





## Abstract

“A SCHOOL OF CHARITY: THE FORMATIVE DIMENSION OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST  
FOR MINISTRY AND MISSION”

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Project under the direction of the Right Reverend J. Neil Alexander, dean of the School of  
Theology and professor of liturgy and theology.

This paper provides a theoretical and practical basis for teaching the meaning of holy eucharist in the parish. The approach is Anglican, inspired by the liturgical movement as expressed in the 1979 book of common prayer. It is premised on the eucharist as the center of parish life. The eucharist gives structure and substance to the individual and corporate lives of the parish in spiritual growth, mission, and ministry. Fundamental to this process is that the eucharist, while clearly instructional, is essentially sacramental and therefore more broadly formational. The weekly regularity and seasonal variation of the eucharist, particularly when engaged intentionally, form holiness of character. This occurs through the basic structural elements of gathering, word, presence, and vocation which have been received in the eucharistic tradition.

Superficially, this might look like a serial process where the parish gathers to hear the word of God in order to experience the presence of God so that they might be sent out to do the work of God. However, these elements are best understood as interdependent and overlapping rather than sequential. This interdependence is empowered by the similarly interrelated themes of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), memory (*anamnesis*), and hope (*eschatology*) which permeate the entire structure. Formation occurs through all these elements, in word and sacrament, engendering a trajectory which both deepens the spiritual life and informs the missional

purpose. This paper explores this process through relatively short teaching modules of variable complexity in order to reach a large constituency of ages from child to adult.

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A School of Charity:  
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for Ministry & Mission

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## Thesis

The foundational premise of this project is that the holy eucharist holds an essential place in the forming of disciples of Jesus Christ in the parish. The project is intentionally presented in various “modules” of varying complexity, which are designed to be used in various ways and modified as needed and as appropriate: as newsletter articles, sermons, for teaching in different contexts, for reflection on retreats, and in any number of other ways. Whether ordained or lay, each module opens the way to deeper reflection. What has been produced here, therefore, is a relatively concise and practical approach to the subject, which gives an overview based on insight gleaned from courses, teachers, colleagues, and readings over the course of the Advanced Degree Program. Its purpose is entirely parish based.

Implicit in the project and the process presented is that some ways of reflecting on this formation are more effective and more consonant with the spirit of the holy eucharist than others. Therefore, the method offered in this project is broadly thematic and structural rather than a detailed explanation of the specific meaning of symbols and signs. The overall impression is that the holy eucharist is considered less helpfully as a training manual and more profitably viewed as an endlessly capacious space into which one enters with the posture of receiving a gift.

This approach can make room for a broad pedagogy. By exploring broad and familiar themes, parishioners from a variety of ages, backgrounds, education levels, and life experiences can enter into reflection upon their own process of formation. Gratitude, memory, and hope are familiar to all walks of life, which is, no doubt, why they are a part of this received tradition, since they are part of our created nature. Those who come to

church from “non-liturgical” traditions can access these themes and see the holy eucharist not as anachronistic, sentimental, or needlessly repetitive, but as lively, provocative, and deeply formational.

Those more familiar with the holy eucharist and those who have been members of the church for some time can themselves be challenged in their own thinking. Today, we in the West tend to be shaped and formed by post-Enlightenment reason and modernist optimism with a tendency to approach the holy eucharist as a puzzle to be solved by acquiring more information rather than as an experience to be entered into whereby we are formed in holiness by God. The holy eucharist is more usefully approached as an art form rather than a prosaic statement. Instructed eucharists and annotated bulletins can be helpful but tend to play into our need to control the meaning of the holy eucharist. The premise here is that quite the opposite is intended. We come to the holy eucharist to be interrupted by God and to leave our need to control at the church door.

Formation, therefore, occurs by an intentional kind of surrender. It is not a mindless surrender but a faithful one, which trusts in God to open our eyes wider to our own journey and how that journey leads us into the world to bring the gospel message of love and healing. The holy eucharist permeates parish life. The eucharist brings its influence to bear in its pastoral life, educational life, missional life, and even its administrative life in the larger worldly context, which creates challenges to this influence. It places God at the center of it all because the holy eucharist is at the center of it all, the place where we participate in the life of the living God.

It is a dance. God is leading us by our hands and our hearts. God guides us through the overlapping and interconnected steps of gathering, word, presence, and

vocation, inspired by our gratitude, our remembrance, and our hope. To use the image offered in this project, the holy eucharist forms us as the very body and breath of Christ, standing on the sure foundation of our acceptance of Christ's loving invitation into his life in baptism.

## Prelude

### The Paradox of the Holy Eucharist

The holy eucharist is deeply traditional, highly structured, and designed for repeated and regular participation. At the same time, it is critically formational for human beings in the context of a culture which is, in many ways, vastly different from and often hostile to the substance of that formation. Therefore, while the liturgy itself is changeable in very subtle ways, its purpose is to change those who participate in it in very substantial ways. It is both traditional and countercultural. It challenges norms. It encourages change, *metanoia*. This has been its character from the beginning.

The holy eucharist accomplishes this change through the participant's experience of thanksgiving (*eucharistia*), memory (*anamnesis*), and hope (*eschatology*), the “breath” of this “body.” These themes are expressed in the overlapping and interdependent structures of gathering, word, presence, and vocation. The ground upon which this body stands is baptism.

What follows seeks to reflect on the formation that occurs in this body, as well as the nature, purposes, and ends of that formation.

**Going to Church as Interruption**

*Who can ascend the hill of the Lord?*

*And who can stand in his holy place?*

Psalm 24, The Book of Common Prayer, p. 613

*Lyla, have you ever had the feeling you didn't want to go to church on Sunday morning?  
I know I have. I wonder why?*

“Many hands make light work.” The children’s eyes roll. They know these are no idle words. Their parents have something specific in mind. The children know it is a call to action. They have heard it before. It means they will have to put aside, for a time, what they are doing on their own and join in a common task. It may be the meal that needs to be prepared or, after the meal, the dishwashing. It may be the house itself, the common dwelling in need of cleaning and organizing by all those who live there. It may be a journey for which they must pack and prepare. It may be the time when the journey is over and the time to unpack has begun.

Worship is an interruption. It is also work. It is above all things a gift. We go along with our ordinary lives, and we are interrupted by God in all sorts of ways, sometimes with others and sometimes alone with our own reflections and memories. Most poignantly, God interrupts us in our brokenness. Here is where the work begins not initially our own but God’s, the God who seeks our healing and offers us our hope. It is God’s spirit that leads us in response. This may take the form of words or not. In whatever shape it takes, it is essentially prayer, which Miroslav Volf has called “an interior seeking for oneself and for the world to become God’s home. For God’s name to be hallowed, and for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Volf, *For the Life of the World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019) 133.

This “becoming God’s home,” the place where God abides, is part and parcel of the whole purpose of religious life.<sup>2</sup> This is what Volf calls the “flourishing life.” This is a life where we come to know that our joy is not of our own making but comes from outside of ourselves, from God. That joy finds its consummation in the world as we are enabled to reveal it in ourselves as God’s gift of love. This “flourishing” truth is something we often forget or perhaps have never come to realize fully. We must be interrupted so that we might have an opportunity to respond and be shaped by God in this truth. Worship, therefore, interrupts us so that we can return to the world better equipped to respond to it in love and loving service. We are formed, in worship, to know that “many hands make light work” and to know that as our deepest joy.

Perhaps in ages past, God was not such an interruption. The nineteenth century poet Mathew Arnold’s famous poem, “Dover Beach,” looked nostalgically and metaphorically to a time when “the Sea of Faith / Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore / Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.” It was a time, he imagines, when God seemed everywhere, to all people, in every circumstance. But now the world “hath neither joy, nor love, nor light / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain / And we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight / Where ignorant armies clash by night.”<sup>3</sup>

As in most poetry, metaphor works better. Any quick reading of history or any gloss over the Psalms will reveal that today’s ignorant violence is nothing new. We have

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<sup>2</sup> See also Rowan Williams, *Where God Happens: Discovering Christ in One Another* (Boston: New Seeds, 2012) 11-36.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach”, M.H. Abrams, ed, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2 (New York: Norton, 1962) 904.

always been in need of God's interruption. The more important point is in its *urgency*, especially as modernity has reduced religion's stature, at least institutionally, with the ubiquitous rise of secularism. It is a condition readily observed. Fewer people are in the pews and more folks make the choice of doing other things on Sunday morning rather than acceding to the interruption of worship.

### **Interrupting Idolatry**

It could be, as Sarah Coakley has written, that the "modern 'death of God' may turn out in retrospective to have been an absolutely necessary purgation of false gods, the prelude to a contemporary rebirth."<sup>4</sup> The West continues, in many ways, to look for meaning beyond the material, even if it appears more "spiritual, not religious." The question is not *whether* we are worshipping, but *what* we are worshipping.<sup>5</sup> What, in effect, are we *willing* to be interrupted or have our lives shaped by? Johann Baptiste Metz joins in the assertion of many other theologians that Western culture is shaped by the market forces around us, and it is to such forces that obedience is given above all things. We interpret our lives and, therefore, see our gods in terms of the *quid pro quo*, of "What's in it for me?" reducing everything to the value it brings to the enterprise of wealth and power.<sup>6</sup> Our greater idolatry in the West could also be the worship of choice

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay on the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 78.

<sup>5</sup> See Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse, *The Altars Where We Worship* (Louisville: John Knox, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, trans. David Smith, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980) 34-49.

itself, with its compelling tragedy of being bereft of the capacity to choose beyond our own passing tastes or whims.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most dangerous of idolatries today is what Miroslav Volf has called the “sacralization of cultural identity.” This “sacralization” has grimly blossomed today from its historic partisan roots, ethnic divisions, and a world-wide migrant crisis which, in practice, dehumanizes the “other” and can so easily “transmute what is in fact a murder into an act of piety.” Volf was born into the bitter partisan conflict of the former Yugoslavia, and his powerful response in *Exclusion and Embrace* both describes and foresees the growth of the “New Tribalism” on our planet expressed in both the xenophobia of immigrants and the sharp and unforgiving partisan divide in our country. That book and his subsequent books are a collective clarion call to return to the fundamental love of God shown fiercely and beautifully in the cross. How, he asks, can we interrupt exclusion and embrace reconciliation in a time of such enmity?

Both Volf and Metz present the interruption of God as far deeper than the Sunday morning choice of breakfast at home or the holy eucharist at church. The interruption of God is no less than the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, interpreted most supremely in the passion of our Lord. The passion interrupts our lives. The passion interrupts our sins. Metz calls this interruption the “dangerous memory” of Jesus Christ because it interrupts our standard operating procedure for now and for all time. The “dangerous memory” of Christ is the active interruption in our participation in the holy eucharist. The eucharist is not a magic show. We do not conjure up God in ritual words and acts. What happens begins in our willingness to be interrupted and through that

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<sup>7</sup> Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology the Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019) 20-21.

interruption to be shaped and formed in holiness. Holy eucharist is a place and a time where, in company, we do not lose who we are but become who we were always called to be, the loving people of God for the sake of the world.

### **Interrupted as the Family of God**

We gather at the holy eucharist as the family of God, and we sometimes find that children are the sublime experts in this experience. Eucharistic formation can be seen so easily in children. They understand so early. Some children might know that “many hands make light work” because they have been called in regularity and custom to both this truth and the task it presents them. They have been formed by its truth and by its action. They have seen its witness in action. This action is itself a place of truth, the truth of who they are invited to be and who, by grace, they are becoming.

Before the action, they were a family in name only. In eucharistic action, they become the meaning of family, a place of action in cooperative love, united and growing with a singularity of vision. The meal, home, and journey are simply places where “family happens.” They have learned this, time and time again. They have been formed by the truth of “many hands make light work.” The action is, in this way, a gift as well as a task. The action of the eucharist gives them something they cannot procure on their own, the ability to become part of a larger entity, unattainable alone.

This kind of communal activity is the foundation for the sacred project of reconciliation, of Volf’s *embrace*. His work has significance in the liturgy of the holy eucharist because of its focus on formation as an essential work of the liturgy. He resists the idea of using “top-down” grand schemes and narratives to solve the world’s problems and turns his focus to human beings as they live, breathe, and have their being.

I want to concentrate on social agents. Instead of reflecting on the kind of society we ought to create in order to accommodate individual or communal heterogeneity, I will explore what kind of selves we need to be in order to live in harmony with others ... the kind of social agent capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive.<sup>8</sup>

The holy eucharist is just such a place of formation, of being shaped into something larger than ourselves. This Sunday morning feast begins long before the service starts. It begins with a call. The call invites us from something to something, by something, and for something. It invites us from a cynical world into a different world of sign, symbol, word, and action, a world that provokes us to think and feel in different ways, giving us a kind of “balcony view” for the rest of our lives.<sup>9</sup> The host invites us into his dwelling to share his sustenance and his substance. In this feast, we meet the spirit of the living God. In all of this, we are formed in this space, Sunday after Sunday, and sometimes more frequently. Here we become the church, not for ourselves alone, but the church for the world. Here we learn to do something together that would be impossible to do alone without the power of Jesus in this feast of love.

This power is an interruption for the world, worship that never forgets its larger context in the world yet still makes it very clear that there is a holy task at hand. Worship is not just another friendly get-together. Worship should not obscure its holy purpose in the world. It is not a personal or mystical trance. It is a place where we begin again, nourished on the living God, being formed in that holy image for the sake of the world. It

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<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abington: Nashville, 1996) 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, Mass: Belnap Press of Harvard University, 1994) xi.

is a place where we can learn to live the truth of loving God and loving our neighbor and learn such truth to be the controlling principles of life itself.

**A Note on Primary Theology**  
*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*  
1 Samuel 3:10

In the tradition we have received, we understand worship as the primary means of participating in the life of God. All else is commentary, important commentary that often goes by the name of theology. The first order of theology is that which is directed *toward* God and not *about* God, making all worshippers theologians of the first order.<sup>10</sup>

Worshippers are not the objects of the liturgy and are not there for worship leaders, ordained or not, to serve them up a healthy dose of religion. Worshippers are, as participants, the subjects of the liturgy. We are all subjects of the living God. The gift of worship, especially worship in the holy eucharist, is to form us into *proper* subjects in holiness. Holiness can be cultivated by study, private prayer, serving in a food pantry for the homeless, or any number of ways. The liturgy is simply a place of intentional holiness that has a structure, developed out of a long and complex tradition and forming countless generations of ordinary Christians who have come in their search to participate in the life of God.

Aidan Kavanaugh has a wonderful personal image of such people in the person of “Mrs. Murphy.”<sup>11</sup> She is that faithful, ordinary worshipper who comes to church, joins in its life, and, simply because of her willing participation, exudes a *natural* depth of faith

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<sup>10</sup> Aidan Kavanaugh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: Pueblo, 1984) 3-4, 73-95; David W. Fagerberg, *Theologia Prima: What is Liturgical Theology?* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2004) 39-72.

<sup>11</sup> Fagerberg, 133-156.

that Kavanaugh calls “primary theology.” She speaks *to* God most of the time rather than speaking *about* God. That is worship.

### **A Note on Lyla**

Finally, at least one piece of what follows moves quite decidedly from secondary to primary theology. At the beginning of subsequent sections of the text are imaginary conversations with a nine-year-old girl named Lyla, a real person, from whom one can learn a great deal when practicing the art of primary theology together in the worship of the holy eucharist.

## Introduction

### The Tradition of the Holy Eucharist

*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you.*

*Do this in remembrance of me.*

1 Corinthians 11:23-24

*"Lyla, what do we do here on Sunday mornings? Why do you think we do this?"*

The holy eucharist is the name given to the regular and usual service of worship on Sundays in the Episcopal Church, when we use the 1979 book of common prayer. This prayer book says that it is *this* service that is the "principle act of worship on the Lord's Day."<sup>12</sup>

The earliest Christians worshipped this form and have continued to worship through the centuries on Sunday, the day they associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Over the centuries, the specific sequence of actions has changed and evolved, as it first emerged from its earliest manifestation as an ancient Jewish practice in the context of classical Greek and Roman culture. However, from even the earliest centuries, an overall pattern can be described, a sacramental pattern that involves symbols and participation in ritual actions that express what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

The liturgy, with its symbols and symbolic action, speaks of a larger world of God and God's relationship with human beings, where words are joined by action to say more than words alone can say. In this way the worshippers, both individually and corporately,

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<sup>12</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation) 13.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Bradshaw and Maxwell Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2012) 1-24.

can experience more of the meaning of what they claim to believe. In this way the holy eucharist involves our entire selves, not only our minds, but our whole bodies.

In the holy eucharist, we are invited to gather with others to intentionally present ourselves before God, whom we see in Jesus Christ. We gather as the baptized to listen and respond and, finally, to be sent out to carry on the work of Christ's love in our lives and in the world.

### **The Furniture**

*One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek;  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life;  
to behold the fair beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.*

Psalm 27, The Book of Common Prayer, p. 617

*“Lyla, when you come into church what kinds of things do you see? Who do you see and what do you see them doing? Do you ever wonder why we do things the way we do them?”*

Like any room, a church has certain kinds of furniture. Furnishings say something about who lives in a home and how they live. In a room where the holy eucharist is celebrated, two pieces of furniture stand out: the baptismal font and the altar. In many churches they stand opposite one another, with the congregational seating in between and the font at the entrance, where we can see the altar at the other end. The font and the altar represent a journey of entering the life of God, being nurtured in that journey, then being sent out to continue that journey in the world.<sup>14</sup>

Another piece of furniture is a stand, or *ambo*, often placed to the side of the altar. Here the word is read and often preached (though a preacher might also use a *pulpit*,

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist: The Pascal Mystery in People, Word, and Sacrament* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012) 105-110.

which serves the same function). The important thing is that wherever it is placed, what is read or said from it is heard clearly.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, since this is a room where people will gather, there must be places for them to locate themselves as a gathering, to sit, stand, or move to and from. Where these arrangements are made is not as important as the need for people to hear and participate in relation to the ambo and altar and, at the time of baptism, the font. Those who lead services will also need to have a similar place where they can conveniently perform their various functions. More furniture can be found in the church, some of it very important, but these are the essential pieces.

In many ways, the service of holy eucharist appears to be a play or drama. Dramatic action occurs, a story is told, and a script is followed. In one important respect, it is not. The gathered people are not the audience, God is. Those leading the service, whether ordained clergy or not, do have a special role to play, largely the role of incorporating people into the service rather than performing for them. The priest does this by presiding or leading. This, in part, is the unifying gift he or she has been chosen to exercise: to orchestrate, preach, and preside over the gathered assembly. Likewise, deacons exercise their gifts in prayer and proclamations. Lay ministers do the same, whether by reading, praying, or singing.<sup>16</sup>

The holy eucharist has two intimately related parts: the liturgy of the word and the holy communion. In the liturgy of the word, the people gather to listen to the word read and preached and respond in prayer, confession, and the sharing of the peace. In the holy

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 105-110.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 98-101

communion, the people turn to the altar and join in the eucharistic prayer over bread and wine to accept the invitation to receive Christ's renewing presence.

