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CHRIST'S SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE IN THE EUCHARIST: A BIBLICAL-PNEUMATOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE MYSTERY OF FAITH

Bruce T. Morrill, S.J.*

The Eucharist is God's fundamental gift to the church—as a body and in each of its members—whereby we come to know over and again ourselves as sharing, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the very life and mission of Christ Jesus. To reflect theologically on the church's traditional practice of the Eucharist is to delve into mystery, indeed, the mystery at the heart of Christian faith and the life of the church. The word mystery here is not meant to hinder believers' use of reason and imagination as they seek a greater appreciation and joy in celebrating the Eucharist. On the contrary, to speak of the Eucharist as mystery is a promising invitation to engage Scripture and tradition, faith and intellect. Indeed, mystery was the preferred term of the earliest Christians for referring to not only the Eucharist and baptism but all the concrete ways in which they experienced God entering into and shaping their lives in Christ. While Orthodox Christianity never lost the language of mystery for the sacraments (at least in practice[1]), popularized scholastic metaphysical theologies in the West contributed to losing the biblical heart of sacramental tradition and, in the Reformation, the unity of the church. In wholeheartedly embracing the theology of paschal mystery borne of the Liturgical Movement, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy proved a genuine source of reform and renewal for not only Roman Catholicism but also Anglican and Protestant communions as well. The present essay seeks to build on that momentum by turning to Scripture (especially John's Gospel) and tradition (particularly pneumatology) to articulate a theology of Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist.

Recovering Liturgy as Participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery

The Greek word *mystèrion* occurs repeatedly in the New Testament, drawing upon Jewish biblical tradition, wherein God's knowledge is hidden, secret, beyond human comprehension, yet needed to solve earthly difficulties. The range of literature in the Hebrew Scriptures unfolds numerous ways God reveals God's plans, purpose, and wisdom to the people, including the law, words of the prophets, intermediaries such as angels, and visions. At times the divine mysteries, even when revealed, are too much for human comprehension, setting up a trajectory through the prophetic and apocalyptic literature toward a fullness of revelation to come at the end of the ages. The first believers in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God believed that in him the dawn of the final age had come. Thus, it is not surprising to find the New Testament authors regularly employing the language of mystery in reference to not only the gift of faith or the revelation of the kingdom but also

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[1] Alexander Schmemann bemoaned what the "Western captivity" of Orthodox sacramental theology as a long deviation from patristic tradition propagating theories with no "organic connection" to the liturgy itself. See *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 64, 71.

such inscrutable wisdom as the already-not yet tension of salvation in Christ or the incomprehensibility of the general resurrection (e.g. Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 15:51).

In Scripture and tradition, then, mysteries are about the revelation of divine wisdom as the fullness of life for the world (see 1 Cor 2:6-8), God's invitation into the seemingly unapproachable light piercing through the events of history. The gift of faith in Christ discloses Jesus—his person, mission, suffering, death, and glorification—as the fullness of revelation. Christ Jesus is not only the message but also the means, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, of sharing in the sure purpose of God for humans. Still, God remains God, the Lord of heaven and earth, whose ways are not our ways (see Is 55:8), the holy one so different from us humans in perfect justice and love as to give us in Christ a peace we cannot give ourselves (see Jn 14:27). Believers live by faith in the God who in Jesus showed himself utterly committed to the thriving of people in this good but fallen creation, by hope in the promises hidden in fragmentary moments of life, and by a love that in Christ-like attitude and deeds draws us into his way as the very truth of life itself.

Over the past century sacramental and liturgical theology has undergone a theoretical reformation and advanced a renewal in liturgical practice by identifying and adopting a concept of central importance to early church tradition: When Christians assemble for divine worship we, the church, participate in the reality of the *paschal mystery*, that is, in Christ's passion, death, resurrection and conferral of the Holy Spirit. To celebrate the liturgy is to share in the very life of God revealed in the saving deeds of Jesus, whose death and resurrection during the annual paschal (Passover) feast disclosed the meaning of all the acts of his mission that culminated in that ultimate mystery. The distinctive Christian belief in God as Trinity is founded upon an experiential knowing of God in and through the person of Jesus; thus, the early church fathers came to write of Jesus himself as the mystery of God. Jesus is the revelation of the trinitarian God of love.

The importance of recovering this ancient concept of the paschal mystery, French sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet argues, lies in locating and celebrating the source of salvation, as does the New Testament, in Jesus' death and resurrection. Chauvet emphasizes this in contrast to the classical Scholastic theology of the sacraments, which took the incarnation as its starting point, focusing on the question of how the divine Word could take on and sanctify human, created reality. The sacraments thereby came to be understood as "the prolongation of the redeeming incarnation," the liturgy as celebrating "the various 'anniversaries' of Jesus' destiny," and the church year as "a sort of immense socio-drama in which one would somehow mime the events that have punctuated this destiny."[2] Attendance at liturgy became a matter of watching the *completed* drama of Christ's life rather than entering into and thus *sharing in* the mystery of the Father's call and the Spirit's empowerment of Jesus for a self-emptying mission of service even unto death, but finally into life.[3] The latter is a dynamic saving process that, while definitively inaugurated in Jesus' passover, has yet to reach its final completion in "a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1).

[2] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 156, 158.

[3] See I. H. Dalmais, "Theology of the Liturgical Celebration," in *Principles of the Liturgy,* vol. 1 of *The Church at Prayer*, ed. A. G. Martimort, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987), 264.

Recognizing the vitality of that eschatological tension at the heart of the church's life and work, Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann came to describe its liturgy as "an all-embracing vision of life, a power meant to judge, inform and transform the whole of existence, a 'philosophy of life' shaping and challenging all our ideas, attitudes and actions … an *icon* of that new life which is to challenge and renew the 'old life' in us and around us."[4] Such is the fundamentally eschatological nature of the mystery of Christian faith and, thus, of the liturgy as the lived knowledge of that faith.

Eschatology is, indeed, about the "last things" and "end of the age," but these not as something only to be imagined (dreadfully or otherwise) in the future but, rather, as already inaugurated in Jesus' resurrection yet awaiting completion in his second coming. This time "in between," living by faith in the "already" of Jesus' resurrection and the "not yet" of the ongoing history of the world's suffering, is the eschatological time of the church. We, the baptized, live this eschatological reality in the history of our time not only for our individual salvation, not merely for our personal piety, but for the sake of a world still so often bent on rejecting the merciful way of God's Christ. What sustains the church and its members as the body of Christ now sharing in God's life for the world is the Eucharist, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving joining our lives to his, empowering us to be, as St. Augustine taught, what we place upon and receive from the altar.[5]

Ecumenical theologian Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard's writings bid us turn again to the New Testament to learn that we, the church, comprise a temple built of living stones, ourselves engaged daily in "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pt 2:5) that glorify God by building up the goodness of humanity (see also, Rom 12:1; Heb 10:19-25). Contrary to the modern expectation that such a term would refer to sacred rituals, "spiritual sacrifices" in the earliest Christian writings (biblical and patristic) comprise believers' ongoing offering of their very lives in service to others. What makes such a life of virtues practiced in service to others, especially the poor, *holy* is the larger reality wherein Christians pursue it, namely, a sharing in the life and death of the Jesus who has become the final (eschatological) revelation of God. The deep, abiding knowledge of the mystery of God as self-emptying love for humanity the church shares in its members in celebrating the Eucharist: "In the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ and the 'spiritual sacrifice' of the church become one because Christ takes the members of his body into the embrace of his sacrifice."[6] Thus, the eschatological nature of the liturgy carries an irreducible ethical and social imperative, our own call to know Christ by following him in words and deeds, participating in the reign of God that has come in him, the one who will come again. But to so live in Christ we need to know him, not merely to know about him or his teaching, but to know him intimately in a deep bond of friendship (see Jn 15:15).[7] To know him now, to "have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68) written on

[4] *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 51-52.

[5] For citations and discussion of Augustine's *City of God* 10.6 and Sermon 227, see J.-M.-R. Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion,* trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 47-48, 133.

