

Introduction

In the middle of the twentieth century there was lively discussion on sacramental theology in the Catholic Church. Theologians have diverse understandings to the nature of sacraments. They treat sacrament as signs of grace, as acts of Christ, as expressions of the nature of the church, as symbolic actions, as encounter with God, as celebration of life etc.¹ One of such theologians who had thorough treatment on sacramental theology is Karl Rahner. In this paper we will explore his theology of sacrament in general and, in particular, his understanding on Eucharist.

We will investigate first Rahner’s Theology of Symbol, because it is the foundation of his sacramental theology.² Then we will have an exposition on his theory of “Church as Sacrament” and on the topic “Sacrament in General”. Finally there will be a detailed treatment on Rahner’s theology of Eucharist, which will be followed by some reflections on Rahner’s thought on sacrament.

1. Theology of Symbol

The concept of “Symbol” occupies a key position in the theology of Karl Rahner. This concept is involved in many areas of his theological reflections like Trinity, Incarnation, and sacraments. Rahner’s discussion on the concept of symbol can be found mainly in his article “The Theology of the Symbol”.³ Rahner is not the first theologian who develops the concept of symbol. In the aforementioned article, Rahner lists a bibliography on the subject ‘symbol’ in philosophical and theological aspects,⁴ it seems that this subject has been investigated extensively. The reason for Rahner to take up the discussion on symbol is that: in the theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart, the investigations on symbol, which is of vital importance in Rahner’s opinion, are lacking.⁵ However, in the course of developing such a symbol concept in the object of devotion, the symbol concept becomes a basis in Rahner’s sacramental theology. We will not follow Rahner’s investigation on the symbol concept in the theology of devotion to the Sacred Heart, and we just point out Rahner’s symbol concept in general and elaborate its significance in his sacramental theology.

The first principle (basic principle) of Rahner’s symbol concept is that: all beings are by their nature symbolic, because they necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature.⁶ This means that any existent being needs to express itself in an “other” in order to fulfill itself. This manifests the symbolic nature of a being while the “other”, which is constituted as the “expression” of the original being, is its “symbol”.⁷ Rahner distinguishes two kinds of symbols: real symbols (symbolic realities, *Realsymbole*) and symbolic representations (*Vertretungssymbole*).⁸ Symbolic representations are merely arbitrary signs. These symbols

¹ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, expanded ed. (Tanytown: Triumph Books, 1991), 110.

² C. Annice Callahan: 〈拉內的象徵神學：其教會論及聖事論的根基〉，胡國楨譯，收《拉內思想與中國神學》〔胡國楨主編〕（台北：光啓，2005），頁 112—3。

³ Karl Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 221-252.

⁴ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 222-224, note 3.

⁵ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 222.

⁶ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 224.

⁷ Joseph H. P. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner* (Rome: LAS, 1984), 75-76.

⁸ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 225; Cf. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 75.

arise when the similarity between two existing things is subsequently perceived. What concerned Rahner is to “look for the highest and most primordial manner in which one reality can represent another – considering the matter primarily from the formal ontological point of view. And we call this supreme and primal representation, in which one reality renders another present (primary ‘for itself’ and only secondarily for others), a symbol: the representation which allows the other ‘to be there.’”⁹ This ability to render another present is proper to the real symbols.¹⁰ Between the real symbol and the symbolized being there exist a reciprocal relationship, on the one hand, real symbol is the result generated by the symbolized being, on the other hand, real symbol can be treated as the cause of the symbolized being, because it causes the symbolized being to be present. Here, to my understanding, when symbol causes the symbolized being to be present, “cause” is not used in the sense of “generate”, but in the sense of “evoke.”