It may be tempting to think of the first part as instructional and the second part as spiritual, but it is better to think of them both as *sacramental*. Reducing the liturgy of the word to something like a lecture tempts us to see God as merely an object for study rather than the one in whose life we are invited to participate. A sacramental emphasis reminds us that the word has come to embrace our entire selves and is not merely something to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. Reducing the holy communion to something like a purely *religious* experience tempts us to separate the spiritual and the real into such sharp terms that our piety becomes sterile and hermetically sealed outside of the world in which we are called to proclaim by word and example the good news. A sacramental emphasis reminds us that the materiality of the holy communion points us to our own materiality and the materiality of the world in all of its weaknesses and needs. It is the world, after all, which is the subject of the love of God. The holy eucharist, in both word and holy communion, clarifies the urgency of our work in mission and ministry in that world.

### **The Flow of the Liturgy**

*They are like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do no wither; everything they do shall prosper.*

Psalm 1, The Book of Common Prayer, p. 585

*Lyla, what does all the movement in church remind you of? A play, a parade? I sometimes think it is more like a dance where all of us are mindful of everyone's actions, and God is leading us all.*

We begin with the assembled people of God. Some fill out the seating available in the larger portion of the worship space, the nave, where pews or chairs are usually available. Some have a role in leading the liturgy, those who are ordained, such as

bishops, priests, or deacons. Some are lay people who have a special role to play in the liturgy, such as reading, assisting at communion, and serving as acolytes or alms bearers. All in the assembly participate.

In the Episcopal Church, as in other “liturgical” churches, those who serve around the altar wear vestments. As in many gatherings, special occasions merit special dress. Essentially the vestments worn, especially by the clergy, are those of “the formal secular dress of the Roman Empire in the first six centuries of the Christian era.”<sup>17</sup> The white alb has a particular significance, representing a baptismal garment. The garments of the clergy represent both a distinctive function and office. The stole of deacon is worn cross-wise, and the stole of a priest is worn straight down. The bishop presides with a *mitre* or hat and crozier, the staff of a shepherding overseer. The vestments emphasize the continuity of the church traditions and are often coordinated with the colors of the church year, along with the vesting of the altar itself.

The service can begin in a variety of ways, depending on the season or the occasion. Generally, it begins with a procession, accompanied often by a song or a hymn. This is a single movement of the unity of the entire assembly, which encompasses the opening greetings, the song of praise, and the collect of the day.<sup>18</sup>

Here we have begun the first part of the service, the liturgy of the word. The readings are appointed for each Sunday and feast day, according to a three-year lectionary. Normally, a reading from the Hebrew scripture (or Old Testament) occurs

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<sup>17</sup> W. Jardine Grisbrooke, “Vestments”, in *The Study of Liturgy*, Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, and Paul Bradshaw, eds (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 544.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 81.

first, then a psalm and a reading from the New Testament,<sup>19</sup> which is often followed by a hymn or song to introduce the reading of the gospel. The gospel book is often processed into the middle of the people as a sign of Christ's presence. A sermon follows, followed by the Nicene Creed, the "sufficient statement of the Christian faith," the prayers of the people, the corporate confession and absolution, and the passing of the peace, the hinge into the second part of the service.

What follows is a period called the offertory. During this time, an offering plate is usually circulated amongst the congregation and those gifts, along with the bread and wine, are brought to the altar where the deacon is preparing for the eucharistic prayer. Here a clarification must be made, especially today in the context of our market-oriented society. The gospel truth is that we can make no offering outside of the offering that has already been made in Jesus Christ: "For we cannot, and we dare not, offer aught of our own part from the one sacrifice of the Lamb of God."<sup>20</sup> Precisely in this spirit, we can now move on in the liturgy. "It is only as Christians are the body of Christ, united to their crucified and risen head, that their self-offering can be taken up into his perfect self-offering and presented."<sup>21</sup> Our offering has significance only as it is joined to the prior offering of Christ.

The holy communion is composed of several parts and, in the Book of Common Prayer, can take at least six different forms of eucharistic prayer, two reflecting the

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<sup>19</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, 877.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Ramsey, "The Parish Communion", in *Durham Essays and Addresses* (London: SPCK, 1956) 18.

<sup>21</sup> Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1985) 150.

language of our Elizabethan heritage and four reflecting contemporary language. Each has its own theological emphasis, but all have essentially the same parts.

The opening dialogue is an exchange of greetings and an invitation to “lift up your hearts,” to rejoice as we open ourselves to the mystery of God. A preface particular to the season or Sunday is then sung or said, followed by the *sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy), coupled with the *benedictus qui venit* (blessed is he who comes). The former is taken from the song of the angels in the vision from Isaiah 6:1-3, which is also reflected in the Book of the Revelation 4:8. The latter is from Matthew 21:9 and the account of our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem. In each case praise is Once again praise in the context of the memory of a glorious anticipation.

What follows, in the context of ancient memory, is thanksgiving for God’s mighty works in creation, redemption, and love, especially in the gift of Jesus, as the climactic moment this history has led to and from which all else will proceed. Next is prayed the “institution narrative,” the account of the establishment of the feast we are now engaged in, using Christ’s own words. The main sources for this are Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-38, and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

Having established the basis for the feast, we proclaim its meaning, past, present, and future: “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” We refer back to the source event of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection and point forward to the continuing effect of that event, even to the end of time itself.

In this memory brought forward to the present, we pray for God’s Spirit to come down upon the gifts offered, the bread and the wine, and upon ourselves that we might be more transformed into the likeness of Christ. We pray that the risen body of Christ,

mystically infused into the body of the elements themselves, might likewise mystically transform us as we receive the elements into our bodies.

Thereafter, we receive in gratitude and grace the gift we have been given, lifting up our hands, right palm over left. The service is now almost complete. After a final prayer and blessing, the deacon dismisses everyone. We leave symbolically in the procession of the altar party, with our baptismal commission to love and serve the Lord, benefitting all of God's creation and all of God's creatures, strengthened and renewed.

### **The Holy Eucharist as a Meal**

*I am the bread of life.*

John 6:35

*Lyla, do you like Thanksgiving dinner when all the family gathers around?  
That may be one of the best ways of thinking about Sunday morning,  
a time of lots of love and lots of gratefulness.*

When we speak of the holy eucharist, we must speak of it first as a meal, a very special meal, but a meal nevertheless. Holy Eucharist is a communal meal, as family, friends, or associates might gather to eat. Secondly, since it has its origins in a particular place and time, we should see it not only in its Jewish context, but also in the Greek, Hellenistic, or Roman contexts of the first century. In these contexts, at such a meal it was common to offer prayer and thanksgiving, whether to the God of Israel or the gods of the pagan world.<sup>22</sup> This had the effect of not only addressing the Divine, but also of establishing a common identity among the gathered company. Today, in the most secular of gatherings, a convivial toast might achieve the same effect.

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<sup>22</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012) 1-19.

However, in the Jewish context, most especially in the context of the establishment of the holy eucharist with its Passover associations, this thanksgiving not only identified the group gathered as faithful Jews, but it also gave them a mission. This mission, enshrined in the prayers and the remembrance of the mighty acts of God's creation and salvation, had everything to do with the covenant established between God and God's people beginning in Abraham and renewed with Moses at the time of the Exodus: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7). Implicit in this covenant is an explicit way of life directed toward the final consummation and perfection of this relationship. Here is where Jesus establishes the holy eucharist as the new covenant in his flesh and blood (I Corinthians 11:25).

The holy eucharist is both an ordinary meal with ordinary food and the most extraordinary of meals. It establishes the gathering as the people of God. It nourishes them with the word and the presence of Jesus. It sends them out to do the work they have been called to do, a sending not as the pious devotees of a cult, but as a transformed people with real bodies and real hearts and minds who are being sent into a real world full of real needs, hopes, dreams that is desperate beyond knowing for the love of God found uniquely in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

## Chapter 1.            Crossing the Sacramental Threshold

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

1 Corinthians 10: 16-17

*Lyla, are there some things that we want to say to people that are so important that just saying them isn't enough? Have you ever felt that just giving somebody a hug says more than any words we can come up with? What kind of things does that say?*

Many human interactions carry meanings that speak far beyond the limits of their physical action. A handshake, for example, can express a whole range of meanings. At the very least, it can signify a greeting, but it can also mean openness, vulnerability, or even joy. A handshake has a range of meanings within a general category of meaning, and its range can vary depending on the circumstances and the participants. Handshakes between strangers tend to be formal greetings, while handshakes between old friends can carry deeper meaning.<sup>23</sup>

We can call these kinds of interactions signs or symbols, since they say more than what they are. But a handshake can be seen as a particular kind of sign, unlike a stop sign, which simply gives us information and whose size and shape, though helpfully familiar, has no relation to or reflection of the substance of its meaning. This makes it more of a symbol, like a national flag. With a handshake, the intimacy of the joined hands is integral to its larger meaning. Understanding the presence of these larger meanings helps us move toward the sacramental. A sacrament is a sign we participate in and which points us toward a larger meaning.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rowan Williams, "The Nature of a Sacrament" in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 200-201.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Sacraments can be everywhere. Human beings can become sacraments as they engage with each other in actions that point to love or friendship. Nature can be sacramental as well. As we walk along a path next to a stream and observe the trees as they frame our path, we might be drawn into larger meanings such as beauty itself or the precious quality of life as it moves from moment to moment. Words also can be sacraments, especially when we speak poetically or metaphorically and try to evoke meaning rather than capture it. Sacraments are the lived places where we begin to move from simply the experience of life toward what life means.<sup>25</sup>

Christ is understood in the church to be the first or “primordial” sacrament,<sup>26</sup> since in him we can be said to understand all other sacraments.<sup>27</sup> Christ, in the material of his flesh, is at the same time “the image of the invisible God” (Colossian 1:15). In him temporal humanity reveals eternal divinity. Christ is, therefore, not merely somebody we talk about, but also someone we talk to and share our lives with. In this sharing, this actual participation in his life, we begin to grasp what it means to both live completely and as a loving creature of God, so we can say that to participate in the life of Christ is to experience God. Irenaeus (c. 130-202) famously exulted that “the glory of God is the human being fully alive.”

In the church, we often speak of a number of specific sacraments (or “sacramental acts”). Baptism and the holy eucharist are the two sacraments most Christians would understand as primary and fundamental. The other sacramental moments are important

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<sup>25</sup>David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), 16-33.

<sup>26</sup> Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 6.

because they represent “hinge” moments in a person’s life: confirmation, marriage, confession (or reconciliation), ordination, and anointing (or unction). Each of these liturgies involves material objects, actions, and people that point to a larger transformative meaning with profound implications for the future. A couple, for example, joins hands and exchanges rings during a marriage ceremony in an intentional act of physical intimacy, which points to a profound change in their relations as they move forward in their lives.

Therefore, while sacraments involve material and sacred objects, the sacramental experience is where the essential meaning and grace come into our lives and into the lives of others who bear witness to them.<sup>28</sup> The sacraments of the church are celebrated as a part of this shared experience and common life. Individual participants do receive grace, but it is a grace derived from the fact that we are part of the body of Christ. This participation in the body of Christ is made clear through the action of the sacrament.<sup>29</sup>

Sacraments are expansive; they are not limited to a certain time or place or limited only to the benefit of those who partake in them. Sacraments are meant, as has been said, “for the life of the world.”<sup>30</sup> Since sacraments arise out of the particularity of life itself, they never lose their connection with the world, since they disclose the presence of God active in the world.<sup>31</sup> In this way, the sacraments also reveal the essential sacred nature of

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<sup>28</sup> Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995)

<sup>31</sup> Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist*, 64.

the world. On the other hand, the sacraments also reveal for us where the world falls short of that nature and where human beings have failed to live as images of God.<sup>32</sup> The sacraments, in this sense, tell us the truth. However, they also point us forward in hope. They reveal to us the way the world should be, in perfect harmony with itself and God, by revealing the way the world will be. The sacraments give us a glimpse of heaven to make us hungry for something of that heavenly world right now.<sup>33</sup> The sacraments both draw us beyond ourselves and toward God and, at the same time, out into the world to make a difference, beginning with our own lives and among those with whom we live.

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<sup>32</sup> Andrea Bieler and Luise Shottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2007) 5-7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 5-7.

## Chapter 2.                   **The Breath of the Holy Eucharist:** Thanksgiving, Remembrance, and Hope

### i.                                   **Thanksgiving: *Eucharistia*** “*Blessed Be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*” The Book of Common Prayer, pp. 323, 355

*Lyla, what are you thankful for?*

That we should give thanks at the eucharist is a truism, since the Greek word from which it is derived, *eucharistia*, literally means “thanksgiving.” We give thanks throughout the eucharist for all the gifts of creation God has given us and, most particularly, for the gift of Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our souls. But there is, as in all good things, a temptation to think of giving thanks in terms of exchange. It can so easily become transactional. For example, when we are given a gift, we often feel the need to offer a gift in return. Giving thanks can, in this spirit, seem to be more of a deal we somehow strike with God. Thanksgiving, in the sense of the holy eucharist, does not hold this meaning. The gifts God has given us are as unconditional as his love. Thanksgiving in the holy eucharist acts more as a reminder of our dependence on God’s grace, which we are prone to forget. To respond to this grace is not to give God something in return, as if God needs anything.<sup>34</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet deftly directs us to another response pleasing to God, our response to the world. We respond to God love by sharing God’s love.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, we might understand response to God as “paying it forward.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 45-47

<sup>35</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997) 117-127.

<sup>36</sup> John Baldovin suggested this interpretation in a ADP class in the summer of 2018.

### **The Question of Gratitude**

*Lyla, have you ever noticed that when we are happy and joyful, the world and the people in it look so much better than when we are sad or worried?*

Those who live in large cities, who find themselves making their way through all its traffic and congestion, know something about the frustration traffic brings. If we look a little closer and take a broader point of view, we can see that most of the frustration, if not all of it, comes from within us, from the kind of mood we carry with us into the world. If we enter our journey in a mood of anger or worry, even a trivial event that appears to get in our way will set us off in a burst of animosity toward a complete stranger. However, if we enter our journey calm, cool, and collected and deeply aware of how good life is at that moment, we are likely not to be so troubled at the mistakes or carelessness of others as we navigate the world in which we live. We might even care for them a little. We might even wish them well.

Such a calm disposition is not easy either to acquire or sustain. This difficulty is what C. S. Lewis called the “real problem of the Christian life.” It comes, he wrote, the moment we get out of bed in the morning:

All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals.  
And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back;  
in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that  
other stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing  
back from all your natural fussings and fretting; coming in out of the wind.<sup>37</sup>

The “other point of view” is the realization that life is a gift, and the proper response to any gift is to give thanks for it. Indeed, we might say that a gift is not completely given unless we receive it as a gift, appreciating it as a free and valuable expression of someone’s care for our well-being. We can say that, in this kind of moment, the gift is

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<sup>37</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1952) 198.

properly consummated and, therefore, complete. Once we receive the gift of life in this way as a true gift, not as something we have earned, deserve, or negotiated for or as something that further indebts us, then we can begin to enjoy it as freely as it has been given to us. At the same time, we can care for the gift of life in both ourselves and others as a gift of love and therefore of infinite value. That can be transformational, shocking us out of our complacency and despair, where gratitude becomes the vehicle for a deep joy we can share with the world..

Gratitude has been the subject of a great deal of social science study. One major scholarly study has tackled the tricky goal of defining it as,

an interior depth we experience, which orients us to an acknowledged dependence, out of which flows a profound sense of being gifted. This way of being, in turn, elicits a humility, just as it nourishes our goodness. As a consequence, when truly grateful, we are led to experience and interpret life situations in ways that call forth from us an openness to and engagement with the world through purposeful actions, to share and increase the very good we have received.<sup>38</sup>

Popular psychological journals have built on this kind of work and associated gratitude with improving relationships, physical and psychological health, enhancing empathy, and reducing aggression, as well as bringing other positive effects.<sup>39</sup>

### **Biblical Approaches**

Why then is thankfulness so difficult? In short, it is because in life we experience all degrees of pain, and at the end of it all, we experience death, the death of others and our own. As Hobbes described, life for most people throughout history has been seen as

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<sup>38</sup> Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E., *The Psychology of Gratitude* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 273.

<sup>39</sup> Amy Morin, Psychology Today, "Seven Scientifically Proven Benefits of Gratitude", posted April 3, 2005, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201504/7-scientifically-proven-benefits-gratitude>

“solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” The Bible does not hide this pain. “Man (sic) that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and withers; he flees like a shadow, and continues not” (Job 14:1-2). The Psalms, likewise, are famously full of laments, or psalms of “disorientation” as Walter Brueggemann has described them.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps chief among them, Psalm 88, ends with a chilling verse: “My friend and my neighbor you have put away from me / and darkness is my only companion” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, p. 713). This is the language of the most honest and painful prayer. “The language of prayer is that of our impassioned questioning of God and hence also expresses out tensely anxious expectation that God will one day vindicate the terrible suffering of the world.”<sup>41</sup> Brueggemann describes another movement in the psalms that reflects this hope, a movement from disaster to a new orientation of joy and healing:

That astonishing move is characteristically Jewish move, one beyond reasonable expectations, one that evokes strident doxology because the new gift of life must be gladly and fully referred to God. For Christian faith that characteristic Jewish articulation and reception of a new orientation is decisively embodied in the resurrection of Jesus. This is why the church has found it appropriate to use such hymns with particular reference to Easter. This means that the use of these hymns and songs of thanksgiving move back and forth among references to Jesus’ new life, to the voice of Israel’s glad affirmation, and to our own experience of new life surprisingly granted.<sup>42</sup>

Life, the psalms remind us, are full of ups and downs. But they are also, paradoxically, the primary focus of God’s praise in the Old Testament. They are the

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<sup>40</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 15-25.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Rahner and Johann B. Metz, *The Courage to Pray* (New York: Crossroads, 1981) 12.

<sup>42</sup> Brueggemann, 21.

hymns sung to God's glory and, at times, by the pilgrims making their way into the temple. The psalms are often songs of praise and supplication, which reflect so much of the larger text of the Old Testament. In that great text we find such moments of thanksgiving in the Song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-6, 11-13, 17-18 (Canticle 8 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 85) celebrating the Exodus event, the Song of Hannah, 1 Samuel 2, and giving God thanks for a child (traditionally associated with the equally joyful Song of Mary, Luke 1:46-55, Canticle 15, p. 91), as well as the three Songs of Isaiah (12:2-6; 55:6-11; 60:1-3, 11a, 14c, 18-19, Canticles 9, 10, and 11, respectively, p. 86-87) They are, above all, responsive to what God has done both in an individual life and in the collective life of Israel, and they undergird all worship.