[6] Ibid., 109.

[7] Friendship as fundamental symbol (sacrament) of divine love humanly experienced as grace, definitively in Jesus, has been a hallmark throughout Bernard Cooke's theological writings. For the most recent elaboration, see his *Power and the Spirit of God: Toward an Experience-Based Pneumatology* (New

our bodies in this time between his first and second comings, in this time of the church, Jesus left us the Eucharist as the sacrificial meal in which we share in his paschal mystery.

As is the case with any person, Jesus becomes known to his followers by what he says and does and, moreover, by sharing with them the memories that have established and continue to advance this most important of friendships. The saving, life-giving mystery of those memories the Spirit of the risen Christ imparts to the body of his church in the narrative word of Scripture, made effectively present through the ritual gestures of sacramental liturgy, and existentially appropriated through ethical lives characterized by justice and mercy, forgiveness and compassion. Historically, different traditions within the one church of Christ have emphasized different aspects or even the entire reality of this most fundamental mystery of the faith, resulting in a richness of diversity that nonetheless lent itself to distortions within the practices of the traditions themselves.

Eastern Orthodoxy has always thought of the mystical heart of the Divine Liturgy, celebrated strictly on Sunday and a few other major feasts, in terms of ascending into the perichoretic (mutually shared or inter-penetrating) love of the Trinity. Orthodoxy developed extensive normative elements for the worship space—the layout and decoration of the church interior, the choreography of movements and style of music, etc.—meant to raise participants into the heavenly banquet of the kingdom of God. The problem, however, is that such elaborate symbolism collapsed under its weight into fragments: popular piety developed hybrid meanings for individual symbolic elements (processions, gestures, vestments) in isolation from their function within the liturgy as a whole.[8]

As for the West, while Luther and Calvin recognized the primordial importance for the church of celebrating the Eucharist on the Lord's Day, the subsequent evolution across much of Protestantism and Anglicanism, often in polemical environments, saw a marginalization of the Lord's Supper to occasional enactments during the year. The preferred Protestant language of Lord's Supper, symbolizing the biblical warrant for the ritual action (see Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:25), highlights the authority of the word of God in Scripture over traditions of Eucharist or Mass. One can generally say that for Protestants, worship on Sunday became centered on the proclamation of the biblical word through the reading of Scripture, preaching, hymnody, and prayers.[9] Roman Catholic sacramental practice and theology, on the other hand, during the medieval era and then all the stronger in the Counter-Reformation, developed an all but exclusive focus on the descent of Christ to the altar, the site of his real presence in the host. That the Latin term *hostia* means victim, understood as Christ's body sacrificed on the cross, is indicative of how narrowly the Roman Catholic understanding and practice of the Eucharist became focused on worshiping the "sacred species" of Christ's body in the sacrament.

York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 168-77.

[8] See *Liturgy and Tradition*, 95-97, 123-125.

[9] Methodist moral theologian Stanley M. Hauerwas has critiqued the extreme form biblical fundamentalist practices can take: "They [many 'conservative' Christians], of course, say they use the name of Jesus, but they fail to see that *how* Jesus' name is used makes all the difference. Without the Eucharist, for example, we lack the means to know the kind of presence Jesus' resurrection makes possible." "Worship, Evangelism, Ethics: On Eliminating the 'And,'" in *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God*, ed. E. Byron Anderson and Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998), 101.

In the early twentieth century the impetus for reform and renewal of the liturgy emerged in Benedictine abbeys in Belgium and Germany in what became known as the Liturgical Movement. Historical and pastoral initiatives complemented scholarly theological work in monasteries and theological faculties in a number of European countries and, eventually, North America. The Movement realized steady ecumenical and official impact, evidenced in the 1950s by Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei* and the Church of England's establishing its Liturgical Commission, and still later, the 1982 Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. The climax, nonetheless, came with the Second Vatican Council's *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the 1963 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, The document not only promulgated reform of the Roman ritual but was also widely embraced by Protestants and Anglicans in their efforts at liturgical renewal.

Key principles of the Constitution include identifying the liturgy as the source and summit of the church's entire life (no. 10) and, therefore, the full and active participation by all the people as the highest priority for realizing the pastoral, humanly sanctifying potential of the liturgy (no. 14). As a corrective to the practical equation of worship with gazing at the sacrificial victim in the host, the council fathers recovered the "sound tradition" (no. 4) of liturgy as ritual activity singularly capable of nourishing the faith-lives of all through the full complement of its symbols, actions, and words.

> … For in the liturgy God speaks to his people, and Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel. And the people reply to God both by song and prayer.
>
> Moreover the prayers addressed to God by the priest who, in the person of Christ, presides over the assembly, are said in the name of the entire holy people and of all present. And the visible signs which the sacred liturgy uses to signify invisible divine things have been chosen by Christ or by the Church. Thus not only when things are read 'which were written for our instruction' (Rom. 15:4), but also when the Church prays or sings or acts, the faith of those taking part is nourished, and their minds are raised to God so that they may offer him their spiritual homage and receive his grace more abundantly. …[10]

Celebration of the full range of words, symbols, and gestures in the liturgy disposes the faithful to receive the graces of drawing close to God in worship and gaining strength for practicing charity (no. 59). The council's teaching amounts to a splendid renewal of the ancient relationship between the liturgical assembly's sacrifice of thankful praise and the myriad spiritual sacrifices its members perform in their daily lives. "In doing this," writes Irénée Henri Dalmais, "the Church pursues its most essential purpose, which is to ensure the active presence of divine realties under the conditions of our present life—and that is precisely what 'mystery' means."[11]

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[10] The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 33, in *Vatican Council II: Volume I: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello Publishing, 1996), 11-12.

[11] Dalmais, "Theology of the Liturgical Celebration," 266. Father Dalmais, a Dominican friar, served for years on the faculty of the Parisian *Institut Supérieur de Liturgie* and numbered among the scholars of the French Liturgical Movement so influential in crafting the reformed Roman rites mandated by the Second Vatican Council.

Encountering Christ in the Eucharistic Celebration: Life for the Church, Life for the World

The active presence of divine realities in the human work of liturgy is nothing other than another way to speak of mystery. And the mystery, as we have seen, is Christ Jesus himself. To celebrate the paschal mystery is to encounter the presence of a living person, Jesus the Christ, sharing himself with his sisters and brothers. Such intimate sharing in human friendship between the Lord, who has ascended bodily to the right hand of his heavenly Father, and earthly people comes through the divine power of the Spirit working through the ritual's human words and symbols. Christ relates to the earthly members of his body precisely in our bodily means of mutual presence and receptivity, that is, *sacramentally*, in the liturgy, touching senses and memory, intellect and emotion, to form us as his members. Just as the flourishing of human friendship requires multiple modes of symbolic communication, one person to the other, so the risen Lord's sacramental presence to the faithful comes through a number of distinct yet interrelated modes. Thus does the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy teach that Christ "accomplishes so great a work" by being present in the assembled people as they pray and sing, in the person of the presiding minister, in the proclamation of the word, and in the sacraments, "especially in the eucharistic species."[12] Here the distortions and old polemics valorizing one means of grace to the exclusion of others—e.g. preaching of the word versus adoring the consecrated host—fall away to the oblivion they deserve. For if the Word Incarnate is to take ever-fuller form in us, then the divine Spirit who raised him from the dead (Rom 8:11) must work with all dimensions of our ritual bodies so that we might share in his saving work.

As Saint Augustine teaches, the mystery of the intimate union of our lives with Christ's, of ourselves as members of his body now in the world, is proclaimed so as to elicit our life-committing response:

> Thus, if you wish to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle, who says to the believers: You are the body of Christ and His members (1 Cor 12, 27). And thus, if you are the body of Christ and His members, it is your mystery that has been placed on the altar of the Lord; you receive your own mystery. You answer 'Amen' to what you are, and in answering, you accept it. For you hear, 'The body of Christ' and you answer 'Amen.' Be a member of Christ's body, so that your Amen may be true.[13]

This mutual abiding of Christ in us—members of his body as church, branches on him, the vine (Jn 15:5)—is what the Spirit initiates at baptism and nourishes at the one table of the word and Eucharist.[14] This is what is meant by the sacramentality of our Christian lives and, thus, why the liturgical sacraments are needed as revealers of that abiding presence of the Word of God, of Christ, in the stories of our lives. Participation in the liturgy empowers us to interpret our human story, as individuals and corporately, according to the meaning

[12] The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 7.