The first principle of Rahner’s symbol concept can be understood as “that all beings are symbolic inasmuch as they necessarily express themselves for their own fulfilment”,¹¹ then, the plural moments of a being, therefore, are conceived as its “self-expression” (*Selbstausdruck*) which is necessary for its ‘self-realization’ (*Selbstvollzug*).¹² Moreover, this self-expression is not something secondary or additional to a being but belongs to its intrinsic constitution, since it is for the being’s own fulfilment. The idea which mediates between a being’s self-expression and its self-fulfilment is that of ‘self-possession’ (*Selbstbesitz*) or ‘being present to itself’ (*Beisichselbersein*).¹³ ‘Being present to itself’ is the actuality or intrinsic self-realization of a being. Further, a being can be present to itself only through self-possession in knowledge and love.¹⁴ But a being achieves self-possession by differentiating itself, that is, a being must express itself in, or give itself to, the ‘other’, in order to aware of itself. So a being comes to itself in knowledge and love through expressing itself in the ‘other’ and retaining it as its own expression.¹⁵ In Rahner’s words: “A being is also ‘symbolic’ in itself because the harmonious expression, which it retains while constituting it as the ‘other’ is the way in which it communicate itself to itself in knowledge and love. A being comes to itself by means of ‘expression’ insofar as it comes to itself at all. The expression, that is, the ‘symbol’ is the way of knowledge of self, possession of self, in general.”¹⁶ “As a being realizes itself in its own intrinsic ‘otherness’ (which is constitutive of its being), retentive of its intrinsic plurality (which is contained in its self-realization) as its derivative and hence congruous expression, it makes itself known.”¹⁷ For Rahner, there is an ontological distinction between the symbol and the symbolized being. In this aspect Rahner appeals to the teaching of the difference between the ‘substance’ and ‘species’ from Thomas Aquinas, in which the symbolized being is the *forma substantialis* and *materia prima*. And the symbol is the ‘species.’¹⁸ Thus the symbolized being has ontologically a higher priority than the symbol.

By reversing the content of the first principle Rahner arrives at the second principle of the symbol concept: The symbol strictly speaking (symbolic reality) is the self-realization of a being in the other, which is constitutive of its essence.¹⁹

⁹ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 225.

¹⁰ Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 75.

¹¹ Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 78.

¹² Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 78.

¹³ Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 78.

¹⁴ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 229; Cf. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 79.

¹⁵ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 229-230; Cf. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 79.

¹⁶ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 230.

¹⁷ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 231.

¹⁸ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 234. Cf. Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 230-4 for a detailed discussion on the ontological distinction between the symbol and the symbolized being in light of the Thomas Theology.

¹⁹ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 234.

Then Rahner demonstrates how the concept of symbol can be applied to different areas of theology. Firstly, Rahner points out that the theology of Logos (the incarnate word) is the supreme form of the theology of symbol.²⁰ In the immanent divine life, the Logos is generated by the Father as his image and expression, and this process is necessarily given with the divine act of self-knowledge.²¹ Therefore the Logos is the symbol of the Father, and the Logos has the following properties of a symbol: the Logos remains distinct from what is symbolized (the Father); the Logos is constituted by the Father; in the Logos the Father expresses Himself and possesses Himself. Moreover, starting with the biblical verse: “He that sees me, sees the Father” (Jn 14:9), Rahner maintains that the “incarnate word is the absolute symbol of God in the world, filled with nothing else can be with what is symbolized. He is not merely the presence and revelation of what God is in himself. He is also the expressive presence of what – or rather, who – God wished to be, in free grace, to the world, in such a way that this divine attitude, once so expressed, can never be reversed, but is and remains final and unsurpassable.”²² So long as the ontological distinction between the symbolized being and the symbol is established,²³ the incarnate word, as symbol, can render the Father present. Thus Rahner’s concept of symbol has its application in Christology.

Secondly, Rahner applies his theology of symbol to the teaching on the sacraments in the Catholic Church. For Rahner “the sacraments make concrete and actual, for the life of the individual, the symbolic reality of the church as the primary sacrament and therefore constitute at once, in keeping with the nature of this church a symbolic reality. Thus sacraments are expressly described in theology as ‘sacred signs’ of God’s grace, that is, as ‘symbols’, an expression which occurs expressly in this context.”²⁴ Rahner quotes the old axioms of sacramental theology to support the symbolic property of sacrament: *Sacramenta gratiam efficiunt, quatenus eam significant* (literal translation: Sacraments effect (bring about) grace as far as they signify it) and *Sacramenta significant gratiam, quia eam efficiunt* (literal translation: Sacraments signify grace because they effect (bring about) it), and delivers his own conclusion: The grace of God constitutes itself actively present in the sacraments by creating their expression, their historical tangibility in space and time, which is its own symbol.²⁵ Here we see that sacraments satisfy the conditions (first and second principle of the theory of symbol) of being a symbol, and sacraments can render grace of God present.

