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The Sacraments of Initiation as ‘Proof of Concept’ for Bernard Lonergan’s ‘Four-Point Hypothesis’

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Abstract

This essay endeavors a correlation between Bernard Lonergan’s ‘four-point hypothesis’ – a theological proposal integrating trinitarian theology and the supernatural order of ‘created grace’ – and the sacraments of initiation. The same formal structure that Lonergan discerned in the experience of grace, itself a means of participation in the life of the Trinity, is replicated in the sacramental reception of that grace in those ritual acts whereby one is made a Christian. This at once serves as a ‘proof of concept’, lending credence to the Lonerganian proposal, and provides a speculative framework for understanding how it is that the sacraments introduce Christians into the divine life.

Keywords: Bernard Lonergan; Robert Doran; sacraments; sanctifying grace; Trinity

This essay is something of a thought experiment, aimed at demonstrating the coherence of a theological proposal from one of the twentieth century’s greatest theologians by drawing connections between it and an area of theology into which he only rarely ventured, thereby providing something of an indirect proof of concept. Bernard Lonergan made his mark in Catholic theology principally through his contributions to cognitional theory and an accompanying theological methodology, though, as a seminary professor, his explorations ranged more widely than such confines.¹ For our purposes in this essay, it is his trinitarian theology and his theology of the supernatural that are most germane.² One locus to which he contributed

¹See especially Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

²Lonergan composed two treatises on the Trinity, one from a dogmatic perspective, the other systematic. *The Triune God. Doctrines* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); *The Triune God: Systematics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). I shall be principally concerned with the systematic portion. His earliest major undertaking was his dissertation on Thomas Aquinas’s theology of grace, which is reproduced in *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). My main focus will be on his instructional outlines: ‘The Supernatural Order’, in

rather little was sacramental theology, and it is to this area that I aim to draw connections.³

By this point, the theological proposal that has come to be known as the four-point hypothesis, is fairly well known within Lonergan circles, largely thanks to the efforts of Robert Doran, who identified this proposal – long buried within the Latin text of Lonergan’s systematic theology of the Trinity – as an integral component of a ‘unified field structure’ for a contemporary Catholic systematic theology.⁴ While not uncontroversial, to claim a particular status for this proposal is certainly not unheard of.⁵ Beyond such circles, though, familiarity cannot be presumed, and so I briefly rehearse it here. In the course of his discussion of the missions of the Word and Spirit, Lonergan notes suggests correspondence between the four real relations in the Trinity (paternity, filiation, active spiration, passive spiration) and four absolutely supernatural realities (the secondary act of existence of the incarnation, the light of glory, sanctifying grace, and the habit of charity). Beyond mere correspondence, he posits that these four supernatural realities are ‘created participations of’ the divine relations, with the *ens secundarium* participating in paternity, sanctifying grace participating in active spiration, habitual charity participating in passive spiration, and the light of glory participating in filiation.⁶ Of these supernatural realities, only two (sanctifying grace and the habit of charity) are experienced in this life. The *ens secundarium* is unique

Early Latin Theology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 52–255, and ‘Supplementary Notes on Sanctifying Grace’, in *Early Latin Theology*, pp. 562–665.

³Beyond a few brief pastoral essays, the most sustained reflection on sacramental theology, which isn’t even primarily about the sacraments, is Bernard Lonergan, ‘The Notion of Sacrifice’, in Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, eds., *Early Latin Theology*, pp. 2–51. As a result, there is a corresponding dearth of Lonerganian sacramental theology. See, e.g., Raymond Moloney, ‘Lonergan on Eucharistic Sacrifice’, *Theological Studies*, 62 (2001), 53–70 (including Moloney’s understated observation that ‘The name of Bernard Lonergan is not one that figures prominently in sacramental theology’ [p. 53]); Joseph C. Mudd, *Eucharist as Meaning: Critical Metaphysics and Contemporary Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014); ‘What Might Bernard Lonergan Say to Bruce Morrill?’, *Theological Studies*, 75 (2014), 613–23; Eugene R. Schlesinger, ‘Opus Dei, Opus Hominum: The Trinity, the Four-Point Hypothesis, and the Eucharist’, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 88 (2023), 56–75; Neil Ormerod, ‘The Four-Point Hypothesis: Transpositions and Complications’, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 77 (2012), 127–40. Particularly pertinent is M. Shawn Copeland’s account of a eucharistic solidarity in *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, 2nd edn. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023).

⁴Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions. Volume 1: Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions. Volume 2: Missions and Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions. Volume 3: Redeeming History*, ed. by Joseph Ogbannaya (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2022). In addition to these monographs, Doran devoted several articles to developing this proposal. He regarded these shorter works as sublated by the books, and so I attend principally to the monographs.

⁵In particular, Charles Hefling, ‘Quaestio Disputata: On the (Economic) Trinity: An Argument in Conversation with Robert Doran’, *Theological Studies*, 68 (2007), 642–60, and Jeremy Wilkins, ‘Dialectic and Transposition: Lonergan, Scholasticism, and Grace, in Conversation with Robert Doran’, *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 85 (2020), 286–306 have questioned some of Doran’s larger claims regarding the four-point hypothesis. Neil Ormerod, on the other hand, has seen great utility in the proposal and Doran’s approach ‘Two Points or Four? – Rahner and Lonergan on Trinity, Incarnation, Grace, and Beatific Vision’, *Theological Studies*, 68 (2007), 661–73; ‘The Four-Point Hypothesis’.