[13] Augustine, Sermon 272, *Patrologiae Latina*, trans. J.-P. Migne, cited in Joseph M. Powers, *Eucharistic Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), 20.

[14] "The Church … never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ." Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: *Dei Verbum*, no. 21, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello Publishing, 1996), 762.

disclosed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Through the tangible bonds of communion with Christ at the Eucharistic table—both in the sacrament of his very body and blood and the sacramental solidarity as members of his body—we are nourished for the journey, the mission we take up as the privilege of sharing in God's practical love for the world.

The living out of the paschal mystery in our lives is impossible if we bypass the altar table (too often the Protestant mistake), that is, if we think we can hear the word and then go directly into the world to "make it happen." On the other hand, if we bypass the table of the word so as directly to adore Christ the host on the altar (long the Catholic mistake), we are left to our own imaginations as to who he is and to what sort of life he is concretely inviting us. In either case, rather than "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45) working in and through us, Christ functions as an external exemplar of the moral life to be imitated. But even that seems impossible, since popular theology long ago devolved into a certain simplistic narrative of the Son of God suffering and dying on behalf of sinful human sons and daughters: How could anyone even approximate the moral character of the perfect man Jesus (who, when one gets down to it, really is not considered human the way we are anyway)? And how could anyone imagine or perhaps even desire drawing close to such a God, the Father, who sends his darling son to be born miraculously among humans only to cut him down brutally in the prime of life in divine retribution for humanity's disobedience? The sadomasochistic drama plays out on a stage over and above the terrain of we "regular" humans. The transaction between the Father and the Son is a matter settled between them on our behalf. The Father sacrifices his Son brutally, at the hands of men; the Son atones for humanity's dishonoring of God. All we can do is shudder at the horrific torture and execution, resolve to do better with our own lives as some small way of "making it up" to Jesus for what he suffered, and hope to be found worthy of the promised heaven the crucified Christ opened for us. The Christian life is reduced to personal resolve and initiative for which divine judgment and reward ultimately await, rather than a mysterious participation in the life of the Son that God is offering here and now in the power of the Spirit.

The latter wisdom, not of humans but of God, comes only through Scripture. "Both the mystery of the Word and the mystery of the Eucharist send one back to the mystery of Christ Jesus."[15] Thus did the Vatican Council's assertion of Scripture as "of greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy," with the "restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy" depending on the "lively appreciation of sacred scripture," ring of evangelical truth and promise the ecumenical way forward.[16] To further theological investigation of Christ's abiding presence in the sacrament of Eucharist, then, requires turning repeatedly to Scripture. First, I shall explore Christianity's struggle to align the notion of sacrifice, particularly as related to the Eucharist, with the biblical deposit of the faith. The fruits of current theological work on that question point to the revelation of the triune God's self-giving love in the incarnate (fully human) Son as the key to the sacrificial, and thus sacramental, dimension of the Eucharist. The second step, then, will be a close look at how the Gospel of John grounds sacrament in the abiding presence of the absent, ascended Jesus, through the promised Spirit sent by the Father. While John discloses the meaning of the

[15] Lucien Deiss, *Celebration of the Word,* trans. Lucien Deiss and Jane Burton (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 21.

[16] The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 24.

Eucharist in the testamentary form of Jesus' farewell discourse at the supper, other early Christian literature provide cultic resources for the Eucharist as the ritual means for our sharing in that abiding presence of God in the crucified, exalted Jesus. A survey of the Eucharistic ritual pattern of taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing—all as an act of remembrance—will round out the article as an appreciation for the Jewish and early Christian roots of the church's real-symbolic communion in Christ's body and blood.

What Sacrifice To Offer?

The impotence of the conventional Christian myth of sacrifice and atonement at the dawn of the new millennium is evident in the "mainstream" churches' struggles for effective influence upon society—locally, nationally, or now globally—and in the lives of individuals. In their efforts to assess how the Christian message has lost its way both within churches and in relation to contemporary people theologians have turned directly to the symbols so powerfully dominating Christian imagination: for Catholics, sacrifice, and for Protestants, atonement.[17] While both terms have roots in earliest Christian biblical and patristic literature, where they functioned as just two among numerous symbolic expressions for what God has done in Christ,[18] they became in the second millennium the dominant, if not exclusive Christian myth, tragically untethered to the full mystery of the Gospel. Sacrifice or atonement theology by the end of the Middle Ages reduced more or less to the following; "(1) God's honour is damaged by sin; (2) God demanded a bloody victim to pay for this sin; (3) God is assuaged by the victim; (4) the death of Jesus the victim functioned as payoff that purchased salvation for us."[19]

The crisis that eventually developed in the Reformation theologically concerned how humans connect to that payoff, to that salvation. The Medieval outcome functioned in the sacrifice of the Mass: Christ the victim (the host , *hostia* in Latin) offered in a non-bloody manner reprising the slaughter on Calvary, an atoning act of measurable merits that in each execution of the ritual could be applied as redemption for individual souls (of the dead). The Reformers raged in their rejecting this, asserting Christ as having died once for all sinners, whose justification lies only in their personal acceptance of that grace by faith. While differing in theological details and practical outcomes, Reformation leaders inevitably rejected the ritual and theology of the Medieval Mass, replacing it with services of the Lord's Supper celebrated as memorials of Christ's death and/or sacrifices of praise and

[17] See S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006); Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005), and *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007); David N. Power, *The Sacrifice We Offer: The Tridentine Dogma and Its Reinterpretation* (New York: Crossroad, 1987); Erin Lothes Biviano, *The Paradox of Christian Sacrifice: The Loss of Self, The Gift of Self* (New York: Crossroad, 2007); and Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London/New York: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2009).

[18] New Testament and extra-canonical metaphors for the fundamental grace that Christ is for humans include: adoption, new creation, birth from/being a child of God, gift of the Holy Spirit, being formed in the image of Christ, salvation, redemption, freedom (from slavery), reconciliation, peace/satisfaction, legal deliverance/justification, victory over alienating/demonic power, and more. See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 468-511.

[19] Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled*, 4.

thanksgiving. The Council of Trent reacted in turn, condemning all who rejected Eucharistic doctrine as including the real substantial presence of Christ, sacrifice for the propitiation of sins, and the fruits of communion, both sacramental and spiritual (by desire).

Trent's decrees on those various elements, however, were formulated separately, lacking integration. The legacy right into the twentieth century was a Roman Catholic theology and practice of the holy sacrifice of the Mass amounting roughly to an enacted allegory of Christ's execution, for which the climactic moment was (and for so many Catholics, remains) the medieval gesture of the priest elevating his large communion wafer (the host, *hostia*) as the moment when the victim Christ once again really is present. All, priest and people, shared in the moment of the "gaze that saves," with the fruits of the consecration applying to an intended deceased soul as well as variably to those attending, who in general rarely "received communion."[20] In reaction to the isolation of the priestly action of the ordained minister at the altar, and this, moreover, to benefit the dead, Protestant theology and practice came to focus on the fellowship shared by all at the table of the Lord's Supper. The ritual's power rested not in the sacred hands and words of the priest but, rather, in the community's obedient response to the Lord's words of biblical command, "Do this in memory of me." Rather swiftly, however, the communal dimension tended to devolve into a fellowship of two: me and Jesus.

One can safely say that the biblically, historically, ecumenically grounded renewal in Eucharistic theology of the past several decades amounts to an integration of the notions of presence, sacrifice, memorial, and communion that Tridentine theology left fragmented. That fragmentation contributed to the internal distortions and largely fruitless polemics of Catholic and Protestant theology, rigidly pitting word against sacrament, presence against memory, meal against sacrifice, altar against table, thanksgiving against propitiation. As things turn out, careful exegetical and historical attention to Scripture and tradition finds the Gospel subverting all the conventional wisdom of those hardened positions. Set in the key of the paschal mystery, and the trinitarian God of love revealed therein, the seemingly opposed terms fall into their own harmony, albeit sung to the strange (but therefore freeing) tune of the Good News.

