

## SACRAMENTAL EFFICACY IN KARL RAHNER AND COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Eugene R. Schlesinger

Marquette University

### Abstract

An examination of Rahner's theology and cognitive linguistics shows that the two are basically in accord concerning sacramental efficacy. This article also puts cognitive linguistics into conversation with Rahner's theologies of expression. In Rahner's theology of the symbol, he argues that all beings express themselves in that which is not themselves. Furthermore, Rahner noted the existence of uniquely powerful "primordial words" (*Urworte*), which mediate the reality to which they point. Cognitive linguistics sees all human knowing as mediated by the "embodied mind," and characterized by concept integration, wherein a given thing comes to be known in terms of another. This understanding of embodied mind, poses a significant challenge to the Christian tradition. This challenge is answered, though, by Rahner's distinctive anthropology and christology.

### Introduction

The relationship between time and eternity, matter and spirit, nature and grace, the concrete and the abstract, the categorial and the transcendental is a fault line in any theology, and in many ways, implicitly at least, Karl Rahner made exploiting this tension his particular focus (For a representative sample of essays in which this tension is a key factor see Rahner 1994a [SW 4]; *TI* 6: 153–77 [SW 15, 309–30]; *TI* 9: 28–45 [ST 8: 43–65]; *TI* 17: 71–89 [SW 22/2: 159–74]). The result lends a distinctive character to his theology. Rahner scholars attempt to describe this variously, calling it "Copernican" or a "dialectical analogy," oscillating between transcendence and history; or coining neologisms like *osmoséité* for the relationship between nature and

grace (Onyedikachukwu 2007, 126–42; Burke 2002; O’Donovan 2005, 352–63; Jochen and Nitsche 1997, 257–58; Bosson 2002, 116–17). Clearly something tectonic is happening along this fault line in Rahner’s theology, but precisely what seems to be debatable. Recently, Robert Masson has proposed that the tectonic shift in Rahner’s thought can be explained in terms of the sort of metaphoric process proposed by Mary Gerhart and Allen Russell in the article, “Interpreting Rahner’s Metaphoric Logic” (Masson 2010, 380–409, drawing from, e.g., Gerhart and Russell 2001, 10–52). In subsequent, as yet unpublished work, Masson connects this with conceptual blending which contemporary cognitive linguistics envisages as constitutive of all human thought (Masson n.d.).

Following this trajectory, this article puts forth a novel approach to Rahner’s theology, which results in a new articulation of sacramental causality. I examine how cognitive linguistics, in particular, the concepts of “embodied mind,” new emergent meanings in blended spaces (what Masson calls tectonic process), entrenched mental spaces, and linguistic prompts, correspond to aspects of Rahner’s theology, particularly the concept of *Urworte*, and his theology of symbol. My investigation will open up new possibilities for explicating the inner workings of phenomena that Rahner observed with regard to religious discourse, as well as radicalizing Rahner’s own integration of word and sacrament. This allows me to posit the mechanics of cognitive linguistics as the anthropological conditions for the possibility of the sacraments’ efficacy.

It is worth noting that this sort of dialogue between Rahner and cognitive linguistics is eminently appropriate, given Rahner’s own “anthropological turn.” Two aspects of Rahner’s thought impel us to do theology in anthropological terms. The first is Rahner’s transcendental method. To approach the question of God transcendently means to approach God as the “Whither” to which humanity is existentially oriented. However, theological reflection must also turn its gaze on humanity in general, (of which Christ is the preeminent example) which is oriented toward God in this way (*TI*9: 29–33 [*SW*8:44–49]). The second is the doctrine of the Incarnation, which was central to Rahner’s theology. If the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us, then “all theology is therefore eternally an anthropology” (*TI* 4:

116 [SW 12: 319]). Rahner's thought makes much of the ongoing, permanent importance of the incarnation for human-divine relations, and particularly the fact that what the Word has assumed is the very structure of humanity with all its faculties and furniture as the medium of God's self-expression (*TI* 3: 35–46 [SW 12: 251–60]; *TI* 5: 193–215 [SW 12: 335–42]; *TI* 4: 237–38 [SW 18:437–38]). For this reason cognitive linguistics' investigation of the structure of human knowing is not only a permissible but indeed a helpful interlocutor for Rahner's theology. Anything that allows us to better understand humanity helps us to engage in theology. Now I turn to a brief consideration of *Realsymbol* and *Urworte* in the theology of Karl Rahner

### In the Beginning was the Metaphor

Rahner's theology of symbol is both central to his theology and inextricably linked with his christology. As Rahner himself wrote, "No theology can be complete without also being a theology of the symbol," and "if a theology of symbolic realities is to be written, christology, the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word, will obviously form the central chapter" (*TI* 4: 235, 237 [SW 18:435, 437]). Briefly stated, Rahner's argument runs thus: every being is necessarily a plural unity. This applies to both composite finite beings and the Simple Infinity of God. Yet even in their plurality, beings partake of a prior unity (*TI* 4: 225–28 [SW 18: 426–30]). As a result, all beings also express themselves in another, which retains a fundamental unity with the self. This symbolic expression is both the means by which a being gains presence to itself (self realization and self knowledge) and by which it gives itself as an object of knowledge to others (*TI* 4: 229–30 [SW 18: 430–31]). The classic example for this is the intra-trinitarian life: the Father self-expressively realizes and gives himself in the Son, who himself is the symbol of the Father: both other than, but also one with the Father (*TI* 4: 235–37 [SW 18: 436–38]). From there the train of thought is easy to follow: the eternal Logos symbolically expresses himself in the humanity of the Incarnation, the incarnate Christ symbolically expresses himself in the Body of the Church, and the Church symbolically expresses herself in the sacraments (*TI* 4: 237–43 [SW 18: 446–48]). Because of the fundamental unity and otherness of all symbols, this schema comports nicely with Rahner's