⁶Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 471–73.

to the incarnate Word, while the light of glory is granted eschatologically in order to facilitate the beatific vision.

With this proposal, Lonergan gestures towards a profound articulation of the *nexus mysteriorum*, encompassing at a minimum, trinitarian theology, Christology, pneumatology, the theology of grace, soteriology, and eschatology (in the course of the exposition, further connections to ecclesiology are forged, to which we shall attend below).⁷ The hypothesis invites us to consider the ways in which the missions of the Word and Spirit catch human beings up into the life of God, thereby providing a theological basis for considering the activity of the triune God in history, most particularly through that same God's recruitment of human agency into the *missio Dei*.

In what follows, I put this hypothesis to work through an interrogation of the sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. In so doing, deep points of connection emerge, particularly between the effect of the sacraments and the structure proposed by Lonergan. In particular, baptism's bestowal of sanctifying grace serves as an instrumental cause in the Christian's participation in active spiration with its special relation to the Holy Spirit. Confirmation's special relation to the Holy Spirit bears a close connection to the habit of charity, and so is instrumental in our participation in passive spiration's special relation to the Father and Son. The eucharistic sacrifice reproduces in us the same mindset that was in Christ Jesus, whereby his confidence in the Father's love for him informed his own act of saving love, once more serving as an instrument in our appropriation of the divine gift of love (sanctifying grace) and the call to love in turn (charity). By tracing how the sacramental reception of sanctifying grace follows upon formal and material lines that are isomorphic to the trinitarian structure of the supernatural order proposed by Lonergan, we find both confirmation of his hypothesis's utility and a renewed resource for thinking and speaking about the sacramental and ecclesial contours of our elevation into the life of God.

I. Preliminary: sanctifying grace and the psychological analogy

True to Lonergan's understanding of speculative theology, my aim here is demonstrating coherence rather than proof. Therefore I shall, in a fairly cursory fashion, establish several of the terms and relations germane to the topic before moving on to the business at hand. One could, of course, dispute the adequacy of any or all of the positions I take as givens, but such questions would fall under the purview of a different article than the present one. Two preliminary matters must be articulated: Lonergan's basic understanding of sanctifying grace and Doran's reception and transposition of that understanding in his proposed modification of the psychological analogy of the Trinity, drawn from the supernatural order.

As we have seen, Lonergan understood sanctifying grace to be an absolutely supernatural reality, and thus beyond the proportions of any finite nature. Moreover, in his

⁷Probably the most extensive treatments are H. Daniel Monsour, 'Bernard Lonergan's Early Formulation of the Foundational *Nexus Mysteriorum* in God's Self Communication in Creation', in *Meaning and History in Systematic Theology: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Doran*, ed. by John D. Dadosky (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009), pp. 375–404; J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

supplemental text to a course on the theology of grace, Lonergan identifies the supernatural order as so many ‘created communication[s] of the divine nature...whereby there are operations in creatures through which they attain God as he is in himself’.⁸ Even at this early stage, Lonergan was drawing connections between the supernatural order and the doctrine of the Trinity, noting that the model for and basis of such created communications of the divine nature was the uncreated communication of the divine nature, which are the processions of the Word and Spirit within God.⁹ Later in the trinitarian systematics, Lonergan would put a finer point on it, ‘For the divine persons are sent in accordance with their eternal processions, to encounter us and dwell in us in accordance with similar processions produced in us through grace’.¹⁰ It is the matter of these processions in us – the operations by which we human creatures attain God as God is in Godself – that will provide the basis for Doran’s reconfiguration of the psychological analogy, to which we shall turn momentarily. First, though, one more piece of the early, Latinized Lonergan must be set forth.

Lonergan’s most substantial text on sanctifying grace was produced as a supplemental schema to his course on the topic, and sets forth a biblically-grounded account of the Catholic position on justification, in explicit contrast to the doctrines of the Protestant Reformers.¹¹ In the course of his presentation, Lonergan, drawing from a wide array of biblical passages, synthesizes the fundamental meaning of sanctifying grace:

To those whom God the Father loves [1] as he loves Jesus, his only begotten Son, (2) he gives the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit, so that (3) into a new life they may be (4) born again and (5) become living members of Christ; therefore as (6) just, (7) friends of God, (8) adopted children of God, and (9) heirs in hope of eternal life, (10) they enter into a sharing of the divine nature.¹²

In this connection, Lonergan’s understanding hews closely to the Thomistic account of *gratia gratum faciens*, which the angelic doctor understood as a ‘participated likeness of the Divine Nature’¹³ granted by virtue of incorporation into Christ, who is the basis of a special love of God for us, a love which causes a special, lovable goodness in us,¹⁴ and which, in turn, leads to our love of God.¹⁵

In later years, Lonergan would suggest that, were we to transpose our terminology from the framework of the metaphysical theology and faculty psychology within which scholasticism operated to a methodically and interiorly grounded framework

⁸Lonergan, ‘Supernatural Order’, p. 65.