The dissonance between the Gospel and conventional and other religious understandings of sacrifice has led some at times to question whether the pastoral and theological effort should not be directed at expunging the notion of sacrifice from Christian liturgy and preaching entirely. Conventional notions of sacrifice entail painful loss and self-denial in the pursuit of some desired benefit, some greater good. Applying the concept to life and worship inevitably casts Christianity in a negative light, a mirthless (and for modern psychology) unhealthy pattern of self-deprivation or co-dependent denigration. A generic religious view of sacrifice imagines ritual repeated either occasionally or regularly to sustain contact and favor with some divinity. Depending on the nature of the god(s) in question, this may entail expressing gratitude or propitiation or purification through offering the best (unblemished) from crops or herds or (in the case of human sacrifice) the people themselves (beautiful, innocent youth) to express adoration or to elicit reconciliation with perfect divinity. Nothing could be at greater odds with the whole point of the Letter to the Hebrews, the New Testament's most fully developed treatment of sacrifice as a *metaphor*

[20] See Powers, *Eucharistic Theology*, 26, 31.

expressing the mystery of what God has done, how God has saved us sinful humans, in Christ Jesus.

In Hebrews the imagery of the Jewish temple priestly sacrifice of an animal's blood becomes the *metaphor* for Jesus offering his life as a single, perpetual gesture sealing the new and eternal covenant, the perfect worship of God through the sanctification of humanity (see 9:11-14). We need make no further sacrifices in the sense of atoning for our sins, for Christ has done this once for all. The author of Hebrews, rather, exhorts believers to live with hope in the assurance of that heavenly vision, "provok[ing] one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another …" (10:24-25). The rhetoric of sacrifice, however, tends to defeat this sense of liturgically celebrated faith fostering solidarity and service by casting the work of Christ too much in terms of painful propitiatory ritual, perpetuating that sort of ritual institution as the foremost characteristic of Christian life and worship. It would seem, then, that the concept of sacrifice has too much going against it to contribute positively to the theology and practice of the Eucharist as a sharing in the presence of the risen Christ abiding in the church and, through the Spirit, active in its members.

In pursuing more adequate expressions of the mystery of faith, however, most contemporary theologians recognize the impossibility of eliminating sacrificial discourse from Christianity, not only due to its pervasive persistence but also, some argue, because the complex symbolism of the word "sacrifice" actually does serve well the Gospel's truth. In a lucid article synthesizing Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox contributions, pastoral theologian Scott O'Brien frames the meaning of sacrifice as it "pertains metaphorically to the life and death of Christ as celebrated in the liturgy." The sacrificial metaphor, not despite but because of its contentious history within Christianity and in relation to world religions, is helpful for getting at what Christian liturgy as celebration of the paschal mystery is all about, namely, "a more fulsome appreciation of God's just mercy and our dignity as partakers of the divine life."[21] Sacrifice, as a general religious phenomenon, is certainly about humans seeking union with the deity but, as ever for Christianity, a more fundamental question must govern the approach, namely, "What god exactly are people talking about?"

A biblically inspired way of framing sacrifice points not to a vengeful or jealous or despotic divinity but, rather, one whose chief characteristics are justice and mercy and whose chief posture towards humans is to draw them right into heavenly friendship, divine communion. The power of God lies in a communion of persons (Father, Son, and Spirit) who share an intimate love overflowing into creation. When extended to a humanity in the throes of injustice and suffering, the hallmark of that love is "a terrible yet tender mercy"[22] given in Jesus' life unto death. The "costly love of friendship"[23] is the shape divine love takes in humanity. And so love, even from the side of God, knows a necessary pain in surrender if life-giving union is to be born and thrive freely with and among people. In the new covenant, "sacrifice" denotes both the divine-human relationship's need for ritual sustenance

[21] Scott O'Brien, "Partakers of the Divine Sacrifice; Liturgy and the Deification of the Christian Assembly," *Liturgical Ministry* 18 (Spring 2009): 69.

[22] Ibid., 76.

[23] Barbara E. Reid, "From Sacrifice to self-Surrender to Love," *Liturgical Ministry* 18 (Spring 2009): 86.

and the inevitable suffering the practice of love for and among mortal, sinful humans entails. The whole affair is shot through with paradox, and that paradox, of course, is climactically located at the cross. The Eucharistic liturgy functions as Christian sacrifice by providing both the ritual (in the lineage of the Jewish sacrificial covenant meal) connecting humans to the divine love offered in Christ and the effective symbol of the unthinkable cost of that love.

God's Glory in Jesus: Mutual Presence in a Fierce, Abiding Love

To think biblically of the Eucharist as sacrifice, keeping word and sacrament together at one table, would normally conjure the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), with their drawing on the Sinai covenant. However, to meditate even more deeply on the mystery of the reality present in the sacramental celebration we do better to turn to John, whose treatment of Jesus' passion and death keep the paradox of salvation at a provocative pitch by proclaiming this human disaster the defining moment of God's glory. In John's Gospel the mission of Jesus, the meaning and purpose of his words and actions, are entirely oriented to his "hour" (see 2:4; 12:27: 13:1; 17:1) which, as Barbara Reid points out, John develops through a metaphor significantly different from sacrifice or atonement: giving birth to new life.

> There is a unique detail in the crucifixion scene in the Fourth Gospel that brings this theme [of birthing new life] to a climax. After Jesus has died a soldier thrusts a lance through Jesus' side, to assure that he is dead. Blood and water come forth (19:34), the same two liquids that accompany the birthing process. The language of birthing is prominent throughout the whole gospel, culminating with this image of Jesus' death as a birth to new life. The theme is first sounded in the prologue which speaks about those who believe as being born of God (1:12-13). Then, when dialoguing with Nicodemus, Jesus talks about the necessity of being born again/from above (3:3). At the Feast of Dedication (7:38) he speaks about 'rivers of living water' that flow from his own and the believer's heart (*koilia*, which is literally, 'womb'), foreshadowing John 19:34. At his final meal with his disciples, Jesus likens the pain of his passion to the labor pangs of a woman giving birth (16:21-22). All these texts point forward to John 19:34, where the birth to new life that was begun with Jesus' earthly mission comes to completion in his death.[24]

Note that in John's account of the supper Jesus uses a metaphor for pain (childbirth), indicating the suffering entailed in his death. Thus, the self-surrendering, pain-enduring dimension associated conventionally with sacrifice is not absent in Jesus' final words during the meal. The key, however, is the end for which such selfless endurance of pain is freely undertaken. In the Johannine metaphor it is to give life: But what life? The very life of God made possible for believers through their mutual abiding in Jesus, the Son (see 15:4). To elucidate so great a mystery Jesus, in John's Gospel, needs five chapters of discourse, making it quite a different presentation of the Last Supper than found in the Synoptic Gospels. As is true for all encounters with difference or otherness, however, John's unique rendition brings

[24] Ibid. Reid notes that such early Christian bishops as Ambrose of Milan and medieval mystics as Julian of Norwich capitalized on the birthing imagery in John to describe Christ as the virgin or mother giving birth to us believers.

a whole level of awareness and, thus, revelation of the truth, that otherwise might be lost on us.

The Last Supper account in John contrasts with those in Matthew, Mark, and Luke due to not only its extensive length—several chapters as opposed to a couple dozen verses or less—but also the complete absence of Jesus' words and gestures over bread and wine at the table (traditionally called the "institution narrative"). What modern scripture scholars have made of such a glaring omission in this gospel has proven a function of their biases concerning the meaning and even appropriateness of sacramental rites in the life of the church. Opinions have ranged from seeing the Fourth Gospel as purposely and polemically anti-sacramental to concertedly emphasizing and promoting the sacraments, with the German Lutheran scholars Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) and Oscar Cullmann (1902-99) serving as early champions of the respective extremes.