insistence that there is really only one “mystery” in Christianity, God Godself (*TI* 4: 72–73 [*SW* 12: 135]). Since each symbol brings with it that which it symbolizes, then ultimately the content of the sacraments—found at the furthest remove from the starting point in this schema—is the self-giving triune God.

Before going further, we should consider another important and closely-related concept for Rahner, that of *Urworte*. The *Urwort* and the symbol have a number of features in common, including the fact that they frequently arise in connection to devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (*TI* 4: 221–22 [*SW* 18: 421–22]; *TI* 3: 321–30 [*SW* 13: 379–90]; *TI* 3: 331–52 [*SW* 13: 391–415]). In the essay “Priest and Poet,” Rahner explains what he means by an *Urwort*: it is a word that holds power over us and springs up from our heart. Such a word is mysterious and undefinable because to define it would be to cheapen it. Rahner’s classic example is water:

When the poet or the poor man of Assisi exclaims ‘water,’ what is meant is greater, wider and deeper than when the chemist, debasing the word [*das Wort erniedrigend*], says ‘water’ for his H<sub>2</sub>O. According to Goethe, water is like [the human soul / *die Seele des Menschen*] . . . you cannot substitute H<sub>2</sub>O for that. The water [which humanity sees / *das der Mensch sieht*], which is praised by the poet, and which is used by the Christian in baptism—this water is not a poetic glorification of the chemist’s water, as if he were the true realist. On the contrary, the ‘water’ of the chemist is much rather a narrowed down, technical derivation of a secondary kind from the water [of the human / *des Menschen*]. In the word as used by the chemist, a primordial word [*Urwort*] has been fated to sink down to the level of a technical word of utility [*ein technischen Nutzwort*], and in its fall it has forfeited more than half its being. (*TI* 3: 296–97 [*SW* 12: 423] [ellipsis original] cf. the similar treatment in *TI* 3: 321–22 [*SW* 13: 488–89])

So *Urworte*, precisely because they are *Ur*-words are *original*—poetry is linguistically prior to prose, and certainly prior to reductionistic chemical formulae, prior to what Rahner refers to as *Nutzworte*. Rahner goes on to note that an *Urwort* “[does not merely signal something / *Es signalisiert nicht bloß etwas*] whose relationship to the hearer is in no way altered by it; it does not speak merely ‘about’ a relationship of the object in question to the hearer: it brings the reality it signifies

to us, makes it 'present,' realizes it, and places it before us" (TI 3: 299 [SW 12: 425]). This brings us remarkably close to Rahner's conception of the symbol.

In fact, in "The Theology of the Symbol," Rahner makes a similar distinction. A "*Realsymbol*" is to be distinguished from a "*Vertretungssymbol*" in that the former has a "function of expressiveness" and an "overplus of meaning [*Plus an Bedeutung*]," being truly connected to their reality, whereas the latter are arbitrary signals (TI 4: 225 [SW 18: 426–27]). Both *Urworte* and *Realsymbole* are the means by which God communicates Godself to the world (TI 4: 236–37 [SW 18: 437–38]; TI 3: 303 [SW 12: 428]). So it seems that an *Urwort* is roughly parallel to a *Realsymbol* while a *Nutzwort* parallels a *Vertretungssymbol*. We might, then, say that an *Urwort* is a specific type of *Realsymbol*, a particularly arresting one, and particularly a verbal/linguistic one (Henceforth, for simplicity, when I use the term "symbol," it should be understood in the sense of Rahner's *Realsymbol*. Because there is no corresponding, one-word translation of *Urwort*, I shall retain the German). All beings express and communicate themselves (to themselves and others) symbolically, but certain symbols go right to the core of who we are as humanity, grip us, and implicate us in their reality. These are *Urworte*.

All these concepts find helpful parallels in the field of cognitive linguistics, particularly as articulated by Giles Fauconnier and Miles Turner. According to Fauconnier and Turner, all human thought, speech, and meaning-making in general, proceed from what they call "conceptual integration" or "cross domain mapping" (2002, 40–44; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In other examples of cognitive linguistics, this is also referred to as "metaphoric process" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 46–57). Mary Gerhart and Allen Russell delineate a similar process, which they call "tectonic" (2001, 10–52). While there are different nuances in regard to these terms, the basic idea remains the same and the various theories are essentially compatible (Masson n.d., 75–93). While the term metaphoric process helpfully connects us to Rahner's idea that poetry and *Urworte* are linguistically primary, it suffers the defect of being easily misunderstood to mean "not real." For this reason, I will generally refer to it as tectonic process, conceptual integration, or some variant thereof. Conceptual integration works

when two concepts are “blended” together to form something new. Among the many examples supplied by Fauconnier and Turner is the computer “desktop,” which posits elements from the “real world” such as folders, trash cans, and so forth onto a “simulated desktop,” prompting users to blend their “existing knowledge of office work, interpersonal commands, pointing and choosing from lists” into the new situation of interfacing with an operating system (2001, 22–24).

