

## THE CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST

Theologies wear out. That they do so can come as no news to theologians. When theologies wear out, it is because they no longer fit the shape taken by the living tradition of the Church Catholic. Theologies are human constructions, more or less adequate in their references to divine mystery, and so to the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Even theologies of the Church's Eucharist are subject to this wear and tear, as a living tradition comes to new self-understanding. This is such a time in the tradition. The Church Catholic is in the process of changing its shape. Recall Karl Rahner's 1979 address at Weston Jesuit School of Theology,<sup>1</sup> in which he made two significant judgments about the Church's postconciliar situation. He described the Church as groping for identity and made the case theologically that the Second Vatican Council as an event was, in rudimentary form, the Church's first official self-actualization as a world-Church. However, he also argued that the outcome of this groping is not guaranteed, but depends on the particular actions and judgments of the Church itself. Rahner believed it possible that the Church would act with boldness, embodying itself in all cultures. But he thought it equally conceivable that the Church "will remain a Western Church and so in the final analysis [betray] the meaning of Vatican II."<sup>2</sup> Rahner did not specify the locus of decisions for or against bold action; a reader might reasonably presume from context that the decisions at issue would come from the magisterial center.

But there is a correlative locus of ecclesial decision making, namely, the assembled Church as it makes Eucharist. Because the eucharistic liturgy involves ecclesial embodiment, it is always and only a local gathering in all its particularity that can celebrate Eucharist. Those charged with reforming the liturgy by reforming the liturgical books see their work of thirty years coming quickly to a close. But such magisterially reformed books are subject to another ecclesial authority. The reception of the liturgical reform has been and continues to be in the hands of the Catholic people who make Eucharist each Sunday. The Eucharist as an event of worship does not exist except in the concrete practice of local worshipping assemblies, the baptized with their ordained leaders. If Vatican II, as an event of the magisterium, was a rudimentary realization of the Church's self-actualization as a world-Church, every Sunday Eucharistic assembly on every continent, in every city, town, village, barrio, has a similarly

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716-27.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 717, 724.

decisive character. These Eucharistic gatherings are part of the ritual symbolic process through which the new shape of the Church is gropingly coming into being.

After I had accepted the task of reflecting theologically on "The Church and the Eucharist," I realized the key to my assignment was "and"—the conjunction. The issue is the Eucharistic event as the self-realization of the Church. I propose then to focus on the correlative relationship of the substantives, "Eucharist" and "Church." In the first part of my paper, I will offer my admittedly too hasty review of problems and issues already named by leading theologians of the Eucharist. In the second part of the paper, I will suggest a way forward for doing theological reflection on the Eucharist of the Church in a time of groping.

### THE CHURCH: THE SUBJECT OF EUCHARISTIC PRAXIS

If the Eucharist is always "the Eucharist of the Church," then it does matter for theological reflection on the Eucharist how we understand the mystery of the Church. The Spirit-filled community of the baptized is the effective subject of its liturgical action. Eucharistic action—the eucharistic liturgy—is a corporeal prayer, a ritual symbolic process in which the Church realizes its own mystery. Moreover, the Church that makes Eucharist is never an abstract universal. Because the Eucharist involves ecclesial embodiment—a body of bodies celebrating and becoming the Body of Christ—it is always and only a local assembly in all its particularity that can celebrate Eucharist.

The Church is constituted in its relationships, and the constitutive relationships that are the mystery of the Church are many. Most of them are currently being negotiated at several levels: juridical, theological, liturgical and existential. How are the baptized related to one another? Who is God for us and with us? How are Catholic Christians related to their own cultures? To the cosmos?<sup>3</sup> In every particular eucharist liturgy of the Church, all the relationships that constitute the Church find expression, whether overtly or tacitly, authentically or unauthentically, in the ritual process that is the eucharistic action. Theologians may work for generations to achieve an adequate synthesis of the eucharistic

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<sup>3</sup>More questions about ecclesial relationships: How are peoples of the Abrahamic covenants related? How are peoples of the Mosaic and Christian covenants related? How is God known outside covenant faiths? What is the relationship between Catholics and other Christians? How are humans related to the other forms of life on the planet and to all things inanimate? What does it mean to be living on planet earth "in Christ?" Is it different or the same for men and for women? Is it different or the same for the ordained and unordained? How are bishops related to the Catholic people of their own dioceses? To bishops in their own regions? To bishops in other cultural regions? To the bishop of Rome? What relationship does the Church have to the future of the planet and the cosmos?

mystery through critical discourse. But worshipping communities embody the myriad relationships, negotiating them as they grasp them and are grasped by them, in every Sunday assembly.

*Missing Data:* When theologies wear thin or wear out, they do so because they do not take adequate account of the known data that is the living tradition of the Catholic faith. The late Edward J. Kilmartin spent thirty years studying Roman Catholic eucharistic theology *retrospectively* and arrived at the judgment that the "prevailing synthesis" that is official Catholic eucharistic theology "no longer does justice" to the central Christian mystery and so "has no future."<sup>4</sup> His judgment has two implications, one Kilmartin intended, and one I propose.