Taking up the decades-long debate over Johannine sacramentalism, Sulpician Father Raymond Brown (†1998) approached the question of the sacraments' function in the saving union of Christ and the believer in a profitably broader fashion. For Brown the key to properly recognizing the sacramental symbolism in John is the evangelist's "general insight that the life-giving power of Jesus was effective through the material symbols employed in the deeds and discourse of the public ministry."[25] The sacraments, *per se*, are only a present reality for John's community, as they live in the time after Jesus' ascent to the Father. To represent the sacraments explicitly in the literary genre of a gospel would be anachronistic. Nor should scholars seek their contemporary concern for precise accounts and theologies (including institution narratives for baptism and Eucharist) in the thought of early Christians. Indeed, the imprecise outlook on the sacraments in John fits that gospel's pattern of having the deeper meaning of things only understood later.

It is in this sense of a "deeper secondary meaning intelligible to the Christian after the Resurrection" that Brown finds a real, and not merely "peripheral," sacramental interest in the Gospel of John.[26] John's readers are able to grasp the further sacramental aspect when Jesus employs apposite symbolism (most notably water and spirit in 3:5 and bread from heaven/his flesh and blood as true food and drink in 6:51-58), whereas the people in the story with Jesus could only be expected to hear the primary meaning. British Methodist C. K. Barrett likewise insists on the futility of seeking any explicit or developed reference to the sacraments in John, arguing that one must look not to hierarchical or Hellenistic-mystery influences but within the gospel itself to explain John's sense of the church's sacramentalism. While the people in John's stories grapple with the symbolism in Jesus' teaching, only those imbued with the gift of faith in the glorified Son hear in those words the meaning of the sacraments as their personal knowledge of and "ontological" relation with God (that is, on the intimate level of their very being).[27] Barrett thereby concludes that there is "no sacrament without the word, no benefit in the sacrament without faith, and nothing at all apart from the descent and ascent of the Son of man."[28]

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[25] Raymond E. Brown, *New Testament Essays* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1965), 52.

[26] Ibid., 95. See also, Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), cxiv.

[27] C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 80, 89.

[28] Ibid., 97.

Turning to John's account of the Last Supper we find Jesus disclosing the ontological meaning of his passion as the glory of the faithful Son returning to the loving Father, who will give their abiding Spirit to Jesus' friends as a share in such great love unto death. Dominating John's account is not the symbolism of the supper table but, rather, this *night* (see 13:30) as the turning point of Jesus' entire mission, the final *hour* disclosing who the Son, and therefore *God*, is a communion of abiding love offered for humans to share in mutual, humbling, but thereby life-giving service. This divine-human sharing, however, becomes possible for us only by Jesus' passing through the night, the time when the "world" does what it does only too well, which is, tragically, its worst. Enduring the sort of injustice, inhuman violence, and satanic judgment (altogether, *sin*) so widely inflicted on and among humanity—especially the powerless and poor, and too often in the name of God—is Jesus' way to the Father, his ascent. Divine glory paradoxically unfolds in the very situation people (in Jesus' day, whether Jew or gentile) would consider most utterly godless, death by crucifixion. It is this meaning of such magnitude that John has Jesus convey in the literary form of a final (farewell) testament, rather than, as in the Synoptic Gospels, recounting the cultic tradition of Jesus' words and actions over the bread and cup. Both the cultic and the testamentary traditions, Xavier Léon-Dufour argues, are indispensible for the church. The former provides the symbolic means for the ascended Christ Jesus to remain present to his followers. This is what St. Augustine and theologians thereafter called the *sacramentum*, that is, the symbolic rite itself. In John, on the other hand, the testamentary tradition discloses the *res sacramenti*, that is, the life or ultimate goal the rite signifies. "The 'sacrament' has value only because of the 'thing' [*res*], that is, that which it signifies, namely, Jesus Christ and the love in the Church … since the ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is to intensify in this world that fraternal love which is divine in its origin."[29]

Indeed, John seems to take for granted that once he opens the passage by mentioning Passover, "hour," and "the end" (13:1-2) his readers know that the setting is the Last Supper (with the taking, blessing, and sharing of bread and cup that entailed). Verse 3 has the mere dependent clause, "And during supper," before describing at length Jesus' interior thoughts in rising from the table to wash his disciples' feet. That prophetic symbolic gesture discloses the attitude with which the disciples are to share in this special meal at table with Jesus, an attitude not of superior, lorded privilege but of ready, mutual self-giving love. And so Jesus concludes the gesture by giving the new commandment: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (13:34). This is how people know—in mind, body, and spirit—their communion with Jesus, know their discipleship, know themselves now as the Lord's "friends" (15:14) at table, the ones graced with the privilege of carrying on his last will and testament.

Jesus' farewell discourse in John is a stellar example of testament, a literary genre occurring some forty times in the Bible and Jewish apocryphal literature. The basic testamentary form entails a man near death calling together his immediate relatives, the leaders, or even the entire people, characteristically calling them "my children," as does Jesus in John 13:33. The testator bids them farewell in a lengthy exhortation reviewing God's faithfulness to them with him, presenting his life as exemplary of they now must carry on, especially in communal peace and harmony: "I am giving you these commands so that you

[29] Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The witness of the New Testament*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 95, 251.

may love one another" (15:17). Further testamentary features prominent in John 14-17 include prophetic prediction—"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also" (15:20); the designation of a successor—"the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name" (14:25); and prayers of intercession to God on the heirs' behalf—"Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me … protect them from the evil one" (17:11, 15). In addition, the final gathering of his "children" with Jesus is a meal, a relatively frequent motif of the testamentary genre:

> From the viewpoint of the testator the meal, when it occurs, does not simply serve as a framework for his farewells; it *is* this farewell in action; sometimes it has a cultic context. From the viewpoint of the heirs, the meal is a sign of communication with the testator (who communicates God's favor) and among the heirs themselves (because of their communion with the testator).[30]

Unique to Jesus' testamentary meal is the nature of such communion, namely, an abiding share in the very life of God as a mutual indwelling of powerful love in practice, the total abandon of Father in Son and, through the Spirit, of these divine persons in Jesus' beloved friends. In this resides the glory of God (see 17:22), pointing to the very heart of the paschal mystery, as John conveys it.

Jesus gives his farewell testament at the onset of "his hour … to depart from this world and go to the Father" (13:1). The glory of which he speaks in his departing meal is of a piece with his crucifixion, which paradoxically is exaltation, not humiliation. The cross begins Jesus' ascent to the Father and, with that, his saving Lordship, manifesting his power to give eternal life to all who believe, to all who see "the only true God" (17:3) in this Jesus who finishes the loving work the Father sent him to do (see 17:4). The community, in turn, glorifies God (Father and Son) by living in the Spirit Jesus gives over (19:30) at his death, with the water and blood flowing from his pierced side signifying baptism and Eucharist as the life-giving sacraments whereby the Spirit comes to abide in his friends.[31] The Spirit, the water, and blood all "testify" (1 Jn 5:7) to the Christ Jesus from whose flesh they flow, making them the source of the "presence of the absent one."[32]

Accustomed as we contemporary Christians are to associating the sacrament primarily with bread and body, we might puzzle over how in John blood signals Eucharist. But this circles us back to the sixth chapter's discourse on the bread of life, "a key for the interpretation of the fourth gospel as a whole, since it has to do with the mystery of the Lord's presence."[33] As with the farewell dinner, the timing of this discourse is also just before Passover (see 6:4), with Jesus using the same terminology of life-giving presence as in his testamentary meal: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life … [they] abide in me, and I in them" (6:56). And so the mystical, symbolic movement back and forth in John (in contrast to the straightforward institution narratives we moderns would

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[30] Ibid., 92.

[31] See Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 396, 161. Recall that even Bultmann recognizes the water and the blood as symbols of the two sacraments, while nonetheless denying the verse's authenticity to the Fourth Gospel.

[32] Francis J. Moloney, "Johannine Theology," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, R. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1426.