Such blends are constantly occurring at an unconscious level as we make our way through the world, and they can take a variety of forms, depending on the degree to which the elements of a blend share organizing frameworks. For example, office politics might be blended with a sporting event. The framework of the office would include superiors and subordinates, memos, paperwork, etc., while the framework of the sporting event would include the particular field on which the event transpires, the participants, the elements of the game, the methods of scoring, etc. Simplex blends involve no competition between organizing frameworks because one of the inputs lacks such a framework, and so takes on the other’s. Mirror networks share all the elements of their organizing frameworks in common. Single scope networks have one of the elements of the blend surrender its own organizing framework and adopt that of the second. Finally, double scope networks have both elements retain their own frameworks such that the blend “includes parts of each of those frames and has an emergent structure of its own” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 131). So, returning to the office politics/sporting event example, if a subordinate throws his superior a curve ball, which proves ineffective because it gets stuck in red tape along the way, we have aspects of both the office and the baseball game interacting with each other.

The clash between the elements’ respective frames allows double scope blends to be highly creative in terms of generating new meanings (Fauconnier and Turner 2001, 121–35). These double scope blends are basically parallel to what Gerhart and Russell term “tectonic process.” All sorts of conceptual integrations occur which merely expand, rather than change our field of knowledge. But every now and again a blend occurs which fundamentally reorders the entire field of knowing and is productive of new meanings. These would include the Copernican transition to heliocentrism, the Newtonian synthesis of Galileo and

Kepler, and Einstein's development of the special theory of relativity. Such a blends are tectonic (Gerhart and Russell 2001, 32–38, 53–54).

All this dovetails with Rahner's symbols and *Urworte*. Just as it is the nature of all beings to express themselves in an other, it is the nature of all human cognition, according to cognitive linguistics, to understand one thing in terms of another. And just as poetry is primary, with *Nutzworte* arising (or better, degenerating) from a sort of entropy, all truly meaningful human thought, speech, and expression is metaphoric (in the sense of conceptual blending). While "literal" speech can occur, e.g., "The cat sat on the mat," it is almost universally trivial (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 129; Masson n.d., 51). A simple identification of Rahner's notion of a symbol with conceptual blending would be facile. The two concepts are manifestly addressing different concerns for different reasons, and coming from different presuppositions. Instead of this, though, I propose that given Rahner's theology of symbol, the type of human nature that engages in such conceptual blending is precisely the sort of human nature we would expect to find. If Rahner is correct about how God communicates Godself, we should expect humanity's mechanisms of knowing to function along these sorts of lines. Conversely, if Cognitive Linguistics is correct about how we think and know, then we would expect any revelation of God to proceed along lines compatible with these structures of knowing. Tectonic process (which reorders the entire field of knowing such as Einstein's special theory of relativity) as described by cognitive linguistics, makes possible in humanity the symbolic self-communication posited by Rahner.

The aptness of cross domain mapping as explanatory for Rahner's theologies of expression increases when we consider some other phenomena observed by cognitive science. In order to proceed, we must note that for cognitive linguistics, the accent is upon embodied mind. The "elements in mental spaces correspond to activated neuronal assemblies and linking between elements corresponds to neurobiological binding such as coactivation" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 102). So concepts like "mental space" or conceptual "maps" are themselves conceptual blends, which allow us to conceive of a thoroughly physiological process. And through neural binding and coactivation, we

develop what Fauconnier and Turner refer to as “frames,” which “are entrenched mental spaces that we can activate all at once” such as

Jesus on the Cross. . . . [In these cases ] an entrenched mental space typically has other mental spaces attached to it, in an entrenched way, and they quickly come along with the activation. Jesus on the cross evokes the frame of Roman crucifixion, of Jesus the baby, of Jesus the son of God, of Mary and the Holy women at the foot of the cross, of styles of painting the crucifixion, of moments of the liturgy that refer to it, and many more. (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 103)

This is strikingly similar to the effect of an *Urwort*. Activating an entrenched mental space immediately evokes a whole host of associations. Like an *Urwort* an entrenched mental space “unite[s] . . . [and] by a kind of enchantment produce[s] in the person who listens to [it] what [it is] expressing . . . allow[s] the manifold to harmonize in unity . . . [and] render[s] a single thing translucent to the infinity of all reality” (*TI* 3: 295 [*SW* 12: 422]). It seems as though the one can be understood in light of the other, with the cognitive linguistic phenomenon once more as the condition of the possibility of the Rahnerian category. In other words, entrenched mental spaces and coactivation explain how *Urworte* can have the effect Rahner claims for them. However, as helpful as these parallels may be, cognitive linguistics, by recognizing the pervasively bodily character of these processes also presents a significant challenge to theology, which must be addressed if the two are to engage in constructive dialogue. To this challenge, I now turn.

