

Robert T O’Gorman, PhD
Professor Emeritus
Loyola University Chicago
rogorma@luc.edu

2015 REA Annual Meeting, Nov 6-8

“The Sacraments Reappropriated: Imagination Embodied”

Abstract

Focusing on our theme, *The Power of Imagining* (“the life giving possibilities of education in faith”), this paper reexamines our sacramental religious education.

Paul Tillich has cautioned us: “The relationship of man to the ultimate undergoes changes. Contents of ultimate concern vanish or are replaced by others... *Symbols* which for a certain period, or in a certain place, expressed the truth of faith for a certain group now only remind of the faith of the past. They have lost their truths...”

Our present understanding of the cosmos and the human has radically challenged our religious education of these symbols/sacraments, not dissimilar to how our biblical education over the last half century has challenged our interpretations of the ancient traditions that have shaped these symbols.

This paper takes up two challenges to sacramental education: 1) focusing imaginal education in the body and 2) encountering the changes/challenges to traditional conception of the symbols that have effected the sacraments.

Main points –

1. The nature of imaginative knowing: an examination of the epistemological role of the imagination in relationship to the intellect, with distinctive emphasis on embodied knowing, i.e., visceral knowing in contrast to rational knowing.
2. A look at selected problems which reshape contemporary “ultimate concerns” and challenge our traditional symbols for the Divine and our relationship to the Divine.
3. Sacraments as related to the energy of the body in the archetypal events of human development and contemporary ultimate concerns. This section, the core of the paper, proposes an understanding of each of the traditional Christian seven sacraments as they relate to the vital developmental centers of the body. Further it relates the tasks of these developmental centers – forming community, entering into intimate relationships, forging a vocation to serve others, practicing reconciliation, surrendering (to the will of God) to contemporary issues which challenge each of these tasks: racism, terrorism, social liberation, etc.
4. Educational strategies both which address the contemporary practice of the sacraments. This section will focus on practices of the sacraments flowing out of their bodily understanding and their relationship to contemporary issues. It is a practical synthesis of contemporary imaginal education effecting a renewal of a sacramental encounter with the tradition.
5. Conclusion

Due to the 3,000 word limitation parts 3, 4 and 5 are not presented here. They will briefly presented in my session at the REA Atlanta in November.

1. The Nature of Imaginative Knowing

James Carroll in his recently published, Christ Actually sets this thesis of the nature of imaginative knowing:

... Humans are set apart from other sentient beings by the act of knowing. That capacity depends on utterly material circumstances, like chemical interactions in the brain and the wiring of neurons, yet it opens into the immaterial world of consciousness.... This double knowing – knowing that we know – points beyond itself to an experience for which there are no intellectual or linguistic categories, but which humans have nevertheless constantly stretched to express. Brain cells may generate this realm of mind, but they fall short of explaining it. The mind by definition leaps from gray matter to enlightenment.

The exquisite subtlety of human consciousness ... can account for everything but itself. Following, in effect, a three stage movement, *knowing* (i) opens into *knowing that we know* (ii) which can open, in turn into *knowing that we are known* (iii). Consciousness lends toward some kind of... primal consciousness that includes all consciousness in itself. Religion puts the name of God on that transcendent knower whom Jesus recognizes as “Father.”

Let me parse the elements of this thesis from his text.

1. The act of knowing as it has developed in self-conscious human beings is the gift or grace of the capacity to relate beyond the created evolutionary stage which they have attained.
 - a. This capacity arises from the physical material – brain cells in the mind – and its processes of which they are constituted – chemical interactions and the wiring of neurons.
 - b. Yet, this capacity transcends their human nature – to an experience of an “immaterial world of consciousness.”
 - c. Yet, this experience – since it is transcendent is beyond human linguistic categories.
 - d. Carroll says, “. . . but which humans have constantly stretched to express.” He describes this stretching in distinguishing the human brain from the mind and describing the mind as mediator to enlightenment.
 - e. We go from knowing to “knowing that we are known.”
2. This “stretching to express” is what in the Christian tradition we know as sacraments.