With the above consideration of application of the theory of symbol in theology, Rahner comes to the third and fourth principles of the symbol concept. Third principle: The concept of symbol is an essential key-concept in all theological treatises, without which it is impossible to have a correct understanding of the subject-matter of the various treatises in themselves and in relation to other treatises. It seems, however, that Rahner is too bold to claim that the concept of symbol is essential to all treatises at this stage, after he has only reviewed some theological issues such as the theology of Logos and of sacrament. He should have examined at the usefulness of this concept on more doctrines, before he made this universal claim. Fourth principle: God’s salvific action on man, from its first foundation to its completion, always takes place in such a way that God himself is the reality of salvation, because it is given to man and grasped by him in the symbol, which does not represent an absent and merely promised reality but exhibits this reality as something present, by means of the symbol formed by it.

²⁰ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 235.

²¹ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 236.

²² Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 237.

²³ See page 2 above.

²⁴ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 241.

²⁵ Rahner, “The Theology of the Symbol,” 242.

We will not come to the fifth and sixth principle of Rahner's theology of symbol, as the first four principles are adequate for our investigation on Rahner's theology of sacrament in this paper.

2. Church as Sacrament

The sacramental theology of Rahner cannot be separated from ecclesiology and Christology. For Rahner there are three mysteries in the strict sense in the Christian faith: the mystery of God (Trinity), the mystery of incarnation and the mystery of grace/glory. And these three mysteries are simply three aspects of the one single mystery: the mystery of God's self-revelation and self-communication in Jesus Christ.²⁶ In Incarnation the Logos became man, Jesus Christ, who has both natures of divinity and humanity. In Christ "God's self-utterance as forgiveness and divinization comes to its historical manifestation and its irrevocable fullness."²⁷ God uttered his word of grace, his mercy, his salvation, his reconciliation with man and his giving of eternal life to man in Jesus Christ. In this sense Christ is the sacrament, his historical existence is both reality and sign, *sacramentum et res sacramenti*, of the redemptive grace of God. Before Christ comes to the world, the grace of God was hidden and remote, but in Christ the grace of God is established and manifested.²⁸ In terms of the symbol concept Christ, in whom God is the constitutive of his essence, symbolizes God by rendering his will of grace and salvation present.

Church as the Body of Christ is the "continuation, the perpetual presence of the task and function of Christ in the economy of redemption,"²⁹ she has to continue to render present the "real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence of God's salvific will."³⁰ In this sense Church is a sacrament: "From Christ the Church has an intrinsically sacramental structure," and she is the "well-spring of the sacraments in strict sense."³¹ While both Christ and Church are sacraments, Rahner uses two terms to distinguish Church from Christ in this sacramental aspect. He designates Christ as the arch-sacrament or primordial sacrament (*Ursakrament*) and Church as the basic sacrament or fundamental sacrament (*Grundsakrament*).³² Here is an allusion that ontologically Christ is of higher priority than the Church. Regarding the symbolic nature of the Church: Since the Church symbolizes the triumphant and irrevocably established presence of God's salvific will and the grace of God in Christ, she must be a real symbol. "As an historical and social entity, the Church is always and unchangeably the sign which brings with it always and inseparably what it signifies The Church is the official presence of the grace of Christ in the public history of the one human race."³³ The actualization of the saving grace of Christ becomes the essence of the Church.

3. Sacrament in General

For Rahner there exists sacrament in general, but he does not conduct the generalization process by observing individual sacraments and then lists out the common elements from each

²⁶ Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 62-67, quoted in William V. Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," *Philosophy and Theology* 112, no. 1 (1998): 125—46, 126.

²⁷ Karl Rahner, "What is a Sacrament?" in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIV, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 142.

²⁸ Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacrament*, trans. W.J. O'Hara (London: Burns & Oates, 1974), 15-16.

²⁹ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 13.

³⁰ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 18.

³¹ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 18.

³² Rahner, "What is a Sacrament?" 142; Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 18; Cf. Wong, *Logos-Symbol in the Christology of Karl Rahner*, 194-5, note 49.

³³ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 18-19.

sacrament. Rather Rahner's idea of sacrament in general stems from his theology of symbol and the idea that both Christ and the Church are sacrament (i.e. the idea of sacrament in general relates to Christology and ecclesiology). We will consider four aspects of Rahner's idea of sacrament in general: Institution of sacraments by Christ; Sacrament causes grace; *opus operatum* and *opus operantis* in sacrament; word and sacrament.