⁹Lonergan, p. 73.

¹⁰Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 513.

¹¹Lonergan, ‘Sanctifying Grace’, pp. 565–75.

¹²Lonergan, p. 581.

¹³*Summa Theologiae* 3.62.2; 1-2.110.3–4. Hereafter *ST*.

¹⁴*Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.150. Hereafter *SCG*.

¹⁵*SCG* 3.151. For treatments of Thomas’s doctrine of grace, see, e.g., Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*; Shawn M. Colberg, ‘Aquinas and the Grace of Auxilium’, *Modern Theology*, 32 (2016), 187–210; ‘“Lord, Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner”: Aquinas on Grace, Impetration, and Justification’, *New Blackfriars*, 101 (2020), 286–300; Jeremy D. Wilkins, ‘Grace and growth: Aquinas, Lonergan, and the problematic of habitual grace’, *Theological Studies*, 72 (2011), 723–49.

that takes its stand on the intentional operations that constitute human activity within the world mediated by meaning, sanctifying grace would be construed as a dynamic state of being in love with God.¹⁶ Taking Lonergan's lead, Robert Doran extended the proposal further and in so doing proposed a revised version of the psychological analogy of the Trinity as *verbum spirans amorem*.¹⁷ Here I presume the viability and utility of the psychological analogy and, so, forgo any exposition or defense of it, content to stand on the shoulders of my forebears and, hopefully, to advance their thought even incrementally.¹⁸ Doran's modified psychological analogy takes as its basis, not the dynamics of the mind and its operations within the natural order, but the subjective experience of supernatural graces.¹⁹

Briefly stated, Doran draws from the four-point hypothesis's identification of sanctifying grace with active spiration and the habit of charity with passive spiration to articulate a trinitarian analogy wherein the recalled reception of unqualified love (sanctifying grace), breathes forth one's own love in turn.²⁰ Just as the Father and Son together breathe forth (active spiration) the Notional Love that is the Holy Spirit (passive spiration), sanctifying grace breathes forth charity, and does so as a created participation of the way the *verbum Dei* eternally breathes forth *amor* along with the one who speaks this Word.²¹ This analogy is structurally identical to the classical analogy articulated by Aquinas (itself a refinement of certain proposals from Augustine),²² because active spiration is conceptually, but not really distinct

¹⁶Lonergan, *Method*, pp. 101–4. See also, e.g., Christiaan Jacobs-Vandegheer, 'Sanctifying grace in a "methodical theology"', *Theological Studies*, 68 (2007), 52–76.

¹⁷Doran, *Trinity in History*, 1:pp. 33–39; 2: pp. 15–20. The most relevant texts for Lonergan on the psychological analogy are *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 125–229; 'Christology Today: Methodological Considerations', in Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky, eds., *A Third Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 91–93.

¹⁸For contemporary restatements and/or defenses of the psychological analogy, see, e.g., Neil Ormerod, *The Trinity: Retrieving The Western Tradition* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005); Peter Drilling, 'The Psychological Analogy of the Trinity: Augustine, Aquinas, and Lonergan', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 71 (2006), 320–37; John D. Dadosky, 'God's Eternal Yes!: An Exposition and Development of Lonergan's Psychological Analogy of the Trinity', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 81 (2016), 397–419; Jeremy D. Wilkins, 'The Spiration of Love in God According to Aquinas and His Interpreters', *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 83 (2019), 357–405.

¹⁹Doran worked this out painstakingly in his *Trinity in History*, 1:pp. 17–82. While it is typical to develop analogies from the natural order, rather than the supernatural order, the Constitution *Dei Filius* notes that both analogy and the nexus of mysteries grant us partial understanding of the divine mysteries. Doran's psychological analogy drawn from the supernatural order recognizes that when we attend to the data of consciousness, we attend to the same operations whether we consider the production of inner words proportionate to our finite reason or the experience of a supernatural gift exceeding those proportions. He notes that his analogy comprehends the same data as the classical psychological analogy, has the same formal structure as it, and also keeps us more closely tethered to the saving acts by which the Trinity has been revealed to us.

²⁰Doran, 1:pp. 40, 54–57, 62–64.

²¹Doran, 1:pp. 17, 137–38; 2:pp. 77–95.

²²Aquinas develops his analogy in *ST* 1.27.1–5. While Augustine's appeal to mental triads in texts such as *Sermon* 52 and Book 15 of *De Trinitate* are the inspiration for later developments, I do not regard these as psychological analogies, properly speaking, for two primary reasons. First, Augustine himself states that they are not analogies, but rather 'similitudes'. Second, Augustine's concern is to demonstrate the rationality of inseparable operations, while the psychological analogy is concerned with the question of how there can be processions in the simple God. See further Lewis Ayres, "'Remember That You Are

from the Father and the Son. Hence, we still have the structure of an inner word breathing forth love. It advances our understanding, though, by moving us away from faculty psychology into the realm of interiorly differentiated consciousness and intentionality analysis. It further tethers our attempt to understand the trinitarian processions to our experience and appropriation of those processions by way of the grace given in the divine missions by which those processions are extended into the economy.