Kilmartin's point is this. At their best, Western scholastic theological traditions dealt inadequately with the mystery of the Church and the Church's Eucharist, because scholastic theologians neglected pertinent data constitutive of the Christian mystery. He found particularly inadequate scholastic understanding of the mission of the Holy Spirit and trinitarian *koinōnia*. When he looked critically at ancient eucharistic anaphoras, Kilmartin determined that the *lex orandi* said more than the scholastics grasped. If they had overlooked data, their synthesis was deficient. I find other grounds for the same judgment ("does not do justice . . . has no future"), grounds he hints at but does not explore. My issue is the inattention in the prevailing synthesis to the Church that makes Eucharist, the corporate subject within which the mystery of the Holy Spirit and trinitarian *koinōnia* are really present.

Kilmartin, like the scholastics, focused primarily on interpreting the *doing by saying* that is the liturgical work of the ordained minister of the Eucharist. This focus typically presumes that it is the priest saying the eucharistic prayer and consuming the elements who is the effective human subject of the Church's liturgical action. In his later writings, Kilmartin called the eucharistic liturgy the "performative form" of the Church's faith and regularly made reference to "the symbolic action" that "accompanies" the Eucharistic prayer.<sup>5</sup> Through such references, I believe he was registering his growing appreciation that the *lex orandi*, to which he wanted to make the theological and magisterial communities accountable, is more than a set of texts, more than a treasured corpus of eucharistic anaphoras. But his formulation makes clear his conviction that the text voiced by the priest is the stable bearer of the Church's Eucharistic meaning and so the reliable witness to the faith of the church as it is expressed in the Church's Eucharist. "Accompanying symbolic action" remained enigmatic in Kilmartin's textually grounded critique of Western scholastic traditions of eucharistic theo-

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<sup>4</sup>Edward J. Kilmartin, "The Catholic Tradition of Eucharistic Theology: Towards the Third Millennium," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994): 405, 443. Robert Daly has edited Kilmartin's book-length manuscript on the history and theology of the Eucharist, to be published posthumously by Liturgical Press (Collegeville MN) autumn 1998.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.: "The best access to the more authentic traditional theology of the eucharistic sacrifice is the classical Eucharistic Prayers and accompanying symbolic activity." 443.

gy. Symbolic action, the whole assembly's active symbolic embodiment of the relationships that constitute the Church, was never a firm source of theological data for him, but always ancillary.

There is irony here. Having engaged with the scholastics to critique them, Kilmartin let them continue to set the terms for eucharistic discourse. Scholastic eucharistic theology was solidly focused on the ordained presiders and their ritual *saying* of the Roman canon. The scholastics had little interest in interpreting what was going on in the nave, where most of the Church was always gathered—quite possibly because scholastic theologians did their reflection from their own standpoint, as we all do. Their standpoint was usually near the altar within the elevated sanctuary. The resultant priest-centered eucharistic praxis inevitably generated a defective theology of the Church and of the Church's Eucharist.<sup>6</sup>

Every theological interpretation of the Eucharist not fully attentive to the actual eucharistic working of the ecclesial Body can bring us only part of the distance toward a eucharistic theology that does justice to the data, because it leaves out just about everybody. Accordingly, continuing a narrow theological debate about in whose *persona* the priest acts in the Eucharist seems to me to have interest and value primarily as a disputational exercise, yielding occasional experiences of theological "Gotcha."<sup>7</sup> Why? The premise of the debate is that the priest is the sole effective human subject of liturgical action, and that premise itself is no longer tenable. While Bernard Lonergan warned that knowing requires more than just taking a good look, he also argued that getting the data straight was intrinsic to good theological method.

If we accept the standpoint in the nave as one to be attended to along with the standpoint at the altar table, we arrive by another path at the truth with which Kilmartin wished to confront the theological community: the eucharistic theology that developed in the second Christian millennium is inadequate. Kilmartin had also said the prevailing Catholic synthesis of Eucharistic theology "had no future." So until his death he worked tirelessly on making that synthesis more critically adequate through augmentation and emendation. He was working for the future. The Second Vatican Council had explicitly proposed a new viewpoint for critical reflection on the Church's liturgy, which certainly and especially includes the eucharistic liturgy. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (par. 14) had mandated, "In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, *the full and active participation by all the people* is the aim to be considered above all else. . . ." In this statement, the baptized are clearly identified as the effective human subjects of the Church's liturgy. Reasons for adopting the new viewpoint—that is, beginning with the actual ritual practice of the gathered Church—are clearly

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<sup>6</sup>In a forthcoming article in *Louvain Studies* (1998) I explore the role of ninth century Germanic evangelization and catechesis in shaping this theological perspective.

<sup>7</sup>*Theological Studies* has chronicled some of the contemporary disputation in the series of articles (1994–1996) by Sara Butler and Dennis Ferrara. See also David Power, "Church Order: The Need for Redress," *Worship* 71 (1997): 296–309.

given. "It is demanded by the nature of the liturgy;" full and active participation is "the Christian people's right and duty by their baptism."