Let’s re-examine our common understanding of sacrament derived from the Christian tradition in light of this thesis on imaginative knowing. A sacrament is a ritual event expressing the connection of the self-conscious (finite) human to the infinite (transcendent) God. Sacraments are human means of communication with the Divine. It must be said that since the Divine transcends human consciousness the experience that calls forth this communication is initiated by the Divine. This is what is meant in the Christian tradition which says that Jesus is the primal sacrament. A bit more on that later.

To try to illustrate the “stretch” that goes on in sacramental communication between the human and divine consider the mechanical firing of an automobile spark plug. It bridges or

connects energy between its two points. Electrical energy (current) cannot flow between the gap of the two points (electrodes) on the spark plug until the voltage generated in the ignition of the automobile rises and begins to change the structure of the gases – the air and fuel between the electrodes. The gases become ionized – their structure changes and electrons flow across the gap. To put it more simply, a spark plug is the setting for a bolt of lightning between its two points. This spark ignites the fuel (air and gasoline) and produces the energy to drive the pistons which drive the automobile.

Sacraments, then to follow the quote from Carroll, begin “as chemical interactions in the brain and the wiring of neurons” opening the human act of knowing “into the immaterial world of consciousness.” This knowing points “beyond itself to an experience... which humans have... constantly stretched to express.” This knowing is an active imagination known as symbolic knowing.

Let’s take a look at this keyword in imagination epistemology, “symbol.” The word symbol is derived from the Greek σύμβολον (sýmbolon) with the root words συν- (syn-) meaning "together" and βολή (bolē) "hurl." Symbol has the approximate meaning of "to hurl together" two contrasting things. Interestingly enough, the opposite derivative is “diabolic” (diabolon), from which comes the word devil, and it means to push apart¹.

The Oxford English Dictionary says this about imagination as a way of knowing: 1. the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses; 2. the ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful; 3. the part of the mind that imagines things. “Imagination is not only a way of knowing, but also a way of finding the known².”

Memory plays a key role in imagination and certainly in our very definition of sacraments – “do this in memory of me³.” This quote from Augustine is quite profound on the role of memory in the knowing that comes through imagination.

The wide plains of my memory and its innumerable caverns and hollows are full beyond measure of countless things of all kinds. Material things are there by means of their images; knowledge is there of itself; emotions are there in the form of ideas or impressions of some kind, for the memory retains them even while the mind does not experience them, although whatever is in the memory must also be in the mind. My mind has the freedom of them all. I can glide from one to the other. I can probe deep into them and never find the end of them. This is the power of memory! This is the great force of life in living man, mortal though he is!⁴

Imagination puts flesh/clothes on the energies of mystery. Imagination lies at a kind of crux where perception, memory, idea generation, emotion, metaphor, and no doubt other labelled

¹ Cf. Marianne Sawicki, The Gospel in History: Portrait of a Teaching Church: The Origins of Christian Education. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988.

² This intriguing quote comes from a very nice PowerPoint presentation exploring the complexities of imagination. <https://prezi.com/omcikqrkiuad/tok-imagination-as-a-way-of-knowing/>

³ Luke 22:19

⁴ St Augustine, Confessions - Book X

features of our lives, intersect and interact⁵. Imagination is the bridge from the everyday to the mystery.

The function of sacraments (as symbols), then, is to point beyond to something else and further to engage the reality to which they point. Sacraments tie together the *transcendent* (the unseen) and the *immanent* (the seen) binding spirit and matter—body and soul, revealing the reality that overlaps these two worlds. Through this "sacramental" connection the mysterious becomes apparent in matter (e.g. bread) and form (e.g. the ritual words of consecration). Sacraments accomplish a spiritual effect (i.e. evoked deeper consciousness) when the transcendent (the unseen) appears to our awareness as present – so much so that our finite condition is likely to experience transformation (e.g. we love our neighbor). In this way, the whole cosmos, human beings, and the enfleshed Jesus Christ act as material realities that are means for personal communication from and to the triune God. Sacramental ritual is able to reveal a level of reality that is otherwise inaccessible to the self-understanding of ordinary human experience—it holds a mirror in which we catch a glimpse of the soul (created in the image of God).

According to Christian theology, Jesus is the sacrament or the physical presence of God⁶; the church “the body of Christ” is the sacrament or physical presence of Jesus; and the people of God's church celebrate sacraments, or enact the finite expression of God's presence. This Christological view of the sacraments is essential to a Christian grasping of sacramental reality. In the words of Barbara Fiand: "The life of Christ was the ‘presenceing’ of God. Ours is called to be that as well, as we embrace the fullness of our humanity....”⁷ The sacraments then are both our encounter with Christ and our transformation in Christ.