[33] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 252.

prefer) is at play, with all moving toward Jesus' death (on Passover) as exaltation. The mystery of his exaltation as including, rather than following, his death likewise plays out between the farewell dinner discourse, the crucifixion scene, and the resurrection appearances. Most notable for our purposes is Jesus' promise of abiding presence through the Holy Spirit in the supper testament, delivering the Spirit (along with the sacraments) on the cross, and then his breathing the Holy Spirit into them on Easter Sunday night (see 20:22). The latter explicitly sets in motion the time of the church, life in the present era that nonetheless finds its source and meaning in the concrete life of Jesus of Nazareth. The ascended Jesus is experienced as alive and active through the Spirit abiding in the community, in those who have been born of water and Spirit (3:5) and abide in him through sharing in "true food" and "true drink" (6:55), the effective symbols of his life-giving body and blood.[34]

This mystery as *our* reality is what the church celebrates, shares, experiences, knows every Sunday, every Lord's Day, the primordial Christian feast effectively conveying the life-giving power of the crucified and risen Jesus to his friends through word and sacrament. But the Christian community, as we saw in chapter two, dwells more deeply on this mystery through the annual Easter Season, the fifty days spanning from Easter to Pentecost. This the church does not so as to reenact Jesus' death, resurrection, and gift of the Spirit as so many separate dramatic events but rather, following Johannine theology, as one continuous ascent glorifying God through the sanctification of his friends "in truth" (17:19).[35] Jesus testifies to the Father in his farewell discourse, "your word is truth" (17:16); it is that word which unfolds the content of the paschal mystery. Through the Easter Season the church's lectionary cycle, in all three years, has as its gospel reading on the Second Sunday John's account of Jesus' Easter evening appearance and breathing of the Holy Spirit on the disciples (20:19-31). Later, on the Fifth through Seventh Sundays of Easter, the Gospel is taken from Jesus' Last Supper discourse, a total of nine pericopes (over the three year cycle) selected from John 13 through 17. The assembled faithful on those Sundays do not find themselves asking why they are hearing *about* the Last Supper when it is already Easter time (as if the liturgical year were a chronological reenactment of the Jesus story). On the contrary, the successive Sundays of Easter are the time for being immersed in Jesus' Passover-ascent to God as *our* mystery, as our abiding in the Spirit who enables us to remain in Jesus, to bear fruit to God's glory, to love as friends in the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. Such reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist during the Easter Season follows in the church's ancient tradition of *mystagogy*,[36] preaching directed to the recently initiated (while beneficial to all) on the sacred mysteries revealed in the sacrament as our communion, a "share" (Jn 13:8), in the ascended Lord. Hearing selections from the Last Discourse each year in Eastertide gives us the opportunity to appreciate ever more deeply what we do ritually in every Eucharist we celebrate, week in and week out throughout the year.

[34] See ibid., 270.

[35] See Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 417-21.

[36] See Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), xviii, 125, 229, 295.

Sacramental Rite: Christ's Presence in Remembrance

The testamentary tradition in John's Gospel treats the Last Supper in the genre of a farewell meal wherein Jesus' parting words to his disciples disclose the profound meaning of the meal in relation to his death-exaltation. John's account reveals the ultimate purpose (later in Latin, the *res*, the "thing") of the symbolism at the table to be a real participation in the love of God that is a self-giving love for and among humans. That participation, however, like all group sharing and communication, can take place only through the bodily activity of symbols, of words and gestures, and these in a stylized, liturgical fashion whose repetition connects generations of followers to the Lord's promised presence in the command, "Do this in memory of me." With those words (see 1 Cor 11:24; Lk 22:19), along with Jesus' proclamation over the bread and cup (in Mk 14:22-25; Mt 26:26-29; Lk 22:17-20; 1 Cor 11:24-25), we may feel like we are on more familiar Eucharistic ground. Indeed, Jesus' words concerning the bread and cup, accompanying his actions of taking, blessing, breaking (the bread), and sharing, comprise the shape and content of the earliest believers' liturgical (cultic, sacramental) tradition. The power in the cultic dimension of the Eucharist resides in the words and gestures, the entire ritual complex, to actualize an encounter with the crucified and risen Lord, whose identity is conveyed through the words of prayer and whose presence is affected by his promised, abiding Spirit.

Many Christians, however, since the Reformation period in the West, and all the more in the modern spread of biblical fundamentalism around the globe, have questioned and even rejected what to them seems an excessively complex rite in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglo-Catholic traditions. The problem focuses on the lengthy Eucharistic Prayer (or anaphora) that the presiding minister proclaims over the bread and wine. While the content of this form of prayer is suffused with biblical referents, including in most cases the chanting of the "Holy, holy" based on Isaiah 6:3, it nonetheless is not a word-for-word proclamation from the Bible. The exception would be what widely is called the "Institution Narrative," which midway into the prayer changes its genre from an address to God (extolling God's work in creation and history) to a rehearsal of the Last Supper account of Jesus' words and actions with the bread and wine. The latter amounts to what many Protestants came to consider permissible, namely, a short table service for which the words are a direct reading from a gospel account of Jesus' words and gestures at the supper as the "biblical warrant" for the cultic action. The long eucharistic prayers and symbolic gestures in the "liturgical churches," they argue, abet the clericalism, magical superstition, and idolatry that cripple the proper vocations of the baptized, diverting them from genuine faith in the biblical God of Jesus. There is historical evidence to support some of that criticism. In fact, the whole impetus and success of the modern Liturgical Movement,[37] with the reform and renewal of the rites in Roman Catholicism and other "mainstream" Protestant churches, resides in the historical, biblical, and theological work of scholars being applied practically in the revised liturgical books and rites. The effort has been to retrieve and follow sound, ancient tradition in ways that enable the active participation of believers in contemporary contexts. Those reforms over the past several decades have nonetheless met resistance and even backlash from the other end of the spectrum, namely, ritual conservatives among Catholics (both Roman and Anglo) infuriated by the loss of obscure language and arcane symbolic gestures

[37] See above, ms pp. 7-8.

that they experienced as mystical, transcendent ritual singularly appropriate to the realm of the sacred.

The nub of the Eucharistic liturgical reform comes down to question of how the early church actually obeyed the Lord's command: "Do this." The command refers to the entire liturgical action.[38] Tantalizing, and pastorally beneficial, scholarly work has included the investigation of how the basic biblical sketch of Jesus taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing came by the fourth century to entail quite complex prayers and rituals all across the Christian churches. It is, indeed, only as late as the fourth century that we have complete, reliably dated texts of extensive Eucharistic prayers, homilies, and catechetical instructions on the liturgy and sacraments. One dominant misguided approach to this challenge has been the (anthropologically predictable) desire to find a pure line of practice tracing back to Jesus' words and actions or, put another way, a universal form of Eucharistic practice in the early church to which all the current rites should conform. Things are not that simple.[39] Taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing do constitute the basic elements of the cultic tradition, as found in not only the New Testament but also the extremely early (Syrian, perhaps Palestinian) church order, the *Didache*, and the mid-second century *Apologia* of Justin, martyred in Rome. Still, the exact content and order of those elements of Eucharistic celebrations varied from the start, as would only be expected of oral, house-based, local traditions.

The blessing component of the ritual is what I would argue is most important yet haplessly lost on the biblical fundamentalists in their rejection of robust Eucharistic liturgy. The New Testament accounts all mention the blessing as part of what Jesus does *prior* to his words of command, "Take this . . . eat . . . drink . . . do this in memory of me." Jesus was a Jew celebrating that meal in the company of his disciples, fellow Jews. We do have solid historical knowledge of what "blessed" would have meant in such a meal context. The historical evidence supports the Jewish forms of blessing as crucial sources in the development of the liturgical Eucharistic traditions—in ritual words, symbols, and gestures.