*Metaphorical Misunderstanding:* The problem of the correct starting point is just one matter to be dealt with. Kilmartin was also working to extend the reach of the controlling metaphor in western eucharistic praxis: *sacrifice*. It was favored by the scholastics as a useful vehicle for interpreting the dynamic structure and meaning of the Church's sacramental liturgy from the viewpoint of the ordained minister. Kilmartin sought to make its too-narrow reference more comprehensive, showing how eucharistic sacrifice was the deed of the whole Church.<sup>8</sup> David Power's writing about the continuing usefulness of this metaphor has shown more ambivalence.

Power, in the company of many other, has examined the origins and history of the metaphor *sacrifice* and evaluated its relative adequacy as a heuristic for interpreting the apostolic faith concerning the Church's Eucharist.<sup>9</sup> Despite an auspicious patristic beginning as early Christian irony, the metaphor lost its original edge. When nonironic, literalist understandings of *sacrifice* gained hegemony in the West, the ancient faith of the Church concerning its eucharistic action as *sacrifice* was compressed, squeezed, twisted—some aspects even set aside—to reduce the power of this once challenging metaphor. Early in the second Christian millennium, the metaphor came to be used more and more literally. *Sacrifice* in its reductionist mode shaped liturgical practice.<sup>10</sup> Literalist liturgical practice in turn reinforced popular and theological interpretations of the Eucharist as cultic sacrifice and made credible a univocal conceptualization of how Christian ministry at the Eucharist table was "priesthood."

The sacrifice metaphor as it developed in the second millennium reinforced marginalization of the baptized gathered out in the nave. So as recently as 1947 Pope Pius XII could write in *Mediator Dei* (112), following the scholastics, that the communion of the priest alone was essential to the integrity of the sacrifice. The very possibility of a magisterial teaching about eucharistic sacrifice that sees no necessary relationship between the ecclesial and the eucharistic Body of Christ exposes the inadequacy of this controlling metaphor as it has been commonly appropriated. I think I am accurately reflecting current critical ambivalence when

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<sup>8</sup>Kilmartin, *ibid.*, 446-47.

<sup>9</sup>David Power, "Roman Catholic Theologies of Eucharistic Communion: A Contribution to Ecumenical Conversation," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 593-94, 603; "Words That Crack: The Uses of 'Sacrifice' in Eucharistic Discourse," *Worship* 53 (1979): 386-404; *The Sacrifice We Offer* (New York: Crossroads, 1977). Also Gordon Lathrop, "Justin, Eucharist, and Sacrifice: A Case of Metaphor," *Worship* 64 (1990): 30-48; and Robert Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

<sup>10</sup>Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origin and Development*, 2 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1954, 1955) vol. 2, pt. iv: "The Ceremonies in Detail—The Sacrifice."

I borrow Kilmartin's formula: given its historical trajectory, *sacrifice* as a root metaphor "fails to do justice" to the data of the Church's eucharistic faith, and so may have little or no future.

*Picking Up the Pieces*: What is to be done with the shards left from a century of deconstruction of Catholic eucharistic praxis in which theologians and bishops in ecumenical council and the laity have conspired? Shall the familiar pieces be stuck back together reconfigured, holes filled in with new bits. Do we work for an alternate metaphor, better pneumatology, more about the laity and the Trinity?

This is not idle questioning. Echoes of 1979 Karl Rahner's talk challenge us who do theology after the Second Vatican Council. Will theologians of the Church act with boldness, risking a way forward, groping intellectually toward a more adequate eucharistic theology to support the Church's continued groping toward self-actualization as a world-Church? Counterpoint to the invitation to boldness I also hear the voice of a New York psychiatrist who tends in her practice to the desolation of Catholics, laity and clergy alike, for whom "traditional" liturgical practice and the theological construction of the scholastics served positively as a mediating "transitional object" connecting them with divine mystery.<sup>11</sup> Disillusionment, perhaps especially theological disillusionment, involves risk. For how many of the baptized and ordained is it possible that if the "traditional theology" goes the way of the "traditional liturgy" there will be no *there* there? Remaining a "Western Church" in an underdeveloped mode might initially seem better than undermining ourselves.

Concerned to my core about doing harm to the Church, I check in at the parish every Sunday. I enter like a scout with an ear to the ground, like a nurse pressing flesh to pick up the pulse, like an uncertain prophet listening for a still small voice (I Kg 19:12), like Annie Dillard watching the Church drifting toward the pole of the Absolute.<sup>12</sup> And I am relieved to discover week after week: the Catholic people in their unpolished Sunday assemblies know more than theologians and the magisterium can yet express conceptually, more than their ordained clergy can set out coherently, more than the official rites of the Church are yet able to offer them for their worship. Parishes are doing their Eucharistic liturgies in the spirit of G. K. Chesterton, who is credited with the profound insight that anything worth doing is worth doing poorly. By acting on what they know, ordinary people in ordinary liturgical assemblies are working to gain what ritual theorist Catherine Bell calls "ritual mastery,"<sup>13</sup> a capacity to use the

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<sup>11</sup>For "transitional object," see William W. Meissner's discussion of the work of Donald W. Winnicott in "Art and Religion: Psychoanalytic Reflections," in *Religion and the Arts* 1/2 (1997): 34-56; also Raymond Studzinski, *Spiritual Direction and Midlife Development* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985) 88-92; 130-31.

