

BECOMING A LIVING SACRIFICE IN CHRIST

THE EUCHARIST AS SACRAMENT OF LOVE

BY TIMOTHY P. O'MALLEY



As the first Sunday of Advent in 2011 came to a close, the lengthy process of preparation for the new translation of the Mass also concluded. With rare exceptions, the celebration of the Eucharist on this Sunday was surprisingly ordinary. Indeed, we all stumbled a bit in our first run through the new texts. Still by the third Sunday of Advent, the regulars of the parish had mastered most of their replies, beginning to fall back into the habitual back-and-forth that marked our familiarity with the previous translation.

Pastoral leaders should be pleased with the speedy formation of these new liturgical habits. The Mass is such an effective form of prayer precisely because of its regularity. The greater familiarity

we have with our responses and the prescribed actions of the Mass, the more we are capable of entering into the Eucharist as prayer. We do not have to think about what to say or to do. Rather, we perform our parts with the confidence of the concert pianist who no longer needs to look at the keyboard to find Middle C; the driver, who no longer needs to remember that the brake is to the left of the gas pedal; the actor, who no longer has to think about characterization or staging but can simply perform the role of Hamlet. We become performers of the prayer of the Mass.

But, what constitutes excellence in such prayer? What does the Church perform in her prayer? These are questions that

deserve constant attention from liturgy committees, liturgical catechists, youth ministers, as well as preachers and presiders. In fact, what was most striking to me, as a presenter on the third edition of the Roman Missal, is how few people understand what the Mass is about in the first place. Many participants in the Sunday Eucharist have learned the language of the Mass, without understanding any of its meaning—akin to a singer who knows how to pronounce the Latin text of the *Salve Regina* but never understands that the anthem is a hymn in praise of the Virgin Mary.

If the Church is to foster a deeper participation in the Eucharist, she will need to expand the theological imagination of those who participate in the rites. The following books may assist parishes, schools, and dioceses as they strive to develop the next stage of liturgical formation.



Alexander Schmemmann
The Eucharist

Translated by Paul Kachur
Crestwood, NY

St. Vladimir's, 1987

For those interested in providing a more robust liturgical formation in the Roman rite of the Mass, Schmemmann's *The Eucharist* may seem like a strange choice. A mystagogical commentary on the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox Church, Schmemmann's *The Eucharist* is at times hostile toward the influence of the medieval Eucharistic doctrine of the West on Eastern Orthodoxy (46). In fact, the genius of Schmemmann's commentary is not in his account of Western Eucharistic doctrine or practice—it is his retrieval of a Eucharistic theology intrinsically connected to the Church's identity (24). As he attends to the “sacraments” of the Divine

Liturgy (assembly, kingdom, entrance, Word, faithful, offering, unity, anaphora, thanksgiving, remembrance, the Holy Spirit, and communion), he discovers the hidden wisdom of the Church's Eucharistic practice. This discovery, of course, yields rich insight for participation in the Divine Liturgy.

In particular, Schmemmann comes to three insights drawn from the *ordo* of the Divine Liturgy vital to a fruitful participation in the Roman rite. First, the Eucharist is the Sacrament in which the Church performs her truest identity. In assembling, “We need to be thoroughly aware that we come to the temple not for individual prayer but to *assemble together as the Church*, and the visible temple itself signifies and is but an image of the temple not made by hands” (23). For the Eucharist

is not one of many equal actions that the Church performs, rather it is “the very manifestation and *fulfillment* of the Church in all her power, sanctity and fullness. Only by taking part in it can we increase in holiness and fulfill all that we have been commanded to be and do” (24). The Church is the sacrament of the Eucharist, an identity that is always a gift. And for this reason, the Eucharist is the Church’s sacramental entrance into the kingdom of God, into the heavenly liturgy through the visible signs of the Church’s prayer. Schmemmann notes:

What does it mean to *ble**ss the kingdom*? It means that we acknowledge and confess it to be our highest and ultimate value, the object of our desire, our love and our hope. It means that we proclaim it to be the goal of the sacrament—of pilgrimage, ascension, entrance—that now begins. It means that we must focus our attention, our mind, heart and soul, i.e., our whole life, upon that which is truly the “one thing needful.” Finally, it means that now, already in “this world,” we confirm the possibility of communion with the kingdom, of entrance into its radiance, truth and joy (47-48).

Thus, the Church’s Eucharistic celebration is a “sacramental” sharing in what the Church will one day become. A consequence is that the signs of the liturgy (including architecture, iconography, and music) should refer to this heavenly destiny.

Second, the Divine Liturgy (or the Mass) is Eucharistic in any of its parts. Schmemmann is wary of isolating the “consecration” to a particular moment of the Eucharistic prayer (193). He writes:

The sacrament of the assembly, the sacrament of offering, the sacrament of anaphora and thanksgiving and, finally, remembrance, are a single sacrament of the kingdom of God, of a single sacrifice of Christ’s love, and therefore they are the sacrament of the manifestation, the gift to us of our life as sacrifice. For Christ took our life in himself and gave it to God. Man was created for the sacrificial life, life as love. He lost it—for there is no other life—in the falling away of his love from God. And Christ manifested this sacrifice as life and life as sacrifice in the self-giving of his love; he granted it as ascent to and partaking of the kingdom of God (210-11).