Institution of Sacraments by Christ

In the seven sacraments (in the Catholic Church) in strict sense, only Baptism and the Lord Supper are recorded biblically as instituted (or commanded) by Christ. Due to the fact that there is lack of biblical evidence for the institution of the other five sacraments (Confirmation, Penance, Anointing, Marriage and Ordination) by Christ, the Reformers do not accept those five rites as sacrament. However, Rahner understands the institution of a sacrament by Christ as the fact that "Christ founded the Church with its sacramental nature,"³⁴ where Christ is the primordial sacrament and the Church is the basic sacrament.³⁵ Therefore, the treatise "on Sacrament in General" is not an abstract formulation of the nature of the individual sacraments, but a part of the treatise "On Church". Only on the basis of the doctrine about the Church, the basic sacrament, can the sacramentality of the sacraments in strict sense be recognized at all.³⁶

Sacrament causes Grace

It is an old doctrine of the Church that sacraments cause grace, but Rahner offers a new interpretation of how sacraments cause grace in the light of his theology of symbol. Rahner starts with the duality of *sacramentum* and *res sacramenti*. "The efficacy of sacraments is precisely that of signs: by signifying, to effect what is signified."³⁷ Here Rahner understands "sign" and "signify" according to his notion of a real symbol, and this symbol relates to the reality it symbolizes.³⁸ The sacrament functions as real symbol of grace. We have seen above that Christ and Church are arch-sacrament and basic sacrament respectively, and they are symbols render present the grace of God. Thus it follows that grace of God is present prior to any sacramental activity (sacrament). The sacrament as real symbol characterizes the sacramental causation, thus sacrament is understood as "sacramental causality". The Church in her visible historical form is a real symbol of the eschatological triumphant grace of God, in that spatial temporal visible form, the grace is present. And the presence of grace in sacrament is the actuality of the Church as the visible manifestation of grace.³⁹

Opus Operatum – Opus Operantis

Traditionally, *opus operatum* is understood as a concept, which means that grace is conferred on the recipient through the positing of the sacramental sign itself, and neither the merit of the minister nor that of the recipient is causally involved.⁴⁰ However, Rahner has another understanding of *opus operatum*. For him God offers his grace here and now in the sacrament, thus *opus operatum* means the unambiguous, abiding promise irrevocably made by God, and as such recognizable and historically manifest, of grace for the individual human being, a promise made by God of the new and eternal covenant. This is the positive content of

³⁴ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 41.

³⁵ See above section 2. Church as Sacrament.

³⁶ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 41.

³⁷ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 34.

³⁸ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 137.

³⁹ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 39.

⁴⁰ Cf. Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 25.

the concept.⁴¹ Regarding *opus operantis*, Rahner maintains that the human recipient's response to the grace offered in the sacrament is also important. This idea is consistent with Rahner's thought that human being, as person and subject and with freedom, can say "yes" or say "no" to God.⁴² The subjective disposition of the recipient is necessary for the efficacy of the sacrament.⁴³ In sacrament man should receive the grace of God with faith, hope and love.⁴⁴ Here Rahner complies with the catholic tradition that the intention of the recipient is also important for a fruitful reception of the sacrament, but he incorporates this compliance into the teaching of *opus operantis*. It can be summarized that, for Rahner *opus operatum* relates to the offer of grace by God, and *opus operantis* relates to the acceptance of grace by the recipient.⁴⁵ This kind of dialogic and interpersonal nature of sacrament helps to remove any hint of the magic and mechanical understanding of sacramental efficacy.⁴⁶

Word and Sacrament

In considering the relationship between word and sacrament, Rahner's starting point is again the Church. Word is the word of God, which is preached in the Church.⁴⁷ For Rahner the power of the sacrament and the word characterize fundamentally the nature of the Church.⁴⁸ These two natures do not exist side by side, they have close relationship with each other. The word of God is the inner moment of the salvific action of God on man, it renders the grace of God present.⁴⁹ Hence the word has in the Church the exhibitiv and event character.⁵⁰ Also the word and the sacramental action participate in the symbolic character of the sacrament, the sacramental action has the character of a word: it designates something, it expresses something, it reveals something that is of itself hidden.⁵¹ And the sacrament is the full and adequate realization of this definition of word of God.⁵² We will consider the relation between word and sacrament in detail below by considering a concrete sacrament – the Eucharist.