### **And the Metaphor Became Flesh, Causing a Good Deal of Trouble**

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* certainly lives up to its subtitle. In it they argue for the essentially and irreducibly embodied nature of all human beings, an argument which, as they contend, overturns much of the Western philosophical (and theological) tradition (1999, *passim*). Whereas the traditional view has seen reason as a basically disembodied, universal, and transcendent reality, Lakoff and Johnson contend that it is none of these (1999, 21–22, 57). For

them our reasoning is thoroughly determined by embodied neural realities, which not only facilitate reasoning, conceptualization, categorization, etc. but also “determine what kinds of categories we will have and what their structure will be” (1999, 18). Our perception and conception of the world is the result of a complex interaction between objects in the world and the physical neural hardware with which we are equipped. As we shall see, this leads Lakoff and Johnson toward a reductive understanding of reality, while Rahner’s theology affords tools for overcoming such reductivism.

As an example of this dynamic, they use the concept of color. Science has demonstrated that color does not inhere in things, but rather arises from the interaction between reflected light, the cones in our eyes, the fibers that transmit them to our brains, and our culturally constructed abilities to perceive (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 22–36). This gives us a view of conception that is neither wholly objectively out in the world, nor wholly culturally constructed, and not wholly subjectively internal to human beings, but a mixture of the three. This allows for a functional realism, one which must be acknowledged as “embodied realism,” as it is inescapably determined by embodied processes, the bulk of which (perhaps 95 percent) happens at the unconscious level, and thoroughly shapes our conscious perceptions (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 10–13, 74–117). Such an embodied realism is the death knell for both correspondence theories of truth (we have no ability to judge whether or not our conceptions correspond with objective reality because we have no ability at all that is not mediated and determined by our embodiment), and the utility of “literal” meaning, because most literal statements are, in reality, metaphors, and those which are truly literal—with no metaphoric content—tend to be trivial (e.g., the cat sat on the mat) (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 118–29; Masson nd., 51–53).

The uselessness of literal meaning brings us back to the domain of metaphoric or tectonic process, which Lakoff and Johnson note occurs inevitably and unconsciously as we form synaptic connections between subjective judgments and certain sensorimotor domains. An example is an infant pairing the subjective experience of receiving affection with the warm embrace of her mother, leading to the metaphor, affection is warmth.”(1999, 50, 57). I noted above that cognitive

linguistics conceives of this process in terms of embodied mind. Just as our conceptual abilities are mediated and shaped by our embodiment, our conceptual integrations (or metaphors) are “embodied in three ways.” (1) [They are] embodied through bodily experience in the world. . . . (2) The source-domain logic arises from the . . . structure of the sensorimotor system. And (3) [they are] instantiated neurally” in the physical structures of the brain (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 73).

There is no escaping embodiment, and there is no access to reality apart from embodiment. Nor is there any human experience which cannot be traced back at some level to an embodied biological/neural event. The challenge this presents to theological reflection is this: First, there is no room left for a soul conceived of as a Ghost in the Machine. Second, the experience of “God” could be readily reduced to the mere firing of neurons and a consequence of metaphors that are not recognized for what they are. Moreover, because all our reasoning is unconsciously and bodily determined, there is no God’s eye view to take in order to solve this problem. Yet all hope is not lost. Lakoff and Johnson, almost as an afterthought, note, “One might imagine a spiritual tradition in which such a Soul is fundamentally embodied—shaped in important ways by the body, located forever as part of the body, and dependent for its ongoing existence on the body. The results about the mind discussed throughout this book in no way rule out the existence of *that* kind of Soul, an embodied Soul” (1999, 563). Karl Rahner provides us with an account of the soul which can be properly understood as “embodied,” and which makes sense of the material mediation and realization posited by Lakoff and Johnson.

### **Rahner’s Deus ex (in?) Machina: Embodied Mind as Geist in Welt**

If the findings of cognitive science are accepted, we run into certain strictures regarding the God-world relationship. The existence of God is not ruled out. Indeed, given the premises of embodied mind, this is impossible to do. On the other hand, humanity’s ability to know, commune with, or experience God can happen in no way other than through the embodied mechanics posited by cognitive science. God might still be able to reveal Godself, but such a revelation would necessarily be “the Word of God at the mercy of the body” (a deliber-

ate echo of Chauvet 2001). Appropriately, there are rich resources in Karl Rahner's theology for addressing this challenge. In fact, his own ruminations on the philosophy of religion led him to much the same conclusion: the "place" of any possible revelation of God will necessarily be in human history with all the materiality that this involves (Rahner 1994a, 141–42 [SW4: 252, 254]). In this section I endeavor to show that Rahner's anthropology and christology are adequate to the challenge raised by cognitive science. This will accomplish three things: (1) it will eliminate the possible obstacle to using cognitive science as an explanatory tool for Rahner's theology; (2) it will tighten the links between the aspects of Rahner's thought we have already explored and cognitive linguistics; and (3) it will set the stage for a final, constructive movement in this dialogue.