<sup>12</sup>Annie Dillard, "An Expedition to the Pole," in *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982) 17-52.

<sup>13</sup>Catherine Bell. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press,

resources of the liturgical tradition to express the apostolic faith and to explore the relationships that constitute the mystery of the Church, which is their mystery.

How does the worshipping assembly know what it knows and celebrates, however poorly? The Australian theologian Peter Carnley published his study *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* a decade ago.<sup>14</sup> He was concerned to locate the "empirical anchor" that made and still makes credible and intelligible the ancient proclamation "He is risen." Concurring with New Testament scholars who say we cannot assert with authority exactly what limit experiences gave rise to the apostolic proclamation, yet confident with them that the ancient proclamation intended more than a declaration of ocular seeing, Carnley wanted to know what kind of knowing was going on. In a carefully crafted argument he shows that it is experiential knowledge—their own lives transformed by the Holy Spirit of Christ Jesus—that put flesh and blood behind the apostolic proclamation.

This is the mystery of the celebrating Church. Experiential knowledge and evangelical—or liturgical—proclamation make a single whole. Communities of disciples trying to live by the power of the Spirit stirring within them make their proclamation of resurrection faith credible and their celebration of Eucharist necessary. They adhere to the Catholic tradition as they have appropriated it. Yet where the symbolic resources of the official liturgical tradition are underdeveloped, not adequate for expressing the mystery of faith as they have grasped it and as the mystery is grasping them at the end of the twentieth century, liturgical assemblies everywhere are pressing the existing limits of the Catholic tradition. So on the seventh Sunday of Easter 1997, in this season when biblical scholars and the magisterium are contesting the doctrinal implications of referring to God with inclusive gendered language, I celebrated the Eucharist with an assembly of working people, middle class and poor from all the continents of the world. They expressed their groping understanding of God's mystery with no sign of self-consciousness. Substituting another psalm for the one designated in the lectionary—psalm 131 for psalm 103—they sang "Like a weaned child on its mother's breast, so I rest in you." It was Mother's Day in America, and they were publicly negotiating relational images of God in their eucharistic liturgy, unaware that their shepherds were deadlocked over how to protect them from disturbances to their faith.

My anecdote makes a theologically significant point. The way forward toward an adequate systematic theology will require fresh critical conceptualization of what is going on in the weekly eucharistic event as the baptized begin to make the Eucharist more fully the Eucharist of the gathered community. Many

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1992) 107-108; also Mary Collins, "The Forms of Liturgical Prayer: The Challenges of Embodiment, Aesthetics, Ambiguity," in F. Eigo, ed. *Teach Us To Pray* (Villanova PA: Villanova University Press, 1996) 85-87.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Carnley. *The Structure of Resurrection Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

fragments that will contribute to a new theological synthesis are already available for examination; I will consider some here.

### THE MYSTERY EMBODIED IN THE PARTICULAR EUCHARISTIC ASSEMBLY

Catholic eucharistic theology has consistently reflected on the Church's faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist of the Church. "Real presence" continues to be a central focus, for the magisterium, for theologians, for the Catholic people. In his recent discussion of movement toward an ecumenically adequate eucharistic theology, David Power observes that the way forward for a critical theology of the Eucharist lies in acknowledging that the ontological presence of the eucharistic mystery is effected *ad usum*.<sup>15</sup>

*Ad usum* involves embodiment. The preceding millennium of theological reflection on what the priest does in the eucharistic prayer and at communion makes it likely that this affirmation will still be understood too narrowly. At first it might seem a gain to interpret *ad usum* as extending now to the people's eating and drinking the eucharistized elements of bread and wine or even to the insistence of some that the baptized, too, can say the "words of institution." But to be understood fully, *ad usum* must be taken theologically to refer not to some particular part or parts of the liturgy, as though to say, "here is the doing that effects real presence *ad usum*."

Rather I will argue that the "use" efficacious for real eucharistic presence comprises the whole ritual symbolic process, *doing* and *saying*, by which the body of bodies that gathers in the local church brings itself into being as the Body of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit alive in the assembly. To do so, I will approach the Eucharist as corporate ritual symbolic process, and use ritual theory and ritual hermeneutics to trace another path toward the construction of a eucharistic theology that "does justice" to the data and so might "have a future."