In the third section of this paper I will go on to further develop its thrust of sacraments/imagination as embodied knowing, visceral knowing in comparison to rational knowing. Moving to the second part of my paper I wish to touch base with my opening quote from Paul Tillich which says “The relationship of man to the ultimate undergoes changes;” that the symbols or sacraments are refashioned when our context pushes our ultimate concern deeper.

Thus in re-appropriating the sacraments we look to two sources – not just psychological insights about the operation of our imagination but also our social context that defines more clearly that ultimate concern, “the reign of God.”

2. Contemporary Ultimate Concerns

Focus on the sacraments and particularly this paper's focus on the sacraments as spiritual development can run the danger of individualism, a focus on one's personal psychological development, leaving the social out of the spiritual. But the sacraments as developed rituals in the church were expression of the presence of Jesus as an expression of his resurrection. This presence of Jesus was always communal – “For where two or three are gathered in my name,

⁵ Imagination in Teaching and Learning (Introduction) Kieran Egan <https://www.sfu.ca/~egan/ITLIntro.html>

⁶ For more in-depth discussion of this see Keenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* chapters 4 and 5: – Jesus and Primordality and The Church as Foundational Sacrament

⁷ Fiand, B.: Awe Filled Wonder the Interface of Science and Spirituality, New Jersey: Paulist Press. p. 69.

there am I among them⁸.” In line with this I want to take heed of Paul Tillich’s comment that our relationship to the ultimate undergoes change. “*Symbols* which for a certain period, or in a certain place, expressed the truth of faith for a certain group now only remind of the faith of the past. They have lost their truths...”⁹ Our present understanding of the cosmos and the human has radically challenged our religious education of these symbols/sacraments, not dissimilar to how our biblical education over the last half century has challenged our interpretations of the ancient traditions that have shaped these symbols. Human life and human relations are under assault as they never have been before by political, cultural, technological economic and environmental factors that favor power and self-interest over the innocent and imperiled: migrants washing up on the shores of an amoral capitalism, the planet laid waste, wives trapped by the rules that tie them to abusive husbands, the evident connection between gender equality and justice for all and the fact that we have to be reminded “black lives matter.” These concerns require the reinterpretation of traditional symbols of beliefs.

Pope Francis captures the way in which symbols have the power to confuse truth. In his apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” (“The Joy of the Gospel”), he writes that the “worship of the ancient golden calf has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money.” In commenting on “trickle-down economics,” he says, the rich are “stealing” if they do not share their wealth with the poor. In his encyclical, “*Laudato Si*” (“Praise Be to You”), he writes that the throwaway society with its profit-before-all-else economics is destroying the planet. He is telling us that this assault will succeed unless we are open to Christ’s example of sacrificial love.

Francis serves us well in helping us to get underneath and clear away the clutter that tarnishes the ultimate concern that the sacraments point to when he speaks of the consumerist society and free-market capitalism that underpins the American economy and its “unfettered pursuit of money” and that what is underneath that is an intolerable economic system that requires structural change. As a Latin American he describes the economic and cultural dominance of Argentina’s bigger neighbor.

This reference reminds me of the journey in the late 1980s that I was on with several United Methodist field educators in Cuernavaca Mexico. We were guests at the mass of a base community and during the interactive homily one gentleman, who was our host, spoke similarly, after expressing his apologies to us. The text of the gospel was “behold him who takes away the sin of the world.” The priest had raised the question for discussion – “what is the sin of the world?” Our host then said, “Los Estados Unidos es el pecado del mundo.”

The symbol of the city on the hill which “in a certain time, expressed the faith for a certain group now only reminds us of the faith of the past.” Winthrop's 1630 sermon gave rise to the widespread belief that the United States of America is "God's country" because metaphorically it is a "Shining City upon a Hill." We know this today as American exceptionalism.