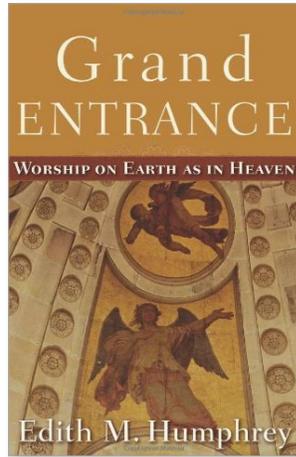
Every part of the Eucharist enters us into this logic of self-giving that is revealed in Christ’s sacrifice. And every action that the Church carries out within the liturgy is intended to recall this fact to our memory. The sacrifice we bring in bread and wine is a “sign” of the transformation of all creation through life in Christ (165-66). The purpose of the Eucharist is sacrifice, and every facet of the rite should lead us to a joyful thanksgiving and remembrance of this fact, a recollection of the origins of creation and the depth to which God’s love descended to bring us back to paradise (222). Therefore, entering the Church, praying the *Gloria*, attending to the Word of God in the Scriptures and the homily, praying the intercessions—these liturgical practices of the Mass cultivate the heart to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

Lastly, the Divine Liturgy is indeed a separation from the world but never as sect or cult. Instead, as Schmemmann writes,

...this exodus from the world is accomplished *in the name of the world*, for the sakes of its salvation. For we are flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of this world. We are part of it, and only by us and through us does it ascend to its Creator...We separate ourselves

from the world in order to bring it, in order to lift it up to the kingdom, to make it once again the way to God and participation in his eternal kingdom (53).

Liturgical reform does not use the logic of the world, precisely because the world does not know the depth of what it needs in the liturgy. Schmemmann is so hard on certain features of contemporary religious practice (the elevation of religious feeling above faith [144], clericalism [89], the replacement of economics for salvation [10]) because only in the Eucharist is the medicine for the world's ills revealed. And if one creates a passive laity, or forms a person to enjoy religious feeling alone, then the logic of the Eucharist is forgotten: "In offering our life to God, we know that we are offering Christ—for he is our life, the life of the world and the life of life, and we have nothing to bring to God except him" (105). Because of Schmemmann's remarkable spiritual insights, historical knowledge, and theological wisdom, his commentary on the Divine Liturgy is indispensable to those catechists seeking to carry out Eucharistic formation in all parishes.



Edith M. Humphrey
Grand Entrance: Worship on Earth as in Heaven

Grand Rapids, MI
 Brazos Press, 2011

If Schmemmann's *The Eucharist* provides a theological foundation for contemporary mystagogy, Edith Humphrey's *Grand Entrance* is an astute analysis of the biblical roots and contemporary obstacles to celebrating "worship on earth as in heaven." Humphrey begins her book with an observation: contemporary worship is primarily about the cultivation of the self (8). Worship that becomes a matter of entertainment, of self-improvement and expression, fails to perform the proper function of worship: "responding to God's own invitation, that we should see more and more clearly who God is, hear more and more clearly what he is saying, be more and more thankful about his mighty actions, and enter more deeply

into his communion with us and his care for the world" (17). In chapters two and three, worship is elaborated upon through a careful reading of the Old and New Testaments. Humphrey argues that worship in the Scriptures is a gift from God, something that the human being enters into through a divine invitation. In the Old Testament, this entrance is a cleansing, an encounter with holiness manifested through God's involvement in human history (31). In the New Testament, the physical nature of worship is internalized for we "learn that God's people need not build shrines to hold God's presence because they themselves will become portable tabernacles of the glory" (45). In both Testaments, there is an emphasis on the corporate invitation by God; and in the New Testament, the Christological and Trinitarian quality of this worship is drawn out. Worship is never about self-cultivation but God's cultivation of his own people.

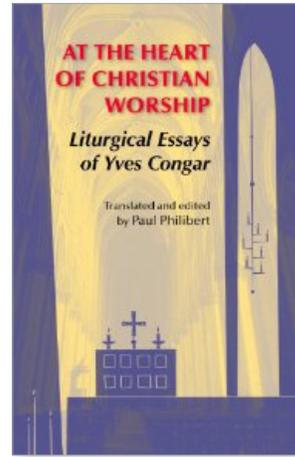
In chapters three and four, Humphreys continues to reflect upon the theme of worship as an entrance into heaven through attending to the Eucharistic liturgies of both East and West. For those with a background in liturgy, these two chapters are a

review of the major Eucharistic texts encountered in graduate school. But for parish groups, studying the Eucharist together for the first time, Humphrey offers an introduction to these texts according to the theme of the book: grand entrance.