Praise and thanks are in a sense the final word, the direction one is headed in the relationship with God. There the expression of faith has moved from a focus on the human situation to reach that end toward which human life has been set, that is, the fulsome glorification and praise of God.<sup>43</sup>

The question set before us is what our final orientation will be. Will the loss of a loved one cause us to remain, or will it lead to gratitude for the gift of life shared for a season? What will our focus be when we receive the news, as the noted neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks did, that his cancer would soon end in death. Sacks, a non-practicing Jew, wrote that there was only one way for him to approach it:

I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return...above all I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet and that, in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Patrick D. Miller, Jr, "Enthroned on the Praises of Israel: The Praise of God in Old Testament Theology", *Interpretation*, 39 no 1 Jan 1985, p 5-19.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Gratitude*, (New York: Knopf, 2016) 20.

At the end of his essay, finished just before his death, his thoughts drifted back to his Jewish upbringing and to the table he shared with his family on the holiest day of the week: “I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one’s life as well, when one can feel that one’s work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Liturgical Approaches**

The thanksgiving of the holy eucharist begins in that same place, around an ancient Jewish meal where a family sits in gratitude for what God has given them. Perhaps it is a Passover meal, where the family both remembers and relives the gratitude they have for a God who, at a particular time and place, delivered them from bondage to freedom. Perhaps it was an ordinary Sabbath supper on Friday evening when, before eating, a blessing of God, a *berakah*, would be offered. Perhaps it would be the *birkat hamazon*, already in use by the first century, which likely took this form:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who feeds the whole world with goodness, with grace, and with mercy.  
 Blessed are you, Lord, who feeds us all.  
 We give thanks to you, Lord our God, that you have caused us to inherit a good and pleasant land, the covenant, the law, life and food.  
 For all these things we give thanks to you and praise your name for ever and ever,  
 Blessed are you, Lord, for the land and for the food.<sup>46</sup>

Christians, similarly, began to gather around a table in thanksgiving to God in what they came to call *eucharistia*. This meal flowed out of their common life, alongside the Jewish tradition of giving thanks. Jesus gives thanks just before the feeding of the five thousand

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 45

<sup>46</sup> Paul Bradshaw & Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989) 5-6.

(John 6:11) and at the institution of the eucharist itself (Luke 22: 17, 19). Paul is constant in his thanksgiving for the people of the churches he serves: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

The early liturgies of the church reflected this posture in a pattern of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication, where petition was always deeply connected with gratitude and that we made our needs known to a God known to be generous and for whom we were thankful. The *didache*, a document contemporary with many of the writings of the New Testament, begins “the thanksgiving” (*eucharistia*) with these words:

We give thanks to you, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant; glory to you forevermore, We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant, glory to you forevermore.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, some early prayers are almost exclusively eruptions of the most effusive thanksgiving. The Acts of John (Syrian, late second, early 3<sup>rd</sup> c.) is one extraordinary example:

What praise or what offering or what thanksgiving shall we name as we break this bread, but thee alone, Jesu. We glorify thy name of Father which was spoken by thee; we glorify thy name of Son which was spoken by thee. We glorify thine entering the door; we glorify thy Resurrection that is shown to us through thee, we glorify thy Way; we glorify thy Seed, the Word, Grace, Faith, the Salt, the inexpressible Pearl, the Treasure, the Plough; the Net, the Greatness, the Diadem, him that for our sakes was called Son of Man, the truth, repose, knowledge, power, commandment, confidence, liberty and refuge in thee.<sup>48</sup>

Thanksgiving is still a central part of the eucharistic prayer in the Episcopal Church.

After centuries of development, the same pattern exists as the central action of the liturgy

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 37.

we find in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. From the very beginning, we praise God by blessing God's name: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The song of praise that follows, often the *gloria*, continues in this praise: "Glory to God in the highest." Even in the confession, we offer our daily conversion to holiness "to the glory of your name." At the opening of the holy communion, we "lift up our hearts...(to) give thanks to the Lord our God". Following that we offer praise in the *Sanctus*, "heaven and earth are full of your glory." Each part that follows gives thanks for what God has done in creation, in the sending of his Son, in the sending of the Holy Spirit, and, fully and finally, in the work of the paschal mystery: the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

### **The Challenge of Thanksgiving**

Since this thanksgiving is grounded in the paschal mystery, the mystery in which God plunges deep into the suffering and sin of humankind, it is not a naïve kind of thanksgiving which tries to see the world through rose-colored glasses. Paul met the churches he ministered to in their pain and suffering and, in Christ, offered them a way through: "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Don Saliers writes that there are two central requisites to participate in Christian worship: "a sense of wonder and awe at the mystery of God becoming flesh, and an awareness of suffering and the interdependency of all things."<sup>49</sup>

One of the fundamental challenges to a life of gratitude is pain and suffering...while other traditions...diminish the problem of evil and suffering, the very Christological mediation of the presence of God in creation and history heightens the problem. Unmitigated suffering counts against being grateful...The praise and thanksgiving to God is like a reorientation to the essential relationships in life. Thus one does not thank God for evil and suffering. Rather, in the midst of

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<sup>49</sup> Don Saliers, *Worship as Theology: A Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Abingdon: Nashville, 1994) 191.

suffering and perplexity one thanks and praises God for the gift of life and endurance. The thanking is itself an act of hope and resistance to what is evil—including evil intentions and destructive desires that inhabit the human heart.<sup>50</sup>

In an age of all too common narcissism, thanksgiving seems more like a weak admission of vulnerability and dependence. However, from the deep ages of our faith, Jewish and Christian alike, it is quite the opposite. It is the powerful engine of holiness. Diana Butler Bass heralds it as the great challenge to a broken world.

Gratitude is defiance of sorts, the defiance of kindness in the face of anger, of connection in the face of division, and of hope in the face of fear. Gratefulness does not acquiesce to evil— it resists evil. That resistance is not that of force or direct confrontation. Gratitude undoes evil by tunneling under its foundations of anger, resentment, and greed. Thus, gratitude strengthens our character and moral resolve, giving each of us the possibility of living peaceably and justly. It untwists knotted hearts, waking us to a new sense of who we are as individuals and in community. Being thankful is the very essence of what it means to be alive, and to know that life abundantly.<sup>51</sup>

Mindful of much the same understanding, Alexander Schmemmann, from a Russian Orthodox position, identified the entire liturgy as consummately one of thanksgiving, which he identified as “the presence, joy, fulness the knowledge of God” a knowledge that he equated with knowledge of the world.<sup>52</sup> Thanksgiving, therefore, frees us to go into the world with the clear, sanctifying knowledge of God to understand, just as clearly, what the world is about and what our role in the world is about. In Schmemmann’s characteristic way, he described the experience of thanksgiving as the experience of “paradise”:

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>51</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks* (New York: Harper, 2018) 186.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood, St. Vladimir’s, 2003) 176-7.

Paradise is, in other words, the beginning and the end, to which is oriented, and through which is defined and determined the entire life of man (sic) and in him all creation. It is in relation to it that we comprehend the divine source of our life and our fall from God, our enslavement to sin and death, our salvation by Christ, and our eternal destiny. We were created in paradise and for paradise, we were exiled from paradise, and Christ 'leads us again into paradise.'<sup>53</sup>

In thanksgiving, we see God as God is and participate in God's life. In this participation, we can both reach back in remembrance of our beginnings and forward toward our ultimate goal in life. In both of these divergent temporal actions, we give praise and thanks today as the very power of God is working in us "for the life of the world."<sup>54</sup>

Finally, gratitude is not, as Don Saliers points out, simply personal gratitude for all the blessings God has given. Gratitude is having clarity about ourselves and the world.

"Without gratitude, communal and personal, we cannot see. If we are to know God in any sense of the word, it will be because we have a heart that responds in gladness and gratitude in our complexity."<sup>55</sup>

### **Questions for Worship, the Church, and the World**

If, therefore, the holy eucharist is essentially thanksgiving, how might we approach our weekly celebration on the day of the Lord? The space should be beautiful and orderly, as the actions of all should be, as if we were welcoming and communing with the honored guest. It is joyful worship, but we are also mindful that our joy is the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 174

<sup>54</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's, 1995) 11-13

<sup>55</sup> Saliers, *Worship*, 47.

result of a gift that we have received in the midst of a broken world. It is humble, reverent, loving, and inviting because we have received something we desire to share.

How can our parish life be enriched by contemplating what we are thankful for before we move on toward the challenges we face? <sup>56</sup> How does our thankfulness connect with our generosity?

Where does this thanksgiving lead us as we leave church and enter into the world? How can we hold together the tension of a world with all of its challenges and also see it as a place of God's hope? How can we live the eucharistic life in a world that has a hard time giving thanks? How can we give thanks in a world where there is injustice and want and loneliness?

**ii. Remembering: Anamnesis**  
*Do this in remembrance of me.*  
*Luke 22:19*

*Lyla, can you think back to a time when you were really happy and full of joy?  
 Maybe it was the people around you.  
 How does that make you feel right now?*

**Conscious and Unconscious Memory**

Thankfulness is intimately associated with remembrance. Our memories are the vehicle that enables our thanksgiving, sending us back to a time and place that we can identify as the source of our gratitude, even though, at the same time, our memories hold the source of much of our pain. Our very identities are, in large part, constituted by our memories; they are the stories we tell about ourselves and places we go to understand where we are now and where we might be going. Memory is the stuff of poets, novelists, artists, and historians, since they not only want to explore the details of the past, but also

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<sup>56</sup> The process of Appreciative Inquiry comes to mind as a useful tool in this process.

want to ponder the meaning of those details. Marcel Proust's narrator in his series of novels *Remembrance of the Things Past* begins his story, a story of vast memory in multiple volumes, with a faltering struggle to remember a part of his past. Then comes a moment in those opening pages when he is served tea and, all importantly, a *madeleine*, a little cookie:

No sooner had the warm liquid and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through...and once I recognized the taste of the crumb of *madeleine* soaked in her decoction of lime flowers which my aunt used to give me... immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was rose up like the scenery of a theatre.<sup>57</sup>

From the taste of that little cookie, the memories that constitute the rest of the book and the succeeding volumes flow. The narrator experienced in that early moment what science would consider two kinds of memories. His struggling attempt to call up specific memories is known as conscious or explicit memory. In that, he tries and seems largely to fail. What serves him better is his unconscious or implicit memory. Eric R. Kandel, a Nobel Prize winning scientist in the field of memory, describes implicit memory as a very complex process "involving several different brain systems that lie deep within the cerebral cortex."

Implicit memory often has an automatic quality. It is recalled directly through performance without any conscious effort or even awareness that we are drawing on memory. Although experiences change perceptual and motor abilities, these experiences are virtually inaccessible to conscious recollection.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: Swann's Way*, C.K. Scott Moncrieff, tr.(New York: Random House, 1934) 34-36.

<sup>58</sup> Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006) 132.

Implicit memory is established through repetitive actions, like riding a bike or driving a car. The memory is embedded in our subconscious. The liturgy makes use of both kinds of memories: the conscious recalling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, for example, and an implicit memory, honed Sunday after Sunday in prayer and praise, in the saying of the Nicene Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and in the Holy Communion. Between these twin forms of remembering Christ, implicit and explicit, comes the movement of our faith. Austin Farrer preached on the mystery of this movement.

Christ's dying into life has the power to carry us all through the same motions; and so, what we have to do is not simply to imitate, but to adhere: to take hold, by faith, of this strong swimmer in the gulf of death, who not only supports us, but makes us swim with him. For we do not hold him with our hands; we consent that he should hold us by his spirit. And his spirit is an invisible bond which has this strange power, that links our hands to his hands, our feet to his feet, our heart to his heart, in such wise that, without visible contact, our hands move as his hands move and our feet follow the motions of his feet; and yet we are not dragged through the motions we make, we make them freely; for our heart is linked to his heart; it all comes from there.<sup>59</sup>

Conscious, explicit memory works with unconscious, implicit memory to help shape our lives and guide us through the challenges we all face.

### **Memory and Healing**

*God is our refuge and strength,*

*A very present help in trouble.*

Psalm 46:1

John Claypool, an Episcopal priest, gave a series of sermons to his congregation as his young daughter, Laura Lue, was dying of leukemia. He tells a story from his childhood in one of those sermons that, during the Second World War, his family had the loan of a washing machine, a rare luxury in that time. When the war was over, he

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<sup>59</sup> Austin Farrer, *The Essential Sermons*, Leslie Holden, ed. (Cambridge: Cowley, 1991) 47.

remembered being disappointed that this valuable household item had to be returned. He tells us something terribly significant that his mother told him:

But my mother, being the wise woman she is, sat me down and put things in perspective. She said, ‘Wait a minute, son. You must remember, that machine never belonged to us in the first place. That we ever got to use it at all was a gift. So, instead of being mad at its being taken away, let’s use this occasion to be grateful that we ever had it at all.’<sup>60</sup>

Here a memory of childhood, brought forward to a present time of deep grief, brings a measure of healing by pointing from that grief to gratitude in the very same way so many of the psalms do. Indeed, John Claypool’s memory that brought healing might, for others, point in the direction of their own healing memories.

In the gospel of John, it is the disciples who, in the end, need such healing. They have largely failed Jesus, which must trouble them as they head back to Galilee, following Simon Peter. “I am going fishing,” he declares. “We will go with you”, they respond. They go back to the beginning. There they meet Jesus and come face to face with their own shortcomings, especially Peter. As Rowan Williams points out, in the presence of the resurrected Jesus they do not find condemnation, rather, they find the deepest hope. To be sure, it is an uncomfortable presence for Peter, sitting across the fire in the mists of the seashore, but it is also a new beginning.

To know that Jesus still invites is to know that he accepts, forgives, bears and absorbs the hurt done: to hear the invitation is to know oneself forgiven, and vice versa. Thus the memory of failure is in this context the indispensable basis of a calling forward in hope...And what Peter may learn is that where ever he may find himself, however he may fall, his life is constantly capable of being opened to God’s creative grace: God’s presence in Jesus will not fail him.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> John Claypoole, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler* (New York: Morehouse, 1974) 64.

<sup>61</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1982) 30.

The memory of failure and loss is now set in the new context of the hope of the resurrection. This also is part and parcel of the paschal mystery we experience anew in the holy eucharist. “The past is what we cannot change (what even God cannot change), but the memory of cost can be deployed in more than one way to change the present.”<sup>62</sup> This, Williams asserts, is the case even in the horrific crimes of humanity’s past. In our pasts, we can at least seek understanding, the perspective of the victim, and our own confession, which “is how memory leads us Godward.”<sup>63</sup>

**Memory and Forgiveness**  
*Most merciful God,*  
*we confess that we have sinned against you.*  
*(BCP, 360)*

But what of the memories of wrongs against us? Do we not have the right to remember in bitterness and dream of vindication? The Christian imperative, enshrined in the Lord’s Prayer, is to “forgive those who have trespassed against us.” Memory has an important role here, as well. We cannot, Rowan Williams reminds us, simply forgive and forget. Real forgiveness must remember to change things and bring hope.

If someone says to me, “Yes, you have hurt me, but that doesn’t mean it’s all over. I forgive you. I still love you,” then that is a moment of enormous liberation. It recognizes the reality of the past, the irreversibility of things, the seriousness of the damage done, but then it is all the more joyful and hopeful because of that. Because this kind of love doesn’t have illusions, it is also all the more mature and serious. It can look at and fully *feel* my weaknesses, and still say, “I love you”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Rowan Williams, “Remembering the Future” in *A Ray of Darkness* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1995) 206.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, “The Forgiveness of Sins”, 50-51.

Sins must be remembered, but they must be remembered “rightly,” as Miroslav Volf writes. Our memories are fragile and imperfect, with the capacity to alter and exaggerate and so increase the sin beyond its original scale or, as is sometimes the case, to diminish our culpability. However, because we have a moral and ethical imperative for reconciliation and healing, we must not only strive to remember rightly, but also “therapeutically.” We must somehow learn to integrate our memories in a healthy way to lead us not only to wholeness, but also to “learn from the past.”<sup>65</sup> For Jews and Christians, this can only be accomplished by placing such a process in a larger moral framework. For Jews, this framework is indisputably that of the gift of God of the journey from slavery to freedom, the Exodus. For Christians, it is the Paschal mystery. These are “exemplary memories” of collective peoples which refer “not to the memory of any given wrong suffered, but specifically to the memory of the suffering and deliverance of God’s people and God’s anointed.”<sup>66</sup> In this framework, we are not only formed by our memories in the ordinary sense, but we are also formed in our identities as Christians, both individually and corporately.

The same holds true in Christian Holy Communion. When Christians celebrate it by reading Scripture, narrating the story of Christ, singing praise, eating bread, and drinking wine, they do not simply recall the Passion of Christ -- they ritually narrate the death and resurrection of Christ as events in which they themselves as part of a community of people who have died and risen together with Christ and whose core identity consists in this spiritual union with Christ. They remember Christ’s story but also as *their* story and, in a limited but significant sense, the story of every human being.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsmans, 2006) 93.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 94.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 98-99.

This is the gift of another kind of memory, our *collective* memory.<sup>68</sup> We remember because we are part of something larger than our ourselves. That memory gives us perspective and, in that perspective, hope and healing.

### **Anamnesis**

The Greek word, translated as “remembrance” in Luke 22:19<sup>69</sup> and related to the meal practice mentioned in Paul’s teachings to the church in Corinth in I Corinthians 11:24, is *anamnesis*. *Anamnesis*, Marion Hatchett used to remind his students, is the opposite of *amnesia*.<sup>70</sup> Hatchett's point was that in *amnesia*, the patient loses both their memory and their identity (providing a rich source for popular melodrama.)<sup>71</sup>

R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, in their historical compilation of eucharistic prayers, remind us that the substantive meaning of this word has been open to much debate.<sup>72</sup> Dom Gregory Dix championed its “active sense,” which he describes as a “re-calling” or “re-presenting” before God the sacrifice of Christ, thus making it, by the sheer weight of Christ’s active presence, operative in the here and now by its effects on the communicants.”<sup>73</sup> Jeremias interpreted the words as “do this to put God in remembrance

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<sup>68</sup> The study of collective memory has a rich provenance of its own, beginning with the philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945).

<sup>69</sup> All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>70</sup> Marion Hatchett, *Sanctifying, Life, Time, and Space* (New York: Seabury, 1976) 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Random Harvest*, directed by Mervyn LeRoy, Hollywood, CA: Metro-Goldwin-Mayer, 1942 (Based on the James Hilton novel, 1941. Starring Ronald Colman and Greer Garson, this may have spawned the modern genre so familiar to day time soap operas.

<sup>72</sup> R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1975) 14.