Rahner conceives of humanity as fundamentally "spirit in the world" a phrase found in his initial doctoral dissertation in philosophy (Rahner 1994b [SW2]). The human being is a unique blend of matter and spirit, the two of which can be distinguished but not separated. This unity of matter and spirit is demanded by humanity's transcendental structure. Because there is a unity of being and knowing, and because knowledge is first of all presence to self, and because it is only through *exitus* and *reditus* to a concrete object and then back to the self that knowledge occurs, there must be some way for humans to have knowledge of themselves, that is at the same time knowledge of the other. Rahner's solution to this problem is matter. It is one's own matter that is the other through which one attains presence-to-one's self, which allows all knowledge to occur (Rahner 1994a, 99–103 [SW 4: 182, 184, 186, 188]).

The parallels to the theology of symbol are noteworthy. Patrick Bosson notes that Rahner's moves in *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word* are the root of his later theology of symbol (2002, 112–13). In fact, Rahner makes the connection explicit, stating that the body is the symbol of the soul, which is basically the inverse of the scholastic definition of the soul as the form of the body (*TI* 4: 247 [SW 18: 451–52]). This is thrown into bolder relief when we note that humanity is not technically composed of soul and body, but soul and prime matter (*TI* 4: 247 [SW 18: 452]; *TI* 17: 83 [SW 22/2: 170]) Because this is the case, the one cannot occur without the other, rather, they

are interdependent. “Bodily existence . . . is the concrete existence of the spirit itself in space and time [*Raum-Zeitlichkeit*]” (*TI* 17: 84 [*SW* 22/2: 170]). So Rahner, following the magisterium, grants priority to the spirit, the body arises from the spirit expressing itself in matter rather than the spirit arising as something secondary to the body (*TI* 6: 162–63 [*SW* 15: 317–18]).

This is not without tensions and ambiguities as Rahner also conceives of spirit as matter’s own self-transcendence and a distinct achievement of the evolutionary process (*TI* 5: 160–68 [*SW* 15: 221–28]). Yet, as the process of coming to self-transcendence is teleologically ordered to the arising of the human spirit, it is not necessarily contradictory either. Matter, Rahner says, is “frozen spirit.” In other words, our material being must be understood in light of the human spirit (*TI* 6: 168 [*SW* 15: 321–22]). But this does not lead to a simplistic hegemony of spirit, rather it “necessarily implies [a most highly ‘material’ / *höchst* “*materielle*”] explanation of the finite spirit” (*TI* 6: 170 [*SW* 15: 323]). In making this move, Rahner provides us with precisely the sort of embodied soul we need: spirit is not something separate from matter, instead the two are located along a spectrum. At the same time, this works both ways. We do not have embodied soul by itself, instead we have spiritualized body as well. Rahner pushes us not to abandon the idea of embodied mind, but to reconceive it in a non-reductionist way, a way that allows for genuine transcendence.

This non-reductive character of Rahner’s thought potentially brings us into direct conflict with Lakoff and Johnson, who view their model as incompatible with the idea of a transcendent reason (1999, 21). Several observations are in order. To begin, we should note that Lakoff and Johnson’s actual contention is not with transcendence as such (though it would be wishful thinking to imagine them particularly friendly to the idea), but rather to a disembodied reason into which humanity somehow “taps.” Rahner does not conceive of transcendence in this way, nor does he ever view it as disembodied (from the human side). So he is unscathed by this criticism. Additionally, though, we should note that in locating human reason as fundamentally shaped and determined by the sensorimotor system, Lakoff and Johnson *cannot* exclude the possibility of transcendence as such, for the same reason that such transcendence cannot be “proven” by believers. The

dynamics of embodied mind preclude our ability to competently and definitively answer this question. Christian theology, committed to the reality and revelation of God, is not disallowed for these reasons. This cannot be “proven” (again, for the same reasons that it cannot be disproven).

It is finally worth noting, though, that although Rahner’s anthropology and christology can be seen as positing a revelation that occurs within the limitations envisaged by cognitive linguistics, my proposal actually reverses the relationship. The mechanisms of cognitive linguistics are the obediencial potencies for any revelation that God may choose to give. It is not that humanity existed with these limitations to which God had to submit. Instead, God created humanity in such a way that these phenomena would allow God’s self-disclosure to humanity. This is a point that will be expanded when I turn more specifically to christology below.

Rahner further argues that the sort of relationship he conceives between spirit and matter is clarified by the Incarnation, as the Son of God retains his materiality and human nature for eternity, thereby signaling that matter is adequate for his spiritual self-expression. “The spirituality of the creature always remains spirituality in materiality right up to its absolute perfection” (*TI* 6: 170, 177 [*SW* 15: 329–30]). The mention of the Incarnation brings us to the second Rahnerian resource in overcoming the challenge of cognitive science: his christology, which must be understood in light of his anthropology and vice-versa. By becoming incarnate the Logos has taken on our human nature and “uttered [it] as his self-expression . . . he pronounces as his reality precisely that which we are” (*TI* 4: 116 [*SW* 8: 319]; also *TI* 17: 75 [*SW* 22/2: 162–63]; *TI* 6: 160 [*SW* 15: 315]). The human nature is in no way incidental to the Incarnation. Once more we are drawn back to the theology of the symbol. Humanity is not an arbitrary *Vertretungssymbol* in the Incarnation. The human nature is not “borrowed plumes” in which the Logos “masquerade[s]” but is rather integrally related to the Logos because for Rahner the hypostatic union, while more than merely the definitive fulfillment of humanity, cannot be understood apart from its character as that fulfillment (*TI* 4: 111–17 [*SW* 8: 314–19]).