Chapters five and six are the most intriguing of the book. Using the Scriptural and Eucharistic insights developed in chapters one through four, Humphrey evaluates a variety of experiences of worship including a Roman Catholic Mass, an Orthodox Divine Liturgy on the feast of the Dormition, an Anglican Service of the Word, a Presbyterian service in Lent, a worship service by the Salvationists at Christmas, an Emergent Church “liturgy” with a rough *ordo*, and two liturgies of the Chinese Church. While noticing that each group understands worship related as a grand entrance into God’s presence, she also found that “for some Christian congregations, worship is more often conceived as an aid to something else, not as a “selfless” expression directed toward the Lord alone” (153). Though each chapter has a series of discussion questions at the end, chapter five’s questions are especially helpful, inviting the parish to examine how truly its

practice of worship reflects the robust theology of the previous four chapters. In chapter six, Humphrey concludes with a series of obstacles to heavenly liturgy, including an excessive focus on therapeutic celebration (159), an undue focus upon the community (162), heresy in music and preaching (170), experimentation that seeks novelty in worship (175), and the use of worship for one’s own purposes rather than to give adoration, thanksgiving, and confession to God (179).

Humphrey’s book, written as she was herself leaving the Anglican Communion for Orthodoxy, is a helpful one for parishes and congregations seeking to move beyond the worship wars. She is not arguing for a specific style of worship out of personal taste. Rather, through a robust Scriptural theology of worship, we come to see with Humphrey that worship is not about self-cultivation or entertainment but accepting God’s own song into our lips, a hymn that transforms us (200). I recommend this book in particular to liturgy committees, seeking a deeper background in their own planning of the liturgical life of the parish.



Yves Congar
At the Heart of Christian
Worship: Liturgical Essays of
Yves Congar

Translated and edited by Paul Philibert.
 Collegeville
 The Liturgical Press, 2010

In the last text, Paul Philibert translates for the first time five essays by the great ecclesiologist and *ressourcement* theologian Yves Congar on the nature of liturgical worship. What is so extraordinary about each of these essays is that despite their age (published in the 1960s), Congar’s writings remain salutary antidotes to the creeping gap between liturgy and life that threatens each parish today. The first essay addresses the way that preaching and liturgy *should* facilitate an encounter with the reality of God through sacramental signs. In particular, Congar calls for a catechesis that promotes a liturgical realism, which “is the internalization

of worship by the faithful, the development in their hearts of the fruitfulness of their prayer and their love” (9). Such an approach to liturgical catechesis will not simply explain the meaning of the signs but will also elucidate “the meaning that worship can have for their lives in the context of the problems and circumstances that they must live with” (9).

The second and third essays are stunning works of scholarship in which Congar retrieves a patristic and medieval understanding of the Church as offering the Eucharist. These essays are difficult, because they draw on an array of patristic and medieval sources. But, the essays also seem indispensable to a parish’s mystagogical program, precisely because they remind each member of the body of Christ that the Eucharistic offering is only complete in self-offering. The first of the two essays, “The *Ecclesia* or Christian Community as a Whole Celebrates the Liturgy,” argues that the whole Church is the subject of the Eucharistic offering, not simply the priest. Importantly, this does not mean that the laity consecrates the Eucharist. For this conclusion misses the point of the Church’s celebration of the Eucharist. For, “the eucharistic celebration cannot be reduced to a valid consecration. It is a

liturgical act, and it achieves its objective only if it ensures at one and the same time the two ends of glorifying God and of sanctifying the faithful” (59). The importance of the latter is revealed in the next chapter, “The Structure of the Christian Priesthood.” For Congar argues that “In Jesus Christ, the worship that God wants is perfectly realized. This new worship surpasses the entire system of the law still linked to the immolation of external things. It proposes as the only real sacrifice that of persons who lovingly conform their will to the will of God” (77). Every member of the body of Christ is involved in offering the Eucharist, because each baptized Christian is called to this self-offering of the will. And the purpose of liturgical prayer is to assist us in offering ourselves to God, to make possible this gift of self. This is not to deny the validity of the ministerial priesthood, for it is the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood that capacitates, through God’s grace, the People of God in their offering: “The priesthood exists, beyond any sacramental activity, to excite and stimulate participation in the sacrifice of Christ, so as to bring about the sacrifice of human persons united to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ” (95). And the Eucharist, the sacramental sacrifice

constitutive of the Church’s identity, could not exist without the ordained priesthood (64).

Congar’s essays on the Church’s Eucharistic offering and the priesthood are necessary reads for those pastoral ministers seeking to catechize on the renewed sacrificial language in the recent translation of the Mass. Such catechesis, as Congar notes, will result in a richer sense of how all Christian action in the world is intended to be priestly, receiving its power from the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist (98). And this seems like an insight, still not yet appropriated, for the new evangelization.

Congar’s last two essays in the book on the sacred and the secular and the meaning of Sunday are in some sense catechetical consequences of chapters two and three and may be skipped if short on time. Yet having advanced through the more difficult essays before it, the reader can simply enjoy the significance of Congar’s insights into the Eucharistic identity of the Church and the priesthood of the baptized. In particular, this book of essays would be appropriate for parish and diocesan groups seeking to link their own ministry to the liturgical life of the Church.