulas. Why this is so crippling is that we are driven to escape just at the precise moment when the church is needed most to provide some new, creative symbolic structure for the new epoch.

But where do we turn? In our estimation, F. Ernest Johnson has correctly pointed out that "the future of symbolism in Protestantism (or elsewhere) sic has nothing to do with esthetics primarily. The question of 'esthetic barrenness' is almost purely secondary."[47] The power of a symbol to open one into the life Abundant, "new being," or Peace is what is important.

This is especially important when our culture is so fixed on objective bits of data in its search for truth, and its Protestant church is so imbued with the symbol of the Word and sermons. All of these factors tend to close up our irrational and unconscious centers so that real creativity and the working of the Holy Spirit cannot take place.

We must therefore recognize that we do live in a symbol crisis, but that we can't grit our teeth and force God to come up with something that will solve all our cosmological and spiritual problems.

We must also recognize that although we want to increase drama, music, and art in the communication of God's Being in and for men, we do not intend only to make art. Our task is to invite men and ourselves to unfold as Christians who are artists for this task. We are persons who live in the world as God intended men to live and work, participating co-creatively with God in the infinite and perpetual producing of the really "new."

Finally, in our Christian education, we must remember that symbols and the sacraments alone will not do the task before us. In tension with these more irrational and creative expressions of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and God the Father come the day-to-day teaching experiences which are married by our words. Both poles of the electric field must remain if the field is to remain. It just happens that in our time we have stressed the verbal pole too much, and now we must step up the power on the sacramental side.

In this way, it is hoped that we can begin to bring true transformation and deliverance into the Event of living as a "new being." May the whole world be sanctified.

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47 F. Ernest Johnson, *Religious Symbolism* (New York: Harper, 1955), 236.

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