The human nature is the *potentia obedientialis* for the hypostatic union in such a strong sense that Rahner defines it as what arises if God desires to express Godself outwardly (*TI* 4: 239 [*SW* 18: 439]; *TI* 4: 116 [*SW* 8: 319]). In other words, humanity was created for this: to bear God's self-disclosure to and as humanity in the Incarnation of the Logos. The concrete humanity of Jesus is the symbol of the eternal Logos of God (*TI* 4: 237–38 [*SW* 18: 437–38]; *TI* 4: 116 [*SW* 8: 318–19]). It is precisely through the stuff of humanity: its materiality, the various psychological faculties and physiological mechanics of human being, that God achieves his purpose in the Incarnation of the Logos (*TI* 5: 207–08 [*SW* 12: 344–45]; also Wong 1986, 8). In fact, Rahner envisages the hypostatic union's *visio immediata* taking place precisely here, in the embodied human consciousness of Jesus (*TI* 5: 209 [*SW*: 346]).

This is an arrangement with eternal, irreversible, and irrevocable effects. Only by way of the incarnate Christ do we have knowledge of the Trinity, and even in the beatific vision, our knowledge of God will be mediated through this humanity (*TI* 17: 80 [*SW* 22/2: 166–67]; *TI* 4: 244 [*SW* 18: 249–50]). “This created human nature is the indispensable and permanent gateway through which everything created must pass if it is to find the perfection of its eternal validity before God” (*TI* 3: 43 [*SW* 12: 258]). God can give us knowledge that goes beyond our embodied mind, but he can only do this by giving it to us by means of and in and through our corporeality. A belief in the Incarnation allows us to affirm that this is so, and that our bodyliness is adequate to bear and receive this revelation. The Incarnation secures the fact that all knowledge of God, all spirituality, will be mediated materially, and specifically through the dynamics of embodied humanity. This secures the eternal validity and necessity of material, embodied symbols.

These considerations also explain the central importance of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rahner's thought (note the similar connection in Bosson 2002, 118). It is fascinating that in developing his theology of symbol and in explicating *Urworte*, Rahner has recourse first of all to the Sacred Heart, rather than to the Eucharist or something similar. But this point of departure is especially apt, since, as Rahner notes, the word “heart” encompasses humanity in

both its material and immaterial aspects, and thereby cuts across any sort of strong spirit-matter dualism (*TI* 3: 332 [*SW* 13: 496–97]; *TI* 3: 323 [*SW* 13: 489–90]). Moreover, considering Jesus’s heart forces us to a recognition of the Incarnation because although the Sacred Heart *is* a symbol, it is precisely the human heart of Christ that we consider (*TI* 4: 252 [*SW* 18: 456–57]). Rahner concludes his essay, “Behold this Heart! Preliminaries of a Theology of Devotion to the Sacred Heart” poignantly:

But we must know what heart means and what an immeasurable weight the word “heart” already has in itself, if we wish to speak of the heart of the God-man and in adoration acknowledge his grace. Only then can one begin to say: “Behold this heart!” Only then can it dawn upon us what it means when we hear the news: the eternal Logos of God has a human heart, he risked the adventure of a human heart, until, pierced by the sin of the world, it had flowed out, until it had suffered to the end on the Cross the uselessness and powerlessness of his love and had become thereby the eternal heart of the world. Since that moment the word “heart” is not only a word which affects [one / *den Menschen*] in the core of [one’s / *seines*] being, but a word which can no longer fail to take its place in the eternal praise of God itself and in it in the centre [*sic*] of it—denotes also the heart of a man. Many words will be reduced to silence because what they mean is not worth speaking about. But there are human words which, because they mean human things, can properly be said only in a human way. And if they mean something human which belongs eternally to God himself, then such human words are words of eternity which [people / *Menschen*] can never cease to utter, either here or in eternity. And to these words of earthly beginning and eternal ending belongs the word which God will still say to us men in all eternity: “Behold this heart, which has so loved [people / *Menschen*].” (*TI* 3: 330 [*SW* 13: 495])

This sums up the foregoing, and prepares us to take our next step as we consider that by virtue of the Incarnation our sharp distinctions between spirit and matter are blurred. The body and its processes is marked out as the arena and the instrument by which God communicates himself to us and by which we come to know God; and certain materially embodied *Urworte* and symbols are eternally taken up into the divine life gaining an enduring and eternal necessity. With these

pieces in place, I turn my attention to the relationship between word and sacrament in Rahner's thought.

### The Sacramental Turn

As we have seen *Urworte* are particularly arresting symbols, which arise from and touch our hearts. Rahner draws a strong connection between these *Urworte* and the sacraments proper when he writes, "There are gestures that [bring with them and cause / *mitbringen und bewirken*] what they express. . . . Where the Church addresses such a gesture to a person, in a solemn and official way, we have to do, in this gesture of the Church, with what we call a sacrament" (*TI* 23: 189–90 [*SW* 30: 597]; also *TI* 14: 139, 141 [*SW* 18: 480, 482]). That Rahner's conception of sacrament is so close to his conception of *Urwort* means that just as *Urworte* are a particular type of symbol, so sacraments are a particular type of *Urwort* (and hence a type of word understood in a certain way).