*Eucharistic Mystery in the Flesh*: Beginning critical theological reflection on the Eucharist of the Church by looking directly at liturgical practice—at what churches do to embody the mystery—requires taking the baptized laity seriously as a repository of the living faith of the Church. It does not have the consequence of making the Church's liturgy a merely human activity. To the contrary, it requires assenting to the mystery of the graced yet sinful Church. Particular eucharistic practice, the "performative form" of the apostolic faith—what a local assembly does for half an hour or three whole hours—is its embodied expression of the mystery of trinitarian *koinōnia* revealed in Jesus Christ *as that mystery is understood and lived in particular times and places*.

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<sup>15</sup>Power, "Roman Catholic Theologies," 605-606.

Theologians of the Eucharist have critically retrieved the biblical category *memorial* to interpret the dynamics of Eucharist action. Today the discussion has gone well beyond the earlier focus on remembering as *making present* the salvifically efficacious theandric acts of the historical Jesus.<sup>16</sup> *Memorial* in theological discourse on the Eucharist is now trinitarian in its reference. Eucharistic memorial is understood as the Church's corporate manifestation of its gracious mystery, the Church's living into the *koinōnia* that is the Holy Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

Being drawn into the saving *koinōnia* is the constitutive relationship that brings a graced Church into being and gives it its mission. The Church's eucharistic memorial celebrates the Church's own mystery, for the Church that makes Eucharist believes itself to be abiding in the mystery that it celebrates liturgically. As *Sacrosanctum concilium* puts it, "The liturgy is . . . the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church" (SC, 2).

The authors of the liturgical constitution never specified exactly what it is about "the very nature of the liturgy" that makes it so important in the life of the Church, leaving it to theologians to figure that out. So what do we know? Liturgy as Catholic practice, a form of public ecclesial behavior, is a ritual symbolic process.<sup>18</sup> Corporate ritual processes by their nature embody and negotiate relationships symbolically.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Church in its Eucharistic liturgy symbolically embodies its inner mystery: the saving *koinōnia* by which it lives. Only a community in which the mystery is already active gathers to make Eucharist, to remember its reality by giving thanks and invoking the continuing gift of the Holy Spirit. Further, because the ritual symbolic process involves the continuing negotiation of the relationships being expressed, it is also the very nature of the liturgy that the corporate expression of the faith of the Church is always an invitation to conversion, to entering more deeply into the mystery being celebrated.<sup>20</sup> "Day by day," the liturgy constitution declares (par. 2), "the liturgy builds up

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<sup>16</sup>Kilmartin, *ibid.*, 441-57.

<sup>17</sup>Power and Kilmartin in the *Theological Studies* articles cited above are representative voices for this development of a trinitarian rather than a "christomonist" articulation of eucharistic theology. See also Kilmartin's *Christian Liturgy: Theology and Practice* (Kansas City MO: Sheed and Ward, 1988) and Christopher Cocksworth, "The Trinity Today: Opportunities and Challenges for Liturgical Studies," in *Studia Liturgica* 27 (1997): 61-78.

<sup>18</sup>Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Ritual," *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. J. Komonchak, M. Collins, D. Lane (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1987) 906-907.

<sup>19</sup>Roger Grainger. *The Language of the Rite* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1974) 107-109; also Catherine Bell: *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford, 1993).

<sup>20</sup>Margaret Mary Kelleher. "Liturgy: An Ecclesial Act of Meaning," *Worship* 59 (1985): 494-96.

[the Church] . . . into a spiritual dwelling for God . . . an enterprise which will continue until Christ's full stature is achieved (cf. Eph. 4:13)."

*Pressing Ahead Toward Understanding:* Margaret Mary Kelleher has developed a critical theory of the Church as a collective subject and the liturgy as ecclesial performative meaning,<sup>21</sup> what Kilmartin calls the performative form of faith. By naming the Church a collective subject, Kelleher points to a people who have achieved a degree of common meaning.<sup>22</sup> These meanings are embodied in shared symbols, shared language, shared practice, that is, in evangelically grounded ways of being human. Accordingly, when a particular ecclesial assembly gathers for its Eucharistic liturgy, it acts as a collective subject when it draws on a shared repertoire of symbolic practices—things to be done and said—to engage in what Kelleher identifies as "constitutive acts of meaning."

Pressing further, it can be argued that what the particular ecclesial subject does is give visible expression to a greater or lesser degree, with greater or less authenticity, to the relationships constitutive of its being and its well-being as the Church. Yet the ritual symbolic process that is the Church's Eucharist intends to manifest the Church's inner mystery to itself: a body of bodies becoming the Body of Christ. To quote Kelleher, "Since liturgical assemblies are particular realizations of the Church, the Church itself is being mediated."<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, it can be said that the Church's Eucharistic enactment of its mystery takes the form of a symbolic ritual process that mediates the Church's very reality *ad usum*. For Kelleher, the meanings negotiated in particular Eucharistic praxis set out the ecclesial horizon, the "boundary establishing the world of meaning" within which the graced Church as collective subject lives.<sup>24</sup> In principle this boundary can, be nothing less than the mystery of *koinōnia* in its trinitarian and ecclesial density. In practice, the only possible medium for visibly expressing of its inner mystery is a ritual symbolic process engaging the gathered ecclesial body.