I’ll stay with Pope Francis in relating these contextual issues to our spiritual development. In an address to clerical members of the Roman Curia before Christmas 2014 he led an examination of conscience in preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation listing “spiritual diseases,”

⁸ Matthew 18:20

⁹ Paul Tillich. *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 111

including self-importance, lust for power, and lack of empathy for others . Among these were the disease of feeling 'immortal' or 'essential 'turn[ing] into masters and feel superior to everyone rather than in the service of all people'. The disease of 'Spiritual Alzheimer's': a 'progressive decline of spiritual faculties' which 'causes severe disadvantages to people', making them live in a 'state of absolute dependence on imagined, views'. 'Existential schizophrenia' of who live 'a double life, a result of advancing spiritual emptiness, 'abandon[ing] the pastoral service and limit[ing] activities to bureaucracy, losing touch with reality and real people'. Indifference to others: When each one thinks only of themselves and loses the truthfulness and warmth of human relationships. Hoarding: filling an existential void in the heart by hoarding material possessions only to feel secure. Worldly profit and exhibitionism: 'When the apostle turns his service into power, and his power into a commodity to gain worldly profits, or even more powers. He described this as a disease that 'badly hurts the Body because it leads people to justify the use of any means in order to fulfill their aim, often in the name of transparency and justice!'

3. Sacraments as Related to the Energy Centers of the Body and Contemporary Ultimate Concerns

This section, the core of the paper, proposes an understanding of each of the traditional Christian seven sacraments as they relate developmentally to the vital/energy centers of the body. Further it relates the tasks of these centers – forming community, entering into intimate relationships, forging a vocation to serve others, practicing reconciliation, surrendering (to the will of God) to contemporary issues which challenge each of these tasks: racism, terrorism, social liberation, etc. as mentioned above.

TABLE 1 Sacraments: the Bodily Flow of Energy to Transcendent Consciousness
Chart of Correspondence of the Sacraments with the Body's Energy Centers and Classic Stages of Human Developmental

Sacrament and Sacramental Graces	Energy Center in the Body	Development Stage/Task	Virtue/Sin Archetype
1. BAPTISM – Belonging	Root: The Base of the Spine The Sciatic Plexus (the center of our power to connect with the earth) The Adrenal Gland	Birth and Infancy The Rebirth of the Self for a Journey through Deeper Consciousness of Life with God Acceptance/ Affirmation Physical Survival Groundedness Trust vs. Mistrust (Hope)	Prudence/Sloth Mother/Victim
2. EUCHARIST – Presence	Sacral: The Pelvic Region/The Gut The Pelvic Plexus (the center of relational energy) The Gonad Gland	Childhood The Rebirth of the Emotional Self Intimacy/Connection Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt Pleasure/Sexuality Autonomy vs. Shame (Will) Initiative vs. Guilt (Purpose)	Temperance/Greed Emperor(press)/Martyr
3. CONFIRMATION – Gifts of the Holy Spirit	Mid Abdomen The Solar Plexus (the center of personal power) The Pancreas Gland	Adolescence The Rebirth of the Conceptual, Intellectual Self Self Esteem/Altruism Intention/Will Industry vs. Inferiority (Competency)	Justice/Wrath Warrior/Servant
4. MARRIAGE – Bonding	The Heart/The Chest Region The Cardiac Plexus (the center of love) The Thymus Gland	Young Adult The Birth of the Relational Self Relationship Physical and Spiritual Connection/Generativity Identity vs. Role Confusion (Fidelity)	Fortitude/Lust Lover/actor
5. RECONCILIATION – Restoration of Relationship	The Throat/The Neck Region The Brachial Plexus (the center for self-expression) The Thyroid Gland	Early Responsible Adulthood The Birth of the Mature Personality Truth Telling/Will Power Communication/Voice/Self-Expression Intimacy vs. Isolation (Love)	Charity/Gluttony Communicator/Silent Child
6. HOLY ORDERS – Servanthood	The Forehead The Cervical Plexus (the center for the power of wisdom) The Pituitary Gland	Developed Responsible Adulthood The Birth of the Responsible Self Leadership/Vocation Intuition/Imagination Generativity vs. Stagnation (Care)	Hope/Envy Intuitive/Intellectual
7. ANOINTING – Peace	The Crown of the Head The Choroid Plexuses (the center for the power of surrender) The Pineal Gland	Mature Years The Birth of the New Self Letting Go/Surrender/Entering the Mystery Ego Identity vs. Despair (Wisdom)	Faith/Pride Guru/Egotist

In each sacrament we can discern a developmental task that manifests the human's outreach to conform to God's will, or better, God's tug at the human.