<sup>73</sup> Gregory Dix, , *The Shape of the Liturgy, with additional notes by Paul V. Marshall* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982) 161.

of me,”<sup>74</sup> meaning “help or succor.”<sup>75</sup> In remembering me, you will be healed. More recent analyses, building on earlier models, have emphasized *anamnesis* as “proclamation,” echoing 1 Corinthians 11:26.<sup>76</sup> We remember in order to tell more about it in the world. Questions therefore arise as to whether the term refers to a historical objective event “actualized” and “made available to the worshippers here and now”<sup>77</sup> or merely a subjective mental recollection which may or may not be “essentially commemorative.” Is something actually happening, or has something happened that we need to appreciate and make known?

The problem of interpretation is complicated by the controversies of the Reformation and the assertion or denial of the reality of Christ’s presence and sacrifice in the eucharist, so closely associated with the issue of *anamnesis*. David Gregg postulated three categories to conceptualize the contrasting approaches arising out of this period. In his “sacrificial” category, the Eucharist is a repeated event analogous to transubstantiation, a doctrine which was the cause of great opposition by the Reformers. His “appropriation” theory, a roughly Protestant understanding, essentially equated *anamnesis* with obedience insofar as communicants were to remember by acting out the example of Christ in their lives. Between the two and reflected in Dix, is Gregg’s “memorial” theory, which equated *anamnesis* with Christ’s “real” presence and, therefore, the eucharist itself as an event of *participation* in the divine life. However we

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<sup>74</sup> Jasper and Cuming, 14.

<sup>75</sup> Julie Gittoes, *Anamnesis and the Eucharist* (Routledge: London and New York, 2016) 11.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

might understand this, each of these points on the spectrum of understanding *anamnesis* pay tribute, in their own way, to its importance and vitality. The memory of Christ, whether seen as making Christ present or seen as purely and powerfully inspirational, is essential to the eucharistic purpose of transformation and mission beyond the liturgical action.

Nils Alstrup Dahl's work on the early church's understanding of *anamnesis* begins in the Jewish context, the Hebrew verb *zakar*. The nuanced meaning of remembrance from this perspective is "to call forth in the soul and assist in determining its direction, its action."<sup>78</sup> Bruce Merrill points out that "the distinction Dahl is making between merely recalling some person(s) or situation and 'thinking of' them lies in the recognition that the latter entails a commitment or action on the part of the subject."<sup>79</sup>

Likewise in Phil. 3:13-14, Paul describes how his "straining forward" toward the fulness of life on high in Christ has led him to forget "what lies behind." Although he is certainly capable of recalling it, Paul no longer allows his past to shape his life. For Paul the formative remembrance is that "Christ Jesus has made me his own" (v. 12). Dahl concludes: "To 'remember' in the New Testament, signifies almost always to recall something or to think about it in such a way that it is expressed in speech or is formative for attitude and action."<sup>80</sup>

Remembrance moves us to action, drives us in living our lives and sometimes changes the course of our lives by God's grace.

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<sup>78</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976) 13, quoted in Bruce Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000) 149.

<sup>79</sup> Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 147.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 147-148

## Memory and the Church

Christians are formed toward an attitude and action of forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion for the oppressed, and healing for themselves and the world around them by the present and living memory of Christ. In this way, as Schmemmann wrote, the Holy Eucharist constitutes the church as the church. The church responds to the living call of God to be and become what it is called to be and become in this formation.<sup>81</sup>

The eucharistic remembrance is the remembrance of the Kingdom of God, which was manifested and appointed at the last supper. But the remembrance of the cross, the body of Christ broken for us, the blood of Christ poured out for us, is inseparable from it. This is why only through the cross that the gift of the kingdom of God is transformed into its reception, its manifestation at the eucharist -- in our ascent into heaven, in our partaking at the table of Christ in his kingdom.<sup>82</sup>

This was Paul's urgent appeal to the memory of the churches to take seriously not only their baptized identity ("remember that you were at that time separated from Christ" Ephesians 2:13; "you who were once hostile in mind," Colossians 1:21), but also in the case of the church in Corinth, to take seriously the breaking of bread: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16) Consistent with Jewish practice, memory emboldens faith. For this boldness, Christ institutes a meal of remembrance with his friends at that final meal: "Do this in remembrance of me? (Luke 22:19)" Here is the eucharist in its action, forming the church as the community of the baptized and moving toward its perfection in the completion of all things, the

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<sup>81</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 28-29.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 210.

*eschaton*.<sup>83</sup> Paul makes explicit reference to this tradition in I Corinthians when he reminds the church that this source, the focus of their remembrance, is the catalyst for how they are to live:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (11:23-26).

The action of the eucharist is a proclamation of the past, which can, by God’s grace, prescribe the future.

### **Dangerous Memory**

The words of the institution, whether in the gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark, or Luke or as Paul relates it in I Corinthians, can easily lose something of the drama of the moment because of our easy acquaintance with this story. One hopes that holy week can bring to bear the injustice and graphic suffering that the eucharist must bring to mind. Here, as Johann Baptist Metz wrote, is the “dangerous memory” of Jesus Christ. Here is the uncomfortable truth brought to bear to the comfortable that Jesus dies “for us” but, more particularly, for all who suffer and for all victims. Here, Metz asserts, we too often forget what should be at the very center of our remembering, our *anamnesis* of Christ. We cannot experience the *anamnesis* of the Passion of Christ without remembering the suffering of all victims throughout history.

The purpose of this dangerous memory is both negative and positive. First, it is to tell the critical truth of the brokenness, violence, and division in the world, a truth that

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 14.

must be rejected in principle. Secondly, it is to “stimulate human imagination for social political action.”<sup>84</sup> This kind of remembering is activated by imitating Christ in his obedience to a God of justice and love by remembering, in particular, the “losers” in our society and upholding their dignity and worth. Through prayer and action, Metz sees the potential for the development of “messianic virtues”: “capacities for sorrow and joy, pain and play, mourning and expectation, generosity and gratitude, friendship and loyalty, solidarity and individuality” to bring a “new moral imagination” into the world.<sup>85</sup>

Here the “dangerous memory” of the past moves toward a future hope, an urgent need to move forward from the way the world is to the way the world should be. Here Metz moves us toward eschatological hope.

**iii.**

**Hope: Eschatology**

*Christ has died.*

*Christ has risen.*

*Christ will come again.*

*The Book of Common Prayer, p. 363*

*My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning / more than watchmen for the morning / O Israel wait for the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy / with him there is plenteous redemption.*

Psalm 130: 5-6

*Lyla, have you ever looked forward to something so much that it made you happy even before it happened? Maybe it was your birthday or Christmas, or maybe it was when someone you really wanted to see was coming to visit you.*

*Even before they arrive, the whole way we see the world around us can change.*

**Moving Toward the Eschaton**

The Holy Eucharist stands as a hinge moment *in time*. As just indicated, we are drawn into it as a *present* experience of a *past* event. At the same time, it is also a *present*

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<sup>84</sup> Morrill, *Anamnesis*, 30.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

experience of a *future* expectation. As has often been said, it is a “foretaste” of the heavenly banquet to come. Past and future come together in the present.

We necessarily enter the holy eucharist in deep humility of our way forward in our assurance of being God’s children. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:2). In the eucharist, we have that glimpse of God in Christ in glory. With that glimpse and our humble willingness, God’s future beckons us forward.

Sarah Coakley locates our desire for God in this willingness before God. Prayer is the counterpoint which results from this willingness. This prayerful willingness draws us forward out of our self-obsession toward God in order to find a greater depth of meaning in our life.

The willingness to endure a form of naked dispossession before God; the willingness to surrender control (not to any human power, but solely to God’s power); the willingness to accept the arid vacancy of a simple waiting on God in prayer; the willingness at the same time to accept disconcerting bombardments from the realm of the “unconscious”: all these are the ascetical tests of contemplations without which no epistemic or spiritual deepening can occur.<sup>86</sup>

The willing way ahead is both hopeful and open, pointing toward “that heavenly country” (Eucharistic Prayer b).<sup>87</sup> This trajectory is implicit in the liturgy, a movement from one place to another. The action of the liturgy, through its constant shift of focus, is a sequential formative procession forward to the word, to the altar, and ultimately to the world. The trajectory is both a physical and spiritual pilgrimage by which God seeks to

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<sup>86</sup> Sarah Coakley, *Gender, Sexuality, and the Self*, 19

<sup>87</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, 369.

shape us and form us in a continuing action of conversion, of *metanoia* (“change of mind or spirit”). Robert Hughes captures something of the mystery of this kind of movement.

The journey of the spiritual life is like any other journey in that it begins long before it “begins” and lasts long after it is over. A journey does not begin in one particular moment but goes through a number of stages, including noticing the possibility of a trip, deciding to go, planning the trip and taking anticipatory measures...then there is magical sort of moment, different for every trip, when there is a kind of settling down into being “not at home” or even in the process of leaving it, but being on the trip. Conversion is like this last moment. It is the signpost that says, “Well, we’ve actually started this journey.”<sup>88</sup>

The holy eucharist invites us on this journey in a liturgical moment when, as Don Saliers writes, our human *pathos*, our real life of joy and sorrow and confusion, meets God’s *ethos*, the very action of God’s self-giving to us, “where grace and glory find human form.”<sup>89</sup>

### **The Good News of Judgement Day**

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*

*On earth as it is in heaven.*

Matthew 6:10

What are we moving toward? What does the coming of Christ *mean* for us? This is the question raised by the prospect of the “last days”, the *eschaton*. In the book of Daniel, the vision of the prophet reveals that “someone like the son of man” (7: 13) will liberate the world from injustice and tyranny. A stream of Christian thought rose up out of various millennialist movements in the nineteenth century and took the strange and violent apocalyptic language of Daniel and other similar texts literally by emphasizing a time-space cataclysm and, in some cases, associating it with a “rapture” of chosen

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Hughes, *Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life* (New York: Continuum, 2008) 72.

<sup>89</sup> Saliers, 22.

individuals, which leaves others, the un-chosen, behind.<sup>90</sup> However, another ancient, biblical understanding of the *eschaton* regards the greatest hope for the world. This hope, rooted in Jewish tradition,<sup>91</sup> is inaugurated in Christ in the moment in Acts 1:11 when two mysterious figures urge the disciples, having seen Jesus ascend, to take heart in his eventual return, to gaze no longer up to heaven and to bring their gaze, quite literally, down to earth.

This hopeful eschatology is found in the lyrical language of Paul in Romans in which he looks forward to the glory to come and, indeed, the whole “creation awaits with eager longing” (Romans 8:19). This language is found when Paul speaks in I Corinthians 26, declaring that when that time comes, “the last enemy to be destroyed is death.” The climax is described in Revelation 21 and 22, with “a new heaven and a new earth...the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:1-2). This eminently hopeful vision is embedded in the very prayer that Jesus taught us to pray, our earliest liturgical experience with him: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, *on earth* as it is in heaven” (Luke 11:2).

Apocalyptic language in the eschatology of hope, according to N.T. Wright, was used in the early Christian writings, as it was used essentially in the Hebrew scripture “to invest space-time with a theological significance,” rather than creating a literal scenario

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<sup>90</sup> “This dispensational hermeneutic was never common in the church until introduced by John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the nineteenth century, popularized by C.I. Scofield and Hal Lindsay in the twentieth, and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in the twenty-first. The Christians of the first three centuries were premillennialist but not pretribulationists, and the church after Augustine was predominately amillennial with millennial sects growing up during each time period.” John R. Yeatts, “The Fictionalizing of Fundamentalist Eschatology: The Left behind Series, A Review Essay, Brethren in Christ History & Life, 26, no 1 2003, p 296.

<sup>91</sup> N.T. Wright

of cosmic obliteration.<sup>92</sup> Such language speaks of what would be inexpressible in ordinary ways and is often the language of those in the midst of struggles or oppression and who are reaching for hope.<sup>93</sup> Therefore,

the fundamental theological position is a view of creator and creation, of evil within creation and the rescue of creation from that evil, of hope fulfilled and hope to come, of a people who are both rescued and rescuers.<sup>94</sup>

We have, therefore, hope in the coming glory of God, and we are invited to assume a role in that coming glory. As Paul declared to the church in Corinth, “We are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (I Corinthians 3:9). This, at the very least, is the *meaning* of the coming of Christ. We are to be a part of the building up of the Kingdom of God, right here and now. Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottrop have suggested that a more helpful way of understanding the coming of Christ is by thinking not in terms of linear time, since we are not to know “the day or the hour” (Matthew 24:36, Acts 1:7), but in terms of relationship and of “nearness.”<sup>95</sup>

This understanding of Christ's coming is consonant with an urgent kind of discipleship fueled by a present sense of future glory, the kind commended by Paul in Romans 10:8, quoting Moses at Deuteronomy 30:14: “The word is very near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart, *so that you can do it.*” This understanding is also consonant with the great cry of *maranatha* in 1 Corinthians 16:22, “Our Lord, come!”

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<sup>92</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992) 464.

<sup>93</sup> Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies Bread and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 22.

<sup>94</sup> Wright, *The New Testament*, 458.

<sup>95</sup> Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) 38.

The urgency of our present desire for Christ's full presence translates into our work in the world today, especially on behalf of the suffering and the dispossessed.<sup>96</sup> This urgent desire is demonstrated in the fervent cry of one of the earliest liturgies of the church, found in the first century Syrian document known as the *didache* (10:6).<sup>97</sup> This understanding of the *eschaton* keeps the eyes of the followers of the risen Christ firmly fixed on the needs and ministry opportunities of this world, a world Christ came to save (John 3:16), rather than gazing with pious curiosity into heaven. Here the Church finds its mission. Jürgen Moltmann, in his ground-breaking book, *Theology of Hope* wrote:

Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological...is the key in which everything is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and the passionate longing kindled by the Messiah.<sup>98</sup>

This is an ambitious faith that does not shrink into half-measures. Hope, in this sense, is not an idle dream or even a genuine ambition; it is the power of God at work in us now to build up the coming kingdom.

### **Hope Is Not Optimism**

As with memory and gratitude, wide scientific and social science research is available in the field of hope. However, a sharp distinction needs to be drawn between hope and optimism. One social science study described optimism simply as an individual's core belief that their future will have positive experiences, not negative

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<sup>96</sup> Morrill, *Anamnesis*, 197-205.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>98</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harpers, 1965) 16.

ones.<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, C. R. Snyder, a leading researcher in hope studies, has defined hope, by contrast, as “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy), and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals).” In other words, hopeful people seem to have more capacity and greater motivation to make use of their resources to achieve their goals. Snyder concluded his study on a colorful note which *verges* on the spiritual:

In studying hope, so too have I observed the spectrum of human strength. This reminds me of the rainbow that frequently is used as a symbol of hope. A rainbow is a prism that sends shards of multicolored light in various directions. It lifts our spirits and makes us think of what is possible. Hope is the same—a personal rainbow of the mind.<sup>100</sup>

Hope is indeed a source of strength and, as Moltmann observed, is in a different league than optimism, as it is merely based on "extrapolative cause and effect thinking."

Moltmann noted that we often confuse the two. He was asked once why, at a particular conference, he chose to talk about the crucifixion. He replied, “Well, last time I was here I discovered Americans are always confusing hope with optimism, so I thought I should talk about the cross.”<sup>101</sup> Miroslav Volf expanded on Moltmann’s distinction.

We draw conclusions about the future on the basis of the experience with the past and present, guided by the belief that events can be explained as effects of previous causes... hope, unlike optimism, is independent of people’s circumstances. Hope is not based on the possibilities of the situation and on correct extrapolation about the future. Hope is grounded in the faithfulness of God and therefore on the effectiveness of Gods promise... Optimism is based on the possibilities of things as they have come to be; hope is based on the possibilities

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<sup>99</sup> M. F. Scheier & C. S. Carver, (1985). Optimism, coping, and health: Assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies. *Health Psychology*, 4(3), 219-247.

<sup>100</sup> C. R. Snyder, “Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind”, *Psychological Inquiry* Volume: 13 Issue 4 (2002) 269

<sup>101</sup> Hughes, 97.

of God irrespective of how things are. Hope can spring up even in the valley of the shadow of death; indeed, it is there that it becomes truly manifest.<sup>102</sup>

### **Eschatological Imagination**

In the gritty reality of the injustice and the challenges of life, eschatological hope must spring. Here the “dangerous memory” of Jesus Christ brings to sharp relief the needs of the present and the shortfall today of the glory to come. Both past and future issue a radical critique of the world today and urge us forward into an imaginative and creative project of being part of God’s great work to set the world to rights.<sup>103</sup> As a result, both of these perspectives can bring a sacred interruption to the standard operating procedure of the world.<sup>104</sup> They both call us to stop where we are and appraise the situation. Worship, in its best sense, has the quality of stalling the *status quo* of human life, beginning with ourselves.

Eschatological imagination is about the real stuff of life in all its pleasure pain and alienation. Bodies in pain are and will be transformed into resurrected bodies at the table -- bodies that are indeed the temple of the Holy Spirit... This is what we yearn for when we come to the table and when we dare to hope that our sins are forgiven. Eschatological imagination is at the heart of the Jewish-Christian tradition. It provides the hermeneutical power to connect the storytelling that gives witness to the overwhelming violence that human beings act out against each other with the yearning for the solidarity and community (*koinonia*) in which the resurrected Christ reveals his body... Eschatology is for people who dare to hope that resurrection happens and will happen in a world that is driven by adoration of the forces of death.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Volf, Miroslav. Source: The Christian Century, 121 no 26 Dec 28 2004, p 31

<sup>103</sup> Bieler and Schottroff, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Morrill, *Anamnesis*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> Bieler and Shottroff, 6-7.

Our stories, the stories of the world, have an essential place in the Holy Eucharist in prayers, preaching, and the witness of the word and in our participation in the sacrament, where the human story is told again and again and never more clearly than in the cross itself. In the weaving of this story and in our participation in the paschal mystery, where God leads us forward to exercise perhaps his greatest gift to us, our imaginations, and to exercise them not only for ourselves, but for the sake of the world. Tolstoy's essentially Christian question becomes ours: "What is to be done?" (what then must we do?).<sup>106</sup> What is to be done in the face of poverty, injustice, tyranny, and the countless inventory of the inhumanity of human beings to one another?

**Remembering Toward the Future:  
Reflecting on the Steps Along the Eucharistic Way**

Thanksgiving, memory, and hope work like a fugue winding its way through the liturgy, always moving upward in an ascending spiral toward the hope we seek in God. Thanksgiving is a symphony that inspires memory toward hope. It enlivens, empowers, and harmonizes. In each movement of the ritual process, thanksgiving is reinforced, point after counterpoint, guiding the gathered people's ascent toward God and toward God's world.

The opening sentences of Rite II remind us of the God we have come to praise together. This God is the one toward whose kingdom we are moving, whose resurrection power points us to our own, and whose mercy extends into a future beyond our

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<sup>106</sup> Leo Tolstoy. *What Must Be Done?* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1917). This was one of Tolstoy's later non-fiction works, deeply influenced by his Christian beliefs, describing the social conditions of the poor in late nineteenth century Russia. It is not to be confused with the later books of the same name written by Vladimir Lenin and Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

imagination. This God is the one toward whom our human hearts are lifted in praise and thanksgiving toward action.