Whether the Last Supper was a Passover Seder (as in the Synoptic Gospels) or a festive meal celebrated a day before Passover (the scenario in John), the basic type of ritual entailed would have been the same, namely, the communion sacrifice or peace offering. Such meals entailed multiple blessing prayers, including one with bread and up to several over cups of wine. Liturgical historians caution us that the earliest textual evidence for Jewish blessing prayers at table is found in the second-century C.E. rabbinic collection called the Mishnah.[40] That book, along with the Hebrew Bible and literature from the period between the Old and New Testaments, nonetheless provide the bases for outlining what the prayer pattern would have been at the Last Supper and help explain the shape Eucharistic rituals took in the earliest Christian generations. The Mishnah instructs that a *berakah* (a blessing of God) was to be said before anything was consumed, and it provides short *berakoth* (plural for *berakah*)

[38] See Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 169-70.

[39] See Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52-53, 97.

[40] Here I follow the brilliant critical summary in Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 43-46.

to be said for specific items. If three or more were gathered at table, then one was to say the blessing on behalf of all. While it is doubtful that formally set wordings of blessings for wine and food existed prior to the second century C.E., blessings nonetheless were surely said. In addition, while the Mishnah does not provide textual content, it does indicate a well-established pattern of three *berakot* at meal's end, for which the basic substance can safely be assumed corresponds to what eventually became the formal closing grace, the *Birkat ha-mazon*.

The purpose of *berakah* is to praise God for God's favor (*hesed*, grace) toward the people, with the most basic expression including a dependent clause describing what God had graciously done (specifically or in general). A *berakah*, nonetheless, could be more complex. The *anamnesis* (remembrance) could expand to a full narrative of God's works as the basis for asking God to continue to be so gracious, with the supplication leading back to praise in the form of a closing doxology (praise of God). Similar in pattern—remembrance, supplication, doxology—was another type of praise to God, the *hodayah*, a thanksgiving in the form of acknowledging how God has been gracious that later was rendered *homologeo* or *eucharisteo* in Greek. The tripartite combination of those forms of praise, as found in the later *Birkat ha-mazon*, is found in the second-century B.C.E. *Book of Jubilees*, wherein Abraham delivers a grace comprised of: "a blessing of God for creation and the gift of food; thanksgiving for the long life granted to Abraham; and a supplication for God's mercy and peace."[41] Thus, while we have no detailed textual content of the Jewish blessing-prayers at meals in Jesus' lifetime, we have ample indication of the pattern that the blessings with food and cups took, including an extended grace at meal's end. For the early church, then, to "do this" in memory of Jesus was to enact a form of communion sacrifice, taking gifts of food and drink in blessing of God, sharing them in fellowship as the people graced by God's faithfulness, and anticipating God's continued favor and deliverance of Israel.

Given the flexibility of wording and content of Jewish blessing prayers in that period, we can understand how Jesus at table could not only highlight or integrate certain aspects of the Jewish remembrance heritage but also even do something utterly new within it. The person presiding over the grace chose the material to be remembered, that is, what gracious deeds and beneficial actions those at table were calling to mind in blessing, which would of course be specific to festival days. The festive framework for the Last Supper is Passover (whether the Seder proper, as in the Synoptic Gospels, or the evening before, as in John).[42] We could well expect, then, that the blessings beginning, during, and at meal's end included narrative remembrance (anamnesis) of the exodus, with supplications that God continue to remember Jerusalem, the deliverance of Israel, and the promised Messiah (as is prayed at the end of Passover meals to this very day). What Jesus uniquely did was to see "the meal as the appropriate way of drawing the symbolism of Passover, and all that it meant in terms of hope as well as of history, on to himself and his approaching fate.[43]

In Paul and Luke's accounts of the Last Supper Jesus words his command after blessing and sharing the bread and cup—"Do this in remembrance [*eis anamnesin*] of me" (1 Cor

[41] Ibid., 45.

[42] See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 555-59.

[43] Ibid., 556.

11:24; Lk 22:19)—in parallel fashion to YHWH's command in Exodus: "This day shall be a day of remembrance [*lezik karôn*] for you. You shall celebrate it … " (12:14).[44] Scholarly analyses of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Jewish Bible), the Mishnah, and other sources point to the Greek word for remembrance (*anamnesis*) in New Testament texts being rooted in the Hebrew term *zikkaron*, a ritual act of commemoration.[45] The words commanding remembrance included the entire cultic action that came before, where further similarities in ritual exist between the two texts. In each, the meal takes place on the eve of the crucial divine act of deliverance (the exodus, Jesus' death), with the symbols shared in blessing referring not only to that immediate future event but also, by virtue of the command of repetition, to an extended future. The entire ritual action, then, is not only cultic but also prophetic in character, first insofar as the symbolic gestures put in motion the historical events that God immediately brings about the next day (the escape from slavery, Jesus' crucifixion). This means, however, that subsequent generations in celebrating the communion sacrifice do not somehow reenact or repeat the singular historical event. Their remembrance, rather, recounts the prophetic pre-figuration of that event, whose symbols were "pregnant with the future"[46] of those generations' celebrations, of their lives as a people together in communion with this God, and of the still awaited fulfillment of the reign of God the meal anticipates.

The continuity between the structures of the meal rituals depicted in Exodus and the Last Supper accounts bespeak the fundamental Christian belief in the single God whose purpose in creation and redemption is the thriving of people in covenant with him. The radical difference, nonetheless, lies in the prepositional object added to the end of the Christian anamnesis: remembrance is kept "of me," that is, of Jesus. To "proclaim the Lord's death" by eating this bread and drinking the cup (1 Cor 11:26) is to be drawn into Jesus himself, the entire life and person who gave fully of himself in that final act.

> The symbols ordering Israel's life and hope were redrawn, focusing now upon Jesus himself. The final meal which he celebrated with his followers was not, in that sense, free-standing. It gained its significance from his own entire life and agenda, and from the events which, he knew, would shortly come to pass. It was Jesus' chosen way of investing those imminent events with the significance he believed they would carry.[47]

In the Passover context of that meal Jesus was identifying in the bread and cup himself not only as known in his words and deeds, but those as carrying forward the gifts of creation and God's unfailing covenant-love to Israel and, through them, to all nations. In the Semitic world bread signifies food as needed by humans to live. Moreover, "in the context of the Passover, bread suggests the good will of Yahweh toward his special people and therefore his constant presence."[48] The cup, containing the "fruit of the vine," signifies the Creator's gifts through the productive land but, when raised as in a toast (blessing), it also symbolizes shared love and friendship. In the context of the festive meal it functions as a sacrifice of

[44] See Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 110.

[45] See David Gregg, *Anamnesis in the Eucharist*, Grove Liturgical Study 5 (Brambcote Notts: Grove Books, 1976), 22.

[46] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 111.

[47] N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 558.

[48] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread*, 58.

thanksgiving, a brimming cup of salvation, as in the psalms, celebrating "communion with the God of the covenant, with him who is himself said to be the 'cup' that is Israel's lot."[49]

Done now as memorial (*anamnesis*) of *Jesus*, the taking, blessing, and sharing of bread and cup is the ritual means of the absent (risen, ascended) Christ's presence as life-sustenance, life itself, as life in the new covenant, empowering participants for a shared love in service "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Alien to dualistic philosophies dividing body and soul, the Semitic heritage of ritual remembrance engages participants integrally, such that memory poses not the problem of how people can connect to a past event but, rather, the challenge of how to live the reality the commemoration actualizes among them.

Eucharistic Prayer: Transformative Power in Word and Spirit

During the first several centuries of the common era Christianity developed alongside the rabbinic forms of Judaism that were likewise emerging in the wake of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 C.E.[50] The Syrian church-order collection called the *Didache*, conservatively dated to the early second century but now largely agreed as coming from the first, contains instruction for celebrating the Eucharist that correspond to the three steps of the supper in Luke: "He took a cup. … He took bread. … After supper."[51] This is, as we saw above, the Jewish cultic prayer pattern for a festive meal or communion sacrifice in this period. Moreover, the *Didache*'s prayer texts for each of those ritual steps comprise brief *berakoth* for the first two and then for the last, a lengthy narrative *berakah* replete with remembrance (of what God has done in Jesus), supplication (for the safety, unity, and holiness of the church and the coming of the kingdom), and doxological praise. The blessings thank God for the gifts of creation and for the "holy vine of David," that is, for Israel, from which follow the remembrance of Jesus, the supplication for the present church, and the eschatological invocation of the coming kingdom. The prayer closes with *Maranatha*, an Aramaic term that, depending on its inflection, can mean either "The Lord has come," or "Come, Lord!"[52] Thus, the prayer bespeaks the already-not yet reality the church experienced, sharing in the life of the Messiah yet, in the Eucharist, celebrating also the anticipation of the full coming of God's reign in him.

Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff explain the implications of the fact that the *Didache*, belongs to a non-Jewish environment:

> The text reveals the existence of Christian communities that were not Jewish in origin and yet were thoroughly rooted in Jewish tradition. They regard themselves as those who have come to Israel through God's grace, a community who take nothing away from Israel and inherit nothing. The 'holy vine of David' has been revealed to the community through Jesus (9:2). … As we already saw when we discussed the

[49] Ibid., 59. Léon-Dufour cites Psalms 23:5; 16:5; and 116:13.

[50] See Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?: Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 75-85, 102.

[51] Robert Cabié, *The Eucharist*, The Church at Prayer, ed. A. G. Martimort, trans. Matthew O'Connell, vol. 2 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1986), 25. Translation of the full text of *Didache*, nos 9 and 10, the Eucharistic material, may be found at pp. 23-24. On the dating of the *Didache*, as well s another translation, see Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 25-27, 161-71.

[52] See Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 197-98.

> covenant theology of the early Christian Eucharist,[53] the Gentile church at this time was not seen to be separated from Israel in any negative sense. It has received honorary membership … Jesus Messiah has shown it the way to the God of Israel. Israel's ancient hope for the healing of the community of nations is expressed again here.[54]

Thus, the document is a treasure in its conveying both how some early Christians followed Jesus' command, "Do this in memory of me," and how even as the mission spread quickly among gentiles, the Jewish character of both the prayer and the Messianic reign of God could not be dispensed with, even if tensions between the nascent church and emergent rabbinic Judaism had already begun to flare up.

The other early voice we have for the Eucharist is Justin, a Palestinian from a Greek pagan family who eventually converted to Christianity and became a prolific writer and defender of Christianity for some thirty years before his martyrdom in Rome in 165. Only two of his writings survive, one of which, found in fragments, is the oldest known Christian apology (or defense) against Judaism, a mid-second century witness to what would gradually become a "supersessionist"[55] understanding of the church in relation to Judaism. Shortly before composing that tract, however, Justin wrote to the emperor his *First Apology*, defending the reasonableness of Christianity, which includes descriptions of baptism and the Eucharist. Justin speaks of the assembly of the church, one person presiding, a lector proclaiming readings from the apostles and prophets, the president exhorting all to imitate what they have heard, and then all the faithful standing to offer prayers. He continues:

> When the prayers have concluded, we greet one another with a kiss. Then bread and a cup containing water and wine are brought to him who presides over the assembly. He takes these and then gives praise and glory to the Father of all things through the name of his Son and of the Holy Spirit. He offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at his hands. When the presider has concluded these prayers and the thanksgiving, all present express their consent by saying "Amen." In Hebrew this word means "so be it." And after the presider and all the people have given their consent, those whom we call deacons give to each of those present a portion of the eucharistic bread and wine and water and take the same to those who are absent.[56]

Thus within a few Christian generations we have an account of the Eucharist that resonates with the features of Luke's Emmaus story: presider (in the story, Jesus), assembly (disciples in Luke), unfolding of the Scriptures, and the table ritual of taking, blessing, breaking, and sharing. Justin continues with a straightforward explanation of what the community believes in doing this:

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[53] Present author's note: See above, ms pp. 25-33.

[54] Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 65-66.

[55] "Supersessionism, from the Latin, *supersedere* (to sit upon, to preside over), is the theological claim that Christians have replaced the Jews as God's people because the Jews rejected Jesus … Judaism is obsolete, its covenant abrogated." Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?*, 10-11.

[56] In Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 67-68.

> We call this food the 'Eucharist.' No one is permitted to partake of it except those who believe that the things we teach are true and who have been washed in the bath for the forgiveness of sins and unto rebirth and who live as Christ directed. We do not receive these as if they were ordinary bread and ordinary drink, but just as Jesus our Savior was made of flesh through God's word and assumed flesh and blood for our salvation, so also the food over which the thanksgiving has been said becomes the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh, doing so to nourish and transform our own flesh and blood.[57]

As we saw earlier, here again is the ancient Mediterranean/Semitic holistic understanding of the human person in motion: The Eucharistic flesh and blood of Christ transforms the bodies of the baptized, empowering them to "live as Christ directed." This they do, Justin goes on to explain, by living in unity, offering mutual instruction, and helping the needy.

For all that wealth of information, Justin nonetheless leaves various aspects of the ritual vague,[58] not the least of which is the lengthy "prayers and thanksgiving" the president says over the bread and cup. Fragments of two Eastern anaphoras from the third-century exist. Only from the fourth century forward do we have complete extant Eucharistic prayers, which largely sustain the basic thanksgiving-petition structure of the long Jewish *berakoth*, recast in terms of Christ Jesus, while nonetheless demonstrating much variation in the details of their anamneses, supplications, and doxologies. The sacramental dimension of the Eucharistic action comes through an increasingly formalized anamnesis, "which expresses the 'today' of the mystery being commemorated: the bread and wine become sacraments of the self-offering of the dead and risen Christ."[59] Here again we find variety in this element, with the offering-in-remembrance often including not only commemoration of the saving acts of Jesus in the past but also an expectant reminder of the promised future coming of Christ. As for the supplication or petitioning of divine power, the part of the prayer called the *epiclesis*, ancient churches invoked in a few cases the Messiah or the Word, while others beseeched either the Son or the Father to send the Spirit to abide in the gifts and, in many cases, the assembled church sharing them.[60] By the end of this period throughout the churches (although not in the Roman Canon) the power the epiclesis invoked on gifts and people was that of the Holy Spirit, the divine agent of creation and bodily transformation.[61]

In analyzing the Eucharistic prayers in this period (the fourth to eighth centuries) we must keep in mind the Trinitarian and Christological controversies through which the church only gradually arrived at creedal consensuses in ecumenical councils. Even then, the decisions of the councils at Nicaea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon were called symbols and used as standards, rather than set formulas to be recited word for word in each local church's liturgy. The orthodox consensus about the persons and power of Father, Son, and

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[57] Ibid., 68.

[58] For Bradshaw's cautions, see *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 98-99.

[59] Cabié, *The Eucharist*, 35.

[60] See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 136-37.

[61] In his catechetical homilies the fourth-century Syrian bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia produced a masterly synthesis of orthodox teaching on the Holy Spirit 's role in creation, incarnation, resurrection, and sacraments. See Bruce T. Morrill, "The Many Bodies of Worship: Locating the Spirit's Work," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bruce T. Morrill (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 19-37.

Spirit, nonetheless, gradually found expression in the Eucharistic prayers of the churches embracing it. At the same time, the ritual environment in which local churches celebrated the rites necessarily shifted from large houses (as late as the third century) to basilicas, a style of public building used for administering justice, political assemblies, and other civic or social gatherings. The basic structure was a vast rectangular space with rows of interior columns supporting the roof and, often, a semicircular apse at one end, where was seated the presiding officer or judge. In the case of the church, the apse became the location of the presiding minister (bishop), altar table, and reading table (ambo), all facing the assembly. While much variety in details of design and decoration evolved markedly between East and West, the overall impact of an increasingly imperial-style space, vesture, and ritual gestures inevitably impacted how people experienced and understood the Eucharist.

The history going forward from the early church into subsequent periods up to modernity is, of course, complex and fraught with controversies, many divisive, as could only be the case given how central and powerful a ritual the Eucharist is in a social-cultural-political entity as wide reaching as Christianity. My purpose in this article, however, has been to focus on the primordial sources for the church's belief in and celebration of the real, abiding presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist so as to get at the purpose for the rite: its participants' transformation as members of Christ's body.