Doran's proposal maneuvers us into a position whereby we are better able to discern the links between the reception of grace and the life of the Trinity. Because the sacraments are instrumental causes in the reception of grace, Doran's revised psychological analogy also positions us to consider the linkage between the sacraments of initiation and participation in the Trinity.

2. Fundament: baptism in and as the beloved

In turning to the sacraments of initiation, we find a rather elegant coherence with these generally non-sacramental proposals from Lonergan and Doran.²³ Christ's baptism in the Jordan has long been a locus classicus not just for the sacrament of Christian baptism but also for trinitarian reflection. Here we see the interplay of all three divine persons, as Christ receives the gift of the Holy Spirit in bodily form as a dove and as the Father speaks with divine approval, identifying Jesus as the beloved Son.

At the outset, we can note that this episode reproduces exactly both the trinitarian proposals and the theology of sanctifying grace articulated above. In terms of the Trinity, we have the Father speaking a word of a judgment of value, the content of which is that same Word that is eternally uttered by God, who was with God in the beginning and is God. Moreover, in the speaking of this word, the Holy Spirit is given, and given precisely as an expression of love for the beloved.

In terms of the theology of grace, we see here the eternal love of God given to the incarnate Word precisely as human, along with the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit. Which is the initial basis for the theology of *gratia gratum faciens*. From this we can extrapolate further to the rest of the position, following the lead of patristic reflection. The principle is articulated in such luminaries as Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor, but pithily summed up by Eugene F. Rogers:

At the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit hovers over the Son. This does not sanctify the Son; the Second Person of the Trinity is already holy. This does not deify the Son; the Second Person of the Trinity is already God. This does not adopt the Son; the Second Person of the Trinity is already Son. But because the Spirit wishes to celebrate the holiness, deity, and sonship of the Son, the Spirit makes those qualities new by granting them also to human beings...The Spirit gives gifts to the Son,

Catholic" (Serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 8 (2000), 39–82.

²³I say generally non-sacramental because Lonergan does advert to baptism at a few junctures, taking the basic position that Christ's baptism is the model of our own and serves to signify the effect of Christian baptism. E.g., Lonergan, 'Sanctifying Grace', p. 643; *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 481–83. These remarks remain relatively undeveloped.

but gifts that he already has by nature (hence, he receives them *as gift* from the Spirit). This giving and reception enables humans to receive a participation and share as well.²⁴

The baptism of Christ represents the gift now made available to other human beings in Christ and by virtue of their baptisms.²⁵ This completes the position on sanctifying grace articulated by Lonergan, the same love that God eternally has for the Word, is now given to the Word's fellow human beings, along with the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that they can share in the same life the Word eternally shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Hence, it is appropriate that scholastic theology has long identified sanctifying grace as the second effect, or *res tantum* of the sacrament of baptism. The first effect, or *res et sacramentum* is the indelible character of baptism, whereby the neophyte is configured to Christ, with a relationship to the church established, including the right and duty to participate in the church's liturgical worship of God – itself an expression of and participation in Christ's priestly ministry. The *res-sacramentum* framework allows for an elegant and nuanced articulation of the matter. The first effect pertains to the sacrament's *opus operatum*, which is to say that it always occurs when the sacrament is validly administered. The second effect occurs *ex opere operantis*, which is to say it depends upon the dispositions of the recipient. When we consider this under the auspices of Doran's transposition, the principle emerges clearly. Sanctifying grace is the recalled reception of unqualified divine love. It is the conviction and experience of oneself as infinitely loved by the one who is infinitely good and infinitely wise. Perfectly loved via a perfect judgment of value. The dimension of this that devolves upon our recognition and appropriation of the divine love is the difference that makes a difference. Given God's universal saving will, we can say with confidence that everyone is so loved by God. That being the case, all who are baptized certainly have this love bestowed upon them.²⁶ But only those who recognize and receive this love – though this recognition and reception are not necessarily thematized – can be said to receive sanctifying grace.²⁷ As Doran put it, his analogy adds recognition of

the ever-occurring invisible mission of the Son through the 'Yes' of the knowledge born of the gift of God's love recalled in *memoria*. That ever-occurring mission is *revealed* once and for all in the visible mission of the Son, and once it is revealed, it can be *discovered* in history over and over again, even where the Son is not explicitly acknowledged.²⁸

²⁴Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 144–46.

²⁵Lonergan, 'Sanctifying Grace', p. 643; *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 481–83.

²⁶It is important not to elide the universal love of God, including the possible (and, I am sure, frequently actual) salvation of non-Christians with the sacramental grace, nor to make the sacrament out to be the ratification of something that was always already true. To do that is to make the sacrament solely a sign and not also an instrument.

²⁷Lonergan, *Method*, pp. 114–20; Doran, *Trinity in History*, 1:pp. 83–107.

²⁸Doran, *Trinity in History*, 3:p. 29.