Only part of the Church's worshipful intending "to cling to God in love" can be embodied in spoken language. The Church's *lex orandi* involves expression in forms other than speaking. This is the nature of liturgical worship, to require a repertoire more extensive than words: to express inner mystery in rhythm and song, in symbolic actions and transactions, in organizing space sonically and architecturally and then moving through it and posturing in it.<sup>25</sup>

Kilmartin had argued in his 1994 essay that the salvific effect of the Eucharistic liturgy was "participation in the Spirit of the faith of Christ," that is,

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 482-97.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 485-86.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 493.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 494.

<sup>25</sup>Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, "Body and Memory in African Liturgy," *Liturgy and the Body*, Concilium 1995/3, ed. Louis-Marie Chauvet and François Kabasele Lumbala (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1995) 71-78.

“the integration of the believer into the single transitus of Jesus.”<sup>26</sup> But because Kilmartin’s work did not involve him in any critical theoretical investigation of the ritual practice that constitutes the Church’s liturgy, the “performative form” of the faith of Christ, he did not reflect further on how that necessary integration of believers into the “transitus of Jesus” occurs ritually.

It occurs as the assembled Church works its way through the ritual process that is the Church’s Eucharist. It occurs through the “full and active participation of the people” doing what is “their right and duty” by nature of their baptism. The eucharistic liturgy itself has the processual structure of the salvific movement into the mystery which Kilmartin explores theologically. The eucharistic liturgy’s first movement in the ritual process is the physical act of the ingathering of the baptized, by the power of the Spirit. Its second movement is the Church’s gathering around the life-giving Word and ritualizing the mystery of the Word made flesh in history, in this place and time. Its third movement is the intimate passage into the mystery of God—with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit—through the thanksgiving that brings table *koinōnia*. Its final movement is out again, the people realized as the Church being sent once more on mission to the world, “having tasted to their full the paschal mysteries” (SC, 10).

The ritual symbolic expression of the third movement—the intimate *transitus* into the mystery of God, with Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit—is complex because of the nexus of relationships that must be set out and into which the whole people are being drawn. The familiar Rublev icon of the Trinity in repose at the table around the cup, with an open place inviting in the believing devotees, is a visual approximation of the third movement. But the artist’s presentation of the eucharistic *koinōnia* keeps the believing Church at the edge of the holy repose, perhaps with good eschatological reason. The repose celebrated in the eucharistic liturgy is only part of the mystery of the Church, which is always in the process of its self-realization in history as sacrament of the justice and mercy of God. The faith of Christ celebrated in each eucharistic liturgy must be embodied existentially week by week in the community’s life. Rahner’s image of a Church “groping” for self-actualization as a world-Church complements the image of *holy koinōnia* which makes the groping possible and necessary. Week by week, myriad ecclesial bodies gathered in particular eucharistic assemblies must express their self-transcending *transitus* into the mystery Rublev painted. Such ecclesial communities effect their communal passage into the mystery *ad usum*, in their graced doing of their liturgy.

Eucharistic praxis as the praxis of the Church in history will always be in process. The experience of the second millennium of eucharistic praxis is instructive. In principle and in practice scholastic theologians concerned themselves

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: “The liturgy inspires the faithful to become ‘one heart in love’ when they have tasted to their full the paschal mysteries . . .” (par. 10).

almost exclusively with the eucharistic *transitus* of the ordained.<sup>27</sup> Liturgical history informs us that this narrowed grasp of "official" praxis had as one of its consequences theological inattention to a millennium of imaginatively rich devotional and mystical eucharistic praxis for the laity.<sup>28</sup> The unofficial eucharistic embodiments of these baptized bodies were real, even if from the scholastic theological viewpoint, they were "out of the picture."

Pope Pius X officially recalled the laity to the action of regular eucharistic consumption in 1905.<sup>29</sup> The bishops in Council called them cautiously to eucharistic cup sharing in 1963 (SC 55). In 1997 theologians are only beginning to understand critically how changing the eucharistic liturgy of the Catholic people across the span of the twentieth century changes everything the Church long thought we knew about our own most fundamental mystery. Theologians must explore and evaluate anew the heuristic worth of various metaphors and the analytic worth of discursive categories for advancing systematic theological reflection on the Eucharist. In every critical theological foray, it is important to affirm what may be Kilmartin's most lasting contribution to a eucharistic theology for the third millennium. The Church's *lex credendi* must be accountable to the Church's *lex orandi*, but understood now as the whole complexus of doing and speaking that is the Church's eucharistic liturgy.

The path for theological reflection I have begun to trace here, by deliberating focusing on the eucharistic work of the assembly, has left as yet unintegrated the Catholic conviction that there is a role for the ordained presbyter in the Church that makes Eucharist. Much more critical reflection needs to be done on this and all facets of developing Catholic eucharistic praxis. Can these theological challenges be faced through the development of ritual hermeneutics? That final question will be explored briefly.