The classic structure of the collects is a roadmap that describe a journey arising from the *memory* of our source and strength, the God to whom “all hearts are open, all desires are known, and from whom no secrets are hid” (in the case of the Collect for Purity, p. 355). Here is made a *present* petition to “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,” *toward* the blessed hope “that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name.” The collects throughout the year describe the same dynamic movement, each in their own particular season. The Second Sunday in Advent, for example, reminds us of the past prophets and prays for the inspiration of our attentiveness to their good news, “That we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ” (211). The collects of Holy Week are virtual narratives of the historic events of the passion which lead us to the resurrection. The collects of the propers after Pentecost are a compendium of the spectrum of human conditions of “ordinary time,” which call us to find our strength in the God we remember so completely in the present that the future opens up hope unimaginable without a God of such blessed memory.

Likewise, the lessons produce a narrative that evokes the past collective memory of the exodus-minded Hebrew scripture and the resurrection-minded New Testament. The entire point of telling the story, of sketching out the context, of offering prophecy and teaching, of singing songs in times of both joy and sorrow is not to simply hark back nostalgically, but to bring meaning to present life and future hope. After all, the sacred trust of preaching is to pronounce the good news, even in a present context of enmity and strife. The creed that follows stands as the traditional road sign on the journey, which

begins with the very nature of the eternal God, the Incarnation, the Passion, to the Ascension, when Jesus is finally in all things, inspiring us through the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we might with confidence “look for the resurrection the dead, and the life of the world to come.” It cannot be overstated that this life has already begun in baptism, nourished by the body and the blood and revealed in our struggle for justice, peace, and the reconciliation of all people.

The prayers and the confession are also part of the grand movement from memory to hope. We remember for whom we pray, but we remember them in the context of the God whom we trust will lift them up for their future hope and glory. We do the same in the confession. There we remember not only our own sins, but our own participation in the sins of the community of which we are part. We acknowledge that we are part of and integral to the world which has fallen short of the glory of God. Holding the remembrance of our sins alongside the memory of the merciful God we worship, we have hope that we are not only forgiven and have been given the capacity to forgive others, but are given the strength and will to become part of the healing of this world for the sake of the Kingdom to come, “to delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your name.” (The Book of Common Prayer, p. 360)

The peace, a simple sacramental act, accomplishes a great deal in one action: it acknowledges the past and moves toward the future. It lets go of what might separate us and leads us into the great journey of holy communion, which reminds us in the Passion and Resurrection that we are led “out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.”

In all these parts, these movements of a great symphony, the subtle crescendo of God's grace leads us and forms us, Sunday after Sunday, imbuing us with the ancient way and a pattern of life to bring to all we do, how we think, and how we might look across the divide at another person, the one we can only know by the transforming love of Christ.

### Chapter 3.      **Baptism: The Ground of the Holy Eucharist**

*You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism  
and marked as Christ's own forever.  
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 308*

*“Lyla, can you think of a time when somebody really welcomed you?  
When things like that happen, it changes us and the way we see things, doesn't it?”*

In many churches, the baptismal font is located near the entrance to the sanctuary. This is because the sacrament of baptism is, at the very least, about being welcomed. When people make the decision to take Jesus up on his invitation and join him in all his redeeming and loving work (either for themselves or on behalf of their children), baptism is the sign of entering this new life. In baptism, we become, in turn, the welcoming people of God to the world and for the world.

Like all the sacraments, baptism is also about transformation. The central symbol is water. Water has many meanings. Water is the stuff of life that we cannot live without, and it can be the agent of death that can take our life away. Water cleans and purifies. Water refreshes. In the earliest biblical imagination, water is the fundamental element of creation itself. We come to the water of baptism aware of the brokenness of the world and our vulnerability to that brokenness. In baptism, we receive the forgiveness of our sins and the washing away of the arrogant idea that we can do anything to save ourselves.<sup>107</sup> In baptism, we are plunged into the death of Christ only to be pulled up again to a new life made possible by his Resurrection. In baptism, the Holy Spirit declares us to be a new creation, sealed as “Christ's own forever.”

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<sup>107</sup> Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist*, 78.

Baptism happens only once in a person's life, but its meaning informs the entirety of that life. Baptism is the identity of a disciple of Christ and, therefore, should properly guide their actions and decisions. In one sense, the sacrament of baptism has accomplished something in the person baptized that can never be removed. In another sense, baptism is a constant reminder in a world that continues in some degree or another in chaos (both inside and outside of ourselves) that we are called to constantly open ourselves both to the Spirit and the world as vessels of God's grace.<sup>108</sup> In all of this, we are called together as the baptized. We are called to worship together and give praise and thanks for the life we have been given and to learn and discern what that life might look like as we live in the world.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 15.



The conclusions are generally consistent with those of theological analyses reflected in the work of Odo Casel, Alexander Schmemmann, Johann Baptiste Metz, and David Brown and in the debate over the effect of Modernism in western Christianity. David Brown writes of the “disenchantment” of our utilitarian age.<sup>112</sup> Metz speaks more in terms of market economics, where “people find themselves part of an anonymous, inevitable, timeless, technological and economic process.”<sup>113</sup> With meaning evaporated in society in general, religion has become privatized as a kind of “add-on,” and community becomes more reflective of the mimetic theory of Rene Girard, where the only thing that holds us together are the victims we identify in common.<sup>114</sup>

Paradoxically, the fear of joining any institution that threatens our human autonomy encourages us to gravitate to groups that reflect our own particular prejudice. The desire, therefore, to be part of something contains within itself both virtue and vice. At the onset, as the church, particularly the parish church, we must ask ourselves frequently *why* we are gathering. Churches are hardly exempt from victim-making and are as vulnerable as any institution or group to reflecting the divisions of the society in which it is located. In many contexts, this takes courage, the courage of a Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany, for example. As with him, it takes a confession that contradicts those divisions and asserts as its core meaning the love of God in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>112</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 5-10.

<sup>113</sup> Morrill, *Anamnesis*, 27.

<sup>114</sup> James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong* (Crossroads: New York, 1998) 7-21.

## The Meaning of Gathering

When we speak of gathering, we can think about it in at least two ways. First, as we gather, we need to be mindful of the porous nature of the church's walls. William Temple commented on this peculiarity when he wrote "the Church is the only society which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members." Our gathering, therefore, is neither exclusive nor insular. Our gathering welcomes everyone, our gathering invites everyone, our gathering exists for the ultimate goal of serving the world and not ourselves alone.

A second sense of gathering is the posture and orientation of the gathering itself. We are a company that manifests in many real and symbolic ways the summary of the law that commands us to love God and our neighbor. The Holy Eucharist may lead to moments of deep personal piety, but the overall trajectory is not the gathering of individuals but the gathering of human beings, drawn together by the power of a loving God. In God we find the capacity to love one another.

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's extraordinary reflection on the nature of a religious community, *Life Together*, he wrote that "Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ."<sup>115</sup> Christians need each other for "encouraging one another" (Hebrews 10:25) with the word of God. It simply cannot be done alone. This community is not possible without Christ breaking down the walls of our self-obsession and fear.

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<sup>115</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 31-33.

Finally, we gather because that is what we do. As Alexander Schmemmann wrote, “The purpose is to fulfill the Church, and that means to make present the One in whom all things are at their end and all things are at their beginning.”<sup>116</sup> The gathering is to remember together the mighty works of God and to dwell upon them in order to embody, in some measure, the perfecting of this world. The world's perfection is our ambition, achievable through the power of praise and thanksgiving, without which our noble intents can too easily become idle dreams.

### **The Three Bodies of Christ**

French theologian Henri de Lubac pointed out an important historical-theological trend. Over the course of Christendom, Christ’s body has been identified in three ways: (1) the eucharistic body (the consecrated bread and wine), (2) the historical body of Jesus, who lived in first century Palestine, and (3) the ecclesial body (the church).<sup>117</sup> In the early church, these three bodies were closely bound, interrelated, and mutually reinforcing. However, during and after the Reformation, the focus fell on the Eucharistic body to the exclusion of the two others. Hans Boersma helps us to grasp the significance of this. “You focus so much on what makes a legitimate eucharist, and you zero in so unilaterally on the eucharistic body, that you forget the sacramental purpose of the eucharistic body is to create the ecclesial body. The *telos* (end) is communion.”<sup>118</sup>

The danger is still present if we focus too much on the actions of the table in a posture of exclusively individual piety. The point is that the action on the table cannot be

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<sup>116</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 27.

<sup>117</sup> Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Eerdsman: Cambridge, 2011) 112-116.

<sup>118</sup> Hans Boersma, 114.

separated from the gathering itself *as* a gathering. The action on the table is Communion in that larger sense that our gathering together is indicative of our gathering with God. The gathering, therefore, is consecrated and invited into the transforming power of God. That gathering then takes that transformation out into the world.

### **Gathering and the Sacramental**

*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you.*

Luke 22:15

*Lyla, can you remember a meal you had with family or friends that you really enjoyed?  
In church, we hope we have the feeling of being part of one another  
and, all of us, part of Jesus.*

Just as baptism is the sacrament of initiation in the church, the Holy Eucharist is the continuing sacrament of the people of God in Christ. The ordinary elements used are bread and wine, the basic ingredients of an ancient meal. In meals, we are nourished, kept from starving, and strengthened for the journey ahead. Meals are also shared. Others join us in this action, and with them, we have fellowship and build relationships. In the Holy Eucharist, we are all invited together by Christ to commune with him and with each other.

In order for this to happen, we have to gather together. Gathering is the first great movement of the Holy Eucharist. People have to leave wherever they are and whatever they are doing to come to join in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>119</sup> In one sense, it is another moment of claiming our baptized identity as members of the body of Christ. In gathering together, we assemble as the church.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, it is also realizing our baptized identity

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<sup>119</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 15.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

in the communal sharing of Christ. We become, as one theologian has said, what we eat.<sup>121</sup> We become the living body of Jesus Christ.

Gathering also requires us to think of ourselves as more than individual human beings. As individuals, we might understand the liturgy as a place to get something we need or to come in contact with what will fix us. When we gather, we can think in more empowering ways. As we gather, the Holy Spirit can form us together in each of the various gifts we have been given as we share in the holy eucharist.<sup>122</sup> In this way, when we gather together, we gather not as mere observers, but as a joined family in the ongoing action of God.

When we gather, we are also formed in the way we see other people. In the Eucharist, we encounter the mystery of God and others as both different and available to us in a rich encounter. In this encounter, we can begin to imagine ourselves as part of God's creation, where human boundaries can disappear.<sup>123</sup> In the Eucharist, even the boundaries of time are overcome as we gather together, just as the Hebrew people gathered under Mt. Sinai and the disciples gathered around Jesus. They gathered at a community banquet, yet celebrated the banquet to come, when all things will be brought to their perfection. When we gather, we share with all generations in heaven and on earth this same hope of which we already have a foretaste.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 11

<sup>122</sup> Morrill, *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist*, 22.

<sup>123</sup> Bieler and Shottroff, *The Eucharist*, 24.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 53-56

Gathering also implies unity. However, it is not a unity cemented together by either the will or the intentions of human beings. If unity is to be found in the gathering, its source is from above and not below.<sup>125</sup> This is shown at the very beginning of the liturgy in the procession toward the common focal point of the altar, a procession joined in by the people rising together and singing in praise of God.<sup>126</sup>

The liturgy intentionally binds us together from the opening dialogue, through our common hearing of the word read and preached, our common creed, our common prayers, and our common confession. In the exchange of the peace, the spirituality of our gathered nature becomes explicit. Once again, the source of this peace is not from ourselves but from God, from whom we receive the one thing we cannot either experience or share without the work of the Spirit, the love of God. The sacrament of the holy meal points to this gift in the holy communion itself as we, together, lift up our hearts in thanksgiving.<sup>127</sup>

Being the gathered brings into our being a sense of the value of what it means to be gathered in love. However, one can also recall what it means not to be gathered. Being gathered recalls the times we are not part of the gathering, either by circumstance or intention. It also recalls those who are outside of the gathering. The gathering is not, however, a moment of condescension, as if those outside are somehow beneath us. Gathering is a moment of hope in the possibility that all might be gathered together around the same grace and in the same posture of open and mutual love.

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<sup>125</sup> Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 149.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>127</sup> Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 136-140.

This is the same direction Brene Brown encourages, the direction of belonging and community, even though gathering takes a certain amount of bravery and self-possession. When we belong, we must belong as who we are, in all our vulnerability. She mentions Emile Durkheim in his exploration of religious experience and the “sensation of sacredness” that happens when we sense we are part of something larger than us.<sup>128</sup> She quotes Irish poet John O’Donohue, a great champion of Celtic spirituality:

Only holiness will call people to listen now. And the work of holiness is not about perfection or niceness; it is about belonging, that sense of being the Presence and through the quality of that belonging, the mild magnetic of implicating others in the Presence.... This is not about forging a relationship with a distant God but about the realization that we are already within God.<sup>129</sup>

Gathering is a practical necessity for worship, but it is more than that. It is a sacramental necessity. In our gathering, we enact the loving will of God for the world. For this reason, when there is conflict in the church it is never enough to approach it simply with civility and reason, as important as those are. Conflict must be approached under the covenantal authority and divine grace of the gift of our gathering, that we are called together in love, and that is the message we must bring “not only with our lips but in our lives” (from the General Thanksgiving of the Daily Office, *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 58, 71, 101, and 125).

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<sup>128</sup> Brene Brown, 130.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

### **Questions and Comments for Worship, the Church, and the World**

Gathering begins before we enter the church and continues long after we leave the church. Gathering is an expected interruption to ordinary life. How then can we prepare for it? How, in other words, might we begin the transition from our privatized world into the world of God's sacramental presence? Upon arriving early to church, does gathering mean chatting with folks, or can it also mean loving others in the gathering by allowing space for others to make their own transition in quiet contemplation?

Gathering continues afterward as we live into the strengthened and nourished baptized life we have received. As we act in imitation of Christ in the world, we act as the body of Christ. This moves us into the arena of vocation. Vocation is inconceivable without gathering, without becoming the church.

Since the gathering is an open gathering (we are not a cult), we should be particularly mindful of those who are visiting, as well as those who are not present. To the visitor, we are reminded that gathering is always to be welcoming. How can we be welcoming to those brave souls who walk through our doors? Might welcoming also entail inviting and evangelizing? Once they find themselves among us, how might we bring them more deeply into the gathering and its work and ministry? This leads us also to those who have fallen away from the gathering. Are they also part of the gathering and, if so, what is the gathering's hospitable responsibility to them?

As for those who are not present, we include them in our gathering by our prayers, reminding ourselves that they are not forgotten, whether living or dead. The gathering of the holy eucharist is never confined simply to those physically present, but also with those in the church who are in the nearer presence of God, those whom we love

and see no more. Our gathering is larger than simply the people around us. Because its focus is God, our gathering is of both heaven and earth.

The holy eucharist is full of shifting *foci* throughout the service. Movement of any particular focus is from place to place: in its several processions, to the word read and preached, in the confession and the prayers, at the peace, at the liturgy of Holy Communion itself. These all function to gather the congregation together in their shared attention to these shifting foci. The entire company, whether in the pews or in the altar party, are called to keep active the unity of this attention by participating in full and avoiding distractions. This mindfulness of the holy eucharist elevates the gathering; we “lift our hearts,” in a sense, throughout the service.

Music is also part of the gathering, “an indispensable part of Christian public worship,” writes Brian Wren. “By ‘indispensable’ I mean two steps down from ‘essential’ but three floors higher than ‘optional.’”<sup>130</sup> However, Wren notes that congregational song is in trouble nowadays, not because authority frowns on it, but because our culture undermines congregational participation through “performance-oriented popular music, electronic discordance, and overamplification.”<sup>131</sup> He advises wise use of the emotional power of music, which should engage the mind. Because music can be such a persuasive tool, he also urges caution against using it against the vulnerable for purposes of the superficial manipulation of emotions.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000) 47-48.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 74-76.

The peace is perhaps the most salient gathering point in the service, both because it comes freighted with meaning and because it sits right at the hinge between the two parts of the service, the liturgy of the word and the holy communion. “The exchange of the Peace also defines the Eucharistic community ritually and so binds the two parts of the service together,” Leonel Mitchell writes. “Those who greet each other in peace are those who will offer the eucharist together so that they become one with Christ.” Therefore, “It is not a folksy greeting of one’s friends and neighbors but a solemn liturgical rite.”<sup>133</sup> Solemn does not mean grim, but it does mean poignant, at the least. In the peace, we declare the love of God in defiance of so much of what goes on in the world and as the very basis for receiving the gift of Christ himself. It should be joyful but deliberate and intentional toward achieving the gracious love of God it seeks to signify.

**ii.**

**Word:**

**Listening and Responding to Holy Scripture**

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Hebrews 4:12

*“Lyla, can you think of a time when you wished somebody would explain to you something you were having a hard time understanding? These are difficult times because that’s when we have to sit still and listen. For most of us, that is one of the hardest things to do.”*

**The Breath of God in the Word**

The word of God is always associated with the breath or Spirit of God, the *ruach* in the Hebrew scriptures and the *pneuma* in the New Testament. God speaks the world into existence in the opening chapters of Genesis, as God does in the opening verses of

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<sup>133</sup> Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1985) 142.

the Gospel of John. In the latter verse, it is made clear that this word, evident in creation and in the revelation to the people of Israel, is made incarnate in Jesus Christ. Word then has different meanings, ranging from the collective words of the Bible to the “word made flesh.” It is in this range that we must “hear, learn, and internally digest” scripture by the grace of God and with the power of the same spirit by which the word itself was created and only by which it can be understood.

As we listen, we listen by the spirit in remembrance of words expressed and memorialized in the past as they find their relevance in the present. As we listen, we are inspired by the prophetic nature of the word, which points us to a future already unfolding in our lives. In all of this, we give thanks to be part of this wonderful work by responding in gratitude toward God and toward God’s world into which we are drawn forward to the goal of the kingdom and bringing, we pray, others with us.

### **Gathering to Receive the Word**

What draws a gathering together is their need to gather together. People experience all sorts of needs, some are desperate, and some are joyful. We gather because we need to be loved, cared for, and heard or sometimes simply because we need to celebrate and share. We gather together for worship because we, all of us together, need God, and in needing God, we are all together. Our need binds us together. Once we recognize that need, we can go a step further by opening ourselves to receive what God wants to give us, which is always himself. Like any other person who wants to give themselves to us, we can best begin by listening to them and by giving ourselves to them

in our attentiveness. In our need for God, we listen to God. By God's grace we can hear him by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>134</sup>

Of course, in the holy eucharist, the word is not confined to the reading of scripture and the preaching. The liturgy is rife with scripture from beginning to end. The word is in action in the liturgy, forming the gathered into the church. The liturgy is holy scripture set to the music of prayer from its opening dialogue, through the song of praise, the creed, and through the great thanksgiving.