4. The Eucharist

In this last section of this paper we will explore Rahner's thought on one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church - the Eucharist. We choose Eucharist for a detailed discussion because in Rahner's view, the Eucharist is the central event of the Church, and it is also the source of other sacraments.⁵³

Word and Eucharist

For Rahner the Eucharist is word, the reasons are as follows: In Eucharist the incarnate Logos of God is himself present in his substance; and in Eucharist the absolute proclamation of the whole mystery of salvation takes place; in Eucharist there is anamnesis, in which the event

⁴¹ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 32-33.

⁴² Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 97-106.

⁴³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 414.

⁴⁴ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 138-9.

⁴⁵ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 129.

⁴⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 414; Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 129.

⁴⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 253.

⁴⁸ Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 254.

⁴⁹ Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 260.

⁵⁰ Rahner, "What is a Sacrament?" 139.

⁵¹ Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 266.

⁵² Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 260.

⁵³ Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 82.

of God's giving himself to the world and the acceptance of this gift on the cross of the Son becomes actually present among the believers in their space and time; in Eucharist there is the anticipation of final salvation in the assurance of the future glory (*pignus futurae gloriae*), because in Eucharist the death of Christ and his coming are exhibited and proclaimed.⁵⁴ Thus the Eucharist is the supreme case of those acts of self-realization of the Church which are called sacraments, it is the origin of all other sacraments. The Eucharist and all other sacraments are again the self-realization of the Church, all other words and actions of the Church function to serve these sacraments. Simply speaking, the Eucharist is the word of God in the Church which supports and conveys all other words, which forms the center from which all the reality of the Church derives its meaning.⁵⁵ And the most crucial factor for the Eucharist to be word is that the Eucharist renders present (or bring forth) the presence of Christ and his redemption in the world. In this sense the Eucharist, and hence the word, has the symbol character.

It is Rahner's concern that since Augustine, the theology of word and of sacrament developed in the Church separately.⁵⁶ By means of the above argumentation and the symbolic characters of word and Eucharist Rahner connects word and Eucharist (the most important sacrament according to Rahner) together. Moreover, it is worthy to mention that although both Rahner and the Reformed tradition lay stress on the relationship between word and sacrament, they have different emphasis. For Rahner word and sacrament are of the same rank, they are constituents of the Church, and they must be related to each other.⁵⁷ But in the Reformed tradition, the sacrament is subordinate to word, as the meaning of sacrament is to reflect the action of God in Jesus Christ, which is proclaimed in the Gospel. Therefore the word is of the first rank and more important than the sacraments. There can be word without sacrament, but there cannot be sacrament without word.⁵⁸ It seems that for Rahner, the Church still has the higher position than word and sacrament. In any case, Rahner draws the relationship between word and sacrament closer with each other.

Furthermore, Rahner links the relationship between word and Eucharist to the effect of Eucharist: the cause of grace. In the Eucharist grace is conferred in the form of word. We should bear in mind that for Rahner, no part of the human experience is untouched by the grace of God.⁵⁹ Specifically, while the word (with exhibitive and event character) as proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus is pronounced in the Church during the Eucharist, it, as real symbol, renders present the reality of salvation to the community, in this sense grace is conferred to the Church in the form of word.⁶⁰ In this consideration the Eucharist complies with Rahner's issue of "sacramental causality".⁶¹ According to this concept, the Eucharist, as a real symbol, renders present the grace of God. And the basis of the concept of "sacramental causality" is the theology of symbol.

⁵⁴ Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 281.

⁵⁵ Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 282.

⁵⁶ Rahner, "What is a Sacrament?" 137.

⁵⁷ Cf. Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 254.

⁵⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Sacramental Teaching and Practice in the Reformation Churches* (Eerdmans, 1957; reprint, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 17.

⁵⁹ The argumentation for this presence of God's grace everywhere involves the discussion on God's self-communication, freedom, knowledge and love, we cannot have a overall discussion here on the grace of God. John Calvin gives a precise discussion on this topic: John Calvin, "The Invitation of Grace," in *A World of Grace*, ed. Leo J. O'Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 64-75. Anyway, Rahner himself unambiguously asserts that "the world is permeated by the grace of God," cf. Karl Rahner, "Consideration on the active role of the Person in the Sacramental Event," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIV, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 166.

⁶⁰ Rahner, "What is a Sacrament?" 144.

⁶¹ See above the section: Sacrament causes Grace, p.5.

The Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

Traditionally the Catholic Church explains the presence of Christ in the Eucharist by means of transubstantiation, that is, in the Eucharist the *substance* of bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ after consecration, whereas the *accident* of bread and wine remains the same in the form of bread and wine. What the believer receives in the Eucharist is the true body and blood of Christ. But Rahner renewed the interpretation of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, and he maintains that this new interpretation is necessary, as modern science force us to consider about what is the meaning of 'substance'. In light of modern science matter is constituted by particles, and bread, as matter, is "an agglomeration of substance and we do not know in which elementary particles the notion of substance is verified."⁶² Thus for Rahner "the substance of bread, as envisaged by St Thomas and the Fathers of the Council – envisaged, not defined – does not exist."⁶³ Then Rahner proposes a concept called 'logical explanation' for the understanding the doctrine of transubstantiation. "The logical explanation of a statement about a given matter would be a statement which makes the statement to be explained clear, that is, more definite and unmistakable, by interpreting it on its own terms, that is, without appealing to matters distinct from the matter to be explained."⁶⁴ In other word, it is not necessary to use other matters such as substance or accidents to explain the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Rather the doctrine of transubstantiation should be treated as logical explanation to the biblical words of Jesus at the Eucharist.⁶⁵ "Its content is identical with the content of the words of Jesus, so that it does not represent a different belief or a different 'mystery' of faith."⁶⁶ The doctrine of transubstantiation "affirms the real presence of the crucified and risen Jesus in the real symbols of the Eucharist, and its value lies in clarifying and underlying the reality of this presence, and protecting the words of Jesus from being weakened or denied. But the function of this doctrine is not to explain the real presence by accounting for how it takes place ..."⁶⁷ For Rahner the function of the concept 'transubstantiation' is similar to the function of the concept 'hypostatic union', which is also used to as logical explanation to affirm what the bible says about the divine and human nature of Jesus.⁶⁸

Ex Opere Operato – Ex Opere Operantis

The *Opus operatum* aspect and the *opus operantis* aspect of sacrament in general have been treated previously in this paper.⁶⁹ And what is said before for sacrament in general is valid for Eucharist. It is worthy to emphasize here that Rahner treats *ex opere operato* and *ex opere operantis* as a whole in the Eucharist. It is always God's initiative to offer grace, but this offer must be met by human response and human acceptance in freedom, so that Eucharist will not be understood in a mechanical and magic way.⁷⁰ When the grace of God is there given by God, "the whole process of grace and its sacramental embodiment also requires participation on the human side in faith, hope and love, and in this participation man's act is an intrinsic moment of the whole process."⁷¹

⁶² Karl Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV, trans. Kevin Smyth (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 307-8.

⁶³ Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," 307.

⁶⁴ Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," 300.

⁶⁵ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 135.

⁶⁶ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 135.

⁶⁷ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 135-6; Cf. Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," 302.

⁶⁸ Rahner, "The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," 301.

⁶⁹ In page 6 of this paper.

⁷⁰ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 138.

⁷¹ Dych, "Karl Rahner's Theology of Eucharist," 138-9; Cf. Rahner, "The Word and the Eucharist," 257.

Eucharist and Everyday Life

Rahner's thought on Eucharist has a practical aspect: He connects the meaning and experience of Eucharist to the everyday life of man, so that the dualism of sacred and profane realm in man's life on earth is abolished, and man can experience God's grace not only in the Eucharist at the Church, but also in his everyday life.

As starting point, we may have the feeling that even as believers we may feel that our everyday life in the world is utterly secular. Although in the Eucharist we experience the grace of God, and celebrate the eternal salvation bestowed upon us by God, but when we leave the Church and go out into the world, we have the feeling that we leave the sphere of the sacred and enter the sphere of profane, the everyday life, a world that is remote from God.⁷² In everyday life we experience anxiety, struggle, worry, depressed, mediocrity and the advancing towards death. Rahner uses the term *prolixitas mortis* (the act of dying long drawn out) from Gregory the Great to describe such torturing life situation of man.⁷³ It seems that the nature of the Eucharist is in contradiction, and mutually opposed to the nature of everyday, and our 'everyday' hearts will swallow up and devour the supreme event in the celebration of the divine lives in the Eucharist.⁷⁴