Thus, God's offer of grace is offered universally through the Word, and most often experienced by humanity 'vécu' rather than 'thématique', but also rendered unmistakable by the incarnate Word.²⁹

Because in the infinite judgment of value that is the generation of the Word, God knows Godself and in knowing Godself knows all that God can do and all that God will do, and because in the infinite affirmation of that judgment of value that is the procession of the Holy Spirit, God also affirms what God can and will do, there is already a basis for our inclusion in that judgment of value that is the Word. With the embrace of our humanity in the incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit to that same humanity, this inclusion is elevated and perfected.

We can deepen these considerations when we note also that baptism is principally a matter of participation in the paschal mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, and bestowal of the Holy Spirit, as indicated by the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults and witnessed to in the Scriptures (e.g., Romans 6:4–5; Colossians 2:11–15).³⁰ Following from the Thomistic principle that the missions of the Word and Spirit are an economic expression of their processions, and noting the way the evangelists depict the culmination of Christ's mission in the cross and resurrection, we can discern in the passion narratives the same love and affirmation that constitutes God's eternal trinitarian life. The processions of the Word and Spirit are an absolute and unrestricted judgment of value and affirmation. That same love and affirmation constitutes the incarnate Word's fidelity to his mission, even unto death on a cross, where he displays in its fullness his absolute commitment both to the one who sent him and to the humanity to whom he had been sent.³¹ These twinned commitments are particularly evident in the Johannine and Lucan witness:

Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end ... Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God [washed his disciples feet and commanded them to love one another]. (John 13:1, 3)

Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.... Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.... Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.... Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. (Luke 23:28, 34, 43, 46)

Thus, once more, we see the absolute affirmation and love of God here turned toward humanity, even errant, sinful humanity, in and for the sake of the incarnate Word of God. All of the sacraments derive their power from the paschal mystery,³² but this is displayed with particular clarity in baptism, through which one shares in Christ's death and resurrection, receiving as well the same Holy Spirit that accompanied him in his

²⁹ *Trinity in History*, 1:pp 78, 124, 349; 2:pp. 9–14, 34–36, 53.

³⁰ *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults*, nos. 8, 213.

³¹ This is regularly observed in the liberationist stream of theology. I am particularly influenced by Copeland's articulation in *Enfleshing Freedom*, pp. 41–74, 119–34.

³² ST 3.62.5.

incarnate ministry. With this mention of the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are in a position not so much to leave baptism behind as to turn to the next sacrament in the sequence of initiation.

3. Strengthened: confirmation and the Spirit's gift

In turning to confirmation, we by no means leave baptism behind, and this for two principal reasons. First, due to the indelible character of baptism, we never leave it behind in actuality. The most fundamental identity of any Christian is that they are baptized. Second, conceptually, one cannot properly reflect upon confirmation in isolation from baptism; they are intimately and intrinsically connected. The sacraments of initiation form a unity, which was witnessed in the early centuries of the church, when they were all bestowed in a single, integrated rite.³³ The retrieval of this unity led to the contemporary Catholic position that regards the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults as the normative pattern of initiation. It has similarly led to the maintenance of their unity in the Eastern churches, even in the case of infants. Confirmation is sometimes called 'a rite in search of a theology', but this only occurs if we consider it in isolation from the overall pattern of initiation.

Confirmation is indeed a distinct sacrament from baptism. We know this because in the Western church they have been separated and possibility follows upon actuality. The distinction is also dogmatically affirmed by the Council of Trent.³⁴ However, though the two sacraments are distinct and separable, their proper theological context is in tandem with one another, and, so long as they are celebrated in tandem, we do not have to worry ourselves overmuch about which sacrament yields which effects. We can instead, note that Christian initiation is both Christological and pneumatological.³⁵ These two dimensions are closely related. After all, Jesus was made the Christ *because* he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit's work involves joining us to Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:12–13) and reminding us of all that Jesus did and taught (John 16:7–15). Thus, it will not do to say that baptism is Christological, configuring us to Christ, while confirmation is pneumatological, giving us the Holy Spirit. Our configuration to Christ is pneumatological, and to receive the Holy Spirit is to be anointed as Christ himself was anointed. While confirmation is particularly associated with the Holy Spirit, it remains that case that the Spirit is given at baptism. After all, 'Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him' (Rom. 8:9).

With those provisos articulated, we see a rather apt connection between confirmation and the four-point hypothesis. Baptism represents and effects the radical affirmation of the new Christian in Christ as a member of his body, which corresponds to the *memoria*-faith pairing that Doran identified as the transposed meaning of

³³See the witness of Cyril of Jerusalem's *Mystagogical Catecheses*, as well as the more sweeping historical-theological surveys of Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999); Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978).

³⁴Council of Trent, Session 7 'On the Sacraments', First Canon on Confirmation. All citations of conciliar documents are from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols, ed. by Norman Tanner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

³⁵See the accounting in Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), pp. 8–13, 40–43, 134–40, 143.

sanctifying grace, itself a created participation of active spiration, which breathes out Notional Love. It is, therefore, appropriate that this affirmation issue in a distinctive expression and reception of the same Gift in and by the faithful. Thus,

Active spiration : Notional Love :: Sanctifying Grace : Charity :: Baptism : Confirmation

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church explains that confirmation deepens the Christian's bond to the church, strengthening them to boldly defend the faith.³⁶ There is a particular and appropriate caritative and pneumatological connection here, for classically, the Holy Spirit has been considered the *anima ecclesiae*. It is by the Holy Spirit that we are bound together as one in the mystical body of Christ, and the tie that binds us is charity. And so the deepened bond to the church effected by confirmation finds its expression in charity, which is particularly appropriate, given the more pronounced pneumatological character of the sacrament.