Within the liturgy of the word proper, the lectionary varies the readings over three years (A, B, and C), with some emphasis respectively on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Readings from John are found throughout each church year. After Pentecost, two tracks are available; the first track provides a semi-sequential reading of the Hebrew scriptures each Sunday, which allows those texts to be heard in their own unfolding context and integrity, and the second track, "echoing the ancient Christian reading of the Hebrew scriptures as the foreshadowing of the person, actions, words, and events of Christ."<sup>135</sup> In this track, the Old Testament readings are intentionally matched with a theme in the gospel reading.

The larger context of the lectionary is the church year, which is divided into two cycles. The Christmas-Epiphany cycle begins in Advent and is thematic of the Incarnation, the coming and manifestation of Jesus as Christ. The older cycle is the Lent-Holy Week-Easter cycle which is thematic of the Passion and Resurrection. Easter, as the

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<sup>134</sup> See Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" in *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper's, 2009) 57-66.

<sup>135</sup> Morrill, *Encountering Christ*, 55.

very semblance and climax of the Paschal mystery is the center of the church year, as well as the model for every Lord's Day. The Easter season ends at Pentecost, followed by Trinity Sunday, then the long green season of "ordinary time." Bruce Morrill describes that central event of the Paschal mystery as the prism through which we understand ourselves and God through its many facets as we move around the different emphases of the Church year.<sup>136</sup>

### **Listening**

As we move through the lectionary and the church year, the gift of listening becomes even more valuable. Listening is hard. It recognizes that we do not have all the answers. It also recognizes that someone else might know something we do not. Listening recognizes that what that other person possesses may fill a void in our lives. If that void is particularly important to us, we might find ourselves listening carefully and quieting not only our outer voice, but also our inner voices. This kind of listening involves the whole body because it involves our entire life. It begins by letting down our pride and our willfulness and allowing God to help our listening. Listening in this gifted way can become transformational.<sup>137</sup>

This attentiveness is the posture of worship. Before we enter into the space of our gatherings, it is always helpful to prepare by consciously setting aside our distractions. We can thus begin to enter into the participation of the holy eucharist. As we have said, we are not simply watching a show or observing an action unrelated to ourselves. We are an essential part of the action in the words that are exchanged and the hymns that are

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>137</sup> See Rowan Williams, "Theological Integrity" in *On Christian Theology* (Blackwell: Malden, MA, 2000) 3-5.

sung. In our listening and in our responses, we proclaim our faith together and hear the proclaimed word of God together.<sup>138</sup>

Simone Weil reminds us that attention is an effort, perhaps the greatest of efforts, because it is a negative effort.

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated of the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of...as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that is to penetrate it.<sup>139</sup>

Listening to scripture is similar to truly honest conversation. Much of what passes for conversation appears more like dueling monologues, where there is no real listening, no exchange of ideas, and often much overtalking. True conversation begins with a desire to hear what the other person is saying in order to cultivate a spirit of longing to hear something one may not know and, by hearing it, entertaining the possibility that our lives might be enlarged by the conversation. Humility is the prelude for both such conversations and such listening.

### **Story and Mystery**

*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

Luke 4:21

Listening to the readings and the preaching prepares us for the sacrament of the bread and the wine. The readings provide a narrative context for holy communion. They tell us a story, regardless of the genre in which they are written. Scripture is a unified story of the companion themes of exile and return in the Hebrew scripture and death and

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<sup>138</sup> Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 22-26.

<sup>139</sup> Weil, 61-62.

resurrection in the New Testament. Scripture is, in fact, our story, and we are incorporated into it as we listen. This incorporation is summarized in the creed and particularized in the prayers. In the peace, we join together in solidarity as witnesses rather than simply observers. The story in which we are part is crystalized and clarified in the ritual enactment of holy communion. Our bodies respond to the word in the reception of the bread and wine and are nourished, strengthened, and prepared to continue the story. In this way, the word read and listened to attentively provides the substance for the liturgy of the table. Without the word read and heard, the actions in and around the bread and the wine can appear as nothing more than a magic show, just as without the sacrament of the table, the word can become mere lifeless doctrine. The word as sacrament, as an invitation into the life of God, points us to the sacrament of the table, where that invitation finds a further response in the participants living as the faithful people of God.<sup>140</sup>

The Bible opens up the story of God's love for God's people. As we listen in quieted reception of the word, we can find our own particular place in this story. As we listen together, we find both our orientation and direction as the body of Christ. Listening is accomplished not only by our intellectual understanding, what we have learned or have come to know about the scripture, but also by the power of God which we freely allow to work in us. As we read and listen in the context of worship, praise, and prayer, we are reminded of the mystical nature of our listening and the mystical nature of the word itself. As the power of scripture penetrates us, God is concurrently revealed through and beyond the literal into our contextual meanings. This power provides us with direction from the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 71

here and now to the destiny he has provided for us. The preaching is a sign of this continuing revelation of God who is not only transcendent and beyond our capacity to fathom, but who is also with us in his word.

Rowan Williams reminds us of the great paradox of listening to scripture. Sometimes we fully understand what is said on deep levels so that scripture translates directly into our lives and the life of the world. On the other hand, we are sometimes left clueless or, worse, positively revulsed by what we read. The text is often too dense or foreign or contains moral outrages beyond our own tolerable limits.<sup>141</sup>

“Scripture, we know, is not simply an oracle ... dropped down from heaven and engraved on stone,” Williams writes. “Scripture is a record of an encounter and a contest.” He likens it to Jacob wrestling with the angel. “Woven into Scripture are those two things, the giving of God and our inability to receive what God wants to give.”<sup>142</sup>

We need to read the Bible around Christ, and read it, therefore, in the confidence that our own mishearing and misapprehending, our own confusions and uncertainties about the text and about the matter with which it deals will be part of God’s triumphant work in us.<sup>143</sup>

One finds this the case in the hardest of passages. God is, after all, speaking in, to, and through a broken humanity, “a humanity poorly equipped to receive God’s liberty.”<sup>144</sup>

### **The Interpretive Task**

The wave of biblical criticism that rose out of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought with it a revolution of interpretive method as a crescendo of the entire post-Enlightenment period. With the advancement of modern science and scientific

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<sup>141</sup> Rowan Williams, “Reading the Bible”, *A Ray of Darkness*, 134-137.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 137.

method, scriptural interpretation became invested with the need to treat the scriptural text as any other ancient text, with the task of plunging into the depth of its historical context and textual history in order to discern the original intent of the writers.<sup>145</sup>

This reduction of the text to analysis, while offering up a vast amount of useful information and methodology, has the effect of objectifying the past itself and creating a huge gap between the text's past context and the present day. Metz points out this gap as the loss of a connected tradition in which there is a "loss of memory, the crucial 'inner elements of the critical consciousness' desperately needed by society today."<sup>146</sup> This scientific, objective search for original intent increasingly leaves less and less room to see how these ancient documents speak to us today, let alone how God speaks to us through them in our own context. Brian E. Daley calls this "*methodologically* atheistic."<sup>147</sup>

Daley in encouraging a return to more pre-modern, patristic principles of interpretation begins, paradoxically, with the late-modern or postmodern hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who theorized that such texts are not limited to "original intent" but actually do have a meaning independent of their source capable of challenging later readers. Everyone comes to such text in their own context and their own "horizon of understanding." Understanding occurs when the horizon of the writer and the horizon of the reader *merge*. This places scripture far more on the level of inspired art than dead letter, and the willingness to brave metaphor and symbol and concede the possibility of more than one meaning is offered to the reader of scripture. "Such is our confidence that

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<sup>145</sup> Brian E. Daley, SJ, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable", from Ellen J. Davis and Richard B. Hays, ed, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 2003) 69-73.

<sup>146</sup> Morrill, *Anamnesis*, 22.

<sup>147</sup> Daley, 72.

we have through Christ toward God,” Paul writes, “. . . who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in written code but in the spirit; for the written code kills, but the spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

It is entirely possible to listen to the word in the post-Enlightenment, modernist, and objective fashion, but a more appropriate way to listen, in the context of the liturgy, is *sacramentally*. This manner of reading expects this ancient word to say something to us today, the same way the early church did. This requires us, as the liturgy is designed for, to take God and the mystery of God seriously enough to suspend our disbelief and to do so, not in the privacy of one’s personal piety, but in the company of the assembly itself, the immediacy of the contemporary world, and in light of a received tradition.

Ellen Davis calls this listening to scripture “confessional” by acknowledging at the outset the central importance of the Bible itself that the role of the Bible is to

. . . tell us about the nature and will of God, to instruct in the many and often hidden ways in which God is present in the world and, second, to give us a new awareness of ourselves and our actions, to show us that in everything, we have to do with God. In a word, the Bible’s aim is to do theology.<sup>148</sup>

### **Preaching**

Preaching, like the liturgy of which it is part, is a *sacramental* act. Above all things, it reveals Christ. Thomas Long prefers to refer to it as an “event” with all its crucial ingredients: The congregation who are there to listen; the preacher who rises before them and thereby puts himself “in some new relationship to the others in the community”; the sermon that is not what the preacher has written, even if there is a text in front of the preacher. The sermon is what happens between the speaking of the

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<sup>148</sup> Ellen F. Davis, “Teaching the Bible Confessionally in the Church”, from Ellen J. Davis and Richard B. Hays, ed, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsmans, 2003) 11.

preacher and the listening of the people. “It is an action, a spoken event, that the preacher performs in Christ’s name.”<sup>149</sup>

Finally, there is the presence of Christ, for to say that the preacher acts in Christ’s name is to say more than the mere notion that the preacher is an agent for a distant authority. Christ is present in and with the church, and all ministries, including preaching, are expressions of this presence. Preaching does not cause Christ to be present. It is possible only because Christ is already present, and to speak in Christ’s name is to claim Christ’ own promise, “The one who hears you, hears me” (Luke 10:16).<sup>150</sup>

### **Language as Sacramental**

Language about God is necessarily analogical. We can only use images and phrases within our limited experience to move toward an understanding of God. In this sense, our theological and liturgical language always points beyond itself and always seeks more to evoke than to describe the nature of God. Language itself, Rowan Williams writes, is less descriptive than we normally think. Language is “representational” and, therefore, essentially multivalent in meaning and always contingent and dependent on context. Language always points forward without a fixed end. Conversations, in a sense, never end. There is always more to say.<sup>151</sup>

Louis-Marie Chauvet takes an even broader view that language is not merely, as we usually understand it, a descriptive instrument of the world around us. Chauvet writes that language mediates the world around us. “Language is no longer regarded as an instrument but as a womb: the subject arises and is maintained within it ... subject and

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<sup>149</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1989) 22.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>151</sup> Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) ix-xiii.

language are contemporaneous.”<sup>152</sup> Language is part of the “symbolic order” of the world and the way we understand ourselves through the way we distinguish ourselves in to the world and others, the

...milieu within which human beings learn, at their own expense, to accede to their own truth and, by the same token, accept to hear the call of truth, which is greater than themselves. At this point, one can glimpse the possibilities open to Christians with regard to their living relationship with God through the sacraments, these sensible and institutional mediations which are so ambiguous.<sup>153</sup>

David Brown in *God and Mystery in Words* also asserts the essential sacramental nature of words, arguing, not unlike Chauvet, that God is actually mediated in words themselves. Poetry provides the touchstone for this argument. Just as in poetry we can move from one form of perception to another, moving toward a new integration of the reality around us,<sup>154</sup> so also can words disclose not only a new integration of reality, but also the reality of God as Logos, the organizing principle of all life.

Likewise, metaphor, by its very nature, points beyond itself and is able to bring fresh, new, and surprising insights to the world of the reader. It connects the apparently unlike and reveals, Brown argues, the interconnectivity of everything. Given that time and reflection and is “not shut down too soon”<sup>155</sup> to allow the “full range of possibilities,”<sup>156</sup> metaphors both point beyond themselves and allow multivalent

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<sup>152</sup> Chauvet, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>154</sup> David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 51.

meanings. This allows the text to become what Brown described in a previous book as “moving,” of engendering a continuing human reflection of meaning in different contexts and times.<sup>157</sup> The text becomes the “inexhaustible” point of the experience of God whose very nature, consistent with this revelation, is also inexhaustible. The same can be said for the liturgical use of images and symbols whose power can be lost when meaning is limited to the literal and liberated when allowed a fuller range of meaning.

### **The Word as Transformational**

Garrett Green suggests that the biblical term “heart,” whether in the Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Greek of the New Testament, refers to what we might call “imagination.”<sup>158</sup> Imagination is what we are called to “lift up” at the beginning of Holy Communion and for which we implore God, at the very beginning of holy eucharist in the Collect for Purity to “cleanse.” We approach the word, therefore, with humility as we might in prayer, not prejudging or superimposing our own meaning, but standing prepared to have our hearts changed along with our minds. “The only alternative to proof-texting” Ellen Davis writes, “is reading with a view to what the New Testament calls *metanoia*, “repentance,” literally ‘change of mind’”<sup>159</sup>

As we sit and hear the word in rite and text in the context of the holy eucharist, we do so precisely as an act of prayer, of surrender in memory and hope, that God is speaking to us and leading us for the sake of his world.

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<sup>157</sup> David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 169.

<sup>158</sup> Davis, 11.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

iii. **The Holy Eucharist: The Presence**

*You speak in my heart and say, "Seek my face."  
Your face, Lord, will I seek.  
Psalm 27:11,  
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 618*

*"Lyla, can you think of a time when someone was with you but didn't seem to pay much attention to you? Now, think about a time when you felt someone really paid attention to you. Think a little about the difference."*

We usually know (children certainly do) when someone is not paying attention to us. On the other hand, most of us have had the transformative experience of being paid attention to, especially in a critical moment. In these times, we come to understand someone's personal presence to be a gift. They do not have to attend to us, but they freely do. The more often we enjoy the presence of someone who loves us, the more we are likely to be shaped by that relationship. This formation persistently occurs in us both because of love itself (the substance of love) and the way that person loves us (the form of love). Personal love is never static but is always active.

This is the life of God described in the Trinity, always relational, always loving, and always reaching out, *ad extra*.<sup>160</sup> The Trinity must always lead to the Incarnation, the coming of God among us. The Holy Eucharist is the unique celebration of this event and its momentous consequences and, beyond that, toward the anticipation of what this means looking forward, the hope of the Kingdom of God.

In the holy eucharist Jesus Christ, is declared generally to be present to us as a gift from God. Just *how* Christ is present has, at least since the Middle Ages, been a point of debate and conflict and still divides Christians today because when we speak of the

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<sup>160</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) 38-46.

presence of Christ, we cannot exclude the work of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross as a means for the redemption of the world. Are we to think of it as a “physical” presence, a “virtual presence,” a “real presence,” or some other kind of presence? Is the action of the holy eucharist, therefore, simply a reminder of Jesus Christ or an experience of Jesus Christ? Is the “presence” on the altar or is it “in the hearts” of the worshippers? These became important questions because they are central to what it means to “participate” in the life of God in the Holy Eucharist and so to be formed not only intellectually, but comprehensively in body and spirit.

The holy eucharist is a vital part of Christ’s invitation to “abide” with him (see especially John, chapters 13-16). We began this in baptism, and we are nurtured in this by the Holy Eucharist. It is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God’s gift to us to see more clearly the presence of God in our lives and, therefore, to discern the path our lives should take. The Holy Spirit is like God’s breath, which breathes into us all that we need to live life fully and completely and is as much of a gift to the world as God has been to us. When the gospel speaks of being “reborn” or having “new life,” this is the work of the Spirit.

### **Eucharistic Presence in History and Tradition**

When speaking of Christ’s “presence” in the Eucharist, it brings to mind an ancient understanding of God in the Bible.<sup>161</sup> It reminds us of the *shekinah* described by the rabbis, which evoked God’s dwelling in the ark and the temple and in the action of God leading the Israelites as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night in the

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<sup>161</sup> Allen Richardson, ed. *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1950) 172-6. <sup>12</sup> Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-19; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-26.

Exodus. It reminds us of the glory a transfiguring Jesus before Peter, James and John. It reminds us of the moment Jesus utters those startling words at the last supper: “This is my body ... this is my blood.”<sup>162</sup> These words come freighted with a rich tradition. The Eucharist imparts the history of God’s personal saving action through its Passover implications, the salvation of the Jewish people from slavery to freedom, and blends it into a feast of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. At the same time, it finds its foundation in the pattern of a simple and intimate Jewish meal of fellowship and common identity.

Gary Macy tells us that little theological commentary was written about the Eucharist until at least the ninth century; after all, he writes, “it is something someone does, not something about which one talks.”<sup>162</sup> Descriptive terms were used in those early writings, a mixture of what might today be called “realist” or “symbolic” language. Justin Martyr, in his First Apology speaks of the bread and drink of the Eucharist as “both the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus.”<sup>163</sup> Origen takes a characteristically more metaphoric view in his description of the institution language of Jesus: “He was not saying that the visible drink was his blood, but the word, in whose mystery the drink was to be poured out.”<sup>164</sup> St. Paul, in the earliest commentary we have of the Eucharist, at times uses extremely realistic language: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?” (I Corinthians 10:16).

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<sup>162</sup> Gary Macy, *The Banquet’s Wisdom: A Short History of the Theologies of the Lord’s Supper* (New York: Paulist Press) 15.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

Every commentary on the Eucharist is influenced by its historical and pastoral context. Macy tells us, “The early Christian writers had a much different view of reality than do most people in the late twentieth century ... and this difference is crucial in understanding what they have to say about the Eucharist.”<sup>165</sup> We do not today ordinarily think in terms of Platonic or Neoplatonic categories.

For example, in the Platonic world-view, there is a deep suspicion of sensory knowledge. True knowledge comes from the transcendent, non-sensory world, to be grasped by intellect or faith alone in a kind of ascending experience of purification from sensory perception to reach the highest principle of reality, which is God (*logos*). In this framework, transcendent essences, “substances,” and “forms” are always more real than sensory data.<sup>166</sup> The idea of “symbol” itself, in the Platonist understanding of the world, meant something entirely different from our own understanding. It was understood as something that allows you to “participate in what it represents.”<sup>167</sup> A symbol mediated the reality it represents. Augustine was influenced by this Neoplatonist schema: “What you see is transitory, but the invisible reality signified does not pass away, but abides. Behold, it is received, eaten, and consumed.”<sup>168</sup> Yet Augustine was known for very realistic language, especially in his controversy with Pelagius. Justo Gonzalez writes that

... two opposed tendencies are struggling in Augustine: the Eucharistic realism that was becoming more and more general, and the Neo-Platonic spiritualism that

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 39

<sup>166</sup> Ibid 39-42.