In the third column I relate the tasks of spiritual development and Erikson's continuum of what he calls the psychosocial crises that are the growth dynamics of that particular stage of development. The key to all of this is that our development begins in relationship, relational processes through which aspects of the self are stimulated and integrated during particular life stages. The sacraments then, as a whole, are envisioned as rituals of relationship enacting deeper spiritual consciousness.

The seven energy centers are related. Energy flows in the body from these energy centers to each other and to the brain. Similarly we should not think of the sacraments as discrete and closed from each other but consider the energy (grace) distinctive to each of the sacraments flowing through the whole body. For example the energy of connection in Baptism flows through the whole body, relating to the energy of intimacy, to the energy of industry, to the energy of generativity. Thus the movement of sacramental grace/energy is multidirectional and flows to the center of the brain. All seven sacraments/energy centers work together not hierarchically nor in a linear flow fashion - but multidirectional (despite the impression of linear direction given by a two-dimensional chart). It is a mistake to view the sacraments (our development for that fact) as segmented.

I have chosen to order the sacraments in a particular sequence that follows both a positive flow of energy in the chakras and a logical sequence of development followed by most developmental psychologists. This varies a bit from the church order in which the sacrament of reconciliation generally comes earlier in the sequence. Each sacrament points to each stage of human development; whereas respective sacraments and respective stages of development do have major tasks.

Next I will present a summary/outline of these seven energy centers, highlighting the biology, psychology and sociology as well as of theology and ritual of the liturgy related to each of the body's areas along with their relation to the seven Catholic sacraments. This paper should not be seen as a paper attempting to write a theology of sacraments. Its genre is that of seeing the sacraments as symbols of spiritual development.

A Selected Bibliography:

Carroll, James, Christ Actually: the son of God for the secular age. New York: Viking, 2014

Cooke, Bernard, Sacraments and Sacramentality. Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic Ct, 1994.

Corbin, Henry Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi. Princeton University Press, 1969.

Cote, Richard. Lazarus! Come Out!: Why Faith Needs Imagination. Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2003

Egan, Kieran, and Dan Nadaner, eds. *Imagination and Education*. Milton Keynes: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Fiand, Barbara, Awe Filled Wonder: The Interface of Science and Spirituality, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008.

Groome, Thomas H. "Remembering and Imagining: The Tree in the Seed." *Religious Education* 98:4 (2003):511-520

Greene, Debra, "Energy Medicine and the Multidimensional Model"
<http://www.noetic.org/noetic/issue-three-october/energy-medicine-and-the-multidimensional-model/>

Green, Garrett. *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of Interpretation at the End of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Hogue, David, Remembering the Future Imagining the Past: Story, Ritual, and the Human Brain, Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press 2003.

Kearney, Richard. The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture. Minneapolis. University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Keegan, Robert, The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development Harvard University Press 1982

Kelcourse, Felicity– Human Development and Faith: the Life-cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul Chalice Press; 2 edition 2015

Masson, Paul, ed. *The Pedagogy of God's Image: Essays on Symbol and the Religious Imagination*. Chico, CA; Scholars Press, 1982.

Martos, Joseph, Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church, Liguori, Mo: Liguori Publications, 2001.

Myss, Caroline, The Anatomy of the Spirit: The Seven Stages of Power and Healing, New York: NY Three Rivers Press, 1996.

Osborne, Keenan, Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999.

Sawicki, Marianne, The Gospel in History: Portrait of a Teaching Church: The Origins of Christian Education. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988.

Schillebeeckx, Edward, Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God (New York 1963)

Schmemmann, Alexander – For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy – St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1973

Shealy Norman C. and Caroline M. Myss, Vision, Creativity and Intuition -- 10 hour videotaped program by Self-Health Systems Fair Grove, MO. 1994.

Shealy, Norman C. Medical Intuition: Your Awakening to Wholeness. Virginia Beach, VA: 4th Dimension Press, 2010.

Tracy, David. The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism. New York: Crossroads, 1981.

Tillich, Paul Dynamics of Faith (1957), New York: Harper perennial Classics, 2001