Recently, Shawn Copeland has called our attention to the need for charity to take the form of solidarity in a world frequently marked by injustice.³⁷ The love that is solidarity has its origin in the mutual love of the trinitarian persons, which is then shared with humanity by the incarnate Word,³⁸ but with a particular configuration, because Jesus of Nazareth enacted a solidaristic stance with those at the margins of society, exercising a preferential option for them.³⁹ This solidarity took him so far as the cross, which

exposes our pretense to historical innocence, to social and political neutrality. It uncovers the limitation of all human efforts and solutions to meet the problem of evil. Thus, the praxis of solidarity is made possible by the loving self-donation of the crucified Christ whose cross is its origin, standard, and judge.⁴⁰

Solidarity is really nothing more (and nothing less) than the expression of charity amid situations of injustice. Love wills the good of the other, and 'through a praxis of solidarity, we not only apprehend and are moved by the suffering of the other, we confront and address its oppressive cause and shoulder the other's suffering'.⁴¹ A love that would not do this is unworthy of the name. And, particularly given the public dimensions of confirmation – the call and the power to contend for the faith before the world – it is especially suitable that the charity/solidarity operative here be seen in connection with the sacrament. And, fittingly, with this turn to solidarity and to the cross of Christ, we are brought to the threshold of the Eucharist.

³⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

³⁷ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, pp. 81–83, 86–91, 130–34.

³⁸ Copeland, pp. 89–90.

³⁹ Copeland, pp. 43–48, 69–73.

⁴⁰ Copeland, p. 86. See also Robert Doran's extended reflection on the law of the cross as the 'one...single feature' marking authentic ecclesial ministry. *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 108–35.

⁴¹ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, p. 82. See also Doran's account of the 'scale of values' (vital, social, cultural, personal, and religious) as the heuristic anticipation of the reign of God. *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, pp. 93–138; *Trinity in History*, 1:pp. 83–107; 2:pp. 29–36, 135–36. The integral functioning of this scale of values would involve just distribution of resources, proper collaboration among all involved in a society, the fostering of human flourishing, and the promotion of the common good.

4. Culmination: the Eucharist as sacrifice of Christ's body

Flowing from our incorporation into Christ's body, and our reception of Christological and pneumatological gifts, it is fitting that Christian initiation culminate in our sacramental reception of Christ's body in the sacrament of the altar. Here the sacrificial nature of the Mass is of paramount performance. The Eucharist is not principally an object – as if the point were merely to confect the real presence – but a ritual action. The Mass is the liturgical exercise of Christ's priestly ministry by and in his mystical body, the church.⁴² Attending to the eucharistic sacrifice also affords connection with our trinitarian concerns, for it foregrounds the activity of a love given, which calls forth love in return.

Immediately, qualifications are in order, for 'sacrifice' unfortunately calls to mind grim and bloody notions of retribution and sacralized violence. I have written elsewhere against such understandings of sacrifice, and so do not reprise that work here.⁴³ Instead, I note three points to clear the air so that we may engage with the matter at hand, undistracted by our a priori assumptions about what sacrifice must mean. First, it is dogmatically defined by the Council of Trent – and reiterated by Vatican II, and assumed throughout the Roman Missal – that Christ's death was a sacrifice and that in the Mass that same sacrifice is offered. In other words, sacrificial understandings of the cross and Eucharist are not optional for Catholic theology. What is open is *how* sacrifice is construed. Second, there are indeed better and worse ways to do so, and most of the poor reputation for sacrifice is well-earned, but such baggage is not fate. We are not obliged to repeat toxic or problematic theologies of yore, but rather to dismantle and repudiate them. Given the dogmatic parameters established by Trent and the pervasive sacrificial language of the Roman Missal, this reversal cannot feasibly occur by way of jettisoning the notion of sacrifice, but rather through a more wholesome rearticulation of it.⁴⁴ Finally, Trent insists that the sacrifice offered in the Mass is unbloody. Hence, we ought to recognize that the constructions of sacrifice as bloody sacrificial violence are out of step with the dogmatic parameters within which theology is called to operate.

Instead, sacrifice is best understood as gift, and fundamentally as the gift of oneself. The trajectory that runs from Augustine – who called sacrifice 'every act done in order that we might cling to God in holy fellowship, that is, every act which is referred to the final good in which we can be truly blessed', while also insisting that *the true sacrifice* is the one sacrifice of Christ, which he further envisioned under the modalities of the historical passion of Jesus, the eschatological offering of the entire city of God, the moral lives of Christians, the unity of the church, and the Eucharist – to Aquinas, who understood sacrifice as the distillation of the virtue of religion, operates with such

⁴²*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

⁴³Eugene R. Schlesinger, *Sacrificing the Church: Mass, Mission, and Ecumenism* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019); 'Eucharistic Sacrifice as Anti-Violent Pedagogy', *Theological Studies*, 80 (2019), 653–72. See also Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).