Indeed, Rahner follows just such a trajectory in his essays "Word and Eucharist" (*TI* 4: 253–86 [*SW* 18: 596–626]), "What is a Sacrament?" (*TI* 14: 135–38 [*SW* 18: 477–88]), and "Faith and Sacrament" (*TI* 23: 181–88 [*SW* 30: 571–78]), writing, "A sacrament is and remains an efficacious word. For signs and words, from the metaphysical and theological point of view, are of exactly the same nature" (*TI* 4: 266–67 [*SW* 18: 608]). For Rahner, salvation is conceived of as God's self-communication to humanity, which means that it is properly termed "verbal." It is the word of God. However, communication, "word" and "verbal" must all be understood metaphorically. God is not "telling" us something. Literal words may or may not actually be uttered or inscribed.

God's self-communication does not impart information about God. Rather, it is God giving Godself to humanity. This self-giving therefore necessarily bestows grace, and is empowered by God giving Godself to both the hearer and the messenger of this word (*TI* 23: 182 [*SW* 30: 572]). This takes us back to the theology of symbol: God gives his very self in his Word. This is why the Second Person of the Trinity, who is the Father's symbol is called the Logos. This implies that anything by which God gives Godself is properly understood as communicative and therefore as word.

Rahner pushes this connection further, arguing that our free acceptance of this self-communication must itself happen by way of God's grace (self-communication/word). This he terms the "inner word of grace" (*TI* 4: 257 [*SW* 18: 600]). This inner word makes possible the reception of the "outer word" (Burke 2002, 114). It is the transcendental condition for the possibility of receiving any revelation from God. But it is the outer word that renders the inner word knowable. The inner word is an unthematic self-communication, while the outer word is concrete (that which is announced in the Church's proclamation or bestowed in the sacraments). To have the inner word be "adequate" for salvation would be to treat humanity merely as soul and not also as body, that is, to leave off its material and historical dimensions. Indeed, given the fact that we know the transcendental only through the categorial (a Rahnerian axiom), it would render salvation deeply problematical. Indeed, the inner word would save us as something other than human (*TI* 4: 257–58 [*SW* 18: 600–01]). This last point is crucial. Although Rahner is often interpreted as undercutting the concrete and particular in favor of the unthematic and transcendental, or of downplaying the necessity of Church and sacrament, here we have the precise opposite.

So the sacraments are generally indispensable for salvation by virtue of: (1) the constitution of humanity as transcendentially oriented towards God as "Whither," but only knowing the transcendental through the categorial; (2) the indispensability of symbols for both God and humanity and the relation between God and humanity; (3) humanity's composition as spirit in the world and therefore inescapably embodied; and (4) the irreversibly material nature of the Incarnation as God's definitive self-revelation to humanity. Because the second person of the Trinity is now human, the human nature and all that comes with it has become somehow part of the reality of God. God has expressed Godself through, to, and as the embodied materiality of human nature, and all of God's self communication henceforth must bear this stamp. Because of who we are as human, the sacraments are generally necessary for God's self-communication. Even more importantly, because of who God now is as human, the sacraments are generally necessary for God's self-communication.

So sacraments are (typically) material *Urworte* (though Rahner notes that matrimony and penance consist entirely of verbiage, without physical matter *TI* 14: 138 [*SW* 18: 479]). Cognitive linguistics provides an interesting parallel, which sheds light on the mechanism at play here. Above I noted the possible connection between Fauconnier and Turner's entrenched mental spaces and *Urworte*. They also note that humanity tends to develop "physical material anchor[s]" for conceptual blends. Such anchors include clocks, dials, and gauges, as well as things like money (2002, 195–205, here 205). These anchors seem to be an integral part of blending, rather than an interesting, but dispensable phenomenon. In the same way Rahner views unthematic knowledge of God without material mediation as unsatisfactory and insufficient. Although, unlike cognitive linguistics, he seems to grant that such knowledge is possible, but without the material component, it is extraordinary. Bosson notes, "Rahner concludes that the materialization of the symbol is necessary for its effectiveness" (2002, 134 [my translation]).

This connection becomes even more noteworthy when we note Fauconnier and Turner's observation that writing and even speech is a material anchor of this sort (2002, 210–12). So even those sacraments which Rahner notes lack a material element and those words which he terms "*außersakramentalen*," have a material component (*TI* 4: 280–81 [*SW* 18: 621]). All of the faculties we have to engage with any sort of word (whether literal spoken words or the sort of self-communication we term the Word of God) are material and embodied. This is true at the sensory level, and at the level of cognition. In the essays with which we have been dealing, Rahner blurs the distinction between word and sacrament, integrating them with one another. And this cognitive linguistic insight strengthens and radicalizes his realization, and allows us to recognize it as its own conceptual blend. This opens a new vista for questions of sacramental efficacy. Given the unity of spirit and matter, the reality of embodied mind, and the overlap between word and sacrament, it is not surprising that a material cause can produce spiritual effects (cf. Tapeiner 1975, 243–44, who notes this as a typical Protestant objection to Roman Catholic sacramentalism). After all, all spiritual effects are mediated through

matter. When the God of pure spirit bestows himself upon humanity, he does it through the Son's Incarnation.