#### FINDING CATHOLIC MEANING IN THE PARTICULAR

It is not enough to point out that the entire eucharistic liturgy, from ingathering to departure, is the event in which the eucharistic mystery is realized *ad*

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<sup>27</sup>Speaking about the eucharistic role of the ordained, John Sheets writes, "Everyone is called to effect the *res* of the sacrament of the eucharist, that is, the unity of the church. Not everyone, however, is called to bring about the *res* through the sacramental mediation of the paschal event." "Forum: The Ordination of Women," *Worship* 65 (1991): 460.

<sup>28</sup>See an account in Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Women's eucharistic meanings are explored in Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992) and Jeffrey Hamburger, *Nuns As Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup>*Sacra Tridentina Synodus*.

*usum*. What must also be said is that it is the concrete practice of eucharistic assemblies in all their particularity that must be attended to. It is the whole ritual process that effects the self-actualization of the Church.<sup>30</sup> Empirically, post-Vatican II Catholics know not all eucharistic acts are alike; but they never were. Even when theological reflection presumed a normative practice, it was because we prescinded from the practice of the assemblies and looked at the juridically controlled priestly practice. Are we faced with the specter of chaos—the eucharistic liturgy out of control—if we give attention to the theological significance of particularity? Closer reflection will show this is not an inevitable outcome.

We who use ritual theory as a point of entrance for theological reflection on the eucharistic liturgy of the Church make a useful distinction among the *official* meanings of the liturgy, the shared *public* meanings of a particular liturgical celebration, and the *private* meanings of those who participate, including the clergy.<sup>31</sup> This distinction accomplishes at least three things. First, it acknowledges the existence of an authoritative ecclesiastical tradition, the source of *official* meanings.

Next, it recognizes the active role of the ritual participants of a particular local assembly in the appropriation of the ecclesiastical tradition. Every particular ecclesial assembly generates both public and private meanings. When a local liturgical assembly embodies the Catholic tradition as it is commonly received and understood in this time and place, shared *public* meaning is being manifest. When individual members of these same local assemblies engage *interiorly* with the Catholic horizon of meaning—an engagement that is not controlled entirely by the ritual process unfolding then and there but fed also by memories of past celebrations and anticipation of future ones—*private* meaning is being generated.

Finally, making distinctions among *official*, *public*, and *private* meanings leaves room for reflecting critically on differences and their significance. Dialectical reflection on differences in official, public, and private meanings can contribute to theological clarification of the faith of the Church as it is manifested in the Church's *lex orandi* and as it engages dialectically with the *lex credendi*.

Magisterial and theological writings are commonly understood as sources for establishing the *official* Catholic eucharistic praxis. Such sources provided Kilmartin with the "official prevailing synthesis" he examined and found wanting. His method of critique was to introduce for theological reflection

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<sup>30</sup>"The words belong within sentences; sentences belong within the text of the prayer; a prayer belongs within the entire ritual action." Power, "Theologies of Eucharistic Communion," 595.

<sup>31</sup>Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Liturgical Theology: A Task and a Method," *Worship* (1988): 6. For an extended ritual analysis that works with these distinctions, see Lawrence Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood. Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

another (but until recently ignored) witness to the ordinary magisterium, namely, the full range of liturgical texts of the tradition.

*Public* meanings find expression when particular local liturgical assemblies appropriate the official texts handed to them for the conduct of their public worship. Official texts are typically used according to the customs of the place, the directives of diocesan bishops, and the local church's operative internalization of "the prevailing theological synthesis." Further, particular assemblies under the idiosyncratic guidance of their ordained presbyters selectively interpret directives that specify who does what and why and how. Where choices are available in official texts, it must be determined at the local level what prayer texts will be voiced. Inevitably, assemblies and their ordained ministers improvise, on the basis of their mastery—or lack of mastery—of traditional ritualizing schemes. In this public ritual work, done with local specificity week after week, in the favelas and the townships, in seminary chapels, in Sunday assemblies without priests, in cathedrals, in the urban and suburban parishes of the United States, the graced Church is realizing itself with greater or lesser authenticity—bringing itself into being by the power of the Holy Spirit stirring within it—through its eucharistic process.

The particularity of ritual data is of importance for the construction of a more adequate Eucharistic theology for the next millennium. A ritual theorist has argued that each ritual performance within a tradition is an implicit public critique of the received tradition, whether by way of affirming that tradition or renegotiating aspects of it.<sup>32</sup> Theologically, it could be asked whether and how each public ritual performance is a witness to the continuing conversion of the local church as it embraces and is embraced by the mystery of *holy koinōnia*. From this perspective, liturgical motility requires critical interpretation. Is the local church moving toward greater authenticity in its embodiment of the ecclesial mystery, or is cherished liturgical practice a retreat toward inauthenticity?

Theologians can draw on several theories of the ritual symbolic process in service to the development of theologically sound ritual hermeneutics<sup>33</sup> adequate to the interpretation of *public* meaning in the eucharistic practice of the local church. Textual hermeneutics are inadequate to attend to nonlinguistic data. What must be examined is the whole ritual and ecclesial process, within which the particular liturgical actions and transactions, including ritual texts, are located and toward which they contribute. Particularly fertile for hermeneutical investigation is the public meaning that is emerging in the highly idiosyncratic liturgical performance of the vernacular eucharistic anaphora; so, too, is there need to study

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<sup>32</sup>Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990) 228-29.