⁴⁴This is one of the principal ways in which my approach differs from Doran's. While affirming more or less everything that he has to say about sacrifice, and its distortions (e.g., *Trinity in History*, 3:pp. 164–66, 171–73, 182–86), I simply do not see, as he did, a pathway for excising it from Catholic reflection.

an assumption.⁴⁵ By ‘sacrifice’ I understand, essentially, the law of the cross that Lonergan proposed in his account of the redemption: the forbearing, self-sacrificial love that returns good for evil, thereby allowing the evils of the human race to be transformed not only into good, but into a supreme good.⁴⁶

Thus, as we turn to the eucharistic sacrifice, we reprise themes already articulated in our discussion of the paschal mystery above, in the section on baptism. Most fundamentally, Christ gives himself, both in the institution of the Eucharist (*take, eat. This is my body, given for you.*) and upon the cross (*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*) – which, recall, are a single sacrifice – at once to humanity and to God, making these a single movement of self-gift. Thus, we see once more the same basic logic developed in Lonergan’s theology of sanctifying grace: the same love that God eternally is comes to be shared with human beings because by his incarnation, Christ extends that same love into the human community, both as its recipient and its agent.

Beyond this, though, the logic of eucharistic sacrifice is such that Christ now associates us, as members of his body and sharers in his priesthood, with his act of sacrifice. In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, ‘they offer to God the divine victim and themselves along with him’.⁴⁷ This is reflected in the words of institution. *This is my body, given for you.... Do this in remembrance of me.* And this gift matched with its return-gift reproduces the same trinitarian structure we have discerned operative throughout our considerations of the four-point hypothesis:

Active spiration : Notional Love :: Sanctifying Grace : Charity :: Divine Approval in Christ : Our Love in Return :: Gift of Christ’s Body and Blood : Eucharistic Sacrifice

Tellingly, within the eucharistic prayer, the operative theology of sacrifice is one fixated upon acceptance of the gift. This is particularly clear in the Roman Canon with its language of petition in the post-sanctus that God ‘accept and bless these gifts, these offerings, these holy and unblemished sacrifices’, or in the *communicantes* that God ‘graciously accept this oblation of our service...[and] bless, acknowledge, and approve this offering in every respect; mak[ing] it spiritual and acceptable’, or in the anamnesis to ‘be pleased to look upon these offerings with a serene and kindly countenance, and to accept them...[and that God] command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty’.⁴⁸ When we overlay this with the Tridentine commitment that Eucharist and Calvary are but one sacrifice, we are positioned to grasp, once more, that same structure. We are accepted in and for the sake of Christ, and via this acceptance love in turn with the supernatural

⁴⁵Augustine, *Civ.* 10.6, 20 [in *The City of God (I-X)*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century 1/6* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2012), pp. 310, 328]; Aquinas *ST* 2-2.85.1-4; Lonergan, ‘Notion of Sacrifice’.

⁴⁶Bernard Lonergan, *The Redemption* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), pp. 197–251. For further discussion of the law of the cross, see, e.g., Jeremy Blackwood, ‘Law of the Cross and the Mystical Body of Christ’, in *Intellect, Affect, and God: The Trinity, History, and the Life of Grace*, ed. by Joseph Ogbannaya and Gerard Whelan (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2021), pp. 274–91; Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, pp. 100–135; *Trinity in History*, 3:pp. 113–86; Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1999).

⁴⁷*Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

⁴⁸Eucharistic Prayer I, nos. 84, 87, 88, 93–94 in *The Roman Missal: Renewed by Decree of The Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI and Revised at the Direction of Pope John Paul II.*, Third typical edition (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011).

love that results from the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the meaning of eucharistic sacrifice.

This is my body, *given* for you. *Do this* in remembrance of me. To be a member of Christ's body is to know oneself to be infinitely loved, and so to love unrestrictedly in turn. To be a member of this body is to give oneself away to and for others, proximately to fellow members of the body of the church, and remotely to the wider world which God has embraced in love through the Word made flesh, and to which he sends the church as Christ's body, constituted by baptism and the eucharistic sacrifice. Lonergan's account of the divine missions suggests that the 'state of grace' is a renewed interpersonal and social situation, one wherein human beings collaborate with one another and with the trinitarian persons, which is essentially the meaning of the mystical body of Christ.⁴⁹

Above I contended that the transubstantiation whereby the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ is an intermediary step along the way to the eucharistic sacrifice. This can be borne out with recourse to the scholastic account of the Eucharist, which notes that while the *res et sacramentum* of the rite is Christ's real presence, the *res tantum* is the charitable union of the mystical body of Christ together with its head.⁵⁰ This is, essentially, the point at which Henri de Lubac was driving with his retrieval of the patristic principle that 'Literally speaking, the Eucharist makes the Church'.⁵¹ Yet, while de Lubac's theologoumenon has become axiomatic in contemporary theology, the role that sacrifice plays in de Lubac's account of the Eucharist's church-making character remains fairly unrecognized.⁵²