One last element drawn from cognitive linguistics will allow me to synthesize all these considerations. Fauconnier and Turner write of yet another facet of conceptual blending in which the common semantic XYZ structure: X is the Y of Z, "systematically prompt[s] for blends" (2002, 142). Such structures can even form Yn Networks, which repeat the association over and over, although normally such networks don't extend beyond Y cubed (2002, 150–51). When we encounter such a network, our tendency is to attempt to construct a "megablend," encompassing the various elements involved in the network, which when it occurs with double-scope integrations "offers exceptionally rich possibilities for creative clashes" (2002, 151–54, 159, here 159). The XYZ structure functions in this way regardless of the nouns supplied, and regardless of the conceptual content involved (2002, 154–59). Jesus's eucharistic words, *hoc est enim corpus meum*, also fit this pattern.

Drawing from what we have covered thus far, an integrated account of sacramental causality is possible. In scholastic sacramental theology, the *res* is the reality with which a sacrament has to do (e.g., the body and blood of Christ), the *sacramentum* is the element which signifies that reality (e.g., bread and wine). The *res et sacramentum* refer to the mysterious union between *res* and *sacramentum* in the rite. *Res tantum* and *sacramentum tantum* refer to the reality alone (i.e., apart from signs and not itself a sign of anything else) and the sign alone, respectively. A minister utters the sacramental words, which, when heard by the recipient, prompt for a blend between the *res tantum* and the *sacramentum tantum*. The resultant blend would be the *res et sacramentum*. At the same time, this prompt activates an entrenched mental space, wherein a host of associations (with both *res* and *sacramentum*) are coactivated, catching up the whole history of these elements (and the history of the subject with them) into what we might call a neural anamnesis, rendering the whole present. All of this blending, association, and coactivation is facilitated by and tied to the sacrament's material elements.

At first blush, this might seem like a reductionistic account of sacramental efficacy, one which approaches bare memorialism. But

several factors guard against that. The first comes from cognitive science: most mental activity occurs unconsciously. So these prompts, blends, and coactivations of entrenched spaces should not be seen in a didactic, “recalling-the-facts” mode. Further, by overlaying tectonic process with *Realsymbol*, room is left for genuine transcendence, even if it can only be mediated by way of the body. Indeed, the Incarnation has forever secured the body as the site of God’s self-communication. The sacraments arise in a sequence in which God expressively gives himself to and as the Son, who gives himself to and as the man Jesus, who gives himself to and as the Church, which realizes and gives herself in the sacraments. The bread and wine, the blends for which they prompt, the neural anamnesis, all these are the way that this genuine self-communication of God takes place. And when this occurs, God reaches all the way down through the chain and the communicant is drawn the whole way up to the mystery that is God.

My line of argumentation actually parallels Rahner’s own tack in thinking through the Incarnation, which he considers from the human side and the divine side. For the Incarnation to occur from the divine side, God must be a God who expresses Godself. For this reason, the Logos is the necessary divine condition for the Incarnation. From the human side, humanity must be capable of being the self-expression of God (*TI* 4: 115–17 [*SW* 8: 318–19] See also my point above about humanity as the *potentia obedientialis* for the hypostatic union). My consideration of cognitive science allows us to investigate humanity’s constitution and capacity for receiving the self-communication of God. Our consideration of the chain of symbols: from God the Father, to the Logos, to the Incarnate Son, to the Church, to the sacraments, allows us to see in what way God actually has communicated Godself to humanity. By submitting himself to the conditions of embodied humanity, God has met us in the only place he could meet us. By providing the sacraments, God pledges to continue to meet us precisely where we need him. There are conditions for the possibility of God’s self-communication that must be met on both the divine and human sides. And these conditions are met on both sides in the person of Jesus Christ: the symbol of the Father, who also reaches us in our materiality.

### Conclusion

In his particular analysis of humanity as spirit in the world, Rahner anticipated and transcended (pun intended) cognitive science's embodied mind. In his theology of symbol and concept of *Urworte*, he anticipated notions such as entrenched mental spaces and offered an articulation compatible with embodied mind or tectonic process. And by transcendently deducing the importance of human materiality and history as the site of any possible revelation of God, he showed his theology to be adequate to the challenge raised by cognitive science against the Western philosophical and theological traditions. Other theologies may also be up to this challenge, but Rahner's, by so explicitly linking anthropology and christology is particularly able to do so. Since Rahner anticipated so many key features of cognitive linguistics, it makes sense that the latter would in turn prove useful as an explanatory framework for Rahner's theology. Hopefully, this paper has demonstrated that this is the case. Cognitive science furnishes an explanation of the mechanics for some of the realities to which Rahner gestured in his consideration of symbols, words, and sacraments. It allows us to account for the necessity of the sacraments for salvation in anthropological terms, and it does this in such a way as to intensify Rahner's own integration of word and sacrament. This last point has ecumenical significance, as it affords the opportunity for evangelicals (in both the historical and contemporary sense of the word) to recognize effects of the sacraments that they had hitherto thought necessary to reserve for the word. While this realization has not been at the forefront of my treatment, it has been in the background throughout, driving many of the twists and turns of this paper. It is my hope that Rahner's theology, read through the lens of cognitive linguistics, will enable us to see the unity of word and sacrament so that we may once more see the unity of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

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