<sup>167</sup> William R. Crocket, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1989) 80. <sup>24</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>168</sup> Macy, 52

earlier had led Origen and others to interpret the Eucharist in spiritualistic terms.<sup>169</sup>

### **Protestants and Catholics**

Few aspects of the holy eucharist have gained as much notoriety for being a point of conflict as that of the precise nature of Christ's presence. In a very general way, there were those who thought something magical was being presented against all reason. On the other hand, there were those who believed that something mystical was being denied against all sense of God's transcendent nature. The story of this controversy is important because, in a very real sense, it continues to this day in many different ways.

Prior to the Middle Ages, according to Louis Marie-Chauvet, the common understanding of the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist was spoken of in relation to the gathered community.<sup>170</sup> "As de Lubac famously phrases it," he wrote, "the Eucharist makes the Church."<sup>171</sup> In the ages that followed, a gradual shift developed from the understanding of presence as the entire action of the Eucharist to understanding the presence as the specific elements of the eucharist, the bread and the wine, and a stronger connection between those elements as exclusively the province of the historic body of Christ.

Some date this to the theological disagreement in the ninth century between two monks of the same French monastery. Paschasius Radbertus (ca. 790-ca. 865) advocated a corporeal or realist point of view and emphasized the "horizontal" unitive effects of the

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<sup>169</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 2 From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* (New York: Abington, 1987) 52-3.

<sup>170</sup> Chauvet, 139.

<sup>171</sup> Boersmas, 114

Eucharist, and Ratramnus (died after 868) put forward a symbolist or spiritual point of view of the presence and emphasized the “vertical” salvific aspects of the Eucharist.<sup>172</sup> This controversy was heightened in the time of Berengar of Tours (999-1088) who, like Ratramnus, questioned the realist view. Lanfranc, later Archbishop of Canterbury, opposed him bitterly, which led to Berengar’s censure and his forced confession of heresy.

Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth century, applied Aristotelean thought and worked on the presumption that the essence, true reality, or “form,” of things we perceive with our senses existed separately from the matter or individuality of things. Together they constituted the substance of such things. Aquinas argued that, in the consecrated elements, the substance or inner reality had changed, while the “accidents” did not.<sup>173</sup> This was purely an intellectual change available only to the mind of the believer. While this began as a metaphysical argument, it ended, by the sixteenth century, as an empirical one.

“Transubstantiation,” confirmed by the Council of Trent in 1563, became to some Reformers little more than a magical way of conveying God’s grace through the consecration of the priest. Calvin called it “a piece of sorcery.”<sup>174</sup> If Christ’s body is present, is this another sacrifice? What is the role of the congregation in the mass? Are they able to offer anything in the way of oblation or offering for the conferring of this

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<sup>172</sup> Owen M. Phelan, “Horizontal and Vertical Theologies: Sacraments in the Works of Paschasius Padhertus and Ratramnus of Corbie, *Harvard Theological Review*, July 1, 2010, 103:3, 271-289.

<sup>173</sup> Macy, 107-8.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 162.

grace? Finally, what of the posture of the belief of the recipient of the elements at the Eucharist? Was faith a necessary precondition to the grace offered in the rite?

The religious landscape of Europe in the sixteenth century became a place of hardened positions. Diarmaid MacCullough writes, “Rome closed down options by the decisions of the Council of Trent: Protestants too were anxious to weed out rival versions of Protestantism.”<sup>175</sup> Polite religious differences were no longer possible.

For Luther, a real presence of Christ was in the elements, not only because of the clear words of scripture, but also because Christ’s presence had the nature of “ubiquity.” In other words, Christ could be anywhere Christ desired to be. He saw Christ’s presence in the eucharist like an iron rod in a fire, when taken out, the heat is retained for all to feel.<sup>176</sup> This in contrast to the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli, whose rejection of transubstantiation had gone far in the other direction to that of a “merely” spiritual presence.

John Calvin (1509-1564) saw faith as a gift of God and the Eucharist as the place to strengthen and confirm that gift.<sup>177</sup> Calvin affirmed a real presence but differed from Luther as to the effect of that presence in the unfaithful. For Luther, the unbeliever who received the gifts of the holy eucharist did “nothing else but increase . . . damnation,” therefore, receiving without faith has eternal negative consequences. The exhortation preceding the holy eucharist in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* makes this clear. For Calvin, the matter was simple. Nothing happens. Since the unbeliever had no prior

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<sup>175</sup> Diarmaid MacCullough, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2003) xxi-xxii.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>177</sup> Macy, 161.

connection to Christ by faith, the eucharist, which merely affirmed faith, added nothing to it. For the believer, however, in the eucharist, the Holy Spirit effected the presence of Christ.<sup>178</sup>

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), the person most associated with the creation of the first books of common prayer for the English Church, was a theologian whose point of view on the presence of Christ in the holy eucharist moved across the theological spectrum contemporary to his era throughout his lifetime. Like many, both then and today, he changed and developed over the years of his life, a life deeply embedded in the violence and controversy of the English Reformation and its multivalent philosophical, theological, and social context. He moved from being a loyal Catholic humanist to a devoted Lutheran, then finally far closer to Zwingli than many Anglicans would like to admit.

In England, the official eucharistic theology also shifted. The *42 Articles of Religion* (1553) denied the real presence as well as transubstantiation. The subsequent *39 Articles of Religion* (1563) under Elizabeth took a more moderate tone.

The Body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith. (XXVIII)

Richard Hooker (1554-1600), the great Elizabethan theologian, had the tendency to place the presence of Christ in the person of the receiver, although he seemed to tire of the controversy: “I wish that men would more give themselves to meditate with silence what we have by the sacrament, and less to dispute of the manner how?”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Macy, 166-67.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, (3), 320.

This hallowed food, through concurrence of divine power is in verity and truth, unto faithful receivers, instrumentally a cause of that mystical participation, whereby as I make myself wholly theirs, so I give them in hand an actual possession of all such saving grace as my sacrificed body can yield, and as their souls do presently need, this is to them and in them my body.<sup>180</sup>

The English “divines” of the seventeenth century continued to write about a substantial Eucharistic real presence. Herbert Thorndike (1598-1672) wrote, “The Fathers acknowledge the elements to be changed, translated, and turned into the substance of Christ’s body and blood; though as in a sacrament, that is, mystically; yet, therefore, by virtue of the consecration, not of his faith that receives,”<sup>181</sup> and John Cosin (1594-1672) would write similarly “that in the Eucharist by virtue of the words and blessing of Christ the bread is wholly changed in condition, use, and office: that is, ordinary and common, it becomes our mystical and sacramental food.”<sup>182</sup> Lancelot Andrews (1555-1626), a faithful Anglican, more cautiously wrote in a letter to Cardinal Bellarmine that “Christ said ‘This is my Body.’ He did not say, ‘This is my Body in this way.’ We are in agreement with you at to the end ... we believe no less than you that the presence is real. Concerning the method of the presence, we define nothing rashly.”<sup>183</sup>

### **The Oxford Movement**

The Oxford movement of nineteenth century England took up the mantle of this high view of the presence of Christ in the eucharist and would substantially influence

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, (12), 329

<sup>181</sup> H.R. McAdoo and Kenneth Stevenson, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Anglican Tradition* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1995) 12.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 13.

subsequent theological discussions. Edward Bouverie Pusey was perhaps its greatest, or at least most persistent, advocate, even in an ecclesiastical atmosphere hostile to such views as suspiciously “Roman.” Pusey, Owen Chadwick wrote, “thought of the Eucharist as the gate through which the Lord came to take up His habitation in the soul.”<sup>184</sup> His enthusiasm for the eucharist and especially for his understanding of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament poured out in his enthusiastic sermon of 1843, which had the thoroughly pastoral title of *The Holy Eucharist: A Comfort to the Penitent*. His language soars:

In all these varied symbols, strength, renewed life, growth, refreshment, gladness, likeness to Angels, immortality, are the gifts set forth; they are gifts as to the Redeemed of the Lord placed anew in the Paradise of His Church, admitted to his Sanctuary, joying in His Presence, growing before Him, filled with the river of His joy, feasting with Him, yea Himself feasting in them, as in them He hungereth. Hitherto, there is no allusion to sin; it is what the Church should be, walking in the brightness of His light, and itself reflecting that brightness.<sup>185</sup>

Pusey’s particular understanding of the real presence has been described as one of “moderate realism.”<sup>186</sup> Here Pusey placed himself between the nominalism (aka receptionism) of evangelicals and the High Church party and the “immoderate” realism of the carnal presence of Roman Catholic transubstantiation. The distinction was important for Pusey to defend his credentials in the Church of England not only against “Romanism,” but also, as Brian Douglas writes, to express both his epistemology and ecclesiology. “Moderate realism” charts how he “knows” that Christ is present. He is not

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<sup>184</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967) 49.

<sup>185</sup> E. B Pusey, *The Holy Eucharist A Comfort to the Penitent* (London: John Henry Parker; J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1843) 6, found at <https://archive.org/details/a678858106puseuoft>

<sup>186</sup> Douglas, Brian, *The Eucharistic Theology of Edward Bouverie Pusey* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 9.

like the Roman Church, which requires a rational Aristotelian formula for an explanation. He is also not like the evangelical who might think of it as a “mere memorial” of Christ.

As for Pusey's ecclesiology, the presence was not merely an object for passive devotion. “The chief object of the Holy Eucharist ... is the support and the enlargement of life,”<sup>187</sup> a life larger than the individual because it is life as inseparable from the Church as it is from Christ himself:

This is the perfection after which all the rational creation groans, this for which the Church...groaneth within herself...the whole multitude of the Redeemed being gathered in One Body, His whole Body should, in him, be perfected in the Unity of the Father....He, by the truth of the Sacrament, dwelleth in us, in Whom, by Nature, all the fullness of the Godhead dwelleth; the lowest is joined on with the highest, earth with heaven, corruption with incorruption, man with God. <sup>188</sup>

This was the vision of the eucharist that joined the entire Church on earth with God in Christ in heaven and, by this vast and eternal communion made possible by Christ's real presence, created a sacred community in solidarity for the sake of the world.

Here we begin to see the healing unity and strength of the ordinary congregation bound together in the presence of the person of Christ. Pusey preached, “Were it only a thankful commemoration of His redeeming love ... it would have no direct healing ... (but) it is His Blood.”<sup>189</sup> In Pusey's thought, we see emerge that strong connection between the Eucharistic elements and the gathered body of Christ who come to celebrate their Lord, a connection which would have been so familiar to the early church.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 14-15

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 18.

In the subsequent writings of such liturgical scholars as A.G. Hebert<sup>190</sup> in England and William Palmer Ladd,<sup>191</sup> part of the twentieth century Liturgical Movement, the centrality of the eucharist in the life of the parish found enthusiastic promotion, which led directly to the development of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* in use today.

### **Eucharistic Presence for the Sake of the World**

More recently, the work of David Brown has explored how the gift of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist might open up an even larger project. His work argues for a renewed understanding of the sacramentality of the world and of the presence of God in creation and in God's creatures. He writes that the experience of God has been artificially narrowed by modernism to only a few limited "religious" categories. This narrowing is in contrast to the earlier and more expansive understanding of God's interaction with human beings in the context of nature and culture. As a result, we are left with the modern "disenchantment" of the world.<sup>192</sup> This development has led to a crisis in theology and the church where both, unmoored from the broader context of God's revelation in the world, have become the purview of an isolated elite.

For a growing majority in Western culture, faith has become an "optional extra, almost just like one more competing leisure activity,"<sup>193</sup> the result of the modernist

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<sup>190</sup> A. G. Hebert, ed. *The Parish Communion* (London: SPCK, 1957) 3-23.

<sup>191</sup> William Palmer Ladd, *Prayer Book Interleaves* (Greenwich: Seabury Press, 1942) 50-51.

<sup>192</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place*, 16. (borrowing a phrase from Weber who, in turn, borrowed it from Schiller).

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

“advance of rationality into all areas of life” and the inevitable “retreat of religion.”<sup>194</sup>

What Brown’s work suggests is that the sacramentality of the church can be strengthened and deepened through a renewed appreciation of the sacramentality of the world. If this is true, then the reverse may be also: the sacraments of the church may be able to reveal something of the sacramentality of the world.<sup>195</sup>

In *God and Grace of Body*, Brown explores how the body itself might mediate the experience of God. He illustrates his argument with the examination of the body as beautiful or wasted, in food, in dance, and in music both classical and contemporary. This discussion leads directly to his insistence on “the reality of Christ’s ‘physicality’ in the eucharist despite the ethereal character of that presence.”<sup>196</sup> Since, as he argues, the activity of God in the world is everywhere, comprehensive in form and constant in character ...

... it seems to me no accident that Christianity’s central sacrament focuses on body and on a human body at that. It is no mere ‘spiritual presence’ that is on offer in the Eucharist but one envisaged in definitely material terms. Earthly reality is present not just in the bread and the wine but also through the whole humanity of Christ being once more made available, however transformed it has become through entering a new type of existence.<sup>197</sup>

The human body itself is capable of functioning sacramentally. Since we communicate through our bodies, that communication can also point beyond the body itself as, for example, in acts of love and friendship. Since the human body has this sacramental

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>195</sup> David Brown, *God and Mystery in Words*, 267.

<sup>196</sup> David Brown, *God and Grace of Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 3.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 407-409.

quality, we should take it seriously in worship, not merely as a passive receptacle of pious information. The “body is no less integral to who we are than the words that express our minds.”<sup>198</sup> The body, engaged in lively worship, in song, and in prayer, speaks directly to the personal presence of Christ and breathes life into the ritual language of worship.

At the center of that worship, Brown reminds us, is the sought humanity of Christ in sacramental action, which mediates Christ’s divinity. Brown argues to reclaim the body of Christ against the modern relegation of it as “mere metaphor.”<sup>199</sup> How then is Christ present in the eucharist? Brown argues it is through the perspective of incorporation. Taking John’s language of the vine and branch, Paul’s language of the body and its parts, and the communal emphasis in ancient societies, Brown sees the presence of Christ as his intimate and continued bonding with the gathered community in which the relationship between heaven and earth and divine and human is established and continuing. A renewed elevation of the importance of Ascension Day as the sign of the continued bodily presence of Christ in heaven could, Brown argues, provide just such a proper reminder of this “vital” understanding.<sup>200</sup>

Hans Boersma reminds us that this kind of broader understanding of the presence of God was a prevalent first millennium worldview.

... the debates surrounding the real presence (or, we might say, participation) in the Eucharist were but a particular instantiation of a much broader discussion about the real presence. While the church fathers and medieval theologians did look to the bread and wine of the sacrament in which Christ was really present, in

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 390.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 405.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 407-9.

making this point they simultaneously conveyed their conviction that Christ was mysteriously present to the entire created order. Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist was, we might say, an intensification of his sacramental presence in the world.<sup>201</sup>

Louis Weil concludes his *Theology of Worship* in a similar vein:

In the light of the Incarnation, the whole created, physical world has the capacity to become the place in which God dwells, in every part and in each one of us ... as the people of God, we are witnesses to that grace by which all created things are sustained in being. Our dust, our humanity, is shot through with hints of glory. And that dust finds its deepest fulfillment in the praise of God.<sup>202</sup>

### **Presence and Participation in the Life of God**

The presence of Christ is neither limited to the eucharist nor to any particular part of the Eucharist. Part of the recent concern around an undue emphasis on the institution narrative ("This is my body...") is that it discourages a broader understanding of Christ, mysteriously present throughout the entire service, as well as just prior in preparation and upon leaving in mission and ministry. The presence of Christ in both word and sacrament is the formative basis for our work in the world. This presence is supremely incarnational in that it greets transcendence with imminence, the God beyond our imagination and the God who fills our imaginations and empowers our bodies. Christ's presence is the meeting place of God and humanity for the sake of the world. We experience this presence when we give thanks, when we remember, and when we look toward the future in hope of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>201</sup> Hans Boersma, 26.

<sup>202</sup> Louis Weil, *A Theology of Worship* (Cambridge: Cowley, 2002) 143.

Over thirty years ago in his *Participation in God*, A.M. Allchin bemoaned the loss of the sense of Christ's presence as “the forgotten strand of the Anglican tradition.”<sup>203</sup> “They have abandoned the Christian tradition which seems only to talk about God without showing any way to realize his presence.”<sup>204</sup> Here, he indicates (along with the Church Fathers) where true joy is to be found. In Christ's presence is where we must discover the Holy Spirit, which “makes us truly sharers in God’s nature, makes us sons in the Son, temples of God.”<sup>205</sup> In this, moreover, “there is nothing privatized about this intimately personal joy.”<sup>206</sup> As John Chrysostom remarks, “The bliss of all shall increase the bliss of each.”<sup>207</sup>

Allchin does broaden the Eucharist from a concentration on the sacrificial death of Christ “to an understanding of the Eucharist as the perpetual presence of Easter in the Church, the constant renewal of Pentecost . . .”<sup>208</sup> He accomplishes this time and again through the theological biographies of the great lights of the Anglican tradition: Hooker and Andrewes, Charles Wesley and Williams Pantycelyn, and E. B. Pusey.

The Christian tradition is thus full of an affirmation of God’s nearness to humankind, and of our own unrealized potential for God. The basic affirmations that Jesus is Lord, Jesus is the Christ, are affirmations about the possibilities of man (sic), about the intimacy of relationship between human and divine, no less than about the

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<sup>203</sup> A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in the Anglican Tradition* (New York: Morehouse, 1988).

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

mystery of God. They speak about a meeting, a union of God with humankind which alters our understanding, our deepest experience of what it is to be human.<sup>209</sup>

**iv. The Holy Eucharist: Vocation**

*O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Collect for Proper 10

*The Book of Common Prayer, 231*

*“Lyla, have you ever felt lost? The wonderful thing about finding out where we are or finding the answers to the problems that puzzle us is not so you can simply stand where you are but know where you can go from there.”*

**The Images of Mission**

The question of the mission of the Church and its members in the world is not simply handed out at the end of the holy eucharist with the deacon’s dismissal to “love and serve.” The Eucharist both prepares and guides us toward this apostolic moment. The Collect of the Day begins the liturgy by bringing at least one single and substantial focus to a theme to be both celebrated in the gathering and practiced in the world. The prayers of the people identify, Sunday to Sunday, specific focal points of our mission and ministry, allowing room where “our hearts must grow and must be constantly enlarged in sensitivity to the world’s suffering and sensitivity to the victorious mercy of God.”<sup>210</sup>

The remembrance of God’s love and justice in the reading of the word projects us into the work before us. The prophetic challenge to respond to God in our lives in hope through prophetic preaching helps to reveal our roles in the world when we leave the church and

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>210</sup> Rowan Williams, *Ray of Darkness*, 119.

take up our ordinary lives again. In fact, the entire liturgy of word and sacrament informs and guides us by forming us into witnesses of the Gospel for its mission in the world.

The holy eucharist is not a place to stay but a place to start again. Baptism has already given us an identity and a direction. The Holy Eucharist keeps us on course by reminding us of who we are, what we are about, and where we are going. In the Holy Eucharist, we find our charted course again in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. This course always moves back into the world to love and serve the Lord and to do that by service in the lives of other human beings.