I have developed this at length in other contexts, and so here I presume the precedent of those prior engagements and summarize.⁵³ The Eucharist makes the church because the church is born from Christ's paschal mystery, which is realized and represented in the Eucharist. It makes the church, moreover, because the church is bound together by the same charity that informed Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, a charity which is also active in the eucharistic sacrifice, the same charity that is the created base of a created participation in the Holy Spirit, and so has a special relation to active spiration, the same charity that is breathed forth by sanctifying grace. Of this union, Christ's gift-of-self as the food and drink of new and unending life is the effective sign: the *res et sacramentum* signifies the *res tantum*. Because we are loved so profoundly, we ourselves love in turn. And because in the generation of the Word God also comprehends all that God can and all that God will in fact do, then our participation in that judgment of value includes our own affirmation of all that God affirms. To love God is to love what God loves. And if God loves our fellow human beings, and cleaves to them through the inseparable bond of the incarnation, then so must we

⁴⁹Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 517. See the further development by Doran, *Trinity in History*, 1:pp. 233–40.

⁵⁰For example, *ST* 3.73.1, 3.

⁵¹Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 88.

⁵²de Lubac, pp. 58–62, 65–67, 70, 73–75, 201–4.

⁵³Eugene R. Schlesinger, *Salvation in Henri de Lubac: Divine Grace, Human Nature, and the Mystery of the Cross* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), pp. 94–108; 'Opus Dei, Opus Hominum', pp. 56–75.

hold fast to them by virtue of the indissoluble bond that binds us together through our baptisms.

And with this recognition of the mandate that we cleave to one another in love, as a participation in the same love with which Christ has loved us, the same love that is the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are brought again to the matter of solidarity, broached above when discussing confirmation. Lonergan's discussion of the law of the cross identifies the mystical body of the *totus Christus* as the 'supreme good' into which Christ's redemption converts the evils of humanity.⁵⁴ As the same mind which was in Christ Jesus takes root in us (Phil. 2:5),⁵⁵ we recognize ourselves as absolutely loved (sanctifying grace) and find ourselves loving unrestrictedly in turn (habitual charity). These dispositions now inform the actions we undertake within the world, and so we offer ourselves to the task of collaboration within the missions of the Word and Spirit towards the reversal of evil and the advance of goodness. It is particularly fitting that our initiation into the church should issue thus in mission, for the pilgrim church into which we are initiated is 'missionary by its very nature',⁵⁶ and Pope Francis has called us to appropriate our identity as a community of 'missionary disciples'.⁵⁷

The Christian community's origin is in the missions of the Word and Spirit. Through the created terms that render these missions rather than simply the eternal processions, human beings are drawn – personally and communally through the new interpersonal situation that is the state of grace – to share in the real relations that those missions express, and, thereby to participate in the life of the Trinity and the mission of God. Appropriately, those sacraments by which we enter the community are their own special participation in the realities in which these missions consist, and issue in the recruitment of those who receive them into collaboration with this mission through 'processions produced in us through grace' that accord with those eternal processions according to which they are sent to dwell with us.⁵⁸

5. Conclusion

This essay has more or less confined itself to considering the *convenientia* of the sacraments of initiation and the four-point hypothesis. As an exercise in speculative theology, it has proved nothing, because it is impossible for speculative theology, which aims at understanding of mysteries that exceed the human intellect and could only be known by divine revelation in any case, to prove anything; its task is distinct. Nevertheless, from this consideration a fairly consistent and coherent articulation of the theologies of actual grace, habitual grace, and sacramental grace has emerged. God the Trinity reaches out to embrace humanity in a manner consistent with the eternal pure act that God is – the missions are identical to the processions – and does so

⁵⁴Lonergan, *The Redemption*, p. 199.

⁵⁵In 'Notion of Sacrifice', pp. 5–7, 17–19, Lonergan discusses the sacrificial attitude of Christ in terms of the mystical body. It is in Christ the head properly, essentially, and as originating. In his body the church, it is properly, *per accidens*, and as originated. Such reproduction of mental states may seem overly thin unless one remembers that the psychological analogy and the four-point hypothesis yield an understanding of mental operations as giving a share in and imitating the life of the Trinity.

⁵⁶*Ad Gentes*, no. 3.

⁵⁷Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nos. 119–21.

⁵⁸Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 513.

by incorporating us into the real relations that are really identical to God, through very special created modes of participation in those relations. This pattern, whereby the divine approval is expressed in the Word, issuing in a Love-in-turn in the Holy Spirit, is extended into the human family through the Word's assumption of humanity, and received by human beings through the sacraments of initiation, which themselves follow this same pattern: a bestowal of approval (sanctifying grace) issuing in our love-in-return (charity), themselves participations in and results of the missions of the Word and Spirit, respectively. This bears witness to the consistency of the divine economy in itself, and in relation to the eternal life of God. It further, enables us to speak more consistently of how it is that human beings come to be deified by the divine missions, received by all people of good will, but given a distinctive expression in the church's sacraments.

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