In response to this situation Rahner proposes his thesis: "This sacrament of the eternal encounter with God, this climax in our personal saving history, in the history of our individual lives, which is the Eucharist, is in fact the sacrament of the everyday."⁷⁵ Then Rahner lists out the arguments for his thesis. Firstly, it is the official teaching of the Council of Trent that the Eucharist is the food of the souls, by means of which the souls are nourished and strengthened. Hence the Eucharist is regarded as our daily bread,⁷⁶ that is, the Eucharist is for our 'everyday'. Secondly, by the same teaching the Eucharist has a remedial function, by means of which we are freed from our daily sins and preserved from mortal sin. Again the Eucharist is related to our 'everyday'.⁷⁷ Moreover, Rahner emphasizes that it is Christ, who is bestowed upon us in the Eucharist. Christ is crucified and died for us, his fate is for the redemption of our lives.⁷⁸ Rahner then maintains that when we receive the crucified Lord, we receive daily from Him the counterforce to the slowly dying action through the inner dynamism of what is celebrated and received in the Eucharist, through the power and directive force which the Eucharist contains within itself, that we are sent out into this 'everyday'.⁷⁹ Therefore the Eucharist is as foremost the holy deed bestowed by God upon us which assigns the everyday to us as our task. In this aspect this 'everyday' itself is something that is given to us by God in Jesus Christ through the bond which we have with Him in the grace of baptism, and the giving of it is constantly renewed in the Eucharist.⁸⁰ Furthermore, if the everyday is itself received in the act of receiving Eucharist, if in this act of receiving Eucharist we practise how to accept our everyday, then the everyday will be a further projection of the Eucharist into the reality of our lives.⁸¹ Finally, according to the above consideration, Rahner summarizes the relationship between everyday life and Eucharist as follows: "Where the everyday is truly and effectively endured an abiding

⁷² Karl Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. VII, trans. David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), 212.

⁷³ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 218-9.

⁷⁴ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 215.

⁷⁵ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 216.

⁷⁶ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 216.

⁷⁷ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 216.

⁷⁸ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 217.

⁷⁹ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 219.

⁸⁰ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 220.

⁸¹ Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 224.

communion with Jesus Christ and his eternal life is achieved, not indeed in the sacramental sign but in the reality of what is signified by that sign, namely in the grace of God. In other words it may be asserted as an absolute truth of faith that the everyday is a continuation and further projection of Communion, provided only that in the power of the Eucharist we manage to endure and to sustain our everyday."⁸² It seems that Rahner concerns more in the pastoral aspect of the Eucharist than the symbolic character of Eucharist, as he considers the relationship between Eucharist and everyday life. Anyway it is worthy to mention Rahner's thought in this aspect, as this consideration has practical value to the believers life. It would be perfect if Rahner had related his thought on "Eucharist and Everyday Life" with his theory of symbol.

5. Some Reflections

After we have had a brief overview on Rahner's sacramental theology in general and his consideration on the Eucharist in particular, three points are worthy to mention regarding the merits of Rahner's thought on sacrament. First, Rahner always looks for something fundamental. In developing his thought of sacraments in general, Rahner does not start by analyzing each particular sacrament, and tries to identify the common elements in these sacraments as the nature of the sacrament (this endeavor has not succeed satisfactorily in the history of Christian thought). Rather he starts with identifying Christ and the Church as arch sacrament and basic sacrament respectively and maintains that all other sacramental activities are originated from Christ and then the Church. Christ and Church, and hence Christology and ecclesiology are fundamental pillars of the Christian Faith. This top down approach relates the sacraments to the salvation of God and the continuation of this salvation through the Church. Then the nature of sacraments comes forth: the sacraments render present the grace of God. In this way the common nature of sacraments is found.

Second, Rahner is bold enough to offer new interpretations on doctrines in response to the challenges from the contemporary world, examples of these new interpretations are his understanding on '*opus operatum and opus operantis*' and 'transubstantiation'.⁸³ Rahner's effort contributes to more opportunities for ecumenical discussion and for exchange of thoughts with non-Christians.

Third, Rahner's consideration on the relationship between Eucharist and everyday life shows that he concerns not only with doctrines at the theological and conceptual level, but also with the practical side of the human existence. This is in compliance with Rahner's theology, in which man and human existence is the fundamental (theological anthropology). It could be an interesting topic to investigate Rahner's thought on the relationship of other sacraments to everyday life, but this is out of the scope of this paper.

⁸² Rahner, "The Eucharist and our Daily Lives," 225.

⁸³ See pages 6 and 8 – 9 of this paper respectively.