<sup>33</sup>See Margaret Mary Kelleher "Hermeneutics in the Study of Liturgical Performance," *Worship* (1993): 292-318, and "The Communion Rite: A Study of Roman Catholic Liturgical Performance," *Journal of Ritual Studies* (1991): 99-122.

critically the public meaning finding expression in the ritual performance of eucharistic cup sharing. Equally fertile for study is the ritual shaping of the liturgical assembly and its ministers, the public symbolic expression of fitting ecclesial relationship.

Finally, as noted above, members of the same assembly that embodies its ecclesial horizon publicly are also generating *private* meanings. Embodied symbols, like verbal symbols, have multiple referents, and individual worshippers have conscious and preconscious memories of experiences and understandings that they carry with them into their liturgical working to unite themselves with the single *transitus* of Jesus. The public liturgical process gives imaginatively active worshippers symbols that serve them by condensing and connecting official and private meanings, often in surprising ways. A friend tells how in Rome she was recently included in a group invited to the pope's morning Mass and then barred along with the other laity present from drinking from the cup at communion. That same friend tells how on the next feast of Christ the King she found herself singing "Ride on, King Jesus" lustily at the close of Eucharist, as she jointed imaginatively in his righteous anger toward the temple bureaucrats. She could go in peace to love and serve, healed *ad usum publicum et privatum* from unauthentic eucharistic practice, *ad usum publicum et papalis vel curialis*. What begin as private meanings often find more permanent expression in Christian artistic and musical forms, and in devotional and mystical literature.

### CONCLUSION

My point has been to argue for considering all the significant data in the theological work of constructing more critical eucharistic praxis and a more comprehensive systematic theology of the Eucharist. I have proposed starting the necessary work by taking as seriously as *official* meaning the particular *public* liturgical events that express the living faith of the Church. I have argued that theological reflection on the particularity of local practice will require further development of theological method, notably the development of critical ritual hermeneutics that can do justice to the Church's Eucharist as a ritual symbolic process. What is there to be gained? Let me suggest six possible outcomes.

(1) What I have proposed about viewpoint and method can advance reflection beyond contemporary awareness *in principle* of the theological importance of embodiment to a critical interpretation of the actual embodiment of the gathered Church's Eucharistic faith.

(2) Critical study of the actual ritual process through which the Church embodies its eucharistic faith will take us beyond theoretical arguments that the ontological reality that is the eucharist is actualized *ad usum*. It will make it possible to examine what meanings are being publicly embodied in the liturgical practice of particular assemblies. This hermeneutical task will involve asking not only what is being set out *ad usum*, but also what is missing, what is distorted, what is being negotiated. The approach also invites investigation of the displace-

ment into popular piety and art of excluded aspects of the eucharistic mystery of the Church's *transitus* into the *holy koinōnia*.

(3) The introduction of critical ritual theory into theological reflection on the Eucharist establishes clearly that it is the particular liturgical assembly itself that mediates its own eucharistic horizon. It works as a collective subject coming through its liturgical *memoria Christi* to self-realization as the Church of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(4) The introduction of ritual theory and ritual hermeneutics into theological reflection on the eucharistic liturgy provides a way to make necessary distinctions among official, public, and private horizons in the Eucharistic event; it allows theologians to set varied meanings in relationship in a critical dialectic.

(5) The introduction of ritual theory and ritual hermeneutics into theological reflection clarifies why the construction of a more adequate systematic theology of the Church's eucharist must take into account the processual nature of the eucharistic liturgy. At the very least this means that it is not enough to substitute one isolated focus for another—for example, what happens at communion instead of what happens during the institution narrative or the whole eucharistic prayer. Before the *lex orandi* and the *lex credendi* can be critically engaged, the full horizon of the *lex orandi* must be available.

(6) Finally, the introduction of ritual theory and ritual hermeneutics into theological reflection can set up a critical dialectic between and among the emerging patterns of eucharistic praxis in different human cultures, in different ecclesiastical cultures, in different dioceses within the local church, and in different local assemblies within a single diocese. Such a dialectic is required by the ambitious affirmation of *Sacrosanctum concilium* (38): the substantial unity of the Roman rite is to be maintained while allowing for legitimate variations among different groups, different regions, different peoples.

Because our theological methods are still inadequate to reflect critically on the variant eucharistic praxis of an emerging world-Church, the "prevailing theological synthesis" continues to be the touchstone used for determining what is authentic Catholic eucharistic theology and practice, despite the judgment of theologians that it "fails to do justice" to the apostolic faith. Guided solely by a theological standard which admittedly "has no future," the Church Catholic will be locked into the eucharistic praxis of a second millennium European Church. Fortunately, it is becoming clearer that there is a critical way forward.

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