When describing this charted course in world, Rowan Williams gives a series of well-known biblical images. We are called to be *servants* and to tend to the needs of the world by the grace of God. We are called to be *prophets* as the voice of a loving God who tells the truth, challenges the world in love, reminds the world of the larger meaning of life, and encourages and questions the world in its brokenness. We are called to be *priests* as the mender of relationships among people and between people and God. We are called to be *kings* who seek the welfare of people in justice and peace.<sup>211</sup>

In all of this, we are called into a trajectory toward a future dramatically implicit in the memorial acclamation, “Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.” In a sense, we are called to remember forward. We are called to remember who Christ is and, at the same time, what the world would look like if Christ’s reign were full and clear to us. We are called forward into this world as God’s re-creating agents. The significance of the procession out after the conclusion of the post-Communion prayer is not the end of the service, but a new beginning. The closing words of the liturgy, the deacon’s

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 959-104.

dismissal, is really both invitation and challenge. Our reply is a joyful embrace of this challenge while, at the same, affirming the source of the strength and courage necessary to meet it: “Thanks be to God.”

### **Believing and Doing**

*Lyla, sometimes we do the right things because we believe we should do those things.  
Sometimes we do things just because we want to do them,  
because something tells us they just need to be done.  
Is wanting to do the right thing the same thing as believing?*

What drives us into action? We often act because we have come to believe a certain action is needed and justified. Life itself is the field in which our real beliefs takes shape.

We all have a sense of what we believe. Many of us believe in God. Some of us do not. The idea of God is itself more complex than we ordinarily understand, whether we are believers or unbelievers. This complexity becomes more problematic when we try to separate what we formally believe from how we live. If God were simply an intellectual construct in our minds, then it would not be difficult to imagine disbelieving in God. God would become like an item on a menu that we could choose to order or not. The purpose of the liturgy is to bring some purposeful reality to our belief in words and gestures and thereby enact belief in a form that can be brought to bear in life.

What has been handed down from Christ and the faith he offered us is not merely belief but practice. We live out what we believe. Sometimes, we live out of what we do not believe, and we are called to learn from this, as the decisive words of the baptismal covenant indicate, “whenever we fall into sin, we repent, and return to the Lord.”<sup>212</sup> Repentance is the constant state of the Church because it is the constant state of human

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<sup>212</sup> The Book of Common Prayer, 304, 417.

beings. We are creatures who make mistakes. The difference between Christian faith the ordinary state of the world is that, in faith, we have a new beginning. “Our sins,” as Rowan Williams said, “become starting points, not stopping points.”<sup>213</sup> According to our faith, this is possible because we can always rely, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, on the love of God.

The holy eucharist is the preparation, the rehearsal, and the prelude to precisely this kind of life, not mere pantomime. We come to it not for “solace only,” but for “strength” and not “for pardon only,” but for “renewal” (Prayer C).<sup>214</sup> The Holy Eucharist is a place of the most supreme piety. However, piety means little if we cannot begin again in our lives and in the world around us to make a difference. Believing means little unless we are doing. This active, energetic belief is proclaimed, articulated, empowered, and enacted in the holy eucharist. The rite itself has no magical power. Instead, where it is engaged with intentionality and integrity, it becomes responsive to a loving God, and by that response, we become conformed to that very image. In the holy eucharist, we aspire to look like this loving God. In other words, in the holy eucharist, we simply become the Church.

Questions for Ourselves and for the Church:

When have we acted contrary to what we believe?

What are we prepared to do about that?

What help will we accept to move forward?

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<sup>213</sup> Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness*, 52.

<sup>214</sup> The Book of Common Prayer, 372.

### Vocation as Response

*Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit  
That we may perfectly love you  
And worthily magnify your holy Name;  
Through Christ our Lord.*

From the Collect for Purity  
*The Book of Common Prayer*, p.355

The Collect for Purity, when prayed at the very beginning of the Holy Eucharist, asks for clarity as we begin the service. Originally a private prayer of preparation for the priest, over time it became available to the entire gathering.<sup>215</sup> It sets the tone for the formation to come and our willing availability in our participation with God by the Holy Spirit.

Vocation begins with clarity of self and purpose. The liturgy is not a brainwashing tool to replace what we really want to do with our lives with something foreign and abhorrent to our own preferences. Rather, in the liturgy, we remember who we really are, what we really believe, and what we really hope for, all as variations on the theme of love. It may indeed change our preferences, which is the nature of prayer entered into with a clean heart, free of our own foregone conclusions about ourselves and the world. “Vocation is”, as Rowan Williams once preached, “what’s left when all the games have stopped. It is the last elusive residue that we are here to discover and help one another discover.”<sup>216</sup> One wonders what might happen if the Sunday morning liturgy, in its entirety, were approached like a time and place for the most guileless discovery.

What might be discovered? Franciscan priest and writer Richard Rohr suggests one might find one's true self, which is the opposite of the “false self.”

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<sup>215</sup> Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995) 319.

<sup>216</sup> Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness*, 152.

Your false self is your role, title, and personal image that is largely the creation of your own mind and attachments. It will and must die in exact correlation to how much you want the Real .... The surrendering of our false self, which we have usually taken for our absolute, yet is merely a relative identity, is the necessary suffering needed to find the “pearl of great price” that is always hidden inside this lovely but passing shell.<sup>217</sup>

“He who loses his life for my sake will find it,” Jesus teaches (Matthew 10:39, cf. Luke 17:33). In relationship with others, we discover who we really are. In our relationship with the living God, we see in Jesus Christ that we can make the further discovery that no bargaining or pretense is either possible or needful. In our relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as the image of the active God who reaches out to us as the eternal initiator of this relationship, we can, in our response, discover who we really are and are created to become.

It’s all a way of restating the idea that vocation has to do with saving your souls -- not by acquiring a secure position of holiness, but by learning to shed the unreality that simply suffocates the very life of the soul. It has to do with recognizing that my relationship with God (and so with everybody) depends absolutely on making decisions to be what I am, to answer God’s Word, and do this without fuss and existentialist drama because what I am is already known and loved and accepted by God.<sup>218</sup>

The liturgy is precisely this kind of recognition, what Williams calls “mirroring” God, “playing back to God his self-sharing, self-losing care and compassion.”<sup>219</sup> The liturgy is the practice of God’s presence in our lives and not a reinforcement of our own prejudices and predispositions.

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<sup>217</sup> Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Josse-Bass, 2011) 85-6.

<sup>218</sup> Williams, *Ray*, 151.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

### Mission Malfunctions

*For as rain and snow fall from the heavens,  
And return not again but water the earth,  
Bringing forth life and giving growth,  
Seed for sowing and bread for eating,  
So is my word which goes forth from my mouth,  
It will not return to me empty;  
But it will accomplish that which I have purposed,  
And prosper in that which I sent it.*

Isaiah 55:11

The Second Song of Isaiah, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 87

When we enter the church door for the celebration of the holy eucharist, we are, in one sense, leaving the world behind. As previously referenced, Charles Heifetz urges his readers in the business community and leaders of all kinds to experience the “balcony view,” where one must regularly get off the dance floor of the crowded rough and tumble of life and get a wider, deeper, and broader perspective.<sup>220</sup> Alexander Schmemmann’s description of the early church’s liturgy is roughly analogous.

The early Christians realized that in order to become the temple of the Holy Spirit they must ascend to heaven where Christ has ascended. They realized also that this ascension was the very condition of their mission in the world, of their ministry in the world. For there -- in heaven -- they were immersed in the new life of the Kingdom; and when, after this “liturgy of ascension,” they returned into the world, their faces reflected the light, the “joy and peace” of that Kingdom and they were truly its witnesses.<sup>221</sup>

For Miroslav Volf, the quality of this “ascent” is as critical as the quality of the corresponding descent or “return.”

The ascent is the receptive moment. “Return” is the point at which, in interchange with the world, the message is spoken, enacted, built into liturgies or institutions, or embodied in laws. The return is the *creative* moment.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Heifetz, ix

<sup>221</sup> Schmemmann, *The Life of the World*, 28.

<sup>222</sup> Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011) 8.

Volf points out the problems and pitfalls of an essentially prophetic faith once it enters the world fresh from its experience with the divine. “Ascent” issues occur where there is the possibility that our reception of the divine is blocked by our personal preconceptions and agendas. Corresponding “return malfunctions” occur that can impede the ambitious prophetic commission by focusing on too narrow a scope (the reduction of most moral issues to the realm of sexuality, for example), which results in an essentially “idle” faith in the larger picture of worldly challenges. Another return malfunction is the all too common coercive faith that imposes pat answers on the unwilling. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has described this dangerous phenomenon as the “radical dualism” of fundamentalist religion, where the absolute rightness of one's cause must spell the utter wrongness of all others, with all the dehumanizing violence of words and deeds that follow.<sup>223</sup> We see this in radical Islam and have certainly seen it in fundamentalist Christianity, where it has translated our political and social structure and become the new arena of religious (or quasi-religious) conflict.

Volf suggests another way, the way of being in the world and not of the world (John 15: 19, 17:14-16) or “leaving without departing,” a phrase borrowed by Volf. The liturgy is where this is practiced, where the spiritual is mixed with the material. The liturgy is an echo of the potential in all meals. Similar to Paul’s remarks to the church in Corinth (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11), Volf suggests that “a meal can be an occasion for generosity and an expression of worship rather than an instance of individual or communal self-gratification.”<sup>224</sup> Here human beings can be intentionally engaged in love and the

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<sup>223</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (Schoken: New York, 2015) 44-65.

<sup>224</sup> Volf, *Public Faith*, 91.

unconditional sharing of faith without expectation of acceptance and with the further expectation that even the giver of wisdom can receive wisdom, even from an unbeliever who utterly rejects the faith of believers. This is possible, Volf writes, because the true goal to which the Christian strives is not a short-term, dualistic victory with winners and losers, but one of “human flourishing.” The true goal is the inclusive vision of a world saved in the image of the New Jerusalem from the Book of Revelations and in the visionary language of St. Paul for the world, where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, no longer slave nor free, no longer male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). Navigating between an under- and over-realized eschatology, Volk points us to Paul’s *partly realized eschatology* to live “as if” in the midst of the current tensions of the world. The basic Christian understanding of the world as it actually is can become a hopeful starting point.

First, we must construe the *world as created good* by God, meaning that material goods are not merely things but relations, gifts from the God of love, given equally to all. Second, we ought to see the *world as malformed by sin*, recognizing how the world is broken, especially how ungodly power has distorted the world and enthroned the distortions as “natural,” apparently usurping the rightful priorities of creation. Third, we ought to construe *the world as the site of God’s indwelling in the person of Jesus Christ*, seeing the redemption of all things currently and completely underway. Finally, we must construe *the world as destined for eschatological consummation*, seeing the world both in hope and with sober awareness that the world is not yet what it will be one day.<sup>225</sup> (emphasis added)

These four points should be familiar to anyone who has been attentive during Rite II at holy communion. These points virtually encapsulate the Eucharistic prayers. Taking eucharistic prayer B as an example:

We give thanks to you, O God, for *the goodness and love which you have made know to us in creation*; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word

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<sup>225</sup> Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasman, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* 163.

spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. *In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.*<sup>226</sup>(emphasis added)

The institution narrative of Holy Communion itself follows, punctuated by the memorial acclamation, mixing *anamnesis* with its great eschatological declaration and leading us forward again:

We remember his death,  
We proclaim his resurrection,  
We await his coming in glory.<sup>227</sup>

Another example of the encapsulation of the four points is the Christian narrative: the created goodness of the world for which we are thankful and the tragic brokenness of the world in which we are deeply mindful. Nevertheless, it is that same world in which God chooses to continue to be present and that same world with a destiny of wholeness and completeness that we anticipate with so much eager longing that we are transformed by its promise, here and now, for the sake of that very world. The whole dramatic narrative is then rounded off with the *epiclesis*, the call for the Holy Spirit to sanctify the gifts and those receiving them and to imbue both with grace, to make both sacraments for the Kingdom and vessels of God's love.

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<sup>226</sup> The Book of Common Prayer, 368.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 368.

### **Mission and Holiness**

*Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only,  
and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.  
Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ,  
that we may worthily serve the world in his name.*  
from Eucharistic Prayer C,  
*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 372.

It has been ten years since Bill Bishop published *The Big Sort*, his seminal book on demographic shifts in the United States, and longer still since he began his 2004 research based on patterns begun by 1974.

The old system of order -- around land, family, class, tradition, and religious denomination, gave way. They were replaced over the next thirty years with a new order based on personal choice. Today we seek our own kind in like minded churches, like minded neighborhoods, and like minded sources for news and entertainment ... like minded homogeneous groups squelch dissent, grow more extreme in their thinking, and ignore evidence that their positions are wrong. As a result we now live in a giant feedback loop, hearing our own thoughts about what's right and wrong bounced back to us by the television shows we watch, the newspapers and books we read, the blogs we visit online, the sermons we hear, and the neighborhoods we live in.<sup>228</sup>

What role is there for the parish church in such an environment? The parish can be a promising place where, in the same breath, there is communion with God and with each other, not only regardless of our differences, but because of our differences. We seek communion precisely because we are different, different from God and different from each other. Moreover, this liturgical Communion can permeate not only diversity of persons, but diversity of actions. William Palmer Ladd wrote that the liturgy “should gather up and sanctify every parochial activity.”<sup>229</sup> Building on this ever-expansive

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<sup>228</sup> Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like Minded America is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2009) 39.

<sup>229</sup> William Palmer Ladd, *Prayer Book Interleaves* (Greenwich: Seabury Press, 1957) 55.

understanding of the liturgy, Communion can gather up and sanctify a baptized people to serve the world in the very same spirit of communion and reconciliation.

The shift is clear to the parish church. We are responsible for ourselves and our own character, both individual and corporate, not because we need to be good, but because the world needs our goodness. Rowan Williams reminds us that this is what New Testament mission is all about, that the church would be nothing less than “God’s authorizing or empowering agents of the divine purpose for the world, a purpose now made known as the formation of unrestricted community.”<sup>230</sup> The divine act of being in communion and the incarnation itself must point toward this agency. God in Christ “proclaims and enacts an existence that is not undermined by the dread of otherness.”<sup>231</sup> Therefore, Williams writes, the role of the church is to be a “relentless critic” of imposed divisions, with special attention to the care of the marginalized and dispossessed. In this, the church cannot escape its own critique and repentance of our own failings in the continuing task which lies before us as we confront our own fractured condition, not in despair, but in hope.

The actual life of any given Christian community will be, no doubt, shot through with division and fear, yet whenever it reminds itself of what it is, in the celebration of word and sacrament, it makes a statement about its horizon. Whether we like it or not, it thus makes each of us a provocation, an irritant, to a divided society.<sup>232</sup>

The church acts as such an irritant, not for the sake of being irritating, but for the sake of love. The costly and powerful love of Christ is the very thing the parish Communion

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<sup>230</sup> Williams, *Ray*, 222.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 226.

shapes us to be and become. Holy communion is both the message and the means to convey its message. Communion today has an urgency about it that precedes even the informative dimension of the Gospel.

Mission -- to sum up -- is not the work of persuasion, of getting somebody to adopt your views or join your group. It is only persuasion in the sense that an extended hand, a smile, an opening door, a greeting could be called persuasion .... Our mission must, like Christ's, ultimately be the "who" that we are, action and gift, for the sake of a new humanity, and for this we need courage both to act and repent. Learning this is our sanctification.<sup>233</sup>

Where might we find this courage? We will not find it by any magic we might ascribe to the holy eucharist. Magic, Marion Hatchett wrote is "typically done for somebody rather than by them."<sup>234</sup> Liturgy, by contrast, is done by the people and "encapsulates the heritage and hopes of the community."<sup>235</sup> We come together in the holy eucharist to stand naked before God, facing a world of uncertainty.<sup>236</sup> We come together also in hope, a hope we may never see realized or consummated in this life. Living humbly and honestly in this tension is the source of our integrity and our strength. Like the woman criticized for anointing our Lord destined for the cross, "*We do what we can,*"<sup>237</sup> we do what we have been enabled to do in faith by participation with what we praise as divine and give God both the glory and the space to do the rest.

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>234</sup> Marion Hatchett, *Sanctifying Life, Time, and Space*, 5-6.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>236</sup> Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the leader Within* (Jossey Bass: San Francisco: 1996) 3-12.

<sup>237</sup> Mark 14:8.

## Postlude

Three valuable aspects of this project have been felt in my role in the parish. First, the project gives me a simple overview of the holy eucharist based on my studies over the last six years. It gives me a reliable structure I can immediately call to mind. This is valuable in a parish setting, since ordained leadership are often and suddenly confronted with a need to give some measure of explanation of our common life. The holy eucharist, being the touchstone of that life, is the perfect means.

Secondly, the general structure, which is broken down into theme and structure, allow an entry point to go deeper into the holy eucharist. Because these “modules” vary in depth, they can be simplified or made more complex, depending on the context and the people involved.

Thirdly, the dynamic between the broad overview, the thematic approach, and the structural analysis can be seen very clearly as overlapping and interdependent. Each theme permeates each aspect of the structure and acts in mutually supportive ways. This avoids the tendency, for example, to find the sacrament only in the holy communion or to find vocation only in the deacon’s dismissal.

This project, both in its overview and in its parts, has been used effectively in many aspects of parish life. It has been used in teaching in adult classes, inquirer’s classes, youth, confirmation classes, and even Sunday school. It has been used in preaching to connect the holy eucharist to our mission and ministry in the world.

Perhaps more surprisingly, it has found its place in ordinary conversation and in the work of formal and informal spiritual direction, at vestry meetings, and at other meetings of the church. In many ways, it seems to have aided in the promising goal of a

parish understanding that the holy eucharist is not simply a familiar but somewhat static tradition, but the very center of our baptized life together.

More work is yet to be done. In order for it to become truly effective in the fabric of our parish life, it must be taken up by laypeople. This will require more work to create, for example, curriculum for various age groups and for the rich diversity of all our people. More work also needs to be done, in particular, with children and youth. The area of music needs some development as well.

Nevertheless, the present project has established a good starting point for the further vitality of the members of a eucharistically centered community who, being formed sacramentally, can see in their lives and in the world around them abundant opportunities for the working of God's grace.

### **A Final Note for the Present Moment**

The holy eucharist is never more important than at the present time with the pandemic of COVID-19. We are directed to isolate ourselves. Corporate worship has been put on hold. However, there is urgency for us to gather in creative, virtual ways and stay connected with each other. Together, we can still offer thanksgiving, hope, and the word in the presence of God in Christ. Together, we can discover what God has in store for us and through us for the world. The eucharist does not end because the church building is not open. The church, we are presently reminded even more, is not the building, but the people of God connected together by the presence of the living Christ and nourished by that presence for the life of the world.

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Appendix: Graphic





